Despite criticisms like these which came especially from domestic sources, the Fountain and the Electricity set yet again received a golden medal at the exhibition for its innovative approach. The ambiguous attitude in Czechoslovakia towards Pešánek's work again shows the plurality in understanding modern art and design, its relation to historic art and applied arts and the future direction. Pešánek thought of the combination of electricity, light and movement as a new kind of artistic industry and new art, yet one with foundations in crafts and hands-on skills. He himself was a classically trained sculptor who had studied with Jan Štursa (whose sculptures often featured in Czechoslovak pavilions) at the Academy of Fine Arts and believed that being good at craft is the first step in an artist's career. That was why teachers taught sculptors how to work with bronze, stone, and ceramics, and students had to learn all the techniques in the workshops. That was why, in Pešánek's view, there was the need for not only schools of drawing and modelling but also for stone-sculpting, ceramic and metal working schools.

Modernity across the ocean—Art in America

A crude trajectory, from Czechoslovakia represented in folk art, decorative applied arts to ultimately being associated with abstract modernism, could be established based on the Parisian exhibitions between 1920 and 1937. The search for representative modernism for display in the American world's fairs took place in parallel but in a less coordinated way. Here, local preferences and political circumstances played a role in constructing the exhibits as seemingly more conservative. In Philadelphia, for example, Švec's bronze sculpture of the "Motorcyclist," which had appeared in Paris in 1925, was left unboxed because the pavilion commissioner did not find it fitting the overall tone of the presentation. The assumption was that the taste in the United States is more conservative, and audiences would appreciate work of more academic nature. Not many large works were transported across the ocean for the high expense transportation incurred and the heavy "Motorcyclist" seems to be an exception. Many works of art were therefore outsourced locally or came from local collections. This applied to displays of fine arts too, where the work was often based on loans from American collectors, which created another picture of modern art.

This was the case at the Century of Progress exhibition, where the art exhibition was organized by the Art Institute of Chicago in both 1933 and 1934. In the first year, the focus was on American collecting and divided into three sec-

tions: old masters, outstanding paintings especially French and American and contemporary art, which put emphasis on American artists.[88] With one exception, which was *Whistler's Mother* by James McNeill Whistler, all works came from American galleries and collectors and encompassed quite a wide spread of art history.[89] The International section was also quite diverse and limited to the works available from local lenders. This reflected in the fact that Czechoslovakia was represented by the Jewish painter Georges Kars (1880–1945) who, although born near Prague, spent most of his life outside of Bohemia.[90] At the time of the world's fair (and in fact until today), Kars was not a household name in the art history of Bohemia or Czechoslovakia, having lived in France for most of his life.

Only a few years later in San Francisco, the entire world's fair did not embrace modernism and future-orientation as unambivalently as the one in New York, which I discuss elsewhere, and instead retained the fascination with Art Deco and monumental architecture. Czechoslovakia was not represented here in a separate national pavilion but in a section in the International Hall designed by Antonín Heythum. It consisted of displays in vitrines of craft and design objects, such as glass, crystal, textiles, print, "home industries," folk art, silver ware and shoes. These were combined with large scale photographs of the countryside, vistas of Prague and other towns, the Sokol gatherings and folk dances.

In the climate of changing political landscape which saw the disappearance of Czechoslovakia, Poland and other countries during 1939 and 1940, the works of art chosen for the Czechoslovak section in San Francisco were conservative. Many turned to the safety of landscape and rather nostalgic, rural subjects. Vladimír Hurban, the ambassador to Czechoslovakia in the USA, was responsible for the selection of paintings. Assisted by the artist Andrej Kováčik (1889–1953), both were of Slovak origin which reflected in their choice. Born in Budapest, Kováčik was a rather conservative figure and nationalist. He had already organized an earlier exhibition of about 250 works of Slovak art in New York in 1938, shown at the galleries of the Fine Art Society. He worked on this exhibition together with the Slovak League of America, an organization promoting the welfare of Slovaks in the US.

The choice of paintings in both New York and, a year later, in San Francisco consisted mainly of Slovak landscapes and works inspired by folk art. They

88 *Official Guide: Book of the Fair 1933* (Chicago: Century of Progress Administration Building, 1933), 107.

89 *Official Guide:* Book, 106.

90 *Catalogue of a Century of Progress Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1933), 81.

Fig.37. Ľudovít Fulla, *Song and Work*, 1934-35, painting.

were mainly by Slovak artists, such as Ľudovít Fulla and Martin Benka, as well as by some Czechs, for instance František Malý, who often depicted the Slovak countryside. With works bearing titles such as "Countryside from Terchova," "Wooden Church in Kezmarok" or "Orava Castle," Slovakia was represented as through the rural image even in these cases which were in the hands of Slovak organizers [fig. 37].[91]

Yet even with the focus on Slovakia, the larger picture of art, however modern, in Czechoslovakia was very limited. Missing here were any references to modern architecture, art and design of the Slovak cities of Bratislava and Košice or the achievements of the progressive School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava, founded in 1928. More experimental and non-figurative works by the Slovak artists represented here, Fulla included, did not feature. Such work, nevertheless, was shown two years earlier in Paris. *The Song and Work* from 1934/35 combined

91 "Czechoslovakia," *Contemporary Art. Official Catalog, Department of Fine Arts* (San Francisco: Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939), 14.

Fig. 38. Martin Benka, *Countryside from Terchova*, 1936, painting.

references to traditional culture found in the Slovak peasants and attributes of their life, like musical instruments, the plough or cattle, with a modern approach to space and the distribution of objects in it [fig. 38]. Yet until today, his painting is regarded as aspiring to become "a mythical parable of the Slovak world, [and] its essential foundations in the peasantry and shepherds," replicating the association of Slovaks with the rural, pre-modern environment.[92] Yet the nostalgia for this kind of lost world could be now connected to the direct political threats to the national sovereignty of not only Slovaks but the entire state.

Fulla's more figurative painting of the "Madonna," displayed in San Francisco, also combined folk motives and colors with religious symbols and modernist abstraction, yet in a more moderate way. They were received well in the USA and the artist was named one of the "prominent contemporaries who [were] ambassadors to the Pageant of the Pacific," alongside for example Kokoschka, Klee, Du-

92 KB [Katarína Bajcurová], "Ľudovít Fulla," cat. no. 9/5, in *Budování státu*, 293.

champ, and Paul Nash.[93] The entire Czechoslovak display also collected positive reviews in the American press and exhibition publications. The *New York Times*, for instance, noted that "the picturesqueness [...in] these portrayals of Slovakian countryside and its people" seen in "the glimpses of costume, pastime and the occupations of daily existence" provided a "further insight into racial characteristics of the artists and of their land."[94] Slovakia and its art were reduced to a simplified and selective, yet externally successful image.

The fine art from Czechoslovakia that was displayed in the USA therefore emphasized a more restrained modernist language derived from traditional sources of folk art and realistic painting. This was caused by the fact that those responsible for the selection and supply of the works tried to estimate what works would send out the most favorable picture to the visitors. The art on display had a more illustrative function and communicated basic information about the state—it depicted primarily its landscape and folk traditions.

Conclusion

Much of the criticism of the 1937 pavilion as well as other art and design displays in Czechoslovak representations at world's fairs revolved around the elitism and exclusions in the selection of artists as well as designers. The question of who should represent the state and with what art was therefore not settled during the interwar period. The visual objects chosen for display in the national presentations ranged from fine art and luxury decorative arts to utility design. They could be largely linked to the market economy, whether it was collecting art or commercial sales of design products and operated outside the purely representational status.

With such international exposure that world's fairs offered, the artists selected for the national pavilions and their work would be necessarily associated with the nation and national art. Moreover, these choices to an extent helped to establish the canon of modern art in Czechoslovakia, further validated by numerous awards received at the international exhibitions. This included the members of Mánes, representatives of the UMPRUM, the Association of the Czechoslovak Werkbund as well as the Slovak landscapists.

93 "Cream of Contemporary Europe's Art Exhibited at Golden Gate Fair," *The Art Digest. The News and Opinions of the Art World*, March 15, 1939, 37.

94 "Contemporary Slovakian Art," *New York Times* (November 13, 1938): 185.