

Introduction: The Vienna School beyond Vienna. Art history in Central Europe

Matthew Rampley

In his study *Inventing Eastern Europe* the historian Larry Wolff examines the way that the idea of 'Eastern Europe' was constructed in Enlightenment France as part of a process of cultural mapping in which the position of Paris as the centre of civilisation was confirmed and strengthened by virtue of its opposition to the backward semi-barbaric eastern 'fringes' of Europe.¹ This division, which has long impressed itself on the political and cultural imaginary in Europe, shaped the course of art history. As recently as 1998 Steven Mansbach's award-winning book *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* uncritically employed the notion of an 'eastern' European art, which he analysed in terms of its relation to the modernism of 'western' Europe.² Nowhere has this divide between 'east' and 'west' had a more distorting effect than in the study of Austria-Hungary. A complex political, social and cultural space that occupied both eastern and western Europe, the Habsburg Empire has not fared well at the hands of commentators, who have frequently produced limited studies of individual parts, in particular, its capital city, at the expense of considering that complex network of relations that bound the imperial possessions together.

The Vienna School of Art History has been no exception to this pattern. Studies of the work of its leading representatives, most notably Alois Riegl and Max Dvořák, have tended to place them firmly within the tradition of German language scholarship. In one sense this is entirely appropriate and correct, but it risks producing a partial picture of the Vienna School. Of the major figures of the Vienna School, only Albert Ilg, Franz Wickhoff and Julius von Schlosser were born in Vienna or the Austrian 'heartlands'. Rudolf von Eitelberger was a native of Olomouc in Moravia; Moriz Thausing grew up in Bohemia and studied in Prague before moving to Vienna; Riegl was, like Josef Strzygowski, born in Polish Galicia, and he also attended a Polish language school; Max Dvořák was a native of Bohemia, as were Hans Tietze and Karl Maria Swoboda. All consequently had ties to parts of the Empire that subsequently became part of 'eastern' Europe and that had mixed linguistic, ethnic and cultural affiliations. Equally important, as the metropolis of a multi-lingual polity, Vienna and its institute of art history attracted students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Although, during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regional and national centres such as Budapest, Prague, Zagreb, Cracow and Lemberg became the foci of distinct cultural traditions that were driven by local impulses that often ran counter to those of the

¹ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

² Steven Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans ca. 1890-1938*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Mansbach's book was the subject of a probing analysis by James Elkins. See Elkins, 'Modern Art in Eastern Europe,' *Art Bulletin*, 82.4, 2000, 781 – 785.

Matthew Rampley Introduction: The Vienna School beyond Vienna. Art history in Central Europe

imperial capital, Vienna maintained its status, for most, as the most prestigious seat of learning in the Empire. As a result, the Institute of Art History of the University of Vienna trained not only future generations of Austrian art historians, but also scholars would come to be the leading figures of their discipline in the independent states that arose out of the ruins of Austria-Hungary after the First World War.

This issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography* attempts to explore that other side of the Vienna School, examining the ways in which the practices and values of its representatives came to shape the subsequent development of art history across central Europe. As Milena Bartlová and Marta Filipová both argue, it is not in the Austrian capital that one should look for the history of the Vienna School after 1918, but in Prague. Czech art historians who had studied with Riegl, Wickhoff and Dvořák were fiercely loyal to the legacy of their teachers, and consciously tried to introduce the universalist and cosmopolitan values of the Vienna School in order to stifle the parochial concerns of many Prague-based art historians. Jindřich Vybíral's essay in this issue on Czech art history in the late nineteenth century gives a flavour of that parochialism, in which Prague became a locus of acrimonious conflict between Germans and Czechs for ownership of the artistic heritage of Bohemia, which coupled with a resentment towards 'German' scholarship and its putatively preferential treatment by the Vienna authorities.

Due to its complex demography after 1918, Czechoslovakia has often been seen as a continuation of the Habsburg Empire; no single ethnic group was in an absolute majority, and the state struggled to create a sense of communal identity to which all minorities would subscribe. Rival political visions were accompanied by conflicting ideas of political and social affiliation; most notably, there was widespread disaffection with the new arrangements amongst the German population of Bohemia, but Slovaks and Ruthenians were also reluctant partners in the new state. This image of conflicting loyalties, which echoed some of the basic problems of Austria-Hungary, could be found in the work of art historians, too. As Filipová notes, even the ideological division between Riegl and Strzygowski was repeated in the new Czechoslovak state, when the students of Riegl in Prague found themselves confronted by a rival conception of Czechoslovak identity that prioritised its artistic and cultural ties to the Slavic neighbours to the East.

The two most important figures in the dissemination of Vienna School ideas beyond the capital were Max Dvořák and Josef Strzygowski. Dvořák was lionised in Prague as one of the few Czech intellectuals who had managed to achieve a significant presence in Vienna. Indeed, he remained an exemplary figure for Czech art historians throughout the twentieth century. However, his influence spread further. As Paul Stirton's contribution observes, Dvořák was a central influence on the members of the so-called Sunday circle, the group of intellectuals in Budapest comprising his students Frigyes Antal, Janos Wilde, Karoly Tolnay, Edith Hoffmann and Jenő Lányi as well as György Lukács and Arnold Hauser. Indeed, Stirton argues, Antal and Hauser's social art history was a result of the attempt to combine Dvořák's interest in the relation between artistic forms and other cultural beliefs and values with Lukács's work on reification in *History and Class Consciousness*. Political events, specifically, the aftermath of the failed Hungarian revolution of 1919 and the installation of the reactionary regime of Miklós Horthy, forced the members of the

Matthew Rampley Introduction: The Vienna School beyond Vienna. Art history in Central Europe

Sunday Circle into exile and, hence, what might have been a distinctive Hungarian tradition of art historical thought was came to an end, its intellectual energies dissipated.

Many other art historians looked to Dvořák as an inspiration, but Strzygowski exercised an even greater influence. Although a highly decisive figure – in his history of the Vienna School Julius von Schlosser effectively wrote him out of the narrative – Strzygowski's championing of non-classical and non-canonical art was hugely enabling for art historians from minority cultures who saw themselves as marginalised by the dominant cultures of Europe.³ Indeed, as Eva Frodl-Kraft has argued, for many international audiences it was Strzygowski who embodied the Vienna School, and not Riegl and Dvořák's students.⁴ Even before 1918 Strzygowski became a prominent figure in Serbia; his work on medieval Serbian miniatures was seen as a form of validation in a society that was resentful of its peripheral status in the minds of many art historians. Serbia become part of Yugoslavia after 1918, Strzygowski continued to enjoy patronage and support amongst the social elite, including the royal family. His ideas of the 'eastern' origins of European art figured in debates in interwar Czechoslovakia, and in Romanian Transylvania in the 1920s and 1930s his student Coriolan Petranu saw a clear alignment between Strzygowski's ideas and the cultural policies of the newly expanded kingdom.

An exception, perhaps, could be seen in Polish Cracow where, as both Stefan Muthesius and Magdalena Kunińska argue, a distinctive indigenous tradition of art historical scholarship arose that owed little to Vienna, even if Rudolf von Eitelberger was respected and admired. However, even here the Vienna School exerted its pull. Wojciech Bałus notes that engagement with the legacy of Riegl became a major preoccupation for Polish art historians, and that the ability to align itself with the Vienna School tradition was a sign of the progressive nature of Polish art history.

Much work remains to be undertaken on the impact of the Vienna School beyond the imperial capital. The articles in this issue begin, at least, that process of examining the complex exchanges between art historians and their peers in the other cultural and intellectual centres of the Empire and, later, the successor states to Austria-Hungary. In so doing, they also contribute to the wider project of overcoming the legacy of the division of Europe into West and East.

Matthew Rampley is chair of art history at the University of Birmingham. Recent publications include: *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship 1847-1918* (2013); *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe* (co-edited, 2012); *Heritage, Ideology and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (edited, 2012). He is currently working on a critical study of museums as instruments of cultural policy in late nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary.

m.j.rampley@bham.ac.uk

³ Julius von Schlosser, 'The Vienna School of the History of Art,' trans. Karl Johns, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 1, December 2009.

⁴ Eva Frodl-Krafft, 'Eine Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Deutung: Josef Strzygowski - Julius von Schlosser.' *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 42, 1989, 7-52 and 255-258.