

Avant-Garde Anachronisms: Prague's Group of Fine Artists and Viennese Art Theory

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In a devastating review in the popular illustrated weekly *Zlatá Praha*, critic Karel Mádl condemned the Group of Fine Artists' "complete departure from all reality" and denigrated the "total, irresponsible freedom and autonomy of an artist who establishes new laws for himself according to his immediate wishes or needs."¹ To counter the ridicule with which Prague's critical and popular press greeted their exhibitions, members of the Skupina výtvarných umělců (Group of Fine Artists) defended the integrity of their work in their journal, *Umělecký měsíčník* (Art Monthly), published between 1911 and 1914.² In response to the Group's first Prague show in 1912, one critic labeled the young painters' new works extreme and their journal mere propaganda to draw more viewers.³ The critical responses emphasized the incoherence of the works and attacked the artists for turning to French sources.⁴ In this article I look closely at the images and articles the Group published in their journal to show how they justified their work and goals. The Group's work is usually discussed with reference to the French cubism they admired. But a more powerful explanatory model for their work is the discourse they adapted from the new art historical writing emerging from the Vienna School of art history, in particular that of Alois Riegl and his students, Max Dvořák and Vin-

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1. Karel B. Mádl, "Two Exhibitions," trans. unattributed, *Umělecké sdružení Sursum 1910–1912* (Prague, 1996), 263–64. Originally published in *Zlatá Praha* 30, no. 7 (October 1912): 83.

2. The first volume was published monthly from October 1911 until September 1912. The second volume began publication in fall 1912, but the twelve issues were published irregularly, sometimes as double issues, until at least March 1914. The third volume likely began in April 1914 and included only two issues, ending publication in June 1914. Jiří Šetlík, ed., *Otto Gutfreund: Zázemí tvorby* (Prague, 1989), 152–57.

3. F. X. Harlas, "Rozhledy po umění výtvarném," *Osvěta* (1912): 780–84. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

4. In 1921, painter and Group member Václav Špála recalled that the Group's room at the back of the exhibition with Mánes and Jednota had been referred to as the "Lachkabinet" in his notes for an article, "Jak to bylo" intended for *Veraikon*, 1921, vol. 8. Transcription of Špála's notes, 1910–12, National Gallery Archives, Zbraslav, Fond Lev Nerad a Rudolf Rysaný (Collection of letters and other materials from 1908–1941). One satirical response even accused the group of "looking things up in some French magazine." [Josef Skružný], "Původní zprávy Venouška Dolejše: Výstava obrazův Representačním domě," *Humoristické listy* 55, no. 5 (19 January 1912): 57.

cenc Kramář.⁵ The Group defended an avant-garde position by recourse to art history, a strategy that is fundamentally at odds with the emphasis on originality and rupture associated with avant-gardes in the art historical and literary scholarship on modernism. Other avant-garde groups in the urban centers of the Habsburg empire at this time shared some of the Group's strategies, suggesting that emerging vanguard art in this region presents a coherent alternative pattern to the dominant Parisian model.⁶

The critics and the Prague public were responding to sculpted and painted works, to furniture and applied art and to graphic and architectural designs. A few examples by Otto Gutfreund and Emil Filla show the symbolic themes members of the group rendered in an angularly abstracted style. In Gutfreund's plaster bust of *Don Quixote* (1911–12), the distortions of the face metaphorically reference the character's own distorted perception of reality (figure 1). The angular shoulders and thin, elongated neck support an impossibly long ovoid face. A bulbous forehead contrasts with the sharply rendered nose and jutting pointed beard. The quizzical eyes appear sightless below their heavy brows. The whole face seems about to collapse inward toward the center line, producing an impression of impermanence. Gutfreund's stated goal was to depict a character who embodies an abstract concept in the artist's mind in such an unnaturalistic way that the material form produces an idea again for the viewer, in this case a question about the nature and reliability of perception. "The ideal for the sculptor," he wrote, would be "that the abstraction that has been embodied in concrete form becomes abstraction again for the viewer."⁷

In both of his paintings of Salome's dance, Filla renders surfaces as facets rather than contours, using the characteristic angular decomposition of the representation and systematic formal patterning that he found so compelling in French cubism. But unlike his French models, he chose a narrative scene and framed it theatrically with baroque curtains. Filla does not give us an image of decadence or darkness, typical in symbolist treatments of this theme. In the first version, the pale arms raised in dance draw the viewer's attention to the dancing figure, her lower body clad in red standing out from the patterned background (figure 2). This version is filled with saturated blues, greens, and reds, while the second

5. These art historians all taught at the Kunsthistorisches Institut at Vienna University in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, along with a number of other scholars, have come to be known as the "Vienna School" of art history. Ján Bakos, "The Vienna School's Hundred and Sixty-eighth Graduate: The Vienna School's Ideas Revised by E. H. Gombrich," in Richard Woodfield, ed., *Gombrich on Art and Psychology* (Manchester, Eng., 1996), 234.

6. Elizabeth Clegg, *Art Design and Architecture in Central Europe 1890–1920* (New Haven, 2006); Piotr Piotrowski, "Modernity and Nationalism: Avant-Garde Art and Polish Independence, 1912–22," in Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–30* (Boston, 2002).

7. Otto Gutfreund, "Dvě poznámky o Donatellovi," *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 4–5 (ca. May 1913): 137.

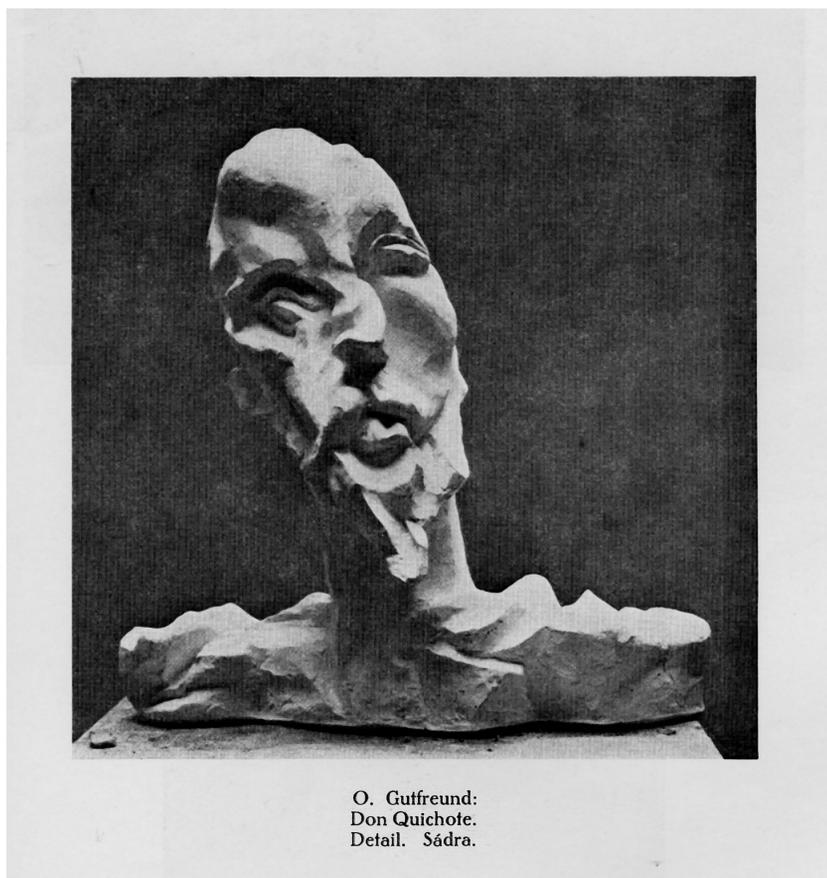


Figure 1. Otto Gutfreund, *Don Quixote*, 1911–12. Plaster. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 4–5 (ca. April 1913): 111. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

version, though similar in composition, is leached almost entirely of color. In both, a kneeling figure offers Salome a platter with a crudely drawn head of John the Baptist. The foreground figures seem ethereal, almost merging with their surroundings, allowing the three main characters to dominate. Salome's body extends vertically almost the whole length of the painting, her curves and angles echoed by corresponding lines throughout the painting. The figure of Herod halts the vertical lines that extend down from the top of the painting behind him and occupies a cramped space, emphasizing his physicality. Salome appears to mediate between Herod and John, the material and the spiritual, just as her body connects upper and lower areas of the painting.

This descriptive approach to both Gutfreund's sculpture and Filla's painting allows us to see the Czechs' characteristic fusion of the formal lessons from French cubism with psychological and symbolic content. But formal analysis cannot explain why they chose to combine cubist form



Figure 2. Emil Filla, *Salome I*, 1911, oil on canvas, 137 x 82 cm. Courtesy of Galerie moderního umění v Hradci Králové. Photograph by Pavel Šůva.

with emotional, literary, and biblical subject matter.⁸ The works raise different questions for viewers now than they did in 1912. We may no longer

8. In his theoretical writings, Filla praised Pablo Picasso and denigrated the more popularly visible artists who showed their cubist works in the Parisian salons, even though the latter, especially Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, and Roger de la Fresnaye, incorporated narrative and symbolism into their work as did the Czech artists. These so-called Salon cubists tended to be left out of canonical histories of cubism until the 1980s.

take offense at the abstractions in the works, but because cubism is now popularly seen as a formal questioning of the means of representation, one that deliberately eschews symbolism and narrative, form and content seem to conflict in the Czech paintings. My concern here is to uncover the reasoning behind the Group's choices by examining the discourse they created to defend their work.

Scholars have explored the articles and ideas in *Art Monthly*, but they have not addressed how the journal lays out a consciously conceived program.⁹ Despite Mádl's accusation to the contrary, the Group's approach to developing more meaningful work was collective rather than the idiosyncratic expressions of one artist.¹⁰ They even questioned the value of originality. They saw their era as so eclectic that the hallmarks of modernism—individualism and originality—were actually the easiest paths for contemporary artists.¹¹ By contrast, to produce an authentic modern art, they worked collectively in dialogue with contemporary and historical international developments while remaining grounded in their local cultural worldview.

The Group was not alone in central and eastern Europe in their quest for international and local relevance. But *Art Monthly's* extended defense of the Czechs' work is exceptional at this time, offering a unique possibility to determine why new art historical ideas served an avant-garde group's needs.¹² In their journal the Group defended their collective project, fusing their experience of French cubism with their understanding of Vienna School theory. Together, these sources inspired them to produce a modern, international, and yet also particularly Czech visual language.

This is a very different approach from other models of avant-gardism. The Group did not dismiss their public or brashly set out to offend. In their journal they made a sophisticated argument for their vision of a new direction for Czech art. An editorial note in the second issue of *Art Monthly* responded to negative reviews of the new journal by appealing to the public, asking them to "judge the work of a whole year," rather than a single issue.¹³ The Group specifically asked readers to see their journal as an extended defense of their ideas.

9. Zdenka Volavkova, "La Revue mensuelle des Arts' de Prague," in Liliane Brion-Guerry, ed., *L'Année 1913: Les formes esthétiques de l'oeuvre d'art à la veille de la première guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1971), 991; Jiří Padrta, *Osmá a Skupina výtvarných umělců: Teorie, kritika, polemika* (Prague, 1992); Jarmila Doubravová, "Umělecký měsíčník a hudba," in Alena Pomajzlová, ed., *Expressionismus a české umění* (Prague, 1994), 147–48; Vojtěch Lahoda, "Moderní revue a Umělecký měsíčník: K proměně 'duchové povahy doby,'" *Moderní revue, 1894–1925* (Prague, 1995), 103–11; and Lahoda, *Český kubismus* (Prague, 1996), 49–51; Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, 1991), 51.

10. Vlastislav Hofman, "Duch moderní tvorby v architektuře," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 5 (February 1912): 127.

11. Vincenc Beneš, "Čin Paula Cezanna," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 9 (June 1912): 261.

12. Piotr Piotrowski and Andrzej Turowski discuss Polish examples. Piotrowski, "Modernity and Nationalism," 315–17. Piotrowski cites both Turowski, "Czym byt kubizm w Polsce," in *Awangardowe marginesy* (Warsaw, 1998), 59, and P. Łukasiewicz and J. Malinowski, eds., *Ekspresjonizm w sztuce Polskiej* (Wrocław, 1980), 7–11.

13. Anonymous [probably Josef Čapek], "Odpověď," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 2 (November 1912): n.p. [after 58]. Josef Čapek edited the first six issues of the first volume of *Art Monthly*.

Without an understanding of contemporary developments in Viennese art history, the full-page images that opened each issue of *Art Monthly* might appear eccentric. They include archaic Greek temple decoration, baroque furniture, paintings by El Greco, and medieval Egyptian glass, as well as contemporary French and Czech painting and sculpture. These and other objects reproduced in the journal have direct parallels in the writings of Riegl, Dvořák, and Kramář. The Group appropriated these discussions to defend their work as a positive contribution to the development of both Czech art and international modernism.

The common thrust of Vienna School ideas was a scientific approach to art history, but Viennese art historians tended not to discuss theory in the abstract. Though their meticulous studies raised larger issues of cultural and artistic development, their work always centered on individual objects.¹⁴ A close reading of the journal reveals how the Group applied new Viennese art historical concepts to particular objects that distorted, stylized, or abstracted themes from nature to justify their own departure from mimesis in their work. They presented these objects without apology and at times without explanation, demonstrating their admiration for previously denigrated styles. The principle that no period in art history is more valuable than any other was one of the key contributions of the Vienna School.¹⁵

Vienna School ideas in general were influential all over the Habsburg empire at this time. Elizabeth Clegg has remarked that the “chief principles” of the Vienna School “were gradually absorbed into the ‘discourse on art’ as this was practiced across the Empire.” In Prague, these ideas were not passively absorbed, but rather, the young Czech artists actively adapted ideas from the Vienna School to their needs. One of the chief principles Clegg mentions, Dvořák’s concept that works of art are outward signs of the cultural worldview that produced them, was fundamental to the Group’s conception of their work.¹⁶ They believed that their spiritual outlook justified their departures from naturalism in painting. But they also made use of some more obscure writings from the Vienna School.

The Group employed the Vienna School theory that stressed the importance for art’s development of exceptions in the history of art—those moments when convention breaks down and we see the “will to form” or the artistic volition (Riegl’s term is *Kunstwollen*) of a cultural moment emerge in a work of art. Kramář was particularly interested in these “exceptions” in an art historical period, considering them emblematic of the “independence from prevailing period sentiment,” a characteristic he also admired in contemporary cubism.¹⁷ In addition, the Vienna School idea of “art value,” that works of art from distant historical periods can resemble contemporary styles because of shared cultural beliefs, was crucial

14. Jas’ Elsner, “The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901,” *Art History* 25, no. 3 (June 2002): 358; Mosche Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art, 2: From Impressionism to Kandinsky* (New York, 1990), 149.

15. Bakos, “The Vienna School’s Hundred and Sixty-eighth Graduate,” 234–35.

16. Clegg, *Art Design and Architecture in Central Europe*, 26.

17. Karel Šrp, “Art on a Different Basis,” in *Vincenc Kramář: From Old Masters to Picasso* (Prague, 2000), 130.

to the Group's use of images in their journal. Finally, to legitimize their use of foreign sources to revitalize Czech culture, the Group applied to contemporary art the Vienna School claim that the meeting of different cultures causes art to progress.

There are some well-known direct connections between the Prague artists and Vienna School ideas. Scholars have noted architect Pavel Janák's interest in Riegl's theories, even claiming that he "was convinced he was creating architecture according to the evolutionary laws formulated by Alois Riegl in his art historical writings."¹⁸ In 1908, in the first issue of the progressive architecture journal *Styl*, Janák had advocated that Prague adopt Riegl's views on the relation between new buildings and architectural conservation.¹⁹ An extract from Riegl's "The Modern Cult of Monuments" (1903), articulating his concept of "art value," appeared in Czech translation in that same issue. It is clear that the Group valued Vienna School theory. What has not been explained is how the Group articulated these ideas in their journal and how they understood them to bolster the legitimacy of their works.

Art historians sympathetic to Viennese theory were Group members from the beginning. Václav Štech, for example, explicitly acknowledged in 1910 how Franz Wickhoff, Riegl, and Dvořák had influenced his work as well as the proximity of his views to those of Wilhelm Worringer, who popularized some of Riegl's ideas in his 1908 book, *Abstraction and Empathy*.²⁰ Kramář trained as an art historian under Wickhoff and Riegl at the Vienna School at the turn of the century, where he befriended his fellow Czech, Dvořák.²¹ In 1910, Kramář wrote an article about the Vienna School for Prague's only fine art journal at that time, *Volné Směry*, when painter Emil Filla was briefly editor.²² He joined the Group after he moved

18. Rostislav Švácha, *The Pyramid, the Prism and the Arc: Czech Cubist Architecture, 1911–23* (Prague, 2000), 34; Tomáš Vlček, "Art between Social Crisis and Utopia: The Czech Contribution to the Development of the Avant-Garde Movement in East-Central Europe, 1910–30," *Art Journal* 49, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 28, 35.

19. Ivo Hlobil, "The Reception and First Criticism of Alois Riegl in the Protection of Historical Monuments," *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work* (Amsterdam, 2001), 184; Pavel Janák, "Moderní regulace a regulace Malé Strany," *Styl: Měsíčník pro architekturu, umělecké řemeslo a úpravu měst* 1, no. 1 (1908): 155–59; Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (Vienna, 1903).

20. Worringer's status as part of the Vienna School is contested, but his work was widely influential. His dissertation, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, was published in a private edition in 1907 and in a trade edition in 1908. Hilton Kramer, "Introduction," in Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago, 1997), vii. Václav Štech wrote his book in 1909–10 in response to Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908). Štech, "Předmluva," *O Projevu výtvarnou formu* (Prague, 1915), v. Jiří Šetlík discusses the Group's plans to publish the book, the publication's delay, and its 1915 publication by Laichter in "Skupina výtvarných umělců: jeho historie a význam" (PhD diss., Ústav dějin umění, 1963), 73.

21. Kramář graduated in 1902. Pavla Sadílková and Lada Hubatová-Vacková, "Chronology," in *Vincenc Kramář*, 217.

22. Vincenc Kramář, "O Videňské škole dějin umění," *Volné směry* 14, nos. 1–5 (1910): 41–43, 75–78, 110–12, 170–74, 209–10; Vojtěch Lahoda, *Emil Filla* (Prague, 2007), 664. Lahoda cites a letter from Filla in Prague to Procházka in Ostrava, 19 February 1911, referred to in Marcela Macharáčková and Lubomír Slavíček, eds., *Antonín Procházka, 1882–1945* (Brno, 2002), 256–57.

back to Prague in 1912. Serving as a conduit of Vienna School theory for the Group, Kramář exposed the artists to ideas he had encountered in Vienna, which he continued to pursue after he returned to Prague. Though he published relatively little before World War I, he expressed his strong opinions about what constituted legitimate development in new art in reviews of contemporary exhibitions for *Art Monthly*.²³ Kramář's role was crucial to how the artists themselves mobilized Vienna School ideas in their journal.

Prior discussions of *Art Monthly* have suggested similarities between it and the *Blaue Reiter Almanach* published in Munich by Vasilii Kandinskii and Franz Marc in 1912, the year after *Art Monthly* was first published.²⁴ It is well known that Kandinskii and Marc found Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* useful as scholarly support for their interest in nonmimetic art from all ages of history. Worringer popularized aspects of Vienna School theory, but his work has a very different character than Riegl's. For example, Riegl always focused on specific objects and rarely offered theoretical ideas in the abstract, whereas Worringer offers a schematic aesthetics for nonrepresentational art using a few selected examples.²⁵ Worringer proposed, following Riegl, that aesthetics could not be objective and constant throughout history, but rather that the appreciation of beauty in a given period is dependent upon "the contemplating subject."²⁶ The style of a society's art in general responded to that society's overall psychological orientation to the world.²⁷ A society at ease in the world was more likely to want to imitate the external appearance of that world, whereas alienation produced the urge to impose abstract order upon surroundings perceived as unruly.²⁸ Similar to the Group's use of images in *Art Monthly*, in their almanac Kandinskii and Marc reproduced images from a wide range of cultures—Egyptian shadow figures, Bavarian glass paintings, medieval sculpture, African carvings, children's drawings, as well as works of contemporary art by Pablo Picasso, Paul Gauguin, and Paul Cézanne alongside their own works. They marshaled this variety of nonmimetic images as testament to the prior historical existence of cultures that prized abstraction.

However similar their ideas were about connections between artworks across centuries and cultures, the Group did not think Kandinskii and Marc took the right lessons from Worringer. In a May 1912 review in *Art Monthly* of Kandinskii's book, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1912), Josef Čapek

23. Vincenc Kramář, "Kapitola o-ismech: K výstavě Le Fauconnierově v Mnichově" and "Picassovy výstavy v r. 1913," *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 4–5 (ca. February 1913): 115–30 and 142–43.

24. See, for example, Lahoda, *Český kubismus*, 49–51, and Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, 51. It is not known whether Kandinskii and Marc knew of *Art Monthly* as they planned their almanac. They also intended to produce a serial publication, but only one volume was published.

25. Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art*, 2, 149; Neil H. Donohue, "Introduction," *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer* (University Park, 1995), 2–3; Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 51, 78, 106.

26. Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 4.

27. *Ibid.*, 15.

28. *Ibid.*

articulated the problem the Group had with the kind of work advocated by Kandinskii.²⁹ “These paintings,” Čapek wrote, “have a flavor so freely personal and subjectively conditioned that it is impossible to grasp in them the slightest real sign of a method, which would help us understand them.”³⁰ Painter Vincenc Beneš also expressed the Group’s objections to the approaches taken by the Blaue Reiter group. Their abstractions may “have a beautiful arrangement, sequence, and rhythm,” Beneš wrote, but they lacked the “necessary causal sequence of thought and expression.”³¹ Kandinskii’s work demonstrated his personal, subjective response to experience, not a new system of modern painting, according to Čapek and Beneš. Even one of the few positive reviews of the *Almanach*, by Hans Tietze, another Prague-born student of the Vienna School, mentioned that the movement had not yet “produced a complete grammar of forms.”³² The Group believed a work of art must be more than personal and subjective, based on something larger than the “arbitrary whim of the artist-individual,” as architect Vlastislav Hofman asserted in a clear retort to Mádl’s condemnation of Group artists as irresponsible individualists.³³

Hofman saw individualism as a dangerous potential result of taking to an extreme the search for a modern style that no longer relied on tradition.³⁴ The other extreme Hofman feared would be to create a lifeless universal art, a purely technical, timeless imitation of historical forms. Beneš also warned against both of these extremes. In his view, the eclectic nature of modernity was a “weakness and a scattering of character,” one consequence of which was that current art could only be individual. If personal style is the default option, then “we must not understand originality and individuality as virtues,” he argued. Lauding them would only make a virtue of necessity. In an explicit justification of *Art Monthly*’s program, Beneš advocated “follow[ing] historical phenomena and their developments in order to understand the present through analogy and comparison.”³⁵ The demand that a work of art have more than personal appeal, and the dismissal of originality as a fundamental principle, set the Group’s aims apart from other contemporary avant-garde groups. Riegl also downplayed the importance of an artist’s personal innovation, seeking the larger patterns in visual art that gave evidence of a particular will (*Wollen*). Just as Riegl conceived of artistic production as the collective endeavor of a culture, the Group conceived of their task as larger than themselves. Riegl described Rembrandt’s works, for example, “merely as links in the large chain of development” from earlier Dutch painters to

29. Josef Čapek, “Kandinsky: Über das Geistige in der Kunst,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 9 (May 1912): 269–70.

30. *Ibid.*, 270.

31. Beneš, “Čin Paula Cézanna,” 262.

32. Hans Tietze, “Der Blaue Reiter,” *Die Kunst für Alle* 27 (1911–12): 543. Cited in Klaus Lankheit, “A History of the Almanac,” in Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, eds., *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, new documentary edition, ed. Klaus Lankheit (New York, 1989), 44.

33. Hofman, “Duch moderní tvorby v architektuře,” 127.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Beneš, “Čin Paula Cézanna,” 261.

those of the mid-seventeenth century.³⁶ Beneš's dismissal of individuality and originality extends to contemporary art Riegl's conception of individual artists' works as particular instances through which we can see the generalized artistic volition of a people.

Exceptions in the History of Art

Using Vienna School ideas to defend their stylistic decisions, the Group developed an elaborate visual discourse that they showcased through their journal. Two works—a baroque cabinet and a medieval glass—reproduced in *Art Monthly* in May 1912, serve to illustrate how the Group marshaled particular historical works to point to larger issues about the production and reception of artworks. Two short notes in the “Chronicle” section at the end of the issue give us a sense of how Viennese ideas support the visual connections between the cabinet, the glass, and avant-garde practice. Pavel Janák, then editor of *Art Monthly*, wrote “Exceptions in Evolution,” to address the baroque cabinet.³⁷ Both Riegl and Kramář had explored the disruptive ramifications of exceptions in art's supposedly progressive history. In a manuscript left unfinished at his death in 1905, Riegl used a similar phrase—anachronisms in the development of the history of art—to describe objects that break with the visual conventions of their times.³⁸ In an excerpt from this work published in 1906, Riegl discussed the art historical significance of the ancient Mycenaean Vapheio cups from the second millennium BCE.³⁹ Prior to Riegl's analysis, the cups had been understood as “a rudimentary, preliminary stage” to the emergence of composition in Greek art, exemplified in “the Dipylon composition.” Exploring their exceptionality in ancient Greek art, Riegl claimed that the historically earlier Vapheio cups exhibited a more complex concept of composition, “leav[ing] all that is Dipylon-like tremendously far behind.”⁴⁰ Kramář applied his experience with Vienna School precepts directly to cubism, and although his published theoretical works on the subject only appeared after World War I, he likely encouraged the young Czech artists to conceive of their work as an “exception” from the prevailing style of their time.⁴¹ The idea of exceptions in art became

36. Alois Riegl, “Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*,” trans. Benjamin Binstock, *October* 74 (1995): 4.

37. Pavel Janák, “Výjimky ve vývoji,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 8 (May 1912): 237–38. Pavel Janák was visual art editor and František Langer edited the texts in the journal from April 1912 on.

38. Christopher S. Wood, introduction to Alois Riegl, “The Place of the Vapheio Cups in the History of Art,” in Christopher S. Wood, trans. and ed., *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (New York, 2000), 104. An excerpt from the first chapter was published posthumously in 1906: Alois Riegl, “Zur Kunsthistorischen Stellung der Becher von Vapheio,” *Jahreshefte des oesterreichischen Instituts* 9 (1906): 1–19.

39. For illustrations of the Vapheio Cups, see Wood, trans. and ed., *Vienna School Reader*, figures 2.1 and 2.2.

40. Riegl, “Place of the Vapheio Cups in the History of Art,” 111.

41. Vincenc Kramář, *Kubismus* (Brno, 1921). Filla thanked Kramář for his “precise knowledge and information about the whole [cubist] movement [which has] clarified

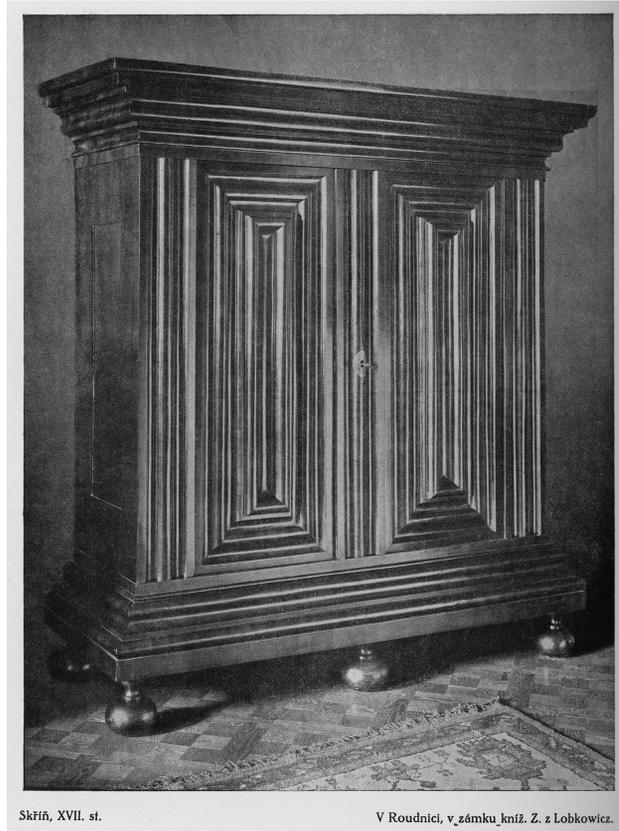


Figure 3. Cabinet, Lobkowitz Palace, Roudnice, seventeenth century. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 8 (May 1912): n.p. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

a central preoccupation of Kramář's work.⁴² He argued that cubism was so disruptive of contemporary artistic assumptions that it "overturned all concepts we have used until now to define and circumscribe the nature and aim of art."⁴³

In his short essay, Janák presents the seventeenth-century cabinet as an "exception" or "anachronism" in baroque style (figure 3). He believes that we can find moments in history that are similar to the cur-

our foggy impression." Emil Filla, letter to Vincenc Kramář, 22 October 1911, National Gallery Archive, V. Kramář collection, inventory no. AA 2945/133 (Vincenc Kramář correspondence 1900–1960). Lahoda cites this letter in "On the History of the Search for a Czech Picasso, *Bringing Warmth* to Cubism: Vincenc Kramář and Emil Filla," in *Vincenc Kramář*, 139.

42. Srp, "Art on a Different Basis," 130.

43. Vincenc Kramář, "Abstraktnost a věcnost současného umění," *Volné směry* 28 (1930–31): 212. Cited in Srp, "Art on a Different Basis," 131.

rent moment's turning point: instinctive beginnings, moments of expression without convention, or evidence that a direction in style had broken down. The cabinet, Janák writes: "developed in [an era] when there was already a fully elaborated style, a completely articulated artistic language sufficient for all expressions. Great architecture dictated the more minor arts, and interior arts were dependent on an architectural richness, a tradition organizing their logical orders of forms and components."⁴⁴ But Janák sees the "author" of the cabinet as having had an independent creative impulse by which he transformed traditional decoration independent of architectural principles. The cabinet's embellishment consists entirely of concentric rectangles that repeat the shape of each door. Janák claims that the maker's "criticality, his independent opinion, and the strength of his creativity," are clear in the design: "He used the styled profile (of the baroque), but with such dynamism, intensity, and openness that these are far from the contemporary norm. They allow a measure of expression and constitute the *actual quality* of the work. The entire surface of the cabinet is awakened."⁴⁵ This cabinet, he writes, is an "independent and daring attempt to feel the will to form [*vůle v tvorbě*]."⁴⁶ The phrase "will to form," approximates the term *Kunstwollen*, or artistic volition, perhaps Riegl's best-known concept.⁴⁷ Not only does Janák deliberately use Riegl's language, but his appreciation of the applied arts is also indebted to the art historian. Riegl pioneered the study of applied arts as stylistically integrated with contemporary fine arts and highlighted the importance of attention to abstract patterns in discussions of stylistic evolution.⁴⁸

Immediately following Janák's note, Štech discusses the medieval glass, marveling at the modernity of the design.⁴⁹ The decorative scheme of the glass has clear connections to Riegl's writings. On the surface, the bodies of two lions are carved in profile with their faces represented frontally (figure 4). Each of the Vapheio cups exhibits a bull in a similar configuration. This example was familiar to Štech because he had written about the cups himself and included an image of them in his book *O Projevu výtvarnou formu* (On Expression by Artistic Form).⁵⁰ The bull is depicted in relief with his body in profile and his head turned to look at the viewer. Referring to this combination of viewpoints as a rare "exception" in ancient Near Eastern art, Riegl read the bull's outward gaze as a sign of subjectivity—an acknowledgement of the viewer rare in ancient art and an early sign of the direction that art would eventually take.⁵¹ Riegl believed ancient art generally recognized only objects, whereas modern art

44. Janák, "Výjimky ve vývoji," 237.

45. *Ibid.*, 237–38. Emphasis in the original.

46. *Ibid.*, 238.

47. Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, 1984), 69–96.

48. *Ibid.*, 70–71.

49. V. V. Štech, "Hedvičina sklenice," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 8 (May 1912): 238.

50. Štech wrote the book in 1909–10. Štech, "Předmluva," v.

51. Riegl, "Place of the Vapheio Cups in the History of Art," 119.



Řezaná sklenice, XIII. st.

V Berlíně, ve sbírce pt. von Róse.

Figure 4. Carved Glass, thirteenth century. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 8 (May 1912): n.p. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

is characterized by a focus on subjectivity.⁵² Not only do the strong parallel lines incised in Štech's glass function as abstract patterning as much as they depict two lions, but the lions suggest a modern subjectivity by looking out at the viewer. The glass testifies to the coexistence on one object of both stylized, abstracted form and a modern sensibility, demonstrating their compatibility. Riegl argued that the subjective perception embodied in this combination of views connected the Vapheio cups with later Greek and Roman art, thus securing the cups' position of importance in the global history of art's development.⁵³ The Group wanted to show that their work connected to the international development of modern art to prove the importance of Czech culture in the contemporary world. "The artistic height of a people is only to be ascertained by the contribution it has made to the general development of art," Dvořák wrote, applying to

52. Wolfgang Kemp, "Introduction," to Riegl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, trans. Evelyn M. Kain and David Britt (Los Angeles, 1999), 8 and 16; Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*," 24.

53. Wood, introduction to Riegl, "Place of the Vapheio Cups in the History of Art," 104.

nineteenth-century Czech painting a concept Riegl had used for ancient art. Dvořák wrote this in an explicit riposte to an unnamed German art historian's claim that the Czechs were "an artless people."⁵⁴

As visual art editor of *Art Monthly*, Janák decided to begin the May 1912 issue of the journal with full-page photographs of the cabinet and glass, apparently without explanation. The intrigued reader must first try to make sense of the apparent modernity of the two works on his or her own and then later, perhaps unexpectedly, encounter the notes at the back of the journal that suggest why the two historical objects matter to the young artists. Janák and Štech reached back into history to find examples of applied art with formal and psychological connections to their own artistic concerns to legitimize artworks that depart from traditions expected by their critics.

"Art-Value" across Space and Time

Riegl writes that in the nineteenth and especially in the twentieth century, works of art from almost any period could be seen as valuable in the present, though an "inviolable artistic canon" still governed some viewers' appreciation of historical works of art.⁵⁵ Insisting that all historical art has its own particular character, Riegl rejected the transhistoricist of Wickhoff's claim that "aspects of . . . late antique art resembled . . . Impressionism."⁵⁶ Yet he acknowledged that our appreciation of historical objects is governed by our subjective "modern perception of them."⁵⁷ Dvořák's analysis of El Greco's paintings offered the Group a particularly resonant example of how artworks deviating from the Renaissance canon could be relevant to contemporary artists. Using Dvořák's and Riegl's examples, the Group assembled objects more closely connected to their own aims than were many of the works from the materialist nineteenth century. Anti-materialism was a common avant-garde position at this time, but the Czech artists' interest in this concept was specifically tied to contemporary art historical discourse.

In addition to admiring the modernity of the Hedvičina glass (figure 4), Štech also described various moments in which it had been used and admired. It was "first experienced," he writes, "in the Orient, where it was produced. Then in the Middle Ages it was imported and treated as a precious object. . . . Finally, contemporary artistic feeling discovered it again as astonishing, beautiful, and as a deep work of art, and its artistic content is asserted for a third time."⁵⁸ Riegl had asserted a similar contemporary sentiment for the Vapheio cups because of the way in which their maker had "obscure[d] the impression of intentionality in the composition. We of the modern age," he wrote, "are wonderfully touched by these reliefs, for we also wish to see all traces of deliberateness strictly avoided in modern works of art."⁵⁹ Štech used the history and provenance of the glass

54. Max Dvořák, "Von Manes zu Švabinský," *Die Graphischen Künste*, vol. 27 (1904): 31.

55. Alois Riegl, "On the Modern Cult of Monuments," *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 22.

56. Elsner, "Birth of Late Antiquity," 362.

57. Riegl, "On the Modern Cult of Monuments," 23.

58. Štech, "Hedvičina sklenice," 238.

59. Riegl, "Place of the Vapheio Cups in the History of Art," 109.

as “proof of the emotional connection and relationship between arts and eras despite their distance from each other.”⁶⁰ In “On the Modern Cult of Monuments,” Riegl analyzed the different values that historical monuments can have for later cultures, coining such terms as *Kunstwert* and *Alterswert*, which translators have purposefully rendered somewhat awkwardly as “art-value” or “age-value” to approximate Riegl’s precise German neologisms referring, not to the values of art or of age in themselves, but to “the artistic value or age-value, among other values” that may be ascribed to a work of art.⁶¹ Riegl specifically discussed the fact that historical works of art appeal to the modern viewer when they “correspond, if only in part, to the modern *Kunstwollen*.”⁶² Historian Christopher Wood refers to Riegl’s interpretation of an artifact as an “open-ended text whose meaning was not intrinsic to it but only concretized in a succession of historical, subjective readings.”⁶³ In a similar manner, Štech emphasized the layers of meaning the glass had accrued over time and in different cultural contexts as integral to its perceived value in his own time.

Ultimately, through this discussion of the Vapheio cups, Riegl’s goal was to demonstrate that the origins of Greek composition lay in the works of “the Indo-Germanic predecessors [of the Greeks] in pre-Homeric times.”⁶⁴ Riegl claimed that the Egyptians worked “objectivistically,” that is, they rendered objects as we know them to be from our experience of touching them, rather than depicting their “momentary optical *impression*.”⁶⁵ The latter was the aim of the Indo-Germanic artist’s “subjectivistic” approach. The Hedvičina glass, with its lions depicted from both side and frontal views, exhibits the kind of contingent rendering that Riegl defined as “subjectivistic.”⁶⁶ For Riegl, however, the “absolutely puzzling anachronism,” of the cups was not only the combination of views or the singularly high relief aspect but also the “modeling of the tactile surface.”⁶⁷ He claimed that a subsequent example of “such a reckless breakthrough of the optical” occurs only “in more recent art.” “All of early Greek art from Homeric times onward knows only the flat relief in the Egyptian sense,” Riegl writes. There are other early examples of high relief, he concedes, but not with the kind of surface modeling found on the Vapheio cups. Riegl refers to relief sculptures found at Selinunte as examples of this unusual “early high relief” without complex surface treatment. Three months after the appearance of the cabinet and glass, *Art Monthly* juxtaposed an Egyptian flat relief depicting dancers with a metope in high relief from Selinunte,

60. Štech, “Hedvičina sklenice,” 238.

61. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, “Translators’ Note,” to Riegl, “On the Modern Cult of Monuments,” 50–51.

62. Riegl, “On the Modern Cult of Monuments,” 22.

63. Christopher Wood, “Introduction,” in Wood, trans. and ed., *Vienna School Reader*, 27.

64. Riegl, “Place of the Vapheio Cups in Art History,” 106.

65. *Ibid.*, 117. Emphasis in the original.

66. Robert Schmidt, “Die Hedwigsgläser und die verwandten fatimidischen Glas und Kristall-Schnitarbeiten,” *Schlesiens Vorzeit in Bild und Schrift* (1912): 53–78. The image in *Umělecký měsíčník* is very likely reproduced from page 55 of this article.

67. Riegl, “Place of the Vapheio Cups in Art History,” 118.



Figure 5. Wood Carving. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 6–7 (ca. May 1913): 151. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

depicting Perseus beheading Medusa.⁶⁸ Štech and Janák deliberately referenced Riegl's argument by publishing the Hedvičina glass and contrasting Egyptian and Selinunte reliefs mentioned by Riegl.

As editor, Janák further developed this sophisticated discourse of images in the journal to express the Group's beliefs about connections among artworks from disparate times and places. In May 1913, *Art Monthly* opened with an image of an African carved head (figure 5).⁶⁹ This head is carved in the round, with a large forehead and shafts of hair that hang to the chin. The large eyes contrast with the diminutive mouth. The whole triangle of the facial features is small in comparison with the bulbous forehead, which is in turn surmounted by a rectangular protrusion from the

68. *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 11–12 (ca. August 1912): n.p.; Riegl, "Place of the Vapheio Cups in Art History," 119.

69. The African head is labeled "Madagascar" in *Umělecký měsíčník*, but it is a Fang funerary carving from Gabon. See Louis Perrois, *Fang*, (Milan, 2006), 128. The sculpture is currently in the collection of the Musée Dapper, Paris.



Figure 6. Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Woman*, 1909. Bronze. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 8 (ca. July 1913): 199. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

ridge of hair. The next month's issue of *Art Monthly* opened with Picasso's bronze *Head of a Woman* (1909), now known as the *Head of Fernande*, followed by a double-page juxtaposition of the two heads together (figures 6 and 7). Kramář had purchased Picasso's sculpture from Ambroise Vollard in 1911, and the *Head* had been a catalyst for Group artists in both painting and sculpture.⁷⁰ In profile, the African head seems far more regu-

70. Vojtěch Lahoda, "The Primal Head: Picasso's *Head of Fernande* (1909) from Vincenc Kramář's Collection, and Czech Cubism," *Bulletin of the National Gallery in Prague*, nos. 3–4 (1993–94): 94.

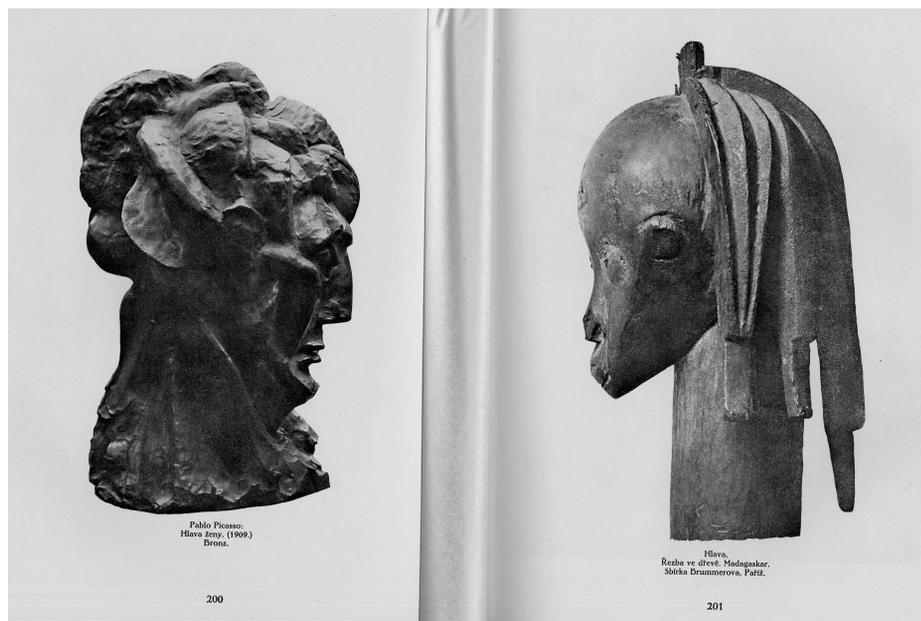


Figure 7. Double-page spread showing Pablo Picasso's *Head of a Woman* and Wood Carving on facing pages. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 8 (ca. July 1913): 200–201. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

lar in its carving than it does from the frontal view, demonstrating that the character of the sculpture changes as one looks at it from different angles, a sculptural element Picasso clearly exploits in his *Head*. The abstract circle on the side of the wooden head stands for an ear in the same way that Picasso has repeated rounded sections that could be hair or ear, depending on where they are on the head. Both use stylized geometric forms to stand in for, rather than represent, facial elements. This staged confrontation between two sculpted heads condenses the Group's aims into a striking visual metaphor. Picasso's sculpture is rendered equivalent and comparable to a carved head from a distant culture. By juxtaposing the two works, the Group enacted on the pages of their journal the kind of relationship among works from disparate times and places that they believed justified their own departures from naturalism. The next issue of *Art Monthly* reproduced Gutfreund's bronze *Head* and Filla's plaster relief *Head*, each of which responds in its own way to Picasso's bronze.

Gutfreund's *Head*, like Picasso's, emphasizes the asymmetries of the female figure's face and hair (figure 8). Gutfreund uses the stylized scalloped curve for the *Head*'s left jaw that Picasso uses in his sculpture's hair and under the right eye, emphasizing that this form stands for rather than represents jaw, hair, or eye. The photograph of Gutfreund's head shows prominently the void he created with a twisting loop of hair. In fact, it was Picasso's ambition to perforate his sculpture's bulk as well: he wanted



Figure 8. Otto Gutfreund, *Head*, 1912. Bronze. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 9 (ca. August 1913): 236. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

“to execute a version of the sculpted *Head* using wire elements; the result would have been to open the solid mass.”⁷¹ Gutfreund frames open space in bronze, annexing it to his sculptural matter. Filla’s plaster relief *Head* also approximates characteristics of Picasso’s bronze (figure 9). Picasso’s emphasis on the neck is echoed by the thick masses at the base of Filla’s relief. The twisting downward motion of Picasso’s *Head* is recapitulated by the looping shelf-like protrusion that juts out most clearly below the chin in the plaster, suggesting a turning motion of the head out of the flat surface ground. In Filla’s work, the sharp ridge of the nose resembles the nose of Picasso’s bronze, and like that work, the eyes are rendered differently, one with a curving shelf beneath it, the other surrounded by more angular shapes.

Filla’s relief forces the viewer to see his work from one point of view, while the photographs of all three of the other heads remind us that we can see only one or two of many possible views. The different impressions

71. Jeffrey S. Weiss, *Picasso: The Cubist Portraits of Fernande Olivier* (Washington, D.C., 2004), 11. Weiss quotes Roland Penrose, *The Sculpture of Picasso* (New York, 1967), 19.



Figure 9. Emil Filla, *Head*, 1913. Plaster. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 9 (ca. August 1913): 237. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

Picasso's and the African work give from different angles emphasize the mutability of the viewer's experience of sculpture's three dimensions.⁷² Nineteenth-century sculptural theorists from Adolf Hildebrand to Charles Baudelaire contended that a sculptor's inability to direct the viewer was a disadvantage by comparison with the painter's control over point of view. Picasso's *Head* has been understood as an attempt to positively exploit this supposed "weakness" of sculpture.⁷³ Relief sculpture returns control over the viewer's vantage point to the artist, but Gutfreund believed it caused

72. On the history of photographs of Picasso's *Head*, see Weiss, *Picasso*, 17. The photographs in *Umělecký měsíčník* were likely dealer photographs sent to Kramář. Pavel Janák drafted a letter to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in 1912 to request reproduction rights. Pavel Janák, *Deníky*, 1912. Archive of the National Technical Museum, Prague (Collection of Janák's journals).

73. Weiss, *Picasso*, 20–21. Weiss cites Charles Baudelaire, "Pourquoi la sculpture est ennuyeuse," in Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques* (Paris, 1923), 187–88, and Adolf von Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (New York, 1907).

more productive confusion for the viewer than did conventional painting. Before a relief, a viewer cannot “determine depth relationships by touch and by the tangible movement of the eye,” Gutfreund wrote in an article about Donatello, so the sculpture “loses its materiality for the viewer and becomes a subjective concept again.”⁷⁴ Gutfreund praises relief sculpture’s combination of physical form and visual uncertainty, an effect referenced by *Art Monthly*’s photographs of sculptures from multiple viewpoints.

Many interpretations of Picasso’s *Head* emphasize formal and self-referential readings of its deviations from naturalism—that it represents the idea of sculpture itself by embodying in static bronze the dynamic transformation of inert matter into created form. As art historian Jeffrey Weiss has noted, “it is conventional to characterize Picasso’s process during the prewar period in terms of a narrow pursuit of formal problems.”⁷⁵ Formally, he writes, *Head of Fernande* “epitomizes the condition of the body in a three-dimensional world,” that is, the condition of sculpture itself as well as of the viewer looking at it.⁷⁶

Vojtěch Lahoda believes the Czech artists understood the head differently. Lahoda has analyzed what he calls the “motif of the destruction of the head” in Picasso’s work and its impact upon the Group. They saw the head, Lahoda writes, as “a reflection of the process of (creative) idea-forming, as well as of the process of thinking, and, in the broadest sense of the term, a plastic metaphor of spirituality in general.”⁷⁷ The idea that formal elements in a sculpture represent the sculptor’s spiritual orientation echoes Dvořák’s concept of art style as embodying cultural ideas. The sculpted heads were reproduced in *Art Monthly* in May 1913, at the same time as the Group’s exhibition of Picasso, Georges Braque, folk and so-called exotic art. In his introduction to the catalogue and in an article in *Art Monthly*, Beneš discussed why the Group was staging an exhibition of new, exotic, and folk art. In part, their aims were didactic. They wanted to explain why the new art looked the way it did. Beneš referred to Worringer’s theory that abstraction and naturalism are alternative artistic responses to a people’s current psychological orientation to the world.⁷⁸ Hence, Beneš explained, there are “timeless relationships to other periods of the artistic past, to which the new art is strikingly related by certain resemblances, which are more formal than internal connections.”⁷⁹ In other words, the art of two periods with similar attitudes to the world will be different, but formally related.⁸⁰

The importance of the meeting between Picasso’s sculpture and the African *Head* is expanded and confirmed by considering them as part of a series of pairings of heads reproduced in *Art Monthly* in 1912 and 1913.

74. Gutfreund, “Dvě poznámky o Donatellovi,” 137.

75. Weiss, *Picasso*, 12.

76. *Ibid.*, 15.

77. Lahoda, “The Primal Head,” 94–95.

78. Vincenc Beneš, “Nové Umění,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 6–7 (after June 1913): 176–87.

79. Vincenc Beneš, “Nové umění pro nového člověka,” *Skupina výtvarných umělců, 3. výstava, Obecní dům města Prahy, květen–červen 1913* (Prague, 1913), not paginated.

80. Beneš, “Nové Umění,” 176–87.

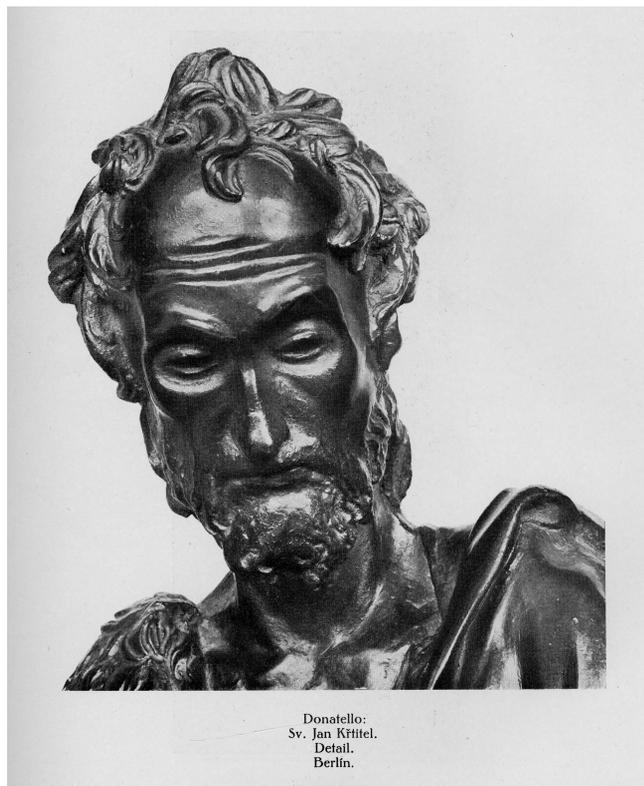


Figure 10. The head of St. John the Baptist—a detail from Donatello's *St. John the Baptist*. Reproduced in *Umělecký měsíčník* 2, no. 4–5 (ca. April 1913): 103. Collection of The Ohio State University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

The juxtapositions of isolated sculptural and painted heads appear to connect across time and space and to suggest a metaphor for spirituality. In fact, the Group seems to focus their attention on the isolated head with several examples of the act of beheading itself. *Art Monthly* published Gutfreund's bust of *Don Quixote* (figure 1) in the same issue and at the same scale as a reproduction of the head of Donatello's *John the Baptist* (figure 10), calling attention to the elongations and angular exaggerations the sculptures share. But the journal also published a full-length image of Donatello's sculpture to show that they had photographically beheaded the Saint themselves, echoing his martyrdom, to emphasize formal connections with Gutfreund's sculpture. Pavel Janák listed Picasso's *Head*, the head of Donatello's *John the Baptist*, and what he called the African "mask" and Gutfreund's "mask," together in a notebook from 1912, confirming that he saw a connection between all of these works.⁸¹

Two other examples demonstrate the Group's interest in the theme of

81. Janák, *Deníky*, 1912. Archive of the National Technical Museum, Prague.

beheading. The ancient metope from Selinunte the Group published in *Art Monthly* depicts Perseus beheading Medusa. Filla's second version of *Salome* was also reproduced in the journal in the summer of 1912, in the issue preceding the one with the Selinunte relief. All of these examples call our attention to the Group's interest in the metaphorical value of the act of severing the head from the body. Just as the Group saw Picasso's *Head* as an embodiment of spirituality and of the formation of creative ideas, the severed head was a metaphor of spiritual freedom for them—freeing the mind from the materialism of the body.

Using Foreign Sources to Reinvigorate National Culture

One of the most important generating forces for artistic forms, according to Riegl, was that produced by the meeting of two cultures.⁸² Similarly, Dvořák claimed that confrontation between two cultural expressions caused developmental progress in art.⁸³ The Group used Vienna School ideas to support their claim that artists in Prague could contribute to modern art despite being at a distance from Paris, the art world's center at the time. Riegl's belief that artistic forms are continually in flux also supported the Group's conviction that they could reinvigorate Czech art by responding to contemporary artistic developments in France. This idea was a radical shift from contemporary nationalist understandings of art history as the search for "ethnically purist" characteristics in works of art.⁸⁴ The idealistic Vienna School belief that "analysis of objects can lead us to large-scale cultural understandings," that led Riegl and Wickhoff to "emphasize the international character of European cultural development" also proved dangerous, serving to legitimize the racist art history of Vienna School art historian Josef Strzygowski.⁸⁵ Riegl analyzed shifts in style resulting from cultural interaction to disprove the assumption that, for example, Roman art represented a decline from that of classical antiquity. Strzygowski, on the other hand used his meticulous observations of a vast array of artifacts to support his argument that it was the "pervasive and malicious influence of the East" that destroyed what was left of the Greek character in Roman art.⁸⁶ Though Group members developed generalizations about what was essential to Czech or French culture, for example, they did so to encourage a cosmopolitan appreciation of the value of the variety of contributions to contemporary culture. Their overall goal of legitimizing their work as Czech in character despite being inspired by international contemporary art aligns them with the idealism of Riegl and Wickhoff. The Group vigorously defended their work against the popular

82. Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*," 19.

83. Max Dvořák, "Das Rätsel der Kunst der Brüder van Eyck," cited in Kramář, "O Viedeňské škole," 209.

84. Elsner, "Birth of Late Antiquity," 360.

85. *Ibid.*, 359; Suzanne L. Marchand, "The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski," *History and Theory* 33, no. 4 (December 1994): 115.

86. Elsner, "Birth of Late Antiquity," 372; Marchand, "Rhetoric of Artifacts," 127.

nationalist view that foreign influences would produce an alien art that would undermine the integrity of Czech culture.

One of the repeated refrains in criticism was that the Group's ideas were foreign, un-Czech. One satirist complained that the young artists just "look[ed] things up in some French magazine."⁸⁷ In response to these attacks, the Group included reproductions in their journal that served multiple purposes. They provided examples of works of art that departed from classical standards, broadening the context for the Group's own work. As we have seen, the Group also used images metaphorically, suggesting formal and psychological connections between widely disparate images. They believed that the current era was a more spiritual one than the materialist nineteenth century and that there were previous eras with which they had more in common than they did with recent history. The journal's reproduction of heads separated from bodies—minds freed from their material moorings—presented a visual argument to show these unorthodox transhistorical, transcultural connections.

Filla's article about the sixteenth-century Greek painter, Domenicos Theotocopoulos, who achieved success in Spain under the moniker El Greco, provided a model for the Group. Filla thought Czech artists were in a position analogous to that of El Greco because they were outsiders to the artistic center of their time. This perspective, Filla claimed, allowed El Greco and the Group to bring what they needed from the major international stylistic developments of their time into conversation with their own indigenous ideas. Filla believed that El Greco's work responded to the ideological shift of the baroque era toward spiritualism and against the materialism of the Renaissance, and that this situation was analogous to that facing contemporary Prague artists.

Filla emphasized El Greco's status as a foreigner, which he claimed gave the painter the freedom to develop his own style. Julius Meier-Graefe's article "El Greco's Baroque," published earlier in 1911, had called modernist artists' attention to the painter's work, and he also saw El Greco's work in this way.⁸⁸ Though Meier-Graefe's article had a wide impact, especially among young artists, the Czech historian and critic F. X. Harlas was incredulous that Filla could be so effusive about an artist whom, "in Spain," he claimed, "they call . . . a madman."⁸⁹ In Filla's view, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586–88) was a turning point in El Greco's work. Filla describes the lower tier of the painting as traditional but points to the upper realm as showing all the signs of El Greco's late work: an angel's billowing garment and twisting body bridge the human and divine worlds. El Greco renders the figures in the upper register of the image in ghostly, pale colors and broadly indicates the indeterminate space with streaked, visible

87. [Skrůžný], "Původní zprávy Venouška Dolejše," 57.

88. Michael Scholz-Hänsel, *El Greco, Domenikos Theotokopoulos 1541–1614* (London, 2006), 90; Julius Meier-Graefe, "Das Barock Grecos," *Kunst und Künstler* 10 (1911): 78–94.

89. F. X. Harlas, "Umělecký měsíčník," *Národní politika*, December 1911 (no page number on clipping), from Památník národního písemnictví, Prague, Jan Thon Fond, Výstřížky týkající se výtvarného umění (Clippings relating to fine art).

brushstrokes. These distortions expressive of the spiritual realm contrast with the sharply rendered row of orderly, naturalistic figures below.

Filla used El Greco to demonstrate the choices contemporary artists have, even asserting that one must pick and choose among the options presented in El Greco's work.⁹⁰ Filla thought El Greco's work not only "concerns the fundamental basis of the artistic work of most recent artists" but also indicated the direction young artists should take: "Interest in and love for him helps characterize the trajectory of our development and shows how far away we are from yesterday, and where we are actually headed."⁹¹ Marc began the *Blaue Reiter Almanach* by describing a spiritual connection between El Greco's works and contemporary art. He referred to Cézanne and El Greco as "spiritual brothers despite the centuries that separate them," adding, "both felt the *mystical inner construction*, which is the great problem of our generation."⁹² But El Greco's usefulness to the young Czech artists extended beyond their admiration for his style. Filla believed that experimental work being done in his time, as in El Greco's, resulted from a breakdown of tradition during a period of cultural and political instability.

By comparing the general psychological dispositions of historical epochs, Filla echoes Worringer's schema of alternating epochs of alienation and empathy. But Filla's argument most closely approximates the way Dvořák discussed El Greco, despite the fact that Filla considered the Spanish painter baroque, while Dvořák used his work to exemplify his definition of mannerism.⁹³ Dvořák's article, "El Greco and Mannerism," first published posthumously (1924) but likely derived from ideas developed in prewar lectures, proposed not only a reevaluation of the painter's work but also a redefinition of the term *mannerist*.⁹⁴ Rather than using it to denote the artistic style of a period of decline after the High Renaissance,

90. "Our era does not want to accept Greco whole, but rather . . . only that which one needs." Filla, "Domenico Theotocopuli, el Greco," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 1 (September 1911): 7.

91. *Ibid.*, 5.

92. Franz Marc, "Spiritual Treasures," in Kandinsky and Marc, eds., *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 59. Emphasis in the original.

93. Dvořák conceived of mannerism as "an all-embracing style and a symptom of the spiritual crisis of the age." Bakos, "The Vienna School's Hundred and Sixty-eighth Graduate," 237. By contrast, Filla "considered [El] Greco an artist who proceeded from the Middle Ages directly to baroque art." Karel Šrp, "Domenico Theotocópuli El Greco," *Umění* 38 (1990): 520. Max Dvořák, "On El Greco and Mannerism," trans. John Hardy, in Gert Schiff, ed., *German Essays on Art History* (New York, 1988), 191. Originally published as Dvořák, "Über Greco und den Manierismus," in Karl M. Swoboda and Johannes Wilde, eds., *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte: Studien zur Abendländischen Kunstentwicklung* (Munich, 1924).

94. The essay on El Greco "is in actual fact the manuscript of a lecture given in October 1920 at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry." Gert Schiff, "Introduction," in Schiff, ed., *German Essays on Art History*, li. Dvořák's published writings commonly stemmed from ideas in lectures developed over years. Karl Maria Swoboda, "Preface," to Max Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, trans. Randolph J. Klawiter (Notre Dame, 1967), xxiv. It is likely that Dvořák's thoughts on El Greco were familiar to Kramář long before the 1920s and that Kramář would have discussed them with members of the Group.

when Italian painters stopped looking to nature and instead put their virtuoso technique to work improving upon their predecessors, Dvořák expanded the term to describe artists beyond Italy and to express more than artistic feeling. Understood in this manner, El Greco's works no longer "refer us back to nature but to a life of inner experience." Dvořák developed a theory of artistic style as a symptom of cultural characteristics. Connecting the inward turn of mannerism with his own time, another period of anti-materialism, Dvořák wrote: "We have seen how both in literature and art there has been a turning towards a spirituality freed from all dependence on naturalism, a tendency similar to that of the Middle Ages and the mannerist period."⁹⁵

El Greco's style in particular, with its elongated and distorted bodies and incoherent spatial renderings, Dvořák argued, expressed the uncertainties of the painter's time. In his conclusion, Dvořák explained El Greco's contemporary relevance:

At about the time when El Greco painted these pictures, his Spanish contemporary Cervantes conceived Don Quixote, a character which Dostoevsky was to describe as the most beautiful in history, apart from Jesus Christ. Don Quixote was the pure idealist, as indeed was El Greco in the realm of art, for his work represents the peak of a European artistic movement which sought to replace the materialism of the Renaissance with a complete spiritual reorientation.⁹⁶

Dvořák added that it makes sense that El Greco's works were virtually forgotten for two centuries because those were years dominated by science and mechanization. The neglected painter was being rediscovered in his own time, Dvořák claimed, precisely because that materialistic age was ending.⁹⁷ Dvořák's ideas, from his thinking about El Greco to his characterization of Don Quixote, clearly resonated with the Group.

Kramář also discussed El Greco as a mannerist, as a deeply spiritual artist who saw the external world as divine. Hence Kramář believed the painter's naturalistic representation of certain objects in his work heightened the sense of spirituality in his painting as a whole. Kramář followed Dvořák's lead in understanding El Greco's work as emblematic of a "new spiritualism" in sixteenth-century culture as a whole.⁹⁸ Kramář had been interested in El Greco since the turn of the century, however, and in 1912 traveled to Spain specifically to study his work.⁹⁹

This understanding of their own time as one of fundamental change to a new era of spirituality after a long reign of materialism led the Group to reject naturalism and to see in cubism the possibility of reinvigorating Czech art. In particular, they believed their position as outsiders allowed

95. Dvořák, "On El Greco and Mannerism," 200, 203, 205.

96. *Ibid.*, 205.

97. *Ibid.*

98. Vincenc Kramář, "Domenico Theotocópuli El Greco: Příspěvek k popsání podstaty a historického významu jeho umění," *Umění* 38 (1990): 511–19. The article was composed in 1937 or 1938 but never published in Kramář's lifetime.

99. Srp, "Domenico Theotocópuli El Greco," 519–20.

them the kind of insight that El Greco had had as a foreigner in baroque Spain. The Czech Group adopted the unusual stance that working at the periphery of a given era's artistic center could give artists the advantage of stylistic choice.

Vienna School theories about the intermingling of cultural traditions were particularly important for the Czech artists' argument that they ought to be able to look to French art to reinvigorate their own culture. The Group claimed that they could produce authentically Czech work inspired by French approaches. In their view, integrating foreign ideas with their own involved far more than simply "looking things up in some French magazine."¹⁰⁰ Riegl's discussion of Rembrandt in his 1902 article *The Dutch Group Portrait* and Dvořák's 1903 work on the van Eyck brothers offered significant models for the Czech artists.¹⁰¹ Riegl believed Rembrandt represented "a high point in the evolution [of Dutch art], after which no more profound problems or far-reaching solutions arose."¹⁰² But Riegl saw Rembrandt as drawing on both Dutch tradition and contemporary Italian art. Rembrandt alienated his contemporaries by adopting Italian elements of "subordination and physical activity as an expression of will," but this synthesis of Dutch and Italian approaches actually allowed Rembrandt to fully realize the goals of Dutch art.¹⁰³ Riegl saw the development of the artistic volition of Dutch art as a significant link in what he called "the long chain of evolution" from the art of classical antiquity and its focus on objects to that of modernity and its emphasis on subjectivity. Rembrandt represented the highest point of development in Dutch art, Riegl concluded, because he combined foreign approaches with the "native element" of Dutch art, "participatory attention." That is, Rembrandt directly involved the viewer in the depicted interaction of multiple figures without arranging them in the Italian manner of a hierarchical composition. Riegl claimed that Rembrandt's combination of Dutch and Italian painterly elements led to "a more complete realization of truly Dutch artistic ends."¹⁰⁴

Dvořák also extolled the results of intermingled cultural traditions in his article about the Ghent Altarpiece, *The Enigma of the van Eyck Brothers*. For Dvořák, this represented the intersection of the art and culture of the French and Italian nations in Avignon (then the seat of the pope), that gave French, and ultimately Flemish, art of the fifteenth century its particular "personal note," raising it above both Italian naturalism and French refinement.¹⁰⁵

100. [Skružný], "Původní zprávy Venouška Dolejše," 57.

101. Alois Riegl, "Das holländische Gruppenporträt," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 23, pt. 1 (1902): 71–278; Max Dvořák, "Das Rätsel der Kunst der Brüder van Eyck," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 24, pt. 1 (1903): 161–317.

102. Riegl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, 64.

103. Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*," 19.

104. *Ibid.*

105. Dvořák, "Das Rätsel der Kunst der Brüder van Eyck," cited in Kramář, "O Viedeňské škole," 209.

The young Czech artists believed their own work, mingled with contemporary French concepts, represented a revitalization of their own “native” culture. Articles in *Art Monthly* suggest that they understood the dominant characteristic of French art to be its preoccupation with questions of form, while they claimed the spirituality and abstraction found in baroque precedents as their own “native” Czech tendency. Filla compared his own culture to the baroque era of El Greco, and Janák saw the Czech national character expressed in the supernatural beauty of baroque architecture, which he described as attempting to escape matter.¹⁰⁶ He defined the baroque period as one “controlled by the abstraction that is characteristic of our national character” and contrasted this with more recent eras: “A large part of our history of architecture was taken up by attempts to escape beyond and above the limits of matter—in the Gothic and the Baroque style—while the rest (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) remained with a positive, accepting attitude towards matter and material form.”¹⁰⁷ Following Kramář and Dvořák, Janák believed that style is symptomatic of psychological cultural characteristics. He advocated using diagonal elements in architecture to infuse it with emotional and spiritual content. In his article “The Prism and the Pyramid,” Janák outlined his belief that the nineteenth century’s materialist emphasis on vertical and horizontal elements had been an exception in the long history of Bohemian architecture and that it was time to return to “native elements.”¹⁰⁸ The force of gravity gives us the horizontal plane as well as the vertical one—the trajectory of objects in free fall. “The column and the slab,” he wrote, emphasize the “natural law of burden and support.”¹⁰⁹ These planes represent the natural building blocks of architecture, but Janák believed that “nature exhausts itself” in them.¹¹⁰ By adding another force, he wrote, one can create “all other geometrically complex shapes.” He illustrated this point with an example: “diagonally falling rain is caused by the additional factor of wind.” Janák added that these planes all produce psychological effects. In nature, horizontal and vertical planes “evoke . . . an idea of dead stillness,” while “diagonal shapes . . . evoke a sense of drama, movement, sharpness and pointedness.” The diagonal element denies gravity, evokes drama, and thereby “provides the means by which matter is conquered artistically.”¹¹¹ Since “the spirit and will to abstraction . . . has always been close to our Northern sensibility,” Janák wrote, the diagonal plane represents a psychological choice of the spiritual over the material, a choice that characterized all the arts that the Group pro-

106. Pavel Janák, “Hranol a pyramida,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 6 (March 1912): 162–70. Translated by Alexandra Büchler as “The Prism and the Pyramid,” in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács, eds., *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Los Angeles, 2002), 86–91. Where I have modified Büchler’s translation, I cite both translation and original.

107. Janák, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” 86–87; Janák, “Hranol a pyramida,” 163.

108. Janák, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” 86–87; Janák, “Hranol a pyramida,” 163.

109. Janák, “Hranol a pyramida,” 163.

110. Janák, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” 88.

111. *Ibid.*, 89.

moted.¹¹² Though the French painting of Picasso and Braque was the immediate inspiration that had awoken the Czech artists' interest in new forms, affinity for the dramatic energy of the diagonal was indigenous, Janák claimed. He argued that worthwhile art could only come out of an artist's correctly attending to his own native culture and to extending the collective project of the nation.

In an article about Cézanne, Beneš defined the "French element" as a formalist preoccupation. Beneš discussed Cézanne as an artist developing ideas from the period expression of his culture. "Efforts like Cézanne's," Beneš wrote, "are not driven by an urge for style." Rather, style "must simply flow as a form of period expression."¹¹³ This conception of the artist echoes Riegl's conviction that, though he considered Rembrandt "the most ingenious" of Dutch painters of his time, he was "primarily merely an executor of the artistic volition of his people and his time."¹¹⁴ Beneš believed that in Cézanne's period expression, impressionism, the means had become the end. He saw this formal focus as the outcome of hundreds of years of French artistic development and hence as a fitting aim in France. Cézanne, then, and by extension, Picasso and Braque, were developing native French artistic culture by interrogating the formal basis of painting. But it would be inappropriate for Czech artists to use the radical forms the Parisian artists had developed for the same purposes. For Beneš, as for the Group, an artistic direction had to have a deep basis in the cultural worldview of its place and people; otherwise, Beneš wrote, "the works would remain empty forms with no relationship to the inner spiritual life, no matter how beautiful they are."¹¹⁵ The Czechs used the cubist language to explore the spiritual possibilities in modern life that they saw as the fulfillment of Bohemia's particular collective tendency.

The Viennese concept of art-value helps us interpret the works with which I began. Gutfreund's *Don Quixote* and Filla's *Salome* emphasize spirituality through abstract form, embodying the "native" Czech rejection of the material world. Dvořák's writings support the impression that Gutfreund's *Don Quixote* represents a pure idealism and a spiritual reorientation. *Art Monthly* visually connected Gutfreund's sculpture and the head of Donatello's *John the Baptist* by reproducing them in the same issue at the same scale and by choosing a point of view that aligns the tilt of their heads. Gutfreund specifically praised Donatello for distorting his figure of John the Baptist to emphasize John's spirituality over his material form.¹¹⁶

Filla's two *Salome* paintings also refer to the story of John the Baptist. His symbolic subject matter may seem at odds with the formal preoccupations of his professed model, Picasso, but this is not evidence of a misunderstanding. The Group recognized that Parisian cubists' works were mo-

112. *Ibid.*, 88.

113. Beneš, "Čin Paula Cézanna," 261.

114. Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*," 4.

115. Beneš, "Čin Paula Cézanna," 260.

116. Gutfreund, "Dvě poznámky o Donatellovi," 137.

tivated by formal investigations, but they borrowed the approach because they saw how cubism's abstractions could be used to suggest a modernized version of a "native" Czech spirituality.¹¹⁷ Riegl's and Dvořák's conviction that cultural interaction generates artistic development clarifies why the Group nevertheless believed it legitimate to borrow these supposedly foreign forms, yet use them to construct a particularly Czech modern art.

Viennese art theory also defended the radical departure of Gutfreund's and Filla's works from the naturalistic style that prevailed in Prague at the time. Though their work seemed exceptional in their contemporary context, they believed this simply attested to their independent creative impulses, the "daring attempt to feel the will to form," that Janák saw in the baroque cabinet. Yet this independence did not signify individualism, for the Group collectively developed the cubist language into an expressive grammar of form that was not merely personal or arbitrary.

Art Monthly offers highly theorized support for avant-gardism in central Europe that runs against the grain of standard narratives of modernism. The extended defense of the Czechs' work is exceptional at this time, providing a unique possibility to explore why the new art historical ideas emerging from Vienna were crucial to an avant-garde group's identity in the region at this time.

117. Beneš, "Čin Paula Cézanna," 261.