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# Flowers and Windows: The First Art Exhibitions in Prague in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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

**Pavla Machalíková**

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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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.

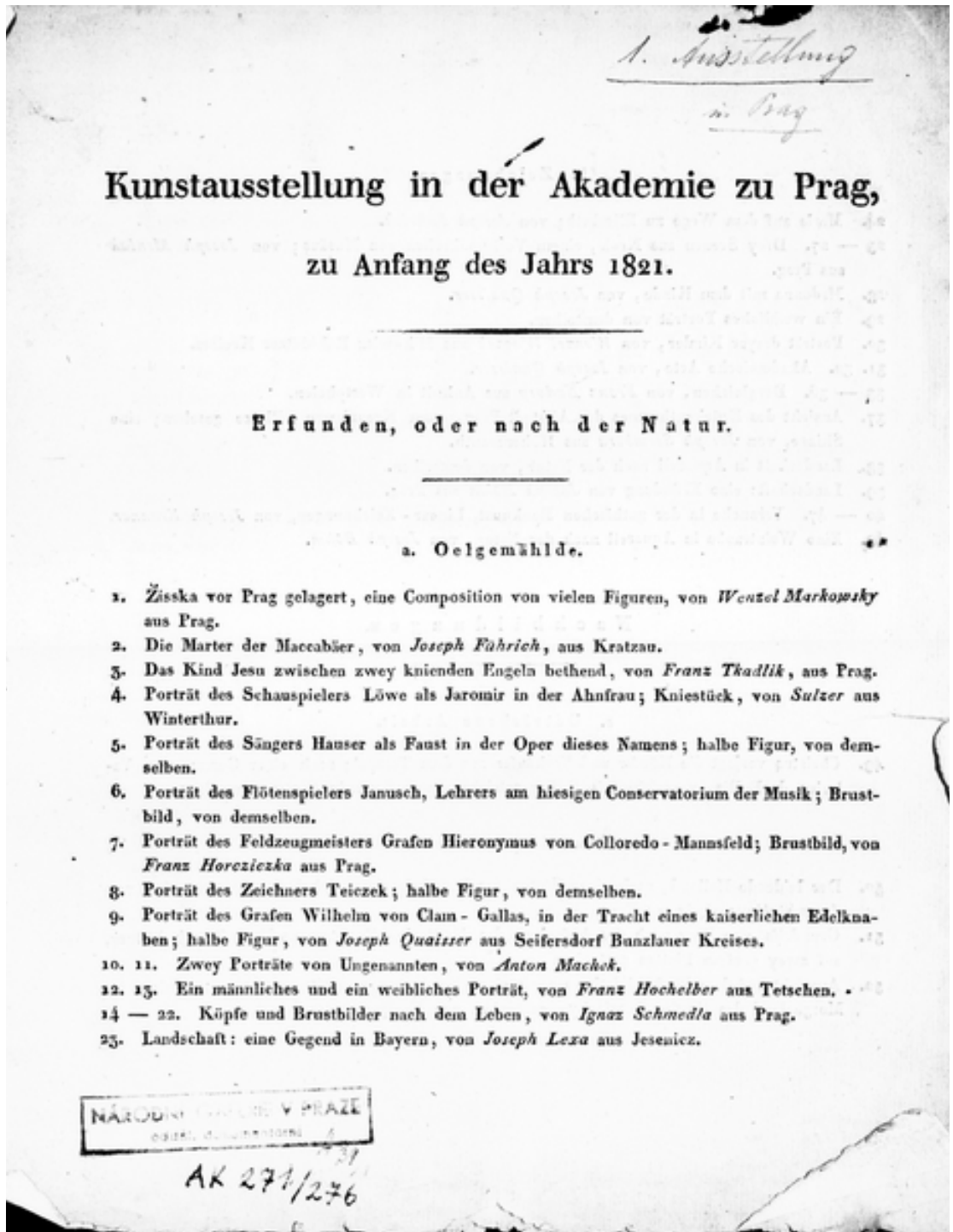


Figure 1: Title page of the exhibition catalogue from 1821.

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>

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).<sup>5</sup> 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

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2) Even the author of a recent chapter on the topic concentrates exclusively on late 19<sup>th</sup> 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 Prahel, *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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

In 1821 the exhibition opened for the first time to the wider public, albeit still mostly aristocratic or upper middle-class.<sup>8</sup> 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**).<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> But an eye was kept on other German cities, too, where the first modern

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*, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 Prahel, *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 Selbstbiographie und den wichtigen von Freundeshand gesammelten bis zur Gegenwart reichenden Daten*, Vienna and Pest: n.p., 1875, 13–14.

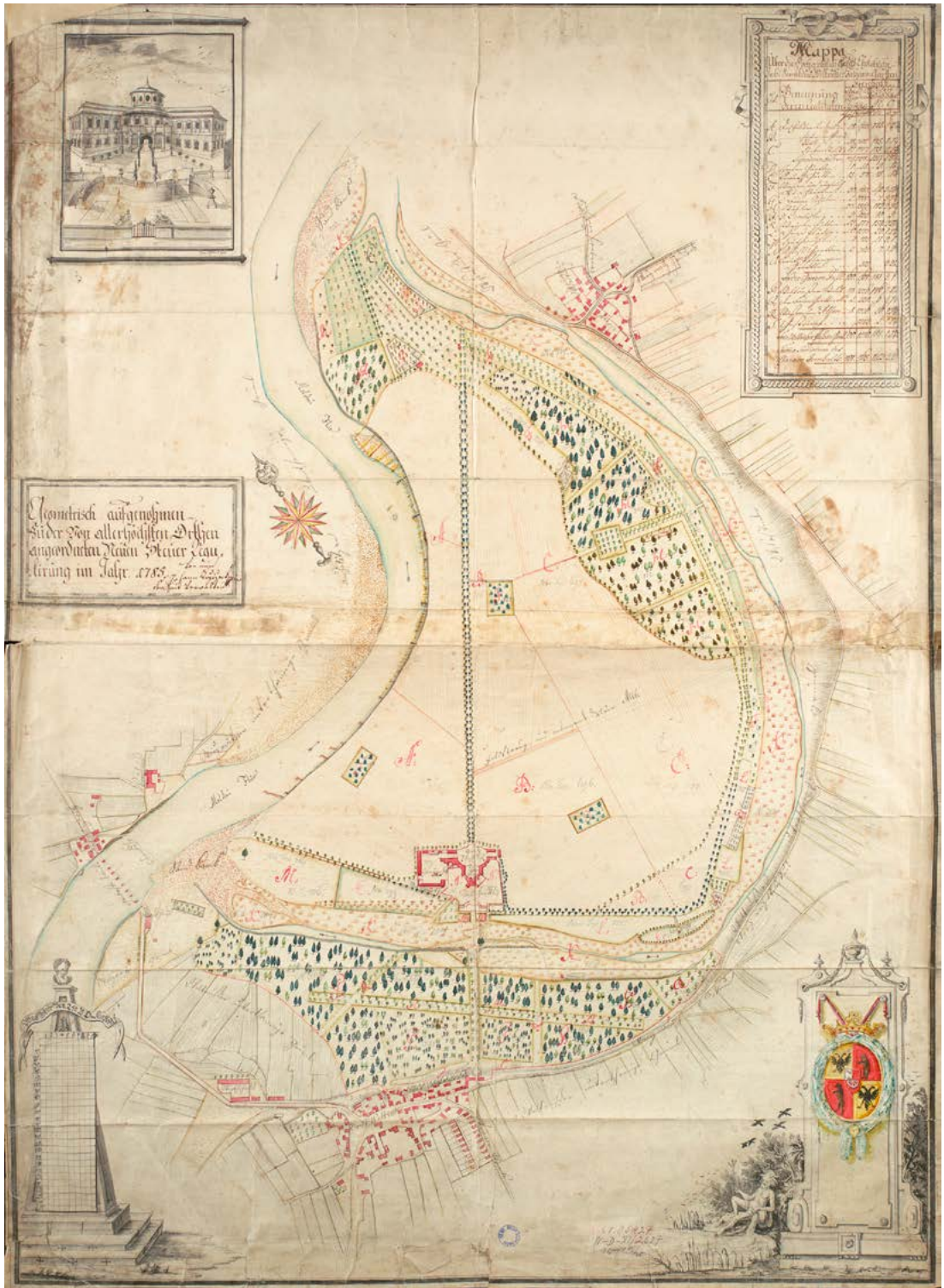


Figure 2: Johann Křížek, Plan of Veltrusy Chateau and Park (1785).

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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> In 1824, Führich managed to organize the shipment of a selection of

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 Prahel, *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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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 handicrafts.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

17) Roman Prahla, ‘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: Anzeigebblatt 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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

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](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.

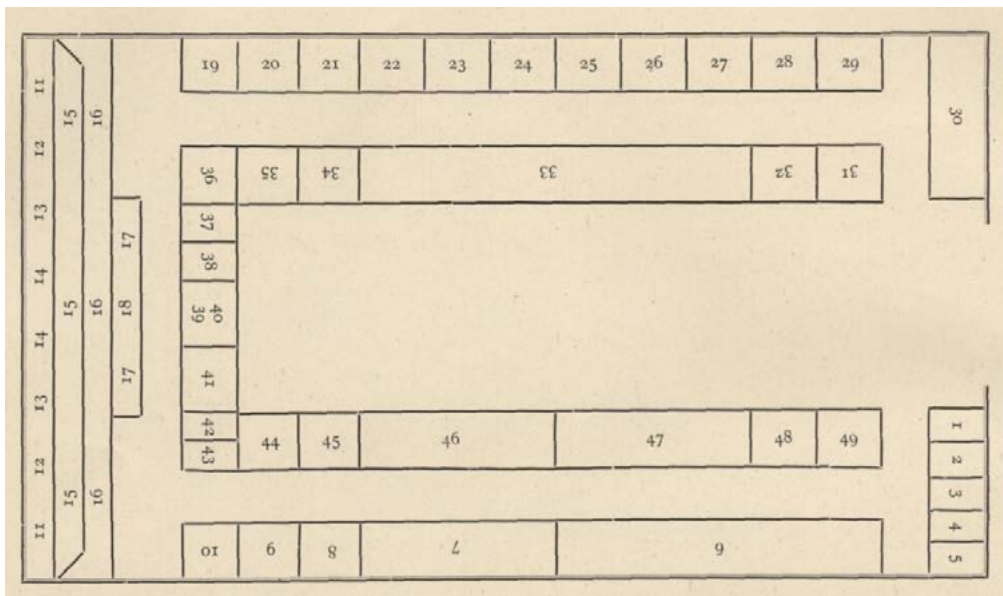


Figure 4: Plan of Clementinum refectory with the layout of the 'Waarenkabinett' installation in 1791.

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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> 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,<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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](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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> 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,

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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).

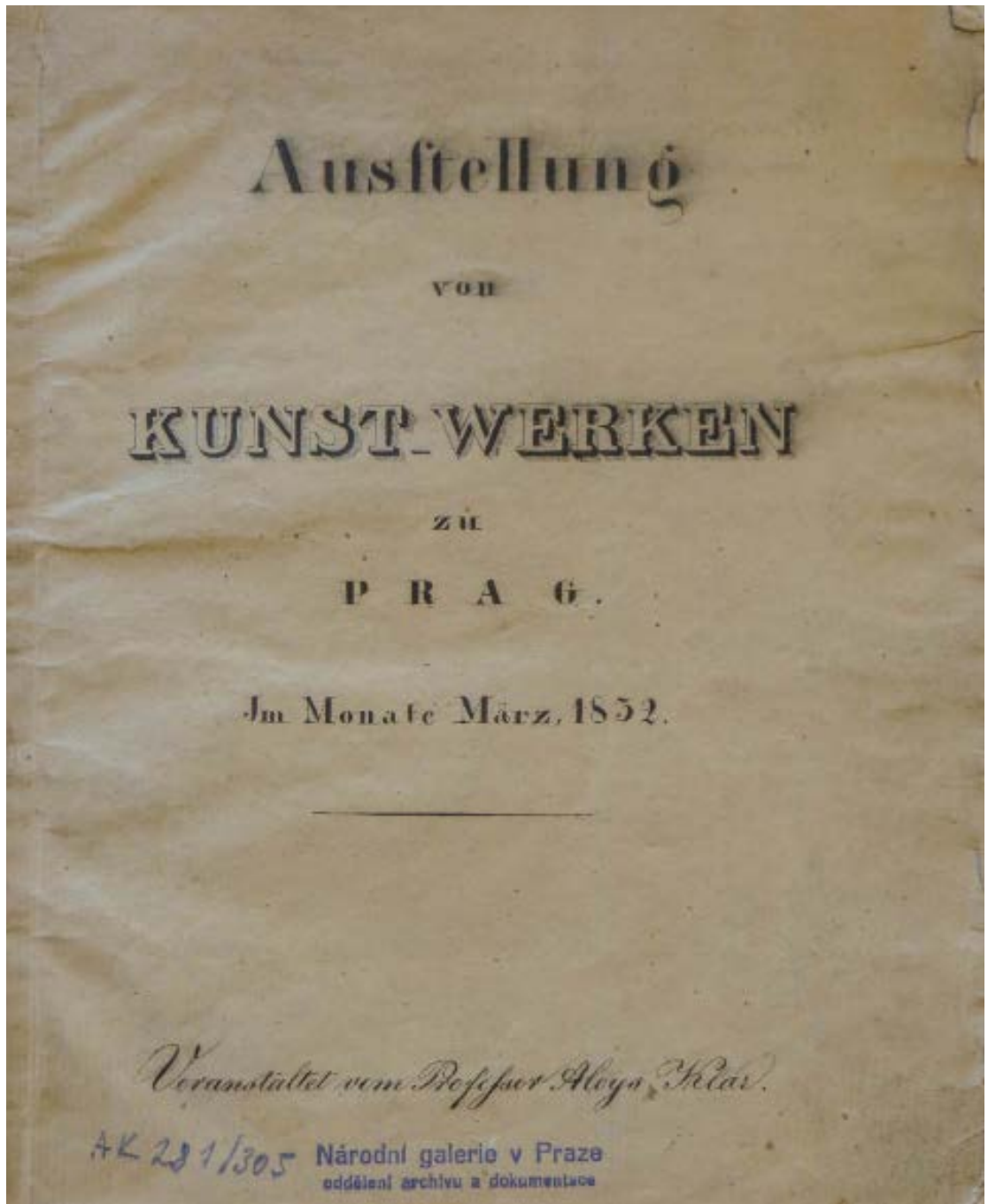


Figure 6: Title page of the Exhibition Catalogue from 1832.

Source: Archives of the National Gallery in Prague.

light hall offered a so far unmatched occasion for exhibiting large paintings.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> The typical hanging in such galleries was classified as ‘gentlemanly’, signifying a practice of hanging paintings that was common in aristocratic collections.<sup>35</sup> Works were organised symmetrically, according to size, format or topic and, typically, without any captions.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

Before turning to an analysis of the early strategies of presenting art in early nineteenth-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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup> 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 Böttiger 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).<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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 Prah, *Kunstverein nebo/oder Künstlerverein?*, 95-240.

44) The lithography workshops are listed in Karel Vladislav Zap, *Popsánj královského hlavnjho 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 Kunstausstellung,' *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.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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).<sup>51</sup>

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.’<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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 Akademieausstellungen 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: Gesellschaft 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, *The 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.<sup>55</sup>

In 1832 followers of German Romanticism and Nazarenism in Fühlich'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.<sup>56</sup> 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

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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 Primmisser 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 Fühlich. 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 Petrbock 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 Prahel, *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.<sup>57</sup> 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 Horčíčka (1776–1858).<sup>58</sup> 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 Prahel and Pavla Machalíková, 'Od restaurování k padělání, od padělání k inspirované tvorbě: František Horčíčka a ti druzí' [From restoration to forgery, from forgery to inspired creation: František Horčíčka 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.'<sup>59</sup> It is also important to note that Horčíčka was asked to design the hanging of the exhibition, which, as far as is known, presented an unprecedented experiment in Prague milieu.<sup>60</sup>

## 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).<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, the mention in contemporary sources of 'a garden pavilion in the Graf Garden'<sup>62</sup> and reference to a 'beautifully lit garden hall'<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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 Horčíčka, *Altarpiece with Saint George* (1831). Oil on Canvas.

Source: St. George's Basilica, Prague-Tmář.



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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> In Prague in 1832, the author of the design was František Horčíčka.<sup>69</sup> 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. Horčíčka'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.'<sup>70</sup>

The success of Horčíčka'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 Kunstaustellung', 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 Kunstaustellung', 38.

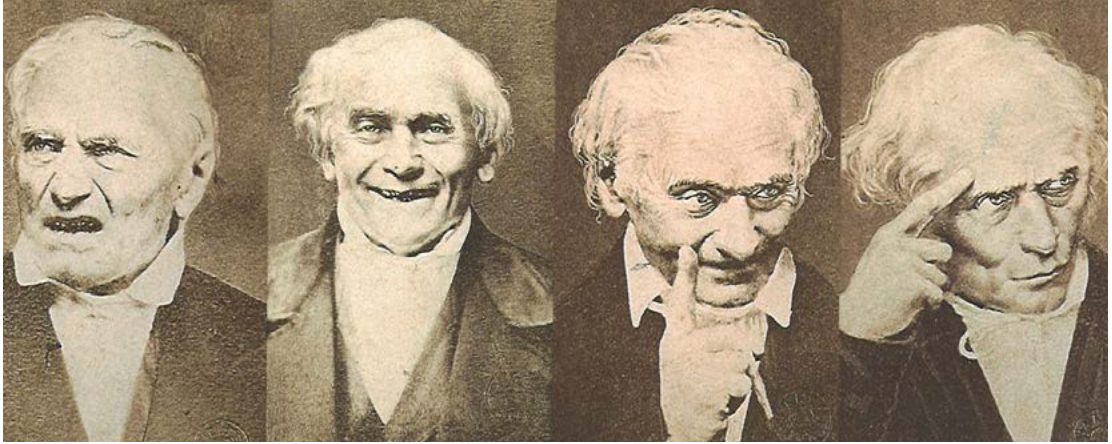


Figure 13: Jan Evangelista Purkyně, *Photos of Emotions* (1862).

Source: National Museum Prague.

produced in support for the claims about the importance of ancient Czech national history.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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**).<sup>73</sup> 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 Horčíčka 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. Horčíčka'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.

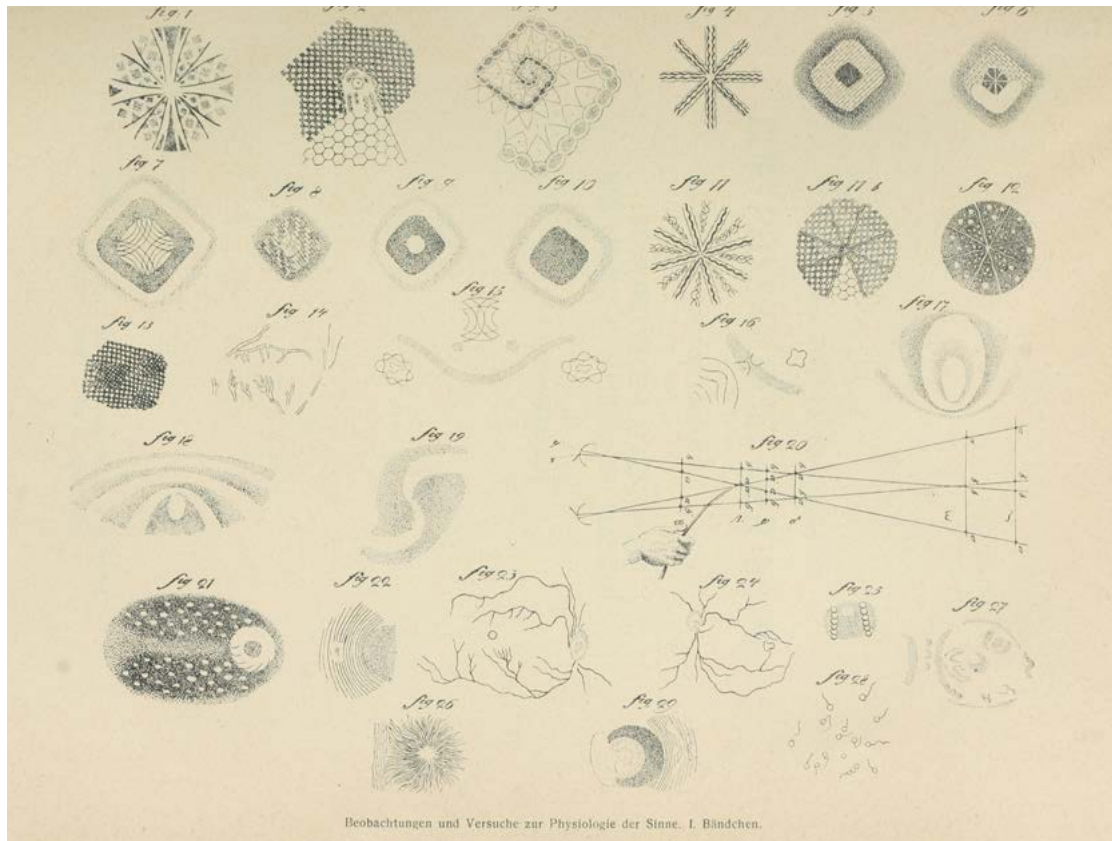
## Aesthetics and manners

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) Prahel 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 derogatory 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.<sup>74</sup>

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’.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup> 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,<sup>77</sup> national community<sup>78</sup> or ritualized conduct leading to the notion of a cultured community.<sup>79</sup>

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 Prah, 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.<sup>80</sup> 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 through 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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

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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.’<sup>83</sup>

## 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.

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

