

# 1934

**Josef Šíma (1891 – 1971)**

**Landscape, 1934**

Art historian František Šmejkal, author of the most important monograph on Josef Šíma (Odeon, Praha 1988), wrote: *“Šíma’s oeuvre has no feature that would correspond to the rapid rhythm of today and to thousands of its changing faces. It doesn’t give in at first sight, it is not conspicuous, it doesn’t shock, it doesn’t remind anyone; it doesn’t demand attention with a special technique or new materials. It does not seem to deny anything. It just exists.”* Such an existence is inherent in Šíma’s *Landscape*, his only painting in the collections of the Karlovy Vary gallery. Here, Josef Šíma presents landscape – one of the oldest and most frequent subjects –, which can be as much in France as in Bohemia, as an artistic universe. It is as if all the principles of gravity have dissolved here, turning the individual components into immaterial and moving signs. The typical character of the scenery, composed of a matrix of soil, trees and forests, balanced by the atmospheric lightness of the sky, transforms into a poetic contemplation of Nature, originating from deep meditation on the nature of the world and our existence in it. Such is the entire work of Josef Šíma.

The life of the painter, draughtsman, and illustrator Šíma was influenced by three ones. The first is associated with the date of his birth, 1891, the second with 1921, when he came to Paris, and the third with his death in 1971. Josef Šíma graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He spent the First World War on the battlefields and in 1919 left for France. In the autumn of 1921 he settled in Paris and spent exactly fifty years there. In 1927, he co-founded the art group *Le Grand Jeu* (The Great Game), which has a more literary, philosophical, spiritual and radical nature than the contemporary Surrealism coined by the circle of André Breton. Josef Šíma decorated the covers of *The Great Game* magazines. Within the group, he was especially close to the young poets René Daumal and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (who both died during the Second World War). Especially the latter understood Šíma’s work when he wrote: *“I am basically looking for nothing but a poet in a painter.”*

In Paris, Šíma joined the *Devětsil* [Butterbur] art group, founded in 1920. One of the reproductions from the *Le Grand Jeu* magazine appeared in the *Devětsil* revue *RED* – a monthly for modern culture published between 1927 and 1931. In 1932, Šíma co-organized the Surrealist exhibition “Poetry 1932”, held in Prague. He spent the Second World War in southern France, where he joined the anti-Nazi resistance. The war period witnessed his protracted creative crisis. He overcame it as late as during the 1950s and 1960s, when he switched from poetic visions to landscape archetypal symbols. However, his contacts with the Czech environment almost ceased.