

E von Vietinghoff

Egon von Vietinghoff's memories

Translated in 2012 (reviewed in January 2014, added one more in September 2018)

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All these stories are recorded by Vietinghoff himself in the first person. Thus, the quotations marks are omitted. Some sentences are the combination of two versions without a change to the choice of words. *The editor's remarks and additions are written in italics.*

For someone who has no special talent even the most gripping experiences can only be sketched by some external and meaningless outlines. Therefore, everyone should avoid writing an *autobiography*. The lively novel turns to a death chronicle which, nevertheless, may be interesting to serve as a bridge to the memory. It is hoped that authors will amuse the reader with stories of unusual situations.

(Egon von Vietinghoff)

1. Childhood

I always traveled a lot; no sooner was I born than I was balanced in a makeshift hammock between baggage nets in a compartment train from Holland to Paris. As a child, I was disappointed that the countries did not change color when travelling from one to another as it was dictated by the atlas. ... And I worried that the conductor passing by made a hole in the ticket as I knew it was then devaluated but our long trip still continued.

My brother possessed many small bears which differed in color and facial expression. On the trains, he distributed them on the window ledge, armrests and luggage rack but usually forgot to collect them before changing trains. To save them from an unknown fate, my father would avert tragedy by running back to the train which had not yet departed in order to collect the little bears at the last moment possible, missing our own train in the process. The tears in the eyes of my brother urged him to hasten and the little bears were rescued.

My parents were most humble and each had a greatness of character in their own way which was rooted in strong ethics. Nevertheless, due to their social background they naturally fostered their social relations. They were helpful friends, gathering artists and other cultivated people in their home, and gave house concerts some times. They had an exceptional radiating presence and, therefore, were welcomed at many receptions.

Once, they were invited to a dinner with the emperor in Wiesbaden which my little brother was allowed to attend. Wilhelm II visited the spa city once in a while so we children saw the parades in his honor. My brother Alexis was maybe six years old and his palate did not yet appreciate the refinement of the imperial banquet. Confused by the abundance of the pleasant-sounding dishes and missing his usual fare, he childishly blurted out his outraged conclusion in an alarmingly loud voice: "There is not even cheese!" But the emperor would not have heard as there were many tables and they were very long...

2. School days

2.1 Zuoz (Switzerland)

On Saturday evenings, the differences between the students, which were carefully recorded throughout the week, were expressed through confrontation. As I felt uncomfortable seeing the bigger ones mistreating the smaller ones and therefore intervened sometimes, I made some enemies among the older thugs and had to suffer a fair number of tortures. This hour of reckoning probably contributed to my parents' wish that I change from the status of a boarder to a day student which remarkably improved my situation. Hence, I lived with a family who owned a house above the lyceum.

In this house lived some other schoolboys and a very pretty but young adult girl from Rhineland. I admired her bright translucent complexion and I was angry not to be adult yet. A big difference in age and hormonal development can have painful consequences as the euphoria of the pre-mature or very old lover is not honored, though the importance which is ascribed to age is ignored by those involved. Fortunately, I was so busy building a slide *in the snow* with other students which would bring us to the lyceum in seconds, that I had little time to abandon myself to lovesickness.

Another unique story was the short employment of a teacher who drew attention due to a deep scar across his skull. When he heard my name, he seemed to become insecure, treated me with kid gloves and gave me too high marks for my performance. My parents were shocked when I told them his name: the scare resulted from the sword stroke which my grandfather (*Arnold Julius von Vietinghoff*) gave him in the 1905 Russian Revolution (*in self-defense when a group of revolutionists entered the manor house and burned it*). In the meantime, he had changed from leader of the revolutionary band to a teacher (*of the internationally renowned boarding school of the high society after his immigration to Switzerland due to the turmoil in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire or he fled from his homeland due to the police reaction to the attack on my family property*).

2.2 Zurich

One of my teachers expelled me from the classroom to wait until the next lesson in the corridor. Until today, I do not know why the manner in which I took this humiliation brought the respect of my mates and an almost friendly relation with the teacher of mathematics. Later, he often invited me to his home and bought some of my works, after I became a painter. However, mathematics remained a riddle wrapped in an enigma. In drawing, I was as bad as the tasks were boring. Once, the art teacher called me a fool because I did not follow his instructions.

3. Morocco

A. (*the travel mate*) was a strange person; I liked him a lot but his character was somber. After that strange and sudden separation from him (*see sub-chapter "Anecdotes"*), I did not think anymore of the Congo River but wanderlust pushed me forwards and I decided to travel to Morocco. Soon, I found a small cargo steamer whose captain agreed to let me travel to Ceuta for a little money. In the evening, when I went to the ship, there already sat on deck several dubious fellows who apparently had the same idea to cross the strait in this cheap way. They settled themselves on the stacked crates, absorbed in a game of dice. I took a seat on the bow. The last loads were carried on board and the wages paid to the dockworker. Then whoever did not want to travel left the ship, on board began the busy, quiet and usual work which always gave me the same impression... as when I came to the theatre a little bit early and saw how the seats filled slowly and the solemn moment came closer and closer. Soon, the lights would go out and from behind the heavy fabric there would appear a fantastic world. Behind the small hole, an eye could be seen from time to time, and the weak light came through, one could not infer even the color of the light which would illuminate the stage. What a beautiful feeling to sit in front of this big secret with the certainty that the moment of its unveiling was inevitable and approached faster and faster! The ship detached slowly from the dock, the ropes which held it lengthened their ends, pitched into the water with a smack and then would carefully roll over each other in skillful bows. The ship's engine hammered regularly into the night while some playful dolphins accompanied us in powerful leaps. ...

I was lost in the dazzling world of stars, when an old Arabian whom I had seen among the playing companions took a seat next to me asking, if I would know how to see the time according to the star constellations; as I did not, he showed me and asked further what I would intend to do in Morocco. He was horrified and scoffed paternally when he heard that I liked to wander alone in a country in a state of war. It was 1920 when the Rif War was at its peak. He vividly described the situation, the hatred of the Arabians for the Europeans and predicted that I would get my throat cut in the first day or disappear forever in one of the many towers which crowned the hills of this hospitable country. He spoke calmly and realistically; I could not doubt his benevolence or the truth of his speech, thus I saw myself with the uncomfortable prospect of searching for a steamer in Ceuta for the return or paying a high price for my love of adventure. I was at a loss; thus the paternal Arab proposed that I perambulate the country with him. He needed to visit several small villages (the reason why, I never found out) and would take me along under two conditions. First, I must wear Arabian clothes in Ceuta so as not to be identified as a European from afar, and second to learn the beginning verses of the Koran to propitiate the Arabian minds. Of course, I joyfully agreed and exercised the complicated guttural sounds of the Arabian language. Later, I was always sorry to have missed the chance to practice it further, as the beauty of the generous and acerbic verses of the Koran, which my companion repeatedly recited with veneration in the course of our travels, soon fascinated me. In Ceuta as well, where we spent two days, I arduously exercised and my barbed Berber corrected me with the patience of a saint.

The curtain was already half open on an unknown, glaringly colorful, flashy, rough world. Tall and scraggy figures rode on small jackasses. The burnous (burnoose) covered them entirely; the naked legs hung down on each side of the donkey, the toes squeezed into huge flat slippers whose back part brushed the soil carelessly. When they met, first they silently and mutually touched their forehead and moved the hand to their mouth. Then, they started to speak directly. The voices continuously somersaulted; rolling and whispered guttural sounds alternated with aspirated, squeezed or rubbed ones and created a muffled diverse base sound for the scarce but sharp vowels. Such was also their music. It passed below my window as the voice of the sinister and arcane world of the desert. Hollow syncopated drum beats combined with small flutes and bagpipes which played games with strident and loud but unlimitedly differentiated sounds. A play which could never end...

4. Memories of Paris (1923-1933)

4.1 “Friends”

Because my studio was quite spacious, I was thought to be wealthy (among the blind, the one-eyed is king) and was sorely exploited. Once at night, a Peruvian friend woke me up knocking on the door. He was an Incan prince and his wife was a dancer. After I let him in, he ran around the studio with a searching glance. To my query of what he wanted, he answered he was looking for a small table to burn; he had no more heating fuel at home. Often the experiences with my colleagues were not as comedic. The covetous will go to any means to gain an advantage over the object of their envy. One borrowed my vacuum cleaner for a few hours, never to be seen again. A second one, now a highly-paid painter, managed to sell my large Persian carpet under the pretext of bringing it to a carpet cleaner known to him. To another colleague, I provided free accommodation for months because his studio's rent was cancelled. After he finally moved out, many things were missing which he seemed to need more urgently than me. I was never repaid the loans I credulously gave to colleagues who were skilled in manipulating people. After such experiences, I did not have a good opinion of the ruling solidarity among artists.

4.2 The kitchen for intellectuals and artists

I was not as wealthy as many of my colleagues believed. I suffered serious shortages and I had to tighten my belt. During such a time, I sought a kind of soup kitchen for intellectuals. It had the name of a great poet. The walls were completely covered with advertisements in which the companies praised the idealism with which they generously allocated their noodles, beans or plum butter to the future spiritual elite of France (the set phrase was: “*Gracieusement mis à la disposition de...*”). The hungry elite sat on long tables. Two watchmen stood between and suspiciously guarded the number of forks and knives. Every time I left the locale, I was full of fleas. I found a spray and the rest of a liquid insecticide which I sprayed under my jacket before I re-entered this kitchen for the impoverished intellectuals. Much to my surprise, the entire spiritual elite moved away from me and left a gaping vacuity around me. Their wrinkled noses were obviously sensitive to the spray.

4.3 Incidental earnings

At that time, I was preoccupied with my training and sold very few paintings, partly as I had not yet reached the state I envisioned, and partly because as a painter who had not made a name for himself, it was very hard to sell paintings in Paris. Aside from sporadic portrait orders, I kept myself and later my family afloat with incidental earnings which I made with all kinds of jobs, which brought in a small sum relative to the time I lost. I illustrated trashy novels from a neighboring backyard printing press; I painted Chinese hunts on huge golden bases (which were delivered to me due to my spatial studio) as well as world maps with the animals and costumes of different regions of the world; I retouched and changed photographs, even worked briefly in a garage making hats according to the fashion designed by my wife. I took any offered opportunity to get some money. My retouching work which I did on female portraits was copious. It consisted in rejuvenating the pictures of women, who considered themselves not beautiful enough, by removing all wrinkles and fat so the portrait was beyond recognition.

In the meantime, I acquired some skills in painting technique; thus I dared to tackle the restoration of damaged oil-paintings with great success. Once someone brought a completely crumpled painting of Winterhalter (*most probably Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1805-1873, the more famous of two German brothers*), which was smuggled over the border in a rucksack during the war (*WW I*). I worked on it over days until any damaged traces were erased. This success brought other restoration orders but I was not fulfilled. The only financial security I had was the property of my studio which I regretted for a long time afterwards, since careless (*and not paying*) tenants and flows of refugees devastated it during the war.

4.4 Apollo and the nine muses

During summer time, which I mainly spent at friends' homes in the South, I rented my studio to painters who sojourned in Paris. Once (*in the years 1924-1927*) a Brazilian, who received a government order, rented it and was happy to have found a room which was big enough. He had to paint an over-sized picture for a public building in Rio which represented Apollo and the nine muses. The little man was obsessed and bright-eyed; with feverish activity, he scampered around the studio like a rabbit. He drank the blackest coffee I have ever seen all day, probably to fight his nonexistent idleness. We agreed immediately; I moved out and he moved in.

The next day, I needed to discuss something with him and visited him. The studio was unrecognizable. Overnight, my tenant was able to erect a five to eight meter large canvas and to produce – with the aid of my double ladder – a rolling mechanism with which he speeded from one end of the canvas to the other. He piled paint cans in one corner of the studio; in another he installed a coffee kitchen. Most astonishing were the ten models, a man and nine women, who he had already found and positioned together in front of the wall on which he pasted a blue paper. All of the completely undressed muses and their master were silhouetted against the azure of that Attic sky and were waiting to be eternalized together by the brush of the Brazilian Apelles (*the most important painter in Antic times*).

I was dumbfounded. Artists have always painted single sketches after nature before they tackled the execution of their oil-painting on a large scale, but possibly nobody before had had the crazy idea to paint ten people at once. I have never seen the completed painting. Thus, when I came back after two months, as agreed, the canvas was already “unrigged”, rolled up and shipped; the Greek sky and the rolling mechanism burned in the oven and the pile of paint was used up.

4.5 Illustrations, photomontages and restoration

Opposite my studio lived a fat Italian who did not succeed – despite his exuberant vitality – to do anything more than run a shabby publishing house and to distribute unutterably kitschy serialized novels. They were illustrated and my task was to compile photomontages matching the text from a mountain of photographs, advertisements, cuttings from old newspapers, and films. For example, it was written: “When the boy entered the room, the grandmother sat in the easy chair and the cat slept in a corner.” Then I cut a cat from the pile of pictures with cats and stuck it in a corner; I transformed a parrot into a grandmother (skillful retouching can do anything), reduced the size of another figure by cutting half of the legs to get a youth and stuck it in the open door of the advertisement of a furniture factory. Then, I took a photograph of the collage and went over it with retouching ink.

The Italian always entered my studio like a dust-raising bull, once with a small Dutch oil-painting of the 17th century. The center of the picture was missing but on the remaining borders one could recognize a good painting. With Italian zeal he had wished to clean the painting with an alcohol soaked cloth and wiped away the entire middle down to the base with a single swipe. I was supposed to replace the missing part. My employer explained the missing scenes. I painted some figures which definitely would not have anything to do with the original but pleased him so much that he pulled a fifty franc banknote from his breast pocket with Southern grandeur and a princely gesture. In other situations, he was easily satisfied concerning the quality; however, he was insatiable in the quantity requested. It came to the point that my lack of time and routine gradually encouraged me to work carelessly. My employer did not notice. Only when I inadvertently pasted a budgie in the bed and a barely dressed girl in the cage, he thought it would be better to remake the scene but recommended keeping the montage to possibly use it for another passage.

4.6 Massimo Campigli's studio

From time to time, we held parties in Campigli's studio during which quite a lot of vodka bottles were emptied. I drank most, even though I did not like alcoholics, because my drunken manner was popular. (*Vietinghoff was a good friend of Massimo Campigli, 1895-1971, at that time though he did not believe much in his art. He said about him: "... Campigli who painted in fresco the palatial rooms of Italian transatlantic ships with his corset women..."*)

M. C., at that time still unknown but later worldwide famous, had a big studio which was partly divided into two rooms by a glazed wall. The smaller part served as a kitchen, washroom and store-room. On this side, there were shelves installed where kitchen and painting utensils were piled up, causing frequent confusion. It did not spoil his appetite when he prepared fish batter with Chinese white (*a pigment*) but he became extremely angry if a prime coat with flour failed on the canvas. His studio was a favored place for nightly carouses because there was plenty of space and alcohol. The only annoying disadvantage was that the light was switched off because the coin of two "sous" (*two pennies*) was often missed which was needed to be put into the gas meter. M. C. invented a complicated process to remedy this trouble with coins, which he put together and used as often as he liked. Thus the studio was illuminated again until the gas inspector discovered the issue and punished its inventor, though sincerely admiring the brilliancy of the idea.

At one of these evenings, we imbibed generously to honor Bacchus what was not well handled by every participant. Once, a tall Swede and a somewhat effeminate Spaniard stood face to face in the middle of the studio. The Swede turned red and the mustache of the Spaniard, which was shaved around the mouth according to the fashion at that time, trembled ominously. They were locked in such heated discussion that I saw the moment arriving when they would attack each other. I placed myself between them to force peace and gave each of them a big shove. The giant Swede staggered only a few steps back but the Spaniard reeled backwards waving his arms across the room until he came to sit in the freshly cooked risotto. He expressed his unfortunate situation with loud howling. It's unknown if he finally remained feminine due to this incident. During that evening, I was very confused by the door of the glazed dividing wall. When I slammed it, it tinkled as it would shatter into a thousand pieces – but it remained intact. To get to the bottom of the phenomenon, I passed the door once again and slammed it more powerfully. The same effect: the clinking of smashed panes but the glazed wall stayed intact. Already at that time, I did not like to be confronted with issues which I could not understand and repeated this experiment several more times without finding any explanation. The day after, M. C. told me in amusement that I had smashed all his china which rested on the shelves of the dividing wall.

I never had any hangover after such festivities. It was sufficient to hold my head under the cold water to drive away all unpleasant consequences of the inebriation. At the occasion of a festive family reunion in Berlin, I went in tails to have a shower and continued in the party like a drowned rat – for the general merriment of the other guests. (*This anecdote was recounted at family gatherings even decades later*). Yet such excesses were exceptions. Generally, I sought to keep a low profile and not cause a sensation. I never wore artist's cravats and velvet trousers but contented myself with the round stiff bowler hat according to the fashion at that time and for festive occasions a tails coat and "chapeau claqué" (*a French top hat which could be folded*). The fashion to be bareheaded emerged only later on.

4.7 In the Subway

I owe one of my most beautiful experiences to the subway in Paris. A girl stood in front of me in the usual crowd, tightly holding onto the brass hand pole which runs under the windows for this purpose. Her hand, small and slender with a white glove, was fascinating. It radiated such a charm and irresistible attraction that I could not help laying my hand gently on hers. She almost did not flinch. For a fraction of a second, she glanced fleetingly at me, then she trustingly let her hand rest under mine and I felt through this hand which I enveloped how my confiding gesture gave her a quiet delight as well. Many stations flew past before we were separated by the masses pouring in or because one of us had to get out – I do not know anymore, but the tender flavor of this virgin experience remained.

4.8 On nightly journey home

On the nightly journey home, I had to pass a bad quarter and was often witness to nasty brawls which psychologically strained me because I was indecisive as to whether I should dutifully help the weaker one or to keep out of the fray. Youthful bravery and the fear of being beaten severely struggled in my conscience. Later I was absolved from this dilemma, due to two incidents: After I was able to deter a large man from kicking the face of someone lying on the floor, I expected the underdog would use my intervention to abscond immediately. Instead, he stood up blood-covered and began to insult his attacker in the most aggressive way because he had soiled his hat. I vainly shouted that he should get away while I was detaining the bigger one. He insisted on risking another defeat due to the trifle of the dirty hat; thus I abandoned them to their fate.

Another time, I rushed in the direction of the sounds of a woman's shrill cries for help. A drunkard was brutally thrashing a loudly wailing woman. All hell broke loose when I interfered as both the man and the woman furiously shouted at me as to why I was meddling into affairs which did not concern me. After that time, I did not intervene in alterations anymore and walked on my own path on the other side of the street with a good conscience...

4.9 The fiscal note

One day, I received a fiscal note which I probably should have filled out but I could not, as the demand remained incomprehensible due to its official language. I asked an acquaintance who was Minister of Finance for many years what I should do. His well-meant advice was: "*Write: I am a foreign student and do not need to pay taxes*". I followed his instructions. Later, it cost me a penalty of thousands of Francs and I thus remain suspicious of experts until today.

4.10 At Mother Rosalie's

At night, I mainly ate at Mother Rosalie's, an Italian whose huge breasts were barely held together with a camisole (*bodice, undergarment*) which was once allegedly white. In her tiny tavern, which was endowed with two tables and five chairs, she fed generations of artists. There was one single menu year in and year out: "beefsteak, with wine and bread at discretion". The boozy Utrillo (*Maurice Utrillo, 1883-1955*) exceeded the "discretion" but in exchange painted on the wall which was later seen by an American and transferred to the States. Mother Rosalie was picky: she served meals only to those artists who suited her taste. I was lucky to belong to her favorites and could expect that she scraped with her dirty hands a big piece of butter from the hunk and smacked it on my beefsteak. It was delicious and cheap.

4.11 The Café du Dôme and the Immigrants

After the meal, I moved to the Café du Dôme, the center of the artistic “fauna” of Montparnasse (*quarter in Paris favored by the artists*). For ten years, almost every evening I was in the Café du Dôme. There one could meet Calder ..., Ray ... with his girlfriend Kiki, Pascin ..., Kisling ..., Campigli ..., Derain and Foujita ..., Giacometti and his brother ..., Picasso ..., van Dongen ..., the ... Masereel and many others (*we consciously omit Vietinghoff's attributes to each of them*).

In 1933, the comfortable encounters ended as the wave of the immigrants who left Germany, which had become dangerous, broke into the “Dôme”. They were very active and occupied several tables with great organizing ability. At one table general information was shared; at another, private lodgings, apartments and studios were found and distributed; at another, job creation was discussed and jobs arranged; at another one, an aid fund for low-income people was installed etc. Thus, lively activities developed with the result that the orders (*for paintings*) passed to the quicker zealous immigrants, who worked for less money and were governed by less scruples and pursued more skillful advertising. As many living in Montparnasse before eked out a living with incidental earnings, many of my painter friends lost their opportunity to earn money and remained unemployed. Thus, I too lost the jobs with which I defrayed my livelihood such as illustration, photographic works and all kinds of graphic orders etc., as these opportunities were found and taken over by the immigrants.

5. Saint-Tropez

In August, the hottest month in summertime, when the people of Paris leave their city empty to gasp for breath at the sea side or in the mountains, a friend invited me several years in a row to spend my vacations in Saint-Tropez. There, he owned a house where he lived for a large part of the year with his wife and daughter. He was the son of a rich Jewish-Yugoslavian lawyer and named Celebonowich. This name was too exotic for the French, thus they changed it to the more familiar “*C'est bon le sandwich*” (which means “*The sandwich is good*”). During World War II, he distinguished himself as a resistance fighter against the German occupation. Yet, during the summer months which I spent over there, it was perfectly peaceful and Saint-Tropez was not yet overrun with vacationers. We often swam and measured our energy by the time which we could remain underwater and by the distance of jogging. The stays in Saint-Tropez contributed much to my physical training.

One evening, a fire broke out near the harbor which could not be extinguished because the awkward fire police let the water pump fall into the harbor basin. In the face of the burning house, but mainly due to the presence of a girl whom I had admired a long time, I jumped into the water without further ado, dived and retrieved the pump back. My jump did not fail to impress because the next day, I met the girl and after each encounter I fell more and more in love with her. She was the most beautiful little creation I had ever met: she recently sprung from childhood, blossoming toward her spring. She was the youngest daughter of a numerous Czech family which spent their holidays in Saint-Tropez yearly. She spoke only Czech language and taught me a single word: “*keřižovatka*” which means “inter-section”. It was sufficient to meet daily and to enjoy being together in the near pine wood. Although I passionately kissed her and showered her with attestations of love, I never passed the limit which demanded my respect of her virginity. We loved each other silently as she did not understand a single French word but the hours which I spent with her appear in my memories like a fairy tale illuminated with magic light. Later, I felt less romantic when an acquaintance, who provided me dry clothes, asked me to collect my taken off garments as they stank up his room, since I had jumped exactly at the place where the sewer merged with the harbor.

6. South America

(*Due to the worsened situation in Paris*) I left my studio and also emigrated with my wife and daughter first to Majorca, which was unbelievable inexpensive at that time, and later to the family-in-law in Buenos Aires, where I was engaged in a metal factory by my brothers-in-law. Unfortunately, I am useless in the everyday work of most men. ... One did what was possible to help me, yet all efforts fell on unfertile soil ... When I heard that a crazy Englishman had constructed a log cabin of entire trunks in the riparian woods in Uruguay which was empty, I did not need a long time to contemplate taking the trip to the other bank of the river Rio de la Plata. There, it is so large that being in the middle, one does not see either bank for a long while. The ship moves through a central channel which is continuously carved out, but the ship still hits the ground at times.

7. The crossing back to Europe

Lightning without thunder illuminates the muggy air of the night. Once in a while, they offer me a round view through the porthole of the cabin in which the pale horizon is spoiled by rain. The machine hammers dully, and the monotone murmuring of card playing Russians ... are not able to hold my ear. Today, one of them asked me how old I am. My answer was: "34 years" and it penetrated my thoughts all evening. I have time and leisure to think about my life. My sense is neither focused on the future with great hopes nor are the disappointments of the past that so far both do not embitter me, so I can quietly realize with some sadness how life let me down that in every respect. Ten years ago, the wonderful images, which I had in my imagination, let me hope that my life would be rich. The ardent desire for love and the capacity to fall in love which I was dying to do ... strengthened my hope ... to deeply unite emotionally and physically with a woman. I admired the great works in art, was enthusiastic about them, no less than now, and believed with the ardor of youth to be talented enough to create great works one day as well. I was full of energy and saw my skills in painting technique growing from month to month. I was not disturbed by economic worries, neither in my personal future dreams nor in those of art. Ten years later, however, I am fleeing on a third class emigrants' ship from the union with a woman in whom I believed to see the personification of beauty and nobility and with whom I hoped to live my dreams of youth. I had to recognize, more from year to year, that it was not possible. The difference of our characters ..., perhaps the impossibility as well, that two human beings are able to give to each other what they expected so fervently, made my marriage more and more bitter, and the existence of the child prevented us from independently going our own ways.

Together with my hope of life, the power to overcome the obstacles on my artistic path died as well. They (*obstacles*) lie so close in front of me and my will is so weakened that I cannot have any hope to possibly create an important work. In addition, financial worries are roaming in my head ... in a more and more urgent language. With regard to my own life and that of most people I meet, the joy of having a lovely child becomes cheerless considering the many disappointments which are in store for this poor little creation.

Destiny! The only joy,
The bitter one of forgoing,
You let us completely taste.

8. My studios

When I still lived at my parents' home (1917-1920; Zurich, Böcklinstrasse 18), I had at my disposal an attic room in which I modeled and painted, later a small studio in the most upper floor of a villa at the Hadlaubstrasse in Zurich. In Anacapri I rented a room with sunlight from all directions (*thus*) in which I could not work. In Paris I owned a huge studio with a skylight which I could partly cover with blinds of dark fabrics when needed. It was the only really useful studio in which I ever worked, since it had the necessary size to keep the required distance to the motif. In Buenos Aires, I had a room at my disposal which did not face the north and thus was only useful at times and with an overcast sky.

In the old town of Zurich, I worked in a dark kitchen of a small apartment ... and later in a small narrow and beveled attic room. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, I worked in a basement room which I had to share with a jazz band producing deafeningly loud mischief during a part of the day. It was the time of the national exposition (1939) and a large Swiss flag, on which it is known the major part is red, was taut over the street. Thus, the room was alternately illuminated dark and red when the wind moved the flag. Of course, I could not paint from nature. I sketched small figure compositions. Curiously enough, they were the biggest success of my career (*we do not know at which time Vietinghoff recorded this statement*) but I cannot remember how it came to pass that Mister W. Gurlitt**) from Berlin, one of the most important art dealers in Germany at that time, saw them, was enthusiastic and offered to arrange a great exhibition. It never took place because World War II began in the meantime.

***)* Of course, Vietinghoff was extremely pleased to meet somebody who appreciated his works, with the prospect of an exhibition in Berlin included in the bargain! Since he never catered to the art trade, he spent only some only some months in Munich and afterwards he lived abroad until 1937, he was unsuspecting with regard to the shady personality of this famous art dealer who decisively ran both official and dubious art trades together with his cousin starting in about 1925.

(The time in his life when Egon von Vietinghoff painted the most was in his studio at Ostbühlstrasse 17 in Zurich-Wollishofen, i.e. from 1944 to 1989, in one of the middle of six neighboring studios on the ground floor with a large wall of windows facing the garden and the direction of North-East. There, the situation of light was not ideal as well, thus he needed to help himself with heavy and dark curtains. Often, the incidence of light was too diffuse, sometimes the wall of the opposite house reflected too much and in the course of the years the growing bushes took much daylight in summer times. Yet, it was situated only a few minutes' walk from his apartment and finally he was accustomed to these difficulties and he executed at least three quarters of his oeuvre at that place, except the landscapes of this period).

9. Switzerland

Arrest on suspicion

At that time (*during World War II*), I painted many landscapes and sought places where I could calmly work without being bothered by spectators. An ideal viewpoint was (*the border of*) the forest above Dietikon (*near Zurich*) from which one could overlook the city and the Limmat valley. However, I innocently settled in proximity of a bunker and was painting peacefully when two soldiers required me to follow them. They confiscated the almost completed painting and took me away to the guardhouse. (*Nevertheless,*) they let me go as, at that time, I made my service in the Swiss army and was politically guiltless, while they kept the painting. After my landscape was examined for places which could indicate a military treason, I received my painting back.

Crying or laughing? (about 1960-1970)

The advantage of selling my paintings directly from my studio was that I did not need to pay a commission to any gallery. However, sometimes I was not so happy when the possible buyer's conversation reduced my working time. I am a painter and not a good salesperson. Once, a couple visited my studio by appointment to purchase a painting. During two entire hours I showed them many of my works; some were hanging on the walls, larger ones stood on the floor between two pieces of furniture, and smaller ones were stored on shelves. Finally, they agreed to take one depicting grapes. While the husband reached for his wallet, his wife nudged him saying: "*Hey, but these are not domestic ones.*" Instead of the round very dark Swiss grapes, I had painted the more oval blue and imported ones, probably from Spain. Even though they liked the painting, they did not buy it.

Another time a customer called me to complain: "*Last year I bought a still life with 12 cherries at a price of 3.300 Swiss francs in your studio. Then, yesterday I saw one with 15 cherries for only 3.000 in the window of the silversmith M. This is not satisfactory!*" I cannot remember how I talked my way out of it and calmed him down, perhaps by the size difference or the quality of the frame. After shaking my head with laughter about such artistic ignorance, the question arose concerning the mentality of the clientele that I was painting for.

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