

## The “WOMEN’S VEKOVNIK or CENTENNIAL ALBUM” Project – A SELECTION

### THE *FEMME* AND THE VEKOVNIK

*...The Amazon Alea, entrusted by her queen Hippolyta to guard Hera’s magical girdle of immortality, was raped by drunken sailors following an attack by Hercules and the Argonauts and then thrown overboard with a severed neck. Fortunately, since she was wearing the magical girdle of immortality, she survived. Alas, she learned that not only was she pregnant, but also that the fetus was immortal. Wanting to rid herself of the unwelcome embryo, she turned to the Greek Pantheon of the gods and undertook a trip to Hades, with a devastating outcome. She then turned to the enemies of the Amazons, the Scythians, with the wish for their gods to remove the immortal fetus in her womb. A Scythian shaman opened for her a passage to the Scythian underworld, with the bargain to hand over to him what she brought out of that underworld into the light of day. In the bizarre underworld, where the Scythian gods of the underworld agreed to remove the immortal embryo from her so that they can kill it at will interminably, Alea realized that she was not inclined to condemn the fetus to a fate worse than death due to of another’s (the father’s) sin. Thus, she refused to hand over her unborn child to the Scythian gods and left for the underworld, where the shaman was waiting, asking her to hand over what she had brought out of it – her future child. Alea refused to do this with disgust, and began an epic journey that will take her as far as possible from the shaman, even to the Himalayas... where the shaman would wait for her first labor pains to take his agreed remuneration, which he did, determined to make Alea’s newborn son his immortal apprentice and heir, who according to legend would be raised to loathe his immortal mother who did her best to deprive him of life immediately after his conception...*

A myth, a legend, a concept or the truth? Whichever way you look at time, history and the present, women hold a special place. The subject of women is not new, just as the form of comics is not new. Throughout the history of art, women have always been and remain an inexhaustible motif. Woman as an inspiration in a specific way carries within her antipodes and rests somewhere on the line of borderline feelings towards women, adoration, hatred, trust, and fear, but perceived from the point of view of the male principle. The form of comics, although it evidences the occasional participation of female creativity, in most cases was created by a *masculine* hand. Here we can look for the first specificity and novelty that is encouraged by the new album of the **Vekovnik** (English: Centennial), which focuses on the connotation of the *femme*.

Both critical and romantic at the same time, **Vekovnik**’s new album highlights the theme of women in a comprehensive way. It is based on the idea of a woman as a subject in the process of creation and an object in the process of observation. Leaning on the flow of time, it carries and conveys a strong message about the attitude towards women and highlights women’s issues by breaking stereotypes. Through a feminism-engaged thread, it brings together female artists from all over the world whose unique expression can be seen in the form of a comic strip.

Through their creative processes, they shape the idea of imposed gender principles. The very notion of Amazon women implies combativeness, emphasizing commitment that neglects other aspects of being. Thus, by choosing the story of the Amazon Alea, that aspect of gender is also introduced, as her struggle turns towards herself and the new being that is a part of her.

The theme of the Amazons knows no time, it is relevant at all times and in different contexts, and it is set, that is, more precisely, it originates from ancient times when the dramatic form of tragedy was established, the critical theme of which was taken from myths. And just as at that time it was aimed at the viewer, today it has as its goal expectation the extending of the viewers' moral qualities and stimulating feelings in them, thus purifying the soul. In this part, we can find the following specificity that connects time and determines the role of the **Vekovnik** and the selected topics.

The very notion of an *Amazon* is socially engaged. It carries connotations of femininity in different times and circumstances. The fact that over time this topic was treated predominantly from a male point of view highlights the importance of the new angle brought to us by the new **Vekovnik** album, the perspective of women as subjects and objects. In this regard, the approach to combativeness is also different: it is victorious. In addition to gender issues, **Vekovnik**'s new album also raises the issue of gender diversity. The discourse of diversity is visible through the differences in artistic expressions observable through the medium of drawing. Strokes, lines, form shaping, expressive gestures are a reflection of the specifics of each artist individually, albeit being congregated around the same theme.

With this new album, the author of the **Vekovnik** comic series, in addition to bringing together female artists of the contemporary era in a specific way, also raises the issue of the existence of a mythical nation of women in art. The history of art records some trends regarding women, but they are reduced to exceptions. In the literature of earlier times, we encounter their presence in Boccaccio (*Teseida*), Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*), and in romanticism in Kleist (*Penthesilea*). However, they were not the main topic here either but rather, observed from a separate angle. A bright spot in artistic trails is Méhul's opera based on de Jouy's libretto (*The Amazons, or The Founding of Thebes*).

There also appeared a pattern of novelistic female characters with allusions to the term 'Amazon' which has entered everyday language with its allusions to matriarchal society. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when many standards collapsed and new systems were established, more attention was paid to this subject. Thus, H. D. Lawrence wrote the novella *Runaway Amazon*, which also has the narrative about the issue of race, not just gender. The seventh art, film, dealt with this topic the on the whole more than other media. The most famous examples are *The Amazon and her Husband* (F. Lang) and *The Amazons* (T. Young), in which the viewpoint of seductive and fatal women is promoted.

Fine or visual art, unlike other artistic expressions, did not overlook the society of the female warriors and hunters called the Amazons. In earlier times, they were usually represented as wounded or defeated, often associated with centaurs as a male counterpoint. The most famous

example from recent times is *The Battle of the Amazons* by Rubens, with a similar proportion of defeated and fallen Greek soldiers.

The theme of the Amazons is also present in the form of comics as a work of visual art. One of the standout examples is Wonder Woman or Diana Prince, a heroine who has been around in comics for a long time. The new **Vekovnik** album that is dedicated to the theme of women and the Amazon Alea, continues the current trend by introducing the novelty that the theme is handled by women from different territories and different cultures united by the same goal aimed at the new correlation between women in social contexts - and all through the form of comic strip art.

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