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VARIA

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OIL SHALE THEME IN ART: SCULPTURE

Oil shale theme has not been widely expressed in sculpture; the existing pieces concern mainly ordered works. In several cases one has confined oneself to memorial tablets and memorial stones. Voldemar Mellik (Melnik till 1939, born in 1887 in the village Purtse of Püssi parish, Virumaa) was evidently the first one who dealt with this theme and created his three miner figures. The Ministry of Economics ordered from him an over-life-size figure "Oil Shale Miner" for the international exhibition in Paris in 1937. The sculpture was modelled 2.5 m high and was intended to be cast in bronze but for lack of time this task was not accomplished and the original plaster figure was exhibited in Paris. (The same happened to the sculptures "Mother and Child" by F. Sannamees and "Women with Sickle" by E. Jõesaar.) These works of art were left in Paris and they have probably perished. We have got only their reproductions to talk about. One must emphasize that "Oil Shale Miner" was the first depiction of a miner in Estonian sculpture and it marked a new direction in the art of V. Mellik who changed his previous lyrical tone to the masculine handling of the figure. The design of this composition is highly logical, its form monumentally simple.



Nothing but a miner's lamp and a pickaxe as the details characterizing miner's work enliven and rhythmize this economical compositional approach. The clothing partly covering the figure is modelled in such a generalized manner that it is associated in quite an original way with the large-surface plastic texture fixing the developed musculature of the upper body. This work of art was awarded the Grand Prix in Paris. The "Oil Shale Miner" as a depiction of a mine worker has remained unexcelled till today. At the autumnal art exhibition of the Department of Fine Arts in November 1940 and at the spring exhibition of the Soviet Estonian Artists' Union in Tallinn Art Building in June 1941 V. Mellik exhibited his figures "Stoker", "Miner", "Fisherman", all in plaster, with the main attention paid to the circumstantial aspect (one of them is kept in a private collection). He has made one more sculpture of a miner in 1941 (in plaster). The information is based on a photo dated in 1941.

The next sculpture concerning with miners is the monument "Glory to Work" (see the next page) inaugurated in November 1967 in the centre of Kohtla-Järve. This

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monument with a tribune including an immured message for the future townsmen of 2046 in its base is made from Saaremaa dolomite (by O. Männi and A. Ivask). It represents two miners with old miner's helmets on, standing hand in hand before an entrance of a mine holding pickaxes above their heads. Symbolizing friendship, miners' work and a happy future it associates nicely with the building of municipal corporation standing opposite

it (the outline of its doorsteps resembles a pickaxe) and, apropos, this monument has become a certain symbol of the town and artists have represented it in book-plates, paintings, booklets, etc.).



Oil Shale Museum

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