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*The Gallery of Portraits* (2020–ongoing)

1. Toyen (1902–1980), born Marie Čermínová, was a Czech painter, drafter, illustrator and a member of the surrealist movement. Toyen left the family home at sixteen, and it has been speculated it was due to sympathy towards anarchism. In 1923, the artist adopted the professional pseudonym Toyen. The name Toyen is derived from the French word *citoyen*, meaning citizen. Toyen favored the gender-neutral name and would speak Czech in the masculine singular form. Vítězslav Nezval wrote that Toyen ‘refused to use the feminine endings’ when speaking in the first person.

2. Veronika Šleivytyė (1906–1998) was an artist who habitually created a ‘film of life’ as a prolific photographer. Today, the candour and courage of her photographs is astonishing. The artist photographed herself at the seaside, surrounded by her girlfriends and lovers, without any fear of turning the lens to the naked body. At the same time, she documented the artistic life of interwar Kaunas, the first Lithuanian Women’s Art Exhibition, and her fellow female artists. The Kupiškis Ethnographic Museum’s rich archive of photographs and negatives were used for a new book published in 2020 titled *Foto Vėros Šleivytyės* (compiled by Milda Dainovskytė and Agnė Narušytė).

3. Sergei Parajanov (1924–1990) was an Armenian film director, screenwriter and artist who made a seminal contribution to world cinema with his films *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* and *The Color of Pomegranates*. He invented his own cinematic style, which was out of step with the guiding principles of socialist realism. This, combined with his lifestyle and behaviour, led Soviet authorities to repeatedly persecute and imprison him, and suppress his films. He was arrested in late 1973 on charges of rape, homosexuality and bribery and was imprisoned until 1977. Even after his release (he was arrested for a third and final time in 1982) he was a persona non grata in Soviet cinema.

4. Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (1871–1951) was a Czech poet, writer, literary critic and prominent representative of decadence in Czech literature. Czech Decadent-Symbolists played crucial roles in bringing homosexuality into public view. They debated the nature and morality of homosexuality in their journal *Moderní revue*, edited by Karásek and Arnošt Procházka. In 1895, a major debate ensued on its pages regarding the Oscar Wilde trials and whether his homosexuality discredited his merits as an author. The debate prompted homosexual writers like Karásek to call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality. In the same year, police confiscated Karásek’s collection of poetry *Sodoma* for indecency and he faced criminal prosecution (though he was granted amnesty by the Emperor). Karásek also edited the first Czechoslovak queer journal, *Hlas sexuální menšiny* (The Voice of the Sexual Minority) that emerged in 1931 and was later renewed as *Nový hlas* (The New Voice) with the subheading *List pro sexuální reformu* (Journal for Sexual Reform), which had a print-run of several hundred copies until 1934.

5. Ljuba Prenner (1906–1977) was a Slovenian writer and lawyer. He was baptised as Amalija Marija Uršula but started calling himself Ljuba in early childhood. In high school, he had a short men’s haircut and started wearing men’s clothes. Because of his gender (presentation) he had to work a lot harder than his peers to pass and had to transfer high schools several times all while supporting himself, but he persisted and moved to Ljubljana to study law after graduating high school in Belgrade. He got his PhD in law in 1941, and started working with the National Liberation Front, saving Slovenian prisoners from Italian prisons and concentration camps based on a fake law he made up, until the Germans caught him. He fought for justice his whole career and was very passionate about saving people from the death sentence and staged trials. His progressive political views often clashed with the authorities – he was banned from practicing law for seven years; expelled from the Slovenian Writers’ Society; banned from writing; and sentenced to a labour camp for two years. He wrote in the first person (using the masculine grammatical gender) love poems for his lover. His most famous statement was: “I am Dr. Ljuba Prenner, not a man nor a woman”

6. László Mednyánszky (1852–1919) was a Hungarian painter-philosopher. Despite an aristocratic background, he spent most of his life moving around Europe working as an artist. Mednyánszky spent considerable periods in seclusion but mingled with people across society – in the aristocracy, art world, peasantry and army – many of whom became the subjects of his paintings. His most important works depict scenes of nature and poor, working people, particularly from his home region in the Kingdom of Hungary. He is also known as a painter of folklore of Upper Hungary (today mostly Slovakia). He was homosexual, having had several relationships with men throughout his life. The longest and most important one, with Bálint Kurdi of Vác, lasted for decades.

7. Lesya Ukrainka (1871–1913) is one of Ukrainian literature's foremost writers, best known for her poems and plays. She was also an active political, civil, and feminist activist. In 1901 she met Ukrainian modernist writer and feminist Olha Kobylianska. The meeting produced an intensely passionate union that was realised through written correspondence, since illness and circumstances prevented them from living together. The literary critic Ihor Kostetsky later suggested that their relationship was lesbian, while George S. N. Luckyj believes that: 'There was probably little or no physical contact between the two women, though the language of their letters appears homo-erotic'.

8. Eugenij Ruban (1941–1997) was a Belarussian chess player, a graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy of Leningrad University. He came second in the BSSR chess championships in 1964 and won the Leningrad championship in 1966. The Dutch grandmaster and former resident of Leningrad, Genna Sosonko, claims that Ruban was stripped of the title of Chess Master of the USSR because he had a criminal conviction. He was found guilty of an act of same-sex intercourse in a public place.

9. Olha Kobylianska (1863–1942) was a Ukrainian modernist writer and feminist. In 1896, she wrote *Arystokratka*, followed by *Impromptu phantasie*, and *Valse melancolique* in 1898. The last of these constituted a pioneering treatment of same-sex love, and was based partly on Kobylianska's own experiences. In the 1890s, she enjoyed a romantic relationship with the male literary critic, Osyp Makovei, who had championed Kobylianska's work and was comfortable with the theme of strong, independent, educated female characters who asserted their right to sexual fulfillment. However, the two later broke up and in 1901 Kobylianska met with the female writer Lesia Ukrainka. The meeting produced an intensely passionate union that was realised through written correspondence, since illness and circumstances prevented them from living together. Solomiia Pavlychko has noted the strong homoerotic motifs found in Kobylianska's published work.

10. Kazimierz Pułaski (1745–1779) is called the 'father of the American cavalry'; a Polish-born Revolutionary War hero who fought for American independence under George Washington and whose legend inspired the dedication of parades, schools, roads and bridges. But for more than 200 years, a mystery persisted about his final resting place. Historical accounts suggested the cavalryman, Pulaski, had been buried at sea, but others maintained he was buried in an unmarked grave in Savannah, Georgia. Researchers believe they have found the answer – after coming to another significant discovery: the famed general was most likely intersex. New evidence suggests that although Pulaski identified and lived as a man, biologically, he did not fit into the binary definitions of male and female, a twist that helps explain why scientists could not previously identify his remains.

11. Clara Haskil (1895–1960) was a Romanian composer and classical pianist, renowned as an interpreter of the classical and early romantic repertoire. She was particularly noted for her performances and recordings of Mozart. She left Romania to study and established herself in Paris. She was active in Parisian lesbian circles and supported by some very well-known French lesbians including Margareta Poligniac. She was historicised as lesbian by Florin Buhuceanu in *Homoistorii*.

12. Janina Degutytė (1928–1990) was a Lithuanian poet and translator, and one of the most prominent poets during the political thaw. Although we won't find queer themes or motifs in her poetry, her life could be described by the phrase 'lesbian continuum' suggested by the American poet Adrienne Rich, which defines not only gender identity but also homosocial relationships between women. Until her death, Degutytė lived with her friend, the painter Bronė Jacevičiūtė (1919–2013). The two women took care of each other, shared the burden of household, went on holiday together and supported each other's creative ambitions. Degutytė enriched Lithuanian poetry with a personal voice suppressed during the Soviet era.

13. Nasta Rojc (1883–1964) was one of the most important Croatian female artists from the beginning of the 20th century. She mostly painted portraits, self-portraits, landscapes and seascapes. With Lina Crnčić-Vivant she founded the Club of Female Fine Artists in Zagreb and advocated in equality of male and female painting. She was married to the painter Branko Šenoa but she divorced him and spent the rest of her life with her partner, the British army officer Alexandrina Maria Onslow. Alexandrine was an exceptional woman, famous for testing the boundaries of femininity, thus opening Nasta up to her true nature.

Rojc and Onslow were imprisoned together by Croatian fascists in 1943. She ended up dying in poverty in the 60s.

14. Marija Leiko (1887–1938) was a Latvian stage and silent film actress in Europe, especially popular in Latvia, Germany, and Russia. Leiko conquered the German big screen first, starring in *The Diamond Foundation* (1917), *Kain* (1918), *Ewiger Strom* (1919), *Die Frau im Käfig* (1919) and *Lola Montez* (1919) as the dancer. When the silent movie era ended Leiko retired from film acting. After the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, she returned to her native Latvia. In 1935 she visited the Soviet Union and stayed to join the company of the Latvian State Theatre in Moscow. During the so-called 'Latvian Operation' the theatre was shut down, and Leiko was arrested on charges of belonging to a 'Latvian nationalist conspiracy'. In 1938 at the age of 50 she was shot and buried in a mass grave at the secret NKVD killing field at Butovo, near Moscow. According to the historian Ineta Lipsa, the pre-war Latvia contemporaries counted Marija Leiko amongst the community of non-heteronormative figures of the time.

15. Kristian Jaak Petersen (1801–1822) was an Estonian poet, commonly regarded as a herald of Estonian national literature and the founder of modern Estonian poetry. Little is known about his personal life since he died of tuberculosis aged 21 but he left a few love poems dedicated to men.

16. Magdalena Rădulescu (1902–1983) was a Romanian painter probably of Roma origins, also living abroad. She was married twice, but always had multiple affairs with both men and women. In 1972 she wanted to return to Romania, but the secret police criticised her morality, ambiguous sexuality etc. She was refused the possibility to return and paid a pension to be able to live in France because she was too 'promiscuous' for communist society.

17. Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) was a Ukrainian poet, writer, visual artist, public and political figure, as well as a folklorist and ethnographer. His literary heritage is considered to be the very foundation of modern Ukrainian literature and language. There are traces that allow one to speculate that the biggest Ukrainian national hero was either homosexual or bisexual. The speaker of most of his well-known verse is either a woman or a girl. Additionally, some historical evidence suggests a love affair with the American actor Ira Aldridge. And while he was in exile, Shevchenko produced many images of half-dressed comrades, as well as a large number of drawings which depicted Kazakh boys, also not overburdened with clothes.

18. Virgilijus Šonta (1952–1992) began photographing homoerotic acts of men during the Soviet era, revealing the tensions between inner freedom and external constraints. The photographer explored marginal spaces and people expelled from the public eye (disabled children, beggars, homosexuals) in search of an authentic relationship with reality. Šonta said: 'Photography enables connection with the world. For that connection to be real, one must be able to look at the world through the eyes of a weirdo. Then it opens up more clearly.' The photographer was able to convey the wide range of liminal human states, from the dizziness of flight (and fall) to the painful distancing from the environment and oneself. Šonta has created some memorable series of photographs, the most famous of which are *Flight* (1977–1979), *The School is My Home* (1980–1983), *Young Men* (1983–1986), and *Western America* (1988–1990).

19. Ewa Hołuszko was born in 1950 in Białystok. She is Polish physicist, oppositionist and important member of the Solidarity movement, as well as a transgender activist. She is inconvenient to the conservative political circles. The attempts at removing her from the history of Solidarity are connected with her transition in the year 2000.

20. Imrich Matyáš (1896–1974) was one of the earliest activists in Czechoslovakia to fight for the equal rights of sexual minorities and the decriminalisation of homosexuality. He was a contributor to the first Czechoslovak queer periodical, *Hlas sexuální menšiny* (Voice of the Sexual Minorities). Imrich's work as an advocate for homosexuality was influenced by the writings of German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and activist Kurt Hiller. Along with them, he was a member of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee and the World League for Sexual Reform. To aid Bratislava's queer community, he authored a manual for gay people on how to defend themselves in the criminal justice system. After the Second World War, the new Czechoslovak government continued the criminalisation of homosexual acts and the new Penal Code of 1950 made it punishable to up to one year of imprisonment. Imrich actively argued against the legislation and tried to convince officials to amend it. Homosexuality was finally decriminalised in Czechoslovakia in 1961.