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F like friendship

Discovering Belgrade and Serbia during my visit to the exhibition “Dado: History of Nature, 1953–2000” in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts last December, thanks to the kind invitation of the Foundation for Serbian People and State, has left an extremely strong and vivid impression on me.

This short stay in Belgrade, whose complex and eclectic architectural heritage is quite permeated by the brutalist style, enchanted and inspired me at the same time, enabling me to see how rich and intensive the exchange between France and Serbia was through their friendship, lively, human, cultural



Laurent Le Bon during his visit to Serbia, at the opening of the retrospective exhibition "Dado: The History of Nature 1953 - 2000" by Amarante Szidon, Belgrade, 21 December, 2024.

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and artistic, as well as how it is once again, at the beginning of the 21st century, becoming stronger after tragic events in the 1990s. The monument of gratitude to France, the work by Ivan Meštrović, particularly impressed me, as well as the building of the French Embassy, the masterful work by Roger-Henri Expert, with the furniture specially designed by Jules Leleu, one of the greatest Art Deco names. The mock-up of this monument, *L'Élan de la France*, is an exhibit of the collections of Centre Pompidou [illustration]. In my opinion, these two places perfectly show the extent to which French-Serbian friendship is essentially generous and fruitful. It is interesting to know that in the past few years, the restauration work on the monument and the furniture in the Embassy is performed thanks to the close cultural cooperation of our two countries and the selfless support of the Institute *Mobilier national*.

Other unforgettable moments of my stay include the visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art, where we were cordially welcomed by Director Maja Kolarić and her team, and the Museum's

fascinating exhibition of surrealism; the tour of the Palace of Federation, today's Palace of Serbia, as well as the Museum of Yugoslavia with Tito's mausoleum – as well as the fascinating Museum of Nikola Tesla and the National Museum, whose rich collections were a pure delight. During my stay, I had the pleasure of meeting extraordinary artists, primarily Dušan Otašević and Mrđan Bajić, whose ateliers we visited.

In these uncertain and turbulent times, history can always offer us valuable messages. Another retrospective view of the 1930s shows us the real importance of the exchange between France and Serbia. Paris, the City of Light, was an unavoidable destination to the artists from all parts of the world, including Serbian artists. Namely, Dado's professor at the Art Academy, Marko Čelebonović, who studied at the Academy Grande Chaumière and was a close friend of Germaine Richier's, achieved an imposing career in France. His works, just as Meštrović's, are kept in the collections of Centre Pompidou [illustration]. Meštrović and Čelebonović are two visionaries



Illustration: Ivan Meštrović
L'Élan de la France, cc. 1929

Mock-up of the Monument of Gratitude to France (the Monument for France), raised in Belgrade in 1930
Bronze, 52 × 57 × 14,5 cm
Centre Pompidou, National Museum of Modern Art, Paris
Artist's donation, 1933. JP 93 S



Illustration: Marko Čelebonović
Atelier, 1939.
Oil on canvas, 92,3 × 65,3 cm
Centre Pompidou, National Museum of Modern Art, Paris
Purchased by the state, 1939; attribution, 1939. JP 919 P

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Laurent Le Bon with the president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zoran Knežević, and the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, Nikola Selaković, at the opening of the retrospective exhibition "Dado: The history of nature 1953-2000" by Amarante Szidon, Belgrade, 21 December 2024.

Photo: Enter media

who strongly inspired the generation of post-war artists who stayed in France in shorter or longer periods of time. They include the great names of figurative painting, such as Vladimir Veličković, Ljuba Popović, Petar Omčikus and, of course, Dado Đurić.

This exceptional exhibition of Dado's works in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts is the first retrospective of the artist's painting opus

since his death. It provides a refreshing insight into his creative path through an accurate thematic and chronological approach. Visiting the exhibition, I had an opportunity to see the works from the artist's Belgrade period, completely unfamiliar to the French audience, which show the artist with an already extremely original and shaped mature expression, before his arrival in France in 1956. Moreover, it was great pleasure to see the works

from the 1990s, the period of outstanding creative renaissance that is vividly testified by the masterpiece *Orpellières*^[2] and so remarkably shown at the exhibition. Dado is an artist I have always admired. Like Picasso, he possesses a unique style and ability of incessant rejuvenation, so typical of great artists. Long before I met him in 2007, thanks to his daughter Amarante, I had discovered his works during my studies and then appreciated him even more through conversations with Alfred Pacquement and Germaine de Liencourt, one of Dado's friends of long standing and also a close friend of Daniel Cordieros, as well as through conversations with

her husband, François de Liencourt, a diplomat and great connoisseur of the USSR.

One of the great merits of this exhibition is that it shows the constant flow, the never-ending intercultural dialogue, and presents the key to understanding Dado's artistic opus. In two years, at the same time when Belgrade hosts EXPO 2027, Centre Pompidou will celebrate its 50th birthday by the project "Constellation". Let this beautiful event, whose triumphant and well-deserved success fills me with joy, contribute to the strengthening of good dynamics of exchange between our two countries through future projects.

[2] I took part in the excellent documentary film made by the Montenegrin television in honour of the restoration of Orpellières. The film shown at the exhibition, "Dado: on the Transient and the Eternal", was directed by Sanja Blečić in cooperation with Snežana Nikčević, in 2023.