> rection who can remove objects that they do not find likeable from the display... Artistic views often change and stand fundamentally against the practical needs of economic life.[57]

It is not clear who was the exact target of the Minister, but his criticism was partly directed at the 1925 Exhibition which was mostly organized by the Ministry of Education and showcased the work of the Association of the Czechoslovak Werkbund and the UMPRUM circles. Although the display in the national pavilion cannot be seen as avant-garde, the overall focus on the visual and modern (however interpreted) was certainly not aligned with the commercial interests of the Ministry of Trade. Another exhibition Matoušek might have referred to was Sutnar's installation in Barcelona, which as the designer argued captured "Czechoslovak work in the area of new, utility items of high quality and valuable artistic industry through the most typical examples."[58]

Instead of such typical, modern items, the Ministry called for an installation that would promote trade and tourism in the interest of increasing the prestige of the state overseas and which would reap economic results.[59] The Ministry of Education with minister Ivan Dérer, on the other hand, defended a more representative approach that would impress the audiences by its quality and emphasized that especially the Association of Czechoslovak Work was a corporation with "the most experience in the area of exhibition organization," as was visible from its success in Paris in 1925.[60] Despite the harsh criticism of the outdated decorativeness of the national display, the number of awards the participating artists and designers generated was overwhelming. The Ministry therefore recommended the Association to oversee the section of the artistic industries and possibly the entire exhibition in Chicago in 1933.

What modernism?

The discussion about the direction of the official visual representation of the state continued throughout the interwar period. Following Chicago, the exhi-

57 Ministerstvo obchodu Předsednictvu ministerské rady, Věc: Světová výstava v Chicagu, Účast Československa, 31 October 1932, Světová výstava v Chicagu 1933, DM2251, AKPR, 3.

58 Ladislav Sutnar, "Státní odborné školy na Mezinárodní výstavě v Barceloně 1929," *Horizont* no. 25–26 (1930): 47.

59 Ministerstvo obchodu Předsednictvu, 4 and 6.

60 Ministerstvo školství Ministerstvu zahraničních věcí, Věc: Chicago, Světová výstava 1933, Účast Československa, June 21, 1930, Světová výstava v Chicagu 1933, D9475/30, AKPR.

bitions in Spain, the United States and Belgium, indeed contained important exhibits of the arts that attempted to frame modernity of the visual arts and I will return to the American context shortly. It was at the Exhibition of Technology and Art in Modern Life in Paris in 1937 that the place of modern art was hotly debated again on the ministerial as well as artistic level, now in the context of the amplified nationalism and looming new political and military conflicts. This was the year of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich, which blacklisted many modernist artists and artworks. The Spanish civil war started in 1936, with Mussolini in charge of the fascists in Italy from 1924. Central Europe, too, was undergoing a radicalization in politics, which included the renewed claims for territorial revisionism in Hungary and the strengthening of the Austrofascist regime in Austria.[61] Czechoslovakia that retained a multi-party system, indeed looked like an island of democracy despite the growing separatist tendencies of Slovaks initiated especially by Andrej Hlinka and his Slovak People's Party.[62]

The place of modern art in this politicized environment was therefore highly charged too. At the Parisian Exposition, the visual arts were again located in a separate building as well as in many national pavilions that oscillated between abstract modernity and conservative traditionalism. The Italian pavilion, for instance, housed several murals by the futurist painter Gino Severini, while Picasso's Guernica, critical of atrocities of the civil war, were featured in the Spanish pavilion alongside his sculptures, Miró's painting and a fountain of mercury by Alexander Calder. Some participating nations took a more conservative path emphasizing the country's historical and religious traditions: the Hungarian pavilion, for instance, showcased paintings on historic, religious topics in the interior while a large wooden statue of Saint Stephen by Pál Pátzay guarded the entrance and received a grand prix.[63] Similarly to the Czechoslovak pavilion here, the Hungarian one contained a mixture of fine art, folk art and crafts, pointing out the historicity, religious character and adherence to traditions of the country.

The Austrian pavilion, by comparison, featured a large photographic montage of the Alps composed by Robert Haas as a view of a landscape modernized by roads. It provided a spectacular effect especially when observed from the outside through the large glass windows of the pavilion designed by Oswald

61 Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *Interwar East Central Europe, 1918–1941: The Failure of Democracy-Building, the Fate of Minorities* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020).

62 Kosatík, *Slovenské století*, 107.

63 Vilmos Gál, "Returning to the Banks of the Seine. Paris, 1937," in *Hungary at the World Fairs* (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2010), 187–90.

Haerdtl.[64] It also fit within the Austrofascist fantasy of idealized rural and traditional Austria combined with modernized progress.[65] Despite this sleek exterior views, the interiors of the Austrian pavilion were fitted with heavy furniture, textiles and decorative objects that used now rather outlived idiom of the Wiener Werkstätte.

The artistic concept of the Czechoslovak pavilion was similarly hybrid. When the plans for the one in 1937 were announced, criticism came from many sides. The members of the Mánes Association, a group of Czech and international artists, architects and art historians, were especially vocal. Josef Gočár and Emil Filla protested the planned vision for the pavilion in their journal *Volné směry* and in a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamil Krofta.[66] They questioned especially the decision that only "a few casts and copies of old masters" were planned for inclusion in an exhibition which was officially focused on modern technology and art.[67] They saw the proposed program of the Czechoslovak display as archaic and outlived, typical of local trade fairs or the Prague ethnographic exhibition in 1895, which was seen as a clear proclamation of 19th century Czech nationalism.

Many commentators called for an appointment of a designated commissioner general who would be responsible for the pavilion's unified content and not act solely on behalf any of the Ministries.[68] For the artistic section of the Exhibition, *Volné směry* also asked for an appointment of a committee of independent experts.[69] This group, they envisaged, would not represent "various local and regional interests and those of some associations," because their attitude to modern art was necessarily negative.[70] *Volné směry* with Emil Filla as the chief editor and the surrealist painter Jindřich Štýrský on the editorial board promoted

64 Matthew Rampley, "From Potemkin City to the Estrangement of Vision: Baroque Modernity in Austria, before and after 1918," *Austrian History Yearbook* 47 (2016): 167–87; Elizabeth Cronin, *Heimat Photography in Austria. A Politicized Vision of Peasants and Skiers* (Vienna: Photoinstitut Bonartes: Albertina – Salzburg: Fotohof Edition, 2015); Chris Zintzen, "Shifting Perspectives: Alpine Scenarios in the Work Complex Nach der Natur (Beyond Nature) by Austrian Architectural Photographer Margherita Spiluttini," in *The Draw of the Alps: Alpine Summits and Borderlands in Modern German-Speaking Culture*, ed. Richard McClelland (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 103–122.

65 Béla Rásky, Artwork of the Month, May 2023: Photomontage at the Paris World's Fair by Robert Haas (1937) https://craace.com/2023/05/30/artwork-of-the-month-may-2023-photomontage-at-the-paris-worlds-fair-by-robert-haas-1937.

66 Ed., "Bude účast Československa na mezinárodní výstavě v Paříži 1937 ostudou?," *Volné směry* 1, no. 32 (1936): 306. Letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 May 1936, Mezinárodní výstava v Paříži 1937, kD5640/36, MFA Archive.

67 Letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

68 "Účast Československa na mezinárodní výstavě v Paříži r. 1937," *Volné směry* 1, no. 32 (1936): 298.

69 "Účast Československa," 298.

70 "Účast Československa," 299.

their own vision of modern art based on abstraction and the avant-garde. The reference to "some associations" was probably addressed to anyone else who held a different, in Mánes's terms more conservative view of modernism.

Critics of the national pavilions often made suggestive comments but did not explicitly point fingers or named those they criticized. *Volné směry* for example also turned against the author of the exhibition plans whom they identified as "an art critic, known for his outdated mentality and prejudice against anything modern."[71] This "failed art critic" would be Václav Nebeský, who oversaw the fine art presentation. Nebeský was an art critic, collector and art dealer who had lived in Paris for several years and returned to Prague shortly before the exhibition. The modern art display that Nebeský eventually put together did conform to some of the pleas of *Volné směry.* Nebeský included a range of artworks of individuals and artistic associations and his understanding of modern art included more experimental painters like Kremlička, Kubišta, Zrzavý, Josef Čapek but also more conservative authors like Vincenc Beneš, Vlastimil Rada, and the sculptors Kotrba and Lauda. Those that Nebeský excluded for their traditionalism included for instance Max Švabinský, Antonín Slavíček, and Štursa.[72]

Nebeský's selection of art works and artists received some responses in the French press but many in Czechoslovakia. A French critic noticed inspiration of the modern art of Czechoslovakia in "almost primitive" forms and in folk art, which "constantly penetrates [the works] with its energetic rhythms, with its brutal artificiality, with its childlike and cute inventions" of the cubist paintings.[73] Czech press and artists were less accommodating. The journal *Dílo* published a declaration entitled "Criticism of the incompetence in promoting national culture," signed by the representatives of artistic associations like The Union of Fine Artists (that published the journal), the Circle of Female Artists from Prague, the Association Aleš from Brno, and several regional art organizations in Bratislava or Plzeň.[74] They criticized the commissioner general of the exhibition, Dr Krčmář (once a minister of education), whom, together with Nebeský, the authors accused of nepotism and favoritism. Similar to the earlier criticism by Mánes, they thought Nebeský, especially, was out of touch

71 Ed., "Bude účast," 306.

72 Ed., "Československé umění na mezinárodní výstavě v Paříži," *Dílo* 29 (1938–39): 50. Several photographs of the works in the journal *Život* (*Život* 16, no. 1, 1937, 14) give an idea what the selection looked like.

73 Raymond Cogniat, "Moderní československé umění," Život 16, no. 1 (1937): 15.

74 Anonymous, "Kritika neschopnosti v propagaci národní kultury," a copy in "Mezinárodní výstava umění a technika v moderním životě v Paříži v roce 1937 – účast ČSR," inv. no. 1033, file 134, D, APRO.

with the art world in Czechoslovakia and promoted only a specific group of artists—those he knew from Paris and they did not represent Czechoslovak national art.[75] The paintings, that came mostly from Mánes members, "paraphrased Parisian modern schools," were deemed derivative of French art and generally not of a high standard.[76] The modernism that *Dílo* (Work) would have preferred therefore looked more towards essentialist nationalism seen in local traditions, figurative subjects and regionalism.

The artists selected for Paris were, ultimately, labelled as the artistic elite partly based on personal preferences and their personal connections with the exhibition organizers. Yet the editor in *Dílo* identified the elitism in another, often neglected aspect of the selection, namely in the marginal representation of female artists. The editor addressed the absence directly, asking "...if the surrealist Štýrský was invited, why not Toyen too; who is better?" and "why was only the male member invited from the Procházka family of painters, and the female one, equally important, was omitted?"[77] The gender imbalance at the Exhibition adhered to the established division where the fine artists were male, while women were mostly represented by crafts. In this regard, Nebeský did not strike as a particular good choice of a curator. His view from 1919 that a "woman ... was not born to be an artist, she was born to be a work of art" was obviously reapplied at the close of the interwar period. Different areas of the visual arts were reserved to women in his view; women excelled in those fields where art can be performed through their body and soul, like dance and theatre, as well as the decorative and applied arts.[78]

As I argue throughout this book, female voices and women were mostly absent from Czechoslovak national pavilions. The male dominance among pavilion designers and artists also indicates the general state of contemporary society in Czechoslovakia in which women only slowly penetrated more prominent positions.[79] After all, throughout the interwar period, the ministerial organizational committees did not have a single woman involved in the main discussions of the content or direction of the displays. This was certainly true in the

75 Ed., "Československé umění na mezinárodní výstavě v Paříži," *Dílo* 29 (1938–39): 50 and "Kritika neschopnosti."

76 "Kritika neschopnosti."

77 Ed., "Československé umění," *Dílo*, 52. In recent literature, Toyen's gender has been reassessed and the artist is often considered as non-binary.

78 Václav Nebeský, "Ženské umění," *Tribuna* 1, no. 23, February 26, 1919, 3. Cf. Martina Pachmanová, *Zrození umělkyně z pěny limonády* (Prague: VŠUP, 2013), 28 or Filipová, *Modernity, History and Politics*, 166–167.

79 Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2006).

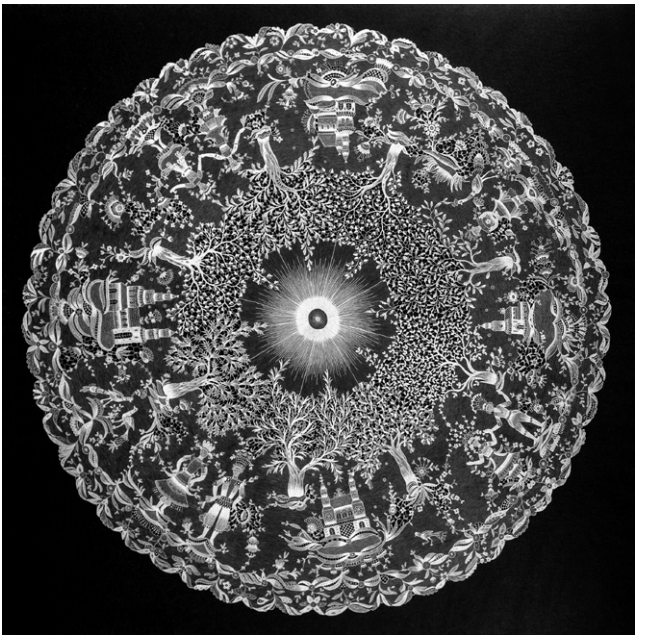

Fig. 35. Emilie Paličková Milde, Little Sun, lace doily, 1925.

Czechoslovak pavilions in 1925 and 1937 where some women were represented but their contributions were limited to crafts like lace making and weaving and only occasionally to other techniques. Emilie Paličková Milde, for example, successfully exhibited her lace in many international exhibitions for which she received various awards[80] [fig. 35]. Together with the work of other female artists, such as the ceramicist Helena Johnová, the painter Linka Procházková, or the sculptor Mary Duras, these examples were individual and isolated cases of female participation and came in tiny proportion to the representation of male artists and organizers.

The odd one out

One of these male artists whose work was made prominent in 1937 was Zdeněk Pešánek shown in the national pavilion. His three works were located on the terrace and at least one of them deserves more attention because they demonstrate another aspect of possible artistic modernity that could be associated with

80 Ludmila Kybalová, *Emilie Paličková* (Prague: Nakladatelství československých výtvarných umělců, 1962), 9.