



Myths of Modernism: Austrian Art after 1918

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Introduction

Between March and August 2018, the Belvedere Gallery in Vienna staged an exhibition with the title *Klimt Is Not the End: New Departures in Central Europe* (*Klimt ist nicht das Ende: Aufbruch in Mitteleuropa*). The exhibition presented interwar artistic practices in former Austria-Hungary, but the title was indicative that something else was at stake: the need to remind audiences that the death of Gustav Klimt in 1918 had not brought about the end of modernism in Austria. The second part of the title, *Aufbruch in Mitteleuropa* – officially translated into English as *New Horizons in Central Europe* – sought to confirm this upbeat message, namely, that the territories of the former Habsburg Empire continued to be a vibrant centre of art.

The exhibition drew attention to the unstated general perception that modernism in Austria, and Vienna in particular, came to a halt in 1918, not only with the collapse of Austria-Hungary as a result of the First World War but also with the deaths in the same year of Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Egon Schiele and Otto Wagner. The year 1918, which marked the political demise of the Habsburg Empire as well as the passing of the major figures associated with Viennese modernism in art and architecture, seemed to take on a highly symbolic function.

Vienna 1900 has long functioned as a *lieu de mémoire*; viewed as the epicentre of modernity, its art and culture have been a source of endless fascination.¹ It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that with few exceptions, art historians have been seemingly reluctant to venture past the year 1918 to examine the art and culture of interwar Austria.² The implicit message of this reluctance is that what came afterwards was of limited significance.³ This understanding has often been reiterated inadvertently, even in Austria itself, by those studies that do focus on the interwar period; they have often adopted an apologetic tone when dealing with the visual arts of the Austrian First Republic and concur with the idea of decline after the First World War.⁴ As Wieland Schmid, one of the editors of a multi-volume *History of Austrian Art*, commented: ‘the era between the two world wars is for long periods a time of indecision and fragmentation, of stagnation and loss of orientation [...] the 20 years of the First Republic of 1918–1938 did not provide a unified or convincing image’.⁵ Even the *After Klimt* exhibition was unable entirely to escape this judgement. As one catalogue essay stated, there was a ‘dramatic hiatus in Austrian art after World War I [...] Vienna lost its preeminent role as an artistic magnet [...] the international avant-garde – based on the international model – remained limited to a few highlights’.⁶

**Detail from Anton Faistauer,
Votive Altarpiece, 1919
(plate 12).**

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For many, knowledge of Austrian art and architecture after 1918 is sketchy, usually restricted to 'Red Vienna', the large-scale communal housing projects built by the Social Democratic council in the 1920s.⁷ Only in the past decade has this perception begun to be challenged, with the Wien Museum and the Belvedere, in particular, staging a number of important exhibitions that have begun to explore its interwar culture.⁸ Nevertheless, historical awareness of Austrian art and architecture of the 1920s and 1930s remains limited, especially among international scholars.

This article does not aim to rehabilitate the art and culture of the First Republic, even though it was immeasurably richer than the traditional neglect would suggest.⁹ Rather, it focuses on the reasons for its marginalization and considers the implications of seeking to move beyond the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the hitherto limited interest in Red Vienna. What assumptions and implicit value judgements underpinning narratives of modernism are revealed when the history of Austrian art is turned to anew? Given that the First World War is usually treated as a watershed, what additional questions are raised in relation to the practices of periodization that draw a line with the collapse of the Habsburg Empire? What are the ideological stakes involved when 1918 functions as a boundary, after which Austrian art often remains little known?

1918 as an Art-Historical Caesura

Art historians frequently use political events as their primary frame of reference. This applies especially in the case of the year 1918 which saw the collapse of an entire political order. In east central Europe the end of the First World War not only brought about the dissolution of four empires: Austria-Hungary, Tsarist Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Germany, it also led to the creation of new states and the resurrection of Poland. As Adam Tooze has put it, 1918 was a 'deluge' that led to a systematic remaking of the world order.¹⁰

Yet how tenable is this view, and how pertinent is it to the history of art? Arguably, if we attend to the multiple trajectories of artists and architects, as well as to the examples of continuity as well as of rupture, we should be open to the possibility that the political tumult that came with the end of the First World War did not necessarily mark the art-historical caesura it is often held to have done. The Habsburg Empire may have formally ceased to exist, and many of the networks and structures it previously enabled may have dissolved, but it cast a long shadow over the culture of the decades that followed. This is an overly familiar metaphor, perhaps, but it is not inappropriate when we consider the afterlife of the defunct state. It lived on, not only in the memory of Austria-Hungary maintained in art and literature, but also in many of the practices and concepts that had flourished before 1918.

Some historians have come increasingly to question the neat packaging of events as before and after the First World War. The most prominent in this context has been Pieter Judson, whose recent history of the Habsburg Empire claims that in central Europe much remained the same after 1918; the successor states to Austria-Hungary retained the same legal frameworks, often the same political arrangements, with the new governments drawn from the social and political elites that had dominated the pre-war era.¹¹ The newly created states of Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, as well as the expanded Romanian Kingdom, replicated the complex demographic composition of the Habsburg Empire, and encountered the same problems of managing the competing demands for political representation and influence by their varying ethnic and linguistic groups.¹²

In *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End*, published in 2017, Robert Gerwarth emphasized that the end of the war was far from being a decisive moment in many parts of Europe.¹³ The conflicts between Britain, France, Germany and Austria-Hungary may have formally come to an end, but they were rapidly followed by desultory violence for many years afterwards. The collapse of Austria-Hungary and the resulting political chaos led to extended military conflict as new groups and authorities sought to lay claim to territories and resources, at the expense of their neighbours. Border conflict between the new Czechoslovak and Polish states, for example, was not settled until 1958; between 1918 and 1920, Hungary engaged in a succession of military campaigns with its neighbours – Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia. More dramatically, the new Polish state was plunged into a large-scale war with Bolshevik Russia and the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic between 1919 and 1922, as it sought to expand as far east as it could and reclaim the old lands of the historic Polish-Lithuanian Republic. For some years after 1918, therefore, political and social life was entering uncharted territory, and this included the First Austrian Republic.

Such examples suggest that in central Europe 1918 was not necessarily the decisive moment it is traditionally assumed to have been. Instead, it was merely one more year of a longer period of uncertainty and disruption to normal patterns of life that had first begun in 1914. Indeed, Judson suggests, the tendency to view 1918 as a historic break may have more to do with the interests of subsequent nationalist historians in the successor states emerging out of the wreckage of the Habsburg Empire, for whom the image of new polities rising, almost immediately and inevitably, out of the conflagration of war, helped legitimize the political map of the 1920s. Examining too closely the disorderly process whereby these new states came into existence, over a time that also saw alternatives dismissed or simply crushed, would put such an image at risk. This topos finds itself unintentionally repeated in art-historical literature, which often ties artistic change to this upbeat political vision. Matthew Witkovsky's important study of interwar central European photography argues, for example, that 'the passage from empire to nation-state spurred fervor for change and reform such as had never been seen before in the West [...]. Radical modern architecture, theatre, design and advertising, all received state or local patronage in parts of the region [of central Europe]'.¹⁴ In other words, the creation of new states was a major engine of progressive artistic renewal.

These arguments highlight the need for historical nuance but, equally, having undergone what Hugh Seton Watson, a contemporary observer at the time, described as 'the biggest purely political event of its kind in the whole history of modern Europe', it would be perverse to assert that the cultural landscape of central Europe was not transformed, even if this was not tied directly to political events.¹⁵ In Austria alone, for example, the deaths of Klimt, Egon Schiele, Otto Wagner and Koloman Moser in 1918 all seem to symbolize an era coming to a close.

Yet even though these major figures disappeared, and Austria-Hungary ceased to exist, what does it mean to mark off the history of art in Austria in this way? What bearing do specific political events and the fate of individual artists have on the wider periodization of art? The answer to this question is not straightforward, for it might be argued that despite the significance of these figures, their loss may not have decisively altered the landscape of art and architecture, whichever narrative one might have wished to construct. This suggestion is not based on an appeal to the *longue durée* of Austrian art, but merely on a number of smaller-scale observations. While his paintings were still popular with the Viennese haute

bourgeoisie, Klimt was, by 1918, already a figure from the past. Writing in 1921, the art critic Max Eisler, though a great admirer, was in no doubt that the final decade of the painter's work lacked vibrancy, originality and significance: 'There were no more gigantic problems to be solved. He was no longer forced to exert his utmost power of thought in their service. Weary of the spiritual exertion [...] his power declines [...]'.¹⁶ Klimt may have continued to win plaudits – in 1911 he won First Prize at the International Exhibition of Art in Rome – but his work had, for some time, been part of the established ornamental culture of the upper middle classes, marked by what Eisler termed 'playful virtuosity'.¹⁷ Moreover, when Klimt organized the *Kunstschau* in 1908, it was the young Oskar Kokoschka who had the greatest impact on audiences. And in the years immediately preceding the First World War, the most dynamic artistic organization in Vienna was the Hagenbund, which, according to Agnes Husslein-Arco, Harald Krejci and Matthias Boeckl, was central to the construction of international artistic networks before and after the First World War.¹⁸

Certain shifts were thus discernible a decade or more before the year that so often marks the period boundary. Many artists are traditionally categorized as belonging to one side or the other of that boundary, but in fact the careers of many artists spanned the decades either side of the war, the momentous political changes of the period sometimes having had little impact on their work. For Karl Sterrer (1885–1972), for example, a conservative painter whose career had taken off shortly before the First World War, and who served as an official war artist for the Austro-Hungarian military press agency, the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Monarchy was primarily a moment of liberation. It allowed him to resume the artistic interests that had been interrupted by military service.¹⁹ His figurative paintings and drawings of the 1920s reprised themes from the pre-war years, ranging from depictions of Alpine landscapes (plate 1) to academic nudes. We may be struck by this reaction; Sterrer was a conservative German nationalist whom one might expect to have been traumatized by political events. Yet for the purposes of the current discussion this is less important than his desire to pick up where he had left off, as if the years of conflict had merely been an interruption.

Other artists similarly confound the way that Austrian art has been hitherto periodized. Anton Faistauer (1887–1930), for example, is known primarily for the murals executed in the Salzburg Festspielhaus in 1926 (plate 2), but he was already an established painter before 1910. Together with his slightly younger contemporary Schiele, he founded the *New Art Group* [*Neukunstgruppe*] in 1909 as a challenge to the conservatism of the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna. It is perhaps symptomatic of practices of periodization that attempts to examine the relation between the two phases of his work have been limited. Only recently has the earlier, pre-war, phase of his work been connected to his later career when he helped set up the artistic group *Aquarius* [*Der Wassermann*] in Salzburg in 1919.²⁰

There is perhaps, too, a gendered aspect to this traditional view of the trajectory of Austrian art after 1918, for if we consider the work of women artists, a sense of continuity, of a bridge between the Habsburg metropolis and the Vienna of the First Republic is much more apparent. Helene Funke (1869–1957), for example, was already an established painter when she exhibited with the Hagenbund in 1911 moving to Vienna from Paris in the same year, and during the 1920s and 1930s (plate 3) enjoyed considerable prestige and recognition – including award of the Austrian state prize in 1928.²¹ Likewise, Broncia Koller-Pinell (1863–1934), active as a conduit between Paris and the pre-war Vienna art world, proved equally instrumental to the revival of art in



1 Karl Sterrer, *Mountain Landscape*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 55 × 69 cm. Vienna: Belvedere. Photo: Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. No. 2563.

the capital after the First World War.²² This included co-founding the Sonderbund in 1918, and being a prominent exhibitor with the Werkbund, the Kunstschau and the Vienna Women's Art Association.²³

One might also mention, in this context, Berta Zuckerandl (1864–1945), notable not only for her art criticism but also for her literary salon. The limited literature on her almost invariably focuses on the period before the war.²⁴ However, she maintained her salon between the wars and continued to be a prominent figure in the Vienna art world. Indeed, she possibly even gained in social significance in the 1920s and 1930s, thanks to her influential family connections; her sister was married to Paul Clemenceau, brother of the French prime minister, Georges. She became personally acquainted with the Austrian chancellors Ignaz Seipel and Engelbert Dollfuß, and her memoirs record their various attempts to persuade her to act as an intermediary between the Austrian government and political circles in France.²⁵

The question of continuity in Vienna from the Habsburg Empire to the interwar Austrian Republic has often been viewed through the lens of the culture of nostalgia. Marjorie Perloff, for example, has identified a particular form of post-war 'Austro-modernism' in literature exemplified by writers such as Stefan Zweig, Joseph Roth and Paul Celan, whose work displays a profound sentiment of exile and longing.²⁶ Roth's short novella, *The Emperor's Bust* (1935), for example, describes the difficulties



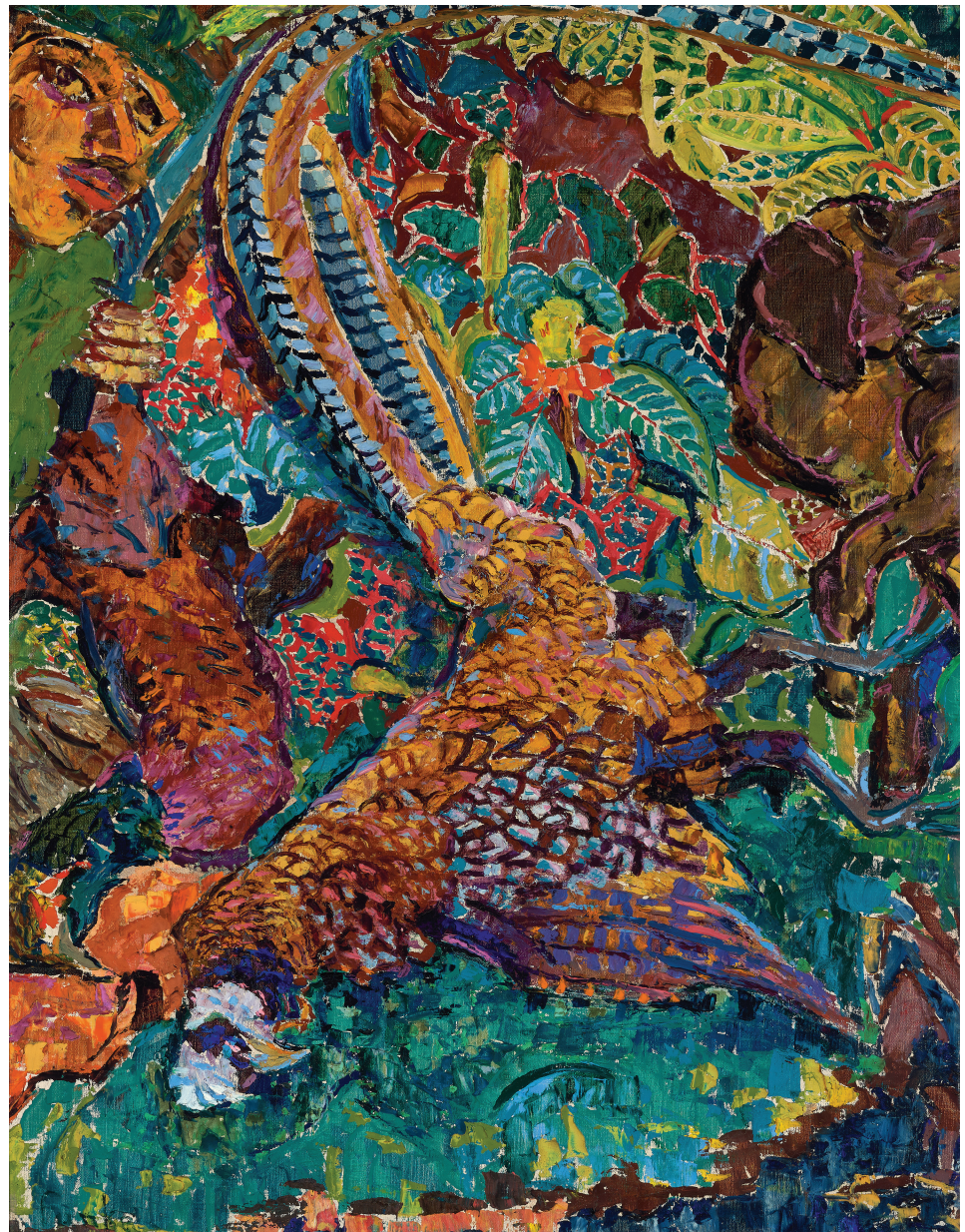
2 Anton Faistauer, mural from the foyer of the Salzburg Festspiel Theatre, 1926. Photo: Bergland Verlag/ Archiv Lars Kroiss Salzburg.

experienced by Count Franz Xaver Morstin in coming to terms with the new political order:

he regarded himself neither as a Pole nor as an Italian, neither as a Polish aristocrat nor as an aristocrat of Italian origin. No: like so many fellow members of his class in the former crownlands of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, he was one of the most noble and pure Austrian types altogether, in other words: a supranational individual, and therefore an Aristocrat of the most genuine kind. If, for example, one had asked him [...] which 'nation' or people he felt he most belonged to, the Count would have been rather uncomprehending, even baffled [...].²⁷

As in his more famous novel *Radetzky March* (1932), Roth also evoked here a mental geography as the object of nostalgic mourning, since Count Morstin could not adapt to the new political landscape of national states. Yet although nostalgia exerted a powerful force in art and literature, the Habsburg Empire lived on, not merely in the memory of an imagined space and community; its transnational culture persisted after 1918. Imperial patronage had encouraged collaboration between artists across the crownlands of the Empire; international observers were struck by the prominence of artists from the Cracow-based *Sztuka* art group in exhibitions of the Vienna Secession, while the Hagenbund enjoyed close relations with the Mánes Society of Artists in Prague.²⁸ Even though the national government of the new Austrian Republic no longer shared the cosmopolitan priorities of the previous Habsburg regime, the Hagenbund continued to promote connections to artists from former Habsburg territories.²⁹ It staged exhibitions in Vienna of work by the

Hungarians Béla Uitz and Lajos Tihanyi, and by Czech artists such as Josef Čapek and Vaclav Špála, and their presence suggests that the idea of a common cultural space across central Europe remained alive. The Wiener Werkstätte, too, continued to be active between the wars, despite the death of its founder Koloman Moser; and while there was a shift in the nature of the work it produced – critics such as Adolf Loos accused it of being overly decorative and ‘feminine’ – it was sustained by the same social network as before. Otto Primavesi, the banker from Olomouc (after 1918, in Czechoslovakia), and then his wife’s nephew Kuno Grohmann, provided basic financial support until it collapsed in 1932. Other designers, too, such as Otto Prutscher and Josef Hofmann, pursued careers that had been established before the war.³⁰ Loos, who famously adopted Czechoslovak citizenship after 1918, continued to work across borders, and some of his most important later projects were executed in his newly adopted state, including the Villa Müller in Prague (1928) and a number of interior designs in Pilsen.³¹ Straightened economic circumstances imposed limits



3 Helene Funke, *Still Life with Pheasant, Head of a Hunter, and Dog*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 87 × 68 cm. Vienna: Belvedere. Photo: Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. No. 6222.

on what was possible in such cases (and undoubtedly contributed to the downfall of the Wiener Werkstätte) but it is difficult to talk of a break.³² Rather, one might talk in many cases of continuity under altered circumstances.

Finally, it is also worth observing that it was to Vienna that Lajos Kassák, Georg Lukács, László Moholy-Nagy and other Hungarian leftists initially fled when the reactionary regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy assumed power in Budapest in November 1919. Likewise, Czechoslovakia attracted significant numbers of émigré artists from Germany and Austria in the 1930s, from John Heartfield to Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. That it did so is arguably not only because of the significant and well-organized German minority in many cities and towns, but also because, for Austrians, there was a continuing sense of affiliation between the two countries, despite the redrawing of political boundaries.³³ In Prague, too, the Mánes Society, founded in 1887 and still the most influential artistic association in the city after 1918, continued to exhibit work by Austrian artists, including a major display in 1928 of contemporary Austrian art, with works by Klimt as well as younger painters such as Kokoschka, Faistauer and Herbert Boeckl.³⁴ Conversely, Mánes Society artists continued to exhibit work in Vienna.

Modernism and/as National Myth

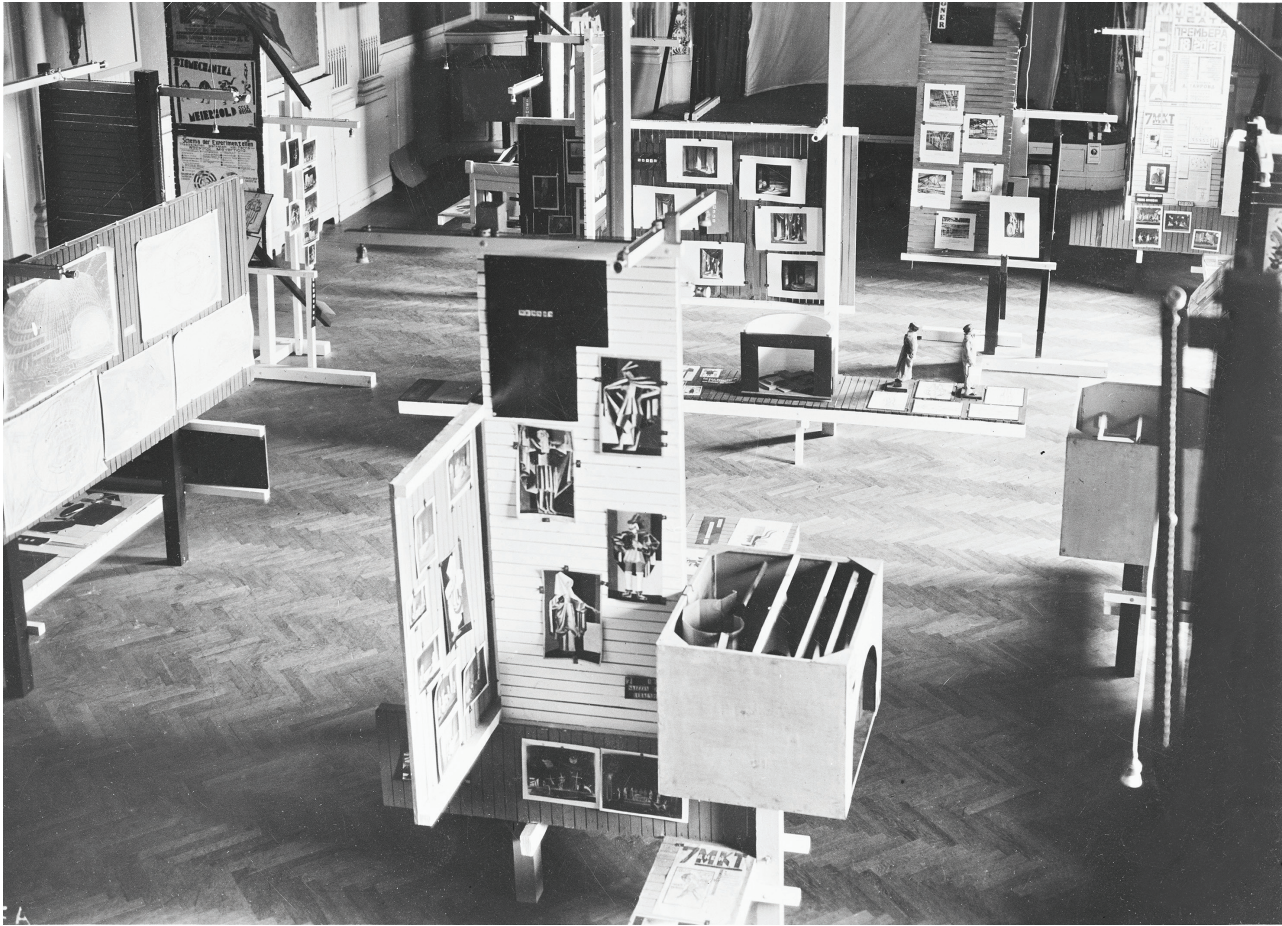
So far this article has questioned the traditional tendency in histories of Austrian art to bracket off the interwar decades from the period of the later Habsburg empire pre-1918. Not only has the broader historical framework underpinning this division come into question in recent years, there is also ample evidence of continuities tying the art world of Austria-Hungary to that of the 1920s. Yet alongside such empirical consideration, it is also possible to analyse the ways in which historical narratives of Austrian (and central European) modernism have been shaped by their entanglement in questions of national identity. In this respect much of the writing about the history of interwar modernism in central Europe can be viewed as an ideological projection, a claim amplified in more detail below.

One common art-historical stereotype emphasizes the decentering of Vienna after the First World War.³⁵ Following the creation of new states, cities such as Prague, Bratislava and Zagreb, amongst others, shook off their former identities as provincial cities in the Habsburg Empire, and emerged as notable sites of modernist art and architecture in their own right. If artists based in these and other cities looked outwards, it was to each other or towards Paris and Berlin that their gaze was directed, rather than to Vienna. As the *Beyond Klimt* catalogue noted, 'while Vienna remained a catalyst', the avant-gardes 'no longer regarded the city as a center but saw the network in which they operated as transnational and polycentric'.³⁶ Contemporaries often reached similar conclusions. The art historian Hans Tietze noted in 1927 that 'as a city of art, Vienna is the shadow of bygone centuries and does not exist as a vital force [. . .]. Vienna has become the centre from which [all] are fleeing'.³⁷ Tietze may well have had his friend Kokoschka in mind, for the latter had left Vienna for Dresden in 1919 and would only return to Austria for short periods thereafter. However, other leading figures also emigrated; most famously, perhaps, the architect Richard Neutra who moved to Switzerland in 1918 and then settled in the United States in the early 1920s. Erika Giovanna Klien, one of the most dynamic representatives of Viennese 'Kinetism' (plate 4), moved first to Salzburg in 1926 and then, two years later, to New York, where she stayed until her death in 1957.³⁸ Finally, the theatre designer Friedrich Kiesler, famous for organizing the International Exhibition of Theatre Techniques in Vienna in 1924 (plate 5), and for staging the world premiere of Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique* in the capital, moved to New York in 1926, eventually directing the Laboratory for Design Correlation at Columbia University.³⁹



4 Erika Giovanna Klien, *Untitled, Houses (Composition with Windows)*, 1924. Intarsia, 28.2 × 28.8 cm. Vienna: University of Applied Arts. Photo: Kunstsammlung und Archiv, Universität für angewandte Kunst, Inv. No. 5203/O.

Such examples cannot be ignored, but whether the new political geography of interwar Europe was the decisive factor is an open question, for it can be equally argued that this centrifugal process merely intensified a situation already evident in the second half of the nineteenth century. As early as the 1860s the Viennese art historian Rudolf Eitelberger was bemoaning the fact that cities such as Cracow, Prague and Budapest were becoming independent artistic and cultural centres that no longer automatically paid heed to the capital.⁴⁰ This was not merely a symptom of the rising nationalism in the various lands of the Habsburg Empire – although this is often regarded as the principal cause. Rather, it was a result of longer-term social trends, such as an expanded school system, increased educational opportunities (including artistic training) and urbanization that led to an art-consuming professional middle class in smaller towns outside of the capital. These shifts accelerated with the introduction of improved means of travel and mass communication, as well as cheaper technologies of publication and image



5 Installation view of Frederick Kiesler, *International Exhibition of Theatre Techniques in Vienna, 1924*. Photo: Austrian Frederick and Lilian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna.

production, but as structural changes, they were only tangentially connected to the new political order of the interwar years.

The narrative of decentring is intimately bound up with powerful national historical myths of decline and rebirth alluded to earlier. Moreover, if such political myths have often framed the history of art, then, equally, art-historical narratives assumed a political legitimizing function; the presence of a dynamic art world served as an index of the general condition of the advanced culture of the states in question. An instructive comparison can be made between Austria and its neighbour the Czech Republic (or Czechoslovakia, as it was between 1918 and 1993), particularly pertinent given that both emerged out of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.

In 2018 the centenary of the creation of Czechoslovakia was celebrated with numerous events, exhibitions and publications in the Czech Republic. In November, the National Gallery in Prague opened a new permanent exhibition, titled *The First Republic*. Replacing the older hang, which relied on a chronological framework from the late nineteenth century through to the 1930s, the new exhibition mounted a thematic display that presented the work of different groups, galleries and institutions as well as centres outside Prague, including Zlín, Brno, Bratislava, Košice and Uzhhorod. An imaginative enterprise that replaced the succession of styles, schools and star individual artists that had formed the core of the older hang, the new presentation was bound up with the political validation of Czechoslovakia, opening on the centenary of the birth of the state that many Czechs continue to regard as theirs.⁴¹ The dominant message was that Czechoslovakia had been a centre of avant-

garde art and design in every way comparable to the traditional centres of modernist culture elsewhere in Europe, and this was emphasized by the inclusion of displays of design work by, for example, the Czechoslovak Werkbund (Svaz Československého díla) (plate 6), and the Odeon publishing house in Prague (plate 7). The display dedicated to surrealism indicated that the Prague art world was an equal partner with Paris. And indeed, the pride of place accorded to the painter Toyen (Marie Čermínová) was designed to show that when it came to questions of gender, Prague surrealists were more progressive than their counterparts in France.

The energetic modernist art world of interwar Prague can be seen as a legitimization of the Czechoslovak state, paralleling the often-made claim that the interwar republic was the only liberal democracy in central Europe. Modernism was a national project, both historically and in the historiography of Czechoslovak art and architecture. In the early 1920s many leading avant-garde figures, such as the architects Josef Gočár and



6 Display of the Odeon Publishing House, in *The First Republic*, National Gallery Prague, 2018. Photo: Author.

Pavel Janák, became drawn into the project of devising a national style while, in the later 1920s, the engagement with Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA) and functionalist design theories was motivated by a desire to distance the new state from its 'German' Habsburg past, and demonstrate its new internationalist credentials.⁴² In works of art and architectural history, too, from general histories to a spate of publications on local modernisms in cities beyond Prague, scholars have focused overwhelmingly on those practices that demonstrate its place in the same modernist landscape.⁴³

Many of the political tensions that led to the eventual break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 were also reflected in and shaped practices of writing about Czechoslovak modernism. Slovak cultural and political elites frequently complained about the dominant position of Czechs in the new state after 1918; state institutions were dominated by Czech middle-class professionals, and the Prague administration saw itself as having a paternalistic civilizing mission towards Slovakia and, further to the east, Subcarpathian Ruthenia.⁴⁴ Recent research by Veronika Rollová has highlighted the extent to which the Czech architectural profession was involved in this project.⁴⁵ Czech architects eagerly pursued commissions for designs in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia that could bring the benefits of Prague-sponsored modernization to what were otherwise considered to be so-called backward regions.

The break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 followed decades of ambivalence amongst Slovaks about the state of which they had been part for seventy-five years. The marking of the centenary was thus considerably more muted in Slovakia and for understandable reasons. Until the 1990s, Slovakia was effectively written out of histories of Czechoslovak modernism, or accounted for only in terms of ideas and practices generated in Prague.⁴⁶ This reflected a long-standing ideological blindness on the part of Prague-based scholars, which was also invariably repeated by scholars internationally. Only recently have Slovak cities such as Bratislava or Košice begun to be recognized as significant centres in their own right, a position that was belatedly acknowledged, too, in the new National Gallery hang in Prague.⁴⁷

7 Display of busts of Tomáš G. Masaryk, in *The First Republic*, National Gallery Prague, 2018. Photo: Author.





8 Rudolf Koppitz, *Snowy Landscape*, 1925. Bromoil print, 29 × 37 cm. Vienna: Albertina. Photo: Albertina, Vienna.

I have dwelt on Czechoslovakia and the Czech and Slovak Republics because they provide a useful counterpoint to Austria and demonstrate a common feature, namely, the intertwining of historiography and issues of national identity. If, in the case of Czechoslovakia, attention to histories of modernism is part of a larger process of state legitimation, then, in Austria, the relative neglect of the art and architecture of the same period may also be put down to *ambivalence* regarding the interwar Republic. In 1940 the historian Reinhold Lorenz published *The Reluctant State*, an analysis of the First Republic of Austria, in which he viewed the Republic's eventual collapse and absorption into Germany in 1938 as the logical outcome of an inevitable process.⁴⁸ As a Nazi sympathizer (he was dismissed from his post at the University of Vienna in 1945), Lorenz presented the 'Anschluß', that is, the annexation of Austria by Germany

in 1938, as the only option for a state he thought was never viable. Yet his view reflected a common opinion, held not only by Nazis but by others across the political spectrum. It was seemingly confirmed after the Second World War when, in 1962, the journalist and historian Hellmut Andics famously referred to the First Republic as ‘the state that no-one wanted’.⁴⁹ Indeed, not only did many, including Social Democrats, conclude that the rump Austrian state should be united with Germany. It was also opposed by those who were against the very idea of a republic and parliamentary government. These even included figures such as Ignaz Seipel, twice chancellor in the 1920s, who played a key role in establishing the new state on a stable financial footing.⁵⁰ As Janek Wassermann has recently pointed out, while the disappearance of the Republic in 1938 was ostensibly due to the Anschluss, it was systematically undermined during the 1920s and 1930s by monarchists, conservative Catholics, Communists and Nazis.⁵¹

After 1945, successive Austrian administrations succeeded in promulgating the myth that it was the ‘first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression’, despite the fact that the regime that was toppled in 1938 was an authoritarian dictatorship.⁵² It is perhaps not too controversial to suggest that, as with Czechoslovakia, it is subsequent memory politics that have shaped the understanding of Austrian art after 1918. For a long time, ambivalence about the interwar republic underpinned a reluctance to write the history of its art and architecture. Much of the latter was inflected by the conservative Catholic politics propounded by the Christian Social Party that dominated political and social life and, after 1933, by the clerical-fascist dictatorship of Dollfuß and Kurt Schuschnigg. The cultural policy of the dictatorship included promotion of a regionalism in art and literature that contested the metropolitan culture of Vienna. Practices that explored other identities, such as the *Heimattfotographie* [rural photography] of Rudolf Koppitz (plate 8), the vernacular modernist architecture of Clemens Holzmeister, and the Tyrolean regionalist painting of Alfons Walde and Albin Egger-Lienz, were often ignored or dismissed as simply conservative and provincial. They were often tainted by the negative connotations of the term ‘Heimat’ [‘homeland’], which was central to Nazi and radical right-wing ideologies of place and identity.⁵³ Alternatively, a compensatory gesture was to focus on ‘Red Vienna’ as a counterweight to the problematic legacy of the national government, and to demonstrate the Austrian contribution to modern urbanism and architectural thinking.⁵⁴ A more recent example is the extended attention that has been given to kineticism and the work of the educationalist Franz Čížek, who was concerned with the expressive power of movement. Two exhibitions in Vienna, *Kineticism: Vienna Discovers the Avant-Garde* (Wien Museum, May–October 2006) and *Viennese Kineticism: Modernism in Motion* (Belvedere, February–May 2011), played an important role in suggesting that the Austrian capital, too, had its own dynamic modernism, a moment when ‘Vienna discovers the avant-garde’.⁵⁵

Avant-Garde Narratives

The historiography of interwar Vienna is thus framed by a politics of forgetting as well as remembering. Yet it is the former that has largely dominated; as Andreas Nierhaus has noted:

[...] the Vienna of the time around 1930 plays no role in international writing on the history of modern architecture. It is as if, after the epochal achievements of Otto Wagner, Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos in profoundly shaping architectural discourse around 1900, no room was left for what happened in Vienna afterwards.⁵⁶

Such comments, a decade old, still retain their pertinence. Yet if this is partly due to the effect of memory culture and national mythologies, it can also be attributed to the ways in which narratives of modernism and the avant-garde have been constructed. The municipal housing projects of Red Vienna were for decades remembered not as a significant contribution to innovative architecture but as part of the broader celebration of the city as a centre of progressive culture that included, for example, the philosophy of the Vienna Circle, the musical modernism of Alban Berg and Anton Webern, ideas of educational reform and radical political thought.⁵⁷ In fact, as early as the mid-1920s the design of the municipal housing projects was being criticized for its overly conservative character. Josef Frank, one of the most cogent architects writing in Vienna between the wars, and himself a collaborator on some housing projects, was dismayed by the tendency to hold on to Habsburg era norms and ideas of urban planning.⁵⁸ He famously coined the term ‘people’s palace’ [Volkswohnungspalast] in a critical review of the Reumannhof housing development by Hubert Gessner.⁵⁹ The development was built for working-class families and was part of the Social Democratic council’s project of providing cheap mass housing for those of on lower incomes. But its grandiose scale (it consisted of nearly 500 apartments) bore strong echoes of the city’s architectural heritage from the Habsburg era (plate 9).

The communal housing estates built by the municipality were at times referred to as the ‘Ringstrasse’ of the Proletariat in reference to the famous grand circular boulevard built in the second half of the nineteenth century in Vienna.⁶⁰ The term was first coined in 1930 in a celebratory article on the Reumannhof in the Social Democratic women’s magazine *Die Unzufriedene* [The Dissatisfied Woman], which described the changed experience of the *flâneuse*, who was now witness to ‘Powerful buildings, in whose spaces live just a few people, who used to be placed in boxes thanks to the privilege of the nobility’.⁶¹ This formulation suggested a proletarian challenge to the real and symbolic ownership of urban space, for the principal occupants of the apartments of the Ringstrasse had been the Viennese bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and it stood as a monument to the social order of the late Habsburg Empire. Yet ‘Ringstrasse of the Proletariat’ was ambiguous, for the metaphor also acquiesced in acceptance of the normative status of the Ringstrasse, and hence of the urban imagination of the Habsburg era. Indeed, for many, the buildings of Social Democratic Vienna seemed to have little in common with the most advanced ideas about housing evident in the Weissenhof Estate [Weissenhofsiedlung] in Stuttgart overseen by Mies van der Rohe in 1927, for example, or Le Corbusier’s unrealized utopian plan of the Ville contemporaine (Contemporary city) from 1922.

Criticisms similar to those of Frank persisted for decades. Commenting on the fact that so many of the architects involved in the municipal housing projects in the city had been students of Otto Wagner, Manfredo Tafuri concluded that they ‘carried a weight of experiences that were completely anachronistic in relation to the ideas being proposed by their new public overseers’, replacing the ‘haut bourgeois ideology of the School of Wagner’ with nothing more than ‘populist sentimentalism’.⁶²

Tafuri’s judgement has been questioned by Eve Blau’s monumental study of Red Vienna, which argues that the apparent failings in architectural design he identified were in fact a sophisticated attempt to enter into dialogue with the history of the city.⁶³ Aside from the specifics of this particular debate, a more general point can be made, in keeping with Nierhaus’s contention, that the most prominent architects in the interwar Austrian Republic, such as Clemens Holzmeister (1886–1983), Oskar Strnad (1879–1935), Rudolf Perco (1884–1942), Josef Frank (1885–

9 Hubert Gessner,
 Reumannhof, Vienna, 1926.
 Photo: Wiener Stadt- und
 Landesarchiv/Gerlach.



1967), and Robert Kramreiter (1905–65), have been all but invisible in general histories of modern architecture. The grounds for this are numerous and have to be explored in turn, but the principal reason is due to the inability to encompass them within what has, since the early 1940s, become an orthodox account of international modernism in architectural writing.⁶⁴ Central to this narrative was the well-known characterization of modern architecture as engaged with the implications of technological change, mass production, a rejection of historicism and a championing of functional design, a concern with addressing the demands of the industrial metropolis, including the provision of mass housing and new forms of urban planning. According to Hilde Heynen:

What was involved first of all was a rejection of the bourgeois culture of philistinism that used pretentious ornament and kitsch and which took the

form of eclecticism. In its stead the desire for purity and authenticity was given precedence. All ornamentation was regarded as unacceptable; instead, authenticity was required in the use of materials, and it was thought that a constructional logic should be clearly visible in the formal idiom.⁶⁵

The geographical scope of histories of modern architecture may have widened, but this basic framework has remained broadly intact.⁶⁶ It is a narrative that cannot easily accommodate many Austrian architects working during the 1920s and 1930s. Holzmeister and Kramreiter, for example, were deeply concerned with the relation between architecture and their religious faith and saw their work as part of a Catholic cultural renewal.⁶⁷ Both architects attempted to develop a modernist architectural language that could, at the same time, respect specifically Catholic historical traditions. This also involved seeking to reinvigorate church design on the basis of liturgical reform and modernization of the Church, leading to buildings such as Kramreiter's *Mary, Queen of Peace* (1933–35) in the Vienna suburb of Favoriten (plate 10).⁶⁸ This building type, with its concern for symbolic resonance and evocation of sacred aura, sits uneasily in a discourse of modern architecture that is primarily secular. In this regard Walter Benjamin's notion of the avant-garde as the destruction of aura plays a particularly important role, given that it became central to Tafuri's reading of architectural modernism.⁶⁹

Josef Frank and Oskar Strnad espoused a range of conceptual and aesthetic concerns that stood in contrast to those of their better-known peers of *Congrès Internationaux de l'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) and the *Werkbund*. Both architects have recently enjoyed renewed attention; Christopher Long, for example, has emphasized their novel approaches to interior space, informed by their reading of the theoretical writings of August Schmarsow on space and form.⁷⁰ Yet their work was long ignored due to differences with their peers in the German *Werkbund*. Frank, for example, was

10 Robert Kramreiter, *Church of Mary Queen of Peace*, Vienna, 1933–35. Photo: Martin Gerlach, Wien Museum.



concerned with the rehabilitation of ornament.⁷¹ He also insisted on the importance of expressive symbolic vocabularies in architecture and their use as a repository of historical associations and memories that enabled its users to form meaningful relations to the modern built environment.⁷² This stood at odds with the functionalist concerns of the CIAM, as did, too, Frank's preference for smaller-scale housing projects, most evident in the 1932 Vienna exhibition of the Austrian Werkbund.⁷³

Such issues open out to the wider question as to whether, aside from emigrés such as Kassák and other Hungarians in the early 1920s, anything that one can meaningfully refer to as 'avant-garde' was active in Vienna and Austria. A direct answer was provided by Jean Clair, who argued that there had been no avant-garde in Vienna because there was no tradition of political activism within art. In contrast to the Salon des Indépendants in Paris, where 'independence' bore the military connotations of the avant-garde, the Secession was, he argued, 'a movement of retreat, an implosion'. Where the avant-garde 'not only accompanied history, but also claimed to complete it', the Secession was a *reaction* to history, immersed in redefining the past rather than shaping the future.⁷⁴

Clair had little to say about the period after 1918; his main concern was with the *fin-de-siècle*.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, it exemplifies a widely held view that extends to the interwar period. If we use a loose definition of the avant-garde as comprising 'works that have been said to gain a political edge through formal experimentation [...] which deal either allegorically or thematically with political issues [...] that overtly align themselves with given political programmes', there appears to be tacit agreement with

Clair's judgement. This has been particularly evident in large-scale publications devoted to the 'avant-gardes' of central Europe, in which, with the exception of *Beyond Klimt*, Vienna, and Austria more generally, has been conspicuously absent, or mentioned only as the site of Hungarian constructivism.⁷⁶ Even in the more recent exhibition, *Years of Disarray*, it appears solely in a short discussion of kinetism.⁷⁷ Otherwise it is almost entirely invisible.

The absence of Austria from these projects may seem a matter of little ultimate significance. Whether or not it is part of 'central Europe' might at first sight be dismissed as of concern only for pedantic issues of categorization, most especially given that 'central Europe' is hardly a stable term. Yet this absence raises questions about Austria's position after 1918. Once more, the politics of regional and national identity-building play a role, for the presence of avant-garde practices and groups, such as Devěsíl and architectural functionalism in Czechoslovakia, the constructivism of Lajos Kassák, Hungarians associated with the Bauhaus, such as László Moholy-Nagy, Sándor Bortnyik and Farkas Molnár, or Tristan Tzara's dadaist heirs in Romania, confirm the narrative of regeneration.⁷⁸ The rump state of the old imperial centre, in contrast, does not fit easily into this image. As with architecture, too, much of its art does not fit into the pre-scripted narratives of twentieth-century art.

11 Rudolf Wacker, *Still Life with Saint Sebastian*, 1927. Oil and tempera on wood, 95 × 61 cm. Vorarlberg: Private collection. Photo: Dorotheum Vienna, Auction Catalogue, 23.6.2020.



Kinetism has been foregrounded in recent years as the one avant-garde movement in Austria, although, despite superficial visual similarities, Čižek's interest in the spiritual and metaphysical meanings of abstract forms had next to nothing in common with the political preoccupations of the constructivism with which it is often compared. Moreover, kinetism was hardly representative of Austrian art after 1918. Instead, figurative painting remained dominant, from the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of Franz Sedlacek and Rudolf Wacker, the late expressionism of Broncia Koller, Anton Faistauer and Herbert Boeckl, and the classicism of Karl Sterrer. In each case these categories are only tentative, however, for while these categories may suggest affinities to art in Germany, closer scrutiny highlights important differences.

Sedlacek and Wacker displayed little of the concern with social commentary that was central to the work of, for example, Rudolf Schlichter, Christian Schad or Otto Dix. Wacker noted in his diary: 'My art is nothing other than a means, an endeavour to probe the mysteries hidden beneath the skin of the visible by depicting life'.⁷⁹ Much hangs on the meaning of 'mysteries' here; a metaphysical interest in the spiritual and the occult was a commonplace in this period, but for Wacker it was connected to his Catholic faith. His paintings featured numerous Catholic subjects and symbols in paintings such as *Still Life with Christ and the Berliner Tagblatt* (1925) and *Still Life with Cactus and Saint Sebastian* (1929) (plate 11). An entry in his diary from 1928 makes the importance of his religious belief clear, when he states that:

Everything, the simplest and the lifeless, remains a mystery. And, ultimately, the pious realist is the true mystic. One final thing: couldn't this discrepancy within the world of objects be the expression of our time, a chaotic time stripped of the sacred, which, if we have the courage to endure it and grasp all things in their naked existence, might lead to a new piety.⁸⁰

Examples of misleading categorization can be found elsewhere, too. Painters such as Lilly Steiner, Anton Faistauer and Herbert Boeckl, amongst others, have traditionally been referred to as exponents of late expressionism, yet even those who have written most extensively about Austrian expressionism have emphasized the caveats that need to be applied when using the term. Patrick Werkner, for example, author of the only extended study of expressionism in Austria, acknowledged that the distinctive characteristics of the work of, for example, Arnold Schoenberg, Kokoschka or Richard Gerstl even before the First World War 'raises the question of its position within European modernism'.⁸¹ Such a caveat should apply even more when discussing interwar painting, for despite the interest of Austrian 'expressionists' in the facticity of painting, in the ability of the medium to challenge pictorial legibility, the meaning of this practice is entirely different from that associated with expressionism. Faistauer, often referred to as an expressionist, was in fact highly critical of what he termed the 'proletarian revolution' of 'so-called Expressionism'.⁸² His book *New Painting in Austria*, published in 1923, mounted a withering attack on contemporary art, claiming that:

Expressionism is not true to the world, and for that reason deserves to be condemned. It despairs at the will of the world, and it is therefore weak. It is no progress, but turns back in desperation, just at that point where it would be summoned forwards.⁸³

Behind this polemic lay a deep commitment to Catholicism; the opening exhibition of the *Aquarius* group in August 1919 was devoted to the theme of religious



12 Anton Faistauer, *Votive Altarpiece*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 85 × 200 cm (central panel), 185 × 94.5 cm (left and right panels). Salzburg: Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Salzburg Museum of Modern Art.

art, and Faistauer's central submission was a large altarpiece featuring a pietà, with Saints Martin and Sebastian on the left and right panels (plate 12). The tonality of this painting reveals an interest in El Greco, and recalls the same interest of his Viennese contemporary, the art historian Max Dvořák.⁸⁴ Indeed, the revival of El Greco has been convincingly interpreted by Beat Wismer and Michael Scholz-Hänsel and others as intertwined with the heightened modernist concern with inner subjectivity in the early twentieth century.⁸⁵ Dvořák has often been credited for his openness to contemporary art, which, it is assumed, also drove his interests in non-canonical phenomena in the history of art. The convergence of interests with those of Faistauer casts this in a different light, however. For it was arguably less to do with constructing a genealogy of modernism and more to do with a desire to retrieve the pious spirituality of the Counter-Reformation. Catholicism was central to Faistauer's work, and by the time he executed the fresco of the Festspielhaus in Salzburg, he had developed a monumental language capable of expressing his religious commitments. The fresco, a series of allegorical images on the origins of the arts and the history of the city, also included a sequence of biblical images and celebrations of the beneficent role of the Catholic Church as patron of the arts.

To illustrate the idiosyncrasies of interwar 'expressionism' in Austria we might take one final example: Herbert Boeckl. It is generally acknowledged that the latter's interest in the ability of paint to evoke material presence could be traced back to an engagement with Cézanne.⁸⁶ Yet, like Faistauer, this was motivated by theological preoccupations; reflecting on his earlier work in a lecture delivered in 1962, Boeckl described it as articulating the 'secret of trans-substantiation' [*Geheimnis der Wandlung*]. As Edwin Lachnit has noted, the theological connotations of this statement are impossible to miss.⁸⁷ Boeckl's deeply held Catholic faith was also evident in the many paintings he produced on religious themes, such as *Hymn to Mary* (1934), for which he was awarded the State Art Prize, and a theological sensibility inflected his depictions of the human body too. In the slightly earlier painting *Anatomy* (1931) (plate 13), for example, the dissected corpse is the main actor in the image, but in contrast to its Rembrandtian archetype this is no mere presentation of the materiality of the human body, or of bourgeois scientific sociality. It is an exploration of the mysteries of the flesh, its heightened chromaticism a symbol of the mystery of the departure of the human soul previously inhabiting it.

We might conclude this discussion with two comments. The first relates to religious belief. In common with Faistauer, Holzmeister and Kramreiter, Boeckl was an unapologetic Catholic and this faith was thematized in his work. This alone may explain his marginal place in broader histories of art, for while Mark C. Taylor attempted, almost thirty years ago, to draw out the intertwining of modern art, architecture and religion, few have taken up his lead.⁸⁸ The interest of modern artists in the occult, starting with Kandinsky, has been difficult to avoid, but historians of modern European art and architecture have been much less interested in including into narratives of modernism artists who had a declared commitment to established religious faiths.

Second, the absence of interwar Austrian art from the historiographic stage may also be explained as a function of the prevalence of figurative painting that displayed little of the interest in radical politics of the avant-gardes in neighbouring Czechoslovakia or Germany. There is little space in histories of modernism for work of this kind, and interesting parallels can be found elsewhere. In her study of women artists in Weimar Germany, Marsha Meskimmon suggested that their exclusion from traditional histories of German modernism was due not merely to the long-standing gender bias of art-historical writing, but also due to the fact that so many women artists employed an expressive figurative language that was

13 Herbert Boeckl, *Anatomy*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 133 × 156 cm. Vienna: Wien Museum. © Herbert Boeckl. Photo: Birgit und Peter Kainz, Wien Museum.



regarded as simply ‘not modern enough’.⁸⁹ A similar argument could be marshalled to explain the invisibility not merely of women artists in Austria, but of post-1918 Austrian painting more generally. Meskimmon pointed to deep assumptions about the trajectory of modernism that have shaped writing about the history of art. These have particular pertinence in the case of Austria, but their relevance is broader. Critical responses to Jean Clair’s 1981 exhibition *Les réalismes 1919–1939*, which explored the revival of figurative painting between the wars and the so-called call to order in French art, revealed much about the norms that informed histories of modernism. A number of criticisms focused on the fact that the exhibition appeared to legitimize an artistic language which, for many, had been devalued due to being the only permitted aesthetic option under Stalinism and Nazism.⁹⁰ The debate spilled over into the United States, where Benjamin Buchloh launched a much-cited polemic that equated interwar modernist figuration with authoritarian reaction and warned against the revival of interest in figurative painting in the 1970s as a dangerous, reactionary, development.⁹¹ Artists such as Boeckl, Funke and Wacker do not exemplify the modernist classicism that served as the preferred artistic language of totalitarian rule. Nevertheless, as figurative painters, one might speculate that their neglect partly stemmed from the comparisons that could be drawn between their work and that much more provocative and problematic return to figurative painting between the wars.

Concluding Observations

This article began with the question of stereotypes of Austrian art after 1918 and, in particular, the marked absence of Austria from wider histories of interwar art and architecture. Its aim was not simply to bemoan that absence – or even to argue for the rehabilitation of Austrian art of the period in question – but to examine the imperatives behind its neglect. A basic starting point is the historical frame that has governed much writing on the history of modernism, for the image of Austrian art has been intimately bound up with the wider mythologies surrounding the collapse of Austria-Hungary. The neglect of art in interwar Austria stands in marked contrast to the narratives of political rebirth in central Europe, and the ways that historical and art-historical narratives have been mobilized to legitimize them.

Critical examination of the historiography of Austrian art and architecture after 1918 thus brings to light the implicit political and aesthetic value judgements underpinning the choice of objects and the ways in which that choice is framed. It has implications most immediately for the historical understanding of Austrian art, but its insights have wider pertinence. They invite reflection on the historiography of central European modernist and avant-garde practices and, more generally, on the principles and assumptions that have persisted in general histories of modern European art and architecture.

Notes

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1 The term ‘*lieu de mémoire*’, translated variously as ‘realm of memory’ or ‘place of memory’, is taken from Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York,

1996. On the myth of ‘Vienna 1900’ see, for example, Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna 1898–1918*, London, 1975; Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918*, Cambridge, MA, 1998; Leslie Topp, *Architecture and Truth in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, Cambridge, 2004; Serge Lemoine and Marie-Amélie zu Salm-Salm, eds, *Klimt, Schiele, Moser, Kokoschka: Vienna 1900*, Paris, 2006; Tag Gronberg, *Vienna: City of Modernity 1890–1914*, London, 2007; Gemma Blackshaw, *Facing the Modern: The Portrait in Vienna 1900*, London, 2013; Tobias Natter, *Klimt and the Women of Vienna’s Golden Age 1900–1918*, Vienna, 2016.

- 2 The few notable exceptions include Tino Erben, ed., *Traum und Wirklichkeit: Wien 1870–1930*, Vienna, 1985; and Jean Clair, *Vienne 1880–1938: L'apocalypse Joyeuse*, Paris, 1992.
- 3 Elizabeth Clegg's overview of central European art went beyond 1918, but the 1920s and 1930s are the subject of a 'postscript', characterized by the same assumption of hiatus. Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design & Architecture in Central Europe 1890–1920*, London and New Haven, 2006.
- 4 Manfred Wagner, Rudolf Dirisamer, and Oswald Oberhuber, *Die Verlorenen Österreicher 1918–1938? Expression – Österreichs Beitrag zur Moderne*, Vienna, 1982; Christoph Bertsch, ed., *Ungewisse Hoffnung: Österreichische Malerei und Graphic zwischen 1918 und 1938*, Vienna, 1993; Rudolf Leopold and Birgit Laback, eds, *Zwischen den Kriegen: Österreichische Künstler 1918–1938*, Vienna, 2007.
- 5 Wieland Schmid, 'Die Malerei', in *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst in Österreich 4: 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Schmid, Munich, London and New York, 2002, 68.
- 6 Stephanie Auer, "'Everyone is striving to move on': The Collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its Impact on Austrian Expressionism", in *Beyond Klimt: New Horizons in Central Europe*, ed. Stella Rollig and Alexander Klee, Vienna, 2018, 49.
- 7 Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, Cambridge, MA, 1999. See, too, Ingo Zechner, Georg Spitaler, and Rob MacFarland, eds, *The Red Vienna Sourcebook*, London, 2020.
- 8 See, for example, Wolfgang Kos, *Der Kampf um die Stadt: Politik, Kunst und Alltag um 1930*, Vienna, 2010; Agnes Husslein-Arco and Alexander Klee, eds, *Kubismus, Konstruktivismus, Formkunst*, Vienna, 2016; Stella Rollig, *Stadt der Frauen: Künstlerinnen in Wien von 1900 bis 1938*, Vienna, 2019.
- 9 Deborah Holmes, 'Introduction: Beyond the Coffee House. Vienna as a Cultural Center between the Wars', in *Interwar Vienna: Culture between Tradition and Modernity*, ed. Holmes, London, 2009, 3.
- 10 Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of the Global Order*, London, 2014.
- 11 Pieter Judson, 'Epilogue: The New Empires', in *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, Cambridge, MA, 2016, 443–454.
- 12 It has been suggested that Czechoslovakia, for instance, broke apart in 1939 not only due to military invasion, but also due to Nazi Germany's ability to manipulate the disaffection of its many minorities, Slovaks, Germans and Hungarians, with the high-handed policies of the Prague administration. See Mary Heiman, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*, London and New Haven, 2009.
- 13 Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*, Harmondsworth, 2017. See, too, Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds, *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence after the Great War*, Oxford, 2012.
- 14 Matthew S. Witkovsky, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945*, Washington, DC, 2007, 13.
- 15 Hugh Seton Watson, 'Austria and Her Neighbours', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 13: 39, 1935, 549.
- 16 Max Eisler, *Gustav Klimt*, Vienna, 1921, 46.
- 17 Eisler, *Gustav Klimt*, 51.
- 18 Husslein-Arco, Matthias Boeckl, and Harald Krejci, eds, *Hagenbund: A European Network of Modernism 1900 to 1938*, Vienna and Munich, 2014.
- 19 Arpad Weixlgärtner, *Karl Storrer: Ein Wiener Maler der Gegenwart*, Vienna, 1928, 107.
- 20 The relation of Faistauer and Schiele was the subject of a recent exhibition in Salzburg, which also examined their collaboration with the painter Felix Harta. Peter Laub, ed., *Faistauer, Schiele, Harta & Co: Malerei Verbindet*, Salzburg, 2019.
- 21 See Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, 'Fauvismus und Frauengruppenbild bei Helene Funk', in *Künstlerinnen in Österreich 1897–1938: Malerei, Plastik, Architektur*, Vienna, 1994, 128–135; Julie M. Johnson, 'Rediscovering Helene Funke: The Invisible Foremother', in *The Memory Factory: The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900*, West Lafayette, 2012, 177–202.
- 22 Plakolm-Forsthuber, 'Die Malerin und Mäzenin Broncia Koller', in *Künstlerinnen in Österreich 1897–1938*, 115–120; and Johnson, 'Broncia Koller and Interiority in Public Art Exhibitions', in *The Memory Factory*, 111–176.
- 23 Koller was the subject of a highly respectful obituary by Albert Paris Gütersloh in the *Wiener Zeitung*, which bemoaned the prejudice she had to face as a female artist. Gütersloh, 'Broncia Koller', *Wiener Zeitung*, 29 April 1934, 29. See, too, Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, 'Frauenbilder und Bilder von Frauen im Wiener Ausstellungsbetrieb', in *Politik der Präsentation: Museum und Ausstellung in Österreich 1918–1945*, ed. Herbert Posch and Gottfried Fliedl, Vienna, 1996, 97–118.
- 24 This is evident in, for example, a recent collection of essays on Zuckerkandl, which leaves the 1920s and 1930s almost unmentioned. See the essays on Zuckerkandl in Bernhard Fetz, ed., *Berg, Wittgenstein, Zuckerkandl: Zentralfiguren der Wiener Moderne*, Vienna, 2018, 191–318.
- 25 See Berta Zuckerkandl, in *Österreich intim: Erinnerungen 1892–1942*, ed. Reinhard Federmann, Vienna, 2013. See, for example, her entries 'Untergang und Neubeginn', 151–160 and 'Begegnung mit Dollfuß', 229–238.
- 26 Marjorie Perloff, *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire*, Chicago, 2018.
- 27 Joseph Roth, 'Die Büste des Kaisers', in *Die Erzählungen*, Cologne, 2008, 283–284.
- 28 Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art, 1890–1918*, Los Angeles, 2000, 70–74; Vojtěch Lahoda, 'Artists Associations in Exchange: Czech Art in the Hagenbund', in *Hagenbund: A European Network of Modernism 1900 to 1938*, ed. Agnes Husslein-Arco, Matthias Boeckl, and Harald Krejci, Munich, 2014, 299–306. See, too, Jeroen Bastiaan van Heerde, *Staat und Kunst: Staatliche Kunstförderung 1895–1918*, Vienna, 1993.
- 29 See Cornelia Cabuk, 'The Hagenbund as Showcase for Central European Modernism in the 1920s and 1930s', in *Hagenbund: A European Network of Modernism 1900 to 1938*, ed. Husslein-Arco, Boeckl and Krejci, 55–61.
- 30 Prutscher was the subject of a critical reassessment at the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna in 2020. See Christoph Thun-Hohenstein and Rainald Franz, eds, *Otto Prutscher: Allgestalter der Wiener Moderne*, Vienna, 2019.
- 31 Christopher Long, *Adolf Loos: The Last Houses*, Prague, 2020.
- 32 Ernst Ploil, 'Economics', in *Wiener Werkstätte 1903–1932: The Luxury of Beauty*, ed. Christian Witt-Döring, Munich, 2017, 20–31.
- 33 The interwar Austrian and German exile culture in Czechoslovakia has been explored in Bronislava Rokytová, *Dost Tichého Sepotu: Exilová výtvarná scéna v Československu (1933–1939)*, Prague, 2013.
- 34 Leopold Rochanowski, ed., *Moderní Umění Rakouské, Spolek Výtvarných umělců Mánes [Modern Austrian Art, the Mánes Society of Artists]*, Prague, 1928.
- 35 See, for example, Timothy Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-Garde: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, Cambridge, MA, 2002; and Krisztina Passuth, *Treffpunkte der Avantgarden: Ostmitteleuropa 1907–1930*, trans. Anikó Harmath, Budapest, 2003.
- 36 Gábor Dobó and Merse Pál Szeredi, "'The Heart of Austria is not the Center but the Periphery' – Avant-Garde Journals in East-Central Europe", in *Beyond Klimt*, ed. Rolling and Klee, 145.
- 37 Hans Tietze, 'Gemeindepolitik und modern Kunst' (1927), in *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft: Texte 1910–1954*, Vienna, 2007, 205.
- 38 Bernhard Leitner, *Erika Giovanna Klein: Wien New York 1900–1957, Ostfildern*, 2001.
- 39 See Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Dieter Bogner, Maria Lind, and Bärbel Fischer, eds, *Friedrich Kiesler: Lebenswelten*, Vienna, 2016.
- 40 Rudolf Eitelberger, 'Eine österreichische Geschichtsgalerie' (1866), in *Eitelberger, Gesammelte Kunsthistorische Schriften II: Oesterreichische Kunst-Institute und kunstgewerbliche Zeitfragen*, Vienna, 1879, 73.
- 41 Lada Pravdová and Lada Hubatová-Vacková, eds, *První Republika 1918–1938 [The First Republic 1918–1939]*, Prague, 2018.
- 42 The national style was the subject of an exhibition held at the Academy of Art and Design in Prague in 2013. See Vendula Hnídková, *Národní styl: kultura a politika*, Prague, 2013. As Rostislav Koryčanek has argued, the redevelopment of the city of Brno, often seen as the major centre of interwar functionalist architecture, was also motivated by similar considerations, including the desire to diminish its visual connections to the Habsburg Empire. Rostislav Koryčanek, *Česká architektura v německém Brně: město jako ideální krajina nacionalismu [Czech Architecture in German Brno: The City as an Ideal Site of Nationalism]*, Šlapanice, 2003.
- 43 Of the general publications see, for example, Otakar Nový, *Česká architektonická avantgarda [The Czech Architectural Avant-garde]*, Prague, 1998, republished in 2015; Rostislav Švácha, *The Architecture of New*

- Prague, 1895–1945, trans. Alexandra Büchler, Cambridge, MA, 1995. As examples of studies of ‘local’ modernisms, see Zdeněk Kudělka and Jindřich Chatrný, *For New Brno 1919–1939*, Brno, 2000; Štěpán Bartoš and Zdeněk Lukeš, *Ve viru modernosti. Architektura 20 století v královéhradeckém kraji* [In the Faith in Modernity: 20th Century Architecture in the Hradec Králové Region], Prague, 2008; Katrin Klingan, *A Utopia of Modernity: Zlín, Prague, 2010*; Petr Domanický, *Pracovna republiky: moderna architektura Plzně v letech 1918–1938* [Workshop of the Republic: Modern Architecture of Plzeň, 1918–1938], Starý Most, 2018.
- 44 See Thomas Lorman, *The Making of the Slovak People’s Party: Religion, Nationalism and the Culture in Early 20th Century Europe*, London, 2019. See especially ‘Turning against Hungary – Turning against Czechoslovakia’, 149–186.
- 45 Veronika Rollová, ‘The Relationship between Centre and Periphery: The Transformation of Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ruthenia’, in *A Spirit at Work: Architecture and Czech Politics, 1918–1945*, ed. Vendula Hnídková, Prague, 2020, 220–265.
- 46 See, for example, Ladislav Foltyn, *Slovenská architektúra a česká avantgarda 1918–1939*, Bratislava, 1939.
- 47 See, for example, Peter Szalay, *Moderná Bratislava 1918–1938*, Bratislava, 2015, and Zsófia Kiss-Szemán and Natalia Žak, eds, *Koszycka Moderna*, Cracow, 2016.
- 48 Reinhold Lorenz, *Der Staat wider Willen: Österreich 1918–1938*, Vienna, 1940.
- 49 Hellmut Andics, *Der Staat den keiner wollte: Österreich 1918–1938*, Vienna, 1962.
- 50 John Deak, ‘Ignaz Seipel (1876–1932): Founding Father of the Austrian Republic’, in *Austrian Lives*, ed. Günter Bischof, Fritz Plasser, and Eva Maltchnigg, New Orleans, 2012, 32–55.
- 51 Janek Wassermann, *Black Vienna: The Radical Right in the Red City, 1918–1938*, Ithaca, 2014.
- 52 The assertion was by the provisional Austrian government established in April 1945, cited here by Heidemarie Uhl, ‘The Politics of Memory: Austria’s Perception of the Second World War and the National Socialist Period’, in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, ed. Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka, London and New Brunswick, 1997, 65.
- 53 On the issues raised by regional art forms, see Julia Secklehner, ‘A New Austrian Regionalism: Alfons Walde and Austrian Identity in Painting after 1918’, *Austrian History Yearbook*, 52, 2021, 201–226. On the concept of Heimat more generally, see Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, London, 2004.
- 54 See, for example, Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*; Harald Jahn, *Das Wunder des Roten Wien*, Vienna, 2015; Helmut Weihsmann, *Das Rote Wien: Sozialdemokratische Architektur und Kommunalpolitik, 1919–1934*, Vienna, 2019; Werner Michael Schwartz, Georg Spitaler et al., *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934: Ideen, Debatten, Praxis*, Vienna, 2019.
- 55 Wolfgang Kos, ed., *Kinietismus: Wien entdeckt die Avant-Garde*, Vienna, 2006; Gerald Bast, Agnes Husslein-Arco, Herbert Krejci, and Patrick Werkner, eds, *Wiener Kinietismus: Eine bewegte Moderne*, Vienna, 2011.
- 56 Andreas Nierhaus, ‘Eine kritische Moderne: Bauen und Wohnen in Wien um 1930’, in *Der Kampf um die Stadt*, ed. Kos, 245.
- 57 Werner Michael Schwarz, Georg Spitaler, and Elke Wikidal, eds, *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934: Ideen, Debatten, Praxis*, Vienna, 2019.
- 58 Frank designed the Wiedenhoferhof housing block (1924) and collaborated with Adolf Loos, Peter Behrens and Margarete Schütte-Lhotsky on the Winarskyhof, completed in 1925.
- 59 Josef Frank, ‘Der Volkswohnungspalast’, *Schriften*, 1, 254–267.
- 60 On the Ringstrasse, see Alfred Fograssy and Monika Faber, eds, *Die Wiener Ringstrasse: das Buch*, Ostfildern, 2014; and Michael Pfundner, ed., *Wien wird Weltstadt: Die Ringstrasse und ihre Zeit*, Vienna, 2015.
- 61 Anon., ‘Die Ringstrasse des Proletariats’, *Die Unzufriedene*, 30 August 1930, 1. *Die Unzufriedene* was published between 1923 and 1934 as a progressive newspaper promoting women’s rights. It was edited by the Social Democratic deputy mayor of Vienna Max Winter (1870–1937).
- 62 Manfredo Tafuri, *Vienne la Rouge: La politique immobilière de la Vienne socialiste 1919–1933*, trans. Catherine Chatin, Bruxelles, 1981, 48.
- 63 Blau states, ‘the Social Democrats seized the opportunity to generate a discursive, dialectical space in the city that destabilized, even while it seemed to reinforce, traditional relationships between building and city, insider and outsider, public and private property and space’. Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, 173.
- 64 I note the 1930s in line with the importance attributed to books such as Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip C. Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*, New York, 1932; and Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, Cambridge, MA, 1941. On the historiography of modern architecture, see Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, Cambridge, MA, 2008.
- 65 Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*, Cambridge, MA, 1999, 28.
- 66 In her re-reading of the genealogy of modern architecture, Alina Payne, for example, still sees the central drama of architecture as scripted around the fate of ornament, culminating in the Bauhaus. Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*, London, 2012.
- 67 Holzmeister was a prolific writer as well as designer, publishing a number of works in which he spelled out his idea of a Catholic architectural modernism. See, for example, ‘Das Katholische in der modernen Kunst’, *Moderne Welt*, 14: 12, 1933, 16–17 and 27, and his book *Kirche im Kampf*, Innsbruck and Vienna, 1936.
- 68 See, for example, Pius Parsch and Robert Kramreiter, *Neue Kirchenkunst im Geist der Liturgie*, Vienna, 1939.
- 69 Manfredo Tafuri, ‘Architecture as “Indifferent Object” and the Crisis of Critical Attention’, in *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia, London, 1980, 79–102. Benjamin outlined his theory of aura in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version’, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings 3 (1935–1938)*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, MA, 2002, 101–133.
- 70 Christopher Long has explored some of the aesthetic precepts of Strnad and Frank in *The New Space: Movement and Experience in Viennese Modern Architecture*, London and New Haven, 2017. Long has almost single-handedly kept alive the reputation of Frank. See, too, his *Josef Frank: Life and Work*, Chicago, 2001. August Schmarsow (1853–1936) was author of *Grundbegriffe der Kunstwissenschaft*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1905, in which he argued the central role of spatial analysis central to art-historical inquiry.
- 71 Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, *Josef Frank Against Design: Das Antiformalistische Werk des Architekten*, Vienna, 2015.
- 72 The key text in this regard was Frank, *Architektur als Symbol: Elemente neuen deutschen Bauens*, Berlin, 1931. Reprinted in Frank, *Schriften in zwei Bänden*, ed. C. Long, Vienna, 2012, II, 9–193. On Frank and the conflict with his counterparts see Paul Overy, ‘“The Whole Bad Taste of Our Period”: Josef Frank, Adolf Loos, and “Gschnas”’, *Home Cultures*, 3: 3, 2006, 213–233.
- 73 Andreas Nierhaus et al., eds, *Werkbundsiedlung Wien 1932: Ein Manifest des neuen Wohnens*, Vienna, 2012.
- 74 Jean Clair, ‘Une modernité sceptique’, in Clair, *Vienne 1880–1938: L’Apocalypse Joyeuse*, Paris, 1986, 46–57. Here, 51.
- 75 Carl Schorske, ‘Gustv Klimt: Painting and the Crisis of the Liberal Ego’, in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, New York, 1980, 208–278.
- 76 See, for example, Krisztina Passuth, *Treffpunkte der Avantgarden: Ostmitteleuropa 1907–1930*, trans. Anikó Harmath, Budapest, 2003; Pál Derék, ‘Vienna’, in *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, ed. Benson, 166–171.
- 77 Patrick Werkner, ‘Kineticism’, in *Years of Disarray, 1908–1928: Avant-Gardes in Central Europe*, ed. Karel Srp, Olomouc, 2019, 507–513.
- 78 See, in addition to the literature already cited, examples such as Alena Pomajzlová, ed., *Devětsil 1920–1931*, Prague, 2019; Éva Bajkay, *Von Kunst zu Leben: Die Ungarn am Bauhaus*, Berlin and Pécs, 2010; Éva Forgács, Thomas Köhler, Csilla Csorba, Vera Baksa-Soós, and Júlia Cserba, *Lojos Kassák: Botschafter der Avant-Garde 1915–1927*, Budapest, 2011; Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, Cambridge, MA, 2006.
- 79 Rudolf Wacker, Diary entry from November 1924, quoted in Gabriele Spindler, ‘Magical Hideaways: Fantastic Trends in Austrian Art between the Wars’, in *Beyond Klimt*, ed. Rollig and Klee, 274.
- 80 Rudolf Wacker, Diary entry from October 1928, quoted in Harald Scheicher, ed., *Macht des Bildes: Visionen des Göttlichen: Kunst und Transzendenz in Österreich im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich, 2009, 140.
- 81 Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: The Formative Years*, trans. Nicholas T. Parsons, Palo Alto, 1993, 245.

- 82 Anton Faistauer, *Neue Malerei in Österreich*, Vienna, 1923, 35.
- 83 Faistauer, *Neue Malerei in Österreich*, 35.
- 84 Max Dvořák, 'Über Greco und den Manierismus', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 1, 1921–22, 22–42. This was based on a lecture delivered in 1920 at the Vienna Museum for Art and Industry.
- 85 The modernist reception of El Greco was examined in an exhibition at the Düsseldorf Kunstpalast: Beat Wismer and Michael Scholz-Hänsel, eds, *El Greco und die Moderne*, Düsseldorf, 2012.
- 86 Andreas Narzt and Matthias Boeckl, 'Boeckl und Paris: Zur Geschichte einer Liaison', in Herbert Boeckl, ed. Agnes Husslein-Arco, Vienna, 2009, 149–159.
- 87 Herbert Boeckl, 'Verwandlung und Wandlung', in *Aufforderung zum Mißtrauen: Literatur, Bildende Kunst, Musik in Österreich seit 1945*, ed. Otto Breicha and Gerhard Fritsch, Salzburg, 1967, 223–226; Edwin Lachnit, "'Ausdruck, Leben, Bewegung": Aspekte des zwischenkriegszeitlichen Expressionismus', in *Die Ungewisse Hoffnung: Österreichische Malerei und Graphik zwischen 1918 und 1938*, ed. Christoph Bertsch and Markus Neuwirth, Salzburg and Vienna, 1993, 186.
- 88 Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*, Chicago, 1992.
- 89 Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism*, Los Angeles, 1999. I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer of *Art History* who highlighted this similarity.
- 90 The initial focus of contention was the exhibition by Jean Clair, *Les réalismes 1919–1939* staged at the Pompidou Centre and the Berlin Kunsthalle in 1981. For an overview of the debate it prompted, particularly in France, see Ralph Dekoninck and Joël Roucloux, 'Art History in France: A Conflict of Traditions', in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley, Thierry Lenain, Hubert Locher, Andrea Pinotti, Charlotte Schoell-Glass, and Kitty Zijlmans, Leiden, 2012, 325–329.
- 91 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting', *October*, 16, 1981, 39–68.

Myths of Modernism: Austrian Art after 1918

Matthew Rampley

The development of art in Austria after 1918 remains little explored; the main focus of research continues to be *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Where interwar Austrian modernism is studied at all, interest is mostly limited to the municipal housing sponsored by the Social Democratic council. The main concern of this essay is to examine the reasons for this inconsistency and comparative neglect. It explores the ways in which the historiography of Austrian post-war modernism has been informed by wider historical assumptions, about the role of the First World War as a cultural-political caesura, for instance, or by ambivalence about interwar Austrian history and its slide into fascism, or valorization of the *avant-garde*. A comparison is also drawn with accounts of art in interwar Czechoslovakia, where modernist practices are much celebrated since they have assumed a legitimating function for Czech and Slovak culture in the present.

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