

GOTTLIEB, LEOPOLD – A SOLDIER AND A GENIUS OF MODERNISM

The art of **Leopold Gottlieb** is still not fully recognized and properly appreciated. He was born on June 3, 1879, in Drohobycz, the son of an owner of a small refinery and a Polish Jew. His older brother Maurycy, who tragically died at age of 23, was a recognized artist and became an inspiration for Leopold.

In 1896, he joined the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow and studied under his brother's teacher Jacek Malczewski. Then, just as his brother did almost two decades earlier, Leopold continued his studies in Munich. His mentor was Anton Ažbe who was famous for realistic painting. While in Munich, Leopold earned his living painting portraits.

In 1904, the young artist settled in Paris. A year later he co-founded the Cracow based Group of Five which included: Vlastimil Hofman, Mieczysław Jakimowicz, Jan Rembowski, and Witold Wojtkiewicz with whom he exhibited his early works in Lwów, Berlin, Vienna, and Warsaw.

At that time Gottlieb's work was influenced by the Secession style as in *Portrait of a Woman* (1903) and the art of the Young Poland movement. In 1906, he moved to Jerusalem to teach painting at the School of Fine Arts of Bazalel. He married a medical student and returned with his wife to Paris in 1908.

There, Gottlieb became active in the circle of artists of Montparnasse and his works were presented at Salon d'Automne, Salon d'Indépendants, as well as at Société Nationale des Beaux Artes and Salon des Tuilleries.

An influential gallerist Adolphe Basler and an art critic André Salmon promoted his paintings, bringing him recognition. His art was in a stream of change as he searched for his own style.

Painted in 1906, *Portrait of Doctor Kupczyk* is an example of the trend at the turn of the century (Fine de siècle), the expression of "decadentism." It is depicted by the portrayal of a person sitting at a table, next to a glass vase with dying flowers, in an almost somnambulant state, frozen in thought,



Compassion (1913)

and with a cigarette held in one of the crossed hands. The face is painted with gray spots and the entire view is as if looking through a broken glass.

A couple of years later, Gottlieb's paintings evolved into the new Modernistic style. In *Portrait of Diego Riviera* (1912), he was using a selective palette of colors and figurative disproportion, which later – as in *Compassion* (1913) – developed into a simplified form driven by Cubism and took curved lines from Secession.

His landscapes were inspired by Cubism as in *Urban Landscape* or *View of Cagnes*. However, in portraits, like *Portrait of Andre Gide* (1916) the influence of Expressionism is visible through the psychological expression of the model and use of strong, contrasting colors.

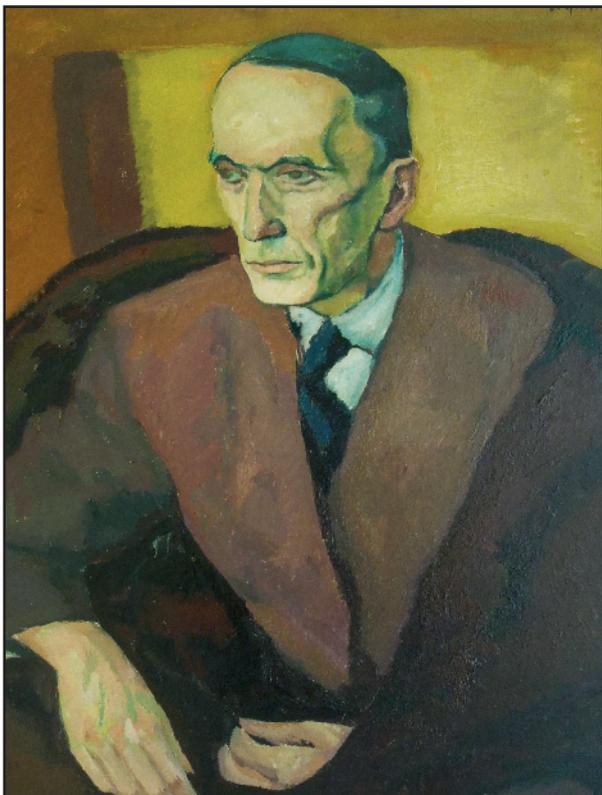
Gottlieb's works were exhibited in Vienna, Zurich, Berne, and Barcelona. He became famous not only through his art but also because of his duel with a painter – Moise Kisling!

In 1914, Gottlieb traveled to Cracow to join the Polish Legion led by Józef Piłsudski. He became a chronicler of the Legions drawing over 1000 pictures including scenes from battles, soldiers' lives, and their portraits. In 1917, an individual exhibition in Lublin presented many of those works. Later they were published in the form of an album.

From 1917 to 1919, Gottlieb's paintings were exhibited with Polish Expressionists with whom he felt connected by his style. In 1920, he moved to Vienna, then to Germany, and in 1926 to Paris. In the 1920s, the style as well as themes of his paintings changed.

At the Table (1920) shows colorful figures defined by curved lines and simplified forms. His *Harvest* reminds viewers of the aesthetics of Henri Matisse. *Gardeners* brought patches of colors in Gauguin's style depicting workers in an Expressionistic, exotic garden. The addition of white and brown color and dissolved shapes shows a further development of Gottlieb's style.

In the 1930s, whites and pearls dominate his pictures, like in *Three Women*, *White Women*,



Portrait of André Gide (1925) (CC BY SA 4.0)



Women and a Tulip

Dancers at Rest, or *Femme Assise*. In *Women and a Tulip* only the tulip is strongly contrasting the dominating white shapes of women. A similar effect is in the painting *Return from Fishing* where baskets add color to two figures defined very simply by white paint. The artistic effect of this simplicity is amazing.

In *Lovers*, the barely defined shapes of figures and patches of color build an expression of an intimate scene. Gottlieb became a master of emotions. His works, through the simplicity of artistic expression (synthetic, almost nonexistent, exoteric shapes... and very basic colors), provoke the imagination of viewers! The incredible transformation of Gottlieb's style and the enormous expression of his paintings and drawings is present in returning motifs in his works like *Portrait of a Woman* or *On the Boat*.

Leopold Gottlieb died on April 24, 1934, in Paris, France. His works were in deep shadow during the decades of the PRL which promoted social realism in art and because of Gottlieb's involvement in the Polish-Soviet War. They surely deserve broader popularization and international recognition.

See his works at: www.the-athenaeum.org/art/list.php?a&s=tu&aid=11496