

# 12 Beyond the Provincial

## Entanglements of Regional Modernism in Interwar Central Europe\*

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### Introduction

When the subject of regional modernism is mentioned, it tends to prompt thoughts of a space that bears hallmarks of the ‘peripheral’: as Bianca Plüschke-Altöf has put it, ‘by manifesting a hierarchical dichotomy of urban centres and rural peripheries, their equation is consequential’.<sup>1</sup> While rural spaces as an antidote to the metropolis carry both positive (authentic, calm, safe) and negative (backward, poor, deficient) connotations in relation to artistic production, the dominant viewpoint, reaching back to the Vienna School, is that the geographical (and thus socio-economic) periphery is either derivative or at a lower cultural level of development than its urban counterpart.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, regional developments of modernism implicitly hold the position of a provincial and thus less significant art, intercepted only by brief moments of success in which urban artists transferred their production to the countryside.<sup>3</sup> Shifting away from a perspective in which formal innovation is the prime denominator of artistic development, however, regional modernism carried important sociopolitical functions in Central Europe throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Within this geographical context, one should add that the notion of the periphery has also been tied to descriptions of the region per se, as addressed in the work of Piotr Piotrowski and Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius among others.<sup>4</sup> By extension, regional modernism addresses a ‘double periphery’ – removed both from traditional art centres such as Paris and Berlin and from more nearby metropolises such as Vienna and Prague. Yet, an exploration of the discursive constructions of regional modernism in the early twentieth century sheds light on the wider impact these developments had across Central Europe, far beyond the rural and ‘peripheral’. Holding a significant stake in identity-building processes, regional modernism, moreover, underlines the entanglements between rural and urban, regional and national cultural spaces.

Discussing the state of Austrian culture after the First World War, the writer Erwin Weill noted in 1922 that ‘after the collapse, when one thought that there would no longer be any special interest in art and literature . . . we suddenly gained proof that this apparently deceased art experienced a renaissance in the provinces’.<sup>5</sup> Referring specifically to two prominent artists who had left Vienna to ‘gather students in their beautiful studios in the Nonntal’ district of Salzburg – Felix Albrecht Harta (1884–1967) and Anton Faistauer (1887–1930) – Weill explores an alternative vision of modern Austrian art, located in the provinces rather than the capital.<sup>6</sup> Taking his argument as a point of departure, this chapter explores the role of regional modernism in Central European art beyond 1918, arguing that it represents an overlooked trajectory of modernism that

challenges dominant models of periodization. Offering a different view on the entangled histories of Central European interwar art, it furthermore suggests that regional modernism is symptomatic of the *longue durée* of artistic developments that are often bypassed in traditional, teleologic models of periodization.

### The *Longue Durée* of Regional Modernism

The concept of the *longue durée* used here refers to the model developed by historian Fernand Braudel, who suggested that, rather than focusing on a history of short-term developments, the tracing of historical shifts over longer periods of time allows the detection of broader trends, repetitions and cyclical patterns: 'If history is called by nature to give a prime consideration to temporalities, to *all* the movements into which it can be distinguished, the *longue durée* seems . . . the most useful for common observation and reflection'.<sup>7</sup> Reassessing 'traditional' models of art historical periodization in this light opens up the possibility of reconsidering developments viewed as time-specific regional modernism across longer periods of time, as well as in relation to broader geographies.<sup>8</sup>

Broadly defined as a 'cultural movement based on a new interest in folklore, typical landscapes, vernacular buildings, dialect, traditional handicrafts, folk songs and other elements of traditional rural popular culture', regional modernism became a central element of modern Central European culture in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Represented by rural 'outposts' of modern culture, it arose from the growing interest in the countryside among urban artists and intellectuals, who began to incorporate vernacular life, forms and traditions into their practice, founded rural artist colonies and workshops, and supported the construction of specific local narratives. As assessed in publications such as *Art and the National Dream* (1993) and *Art around 1900 in Central Europe* (1999), the rediscovery of rural culture was a quintessential facet in projects of modern nation-building at the turn of the century and served a quest for authenticity in modern cultural production.<sup>10</sup> Precisely because of its pertinence to national emancipation movements in the late Habsburg Empire, engagements with regionalism as a part of modern culture have largely focused on a historical period that flourished at the *fin-de-siècle* before 'ending' with the collapse of the empire in 1918. Its significance after this time is often marginalized as attention shifts towards the forward-looking internationalism of the avant-garde in publications such as Timothy O. Benson's *Central European Avant-Gardes* (2002) or, more recently, the multi-author volume *Years of Disarray, 1908–1928: Avant-Gardes in Central Europe* (2018).<sup>11</sup>

Broadening the perception from regional modernism as a phenomenon dominant at the turn of the twentieth century, the model of the *longue durée* explores its continuous importance across the changing geopolitical structures of Central Europe after the First World War. Challenging dominant models of periodization, it locates entanglements in the art historiography of the Habsburg successor states, which show that, after 1918, regional modernism continued to be constructed as a relevant aspect of modern art in the region, especially in relation to nation-building processes.<sup>12</sup> By assessing the discursive construction of Salzburg as bastion of Austrian culture after 1918, and of 'Košice Modernism' in the First Czechoslovak Republic, I argue that regional modernism persisted as a phenomenon of international importance in Central Europe and indeed gained new importance: as the territories of the former empire were split between new states, the national narratives established at the turn of the century were adjusted or remodelled in the light of the new political situation.

## Nationalized Cosmopolitanism and a New Location of Austrian Culture

A small historical town in western Austria, Salzburg was where Harta and Faistauer, the two painters mentioned by Weill, founded a local artists' association, in January 1919. Named Der Wassermann (meaning 'Aquarius'), it represented one of the first collective attempts to expand the Austrian art scene beyond Vienna.<sup>13</sup> Similarly to Weill's celebration of culture in the provinces, it focused on a consolidation of Salzburg's identity in the visual arts, aiming to establish a decentralized culture in reaction to the collapse of the empire. Seeing Vienna as an overbearing Habsburg remnant, renewal could only take place outside it. Nowhere is it more evident that Faistauer had had enough of Vienna than in a letter sent to the critic Arthur Rössler in April 1919, stating:

My last visit clearly revealed the confusion of artistic Vienna to me, and I think it would be easier to bear Bolshevik Munich than this wholly corrupt, oozy metropole. For my work, too, I see no further opportunities, because I am not working towards a pointedly intellectual but a more meaningful development.<sup>14</sup>

This emphasis on a search for something 'meaningful' stood at the core of Faistauer's entire practice. He was not only a prolific painter, playing a significant role in the revival of Austrian fresco painting for example, but also regularly commented on the state of the contemporary Austrian art scene.

In 1923, Faistauer published *Neue Malerei in Österreich* (New Painting in Austria), a book in which he criticized the favouring of form over spiritual content, attacking 'the rush of the city, which has forced us to a stenographic brevity of thought and made our art short of breath'.<sup>15</sup> Proclaiming the need to return to profound spirituality in art, Faistauer praised the work of his contemporaries Franz Wiegeler (1887–1944) and Anton Kolig (1886–1950), emphasizing the 'agrarian character' and 'healthy conservatism' of the former.<sup>16</sup> Like Faistauer, Wiegeler and Kolig had turned their backs on Vienna after 1918, relocating to rural Carinthia where, together with Sebastian Isepp and Anton Mahringer, they founded the Nötsch Circle which predominantly painted religious scenes in a late Expressionist style.<sup>17</sup> Celebrating them as representatives of the most successful development in contemporary Austrian painting, therefore, Faistauer not only set regional artistic practices at the centre of his book, in relation to his own relocation to Salzburg and Der Wassermann, but also constructed a broader landscape of Austrian art located in the provinces, while defining Vienna as a place out of touch with contemporary concerns for profound cultural renewal.

Faistauer was not alone in this opinion. Indeed, contrasting with the lamenting voices of left-leaning, progressive figures such as Hans Tietze about the state of Austrian culture, several of his moderate and conservative contemporaries saw in regional modernism the solution to an Austrian art that corresponded to the country's new set-up as a small alpine republic. In 1921, the German arts magazine *Der Ararat* published a special issue on Austrian art. With 'Vienna' printed in large letters across the header, the capital's prime position still loomed over the Austrian art scene as a whole – to its disadvantage. The first article, penned by Tietze about Oskar Kokoschka, who was living in Dresden by this time, built up an image of the former imperial capital as a lost case, stating: 'Vienna's cultural position today is marked by severe crisis, which

progresses in a *circulus vitiosus*, belated, tired, done with, coated in a patina of used-up cultures, almost wholly consumed'.<sup>18</sup> Following on directly from Tietze's lamentation, however, the art historian Bruno Grimschitz, a student of Max Dvořák and curator at the Belvedere gallery, suggested, 'the withered ground of the city centrifugally disperses talent to the periphery . . . so that, perhaps, the unspent power of the provinces gives new force to bring a new Austrian painting into prominence'.<sup>19</sup> Aside from praise for the Nötsch Circle painters, Grimschitz also emphasized Faistauer and Harta's efforts in Salzburg, placing them at the forefront of hopeful developments for a new Austrian art. While Salzburg and small-town Nötsch shared the fact that they were located in the alpine countryside, which was the new state's main geographical feature, Salzburg also bore further features that made it an ideal new bastion for Austrian culture, based not least on the fact that it already had a strong local history that could be built on and remodelled.

As a small Baroque city and former archbishopric, Salzburg transformed into a hot-spot of culture during the course of the 1920s. Key to manifesting this position was the Salzburg Festival, inaugurated in 1920 as an international celebration of music and drama under the direction of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Reinhardt. In a groundbreaking study on the festival, historian Michael P. Steinberg has argued that Hofmannsthal designed the event as ostensibly cosmopolitan, while simultaneously grounding a new Austria identity in Salzburg's Catholic and Baroque roots: 'Its purpose was the rediscovery and reconstitution of a transcendent Austrian cultural heritage which would help to bridge the gulf that separated the empire from the small Austrian Republic'.<sup>20</sup>

Rather than locating such an attempt in the former imperial capital, whose destruction and poverty in the post-war years earned it a reputation as a 'downtrodden city of invalid veterans' with severely limited opportunities, as the Hungarian émigré artist Lajos Kassák noted in 1919,<sup>21</sup> Salzburg represented a viable alternative also for practical reasons: it was well connected to Vienna and Munich, located at the geographical centre of the new republic, a known touristic location and in close proximity to the Salzkammergut lake district, a favourite holiday location among the Viennese upper classes. Demographically, too, Salzburg was much more homogeneous – German-Austrian Catholic – than the former imperial capital, and as such more representative of the new Austria's overall population.<sup>22</sup> In other words, for everything that made Vienna seem out of place, Salzburg could be constructed as a 'better Austrian' alternative.

The Salzburg Festival challenged Vienna's cultural hegemony in a place that seemed to embody what Hofmannsthal understood as the 'essence' of Austrian identity: German-Austrian Catholicism rooted in Baroque Habsburg culture.<sup>23</sup> With this ideal of 'nationalist cosmopolitanism', as Steinberg termed it, the festival represented many of the contradictions that defined Austrian interwar culture, fluctuating between a provincialist conservative element and a drive to build on the pan-European ideals that the Habsburg Empire quickly came to signify in the post-war era.<sup>24</sup> With Faistauer and Harta, these ideas also found fertile ground in attempts at renewal in the visual arts.

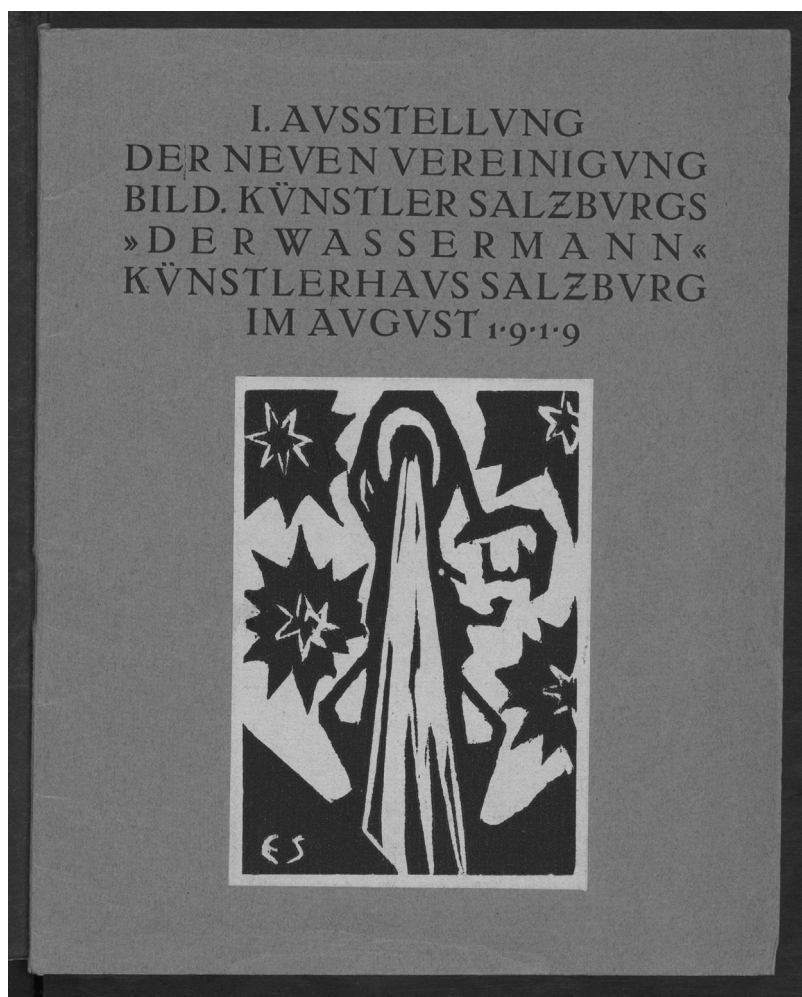
### Regional Modernism and Der Wassermann

Introducing Der Wassermann in *Die graphischen Künste* in 1920, art historian Josef Mühlmann noted that the artistic renewal of Salzburg 'rose from an attempt to move

artistic creation from the metropolis to the province'.<sup>25</sup> In the catalogue of *Der Wassermann's* first exhibition in 1919 (Fig. 12.1), Mühlmann further explained:

[T]he intention of this artists' association is not to cling on to a small country narrow-mindedly, but to forge links with artists in foreign countries. Contemporary art is a cosmopolitan art, directed towards all of humanity rather than just one people.<sup>26</sup>

Mühlmann's proclamations of the group's cosmopolitanism were tightly constructed in reference to Salzburg's specific local identity as a Baroque city deeply tied to Catholicism. A particular highlight of the exhibition was the juxtaposition of medieval sculptures and contemporary works, forging the notion of continuity on the basis of Christian iconography: for instance, Faistauer's votive altarpiece (1918–19; Fig. 12.2),



*Figure 12.1* Cover of the exhibition catalogue of the new Association of Fine Artists 'Der Wassermann', with woodcut by Emma Schlangenhausen, 1919.

*Credit:* © ÖNB Vienna: 683.487-B, cover.



Figure 12.2 Anton Faistauer, Great Salzburg Votive Altarpiece (central part), 1918–19, oil on canvas, 185.5 × 93 cm.

Credit: Museum der Moderne Salzburg, inventory number BU 3755. <https://www.museumdermoderne.at/de/sammlung/detail/der-grosse-salzbuerger-votivaltar/>

commissioned by the regional government, and Harta's *Adoration of the three Kings* (1910–20), were shown alongside medieval and Gothic sculpture.<sup>27</sup>

Eva Michel has suggested that this was part of a legitimization process achieved by a visible genealogy to historical precedents.<sup>28</sup> Yet the focus on Christian subject matter and its incorporation of medieval and Gothic icons also defined the specific function of Salzburg as an alternative modern art. 'Cosmopolitanism' in line with the exhibition set-up suggests affinity to Hofmannsthal's definition of the term, which he principally understood as a 'German virtue' and conceived of in German nationalist terms.<sup>29</sup> By extension, Der Wassermann, and Mühlmann as one of its main spokesmen, promoted a site-specific regionalism embedded in the nationalist cosmopolitanism that the Salzburg Festival embodied as the locus for a new Austrian culture.

An extensive review dedicated to the exhibition in the *Neue Freie Presse* further indicates how these attempts at cultural emancipation were perceived: 'The turn away from Vienna, the growing independence of the provinces . . . is finally starting to demonstrate some awareness of its independence in a positive light'.<sup>30</sup> Despite its 'strange' disposition towards religious art, the reviewer considers the show 'beautiful' for a small city, while pointing towards the curious upheaval it caused with works that were 'through and through moderately modern'.<sup>31</sup> Faced with a selection of works in established styles, the Viennese journalist Erwin Rainalter noted in an essay about Harta's fascination with the Baroque that the strong opposition the show faced in conservative Salzburg was 'inexplicable', since the exhibition as a whole emphasized tradition over modernity.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Hans Faltinger noted in the *Linzer Tagblatt* that, in the provinces, 'one thinks of [the Wassermann group] as the most modern art and thus wants to reject them. In truth, it no longer belongs to the newest directions in painting'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, while the emancipation of the Salzburg art scene was acknowledged as a positive development that bore the potential to enliven Austrian post-war art, in the

light of Der Wassermann's artistic output, this potential had its limits: the strong links to Christian art traditions in combination with the largely figurative subject matter and repertoire of well-established styles rather evoked an air of provincialism to Viennese reviewers, seen to be concomitant with the group's location outside the capital.

A notable exception in this respect was Hermann Bahr, the vocal defender of the Vienna Secession around 1900.<sup>34</sup> Bahr had relocated to Salzburg just before the First World War and, as a devote Catholic convert, increasingly turned Christian conservative. He was also an adviser to and member of Der Wassermann and played an instrumental role in Harta's conversion to Catholicism. Bahr's mention of the group exhibition as part of his column in the *Neues Wiener Journal* was expressed entirely in the vein of his newly found spiritualism, paying exclusive attention to religious work by Faistauer and Harta as well as to the 'spiritual value' of exhibits by Albert Paris Gütersloh (1887–1973), Alfred Kubin (1877–1959) and Carl Anton Reichel (1874–1944); indeed, though ignored by Bahr, the work of the group's female artists such as Emma Schlangenhäuser (1882–1947) showed similar inclinations.<sup>35</sup> While emphasizing the Catholic spiritualism of the artworks, Bahr also related Der Wassermann and the first exhibitions of the Vienna Secession, pointing towards their similar 'sincerity, poise, grace and dignity' in display.<sup>36</sup> Based on the author's established role as a supporter of new artistic tendencies at the turn of the century, this comparison forges a lineage that manifested Der Wassermann's position as representatives of a new Austrian art. Indeed, that the group was based in Salzburg seems all the more fitting in this regard: already in 1900, Bahr had published 'Die Hauptstadt von Europa. Eine Phantasie in Salzburg' (The Capital of Europe: A Salzburg Fantasy), in which he wrote in a dream-like sequence, 'then we moved here and finally found the capital of Europe'.<sup>37</sup> Rather than representing a past phenomenon, regional modernism was thus constructed as a necessary impulse for Austrian art, especially in moderate and conservative circles. Beyond its dominant periodization around 1900, it offered a viable departure from the dominating figures of Austrian modernism before 1918 – Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele especially – and from an imperial past to which the image of Vienna remained tied.

Shifting some years ahead, the 'moderately modern' impression of regional art in Salzburg indeed rose to greater importance than was anticipated by its earlier defenders. Following the accession of the deeply Catholic-conservative regime of Engelbert Dollfuß in 1934, the culture around the Salzburg Festival, and with it Der Wassermann's successor the Sonderbund (1925–38), represented ideal Austrian culture: modern, yet steeped in tradition, Catholic, German, and deeply conservative.<sup>38</sup> Beyond an emancipation of the provinces, the regional modernism constructed in relation to Der Wassermann, as well as the Nötsch Circle, thus grew beyond local significance as a consequence of the anti-democratic shift in Austrian state politics in the early 1930s.

### Portrait of a Democratic State

Based on its instrumentalization by the Austrofascist regime, regional modernism formed part of a construction of an Austrian modernism which developed closely in line with the Catholic conservatism that defined much of the country's intellectual and cultural life outside Vienna. This assessment might suggest that a perspective on regional modernism in Central Europe in the *longue durée* reveals its development from a romantic nationalism around 1900 towards an alignment with the fascist

movements of the 1930s. However, expanding the focus beyond the narrow confines of individual nation states, the tendency towards reactionism represents only one of several variants in which regional modernism persisted after 1918. Shifting attention to neighbouring Czechoslovakia, the example of Košice (Hungarian: Kassa; today in Slovakia; part of Czechoslovakia 1918–38) underlines that, equally, regional modernism was constructed as a hallmark of progress and democratic values.

In the light of interwar Czechoslovakia's demographic diversity, regionalism became a prominent topic of debate in the 1920s in the work of philosophers and sociologists such as Josef Ludvík Fischer.<sup>39</sup> For Fischer, regionalism was 'a direct continuation of Czech cultural endeavours' that had started in the nineteenth century, and represented a cultural method of applied democracy that could be implemented to realize the full democratic potential of the new state.<sup>40</sup> In order to stabilize and optimize the economic, political and cultural set-up of the new country, individual regions had to be supported in an emancipation process that would benefit the country as a whole. Moreover, Fischer understood regionalism as a conscious reaction against the sentimental patriotism of the Romantic era, writing, 'compared to the cultural agenda of the national awakening, regionalism replaces small-town sentimentality with explicitly anti-small-town, non-provincial considerations, and its defence mechanism [against German culture] with a democratic outburst'.<sup>41</sup> More significantly still, he understood regionalism as an integral part of Czech modernization efforts within the First Czechoslovak Republic, a method of state-building. While Fischer's main geographical concerns were the southern parts of Bohemia and Moravia, his vision for cultural regionalism across the country under the auspices of stabilization and integration is especially pertinent for the new state's eastern borderlands, where Košice was also located.

Both on a cultural and an economic level, Košice, under Hungarian rule in the Habsburg Empire, was an important town by the early twentieth century, whose cultural vibrance benefited from a diverse population of Hungarian, Slovak and German speakers, as well as a sizeable Jewish community.<sup>42</sup> When the town became part of Czechoslovakia, the parameters of its diversity shifted from an official orientation towards Budapest to distant Prague within aims to transform Košice from a primarily Hungarian town into an eastern bulwark of the new state.<sup>43</sup> One of the new government's most pressing concerns was to raise the national consciousness of the Slovak population, which formed part of the so-called state-forming nations with the Czechs, while other nationalities were regarded as minorities.<sup>44</sup> To level out the town's dominant Hungarian population, therefore, western Slovak and Czech white-collar workers were deployed – so many, in fact, that the town jumped from 50,000 inhabitants in 1918 to just over 70,000 within the space of a decade.<sup>45</sup> In line with these developments, a cultural revival took place, which gained the designation 'Košice Modernism' in the early 2010s as part of a research project led by Zsófia Kiss-Szemán.<sup>46</sup> A central figure in this regard was the director of the local East Slovak Museum, Josef Polák. While his position in the consolidation of Košice Modernism has long been affirmed, the political implications of a well-connected Czech working in a new Czechoslovak border town adds a further dimension to his impact: that of an officially supported regionalism in a multi-ethnic border town. In relation to Polák, Košice Modernism was not only part of the spirit of optimism associated with the founding of the republic but also an example of the ways in which regional modernism gained a central role in state-building processes.



Born to Jewish parents in Prague, Polák was a lawyer with an astute interest in art and culture. As a student he frequented Prague's Union Café, which he would later recall as 'our contemporary institute of history and art', and attended lectures by art historian Karel Chytil, who remained a lifelong contact; he also volunteered in the city's new Jewish Museum, established in 1906.<sup>47</sup> Polák settled in Košice after serving in the region during the war and, in 1919, became the new collections administrator of the renamed East Slovak Museum.<sup>48</sup> Appointed by the head of the local district administration, Polák's efforts in restoring the museum were bound to larger factors within Czechoslovak cultural policy. The instigation of a cultural revival of Košice as a regional centre through his efforts at once shows how regional modernism remained an important cultural aspect in interwar Czechoslovakia and underlines the ties to state-building efforts such a project could have.

Throughout his time in Košice, Polák maintained contact with central figures of Czech art history in the capital, most notably Chytil and Zdeněk Wirth. Wirth, a former student of Dvořák, was the chief conservator of monuments in the new state and an important figure in the construction of Czechoslovak art as a state-supporting political narrative. Among others, his work included *Československé umění* (Czechoslovak Art; 1926) and *Umění československého lidu* (The Art of the Czechoslovak People; 1928), two major publications which were devised to affirm the Czechs' cultural and political hegemony in Czechoslovakia as a modern, progressive state.<sup>49</sup> Polák had known Wirth since his student days in the Union Café, and through his position in the Ministry of National Education, Wirth not only supported Polák's appointment as director of the East Slovak Museum in 1928, he was also an important contact in relation to funding matters and travelling exhibitions – two significant aspects of Polák's cultural programme in Košice. In the context of Polák's ties to Prague, therefore, the city's position as a contested, multi-ethnic border town gains particular importance as a regional modernism that represented state ideals of democracy and cultural progress.

### 'Making' Košice

Polák's position was to integrate Košice into the new republic. In the first instance, this took place on a local level. In line with Fischer's observations of regionalism as a cultural expression of democracy, Košice came to represent a model image of an integrative society, tied to Polák's close working relationship with the different communities that inhabited the town. Rather than simply overwriting the local mixture of culture with a Czech (state-conforming) vision of modernization, Polák showed acute awareness of the historical entanglements in Košice as a border town. It was this awareness that led to a multifaceted cultural life, much of which developed under Polák's direction.

He set up a public drawing school at the museum, led by the Hungarian graphic artist Eugén/Jenő Krón (1882–1974), established a library in the museum, sent newspapers to surrounding villages, announced art and design competitions and promoted theatre productions staged in Czech, Slovak and Hungarian.<sup>50</sup> Polák commissioned struggling local artists (regardless of their nationality) to create works for the museum collection and supported applications for residency permits from artists such as Krón, who fled to Košice as a proponent of the short-lived Hungarian Communist Republic.<sup>51</sup> Avant-garde artists such as Ludovít Fulla (1902–80) and Mikuláš Galanda (1895–1938)

spent prolonged periods in the town upon Polák's invitation. Showing their work as part of a busy exhibition schedule, the East Slovak Museum was transformed into a space for both historical and contemporary culture. Exchanges were further nourished by a rich exhibition programme, which included shows by the Czech Tvrdošíjn group, the Austrian Hagenbund, as well as the Dresden Secession.<sup>52</sup>

Just as dynamic as artists' movements to and from the town was their artistic output. Local painter Anton Jasusch (1882–1965) focused on large Symbolist scenes that explored universalized human experiences. Having returned to the town after escaping a Russian prisoner-of-war camp, paintings such as *Z prvej svetovej vojny* (From the First World War; 1920–24; Fig. 12.3) addressed the traumatic experiences of war in an Expressionist and highly dynamic formal language. Géza/Gejza Schiller (1895–1927) and František Foltýn (1891–1976) captured the town's modernization, drawing on Constructivist forms and an emphasis on plasticity.<sup>53</sup> Several of Krón's students, meanwhile, focused on a stark social realism which captured the hardships of life at Košice's fringes, such as Konštantín Bauer (1893–1928; Fig. 12.4). Košice Modernism, in this sense, inferred an artistic plurality in its programme and artistic outlook, which embraced modernism in its attention to contemporary life and openness to formal explorations.



Figure 12.3 Anton Jasusch, *Z prvej svetovej vojny* (From the First World War), 1920–24, oil on canvas, 50 × 61.5 cm.

Credit: Východoslovenská galéria, Košice. [https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:VSG.O\\_834](https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:VSG.O_834).

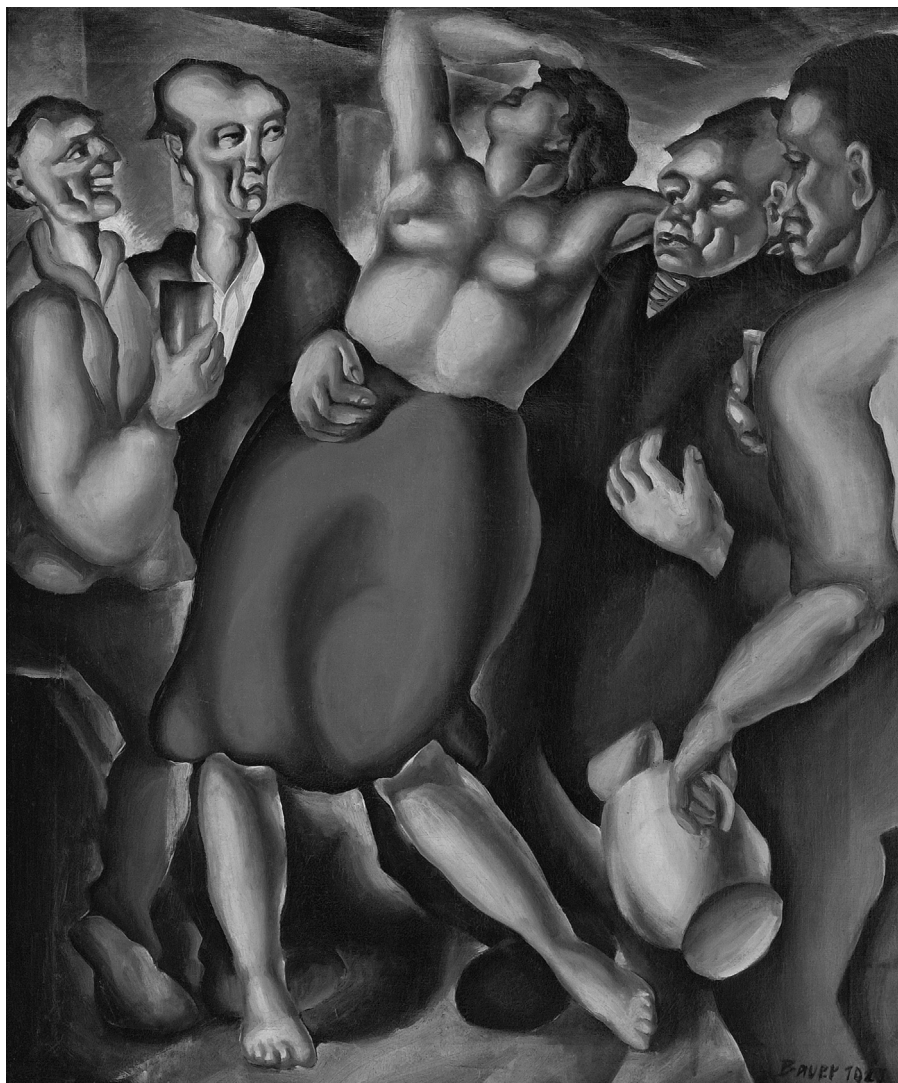


Figure 12.4 Konštantín Bauer, *Odsúdená* (Condemned), 1927, oil on canvas, 100 × 83.5 cm.  
Credit: Východoslovenská galéria, Košice. [https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.O\\_2477](https://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.O_2477).

Tomáš Štrauss, one of the first Slovak art historians who dedicated an extensive study to Košice art, noted:

[I]t is symptomatic that in terms of work of the leading artists of the so-called Košice circle, the question of national and cultural identity was irrelevant. . . . In the early 1920s, a few voices rose up in Slovak artistic circles to warn Polák against surrounding himself with foreign elements . . . but these attempts did not have any impact on actual internationalist feeling.<sup>54</sup>

While the kaleidoscope of cultural activities outlined previously certainly affirms this statement, Polák's ties to Prague also shed a different light on Košice's 'internationalism'. In his prolific writing about Slovak art and culture for national and regional art history books, newspapers and exhibition catalogues, Polák clearly adopted the view of Czechoslovakism, according to which he emphasized a natural connection between Czechs and Slovaks that had been 'interrupted' by Hungarian rule.<sup>55</sup> In broad survey essays such as 'Výtvarné umění na Slovensko' (Fine Art in Slovakia), for example, Polák underlined the strong historical influence on Slovakia by the Czech lands, which was subsequently destroyed by Hungarian and Tatar 'invasions'.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he stressed that, while Slovakia had a range of good artists from 'other nations' (referring to Krón, among others), the 'return' of Slovakia to Czechoslovakia led to 'hopes for a new, most beautiful era of art in Slovakia'.<sup>57</sup> In other words, only by belonging to the new state could Slovakia's cultural life also develop regionally. Looking back at a decade in Košice in 1928, Polák's overview of the beginnings of 'Czechoslovak cultural life' there correspondingly emphasized the town's artistic renaissance as a consequence of its return to (Czecho-)Slovak governance.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, his activities as a museologist and cultural organizer were also committed to a reinvention of Košice to suit the new state ideology. Rather than simply representing a place of cultural intersection where modern culture evolved by virtue of democracy, Košice Modernism was intricately related to cultural policies from Prague by a government which aimed to secure the legitimacy of the state.<sup>59</sup> By extension, Košice not only represented a thriving regional modernism but also the Czech 'civilizing mission' in the country's eastern regions, adjusted to the broader specifications of Czechoslovakia as a progressive, democratic state. Reaching beyond local significance, regional modernism in this context was a part of Czechoslovak state-building efforts, and those who constructed it had in mind not only the emancipation of local centres but also the support of the new state.

### Entanglements, Peripheries and Regional Modernism's *longue durée*: Conclusion

Exploring the development of Salzburg as bastion of new Austrian culture and of Košice Modernism as a marker of democratic values in the First Czechoslovak Republic, regional modernism transpires as a movement of continuous importance in the interwar years. While it has long been periodized as a phenomenon of the *fin de siècle* – a process already confirmed in Fischer's references to the national awakening in his text from 1930 – the relevance of regional artistic developments in the post-Habsburg space was no less important. In line with two examples as diverse in outlook as Salzburg and Košice, a consideration of regional modernism in the *longue durée* underlines a number of parallels reaching beyond the regional context and across state borders. In both cases, existing cultural centres were 'reinvented' in line with the changed geopolitical set-up of central Europe: a Baroque citadel, Salzburg was imagined as Austria's new 'national cosmopolitan capital' by figures such as Hofmannsthal, Bahr and Faistauer, who saw the city as a rural, spiritual antidote to Vienna. As a Hungarian-dominated multi-ethnic town on the new Czechoslovak-Hungarian border, meanwhile, Košice's rich cultural heritage was reframed in line with a new state ideology.

While overall Polák's wide-ranging projects held a more progressive outlook than the theoreticians and art historians supporting the Wassermann group, both parties shared the goal of reinventing a regional identity that built on a revalorization of the past, dressed in a new national cloak. Moreover, Faistauer, Polák and Bahr all arrived

in the regions they committed to from the respective state capitals and maintained contact with Prague and Vienna, pointing towards the fact that the construction of regional artistic centres remained closely bound to networks beyond their immediate location. Significantly, this also impacted their wider construction: while both Košice and Salzburg were initially framed as local modernization processes, ultimately they were constructed in response to the demand for a new national or state-supported culture. Thus, while regional modernism after 1918 appeared to be reoriented towards establishing a level of cultural self-sufficiency with the founding of artists' associations, exhibition activities and art schools, beyond the umbrella of a localized modernity, art historians and critics continued to relate these projects to a national framework, particularly within a rhetoric of renewal after 1918. *Longue durée* regional modernism, in this light, indicates myriad entanglements between the regional and the national, the peripheral and the central across the Habsburg successor states. Developing simultaneously to the modernism of the avant-garde that art historical accounts have long focused on, its continuation across traditional period boundaries highlights alternative trajectories in the art historiographies of Central Europe, in which the significance of the 'peripheral' comes to the fore.

## Notes

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- 1 Plüschke-Altorf, 'Rural as Periphery Per Se?' 11.
  - 2 Riegl, *Volkskunst, Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie*, 34.
  - 3 Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe*, 1–14.
  - 4 Piotrowski, 'Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde'; Murawska-Muthesius, 'Welcome to Slaka'; Joyeux-Prunel, 'The Uses and Abuses of Peripheries in Art History'.
  - 5 Weill, 'Österreichische Provinzkultur', 2.
  - 6 Ibid.
  - 7 Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', 201.
  - 8 See Kaufmann, 'Periodization and Its Discontents'.
  - 9 Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism*, 64.
  - 10 Gordon Bowe, *Art and the National Dream*; Krakowski and Purchla, *Art Around 1900 in Central Europe*.
  - 11 Benson, *Central European Avant-Gardes; Srp, Years of Disarray*.
  - 12 Werner and Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison'.
  - 13 Jandl-Jörg, 'Der Wassermann'.
  - 14 Quoted in Schaffer, 'Weltkrieg und Künstlerfehden', 541.
  - 15 Faistauer, *Neue Malerei in Österreich*, 47.
  - 16 Ibid., 59 and 67.
  - 17 Rohsmann and Wimmer, *Der Nötscher Kreis*.
  - 18 Tietze, 'Oskar Kokoschka 1920', 219.
  - 19 Grimschitz, 'Zur Österreichischen Malerei', 227.
  - 20 Steinberg, *Austria as Theater and Ideology*, ix.
  - 21 In Schneider 'Die Künstlergruppe "Freie Bewegung"', 108.
  - 22 Steinberg, *Austria as Theatre and Ideology*, xii.
  - 23 Ibid., 84–115.
  - 24 Coudenhove-Kalergi, 'The Pan-European Outlook'.
  - 25 Mühlmann, 'Der Wassermann', 83.
  - 26 Mühlmann 'Einführung in die Ausstellung', 5.
  - 27 Mühlmann, 'Wassermannausstellung', 2.
  - 28 Michel, 'Inventing Tradition', 100.

- 29 Steinberg, *Austria as Theatre and Ideology*, 23.  
 30 -ei-, 'Ein neuer deutschösterreichischer Künstlerbund', 1.  
 31 *Ibid.*, 2.  
 32 Rainalter, 'Bei dem Maler F.A. Harta', 5.  
 33 Faltinger, 'Salzburger Kunstausstellung in Linz', 1.  
 34 Farkas, 'Österreich-Bilder Hermann Bahrs'.  
 35 Bahr, 'Tagebuch von Hermann Bahr', 6.  
 36 *Ibid.*  
 37 Bahr, *Kritische Schriften*, 87.  
 38 Anon., 'Sonderbund österreichischer Künstler in Salzburg', 4; Staudinger, 'Austrofaschistische "Österreich"-Ideologie'; Bisanz, 'Österreichische Malerei und Graphik der Zwischenkriegszeit', 370.  
 39 Lenderová and Jiránek, 'Vývoj českého regionalismu'.  
 40 Fischer, *Kultura a regionalismus*, 13.  
 41 Fischer, *Výbor z díla III*, 644.  
 42 Bartošová, 'Palimpsest', 79.  
 43 Ficeri, 'Two Metropolises', 65.  
 44 Heimann, *Czechoslovakia*, 65.  
 45 Ficeri, 'Czechoslovakism in Mentalities of Košice's Inhabitants', 28.  
 46 Kiss-Szemán, 'Košice Modernism and Anton Jaszusch's Expressionism', 65.  
 47 Veselská, *The Man Who Never Gave Up*, 5–10.  
 48 *Ibid.*, 17.  
 49 Wirth, *Československé umění*; Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*; Filipová, *Modernity, History, and Politics*, 128–30.  
 50 Bartošová, 'Palimpsest', 80.  
 51 Veselská, *The Man Who Never Gave Up*, 43–45.  
 52 Bartošová, 'Palimpsest', 81.  
 53 Pomajzlová, 'Košická figurace'.  
 54 Štrauss, *Anton Jaszusch a zrod východoslovenskej avantgardy*, 35; English citation from Bartošová, 'Palimpsest', 79.  
 55 Polák, 'Výtvarné umění na Slovensko'.  
 56 *Ibid.*, 471.  
 57 *Ibid.*, 528. Lucia Kvočáková has recently assessed the construction of Slovak modernism in interwar Czechoslovakia in *Cesta ke slovenskému mýtu*.  
 58 Polák, 'Zaciatky ceskoslovenskeho kulturneho zivota v Kosiciach', 1–3.  
 59 Holubec, 'We Bring Order', 225.

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