



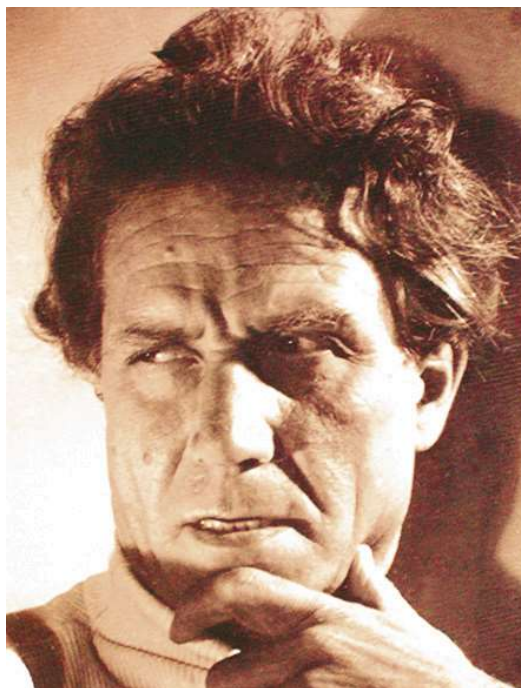
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Society

Vasil Ivanov – the Bulgarian Picasso

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The Bulgarian Picasso, who developed his talent and creativity in France, is considered one of the greatest names in contemporary ceramic art. His unique style was unanimously accepted by his contemporaries, and his works are among the greatest artistic manifestations of our time.

Vasil Ivanov Vassilev was born on February 10, 1897 in Veliko Tarnovo, into the family of the Varna army musician Ivan Ivanov and the daughter of a priest Maria Koycheva. They had two sons. The elder, Sava Ivanov (1886-1976), made a career as a painter, painting mainly landscapes. His paintings are in the National Art Gallery. The younger, Vasil, also became an artist. He spent his childhood in Veliko Tarnovo and Varna. After completing his secondary education, he studied painting, graphics and theater decoration at the university.

In 1917, Vasil Ivanov was mobilized as a non-commissioned officer in the First World War, on the front in Macedonia. There he met his classmate Stoyan Dolmov, who later described him in his memoirs as an erudite man, a connoisseur of the masterpieces of great artists, a man with a poetic soul and talent, with a violent temperament and an indomitable spirit – a creative personality even in his youth.

After the end of World War I, Vasil Ivanov became a class teacher in a village near Varna. Later, he abandoned the teaching profession and embarked on a voyage by ship on the Black Sea and the Indian Ocean, where he worked as an assistant fireman.

In 1922, the thirst for new horizons led him to leave Bulgaria and settle in the French capital, Paris, which at that time was the world center of fine arts. Since the year of his arrival, he has changed many professions: initially he worked in a mine, but thanks to his abilities and enterprising spirit he became a building painter, a fabric decorator, a reporter-photographer for a magazine, and later he opened his own studio for art photography in Paris.

In the South of France he met his future wife – Henriette Moser. She came from the famous wealthy Moser (Mayer) family, famous for the production of Bohemian crystal. Henriette Moser was born on 12.12.1902 in Paris. When she met Vasil Ivanov, she was studying art at one of the Paris academies. They married on 10 October 1927 in Marseille. After the wedding and their honeymoon in Corsica, with the assistance of his father-in-law,



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Gustave Moser, Vasil Ivanov began working as a decorator on Rue Tolier in Marseille. After some time, together with his wife, he returned to Paris and began to engage in artistic photography. They lived on Rue Saint-Charles and had two children – a son Ivan and a daughter Anya.

In 1930, Ivanov received French citizenship. Over the next ten years, he studied painting and theater design at the Parisian academies. His wife Henriette had a younger sister, Yvonne Moser, who in 1937 married the famous photographer Philippe Halsman. He took portraits of famous people such as Marc Chagall, Paul Valéry, André Marleau, and later Salvador Dali and Marilyn Monroe, among many others. But his most famous photograph is "Einstein with his tongue out."

Halsman worked for Vogue magazine. He became famous, but World War II began. With the personal support of Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt, Halsman's entire family left for the United States. He bequeathed his photography studio on Rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré in Paris to his son-in-law Vasil Ivanov, and the two never met again.

In 1943, during a walk in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, Ivanov met Denise Roux, a law student 23 years his junior, who later worked as a fellow at UNESCO. She became his second companion in life and later contributed to the glorification of his work – to publishing books about him, to creating an association in his name, to arranging his house and studio into a private museum.

In 1945, while walking along the banks of the Seine, in a small bookstore Vasil Ivanov found the work of the English ceramist William Lee "The Art of Pottery". This was his encounter with fate that completely changed his life. Inspired by this work, he left his family – his wife Henriette and their two children – and left Paris. With his decision to abandon Parisian life and his apartment on Place Vendôme in the center of the French capital to settle in the village of La Borne, not far from the Loire, Vasil Ivanov is seen as an eccentric in the eyes of the French high life.

Initially, he goes to Saint-Amand-en-Puissant - a place known for its exceptional land, where at that time there were numerous rural pottery workshops. Within a few months, he persistently masters the intricacies of the pottery craft. With great passion, he successfully begins to make, enamel, and decorate. He questions one and the other, listens and observes. His abilities to observe and feel intuitively are exceptional.

In his adventure, Vasil Ivanov also attracted the young Denise Roux, who abandoned Parisian life to remain his companion and friend for the rest of his days. A year after they moved in together, Vasil Ivanov bought a house in La Borne, which he turned into his home and studio, where he built a wood-fired kiln. Experts claim that Vasil Ivanov made a real revolution in ceramics. They were delighted by the inimitable red "bull's blood" color of the objects he made. His colleagues "washed" the clay like gold to free it from impurities, while he let it "mature" for a long time and was particularly careful to preserve in it what others considered impurities – to preserve its living force. He applied faience glaze, enamels and clay slurry to spread clay products on a raw product. He often dosed by eye, by instinct. But in ceramics, the person is the one who does everything. Pottery is an art of technique, and in art it is the personality that creates the work, he states.

The handsome Bulgarian stands out with his appearance and generosity and is revered by his colleagues in La Borne. His talent was recognized during his lifetime. In 1951, he received a gold medal at the national exhibition of arts and crafts at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. From 1948 to 1972, he held numerous exhibitions in Paris and other French cities. His works were exhibited in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Amsterdam and other cities around the world.

His life companion Denise Roux presents Ivanov in her publication as follows: "He knew how to charm, he impressed with his posture, with his erect head, with his blue gaze - piercing and questioning. He had an extremely strong sense of the real. His artistic inspiration seemed to draw from the source of all eras and places. He would say: "I had great luck with the clay, I hope it turns out beautiful. It's as if I'm pulling out part of my roots."

In 1962, together with Denise Roux, Vasil Ivanov visited Bulgaria and the cities of Veliko Tarnovo, Debelets (where his mother's family lived), Varna and Sofia. He also traveled along the Black Sea coast and in Southern Bulgaria, dreaming of having an exhibition in Sofia.

Vasil Ivanov died on June 15, 1973 in Paris. His ashes were buried in the garden of the Vasil Ivanov Museum, next to one of his famous female ceramic figures, as he had wished during his lifetime.

In 1979, an association was created in his name. Its main goal was to collect, preserve and popularize the works of the "Bulgarian Picasso". In 1988, thanks to the initiative of the Vasil Ivanov Association, his house and studio in La Borne were turned into a private museum. Although in the same village, separated by a hundred meters, Vasil Ivanov's studio and museum are on the territories of two different French municipalities. Both allocate funds from their budgets to preserve the memory of the talented Bulgarian. Since 1996, the unique kiln and his studio have been included in the inventory list of historical monuments of the French Republic.



ул. Магистрална №17



Today, over 80 ceramicists from all over the world work for several months in the studios around La Borne. Almost 100,000 guests pass through the village every year and, in addition to the local ceramic art gallery, they also visit the studio and museum of the Bulgarian Vasil Ivanov.

Both his personality and his work are significant for contemporary art. He left behind more than 3,000 works after his death. Called by critics “the proud loner”, Vasil Ivanov is considered one of the most significant figures in contemporary ceramics. It is not by chance that they call him “Picasso in ceramics”.

Nowadays, works by Vasil Ivanov can be found in the catalogs of reputable auction houses, such as those of “Drouot” and the American FADA, as well as in the Parisian gallery “Casson”. In 1990, Beta Production created a film about him, which bears the following annotation: “Vasil Ivanov, who influenced the ceramics of the 20th century”.

In Bulgaria, however, the famous ceramist remains unknown. After his death, the then Bulgarian ambassador to Paris, Irina Bokova, was, according to local people, the first official representative of the Bulgarian state to visit the museum in La Borne. In the museum’s book, she writes: “It is an honor for all of us, for Bulgarians, that we have given the civilized West such a famous artist.”

(excerpt from Ivan Panayotov’s book “The People of Tarnovo, Who Glorified Bulgaria”)



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