

I Have Dušan's Soul at Home

The Magic World of Dušan Kállay

by BARBARA BRATHOVÁ



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In this review-style article, Barbara Brathová uses his recently published volume of collected work, *Magický svet* [Magic world], to introduce the work of Slovakia's finest illustrator, Dušan Kállay

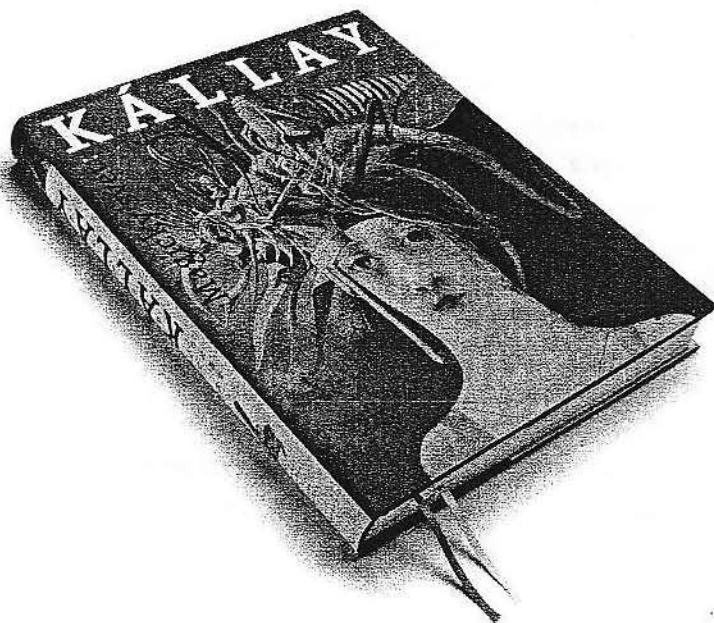
Dušan Kállay

Magický svet [Magic world]

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Dušan Kállay's *Magický svet* [Magic world] was published at the end of 2004 by Slovart and exquisitely graphically designed and presented by the Rabbit & Solution studio – the photographers are Juraj Králik and Martin Marenčin and the typography is by Vladislav Rostoka. It is obvious from this publication that an enormous amount of creative and thoughtful work has gone into its production: it is the work of a whole team of people. Everyone who participated in the making of this monography, rightfully deserves our admiration.

The book covers the work of a significant Slovak artist and professor, Dušan Kállay, who is a disciple of Albín Brunovský's school of illustration, and is a wonderful account of his lifework, covering graphic work, ex libris, drawings, paintings, illustrations, posters and stamp-making, films. The accompanying texts by two scholars of fine art – Ivan Jančár and Fedor Kriška – together with the artist's own thoughts and life observations capture not only his creative process,



influences, development and motivation, but also those little private remarks about childhood and youth, thus formulating major truths in a natural and human form, peculiar to him.

The publication is packed with the artist's life's work from his student years all the way to the artistic masterpieces of Dušan Kállay's present-day work. The book introduces his work in its full expansiveness, with its contrasts and its significant overlapping of genres, clearly detailing the author's artistic 'buoys' carefully released onto the 'sea' of his imagination. Not only do they set boundaries but they also point to the differently imagined possibilities that his work develops in the perception of the spectator.

Dušan Kállay was born in Bratislava in 1948. He studied (1966–72) at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design (VŠVU) in Bratislava, in the department of figural composition and landscape-painting under Professor Želibský. He has been working for the VŠVU in Bratislava since 1990 where, as a professor, he supervises the free graphics and book illustration department. As far as his own work is concerned, he has been engaged in free graphics, illustration, painting, drawing, ex libris and stamp- and poster-making. From 1970 to 1998, Kállay took part in more than a hundred exhibitions both at home and internationally.

Illustration work plays an immensely significant role in the artist's life. Among the children's books that he has illustrated, the one that became most popular and special in his eyes was Lewis Carroll's *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*. The illustrations to this and other books are a mosaic of creativity and inventiveness. His sporadic colouring presents the world in a visionary and imaginative way.

Dušan Kállay has received a number of awards for his work. He has become a multiple winner of the Mladé Letá Publishing award; he was awarded the BIB Golden Apple 1973 for his illustration of *Leteli sokoli nad Javorinou* [Falcons fly over Javorina] by J Horák (published in Bratislava by Mladé Letá); the BIB Golden Apple 1975 for his illustrations to O Mattson's *Rytier Roland* [Roland the knight] (published in Bratislava by Mladé Letá); and the BIB Grand Prix 1983 for his illustration of *The Adventures of Alice in*

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Wonderland. His illustrations were also awarded the Golden Pen award in Belgrade in 1980; the IBA gold medal in Leipzig in 1982; and the Premi Internacional Catalonia d'Il·lustració in Barcelona in 1984.

He has been the Ľudovít Fulla award holder since 1983, and in 1988 he was given a Hans Christian Andersen award and later, in 1993, a BIB plaque for

his illustration of *Ein Strich zieht durch die Welt* [A line goes through the world] (by Heinz R Unger, published in Vienna by Dachs Verlag).

Dušan Kállay is justifiably considered Slovakia's most famous and internationally recognised artist. His illustrated books (including reissues and translations) come to more than two hundred titles.

The work of Dušan Kállay is the ultimate expression of an absolute artistic vision and perception of the world. It is based on an extraordinary imagination and sense of fantasy, applied in rather bizarre compositions of figures, animals and birdlife, all in a labyrinth of never-ending atypical structures knitted together and proving the playfulness and mystery of the artist at the same time. At the moment, he is working together with his wife Kamila Štanclová on a set of illustrations for a grandiose project – the Andersen stories.

For Kállay, it is not difficult to stand in the shoes of younger readers. He himself, it seems, has inwardly remained a little boy with a pure soul, full of imaginative pictures and worlds of fantasy, where everything is possible and where even the abnormal appears to be normal and natural.

On the one hand, his graphic work is characterised by multiple structures, which he uses to 'build' cathedrals and buildings originating from or based on natural motifs. Everything is complicated, maybe even a little difficult to perceive at first glance. However, on analysing the details more carefully, the spectator discovers intimate worlds of the simple figures, flora, elements of zoomorphism. Animals and insects are equal partners. They have their own clothes and attributes but also a character and expressions of feelings. There is always also an element of humour in these magic surroundings. The characters, however, are not idiotic or comic but rather sympathetic and funny. These 'moments' can be found in his graphic work, as well as in the paintings and, of course, in the illustrations.

Kállay's paintings are also in a colourful narrative style, with an emphasis on detail. Specific ideas, symbols, meanings and messages are communicated even on the surface of decorative scenes. These messages are often purposefully unfinished or portrayed just slightly. Each face is a reflection of the character's inner world. Every fragment has also a logical meaning, although it might seem, on the face of it, a pure invention of the artist's creativity.

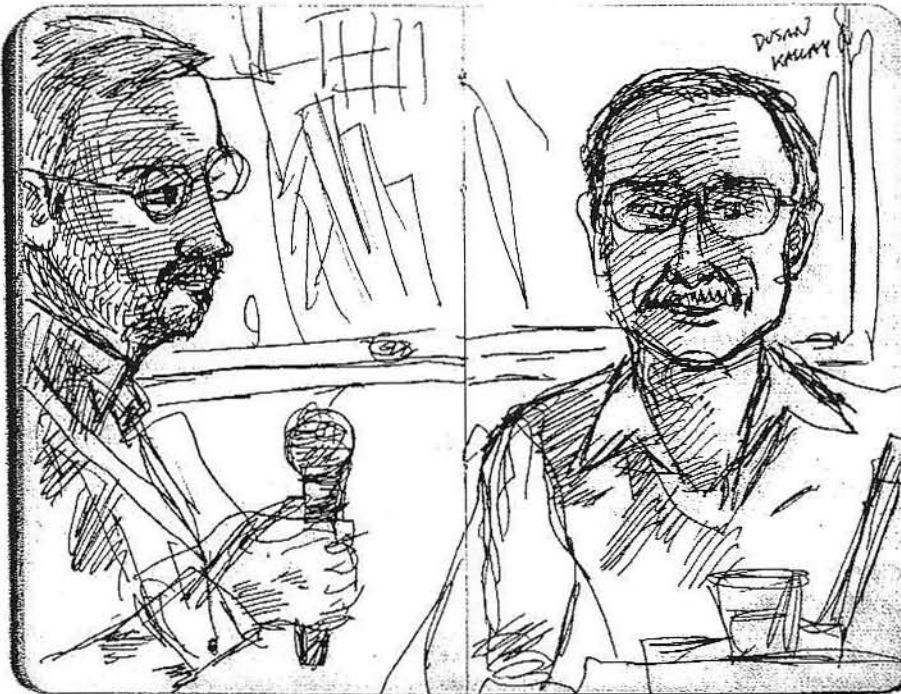


Dušan Kállay takes the creative process very seriously, with a proper level of respect and humility. In spite of this, his work gives a rather optimistic impression, as if he spends his life playing. The life around him is his primary motivation. He sensitively perceives nature, events, circumstances, truths, thoughts, emotional squalls, loves and unkindness – as if with different eyes from the rest of us. He is both rooted in and, using fresh mediums, heading towards knowledge.

This publication is, in effect, a major documentary work on this artist, and it includes a summary bibliography of his work, his biographical details and a listing of his innumerable awards in various international and national forums. It is a summary of exhibitions presented

on various continents. It is also a presentation of private photographs, glances into his studio, fragments of his journeys, family memories, friends and common experiences. On thumbing through this book, you will feel that one life is not enough to experience it all, and respect for the artist grows with every page of thoughtful analysis turned. The reader – indeed, the viewer – of this book will have a worthwhile experience and should feel inspired. The 'magic world' of Dušan Kállay will captivate you.

To have this book doesn't simply mean that you have a masterpiece in your library. It means much more than that. It means you have a piece of Dušan Kállay's inner world at home; it means you have an extra human soul – to keep private or to display on your bookshelf.



Jeffrey Garrett and Dušan Kállay at the Bologna Book Fair 2005, © Philip Stanton/Stanton Studio

Omission

The authors of the material referred to in the article by Penni Cotton on the European School Education Training Course (based on the European Picture Book Collection), 2004 <http://www.nercl.ac.uk/eset/> in *Bookbird* 43 (2) are as follows: Penni Cotton, Celia Keenan, Annemie Leysen, Stuart Marriott, Margarida Morgado, Emer O'Sullivan, Romain Sahr.