One could say about Ivan Sedliský that he is seeking a way of painting that could be used to paint everything.

How he searches and what he imagines by the word “everything” can be seen in his paintings.

Sedliský’s search is in a sense factual and sober, programmatically anti-illusionist. He takes the view that a picture is a surface, and that there is no reason to consider it an illusory intersection of three-dimensional space. It rejects and excludes, or restricts to a minimum, the means by which one can give the impression that a picture is a niche space filled with voluminous plastic objects: the gradations of lights, and valences, the space-creating effects of colour chords.

He fully admits to decorativism, with a characteristic tendency for shapes that are aggregate, powerful, clearly legible, precisely and unambiguously defined, compelling and moving.

A line drawing whose expressive dynamism unembarrassedly claims the same sources and forces that shape the objects of modern technical and industrial civilisation. Often translating this morphology and with a fondness for it, he quotes ancient works of art, figures from paintings by Renaissance painters and famous works of sculpture, figures from Greek vases, Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The surface of his paintings is roughened with brush marks, but without the attempt to fix the ductus of a showy gesture, to make an ostentatious statement about the passion with which one has painted, it is a surface that is picturesquely rugged, but not expressively plastic.

The reality of the image is not the reality depicted. Rather, it is a statement of reality, a declaration in aesthetic code. Sedliský chooses from a broad range of registers.

According to his type of talent and temperament, such positions in the range of which he can communicate with the audience in the fullest and most versatile way possible.

He does not avoid the expressive effects of splashes of colour, but he maintains moderation in this. In terms of art, he expresses himself primarily through a generous rhythmisation of the surface in the area, its structures and the tectonically conceived composition of their textures, and otherwise he does not hesitate to multiply the significance of these shapes and their groupings through the deliberate use of the subject’s symbolic or even allegorical character.

Sedliský’s paintings, like all paintings in general, cannot be read only through emotion; their content must also be penetrated with fantasy and intellect, and deciphered a little in the same way as viewers of old deciphered the paintings of Botticelli or Giovanni Bellini: by analysing the factual meanings of the elements that are depicted.

In this way we come to the conclusion that Sedliský’s paintings are almost epically narrative, developed in content and thoughtful.

As far as I know, Sedliský has not painted any landscapes. He is primarily interested in figures and people’s faces. However, not in the usual sense of the portrait tradition, he is not interested in the individuality of his sitters, but rather with their type. He tries to incorporate them into a more general context, to place their individual personality in relation to the times and to social events, or he tells about them artistically by using the signs and symbols he develops around them.

In terms of the construction of the painting, various problems arise, especially in formulating the relationship between the figure and the accompanying apparatus, compositional problems that are solved individually and in each painting separately.

Sedliský is the only painter I know who is attracted by visual allegory and who is fond of it. He has painted whole groups of paintings that are conceived as explicit allegories. He recounts allegorically of his experiences of contact with ancient Greek culture, and he likes to draw meaning from Homeric mythology as can be found on Greek vases.

If there is an element taken from the immediately perceived reality in these compositions, it is fully incorporated into the structure of the allegory. This is similarly the case in a number of allegories of Prague.

In their individual sections, the painter tries to be symbolic and artistic.

He evokes images of great historical stylistic epochs without abandoning his manner of expression, flatness and distinctive drawing stylisation. Rather, he intensifies the monumentally decorative effect of his canvases, which respect the unconscious flatness of the modern architects’ view of the material elements of contemporary buildings and develop this principle organically and positively, without the intention of modifying or denying it.

Sedliský’s painting never closes itself off to modern civilisation. It could be said that these paintings are conceived as frescoes or sgraffiti, without going back to ancient techniques, practically hard to use in the modern environment and in the modern rhythm of life.

Sedliský’s work is distinctive and special, in many regards it stands out from the framework of today’s tendencies and currents in Czech painting. It has its own circle of admirers, although it is not often exhibited.

Václav Formánek