



In recent years Jakub Čuška has profiled himself primarily as a painter of figures, and they are looking at us and themselves in this exhibition as well. From different angles they cast challenging, suspicious or, on the contrary, puzzlingly apathetic gaze. Seemingly absent in spirit, their world of thought expands into space in the form of oil stains around them. If one could summarize the themes hovering in this haze around the painted and drawn characters, they would be pop culture notions such as *young adult* or *coming-of-age* aka the stories we tell ourselves today instead of community rites of passage, and the *youth culture* derived from their absence, among others.

This timeless conception of age and aging incorporated 1990s and millennial Y2K nostalgia with the vastly different possibility and experience of adulthood in today's socioeconomic conditions. Millennials relate to this era through their own and fictional memories, and Generation Z may idealize the recent past or bend its distorted image in various ways into memes and social media trends. To some extent, this positively understood notion of childhood is not only manifested in mainstream culture of comic book multiverses and mass-read book and manga series about the pitfalls of growing up, but also resonates in post-ironic fashion (Balenciaga) or psychologically petty popular series (Euphoria) or narrative video games (Life is Strange).

Although Jakub Čuška sometimes names his works with terms that anchor them in the present, whether they refer to states of expanded consciousness (Rolling a Blunt) or clothing/shoe brands (Birkenstock), the silhouettes of the outfits depicted often look remarkably anachronistic. This is mainly about relating to dandyism itself through formal motifs and reading about the movement and lifestyle associated with the 19th century in particular. It was then that the figure of the dandy took shape through the emergence of romantic consumerism, the achievement of leisure time and the consequent transformation of the more privileged part of urban society as well as architecture and infrastructure.

The atmosphere of the "flaneur-ish" wandering aimlessly among the shop windows and lounging around in fine-tuned outfits showing off impracticality and artifice is present in Jakub Čuška's paintings more as an echo (e.g. in the painting *The Collector*). Čuška's figures often remind us of the ghosts of swing and rock'n'roll subcultures, i.e. the "dives" and "bands" of the world-war-2 era Czechia and Stalinist Czechoslovakia (the monumental canvas *Smoke Break*) or retrofuturistic ideas of a future that has not come. Nor do we find any violently literal updates, although many dandies would probably appreciate today's popularity of the elaborate skin care routine and the viral technique of accentuating the jawline by positioning the tongue on the palate (so called *mewing*).

However, as early as the Austro-Hungarian-Czech-American decadent and dandy Arthur Breisky, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, used the English colloquial term "pieces" for works of art, a word that has been standardized in Czech painting studios and schools since at least the beginning of the millennium. Jakub Čuška identifies himself primarily as a painter and makes no secret of the fact that he works intuitively rather than conceptually, with an emphasis on a process that he finds as automated as it is simply pleasurable.

The mid-20th-century musical subcultures mentioned above were male-dominated; among historical dandies, women have long been considered incapable of having exquisite taste. One would like to say that, with few exceptions, the figures in Jakub Čuška's works are also symptomatically male-looking. However, there is no oppressive masculinity to be found in his work; on the contrary, the boyish faces often reflect an ambivalent vulnerability, as in the title painting of *The Lost Dandy*, or a calm composure in moments of rest, reflection and daydreaming.

Jakub Čuška (born 1989) lives and works in Olomouc, studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague in the studio of Martin Mainer and then Marek Meduna. He has exhibited solo at the Karpuchina Gallery in Prague (*Untitled Dreams*, 2024) or at the Dole Gallery in Ostrava (*Dreams are Bigger*, 2024), and together with Adéla Janská he exhibited at the Rub Gallery in Olomouc (*Wake up! Be a painter of nasty things*, 2022), and last year he took part in the group exhibition *Faceless* at the Gallery of Fine Arts in Ostrava.