

Conference report on:

‘The influence of the Vienna School of Art History before and after 1918’

3–5 April 2019,

Institute of Art History

Czech Academy of Sciences, Husova 4, Prague

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[Conference program](#)

Petr Kubík and Tomáš Murár

The international conference ‘The Influence of the Vienna School of Art History before and after 1918’, was organised by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Department of Aesthetics of the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University and in partnership with the Austrian Cultural Forum and the National Gallery in Prague. It was hosted by the Academic Conference Centre at the beginning of April 2019. The thirty-four participants came from the Czech Republic (Tomáš Murár, Tereza Johanidesová, Petra Hečková, Marta Filipová, Waldemar Deluga), Slovakia (Tomáš Kowalski), Poland (Wojciech Bałus, Magdalena Kunińska, Dorota Kownacka), Austria (Artur Rosenauer, Alexander Klee, Friedrich Polleroß, Eleonora Gaudieri, Yuka Kadoi, Barbara Czwik), Germany (Regine Prange), Sweden (Peter Gillgren), Croatia (Dubravka Botica), Slovenia, (Katja Mahnič, Barbara Murovec, Matej Klemenčič, Rebeka Vidrih, Gašper Cerkovnik), Romania (Greta-Monica Miron, Vlad Țoca), Turkey (Zehra Tonbul, Verda Bingöl), Russia (Stepan Vaneyan), Ukraine (Mariana Levytska, Stefaniia Demchuk) and the United States of America (Benjamin Binstock, Michael Young, Ty Vanover, Suzanne Marchand).

Tomáš Winter, Director of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, gave the inaugural address of the conference, which was followed by short speeches from the main organisers Tomáš Hlobil and Tomáš Murár from the newly created Department of Historiography and Theory of Art. The rising generation of art historians was actively involved in the encounter alongside leading international scholars – evidence that in the present day too, an intellectual current of seeking, identifying and tackling fundamental aspects of art history originating in Vienna more than a hundred and twenty years ago unquestionably has a justification and future.

The main theme of the three-day encounter, already evident in the title, was the methodology of the Viennese School of Art History and its influence over a longer period on the development of art history as a discipline in Central and, to some extent, Eastern Europe. The presence of this phenomenon in the crown lands that made up the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the early decades of the twentieth century, and subsequently in the national schools of art history of the newly emerging states after 1918, was under particular examination. The concept of ‘the

Vienna School of Art History' as describing a methodology narrowly confined to local art history thus turned into a broad intellectual and formative phenomenon covering the extensive territory of today's Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Ukraine, Poland, Bohemia and Austria. This was emphasised especially in contributions from Wojciech Bałus of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Dubravka Botica from Zagreb University, and Greta-Monica Miron of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, as well as Mariana Levytska of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Lviv, Stefaniia Demchuk of the National University in Kiev, and Waldemar Deluga of Ostrava University, who pondered on the influences of the Vienna School in Ukrainian art history. The theme of Ukraine showed itself to be especially important and topical when, during the last day of the conference, a lively discussion took place in front of a full lecture hall. Thus the Prague meeting was the first ever attempt to take as its subject the extent of the Vienna School in such a broad international context since its methodological approaches have an influence in the spatial dimension as well as the temporal.

The main thrust of the conference was the projecting of the classical Viennese methodology into the personal approach of its direct successors; i.e., following communication with the original centre, maintaining continuity with it, and the natural processes of estrangement, distancing and becoming independent. The individual contributions and the basic premise of the whole conference derived from the idea that the capital city of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy created a particular focal point. From this locus the ideas of the Vienna School and its definition of the discipline of art history then spread in the first place throughout Central Europe, finding their application or interpretation and acquisition of specific forms in the even wider perimeter of Scandinavia, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey. Verda Bingöl of the Technical University in Istanbul presented the 'surprising' influence of the Vienna School on education in art history in Turkey.

It was essential to be aware that, in the direct confrontation of national mutations on the one hand and a specific approach to the methods of the Vienna School on the other, and in spite of the frequently very varied geopolitical and historical starting points of individual countries, it was mostly the ideas of Alois Riegl, Max Dvořák and Josef Strzygowski, later of Hans Sedlmayr and others, that determined the meaning of the Vienna School. These ideas today create a tangible international unity in the middle of an inexhaustible intellectual and methodological variety. Benjamin Binstock of the Cooper Union in New York, whose interest had been caught by Riegl's research into Rembrandt van Rijn, devoted himself to Riegl's thinking as the basis of the Viennese methodology of art history. Eleonora Gaudieri of Vienna University also focused on Riegl's study of Baroque art, specifically his unpublished lectures stored in the Institute of Art History in Vienna.

There was also confirmation of the long-held assumption that the principles of the Vienna School can be used in the widest thematic spectrum in artistic research, starting from purely theoretical spiritual considerations. For example, as Rebeka Vidrih from Lublin University demonstrated with the example of Izodor Cankar's stylistic systematics, and Regine Prange from the Institute of Art History of the university in Frankfurt am Maine, who tackled possible intellectual parallels between the methodology of the Vienna School and the aesthetics of Georg Lukács.

Alexander Klee of the Belvedere Museum in Vienna also devoted himself to theoretical questions of the methodology of the Vienna School, following the polarity of formalism and idealism in the interwar history of art and in fine art itself, as did Dorota Kownacka from the Polish Academy of Sciences who researches Viennese aestheticism manifested in the thinking of both art historians and authors of literature. Barbara Czwik of Vienna also opened the possibility of other interpretations of methodology, especially Otto Pächt and his contemporaries; her interpretation was however sharply criticised by Regine Prange. The topics discussed at the conference thus started from such theories and then they were ranging through practical solutions in the field of heritage conservation as discussed by, for example, Tomáš Kowalski from the Department of Heritage Conservation of the Slovak Republic, as far as the rehabilitation of folk work as a distinctive artistic current. This was apparent, for example, in the context of the contribution by Marta Filipová of Masaryk University in Brno. She demonstrated this theme through the work of Zdeněk Wirth, Antonín Matějček and Pavel Janák, whose studies laid the foundation for modern acceptance and appreciation of folk art in Czech art history. Ty Vanover of the University of California, Berkeley also dealt with a theme very close to this. Using the example of a Hungarian porcelain factory in the town of Zsolnay he analysed the issue of Hungarian national style which manifested itself in simplified forms of applied art with a basis in folk art. Suzanne Marchand of Louisiana State University spoke in this spirit in her contribution; in an analysis of the research work of Josef Strzygowski she demonstrated *inter alia* that it was he who, as one of the first art historians to deal systematically with what is known as trivial art, with the wooden folk churches in Transcarpathian Rus, and with Balkan art. It emerged from her contribution that the methodology of the Vienna School reaches beyond the boundaries of Central Europe and that through its means one can just as well demonstrate the interconnection of Western and Eastern spiritual foundations in, for example, the field of occultism and Buddhism. Stepan Vaneyan of Moscow State University similarly linked the methodology of the Vienna School as far as eschatological meanings in the thinking of Hans Sedlmayr are concerned. Similarly, Petra Hečková of Pilsen University drew attention to the fact that the principles of the Vienna School can be applied just as successfully to, for example, classical archaeology of the first half of the twentieth century.

The broad range of mutations and manifestations through which the Vienna School could be present in the course of the twentieth century was shown in the contribution of Tomáš Murár from the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. It emerged from his contribution that as well as other essential interconnections, social and political circumstances could fundamentally shape or distort the history of art. The division of specialist Czech art historians into two currents after World War II was a manifestation of such distortion. Both currents originated primarily from the principles of the Vienna School but, for political reasons, they can be divided into an officially supported current and an unofficial persecuted current. In this context one can describe as a paradox the statement by Tereza Johanidesová of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences that essential works by Max Dvořák did not begin to be translated into Czech until after 1989, despite the fact that in Czech history of art

Dvořák's ideas had been clearly counted on for almost the whole of the twentieth century (translations into Czech of Max Dvořák's work appeared as early as in the 1920s, as was subsequently pointed out in the panel discussion with Tomáš Murár, Petra Hečková and Friedrich Polleroß of Vienna University. Polleroß presented key archive documents from the Institute of Art History of Vienna University relating to Czech art historians, and the documents from the estate of Max Dvořák were especially interesting).

The contributions of some other participants, for example Magdalena Kunińska of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, revealed certain negative and until now rather less debated manifestations accompanying the phenomenon of the Vienna School. She pointed for example to the fact that in the past there had often been, alongside a conscious and healthy critical acceptance of their principles, a tendency to adopt certain undefined partialities, which in retrospect operated to some extent as a historiographical fetish, an all-powerful mantra suitable for any kind of argumentation. This can also act as a kind of myth-making of certain periods, people and ideas, whose end result is the creation of empty fixed ideas stamped with the mark of the Vienna School of Art History. An analogous issue, but from another standpoint, was introduced in the plenary lecture by Artur Rosenauer of Vienna University, 'the last living representative of the Vienna School', whose significance at the conference was symbolic in the sense that he was present as an internationally known leader in the field. (Dr. Rosenauer's lecture was one of two plenary lectures originally planned. Ján Bakoš of the Slovak Academy of Sciences regretted that he had to cancel because of illness.)

Rosenauer devoted his lecture to the methodological issue of meaning and to the possibilities of the formulation 'The Vienna School of the History of Art' (the title of his lecture was *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte – Transformationen, Erinnerungen, Begegnungen, Fragen*), which he considered primarily as a historiographical instrument created in the actual milieu of Viennese art historians. Julius von Schlosser's 1934 book *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte* is considered to be a codification of this description, as is Meyer Schapiro's text about the 'new' Vienna School of Art History of 1936. This description appeared for the first time, however, in 1909, in a text by Vincenc Kramář, the Czech pupil of Alois Riegl and Franz Wickhoff. Nevertheless, according to Rosenauer 'the Vienna School' in its essence contained a wider topographical contest going beyond Vienna itself; this was documented by the conference contributions concerned with the 'Vienna School' in Poland, Slovenia, Bohemia, Romania and Ukraine and other European centres that originated after 1918 especially. Rosenauer argued that it is necessary to reopen the issue of the 'Vienna School' and overturn established and sometimes erroneous interpretations of this methodological school – since, according to Rosenauer, the 'Vienna School' originated especially based on personal relationships between professors and pupils. Rosenauer provided direct proof of this when he remembered his teachers at Vienna University, Karl Maria Swoboda and Otto Pächt. Rosenauer also drew attention to Prague's determination to hold this conference. He argued that it needed to be held in one of the centres continuing the tradition of the Vienna School rather than in Vienna itself, which could (yet again) be accused of trying to centralise history of art research, thus rendering more

difficult the attempt at methodological and historiographical reformulation from the professional point of view.

It proved that the theme of the Prague conference on the influence of the Vienna School of Art History before and after 1918 was an academically important subject whose thinking, originating at the beginning of the twentieth century in the centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, influenced the way art was considered for a long time before and after World War I. Alongside the impact of the work of well-known representatives of the Vienna School of history of art such as Franz Wickhoff, Alois Riegl and Max Dvořák, a need also came to light during the conference for a new evaluation of the role of Josef Strzygowski and his pupils (as was pointed out by Yuka Kadoi of Vienna University and Zehra Tonbul of Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, together with a methodological possibility of understanding such research in the context of postcolonial studies). In other contributions attention was devoted to individual personalities of various nationalities studying in Vienna at the beginning of the twentieth century – Gašper Cerkovnik of the University of Ljubljana followed the personal and professional path of Vojeslav Molé, the Slovenian historian of art maintaining a relationship with France Stele, on whom Barbara Murovec of Maribor University and Matej Klemenčič of Ljubljana University focused. Peter Gillgren of Stockholm University followed the career of Felix Horb, a native of Prague who after emigration worked in Stockholm; Michael Young of the University of Connecticut focused on another Prague born art historian Oskar Pollak. Katja Mahnič of Ljubljana University devoted her lecture to the Slovenian pupil of Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, Josip Mantuani; while Vlad Țoca of the University of Art and Design in Cluj spoke about the influence of the Vienna School in Transylvania in the example of the thinking of Corilan Petranu. Thus the conference also drew attention to the fact that, despite a common intellectual foundation, in the first half of the twentieth century the methodology of art history was strongly subject to the social situation in the individual successor states of Austria-Hungary. The conference thus opened new possibilities of formulating the phenomenon of the Vienna School's influence in Central and Eastern Europe from this point of view. The employees of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences who spent more than a year organising this encounter can, therefore, consider their efforts rewarded.

The next step in the process is the compilation of the conference proceedings planned for publication in 2020 as a thematic issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography*. This anthology should be the main outcome of the Prague encounter, which, in the plurality of its opinions on the influence and inheritance of the Vienna School, is part of the longer term research programme of the Department of Historiography and Theory of Art of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

Accordingly, following the Prague International Conference on the influence of the Vienna School of Art History before and after 1918 and the publication of the proceedings, the ambition is to synthesise the results of the increased interest about the Vienna School in the last twenty years with a view to further possibilities of how this part of European art history, still not completely understood, can be considered. Ideally, therefore, the aim of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of

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Sciences is to establish new questions relating to the phenomenon of the Vienna School of Art History and in this way to lay the foundation for their further solution on the principles of a broad debate which would be professional and international.

Translated by Barbara Day

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