ized it in the windows. Moreover, the story could also be seen as an analogy of the trajectory Czechoslovakia followed as a state. Many politicians, historians and novelists portrayed the period of the Habsburg rule as an oppressive one during which the Czech and Slovak people survived in primitive conditions. According to this narrative, the nation, nevertheless, had developed through hard work and modernization into a prosperous and confident state. The emphasis on progress and evolution becomes another feature shared by the company and Czechoslovakia, both giving importance to young, healthy people that compose the firm and the state respectively.

As a final point, the painted window also puts in plain view the key role of the two main male protagonists of the company. They are portrayed here, through their central position, as the guardians of the company, the workers and the pavilion. Such elevated place could be reminiscent to the role of the President of the state in the Czechoslovak pavilions. Masaryk, and to a lesser extent his successor Beneš, were depicted as the symbolic protectors in the sculptures placed in central locations of the national pavilions.

Modernity and modernism

The window can be taken as a metaphor for the state and its efforts at presenting itself at world's fairs in several areas, foremost in its attitude to modernity and modernism. While the curved line of the building and the use of large glass areas suggest an innovative approach, Bouda's rendition of the individual scenes in the Baťa window is less experimental. The comprehensible narrative of the series is comparable to the composition, space and figuration of other artists and designers that often featured in the Czechoslovak pavilions. František Kysela, for example, whose narrative-driven tapestries of the crafts featured as one of the highlights of the Czechoslovak pavilion in Paris in 1925 was a regular contributor in most interwar exhibitions. He represented both the School of Decorative Arts and the importance of crafts under the auspices of the state. Bouda's similarly didactic presentation of the Baťa story also shares traces of the visual approach taken from Renaissance painting. This suggests that he (and his sponsor) opted for a tamer version of modernism that emphasized the clarity of the message and links to historic precedents rather than the abstraction and experimentation of more radical avant-garde artists. However, there was one main difference between Bouda's and Kysela's approach and it was in the evolutionary narrative of progress that celebrates modern, global industry in the Baťa window.

The search for an appropriate language to represent Czechoslovakia underlays many of the choices the official organizers made with each world's fair. Works like "The Hymn to Work" built on a tradition found in the crafts, whether it was glass painting, tapestry or shoemaking. Familiarity with established forms of visual expression on the one hand and showcasing a progression leading to modernism was embedded in the duality between national authenticity and universal modernity of the national presentations in the interwar period. The most progressive embrace of modernism could be detected in how the exterior and interior architecture of the national pavilions developed. From the late 1920s, architects and designers used building materials and technologies like large glass areas to tap into contemporary construction techniques and to respond to current trends in pavilion architecture. Interiors developed from museum-like sequences of exhibition rooms with display vitrines and wall hangings to sophisticated and engaging routes that presented visitors with visually impressive objects and large-scale photographs.

Designers like Ladislav Sutnar and Antonín Heythum worked with a visual flow of information that led the visitor through a continuous space, taking into account the psychology of such experience. Or at least, this is how they envisioned their exhibition interiors on paper. In reality, the Czechoslovak pavilions were filled and sometimes overfilled with objects to satisfy various traders, associations and individuals. This was most obvious at the Century of Progress in Chicago in 1933 where the national pavilion was crammed with stalls selling "trinkets" and in the International Exhibition in Paris of 1937, where the Czechoslovak pavilion, originally planned as a flow with a logical sequence of exhibits and breaks, was crowded with exhibits of various sizes and of various companies.

The visual arts and especially the displays of fine art within national pavilions and in art halls had the primary function of representing the state. They were therefore also subjected to a search for appropriate modernism. Personal connections played a significant role here and the various members of the exhibition elites, like the exhibition commissioner Ladislav Turnovský, the pavilion supervisor Bohuslav Soumar or the ministerial official V. V. Štech, could easily influence the choice of participants and exhibits. As a result, The School of Decorative Arts and The Association of the Czechoslovak Werkbund, linked to Štech, featured in many exhibitions and stood for art and design that was comprehensible and, in the case of designers, had strong commercial potential for export. This selectiveness also meant that many omissions were made. While the avant-garde with more experimental work was often excluded, regional artists and associations had no space either.