

GALERIJA ALMA

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AIJA ZARIŅA

RA i nis

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There is Only Rainis and Nothing Else

In February 2015, "Rainis", an exhibition of paintings by Aija Zariņa was opened in Riga.

In the art of our contemporaries, it is quite rare for one to encounter the seriousness with which these works have been imagined and created. This particular seriousness and immense concentration on finding characters that precisely convey meaning impose certain responsibilities on the viewer. In order that these responsibilities (which he may, of course, decline to undertake) do not become too onerous, I would like to briefly and personally introduce the three works in this cycle of paintings, which strike me as being the most complicated. As far as I am concerned, they are also the most important. I will then come to Rainis, who is a simpler element of this series. Aija has given all her paintings titles, but these do not fulfil their usual task of helping the viewer and preventing misunderstandings. They are all akin to comments and are primarily intended for those who have already perceived the content of the images. Therefore, upon coming to the painting entitled "The Vedic God RAdomir", one should not be confused by the title. This work depicts a scene from a legend recorded in the 13th century "Golden Chronicle" about Mary Magdalene as the wife of Jesus Christ, from whom she gave birth to two children. Aija has drawn the family portrait with Mary, Christ, their children, the wise men and John the Baptist, then still in possession of his head, at the foot of the mountain on which the Meteora Monastery sits. She has approached this myth about the holy family through Slavic sources, which explains why Mary Magdalene has a Slavic name and the legendary long hair, in honour of which an entire monastery was built in old Novgorod. Inspired by Slavic tradition, Christ appears here under the name of Radomir, i.e. the name in which he is sometimes referred to by Russian Vedics, who consider Christ to be only one of many prophets – preachers of the religion of light. The sun is extremely red, because at that moment, the Earth is in extremely close proximity to it – much nearer than it is now. Mary smiles and there is a lot of light. The faces of their ancestors peer down at them benevolently from the summits of the ridges.

Chronologically, the next work is **“The Russ Kings”**. It is a painting depicting the last monarch of the Merovingian dynasty, King Dagobert II, who was either murdered or accidentally shot while hunting in 679. His totem is a bear as big as himself; with mouth is agape and adopting a pose as the eighth star in the constellation of the Little Bear. It is considered that the Merovingian dynasty ended with Dagobert’s death. Aija evidently considers these kings to be the last bearers of light, at least in France. She calls them “The Russ Kings”, because their forebears and their cult of light apparently emanated from somewhere in the north of contemporary Russia. The mystical place of origin of these kings is depicted in another painting in the cycle: “The Sun Kingdom”. According to the “Golden Chronicle”, at the end of her life Mary Magdalene ended up in the territory of what is now southern France and died in Aix, where her mortal remains were laid to rest. During the period from the 12th to the 14th centuries, a Christian sect known as the Cathars or “the pure ones”, which had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church rose to prominence in southern France. Aija’s painting “The Wish Man of Battle, RA da” is dedicated to the Cathars. In the 13th century, it was thought that it was the European Cathars in particular who believed in the marriage between Christ and Mary Magdalene and considered themselves to be disciples of Mary. The Vatican waged war against the Cathars with fire and sword. The campaign against the Cathars in the war of the Crusades ended with their defeat and annihilation at the village of Montségur in Languedoc in 1244. In her painting, Aija has depicted the two most important centres of Catharism: the fortresses of Montségur and Usson (their ruins can be still be viewed in France today) and Perfect Esclarmonde de Foix, known as the Princess of the Cathars. In the language which she spoke, Occitan, her name means “Light of the World”. It is significant that by 1244, the year depicted in the painting, Esclarmonde had already died. Therefore, the depicted magus of battle with flowing hair (glowing with stars falling from Heaven) battling the Crusaders is no longer her physical body – it is her spirit. With the destruction of the Cathars – believes Aija – the cult of the sun ended in Europe, heralding the advent of the Dark Ages.

Why has she depicted this, in her opinion, historic battle for the preservation of the cult of the sun through medieval legends and scenes from the life and death of seldom mentioned historical personalities? (I am convinced that, in terms of the format and symbolism, never before has such a considerable iconography of Dagobert II and Esclarmonde de Foix been created as that which we see in the exhibition “Rainis”, not even courtesy of the artists who were the heirs to the Cathars and Merovingians in France.) One of the reasons is certainly that sufficiently detailed materials – at least for Aija’s purposes – have not survived from the defence of the Baltics against the Crusaders. She finds the footprints of the ancient religion of the Sun in Latvian

folklore. It is visible, for example, in the painting “Sun Seer”, in which a raven has turned into a wise man and is holding a golden kokle on its arm – the sun. In her eyes, the only person and historical personality worthy of standing alongside the Merovingians and the Cathar war leaders is the Latvian poet Rainis. The sun, of course, is one of Rainis’ most frequently encountered motifs, and it (as is the case in Aija’s paintings) has so many meanings that, at times, it seems that, as far as Rainis is concerned, the sun is universal and omnipotent. For example, he writes, “Dying, I will not die – the emissaries of the sun will come / They will lay blankets of wings under my feet, / They will bear me into the bright land of the sun.” Who can understand this? And in another poem, he prophesies, “Tissues of the new light, / Along with the blanket of the sun, / Will warmly swathe all the children of pain.” What is this new light? When will it come? In this cycle of paintings, inspired by Rainis’ poem “Antiquity”, Aija has drawn a cockerel, which raises up a sunken castle from the deep with its crowing.

Aija not only tells and depicts myths; she creates them. She is not on the outside and does not view them askance. In my opinion, the unusual seriousness of these works can be traced to this stance. Also integral to the endeavour of myth-making is the fact that she has written the word “Merovingians” with an “a”, i.e. as “Meravingians”. I have not encountered this spelling in any of the sources available to me – neither ancient nor new. It is Aija’s spelling. It is necessary for her in order for the syllable “ra” to be heard in the word. In this word and in all the other works in the sun cycle, the syllable “ra” denotes the Egyptian sun god Ra or the Sun itself.

Accordingly, without even mentioning all the other roads, which converge into one in this myth, through Egypt we also come to Rainis. “Ra” denotes the “sun”, “i” means “and”, and “nis” alludes to everything that the sun shines upon. No existence would be possible without the sun and its light. Therefore, there is nothing other than the sun itself and that shone upon by the sun. There is only Rainis and the whole of existence is expressed in his name.

Agnese Gaile-Irbe