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Editorial:
Exhibitions and the Human Factor

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Keywords

exhibitions; world's fairs; human agency; 1937 Paris World's Fair; 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs; 1936 World Exhibition of the Catholic Press; Prague exhibitions; Soviet Union

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Editorial: Exhibitions and the Human Factor

This issue of *Art East Central* focuses on exhibitions of central and eastern European art and design both in the locality and in other countries of Europe. Four of the articles originate in a workshop held at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art in Paris on 4 and 5 April 2022, under the theme 'Exhibitions, New Nations and the Human Factor, 1873–1939' as part of the European Research Council advanced grant project *Continuity / Rupture: Art and Architecture in Central Europe, 1918-1939*.[1] The project examines legacies of the Habsburg monarchy in the visual arts and culture of central Europe, and scrutinizing world's fairs and international exhibitions has been one of the main themes. The scope of the papers presented at the Paris conference was wide in terms of their geographical interest, but a number of speakers explored topics embedded in the region of interest of this journal. A selection of them that were reworked into articles appears here. They are complemented by another study of exhibitionary cultures that explores the early history of art exhibiting in Prague.

Exhibitions of art and industry provide rich material for investigating the visual cultures of central and eastern Europe. The new political entities here that came to existence as nation states in the early twentieth century sought to legitimise their identities internationally through participation at world's fairs and large international exhibitions. They also tried to do this internally, in the eyes of their own populations, through consolidation of the collections in national museums and galleries of art and design. Many scholars have examined large international exhibitions and world's fairs with their agendas, ideologies and the participations from various entities thoroughly in the past decades. Recently, however, attention has been turned to less exposed aspects of participation in the exhibitionary structures. As a result, they contribute to a fuller and more complex picture of these events. The involvement of the countries of central and eastern Europe, which underwent radical political recomposition in the early twentieth century, has become a key topic. Their motivations can be explored by focusing on the content of their pavilions, or through an examination of the various agents involved in exhibitions. One of the aims of the articles in this issue is to analyse the different roles individuals and groups played in organising, staging, performing or viewing of international exhibitions.

In his study *Fleeting Cities. Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siecle Europe*, Alexander T. Geppert identified five main types of actors whose individual agency could be detected in exhibitions.[2] There were the initiators, who proposed an exhibition or involvement in an exhibition, and consisted of public or private individuals, associations and groups. Then there were the official organisers, who included commissioners and country representatives amongst their number, and who were in charge of the actual organisation in the place of

1) This workshop was made possible with funding from the project (ERC Project Number 786314).

2) Alexander C. T. Geppert, 'Introduction: How to Read an Exposition,' *Fleeting Cities. Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siecle Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 5-6.

exhibition. Geppert includes exhibitors and curators in this group too. Local and foreign active participants, like employees and performers including indigenous people, formed another group. And those who reported on the exhibitions, i.e. reviewers and critics, to different audiences and in different media, fell into a separate category, while the audiences and visitors – local, national, international – engaged with the events either in person or via mass media. The division into these categories, is indeed only cursory and the different roles, one might add, often overlapped. Paying attention to the contribution of such individuals and bodies, however, informs our understanding of how exhibitions, as the physical spaces as well as their ideological meanings, were constructed. After all, an exhibition space, like any other space, can be conceived of as a symbolic as well as a physical category, constructed by human agency.[3]

Agency is one of the key topics that authors in this issue of *Art East Central* address through the lens of gender, regional and national identity as well as religious belief. They focus on the relationships between the official narratives of exhibitions, as devised by the organisers, and those constructed by participants, who helped to create the meaning and content of the exhibits. In so doing, the papers here offer an original approach; they move the discussion away from the habitual focus on the state apparatus and formal ideologies that often prioritise the role of official authorities and see them as the dominant agent. The shift in this issue of the journal is towards what we might term the 'human factor', in other words, the individuals or groups involved, whether creative individuals, employees, interest groups or their representatives. The authors of the papers in this issue explore central and eastern European participation at two large exhibitions in Paris and one in Rome, delving into displays of applied and decorative arts as well as fine art, while studying their creators and promoters.

Julia Secklehner addresses the questions of gender in relation to the display in the Austrian pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts that took place in Paris in 1925. The role of women in world's fairs and great exhibitions like this one was for a long time overlooked, even though women held many positions in all stages of the organisation process. Despite the efforts of various recent scholars to restore the gender balance in exhibitions research, in many cases women still need to be recognised as autonomous creators. Secklehner explores the contribution of the craftswomen of the Wiener Werkstätte, like Rosalia Rothansl, Vally Wieselthier and Emmy Zweybrueck-Prohaska, to the Austrian pavilion and the reception their work received in the press. Secklehner shows how nostalgia for the Habsburg monarchy surpassed a vision of modern Austrian state, which became also visible in the focus of the displayed objects like ceramic and textiles on the middle-class consumer.

The question of class and democracy in exhibitionary practices resonates in other contributions to this issue. It is prominent in two following articles that both focus on Soviet participation at two different exhibitions in Paris. In the current climate of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is pertinent to examine how Russia's predecessor, the Soviet Union, formed and forged its identity using exhibition spaces. Mira Kozhanova continues Secklehner's interest in the 1925 Decorative arts exhibition, while Elizaveta Berezina explores the 1937 International

3) Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith., Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, 1-11.

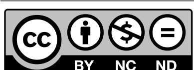
Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life. The Soviet contributions to both fairs have indeed featured prominently in studies of exhibitions, but the focus has been rather limited. In the case of the 1925 event, scholarship has tended to reduce the Soviet pavilion to an example of the constructivist experimentation of Konstantin Melnikov and a few other avant-garde artists, while focus on the ideological competition between Germans and the Soviets in architecture and art has dominated debates of the 1937 exhibition. Going beyond these most obvious expressions of Soviet identity at two different historic moments, Kozhanova and Berezina uncover other, no less important, elements of such identities.

Focusing on the display of folk art in 1925, Kozhanova emphasises the crucial place craft had in the Soviet presentation. Located next to contemporary works of art and in a constructivist pavilion, the so-called *kustar* (cottage) art of Soviet Russia and rural crafts of further Soviet Republics evoked local traditions, the territorial immensity of the Union and links between Russia and Europe. Soviet crafts became an important vehicle of Soviet identity as well as a useful commodity for international markets. As Berezina points out, such practices were extended to the 1937 Exposition. The Moscow-based Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry was responsible for establishing closer contacts with artisans all around the Soviet Union. It was also charged with arranging a collection of Soviet crafts at international displays. The Institute's 'experts' consisted of different individuals and groups of the Soviet art industry: representatives of cultural and trade organizations, researchers, art historians, and artisans who were a diverse group of individuals with different expertise, experience and motivations.

Motivation is an important factor to consider when examining the involvement of individuals and groups in exhibitions and world's fairs. Researchers have mostly focused on the official goals for taking part endorsed by the state and driven by the need to find trading and diplomatic partners and present oneself culturally. However, Joanna Wolańska turns attention to further issues in relation to Poland and its part in the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press that took place in Roma in 1936. Wolańska argues that the state – in her case, Poland – was not always the main organizer of the national participation in such events. The main actor in her examination of the Press exhibition was the Polish Catholic Church, specifically, bishop Stanisław Adamski. Adamski devised the Polish display, the main feature of which was a painting by Jan Henryk Rosek *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis* (Poland – Mother of the Saints and Shield of Christianity) that featured life-size figures of important personalities from Polish history, King John III Sobieski and Marshall Józef Piłsudski, representatives of the Polish state, without the government actually being involved. Although the Catholic Press exhibition was not a world's fair per se, it was organised with a similar ambition of bringing together international participants united by the same belief.

As a medium, exhibitions have always been more than displays of art. The four articles from the Parisian workshop are complemented here by a text in which Pavla Machalíková explores how exhibition space was formed in early nineteenth-century Prague. Exploring early art and trade exhibitions in Bohemia, she argues that exhibitions became established as sites where artworks entered the public sphere and where spaces of interaction between the individual actors of the art world, its economy and politics, opened up for the first. Examining in detail

the art exhibition that took place in Prague's Kampa island in 1832 and was put together by a wealthy individual, Joseph Alois Klar, Machalíková points to the innovative distribution and design of the exhibition space, which deliberately applied contemporary theories of colour, lighting and vision. Alongside these advancements in exhibitionary practice and the initiative of the exhibition's patron, Machalíková also stressed the role of the modern public. Ultimately, the art exhibition of 1832 is another reminder of the class aspect and the human factor that have shaped exhibitions, whether national or international, in all their stages. The explorations of patrons and the public, institutions and individuals, as well as artists and amateur craftspeople in the following articles have their own motivations: to enhance understanding of exhibitions as spaces where the active involvement of human beings affects every aspect of the display.



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articles

A Selection of Papers Presented at the Workshop *Exhibitions, New Nations and the Human Factor,* Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, April 2022.

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‘Feminine horror’ or ‘eminent Viennese specialty’? Vienna’s *Kunstgewerblerin* in Paris, 1925

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Abstract

This article focuses on the Austrian contribution to the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris and the role of the modern woman designer (*Kunstgewerblerin*) in light of the exhibition’s focus on the modern female consumer. Tracing how women’s contributions were seen as significant only when emphasising the pavilions shortcomings in offering truly modern (meaning practical and functional) design solutions, the article draws on debates about gender and the purpose of modern design, about the luxurious nature of the decorative arts in Vienna, and about the contested figure of the *Kunstgewerblerin* as a profession and a type of modern femininity. It argues that the ‘female factor’ in Austria’s participation in Paris epitomised a moment when women’s contributions to interwar Austrian design were being renegotiated in relation to the social, cultural, and economic concerns after the First World War

Keywords

women designers; *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*; applied arts; Austrian design; modernism and gender; decorative arts

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‘Feminine horror’ or ‘eminent Viennese specialty’?[1] Vienna’s *Kunstgewerblerin* in Paris, 1925

Julia Secklehner

Introduction: a festival of consumption

After visiting the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (hereafter the ‘Paris exhibition’), the Austrian journalist Max Ermers described the Austrian pavilion as a ‘pink craft object beneath the green leaves of the Cours de la Seine’, which offers ‘light joys and carefree existence’ as if one ‘stood in front of the boudoir of a seductive woman’.[2] The pavilion was a pink-hued, low building with horizontally striped reliefs with a terrace expanding the limited space within for a popular Viennese café overlooking the Seine. (**Figure 1**) It further included a bell tower, designed by Oskar Strnad, and a glass house by Peter Behrens, featuring an array of exotic plants and woven garden furniture. Outside, open passages propped by slim pillars connected the different tracts of the pavilion, with an inner patio featuring a ceramic sculpture by Dina Kuhn. Inside, the pavilion included a reception room, a large exhibition hall with ceiling-high vitrines on either side, the café leading on to the terrace on the Seine, several offices as well as six smaller exhibition spaces, dedicated to embroideries, fashion accessories and theatre costumes, glassware, stationary, metal sculpture, tapestries and wallpapers. With the chief architect being Josef Hoffmann, a professor at Vienna’s Academy of Applied Arts and co-founder of the Wiener Werkstätte design company, the pavilion was strongly dominated by the two institutions and affiliated companies such as Lobmeyer glass, the luxury furniture company Ungethüm, the Wienerberg brick factory, and the paper manufacture Elbemühl. Overall, the Austrian participation encompassed approximately one hundred and fifty different exhibitors, split between the pavilion and showrooms at the Grand Palais and the galleries at the Esplanade des Invalides. Throughout, the pavilion interiors and exhibits emphasised luxury design aesthetics, closely reflecting the aims of the Paris exhibition at large: aside from avant-garde projects such as Le Corbusier’s functionalist Pavilion de l’Esprit Nouveau and Konstantin Melnikov’s geometrical Soviet pavilion, flamboyance dominated, effectively defining Art Deco as richly ornamented and decorative, exoticist and fashionable luxury style.[3]

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1) Julius Klinger, ‘Mäda’, *Das Tribunal,* 12 May 1927, MAK, WW Archive, WWAN 85–1419–2. English translation in Anne-Katrin Rossberg, ‘Introduction. Brought to Light: Art and Life of the Wiener Werkstätte Women’, in Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Anne-Katrin Rossberg and Elisabeth Schmuttermeier, eds, *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,* Basel: Birkhäuser, 2020, 13. Claire Patek, ‘Modefeuilleton. Ilse Mor-Jacken’, *Neue Freie Presse,* 6 January 1921, 9.

2) Max Ermers, ‘Wo stehen wir nun wirklich? Gedanken über die österreichische Kunstgewerbeausstellung in Paris und die Zukunft unseres Kunsthandwerkes’, *Der Tag,* 23 June 1925, 2.

3) Jared Goss, ‘French Art Deco’, *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/frdc/hd_frdc.htm

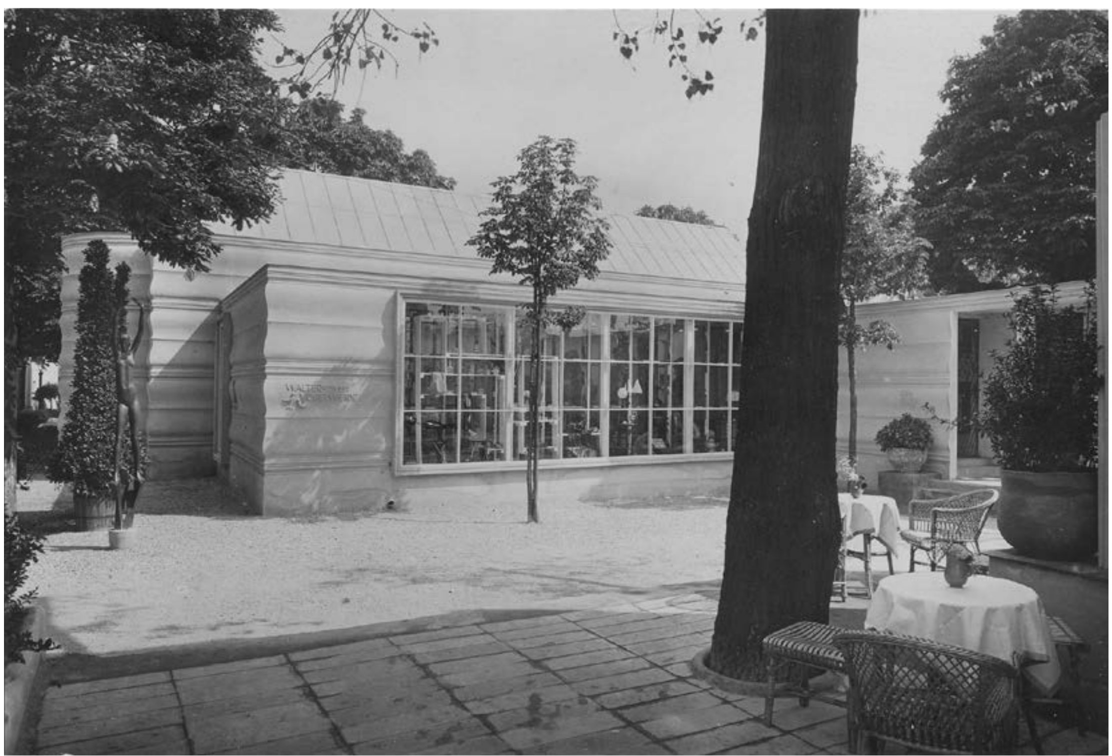

Figure 1: Bruno Reiffenstein, Photograph of a wing of the Austrian Pavilion at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris (1925).

Source: MAK Vienna.

French companies and organisations were the clear majority of the exhibitors overall. Making up two thirds of the exhibition, they set out, as Maurice Dufrêne, head of the applied art workshops of the Galeries Lafayette, explained, to showcase the 'creative genius' of France.[4] That this was inadvertently connected to commercial interests was highlighted by the participation of several Parisian luxury department stores, such as the Galeries Lafayette and Printemps, which had their own, sumptuously decorated pavilions. The Paris exhibition was, thus, a festival of consumption. As Irena Makaryk has argued, the fair transformed Paris 'into a twentieth-century city focused on publicité, fashion, shopping, and, especially, the female consumer'.[5]

Similar to the aims by Parisian companies to demonstrate their prowess in modern art and design for commercial consumption, the Austrian participation was intended to position the decorative arts as central factors in the country's economic recovery after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918.[6] By extension, the Austrian participation in Paris took the

4) Jérémie Cerman , 'The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts of 1925', *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe* [online], https://ehne.fr/en/node/12305.

5) Irena Makaryk, *April in Paris: Theatricality, Modernism, and Politics at the 1925 Art Deco Expo,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018, 106.

6) Makaryk, *April in Paris,* 3 and 14; Alfred Grünberger in *L'Autriche à l'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes Paris 1925,* Vienna: Executive Commission for the Austrian Pavilion in Paris, 1925, 18.

shape of a 'mission of peace', which sought to re-establish connections between France and Austria, after they had stood on opposite sides during the First World War, through cultural and commercial channels.[7] In the exhibition catalogue, the president of the Austrian commission, Franz Quidenus, emphasised: 'This exhibition is perhaps more important for Austria than for other countries. For us, the decorative and industrial arts are not a matter of taste or a hobbyist's passion; they are already a strong support for our economic existence and a hope for our future.'[8]

Yet, ironically, a considerable number of the designers involved in the Austrian pavilion were women designers working in the nexus of the Wiener Werkstätte and the Academy of Applied Arts, who were accused of representing precisely what Quidenius sought to refute. Positioned as 'dilettante daughters of senior civil servants wasting valuable material ... who regard craft as a way of making pocket change before walking down the aisle', as Adolf Loos proclaimed, the work of these artists was closely linked to contemporary debates about the nature of contemporary Austrian design.[9] Ultimately, this plunged the Austrian pavilion in Paris into uneasy debates over the relation between commercial interests, luxury produce and functional and affordable design, against the background of Austria's economic recovery after the First World War.[10] Indeed, the heavily gendered conflict embedded in the flamboyant style and commercial focus of the exhibits was representative of the Paris exhibition overall. In his 1925 article 'The Decorative Art of Today', Le Corbusier argued, for example, that the applied arts had become too decorative and commercial and consequently found greater 'appeal to women and the popular masses'.[11] At the same time, Ermers's review enthusiastically complimented the playfulness of the Austrian pavilion's exterior with allusions to a modern woman of luxury, emphasising precisely the 'femininity' of the design as its greatest strength. By extension, as Simon Dell has suggested, the displays established 'a particular set of relations between the consuming subject and the displayed objects, in which the objects were defined as "expressive" of the identity of the consumer'.[12] In other words, women's presence as designers and as consumers were tied closely to the displays. In the case of the Austrian pavilion this conflation took on particular significance in light of the shifting roles of women designers and their impact on the image of Vienna's applied arts industry at the time.

Taking these preliminary considerations into account, this essay takes the supposedly 'effeminised' nature of the Austrian pavilion in Paris as a point of departure to assess the position of the Viennese craftswoman, or *Kunstgewerblerin,* as a particular type of modern designer that rose to prominence in the 1920s. In line with Robert Rydell's understanding of fairs and exhibitions as a 'symbolic universe', it considers women's participation in the creation of the pavilion in a wider sense, including their realisation of work by

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7) Max Ermers, 'Friedensmission der Kunst', *Der Tag,* 7 March 1925, 7.

8) Franz Quidenus, *L'Autriche,* 23.

9) Adolf Loos, 'Ich–der bessere Österreicher', in Adolf Opel, ed., *Kontroversen: Im Spiegel der Zeitgenossen,* Vienna: Prachner, 1985, 100.

10) Walter Iber, ,'Post-war Economies (Austria-Hungary)', *1914-1918* [online], April 2020, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/post-war_economies_austria-hungary.

11) Michele Greet, '"Exhilarating Exile": Four Latin American Women Exhibit in Paris', *Artelogie* 5, 2013, 1.

12) Simon Dell, 'The Consumer and the Making of the Exposition Internationale Des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, 1907-1925', *Journal of Design History* 12: 4, 1999, 311–325.

chief designers, as well as designs of their own.[13] As Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn have argued, 'women were, of course, part of the "imagined fair community", but they entered the stage differently and on terms that were often not of their own making'.[14] This was also true for the women designers contributing to the Austrian pavilion. Drawing on debates about gender and the purpose of modern design, about the luxurious nature of the decorative arts in Vienna, and about the contested figure of the *Kunstgewerblerin* as a profession and a type of modern femininity, it argues that the 'female factor' in Austria's participation in Paris epitomised a moment when women's contributions to interwar Austrian design were being renegotiated in relation to the social, cultural and economic concerns after the First World War.[15]

In the shadow of Vienna 1900? The Wiener Werkstätte, continuity in Austrian design and a changing social landscape

Despite the designation 'Austrian pavilion', the Austrian contribution to the Paris exhibition was dominated by a handful of Viennese institutions and personalities, who not only sought to shape what Austrian design ought to look like in the future but had also shaped its past. In July 1924, Hoffmann published an article about preparations for the exhibition in *Neues Wiener Journal,* noting: 'Here [in Paris] it is, to my knowledge, the first time that a world exhibition excludes all historical styles and lets only modern production speak. [...] For the first time, too, shrunken little Austria will enter the international competition and compete with many larger states'.[16] Hoffmann showed himself as optimistic that Austria was fit to participate, based on its 'leading position on the international market' since the turn of the twentieth century and because 'it was almost single-handedly Vienna that helped Austria to this leading position' in preceding decades.[17]

Hoffmann emphasised two specific institutions that shaped the pavilion and its content: the Wiener Werkstätte, founded by the architect in 1904 together with the industrialist Fritz Wärndorfer and the designer Koloman Moser, and the Academy of Applied Arts, where Hoffmann began to teach in 1899. Closely linked by figures such as Hoffmann and Moser, the two had played defining roles in the shaping of Viennese Secessionism around 1900 as

13) Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs. The Century-of-Progress Exhibitions,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 2.

14) Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, 'World's Fairs in Feminist Historical Perspective', in Tracey Jean Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, eds, *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs,* Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2012, 2.

15) Megan Brandow-Faller, *The Female Secession,* University Park: Penn State University Press, 2020; Christoph Thun-Hohenstein et al, *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,* Basel: Birkhäuser, 2020; Megan Brandow-Faller and Laura Morowitz, eds, *Erasures and Eradications in Modern Viennese Art, Architecture and Design,* New York: Routledge, 2022; Elana Shapira and Anne-Katrin Rossberg, eds, *Gestalterinnen: Frauen, Design und Gesellschaft im Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit,* Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2023; Elana Shapira, ed., *Designing Transformation: Jews and Cultural Identity in Central European Modernism,* London: Bloomsbury, 2021; Elana Shapira ed., *Design Dialogue: Jews, Culture and Viennese Modernism*. Vienna: Böhlau, 2018; Allison J Clarke and Elana Shapira eds, *Émigré Cultures in Design and Architecture,* New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

16) Josef Hoffmann, 'Die kommende Weltausstellung in Paris', *Neues Wiener Journal,* 6 July 1924, 17.

17) Hoffmann, 'Die kommende Weltausstellung', 17.

an internationally successful style.[18] Both institutions, too, played a considerable role in women's design education and professionalisation in the early twentieth century: the number of students at the Academy of Applied Arts increased significantly during the First World War and led to women's growing presence in commercial design, as well as in design education.[19] The first female professor at the Academy of Applied Arts, the textile artist Rosalia Rothansl, had been appointed in 1920; in addition, between 1924 and 1925, Maria Likarz-Strauß led the fashion department of the Wiener Werkstätte.[20] Many of the female contributors to the 1925 pavilion exhibition were employed by Hoffmann, too. Indeed, his classes at the Academy were a central starting point for the professional careers of many women designers. Between 1915 and 1930, few other design schools counted more female students, and over a third of them initially began to work for the Wiener Werkstätte.[21] To a certain extent, this dynamic must be read critically; for one, women were still primarily encouraged to focus on 'domestic' aspects of design, such as ceramics, soft furnishings, and interior decoration. Women's education at the Academy and their subsequent channelling into the Wiener Werkstätte can also be characterised as the serial production of designers who had precisely the kind of formal and stylistic training required to fulfil the needs of the company.[22] Nonetheless, many of these women carved out successful careers, which often began at the Wiener Werkstätte and with Hoffmann's recommendations. While women's roles often remained in a realm of design that was designated 'feminine', therefore – textile design, ceramics, glass, fashion, interiors – they gained greater responsibility and a heightened visibility in public life. Indeed, the design historian Tomoko Kakuyama has suggested that the Wiener Werkstätte's 'uniqueness was not only the decorative nature of its designs, but also the success of its female members'.[23] As most of them were trained at the Academy, the positioning of the two as cultural institutions important to women entering creative professions went hand in hand.

In Paris, nine out of thirteen Wiener Werkstätte designers were women, in addition to several students or recent graduates from the Academy of Applied Arts. Part of the women designers' contributions to the pavilion was the execution of designs by their professors – replicating a familiar pattern of arts and crafts production, in which men designed and women executed.[24] In this regard alone, women's contributions were plenty. They included the painted vitrines by Christa Ehrlich, Camilla Birke and Hilde Polsterer in the large exhibition hall, or the 'Collections Room', which showcased objects by the Viennese Workshop and were the centrepiece of the pavilion; the religiously inspired 'Room of Silence', executed by students from the class of Anton Hanak such as Angela Stadtherr, one of the few women

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18) Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, ed., *Josef Hoffmann, 1870-1956: Progress Through Beauty,* Basel: Birkhäuser, 2021; Werner Schweiger, *Wiener Werkstätte: Design in Vienna, 1903–1932,* London: Thames & Hudson, 1990.

19) Brandow-Faller, *Female Secession,* 73–100 and 125–156.

20) Lara Steinhäußer, 'By women for women: on the role of female fashion artists at the Wiener Werkstätte', in *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,* 116–139.

21) Elisabeth Kreuzhuber, 'Limited opportunity, seized with both hands: women artists of the Wiener Werkstätte at the School of Arts and Crafts', in *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,* 24–33.

22) This criticism has been suggested, for example, by Kreuzhuber, 'Limited opportunity', 24–33.

23) Tomoko Kakuyama, 'Design and Gender during Wartime – the Vienna Workshops in World War I', *The Journal of the Asian Conference of Design History and Theory* 4, 2022, 42.

24) Anthea Callen, 'Sexual Division of Labor in the Arts and Crafts Movement', *Woman's Art Journal* 5:2, 1984-1985, 1-6.

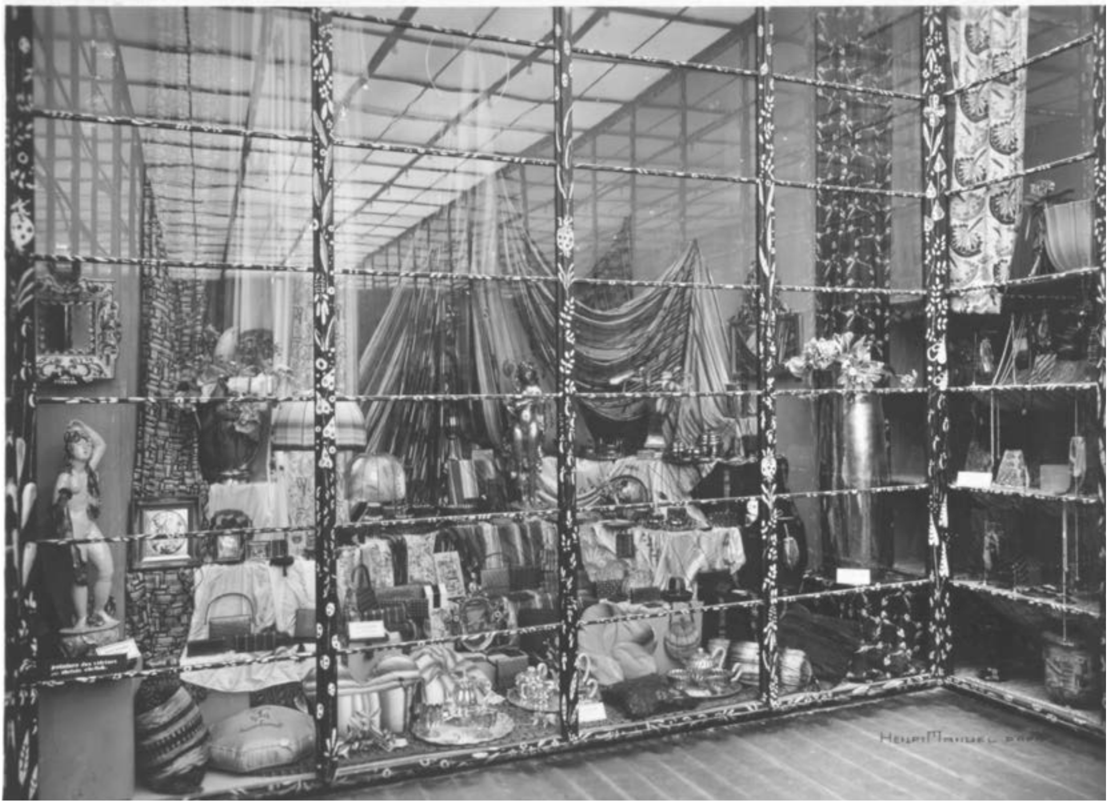

Figure 2: Henri Manuel, *Photograph of a vitrine from the Wiener Werkstätte in the 'Langer Saal' at the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris (1925).

Source: MAK Vienna.

specializing in metal sculpture, as well as Else Flesch and Marianne Wagner.[25] (**Figures 2 and 3**) Stadtherr's tin sculpture of a knight prominently featured in the section dedicated to the Academy of Applied Arts in the Grand Palais, which also showcased an architectural model by Polsterer alongside works by other students from Hoffmann's architecture class. In the exhibition halls of the Esplanade des Invalides, the majolica stove in the Gentleman's Room was designed by Hertha Bucher, a ceramicist who later specialized in façade work. The wall painting and intarsia work in the 'Resting Room of a Lady', first exhibited at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry in 1923, was designed by Likarz-Strauß, and the large fresco of the tent-shaped ceiling in the tearoom was painted by Birke.[26]

As these different interiors indicate, women's contributions to the pavilion went far beyond 'trinket design': they covered various media, including large-scale sculptures, such as Kuhn's *Female Nude* in the courtyard, Stadtherr's knight, and the metalwork in the room of silence, as well as extensive wall painting that featured as central elements in the pavilion's interior. Ceramics, a particular specialism of Viennese women designers such as

25) Max Eisler, 'Unser Handwerk in Paris', *Bau– und Werkkunst,* 1925, 305.

26) See Brandow-Faller, *Female Secession,* 137–151.

Figure 3: Bruno Reiffenstein, Photograph of the cult room by Anton Hanak's class at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris (1925).

Source: MAK Vienna.

Vally Wieselthier, Susi Singer, and Kuhn, ranged from expressionist designs for vases and sculptures of different sizes to large, tiled stoves. Hilda Jesser, meanwhile, built a room installation with paper designs, ostensibly designed for a femme fantaisiste ('fancy, artistic woman'), while embroideries by established artists and teachers such as Emmy Zweybrueck-Prohaska received praise in the French writer and art critic Marie Dormoy's discussion of Central European lace design exhibited in Paris.[27] Dormoy particularly emphasized the 'refined spirit of Vienna' in these works, referring to light humour and fantasy worlds as the defining elements of contemporary Austrian design. (**Figure 4**)

By and large, the contributions by women artists in Paris fulfilled an expectation of Austrian design that had already been established at earlier events, such as the Paris exhibition of 1900. At this point in time, women designers were predominantly represented as homemakers. Notions of 'feminine creativity', expressed through 'cosiness' (*Gemütlichkeit*), playfulness, rich colour and ornamentation, established Viennese middle-class women designers in the nexus of the Wiener Werkstätte as ideal figures to 'beautify' interiors.[28] Rebecca Houze has emphasised that this positioning maintained a 'strong ambivalence toward women, who, on the one hand, served as models of domestic artfulness yet, on the other, were incapable of true innovation, which must be accomplished by men.'[29] This interpretation remained central to discussions about women's designs in post-Habsburg Austria, too, and will be discussed later. Factually, however, the examples above of women's contributions to the 1925 pavilion underline the fact that their involvement had clearly extended beyond the realm of interior decoration and became more intrinsic to the design of the pavilion overall. Contributions by women designers to the Austrian pavilion were, thus, not marginal, nor did they exist in a separate sphere from the work of their male colleagues.

Women's contributions to the Austrian presentation were also recognised in the prizes awarded at the exhibition. A Grand Prix was given to Birke, while Likarz-Strauß and Polsterer received gold medals.[30] Silver and bronze medals went to the ceramicist Singer, who had her own pottery studio in rural Lower Austria and produced work for the Wiener Werkstätte, the ceramicist and textile artist Jesser, Leisching and Fanni Harlfinger – founder of the feminist art association *Wiener Frauenkunst* – as well as Mizi Otten-Friedmann, and the sisters Felice and Kitty Rix (**Figure 5**).[31] Professionally, too, the participation in the exhibition reaped some benefits. For example, Polsterer, a recent graduate of the Academy, was hired on the spot by the Primavera design studio of the Printemps department store.[32] She lived in Paris for the following decade as a tapestry

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27) Marie Dormoy, *Exposition des arts décoratifs Paris 1925: Dentelles de l'Europe Centrale,* Paris: Editions Albert Levy, 1926, 2.

28) Rebecca Houze, 'From Wiener Kunst im Hause to the Wiener Werkstätte: Marketing Domesticity with Fashionable Interior Design', *Design Issues* 18:1, 2002, 3–23.

29) Houze, 'From Wiener Kunst im Hause to the Wiener Werkstätte', 5.

30) 'Österreich auf der Pariser Kunstgewerbeausstellung: Auszeichnung österreichischer Aussteller', *Neues Wiener Tagblatt,* 27 October 1925, 6.

31) Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven, 'Österreich auf der Internationalen Kunstgewerbeausstellung Paris 1925, V. Die Interieurs an der Esplanade des Invalides', *Wiener Zeitung,* 12 September 1925, 7.

32) 'L'atelier Primavera des Grands magasins du Printemps à l'Exposition des arts décoratifs de 1925', *Vogue,* August 1925, 37; Jean-Paul Caracalla, *Le Roman du Printemps, histoire d'un grand magasin,* Paris: Denoël, 1989.

Figure 4: Bruno Reiffenstein, Photograph of embroidery from the class of Rosalia Rothansl at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris (1925).

Source: MAK Vienna.

designer, moved in the avant-garde circles around Tristan Tzara, and exhibited paintings in the *Salon des surindépendants*.[33]

Seen in this light, the 1925 exhibition was also a springboard for the international careers of Viennese women designers. This might have been most evident in the case of Polsterer but it also held when it came to the careers of Likarz and Wieselthier, who, in subsequent years, began to work successfully in the Netherlands and the United States, respectively.[34] Viennese

33) ‘Salons et exhibitionsitions’, *Le Petit Parisien: journal quotidien du soir,* 21 November 1932, 8; Louis Lenon-Martin, ‘Hilda Polsterer’, *Paris-soir,* 21 May 1930, 4; Torrés Garcia, ‘Un peintre viennois: Hilda Polsterer’, *La Revue hebdomadaire: romans, histoire, voyages,* 9 January 1932, 242–244; Leopold Wolfgang Rochowanski, ‘Hilde Polsterer – Paris’, *Estate of Leopold Wolfgang Rochowanski*, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, Vienna, ZPH 347, Box 3 Folder 1.

34) Megan Brandow-Faller, ‘Feminine Vessels: The Ceramic Sculpture of Vally Wieselthier’, *Woman’s Art Journal* 35:2, 2014, 28.

Figure 5: Bruno Reiffenstein, Photograph of two enamel figures by Mizi Otten-Friedmann at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris (1925).

Source: MAK Vienna.

design in Paris was, thus, closely linked to the growing presence of women designers around the Academy of Applied Arts and the Wiener Werkstätte, imbued by the role of the *Kunstgewerblerin* as a particular social phenomenon of the time, intrinsically tied to fashion, the professionalisation of the woman designer and middle-class consumption.

Modern femininity and the *Kunstgewerblerin* as ‘an eminent Viennese specialty’[35]

At the time of the Paris exhibition, women’s shifting roles were widely debated in Viennese society. In her essay collection *Gender and Culture,* first published in 1923, the Austrian feminist Rosa Mayreder noted, ‘civilization [...] would seem to be in its origins a feminine achievement because women everywhere were the first farmers, potters, weavers, tentmakers, in

35) Patek, ‘Modefeuilleton’, 9.

short, the first technicians.'[36] Tracing gender inequality back to women's roles as caregivers, Mayreder argued that the further technology advanced, the more public responsibilities were taken on by men, leading to gendered divisions between men in the public and women in the private spheres. However, she no longer saw these developments viable in the early twentieth century: 'The types of female roles that were still considered ideal two generations ago are now completely out of date and cannot be maintained.'[37] At a time when Austria's social and political foundations had irrevocably changed with the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, feminists like Mayreder drew a link between the country's new political situation and steps towards women's emancipation in public life.[38] In the 1920s and 30s, the *Kunstgewerblerin* stood for a specific type of modern woman: a 'decidedly Viennese speciality', as the journalist Claire Patek described, whose designs mirrored her 'personality and individuality' as a professionally trained expert in different artistic media.[39]

In relation to the Austrian pavilion in Paris this new kind of woman first became visible with the installation of the interiors and craft objects sent to Paris by train from Vienna in March 1925, accompanied by nine students from the Academy of Applied arts, who were responsible for the set-up. Alfred Roller, professor at the Academy, attested later on: 'The whole exhibition in Paris was completed and furnished by nine of our students; they completed the whole work by themselves, also the manual labour.'[40] Among them were three female students: the textile artist and designer Birke, the architect and ceramic artist Ehrlich, and Polsterer, primarily a painter and tapestry artist. Taking on the responsibility of furnishing the pavilion interiors 'with little more support than a scaffolding', the hands-on approach to exhibition design by Birke, Ehrlich and Polsterer was effectively promoted in the press. The illustrated weekly, *Wiener Bilder*, showed the three women dressed in workers' overalls next to the scaffolding, emphasizing that they not only created designs but also had the skills to execute them. (**Figure 6**)

With a focus on female makers (the male students remain invisible in the photographs), the changing role of women designers was thus intrinsic to the pavilion's presentation as a modern-day project. While *Wiener Bilder* offers little commentary on the image, the young women in overalls recall the Paris exhibition's framing as 'modern' and 'future-oriented' and can thus be read as an indication of the fact that the Austrian contribution was going with the times not only in terms of its aesthetics, but also in relation to the social changes of the post-war era. An important shift in this context was the professionalisation of women's craftwork. Across Europe, Grace Lees-Maffei has argued, 'the traditions of feminine accomplishments (textile and handicrafts) [...] eased the entry of women into art and design education generally, and [...] made interior decoration an often-recommended career for women'.[41] Austria was no exception in this case.

36) Rosa Mayreder, 'Civilisation and Gender', in Pamela S. Saur, ed., *Gender and Culture,* Riverside, C.A.: Ariadne Press, 2009, 21.

37) Mayreder, 'Civilisation and Gender', 26.

38) Lynda J. King, 'The Woman Question and Politics in Austrian Interwar Literature', *German Studies Review* 6:1, 1983, 75-100.

39) Patek, 'Modefeuilleton', 9.

40) Alfred Roller, 'Der Streit an der Kunstgewerbeschule', *Neues Wiener Journal,* 12 November 1925, 5.

41) Grace Lees-Maffei, 'Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History', *Journal of Design History* 21:1, 2008, 12.

Nummer 19. Wiener Bilder. Seite 5.

Togal gegen Schmerzen rheumatischer, gichtischer und nervöser Art. Hervorragend bewährt auch bei Kopfschmerzen. — Probepackung in allen Apotheken.

Der Planetenentdecker der Wiener Sternwarte Dr. Johann Palisa, der nicht weniger als 117 Planeten gefunden, starb in Wien im 77. Lebensjahre. Phot. H. Uitenthaler, Wien.

Polnische Rompilger auf der Durchreise vor der Wiener Stephanskirche: 1. Apostolischer Administrator für Polen Dr. Hlond. 2. Polnischer Gesandter Graf Wierusz-Kowalski. 3. Graf Romer. 4. Prälat Dr. Gawlina. 5. Vorstand Fabian. Phot. Willinger, Wien.

Die internationale Ausstellung für dekorative Kunst in Paris: Generalansicht der gesamten Ausstellung. Phot. Ch. Trampus, Paris.

Ein glücklicher Finanzminister: Mr. Winston Churchill verläßt nach seiner Budgetrede, in der er Steuernachlässe und sonstiges Erfreuliche verkündete, das Parlament. Phot. Sport & General Press Agency, London.

Die internationale Ausstellung für dekorative Kunst in Paris: Wiener Kunstgewerbeschülerinnen — die Fräuleins Polsterer, Ehrlich und Birke — bei der Arbeit für die Ausschmückung des österreichischen Pavillons. Nach einer photographischen Aufnahme

Die internationale Ausstellung für dekorative Kunst in Paris: Präsident Doumergue eröffnet mit den Ministern und den Ausstellungsfunktionären die Exposition. Phot. Ch. Trampus, Paris.

Figure 6: The International Exhibition for Decorative Arts in Paris: Students of the Vienna School of Applied Arts – Miss Polsterer, Ehrlich and Birke – at work decorating the Austrian pavilion (1925). Newspaper photograph, *Wiener Bilder*, 10 May 1925, 5.

Source: Austrian National Library, Vienna.

The professionalisation of women designers began in the late nineteenth century and, by the 1920s, distinctions between dilettantes, addressed in fashion and craft magazines, and trained designers were well-established in Austrian culture.[42] Rothansl's advice columns on different crafting techniques for amateurs by an expert are one example of how this distinction was manifested publicly.[43] The shift in positioning women as professional designers is also visible in women's involvement in international exhibitions. The 1873 World's Fair in Vienna already included a pavilion of 'women's work'. Yet there was a significant difference between that and the 1925 exhibition. The earlier 'Pavilion of Women's Work' not only stood on its own as a separate category, it also sought to promote 'the work of the ideal bourgeois housewife'.[44] By contrast, in 1925 the work of women designers was an integral part of the Austrian pavilion and offered a display of skillfully crafted luxury design rather than examples of blissful domesticity, manufactured by designers who had trained at Austria's prestigious Academy of Applied Arts.

As the photograph in *Wiener Bilder* indicates, the meticulous work of painting all the vitrines, as well as the frescoes for the 'Gentleman's room' and the 'Resting Room of a Lady' in the Austrian pavilion, was completed by Birke, Ehrlich and Polsterer, all three of them fresh graduates from the Academy. Their sporting of worker's overalls made for a significant difference from the way their male peers dressed. In a photograph of Fellerer and Haerdtl, for example, the two architects are shown in the 'Garden room', casually sitting at a coffee table, posing for the camera in fashionable suits. In contrast to their leisurely self-presentation, the women position themselves as manual workers, suggesting that women designers did not simply draw fashionable craft objects, but took a hands-on approach to realising designs. Their public self-presentation thus suggests that they knew how to realise designs from start to finish. Birke, Ehrlich and Polsterer's portrait as designer-workers thereby adds an alternative narrative to that promoted by Hoffmann and his supporters such as Berta Zuckerkandl-Szeps in the presentation of the pavilion in the Austrian press, who read it as a continuity of the prowess of Viennese design around 1900. It is worth quoting at length Zuckerkandl-Szeps's summary of the pavilion and its role as a point of connection between the past and future of Austrian design, since it shows how supporters of Hoffmann viewed the architect as the most important representative of Austrian cultural identity in Paris:

> That Austria is pioneering a new European art of living, that Austria was and is a spring of youth from which a European renaissance summons its strength; that the impoverished, wrecked, Austria led on a noose would be an artistic revelation at the international exhibition for decorative arts in Paris, as was already guaranteed by its success of yesterday, shows eternal strength. [...] The strength of a people, whose native culture roots in the joyful game of cheerful beauty, drums drumming and pipes piping, in a harmony of line and colour. The greatest gratitude, however, should go to Josef Hoffmann, who first and foremost led Austrian art to this success.[45]

42) Rebecca Houze, 'At the Forefront of a Newly Emerging Profession? Ethnography, Education and the Exhibition of Women's Needlework in Austria-Hungary in the Late Nineteenth Century' *Journal of Design History* 21:1, 2008, 19–40.

43) Rosalia Rothansl, 'Häusliches Kunstgewerbe: Die Handarbeiten der Dame,' *Moderne Welt*, 4:9, 1923, 34.

44) Houze, 'At the Forefront', 25.

45) Berta Zuckerkandl-Szeps, 'Eröffnung des österreichischen Pavillons: In der dekorativen Pariser Ausstellung', *Neues Wiener Journal,* 12 May 1925, 5.

By contrast, the photograph in *Wiener Bilder* literally puts a new kind of creator into the picture, who epitomised the figure of the female designer in Viennese public debates at the time: the *Kunstgewerblerin*.

To a certain extent, the *Kunstgewerblerin* fits the wider popular phenomenon of the 'New Woman', which was widely present in global interwar visual culture and has been described by Linda Nochlin as 'a heartfelt rejection of woman's traditional role as it was defined by every society in the world: rebellion against oppressive notions of the "womanly" understood to be a life devoted to subordinating one's own needs and desires to those of men, family, and children.'[46] Negative interpretations of this rejection of conventional lifestyles were widespread among established Viennese cultural figures and illustrate the ressentiments that the *Kunstgewerblerin* was exposed to in public culture. She was caricatured in popular illustrations, in advice columns, as well as in literary works, famously described in Joseph Roth's *The Emperor's Tomb*: '[A] craftswoman. Do you know what that is? She designs, or rather carves, in fact — crazy necklaces and rings, modern things you know, all corners, and clasps of fir. I believe she can also plait straw mats. The last time she was here she gave me a lecture, like a professor, about African art…'[47] As Roth's spiteful description makes evident, women's designs were set alongside prejudices against modernist art and its borrowings from non-European cultures, and conflated as an incomprehensible, primitivist body of work, created by the *Kunstgewerblerin* who personified not only a shift in applied arts production, but also a destabilisation of social and gender norms.

Most significantly, women designers became the target of the dismissive attitudes towards women entering the profession that were held by male architects and designers. Anne-Katrin Rossberg, curator of the *Women and the Wiener Werkstätte* exhibition at Vienna's Museum of applied Arts (2021), has suggested that polemics against them were due to a sudden sense of competition that male designers experienced as women entering the workforce.[48] A common example of this polemic was conflation of the figure of the *Kunstgewerblerin* with the producer of unnecessary, frilly trinket designs. Haerdtl, for example, spoke of an 'unheard-of *Pupperlwirtschaft*' (bimbo economy) to describe the women employed at the Wiener Werkstätte, while the artist and print maker Julius Klinger renamed the design company the 'Viennese Broad's Decorative Art' in a personal attack on one of the company's main shareholders, Mäda Primavesi: 'Mäda! […] one immediately thinks of something fractured, exaggerated, affected, frivolous, false, artificial and above all superfluous, in a nutshell: a product of the WW [Wiener Werkstätte]. Viennese Broad's Decorative Art – whom does that not fill with feminine horror!'[49]

46) Linda Nochlin, 'Foreword: Representing the New Woman–Complexity and Contradiction', in Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, eds, *The New Woman International – Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011, vii.

47) Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*, trans. John Hoare, London: Granta, 1999, 97-98.

48) Völker in '"The women of the Wiener Werkstätte". Exhibition in Vienna. Review', *World Today News* [online], 19 September 2021, https://www.world-today-news.com/the-women-of-the-wiener-werkstatte-exhibition-in-vienna-review-culture/.

49) Rossberg, 'Introduction', 13.

Looking beyond such chauvinistic and downright misogynist attitudes, however, the *Kunstgewerblerin* was also defended as a viable profession for women in cultural and women’s magazines. One aspect of this is women designers’ own contributions to specialist publications. Megan Brandow-Faller, for example, has shown how, in her articles for *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration,* the ceramic artist and designer Wieselthier fashioned an image of herself that not only presented her as a professional but also played with the idea of the ‘happy-go-lucky child-woman’ as an emancipatory strategy.[50] Considering more popular news outlets where descriptions of women designers appeared, the profession emerges predominantly as an opportunity for women from the urban middle-class. For although the *Kunstgewerblerin* stereotype was closely tied to non-conforming femininity, she still largely belonged to moderate mainstream society and rarely represented more radical politically progressive artists and designers such as Friedl Dicker-Brandeis or Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. The typical woman designer was uninterested in politics, as Marianne Leisching said of her peers: ‘The overthrow of 1918 affected them financially at most (but at the time they certainly earned very good money at the WW) [...]. Their views (to the extent that they had any) were conservative, monarchist, anti-revolutionary’.[51] In light of this comment, it is apparent that becoming a *Kunstgewerblerin* was hardly a radical career choice in the 1920s. Rather, it had turned into a viable profession for middle class women, who had the necessary financial and social backing to receive the prerequisite training.[52]

Taken at a wider angle and with the *Kunstgewerblerin’*s position as a viable new profession in mind, public discussions suggest that the well-known comments by Loos and his allies. represented only a fraction of her presence in public culture. Yet even these more informative and positive discussions cannot deflect from certain stereotypes that women designers were connected to – most of all, the idea that they wanted to produce fanciful decorative objects as an easy way to make money. An article published in the women’s bi-weekly *Die Frau* in 1921, for example, aimed to clear up misconceptions by describing the *Kunstgewerblerin*’s technical skills and material knowledge, as well as the personal dedication necessary, while warning of the financial risks of taking such a profession, for ‘a domestic help is often better paid’.[53] Meanwhile, an advice column in the fashionable magazine *Moderne Welt* responded positively to a reader’s query as to whether her daughter should become a designer, and described the profession as ‘incomparably more promising’ than an office job.[54] However, the column did not fail to mention that ‘a sense of innovation and original work is a precondition for this indeed not very easy profession’.[55] Adding to these more direct descriptions, numerous advertisements for products of studios run by women designers, offering creative products from toy design to tailor-made fashion and soft furnishings, frequently featured in newspapers and magazines, and confirmed their visibility in Viennese interwar culture.[56]

50) Brandow-Faller, ‘Feminine Vessels’, 28.

51) Leisching in Ann Kathrin Rossberg, ‘The women artist’s workshop’, in *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,* 149.

52) Elana Shapira, ‘Professional Women in the Arts and Media in Vienna – Kulturschaffende Frauen in Wien’, in *Gestalterinnen,* 9-28.

53) A. B., ‘Von Geschmack und Mode. Die Kunstgewerblerin. Der richtige Weg’, *Die Frau,* 3 December 1921, 2.

54) ‘Bitte sagen Sie mir…’, *Moderne Welt* 6:9, 1924, 42.

55) ‘Bitte sagen Sie mir…’, 42.

56) *Die Bühne* 8, 1925, 46.

The continued popularity of the profession also found emphasis in the film industry. Walter Reisch's romantic comedy *Episode* (1935) focused on the young designer Valerie, played by the popular actress Paula Wessely. Set in 1922, the film follows the ceramicist and student at the Academy of Applied Arts who struggles to make a living in the time of economic depression after the First World War. Merging fiction and reality, the film included several actual students of Strnad at the Academy of Applied Arts as silent extras (**Figure 7**).[57] Reisch and Wessely were nominated at the Venice Film Festival in 1935, and the film was the only one by a Jewish director admitted to German cinemas after 1933. In newspapers, film, and literature, therefore, the *Kunstgewerblerin* had a wide presence throughout the interwar period. She was intrinsically connected with the Academy of Applied Arts and the Wiener Werkstätte, and tied to a set of stereotypes that fluctuated between that of a 'confident, headstrong artist' and a 'material-wasting dilettante' with a consistent presence in relation to redefinitions of Viennese interwar design and its social and institutional contexts.[58] Placed in this wider context, the photograph in *Wiener Bilder* of Birke, Ehrlich and Polsterer as modern female designers emphasises the fact that the Paris exhibition not only showed new design, but also represented a new generation of women whose position was peculiar to its time.

A pillar of the national economy?

Given the positioning of the Austrian pavilion by government officials as a marker of the country's economic recovery, and the commercial outlook of the Paris exhibition overall, the role of the *Kunstgewerblerin* should also be considered in the light of economic concerns. Already in 1921, Patek emphasised that the professionalisation of women designers not only led to a playful and highly individual style in fashion and interiors, but also 'brought money to the country'.[59] In context, the term *Kunstgewerblerin* refers to the concept of an artistic profession that existed until the late 1930s, in which connotations of women's applied arts production became explicitly intertwined with national economic interests.[60] From the early 1920s onwards, Austrian arts and crafts quickly became the poster child for the new republic as a 'nation of culture', explained in the exhibition catalogue for Paris in 1925 by Federal Minister of Trade and Transport Hans Schürff, who talked of the Austrians' 'natural predisposition' towards the applied arts.[61] In public debate, too, praise for the applied arts by journalists such as Zuckerkandl and Jacqueline Bertillon testified to the important role of the decorative arts as luxury goods for international export.[62] As early as 1922, Bertillon emphasised

57) Ingrid Wolf, 'Walter Reisch dreht seinen neuen Film Episode mit Paula Wessely', *Die Bühne* 397, 1935, 26–29.

58) Stephan Ehrenzweig, 'Gegenüber', *Moderne Welt* 8:17, 1926, 9; Loos, 'Ich – der bessere Österreicher', 100.

59) Patek, 'Modefeuilleton', 9.

60) Rossberg, 'Introduction', 13.

61) Schürff, *L'Autriche à l'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs*, 14. Herbert Hofreither, '"Kulturnation" Österreich: Anmerkungen zu Image, Identität, Sport, Film und Literatur', *Modern Austrian Literature* 32:4, 1999, 19-39. Marion Knapp, *Österreichische Kulturpolitik und das Bild der 'Kulturnation': Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der Kulturpolitik des Bundes seit 1945*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2005.

62) Jacqueline Bertillon, 'Les industries de luxe à Vienne sonnt prospères mais ne travaillent pas pour les Viennois', *Le Jour*, 19 February 1922, 1. Berta Zuckerkandl-Szeps, 'Eröffnung des österreichischen Pavillons. In der dekorativen Pariser Ausstellung', *Neues Wiener Journal*, 12 May 1925, 5.

Stupsnase. Sieht aus, als ob er sich hauptsächlich für Fußball oder Ähnliches interessieren würde. „Er macht herrliche Aufnahmen", sagt die Wessely. Alles schwärmt für ihn und die Stupsnase. So schön!

Erster Schminker ist ein Wiener, Olschmidt. Auch von ihm ist die Wessely begeistert. Man selber findet es erst gar nicht so schön, diese einheitliche Ockerbeschmierung mit dunkelvioletten Lippen, verständnisloser Laie, der man ist. Nach fünf Minuten erkennt, versteht man und findet es wunderbar.

Eine halbe Stunde Mittagspause. Sie sind seit halb acht da, seit halb neun an der Arbeit. Kantine, Rindfleisch mit Kochsalat, hurra, Appetit haben Sie alle. Oben wird inzwischen ein bißchen umgebaut, um ein Uhr geht es weiter. Frau Wessely ist für heute fertig, Frau Czepa kommt dran, auch eine kleine Kunstgewerblerin mit kurzen Röcken, siehe 1922 und einem Vogelstimmchen. „Die Sechziger?" „Nein, die Fünfziger genügt". Lichtprobe, Sprechprobe, Aufahme, los! —

Es ist ein Schauspielerfilm, um die Wessely aufgebaut, noch kann die Wessely so viel tragen.

Eine sorgfältige Besetzung bis ins Kleinste, sorgfältige, harmonische, ruhige Arbeit. Konzentration, Talent und Liebe zur Sache bis ins Detail.

Um sieben Uhr abends ist offiziell der Tag da draußen zu Ende. Um sieben Uhr abends gehen sie durch verzaubert — stehen gebliebene Altwiener Straßen, nach Hause.

Die Tobis-Sascha dreht! „Episode". Ein neuer Film

Während einer Pause

Die Wessely mit Atelierarbeitern
Photo Casparius

Zeichnungen
von Lisl Weil

Rechts: Paula Wessely durch das Stativ der Aufnahmekamera gesehen
Photo Otto Skall

Figure 7: Ingrid Wolf, 'Walter Reisch dreht seinen neuen Film Episode mit Paula Wessely', *Die Bühne* 397 (1935).

Source: Austrian National Library, Vienna.

that in Austria's precarious post-war economic situation, luxury arts and crafts flourished but barely had a market within Austria. Although the country's economy slowly recovered after the post-war hyperinflation with the help of League of Nations bonds and was largely stabilised with the introduction of a new currency, the Schilling, in December 1924, the middle and upper middle classes had suffered major income losses due to the rapid devaluation of money and reduced purchasing power.[63] Calls to the population to actively support the country's economic recovery were widespread at this time, not only in political pamphlets but also in fashion and society magazines directed at middle-class female readers.[64] The professionalisation of the *Kunstgewerblerin* in this light went hand in hand with a reinterpretation of women's contributions to the applied arts as part of economic resuscitation, supported through different strategies by middle-class women designers such as Rothansl.

Between 1923 and 1924 Rothansl regularly published articles in *Moderne Welt*. In one, titled 'Domestic Arts and Crafts. The Lady's Handicrafts' (**Figure 8**), Rothansl presented a range of techniques for textile work, including carpet weaving, embroidery and tapestry, intended to enable 'the lady with cultivated taste' to create her own designs.[65] Illustrated with photographs of Rothansl's own work and that of her student Jesser, a 1924 article on the creation and decoration of waistcoats, for example, not only provides instructions for sewing and gives advice on suitable haberdashery, but also recommends colour combinations and ways of arranging embroidery on the fabric.[66] Rothansl's contributions thus not only offered an introduction to the applied arts, including historical contextualisation, they also demonstrated the many steps that must be mastered by a craftswoman in the field of textile work, while positioning her and her student's work as a blueprint for domestic design.

With regard to the emphasis on the 'high moral value' of domestic arts and crafts, Rothansl's contributions at first glance reinforce a traditional image of women's handicrafts.[67] Yet unlike conventional women's or handicrafts magazines, *Moderne Welt* had a decidedly cosmopolitan orientation and, in addition to reports on the latest fashions from Paris, also included travelogues from all over the world, reports on the political and economic situation in Austria, as well as portraits of artists and literary texts. In this context, Rothansl's contributions can be interpreted as a popularisation strategy for Viennese design, which supported the high status of the applied arts in economically weakened post-war Austria.[68]

Apart from encouraging handicrafts, the articles also addressed the reader as a consumer: advertisements printed below or next to the articles promote materials such as embroidery silk, while the fashion sections on the subsequent pages suggest how homemade items can be combined with the purchased items. Not least, with selected patterns from 'schools, studios, companies, independent artists', Rothansl's contributions offered not only versatile

63) Walter M. Iber, '"Rettungsschirm" für Österreich: Die Völkerbundanleihen', *Beiträge zur Rechtsgeschichte Österreichs*, 9:2, 2019, 388-391.

64) Hans Kerschbaum, 'Die Männer die Österreich sanieren', *Moderne Welt* 4:9, 1923, 1.

65) Rosalia Rothansl, 'Häusliches Kunstgewerbe. Die Handarbeiten der Dame', *Moderne Welt* 4:9, 1923, 34.

66) Ibid., 32.

67) Rothansl, 'Häusliches Kunstgewerbe', 1923, 34.

68) Fiona Hackney, '"Use Your Hands for Happiness": Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of Design History* 19:1, 2006, 23-38.

instructions, whereby patterns and stitched tracings could be ordered through the magazines, they also provided an overview of contemporary arts and crafts creation in Vienna in the 1920s. Many of the illustrations show works from Rothansl’s own textile class, but patterns by independent artists are also presented including, for example, Hilde Weidner or Margarete Tiemann. Rothansl’s contributions thus functioned as an advertising space for the Academy of Applied Arts and associated designers. Women were in the majority. With the growing presence of women designers in popular media, the contributions confirm the growing professionalisation and recognition of this profession. The fact that the works presented – such as tea cosies, cushion covers, netted doilies, wallets, and belts – were mainly of decorative value should not obscure the fact that arts and crafts had acquired a deeper ideological and economic significance in Vienna in the early 1920s. In the broader social and political context of the magazine, Rothansl’s instructions can be read as part of an attempt to rehabilitate Austria’s position as a ‘nation of culture’. By extension, precisely this image was used to position Austria as an important supplier of applied arts for international markets at the Paris exhibition, exhibiting and promoting the same products that became synonymous with the Kunstgewerblerin in the early 1920s. In fact, even when Austria’s political climate became more and more reactionary in the early 1930s and increasingly limited women’s role in public life, the economic importance of women designers continued to be emphasised. The notion of ‘feminine craft’ had, thus, built a lasting legacy. In 1933, the conservative cultural magazine *Profil* published an article ‘The *Kunstgewerblerin*’ alongside a series of designs by Viennese Workshop artists Jesser and Likarz-Strauß, who had also exhibited in Paris in 1925. Stressing the role of the *Kunstgewerblerin* as a designer who must work in line with the requirements of industrial production, the article concludes: ‘The importance of the *Kunstgewerblerin* in the national economy is evident. The responsibilities of women active in design and their part in the fruition and downfall of our economy is greater than ever before.’[69] Indeed, the fashion historian Jonathan Kaplan-Wajselbaum has emphasised that, from the mid-1920s until the Second World War, Vienna counted among the fashion capitals of Europe next to London, Paris and Berlin, owing to the successful establishment of department stores where fashionable items could be bought at affordable prices.[70] Given the international reach of the Paris exhibition and its overall commercial focus, the representation of women designers at the Austrian pavilion thus ought to be considered as an central aspect to establishing their cultural as was as their economic role in interwar Austria. Yet the particular modes of expression their work was identified with remained strongly contested.

69) H.A.V., ‘Die Kunstgewerblerin’, *Profil. Österreichische Monatsschrift für bildende Kunst* 4, 1933, 38.

70) Jonathan Kaplan-Wajselbaum, *Jews in Suits. Men’s Dress in Vienna, 1890-1938,* London: Bloomsbury, 2023.

Modern design and the *Kunstgewerblerin in Paris*

Described as a ‘Viennese woman with a thorough knowledge of contemporary Paris’, an anonymous author in the *(Neuigkeits-) Welt Blatt* reported her horror upon visiting the Austrian pavilion in 1925.[71] Pointing out the praise for the pavilion in the Austrian press, she writes about her disappointment upon visiting the ‘unsightly’ pavilion whose interiors were reminiscent of ‘Christmas tree ornaments’.[72] She also remarked upon the repeated exclamation ‘pauvre Autriche!’ among many visitors, unsure whether this pertained to the pavilion or to the ‘petty state’ that Austria had become after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918.[73] The connection pointed to the unfitting decadence of the pavilion as a form of national representation, drawing upon the fact that the country had been transformed into a small Alpine state in which the luxurious designs of Viennese institutions were an exception, rather than the rule.[74] This is not to say that the pavilion was generally badly received. As already noted, the French press by and large appreciated Viennese design, while the Frankfurt-based newspaper *Klimsch Anzeiger,* for example, in its review of the Paris exhibition, stressed that the Austrian pavilion was ‘exceptionally noble’ and ‘exemplary and very dignified’.[75] Putting aside the fact that most pavilions received mixed reviews such as these, however, the decorative and luxurious character emphasised in relation to the Austrian pavilion, and the ‘feminisation’ of Viennese design this was associated with, merits some closer attention. With a focus on the applied arts specifically, a different matter was at stake beyond questions of national identity: namely, what modern design ought to look like and whether the kind of objects the women designers were identified with matched these ideas – or not.

Influential critics such as Ermers described the objects by women designers as ‘an intoxicating cascade of fabrics and a remarkable richness of leather– and glassware, jewellery, lampshades, book bindings, miniature sculpture…’[76] His terminology recalls Klinger’s description of the *Kunstgewerblerin*’s work as ‘something fractured, exaggerated, […] artificial and above all superfluous’, produced by ‘almost-artists of an individual kind for a cosmopolitan and moneyed stratum of society’.[77] In line with the dismissive attitudes towards craftswomen in a wider cultural field, Austrian critics blamed women’s contributions for the failures of the pavilion to provide modern, practical solutions for Austrian design.

That the vitrines were not only richly decorated but also filled to the brim was a recurring point of criticism. Considering the set-up of the large exhibition hall, with its ornamented high vitrines, the overall impression was certainly overwhelming. Adding to this the rich colours, different materials and abundance of form of the exhibits, references to luxury consumption hardly come as a surprise. Of the large exhibition hall Ermers noted, ‘here,

71) ‘Pariser Eindrücke’, *(Neuigkeits-)Welt Blatt*, 27 September 1925, 4.

72) ‘Pariser Eindrücke’, 4.

73) ‘Pariser Eindrücke’, 4.

74) Katherine Smits and Alix Jansen, ‘Staging the Nation at Expos and World’s Fairs’, *National Identities* 14:2, 2012, 173-188.

75) ‘Vermischtes’, *Der deutsch-österreichische Photograph* 24, 1925, 10.

76) Ermers, ‘Auf der Seine-Terrasse’, 5.

77) Ermers, ‘Auf der Seine-Terrasse’, 5.

everyday objects are no longer produced with the seriousness, objectivity and solidity to offer potential for mass consumption, but as entertaining and alluring things to help one to overcome the monotonous life of someone not having to rely on employment.'[78] What Patek celebrated as 'personality and individuality' in the design of the modern *Kunstgewerblerin* was, thus, positioned as a detrimental development in Austrian design production.

Looking more closely at some of the individual objects on display by women designers, such as the playful ceramic sculptures by Mizi Otten-Friedmann, glazed in different colours and richly ornamented, it is clear what Ermers and the anonymous visitor were criticising: the sculptures are decorative objects that are highly expressive in colour and form and have no practical function. (**Figure 5**) They served as miniature artworks that played with an overabundance of material, different shapes and patterns, forging a playful means of expression that clearly eschewed the 'objective', 'clean', and 'practical' nature praised in the work of Frank, Behrens, and Hoffmann at the same exhibition.[79] Similarly, the embroideries on display from Rothansl's class at the Academy present fantasy worlds in a variety of needlework techniques, which focused on formal exploration rather than serving a utilitarian purpose. Using the Austrian pavilion as a stage, Vienna's women designers clearly played on notions of the 'attractive', the 'frilly' and the 'playful', which could easily be used by those favouring a functionalist style to play out a gender bias that emphasised a separation of women's creative production from rational and functional modernity.[80] Instead of seeing craftsmanship, Ermers criticised the undue attention paid to aestheticized, decorative surfaces, describing them as the ideas of a 'femme fantaisiste', a fanciful woman with no sense of reality.[81] Putting these flaws down to the new 'feminine character of Austrian design', he saw the spirit of the male design 'geniuses' of an older generation misinterpreted at the hands of their female students.[82] The only remedy to this, in order to rejuvenate Austrian design, he found, was to shift towards a 'masculine, expert, serious […] and well-constructed' mass industry, including the total reorganisation of the Academy of Applied Arts.[83]

At this point, it is necessary to briefly contextualise Ermers' position. Between 1919 and 1923 this art historian and economist led the Housing Office for the municipality of Vienna ('Siedlungsamt der Stadt Wien'), where he was responsible for the planning of housing estates to counter the establishing of uncontrolled building in the city as a consequence of housing shortages after the First World War.[84] Additionally, he acted as one of the three deputy mayors of Vienna at this time, and regularly published articles on cultural questions, including reviews of the Paris exhibition in *Der Tag*, a left-leaning, liberal daily which held a critical

78) Ermers, 'Wo stehen wir nun wirklich?', 2.

79) Eisler, 'Unser Haus in Paris', *Neue Freie Presse*, 19 May 1925, 25.

80) Ankwicz-Kleehoven, 'Österreich auf der Internationalen Kunstgewerbeausstellung', 1.

81) Ermers, 'Wo stehen wir nun wirklich?', 2.

82) Ermers, 'Wo stehen wir nun wirklich?', 2.

83) Ermers, 'Wo stehen wir nun wirklich?', 2.

84) Klaus Novy and Günther Uhlig, *Die Wiener Siedlerbewegung 1918-1934*, Aachen: Klenkes, 1982; Inge Podbrecky, *Rotes Wien*, Vienna: Falter, 2003; Ulrike Zimmerl, *Wiener Siedlerbewegung und Siedlungswesen in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Vienna: Österreichischer Kunst– und Kulturverlag, 1998.

stance towards the Entente powers.[85] A similar scepticism towards Austrian dependence on international funds coloured Ermers's book of 1922, *Austria's Economic Decline and Rebirth. An Economic Program for Self-Salvation*, in which he argued that the country's economic recovery could only proceed through growing economic independence.[86] In other words, Ermers's political position and his understanding of modern design as functional industrial production suitable and affordable for a broad segment of the population, by and large stood in opposition to the luxury designs by middle-class women that the *Kunstgewerblerin* in Paris represented. From this point of view, Ermers's criticisms of the designs were, arguably, justified, notwithstanding their misogynistic motivations.

The gendered criticism of the pavilion, in this sense, can also be understood as an implicit critique of the middle class and its closed circuit of production, which stood in opposition to the goals of Red Vienna. It was the same group of Viennese cosmopolites who produced, promoted, and bought the luxury goods on display in Paris, forging a specific community that continued the design practices of Vienna 1900 in an updated form. In contrast to other women designers who supported Ermers's cause, such as the architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who also worked on Vienna's housing projects, however, it can be argued that the *Kunstgewerblerin* designs had a fundamentally different purpose compared to Ermers's expectations of modern design. It was one that focused on women's creative emancipation. In 1928, three years after the Paris exposition, Illy Kjaer noted in her review of the exhibition *Contemporary Living* at the Museum for Art and Industry in Vienna, that the interiors exhibited reflected the maturing of 'an individual consciousness [...] in contemporary design, which does not unfold in a repetition of forms but, in searching the rhythm of its time, grapples to find its own expression'.[87] Kjaer, a painter and designer herself, as well as a regular contributor to feminist magazines, consequently argued that 'the applied arts offer women the cultural task of realising their own note, their own ways of life, and to carry their individual values of beauty into the widest everyday realities.'[88] The aestheticization of craft objects thus allowed women designers 'the possibility of meaningful artistic expression' beyond the easel.[89] For the Paris exhibition, as a showcase of luxury design for commercial purposes, this positioning corresponded closely with the main figure in mind for the exhibition overall: the modern, middle class woman consumer, who expressed her social and political emancipation with an emphasis on new fashions and interiors.

Conclusion

In line with the wider role of the *Kunstgewerblerin* as a contested figure in Austrian culture, women's contributions to the Paris exhibition were seen as significant only when emphasising the pavilions shortcomings in offering truly modern (meaning practical and functional)

85) Béla Rásky, 'Max Rezensiert Max. Über Max Ermers' Feuilleton zu Max Winters Die lebende Mumie. Ein Blick in das Jahr 2025 (1929)', *Kakanien revisited* [online], http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/fallstudie/BRasky4.pdf/.

86) Max Ermers, *Österreichs Wirtschaftsverfall und Wiedergeburt. Ein Wirtschaftsprogramm zur Selbstrettung,* Vienna: Renaissance, 1922.

87) Illy Kjaer, 'Die neuzeitliche Wohnung', *Die Österreicherin* 1:7, 1928, 4.

88) Kjaer, 'Die neuzeitliche Wohnung', 4.

89) Brandow-Faller, 'Feminine Vessels', 28.

design solutions. Beyond the gender bias such narratives emphasised, they also affected the presentation of a modern post-imperial Austrian identity. Rather than acknowledging the development that Viennese design had undergone with newly trained designers who emphasised an expressive and playful modernity, the attention paid to established figures such as Hoffmann instead accentuated a sense of reminiscence for the innovations of the fin-de-siècle. On the one hand, this presentation manifested a sense of Habsburg nostalgia, carried through Hoffmann, as well as journalists such as Ermers and Zuckerkandl-Szeps, who repeatedly emphasised the glory of the Secession years around 1900. On the other hand, the definition of Austrian design by a lingering presence of glories past negated women's contributions to the field. Rejecting a metropolitan, colourful and playful approach as Austria's new design identity, a confident representation of post-imperial identity would only return with the radicalisation of Austrian politics in the 1930s, delineated by Alpine-inspired designs.[90] In Paris in 1925 – a moment when women's contributions to Austrian design gained greater visibility – the gender bias attached to their designs rejected the mere possibility that this, too, could be what Austrian design represented.

Yet even though the criticism of these works as playful trinkets for luxury consumers was reasonable in light of the exclusive nature of the objects on display, they also missed the main purpose of the Paris exhibition. It was, after all, designed as a show of contemporary consumer culture, with the designers and consumers belonging predominantly to the middle class. Scholars such as Dell and Marta Leśniakowska agree that the particular position of the 1925 Paris exhibition in the history of large exhibitions was its focus on fashion and (female) consumers, embodied, not least, by the unmissable presence of luxury department stores.[91] In this light, the designs on display were hardly a democratising venture but rather were a middle class one, which, recalling the marks of bourgeois distinction by sociologist Edmond Goblot, 'defined the "decorum" of a specific class'.[92] In this sense, then, the contributions by Vienna's women designers might well have been frilly trinkets – yet these were ultimately in chime with the goals of the exhibition. More importantly still, it allowed them to develop their own design language and, as the journalist Else Hoffmann emphasised, to move to 'the top of this specific art movement' that reinserted Viennese design in a global market after 1918.[93]

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90) 'Alpenländische Moderne: Österreich auf der Weltausstellung Brüssel 1935,' in Ulrike Felber, Elke Krasny and Christian Rapp, eds, *Smart Exports: Österreich auf den Weltausstellungen 1851–2000,* Vienna: Christian Brandstätter, 2000, 118.

91) Dell, 'The Consumer', 323; Marta Leśniakowska, 'Czego nie widziano w Pary ż u? Rok 1925 i 'łakome oko',' in Joanna Sosnowska, ed, *Wystawka paryska 1925. Materiały z sesji naukowej Instytutu Sztuki PAN Warszawa*, Warsaw: Polish Academy of Science, 2005, 75–89.

92) Edmond Goblot, *La Barriere et la niveau. Etude sociologique sur la bourgeoisie francaise moderne*, Paris: Felix Alcan, 1925, 32–33.

93) Else Hoffmann, 'Illy Kjäer', *Österreichische Kunst* 1, 1932, 31.

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Curating National Renewal: The Significance of Arts and Crafts in the Construction of Soviet Identity at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris

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Abstract

At the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris in 1925, the newly recognised Soviet Union was given a platform to present its ideology through art. It constructed an official narrative of national renewal through a sophisticated exhibition concept that complemented contemporary art (particularly constructivism) with arts and crafts. This article sheds light on why the Soviet officials chose this specific approach and how their strategy was rooted in the earlier exhibition experience of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Focusing on the two sections of arts and crafts presented in Paris – the Kustar goods of Soviet Russia and folk art from other Soviet Republics – the article examines their significance for the carefully constructed Soviet identity of the time. Furthermore, it analyses the contributions of individual organisers to these sections in light of their statements and writings, their professional positions and their prior experience. By illuminating the human factor behind the official narrative, the article exposes a parallel level of interpretation in order to further a more nuanced understanding of the Soviet contribution.

Keywords

Arts and Crafts; Exposition des Arts Décoratifs; Kustar art; Paris; World's Fair; Soviet identity

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Curating National Renewal: The Significance of Arts and Crafts in the Construction of Soviet Identity at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris

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Introduction

In October 1924, the Soviet Union was recognised by the French government and subsequently invited to participate in the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, which took place in Paris the following year. Despite receiving the invitation only five months before the grand opening on 28 April 1925, Soviet officials readily accepted. In an article for *Paris-Soir* titled 'Pourquoi les Soviets ont éxposé', Pyotr Kogan (1872–1932), *commissaire général* of the exhibition committee, summarised the reason for their willingness to participate, even at short notice, as a desire to show the French public 'proof of the creative activity of the [Soviet] peoples' which has awakened with renewed vigour and was developing rapidly 'under the aegis of the Soviet power'.

Recognizing the significance of this platform, considerable efforts were made to ensure a successful appearance. The multifaceted Soviet exhibition strategy sought to paint a picture of a politically, economically and socially successful country. Contributions were carefully selected according to their ability to showcase cultural achievements of the 'Great experiment' – despite revolutions, civil war and political repression. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Boris Ternovets (1884–1941), one of the leading members of the exhibition committee and the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Moscow, reiterated the effort of the exhibition organisers 'to show the true face of a country whose life is organised on new grounds, according to principles of labour, simplicity and perfect adaptation to its task'.[1] Given the political backdrop, the success of the participation was equated to the success of the political endeavour. Being well received was seen as proof that the Soviet Union could compete on an equal footing with other participating countries.

Art historical studies on the Soviet contribution to the *Exposition des arts décoratifs* have focused primarily on avant-garde architecture, interiors, theatre designs, posters, prints, textiles and porcelain. These exhibits have been discussed in the context of stylistic developments in Soviet art and architecture or in the broader socio-political context of

1) B[oris] T[ernovets], 'En guise d'introduction', *Catalogue des œuvres d'art décoratif et d'industrie artistique exposées dans le pavillon de l'URSS au Grand Palais et dans les Galeries de l'Esplanade des Invalides*, Paris: n p., 1925, 20: 'Notre dessein a été de montrer le vrai visage d'un pays dont la vie est organisée sur de nouvelles bases, selon des principes du travail, de simplicité et de parfaite adaptation à sa tâche'.

Soviet cultural diplomacy.[2] Building on previous research, this article proposes to look at further significant components of the Soviet contribution to the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* in its entirety. In so doing, it argues that folk art was positioned no less prominently and stood in contrast to the avant-garde (primarily Constructivist) contribution both visually and conceptually. Contrary to Constructivism, which spread through most (if not all) Soviet sections and represented cutting-edge contemporary art, the arts and crafts symbolised the continuity of certain artistic traditions. Such an interplay of forward– and backward-looking approaches, of modernity and tradition, reflects the contradictory Soviet cultural politics of the time. Evidently, the benefits expected from creating an image of artistic continuity outweighed the disadvantages, even if this meant a continuation of the imperial legacy.

This article retraces, first, the different sections of the Soviet contribution and highlights the implications of the political context. In tracing the roots of the exhibition conception, it draws parallels with imperial Russian strategies employed at previous World's Fairs, most notably, the 1900 *Exposition universelle* in Paris. It then examines the extent to which the presentation of arts and crafts was articulated as a continuity or a break with imperial practices by looking more closely at two sections: 'Peasant Art of the Kustari',[3] representing artisans from Central Russia, and 'National Ensembles', showcasing the material culture of the indigenous peoples of Russia as well as other nations of the European, Central Asian and Transcaucasian Soviet Republics, such as Belarus, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. By examining both displays and conceptions behind them, the article unravels their mutually complementary messages as well as their significance for the carefully constructed Soviet identity of the time. It addresses the following questions: To what extent did the art of the *kustari* allude to cultural continuity and rootedness in tradition? How is it to be evaluated in relation to the official aim of demonstrating national and cultural renewal? How did the Soviet Union present its ethnocultural diversity and multinationality? In what way did it attempt to distance itself from imperial cultural policy and colonial claims?

Yakov Tugendhol'd (1882–1928), another prominent member of the 1925 exhibition committee who was in charge of propaganda work, expressed in a letter to Pyotr Kogan that it would be 'criminal to experiment' with the selection of people involved and their tasks.[4] Instead, Tugendhol'd pleaded for organisers who would not only have the 'sense of the vernacular, native, specific character of Russia' but also knowledge of Western

2) See, for example, Yvonne Brunnhammer, *1925*, Paris: Les Presses de la Connaissance, 1976, 185; Anna Petrova and Nelli Podgorskaya, 'Rabochii i kolchoznitsa' [Worker and Peasant], in Petrova and Podgorskaya, eds, *Pavil'ony SSSR na mezhdunarodnykh vystavkakh* [USSR Pavilions at the international exhibitions], Moscow: Pareto-Print, 2013, 9–41. For more on the socio-political context see Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 61–97; Aleksandr Golubev and Vladimir Nevezhin, *Formirovanie obraza Sovetskoi Rossii v okruzhayushchem mire sredstvami kul'turnoi diplomatii, 1920-e–pervaia polovina 1940-kh* [Forming the Image of Soviet Russia in the Surrounding World through Cultural Diplomacy, 1920s–the First Half of the 1940s], Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2016, 57–126.

3) The Russian term *kustar* (pl. *kustari*) describes a handicraft worker. It received a specific connotation during the revival of the folk art in nineteenth century. Originally objects of everyday use, *kustar* goods took on the character of decorative souvenir in the course of the revival.

4) He was specifically concerned about appointing Alexander Rodchenko as the head decorator of the whole exhibition, arguing that he did not have sufficient prior experience. See the letter from Yakov Tugendhol'd to Pyotr Kogan of 7 January 1925, in RGALI, fonds 237, op. 1, it. 126, f. 1, 2, published in: Natalia Volkova, Sergei Shumikhin et al., eds, *Vstrechi s proshlym* [Encounters with the Past], Moscow: RGALI, 1996, 8, 400–401.

cultural contexts. A closer look at the individual positions and backgrounds as well as professional experiences of the respective section organisers reveals a new dimension of interpretation. Illuminating the human factor behind the official narrative is therefore an important shift in perspective leading to a more nuanced understanding of the Soviet contribution.

An artistic display with political implications

The Soviet section was inaugurated on 5 June, with a delay of over a month after the grand opening. The official program contained three inaugural speeches held at the Grand Palais. Leonid Krasin, the first Soviet ambassador to France, declared that the art presented reflected the Revolution of 1917 and was still in its formative stages. His address was followed by Kogan, who, in addition to being head of the exhibition committee, was founder and president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and professor at Moscow University. Kogan emphasised that the art on display was by no means merely 'l'art pour l'art'. Instead, it sought to embody real life and to adapt the object to its purpose.[5] In the final speech, Anatole de Monzie, French Minister of Education and Fine Arts, showed particular interest in seeing 'how Marxism had impacted on art'.[6]

The first part of the Soviet contribution was located on the first floor of the Grand Palais. The display occupied six rooms covering a total area of over 500 square meters and presented twelve art categories including architecture, graphic design, photography, and – one of the contributions most appraised by French art critics – decorative theatre art. It could be reached by the southern staircase that led straight to a bust of Lenin on a Constructivist pedestal, centred in front of a wooden construction resembling a door frame, crowned from above by a large-sized poster reading 'URSS' (**Figure 1**). This somewhat provocative display seemingly prepared the visitor for the challenging combination of political message and formal experimentation that awaited them throughout most of the Soviet contributions.

Directly in front of the Grand Palais was the Soviet pavilion, designed by Konstantin Mel'nikov. This bold Constructivist building made of wood and glass became one of the most noted architectural contributions to the exhibition. A lightweight two-story construction, its unconventional forms, unusual height and bright colours stood out from other pavilions at the Cours-la-Reine. Its 'extreme simplicity' was even 'shocking' for some.[7] From an artistic point of view, it reflected the advanced state of Soviet architectural concepts with El Lissitzky going as far as calling it 'the first small building' that embodied the 'new spirit'.[8] Emphasising the message of Soviet progress that was to be conveyed rather than its purely artistic value, Kogan

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5) He expressed the same sentiment in a special publication for the exhibition, stating: 'C'est en effet notre Révolution qui a accentué cette idée que l'art doit avant toute chose incarner la vie réelle, qu'il doit construire la réalité et que la vraie beauté consiste dans l'adaptation de l'objet à sa destination'. Pierre Cogan [Pyotr Kogan], 'Préface', *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'URSS. Edition du comité de la section de l'URSS à l'exposition internationale des arts décoratifs Paris 1925*, Moscow: Gosznak, 1925, 5.

6) Anonymous, 'M. de Monzie', 1: 'comment le marxisme avait réagi sur l'art'.

7) Bernard Lecache, 'Défense et illustration du Pavillon des Soviets', *Paris-soir*, 609, 6 June 1925, 3.

8) El Lissitzky, *Russland. Die Rekonstruktion der Architektur in der Sowjetunion* (Neues Bauen in der Welt), 1.1, 1930, 35 ff.

Figure 1: Henri Manuel, View of the Entrance to the Soviet Sections in the Grand Palais of the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, Paris* (1925).

Source: A. N. Lavrentiev.

described it as the 'symbol of our [Soviet] obstinacy as constructors, of our revolutionary simplicity and austerity'.[9]

The ground floor of the pavilion accommodated the Section of National Ensembles with the material culture of the various peoples of the vast Soviet Union, which will be examined in more detail below. Its upper floor showcased the Section of the State Publishing House, Gosizdat, which was prepared by Isaac Rabinovitch. Finally, there was the room of the Commercial Sector, 'Gostorg', with a presentation of the State Export-Import Office, installed by Alexander Rodchenko. His interiors of a workers' club were located – together with the *Izba* (reading room) designed by Anton Lavinsky, a student of Vkhutemas – across the Seine in the Galerie de l'Esplanade des Invalides, the third and last location of the official Soviet section.[10]

Mel'nikov's pavilion and Rodchenko's worker's club attracted a lot of attention and quickly became emblems of the Soviet section. These 'agitation machines' seemed to embody progress

9) P[yotr] Kogan, ' … symbole de notre opiniâtreté de constructeurs, de notre simplicité et de notre austérité révolutionnaires'. 'Pourquoi les Soviets ont éxposé', 1.

10) These two displays proposed recreation spaces for self-education and cultural leisure activities. See Elitza Dulguerova, 'L'art et le paysan. Fantasmes, débats, pratiques en Russie/URSS', in Neil McWilliam, Catherine Méneux and Julie Ramos, eds, *L'art social en France: De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014, 397–412, especially 401–405.

and the success of the Bolshevik endeavour.[11] The demonstrative political message was not lost on the French public. However, the entanglement of art and politics affected the Soviet contribution to the Paris exhibition as well as its perception and reception, often obscuring the artistic value of the artworks on display and leaving the public with the impression of seeing 'nothing but a political propaganda section'.[12]

Learning from past experiences

Based on previous experiences at international exhibitions, Soviet officials were able to make a likely assessment of what would be well received by the Western public. It stands to reason that both Constructivism and folk art were considered to be a fairly safe choice: David Shterenberg (1881–1948), the artistic director of the Soviet Section in Paris as well as head of the Department of Fine Arts (IZO) at the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), had already gained valuable experience by organising the *First Russian Art Exhibition* at the Gallery van Diemen in Berlin 1922. Its reception made clear that among the various heterogeneous movements of avant-garde art of Soviet Russia, Constructivism received most recognition.[13] *Kustar* art, on the other hand, was already widely popular in Europe long before the October Revolution, and the World's Fairs played a crucial role in its popularity in France.[14] The post-revolutionary exhibition experience of the Soviet Union verified its enduring popularity. The Soviet participation at the Venice Biennale of 1924 provided important experience when preparing for the Paris exhibition the following year.[15] For Kogan, who had been entrusted with the preparation of the Soviet participation in Venice, the display showed leading

11) Yakov Tugendhol'd, 'Stil 1925 goda (Mezhdunarodnaia vystavka v Parizhe)' [The style of 1925 (The International exhibition in Paris)], *Pechat' i revolutsiia* 7, 1925, 35. The demonstratively ephemeral character of the pavilion, expressed among other things in the use of cheap materials, was emblematic of the entire Soviet exhibition. In many ways, it was more about showcasing ideas and future potential than already realised achievements.

12) Maurice de Waleffe, 'À propos de l'exposition des arts décoratifs. Une bataille pour la beauté', *Les Modes,* 1 June 1925, 2.

13) Cf. Éva Forgács, '16 Responses to the First Russian Art Exhibition', in Isabel Wünsche and Miriam Leimer, eds, *100 Years On. Revisiting the First Russian Art Exhibtion of 1922,* Vienna/Cologne: Böhlau, 2022, 105–112. Shterenberg and Anatolii Lunatcharsky were initially very interested in bringing the Berlin exhibition to Paris and were encouraged to do so from the French side as well. However, it could not be realised and the exhibition traveled instead to Amsterdam, where it was shown at the Stedelijk Museum in 1923. It would be of special interest to take this original idea into account and to analyse in what sense the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* can be seen as the successor of the 1922 Berlin exhibition.

14) The Russian Empire took part in the Paris World's Fairs of 1867, 1889 and 1900. The *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* was technically not a World's Fair, as it focused exclusively on the applied arts, but it stood in the same tradition and was organised in a very similar manner, showcasing twenty-one nations side by side. See also Nathanaëlle Tressol, 'The Reception of Russian Arts and Crafts in French Art Journals', *Experiment* 25, 2019, 346–362.

15) Two further large-scale exhibitions took place in New York: the *Russian Painting and Sculpture* exhibition in the Brooklyn Museum in 1923 and the *Russian Art Exhibition* at the Grand Central Palace in 1924. These exhibitions are of little relevance in the present context: The Brooklyn Museum exhibition was prepared by the American art critic Christian Brinton without the involvement of Soviet officials, whereas the exhibition at the Grand Central Palace did not include arts and crafts items. See Roann Barris, 'Exhibiting Russia. Revisiting, Reframing, and Reinterpreting the Russian Avant-Garde', *Experiment* 23, 2017, 142–157. See, too, Christina Lodder, 'Exhibitions of Russian Art after 1922', in Annely and David Juda, eds, *The 1st Russian Show: A Commemoration of the Van Diemen Exhibition Berlin 1922,* London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1983, 80–83.

artistic trends of contemporary Russia complemented by a wide range of arts and crafts.[16] The overall approach, combining modernist and traditional art tendencies, was similar to that of the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs,* which is not surprising given the number of shared members of the organising committee between the two exhibitions.[17] Although the display of folk art cannot be reconstructed in detail, Soviet officials underlined that it was an important part of the contribution at both international exhibitions.[18]

The arts and crafts were represented so prominently not least because they were a popular commodity for the Western public, attracting remarkable attention. In the additional catalogue for the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs,* Kogan highlighted their 'succès extraordinaire'[19] in Venice, confirming moreover the interest of Soviet officials in the financial side of these exhibitions. In Paris, they pursued the same hope for success, coupled with a desire to expand the established range of export items. As part of the unofficial Soviet contribution, twelve Gostorg kiosks were placed on the left bank of the Seine, near the Galerie de l'Esplanade des Invalides. They were built after Mel'nikov's design, painted by artists Alexandra Exter and Victor Bart and sold a variety of handicrafts, in particular *kustar* goods and toys, but also carpets, scarves, embroidery, lace, porcelain and books.

It is important to point out that *kustar* export was certainly not a Soviet novelty. Stores with arts and crafts of the Russian Empire had already been in existence throughout Europe before World War I.[20] The Russian Empire thus presented arts and crafts on a large scale early on, but it was the resounding success at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 that transformed their popularity into a strong export market. Curiously, from the very beginning, arts and crafts played a decisive role in the construction of imperial Russian identity, while the empire's self-presentation was oriented towards its perception and success abroad.[21] In this sense, its emphasis on folk art can be compared with the popularity of ethnographic presentations at World's Fairs. In France, in particular, ethnographic exhibitions played an important role in highlighting the country's colonial successes.[22] The participation of the Russian Empire

16) Interview with Pyotr Kogan, *Il Popolo d'Italia,* 6 June 1924, cited after Vivian Endicott Barnett, 'Der russische Beitrag zur Biennale von Venedig 1924. Eine Rekonstruktion', in Bettina-Martine Wolter and Bernhart Schwenk, eds, *Die grosse Utopie: Die russische Avantgarde 1915–1932,* Frankfurt: Schirn, 1992, 165.

17) Boris Ternovets acted as the general secretary in Venice, both exhibitions shared professors Abram Efros, Yakov Tugendhol'd and others as members of the committee.

18) In a French article from 1925, Ternovets mentioned a few *kustar* items (including items by Golikov) and pointed out that other regions of the USSR, such as Armenia and Ukraine, were also exhibited. See Boris Ternovets, 'La Section russe à l'Exposition internationale de Venise', *La Renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe,* 7/10, October 1924, 535–547; See also Endicott Barnett, 'Der russische Beitrag', 164.

19) Cogan [Kogan], 'Préface', *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'URSS,* 5 ff.

20) In Paris, there was the *kustar* store of V.I. Borutskii and S.T. Morozov on the Avenue d'Opéra and another store on the Place du Théâtre. The Soviet government continued to support the export of arts and crafts as a welcome source of foreign currency and, by the mid-1920s, *kustar* goods were among the most sought-after export items from Soviet Russia.

21) Supposedly, in preparation for the London World's Fair of 1862, the Russian ambassador to Great Britain, Filip Brunov, had sought advice of the 'Russophile English geologist' Roderick Murchison. He received a strong recommendation to contribute objects that were particularly characteristic of Russia and distinguished the country from Western Europe. Russian officials apparently took this advice to heart and followed it at subsequent international exhibitions as well. See Mirjam Voerkelius, 'Russland und die Sowjetunion auf den Weltausstellungen', in Martin Aust, ed., *Globalisierung imperial und sozialistisch: Russland und die Sowjetunion in der Globalgeschichte, 1851–1991,* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2013, 211.

22) The *Exposition Universelle* of 1867 delivered the collections for the *Muséum Ethnographique des Missions*

in the international exhibitions had an important peculiarity: it played on the attraction of presenting exotic goods and at the same time aimed at underpinning its status as an imperial power.

The skilful presentation of an *izba* (log house) at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* in 1867 led to the international fame of the 'Russian style'. While imperial Russian contributions to the *Expositions Universelles* of 1878 and 1889 followed similar strategies, the exhibition of 1900 is to be understood as an important turning point.[23] While imperial Russia itself was considered an exotic curiosity and was represented as 'peuples étrangers à l'Europe' in the nineteenth century, its participation in the 1900 *Exposition Universelle* established its position as a Great Power.[24] It still pleased the French public with its exotic character, but at the same time presented itself as a technically and industrially advanced empire with its own colonial power. Specifically, the contribution included the 'Village russe', consisting of a wooden church, an '*izba* des koustary' a boyarina's *terem* and a bazaar, and was supervised by women such as Princess Maria Tenisheva, Princess Maria Shabelskaia, Princess Aleksandra Naryshkina, Elizaveta Mamontova and Maria Iakunchikova.[25] The section displayed *kustar* handicrafts such as furniture, toys, instruments and further smaller goods, as well as folk-inspired neo-Russian works by contemporary artists, originating mostly from the artistic colonies in Abramcevo and Talashkino, two emblematic places for the development of this style.[26] These exhibits would typically stylise folklore themes with new, non-historicising forms, while keeping the traditional motifs recognisable.[27] This installation was highly praised by the French public which emphasised the 'rich roots of the Russian people and the vitality of a long-lived identity'.[28] The *kustar* goods were judged as 'chefs-d'oeuvres d'art et de goût'[29] and made a lasting impact on the perception of Russian art in France. These objects corresponded well to widespread clichés of the Tsarist Empire as exotic, mystical and Byzantine.[30] At the same time, the *kustar* and neo-Russian contributions were complemented

Scientifiques. Starting with the *Exposition Universelle* of 1878, ethnographic displays became a special feature of World's Fairs. See Polina Matveeva, 'Vsemirnye vystavki kak prototipy etnograficheskikh museev' [World's Fairs as Prototypes of Ethnographic Museums], in *Evropeiskoe kul'turnoe prostranstvo v kollekciyakh MAE* [European cultural space in the collections of the MAE], St. Petersburg: MAE RAN, 2013, 61–74.

23) Olga Kazakova, 'Les Pavillons russes aux Expositions Universelles du XIXe siècle. Expression de l'identité qui n'a jamais existé', *Diacronie* 18/2, 2014, document 6. URL: https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.1411 (last accessed 6 July 2023).

24) For example, the Russian contribution to the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 was still reviewed in ethnographic contexts. See, Alexandre Tausserat, 'Notes et enquêtes. Musique populaire russe', *Revue des traditions populaires* 4/10, October 1889, 550.

25) For more on women's contribution to the *Village russe* see Louise Hardiman, 'Invisible women. Re-examining the Arts and Crafts of Maria V. Iakunchikova at the Paris "Exposition universelle" of 1900', *Experiment* 25, 2019, 295–309.

26) Jelena Tschernewitsch, 'Ausdruck eines neuen Russlands. Der neorussische Stil im Spannungsfeld von Folklore und nationaler Identität', in Ralf Beil, ed., *Russland 1900. Kunst und Kultur im Reich des letzten Zaren*, Cologne: Dumont, 2008, 147–165.

27) Netta Peacock, 'The New Movement in Russian Decorative Art', *International Studio* 13, May 1901, 268–276; Jewgenia Kritschenko, *Zwischen Byzanz und Moskau. Der Nationalstil in der russischen Kunst*, Munich: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1991.

28) Gianni Cariani, 'La découverte de l'art russe en France, 1879–1914', *Revue des études slaves* 71: 2, 1999, 400.

29) *1900 Paris Exposition. Guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition,* Paris: Hachette, 1900, 294.

30) Voerkelius, 'Russland und Sowjetunion auf den Weltausstellungen', 213.

with works by contemporary artists from the Russian Empire who could fit into the current European art scene,[31] reflecting thus an image of the Russian identity as a 'singulier mélange de l'Orient et de l'Occident, de la civilisation et de la barbarie'.[32] The image of Russian identity that this presented was, however, only a construct for the Western public. It corresponded neither to the official ideology of the Empire, nor to the mentality of its Europeanised cultural elite, nor to the way of life of its diverse peoples.[33]

Furthermore, imperial Russia positioned itself as a Western-style empire, presenting its central pavilion entitled 'Siberia and Russian Asia' at the section of the Foreign Colonies. Its stone building in pseudo-Russian style resembled the silhouettes of the Moscow Kremlin and evoked in the eyes of the Western public 'the history of the growing greatness of the holy Russia'.[34] It presented a collection of everyday objects from the regions of Central Asia, Siberia and the Far North. In addition, the sensational presentation of the Trans-Siberian Railway embodied technical progress and vividly demonstrated an 'ability to master space'.[35] The geographical area that was presented was staged as a project of modernisation in which the Russian Empire acted as 'an imperial power incorporating its colonies and its annexed peripheries'.[36]

Overall, the 1900 exhibition strategy – with contributions oscillating between tradition and heritage on the one hand and innovation and progress on the other – proved to be an effective formula for success.[37] In fact, Sergei Diagilev applied the same formula for his 'Saisons russes', which initially started with the *Exposition Rétrospective de l'Art Russe* presented at the Salon d'Automne in 1906. Although the part of the exhibition devoted to traditional art was mostly represented by icons and the art of previous centuries, Diagilev was also a zealous advocate for the decorative and industrial arts in Russia and for their international recognition.[38] With the subsequent *Ballets Russes* (1909–1929), Diagilev furthered his intention 'to groom Russian

31) Contemporary artists of the Russian Empire were exhibited separately, in the Foreign Section of the newly built Grand Palais, and included Mark Antokol'skii, Naum Aronson, Albert Edelfelt, Alexei Kharlamov, Konstantin Korovin and others.

32) Hippolyte Gautier, *Les curiosités de l'expositions universelle de 1867*, Paris: Delagrave, 1867, 115.

33) Olga Kazakova, 'Les pavillons russes aux Expositions Universelles du XIXe siècle. Expression de l'identité qui n'a jamais existé', unpaginated.

34) *Exposition universelle de 1900. Les plaisirs et les curiosités de l'Exposition*, Paris: Chaix, 1900, 272.

35) Voerkelius, 'Russland und Sowjetunion auf den Weltausstellungen', 215. This installation was a simulated train journey from Samara to Vladivistok. Visitors could enter three carriages, which simulated the movement of a train through shaking and showed the multilayered panorama from the windows, moving at 300 metres per minute. Cf. Valerii Privalikhin, 'Kartina dlinoi v kilometr' ['A kilometre long picture'], *Nauka i zhisn'* [Science and Life], 8, 2010, 84–88.

36) Claudia Weiss, 'Representing the Empire. The Meaning of Siberia for Russian Imperial Identity', *National Papers,* 35: 3, 2007, 448.

37) These two factors allowed the integration of the Russian Empire on a par with other nations. The success of this concept was likely due to it being in line with the prevailing idea of 'civilisation' in France. Cariani, 'La découverte de l'art russe', 399.

38) Not only was he at one point closely involved with the leading figures of folk art revival such as Elena Polenova, Savva Mamontov or Maria Tenisheva, but his interest might also have stemmed from his own family. His elder brother Iurii was one of the leading agents of kustar affairs and politics. Early on he headed a private school for the revival of *naboika* printing in the village of Borovenets in Novgorod province and was later appointed director of the Kustar Museum in St. Petersburg. See Wendy R. Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia. Reviving the Kustar Art Industries, 1870–1917,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 72.

painting and bring it to the West, to glorify it in the West'.[39] At the same time, he catered to the desire of the Western public for the exotic by initially giving the image of Russia a strong Eastern appeal and quickly turning to Russian folklore and folk-tales in the early 1910s.

The success of Diagilev's enterprise had an equally lasting effect on the perception of Russian art in France, as well as Russian life and culture in general.[40] So, when Kogan spoke out in his inaugural speech against exhibiting 'l'art pour l'art' – alluding to Diagilev's former group *World of Art* that put this principle at the centre of their creative pursuits –, he wanted to set Soviet art apart from preconceived Western notions of 'Russian art'. It was to be associated neither with the achievements of pre-revolutionary times nor with those of the *émigrés* from the former Russian Empire.[41] French art critics sensed this message and stated regretfully that 'the Red Revolution drowned the *Firebird'* and with it any hopes for Russian art 'raised by the famous Russian ballets'.[42] Despite this official stance and the corresponding public reception in regard to the renewal of Soviet art, however, it is still possible to trace a clear continuation of the imperial exhibition strategy, as will be shown below. A closer look at the individual agents involved in the preparation of the Soviet contribution in 1925 allows a better understanding of this incoherence.

Peasant art of the *kustari*

At the *Expositions des Arts Décoratifs*, the arts and crafts were employed as an elaborate device not only to symbolise the revival of popular labour according to the new ideology, but also to maintain a bridge to certain artistic traditions. The notion of peasants as the 'keepers of national identity'[43] played an important role in preserving a continuity between imperial Russian (in the supranational sense) and Soviet identities. Therefore, folk art was entrusted with the mission of conveying this image of continuity despite political transformation, and of reassuring the Western public that the Soviets were not making a *tabula rasa* of their entire cultural heritage, and they were building on certain traditions.

In contrast to the 1900 *Exposition Universelle*, the Soviet display of arts and crafts in 1925 eschewed neo-Russian works, which were too closely associated with their aristocratic patrons. Instead, they aimed to showcase 'authentic' Russian handicrafts that would reflect the popularity and success of the new government. In the absence of other established mass production (peasant or industrial), organisers had to rely on traditional *kustar* goods. Existing

39) See Diaghilev's letter to Alexander Benois, in I. S. Zil'bershtein and V. A. Samkov, eds, *Sergei Diagilev i russkoe iskusstvo* [Sergei Diagilev and Russian Art], 2, Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo, 1982, 26.

40) See, for example, Gleb Pospelov, 'Rossiia glazami diagilevskikh sezonov' [Russia through the eyes of Diagilev's seasons], *Pinakoteka,* 13/14, 2002, 215–224.

41) The Soviet participation in the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* actually led to a major split within the artistic émigré community in Paris, as was the case with the *Union des artistes russe*. Some of the artists of the (former) Russian Empire ended up working with the Soviet delegation, others participated in French sections, still others held back from participation altogether.

42) De Waleffe, 'Une bataille pour la beauté', 2: 'Du pavillon bolchevick on peut craindre qu'il ne défende assez mal les espoirs que firent naître, vers 1910, les fameux ballets russes. L'art russe semblait alors parti pour métamorphoser notre sens des lignes et des couleurs. La révolution rouge a noyé l'*Oiseau de feu*'.

43) Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia*, 7.

Figure 2: View of the kustar section in the Grand Palais (1925).

Source: *Catalogue général officiel: Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (Paris, 1925).

handicrafts in the pre-revolutionary style were not excluded from display, but they were accompanied by variations with new Soviet decorative elements.

The Section of Peasant Art of the *Kustari* in the Grand Palais consisted of six stands and was supposed to shed light on the reformed *kustar* industry, which counted, by the mid-1920s, about 400,000 artisans (**Figure 2**). It showcased toys, carved wood, pottery, embroidery, lace, objects in papier-mâché and many more goods from a large number of schools in, among others, Palekh (some 350 km east of Moscow), Sergiev Posad (to the north-east of Moscow), Bogorodskoe (now a north-eastern suburb of Moscow) and Torzhok (some 240 km north-west of Moscow). A certain renewal was visualised through new, Soviet, motifs with interpretations of the life of the Red Army and a 'new social symbolism'.[44] One specific ornament became distinctive for works made for this exposition: the image of the sickle, hammer and red star surrounded by a waving red ribbon, corn ears and the inscription 'USSR' (**Figure 3**).[45] It was to be found on a variety of applied and *kustar* art objects, such as porcelain, iron trays, lacquer

44) Vétrov, 'Section des "Koustari"', *Catalogue de la Section URSS,* Paris 1925, 81.

45) Ol'ga Briuzgina and Natalia Proskuriakova, 'Vserossiiskii muzei dekorativno-prikladnogo i narodnogo iskusstva' [The All-Russian museum of decorative, applied and folk art], in Vladimir Ziakin, ed., *Istoriia i kultura Rostovskoi zemli* [*History and culture of the Rostov land*], Rostov: n.p., 2007, 284.

Figure 3: 'Finift' Enamel Brooch shown at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, Paris (1925).

Source: Ol'ga Briuzgina and Natalia Proskuriakova, 'Vserossiiskii muzei dekorativno-prikladnogo i narodnogo iskusstva' [All-Russian museum of decorative-applied and folk art], in Vladimir Ziakin, ed., *Istoriia i kultura Rostovskoi zemli* [History and culture of the Rostov land] (Rostov, 2007).

miniatures, embroidery, silverware and more. To the less informed observer, the frequency of this decorative element could have given the impression that it reflected the popularity of the Soviet ideology among the peasant population. This portrayal of *kustar* production as a mouthpiece of popular sentiment and a direct expression of people's creativity was, however, misleading and played on the widespread misconception in the Western public that this production was independent and, in this sense, authentic.[46] In reality, *kustar* art underwent significant modernisation, especially after the reforms of 1905, a movement that led to a division of labour into 'supervisors' and workers and, ultimately, to commercialisation of the *kustar* industry. In this system of labour division, the creative direction was given by an artistic expert 'from above', whose designs were then carried out by the *kustari* (who were allowed a certain degree of artistic freedom in their execution). This *kustar* reform movement created a gulf between the local patterns of *kustari* and ornaments designed by artists in contemporary style, which became evident already in the 1900s. By the 1910s, the gulf between the two steadily widened, producing a polarisation between the artistic and the utilitarian, the decorative and the functional, the rural and the urban.[47] The turmoil around the Revolution of 1917 brought *kustar* activities to a halt and led to major reorganisations of its workshops and institutions, but the general structure of the *kustar* industry remained intact even after the Civil War.

46) Interview with Kogan, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 165.

47) Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 153 and 165 ff.

It is therefore somewhat surprising that, despite the official narrative of radical new beginnings, the agents involved with the *kustar* section actually belonged to the leading representatives of the pre-revolutionary movements. The section at the 1925 exhibition was realised by the artist Alexander Durnovo (1873–?).[48] He typified a generation of decorative artists of the 1900s who made their career as part of the *kustar* reform movement. As a graduate of the St. Petersburg Stieglitz School of Design, he joined the *kustar* reform movement when he became involved in preparations for the *Exposition universelle* of 1900, where he assisted the artist Konstantin Korovin in the construction of the Russian village displayed there. Between 1902 and 1910 he directed the St. Petersburg Kustar Museum.[49] Among the many similar institutions could be found in other provinces, the *kustar* museums in St. Petersburg and Moscow had the widest reach. Their main tasks were not only to preserve and exhibit folk art, but also 'to familiarise the public with the *kustar* industries and to disseminate improved models and designs among *kustari* in the various provinces'. As an integral part of the *kustar* industry the museum, furthermore, 'acted as middleman between *kustar* and customer, and employed artists to design for the jewelry, ceramic, enamel, metalwork, mosaic, and furniture industries'.[50]

Durnovo's designs in neo-Russian Style became a household name, so that in 1910 he was invited to 'Russia's oldest woodworking center', Semenovskii uezd in the Nizhnii Novgorod province. He was appointed to take charge of the artistic affairs of this workshop and to improve the production of painted woodware and furniture. In an evaluation report from 1896 for the Ministry of Agriculture and State Domains, the production was criticised for the dull designs and their monotonous use, which led to the identical appearance of the items produced and thus to the loss of their unique character.[51] Durnovo aimed at 'reinstating traditional designs and improving quality, with the goal of transforming Semenov ware from low grade items (*deshevka*) fit only for the local market into art goods for export'[52] (**Figure 4**).

Durnovo's activities not only exemplified the *kustar* reform movement, they were also instrumental in its further development. Agents of this movement were closely interlinked with the paradox of folk art revival 'from above' and were now trying, in the same manner, to adapt the material culture of peasants to the needs of industrialised Soviet Russia. This approach was somewhat at odds with the Soviet ideology that aimed to enable the peasant population and the urban proletariat to gain agency over their lives. However, even though Durnovo's approach represented the complete opposite of that Soviet programme, his earlier exhibiting experience was too valuable not to involve him in the preparation for the 1925 exhibition. As director of the St. Petersburg Kustar Museum, he had been involved in the organisation of all major exhibitions of *kustar* goods in the Russian Empire and abroad, such

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48) David Shterenberg was involved with the installation as well. Evgeniia Prilbyl'skaia (1887–1947) played an important role in the design of the section. However, in the official publications for the exhibition, she is mentioned solely as a jury member of the exhibition committee in four categories: toys, leather goods, costume and small artistic products. The contributions of these 'invisible organisers' have yet to be examined in detail.

49) Iurii Diagilev replaced him in his post as director.

50) Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 226, note 79.

51) M.Z.i.G.I., *Obzor deiatel'nosti pravitel'stva na pol'zu kustarnoi promyshlennosti, 1888–1903,* St. Petersburg, 1902, 105, cited in Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 154.

52) Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 154.

Figure 4: Oak furniture in the Russian style designed by Alexander Durnovo and made by the kustari of the village of Lyskova, Nizhnii Novgorod province.

Source: *Russkoe narodnoe iskusstvo* (Petrograd, 1914).

as the 1906 *Milan International Exhibition* and the 1913 *Ideal Home Exhibition* in London. In this context, the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* can be seen as a continuation of an imperial tradition of exhibiting *kustar* art in the West, and Durnovo was perfectly skilled to estimate and satisfy the taste and demand of the Western European public.

Further leading organisers involved in the preparation of the *kustar* section included Nikolai Bartram (1873–1931) and Alexei Vol'ter (1889–1973). Vol'ter received an artistic education first in Nizhnii Novgorod and later in St. Petersburg.[53] In 1923, he headed the reorganised *kustar* industry, where masters of Palekh, Mstera and Kholuya (both to the west of (near Nizhnii Novgorod) created products with new 'Soviet' themes based on his designs. Parallel to his artistic activities, he directed the Moscow Kustar Museum between 1920 and 1928. His task was to restore and coordinate the museum's collaboration with the *kustar* industry and independent artisans, which had been interrupted by the revolution.[54] Bartram, on his part,

53) In Nizhnii Novgorod he attended classes in Andrei Karelin's studio (1900–1906); in St. Petersburg he attended courses by Nikolai Rerikh and Arkadii Rylov at the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (1913) and classes of Pavel Chistiakov (1913–1915).

54) The Moscow Kustar Museum was not only the sole *kustar* museum of a province to survive the revolution and continue its activities in the Soviet times. It was also, in a way, the cradle of the *kustar* reform movement. Since its foundation in 1882, the museum had played a decisive role in firmly intertwining the 'connection between artistic improvement and increased profits', with the result that 'the *kustar* art industries had almost completely metamorphosed into a highly regulated form of industrial art' before the revolution (Salmond, *Arts and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 169). In fact, the leaders of the museum, and above all its co-founder Sergei Timofeyevich Morozov,

was the leading toy designer for the same museum during the 1900s and its director from 1907 until 1917. After the revolution he worked in *Narkompros*, the People's Commissariat of Education, as a member of the Glavmuzei and president of the Commission on the Decorative Arts.[55] In 1918, he initiated the opening of the Moscow Toy Museum where he worked as director at the time of the exhibition. Bartram's display of *Le monde de l'enfant* at the Kustar section with more than four hundred toy models, wooden models and dolls came largely from the collections of the Moscow Toy Museum.[56]

Vol'ter and Bartram's involvement with the Moscow Kustar Museum was evident in the fact that most of the exhibited items came from its collections. The selection was largely based on the exhibition *The Kustar and the Revolution* that had taken place in the museum in September 1924, with the slogan 'Everyday peasant art is the healthy blood for industrial art'.[57] The works on display in 1924 were made specifically for this exhibition by the artists of the museum and selected by the museum's artistic council, which included among others Vol'ter, Bartram and Durnovo.[58] It becomes apparent that the three organisers of the *kustar* section at the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* were central figures of the *kustar* revival movement and continued to devote themselves to the *kustar* reforms with their pre-revolutionary zeal. Despite their connection to imperial times, Soviet officials had no objections to their involvement in the Paris exhibition. It becomes evident that although the official narrative tried to paint a clean break with the bourgeois past (and *kustar* revival was heavily influenced by wealthy individuals in the private sector), in 1925 they were still heavily dependent on the very individuals who had been strongly associated with these pre-revolutionary developments.[59]

The section of national ensembles as a laboratory of future tendencies

The arts and crafts of the vast territory of the Soviet Union were not exhibited all together but divided by geographical origin. *Kustar* goods of West and Central Russia were displayed separately from the handicrafts of Russia's rural regions and of further Soviet Republics. The latter were showcased not in the Grand Palais but at the very heart of the Soviet contribution, in Mel'nikov's pavilion (**Figure 5**). The Section of National Ensembles was prepared by

developed the strategy of interaction between the museum and the creative industries. See Konstantin Narvoit, ed., *Znamenityi i neizvestnyi Kustarnyi Muzei. Iz sobraniia Vserossiiskogo muzeia dekorativnogo iskusstva* [The Famous and unknown Kustar Museum. From the collection of the All-Russian museum of decorative art], Moscow: Muzeon, 2021, 10–14.

55) Narkompros was a Soviet agency in charge of the administration of public education and cultural issues.

56) For more on Bartram's conception of peasant art as a reconciliation of tradition and originality as well as his position in regard to the post-revolutionary Soviet context, see Elitza Dulguerova, 'Potentialité du jouet dans la pensée de Nikolaï Bartram', *Strenæ* 17, 2021. URL: https://doi.org/10.4000/strenae.6183 (last accessed 6 July 2023).

57) To my knowledge, there is neither an exhibition catalogue nor a detailed list of the exhibited objects. The All-Russian Decorative Art Museum in Moscow possesses albums with photographs of this exhibition, as well as a number of objects that were displayed there. They might give an idea of the creative work done by the museum in 1924 and thus also an important clue to better understand the selection for the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris.

58) Narvoit, *The Famous and unknown Kustar Museum,* 10.

59) At the same time, it must be noted that in some respects this structure of *kustar* industry played into the hands of Soviet ideology, such as the suppression of individual initiative in favour of collectivisation, as well as the centralisation of regional affairs in Moscow.

Figure 5: View of the National Ensembles in the Soviet pavilion (1925).

Source: Archive Pyotr Dul'skii, National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, KPPI-120181 / 3330-16.

the aforementioned art critic and art historian Yacov Tugendhol'd and Professor Alexander Miller (1875–1935?). Tugendhol'd acted at the time as head of the Fine Arts Department of the *Glavpolitprosvet* (Main Political and Educational Committee of *Narkompos*), with the task to direct political, educational and propaganda work. He had become involved in politics already as a student, and spent almost the entire year of 1902 under arrest due to his activities. Afterwards, his family migrated first to Munich (1903) and later to Paris (1905), where he studied art at the Académie Ranson and the studio of Théophile Steinlen. After his return to Moscow in 1913, Tugendhol'd continued to be not only well informed about the latest French art developments, but also contributed significantly to the lively exchange between artists of Russia and France.

Professor Miller, on the other hand, brought expertise and experience in mounting ethnological displays. He was an internationally renowned archaeologist and had also close ties with France: After retiring from an initial military career, he went to Paris to study at the École Russe des Hautes Etudes Sociales. Pursuing an artistic career on the side, he additionally attended the Académie Julien, exhibited in the Parisian salons, and received recognition by

publications and sales to prominent collectors. At the same time, he discovered his passion for archaeology, to which he devoted himself fully since 1903. In 1907 he started working as head of the Department of the Caucasus for the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, where he created an ethnographic department shortly before the revolution.[60] Despite his return to Russia, his ties with Paris remained strong, and between 1908 and 1910 he was even elected a full member of the Geographical, Archaeological and Prehistoric Societies of France.

The Section of National Ensembles included displays of thirty-three ethnic groups of different regions: Regions belonging to Soviet Russia – with the indigenous peoples of Finland, Siberia and the Far East –, autonomous Republics of Crimea, Dagestan, Kirgyz and Tartarstan, and further Republics of the Soviet Union including Belarus, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and the Transcaucasian Union (consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). Their placement in the Soviet pavilion is indicative of the indispensable and instrumental value attributed to the section. In describing the Soviet contribution in its entirety, Kogan emphasised that, indeed, its 'primary interest lies in the brightly coloured and variegated compartments of our various nationalities, grouped together in this slender building'.[61] The large-scale windows of the pavilion made it possible to see this display even from the outside, reaching an even bigger audience. Mel'nikov acknowledged this advantage as well, saying that: 'Not everyone who walks past the pavilion will go inside it. But everyone will know what is inside my building: its walls are made of glass, and the staircase […] allows a view from above'.[62]

The traditional works of folk art on display stood in stark contrast to the ultra-modern style of the building (**Figure 6**). Moreover, they did not quite fit the general concept of the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* which required that the works of art and industry of the Section of National Ensembles should demonstrate 'une inspiration nouvelle et […] une originalité réelle'.[63] The French critics reacted accordingly, as they observed somewhat astonished that the 'USSR […] has stuck to its fundamentally national production and has not been afraid to offer us a retrospective exhibition of the picturesque costumes used in the various regions of its immense territory'.[64] Indeed, whereas 'the majority of Russian *kustari* were now working primarily for others, for the market, for sale', these handicrafts 'were still for the most part goods made by peasants for their own use'.[65] It represented the seemingly 'genuine folk art that had passed through no factory or manufactory, and was quite ignorant of compasses,

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60) In 1918, he was elected the director of the Russian Museum but resigned two years later to return to his scientific activities as head of the department of the Caucasus. In 1923, he was additionally elected professor and head of the Department of Archaeology at Leningrad University and became a full member of the State Academy of the History of Material Culture.

61) Kogan, 'Pourquoi les Soviets ont éxposé', 1: 'Ce qui est en fait l'intérêt principal, ce sont, vivement colorés, bariolés, les compartiments de nos diverses nationalités, groupés dans cet édifice aux formes élancées'.

62) Interview with Konstantin Mel'nikov, *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, 11, 1 June 1925, 232 ff: 'Toutes les personnes qui passent devant une boutique n'y entrent pas. Toutes pourtant sauront ce qu'il y a dans la mienne: ses murs sont de verre, et un escalier accueillant aux foules et pratiqué de part en part permet, en outre, une vue plongeante'.

63) See 'Conditions générales d'admission', *Catalogue général officiel: Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, Paris: Ministère du Commerce et de l'industrie, 1925, 18.

64) Léon, *Rapport général*, vol. 9: *Parure (classes 20 à 24)*, 31: 'L'URSS […] s'en est tenue à sa production foncièrement nationale & n'a pas craint de nous offrir une exposition rétrospective des costumes pittoresques en usage dans les diverses régions de son immense territoire […]'.

65) Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 173.

Figure 6: Rural crafts of the Evens and Sakha (formerly Lamuts and Yakuts), photographed by Henri Ernst (1925).

Source: Henri Ernst, *Ornements de Perles des Peuples Finnois et Sibériens* (Paris, 1925).

sketches, art classes, or professors'[66] and was thus still untouched by the *kustar* reform movement, with its process of industrialisation and commercialisation.

The apparent incongruity of this section within the overall exhibition raises the question of why it was exhibited at all, and so prominently at that. One of the reasons was likely related to the French public: On the one hand, it was intended to serve the public's interest in the exotic as well as to create a reassuring association with tradition, as already shown in the case of *kustar* goods. On the other hand, visitors were seen as potential consumers who should be made aware of the existence of these handicrafts in order to create a profitable market for their export. Furthermore, the present article proposes to read the striking inclusion of arts and crafts indicating their instrumental significance in enhancing the appeal of the Soviet *Union*. Firstly, the inclusion of handicrafts with 'Soviet' motifs and symbols advanced the narrative of the spread of cultural and national renewal, which implied, too, the success and acceptance of social and political transformations beyond Soviet Russia. In addition, it was arguably an attempt to radically dissociate the Soviet Union from the Russian Empire,

66) Vladimir Stasov, 'Na vystavke v Moskve' [On the exhibition in Moscow], *Izbrannye sochineniia*, 2, Moscow 1952, 125, cited in Salmond, *Art and Crafts in Imperial Russia*, 82.

its imperial narratives and national politics, as had been demonstrated at the previous World's Fair.

In contrast to the presentation of the Russian Empire at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, the Soviet organisers of the 1925 exhibition distanced themselves explicitly from the appearance it gave as an 'internal coloniser' as well as from the imperial politics of its policy of 'russification'.[67] Instead, as Tugendhol'd declared in the catalogue for the 1925 exhibition, the October Revolution had proclaimed the new concept of 'brotherhood and the equality of nations without dividing them into superior and inferior groups'.[68] Tugendhol'd furthermore asserted a new narrative of a 'common oriental tradition' among the Soviet countries, a characteristic trait common to their free and autonomous nations and cultures, despite the differences in their artistic expression.[69] This narrative of a specific unifying feature that distinguished the Soviet countries from the rest of Western Europe is oddly reminiscent of the imperial exhibition strategy at the World's Fairs discussed earlier. Tugendhol'd failed, however, to elaborate on what this common trait consisted of. In the absence of a clear starting point as well as due to lack of time to develop a new curatorial approach, Miller, for his part, resorted to a rather conventional exhibition display, in which cases were arranged separately according to nations.[70] Information about the social and cultural life of each nation was provided, while the artistic value of the objects themselves was hardly addressed. Miller's ethnographic approach revealed his continued adherence to an imperial gaze and differed little from the approach he had adopted in the pre-revolutionary Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

The presentation of rural crafts in the Soviet pavilion was a key element of the new Soviet exhibition concept, which, in theory, differed from the exhibitions of the Russian Empire. In practice, however, it did not overcome deeply rooted imperialist tendencies. This is evident in the organisational infrastructure of the exhibition, which was prepared and carried out under centralised control from Moscow. Time constraints as well as logistical and financial circumstances only served to prevent the curators from realising their declared ideals even more. The 'othering' character of the display, expressed at a fundamental level through the division of arts and crafts into Russian (*kustar* art) and non-Russian (crafts of indigenous peoples of Soviet Russia and further nations of the Soviet Union), was symptomatic of the national policy of the new government, which revealed its colonialist tendencies only a few years later.

67) For more on the political and cultural-linguistic aspects of 'russification' in the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century see Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History,* London and New York: Routledge, 2001, 247–282.

68) '[La revolution] qui a proclamé pour la première fois la fraternité et l'égalité des peuples sans les diviser en peuples supérieurs et inférieurs et interdisant le terme d'indigènes'. Jacob Tugendhold, 'L'Élément national dans l'art de l'URSS', *L'art décoratif et industriel de l'URSS,* 32.

69) Ibid., 29.

70) Interestingly enough, the arts and crafts section of the Soviet contribution at the *Exposition universelle* in 1937 was arranged according to the material the object was made of and not its geographical origins. This points to a more successful implementation of the conceptual approach. It should be noted, however, that by that time the political course as well as the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union had already changed drastically.

Conclusion

This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the Soviet Union's participation at the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* and its complicated exhibition strategy, highlighting the convergence of old traditions, new aspirations and evolving identities on a global stage. Against the background of the political context, the official Soviet narrative painted a picture of a successfully reformed Russia as well as the promising expansion of the Soviet ideology within the newly formed Soviet Union. The image of national renewal was constructed on the basis of three aspects: (1) contemporary artworks – represented by constructivism – embodying an image of artistic, cultural and technical progress; (2) *kustar* art of Soviet Russia, symbolising renewal of popular labour while at the same time maintaining a bridge to certain artistic traditions of the peasant populations (and thus constructing a continuity of national identity); and (3) rural crafts of further Soviet Republics, asserting that the cultural renewal is spreading to all areas of the Soviet Union. Considering this triad together – which in a nutshell represents a renewed culture, its traditional basis and its future tendencies – provides a more comprehensive picture of Soviet self-presentation on the West European stage in 1925.

Emphasising the value of traditions, even if they stemmed from an imperial era, the display of arts and crafts was intended to comfort the Western public by reassuring it that certain continuities could be maintained. At the same time, the Soviet contribution distanced itself from the preconceived notion of an imperial Russian identity epitomised in the exterior designs *à la russe* of the Russian pavilions at the earlier World's Fairs, in order to construct a new Soviet identity. A clear turning point in the imperial legacy was the section of 'National Ensembles' which proclaimed that the nature of international relations within the Soviet Union had now evolved away from the imperial dynamic of colonial domination towards a 'friendship of nations' on an equal footing. This shift marked the crucial difference in the Soviet exhibition strategy as a whole and could certainly have had a stronger impact if it had been carried out as clearly as it was announced. As this article has demonstrated, however, the execution of certain displays did not necessarily coincide with the ideological concepts of the exhibition, which was due to overlapping interests, immature concepts, lack of preparation, but also due to the individuals behind the implementation.[71] The curators acknowledged the still-evolving character of the art tendencies on display, so, in a sense, the 1925 contribution can be seen as a 'concept show' that presented their ideals, future projects and hopes.

Many of the organisers involved had spent years abroad and therefore had a good knowledge and understanding of Western societies. Their approach stood in contrast to the official narrative of 'revolutionary fundamentalism',[72] as they tried to remain 'the nerve which, despite all the previous amputations and purges, continued to link intellectual life in Russia with intellectual life in Europe'.[73] The fact that some of them were not completely aligned with the new doctrine became even more apparent when their careers and lives took a tragic

71) In a sense, participation in a World's Fair was in itself counter-ideological, since Karl Marx dismissed it as a bourgeois event.

72) Golubev/Nevezhin, *Formirovanie obraza Sovetskoi Rossii*. 63–65.

73) Viktor Kumanev, 'Sud'by sovetskoi intelligentsii (30-e gody)' ['The fate of the Soviet intelligentsia. (30s)'], *Istoriia SSSR* [*History of USSR*] 1, 1990, 32.

turn by the 1930s. Leading figures of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia were removed from important positions. While Yakov Tugendhol'd died in 1928, Nikolai Bartram in 1931 and Pyotr Kogan in 1932, other leading pre-revolutionary figures such as David Shterenberg or Alexei Vol'ter were gradually removed from public view and virtually forgotten before their death. Alexander Miller was arrested in 1933 for the ideological nonconformity shown throughout his career and sentenced to five years of exile in Kazakhstan, where he died, presumably in 1935.[74] Gradually, the pre-revolutionary intellectual elite was replaced by a new generation of cultural leaders educated purely in the Soviet system, resulting in a growing distance between Soviet and Western societies.

74) In none of his works did Miller make ideological references to the Party and Stalin. When asked why he does not mention Marx, Engels, Lenin or Stalin, he answered that he did not know any such scholars among archaeologists.

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Experts and Artisans at the 1937 Paris World's Fair: the Case of the Soviet Pavilion

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Abstract

In 1937, at *the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life* in Paris, the Soviet pavilion featured a rich variety of arts, including handicrafts. This article explores the endeavors of the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry to arrange a collection of Soviet crafts for international display. Throughout the article, the preparation work is contextualized in relation to the other cultural and political processes of the mid-1930s. It further highlights the role of the Institute's experts in translating the ideological guidelines of the Fair Committee into the language of artistic practice. Based on analysis of archival documents, the article argues that in addition to the short-term goals of preparing for the exhibition, the Institute used this opportunity to expand its network of contacts and establish closer links with artisans all around the Soviet Union. The co-operation of experts and the artisans during the preparatory phase helped to build a common ground for planning further reforms in the industry. Finally, the articles seeks to determine how the motivations of the collectives and individuals corresponded to the official goals and state narratives of the Soviet participation in the 1937 Paris World's Fair.

Keywords

1937 Paris World's Fair; Soviet pavilion; Soviet crafts; Soviet cultural canon; Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry; experts; artisans

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Experts and Artisans at the 1937 Paris World's Fair: the Case of the Soviet Pavilion

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Introduction

From a modern historiographical perspective, *the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life*, which was held in Paris between 25 May and 25 November 1937, stands out as an emblematic international event of the interwar period. A photograph of the juxtaposed Soviet and German pavilions, and the Eiffel Tower between them, was reproduced multiple times in historical publications to visualize the tensions in the air as the world stood on the cusp of a new spiral of the global war. The truly spectacular skyline it created in Paris in 1937 has often been seen as an 'allegory of the times', since it makes visible the symbolic confrontation of the competing ideologies of Soviet Stalinism, National Socialism, and Western industrial capitalism.[1] In the historiography of world's fairs, exhibition architecture is often considered as one of the main mediums for communicating political and ideological statements and for presenting national ideas of progress and modernity.[2] The case of the Soviet pavilion is particularly notable in this regard: both Boris Iofan's architectural project and Vera Muchina's sculpture of *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* on its roof have been well researched and analyzed in the context of the architectural and ideological competitions of the interwar period.[3]

To a certain extent, the colossal construction of the Soviet pavilion and its appealing architecture drew scholars' attention away from other aspects of exhibition planning: its alternatives and failures, the internal zoning of its exhibition halls, the selection of exhibits, and its display strategies. One notable exception is an article by Tatiana Trankvillitskaia, which discusses some of the financial and organizational challenges of Soviet participation in the 1937 Paris World's Fair in relation to the examples of the most expensive commissioned artworks – the large-scale decorative wall frescoes.[4] Analyzing organizational efforts of the Fair Committee and the participation of the artists, Trankvillitskaia concludes that it was the human factor, namely diligence, flexibility, and willingness to adapt to unexpected changes,

1) Ulf Strohmayer, 'Pictorial Symbolism in the Age of Innocence: Material Geographies at the Paris World's Fair of 1937', *Ecumene* 3: 3, July 1996, 282–304.

2) Rika Devos, Alexander Ortenberg, and Vladimir Papernyi, eds, *Architecture of Great Expositions 1937–1959: Messages of Peace Images of War,* New York: Routledge, 2015.

3) Danilo Udovički-Selb, 'Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition', *Journal of Contemporary History* 47: 1, January 2012, 13–47; Evgeniya Konysheva, 'Superiority Complex: The Pavilion of the USSR at the Exposition Internationale in Paris and the Soviet Cultural Diplomacy', *Quaestio Rossica* 6: 1, April 2018, 161–182; Dzhemma Manukyan, 'Expo1937: Exhibition of the Three Dictatorships', *Articult* 2: 14, 2014, 23–32.

4) Tatiana Trankvillitskaia, 'Le Pavillon Soviétique de l'Exposition de 1937 à Paris: Aspect Financier et Problèmes d'Organisation', *Studia Litterarum* 5: 4, December 2020, 444–471.

that often compensated for Soviet officials' mismanagement of the preparation for the Fair.[5] Her research demonstrates that by concentrating on the initial stages of exhibition planning, researchers can uncover the competing and converging interests of the various individuals and groups engaged in the preparation of the national section of the Fair. This approach also enables identification of the unintended outcomes that arose out of the collaboration of different actors and which outlasted the initial event.

This article provides an overview of the preparations undertaken to display a collection of Soviet handicrafts at the 1937 Paris World's Fair. Although artistic crafts occupied a rather modest place in the Soviet pavilion, considerable efforts and resources were invested in getting the exhibits ready for the show. Curating even a small collection of exhibits involved engaging various actors who were involved in negotiations about every object at different stages of its journey, from the workshops to the showcases of the Soviet pavilion. By focusing on the preparation phase, this article explores whether the official narrative of Soviet participation in 1937 Exposition reflected the motivation of artisans, experts of overseeing institutions, and other cultural authorities. It also examines whether the networks and practices developed during the preparatory period caused any transformations in the way supervisors from the capital communicated and collaborated with the artisans in the local workshops.

The 1937 Paris World's Fair challenged the common perception of handmade crafts as old-fashioned remnants of the past and illuminated their role in shaping national images and public opinion about the modern countries and their nations. Various national expositions showcased their crafts, each reflecting a unique approach of fitting the crafts into a modernized image of their respective countries. For example, as a host country, France displayed provincial crafts in the pavilions of the Regional Centre and invited artisans to demonstrate their mastership in the Artisanal Centre. This deliberate inclusion of crafts as a living part of the national culture and industry contributed to the projection of the image of a 'balanced society', which aimed to counter the adverse effects of excessive industrialization by fostering a harmonious growth of industrial and rural areas of the country.[6] At the same time, artisans from overseas colonies performed their crafts in front of the public at the Colonial Centre, upholding France's image as a colonial power.[7]

The incorporation of crafts into the exhibition design of the pavilions of newly established states and their nations could hold additional symbolic meanings. Czechoslovakia, for example, created as a political entity in 1918, turned to folk arts and crafts to map the cultural features of national groups withing the country and to reproduce the hierarchy between the regions on the symbolic level. In the interwar exhibitions, for instance, Slovakia was mostly represented by the regional folk arts, which contributed to the image of its territories as rural and economically backward in comparison to Bohemia. Simultaneously, certain notable similarities between Czech and Slovak folk cultures, manifested through artistic crafts, were showcased as evidence of the strong interconnections between the two Slavic nations, which

5) Trankvillitskaia, 'Le Pavillon Soviétique de l'Exposition de 1937 à Paris', 452.

6) Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World's Fair*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.

7) Peer, *France on Display*, 42–43.

supposedly provided the solid foundation for their unity.[8] Hence, at the 1937 Paris World's Fair, the Soviet Union was no exception when it came to curating the collection of craft exhibits to refine its international image. By examining the Soviet case, therefore, this article contributes to our understanding of how the display of artistic crafts might reinforce the construction of national narrative through the means of expositional design and planning. Recognition of the significance of crafts within national representations at the World's Fairs provides deeper insights into the dynamics of cultural policy in relation to folk arts and crafts across different countries during the interwar period.

Without a margin of error: cultural mobilization in the years of political terror

The initial arrangements for *the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life* began in spring 1935, when Soviet officials confirmed their participation in the Fair to the French minister of Foreign Affairs.[9] The planning of the Soviet pavilion was entrusted to the Fair Committee, which was headed by Ivan Mezhlauk (1891–1938) and comprised of the exhibition departments of the All-Union Chamber of Commerce (*Vsesoiuznaia torgovaia palata*) and the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (*Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul'turnykh sviazei s zagranitsei, VOKS*).[10] The organization of an event on such a scale and significance required the mobilization of numerous administrative entities, which in turn were responsible for providing materials and exhibits to be showcased in the Soviet pavilion. The task of organizing the collection of crafts was assigned to the All-Union Council of Industrial Cooperation (Vsesoiuznyi sovet promyslovoi kooperatsii or 'Vsekopromsovet'), which oversaw the Soviet art industry. In January 1936, the Vsekopromsovet delegated the task of selecting the exhibits to the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry (Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti). Therefore, the Institute was the most important link in communicating with workshops and artisans and translating the vague ideological guidance of the Fair Committee into practical recommendations and instructions for the artists involved.[11]

The Institute originated in research departments of the Moscow Kustar Museum, a multipurpose organization that had been working to reform, support, and promote artistic crafts since its foundation in 1882.[12] Before the Institute was officially established in 1932,

8) Marta Filipová, '"Highly Civilized, yet Very Simple": Images of the Czechoslovak State and Nation at Interwar World's Fairs', *Nationalities Papers* 50: 1, 2022, 145–165.

9) Trankvillitskaia, 'Le Pavillon Soviétique de l'Exposition de 1937 à Paris', 449.

10) Aleksandr Sokolov, 'Rossiia i SSSR na vsemirnykh vystavkakh XX-XXI vekov' [Russia and the USSR at the World Exhibitions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries], *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* 2, 2018, 130.

11) GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), f. A-643 (Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry), op. 1, d. 74 (Documents on the participation of industrial cooperation in the international exhibition in Paris), l. 11–14.

12) Konstantin Narvoit, ed, *Znamenityi i neizvestnyi Kustarnyi Muzei. Iz sobraniia Vserossiiskogo muzeia dekorativnogo iskusstva* [*The Famous and unknown Kustar Museum. From the collection of the All-Russian museum of decorative art*], Moscow: Muzeon, 2021, 10–14; N. N. Ivanova, 'O sozdanii muzeia narodnogo iskusstva' [On the foundation of the Museum of Folk Art] in *Muzei narodnogo iskusstva i khudozhestvennye promysly* [The Museum of the Folk Art and artistic crafts], Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1972, 7–19.

the museum had undergone several reorganizations and eventually became a subsection of the Institute. During the 1930s, the museum's exhibition bureau was responsible for selecting exhibits, which belonged to the category of artistic crafts, for regional, all-Union, and international exhibitions.[13] The combination of factors, such as strongly established ties with regional and republican workshops, as well as the experience of the Institute's members in selecting craft objects for international display, enabled it to respond effectively to the mission it had been assigned. Its involvement in the Fair was to supposed ensure that the exhibits were created in a timely manner and that they met quality, artistic, and ideological standards.

Although the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry was gradually gaining authority as a center for studying, collecting, and supervising the production of artistic crafts in the Soviet republics, during the 1930s, it was regularly attacked by other cultural organizations as part of the ongoing process of restructuring the cultural field under increasing state control.[14] The Institute's contribution to the Soviet pavilion was one of its significant reputational projects, which helped to secure its position as a leading research and supervisory authority in the Soviet art industry. At the same time, the Institute's administrators were concerned not only with meeting the urgent challenges of preparing for the exhibitions but also with building bridges and maintaining regular contact with workshops as a central component of their regular working agenda.

The Institute's mediation during the preparation phase was especially critical amid the intensification of politically and ideologically motivated repressions. While the meticulously planned Soviet pavilion maintain the semblance of 'the friendship of peoples' in the multinational state, several diaspora minorities were forcibly displaced or targeted in the course of national operations.[15] In exhibition halls, state-approved folk artistic crafts were chosen to showcase the cultural progress and creativity of Soviet nations, even while the material culture and everyday life (*byt*) of other ethnic groups were being eliminated as a result of the deportations. When it came to the selection of exhibits for the pavilion, the objects on display were supposed to represent the rich cultural landscape of the official Soviet nations in accordance with Soviet nationality policy.[16] The Fair Committee and associated commissions were therefore required to identify and follow plenty of unwritten rules regarding what it was acceptable to demonstrate for an event of such magnitude and significance.

Indeed, in the year of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the Soviet authorities aimed to put on display the achievements of recent years. The preparations for the exhibition in Paris were thus taking place amidst an unprecedented cultural mobilization,

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13) Natalia Vedernikova, Raliia Musina, ed, *Institut na Vorovskogo (ne sostoiavshiisia iubilei): Sbornik statei k 85-letiiu nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti* [The Institution on Vorovsky Street (The Failed Anniversary): Collected papers dedicated the 85-years anniversary of the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry], Moscow: Association NKhP Rossii, 2017, 26.

14) Galina Yankovskaya and Rebecca Mitchell, 'The Economic Dimensions of Art in the Stalinist Era: Artists' Cooperatives in the Grip of Ideology and the Plan', *Slavic Review* 65: 4, 2006, 780–81.

15) Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, 311–393.

16) On displaying material culture and ethnographic exhibit as a tool to educate masses and shape representation of the Soviet nations see: Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, 187–227.

when numerous cultural institutions, as well as artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers, were expected to produce new creative and ideologically impeccable works celebrating the revolution and the transformation of all spheres of public life during the past twenty years.[17] On the one hand, the enthusiastic drive of the anniversary facilitated preparation for the Paris exhibition and allowed the fair committee to choose from a greater number of works of different quality and genres, which granted some flexibility with planning and designing of the exhibit. On the other hand, as Karen Petrone has noted, due to 'the constantly shifting rhetoric and tense political atmosphere of the mid-1930s' many creators experienced 'writer's block', or a crisis of creativity stemming from the fear of making mistakes in their artistic interpretations of past and present events.[18]

Simultaneous planning for various cultural events and celebrations on different scales contributed to the adaptation of a preparation strategy that I would describe as an 'economy of display'. Once commissioned and approved by cultural officials, the same artwork or collection would be displayed multiple times on different occasions. By making use of the same objects or exhibition complexes, the Soviet cultural authorities could save time and limited resources while responding to rapidly changing requests to organize yet another celebration or exhibition.[19]

An example of another major cultural campaign of the mid-1930s was the commemoration of the centenary of the death of Aleksandr Pushkin.[20] From the very announcement of the campaign, Soviet artists and the cultural intelligentsia were reinterpreting Pushkin themes in different media, including arts and crafts. In February 1937, a collection of exhibits on Pushkin's themes was demonstrated at the *All-Union Pushkin Exhibition* in Moscow: among them were decorative boxes and panels by lacquer painting workshops in the villages of Palekh, Mstera, and Kholui, wood carving from the villages of Bogorodskoe, Abramtsevo, and town of Zagorsk, decorative wooden ware from Semenov and Kaliazin, silverwork, bone carving, ceramics, embroidery, and other examples of popular crafts.[21] Although Soviet art critics claimed that artisans no longer needed to depict fairy tales in their works because 'everyday life had become fabulous' and would outshine any fantasy, the fairy-tale scenes based on Pushkin's literary works remained a favorite subject in artistic crafts.[22]

Several artworks from the *All-Union Pushkin Exhibition* were selected for display at the Soviet Pavilion in Paris, including, for example, a cutlery set in niello technique with decorative

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17) On the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution see Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 149–174; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002; Karl Schlögel, *Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937,* Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2008.

18) Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*, 170.

19) For a discussion of the cost-saving strategies employed during the arrangements for the 1937 Soviet Pavilion, see: Trankvillitskaia, 'Le Pavillon Soviétique de l'Exposition de 1937 à Paris', 461–62.

20) Jonathan Brooks Platt, *Greetings, Pushkin!: Stalinist Cultural Politics and the Russian National Bard,* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

21) P. Popov, 'Vsesoiuznaia Pushkinskaia vystavka' [The All-Union Pushkin exhibition] in *Pushkin: Vremennik Pushkinskoi komissii* [Pushkin: Annals of the Pushkin Committee], Leningrad: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1937, 524.

22) A. P. Korablev, ed, *Narodnoe iskusstvo SSSR v narodnykh promyslakh* [Folk art of the USSR in folk crafts], Vol. 1, Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1940, 5–8; German Zhidkov, *Pushkin v iskusstve Palekha* [Pushkin in Palekh Art], Leningrad: OGIZ, 1937.

engravings with motifs from Pushkin's fairy tales (**Figure 1**).[23] The set was a collaborative project by artisans of the Northern Niello (Severnaia chern) workshop from Veliky Ustyug in the Vologda Oblast. The preparation of semi-finished blank items was supervised by a young silversmith, Rafail Govorov; the sketches and compositions of engraving were created by the artist Evstafii Shil'nikovskii; female artisans Pavla Uglovskaia, M. Khokhlova, and M. Melent'eva executed the engravings on silver, Mariia Uglovskaia oversaw the niello process and final refinements, while Georgii Korsakov applied gilding. The table set comprised 42 items, including spoons in various sizes, forks, knives, shot glasses, and napkin rings. Notably, the workshop was awarded a gold medal at the 1937 Fair. The exhibits related to Pushkin not only paid tribute to the poet but also showcased the widespread admiration for him, elevating the author to the status of a cultural icon of the Soviet people. It also served as a means to irritate Russian emigrants and the diaspora abroad, who cherished Pushkin's image and resisted his appropriation and integration into the official Soviet cultural canon.[24]

Sovietizing Crafts: the New Place of Artistic Crafts in Soviet Culture

Despite all the challenges of the lengthy preparation and transportation of exhibits to Paris, the Soviet pavilion was opened on time. The interior was structured as a multi-level enfilade with wide ceremonial staircases and a spectacular view through multiple halls, which allowed the visitor to experience the 'intensification of impressions'.[25] The first hall of the pavilion was dedicated to the 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union, also known as the Stalin Constitution. The hall was dominated by a porphyry obelisk, designed by Nikolai Suetin (1897–1954), which featured inscriptions of five articles from the Constitution. These articles, along with accompanying diagrams, documents, and photographs, narrated the story of people's accomplishments in building socialism, highlighting the freedoms and rights of the nations in the USSR. One of the pavilion's most remarkable exhibits was located in the same hall—a map of the USSR crafted from precious and semi-precious stones. The second hall, focused on science and technology, was located on three flights of a wide staircase. In the third hall, which is of primary interest for the following discussion, visitors encountered a display dedicated to the arts—painting, sculpture, artistic crafts, and theater. The next hall displayed exhibits featuring air, railroad, and water transportation in the USSR. The fifth hall revolved around architecture, encompassing construction projects, city reconstruction, and urban planning. The visitors' journey reached its culmination upon entering the sixth hall, where they were greeted by a three-and-a-half-meter marble statue of Joseph Stalin against a backdrop of three panels showcasing the triumphant procession of the people of the USSR.

23) Svetlana Romashkina, ed., *Narodnyi khudozhestvennyi promysel Severnaia Chern* [Folk artistic craft of northern niello], Vologda: Izdatel'skii dom Vologzhanin, 2008, 52.

24) Vadim Perel'muter, *Pushkin v emigratsii: 1937* [Pushkin in emigration: 1937], Moscow: Progress-Tradicija, 1999, 7–42; Greta N. Slobin, 'Introduction: The October Split and Its Consequences', in *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919–1939)*, ed. Katerina Clark et al., Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013, 14–36.

25) Boris Iofan, 'Arkhitekturnaia ideia i ee osushchestvlenie' [The architectural idea and its implementation], in *Pavil'on SSSR na vsemirnoi vystavke v Parizhe. Arkhitektura i skul'ptura* [The Soviet pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris. Architecture and sculpture], Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznoi akademii arkhitektury, 1938, 27.

Figure 1: Spoons from a silver table set decorated with motifs of Pushkin's Fairy Tales, Veliky Ustyug (1936–1937).

Source: S. Romashkina, ed. *Narodnyi khudozhestvennyi promysel Severnaia chern* (Vologda, 2008).

Upon closer examination of the hall of arts (**Figure 2**) one can observe that the craft exhibits were predominantly placed in showcases positioned between partitions that held paintings and other flat objects. The decision to display various art forms within a single space aligned with the broader approach of Soviet cultural policy of the late 1930s, which aimed to promote the synthesis of arts, particularly within the realms of architecture and the design of public spaces. All paintings, sculptures, graphics, and crafts in the hall were coordinated in their 'ideological orientation (*ideinaia napravlennost*) and realistic representation of the Soviet reality'.[26] Handicrafts echoed the themes and subjects of Soviet fine arts, adding to

26) Ia. Boiarskii, 'Iskusstvo SSSR' [Art of the USSR], *Pravda* 142, 25 May 1937, 4.

the endless gallery of portraits of the party leaders, classic authors, and scenes of glorious Soviet daily life. For example, an enamel workshop in Rostov bearing the name 'Renaissance' (Vozrozhdenie) contributed to the exhibition with enamels featuring portraits of Lenin, Voroshilov, Stalin, Gorky, and Gogol.[27] However, this approach to exhibiting artistic crafts was not immediately obvious. When the Vsekopromsovet submitted the third version of the program for the display of artistic crafts to the Fair Committee for approval, it explicitly emphasized a persistent stance: firm advocacy of the consolidation of all exhibits of cottage ('kustar') industries, including artistic crafts, in a single section of the pavilion, opposing any division across thematic zones.[28] Therefore, showing handicrafts in the hall of arts was not the only approach to be discussed.

The Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry, directly responsible for overseeing exhibit preparation under the guidance of the Vsekopromsovet, also certainly considered the experience gained from previous international exhibitions. One of the important references for their work was the 1925 Paris International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts.[29] The majority of the organizers of the Kustar and National crafts sections of the 1925 Paris exhibition had already passed away, and the exhibits that had been displayed there became a part of the Kustar Museum collection and were studied by the Institute's research fellows. However, the lessons learned by their predecessors could barely serve as a ground for building a new strategy for selecting exhibits to represent the national and folk art of the Soviet Republics.[30] In 1925, the organizing committee had to strike a balance between showcasing the new face of the country through the arts and meeting the Parisian public's expectations for the then-popular 'exotic' Russian crafts.[31] In 1937 the Soviet participation in the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life presented new challenges for the experts.

First, the exhibits were meant to provide convincing evidence of progress in the field of arts and crafts, and its transformation from the practice of banal decoration and ornamentation of everyday objects ('byt') into an integral part of the Soviet art system.[32] The high quality and exquisite artistic execution of the things on display were meant to demonstrate that, under Soviet cultural policy and supervision, crafts were no longer merely a means for peasants to make ends meet and earn money during the low agricultural season, but a deliberately

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27) Vera Pak, 'Rostovskaia finift' vo vtoroi polovine 1930-kh gg. Po materialam otcheta V.M. Vasilenko o komandirovke v Rostov' [Rostov's enamels in the second half of the 1930s. Based on V. M. Vasilenko's report on his business trip to Rostov] in *Nauchnue chtenia pamiati V. M. Vasilenko. Sbornik statei.* [Scientific readings in memory of V. M. Vasilenko], ed. Vladimir Gyliaev and Elena Tomashevskaia, Moscow: VMDPNI, 2012, 93.

28) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 74, l. 53.

29) Mira Kozhanova, 'Curating National Renewal: The Significance of Arts and Crafts in the Construction of Soviet Identity at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris 1925 ', *Art East Central* 3, 2023, 37–57.

30) On the declared rationale of participation in the 1925 Paris exhibition, see Boris Ternovets, 'En guise d'introduction', in *Catalogue des oeuvres d'art décoratif et d'industrie artistique exposées dans le pavillon de l'U.R.S.S. au Grand Palais et dans les Galerie de l'Esplanade des Invalides,* Paris: n.p., 1925, 20.

31) Iakov Tugendkhol'd, 'K izucheniiu izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva SSSR' [To the study of the fine arts of the USSR] in *Iskusstvo narodov SSSR* [Art of the people of the USSR], Vol. 1, Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia akademiia khudozhestvennykh nauk, 1927, 43–44.

32) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 73 (Institute report on the participation of kustar artistic crafts in the Paris exhibition of 1937), l. 1.

Figure 2: Interior of the Soviet Pavilion, the Third Hall.

Source: *Livre d'Or Officiel De L'Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (Paris, 1937).

chosen professional occupation that gave an opportunity to talented artisans to express themselves and improve their artistic skills. By the end of the 1930s, in the experts' narrative, the term 'kustar crafts' was gradually replaced by the idiom 'folk arts and crafts' ('narodnye khudozhestvennye promysly'). The admission of kustar crafts into the canon of Soviet arts was meant to confirm the benefits of the socialist way of life for the liberation of popular 'folk' creativity.

Secondly, by displaying folk arts and crafts, the Fair Commission sought to demonstrate that there was mass support for the Soviet regime. Therefore, successful mastery of Soviet themes and motifs in the design and decoration of objects was a central criterion for its approval as an exhibit.[33] In 1925, most of the objects with Soviet motifs sent to Paris were designed by professional artists contracted by the Kustar Museum and were produced in the museum's workshops. The exhibition catalogue mentioned such artists as Z. D. Kashkarova (1888–1961), B. N. Lange (1888–1969), E. G. Teliakovskii (1887–1976), P. I. Spasskii (1889–1964), V. M. Golitsyn (1902–1943), and others, many of whom graduated from the Imperial Stroganov School of Technical Drawing and were well-educated professionals and, most importantly, were not of peasant background. Vladimir Golitsyn, for example, whose works received a gold medal at the exhibition, was a descendant of the princely family of the Golitsyns. Being displayed along with mundane peasant furnishing objects, exhibits with Soviet motifs conveyed an impression of the penetration of the new themes into kustar crafts and popular support of the Revolution.

However, in 1937, the Fair Committee could not approve of risking such a trick. The adoption of Soviet administrative policy in the realm of artistic production was intended to further reforms in arts and crafts. Among other things, Soviet modernization of crafts was expected to increase the cultural and political consciousness of the artisans that allowed

33) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 73, l. 1.

them to create new compositions independently. Even though the Institute's experts were still designing samples and patterns for replicating in regional workshops, their declared long-term goal was to support the creative initiative of the artisans. Therefore, artworks on Soviet themes based on craftspersons' sketches were regarded as especially valuable, since they testified both to the development of their artistic skills and the rising of their political awareness.

In addition to pursuing short-term organizational goals for the Paris Exposition 1937, the Vsekopromsovet and the Institute were concerned with strategic planning for the handicraft industry. Up until the mid-1930s, kustar crafts had been primarily produced for export, but the Institute was striving to remodel the industry for the domestic market and Soviet customers. For experts from the capital, preparatory work for the exhibition was an opportunity to expand contacts with regional workshops and artisans, and to map the industry and study its capacity. In a letter to the chairs of republican and provincial industrial councils, the Vsekopromsovet announced to its representatives that 'the preparation of fair exhibits should serve as a training ground for producing goods of high quality and artistic designs for mass distribution on the Soviet market.'[34] Regional administrators were tasked with identifying both 'stalled' (zaglokhshie) crafts and new crafts, which emerged after the Revolution, as well as individuals who could be brought together and organize a workshop. Thus, further reforms would be based on the revision and assessment of the arts and crafts industry which took place in advance of the exhibition. The following section elaborates on the working program and concrete steps that were shaped by the above-mentioned ideological determinants.

From Moscow to the regions: the Institute's preparation program

When the Vsekopromsovet authorized the Institute's selection of exhibits in January 1936, associated fellows immediately formed a local exhibition committee and started developing a preparation plan. In comparison with the exhibition of 1925, where the arrangements were limited to a few months, the Soviet cultural and diplomatic officials had much more time to work on the display strategy and distribute the commissions.[35] Even so, the time allotted was not sufficient for the Institute, which supervised workshops throughout the Soviet Union, from Chukotka in the east to Ukraine in the west, and from Arkhangel in the north to Uzbekistan in the south. Its global reach meant that its experts could not visit all workshops in person in a short period of time. Consequently, the Institute relied heavily on those workshops with which it already had a 'living connection' (*zhivaia sviaz'*), such as: lacquer painting workshops in the villages of Fedoskino (just north of Moscow), Mstera (between Moscow and Nizhnii Novogorod) and Kholui (near Moscow); workshops specializing in lacquer painted metal trays in Zhostovo (on the outskirts of Moscow), Akhtyrskaya (now Okhtyrka in eastern Ukraine) and Bogorodskaya (near Kirov); woodcarving workshops; artisans from Dagestan and Uzbekistan, and bone carving workshops in Kholmogory (near Arkhangel), Tobol'sk (in

34) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 74, l. 11.

35) Trankvillitskaia, 'Le Pavillon Soviétique de l'Exposition de 1937 à Paris', 449; Kozhanova, 'Curating National Renewal'.

central Siberia) and Chukotka (in far eastern Russia), to name just a few examples. 'Exhaustive explanations' were given to these artisans about what was expected from them, in what quantity and within what time.[36]

To make sure that the intended plan would be carried out, experts from the Institute inspected the workshops on site. During such visits, they articulated and explained the exhibition guidelines, examined samples, and collected proposed items to ship them to the Institute for further evaluation by the committee.[37] For each visit, a program was drawn up in accordance with the production and exhibition plans. The Institute's employees were assigned a wide range of tasks, from testing production prototypes created by the Institute's laboratories in real conditions of production to instructing artisans on technical and artistic issues.

Perhaps, from an ideological perspective, the most important part of the interventions of the Institute's experts in the workshop routine consisted of the discussions with the artisans about the compositions on 'Soviet themes'. For example, when, in May 1936, the art historian and research fellow of the Institute, Victor Vasilenko (1905–1991), visited a lacquer painting workshop in Fedoskino, near Moscow, he recommended the painters focus on the following topics: 'Chapayev, Chapayev's tachanka (a horse-drawn machine gun), history and everyday life of the Red Army, scenes from everyday life on collective farms'. Artists were also encouraged to take the initiative and suggest their own ideas about the Soviet theme in miniature painting. Vasilenko approved of copying paintings by Soviet artists, such as Aleksandr Gerasimov, Fedor Bogorodskii, Georgii Riazhskii, and paintings of 'old Russian artists' (from the collection of the Tretyakov gallery) as well.[38] Together with Professor Anatolii Bakushinkii (1883–1939), who was the Institute's academic advisor and closely collaborated with the department of lacquer painting, he stressed that artisans should learn to interpret the copied paintings and adapt them to their media. Yet for artists, copying was a safe and beneficial practice, since it was less likely to lead to ideological mistakes. Moreover, by 'turning art into an accessible consumer good', copying reinforced and promoted the norms of the Soviet visual and cultural canon and thus was cultivated and rewarded.[39]

A part of the Institute's regular working program was also carried out during the visits to the workshops. For example, experts gave lectures on art history: a two-hour lecture, dedicated to Russian artists of the late nineteenth century, delivered by Vasilenko in Fedoskino was just the sixth in a series.[40] These lectures could be considered as a part of the Institute's educational endeavors aimed at the artisans. To enhance the 'acculturation' of artisans, the Institute invited the most active artisans to visit exhibitions and museums in Moscow during the organized tours to the capital. In addition to their educational value, these excursions were also practical in nature. While visiting the museums, the artisans sketched

36) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 27 (Progress report to the administration of Vsekopromsovet on the preparation of exhibits for the Paris International Exhibition), l. 1–12

37) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 27, l. 1.

38) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 37 (Reports on expeditions of the Institute's fellows on the survey of papier-mâché workshops), l. 20; GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 27, l. 1.

39) Yankovskaya and Mitchell, 'The Economic Dimensions of Art in the Stalinist Era', 786–88.

40) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 37, l. 17.

copies of original paintings in order to transfer them later to the lids of the lacquer boxes.[41] As soon as the works were completed, the Institute's committee evaluated them and prepared the selected items to be shipped to Paris.

During on-site visits, the experts also discussed with workshop administrators, artists, and technicians how to improve and broaden the product assortment. While agitating for the introduction of more utilitarian objects, they attempted to pursue the Institute's long-term strategies of redirecting the art industry to the internal Soviet market. Wood, papier-mâché, metal, bone, and horn-carving workshops were encouraged to design photo frames, cigarette holders, pencil boxes, and decorative handles for paper knives. Being sent to Paris as souvenirs, these household objects could bring in a significant financial profit for the Soviet pavilion that was confirmed by the previous experience of Soviet participation in international exhibitions. Sales of exhibits were anticipated to exceed the cost of their production, which approximately amounted to 739,500 rubles.[42] Despite a lively international interest in Soviet arts and crafts, however, poor marketing and an insufficient quantity of goods limited the potential revenue from this.[43]

The preparatory work contributed to a concomitant revision of the art industry, which involved closer examination of the existing workshops, as well as a search for new resources, including calling for individual artisans, who were sometimes considered the last representatives of fading traditions. The Institute was especially interested in exploring traditional crafts and establishing connections with the workshops in the republics of Central Asia. The onsite survey was delegated to a representative of the Institute, comrade Umnov. Unfortunately, there is no additional biographical information available about Umnov, but an artist with the same surname was mentioned as having collaborated with the Moscow Museum of Oriental Art.[44] To coordinate on-site arrangements and groundwork, he was instructed to contact regional Soviet and party organizations as well as local cooperative councils and unions. Umnov visited cities and districts within the republics and organized local commissioners, who were assigned to collect samples in order to expedite the survey. Umnov inspected all the samples, took photos, and described each selected exhibit in a special document, a passport of an object. This document contained information about the object's name, materials, size, workshop, and artisans who produced it. If the exhibit was made in a collective workshop, Umnov had to fill out a special questionnaire about the artel and sign it by its chairman.[45]

In addition to exhibits, the Institute recommended collecting all available materials related to crafts: reports, descriptions, books, photographs, and everything that 'characterizes the current state and perspectives of development of artistic crafts' in the region.[46] According to the Institute's publishing plan, fellows were expected to write scientific reports and edit books or brochures based on these materials. The photographs that were compiled

41) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 27, l. 1.

42) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 74, l. 37–38.

43) Trankvillitskaia, 'Le Pavillon Soviétique de l'Exposition de 1937 à Paris', 465.

44) Natalia Sycheva, *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* [The decorative art of Central Asia and Kazakhstan], Moscow: Nauka, 1980, 3.

45) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 74, l. 10.

46) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 74, l. 10

supplemented the Institute's Photographic Collection, which was used to research and design artistic samples. Upon completion of the regional inspections and analysis of the results, the Scientific Council of the Institute planned to publish a two-volume album, *Folk Art in Artistic Crafts of the USSR*.[47] The first volume was dedicated to solid materials (wood, ceramic, metal, bone, papier-mâché), and the second was reserved for textiles. It appears that the publishing plan was disrupted and that only the first volume was printed.[48] Although some drafts and papers were not published, they were preserved in the Institute's Scientific Library, which served as a reference and research library for the Institute's collection. Overall, information, sources, and exhibits accumulated during the preparation phase of the exhibition, if not displayed in the pavilion, became part of the Institute's Museum and scientific collection.

For the 1937 Paris World's Fair, the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry selected more than 400 exhibits, among them 296 objects and 330 meters of textile handicrafts. The exhibits were provided by forty-one organizations, including workshops, educational institutions, and museums, which were associated with the Vsekopromsovet. The awards and special mentions were given to forty-six organizations and personally to twenty-three artisans.[49] In Soviet press reports on the pavilion, the arts and crafts were regularly mentioned as a success by the international public; the miniature lacquer paintings from Palekh, Mstera, and Kholui, and the bone carvings from Kholmogory and Chukotka were of particular note.[50]

Creativity beyond routine: exploring the boundaries of artistic autonomy

When one considers what has been outlined above, it might seem that the only motivation for the craftsmen and -women to participate in the exhibition came from state commissions and the Institute's persistent urging. However, it is important to note that regional authorities, collective workshops, and individual artists often took the initiative and showed interest in submitting their works for evaluation by the Fair Committee. For example, Vasilii Borodkin (1883–1944), from the lacquer painting workshop in Fedoskino, created a composition and painted a papier-mâché panel with a genre scene on Ukrainian motif, which he intended to present as an exhibit for the Paris Fair. His work was discussed and evaluated by the Institute's inspection board, which suggested displaying it rather at *the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition*, also planned for 1937, since the workshops had already provided enough

47) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 73, l. 1.

48) Korablev, ed, *Narodnoe iskusstvo SSSR v narodnykh promyslakh*; It is mentioned that the publication was suspended in 1941 because of the Soviet Union's entry into the war of 1939-1945. In 1941, the Vsekopromsovet was also liquidated, and the Institute was temporarily subordinated to the All-Union Committee on Artistic Affairs that could affect its funding, see: V. M. Vasilenko, 'Anatolii Vasiel'evich Bakushinskii i narodnoe iskusstvo [Anatolii Vasiel'evich Bakushinskii and folk art] in *Muzei narodnogo iskusstva i khudozhestvennye promysly* [The Museum of the Folk Art and artistic crafts], Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1972, 98.

49) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 112 (Documents on the participation of artistic crafts in the international exhibition in New York in 1938), l. 75.

50) G. Belkin, 'Nauka i tekhnika. Mezhduarodnaia vystavka v Parizhe' [Science and technology. International exhibition in Paris], *Novyi Mir* 8, September 1937, 267.

exhibits for the Paris event.[51] While official narratives emphasized the collective nature of Soviet handicrafts, the artists did not miss an opportunity to bring their individual projects forward and used exhibitions to gain recognition and manage personal reputations.[52]

As the preparations for the exhibition were underway, the regional offices and workshops also made the most of the increased interest from the capital they received. The Presidium of the North Caucasus Industrial Council, for example, asked the Institute to send an employee to Dagestan to give on-site briefings to the artisans. They also requested that the most valuable objects of Kubachi silverwork be brought back from the museums to demonstrate to the artisans what could be considered good and high-quality work.[53] Several collectives used the opportunity to report their problems and try to get them resolved by contacting the Institute on the excuse of the importance of the upcoming exhibition and need for extra assistance. The workshops complained about a lack of raw materials, delays in shipping samples, the need to raise additional funds, the fact that artists were overloaded with work from other commissions and a lack of time for 'creative works'.[54]

'Creative works' were defined as those in which artisans developed new themes, compositions, or ornamental motifs. Commissions and special requests in preparation for exhibitions presented a chance for craftsmen and -women to break away from the monotony of workshop routine, which was focused on meeting a production plan, and to explore new themes in their artistic practice. For example, the miniaturists from the Palekh workshop of lacquer painting created several boxes and panels on the themes of French literature especially for the 1937 Paris World's Fair. For a round plate titled *Under Fire*, which illustrated the novel of the same name by Henri Barbusse, and conveyed a strong antimilitaristic message, Nikolai Zinov'ev (1888–1979) was awarded a Grand Prix. His colleague Vasilii Salabanov created a panel *Gargantua took away the bells from Notre-Dame de Paris,* following the plot of the satirical novel by François Rabelais (**Figure 3**).[55] By expanding the range of themes, the designers were able to step beyond the boundaries of their typical subjects and experiment with new compositions.

While Palekh was the most renowned center for lacquer painting, similar opportunities also emerged for the workshops in Fedoskino, Mstera, and Kholui. Artists from regional workshops appreciated the opportunity to establish closer ties with cultural authorities and supervisors from Moscow. Among them, Aleksandr Briagin (1888–1948) shared the common frustration of artisans resulting from the lack of critical analysis of their work. Although the Mstera workshop *Proletarian Art* received praise in the Soviet media, its works did not sell well, and artisans often faced rejection when they submitted new compositions. Assistance with 'advice and pencil', as the Institute's representatives called it, involved providing artists not only with detailed recommendations on how to improve ornaments or compositions, but also direct corrections to sketches of future works (**Figure 4**).[56]

51) GARF, f. A-643, op. 1, d. 20 (Minutes of meetings of the Institute's administration), l. 31.

52) Galina Iankovskaia, *Iskusstvo, den'gi i politika: khudozhnik v gody pozdnego stalinizma* [Art, money, and politic: an artist in the years of late stalinism], Perm: Permskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2007, 104–141.

53) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 73, l. 3–6.

54) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 37, l. 16; d. 73, l. 3–6.

55) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 43 (Minutes of the selection meetings for the Paris exhibition), l. 34.

56) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 102 (Reports on the field trips to the papier-mâché workshops), l. 1.

Figure 3: Vasilii Salabanov, *Gargantua Took away the Bells from Notre-Dame de Paris* (1936). Palekh (Papier-maché, lacquer, tempera, gold, miniature painting). 22 x 25 cm.

Source: Nikolai Sobolevskii, ed., *Iskusstvo sovetskogo Palekha* (Moscow, 1958).

The practice of intervention in artistic work wasn't unique to Soviet craft policy. A comparable approach was employed by the French Regional Commission overseeing handicraft exhibits at the 1937 Paris World's Fair. The 'interventionist policy of artisanal dirige' that was adopted aimed to assist artisans in creating items suitable for display in the exposition that were both contemporary and tasteful according to the Commission's expertise.[57] The delegates of the Commission inspected the regional workshops; the artisan committee provided designs and drawings of models suited for various crafts, which could then be reproduced in the local workshops using available materials. Artisans who replicated these designs were required to credit the author of the artist in the display catalog and as inscription on the object along with their own name. Additionally, they had to pay the artist a ten percent commission on future sales of the model.[58] We observe a situation similar to that of the Soviet Union, where experts from central institutions dictated to regional artisans what was considered aesthetic,

57) Peer, *France on Display*, 88–93.

58) Peer, *France on Display*, 89.

Figure 4: Vasilii Puzanov-Molev, Sketch for a miniature, 'Happy Childhood' (1937).

Source: *Narodnoe Tvorchestvo,* 1938.

authentic, and ideologically correct in the local crafts. At the same time, artisans indeed relied on this expertise, as it held the potential to enhance their chances of selling their works more effectively. It would be interesting to investigate further how craftsmen and -women in different countries perceived such interference in their work and what their experiences of authorship were under various craft policies.

Conclusion

In summary, for both the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry and regional workshops, the preparatory period was an intensive time for networking, mapping the industry, and identifying the advantages and limitations of cooperation with each other. Having received an extra budget for preparations, the Institute's collective was able to set more ambitious goals for researching new crafts and restoring older ones. During the expeditions and trips, the fellows were able to gain a deeper understanding of the artistic traditions and

working practices in the workshops, as well as to learn about the everyday life and needs of the artisans. As for the craftsmen and -women, they received consultation advice from the experts and modified their artworks in accordance with the expectations from the center, ensuring their chances for the pending commissions and success in regular artistic competitions. Mediating between the artisans and the state's authorities, the Institute's members sought to respond to the ideological guidance of the Soviet officials as well as to navigate the workshops through the challenge of meeting production plans.

Reflecting on Soviet culture in the 1930s, Malte Rolf invites to think about it as a 'hall of mirrors', where 'cultural items constantly reflected other bits of the rhetoric, symbols or rituals of the Soviet cultural canon. Although extensive in quantity, these reproduced images were limited with regard to subjects, themes and composing elements.'[59] This metaphor describes, among other things, the processes taking place in handicrafts and the art industry in the mid-1930s. As the Institute prepared exhibits for the Paris Fair, it transformed the handicrafts into yet another mirror that was supposed to reflect Soviet reality accurately, clearly, and without any distortion. In this regard, the Institute met the ideological goal of introducing handicrafts not as a marginal or exotic domain of cultural production, but as an integral part of the Soviet system of arts, which shared the same values, ideas, and norms.

The objects displayed also demonstrated that the Institute had accomplished another task entrusted to its fellows: teaching artisans how to express themselves in different media with Soviet visual vocabulary. Summarizing the outcomes of the exhibition, the senior researchers Vasilii Voronov (1887–1940) and Viktor Vasilenko reported that Soviet artistic crafts discovered a tendency to explore new imagery and modern compositions. It was especially noted that artists were interested in complex thematic commissions on Soviet themes, which gave them the opportunity to reflect on new dimensions and manifestations of Soviet socialist culture.[60] However, the more demanding ideological commissions required more consistent and careful expert assistance. Here again, the Institute demonstrated the necessity and importance of its work and collaboration with the workshops. In the field of arts and crafts, the Institute thus guided artisans into the Soviet visual canon, explaining its elements, translating the ideological language into the language of artistic practice.

The additional resources dedicated to the exhibition allowed the Institute to expand its networks with workshops and establish closer ties with artisans. These encounters were mutually beneficial: by building a common ground between experts and artisans, the Institute could count on a more predictable outcome of the production plan, while workshops in turn acquired official patrons and advisors, to whom they could turn for solutions to their problems. Based on observations made during the trips, the Institute's collective planned for further reforms in the industry: creating artistic councils in the workshops, inviting professional artists to make samples for copying, introducing new administrative regulations for the workshops, and so on. As expected, with growing political and cultural consciousness of the artisans, some of the Institute's supervision and advisory functions would gradually be taken over by workshops' own art councils.

59) Malte Rolf, 'A Hall of Mirrors: Sovietizing Culture under Stalinism', *Slavic Review* 68: 3, 2009, 601.

60) GARF, f. A643, op.1, d. 73, l. 6.

Contemporary scholarship on the history of international exhibitions often tries to measure how participation in World's Fairs affected a country's international reputation, trade, and diplomatic relations with other states. However, it is also relevant to consider how preparations for the exhibitions altered relations between different stakeholders within the state, what new opportunities arose from them, and how collectives and individuals took advantages of these opportunities. By focusing on the endeavors of the Scientific Research Institute of Art Industry, this paper has demonstrated how the 1937 Paris World's Fair brought together different groups and communities within the Soviet art industry: experts of cultural and trade organizations, researchers, art historians, and artisans. While working together towards a common goal and following the official directives, all the agents were also pursuing their own individual objectives and agendas, which may not necessarily be announced as a part of the preparation program.

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Arma Veritatis: Poland and the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press (Esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica), Vatican City, 1936

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Abstract

The World Exhibition of the Catholic Press held in the Vatican City from mid-May 1936, though not a 'universal' exhibition, but – seemingly – an internal affair of the Catholic Church, attracted representations of 45 states of Europe and America and 53 regions of the remaining three continents. True to its motto, its aim was propagandistic, directed against the current communist and liberal tendencies. The present paper, which looks at the exhibition from the perspective of the Polish room, is based on documentary materials left by its prime mover, Fr Stanisław Adamski, bishop of Katowice, responsible for the mass media in Polish episcopate. An interesting paradox is that it was not Poland as a state, but the representation of Polish Church that participated in the event. The state authorities were contacted only as much as political correctness and diplomatic courtesy required, or with the prospect of some financial support. They seemed to be indifferent and, at any rate, unwilling to spend any money on the exhibition, even though it was advertised by the Church as an excellent promotional opportunity. Bishop Adamski almost single-handedly devised the Polish exhibit, including the iconography and political message of a painting entitled Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis ('Poland – Mother of the Saints and Shield of Christianity'), which depicted important personalities from Polish history, including – tellingly – the figures of King John III Sobieski and Marshall Józef Piłsudski.

Keywords

Catholic press; World Exhibition of the Catholic Press / Esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica 1936; Vatican City; Stanisław Adamski; Jan Henryk Rosen

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Arma Veritatis: Poland and the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press (Esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica), Vatican City, 1936

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On 12 May 1936 the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press opened in the Vatican City (**Figure 1**).[1] It was organised to mark the 75th anniversary of the Vatican daily *L'Osservatore romano* (founded in 1861) and was dedicated to Pope Pius XI (the date of the opening ceremony – held on the Pope's name day, 12 May, in the liturgical calendar a feast of St Achilleus of Terracina, a name saint of Achille Ratti, was thus not accidental).

Representations from the Catholic press of 45 states across Europe and America, and from 53 regions from the remaining three continents, appeared in the main part of the exhibition (Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia were conspicuous by their absence).[2] During the show, which ran for over a year until the following May, numerous accompanying events were held on the exhibition grounds, including a Week of Sacred Art and the Second International Congress of Catholic Journalists (24–27 September 1936).[3] Simultaneously, a sort of a 'counter-exhibition' was staged in the Pontifical Oriental Institute, though on a far smaller scale, of the so-called 'evil' press, specifically, an exhibition of the international

1) Remarkably little scholarship has been devoted to the exhibition, and the present paper is based mainly on documentary sources related to the Polish exhibit (papers of the organising committee, for which see in what follows) and contemporary press reports. For a short dictionary entry dealing with the exhibition in very general terms, see A. Martini, 'Esposizione Internazionale della Stampa Cattolica', in *Mondo vaticano. Passato e presente*, ed. Niccolò Del Re, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, 465–66; for the Vatican City daily paper, see Niccolò Del Re, 'Osservatore Romano (L')', in *ibidem*, 754–56. Numerous detailed reports of the inauguration of the exhibition appeared in the press (here, necessarily, because of the main interest of the present paper, mainly Polish press will be referred to), see e.g. Jan Kawczyński, 'Święto prasy katolickiej... (Światowa wystawa Prasy Katolickiej – Wielkie rozmiary imprezy – Niezwykłe pomysły dekoracyjne i architektoniczne – Pawilon Polski – Spotkanie z "Kurjerem Poznańskim")', *Kurier Poznański*, 24 May 1936, 15, and 'Wystawa prasy katolickiej w Watykanie przedstawia się imponująco', *Gość Niedzielny*, 21, 24 May 1936, 290. The exhibition is only casually mentioned at best in studies dealing with Church or press history; for a detailed bibliography see J. Wolańska, 'Wawel i Kresy. Malowany fryz Jana Henryka Rosena w dziale polskim Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica w Watykanie (1936)', *Przegląd Wschodni* 13, 3:51, 2014, 609–69. A study by Viktoria Pollmann, 'Die katholische Presse – Waffe der Wahrheit' in Pollmann, *Untermieter im christlichen Haus. Die Kirche und die 'jüdische' Frage in Polen anhand der Bistumspresse der Metropolie Krakau 1926–1936*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001, 141–158, is an exception that seems to prove the above rule.

2) Their 'dolorous absence' was noted by the pope in his address pronounced at the opening of the exhibition. See 'Discours à la cérémonie d'inauguration (12 mai 1936) de l'Exposition internationale de la presse catholique à la Cité du Vatican', in *Actes de S.S. Pie Xi. Encycliques, Motu Proprio, Brefs, Allocutions, Actes des Dicastères, etc. Texte latin et traduction française*, Tome XIV (Année 1936), Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1939, 30.

3) On the week of sacred art see Martini, 'Esposizione Internazionale', 466. On the Congress see Stephen J. Brown, 'A Congress of the Press and Two Exhibitions', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 25:100, 1936, 659–64 (on the exhibition, 661–63); Stanisław Bednarski, 'Rzymskie kongresy prasowe', *Przegląd Powszechny* 4: 212, 1936, 255–60.

Figure 1: Gio Ponti, poster and cover of the official catalogue to the exhibition: *Arma veritatis: Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica* (Città del Vaticano, 1936).

Source: Archive of the Archdiocese of Katowice (AAKat.).

Communist and 'godless' press.[4] This 'counter-exhibition' was meant to emphasise the propagandistic aim of the 'main' show, which was directed against Communist and liberal tendencies in the press of the time. True to its motto – *Arma veritatis* ('the arms of truth') – the exhibition was by no means a neutral event but rather was intended as a powerful manifestation of Catholic propaganda. Its motto threw up associations with the 'Ecclesia militans' (or Church militant) and concepts such as that of the 'miles Christianus' (Christian

4) Brown, 'A Congress of the Press', 663, calls the Institute 'Russicum', and describes the exhibition as 'of Communist propaganda'; Bednarski, 'Rzymskie kongresy prasowe', 259, and idem, 'Dwie wystawy prasowe w Rzymie', *Przegląd Powszechny* 213, 1937, 125–36, on the exhibition esp. 130–36.

soldier). In view of the political situation in fascist Italy, these phrases had been gradually losing their theological or symbolical dimension and the notion of 'spiritual warfare' had come to acquire a rather literal meaning. Undoubtedly, the military phraseology used in the exhibition's title seems to have quite consciously reflected the then current attitude of militant Catholicism already at war, for instance, with the godlessness of Communism. It was no secret that the press was a powerful weapon in this campaign, as one of the visitors remarked, 'Statistics and diagrams show clearly the enormous and increasing influence which must be possessed by those who control the newspapers of the world, even when compared with such rivals as the wireless and the cinema. The most careless inspection (...) makes it impossible to doubt the vital need for a Catholic press which is capable of sustaining the burden of responsibility thus thrust upon it'.[5]

It was a one-of-a-kind event, without precedent and with no successor and, curiously, has attracted hardly any scholarship.[6] Even in studies of the pavilion's designer, Giovanni, or Gio, Ponti – an otherwise celebrated architect – the exhibition is only mentioned cursorily at best. So what we are left with is scanty documentary evidence and a handful of press articles. This is despite the fact that the exhibition would make a significant object of study for historians of the Church and of political history of the interwar period, or for press historians, across Europe, and, possibly, also worldwide. With only one national exhibit more or less thoroughly researched, a more in-depth, let alone comprehensive, analysis of the exhibition, is impossible given the current state of research. The present art-historical treatment of this article focuses on just one national exhibit, that of Poland, looking at it from the perspective of the 'human factor': the way it was conceived by Bishop Stanisław Adamski, its organiser and prime mover. Being only a tiny contribution to a vast topic that could be approached from many different angles, the present paper may perhaps become an incentive for research on other national exhibits, as it is only from a sum total of such detailed contributions that an overall picture of the Catholic Press Exhibition might emerge. Although it was not a 'world's fair' in the proper sense of the word, it was evidently organised with comparable ambitions in mind, had a worldwide scope, and deserves at least a mention also in this context. It was, in a way, an ecclesiastical, Catholic 'ideological' world's fair, after all.[7]

It must be stressed from the outset that although it included the Week of Sacred Art event, it was neither an art exhibition in general nor an exhibition of Christian art in particular.

5) P. F. Firth, 'The Vatican Press Exhibition', *The Venerabile* 8:1, 1936, 32–33.

6) If any attempts were made to find a parallel for the 1936 Press Exhibition – as for instance in Gio Ponti, 'La Mostra della stampa cattolica', *Emporium*, 84:502, 1936, 199, and in Firth, 'The Vatican Press Exhibition', 30, it was compared with the Universal Missionary Exhibition (Esposizione Universale Missionaria) organised at the behest of Pius XI, to celebrate the Jubilee Year 1925 (the latter author wrote, '[the 1936 press exhibition] may indeed be regarded as the natural sequel to the Missionary Exhibition of the Holy Year, 1925'). For more on the latter exhibition, see the special bi-weekly journal that appeared during its run *Rivista illustrata della Esposizione Missionaria Vaticana* (15 Dec. 1924 – 31 Dec. 1925) and Luigi Gramatica, 'L'Esposizione Missionaria Vaticana', *Emporium*, 62:368 (1925), 74–87. The Esposizione Missionaria may be treated as a sort of predecessor of the press exhibition also because the pavilions of the former exhibition were located around Cortile della Pigna (but then the courtyard had not been roofed in as was the case in 1936; see below).

7) The online Vatican News does mention the exhibition in question among 'world's fairs' in which the Vatican City participated ('principali partecipazioni della Santa Sede alle Esposizioni Internazionali'), next to, for instance, the Paris international exhibition of 1937; see Paolo Ondarza, 'La Santa Sede e le Esposizioni Internazionali' <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2018-03/partecipazione-vaticano-expo-internazionali-e-biennale-venezia.html> (accessed on 10 Sept. 2022).

This was in contrast to the Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Sacra Cristiana Moderna, held in Padua in 1931–1932 (organised to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the death of St Anthony of Padua), or the Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Sacra that took place in Rome in 1934, to mention just two.[8] Any artworks that appeared in the individual national sections and on the common exhibition grounds were meant mostly as 'decoration'. In the absence of a proper visual record of the exhibition, little can be said about the appearance of individual national exhibits. Apart from a small number of photographs that appeared in the press, the only purpose-made visual documentary of a national exhibit at the event known to have survived is that of Austria: *Österreichische katholische Presse in Rom 1936*.[9] It takes the form of an album containing about twenty original photographic prints showing the maps, diagrams, and decorations that were depicted on the walls of the Austrian room and specimens of Catholic periodicals displayed there. It seems that the album may be treated as a *pars pro toto* of a typical display encountered in the national sections. According to one reviewer: 'Perhaps the most beautiful of all the national sections is that of Austria. Here the walls have been panelled with beech wood, upon which the figures are drawn by a special process which gives the effect of old carving and painting. There is a fascinating map of the country with toy trees, buildings and mountains and little people in appropriate national costume to mark the regions, whilst everywhere are dotted little cream coloured rhomboids to show the positions of the Catholic papers. Above the Tyrol sits a typical Austrian family; the crucifix is on the wall and Father is reading from his Catholic newspaper. The diagrams and graphs give their information clearly but in the same spirit of pleasant fantasy, and there are two splendid Tyrolese works of art to set off the whole scheme of decoration – a carved and painted wooden statue of St Paul and a stained glass window to St Francis de Sales'.[10]

Otherwise, what is known is that the displays mostly consisted of large numbers of statistical data related to the output of the Catholic press, arranged in all kinds of graphs and diagrams, accompanied by maps, decorative motifs and perhaps also some photographs.[11] The only other artwork known to have been displayed, apart from the painting in the Polish section, a subject of the present paper, and which appears on the scarce photographs showing national exhibits, is a statue of St Wenceslas in the Czechoslovakian room (**Figure 16**).

8) For the exhibitions see Pia Vivarelli, 'Dibattito sull'arte sacra in Italia nel primo Novecento', in *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime*, vol. 2: *Urbanistica, architettura, arte e decorazione*, exh. cat. eds Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Guidoni, Simonetta Lux, Rome (Archivio centrale dello Stato, aprile–maggio 1987), Venice: Cataloghi Marsilio, 1987, 249–60; for more on the Anthonian exhibition, see Maria Beatrice Gia, 'L'Esposizione Internazionale d'arte sacra cristiana moderna di Padova nel 1931–32', *Il Santo*, 52, 2012, 397–434.

9) Authorship is attributed to 'das unter dem Ehrenprotektorate ihrer Eminenzen der Herren Kardinäle Erzbischof Dr. Theodor Innitzer und Apostolischer Pronunzius Dr. Enrico Sibilia und des Herrn Bundeskanzlers Dr. Kurt v. Schuschnigg stehende österreichische Komitee für die 'Internationale katholische Presseausstellung im Vatikan 1936'. It is held in the Library of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (Universitätsbibliothek der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien), call no. 17580-D.

10) Firth, 'The Vatican Press Exhibition', 35. The display in the Austrian room was designed by Clemens Holzmeister, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

11) Brown, 'A Congress of the Press', 662, writes that the individual rooms were filled with 'graphs, diagrams, symbolical figures and so forth, as well as by actual specimens of the Catholic newspapers, reviews and magazines'; he also notes that 'The Czechoslovakian room is remarkable for its graphs and diagrams'. Similarly, Firth, 'The Vatican Press Exhibition', 33–34, stated, 'In an exhibition of this kind it is natural that the medium of expression should be somewhat limited: maps, statistics, graphs and diagrams do not permit of much variation, and one newspaper or magazine is very much the same as another, whatever the language in which it is printed. As it is, the originality and skill displayed by those responsible for the arrangement of each room is little short of marvellous.'

The Pavilion in the Pinecone Courtyard (Cortile della Pigna)

The structure in which the exhibition was held is referred to here as a 'pavilion', as it was after all a semi-permanent roofed construction, but because of its specific arrangement and the fairly large area it covered, the venue could just as well be called 'exhibition grounds' (**Figure 2**). It was ingenuously designed by the architect Gio (Giovanni) Ponti (1891–1979) on the Pinecone Courtyard (Cortile della Pigna), spanning its area between the 'nicchione', or Bramante's Niche, and the Braccio Nuovo (the New Range), which at that time held the Museo Chiaramonti, part of the Vatican Museums (**Figure 3**). The entrance to the exhibition through the Porta Angelica towards the Belvedere Court and then along a ramp leading to the Vatican gardens (Salita del Giardini). At the entrance proper, located at the Cortile della Galera (Court of the Galleon), with the sumptuous Fountain of the Galleon by Carlo Maderna (**Figure 4**) the visitors were greeted by the exhibition's emblem: an image of an open newspaper surmounted by a cross, along with the exhibition's motto *Arma Veritatis* (**Figure 5**).[12] The inner entrance was located slightly further in, in the Cortile della Pigna proper.

The exhibition pavilion was supposed to embody the vitality and dynamics of the modern Catholic press and to be a product of its time. Visitors were led through corridors of various length, their height and width changing gradually (some corridors had side walls reminiscent of old-style concertinaed cameras, as in bellows joining a lens to a camera body), and unevenly lit, only from above (**Figures 6 and 7**). Next to the rooms with national or topical exhibits, smaller spaces were arranged, dramatically lit, using light wells and other similar devices, with impressively displayed artworks – statues or stained-glass panels – which were intended to act as visual foci. Contemporary accounts repeatedly emphasised the theatrical aspect of the design, marvelling at its dynamic appearance and changeability – 'come una vera e propria successione di scene' ('like a veritable and real sequence of scenes').[13] This effect, however, was achieved by simple and modest means characteristic of

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12) The motto was reportedly derived from the words of Pius X spoken in a conversation with a French journalist at the beginning of the twentieth century: ' "The importance of the religious press", said the Pope, "is not even yet understood either by faithful or clergy. The elders say 'formerly' souls were saved without newspaper and press work. But 'former' times are not our times. We live to-day, when an evil press is widely diffused, when Christians are deceived, poisoned, destroyed by impious journals. In vain would you build churches, preach missions, found schools; all your efforts, all your good works would be defeated should you not simultaneously wield the defensive and offensive arm of the press, Catholic, loyal, sincere" '. See J. F. Boyd, 'The French Ecclesiastical Revolution', *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, 32:128, 1907, 665.

13) B. Moretti, 'L'Esposizione della stampa cattolica – Architetto Gio Ponti', *Edilizia Moderna*, 23, Oct.–Dec. 1936, 36–45, citation here 38. Four hundred tonnes of iron and 1.5 thousand cubic metres of timber were used in the construction of the pavilion; seven thousand square metres of linoleum in various colours covered the floors; the total exhibition area was estimated at twenty thousand square metres. For more on Ponti's work and the exhibition in general in Italian scholarship and contemporary press, see: Gio Ponti, 'L'Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica: il concetto architettonico', *L'Illustrazione Vaticana*, 7, 1936, 421–26; Marcello Piacentini, 'Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica nella Città del Vaticano (Arch. Giovanni Ponti)', *Architettura*, fasc. VII, July 1936, 297–309 (with numerous photographs); Vivarelli, 'Dibattito sull'arte sacra', 249–60; Lucia Miodini, 'Mostra Internazionale della Stampa Cattolica, Città del Vaticano (1935/36)', in Lucia Miodini, *Gio Ponti. Gli anni trenta*, Milan: Electa, 2001, 161–62 (the author especially emphasised the theatrical effects of Ponti's design and his role as a sort of 'director' of a theatrical production which kept surprising the 'viewers', i.e. the visitors to the exhibition); Lisa Licitra Ponti, *Gio Ponti. L'opera*, Milan: Leonardo, 1990; Carlo Capponi, 'Esposizione mondiale della Stampa Cattolica, Città del Vaticano 1936', in Maria Antonietta Crippa and Carlo Capponi, Cinisello Balsamo, eds, *Gio Ponti e l'architettura sacra. Finestre aperte sulla natura, sul mistero, su Dio*, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2005, 127–31; Ponti, 'La Mostra della stampa', 199–205; E. Rosa, 'L'apostolato della stampa e la "Mostra internazionale della stampa cattolica" in Vaticano',

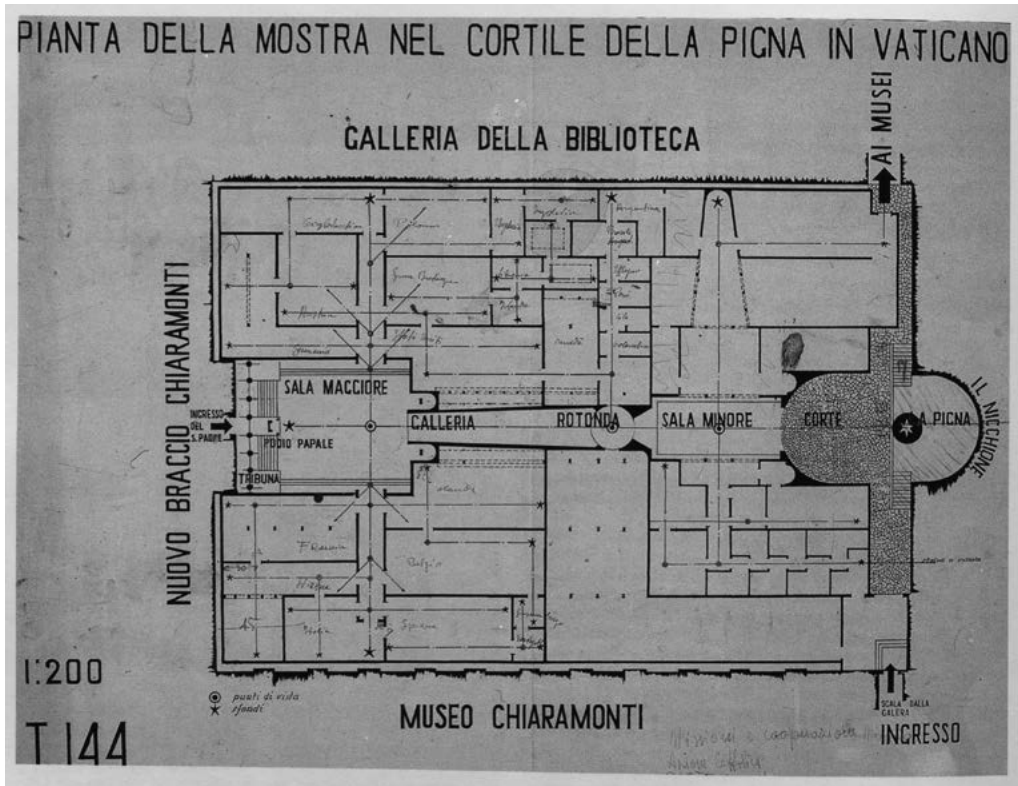

Figure 2: Gio Ponti, Ground plan of the exhibition marked with perspectival focal points and viewing axes.

Source: Miodini, *Giò Ponti*, 162.

Figure 3: Courtyard of the Pinecone (Cortile della Pigna), view towards the Braccio Nuovo (with a columned portico).

Source: Wikimedia commons.

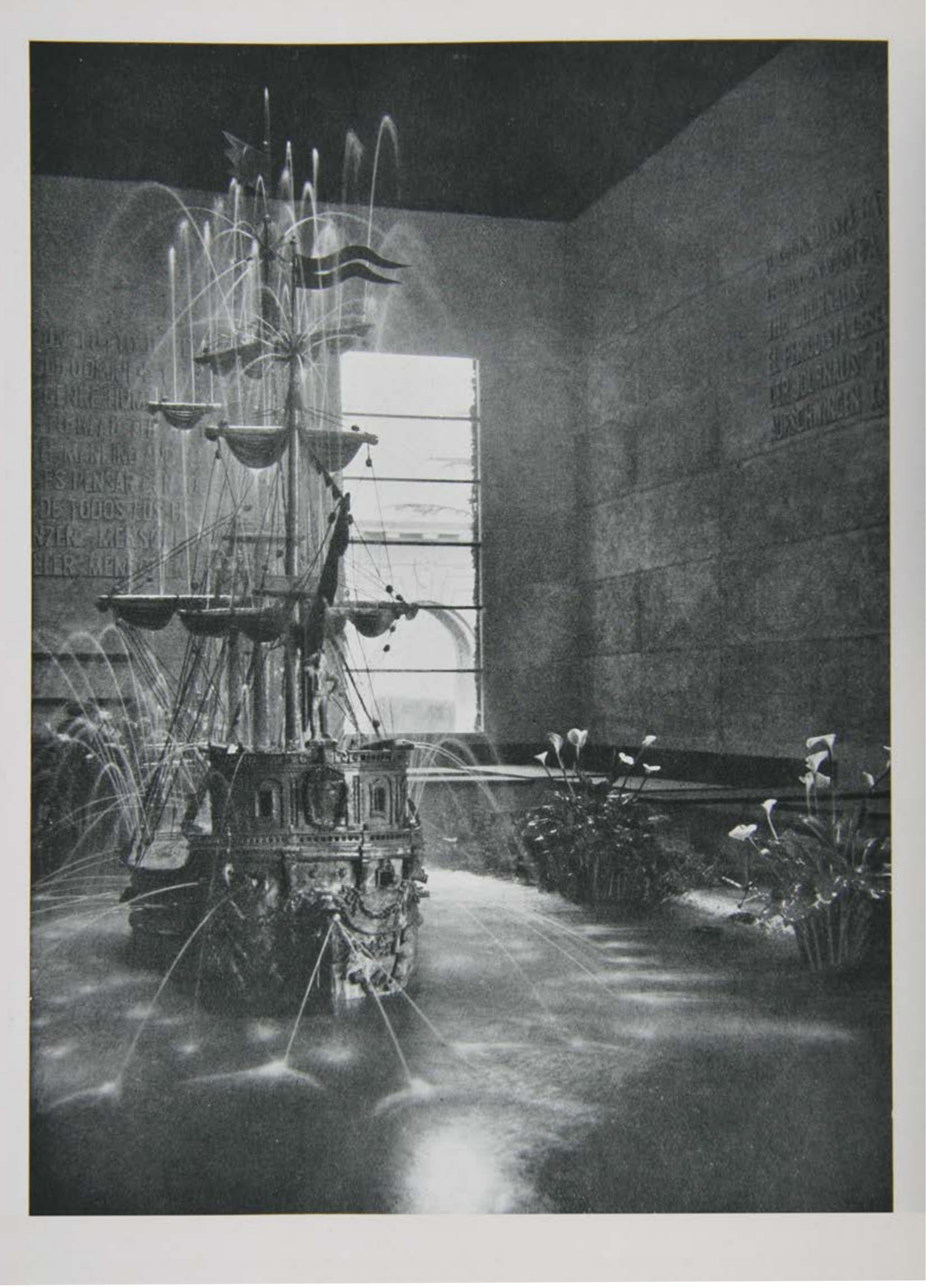

Figure 4: Fountain of the Galleon in the vestibule to the exhibition grounds.
Source: *Emporium* (1936).

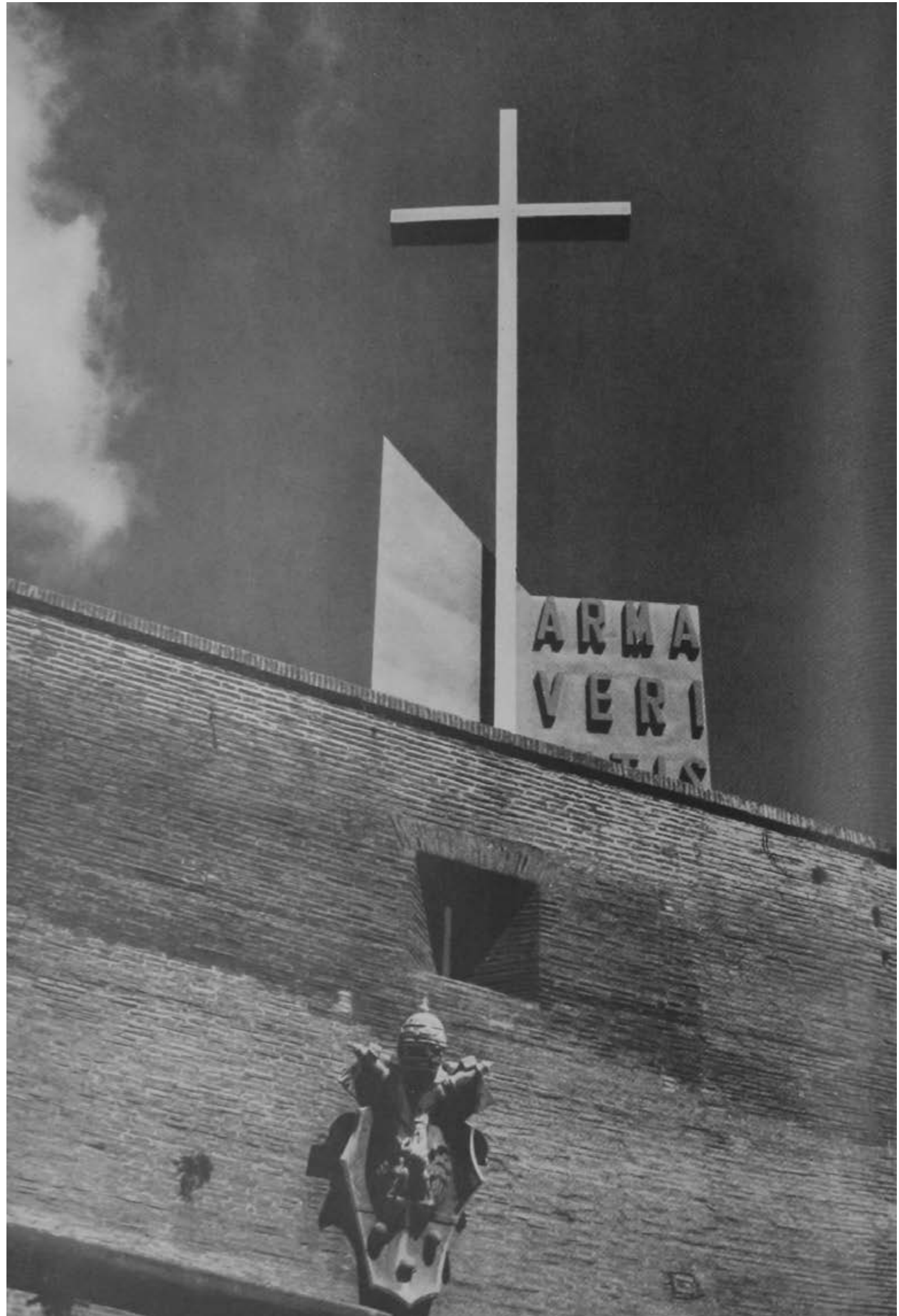

Figure 5: The exhibition emblem and motto above the walls of the Vatican City, at the entrance to the exhibition.
Source: *Emporium* (1936).

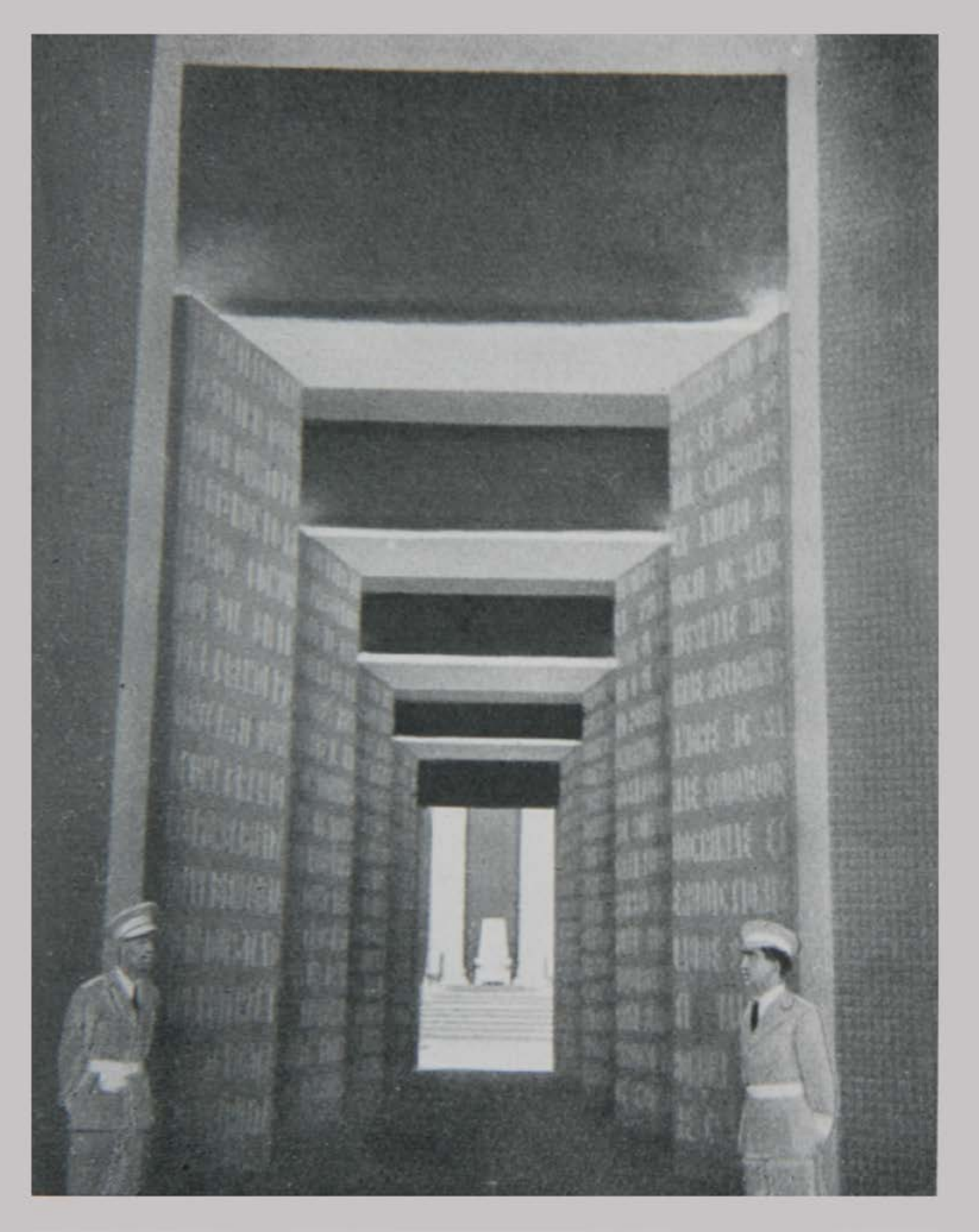

Figure 6: Central gallery in the exhibition pavilion.
Source: *Emporium* (1936).

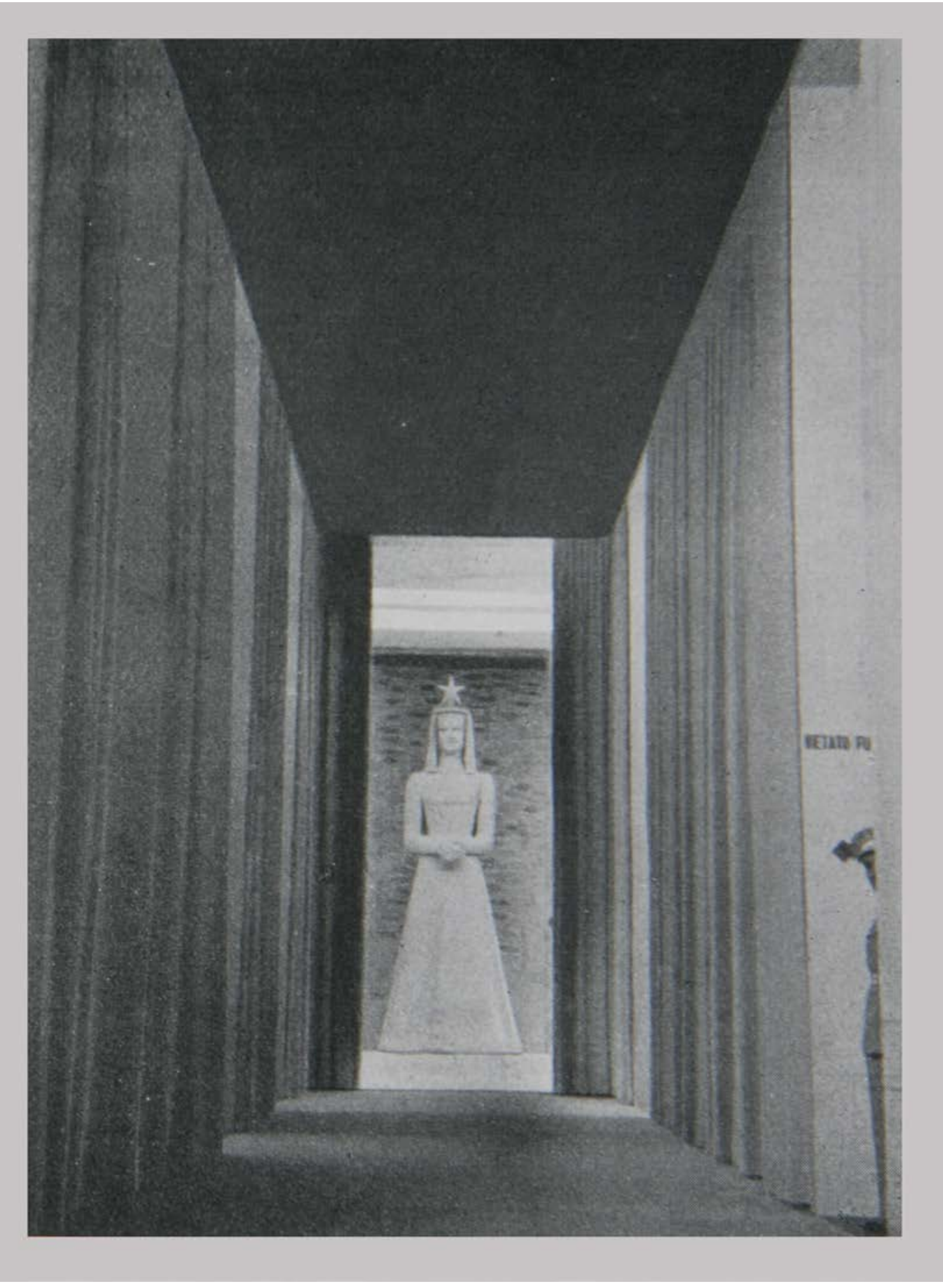

Figure 7: One of the transverse galleries in the exhibition pavilion (with a statue of *Italia cattolica* by Italo Griseldi).
Source: *Emporium*, 84 (1936).

modernist architecture: plain and pure lines, shapes and colours. As far as the last aspect is concerned (although, as far as is possible to ascertain, no visual record of the exhibition in colour exists), special emphasis in press reports was put on the various colours (mainly grey, red, black and white) and the textures of the linoleum that covered the wooden floors of all rooms and corridors in the pavilion. The architect himself compared the simplicity of his design to that of a complex of buildings of a religious order, the pavilion, in his words, representing the 'Order of the Catholic press' (Ordine della stampa Cattolica).[14] He did not conceal the fact that he intended the harmonious combination of possibly the most up-to-date architecture with the historic tissue of the existing buildings, mostly in Renaissance and Mannerist styles, such as, for instance, the Niche of Bramante, the walls of Julius II, and the Neo-Classical portico of the Braccio Nuovo.

The exhibition space was divided into three parts: a general one, charting the history of the written word from monastic scribes to the invention of the movable type, to the contemporary press (and other mass media, including the radio and cinema); another that encompassed presentations of the national presses, and a final one focused on periodicals published by the organisation Catholic Action, religious orders and missionary work.[15]

The 'heart' of the exhibition was located in a large audience hall called the Sala Maggiore, adjacent to the Braccio Nuovo and inventively arranged using the building's eight-column portico, with the papal throne mounted atop the stairs leading to the entrance (**Figure 8**). Above the columns, along the cornice, there ran a Latin inscription referring to the pope seated underneath: *Inerranti veritatis magistro veritatis arma deduntur* ('To the unerring teacher of truth are given the weapons of truth'). This hall, much taller than other parts of the pavilion, was decorated only with two large tapestries, executed after the famous Raphael cartoons depicting the *Adoration of the* Magi and *The Resurrection* (**Figure 9**), hung opposite one another on the side walls. A huge window facing the papal throne – above the remaining lower parts of the pavilion – afforded a spectacular view of the Bramante niche at the other end of the Cortile della Pigna (**Figures 10 and 11**). The Polish room (No. 27) was located next to the Czechoslovak (No. 26) and Hungarian (No. 28) sections; and the exhibits of Austria (No. 25), Great Britain (No. 34) and Lithuania (No. 32) were located nearby (**Figure 12**).

La Civiltà Cattolica, II:87, 11 March 1936, 267–75; A. Benedetti, 'La mostra della stampa cattolica', *La Rivista illustrata del Popolo d'Italia*, August 1936, 23–27; M. Labò, 'Mostra universale della stampa cattolica al Vaticano', *Casabella*, 105, Sept. 1936, 18–23. See also the guide to the exhibition: *Arma veritatis: esposizione mondiale della stampa cattolica, Città del Vaticano, 1936*, Rome: n.p., 1936 (French edn: *Guide de l'exposition mondiale de la presse catholique*, Rome, 1936, for description of the Polish room, 65–66). Separate guides to individual national sections, often in various languages, were published, for instance, by the Netherlands (*Arma veritatis: gids voor de Nederlandsche afdeeling op de wereldtentoonstelling van de katholieke pers* [Vaticaanstad, 1936] = *Guida per la sezione olandese = Guide pour la section des Pays-Bas = Führer für die niederländ. Abteilung = Guide for the Netherlands Exhibition = Guia para la Sección Holandesa*, Leiden: De Leidsche Courant, 1936) and France; see S. Wyszyński, 'Arma Veritatis – Watykańska Wystawa Prasy Katolickiej', *Ateneum Kapłańskie*, 22:38, 1936, 312.

14) 'Addossati alle grandi muraglie i padiglioni esterni nella severa simpicità della linea e nella candida chiarità della costruzione annunziano subito il concetto che ha informato l'opera: "intonazione severa e candida che caratterizza la Mostra quasi fosse la casa di un Ordine, l'Ordine della stampa cattolica" dice l'arch. Ponti', E. Lucatello, 'Guida alla Esposizione Mondiale della Stampa Cattolica', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 May 1936, 5; see also an account by the architect himself, in Ponti, 'La Mostra della stampa', 202, 205. Lucia Miodini ('Mostra Internazionale', 161) compared the layout of the Vatican pavilion to the ground plan of the medieval Benedictine abbey of Sankt-Gallen.

15) Ponti, 'La Mostra della stampa', 199; a detailed description, along with a discussion of the ground plan of the pavilion and its functions can be found in Wyszyński, 'Arma Veritatis', and Bednarski, 'Dwie wystawy prasowe.'

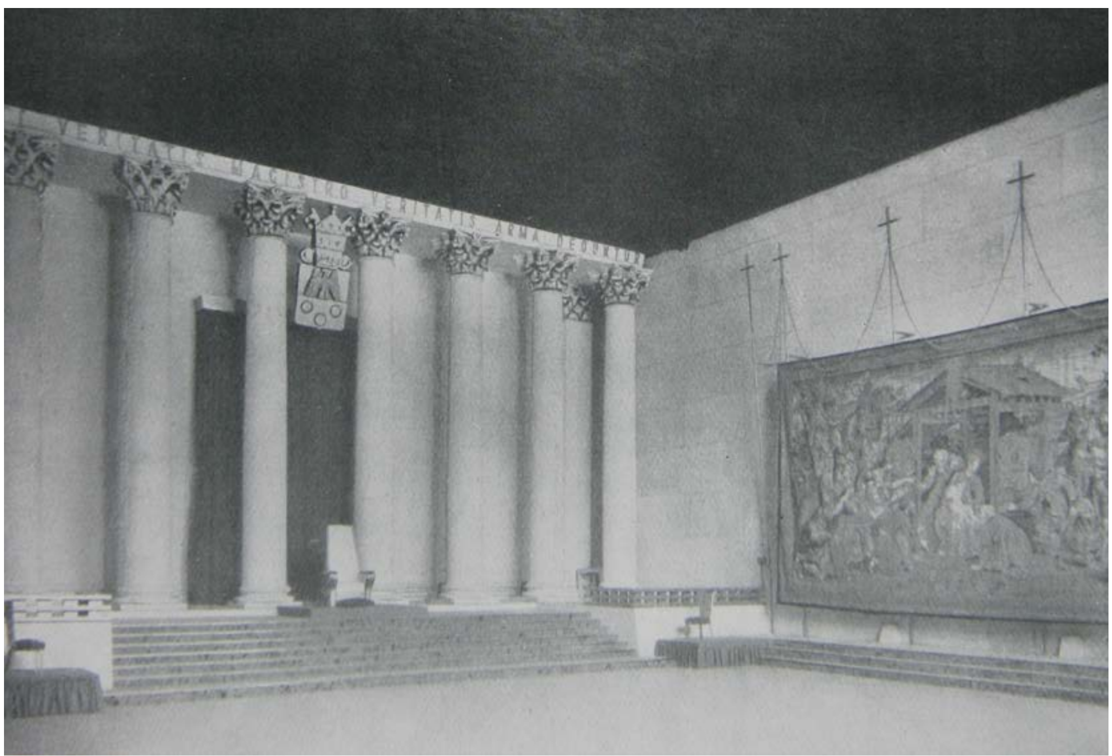

Figure 8:*Sala Maggiore* with the columned portico of the Braccio Nuovo serving as a backdrop for the papal throne.

Source: *Emporium* (1936).

The pavilion was ingeniously conceived – not with the inside out but, so to speak, with the outside turned inwards: the external elevations of the existing buildings surrounding the courtyard became the internal walls and – as in the case of the Braccio Nuovo portico – formed a splendid setting for the papal throne. Ponti's design was an excellent example of the imaginative appropriation of the existing architecture.

The Polish room: organisation and decoration

In contrast to world's fairs proper, it was not individual states, but organisations of the Catholic Church operating in particular states that participated in the World Exhibition of the Catholic Press. Yet, such an arrangement was, at its very roots, a contradiction in terms: it was impossible to separate a 'national' Catholic Church from the country within which it operated, and to represent the church without – in some way at least – representing the state itself. This led to an interesting paradox: although it was not Poland as a state, but Polish Catholic Church that participated in the event, the exhibit was, ultimately, a 'Polish section',

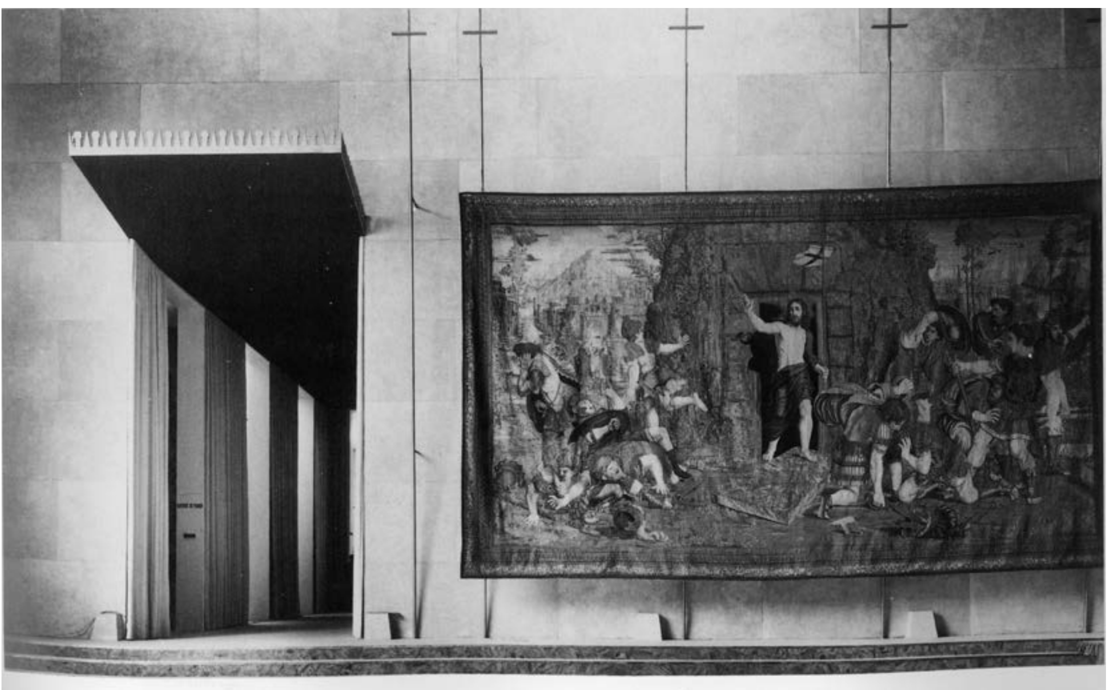

Figure 9: S*ala Maggiore,* one of the side walls hung with a tapestry depicting the Resurrection, designed by Raphael, and a doorway to one of the lateral galleries.

Source: Capponi*, Esposizione mondiale,* 127.

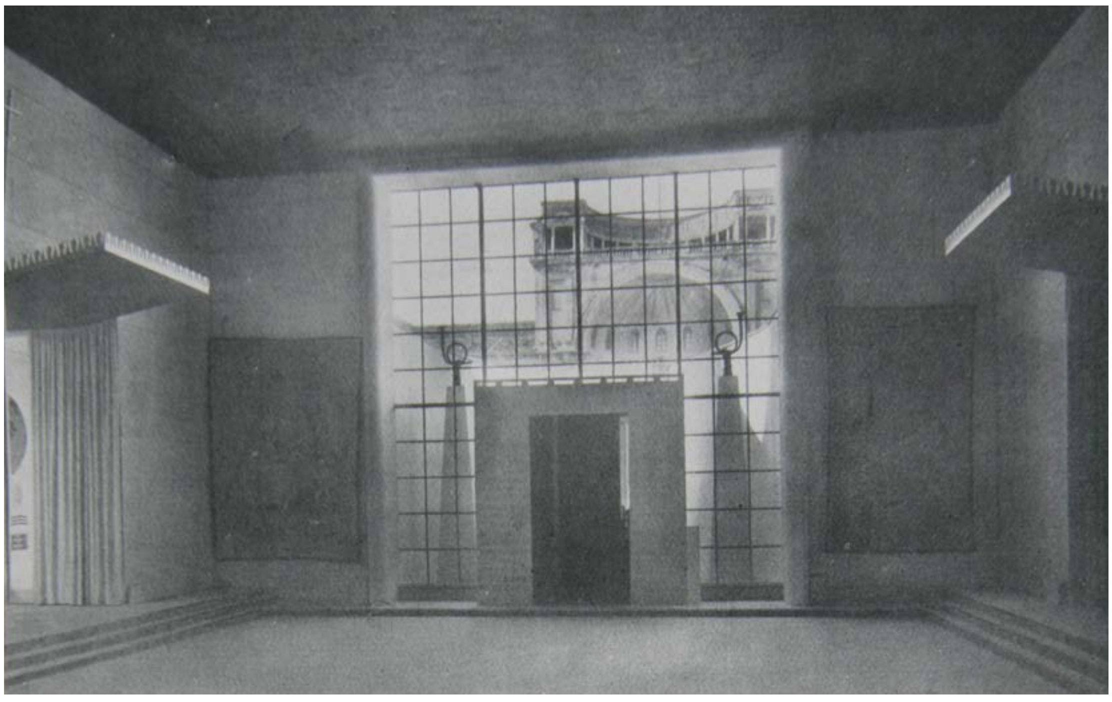

Figure 10: View from the window of the *Sala Maggiore* towards Bramante's Niche.

Source: *Emporium* (1936).

Figure 11: Bramante's niche on the Cortile della Pigna (1505).

Source: Wikimedia commons.

displaying Polish national emblems and other items.[16] State authorities were contacted by ecclesiastical organisers only as far as political exigency and diplomatic courtesy were required or there was a prospect of some financial support from the government. The state authorities, however, seemed to be almost indifferent to the event and were, at any rate, unwilling to spend any money on the exhibition, even though it was advertised by the Church as an excellent promotional opportunity for the country's tourist attractions.[17] The entire Polish exhibit, including the iconography (and political message) of a figural frieze that decorated it, was almost single-handedly devised and realised by Fr Stanisław Adamski (1875–1967), since 1930 bishop of Katowice and chair of the executive committee of the Press Commission in the Polish Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In view of the convoluted political status of the exhibition, another paradox is that the centrepiece of display in the Polish room was a huge frieze (measuring 254 × 726 cm), entitled *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis* ('Poland – Mother of the Saints and Shield of Christianity'), showing life-size figures of important personalities from Polish history, including – very tellingly – King John III Sobieski and the then recently deceased (in 1935) Marshall Józef Piłsudski, whose 'secular cult' was only beginning to take shape at that time

16) An official enquiry with the Director of Protocol in the Polish Embassy at the Vatican, about the proper colours and form of the Polish flag and the national emblem, to be displayed in the Polish room, was one of very few instances that the organisers were compelled to contact the state authorities. Nevertheless, they were very well aware of the fact that the enquiry was rather awkward, since Poland (similar to other countries) did not officially (i.e. as a state) participate in the exhibition.

17) It was not the case, for instance, of Austria, whose participation in the event and the exhibit itself was considered an event of national importance, having been organised under patronage of the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg. However, nothing is known in this regard about any other participating countries.

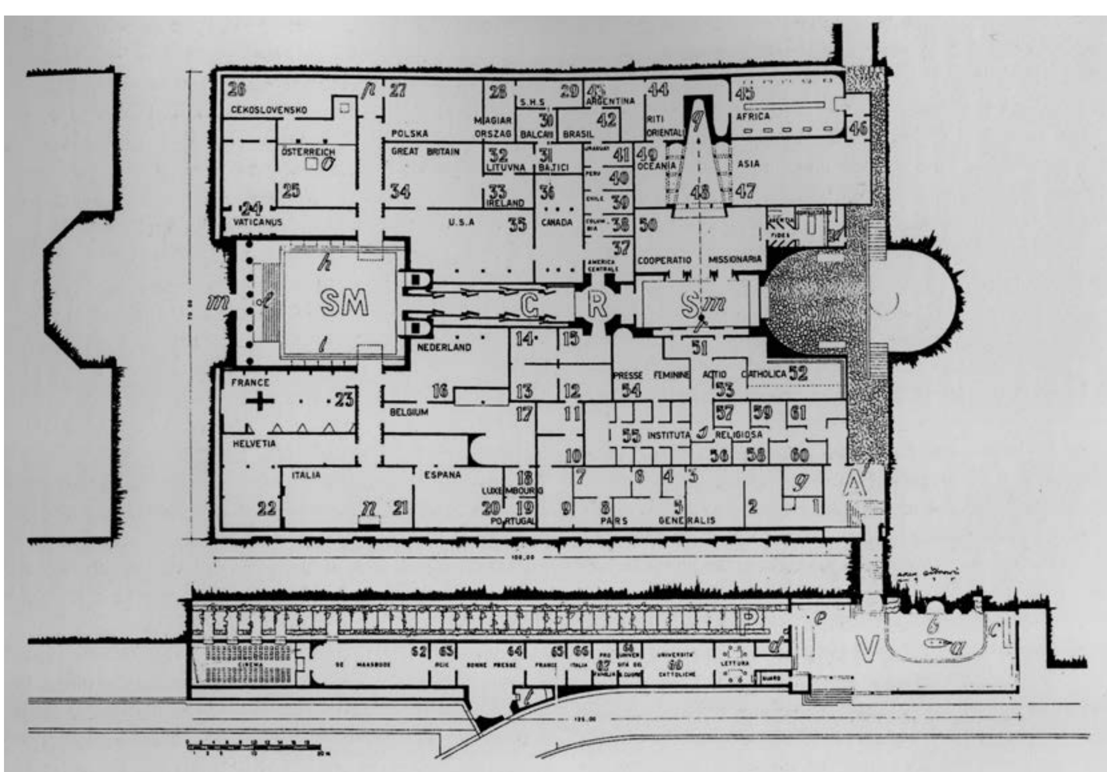

Figure 12: World Exhibition of the Catholic Press, Vatican, 1936, Ground plan of the exhibition pavilion, by Gio Ponti (after Miodini, 162).

Legend: V – vestibule; A – atrium; R – rotunda; G – gallery; SM –*Sala Maggiore* (Great Hall); Sm –*Sala Minore* (Little Hall); P – pergola

a – Fountain of the Galleon; b – pool of the fountain; c – bar; d – services; e – ground plan of the exhibition; f – stained glass St Francis de Sales (by Gio Ponti); g – John of Gutenberg's printing press; h–i – Raphael's tapestries; l – papal throne; m – papal entrance; n – statue of *Italia cattolica* by Italo Griseldi; o – statue of St Paul by Hans André p – statue of St Wenceslaus; q – statue of the *Virgin of the Missions* (*Regina Missionum*) by Aurelio Mistruzzi; r – *Pax Christi in regno Christi* by Gio Ponti; s – *Three Brothers* by Gio Ponti t – small shrine at the exhibit of the Bonne Presse publishers

(**Figure 13**).[18] The Latin motto reiterated the notion of Poland as a bulwark (or shield – the Latin word 'scutum' could be understood as both) of Christianity, referring to Sobieski's relief of the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and the fairly recent victory over the Soviet Union of the

18) Press reports inform that, for instance, also the exhibition in the neighbouring Czechoslovak section carried a political message (little is known in that regard about other national exhibits). Fr Wyszyński ('Arma Veritatis', 314) wrote about it very favourably, stating that it is 'not only a presentation of the press, but at the same time a political and religious testimony to the role played in [the history of] religion by Bohemia from 863 to 1936: "La Repubblica Cecoslovacca – un ponte verso L'Oriente" [The Czechoslovak republic – a bridge to the East] – is the motto of the Czech exhibit'. Interestingly, Czechoslovakia styled itself a 'bridge' between the East and West, whereas Poland resolutely cut, or even barricaded, itself off from the East, in keeping with the centuries-old *topos* of the country being an *antemurale Christianitatis*, or a 'bulwark of Christianity'.

Figure 13: Jan Henryk Rosen, *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis* (1936). Residence of the Archbishops of Warsaw, Warsaw.

Source: author's photograph.

Battle of Warsaw in 1920.[19] Pius XI would have known the latter first hand, since he had been a nuncio in Warsaw at the time. Famously, he was the only member of the foreign diplomatic corps who did not flee the Polish capital in August 1920, in the face of the approaching Red Army.[20] These two battles, especially the latter, more recent, one, proved to be extremely useful in terms of both religious and national propaganda abroad. The battle may have occurred fifteen years earlier, but it is important to bear in mind that it was as recently as 1931 that the book *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920*, by the Chairman of the Interallied Mission to Poland in July 1920, Viscount D'Abernon, appeared.[21] D'Abernon, a British diplomat, had added 'Warsaw, 1920' to 'the best of' list of historical battles originally started by Sir Edward Shepherd Creasy back in 1851 with his publication of *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: from Marathon to Waterloo*.[22] Apart from making the 1920 battle famous by putting it on an imaginary chart, D'Abernon's attitude towards the event seems to have been fully in tune with the message that the Polish Catholic Church, including Bishop Adamski, wanted to communicate through the decoration of the Polish room to its viewers. This suggests that at that time the sentiment was not limited to Polish nationalist circles but was more widespread, at least across Europe. D'Abernon famously wrote – as Norman Davies has aptly put it – in Gibbonian tones, quoting the great Enlightenment historian's lofty phrases

19) For a useful introduction to the notion of 'bulwark of Christianity' applied to Poland, see Norman Davies, 'Antemurale: The Bulwark of Christianity', in *God's Playground. A History of Poland*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, I, 125-155. Characteristically, Davies writes that 'The concept of "*Antemurale*" has been specially favoured by Catholic writers' (ibidem). Bishop Adamski wrote in a letter to Rosen that 'antemurale Christianitatis' was the most apt term to describe Poland's situation in the history of the world, and that it imbued Poland with a special character extending from the past into the present, and was of worldwide importance.

20) For the historical background to the 'relief of Vienna', see Davies, *God's Playground*, I, 362–70; for the Battle of Warsaw, see Davies, *God's Playground*, II, 292–97.

21) Viscount D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931.

22) D'Abernon intentionally refers to Creasy's work right at the start of his book; see D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle*, 7.

about the decisive role of Charles Martel's victory in the Battle of Tours of AD 732 against 'the Saracen' in the history of Western civilisation:[23]

> Had Pilsudski and Weygand failed to arrest the triumphant advance of the Soviet Army at the Battle of Warsaw, not only would Christianity have experienced a disastrous reverse, but the very existence of Western civilisation would have been imperilled. The Battle of Tours saved our ancestors of Britain and our neighbours of Gaul from the yoke of the Koran; it is probable that the Battle of Warsaw preserved Central and parts of Western Europe from a more subversive danger – the fanatical tyranny of the Soviet.[24]

Furthermore, D'Abernon painted a bigger picture, which was, again, entirely in keeping with Bishop Adamski's intent, including even the notion of the bulwark – if not of Christianity, then at least of the West (which was, in any case, roughly synonymous with Christianity):

> In 1684 [*recte*: 1683] the Ottoman invasion made its furthest advance west. The Battle of Vienna was one of the occasions when Europe owed safety to Polish valour. Already at Chocim in 1280 [*recte*: 1621] Polish arms attained an important victory over Asiatic assailants, but the danger was even more grave before the walls of Vienna, and John Sobieski earned the gratitude of all who value the maintenance of European civilisation.
> It is difficult to estimate the relative importance of these events in the tenth and seventeenth centuries as compared with the Battle of Warsaw in our own time, but the surmise is justifiable that in its influence on the civilisation of Europe the victory before the walls of Warsaw in 1920 was no less vital than the historical contests in which Poland in earlier years acted as a bulwark to the west.[25]

It may be mentioned as an aside that a few years earlier, in 1933, apparently to commemorate his heroic stance in 1920, Pius XI had commissioned Jan Henryk Rosen, the artist who executed the frieze for the press exhibition, to paint two compositions of a similar subject matter: the Defence of Jasna Góra, or the 'Bright Mountain', and the Battle of Warsaw, for his private chapel in the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo (**Figures 14 and 15**). The latter subject also appeared in Rosen's Vatican frieze – represented there *pars pro toto* by a figure of the dying Fr Skorupka, a heroic chaplain in the Battle of Warsaw (**Figures 13 and 20**). This earlier papal commission, no doubt, must have contributed to the fact that he was chosen by Bishop Adamski to execute the painting for the Vatican press exhibition. In spite of Pius XI's earlier contacts with Poland, first as an apostolic visitor and then a nuncio in Warsaw (1918–1921), and his commission of paintings from Rosen, the pope himself was not involved in any way in the arrangement of the Polish exhibit, nor in any other matters related to the press exhibition in general, which, as stated at the outset, was organised in his homage.

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23) Davies, *God's Playground*, II, 297.

24) D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle*, 8.

25) D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle*, 11. Polish circles would definitely not have needed Lord D'Abernon's book for such an interpretation of the events, but it cannot be excluded that Bishop Adamski may have been influenced in some way by the thoughts of the British diplomat. Nevertheless, Viscount D'Abernon's name does not turn up in the surviving archival materials related to the exhibition, which include Bishop Adamski's correspondence and similar documents (for which see below).

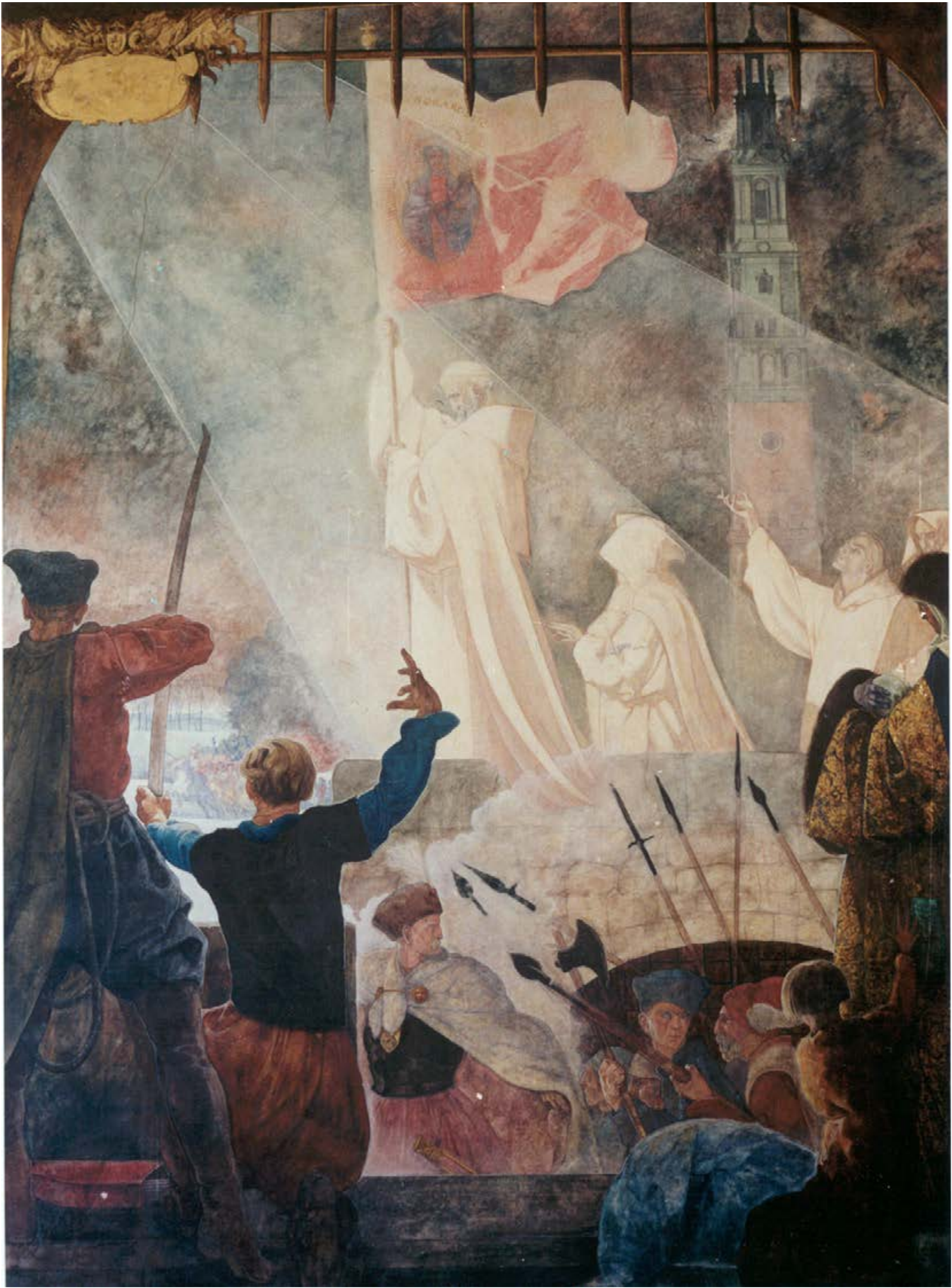

Figure 14: Jan Henryk Rosen, *The Defence of Jasna Góra (1655)* (1936) in the private chapel of the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

Source: author's photograph.

Figure 15: Jan Henryk Rosen, *The Battle of Warsaw (1920)* (1936) in the private chapel of the papal summer residence at Castel Gandolfo.

Source: author’s photograph.

A wealth of information on the organisation of the Polish exhibit can be found in the papers of Bishop Adamski who had kept a meticulous record of his correspondence related to the event.[26] He was the moving spirit of the undertaking, and masterminded an enormously difficult task. The Catholic Press Agency, which was supposed to organise the Polish section, had hardly any funds. Nor did the Polish Catholic publishers and Catholic journals that were supposed to become involved in the show and contribute to the organisation of the Polish section financially; they turned out to be unable or reluctant to lay out considerable sums of money for participation in the exhibition. Happily, Bishop Adamski had found a dedicated assistant in Rome, with whose help all his plans and ideas could be realised. This man was Fr Tadeusz Zakrzewski (1883–1961), from 1928 to 1938 rector of the Polish Pontifical Institute in Rome (Pontificium Institutum Ecclesiasticum Polonorum), which had been founded in 1910 to take care of the affairs of the Polish church in the Vatican curia, on behalf of Polish bishops. It was Zakrzewski who made sure that all decisions of Bishop Adamski were painstakingly carried out on site. Apart from that, both prelates evidently enjoyed good relations, both of them having come from Poznań and having trained as priests in a seminary there.

Comparison of the aforementioned archival documentary evidence with the few extant photographs attest to the fact that the ideas of Bishop Adamski, voiced in letters and written instructions sent to the painter and other people involved in the decoration of the Polish room, designed by the architect Włodzimierz Padlewski (1903–2007), were executed to the letter.[27] In the message of the decoration, Adamski wanted to combine 'two main ideas', as he had put it: the religious element with the national one, resulting in the all too familiar stereotype – or myth – of Catholic Poland, or one equating Polishness with Catholicity, that is, an assertion that every Pole must necessarily be Catholic (the Pole-Catholic, or 'Polak-katolik').[28] In addition to the frieze, the White Eagle, Poland's national emblem, featured prominently (**Figures 16, 17 and 18**), as did the image of the Virgin Mary, the so-called Black Madonna of Jasna Góra (or the 'Bright Mountain'), the most sacred of Poland's holy images (depicted on a knightly gorget), and a sword, symbolising the military victories, expressed by inclusion of their dates and names (in Latin): 1683 | VINDOBONA and 1920 | VARSOVIA (**Figure 19**). These

26) Archive of the Archdiocese of Katowice (Archiwum Archidiecezji Katowickiej; AAKat), Katowice, collection: Office of Bishop Stanisław Adamski (Kancelaria bpa Stanisława Adamskiego; KBA), call no. KBA 80: The Press Commission of the Polish Conference of Catholic Bishops (Komisja Prasowa Episkopatu Polski), 1935–1936 and KBA 186, KBA 187: Conventions and exhibitions related to the Catholic press. The exhibition of the Catholic press in Vatican in 1936 (Zjazdy i wystawy dot. prasy katolickiej. Wystawa prasy katolickiej w Watykanie w 1936 r.). Bishop Adamski had stood at the head of the archdiocese for 37 years and was a highly respected prelate of the Catholic Church. The literature dealing with his life and various aspects of his administration is vast; nevertheless, nowhere is his role in the organisation of the Vatican press exhibition, under discussion here, even mentioned. For a detailed bibliography on Bishop Adamski (in Polish), see Wolańska, 'Wawel i Kresy', n. 20, 14.

27) An extensive monograph on the architect: Hubert Bilewicz, ed., *Włodzimierz Padlewski: architektura i sztuka.* (*W roku jubileuszu stulecia urodzin*), Gdańsk: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, 2008, which includes only a laconic reference to his involvement in designing the Polish room at the Vatican exhibition; see Bilewicz, 'Curriculum twórcze Włodzimierza Padlewskiego', in ibidem, 8, and 42, 87 (reminiscences of Janina Padlewska, the wife of the architect).

28) Zygmunt Zieliński, 'Mit "Polak-katolik"', in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1994, 107–17. On this concept, an association of 'Pole' with 'Catholic', see Chapter 9: 'Polak-Katolik', in Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 328–59 (for the interwar period, esp. 328–40).

were only, so to speak, catchwords, further elaborated in the figural frieze (the gorget with the image of the Virgin, among other elements, having been replicated there outright, while the above-mentioned battles were personified by the figures of their military commanders, Sobieski and Piłsudski, respectively), illustrated by Jan Henryk Rosen according to precise instructions of the bishop. All of the above decorative elements, including the map of Poland, display cabinets with specimens of Catholic periodicals published in Poland and historical and statistical information on Polish Catholic press as well as an exhibit of photographs of Polish historic architecture – the last-mentioned element eventually sponsored by Polish ministry of transport as a sort of advertisement for Poland's tourist attractions (**Figure 20**) – were designed by Włodzimierz Padlewski. It is very striking that the general tenor of the decoration in the Polish room – emphasising two military victories and featuring a prominent display of chivalric accoutrements: a gorget and a sword – was perfectly consonant with the overall militaristic tone (and motto) of the exhibition as a whole.

Rosen's painting: art and politics

Rosen and the bishop exchanged a number of letters and several sketches (mentioned in their correspondence, none of them is known to have survived), and agreed upon the final appearance of the frieze-like picture (and a – rather meagre – fee for the artist). As attested by documentary evidence, the idea and choice of the personages depicted in the painting were conceived by bishop Adamski from beginning to end. And again, written documentary evidence surviving in bishop Adamski's papers compared with the final work confirms that the painter painstakingly realised the wishes of his patron and executed every correction he was ordered to make; he literally illustrated the bishop's 'vision', narrated in his letters. The painter's only contribution was in fact, the artistic form and style. And the latter, especially technical, aspects of the work were quite significant. As there was no money to pay for the painter's trip to Rome, he had to execute a large-scale, impressive artwork fairly quickly that would be lightweight, transportable and fairly long-lasting, and that could be installed easily on site. So, the picture was executed in Lvov where the painter was living at that time (**Figure 21**). What he had come up with was the technique of crayons on paper pasted on canvas. Strictly speaking, he used crayons, or chalks, in three colours (black, red and white), the so-called 'aux trois crayons' technique, favoured by French eighteenth-century artists, applied to brown paper, the acres of which were covered with gold ground (**Figure 22**). Conforming to the overall idea of the pavilion's architect, the work was hung on a wall at the end of one of the visual axes (to the left of the entrance), in keeping with the instructions of the architect Gio Ponti.

Rosen's frieze should be construed as a work of applied, rather than fine art, and not as a painting in its own right. It should be thought of, perhaps, as a sort of oversized poster, or an element of a stage set design, whose function was purely utilitarian, meant to disseminate straightforward propaganda.

Although, technically, the frieze is a drawing, the addition of the gold ground greatly enhanced its overall appearance making it look like a true painting. Furthermore, the limited palette must have looked quite 'modern' and seems to have fitted well into the

Figure 16: Entrance to the Polish section (in the background) from the Czechoslovak room (with a statue of St Wenceslaus on the left).

Source: *Guide de l'exposition mondiale de la presse catholique* (1936).

Figure 17: General view of the Polish room.

Source: *Rodzina Polska* (1936).

design of the pavilion, as it was apparently based on a similar principle of simplicity (the main colour accents came from the linoleum floors, mostly in white and various shades of grey; the roofs over entrances to individual rooms as well as some draperies were red – as was the brocade fabric with a repeated pattern of stylised eagle in Polish room). The frieze (**Figure 13**) presents eleven figures (eight main characters and three accompanying figures, the latter quite meaningless from historical point of view and the political message the composition was to convey), depicted in two groups on either side of the central panorama of the royal castle on Wawel Hill in Cracow, Poland's ancient capital city.[29] It was intended here as a symbolic 'personification' of Poland, its appearance roughly based on a seventeenth-century print, with the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa on a gorget 'suspended' above, and inscribed with the composition's title:[30] POLONIA SANCTORUM MATER | SCUTUM CHRISTIANITATIS in a banderole below the view of Wawel Castle. Each

29) Since the period of the Partitions, Wawel Hill, with the royal castle and Cracow Cathedral housing the tombs of Polish kings and the country's national heroes, had been considered a Polish 'Capitol', 'pantheon', 'Acropolis' and the 'crown of Poland', or simply it was a synecdoche of the then non-existent state; it was synonymous with Polishness in general.

30) It was probably based on a view engraved by Mathäus Merian, published in Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg's *Civitates orbis terrarium*, Cologne: Peter Brachel, 1617.

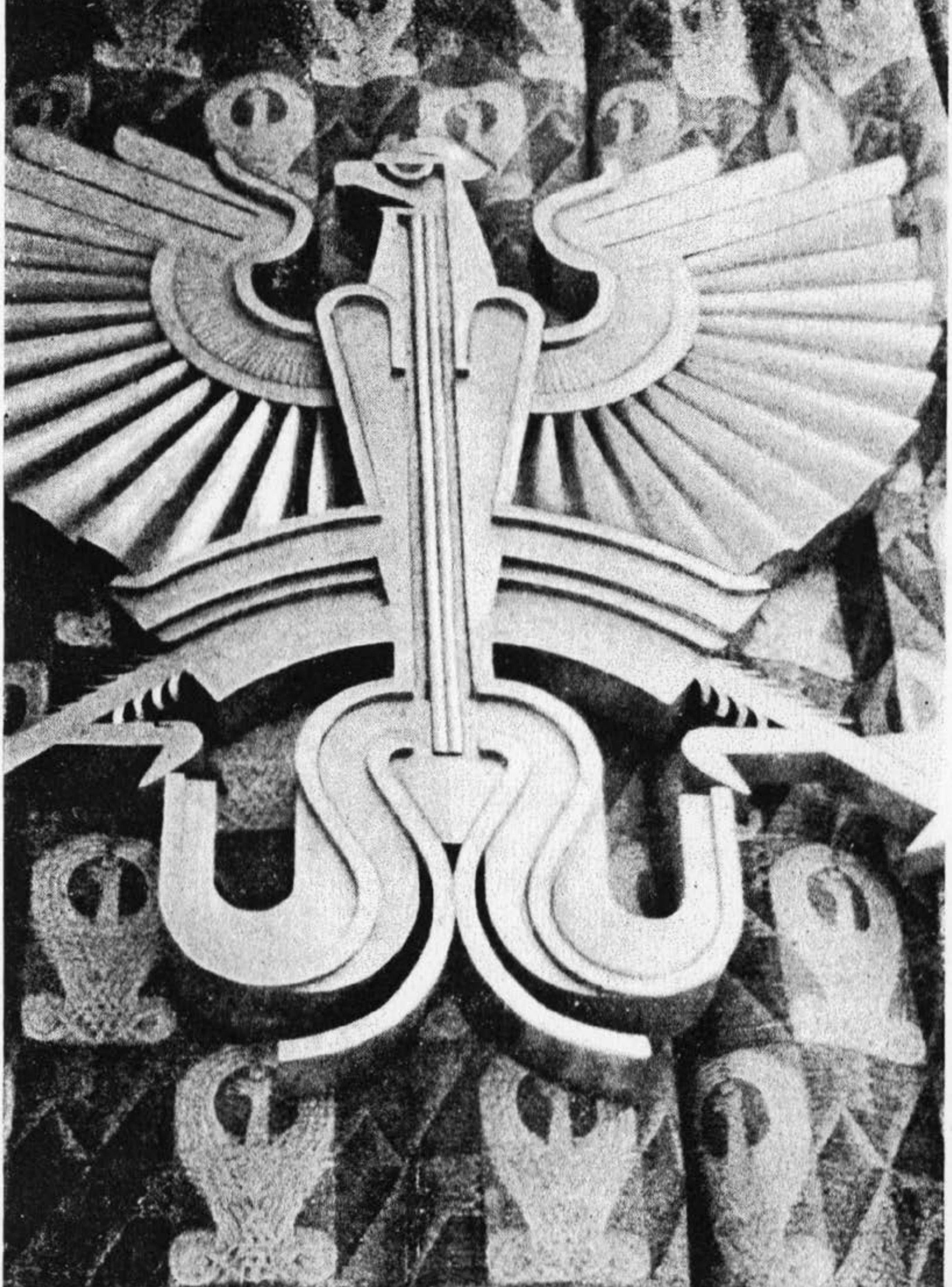

Figure 18: The White Eagle made of sheet silver against a (red and white) fabric decorated with a pattern of stylised eagles.

Source: *L'Illustrazione vaticana* (1936).

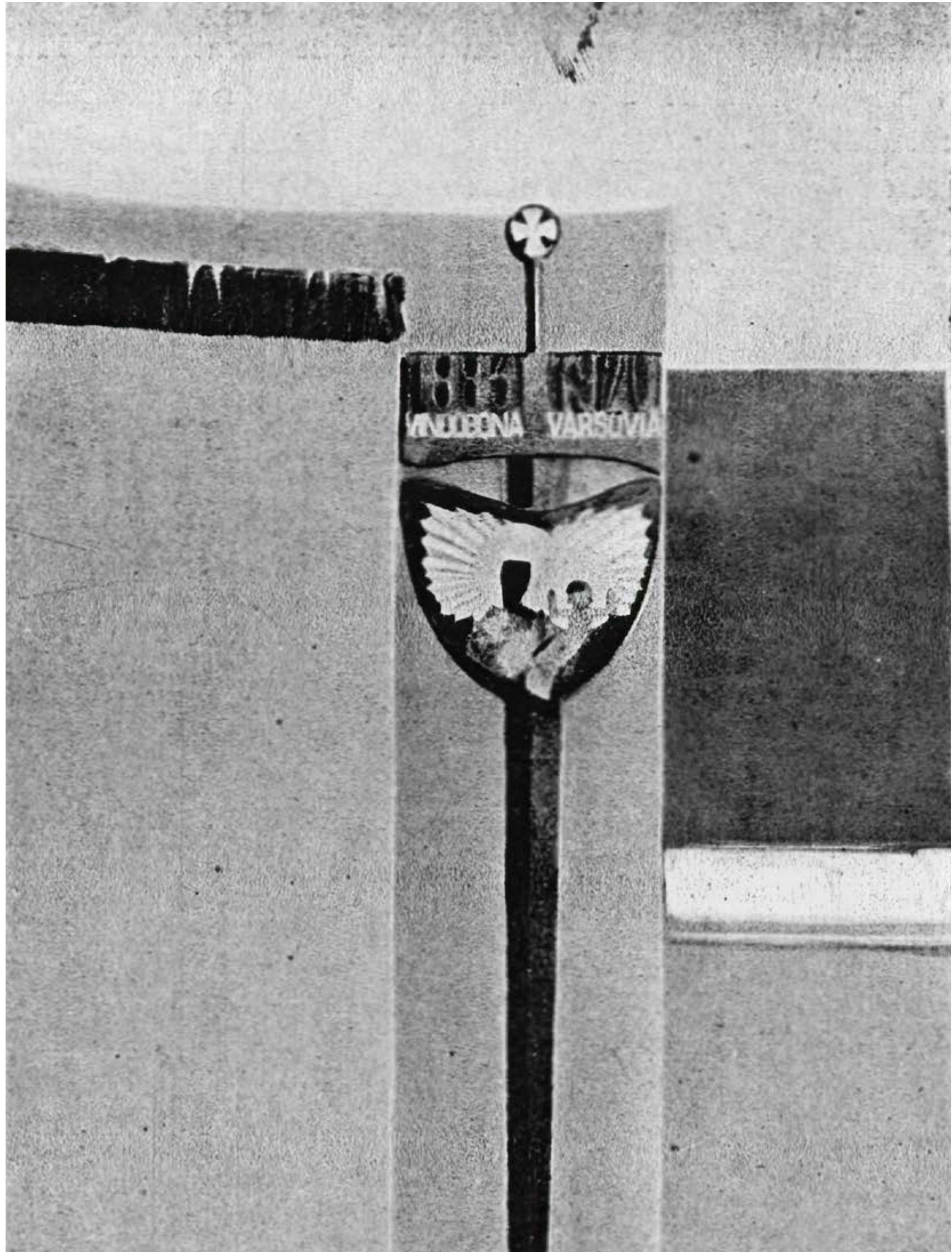

Figure 19: Fragment of the motto 'Polonia antemurale christianitatis', a sword with the dates and names of battles and a gorget bearing an image of the Virgin and Child.

Source: *L'Illustrazione vaticana,* (1936).

Figure 20: Rosen's painting, exhibition of photographs of Polish historic architecture and display cases with specimens of Catholic periodicals in the Polish room. Source: *Rodzina Polska* (1936).

Source: *L'Illustrazione vaticana,* (1936).

of the figures – for the most part emblematic personalities in Polish history – has been identified with a name inscribed on a scroll or banderole running in various arrangements on the painting. Broadly speaking, the left-hand side represents the men of letters ('Poland spiritual', as Bishop Adamski has put it), while military figures ('Poland heroic') have been depicted on the right-hand side. Starting from the left we see: St John Cantius, a medieval professor of the University of Cracow, apparently intended to personify here medieval learning and the ecclesiastical origin of the university, seated at a pulpit in his study, with inscription on a banderole: S. JOANNES CANTIUS; Jan Kochanowski, Poland's outstanding poet of the Renaissance period, whose contribution to the formation of Polish language is comparable to that of Shakespeare's for English, standing before an open book and holding a scroll inscribed with his name and profession: JOANNES | KOCHANOW | SKI | POETA; Cardinal Ledóchowski, a nineteenth-century bishop of Poznań, a capital of the Prussian province of partitioned Poland, known for his opposition to the Germanisation of the Kulturkampf, intended to eradicate the Polish language and national sentiment, conducted by Prussian authorities (labelled: CARD. LEDÓCHOWSKI), a figure apparently close to Bishop Adamski who came from Poznań himself (Catholic faith seen as synonymous with Polishness); then we see St Josaphat Kuntsevych (SANCTUS JOSAPHATUS MP.), a martyr of the Union of Brest-Litovsk, which established the Uniate Church, and the kneeling St Stanislaus Kostka

Figure 21: J. H. Rosen while painting the exhibition frieze.

Source: NAC – Polish National Digital Archive.

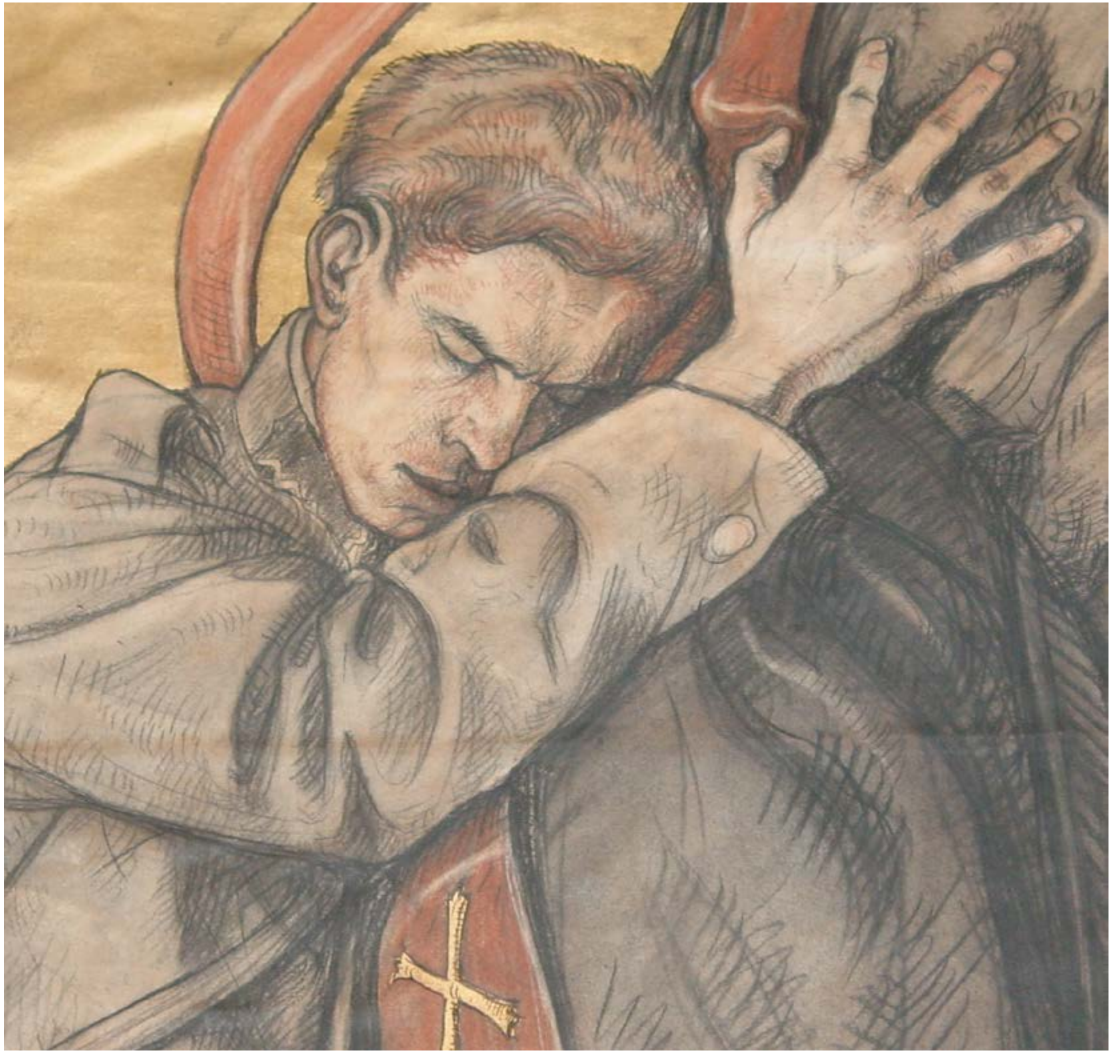

Figure 22: J. H. Rosen, Detail of *Polonia – Sanctorum Mater et Scutum Christianitatis*, showing a soldier supporting the dying Fr Skorupka (1936).

Source: author's photograph.

(S. STANISLAUS KOSTKA), an internationally known Polish Jesuit novice saint, accompanied by a page boy.

On the other side of the view of Wawel Hill appear: the dying Fr Ignacy Skorupka (PSB SKORUPKA), a military chaplain who fell in the battle of Warsaw in 1920, with a cross in his hand, the very stance in which he was believed to have led Polish troops against the Bolsheviks, the collapsing priest supported by an anonymous Polish soldier; King John III Sobieski (JOANNES III REX), a victor of Vienna, considered to have saved the Austrian capital (and Europe in general) from the Ottoman Turks in a battle fought on the outskirts of Vienna on 12 September 1683, paired here with his modern counterpart, Marshall Józef Piłsudski (captioned: PIŁSUDSKI), a head of Polish state during the Polish-Bolshevik war and victor of

the Battle of Warsaw on 15 August 1920, who kept the Bolshevik army at bay, accompanied by a drummer boy whose costume roughly situates him in Sobieski's times.[31]

In keeping with the intention of Bishop Adamski the picture was supposed to summarise of the history of Poland as a country that had always defended Christianity – either through the intellectual work of its greatest men of letters, or in action, on the battlefield. The frieze and the remaining decoration of the Polish room reiterated the same ideas again and again, or, rather, the decoration of the room mirrored the message of the painting and the other way round, and even the inscription in the painting was replicated in the motto 'Polonia antemurale Christianitatis' inscribed next to the sword. It was the very concept favoured by the Catholic church in Poland in the interwar period, and one so powerful that the preceding phrase, Poland – mother of the saints – was vastly overshadowed by it. What is more, it perfectly combined religion with politics and apparently was in tune with the then current political situation.

Given this strong political message, consciously and skilfully reiterated all over the Polish room, it is little wonder that information about the state of the Catholic press in Poland – after all, the main purpose of the exhibition – was hardly noticed (as it was evidently hardly present there at all). Apparently all efforts concentrated on the decoration, a strategy that reflected the attitude of the bishop towards the exhibit. One of the very few matter-of-fact accounts of the exhibition, incidentally, written by the future Polish Primate, Fr Stefan Wyszyński, who visited the exhibition in 1936 when still a young priest and journalist, stated: 'the decorative aspect of the Polish room stands out favourably [against other exhibits], whereas its press display leaves much to be desired, especially when compared with other rooms'.[32]

Conclusion

This pithy comment by Fr Wyszyński seems to be a valid and accurate summing up of the Polish presence in the press exhibition. Having defended his doctorate in 1929, Wyszyński spent the following year (from September 1929 to June 1930) gaining experience on a study trip that brought him to 'research centers in Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. He listened to universities' [sic] lectures, learned a lot about Catholic social teaching, and collected comparative material relevant to his future studies'.[33] Wyszyński's extensive and

31) As a relatively recent parallel for a similar pairing of the saintly and lay figures within a single artwork, though in a sacred space of a church, one can cite the mosaic decoration in the apse of the Sacré-Cœur in Paris, designed around 1912 and completed in the 1920s, by the French 'pompier' artist Luc-Olivier Merson, under whom, incidentally, Rosen had trained privately for some time in Paris before 1914. (I realise that distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane' in the case of such a highly ideologically charged event, directed unequivocally to the clergy and the faithful, as the Vatican exhibition of the Catholic press may be problematic, but the exhibition space must after all be deemed 'secular'.) For Merson and the Sacré-Cœur mosaics, see *L'étrange Monsieur Merson*, eds. François Ribemont, Anne-Blanche Stévenin, exhib. cat. Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, Lyons: Lieux Dits, 2008, 179–81 (esp. 181, where such a mixture was termed as 'religioso-national').

32) Wyszyński, 'Arma Veritatis', 317 ('strona dekoracyjna sali polskiej wyróżnia się dodatnio, strona wystawowa ma wielkie braki, widoczne w porównaniu z innymi salami').

33) R. Ficek, 'The Włocławek Period of Fr. Stefan Wyszyński's Pastoral Ministry: Presbyterate and The Time of Priestly-Spiritual Leadership (Part 2)', *Resovia Sacra* 28, 2021, 61 (Ficek, in turn, refers here to the work of A. F. Dziuba, *Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński*, Cracow: WAM, 2010, 19).

very incisive review of the Vatican Press Exhibition attests that the young and eager journalist was probably the most knowledgeable person in Polish Catholic Church as far as the current state of affairs of international Catholic press was concerned, and one can only lament that his help and expertise in the field had not been solicited by the organisers of the Polish section of the 1936 show. As noted at the beginning, while a proper assessment of the exhibition within a broader context of the history of the press in the interwar period and in the political tensions between the Polish state and church, including the attitudes of both parties towards ethnic and religious minorities at that time, must be left to qualified historians in the respective fields, what may be said on the basis of the present preliminary analysis is that the Polish presentation missed the point, focusing, as observed by Fr Wyszyński, on the room's aesthetic impact, but offering very little factual content related to the actual state of Polish press. Furthermore, what Bishop Adamski asked Rosen to do was to illustrate a rather trite 'sermon', a banal story one would expect to hear preached at a mass in a church in newly independent Poland to people who until fairly recently had lived under various regimes on the lands of partitioned Poland, and for whom the national unifying aspect was undoubtedly of paramount importance. But it was this very aspect that was probably hardly understandable to international audiences who visited the Vatican exhibition in 1936.

Coda

The fate of the furnishings of the Polish room after the exhibition had closed is not entirely clear. Some objects must have been returned to Poland, some were intended to be gifted to people involved in the mounting of the display and running of the Polish room (as for instance the eagle-patterned fabric that was offered to Fr Tadeusz Zakrzewski), but Rosen's huge painting – even though relatively lightweight and portable – evidently remained in Rome, in all likelihood, in the Polish Pontifical Institute. It must have been held there until the 1970s when Wyszyński, then Primate of Poland from 1948, who held his private rooms at the Institute and had lived there during his sojourns in Rome, took it to Warsaw, to the residence of the Archbishops of Warsaw, where it has remained ever since. In the summer of 2020 – 86 years after its execution – Rosen's unassuming (and generally long forgotten) work was suddenly plucked from obscurity and exhibited nowhere else but at the Royal Castle in Warsaw – an honour the artist would have never dreamt of.[34] The reason for this unexpected elevation was the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw – or the 'Miracle on the Vistula', as it is nicknamed in Poland.[35] A special exhibition of the painting was staged at the castle from late July to mid-November 2020, with the title *With Sword and with Cross*.[36] Laudable though this action might have been, the organisers did not (or did not want to) understand the circumstances of

34) It was virtually unknown until the publication of Wolańska, 'Wawel i Kresy'.

35) Initially the term was sarcastic and slightly derogatory, but it has stuck, while its negative connotations seem to have been forgotten over time; now the 'miracle' is an accepted term, used by historians while referring to the Battle of Warsaw – as for instance in the title of the exhibition catalogue quoted in the next note.

36) Paweł Tyszka, ed., *Szablą i krzyżem: pokaz obrazu Jana Henryka Rosena w stulecie Cudu nad Wisłą 1920* (Exhibition catalogue Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum, 23 July – 15 November 2020) Warsaw: Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum, 2020.

the work's origins and presented it in an oversimplified narration limited to the two figures immediately related to the battle: Fr Skorupka and Marshall Piłsudski.[37] Regrettably, the artwork was seen merely as a vehicle of an ideological message – in 2020 identical as in 1936 – and a once in a lifetime occasion to present it in historical perspective and a broader context of the Vatican Press exhibition was irretrievably lost.

37) A tiny exhibition catalogue, published to accompany the showing, features two historical papers, one dealing with the rebirth of the Polish state, and the other one with the 'Miracle on the Vistula' proper; the third text – bearing striking similarities to Part II in Joanna Wolańska, *Katedra ormiańska we Lwowie w latach 1902–1938. Przemiany architektoniczne i dekoracja wnętrza*, Warsaw: Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, 2010 (Poza Krajem) offers a sketch of Rosen's life and work.

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Flowers and Windows: The First Art Exhibitions in Prague in the 19th Century and the Shaping of Modern Exhibition Spaces

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Abstract

The staging of art exhibitions has been a decisive factor in the formation of the modern art scene since the beginning of the 19th century at the latest. The art exhibition served as a space that facilitated regular viewing and discussions of contemporary artistic production. In the Spring of 1832 an art exhibition opened in Prague that provided an alternative to the official academic exhibition held annually since 1821. The show attracted critical opinions both inland and abroad. For this reason, its analysis can provide an insight into early concepts and ideas of an art exhibiting, which can be regarded as a space of contest among the artists and of encounter between the artists and the public, as well as a site of development of modern audiences and their sensitivity.

Keywords

Prague Exhibitions; 1832 Art Exhibition; Clementinum; Kampa Island

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Flowers and Windows: The First Art Exhibitions in Prague in the 19th Century and the Shaping of Modern Exhibition Spaces

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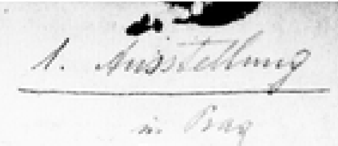
Introduction

The staging of art exhibitions has been a decisive factor in the formation of the modern art world since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century. The art exhibition along with the museum or art gallery became a space that facilitated regular viewing and discussion not only of historic art, but also of contemporary artistic production (**Figure 1**). Through exhibiting, practising artists had to engage with the anonymous public, critics and potential patrons or buyers, who, in turn, were offered the possibility of comparing their personal individual tastes with contemporary trends in art. The exhibition was established as a place where the artwork became public; it opened up a space of interaction among the individual actors of the art world, its economy and politics included.[1]

Exhibition histories offer the opportunity to redefine our standpoint in viewing artworks and concentrate more on the original context of their presentation, circulation and mutual influence. Through analysis of exhibitions, we can trace the confrontations of parallel scenes, both official and alternative, national and foreign, and the use of exhibiting for the purposes of cultural diplomacy, ideological purposes or political manipulations. No less importantly, it is possible to analyse the birth and formation of modern attitudes towards art and its judgement – which were very much formed within the 'space' of public exhibiting.

The physical space of the exhibition / gallery has become one of the attributes of modern urbanized society and one of the spaces of its cultivation. Insights arising out of research into exhibition histories sustain the hypothesis that a certain public composed previously of individual figures was meeting there in a common environment that enabled, in various ways, its symbolic formation. This could simply be the cultivation of an art-loving public including new patrons of art or, at a subtler level, the formation of a national cultured community and its manners of behaviour. The vehicle of these processes, art and its presentation, may hide various ideologically based manipulations. Whether these manipulations were deliberate or occurred incidentally is the matter of discussion. However, the analysis of various specific case

1) On exhibitions as a rising phenomenon in nineteenth-century culture see basic titles such as: Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995; Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011. As a comprehensive study on the role of exhibition spaces in the politics of art see Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.



Kunstausstellung in der Akademie zu Prag, zu Anfang des Jahrs 1821.

Erfunden, oder nach der Natur.

a. Oelgemählde.

1. Žiska vor Prag gelagert, eine Composition von vielen Figuren, von *Wenzel Markowsky* aus Prag.
2. Die Marter der Maccabäer, von *Joseph Führich*, aus Kratzau.
3. Das Kind Jesu zwischen zwey knienden Engeln bethend, von *Franz Tkadlik*, aus Prag.
4. Porträt des Schauspielers Löwe als Jaromir in der Ahnfrau; Kniestück, von *Sulzer* aus Winterthur.
5. Porträt des Sängers Hauser als Faust in der Oper dieses Namens; halbe Figur, von demselben.
6. Porträt des Flötenspielers Janusch, Lehrers am hiesigen Conservatorium der Musik; Brustbild, von demselben.
7. Porträt des Feldzeugmeisters Grafen Hieronymus von Colloredo-Mannsfeld; Brustbild, von *Franz Horcziczka* aus Prag.
8. Porträt des Zeichners Teiczek; halbe Figur, von demselben.
9. Porträt des Grafen Wilhelm von Clam-Gallas, in der Tracht eines kaiserlichen Edelknaben; halbe Figur, von *Joseph Quaisser* aus Seifersdorf Bunzlauer Kreises.

10. 11. Zwey Porträte von Ungenannten, von *Anton Machek*.
12. 13. Ein männliches und ein weibliches Porträt, von *Franz Hochelber* aus Tetschen.
14 — 22. Köpfe und Brustbilder nach dem Leben, von *Ignaz Schmedla* aus Prag.
23. Landschaft: eine Gegend in Bayern, von *Joseph Lexa* aus Jesenicz.

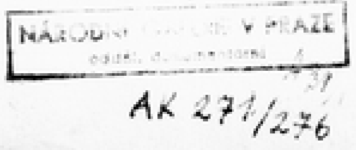


Figure 1: Title page of the exhibition catalogue from 1821.

Source: Archives of the National Gallery in Prague/Library of the National Gallery in Prague.

studies leaves no doubt that the presentation of artworks cannot be regarded as an impartial undertaking.

The case study presented in this text is the reading of an art exhibition staged in Prague in 1832. For reasons explained later, we can regard it as an outstanding example of exhibitionary practice in Prague: it summed up the preceding period of exhibiting and highlighted concepts that would be important for the future. The aim of the research is to follow the specifics of the exhibition and to relate them to two more general phenomena: the development of exhibition spaces and their symbolic use, and the question of the public as related to the modern art sphere.

The (conscious) formation of early exhibition spaces in the early nineteenth century as a place for staging modern art in active relation to the rising art public has not, as yet, been sufficiently discussed in relation to Prague.[2] The question of the art public (and a slow shift in its social class identification) appears as an important issue connected not only with the changes of the actors appearing on the art scene itself, but also in the context of contemporary society marked by rising patriotic and later nationalistic feelings. While stating this, it is necessary to keep in mind a due context: at that time Prague was one of the centres of the crown lands of the Habsburg Empire and, as in other comparable cities, the art scene was slowly starting to develop modern strategies vis-à-vis the changing social and political conditions in Europe.[3]

Before turning to spring 1832, it will be necessary to highlight three points relevant for the further discussion: the early history of art shows in Prague; their pre-history as exemplified by earlier events of a similar type; the emerging outlines of 'thinking' about exhibition space in Prague during the first third of the nineteenth century.

The early history of art exhibiting in Prague[4]

The tradition of public art exhibitions in Prague goes back to the exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts introduced shortly after the founding of the institution in 1800. These shows were held annually from 1801 on the occasion of the distribution of awards for outstanding pupils by the board of the Society of the Patriotic Friends of the Arts (Společnost vlasteneckých přátel umění, SVPU).[5] The aristocratic Society, as the founding institution of the Academy, served as a supervising body which oversaw the functioning of the school, including the promotion of 'high taste' through by giving awards to outstanding student works that responded best to academic standards. The student show would take place early each year, at the time

2) Even the author of a recent chapter on the topic concentrates exclusively on late 19th century and remarks upon the lack of such a study. Markian Prokopovych, 'Museums and their Publics: Visitors, Societies and the Press', in Matthew Rampley, Markian Prokopovych and Nóra Veszprémi, *The Museum Age in Austria-Hungary: Art and Empire in the Long Nineteenth Century*, University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021, 180–212.

3) Cf. the comment on the formation of specific strategies in Rampley, Prokopovych and Veszprémi, *The Museum Age in Austria-Hungary*, 5.

4) This research into the early history of art shows in Prague is made possible by an ongoing project of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Science in Prague. Its provisional results are continuously published in the Database of Art Exhibitions in the Czech Lands 1820–1950 accessible at: https://databazevystav.udu.cas.cz.

5) According to the Society's annual report of 3 January 1801, the results of the pupils were for the first time shown to the public. See Roman Prahl, *Posedlost kresbou* [The obsession with drawing], Prague: Divus 1998, 116.

of the annual meeting of the board. The aristocratic members of the board would go round the Academy spaces situated in the former Jesuit College, the Clementinum, in Prague. Three large rooms on the second floor of its Baroque building (adjacent on one side to a hallway and lit by windows on the other) not only provided, at that time, spaces suitable for drawing lessons. They were also used to display student works.[6] The shows included drawings, but very quickly works in three dimensions, too, (works in metal, reliefs, sculpture), as well as paintings and prints. Although the Academy exhibition – and the school as a whole – was supported by a private aristocratic organization, it soon became the dominant institution in the land in terms of setting up the artistic canon and official standards. It was a space of inclusion / exclusion with all the resulting consequences for artists and the art public, especially later, when the rising distinction between Czech and German, based on language and ethnicity, became a focus of conflict over precisely the issue of who was and was not included.[7]

In 1821 the exhibition opened for the first time to the wider public, albeit still mostly aristocratic or upper middle-class.[8] The accounts of the Society of Patriotic Friends from the early 1820s document finances allocated for the printing of the catalogue and also sums raised as a result of its sale and as an entrance fee to the exhibition (introduced in 1822) (**Figure 2**).[9] The opening of the exhibition to the public can be regarded as a logical step in the growth of exhibiting in Prague as one of the centres of the multinational Habsburg empire. This development, together with the rise of modern museum culture after 1800, led to the creation and diversification of the 'museum landscape' of the Empire and served as an element of the new cultural space designated for the aristocratic society and cultivated higher-middle class public.[10] In Prague this followed analogous processes in the other art centres nearby regarded as models. In the case of Prague in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was especially Vienna (as the centre of the monarchy) and Dresden (attractive due to its proximity to Prague and the vivid socio-cultural milieu of its court, as a counterweight to the capital) that fulfilled this function.[11] But an eye was kept on other German cities, too, where the first modern

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6) The Academy premises were described in guidebooks to Prague. They consisted of one large, so called drawing room and two smaller ones, used for copying antique plaster casts and drawing by artificial light respectively. See, for example, Wolfgang Adolf Gerle, *Prag und seine Merkwürdigkeiten, für Fremde und Einheimische*, Prague: Borrosch, 1825, 117–118.

7) For basic background and specificities of the situation see Jiří Kořalka, *Češi v Habsburské říši a v Evropě 1815–1914* [Czechs in the Habsburg Empire and in Europe, 1815-1914], Prague: Karolinum, 2000; Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914*, 2nd edition, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006; Rita Krueger, *Czech, German and Noble: Status and National Identity in Habsburg Bohemia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009.

8) The social stratification of the art public probably remained limited to these higher classes long into the nineteenth century. See the research of the topic by Zdeněk Hojda, 'Kdo nakupoval na výstavách Krasoumné jednoty?' [Who purchased items at the exhibitions of the Bohemian Art Union?] in Jiří Kotalík, *Město v české kultuře 19. století* [The city in Czech culture of the 19th century], Prague: National Gallery in Prague, 1982, 133–153.

9) Archive of the National Gallery Prague, fonds SVPU, inv. no. AA 1506 and AA 1522. – For details of the exhibition see the database Art Exhibitions in the Czech Lands 1820–1950, https://databazevystav.udu.cas.cz, entry: '1821 Exhibition of the Academy in Prague'.

10) See Matthew Rampley, 'Introduction,' in Rampley, Prokopovych and Veszprémi, *The Museum Age*, 1.

11) In the early 19th century, the Dresden Romantic circles and Protestant milieu were appealing to Prague artists and culture elites, see Roman Prahl, *Prag 1780–1830: Kunst und Kultur zwischen Epochen und Völkern*, Prague: Eminent 2000. See also Pavla Machalíková and Petr Tomášek, *Josef Führich (1800–1875). Z Chrastavy do Vídně/Von Kratzau nach Wien*, Prague: National Gallery in Prague, 2014, 78–82. Details of contacts are described also in the autobiography of Joseph Ritter von Führich, *Lebensskizze. Zusammengestellt aus dessen im Jahrgange 1844 des Alamanachs Libussa erschienenen Selbstbioghaphie und den wichtigen von Freundeshand gesammelten bis zur Gegenwart reichenden Daten*, Vienna and Pest: n.p., 1875, 13–14.

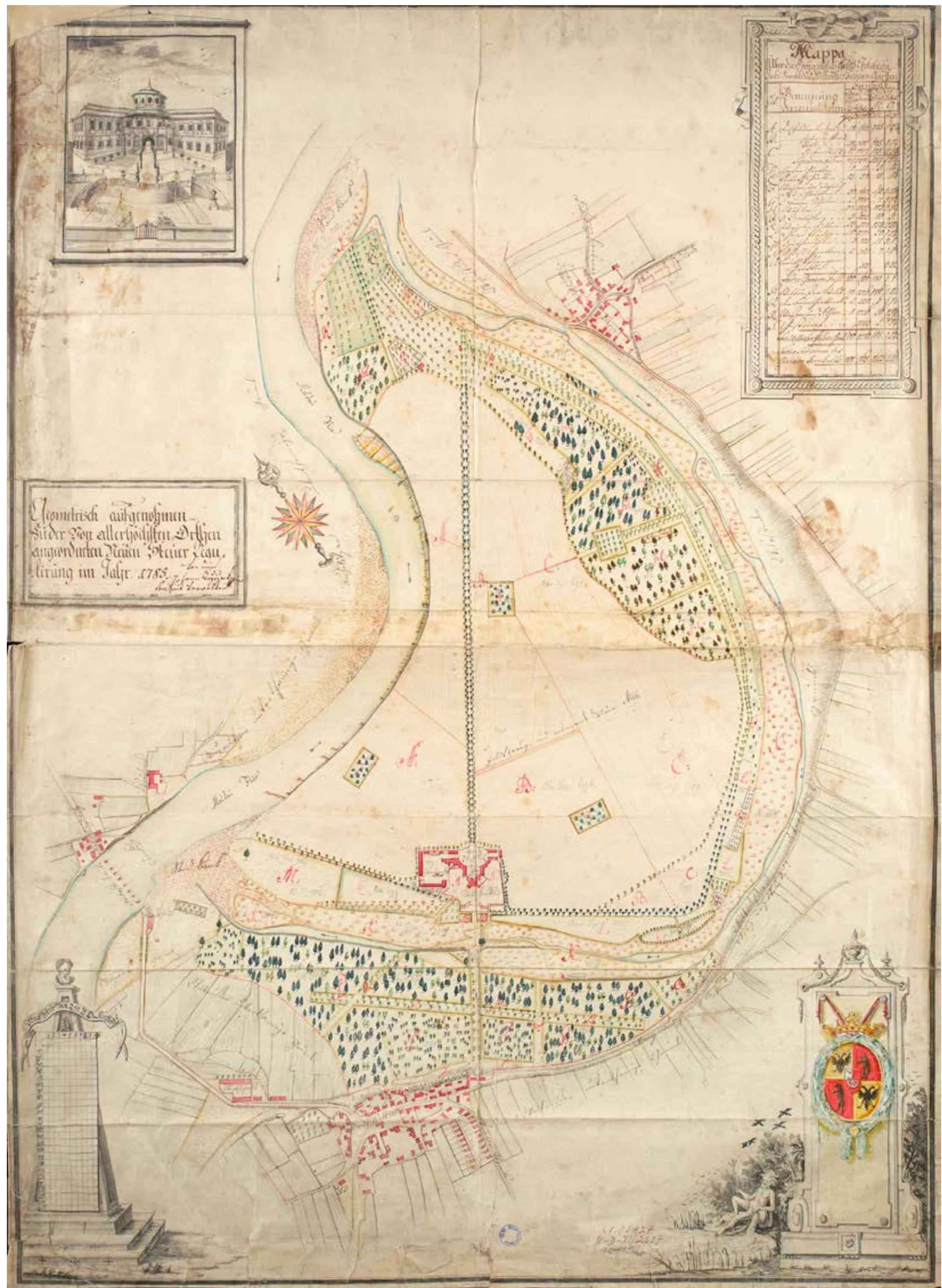

Figure 2: Johann Křížek, Plan of Veltrusy Chateau and Park (1785).
Indian ink and watercolor on paper, 95 x 68 cm.
Source: Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences.

art societies and unions were founded and started to stage their public shows.[12] As elsewhere, the goal of the Prague exhibition was to present student works to the art-loving public for their mutual benefit: to educate public taste according to the latest creations of art professionals (which was one of the goals of the existence of the Academy since its foundation), but also to enable the connection between the artist and the (buying) public. The art market developed only slowly: the modern artists' union buying artworks from the exhibition and distributing them through lottery only started to operate in Prague in April 1836, and a catalogue with the list of prices was published for the first time in 1840.[13]

Thus until 1836, no sales were facilitated through the exhibition. The Academy, which was still tied to traditional forms of patronage by members of the Society of Patriotic Friends, responded to complaints about the lack of support for creative artists by taking other steps. In order to enable its students to gain an income as members of increasingly professionalized society, it awarded commissions directly to some of them as a form of stipend for prospective students. A commission from the early 1820s by count Christian Christoph Clam-Gallas for five altar paintings for churches at his properties in North Bohemia enabled the young Joseph Führich (1800–1875), for example, who later topped his career as an academician in Vienna, to stay in Prague and continue his studies at the Academy.[14] Similarly, count Silva Tarouca's commission for a family portrait gallery at his chateau in Čechy pod Kosířem, some 20 kilometres west of Olomouc in Moravia, helped the later famous painter Josef Mánes (1820–1871) to finance a study trip to Munich after 1844.[15] Such commissions by rich aristocrats serve as examples of the transformation of traditional art patronage into more modern forms of support.

A second important issue of the modern art world that was reflected in Prague exhibitions as early as the 1820s was the way that art professionals came into contact with each other. Thus, the fourth public exhibition in 1824 already brought an important insight into art from abroad – namely from Dresden. It can be regarded as the first 'international' art exhibition in Prague. Its organization was probably due to the activity of students, rather than the conservative representatives of the aristocratic Society who were traditionally responsible. In comparison with the first students of the Academy, those who enrolled at the Prague Academy around 1820 were increasingly aware of the need to cultivate their status as professional artists offering work for sale in competition with others. Obviously, much can be attributed to the initiative of the young and energetic Joseph Führich (1800-1876), who closely followed developments in contemporary art, especially the work of the Nazarenes, famous for their 'secession' from the Art Academy in Vienna, and who also established strong contacts with Dresden Romantic circles around 1820.[16] In 1824, Führich managed to organize the shipment of a selection of

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12) Examples include art exhibitions in Nuremberg in 1792, Hamburg in 1817 (opened to the public from 1826), Karlsruhe 1818/1821, and Munich 1823/1824.

13) Sources for the history of the artists' union and its sales lottery were published and interpreted by Zdeněk Hojda and Roman Prahl, *Kunstverein nebo/oder Künstlerverein? Hnutí umělců v Praze 1830–1856 / Die Künstlerbewegung in Prag 1830–1856*, Prague: Artefactum 2004.

14) Machalíková and Tomášek, *Josef Führich*, esp. 60 and 129.

15) Cf. Anežka Mikulcová and Pavla Machalíková, 'Chronologie', in Pavla Machalíková, ed., *Let s voskovými křídly. Josef Mánes 1820–1871*, Prague: Arbor vitae societatis, 2022.

16) Cf. Machalíková and Tomášek, *Josef Führich*, 105–106.

contemporary artworks which included paintings by the director of the Dresden Academy, Karl Vogel von Vogelstein (1888–1868) and two prominent landscapists: Johann Christian Clausen Dahl (1788–1857) and Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840). Already acknowledged in Dresden, they subsequently had a great impact on painting in Prague, and their prior reputation in the German city may have contributed to their positive reception there, too.

Probably most importantly, the show of 1824 spawned the first public art discussion in the Prague press.[17] Until then, lists of works had been published in newspapers as announcements of local exhibitions, but that was all. In contrast, in 1824 critical voices were formulated for the first time in a sequence of articles on the exhibition by various authors, thus launching a continuous stream of critical polemic.[18] The topics of discussion were Romanticism and its iconography (dismissed at that time as 'sick' fantasy), disputes over the relations between the universal and the particular in art, and discussion of the existence of a national school of painting in Bohemia that partly also reflected contemporary research into medieval painting.[19] The latter was a very important point, since amongst Czech-speakers, it spurred debate specifically on the idea that each country or nation had a certain artistic character that could be compared with others both in historical and contemporary art.

To exhibit: to compare and to compete?

The idea of comparing and competing in an exhibition touches on the question of how to characterize the modern habit of exhibiting in Bohemia, and the ways it can be linked to its roots. Recently, this question was touched upon in connection with the early history of the European museums of applied art, linked to exhibitions of handcrafts.[20] Already in the eighteenth century a milieu had formed in which it became natural to present (and view) the latest artefacts and achievements of handcraft. Gradually, a culture of exhibiting sprung up that demanded specific spaces, public, attention and even behaviour: on the side of the exhibitors, organizers and attendants. This milieu can be connected with modern art exhibitions in that being visual spectacles, they relied on very similar principles of display and built upon similar habits. Although there has been debate as to whether or not it is possible to connect the first exhibitions of art with the preceding shows of products of handicrafts and applied arts, the habit of putting artefacts on public display for evaluation, the setting of prices or even sale was undeniably adopted very soon by the modern artworld as well.[21]

17) Roman Prahl, 'Počátky a "konce" výtvarné kritiky v Praze' [The beginnings and the 'ends' of art criticism in Prague], *Documenta Pragensia* 19, 2001, 305–318.

18) For basic sources and bibliography see the Database of Exhibitions (as in note 4), entry: '1824 Exhibition of the Academy in Prague'.

19) Alois Primisser, 'Über die alten Gemälde auf dem Schlosse Karlstein bey Prag', *Jahrbücher der Litteratur* XXVII, Beilage: Anzeigeblatt für Wissenschaft und Kunst (Wien), 1824, 1–3.

20) Matthew Rampley, Markian Prokopovych and Nóra Vezsprémi, *Liberalism, Nationalism and Design Reform in the Habsburg Empire. Museums of Design, Industry and the Applied Arts*, London and New York: Routledge 2020. On the element of competition see, also, Marta Filipová, ed., *Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840–1940. Great Exhibitions on the Margins*, London and New York: Routledge 2015.

21) The argument in favour of this connection was developed in the Czech context by Jan Krčmář, but later contested by Zdeněk Hojda, 'Geneze uměleckých výstav v Praze 1791–1851' [The genesis of art exhibitions in Prague, 1791-1815], *Documenta Pragensia* 12, 1995, 317–324.

These first modern predecessors of the art exhibition in the Habsburg Empire have been identified in recent scholarship on the Czech lands.[22] There appear to be specific traits in their character that further support the above thesis about their relationship to art exhibitions, and their visual appearance also stands in connection with later exhibitions of art.

The first of these enterprises was an exhibition of products of art industry initiated by the imperial counsellor for commerce and industry Otto Loscani and the future High Chancellor, Count Rudolf Chotek, on the occasion of the visit of the Empress Maria Theresia to Bohemia in August 1754.[23] It was organized in the form of a market at Chotek's property at the Veltrusy chateau and the surrounding park (**Figures 3** and **4**). Producers of various artefacts were asked to present their products in order to demonstrate the quality of handicraft production in Bohemia. There were market stalls and tables arranged in the great hall of the chateau and in the park in front of it. The Empress was shown around the exhibition stalls, and she awarded golden pieces (medals) to the most outstanding producers of her choice, a forerunner of the later practice of awarding medals at the Academy exhibitions. The clear goal of the organizers was to demonstrate the high quality of domestic production, and we can regard this as a way of distinguishing the event from ordinary markets, since it ushered in an element of competition, which would later be so important for modern exhibiting. As a whole, the exhibition of 1754 served to strengthen the position of its organizers – the landed aristocracy – within the crownlands of the Empire.[24] On this point it was not dissimilar from the staging of Academy art exhibitions, which were backed by the resources of the same social milieu and were intended initially for a very similar aristocratic public.

On a similar occasion nearly forty years later, another, related exhibition took place. When the Emperor Leopold visited Prague in 1791 for his coronation as king of Bohemia, the High Chancellor of Bohemia, Heinrich Rottenhan, organized a Jubilee Land Exhibition (a so-called 'Waarenkabinett' or cabinet of wares) in his honour. This time, a show of the most outstanding products of manufacturing and handicraft was staged in the great refectory hall of the Clementinum in the centre of Prague, in order to demonstrate the quality of applied art production in the Kingdom of Bohemia. As the event was a part of the official coronation program, a detailed description published at the time enable us to reconstruct it.[25] As in 1754, no 'artworks' in the strict sense of the word were displayed, but the nature of the event as a public presentation and its arrangement did bring it close to the structure of the future art exhibition. Some of the artefacts on display, which included gems, carved three-dimensional objects, painted glass and earthenware ornament, came close to the sphere of fine art, as far as the craftsmanship was concerned. Also, their viewing in public could resemble similar

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22) Matthew Rampley, in Rampley, Prokopovych and Veszprémi, *Liberalism, Nationalism and Design Reform*, 15.

23) On the exhibition of manufacture goods in Veltrusy see a comprehensive information on http://www.veltrusy.net/zajmavosti/veletrh/cs_CZ-4225.html (accessed on 11. 2. 2022); Matthew Rampley in Rampley, Prokopovych and Veszprémi, *Liberalism, Nationalism and Design Reform*, 14–15; Tomáš Jelínek, 'Zemská výstava v Klementinu roku 1791' [The land exhibition in the Clementinum in 1791], *Documenta Pragensia* 12, 1995, 325–331.

24) Cf. Rita Krueger, *Czech, German and Noble*.

25) Johan Debrois, *Aktenmässige Krönungsgeschichte des Königs von Böhmen Leopold des Zweite*, 1792, available in reprint in *Sto let práce. Zpráva o všeobecné zemské výstavě v Praze 1891* [One hundred years of practice: report on the general land exhibition in Prague, 1891], Prague: Committee of the 1891 Jubilee Exhibition, 1893, I, 8–11.

Figure 3: Benedikt Piringer, after Luisa Clary-Aldringen born Chotek, View of Veltrusy Chateau and Park (First Half of the Nineteenth Century).

Source: Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences.

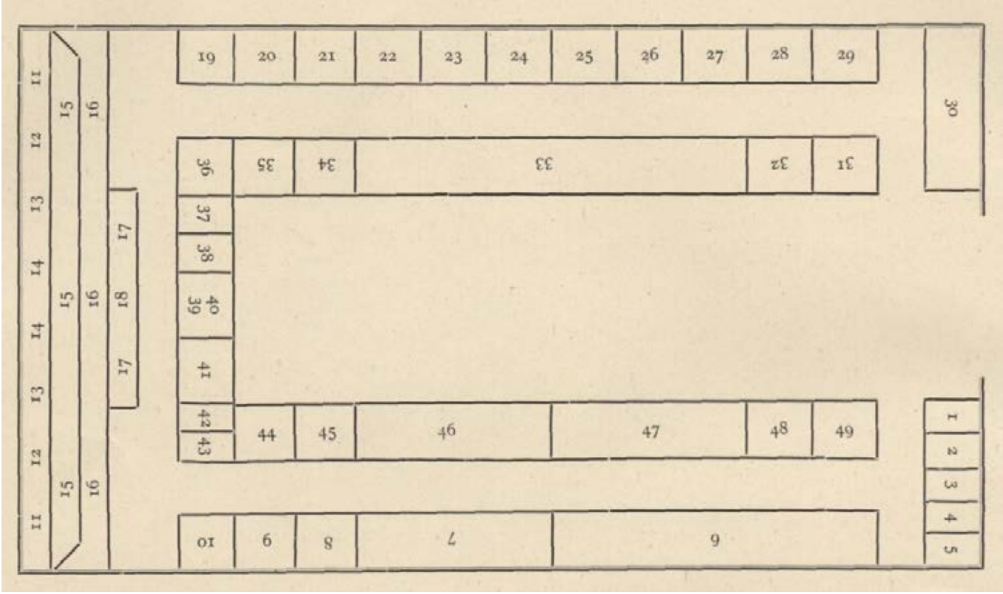


Figure 4: Plan of Clementinum refectory with the layout of the 'Waarenkabinett' installation in 1791.

Source: *Sto let práce: Zpráva o Všeobecné zemské výstavě v Praze 1891* [One hundred years of work: Report on the General National Exhibition in Prague, 1891] (Prague, 1893).

experience in art exhibitions where the boundaries between arts and handicrafts were often erased.[26]

The whole exhibition also testifies to the competitive element behind such events. A polemic in the Prague press shows that the connection declared between the exhibition and the achievements of manufacturing industry in Bohemia was contested in favour of industry in the German lands, but it was later successfully defended in competition with foreign producers of similar artefacts.[27] The element of competition for commercial purposes in industrial exhibitions was akin to that in the art sphere, and for very similar reasons: setting prices and the sales of goods and artworks accepted by the jury or the public as outstanding.

Exhibition spaces

Staged almost half a century after the Veltrusy park exhibition of 1754, a festive venue was chosen for the 1791 event and this choice of location was an important aspect in the development of exhibitionary practice. The great hall of the Clementinum boasted a large, unified space very well lit by a row of rounded windows reaching from floor to ceiling on one of the longer sides. The choice of hall testifies to the effort of the organizers to search for a suitable space for the combined activities of clear presentation, comfortable viewing and, perhaps, due discussion, even if only as a social event. An analogous viewing and social experience at that time might have been offered by a visit to a private aristocratic gallery, or a public marketplace.

A plan enclosed with the description of the ceremonies in 1791 makes it possible to reconstruct both the composition and the layout of the exhibition (**Figures 5 and 6**). In contrast to the Veltrusy fair, where each producer had their own stall,[28] the artifacts in the Clementinum were sorted and arranged according to type and / or material, and with a caption identifying their origin and / or producer.[29] They were distributed in the hall according to a central symmetrical arrangement: along and on the walls and on a central table. The groups of individual objects were probably arranged according to size into elegant hangings or compositions. The arrangement of marketplace stalls was elaborated here by sorting into groups of objects of the same material and by creating a unified exposition.-

From analogous cases it can be assumed that the choice of locale in 1791 was a product of careful deliberation. A very similar example, as far as the room is concerned, can be found in Dresden, which was an important cultural model for Prague due to the fame of the Dresden court. Exhibitions at the Dresden Academy, which was founded in 1764, were a novelty in the context of Central Europe, as were the arrangements of the Dresden court

26) Even the exhibitions of the Academy in Prague juxtaposed academic paintings with artefacts such as goldsmith's work, glass and porcelain paintings, and curiosities such as landscapes composed of moss or still lifes made of shells or butterfly wings. Radim Vondráček, 'Voskové figuríny, kaligrafie a výšivky: Hranice umění na akademických výstavách raného 19. století' [Wax figurines, calligraphy and embroidery: the limits of art of the academy exhibition of the early 19th century] in Eva Bendová and Pavla Machalíková, eds, *Kariéra s paletou,* Pilsen: Západočeská galerie v Plzni / B&P Publishing, 2019, 31–37.

27) *Sto let práce,* 11; Jelínek, 'Zemská výstava v Klementinu roku 1791'.

28) 'Veltruský veletrh', http://www.veltrusy.net/zajmavosti/veletrh/cs_CZ-4225.html.

29) Debrois, *Aktenmässige Krönungsgeschichte.*

Figure 5: View of the Interior of the Clementinum Refectory, before 1891.

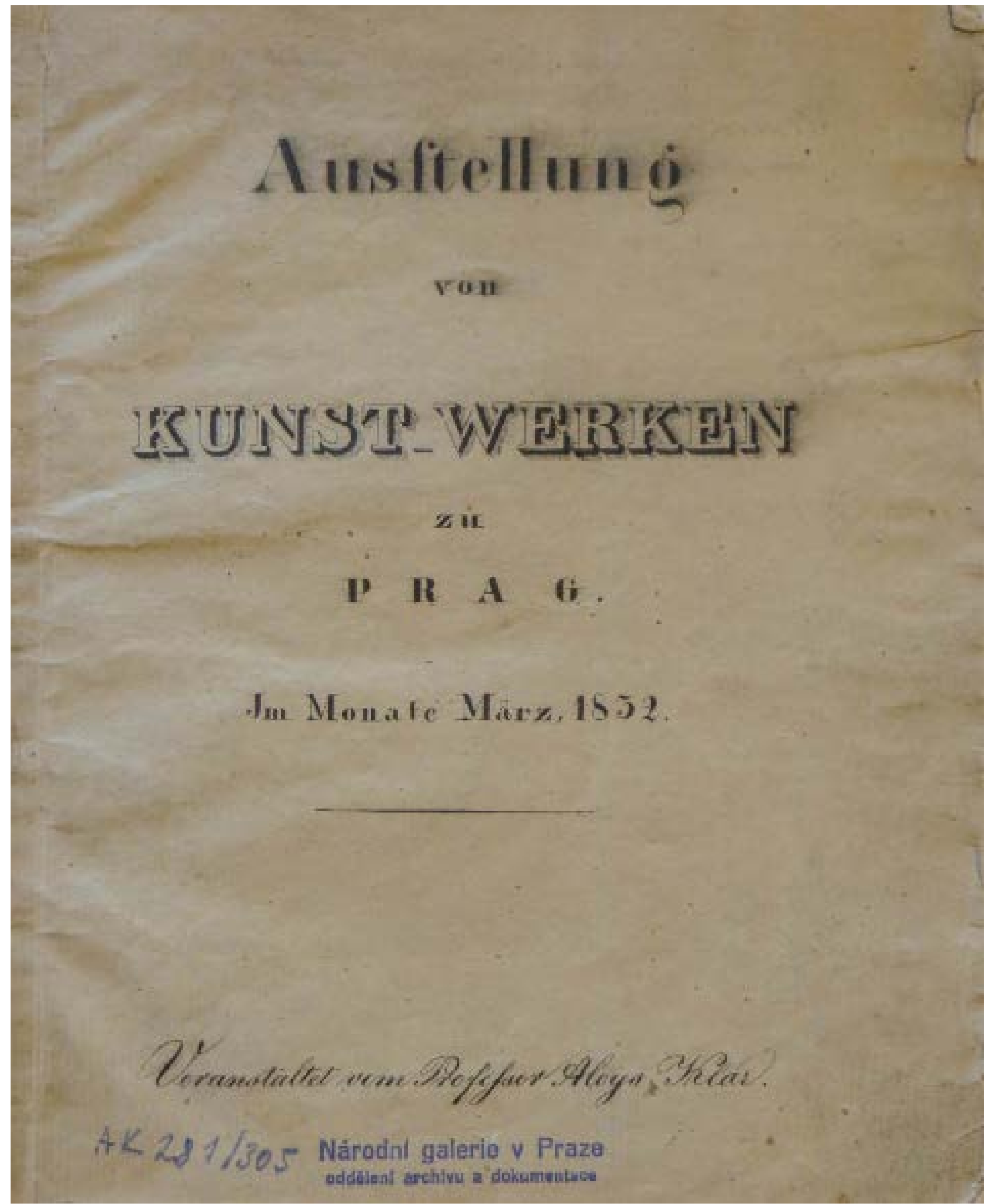
Source: *Sto let práce: Zpráva o Všeobecné zemské výstavě v Praze 1891* [One hundred years of work: Report on the General National Exhibition in Prague, 1891] (Prague, 1893).

collections after 1794 for public viewing, an innovation that attracted considerable attention in cultured and art-loving circles. The requirements of such spaces were clear: large, well-lit, unified spaces. In Dresden, one of the halls for this purpose was created by reconstruction of the court stalls in the 1740s and a new exhibition hall was built in 1829 and decorated in a sophisticated way.[30]

Although Dresden was an important model, it is interesting to note that the spatial dispositions of the Prague Academy exhibitions after 1800, quite soon after the exhibition of 1791, were different. The three drawing rooms of the Academy of Fine Arts were located in smaller spaces on the floor above the refectory and served as the venue for Academy exhibitions until 1839. This situation is analogous to Vienna where the exhibitions of the Imperial Academy of Art continued to be held in the drawing halls of the Academy in St. Anne's cloister from 1786 until 1839.[31] In Prague the academic exhibition later 'rotated' through aristocratic palaces in an explicit search for suitably large premises: reviews of the 1840 exhibition praised the new locale in the Coloredo-Mansfeld Palace where the large,

30) Katharina Köpping, *Die Ausstellungen der Akademie für bildenden Künste Dresden im 19. Jahrhundert. Konzeptionen und Tendenzen*, Saarbrücken: VDM, 2011, 8–10.

31) Public exhibitions of the Academy in Vienna were held in the so called 'modellsaal' and 'antikensaal' in the building of St. Anna cloister from 1786 (1786, 1790, 1820, 1824, 1834 and later every year, after 1840 they were moved to the Polytechnical Institute).



Ausſtellung

von

KUNST-WERKEN

zu

P R A G.

Jm Monate März, 1832.

Veranstaltet vom Professor Aloys Klar.

AK 281/305 Národní galerie v Praze
oddělení archivu a dokumentace

Figure 6: Title page of the Exhibition Catalogue from 1832.

Source: Archives of the National Gallery in Prague.

light hall offered a so far unmatched occasion for exhibiting large paintings.[32] Surprisingly, and for reasons probably linked to the circumstances of the property, exhibitions were not held again in the Clementinum refectory until 1926, when there was a display of sculptures by Jan Štursa. Extant photographs show the desirable effect of lighting through the row of large windows.[33]

Another point of reference for the staging of exhibitions in the early nineteenth century was provided by the arrangement of paintings in contemporary aristocratic picture galleries. In Prague these included the Czernin, Colloredo-Mansfeld and Nostitz galleries, to name just the most famous examples.[34] The typical hanging in such galleries was classified as 'gentlemanly,' signifying a practice of hanging paintings that was common in aristocratic collections.[35] Works were organised symmetrically, according to size, format or topic and, typically, without any captions.[36] These arrangements usually followed the disposition of the gallery walls, with fixed panelling very often designed to accommodate the paintings in decorative arrangements: they could therefore be designated primarily as aesthetic arrangements.[37] This stood in contrast to the approach of emerging art historical scholarship, the first manifestations of 'scholarly' hanging being an ordering by schools of painting and by chronology. Such installations reflected the nascent system of art historical classification of art and relied on the interpretation of ancient art, old masters and contemporary artists as following a line of progression. Such an arrangement highlighted the present state of the arts, which were supposed to flower under the care of its sponsors, be it the emperor or aristocratic patrons. This revolutionary new system was introduced close to Prague in the famous installation of the Belvedere picture gallery in Vienna, reorganized in 1780 by Christian von Mechel. It enabled the comparison of different schools of painting, highlighting amongst them, too, the existence of national schools of art, including a German school, which contributing to the cultivation of local visitors' patriotic feelings.[38]

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32) Cf. anonymous review [Z.], 'Die Kunstausstellung', *Bohemia: oder Unterhaltungsblätter für gebildete Stände*, 13.48, 21 April 1840, 4, or the review by Bernhard Stolz, 'Bemerkungen zu der akademischen Kunstausstellung in Prag', *Ost und West: Blätter für Kunst, Literatur und geselliges Leben*, 5, 1840, Bailage Prag, 45, 3. 6., 215. The exhibition was only on display in the Colloredo Mansfeld palace in 1840. After that it moved again (with no mention of the qualities of the new locale in Morzin Palace).

33) See the database of exhibitions (cited note 4) for photographs of the premises, entry: 1926 The Exhibition of Jan Štursa.

34) Gerle, *Prag*, 100–104; Karl Eduard Reinold, *Prag und seine Umgebungen*, Prague: Haase, 1831, 114.

35) For the distinction as gentleman's/scholarly, see Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

36) See Köpping, *Die Asstellungen*; Tristan Weddingen, 'Kennerschaft ausgestellt – Die erste Hängung der Dresdner Gemäldegalerie und das verlorene Inventar von 1747', in Barbara Marx and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, eds, *Sammeln als Institution. Von der fürstlichen Wunderkammer zum Mäzenatentum des Staates*, Munich and Berlin: Deutsches Kunstverlag, 2006, 101–107.

37) The distinction between aesthetic and scientific installation is used by Deborah J. Meijers, *Kunst als Natur. Die Gemäldegalerie in Wien um 1780*, Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum 1995.

38) On Mechel and the influence of his reorganisation of the installation in Belvedere see Meijers, *Kunst als Natur*. The patriotic reading of the installation of the 'German' school was emphasised by Mechel himself, see Alice Hoppel-Harnoncourt, Eine ungewöhnliche Einrichtung wird zum fixen Bestandteil der kunsthistorischen Ordnung, in Gudrun Swoboda, ed., *Die kaiserliche Gemäldegalerie in Wien und die Anfänge des öffentlichen Kunstmuseums*, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Boehlau, 2013, I, 91–114 (see especially 91).

Unfortunately, there is no evidence regarding the very first hanging of the picture gallery of the Society of Patriotic Friends, which opened in 1796 in the Czernin Palace by Prague castle, where it remained until 1809. It is therefore assumed that it followed the above-mentioned tradition of the aristocratic picture galleries, with a symmetrical arrangement of paintings hung close to one another and set into the wall framings.[39] After 1814 the gallery of the Society opened in the newly acquired Sternberg Palace, also near the castle complex in Prague. The first installation, designed by the painter and, from 1804, gallery inspector Joseph Carl Burde, and for which there is evidence, did not present a clear concept. It followed neither chronological sequence nor national school provenance.[40] The paintings were hung in the consecutive rooms of the baroque palace in a random order, but the gallery did include a room devoted to the 'modern school,' i.e., to contemporary painting, thus partly meeting the current historicist demands for some kind of art historical chronology.

Staging an alternative in 1832

When, in 1832, an art exhibition was organised in Prague as an alternative to the official annual event of the Academy, the issue of suitable exhibition spaces was one of the motivating factors.[41] In scale it resembled the preceding official Academy exhibitions: 155 artworks were exhibited as compared 168 pieces the preceding year; the exhibitions of 1833 and 1835 featured 243 and 203 works respectively. The character of the 1832 exhibition as an 'alternative' event was determined by the conditions behind its staging rather than by the choice of the exhibiting artists, who were mostly the same as those who participated in the regular academic exhibition. It was the situation of the institutions of art in Prague around 1830 that led to these alternative enterprises. First, the growing self-consciousness of artists as autonomous professional members of the of society led to a petition to form an artists' union (Kunstverein) to support their material position and welfare, by securing the possibility of participating in the exhibition and sales of artworks.[42] Second, the death in 1829 of the first Academy director, Joseph Bergler, and, in 1830, of Franz Josef Sternberg Manderscheid, second president of the Society of the Patriotic Friends, destabilized both institutions to such an extent that the Academy exhibition of 1829 was abolished and, for a short period, ceased to be a regular annual event (no exhibition was planned for either 1830 or 1832), which left space for a new undertaking.

Under these circumstances, artists took over the initiative and staged an exhibition under the auspices of Joseph Alois Klar (1763–1833), a philanthropist, supporter of the arts and previously a professor of classical literature at Charles University. The obvious relation of

39) Vít Vlnas, *Obrazárna v Čechách 1796–1918*, Prague: National Gallery in Prague, 1996, 28.

40) Petr Šámal and Kristýna Brožová, *Umění inspektora: Josef Karel Burde (1779–1848)* [The art of the inspector: Josef Karel Burde, 1779-1848], Prague: National Gallery, 2015, 105–108. Further thinking in terms of chronology and division into schools can be followed in the catalogues (first five published 1827, 1831, 1835, 1838 and 1844) and Burde's sketches not earlier than in the 1840s.

41) For comprehensive information see the exhibition database (note 3), entry: 1832 Exhibition of Artworks in Prague, with relevant sources and bibliography.

42) The first petitioning activities in favour of founding an artists' union date to the early 1830s.

the organizers to the artists' movement is testified by the fact that almost all those who were signatories to the above-mentioned petition in support of the creation of the Artists' Union were exhibited work there.[43]

Before turning to an analysis of the early strategies of presenting art in early nineteenth-century century Prague, let us sum up the position of this particular event in Prague's early exhibition history and highlight those aspects that were of significance for the development of the exhibition as a space of interaction between art and its modern public.

Both the works exhibited and the artists involved are listed in the catalogues. Unlike the catalogues of previous exhibitions, which were published in booklet form by the Bohemian estates book publisher Gottlieb Haase, this time it was produced as a lithograph print in the workshop of Anton Svoboda, one of Prague's printers specializing in lithography.[44] The title page clearly listed Klar as the organizer of the exhibition. Although already an aging man at that time (he died a year later, at the age of 70), he supported the activities in favour of the Art Union and planned to start a foundation for young artists to enable them to travel abroad. This was a very specific goal of the exhibition and the money collected from the entrance fee and from the sale of the catalogue was used to start this fund.[45]

It is certainly interesting to note here that Klar had a continual interest in new art and young artists; in the 1820s he had stayed for some time in Dresden, where he had entered into art circles connected with current German art.[46] He became acquainted with the director of the Dresden Academy Christian Vogel von Vogelstein, the Romantic writer and poet Ludwig Tieck and art historians Carl August Böttinger and Carl Förster. These contacts were very similar to those of Führich, who had a comparable experience in Dresden when organizing the 1824 Prague exhibition (in 1832 he was already away from Prague on a Rome stipend, thus unable to take an active part in the organization).[47] Klar included the work of artists from Dresden, and in this, together with the stress on younger artists in Prague inspired by recent German art, he was following in the footsteps of the 1824 exhibition.

The year 1832 thus saw a hitherto unprecedented collection of foreign artworks on show in Prague. It attracted considerable attention in contemporary press reviews.[48] Its importance can also be demonstrated if we compare it with the numbers of foreign exhibitors taking part in the Prague annual shows so far. While the number of artists from abroad had not previously exceeded ten (six in 1824, five in 1825, between six and eight in

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43) The relevant documents from the Archives of the National Gallery in Prague are largely reprinted in Hojda and Prahl, *Kunstverein nebo/oder Künstlerverein?*, 95-240.

44) The lithography workshops are listed in Karel Vladislav Zap, *Popsánj královského hlawnjho města Prahy pro cizince i domácj* [The description of the royal capital of Prague for foreigners and locals], Prague: Václav Špinka, 1835, 293.

45) The sum reached almost 140 golden crowns; the funds were allocated for an artist's stipend for the first time only in 1838, under the direction of Klar's son Pavel Aloys. See Rudolf Müller, *Die Prof. Dr. Aloys Klar´sche Künstlerstiftung nach ihrer Bedeutung und Wirksamkeit, unter Beischluss biographischer Skizzen*, Prague: Commissions-Verlag von F. Kytka, 1883.

46) For biographical details about Alois Klar see Müller, *Die Prof. Dr. Aloys Klar´sche Künstlerstiftung*.

47) For the connections to Dresden and Führich´s activities see Machalíková and Tomášek, 78–82.

48) Although the two reviews by Böttiger and Müller found so far can seem very limited, when combined with two additional, shorter notices, they present for Prague in that time quite rich material: [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstaustellung,' *Artistischen Notizenblatt* 10.10, 1832, 37–38; [Anton Müller], 'Kunstnachricht,' *Bohemia: oder Unterhaltungsblätter für gebildete Stände*, 5.44, 10 April 1832, 3.

the years 1828 to 1831) and the number of works no more than two dozen (seventeen in 1824, fifteen in 1828, 25 in 1829 and nine in 1831), in 1832, in contrast, 25 foreigners exhibited 50 works.[49] Aristocratic patrons from Dresden were also named as important supporters, in particular, Georg Karl von Nostitz-Jänkendorf (1781–1838), an officer in the Imperial Russian army, and Bernhard von Lindenau (1779–1854), prime minister of Saxony, and the event was explicitly characterized as an encounter between two neighbouring artistic regions, Saxony and Bohemia, mapping the state of the arts in each of them.[50] A large part of the initiative was obviously due to the artists themselves – other names stressed in the press as important organizers were the exhibiting Dresden painters Vogel von Vogelstein (who sent ten paintings) (**Figure 7**), Johann Clausen Christian Dahl (**Figure 8**) and Caspar David Friedrich and (**Figure 9**). While Dahl sent a typical landscape of his representing a shipwreck at the northern seacoast, Friedrich sent a variant of his *Swans in Morning Light*. All three painters had already been known in Prague since first exhibiting there in 1824. Among other foreign authors were painters from Leipzig, Nürnberg, Brussels and a number from Vienna, including Ferdinand Waldmüller (1793–1865), Johann Ender (1793–1854), Johann Dallinger (1783–1844), Joseph Salomon (1793–1856) or Anton Einsle (1801–1871).[51]

The commentaries on the participation of foreigners highlight the motif of competition and comparison of 'the most pleasing products of the land with outstanding works from neighbouring Saxony.'[52] The idea of comparing the levels attained in national art became increasingly common from the 1840s onwards and reached its apogee at the first great international exhibition in London in 1851 and after.[53] One review interpreted the exhibition as an explicit exercise in competition between artists in the public gaze, and it also highlighted the benefits for artists of different generations. For younger artists, it acted as a spur to encourage them further, while for more established artists, the review contended, it was an opportunity to sell work.[54]

Among the artists from Prague and Bohemia, the younger generation prevailed, in other words, adherents of Nazarenism and the current of German religious-patriotic art whose works combined the fashionable sentimentality of religious painting with subjects from national history. Two of the largest groups of work were sent by Josef Führich and František Tkadlík (1786–1840), both of them on a state stipend in Rome at the time, and both of whom had pre-eminent positions in the Bohemian artworld of the time (**Figures 10 and 11**). In continuation of an older discussions on difference in style between Czech and German schools of painting, they represented two different positions that became topical: while the German school was held to be associated with sharp, broken lines, dramatic postures and

49) Birgit Lange, 'Der Stufengang der vaterländischen Kunst. Die Prager Akademieaustellungen der Gesellschaft patriotischer Kunstfreunde (1821–1833),' in Susanne Kimmig-Völkner, Eva Pluhařová-Grigienė and Kai Wenzel, eds, *Gestaltungsräume. Studien zur Kunstgeschichte in Mittel– und Ostmitteleuropa. Festschrift zu Ehren von Prof. Dr. Michaela Marek*, Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2017, 89.

50) [Müller], 'Kunstnachricht'.

51) See the exhibition catalogue *Ausstellung von Kunst-Werken zu Prag*, Prague: Gesellchaft patriotischer Kunstfreunde in Böhmen, 1832.

52) [Müller], 'Kunstnachricht'.

53) John Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions*, London: Studio Vista, 10–13.

54) [Müller], 'Kunstnachricht'.

Figure 7: Carl Christian Vogel von Vogelstein, *Portrait of the Artist's Son* (1832).
Source: Public Domain / Location Unknown.

Figure 8: Johann Christian Clausen Dahl, *Shipwreck on the Coast of Norway* (1832).
Source: National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo / Public Domain.

Figure 9: Caspar David Friedrich, *Swans in the Morning Light* (Around 1832).
Source: The Hermitage, St. Petersburg / Public Domain.

Figure 10: František Tkadlík, T*he Apostle Paul Giving Farewell to the People of Miletos* (1831).
Source: Prague Castle Collection.

a naturalistic approach to detail, the Czech style was valued for the use of soft lines, muted colours and an overall tendency towards idealization.[55]

In 1832 followers of German Romanticism and Nazarenism in Führich's footsteps included the painters Anton Gareis, Josef Mrňák, or Martin Tejček, while Johann Gruss or Josef Vojtěch Hellich were favoured for the 'Czech' traits of their paintings, in the wake of Tkadlík. Close to them appears to be also the only sculptor in the exhibition, the later famous Joseph Max. Hellich (1807–1880) is regarded as the leading spirit of the artists' movement in contemporary Prague and his participation underlines the anti-official character of the exhibition.[56] Nevertheless, he did appear in the official Academy exhibitions in 1828 and 1831. Other artists, too, who were connected with anti-academic currents of painting in 1830s Prague, and who

55) The opposition between a Bohemian and a German school in Gothic painting was described for the first time by the painter, theoretician, and connoisseur Jan Quirin Jahn in 1792. The discussion was revived in the 1820s – partly in coincidence with the research of Alois Primisser made on medieval painting in Karlštejn castle in Bohemia – to include also contemporary painting. Thus, the point of difference between painting in Bohemia as opposed to Germany was reformulated as a distinction between Tkadlík and Führich. For detailed discussion and sources see Pavla Machalíková, 'České versus německé? Diskuse o stylu v Praze ve 20. letech 19. století,' in Taťána Petrasová, Václav Petrbok and Pavla Machalíková, eds, *Neviditelná loajalita? Rakušané, Němci, Češi v české kultuře 19. století* [Invisible loyalty? Austrians, Germans, Czechs in Czech culture of the nineteenth century], Prague: Academia, 2016, 145–156.

56) Hojda and Prahl, *Kunstverein nebo/oder Künstlerverein?*, 19–23. Moreover, from the overview of exhibition catalogues it becomes clear that he never exhibited at the official Academy exhibition, although he was a student of the Academy.

Figure 11: Josef Führich, *Moses Praying on Mount Horeb* (1832).
Source: Belvedere, Vienna.

had also signed the petition for an independent artists' union, nevertheless showed regularly at the annual Academy exhibitions, including, for example, Antonín Machek, Josef Navrátil, August Piepenhagen, Anton and Wenzel Mánes. A critic of the *Bohemia* newspaper described the respective styles of some of them with fitting although occasionally ironic epithets: the sweet Gruss, the talented Hellich, the humorous Gareis, the excellent Piepenhagen, the efficient Navrátil, industrious Holzel.[57] This varied assembly suggests that the exhibition provided a public platform for voices that stood in opposition towards the official institutions of the Prague art scene in the early 1830s.

One last participant who merits attention is the Prague painter František Horčička (1776–1858).[58] He was already an elderly man, who always stood apart from the Academy and official platforms but was respected as an advisor by a majority of the artworld. As a versatile painter, he experimented with techniques, including encaustic, which was popular but viewed as mysterious, and was highly innovative as a painter of romantic moods and fantasies (in

57) [Müller], 'Kunstnachricht'. Unfortunately, he never published an announced second part of his critical text.

58) Roman Prahl and Pavla Machalíková, 'Od restaurování k padělání, od padělání k inspirované tvorbě: František Horčička a ti druzí' [From restoration to forgery, from forgery to inspired creation: František Horčička and others], in Martin Hrdina and Kateřina Piorecká, eds, *Historické fikce a mystifikace*, Prague: Academia 2014, 79–92.

Enlightenment Prague a very rare interest). He was also a capable administrator and restorer of the Colloredo-Mansfeld picture gallery. In the Prague milieu, he was honoured both for his abilities as a painter and also for his knowledge as a well-informed connoisseur and organizer. In 1832 he exhibited three works at Klar's show. It was his first public appearance of this type, although probably his participation at the annual exhibition was negotiated already the year before. Critics awaited with particular eagerness his painting of an altarpiece with Saint George (**Figure 12**) which he had finished in the previous year but was unable to exhibit, supposedly due to lack of space. The reviewer from *Bohemia* (probably Anton Müller) writes that the painting exceeded expectations because it was rendered with great 'spirit and passion.'[59] It is also important to note that Horčička was asked to design the hanging of the exhibition, which, as far as is known, presented an unprecedented experiment in Prague milieu.[60]

Space, decoration, and human feelings

An important priority was to find a suitable locale capable of accommodating such an event. The fact that even the official Academy exhibition after 1839 'rotated' through the palaces in Prague in search for a suitable location testifies that it was not probably easy to find a hall meeting the requirements of the growing art show. Up to now, there has been some confusion as to where the exhibition of 1832 actually took place. The seemingly incontestable location in 'the garden pavilion of the Klar house on Kampa Island' could not be confirmed due to the size of the show (155 paintings, many of them large format).[61] On the contrary, the mention in contemporary sources of 'a garden pavilion in the Graf Garden'[62] and reference to a 'beautifully lit garden hall'[63] suggest that it was held in the so-called Steinitz House.

The 'Graf Garden' refers to a certain Johann Anton Graf, owner of one of the fashionable palaces located in Bredauer (later Dominicaner) Gasse on Kampa Island in Prague, which was then very much used as a place for leisure activities such as strolling, enjoying the first public coffee houses and spending time in conversation. In Graf´s garden, there was a Baroque garden pavilion which was sublet to the first Prague coffeehouse owner, Václav Steinitz, towards the end of the eighteenth century. The guidebooks to Prague confirm that during the first half of the following century the pavilion became a very famous public coffeehouse and also a ballroom, due to its considerable size.[64] Therefore, we can identify the location of the exhibition with this place, since there was no other structure of such dimensions and disposition in the Kampa gardens.

59) [Müller], Kunstnachricht.

60) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstaustellung', 37.

61) Hojda, 'Kdo nakupoval', 321.

62) Anonymous author, 'Für Freunde der Kunst', *Bohemia: oder Unterhaltungsblätter für gebildete Stände*, 5.34, 18 March 1832, 1.

63) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstaustellung', 37. I am indebted to my colleagues Dalibor Prix and Jan Salava for providing advice for the identification of the place of the exhibition.

64) Reinold, *Prag*, 84; cf. also Anon, *Kurzer Auszug der Beschreibung Prag und seine Umgebungen aus der Zeitschrift Hyllos Prag 1819*, Prague: no publisher, 1820, 39.

Figure 12: František Horčička, *Altarpiece with Saint George* (1831). Oil on Canvas.
Source: St. George's Basilica, Prague-Tmáň.

When reconstructing the space itself, it is important to remember the light conditions, which were regarded as favourable. As in the Clementinum, Graf´s garden hall boasted a rounded window penetrating one of its longer sides almost completely and letting in the daylight necessary to enjoy the paintings. This was due to the fact that, having originally been designed as a typical Baroque garden pavilion, one side opened onto the garden. Only later was the opening transformed into a window and glazed. Another important factor was the height of the ceilings, which was also favourably noted: they allowed for the showing of paintings that would not fit elsewhere.

Surprisingly, only the Berlin review by Böttiger – not the Prague one – mentions a novelty introduced here: the colouring of the walls, for they were covered in red cloth.[65] A smaller adjacent room had walls covered in blue. These exemplify the continuous consideration and experiments with coloured gallery backgrounds of the time. As early as the late eighteenth century, there were directions issued for the Dresden gallery, where the preference was for green and grey as opposed to white, which would, according to the director Hagedorn, reduce the effect of the paintings.[66] Between ca. 1845–1861, experiments with complementary colour schemes were considered by the gallery director Charles Eastlake in connection with the rearrangements at the National Gallery in London.[67] Eastlake knew about the colour experiments of the physiologist Jan Evangelista Purkyně (1787–1869), who was active in Prague and famous for his experiments with subjective colour impressions.[68] In Prague in 1832, the author of the design was František Horčička.[69] The outcome was praised as a very tasteful arrangement, with the red and blue background in the hall lit by light from a single wide window. Horčička's hanging was organised around two dominant paintings by Vogel von Vogelstein (*The Coronation of the Virgin* and *Christ's Baptism*) which were probably hung side by side as central pieces. As Böttiger's review in Berlin noted: 'everyone stopped in front of them in astonishment. Everyone also started and ended the tour around the exhibition in front of them. Especially his angels were viewed with indescribable astonishment.'[70]

The success of Horčička's arrangement can be attributed not only to his artistic background but also to his curatorial experience from the Colloredo-Mansfeld gallery and his other intellectual interests. His early career was connected with the birth of the Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom (now the National Museum) in Prague, which was founded in 1818. In this milieu he came into contact with the first adherents of the Czech nationalist movement in Bohemia and defenders of forged 'medieval' manuscripts of Zelená Hora and Králův Dvůr,

65) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstaustellung', 37.

66) Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum. From Boullée to Bilbao*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 2008, 19–20.

67) Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2009, 39–44.

68) Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 29–30.

69) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstausstellung', 37. The decision to confer the hanging of the exhibition to an active painter was probably not unusual – other examples from Prague include the printmaker and painter Josef Karel Burde, who served as a custodian to the picture gallery of SVPU from 1804, or the painters Karl Wurbs and Josef Vojtěch Hellich who arranged the annual exhibition in 1840 (cf. Minutes from the session of the SVPU board, 15. 4. 1840, Archive of the National Gallery in Prague, AA 1506).

70) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstausstellung', 38.

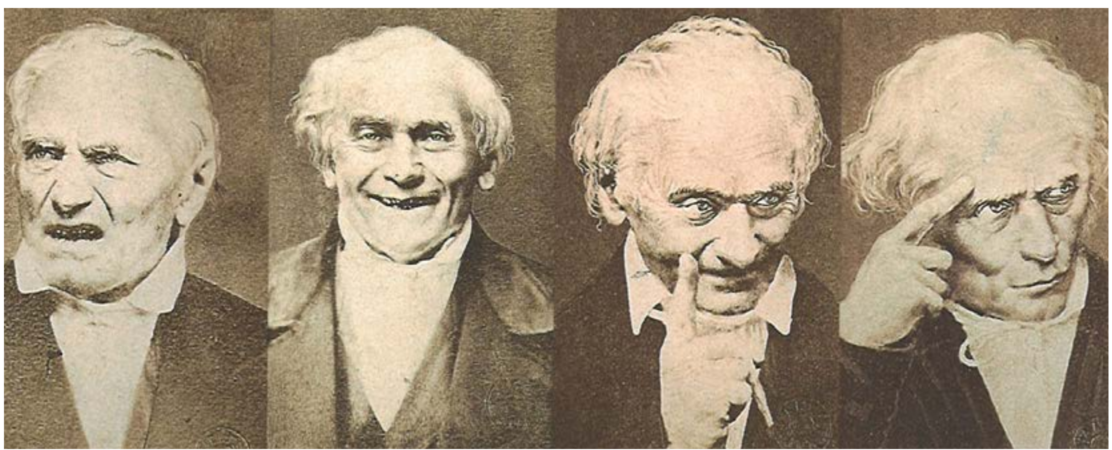

Figure 13: Jan Evangelista Purkyně, *Photos of Emotions* (1862).

Source: National Museum Prague.

produced in support for the claims about the importance of ancient Czech national history.[71] Specifically, it has been suggested that he contributed to the visual design of the forged manuscripts. The group associated with the Museum of the Bohemian Kingdom included many leading scientists and thinkers of the time, among others, Purkyně, who was then experimenting with human vision and human feelings such as vertigo, dream images, and visual phantasms.[72] Purkyně was one of the founders of modern physiology who not only made major observations about optics and vision, but also stood very close to the Prague artistic milieu until the 1860s. His later experiments in the nature of human emotions and their visual expression are an often-cited example of scientific analysis of one of the practices of the visual arts (**Figure 13**).[73] Of particular relevance to the visual arts is his systematic research into the nature of human perception of colour, light and various optical effects caused by the intermittence of light and shadow or by sequences of colours or images (**Figure 14**). Given that Horčička and Purkyně inhabited a shared milieu, it is not unfeasible to suggest that the painter's familiarity with the work of Purkyně can partly explain his interest in various colour experiments, including the gallery installation. Horčička's use of colour as a background for the paintings in 1832 can be regarded as the first documented use of this practice in Prague and a very early example of an experiment directed towards enhancing the viewers' experience.

Aesthetics and manners

Here we come finally to highlighting the peculiar fact that in his Berlin review, Böttiger paid considerable attention to viewers' attitudes and to the manner in which the public used the space of the exhibition and contemplated the individual paintings, and also to the description

71) Prahl and Machalíková, 'Od restaurování k padělání'.

72) Nicholas J. Wade, *Purkinje's Vision: the Dawning of Neuroscience*, London: Taylor and Francis, 2001.

73) Lada Hubatová-Vacková, 'Vnitřní zrak: Jan Evangelista Purkyně, laboratoř vizuality a moderní umění' [Inner vision: Jan Evangelista Purkyně, the laboratory of visuality, and modern art], *Umění* LIII, 2005, 566–585.

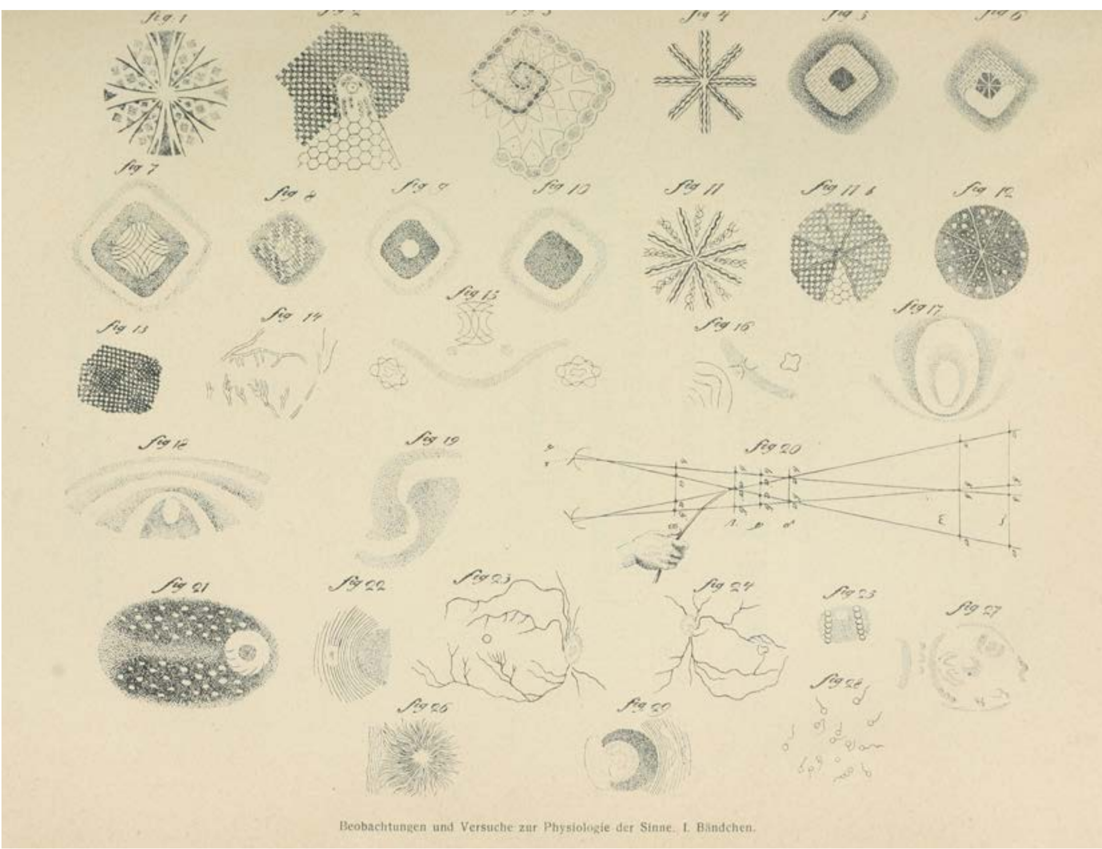

Figure 14: Subjective Visual Phenomena.

Source: Jan Evangelista Purkyně, *Beiträge zur Kenntniss des Sehens in subjectiver Hinsicht* (Prague, 1819).

of feelings aroused or tempered by artworks. Thus, we know not only about everyone's astonishment before the two large Vogel paintings, but also about feelings that were identified as being distinctively feminine, and that were described in a manner that was in no way derisory or dismissive. Thus, it seems, women could not take their eyes away from the beautiful portrait of Vogel's little son. Artworks played directly with human senses; their effect was long-lasting, and this testified to his desire to educate human nature through fine art. Such an assertion complied perfectly with the pertaining conviction of art theory, based still largely on classicist premises. Such educational purposes should not of course be overestimated, even though there were attempts to achieve an improvement in human nature through art in important museum and gallery institutions in early nineteenth-century Europe. In Prague it is not possible to talk of attempt at a general art education directed towards the wider public since there was a rather high entrance fee to the exhibition. If there had been, it would have been parallel to the philanthropic activities of Alois Klar, the founder of both the Institute for the Blind in Prague as well as a foundation for widows and orphans. Rather, the audience that was characterized as the 'art-loving Prague public, from the noblest estates to the educated bourgeois' could be still judged as a somewhat elite one.[74]

74) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstausstellung', 38

The two adjacent rooms of the summer hall provided a lofty space for all the paintings. The mention of the first and last stop in front of the two highlights suggests the habit of going 'around' the space – where other paintings were probably arranged in clusters and sorted according to authorship. This arrangement is suggested by the numerical order of the catalogue, as opposed to the Academy catalogues, where grouping by artist was disregarded in favour of a classification according to genre or subject matter and technique. A very special mention is made of the flowers: while the reviewer sarcastically comments on the topic of the very current and fashionable flower-painting, it also testifies to a very early use of flower decoration in the interior, facilitated probably by the vicinity of the garden where the spring flowers were actually in blossom. Their arrangements were obviously included to enhance the generally pleasant atmosphere highlighted in the reviews, and the effect on the human senses can be compared to the effect of the artworks that had 'a lasting effect of delight in the viewer'.[75]

Such comments by the reviewers lead to the conclusion that the interaction between the works and the audience was under scrutiny, as well as how the effects of painting can be enhanced by the juxtaposition of other colours (of the background) and other objects (flowers). Exploration of the human senses, of individuality and its expressions, and of the perception of various light and colour effects was a fast-developing discipline at that time. It seems that Purkyně's research into the effects that could be aroused by the juxtaposition of various colours was reflected at least marginally in contemporary thinking about gallery and exhibition installations throughout Europe. In Prague, at least, the fact that the two exhibition rooms in 1832 were covered with differently coloured cloth can lead to the assumption that there was the notion that the colours and shapes used in the individual paintings could be best enhanced by different background colours. This notion combined well with the continuous effort that lay behind the ethos of the Prague art institutions of the time, both the Society of Patriotic Friends and the Academy, to educate and elevate the public's taste.[76] The art exhibition was slowly becoming more accessible for people beyond the narrow aristocratic circles, extending to members of (upper-)middle class public. It could take on the function of impressing the anonymous community gathering in front of the artworks within one common – public – space, thus forming a new type of community. This mass of art-goers was confronted in the exhibition with a certain type of narrative that can in turn discipline the community, whether in the sense of civilized manners,[77] national community[78] or ritualized conduct leading to the notion of a cultured community.[79]

The exhibition of 1832 typified what Tony Bennett has referred to as the 'culture complex', a shared space where conduct was regulated and governed and where individuals' consciousness of belonging voluntarily to a certain (national) community could be strengthened via the

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75) Ibid.

76) A last summary on the beginnings of the Academy with relevant sources and bibliography offers Luděk Jirásko, Die Kunstakademien in Prag und München, in Taťána Petrasová and Roman Prahl, eds, *München – Prag. Kunst zwischen Tradition und Moderne,* Prague: Academia 2012, 69–85.

77) Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process,* trans. E. Jephcott, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

78) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London and New York: Verso Books, 1983.

79) Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals.*

influence of feelings of a common culture, as opposed to the preceding relations of power in an absolutist society.[80] The show presented art with due seriousness and attention to its role in interaction with civil society. Questions of attendance at the exhibition, purchases and conscious patronage that have to do with support for modern cultured society and, last but not least, attention to human behaviour and its refinement, can all be explored from a detailed reading of the reviews. They attest to the character of the exhibition that offered a voluntary activity for leisure but where, as exhibition histories have argued, conduct in these spaces could be discretely regulated and governed though aesthetic perception.

If we return to the concept of the public, it certainly did not include, in Prague in 1832, a broader public in the sense of society in general. From the scarce sources available, it can be deduced that during the entire first half of the nineteenth century the art-loving public included only the landed nobility and the few members of the nascent bourgeoisie ranking among the upper-middle class. This was despite the fact that newspapers complained about the high entrance fee – necessary for Klar's fundraising purposes – which would, in any case, prevent larger audiences from attending. Indeed, both the picture gallery of the Society of Patriotic Friends and the aristocratic collections announced days and hours reserved for visitors – who could attend free of charge.[81] This was certainly a step that would open up exhibitions to a wider gallery-going public, although the annual exhibition of the Academy from 1821 onward was accessible also only with a fee, which was used to cover some of the necessary costs. Thus, a remark from the Berlin reviewer about the low attendance of possible buyers did not necessarily mean that some noble goal of public education came into conflict with the practical necessity of fundraising and securing financial support for the event. and for the artists. This second, much less noble point seems to have been a very pressing one for the artists themselves. From the early 1830s this concern had been in evidence in Prague in their attempts to found an artists' union with exhibitions funded by a lottery and sales of artworks. The examples of artists' unions across Europe show the rise, too, of the recognition that regular exhibiting was the key to artistic success, both financially and in terms of fame and prestige.

Exhibiting was becoming a way of restructuring the traditional system of patronage and allowed necessary contact with the public, and the reviews from 1832 mention this as a reason for exhibiting. Mounting temporary exhibitions as a new activity in bourgeois society helped to recompose the consciousness of the new rising middle classes whose civic virtues should include also interest in the state of the visual arts. It was part of this new activity that they were expected to support the artists by buying their works, although this was far from being a common habit. Still, for a long time after, it was mostly the nobility who were expected to provide financial support for artists. In 1832 visitors from Dresden were surprised that while the Prague nobility had not yet left their city palaces for the countryside, they did not flood the exhibition to buy any artworks.[82] And some forty years later, the poet and critic Vítězslav Hálek wrote about the lasting desire for aristocratic support for outstanding national artists (here, specifically, he had in mind the painter Josef Mánes): 'we have to regret that our nobility due

80) Tony Bennett, *Making Culture, Changing Society*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 24–38.

81) Šámal and Brožová, *Umění inspektora*, 99.

82) [C. A. Böttiger], 'Prager und Wiener Kunstausstellung', 37.

to their interest in horses and such things has not as yet managed to attain the position of real, true patronage.'[83]

Conclusion

Analysis of the specific case of the 1832 exhibition in Prague highlights the recurring general questions of exhibiting, suggested in the introduction. They concern the problem of the early exhibition audiences, articulation and usage of a new public space in the urbanized modern community, and the ways of disciplining a specific public important for the rise of modern state and society.

As a public space, exhibitions after 1800 gradually offered to the art loving public an encounter with artworks – paintings, sculptures – but presented now under new circumstances: for public appreciation as opposed to their elite use in churches, aristocratic galleries or private spaces. The early exhibitions in Prague and its surroundings, from the exhibitions at the Academy to the shows of applied arts and handicrafts in the noble estates, indicated the degree to which the Czech lands, too, participated in this wider process. The goal was not only to give an overview, but also to attract the attention of possible buyers to the individuals who stood behind the production of art as professionals. The astonishment of foreigners that Prague in the first third of the nineteenth century still lacked customers willing to buy contemporary art only shows that the expectations may have been too high in this respect and that the habits of the Prague environment were not yet developed. In Prague there did not yet exist a wealthy and art-consuming middle class that would purchase the pictures. Nevertheless, the notion of a modern public that appreciated and shared values of art as a specific commodity and that served representative purposes, was tentatively present, as testified by the private initiative of Klar.

83) Vítězslav Hálek, 'Josef Manes', *Květy*, VI.1, January 1871, 7.

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reviews

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Reconsidering Jewish Cultural Identity in Modern Central European Architecture and Design

A Review of: Elana Shapira, ed. *Designing Transformation: Jews and Cultural Identity in Central European Modernism.* London: Bloomsbury, 2021. 344 pp. ISBN: 9781350172272

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Reconsidering Jewish Cultural Identity in Modern Central European Architecture and Design

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Michelle Jackson-Beckett

What is Jewish space and how can we understand the nature of a specifically Jewish practice in modern architecture and design in Central Europe? Elana Shapira and the contributing authors to *Designing Transformation: Jews and Cultural Identity in Central European Modernism* set out to answer these questions through case studies largely set during the interwar years, with a coda section devoted to the Jewish diaspora and émigré designers and architects. The question of identifying and defining a specific Jewish identity (whether self-identified or not) in the context of the modern built environment can be difficult to untangle from specific religious contexts. As several of the authors point out, the notion of 'Jewishness' in art, architecture, and design was, and continues to be, a contested topic at the center of often politically charged debates. In 2015, the Jerusalem-based architect and urban planner Gerard Heumann published a reactionary opinion piece for the right-leaning *Jerusalem Post* that 'there is no such thing as "Jewish" architecture.'[1] Heumann, who is not trained as an architectural historian, went on to argue that: 'Judaism has always been mainly a literary culture in which the height of achievement was to be a scholar of the Torah. Moreover, in Judaism, the emphasis is placed not on the physical but on the spiritual. Lacking a body of historical precedents, a Jewish architecture could not possibly have flowered.'[2] *Designing Transformation* and its impressive group of contributing authors debunks Heumann's incendiary polemic, which flattens Jewish identity and culture. Shapira and the contributing authors offer a window into the vibrant and complex world of interwar Jews active in modern Central European design and architecture, as practitioners, patrons, and entrepreneurs– arguing in tandem that neither architecture and design, nor Jews as a group, are monolithic.

1) Gerard Heumann, 'No Such Thing as "Jewish" Architecture,' *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 May 2015 (URL. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/no-such-thing-as-jewish-architecture-402192 (Accessed 1 August 2023). It might be noted that Reuters reported in 2020 that the *Jerusalem Post* had published op-ed pieces by non-existent writers. At the time of writing, Gerard Heumann, however, does appear to be a real person based on a LinkedIn profile and other professional websites.

2) Ibid.

Wider discourses on Jewish identity, modernism, and the built environment

In this volume, Shapira returns to the question of Central European Jewish identity and cultures of design, this time expanding beyond Vienna from her edited volume of 2018, *Design Dialogue: Jews, Culture and Viennese Modernism*.[3] Like that publication, *Designing Transformation* arose out of an international symposium hosted by the University of the Applied Arts Vienna in conjunction with the MAK - Museum of Applied Arts Vienna, the Brighton Design Archives, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2018.

The book is organized into three parts: (1) 'Designing Their Homes in Central Europe'; (2) 'Outsiders/Insiders—Cultural Authorship and Strategies of Inclusion'; and (3) 'Survival through Design—Projecting Transformative Designs onto the Future'. Each section offers several case study chapters authored by experts in the field. Although the title of Part 1 is slightly awkward in its word choice (the unqualified 'Their' suggests a monolithic flattening of a diverse group), the chapters are successful in illustrating the rich and complex strata of various Jewish social classes, political, and aesthetic approaches to design across Jewish, Christian, and secular spaces in Central Europe. Those familiar with Shapira's past work will find similar threads woven into *Designing Transformation*, including the importance of Jewish acculturation, or the process by which individuals or groups adapt to a dominant culture through social, psychological, or cultural means. One theme among the chapters, Shapira suggests, is the importance of chosen networks and artistic or design languages as modes for Jewish architects, designers, and patrons to navigate the paradoxes of modern Jewish identity. They also made it possible for Jews to become reconciled to their liminal status as both insiders and outsiders in modern society, a sociological reading that has been popularized by Peter Gay, Lisa Silverman, Simone Lässig, Miriam Rürup, and others.[4]

The main theme of Jewish cultural identity in *Designing Transformation* is part of a broader discourse focused on identity politics in architecture and design history, a discourse that expands beyond Central European studies, including the Jewish diaspora in Anglophone architecture and design communities into the twentieth century and today. Some twenty years ago the architect and architectural historian David Gissen referred to a turn in the 1990s, when architecture critics and scholars embraced social construction as a point of departure for critical studies of Jewish space.[5] Moving away from an essentialist model in histories of Jewish architecture and design, Gissen examined how postmodern and contemporary examples in architecture illustrated the shift. Examples included the architect Peter Eisenman's engagement with Jewishness and self-identification (notably in interviews with Leon Krier and Charles Jencks), as well as the multimedia artist Rachel Schreiber's critical approach to constructions of Jewish spaces. While *Designing Transformation* differs in period and geography from these examples, Shapira's work generally takes this social constructionist approach.

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3) Elana Shapira, ed., *Design Dialogue: Jews, Culture and Viennese Modernism*, Vienna: Böhlau, 2018.

4) Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, New York: Norton, 2001; Lisa Silverman, *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture Between the Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup, eds, *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2017.

5) David Gissen, 'Is There a Jewish Space? Jewish Identity Beyond the Neo-Avant-Garde', *Thresholds*, 23 2001, 90–95.

Case studies and cultural biographies

Fourteen case-study chapters in *Designing Transformation* examine at times the impact, and at times, the erasure, of Jewish practitioners of design and architecture, entrepreneurs and, clients in modern Central Europe. In the language of archival description, the term 'creator' lends itself well to the figures in this book who often engaged in a wide range of activities that spanned architecture, design, and art. Archival practice comes into play literally in Part Three, when Sue Breakell offers a compelling analysis of how émigré designers engaged with the archive, focusing on figures such as German-British graphic designer Hans Arnold Rothholz and the Viennese born graphic designer Willy De Majo.

Part One, 'Designing Their Homes in Central Europe', is the longest section, with six authors contributing case studies from a variety of cities: Budapest, Bratislava, Berlin, Brno, Kraków, and Zagreb. Rudolf Klein's analysis of New Leopold Town (Újlipótváros) in Budapest is a cultural biography of a neighborhood and takes a longer view of history. Klein explores social and spatial relations, conceiving of this Jewish neighborhood as a modern shtetl that was influenced by voluntary segregation as much as modernist urban planning and construction, and today is notable for a diverse population of Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. Henrieta Moravčíková's chapter focuses on the Jewish architect Friedrich Weinwurm and his work designing residences for a cohort of Jewish entrepreneurs, doctors, and lawyers who commissioned his work in Bratislava. Weinwurm's work extended as well to a Jewish hospital, department store, and a housing block for 'Unitas,' the shortened name of the Cooperative for the Construction of Small Apartments (*Stavebné družstvo pre výstavbu malých bytov*). While Weinwurm's clientele was predominantly Jewish, Moravčíková ultimately argues that he should be viewed in the broader context of modern Bratislava's urban development in the 1930s and 1930s and that his architecture was 'removed from ethnic and any provincial concerns.'[6]

Celina Kress's chapter revisits a renowned modernist home, the Sommerfeld House in Berlin (1920-1922) by Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, and reconsiders the role of Adolf Sommerfeld as both a client and a collaborator with Gropius and Meyer. Kress offers a reappraisal of Sommerfeld as an influential agent in Berlin's network of modern urban planners, politicians, and architects. Her argument is ultimately focused on the intertwining of patronage and collaboration in modern architecture in Berlin, rather than a reading of Jewish cultural identity or theories of Jewish space. Jasna Galjer's chapter addresses a gap in the historiography of modern design and architecture by focusing on Croatia, and Zagreb in particular, in order to examine residential projects. Working with sources limited due to historical erasure and destruction, Galjer's essay corrects a gap in the literature on modern interiors and design in Central Europe, which has historically favored examples from Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia during the interwar years. Stjepan Gomboš and Mladen Kauzlarić's Villa Spitzer (1931), Mathias Feller's Villa Feller (1930), and Robert Deutsch Maceljski's apartment (1927), all constructed in Zagreb during the interwar years, are apt illustrations of a new culture of domesticity.

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6) Henrieta Moravčíková, 'Shaping Modern Bratislava. The Role of Architect Friedrich Weinwurm and His Jewish Clients in Designing the Slovak Capital', 69.

The section concludes with two chapters that take a broader approach and are not primarily focused on housing or the domestic sphere. Zuzana Güllendi-Cimprichová examines a synagogue designed by Otto Eisler in Brno (1934), while Kamila Twardowska's chapter focuses on resuscitating two biographies of prominent Jewish architects in Kraków in the interwar period: Fryderyk Tadanier and Diana Reiter. The discussion of Reiter's career is a particular highlight. Twardowska's comparison between the two architects illustrates differences in social class, gender, and professional success – particularly their desire for assimilation or acculturation as Jews to better fit into a mainstream professional practice in interwar Poland.

Part Two of the book, 'Outsiders/Insiders – Cultural Authorship and Strategies of Inclusion', includes a shorter selection of chapters with a cohort of established scholars revisiting and rereading some familiar figures, often taking the approach of cultural biography. Juliet Kinchin revisits previous work on Lajos Kozma, the historiographical marginalization of Kozma's neo-Baroque formal language, and his early involvement in the group of young artists known as the Fiatalok (The Young Ones), in a reconsideration of the vibrant Jewish community in interwar Budapest. Christopher Long returns to Haus & Garten, this time homing in on the understudied figure of Oskar Wlach in collaboration with Josef Frank, to consider the nature of modern Jewish 'Wohnkultur' in interwar Vienna. Rebecca Houze considers Anna Lesznai's engagement with traditional folk art in Hungary; and Megan Brandow-Faller returns to the topic of children's art and creativity with a focus on Friedl Dicker-Brandeis at the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

Houze's essay effectively engages with the popular topic of cultural appropriation, analyzing the relationship between Lesznai's upper class status and her work inspired by traditional Hungarian folk art as a response to experiences of exclusion as a Jewish woman in interwar Hungary. Each chapter in this section is tied together effectively with themes of marginalization and historical erasure from different angles: gender, professional practice, religious, ethnic, social, and cultural identities. More broadly, the authors also redress the issue of marginalization in the historiography of modern architecture and design history established largely by Western European and North American discourses.

The third and final section of the book, 'Survival Through Design – Projecting Transformative Designs onto the Future', expands the view beyond Central Europe to consider select case studies of Jewish émigré designers and architects in Great Britain, the United States, and British Palestine of the 1930s. Readers familiar with Shapira's collaboration with Alison Clarke on the book, *Émigré Cultures in Design and Architecture* will encounter familiar themes in this final section – social transformation through design, Jewish assimilation / acculturation to the mainstream, and the social construct of Jews as outsiders and insiders.[7] Two chapters, by Lesley Whitworth and Sue Breakell, cover émigré graphic designers in Great Britain, both related to the Brighton Design Archives. Tanja Poppelreuter's analysis of Marie Frommer considers her architectural networks in Berlin and New York. Or Aleksandrowicz's study of climatic architectural design and hygiene in the work of Jewish émigré architects in British Palestine shows how collaborations between scientists and architects in the 1930s and 1940s shaped an approach to modern architecture that resonated with the region into the 1970s.

7) Elana Shapira and Alison Clark, eds, *Émigré Cultures in Design and Architecture,* London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Breakell's chapter on the archives of three émigré designers held at the Brighton Design Archives focuses on Arnold Rothholz, Willy De Majo, and FHK (Frederick Henri Kay) Henrion, another German-British graphic designer. Breakell's approach reveals snippets of personal narratives through poetic readings of various archival records: annotated photographs, a manuscript reflecting on a childhood in interwar Vienna, and the organization, control, and choices made for self-presentation of various promotional materials, photographs, and intellectual property. While Breakell is correct to point out that design archives are acquired primarily for their research value and thus reflect a focus on professional records, personal records do appear in architecture and design archives of Central European Jewish émigré outside of the Brighton context. (The collections of Central European émigré architects held in the Avery Drawings & Archives at Columbia University are one such example where personal records were indeed included in the acquisitions of professional archives, although such records are, of course, incomplete.) Nevertheless, Breakell's chapter is a valuable exploration and excavation of these figures through a close reading of archival theory and migration.

Conclusions

There is much to learn from *Designing Transformation*, which is densely packed with new and original research. While each of the individual chapters is a valuable, scholarly contribution to the field that could stand alone, the overarching connections and transitions between each section are not always as strong. Part Two is perhaps the strongest section in this regard. The variable number of chapters in each section also reinforces the book as a reincarnation of the original symposium. Each of the three sections could have benefitted from a brief editorial note underscoring the editor's vision for curation of the chapters, as well as the shared themes across sections beyond what is provided in the main introduction. Nevertheless, *Designing Transformation* successfully contributes to scholarly discourses about Jewish influences on modern design and architecture. Complementary reading includes, for example, Ursula Prokop's *On the Jewish Legacy in Viennese Architecture* (2016); Alexandra Chiriac's *Performing Modernism: A Jewish Avant-Garde in Bucharest* (2022); and *Jewish Architects, Jewish Architecture?* edited by Andreas Brämer, Katrin Kessler, Ulrich Knufinke and Mirko Przystawik (2021).[8] The latter, in contrast to *Designing Transformation*, takes a wider look at the history of Jewish architects, designers, professionals and their influence from a range of eras and geographies. Ulrich Knufinke's introduction to this book complements Shapira's in *Designing Transformation*, noting that:

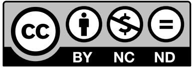
> A controversy has existed ever since the nineteenth century, as to whether and how architecture should express a Jewish self-image, depict the Jewish function of a building, or even describe a Jewish style of architecture. These discussions, which were by no means exclusively Jewish or

8) Ursula Prokop, *On the Jewish Legacy in Viennese Architecture. The contribution of Jewish architects to building in Vienna 1868–1938*, Vienna: Böhlau, 2016; Alexandra Chiriac, *Performing Modernism: A Jewish Avant-Garde in Bucharest,* Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022; Andreas Brämer, Katrin Kessler, Ulrich Knufinke and Mirko Przystawik, eds, *Jewish Architects, Jewish Architecture?* Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2021.

> involved architects-only, always reflected the contemporary position of Jewish communities in the respective countries and in an international context.[9]

With its extensive index, bibliography, illustrations, and available formats as both a print and e-book, *Designing Transformation* will be a worthwhile teaching resource across Central European history, architecture and design history, cultural history, and Jewish studies. Lecturers could easily work with a selection of chapters to support studies of Jewish cultural identity and historical erasure, or Jewish cultural approaches to interwar design and architecture. *Designing Transformation* is hopefully one of many projects to come in a continued scholarly dialogue to revisit and excavate the lost, erased, or ignored histories of Jewish architects, designers, and patrons in the history of Central European modernism.

9) Ulrich Knufinke, "Biographical Studies and Architectural History as an Interdisciplinary and International Field of Research," in *Jewish Architects–Jewish Architecture?* Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2021, 18.



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Change and Conformity: To the Rhythm of European Classicisms?

A Review of: Małgorzata Sears: *The Warsaw Group Rytm (1922-1933) and Modernist Classicism*, Cracow: Universitas, 2022. 544 pp.
ISBN 978-83-242-3764-7

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Change and Conformity: To the Rhythm of European Classicisms?

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Christian Drobe

In 1925 at the famous Paris International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, a sculpture by Henryk Kuna (1885-1945) stood in front of the entrance to the Polish pavilion, simply titled *Rtym* (Rhythm). The figure depicts a standing nude woman with her head slightly tilted to one side in a pensive pose. The leaning but stable posture of the figure, supported by the cloak's curved lines, indicate a well-balanced rhythm. This brings us to the heart of Małgorzata Sears's book, published in 2022 as an extended version of her dissertation originally completed at the Courtauld Institute. Rhythm and balanced lines, in fact, characterize the style of the Warsaw group of artists who adopted this name and who were active in the interwar period from 1922 to 1932. The group consisted of more than 20 people, some of whom knew each other from their student days in Warsaw and Cracow. Important members included Wacław Borowski (1885-1954), Eugeniusz Zak (1884-1926), who died early, and later Ludomir Sleńdziński (1889-1980). Sears presents the first monograph on this group of artists, a work that not only makes an important contribution to the history of Polish art at the beginning of the 20th century, but also addresses a highly ambivalent problem in international studies on modernism. I am referring here to the problem of modern classicism and the question it raises as to how we should deal with supposedly traditional or retrograde art movements and styles in an age of the supposedly radical practices of the avant-garde. Sears attempts to forge a path through the various forms of modern classicism from across Europe and accomplishes the goal of crafting a differentiated image of the phenomenon in interwar Poland. She does so without ignoring the political implications, that is, the potential identification of classical styles with conservative or even authoritarian regimes, as is familiar from Mussolini's fascism or National Socialism in Germany. Examination of the tension between the dynamics of the *Rytm* group within Poland and the overarching development in Europe is a major attraction of the book.

Sears has divided her book into six chapters, the first two of which retell and analyse the history of the group. The first chapter in particular, which outlines the history of the exhibitions staged by the group, provides rich material for future research. The subsequent four chapters gradually unravel the manifold overarching influences, contexts, and references in the group's works, which include, in addition to the political implications in interwar Poland, the influence in particular of the French painter Maurice Denis (1870-1943) and the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), each of which is followed by analyses of the works (and the

intellectual environment in which they were produced) of the artists of the group. The book culminates in the question as to the extent to which neoclassical art in the twentieth century can be described as a 'moderate modernism.' The comprehensively illustrated volume concludes with a long appendix, which again provides an excellent basis for future research with translated letters and other primary sources.

Humble beginnings

Scholars have studied the phenomenon of modern classicism mainly in France and Italy, presenting a long-lasting gap in research.[1] Other regions have long been neglected, not least east central Europe, but Germany and England too, for example, have also been little discussed.[2] In order to familiarize an international readership with the little-known material of Polish art, Sears somewhat unusually places a very detailed chronological exhibition history of *Rytm* at the beginning. This has the effect of giving the reader a very structured breakdown of their practical and cultural-political work. Sears makes clear how the group emerged in opposition to other artist associations and secessions in Warsaw and Poland, mainly in opposition to Impressionism, but also in continuation of Formism, which was active as an avant-garde movement from 1917 to 1922. The more conservative of the Formists moved on to *Rytm*.[3] All this resulted in a turn to simple clear forms and the eponymous rhythm, as a notion of order and harmony, which was then further developed under the influence of the theories of Henri Bergson and Maurice Denis. The name *Rytm* can be traced back to, among others, the art critic and museologist Mieczysław Treter (1883-1943), who is hardly known outside Poland, and other art critics in the group's close circle. There was, Sears indicates, a prolonged debate around the term, which was initially used critically, but then gained acceptance and became more deeply associated with the group's aesthetics, for example, through the critic and promoter of folk art, Janina Orynzyna (1893-1986).[4] For Orynzyna it was clear, Sears argues, that the choice of the name *Rytm* came with a set of formal, aesthetic and philosophical ideas. Those included the notion of balance and composition spanning not only the visual arts, but also music, dance and poetry. Sears then explains very coherently the highs and lows of the most important exhibitions that took place in Cracow, Warsaw and also outside Poland. The book consequently provides useful insight into the background cultural politics, exploring issues such as the alliances the artists subsequently formed, and highlighting the newspapers and magazines they collaborated with (important examples included *Museion*, *Pani* or *Skamander*), most of which advocated modernism and were politically liberal.

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1) Key studies include Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps. The Art of the Parisian Avant-garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; Christopher Green and Jens M. Daehner, eds, *Modern Antiquity: Picasso, De Chirico, Léger, Picabia*, Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2011.

2) Irena Kossowska, ed., *Reinterpreting the Past: Traditionalist Artistic Trends in Central and Eastern Europe of the 1920s and 1930s*, Warsaw: Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2010. Simon Martin, ed., *The Mystic Method: Classicism in British art 1920-1950*, Chichester: Pallant House Gallery, 2016.

3) Sears, *The Warsaw Group Rytm*, 51.

4) Sears, *The Warsaw Group Rytm*, 42-43.

Sears is also able to explain conclusively what political positions this entailed. It will not be readily apparent to readers unfamiliar with Polish history how Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935) came to power after World War I and how his *Sanacja* (Sanation) party developed in the interwar period. It was originally a centre-left party and later tilted towards conservative nationalism especially after the May coup of 1926. His government then turned into a military dictatorship, but one which was still culturally liberal and respected the freedom of the arts, and therefore cannot be compared to other right-wing dictatorships of the time. The artists of *Rytm* were particularly close to Piłsudski and *Sanacja*, and Sears makes it clear that although they saw themselves as state artists as early as the mid-1920s, their modern classicism did not manifest itself in a monumental manner.[5] *Rytm* appeared as a progressive group formally early on and processed a wide range of influences from all over Europe, for example when they took an interest in the Swiss dancer Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) and his conception of modern dance, central to which was the concept of rhythm. Sears does a good job of navigating the reader through this complex terrain, and, ultimately, she makes clear how *Rytm* as a group asserted itself at the Paris exhibition of decorative arts of 1925 at the latest. With success behind them, its members saw themselves as representatives of the modern state. Somewhat later, their work became visibly more conservative when they fully embraced classicism and the political atmosphere shifted. At times the book suffers a bit from a lack of explanation of many specific details and persons involved, who will not be familiar to a readership unless it is already deeply immersed in Polish literary or artistic history. Overall, however, this is a great contribution to the research of the artists' group, and Sears marks an important milestone in Polish art history by presenting the material to an international audience, which also secures the work of the *Rytm* group for future generations of researchers.

Classicism again and again

Throughout the history of art, there have been many occasions when artists embraced classicism. This was also the case in the period after the First World War, the horrors of which gave rise to what many saw as retrograde art styles throughout Europe; for Benjamin Buchloh this shift constituted a betrayal of the avant-garde.[6] Only more recently have scholars been more open to the phenomenon and seen it as a typical part of modernism. The 'Rappel à l'ordre' issued by Jean Cocteau in 1926 and the call for a 'Ritorno al Mestiere' (Return to craft) proclaimed by Giorgio de Chirico in 1928 are the most prominent examples of this development.[7] However, it was not only the war and the watershed of 1918 that favoured the new classicism. A major achievement of Sears's work is to present the continuity of classical aesthetics from before the war, a topic that is rarely addressed in research. The author judiciously describes the transformations of an aesthetic that peaked in the late eighteenth century but

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5) Małgorzata Sears, Rytm, Sanacja, and the Dream of Modern Art Patronage in Poland (1922-1932), in Beáta Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch and Jonathan Owen, eds, *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918-1956*, London: The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2019, 173-189.

6) Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting, *October*, 16, Spring 1981, 39-68.

7) Sears, *The Warsaw Group Rytm*, 160.

then underwent many variations up to the modern period, often in a different guise. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this mostly involved updates of aesthetic concepts with the ideas of more recent philosophers. With these insights alone for the context of Poland, the author fills important gaps in the research.

All further chapters are basically about these different possibilities and transformations of neoclassicism, which highlight the fact that modern classicists were searching for comparable practices across Europe in an effort to find allies or inspiration. There was considerable exchange of ideas between French and Polish artists, but Italian art was also important. A central, productive, figure in the further adaptation of classical tendencies was, surprisingly, Henri Bergson, whose ideas became popular throughout Europe in the early twentieth century. His well-known concept of *élan vital* was particularly important in this regard, but so was his conception of time as *durée*, in other words, of the experience of time as being a long flow of intuitive perception, which he formulated in his 1907 book *Creative Evolution*.[8]

Although, at first glance, the application of these theories to classicism must be puzzling to the reader, Sears convincingly unpacks the importance of these concepts to the Polish art and literary scene in the 1920s. These included an understanding of *durée* as a notion of life beyond history, and of mortality as an 'original state of innocence', as a Polish poet formulated it in the magazine *Skamander* in 1920.[9] Sears identifies these ideas as a part of a bigger vitalist discourse and also sees the influences in the symbolism of dance, the possibility of uniting two incompatible representation methods such as idealisation and untamed expression, and the refusal of the group to formulate manifestos.[10] In other words, it is a very loose and associative understanding of Bergson's philosophy, which she traces to formal statements by Polish artists in the 1920s, but also identifies in the group's art practice. These ideas were also taken up by the Polish lyricist Bolesław Leśmian, among others, and he combined them with ideas from Nietzsche and the concept of rhythm in his poem 'U źródeł rytmu' (At the sources of rhythm) in 1915.[11] Bergson's writings found a wide audience in Poland in translation through newspapers and magazines such as *Skamander*.[12] The concept of *durée* well describes the aesthetic of artists such as Wacław Borowski or Eugeniusz Zak, who was often prone to painting images of Arcadian scenery. Despite the insightful description of the reception of Bergson's writings, this section turns into more of an iconology of neoclassical art, which, however, is not Sears's fault, but rather describes the Polish artists' loose approach to Bergson in the 1920s.

Due to the tense international political situation of the 1920s and 1930s, Polish artists oriented themselves less towards Germany and turned more to France and Italy as the most influential 'classicist' countries. One of the major qualities of Sears's work is the fact that she is repeatedly able to uncover cross-connections, such as when Giorgio de Chirico refers, in his text 'Ritorno al Mestiere', to the Polish painter Eugeniusz Zak, who was active in Paris at the time.[13] In 1919 De Chirico had noted that the Pole was largely ignored by Parisian artists, but

8) Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, Paris: Alcan, 1907.

9) Sears, *The Warsaw Group Rytm*, 225.

10) Ibid., 224.

11) Ibid., 229.

12) Ibid., 225.

13) Ibid., 160-161.

he predicted that his neoclassical style would soon gain currency. Sears then explains these and other connections and influences through the lenses of the surrounding philosophical influences. She also highlights the group's use of iconography. Themes included, as often is commonplace in classicism, Arcadian idylls, female nudes, fountains and springs, dancing and the depiction of youth, scenes of primordial innocence and serenity. Sears also observes that their work went beyond traditional classical themes, and encompassed the primitive, the ideas of Nietzsche, vitalist an affirmation of life and youthful energy, and folk art. Her discussion of these issues would have benefitted from comparison with other states in east-central Europe, such as Hungary or Austria, where many artists also explored neoclassical idioms, although this might have gone beyond the scope of the study. Overall, Sears presents the classicism of the *Rytm* group as assembled from an eclectic range of influences. In doing so, she avoids making any particular philosophical direction absolute, and she also shows that *Rytm* developed playfully and shaped their modern classicist art in an almost mannerist fashion.

Maurice Denis

One of the underestimated figures of modern classicism is the French painter Maurice Denis, who became an art writer early on. Known as a representative of Catholic spiritualism, he is often stylistically assigned to post-impressionism, from which, however, he increasingly turned to classical themes. Drawing above all on Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), he developed a classical aesthetic, dedicated to a utopia and rich future for youth by means of education and ideas of social order. It may therefore not be surprising that, as Sears points out, Polish artists, coming from a deeply Catholic culture, turned to this artist and his theories. But it was Denis's conception of Synthetism that was the more important source for the Polish group's aesthetic. Denis referred to the idea of painting as a system of flat, two-dimensional patterns that are assembled synthetically, not naturalistically, by the artist. Evolving out of art movements such as Symbolism and *decadence*, Synthetism also embodied a way of thinking about rhythm and balance. Denis's influence came to Poland in many ways, most notably via the painter Eugeniusz Zak, but also through countless other voices and avenues, such as the art historian Wacław Husarski (1883-1951), who promoted the French artist's work. Sculptors such as Henryk Kuna (1885-1945) or Edward Wittig (1879-1941) were also inspired by French art. It seems important to emphasize once again Sears's achievement in having expanded these waves of reception to include hitherto little-noticed influences and figures from all over Europe, towards east central Europe, where modern classicism has still not been adequately researched. This includes her discussion of the painter Ludomir Sleńdziński (1889-1980), a native of St. Petersburg who was active for a long time in Vilnius (at that time part of Poland) and who absorbed influences from German New Objectivity, as well as from recent art movements in Italy and in general revisited the art of classical antiquity.

Moderate (modernism) or not?

Lastly, Sears's book raises the question of political responsibility, often a source of controversy in research on modern classicism. Since the *Rytm* group ceased to exist as early as 1932 – it was seldom more than an informal artists' association that issued a few manifestos and staged exhibitions together – the question arises as to whether and how *Rytm* prepared the ground for the distinctly conservative turn artists took in the 1930s with their embrace of a much more traditional aesthetics. This occurred everywhere in Europe, and in Poland, too. Classicism was usurped above all by Italian fascism and the Nazi regime, which cast a long shadow over the art style and almost completely discredited it after 1945. A quality of Sear's study is that she focuses on the wider theoretical concepts of monumentality and totality that often lay behind these developments, rather than the later political consequences. She shows that such universal concepts of art had been in circulation since the early twentieth century, including in Poland, when artists were searching for the appropriate style for the era. Against the background of the fragmented art scene and the many '-isms,' the search for a uniform epochal style was seen as vital for a reform of the art world. Yet, the neo-classicist theories favoured by the *Rytm* group tended to lean towards conservative ideas of order. Maurice Denis's persistence in asserting the need for a 'unified' world, for instance, has been criticized 'as treacherous in legitimising authoritarian power'.[14]

As Sears notes, this relationship between art and power is difficult to establish for *Rytm* and interwar Poland. Since Piłsudski's regime showed little interest in culture, it even seems paradoxical that the *Rytm* group saw themselves as state artists. One answer could be that *Rytm* felt obliged to the state without being heard by it, but another would be that the group could not find a new 'monumental style', and no universal symbols emerged (that would suit a new national style, for instance). Sears convincingly demonstrates that this desire for universality and synthesis often failed in modernism, and she rightfully uses the term 'moderate modernism' to describe the paradox of *Rytm's* 'distanced closeness' to the state and the eventual dissolvement of their utopian dreams. She concludes by stating: '*Rytm* was dissident, but it was not revolutionary; it was pioneering, but also accommodating; inventive, while at the same time conforming.'[15] Again, comparisons to other countries in central Europe could have been fruitful, and Sears could have contrasted the situation in Poland to that in Austria, for instance. Overall, this path saved the *Rytm* group from political exploitation. Sears makes it clear that its forms cannot be placed in the same lineage as the monumental classicism associated with Italian fascism or Nazism in Germany. Nevertheless, she stresses that *Rytm*, by emerging as a representative, 'moderate Left' style for a brief moment in history, likely displaced more progressive positions in interwar Period. Ultimately, this is the story of 'a group which, eager to bring change and modernisation, itself fell into ossification and conformity as soon as it gained influence.[16]

Sears succeeds in showing the diversity of modernist classicism across Europe and her book should be a prompt for research in many new areas. These include analysis of the strong

14) Ibid., 325.

15) Ibid., 329.

16) Ibid., 340.

influences and exchanges between the countries of Europe, which she ably demonstrates here for the first time through the examples of countless artists and critics from east central Europe she discusses. From this, many further research topics are sure to emerge in the future, including, one might hope, questions of gender, the role of private collectors, the art market and the history of taste, parallel literary phenomena, and further interconnections in Europe. Her meticulously researched and superbly illustrated book lays the groundwork for these endeavours and presents a long-understudied part of Polish art history to an international audience.

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Toyen Captured by Identitarian Politics?

A Review of: Karla Huebner, *Toyen: Magnetic Woman and the Surrealist Erotic.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020. 426 pp. ISBN 978-0-8229-4647-2.

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A Review of: Karla Huebner, *Toyen: Magnetic Woman and the Surrealist Erotic.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020. 426 pp. ISBN 978-0-8229-4647-2.

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On March 10, 2019, the blogger Petr Tomek published a radical text *Přestaňeme lhát o Toyen* [Let's stop lying about Toyen], where, based on the testimony of Jaroslav Siefert, he argued that at the time Seifert met Toyen, they[1] talked about themselves in the masculine gender and, therefore, that we must take Toyen as a transgender man into account.[2] The linguist Jana Valdrová provided the same argument a year and a half later in her blog post *Toyen byl muž. Učme se to respektovat* [Toyen was a man. Let's learn to respect that].[3] This interpretation of Toyen's gender identity subsequently began to be promoted by the organisation *Transparent*, which fights for the rights of transgender people in the Czech Republic. The ambivalence of Toyen's gender identity was stirred up again around the exhibition project *Toyen: The Dreaming Rebel*, which was staged at the National Gallery in Prague between April 9 and August 22, 2021. The curator of the exhibition, Anna Pravdová, commented on this in an interview for *Harper's Bazaar*: 'the fact that she spoke of herself in the masculine gender, says Jaroslav Seifert, [...] that is the only source. [...] No one in France confirmed this to me. [...] Maybe she just had periods like that and then she stopped.'[4] Both reviewers of the exhibition, Eva Skopalová for the national art magazine *Art+Antiques* and Martin Vaněk for the main Czech art web journal *Artalk.cz*, decided to write about Toyen explicitly in the masculine gender, because they felt that the exhibition did not address these issues sufficiently.

Back in 2019, I was asked by the *Queer Eye* festival to give a talk, attended by a significant number of trans people, about Toyen's gender identity and sexuality as performed in their work. I then summarized the main argument of this lecture in the article 'I am not your lesbo! K diskurzu o soukromí "snící rebelky"' [I am not your lesbo! Towards a discourse on the private Life of a „Dreaming Rebel"],[5] published on *Artalk.cz* in response to the exhibition *The Dreaming Rebel* in 2021. With this extensive introduction, I want to demonstrate that the debate about Toyen's (trans)gender identity is a fundamental question that has resonated both within the art-historical discourse and in public space and it is impossible to avoid it. Unfortunately,

1) As a manifestation of gender ambivalence of Toyen's self-expression, as well as for other authorities identifying as trans, I am going to refer to them with a pronoun *they* in a singular antecedent.

2) Petr Tomek, Přestaňme lhát o Toyen, http://enzmannovaarcha.blogspot.com/2019/03/prestanme-lhat-o-toyen.html

3) Jana Valdrová, Toyen byl muž. Učme se to respektovat, https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/jana-valdrova.php?itemid=38162

4) Veronika Scattergood, 'Toyen', *Harper's Bazaar*, 4/2021, 66 and 28.

5) Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, 'I am not your lesbo! K diskurzu o soukromí "snící rebelky"', *Artalk.cz*, https://artalk.cz/2021/06/14/i-am-not-your-lesbo-k-diskurzu-o-soukromi-snici-rebelky/?fbclid=IwAR1L_19adlqcbYR7OZ2AfYe_Lz2WOi4z3tE2GAaFm8tz6nt_HDF4OiWaREc#_ftn11

this is one of the main weaknesses of the book of the art historian Karla T. Huebner in the present book *Toyen: Magnetic Woman and the Surrealist Erotic*, which has failed to respond flexibly enough to current shifts in social discussion and understanding of the past that have happened within the past fourteen years since the majority of the book was written.

Magnetic person: on Toyen's gender identity

This is not Karla Huebner's first involvement with Toyen: the avant-garde scene in the Czech lands has been the central topic of her professional interests. She contributed to the books *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (2021), *Czech Feminisms: Perspectives on Gender in East Central Europe* (2016), *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption* (2016), and *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s* (2011). She published a study, 'Fire Smoulders in the Veins: Toyen's Queer Desire and Its Roots in Prague Surrealism', on Toyen and their networking in the surrealist movement in 2010 in *Papers on Surrealism*[6] and, in 2013. a paper in *Journal of Women's History* titled 'In Pursuit of Toyen: Feminist Biography in an Art-historical Context'.[7] Together with her interest in the construction of a 'new' femininity in the period after 1918 and the discourse on non-heterosexual identities at this time, Karla Huebner had the ideal prerequisites for interpreting Toyen's life and work in a broad historical context.

She has succeeded with flying colours in the comprehensive presentation of artistic and social contexts in the current book. Already in the first two chapters of the book, Huebner proves this: in the chronological narrative of the first two stages of Toyen's life and their beginnings in the artistic avant-garde, she finds a number of contradictions: that between the stereotypical categories in which their companions from artistic circles put them, such as Bedřich Feuerstein's proposal to name them the [female] 'Muse of the Devětsil' (p. 8), and Toyen's self-identification, self-conceptualisation and self-expressivity, demanding equality and equity with their cis-male colleagues. [8] Huebner describes Toyen's own understanding of identity with the period term 'androgyny', although Toyen never used this signifier in relation to themselves and neither did their cis-male artistic companions. In this context, Huebner reports on several meanings of the pseudonym that Toyen chose – whether it was a derivation from the French *citoyen* (Seifert) or a reference to gender ambivalence emphasized by Adolf Hofmeister's illustration *Ten-Ta-Toyen* [Him-Her-It-yen] (p. 13). At the same time, however, Huebner also offers an interpretation of the birth of the 'new woman', which was

6) Karla T. Huebner, 'Fire Smoulders in the Veins: Toyen's Queer Desire and Its Roots in Prague Surrealism,' *Papers of Surrealism* 8, 2010, 1–22.

7) Karla T. Huebner, 'In Pursuit of Toyen: Feminist Biography in an Art-Historical Context', *Journal of Women's History* 25.1, 2013, 14–36.

8) Huebner states that the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design (UMPRUM) was the only state school and suggests that this was the reason Toyen decided to attend. However, The Academy of Arts (AVU) was a state school from 1896. The real reason is that at the time it was legal (access to universities for women became legal in 1919) but very unusual for a woman to attend the Academy (AVU). On the other hand, until 1946 the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design (UMPRUM) had a status of a high school, not a university, so women had attended since the 1890s. This was not very frequent but it was also not that unusual.

a phenomenon more or less present in all Central European countries. It was supposed to create a new, emancipated, practical woman who was supposed to be either a bourgeois ideal or a worker's necessity. Prototypes of work clothes or sports overalls for women were created to resemble men's fashion as much as possible, while at the same time the transgression of gender roles and stereotypes became a sensation in popular culture (a lesbian kiss of Marléne Dietrich dressed in a man's suit in the film *Marocco* from 1930). This time-shift is not self-evident; Huebner aptly adds that the French painter Rosa Bonheur (who was, by the way, mentioned by the lesbian activist Jana Mattuschová as a positive role model for lesbian women in 1931) had to obtain a police permit to wear trousers in the 1850s (p. 15).[9]

However, as we will see in the sexological discourse of the time, even circles close to the left avant-garde were patriarchal and heterosexist. Evidence for this can be found in the peculiar Freudian and Jungian-oriented writings of Bohuslav Brouk, who, at a young age, joined the avant-garde circles around Karel Teige, to which Toyen also belonged. His texts were full of internal contradictions. On the one hand, he referred to outdated authorities, and he held very liberal positions, for example, on the institution of marriage (which he proposed to abolish completely) and monogamy. But at the same time, he was convinced of the essentialist nature of genders and held often even misogynistic points of view. He had a liberal attitude towards homosexuality for his time, although he was, again, ambivalent. He had a certain understanding of (male) innate homosexuality, he condemned homosexual prostitution and homosexual behaviour (in, for example, prisons). It was from the position of a heteronormative worldview that he strongly opposed Weininger's theory that every individual is born more or less bisexual, and he considered hermaphroditism, including gynandry and androgyny, to be a pathological phenomenon. In his book *Psychoanalytická sexuologie* [Psychoanalytic Sexology], which he specifically dedicated to Toyen and Štyrský, Brouk wrote: 'Women are automatically predisposed to [feminine character] and appearance, and subsequently, any use of the female genitalia will make it impossible for them to attempt to become psychologically male'.[10] Brouk's internally contradictory, misogynistic interpretation is best illustrated by the final passage of his chapter on homosexuality: 'Of course, only man – the penis – raised women to the human level, but at the same time he became the culprit of their inferiority, which arose through comparison with him.'[11] So, androgyny definitely could not be a positive category that even the most enlightened and, at the same time (in terms of sexual morality), most liberal members of Toyen's cultural and intellectual circle would use to describe them. At the same time, however, one cannot ignore secondary remarks, such as that of Jaroslav Seifert, that at some point, Toyen spoke of themself in the masculine gender, as well as their own remark 'I am a sad painter' (which Huebner vividly translates as 'I am a sad, male painter'). Unfortunately, from the topic of Toyen's gender identity, Huebner moves on to their sexual orientation. In several subsequent chapters, she addresses shifts in Czech society regarding the acceptance of foreign feminisms and the construction of the next wave of domestic feminism. She aptly adds that domestic feminism was bourgeois and sexually restrictive (p. 34), thus providing

9) Matthew Wills, 'Rosa Bonheur's Permission to Wear Pants', *JSTOR Daily*, 8 May 2022. https://daily.jstor.org/rosa-bonheurs-permission-to-wear-pants/.

10) Bohuslav Brouk, *Psychoanalytická sexuologie*, Prague: self-published, 1933, 113.

11) Ibidem, 115.

little impetus for Toyen. Huebner further focuses on the partnership with Štyrský, and she sets the previously romanticized and even sexualized image of the relationship in perspective. At this point, Huebner returns to the construction of Toyen's gender identity as she elaborates on Vítězslav Nezval's remark that Štyrský is the feminine element and Toyen the masculine element in their professional partnership (p. 45). She notes that this idea persisted until the present day, supplemented by the art historians František Šmejkal and Věra Linhartová.

At first glance, Huebner does not offer her own interpretation, only briefly commenting that we will probably never explain their relationship and never fully understand it, but the very ambivalence of their dynamic is part of the elusiveness and ambivalence of Toyen themself. Huebner returns to Toyen's gender identification when writing about their integration into Parisian Surrealism. She notes that 'the central position Toyen would assume in Prague surrealism contrasts with that of most surrealist women, who tended to operate on the movement's fringes, as friends and lovers of the men' (p. 102). Huebner claims that on the one hand, Toyen adopted the theory and practice of Surrealism far more intensively than many men, and at the same time that most other women in Surrealism were also very liberal in terms of sexuality, although they did not try to compete with men or take a leadership position. Toyen differed from these women in that, despite varying degrees of eccentricity, they did not ultimately have to adopt a conformist attitude because they had no ambition to marry and start a family like other straight, cis women within the movement (p. 103). At the same time that Brouk was formulating his essentialist theories, however, the magazine *Hlas sexuální menšiny* [The Voice of the Sexual Minority] and, subsequently *Nový hlas* [The New Voice], was published and offered alternatives to these majoritarian ideas on gender roles and sexualities. In the very first issue of the first volume, Jana Mattuschová, writing under the pseudonym 'sigma', provided a better image of a lesbian woman and at the same time pointed out the prejudices and multiple inequalities they faced in contemporary society. In the following testimony, Mattuschová described an incident that could have happened to Toyen themself: 'I myself once witnessed the rude invectives that were bestowed upon a lesbian-based lady who has the courage to walk around in clothes that suit her taste.'[12] Gynandra, whom Brouk considered pathological, became a positive model of masculine femininity thanks to Mattuschová.[13]

Karla Huebner's interpretation has an unprecedented contextual breadth: artistic, geographical as well as social, political and sexological. Despite that, the conclusions of Milena Bartlová's chapter 'Ten-ta-to-yen: Obrazy toho, o čem se mlčí' [Him-Her-It-yen: paintings of what is passed by in silence] published in 2011 in a collective monograph *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury* [Homosexuality in the history of Czech culture] can appear to be at least more condensed or bolder. Bartlová here identifies with Huebner's conviction, available at the time mainly in her dissertation and several published studies, that Toyen can best be identified as a lesbian woman who at the same time wanted to defy traditional stereotypes of a woman's role in terms of appearance, social behaviour and life path.[14] Bartlová offers the concept of *female masculinity* for understanding Toyen's identity, which was created for

12) [Jana Mattuschová], 'Lesbická láska' [Lesbian love], *Hlas sexuální menšiny* 1.1, 1931, 4.

13) [Jana Mattuschová], 'Gynandra standardním zjevem dneška' [Gynendra, a standard phenomenon today], *Hlas sexuální menšiny* 1.5-6, 1931, 3–4.

14) Milena Bartlová, 'Ten-ta-to-yen: Obrazy toho, o čem se mlčí', in Martin C. Putna, ed., *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury,* Prague: Academia, 2011, 349–358, quoted on 353.

cultural history by Jack Halberstam in their book *Female Masculinity* from 1998.[15] Halberstam shows that female masculinity does not consist of any inversion, or 'man play' either, but is a legitimate self-expression and performativity of femininity, and may or may not be associated with transgender identity and lesbian orientation. Huebner repeats the question of whether Toyen was a transgender man or a lesbian woman in the conclusion, without offering the possibility that these two variants are not mutually exclusive. For most of their life, Toyen could not go through the transition, i.e. the operation changing their sex, which was first performed in the Czech lands in 1942 to Zdeněk Koubek (FtM), and not until 1958 to a French citizen (MtF), so life in a female body even in the case of gender dysphoria, was Toyen's only option for most of their life. And it is from this point of view that we must admit not only their emotional and sexual orientation towards women, but also the possibility of a gender identity other than cis.

On Toyen's sexuality: what does *Surrealist Erotic* mean?

Karla Huebner herself noticed in her fourteen-year-old dissertation that Toyen's erotic drawings have two facets, which is perfectly recognizable in the reproductions of them in the *Erotická Revue* [Erotic Revue], published by Jindřich Štyrský. Some seem more academic and lyrical and are signed, others have a naive, crude style (and also include various sexual practices) and are anonymous or signed with a pseudonym.[16] Karel Srp also noticed the multitude of styles and signatures in the *Erotická revue*, but he could not give a satisfactory answer as to why this was so. Only Huebner has provided a convincing critical analysis: 'Toyen, in fact, divided her contributions to the magazine into three groups. Those marked "XX" were rough primitivist sketches from around 1925. […] In contrast, the drawings signed "T" mostly dated from the beginning of the 1930s and were considerably more sophisticated in style and content. […] The third, much smaller, group was that of those openly designated "Toyen". The only pictures so designated were a hermaphroditic drawing and the three drawings for the Malinowski excerpt.'[17] It is erotica, heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual, that has been the central theme of the artistic historiography of Toyen's work in the last twenty years. A heterosexist and to some extent patriarchal view is represented by Karel Srp's catalogue from 2000 with the simple title *Toyen*. Srp states here that Toyen 'dealt with erotic themes more consistently only thanks to Styrský's activity', which completely ignores Toyen's sketchbooks from the twenties and the entire production containing lesbian erotic desire. As if true and correct eroticism is only heterosexual and hetero-erotic, including the one that Toyen is led to by a man.[18] This is also confirmed by Srp's extensive subsequent text, which analyses with an almost bizarre obsession how Toyen depicted the penis, and closes a passage of several pages with the implausible statement that 'naturally, it was the only organ that interested her

15) See Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity,* Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

16) Karla T. Huebner, *Eroticism, Identity, and Cultural Context: Toyen and the Prague Avant-Garde.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh PhD Dissertation Thesis, 2008, 51, 210–212.

17) Ibidem, 211.

18) Karel Srp, *Toyen,* Prague: Prague City Gallery, 2000, 84.

in the male body.'[19] A single, laconic mention is made of lesbian desire in Srp's monograph, the addition of which also points to Srp's essentialist conception: 'She was interested in lesbian love [...] as well as in various natural themes falling under the male or female principle.'[20] In the catalogue of the exhibition *The Dreaming Rebel*, Toyen's eroticism is dealt with by Anne Le Brun, who was involved in the project as an eyewitness and friend of Toyen. Her text is therefore more of a personal statement than a professional analysis (it lacks a scientific apparatus, after all). It is characterized by a double effort: to find internal coherence in Toyen's erotic themes and to convince the reader that this work by Toyen is comparable to the legacy of 'great men' such as Turner, Rodin, Picasso, etc. Le Brun finds Toyen's approach to the violent sexuality of de Sade's concept as typical, yet although she correctly mentions that this interest in heterosexual eroticism arose at the behest of Bohuslav Brouk in 1938, she does not realize that it probably could not have been a desire with which Toyen would have themself identified.[21]

The first suggestion that Toyen was a lesbian woman is presented in Huebner's current book on page 15, but she immediately adds that we have no information about their first alleged partners or socialization among Prague's lesbian community.[22] As Huebner further shows, a stay in Paris and encounters with both relatively openly living lesbian couples and a liberal nightlife were probably decisive for the formation of Toyen's sexuality. The meeting with Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, when Cahun was actively involved in the editing of the gay magazine *Inverions*, must have made a great impression on Toyen. Huebner devotes an entire section of the book to the interpretation of discussions about sexuality of the time; she addresses the Czech reception of Freud, Weininger, Rank and Reich (the latter two also referred to by Brouk), as well as the first emancipation efforts of sexual minorities, for which the research and activism of Magnus Hirschfeld were essential. Huebner does not mention the reception of Richard Krafft-Ebing, who was, alongside Weininger, one of the few positive sources for Brouk's chaotic sexological theses on homosexuality. Bohuslav Brouk did not really recognize female homosexuality, although he did to a very limited extent just to be coherent with male homosexuality. He claimed that most women resort to 'pseudohomosexuality limited to genital satisfaction'.[23]

In the sixth chapter, Huebner addresses the surrealist visual vocabulary in the work of Toyen and to some extent Štyrský, based on the reading of Roman Jakobson, Jan Mukařovský and Jindřich Honzel, although each of these authors, viewing it from a different perspective and position, arrived at the need for a normative surrealist semiotics. The contrast between the full and empty torso in *The Magnetic Woman* (1934) and *The Abandoned Corset* (1937), as well as the fragments of the female body – be it the decapitated head or the play with the 'regendered

19) Ibidem, 93.

20) Ibidem, 88.

21) Anne Le Brun, 'Nezkrocený přepych: Toyen a Erotismus' [Untamed luxury: Toyen and eroticism], in Anna Pravdová, Annie Le Brun and Annabelle Görgen-Lammers, eds, *Toyen: 1902–1980: Snící rebelka*, Prague: National Gallery, 2021, 305–318.

22) The only 'testimony' of Toyen's lesbian desire was provided by Jaroslav Seifert in his memoirs, see Jaroslav Seifert, *Všechny krásy světa: Příběhy a vzpomínky* [All the beauties of the world: stories and reminiscences], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1982, 346. More recently, referring to the 1950s, see Meda Mládková, *Můj úžasný život* [My amazing life], Prague: Academia; Museum Kampa, 2014, 51.

23) Bohuslav Brouk, *Psychoanalytická sexuologie*, 122.

body' in the *Drawing [Hermaphrodite]* (1932) – represent for Huebner the woman, the female genitalia or the masculine woman (a woman who seduces another woman), although it relies on a reference to the rather old theories of Bohuslav Brouk. Milena Bartlová reaches a similar conclusion somewhat more convincingly by comparing the fragmented female body parts in Toyen's work with the collages of Claude Cahun. Bartlová points to the ambivalence of the ideal of female beauty in the case of lesbian creators: it is a bodily ideal that they simultaneously desire, while at the same time wishing to suppress their own desire for it.[24]

So what does the surrealist erotic, which is signified in the title of the book, mean? Does Huebner manage to defend this concept? I believe that this is the main contribution of the book: the surrealist field opened artistic expression to the most up-to-date scientific sexological views, which probably would not have been possible without the inherent left-wing political orientation of both the local, and global, surrealists. The connection between politics, artistic creation and liberal sexual morality is shown very convincingly by Huebner, and Toyen is at the same time a vehement actor, a passive recipient and a reproducer of these ideals and ideas.

Writing on something we know nothing about?

So how does Karla Huebner's book stand up to the current social discussion about identity politics and its projection onto the image of the artist Toyen? In this, Huebner adheres to a fairly positivist-based interpretation using very coherent art historical methodology, and she also keeps to the view that she formulated fourteen years ago in her dissertation: Toyen was a lesbian woman with her own construction of female masculinity. She does not deny that Toyen considered themself a transgender man whose desire was still oriented towards women, but sadly, she does not elaborate on that possibility. Despite the undeniable fact that Huebner opens up and presents to the Czech readership relatively bold and convincing corrections of the previous narrative about Toyen, she probably could have paid a little more attention to updating her interpretation in the face of new questions and challenges, and not only regarding the diminishing of the transgender narrative. Regarding Toyen's early painting *The Paradise of the Blacks* from 1925, for example, Huebner comments as follows: 'Toyen here presents a golden age where no one hesitated to perform any erotic act. […] The painting simultaneously parodies the Western tradition and celebrates what Toyen imagined to be a more sexually liberated culture' (p. 80), while we lack any commentary or criticism from the position of decolonization theories.[25]

Huebner pays attention to the transgender nature of life and work of Toyen on one single page. In a passage focused on the period's discussion on sexual minorities, Huebner asks: 'How, we might ask, does Toyen resemble or differ from sexually and/or gender-transgressive

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24) Quoted in Milena Bartlová, 'Ten-ta-to-yen: Obrazy toho, o čem se mlčí', 354.

25) On the latest very coherent contributions on decolonization of this particular panting, see: Rado Ištok, 'Kapitoly z koloniálního dějepisu umění. Kapitola 3: Ráj, bál, vesnice nebo výstava?' [Chapters from colonial art history. Chapter 3: Paradise, ball, village or exhibition], *Artalk.cz*, https://artalk.cz/2021/06/28/kapitoly-z-kolonialniho-dejepisu-umeni-kapitola-3-raj-bal-vesnice-nebo-vystava/; Marta Filipová, 'Artwork of the Month, March 2022: The Paradise of the Blacks by Toyen (1925),' *Craace.com*, https://craace.com/2022/03/30/artwork-of-the-month-march-2022-the-paradise-of-the-blacks-by-toyen-1925/.

figures now embraced as part of transgender history?' (p. 121). If Toyen identified as a lesbian woman, Huebner continues, then no, if genderless/non-binary or a man in a female body, then yes. At the same time, Huebner correctly admits that the subversion and transgression offered by their play with gender ambiguity could not only be a manifestation of gender and sexual identity, but also a part of artistic performativity. The ambiguous nature of self-identification as well as the self-expressivity and performativity of Toyen's gender seems to prevent Huebner from formulating an unequivocal position. She writes that Toyen provides us with a 'window into what was possible for a non-normative Czech woman of her generation' (p. 121). It would be easier to frame these considerations in some of the postmodern discourses on the conceptualization of gender and sexuality in historical cultural production, as Bartlová provided in the case of Butler and Halberstam. Another way might be to simply realize that the very fact that Toyen was an artist can not only complicate but also simplify these considerations, as many works on queer art and queer art history show – and Huebner does not refer to them either (it would be pertinent to mention the work of Whitney Davis who has written both on queerness and on Freudian psychoanalysis). The work of art is by its nature ambivalent, has infinite meanings and interpretations and it is legitimate to articulate them, so if we cannot prove that Toyen was a transgender (heterosexual) man or a lesbian woman (or some other combination and variation from the range of gender and sexual identities), we can declare that their work is both lesbian *and* transgender, that is, that it contains lesbian codes and resonates with the transgender experience when and if it speaks to both lesbian women and transgender people. If a historic work of art tells us something about ourselves today, this insight into Toyen's work can never be considered as irrelevant or un-scientific.

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Exploring the Demystification of an Architectural Legend

A Review of: Ladislav Zikmund-Lender and Helena Čapková, eds, *Mýtus architekta: Jan Kotěra 150* [The Myth of the Architect: Jan Kotěra 150]. Prague: Academy of Art and Design, 2021. 285 pp. ISBN: 978-80-88308-41-6.

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The book *Mýtus architekta: Jan Kotěra 150*, as the title suggests, was created on the one-hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the architect's birth in 1871. Furthermore, it has been two decades since the last extensive monograph on him was published by an authorial team led by Vladimír Šlapeta.[1] The anniversary of Kotěra´s birth offers an excellent opportunity for a new interpretation of his role in the history of modern Czech architecture. In addition, this anniversary provides sufficient distance to assess the position of this important figure in the historiography of Czech modern architecture and to address gaps in research. In the following review, I attempt to determine how the book's authors have handled this challenging task.

First, let's begin by recalling a few facts about Kotěra himself. He was one of the most influential figures shaping the development of modern architecture in the Czech lands. After completing his studies under Otto Wagner at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts between 1894 and 1897, and embarking on a promising career in Vienna, he returned to the Czech lands. He settled in Prague, a move warmly welcomed by the local professional community. Quickly, he assumed a leading position amongst Czech architects. He initially worked in the style of progressive Art Nouveau, influenced by his tutor Otto Wagner. Among his most famous works from this period are the Peterka House in Prague (1899-1900) and the National House in Prostějov (1905-1907). Over the following decades, he moved away from decorative elements and became more interested in structural rationality. Some of the most celebrated buildings from this era include the Municipal Museum in Hradec Králové (1906-1913), his own villa in the Prague suburb of Vinohrady (1908-1909), and the 'Laichter House' (1909), also in Vinohrady.

In addition to designing buildings, he dedicated himself to other activities; he was involved in the art and architecture magazine *Volné směry* (Free Directions), for example, and, above all, was engaged in pedagogical work. Initially, he worked as a professor at the Prague School of Applied Arts (1898-1910) and later transferred to the newly established specialised architecture school at the Academy of Fine Arts (1910-1923). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, he educated several generations of Czech architects who would promote modernist architecture in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Even though Kotěra did not complete many buildings and had a shortage of larger commissions, especially in the later years of his life, his position within modern architecture was perceived in later literature as foundational. The first monograph on Kotěra's work was pub-

1) Vladimír Šlapeta and Daniela Karasová eds, *Jan Kotěra: 1871–1923, zakladatel moderní české architektury*, Prague: Kant, 2001. An English-language edition was also published the same year as *Jan Kotěra, 1871-1923: the Founder of Modern Czech Architecture*.

lished during his lifetime by the Prague-based scholar Karel B. Mádl in 1922.[2] Kotěra's early death in 1923 triggered a multitude of obituaries, followed by further articles assessing his pioneering role within modern architecture.[3] Additional pieces referred to his 'creative genius'.[4] These efforts reached their peak with a comprehensive publication of Kotěra by his student, the architect Otakar Novotný, which was released in 1958.[5] Later, the art historian Marie Benešová also explored Kotěra's legacy through the lens of historical materialism.[6] However, she arrived at identical conclusions as the earlier scholars. Another example of the reception of Kotěra´s work during the times of Communist rule in Czechoslovaka was a book or, rather, a brochure presented by one of his students, Bohuslav Fuchs in 1972, issued on the commemoration of the centenary of Kotěra's birth.[7]

All these efforts culminated, much later after the revolution in 1989, in the publication mentioned above: *Jan Kotěra 1871-1923: The Founder of Modern Czech Architecture*. This volume is, to some extent, comprehensive in terms of content, but it still perpetuates the existing view of Kotěra veiled in a mythical aura of genius. In contrast, *Mýtus architekta: Jan Kotěra 150* challenges established conventions and demystifies Jan Kotěra's persona and work from various perspectives.

All this earlier literature more or less helped to construct and conserve the cult of Kotěra as the founder of Czech modern architecture. Kotěra was highly adept at creating his own media image, and as Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, one of the editors, observes in *Mýtus architekta* (p. 206), he imparted these skills to a number of his students and clients. Furthermore, his students, and later art historical literature, reinforced his status as a pioneer of architectural modernism in the Czech lands. His premature death in 1923 also contributed to this perception.

This type of heroization is a highly characteristic phenomenon of pivotal cultural periods, and the emergence of modernism is undoubtedly among them. A selected individual suddenly rises to prominence, characterized by unparalleled talent and genius that overshadows their individuality and any other contemporaries in the field. A mythical aura is created around the person, becoming an integral part of their identity, collectively shared by both experts and colleagues in the field. It is typical of the early years of modern architecture when other national 'pioneers' such as Le Corbusier in France, Mies van der Rohe in Germany (and later in the USA), or Adolf Loos in Central Europe, were glorified. In the Czech context, Jan Kotěra undoubtedly belonged to this group of personalities. These iconic figures often transcend their era, becoming symbols of architectural innovation. However, the uncritical glorification of the persons often leads to a distortion of their life and work and interfere with more nuanced understanding of their contributions. Let's consider how the authors of *Mýtus architekta* tackled this issue.

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2) Karel Boromejský Mádl, *Jan Kotěra*, Prague: Jan Štenc, 1922.

3) František Žákavec, 'Jan Kotěra mrtev!' [Jan Kotěra is dead!], *Národní listy*, 17 April 1923, evening edition, 1, or Zdeněk Wirth, 'Jan Kotěra', *České slovo*, 18 April 1923, unpaginated.

4) For example Jaromír Krejcar, 'Jan Kotěra', *Stavba* 2, 1923-1924, 4-7.

5) Otakar Novotný, *Jan Kotěra a jeho doba* [Jan Kotěra and his times], Prague: Statní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1958.

6) Marie Benešová, *Jan Kotěra*, Prague: Svaz architektů ČSR, 1972.

7) Bohuslav Fuchs, *In margine uměleckého odkazu Jana Kotěry* [In the margin of Jan Kotěra's artistic legacy], Brno: Dům umění, 1972.

In the introduction, the editors and principal authors, Ladislav Zikmund-Lender and Helena Čápková, set the following premise: if, until now, Jan Kotěra has been associated with his leadership role in the formative period of modern architecture, it is now necessary to point out the wide range of the architect's activities and to interpret his place as an individual in the context of social relations. For the authors, a new perspective on Kotěra is made possible by applying new methodological approaches that offer alternatives to existing analyses focused on individual and biographical approaches. Zikmund-Lender and Čápková go even further and mention the use of decolonisation theory, transnationalism, and even ecocriticism. Alongside such methodological innovations, the book points to new, unpublished, material and illuminates previously unnoticed issues in existing research.

The book consists of ten chapters by eight authors, each focusing on various aspects of Kotěra and his work. Most of the authors are younger art historians who define themselves in contrast to the older conception of Kotěra's work represented by Šlapeta's publication. The book also presents archival materials, many of them previously inaccessible. This choice is justified by the redundancy of presenting already-published materials, which have been repeatedly discussed. A further section of the book includes reprints of original texts by and about Kotěra, along with transcriptions of them.

The first chapter, by Jan Galeta, delves into Kotěra's relationship to the history of architecture. Galeta explores the architect's stance towards historicism, highlighting the fact that Kotěra drew directly from the architecture of historicism. This is despite the architect's programmatic statements in which he interpreted his work as innovative and opposed to the past.[8] Galeta supports this argument with lesser-known examples from Kotěra's early work, such as the neo-Gothic reconstruction of Červený Hrádek near Sedlčany, south of Prague (1895). Additionally, the author illustrates the architect's connections to architectural theory from the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly through excerpts from Kotěra's own writings on architecture. Another valuable insight into Kotěra's thinking is his archival correspondence with clients. It could be argued that at this early stage in his career, the emerging architect needed commissions, necessitating certain client compromises. Nevertheless, Galeta's chapter serves as a fresh and promising start to a book poised to challenge established perceptions of Kotěra.

Jana Sklenářová Teichmanová's chapter sheds light on another lesser-known phase of Kotěra's professional life: his work at the School of Applied Arts in Prague. The author delves into Kotěra's pedagogical beginnings and demonstrates how his architectural thinking influenced his approach to teaching. She logically connects Kotěra's pedagogical activities to his formative years at the Vienna Academy under Otto Wagner. Much like Wagner's other students, Kotěra formed a circle of emerging architects around him, who would go on to influence various parts of the Czech lands. The chapter thoroughly explains the roots of this well-known parallel, highlighting Kotěra's distinctive approach to respecting the stylistic expressions of his students. Furthermore, it explores Kotěra's significant role in representing the School of Arts and Crafts at World's Fairs, notably in Paris (1900) and, four years later, in St. Louis.

8) See Jan Kotěra, 'O nové umění' [On New Art], *Volné Směry* [Free Directions], 4, 1900, 189-195.

Helena Čapková's chapter, titled 'Kotěra's Oriental Salon: a Polemic with Jan Letzel,' delves into Kotěra's engagement with 'oriental' cultures. Čapková considers whether Kotěra's architectural work possesses a transnational dimension. His interest in vernacular aesthetics and non-European architecture was in keeping with contemporary tendencies, and represented a portion of Kotěra's multifaceted portfolio which has never been previously explored. The chapter reconstructs Kotěra's engagement with Islamic and Asian cultures, based on examination of several design proposals he drafted as well as his correspondence with Jan Letzel, one of his pupils who worked as an architect in Japan. This chapter navigates the realm of speculation, offering insights into how Kotěra's work related to contemporary conceptions of the 'Orient'.

A further chapter by Zikmund-Lender explores Kotěra's sojourn in the USA during the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, and follows a similarly speculative approach. It focuses primarily on Kotěra's potential familiarity with the works of the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Additionally, the chapter presents intriguing – although sometimes unnecessary – information from archival sources, offering glimpses into the details of Kotěra's journey and the intricate processes involved in designing and realising the exhibition pavilion.

Miroslav Pavel analyses Kotěra alongside the Dutch architect H. P. Berlage in a chapter titled 'Jan Kotěra: Dutch Full Brick and Czechoslovak Empty Form'. Pavel explores the portrayal of new Czech architecture in Dutch architecture magazines, which, surprisingly, provided detailed coverage of developments in the Czech lands. He interprets Kotěra as a mediator between Czech architecture and modernism elsewhere, emphasising Kotěra's distinctive architectural language, which was characterised by the use of unplastered masonry and precise tectonic composition. In a second contribution to this volume, Zikmund-Lender examines Kotěra's role as an educator at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, using the school's infrastructure as a lens to discuss contemporary gender issues in education. The chapter highlights details such as the absence of women's bathroom facilities in the school's design and disparities in the staff salaries of men and women. However, it does not establish a direct connection between these issues and Kotěra personally.

Vendula Hnídková discusses Kotěra's relationship to the phenomenon of garden cities. She explores the pioneering efforts to create garden cities in the Czech lands. However, the description is somewhat incomplete, as it focuses primarily on Prague, and overlooks developments in other parts of Bohemia, Moravia and, after 1918, Czechoslovakia. Strangely, too, the chapter overlooks Kotěra's most significant achievement in this field, the housing colony in Louny.

Markéta Žáčková analyses Kotěra's involvement in urban development projects. In a number of his large-scale buildings, Kotěra grappled with the problem of integrating such structures into the cityscape. Yet although he was involved in urban planning, this was not, she points out, a significant aspect of his oeuvre and remained a relatively marginal aspect.

In his third chapter, Zikmund-Lender explores the reasons behind Kotěra's inability to successfully execute any of the designs he submitted to Tomáš G. Masaryk once the latter became President of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The authors consider whether Kotěra's failure was caused by his traditional approach to the interiors of Prague Castle,

characterised by an aristocratic touch. Masaryk's desire to transform Prague Castle into a democratic seat of the state favoured instead the austere yet timeless approach of architect Plečnik, who worked on the adaptation of the Prague Castle complex from 1920 onwards.

The final chapter, once again by Zikmund-Lender, analyses the construction of the Kotěra myth in Czech architectural historiography, its origins, and its present-day relevance. This section includes a critique of texts on Kotěra and assesses their contemporary significance. Since all the primary texts discussed in this final chapter are included in this volume, too, readers can reconstruct the evolution of the Kotěra myth and form their own opinions about it. Zikmund-Lender effectively uncovers its origins and attempts to decipher it by examining these key historic writings related to Kotěra and his work. The author traces the roots of this approach back to a newspaper article celebrating Kotěra's first major public project, the Municipal House in Hradec Králové, written by Kotěra's colleague from the School of Arts and Design, Karel Boromejský Mádl in 1905,[9] author, as noted above on the first monograph on Kotěra.[10] Zikmund-Lender then guides readers through all the important articles about Jan Kotěra and his personality until the publication of the comprehensive monograph twenty years ago, under the leadership of Vladimír Šlapeta.

Nearly all these historical sources use a similar rhetoric regarding the architect's myth and his pioneering mission: there are a few exceptions criticising work of Kotěra, primarily from the prominent Czech art critic and theorist Karel Teige.[11] Much of the literature about Kotěra was written by his students, friends, and colleagues, so a certain celebratory tone is to be expected, and this fact, in my opinion, should be emphasized. Surprisingly, Zikmund-Lender concludes this chapter by analyzing the materialistic articles by art historian Marie Benešová from the 1970s and 1980s, somewhat unexpectedly avoiding discussion of the situation after the revolution of 1989, when many texts appeared as a consequence of the newly established freedom of speech. This was some thirty years of turbulent transformations in discourse, regarding not only Jan Kotěra but also the entire field of art history. It is notable that he does not analyse critically the Šlapeta and Karasová publication of 2001. This is in spite of the fact that in their introduction Zikmund-Lender and Čápková regard it as representative of contemporary literature on the architect. Their reluctance may be interpretated, perhaps, as due to a certain respect for the previous generation of colleagues. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the analysis of the historiography of Kotěra concludes with the 1980s.

It is also worth noting the unique design of the book by the duo of Jana Hrádková and Svatopluk Ruček. The minimalist concept is accentuated by a pastel colour palette, which complements the archival materials in ochre and beige tones. However, the choice of rather flimsy paper, which contrasts with the book's solid covers, is questionable. Such a choice of paper, especially for graphic pages and photographic reproductions, is hardly suitable and

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9) Karel Boromejský Mádl, 'Z Hradce Králové' [From Hradec Králové], *Národní listy*, 22 October 1905, 13.

10) Mádl, *Jan Kotěra*, as in note 2.

11) Karel Teige, *M. S. A. 2: Moderní architektura v Československu* [Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia], Prague: Odeon, 1930, 50-60.

might not lead to a durable, high-quality book. Yet despite such shortcomings, the design is striking, especially the illustrations by Jan Šrámek, which are based on abstract patterns derived from Kotěra's buildings, and which appear to facilitate a fresh interpretation through this graphic representation. This is particularly refreshing for Czech readers, who are likely well-acquainted with Kotěra's architecture, as it offers a new perspective on familiar structures.

The photographic material accompanying the individual chapters is equally eye-catching. The details of Kotěra's buildings and their elements are well displayed. The focus on striking details underlines the researchers' intention to conduct a closer reading of Kotěra's work. In contrast, some of the archival material is shown on such a small scale that it is hardly readable. This aspect of the publication is probably the result of an attempt to cover as much material as possible but, unfortunately, this is at the expense of quality and practicality. This also applies to the original reprints included of period texts, which are, in places, barely readable and would certainly deserve a more suitable text size.

The individual chapters cover a wide range of the architect's activities. Some bring new impulses concerning Kotěra's architectural thought, such as the discussion of his relationship to historicism. Others describe his work in the context of his social interactions, such as the chapters on Kotěra's time at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and his sojourn in the United States. Still others deal with issues that concerned Kotěra only marginally, but they have value inasmuch as they draw attention to the limits of his practice, to what Kotěra did and did not deal with. This fact might suggest an inevitable exhaustion of the subject, at least regarding new material and ideas. In this respect it is a pity that the authors did not offer new interpretations of now established accounts concerning the stylistic transformation of the architect's work, or present new interpretations of his best-known architectural achievements.

Despite such misgivings, however, the book has injected fresh perspectives into Czech art history. Its analysis of the socio-cultural background of Kotěra's work and of other, mainly pedagogical, circumstances of his life present a different picture of this important figure in Czech modern architecture. Together, the authors drew a more nuanced picture of his oeuvre. Zikmund Lender succeeded in analysing the origins of the heroisation of the personality. Yet, with a lack of criticism of more recent materials that continue to present Kotěra as the 'father' of modern architecture, the book is mainly concerned with the older literature, and analysis of contemporary literature is missing. Nevertheless, the attempt to demythologise the person of the great architect is more or less successfully. It is possible to imagine how other figures in Czech art and architecture could be subjected to a similar process. Even though there are no indications of Kotěra's personal attitudes and no direct connections to his practice, the discussion of gender imbalance in art education of the time, to which women had limited access, is important and pertinent. Also helpful and surprising was the comparison of Kotěra with Berlage, and Pavel's careful placing of Kotěra's work in the context of European architecture of the period. The critical analysis of the material on Kotěra by Zikmund-Leneder also offers an insightful assessment of his legacy. The rich pictorial appendix and the reprint of texts by and about Kotěra will surely be helpful for future readers and scholars. It cannot be said that the book brings

a single consistent set of new ideas and information about Kotěra, but that was not its aim. The earlier publication, *Jan Kotěra: The Founder of Modern Architecture,* had already offered a complete view of the architect but it still laboured under the shadow of the myth constructed around the architect. This new publication complements that older work, by offering a new appreciation of Kotěra's legacy and by considering previously unacknowledged aspects of the architect and his work.

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National Art and Culture in Poland before the First World War

A Review of: Adrianna Dominika Sznapik, *'Otoczyć naród swój pięknem…' Dyskusja wokół ideo kultury i sztuki narodowej na ziemiach polskich na przełomie XIX i XX wieku na tle prądów europejskich* ['To surround the nation with beauty…' Discussion around the idea of national culture and art in the Polish lands of the turn of the 19th century in the context of European tendencies]. Warsaw: Institute of Art History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2021. 486 pp. ISBN 978-83-66911

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This book by Adrianna Dominika Sznapik is devoted to the discourse of national art and culture in Poland. It elaborates on a broad chronological and thematic range of concepts, events and activities in an attempt to trace the development and evolution of the ideas of national art, style and culture proposed by the Polish intelligentsia before Poland regained its independence in 1918. Much of the publication focuses on the last decades of the nineteenth century (from around 1880) until the outbreak of the First World War. However, in specific cases, the author ventures back to as early as the 1820-1830s, while the epilogue discusses events of 1925. The monograph thus covers a period of around a century. As for the term used in the title of the volume: 'Polish lands' (Polskie ziemie) refers to the territory of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth composed of parts of modern-day Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

The publication has a complex structure divided into four sections. Part One serves as an introduction to the main argument and provides details about methodology, chronological and territorial scope, used literature and sources as well as goals of the study. The last chapter of this section also briefly explains the ideas of John Ruskin and the Arts & Crafts Movement as well as their reception in various countries of continental Europe. Following the author's claims, the main goal of the volume is to recreate the discourse revolving ideas of national art and culture that took place in the Polish lands and to uncover the intellectual background that stimulated the discussions about them. Additionally, the social reception of these ideas is further analysed in the context of cultural private associations that, according to the author, attempted to translate the postulates of discussions into practice (p. 8). From a very wide range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage that expressed patriotic feelings of the Polish intelligentsia of the turn of the nineteenth century – such as literature, music and customs, to name just a few – the volume's subsequent sections focus principally on architecture and, to a smaller extent, applied arts, which were 'the best fields for application of national styles' since 'almost every person was in contact with these art disciplines'

(p. 11). To trace the development of the concepts of national art and style, Sznapik undertakes interdisciplinary research merging methods of history of art and architecture with those of social history, culture studies, history of ideas and the history of science (p. 13). As such, the volume promises a new, interesting perspective on a topic that has been broadly studied in art history principally in terms of aesthetic and formal characteristics.[1]

In Part Two the author identifies and analyses two tendencies in the discussion of national art. The first consists of historicism and debates about architectural styles of the past. Sznapik focuses on early discussions and scholarship related with the development of disciplines of the history of art and architecture, museology, architectural conservation and preservation and on how they influenced the emergence of styles that lay claim to the title of 'national style'. These included a variant of northern gothic called the Vistula-Baltic style (*styl wiślano-bałtycki*), which became the preferred style for church architecture of the turn of the century, or the so-called *styl nadwiślański* (Vistula style), which was inspired by the Gothic architecture of Lesser Poland (the area around Cracow). Other, lesser known and loosely defined options included the so-called 'homely style' (*styl swojski*) or the 'transitional style' (*styl przejściowy*). One of the most interesting issues touched upon is the fact that early studies of art historical character deliberated over when, in the past, Polish art and architecture stopped being independent and instead started closely following Western tendencies. Such considerations often influenced the selection of preferred historical styles as model sources for the proposed national styles. The section also explores the idea of national painting expounded in the writings of Karol Matuszewski (1842-1902). An art critic and publicist, Matuszewski studied Cracow's medieval and early-modern guild painting, and sought to establish its distinctive, local, independent character. For Matuszewski, the later development of Polish art was inhibited by the aggressive and overwhelming introduction of Renaissance art and only in the works of his own contemporaries (they included, among others, the painters Artur Grottger, Jan Matejko or Józef Chełmoński) could he observe the rebirth of national painting (pp. 74-78). This is an interesting claim and Sznapik suggests, too, for some writers on the subject, national art had more to do with iconography than with any formal national style.

The second tendency identified by Sznapik in this section looked back to vernacular folk art and architecture in search of models for the national style. Here, notable examples were the well-known and much-studied Zakopane style or the so-called *styl dworkowy* (the manorial style) a classicising tendency that looked to the Polish noble house (*dwór* or *dworek*) as its model. The chapters devoted to the inventor and main promoter of Zakopane style, Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851-1915), are the most comprehensive and well developed. Among others, the reader is presented with an interesting discussion that Witkiewicz and his supporters held in the press with a group of architects (Edgar Kováts, Władysław Ekielski and Jan Sas Zubrzycki) who, following technical and scientific norms of their profession, refused to accept that the Zakopane style could be considered a style at all. The conflict seems to illustrate well the fact that the style in question was the invention of an *artist*, not an architect, with a specific ideological agenda.

1) Key publications in English on the topic include: David Crowley, *National Style and the Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style*, Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 1992; Nicola Gordon Bowe, ed., *Art and the National Dream: The Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-off-the-Century Design*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993; Andrzej Szczerski, ed., *Polskie style narodowe 1890-1918 / Polish national styles 1890-1918*, Cracow: National Museum, 2021.

Derived from the picturesque imagination of the origins of Polish architecture, the Zakopane style gained popularity as a symbol of 'Polishness' that appealed to the ambitions and unfulfilled aspirations of the upper middle class, mainly in the Congress Poland and Eastern Borderlands, who wished to emphasise their Polish identity visually. What is perhaps missing from this examination of the discussions around the Zakopane style is a consideration as to whether Witkiewicz was himself a modernizing reformer or merely a nostalgic romantic.[2]

Part Three changes the perspective and attempts to present the social reception of the ideas of national art and culture. To do so, the author chooses to analyse the activities of a number of private cultural and scientific associations and societies. These are discussed in three subchapters, each devoted to a land under the rule of another partitioning state, with their main cities treated as centres of activities: Galicia with Kraków and Lviv, Grand Duchy of Posen with Poznań and Congress Poland with Warsaw. As the author explains, the emphasis is put on Galicia, due to the legal and formal restrictions that limited the possibility of similar activities in other partitions. Most of the societies discussed (including the Society for the Beautification of Cracow and its Surroundings, and the L'viv Historical Society) focused on the topics of architecture preservation and conservation. However, Sznapik presents also an array of organizations in fields such as history, science, education, literature, tourism, photography, museology or ethnography. The range of different types of endeavours (among others, books and journals publications, the organization of conferences and congresses, museums and exhibitions, lectures, courses, tours, commemoration events, scholarships, conservations) taken up by these private groups provides compelling evidence that they took over many functions of public institutions when Polish universities or national collections could not flourish or even exist.

The last, fourth, part contains the conclusion and an epilogue discussing the importance of some of the associations mentioned for preservation of cultural heritage during the Great War, as well as the public reception, as presented in press, of the Polish Pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925.

The volume provides an important contribution to the literature on topics related to national culture and art in the Polish lands. It will be a useful introduction to, among others, profiles of scholars and professionals taking part in the discussions about Polish heritage and to the early achievements of Polish academia, including those in art history, archaeology, ethnography, conservation, or museology. It also presents a wide perspective on the concept of 'national style' and discusses many of the proposed styles that refer to both historicism and folk tradition. Moreover, readers will welcome the abundant quotations from primary sources – archival documents, historic publications and press clippings – that might not be readily available elsewhere. In general, Sznapik presents a good overview of the voices and highlights in the discussions relating to the concept of national character and culture of the turn of the century. Her book is a welcome addition to Polish historiography that emphasises continuation (as opposed to rupture) between Polish cultural thought before 1918 and that of the interwar Second Polish Republic.

2) This idea has been proposed principally in Andrzej Szczerski, 'Styl narodowy – Zakopane, Litwa i Esperanto,' in idem, *Cztery nowoczesności. Teksty o sztuce i architekturze polskiej XX wieku* [Four modernities: texts on Polish art and architecture in the twentieth century], Cracow: Neriton, 2015, 19-39. Szczerski observes that the Zakopane style had also modernizing, democratizing and universal character and was intended to serve as an initiator of social reform.

However, covering such a broad thematic scope, the publication is not without its shortcomings. The author herself admits that the subject she placed in the centre of her reflection is 'difficult to define, oftentimes almost intangible, looming between the lines of programmatic texts, deciphered intuitively from the surrounding architecture or artworks' (p. 7). And indeed, the reader struggles with the elusiveness of the main topic throughout the volume. Following the proceedings of the 1995 conference of the Association of Polish Art Historians, Sznapik defines 'national style' as the vehicle of an idea, consciously intended and received as a sign of a specific patriotic idea (pp. 9-10).[3] However, throughout the study, terms such as 'national style', 'Polish art', 'national art', 'national culture', 'Polish cultural heritage', 'Polish spirit' and 'national feelings' are used interchangeably and, without justification, her definition is applied to all of them. As a result, the reader is left wondering what the relationship and direction of influence between these terms might be (or how the author understands them). Can art be national in character but not in the national style? Is *all* Polish heritage automatically considered national art and why (or not)? Another issue is the use of the concept 'Polishness' and the adjective 'Polish' in reference to culture and art. What definition of these terms does the author follow, for instance, in her selection of source material? It is not stated directly, but the definition that emerges between the lines has a conservative character where 'Polish' means of Polish ethnicity and Catholic origin, excluding from discussion the national, ethnic and religious minorities that composed the society of the pre-partitions Commonwealth. The author states that the issue of the reciprocal influence of Polish and, for instance, Ukrainian, Lithuanian or Jewish discourse about national culture exceeds the scope of the study (p. 12), but one might nevertheless have hoped for discussion about whether non-Catholic and ethnically non-Polish examples would have been considered part of the 'Polish national culture' at the time.[4]

The overall character of the publication is compilatory with the ambition of offering analytical examination, but the reader is sometimes left wanting more critical inspection of some issues. For instance, the problem of class is fully omitted from the examination even though it was surely an important factor. Considering that virtually the only participants in the debates and the societies that fostered them were the aristocratic, intellectual and artistic elites, the question remains as to how or even *if* they extended to all layers of a Polish society that was predominantly rural and agrarian character. Related to this are the ideas, mentioned earlier, of democratization, social reform and the modernizing character of the national style projects, which are all absent from the analysis. This is part of a deeper issue about the study, namely that there is little discussion of why or to what end the national styles were conceived in the first place. What were their theoreticians' goals and ambitions apart from the straightforward preservation or expression of the national character?

Finally, a reader with an art historical background will perhaps be wondering about the selection of the photos illustrating the volume. Their usage may sometimes give the impression of the lack of purposefulness that a study of visual material requires. This might be because

3) D. Konstantynów, R. Pasieczny and P. Paszkiewicz, eds, *Nacjonalizm w sztuce i historii sztuki 1789-1950. Materiały z konferencji zorgzanizwanej przez Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk i Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki w dniach 5-7 grudnia 1995 w Warszawie*, Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1998.

4) The only reference to the issue is regarding the presence of Hutsulshchyna in the Galicia Pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900, 228-229.

of the academic background of the author: Sznapik is not an art historian, but a historian focusing on the history of ideas, culture and social history. As a result, we find photographs of objects that are not mentioned in the text or are irrelevant to the argument (for example, many various designs related to the English Arts & Crafts Movement), while in other places where specific buildings or styles are discussed, the reader will find no accompanying relevant illustrations.

Despite such shortcomings, Sznapik's book will be a relevant addition to the bibliography for anyone interested in the topics of history, culture and patriotism of the times before Poland reappeared on the map of Europe. It contains a significant amount of scholarship regarding the thought and activities of Polish intelligentsia of the turn of the nineteenth century and will be a useful basis for further critical studies devoted to the history of art and architecture in Poland.

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Questions for Czech Architectural History

A Review of:

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Matthew Rampley

For anyone interested in the history of Czech architecture, the five volumes reviewed here are an important landmark, all the more so given that they are published in English as well as in Czech. They are the result of a project on the theme of Czech Architecture and Politics that was funded by the Czech Ministry of Culture. It culminated in an exhibition staged at the Academy of Art and Design in Prague in 2022.

As Jindřich Vybíral, editor of the first volume in the series, states, the project's purpose was to inject the study of architecture with renewed intellectual energy, replacing the traditional focus on formal analysis, style and gathering of circumstantial facts with a focus on the intertwining of architecture and public policy. As such, the volumes explore a number of topics that are seldom discussed in architectural histories of the Czech lands, or at least are often analysed only in the form of individual case studies. Hence, the first volume examines, for example, the nineteenth-century cult of the Middle Ages, triumphal arches, and workers' housing, alongside the predictable subjects of the National Theatre and nationalism. The second volume, on Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1945, covers, in addition to the canonical themes of the avant-garde and debates over housing, urban planning in as well as outside of Prague, military and government architecture, and the tensions that arose from architectural policies and practices in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. These two territories are usually invisible in architectural histories of this period, as if Czechoslovakia was merely an earlier incarnation of the current Czech Republic, and so their inclusion is particularly welcome. In the third volume, which covers the period of socialist rule after the Second World War, there are essays not only on the perennial theme of housing policy, but also on, for example, heritage policy, building for leisure activities, gender and women's emancipation. The fourth volume, covering the period following the Velvet Revolution, contains contributions on subjects such as municipal architectural policies, squatting and

government and administration buildings. The final volume is the catalogue to the exhibition on the topic as a whole that was held in the exhibition space of the Academy of Art and Design in Prague in 2022.

For international readers especially, these volumes contain a wealth of material that is almost never discussed outside of specialised Czech publications, and they will greatly enhance understanding and knowledge of Czech architectural culture. Some of it covers familiar territory. Much of the volume on the nineteenth century, for example, considers the ways in which architecture became a terrain where imperial and local administrations sought to exert their authority. Architectural debate as a proxy for nationalist conflict has been extensively explored already. Nevertheless, the volume contains a considerable amount of new material and ideas. The Czech avant-garde has long been well respected in terms of its place in the larger landscape of twentieth century, but in comparison with the Bauhaus and other figures in Germany or France, there is still a surprising dearth of international scholarship on it, and the relevant volume here contains material that will be new to many international scholars. One example is the exhibition *For a New Architecture* staged in the Academy of Art and Design in Prague in 1940, the subject of a chapter in the second volume. It has attracted little international attention, yet with a title alluding to Le Corbusier's famous 1923 book *Vers une architecture*, its endorsement of modernist practice was clearly a significant rebuke and act of resistance to the occupying Nazi regime.

The same absence of extensive international attention also holds for architecture under socialism, where, aside from clichés about socialist housing and the denigrated nature of cityscapes due to socialist urban policies, more in-depth discussion is sporadic.[1] A particular strength of the third volume is the overview it gives of the proliferation of architectural and urban theories under socialism, which also points to the active engagement of writers with the ideas of theorists based in western Europe and the United States.[2] In its exploration of socialist-era prognostications of future urban development, the volume also explores how members of the interwar avant-garde adapted to the new political circumstances and intellectual environment of post-war socialism.

The appearance of these volumes is thus to be welcomed and they will make an important contribution to knowledge. It is not possible, in a single review, to give a detailed account of all the arguments and material presented, since the quantity of material is so large. Instead, the remainder of this discussion concentrates on general issues; for although the volumes are quite diverse in their approach and their subject matter, certain questions are raised by all the volumes.

A striking aspect of the project is the decision to focus on the public sphere and on building sponsored by the state, local authorities, or by bodies that had some kind of relation to the state. This may be pertinent for the years between 1918 and 1989, where the state was all-powerful and actively intervened in urban development and architectural practice. It is an

1) An important corrective to this is the journalism of Owen Hatherley, who has produced important studies of architecture and design in socialist and post-socialist Europe. See Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism: A History through Architecture*, New York: New Press, 2015 and *The Adventures of Owen Hatherley in the Post-Soviet Space*, New York: Repeater, 2018.

2) Vojtěch Märc, 'Spaces of Expectation: Socialist Architecture and the Politics of the Future', in Rollová and Jirkalová, eds, *The Future is Hidden in the Present: Architecture and Czech Politics, 1945–1989*, 134–90.

orientation towards the public sphere that continues the approach of an earlier publication by some of the same team, *Building a State* (2015), which explored the ways in which architecture was used as a platform in the service of identity formation by the newly founded Czechoslovak Republic after 1918.[3] However, it seems to be an unnecessary limitation. Private enterprise was an important driver of building in the nineteenth century; one of the major challenges for the current-day Czech Republic, for example, is dealing with the legacy of derelict factories and other buildings from the industrial revolution. Likewise, the profiles of many city centres, from Wenceslas Square in Prague to the Upper Square in the small town of Znojmo, were changed by the creation of commercial buildings. Between the wars they included, for example, the Baťa shoe stores or the *White Swan / Bíla Labuť* department store in Prague (1939). This omission of private and commercial building is most glaring, perhaps, in the final volume, on the post-socialist era, in which so many of the issues that have been central to discussions of recent and contemporary architecture – rampant commercialism, the privatisation of space and the decline of the public sphere, the impact of migration, non-plan, spectacle, the loss of modernist utopias – are almost completely absent.[4] Yet these topics, spelt out by authors such as Mike Davis, Reyner Banham and Edward Soja in relation to the United States and now pursued by a younger generation of scholars, are just as relevant to central Europe.[5]

The apparent reluctance of the contributors and editors to look beyond the state and municipal authorities as the primary agents is important because it impinges on the putative ambition of the volumes to engage with architecture as a *political* practice. Surprisingly, it is not very clear what is meant by 'politics' in any of the volumes. There are forays into 'political' subjects, such as gender, squatting and social inclusion / exclusion, leisure as a form of resistance, and these chapters provide illuminating and thoughtful discussions, but they do not add up to a consistent picture. There is also lurking in the project a rather traditional narrative of Czech identity and statehood, which is about overcoming adversity and attaining autonomy. The title of the final volume: *The Rule over Your Affairs Once Lost Will Return to You* embodies that dream of autonomy, yet, as numerous historians and commentators have observed, such sovereignty never was achieved. The dictatorship of the Socialist Party was superseded by the much more insidious power of global capitalism and private finance, and architecture provides a vivid illustration of that process. Czech cities do not have the vast developments of skyscrapers and other powerful symbols of the intertwining of architecture and the capitalist economy, but they have been put under pressure by the proliferation of out-of-town shopping malls, for example, which have hollowed out city centres and turned many of them into ghost towns. If politics is to be the central theme of the book, it would have been helpful to have a proper discussion of the tensions between public and private

3) Milena Bartlová, ed. *Building a State: The Representation of Czechoslovakia in Art, Architecture and Design*, Prague: UMPRUM, 2015.

4) Some 20 years ago a remarkably perceptive short study of Tallinn was published that examined precisely these issues in relation to the changing character of the post-Soviet capital of Estonia. See Andres Kurg and Mari Laanemets, *Tallinna Juht: A User's Guide to Tallinn*, Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2002.

5) Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, London: Vintage, 1992; Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000; Reyner Banham, *Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, London: Routledge, 2013; Kenny Cupers, Catharina Gabrielsson and Helena Mattsson, *Neoliberalism on the Ground: Architecture and Transformation from the 1960s to the Present*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

spheres, or of the debates that have arisen in the Czech context in this regard. Especially for international readers, it would have been useful to see some analysis of the ways in which the specifically Czech historical experience had impacted on the shape of such debates, in comparison with elsewhere.

It is always possible to bemoan omissions, and this can sometimes be unfair, since no publication can cover all territory, but there are some curious absences that suggest unexamined assumptions about the meaning of 'Czech' in this project. The first volume, dealing with the nineteenth century, includes a useful chapter on the German Bohemians (although not on German Moravians).[6] Yet the German minority almost disappears entirely from the picture in the following volume, as do most other minorities. Despite the fact that Jews left a visible mark on the built environment, in the form of synagogues, factories and private villas (the best known of which remains the Villa Tugendhat in Brno), there is no mention of Jews in Czechoslovakia (or in the so-called 'Czech lands' before 1918). It is mentioned in passing that the architect Ernst Wiesner was referred to by the Czech-language press as the 'German architect,' but it would have been helpful to state that this was because he was Jewish, something which gives a clue to attitudes towards Jews in many quarters of Czech society.[7] A further omission is the Roma. As a significant minority they were subject to numerous planning rules and measures to 'domesticate' them. The socialist regimes were particularly keen on the forced relocation of Roma communities, concerned at their putative anti-social behaviour. Such racist 'antiziganist' policies were not limited to socialist Czechoslovakia.[8] In the late 1990s, Ustí nad Labem in north-western Bohemia came to international public attention because of the wall that the local council had built to confine the Roma community.[9] It was, at least, demolished, but it highlighted an ugly aspect of Czech society and politics that has a direct relevance to questions of architecture and the built environment. One might wish that a book dedicated to the relation between architecture and politics would hopefully have approached this issue and the situation of other minorities, most especially given that the question of national identity and imagined community is a central part of its narrative.

At times, too, the volumes are a little descriptive when more exposition and interpretation would have been welcome. The considerable literature on socialist urbanism is discussed, for instance, authors are mentioned, and individual books are listed. However, we never learn in much detail what the specific ideas and arguments were. This project would have presented the ideal opportunity to present a body of thought that is little known outside of the Czech Republic. Moreover, the authors seem unwilling to exercise critical judgement, and questions of significance are seldom addressed. The fourth volume, for instance, include extensive interviews with municipal architects in Český Krumlov and Mnichovo Hradiště. They are part of a section on municipal architects, but the rationale for this choice is missing and leaves the reader somewhat puzzled, especially as the substance of the interviews is rather inward-looking and often focuses on rather mundane issues.

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6) Jan Galeta, 'The Architecture of the German Bohemians', in Vybíral, ed., *Síla i budoucnost jest národu národnost: architektura a česká politika v 19. století / The Strength and Future of the Nation is National Identity*, 528–66.

7) Jan Galeta, 'Urban Development Strategies in Brno and Moravská Ostrava', in ibid., 336.

8) The term 'antiziganism' has been coined as an alternative to 'romaphobia'. See Jan Selling et al, eds, *Antiziganism: What's in a Word?* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.

9) Ray Furlong, 'Czechs Pull Down Gypsy Wall', *BBC News* 24 November 1999.

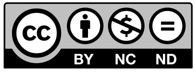
Český Krumlov is UNESCO-listed, but this is not really examined thematically (maybe it would be possible to have had a comparative analysis of other urban Czech UNESCO sites and their role in the cultural and social politics of the Czech Republic). There is also a separate section on the 'Litomyšl Miracle,' but the 'miracle' requires elaboration (what was miraculous about it?) as does its wider significance.[10] The volume also contains a section on the Research Institute for Construction and Architecture (VÚVA, *Výzkumný ústav výstavby a architektury*). The authors evidently regret the fact that this socialist institution (founded in 1951) was closed in 1994, but the reader will not learn why. Beyond information about its various administrative reorganisations during its 40-year existence, we learn very little about its contributions, the kinds of research that were pursued, and the ideas and insights that emerged as a result.[11]

One final observation might be worth making. The volumes have been published in bi-lingual editions, but maybe the logic of this decision has not been fully thought through. It implies that the project team are trying to reach an international readership, which is a laudable aim. However, the books contain sometimes detailed discussions of individuals, places and topics that will be mostly unfamiliar to international readers, without framing them in ways that make them more accessible. In other words, while the team have gone to the expense of translating the volumes into English, they have still been written primarily for a Czech audience. This is a pity, because the value of a project of this kind would have been considerably magnified if consideration had been given to the readership.

Despite such critical observations, it is important to conclude on a positive note. Although closer and more reflective analysis would have strengthened and underlined the ambitions of this project, the volumes, as a whole, do achieve the goal of the project, which is to move away from the affirmative, positivistic paradigm that still dominates so much writing on Czech architecture. Not only should they be added to the library of anyone engaged seriously with architectural history, they will also provide a platform for future debate and research.

10) Cyril Říha, 'The Litomyšl Miracle as an Exemplar of a "Political Thing"', in Říha, ed., *The Rule over your Affairs Once Lost Will Return to You: Architecture and Czech Politics after 1989*, 362–80, 184–248.

11) Marcela Hanáčková, 'The End of VÚVA', in Říha, ed., *The Rule over your Affairs Once Lost Will Return to You: Architecture and Czech Politics after 1989*, 362–80.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Temporal Entanglements in Art and Exhibition Histories

A Review of: Dóra Hegyi and Eszter Szakács, eds, *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism,* Budapest and Bucharest: PUNCH / tranzit.hu, 2022. pp. 332. ISBN 978-615-5341-74-8.

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Keywords

Hungarian art; Hungarian modernism; exhibition histories; art historiography; state collections; Kiscell Museum – Municipal Gallery; László Beke

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What is the significance of the year 1971 in the context of Hungarian art history? What is the significance of 1971 for the art of East-Central Europe, for global art history, and political history? What does 'parallel' imply in (art-)historical investigations? What analogies, juxtapositions, and comparisons are expected in contemporary art narratives, permanent museum displays, and temporary exhibitions? Is it possible to find similarities between art events occurring in the parallel, unrelated times of national and local art histories? Are they unrelated? Is it possible to find parallels when the art histories are considered nonsynchronous, not simultaneous?

These and other questions current in academic debate on time in art history are provoked by the title of the exhibition *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism*, which was curated by Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, Zsóka Leposa, Enikő Róka, and László Százados at the Kiscell Museum Municipal Gallery, part of the Budapest History Museum, between 13 October 2018 and 24 March 2019. What remains after the temporary visual event are the Hungarian and English editions of its catalogue. The exhibition and catalogue are the outcome of the joint research conducted by representatives of the contemporary art organization tranzit.hu, which in 2009 initiated the online archive *Parallel Chronologies: Collection of Exhibitions in Eastern Europe 1950–1989*, and the Kiscell Museum Municipal Gallery in Budapest, which holds a collection of twentieth-century Hungarian art. The catalogue documents the exhibition and gathers essays examining the art, cultural institutions, and art networks in socialist Hungary during the so-called Kádár era (1957–89). However, this political time frame, mentioned by the authors in the introduction, should not be identified with the concept of art-historical time delineated in this project.

For the creators of the exhibition and the impressive catalogue of 332 pages, the initial point of reference is 1971. In that year the Budapest History Museum, for example, hosted exhibitions of work by Gyula Hincz (1904–1986), József Somogyi (1916–1993), and Endre Domanovszky (1907–1974), all of whom were well established in the official art system. In 1970 Hincz and Somogyi presented their works in the Hungarian Pavilion at the 35th Venice Biennale, and Domanovszky in 1972 at the 36th edition. Also, in 1971, László Beke (1944–2022), the then-twenty-seven-year-old art historian, initiated his 'unofficial' curatorial project, a call to artists to submit artworks on A4 sheets. He received works from thirty-one artists and exhibited them in his apartment. This project, titled *Imagination* [*Elképzelés*], gathering a young generation of artists, is today considered the first collection of Hungarian conceptual art.

Art historians and curators often appropriate time frames from political history, considering them essential for the periodization of art. Typical examples are 1968 – the year of global 'revolutions', or 1989 – the fall of the Berlin Wall.[1] *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism* places as its starting point a date relevant to local art history, or to be more precise, to two parallel 'micro-histories' – of the Kiscell Museum and Beke's exhibition project of conceptual art.

Maja and Reuben Fowkes have recently problematized Piotr Piotrowski's 'horizontal art history' in terms of Euclidian geometry, pointing to the fact that 'horizontality' implies 'the act of constituting a boundary line'.[2] As inscribed in *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism*, the concept of time would rather correspond to a 'rhizome-like' structure, as is explained in the catalogue's concluding essay by László Százados ('Space Grid'), and visualized by Tamás Kaszás's labyrinthine installation *Dezső Korniss Space Grid*, commissioned for the exhibition of 2018 and placed in the courtyard of the Kiscell Museum. Kaszás's installation introduces another shoot of time; it is a contemporary interpretation of Dezső Korniss's pencil drawing *Space Grid*, the artist's answer to Beke's call of 1971. The installation and the drawing resemble a geometrical meander rather than an organic rhizome. Nevertheless, if one accepts a rhizome as a visualization of historical time, 1971 would be a node from which sprout many shoots of various lengths, such as 1968–73, a time frame marked at the beginning of the catalogue's *Context* section, and 1957–89, the Kádár era.

In the introduction to the catalogue Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, and Enikő Róka explain the concepts of time informing the project, such as 'nonsynchronism', inspired by Ernst Bloch's idea of 'Ungleichzeitigkeit', Reinhart Koselleck's analysis of historical categories ('space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation'), Karl Mannheim's definition of 'generation', and Carlo Ginzburg's notion of microhistory. The account of the reception of Bloch's philosophy in Hungary and his intellectual divorce from György Lukács is fascinating and thought-provoking, as well as its discussion of the adaptation of the concept of 'generation' by Lajos Németh in his 1968 study of modern Hungarian art.[3] It is worth adding that Bloch's ruminations on 'non-contemporaneity' and Koselleck's studies of the semantics of historical time often serve as references for contemporary reflections on time in art history; Keith Moxey's exploration of 'heterochronicity,' alluding both to poststructuralist perspectives and hermeneutical horizons, is a case in point.[4]

The introduction also summarizes the state of research on East-Central European art, including Piotrowski's notion of 'horizontal art history', Edit András's reflections on the place of Eastern Europe in global art history, Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl's edited volume *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (2002), and many more publications, research projects, and exhibitions of the past twenty years that have offered alternatives to the North Atlantic 'canons'. In this context, *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchro-*

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1) See, e.g., Claire Bishop and Marta Dziewańska, eds, *1968–1989: Political Upheaval and Artistic Change / Momenty zwrotne w polityce i sztuce*, Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2009.

2) Maja and Reuben Fowkes, 'How to Write a Global History of Central and Eastern European Art', in Agata Jakubowska and Magdalena Radomska, eds, *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Critical Practices*, New York and London: Routledge, 2023, 111–12.

3) Lajos Németh, *Modern Magyar művészet*, Budapest: Corvina, 1968.

4) See, e.g., the bibliography in Keith Moxey, *Visual Time: The Image in History*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2013, 180 and 189.

nism can be described as a reference book on East-Central European art and its contemporary, decolonizing historiographies. It discusses many theories and practices of historical narrative but does not consider them to be the only possible solutions.

The publication's subsequent chapters follow the exhibition sections: 'Context,' 'Retrospection,' 'Museum,' 'Imagination/s,' 'In Between Genres' and 'Space Grid.' While the introduction defines the project as parallel to the international art world, the next section, 'Context,' offers a dozen or so short essays on Hungarian art, its institutions, and its historiography between 1968 and 1973, including comments on the institutional system of fine arts, periodizations of Hungarian art, national and self-financed exhibitions, state museums and galleries, and alternative art spaces. This section, richly illustrated with archive photographs of catalogue covers, exhibition openings, and specific artworks, is a primary source of information on post-war Hungarian art. It also includes the biographical notes, short descriptions, and reproductions of thirty-five artworks presented in the *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism* exhibition, ranging from the painting *Artists' March into the Art Fund* (1959) by Sándor Bortnyik (1893–1976) to the print *Hammer and Sickle* (1973) by Sándor Pinczehelyi (b. 1946), artists representing different generations, artistic milieux, and post-war trends.

A similar structure – essays illustrated with archival material, followed by a sequence of artwork reproductions – is applied in subsequent parts of the book. The many visual materials, archival data, and research perspectives are impressive, but the layout could, at times, be more transparent. This lack of clarity may also result from the general incompatibility between an exhibition space and the temporal structure of a book narrative. A reader who has not seen the exhibition cannot, in places, differentiate works presented at the Kiscell Museum Municipal Gallery in 2018 from those that serve only as illustrations to essays (the list of exhibited works at the end of the book is helpful). Regardless of such problems with navigation, the structure reflects the manifold and ambitious nature of *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism*; the volume is an exhibition catalogue, a compendium of knowledge about Hungarian modern art, and an academic attempt at situating local art histories in an international context.

In the 'Museum' section, Enikő Róka and Zsóka Leposa outline a history of the museum collection as a context for the exhibition of Hincz and Somogyi it held in 1971 (see their 'Art Collection and State Representation at the Budapest History Museum'). This collection includes, for example, a bronze sculpture by Somogyi shown in 1970 in Venice and reproduced in the catalogue. Thus, the circulation of artworks can be traced from their presentation in the Hungarian pavilion to their presence in the museum collection. As Sándor Hornyik argues in his text 'Realism, Abstraction, and Contemporaneity: The Modernity of Lajos Németh's History of Modern Hungarian Art', 1968 was significant for Hungarian art historiography as the year of publication of Németh's *Modern Hungarian Art*, which began redefinition of the periodization of local twentieth-century art. Kinga Bódi and Barbara Dudás present the history of Hungarian participation in the Venice Biennale in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the biography of Lajos Vayer, then-commissioner of exhibitions in the national pavilion, and the historical context of Gyula Hincz's exhibitions organized around 1971 (see the essays: '"I carried out the program according to plan": Lajos Vayer and the Hungarian Exhibitions at the Venice Biennale, 1968–1972' and 'On the Path Towards Triumph – Gyula Hincz at the 35th Venice Biennale and the Budapest History Museum').

Many of the local stories presented in the catalogue catch the attention because of their parallels with more general phenomena. Csaba Gál's article 'Following the Red Thread in the 1960s–1970s Textile Art' provides a context for Endre Domanovszky's exhibitions in Budapest and Venice (1971–72). A remark that Domanovszky's designs 'were woven mostly by his wife' prompts the reader to raise issues of contemporary gender-oriented research on textile art and this medium's importance in East Central Europe; it is no accident that many artists from the region succeeded at the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennials (1962–95).

The 'Imagination/s' section includes a reconstruction and reinterpretations of László Beke's collection of Hungarian conceptual art, its 1971 display at the art historian's apartment, and its affinities with the 1972 *Imaginations* exhibition conceived by Márta Kovalovszky, an art historian at the King Stephen Museum in Székesfehérvár. The section opens with brief notes about Beke's and Kovalovszky's projects, followed by a selection of the artworks included in the *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism* exhibition. The section is supplemented by two essays analysing Beke's project and Kovalovszky's exhibition: Zsuzsa László's 'Realism of the Future: Debates around László Beke's Elképzelés (Imagination) Project', and Katalin Izinger's '"Wherever a door was left open, we got our foot in it." Bold and Careful: Exhibitions in the 1960s and the 1972 *Elképzelések* (Imaginations) Exhibition at the Székesfehérvár Museum'. The above summary may make the book's content appear complicated, but it follows the complexities of the 'moment,' 1971, selected from the history of Hungarian art. At this point, all theoretical ruminations on (art-)historical time presented in the introduction read as a reaction to the complex network of factual events meticulously documented in the *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism* catalogue.

This section of the catalogue culminates with the late László Beke's clarifications of the concept of his collection (*Imagination*, 1971), constituting the basis of an exhibition presented at the Székesfehérvár Museum (1972), and his explanations of the title and concept of the exhibition *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism*. Recalling the discipline of diagrammatology, which investigates the fundamental epistemological role of diagrams, Beke provides the reader with his drawings visualizing 'networks of relationships' in modern Hungarian art. At the end of the book, the reader discovers the similarities between Beke's project and Bloch's notion of non-synchronism and Mannheim's concept of generations.

Together with representations of historical time, the catalogue's English edition, intended for international readers, triggers questions about globalizing art history. How is global, or at least transnational or cross-cultural, art history possible when this academic discipline crystallized together with the concept of the nation-state during the nineteenth century? In contemporary debate, the argument that 'art history is closely affiliated with senses of national and regional identity' is not isolated.[5]

Still, the curators, editors, and contributors to the catalogue (fifteen altogether) have made the regional art and its political entanglements understandable to outsiders. For example, the essays in the 'Context' section are supplemented by a diagram which helps readers better understand the complex system of Hungarian cultural institutions during the Kádár era. The diagram represents centralized power structures, with the Central Committee of the Hun-

5) James Elkins, 'Art History as a Global Discipline', in James Elkins, ed., *Is Art History Global?*, New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2007, 9.

garian Socialist Worker's Party at the top, and its subordinated Ministry of Culture managing four leading institutions (The Art Fund of the Hungarian People's Republic, The Association of Hungarian Fine and Applied Artists, The Supervisory Body for Arts and Crafts, and The Institute for Cultural Connections), which were the bodies affecting the programs of art galleries, studios, exhibition institutions, museums, and cultural centres. This picture is indeed worth a thousand words. The names of such institutions differed in various countries of the former Soviet Bloc. However, the principles of the central management of culture, parallel forms of 'bottom-up' organization of artistic life, and the intermingling of the so-called 'official' and 'unofficial' art scenes show some similarities – for instance, with the organization of the art world and cultural diplomacy in the Polish People's Republic.

The catalogue includes brief biographies, descriptions of artworks, and histories of art milieux and movements, which help readers appreciate interpretations of modern Hungarian art. The authors justify their selection of events from the history of Hungarian art, situate them in the context of current research on East-Central European art, and address methodological issues as discussed 'globally' by art historians, thus enabling a comprehensive understanding of art and its institutions in state socialist Hungary. The advantage of the publication – in addition to its archive material – lies in its combination, in one volume, of an exhibition catalogue, a museum collection catalogue, academic articles, and biographical notes. This hypertext, which does not have to be read sequentially, is a collective art narrative presented by curators, researchers of exhibition histories, museologists, and artists. The more art historians confront the entanglements of time, the more they appreciate the polyphony of historical and methodological perspectives.

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