

therefore no wonder that many interwar exhibition designers and architects in Czechoslovakia, including the abovementioned Kroha, Heythum or Sutnar, were not only exhibition, graphic or information designers but also stage designers.

### Reception

How successful were the new exhibition techniques and approaches to the exhibition space? While architects and designers were indeed aware of the need to engage the visitor and aimed to create a well-thought-out, well-designed interior, the reality of the pavilion turned out differently. Consistency, or the lack of it, was one of the issues that the pavilion faced. The pavilion, as I mentioned earlier, was split into a series of smaller or larger individual sections each composed by a different designer. The number of architects and designers who were responsible for the various segments of the national pavilion led to the fractionality of the overall exposition. This was seen as a flaw of the interior installation, which then gave a sense that a unified concept was missing, a result of fighting for responsibility between different agents.<sup>92</sup>

In his post-exhibition report, Sucharda identified the inconsistencies between the concepts of the architects and designers on the one hand and the input from the exhibitors and organizers on the other hand. As various ministries were involved in organizing the diverse parts of the pavilion, their goals differed. While some displays aimed at showing the state as modern through the arts, design and architecture, others put primary emphasis on consumerist culture, trade and commerce. Yet, these goals were sometimes not mutually exclusive, and, for example, the showcases of design had both artistic and commercial intentions. This is added to the mixed messages because the same items appeared in different contexts. This was the case, for instance, of glass objects that featured in the trade-oriented section on glass as well as in the section on vocational schools.

The discrepancy between the original concept of the pavilion and its final look was a result of the conflicts between the ideological and materialistic interests of the ministries involved in the display.<sup>93</sup> The ministries of education and public works, on the one hand, and that of industry, on the other, pursued either cultural propaganda or trade and export interests respectively and, as

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<sup>92</sup> Jan Sucharda, "Zpráva," 7.

<sup>93</sup> Sucharda, "Zpráva," 5.

a result, the exhibitors' point of view was often privileged over the visitors' experience. The intention of the designers to lead the visitor through the exhibition on a route that did not overwhelm and exhaust them, ultimately fell short of the actual displays.

The interval of silence, for instance, that would allow rest from the often-overwhelming exhibits, was, in the end, hard to find in the pavilion overcrowded with objects. The intended effects of natural light entering the interior through the Thermolux glass were also diminished in the actual installation of exhibits. Parts of the pavilion were screened off from natural light and lit artificially—these were, again, the glass and porcelain displays and partly the tourism sections. The glass section was, in the end, composed as a magical cave [fig. 29]. The rows of blue columns of light in the “winding hallway with a low ceiling, darkened and narrow” made the space rather oppressive for many.<sup>94</sup> It had an adverse effect on the visitors—it did not let them “breathe out” until the end of this section. This, Sucharda complained, created a strange discord between how the effects of light were envisaged in the exterior and interior and the actual realization.<sup>95</sup>

Many national papers commented on the mishaps in the Czechoslovak pavilion. Further criticism aimed at the overcrowded displays of the heavy industries<sup>96</sup> as well as the “near life-threatening jam” in the narrow, winding curves of the ground floor exposition of glass and ceramics.<sup>97</sup> The Czech theatre director Jiří Frejka, who visited the pavilion, also noticed the conflict between what he described as the “beautiful” exterior and the interior which contained “good and bad objects.”<sup>98</sup> He noticed that some of the displays, for instance those of the fez and wood, were overexposed, and despite the theatricality of the overall space, the individual rooms lack a unifying concept.<sup>99</sup>

Regarding the exterior, an anonymous contributor in the newspaper *Venkov* criticized the excessive emphasis on the architecture of the Czechoslovak pavilion at the expense of the interior displays.<sup>100</sup> The author concluded that the architecture of national pavilions in the fairs should be secondary to what was

94 Sucharda, “Zpráva,” 5.

95 Sucharda, “Zpráva,” 5.

96 “My na Světové výstavě v Paříži,” *Venkov*, August 22, 1937, 5.

97 *Rundschau Technischer Arbeit Berlin*, September 22, 1937, quoted in *Národní politika*, October 12, 1937, Excerpts Archive, MFA, oh8.

98 Jiří Frejka, “Děláme československou divadelní expozici,” *České slovo*, August 22, 1937, Newspapers Excerpts Archive, MFA, oh8.

99 Frejka, “Děláme.”

100 “Náš pavilon na pařížské výstavě,” *Venkov*, August 11, 1937, 8.

displayed inside. The temporary pavilions in Paris, including the Soviet, German, and Italian ones, did not represent the best of international architecture and “in terms of the construction, technology, crafts, these [were] improvisations almost like in the theatre. We [the Czechoslovak representation] did not grasp that and that is where the core of all our mistakes lies...”<sup>101</sup> Another daily, the leftist *Právo lidu*, went even further in their criticism and turned attention to ordinary visitors who were left out of the pavilion. The designers and exhibitors failed to address the regular audience because apart from a few excep-



**Fig. 29.** Antonín Heythum, Glass section, Czechoslovak pavilion, Paris, 1937.

tions, there were no displays of ordinary life in Czechoslovakia. Instead, Latin inscriptions in the Hall of Honor gave the impression that the target audience was probably professors of classics, rather than the masses of visitors that normally flow into world's fairs.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> “Náš pavilon,” 8.

<sup>102</sup> “Procházky po výstavě,” *Právo lidu*, October 19, 1937, Newspaper Excerpts Archive, MFA, oh8.