

# The Contribution of Czech Artists and Intellectuals to the Dynamics of the Development of Modern Slovak Art during the First Czechoslovak Republic<sup>1</sup>

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The First Czechoslovak Republic is without a doubt one of the most important periods (if not the most important) for the development of modern Slovak culture and art. Previously, under Hungarian rule, Slovak culture and art had been suffocated and limited; thus, the founding of the Czecho-Slovak state opened up previously unimagined possibilities and dimensions for overall development. It was, however, not only Slovak cultural and artistic actors who played an important role in this process; Czech artists and intellectuals did as well, arriving in Slovakia after the establishment of Czechoslovakia to work in the capital city for the development of modern Slovak culture and art. The Czech contribution to the advancement of Slovak culture in Czechoslovakia is generally most highlighted in the area of education, and in the field of art it is reflected on somewhat less so in this context. Therefore, in the present paper, I want to point out the importance of the Czech contribution and assistance in the development of modern Slovak art during the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic with a representative sample of Czech artists and intellectuals (Alois Kolísek, Jaroslav Jareš, Ludmila Rambouská, Josef Vydra, Leopold Mazáč and Josef Polák). The following criteria were crucial for the selection of the above personages: 1. These people left behind the most visible memory trace in the narrative sources of Slovak artists. 2. Within the scope of the research, these figures showed the most documented interactions with Slovak artists or representatives of modern Slovak culture. The paper is designed in such a way that each of the analyzed people has a separate section with generalized findings presented at the end of the study.

After the founding of Czechoslovakia, the Moravian Catholic priest, theologian, intellectual, politician and Slovakophile **Alois Kolísek** (1868–1931) moved permanently to Bratislava in early February 1919,<sup>2</sup> thus ending his

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<sup>2</sup> *Do památníku dru Aloisu Kolískovi* [On the Memory of Dr. Alois Kolísek] (Prague: Kruh přátel Kolískových, 1930), 43.

more than twenty years of work in Hodonín. His arrival in Bratislava was motivated by several factors, in which his relationship with Slovak culture and art predominated. From the beginnings of the Czecho-Slovak state, he worked as a member of the Czechoslovak People's Party in Slovakia.<sup>3</sup> In his only speech at the Chamber of Deputies of the Revolutionary National Assembly, which he gave on 23 January 1920, Kolísek expressed himself in his typical position as a patron of Slovak artistic and cultural life and appealed for increased subsidies in the state budget for various aspects of artistic life in Slovakia. He first pointed out the need to secure scholarships for Slovak students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.<sup>4</sup>

From his position as a member of the Revolutionary National Assembly, he further highlighted the need for much greater financing of musical life and education in Bratislava, pointing out the predominance of the German and Hungarian elements in this field. He was concerned with securing a counterbalance of Slovak music and musical institutions against the particularly well-organized German musical life in Slovakia's capital. For the literary field, he requested within the Association of Slovak Artists a certain form of financial support from the state for Slovak writers.<sup>5</sup>

Kolísek ranked among the leading figures of cultural life in Bratislava in the first decade of Czechoslovakia's existence. After arriving in Bratislava, he lived in a modest two-room apartment on Kapitulská Street, no. 5.<sup>6</sup> Similarly as in the Hodonín environment, he decorated his room with various rare relics, Slovak embroidery, ceramics and paintings by Slovak painters.<sup>7</sup> Kolísek thus also established the so-called "Slovak room" in Bratislava. We also learn a great deal about the cultural and social functions of Kolísek's apartment from the memoirs of Slovak modernist painter Janko Alexy (1894–1970), who endeavored to create a new national style based on the achievements of modernity. Alexy was among the visitors to Kolísek's apartment, and its furnishings made a romantic impression on him. We also learn from Alexy's memories that it was a two-room apartment. Kolísek lived modestly in only one of the mentioned rooms; the other often served as a refuge for young

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<sup>3</sup> Slovenská národná knižnica – Literárny archív (SNK–LA), o. f. 153 (Alexyovci), sign. 153 AO 6.

<sup>4</sup> Alois Kolísek, "Prejav v poslaneckej snemovni 23. januára 1920" [Speech in the National Assembly, January 23, 1920], Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna, accessed June 6, 2022, <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/110schuz/s110011.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Kolísek, "Prejav v poslaneckej snemovni 23. januára 1920".

<sup>6</sup> AVU SNG, o. f. Jozef Hanula, sign. 2 A 15. Compare: Karel Sommer and Josef Julínek, *Politik a kněz Alois Kolísek* [The Politician and Priest Alois Kolísek] (Prague: ARSCI, 2012), 116–117.

<sup>7</sup> Sommer and Julínek, *Politik a kněz Alois Kolísek*, 116–117.

and talented students who came from poor backgrounds. Alexy tells us that Kolísek's apartment on Kapitulska Street became a place of help for "the young and desperate, arriving for good advice or financial support".<sup>8</sup> In this case, Alexy had in mind rather young and unsuccessful art novices, and he placed himself among them at that time.

Kolísek thus acted as a selfless patron to young and beginning Slovak artists; he was not only interested in the Christian motivation to help the needy, but also support for the development of Slovak art. Aside from providing housing and mediating the contacts needed for professional advancement, he also provided financial assistance and promotion. In this context, Alexy wrote: "But Kolísek also helped any art novice financially; he lent but perhaps never received anything back, and though he found complaints distasteful, he was always willing to help when they asked him for it."<sup>9</sup>

Another visitor to Kolísek's apartment from among Slovak artists, aside from Janko Alexy, was Karol Miloslav Lehotský (1879–1929), a painter with mystical and decadent inclinations, who died in Brno in 1929, and about whom Kolísek published an independent work.<sup>10</sup> Alexy's later memories confirm that even Kolísek's selfless efforts to help Slovak artists were not enough to improve their position in society.<sup>11</sup>

Based on Kolísek's letter to the Slovak painter and restorer Peter Július Kern (1881–1963), dated 11 December 1921, we know that Kolísek was compiling a systematic collection of contemporary Slovak visual art in his apartment, in which he wanted every Slovak artist to be represented.<sup>12</sup> From Kolísek's correspondence with Kern, we also learn that Kolísek was a patron of the young and prematurely deceased fine arts novice Ladislav Treskoň (1900–1923), who studied at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts from 1919 until his untimely death in 1923. A pioneer of post-war social art, Treskoň greatly valued Kolísek, something that is also evident from the legend he used for his drawing of Alois Kolísek.<sup>13</sup> Kolísek's support for young beginning Slovak artists was not only limited to the Bratislava environment, it was also provided to Slovak students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

<sup>8</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Alexyovci, sign. 153 AO 6.

<sup>9</sup> Janko Alexy, "Naši. (Úryvky)," in *Do památníku dru Aloisu Kolískovi* [On the Memory of Alois Kolísek] (Prague: Kruh přátel Kolískových, 1930), 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Do památníku dru Aloisu Kolískovi*, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Alexy, "Naši. (Úryvky)," 124.

<sup>12</sup> AVU SNG, o. f. Peter Július Kern, sign. 13 A 62.

<sup>13</sup> Archív výtvarného umenia Slovenskej národnej galérie [Archive of Fine Arts of the Slovak National Gallery] (AVU SNG), o. f. Peter Július Kern, sign. 13 A 62.

Alois Kolísek also became friends with the Slovak composer and collector of folk songs Miloš Ruppeldt (1881–1943), who after the founding of Czechoslovakia established the Music School for Slovakia in Bratislava, anticipating that it would gradually transform into a conservatory of a similar level as those in Prague and Brno. The paradox in terms of the status of the Music School was that it was private, and the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment was supposed to support it only financially. Miloš Ruppeldt and the members of the board of trustees of the school, which operated on a federal basis, submitted a request for nationalization to the relevant ministry several times. These efforts were also intensively supported by Alois Kolísek, who as a result earned the title of the “Slovak Consul”.<sup>14</sup>

Another form of Kolísek's support for Slovak artists in the 1920s consisted of pilgrimages of the faithful to Rome, where, as a spiritual leader and organizer, he liked to take Slovak artists so that they would have the opportunity to draw inspiration and knowledge from the rich well of Italian visual arts. For the first such Franciscan pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi during the First Republic, which Kolísek organized in 1923, he compiled and published a special work in the form of a memorial book. From this publication, one sees that the respected portraitist Štefan Polkoráb (1896–1951) was the first Slovak painter to take advantage of this pilgrimage to Italy organized by Kolísek.<sup>15</sup> In 1932, Polkoráb became celebrated for his portrait of President T. G. Masaryk at the castle in Topoľčianky. Since the correspondence between Kolísek and Polkoráb has not been preserved, one cannot guess with certainty how long they had known each other, but it is probable that Polkoráb's participation in the pilgrimage in 1923 helped to strengthen their friendship. In this context, it should be mentioned that Polkoráb also painted a portrait of Kolísek in 1928.

In 1926, Alois Kolísek organized a Franciscan pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi, which several Slovak artists took part in: the painters Milan Thomka Mitrovský (1875–1943), Andrej Kováčik (1889–1953) and Janko Alexy, and the writer Tido J. Gašpar (1893–1972).<sup>16</sup> The editor Jur Koza Matejov (1884–1973) also took part in the pilgrimage. Kolísek wanted five Slovak artists to accompany him on this pilgrimage along with ordinary pilgrims, so that they could draw inspiration and stimuli for their artistic work. For the painter Andrej Kováčik, who was in a very problematic financial situation at the time,

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<sup>14</sup> AVU SNG, o. f. Peter Július Kern, sign. 13 A 71.

<sup>15</sup> Alois Kolísek, *Do Ríma, Assisi. Pamätnica slovenskej terciárskej púti 1923* [To Rome, Assisi. Memorial Book to the Slovak Tertiary Pilgrimage 1923] (Bratislava: Serafínsky svet, 1924), 215.

<sup>16</sup> *Do pamätníku dru Aloisu Kolískovi*, 81.

the opportunity to take part in the trip to Italy was a great boost. His wife also made the journey with him.<sup>17</sup> Kováčik at this time was in such dire financial straits that he could not even afford a trip to Turčiansky Sv. Martin for the meeting of the Association of Slovak Artists. Alois Kolísek also helped him significantly in this case.<sup>18</sup>

As is apparent, Kolísek's share in the development of modern Slovak culture and art was multi-faceted. The first level was represented by direct personal contacts and meetings with Slovak artists, which most often occurred in Kolísek's Bratislava apartment, but to a large extent also through assemblies and meetings of various art associations (most often the Association of Slovak Artists), during the organization of exhibitions and art events and last but not least, through visiting artists throughout Slovakia. In the 1920s, Kolísek's apartment became an important place of the intellectual and artistic life of Bratislava. The meetings that took place as part of Franciscan pilgrimages to Rome and Assisi, which Kolísek led and organized, also fall into the category of personal meetings with Slovak artists. The second level comprises his written contacts with Slovak artists through correspondence. This also involves an important form that has wider historical value for historical studies because it allows us to look behind the scenes of the cultural and artistic life of Slovakia during the first decade of existence of the first Czechoslovak Republic. In terms of the professional focus of Slovak artists, Kolísek's contacts with Slovak artists in the given period were the most dynamic with artists and musicians.

The Czech painter **Jaroslav Jareš** (1886–1967), who already had a great deal of experience in organizing the artistic life in Prague as part of the Art Forum, also filled the role as a patron and all-round supporter for Slovak artists during his stay in Bratislava between 1919 and 1930. Jareš was an exceptionally versatile visual artist and intellectual, because along with his profession as a painter, he was also a sculptor, illustrator, scenographer, architect, artistic-industrial designer and publicist. He was also one of the creators of the national flag and coat-of-arms of Czechoslovakia from 1918. After arriving in Bratislava in 1919, he made significant contributions to the development of relations between Czech and Slovak artists. His greatest contribution to the development of modern Slovak art is without a doubt related to initiating the construction of the House of Art (today's Umelka) in Bratislava, where he found support from the well-known Slovak architect Dušan Jurkovič (1868–1947), the lawyer Jaroslav Dvořák (1894–1963) as well as Edvard Šafařík. The House of Art provided Slovak artists their first exhibition spaces built for this purpose.

<sup>17</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Alexyovci, sign. 153 AO 6.

<sup>18</sup> AVU SNG, o. f. Peter Július Kern, sign. 13 A 65; SNK–LA, o. f. 153 (Alexyovci), sign. 153 AO 6.

Jareš also obtained the first functional studios for Slovak artists in Bratislava in the form of four studios in the state building at no. 5, Trnavská Road. The first studio went to Janko Alexy, and after him the sculptor Jozef Pospišil (1897–1976) and the painters Karol Miloslav Lehotský, Ľudovít Fulla (1902–1980) and Mikuláš Galanda (1895–1938) also worked there. The second studio was assigned to the painter Július Koreszka (1895–1958), the third to František Malý (1900–1980) and the fourth to Imrich Weiner-Kráľ (1901–1978). Jareš is also credited with the tasteful furnishing of the interiors of the apartment of Jozef Gregor Tajovský (1874–1940) and Hana Gregorová (1885–1958).<sup>19</sup>

After his arrival in Bratislava, Jareš himself lived in only a modest wooden house on the city's periphery, which at the time was called Nový svet. His wife at that time, the painter and illustrator **Ludmila Rambouská** (1899–1952), was also among the patrons and supporters of Slovak modernist artists. She became well-known due to her renowned caricatures of Slovak modernist writers and artists, which were published in Prague by *Elán*, the most prestigious Slovak art magazine of the time. Rambouská's contribution to the development of modern Slovak culture was most important in this area. Through her caricatures of predominantly modern Slovak artists, she contributed to building their legend and legitimizing Slovak modern art in the eyes of both the Slovak and Czech cultural public. Jaroslav Jareš is also credited with the founding of an art association in Bratislava based on the model of Prague's Umelecká beseda (Art Forum). He was the first, among Slovak and Czech painters in Bratislava, to understand that an art association had to be established here as well, which was eventually founded relatively rapidly in 1921 under the name Umelecká beseda slovenská (Slovak Art Forum). In the Bratislava cafes, Jareš gathered around him productive and influential collaborators (e.g. the architect Dušan Jurkovič, the lawyer Dr. Jaroslav Dvořák and his wife the Slovak writer Zuzka Zguriška, the lawyer Edvard Šafárik).

Jareš also constantly encouraged Slovak modern artists; he pushed back against lethargy and inactivity, and thanks to his coffee house group, succeeded in securing the necessary funds for the construction of the art pavilion Dom umenia (House of Art) on Šafáriková Square. Jareš did not even worry about the large debts that remained after the building was completed. In this context, it is peculiar that Jareš's modern conceived paintings did not find any understanding among the Slovak public, and he did not sell a single painting in Slovakia. Despite the financial setbacks, he continued to paint, even though he had to take a job as a clerk at the Education Department. Despite

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<sup>19</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Alexyovci, sign. 153 AO 6.

the invaluable support he had provided, his years in Bratislava were a time of struggle, of construction problems, of bitterness from the lack of recognition and financial debacles, which ultimately led to the 50-year-old Jareš leaving Bratislava as a ruined and prematurely aged man. His marriage to Ludmila Rambouská also disintegrated in the process. She took a job in Prague at the Slovak publishing house of Leopold Mazáč (1900–1948), which was led by Ján Smrek, and set off on her path as a caricaturist of representatives of Slovak artists in the magazine *Elán*.<sup>20</sup>

The Czech artist, art theoretician and teacher **Josef Vydra** (1884–1959) also left a significant imprint in relation to the development of modern Slovak culture and art. In Slovakia, his name is linked with his lifelong project, which was the School of Arts and Crafts (ŠUR) in Bratislava. This school, whose origins date to 1928, operated for the ten years of its short existence (1928–1939) under the leadership of Josef Vydra, until he, like other Czech teachers, had to leave Slovakia on 1 December 1938. Vydra became a pioneer of modern art education in Slovakia. In his conception of ŠUR, the Bauhaus played an important role as a source of inspiration, specifically its conception, organization and methods of pedagogical work. Vydra was of the opinion that the Bauhaus offered one of the most modern methods at that time for developing the skills of visual perception in line with the current knowledge of modern science.<sup>21</sup>

In this context, it is important to note that the already mentioned Alois Kolísek also stood by the birth of the first public art school in Slovakia in the form of the School of Arts and Crafts. When the founding of this kind of school was being discussed in Bratislava, Kolísek called for the concept of a school that should not only educate for the understanding of art, but also the needs of contemporary life.<sup>22</sup>

It should be stated, however, that Vydra was not concerned with a mere mechanical copying of Bauhaus methods; he adapted his concept to the situation in Slovakia. ŠUR was not a university or a secondary school; it was a master's level of apprentice schools. This was not a direct copy of the Bauhaus,

<sup>20</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Alexyovci, sign. 153 AO 6.

<sup>21</sup> Alena Kavčáková, "Organizátorské a teoretické dílo Josefa Vydry v kontextu umělecké a výtvarné pedagogické avantgardy 20. století," [Organizational and Theoretical Work of Josef Vydra in the Context of Artistic and Fine Arts Teaching of the Avant-Garde of the Twentieth Century] in *Josef Vydra (1884–1959) v kontextu umělecké a výtvarné pedagogické avantgardy 20. století* [Josef Vydra (1884–1959) in the Context of Artistic and Fine Arts Teaching of the Avant-garde of the Twentieth Century], ed. Alena Kavčáková, and Alena Myslivečková (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2010), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Archív mesta Bratislava (AMB), fond Škola umeleckých remesiel (ŠUR), Documents 1928–1939, Minutes from the meeting of ŠUR board of trustees, 25 September 1930.

even though Walter Gropius (1883–1969) inspired Vydra in several directions, including his masterful talent for advertising. Led by Vydra, ŠUR played an important part in the modernization of art, material culture and lifestyle in Slovakia. This is currently among the most attractive topics in the history of modern art culture in Slovakia; therefore, the notion that the “Bratislava Bauhaus” was associated with ŠUR is not surprising. Josef Vydra wanted the ŠUR to raise domestic Slovak production to the international level of modern industrial creation.<sup>23</sup>

In December 1928, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bratislava opened evening courses in drawing and advertising engagement, on the basis of which ŠUR was built. Vydra succeeded in recruiting exceptional artists, such as the painters Ľudovít Fulla and Mikuláš Galanda, to the teaching staff of ŠUR. In the context of Slovak visual arts at the time, Fulla and Galanda represented an avant-garde pair of artists. The painter Janko Alexy also lectured several hours a week as part of the evening courses in the building of the Industrial School.<sup>24</sup> Vydra had already noticed Ľudovít Fulla during his studies at the School of Applied Arts in Prague. In its beginnings, ŠUR's classes were conducted three times a week on the premises of the State Industrial School next to the building of the Agricultural Museum.<sup>25</sup>

If no classes were being taught at ŠUR in the early evening, Ľudovít Fulla used to sit over coffee in the *Múzeum* cafe with the director Vydra. These meetings in the *Múzeum* cafe, which was located right next to the State Industrial School, in the building of the Agricultural Museum, were important in regard to talking over the plans and concepts of the development of ŠUR.<sup>26</sup> Fulla's fellow artist Mikuláš Galanda also began to teach at ŠUR, and before the arrival of his future wife in March 1932, he often spent evenings in the company of the director Josef Vydra. In a letter to Fulla dated 8 March 1932, Galanda mentions how he and Vydra were first at the *Atlon* cinema and had

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<sup>23</sup> Iva Mojžišová, “Josef Vydra medzi utópiou a realitou (Škola umeleckých remesiel v Bratislave 1928–1939),” [Josef Vydra between Utopia and Reality (The School of Arts and Crafts in Bratislava 1928–1939)] in *Josef Vydra (1884–1959) v kontextu umělecké a výtvarně pedagogické avantgardy 20. století*, ed. Alena Kavčáková, and Alena Myslivečková (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2010), 30–31.

<sup>24</sup> Janko Alexy, *Ovocie dozrieva* [The Fruit is Ripening] (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1957), 52.

<sup>25</sup> Radislav Matuščík, *Ľudovít Fulla* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenského fondu výtvarných umení, 1966), 27. The Agricultural Museum was located in the building of today's Slovak National Museum.

<sup>26</sup> Ľudovít Fulla, *Okamihy a vyznania* [Moments and Confessions] (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1983), 161–163.



then moved to a wine bar. The meeting was also of artistic significance, because in addition to conversations about ŠUR matters, they most likely also agreed on the content of the last issue of the *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu* [The Private Letters of Fulla and Galanda], which consisted only of Vydra's article.<sup>27</sup>

Fulla and Galanda had also declared their efforts for artistic independence by publishing their own avant-garde magazine, which was published in 1930–1932 under the name *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*. This was the only avant-garde periodical in Slovakia at that time. The first issue appeared on 28 February 1930 in a self-published edition of 500 unsold copies. The main goal of the magazine was to inform the Slovak public about new painting, their own artistic opinions and their own artistic work, but the Slovak public did not understand Fulla and Galanda's work at all.<sup>28</sup>

Josef Vydra also supported Fulla and Galanda's initiative with an article he published in the last double issue of the *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, which was published on 15 February 1932. In that article, he highlighted the artistic significance of the avant-garde achievements of Fulla and Galanda and introduced his concept of "pure and high art". Vydra set out a clear contrast between high art and folk art, which in terms of artistic expression moves on the level of personal – impersonal, whereby "pure and high art" is, in his view, a product of the city and the extraordinary personality of the artist. In Vydra's view, a true artist refuses to submit to the consumer needs of the broader masses and refuses to paint his pictures for money, because then they would effectively lose their artistry and become mere handicraft products.<sup>29</sup> Josef Vydra understood very well the situation of Fulla and Galanda, in which they found themselves amidst an uncomprehending mass of consumers of predominantly folk art.<sup>30</sup> We can therefore state that the importance of Vydra's help in establishing Fulla and Galanda in the social consciousness was significant.

Josef Vydra also supported professors working at ŠUR during study stays abroad and various activities of transnational importance. He organized a number of exhibitions at the school as well as a lecture series, where several prominent representatives of the European avant-garde (Jan Tschold, László Moholy-Nagy, Karel Teige, Hannes Mayer, Ladislav Sutnar)<sup>31</sup> presented their

<sup>27</sup> AVU SNG, o. f. Ludovít Fulla, sign. 22 B 9.

<sup>28</sup> SNK-LA, o. f. Alexyovci, sign. 153 AH 1.

<sup>29</sup> Josef Vydra, "Priatelja pp. Fulla a Galanda!," *Súkromné listy Fullu a Galandu*, February 15, 1932, 3–4.

<sup>30</sup> This is also confirmed by the memoirs of Ludovít Fulla.

<sup>31</sup> Jan Tschold (1902–1974) – German typographer, book graphic artist, teacher and writer; László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) – Hungarian painter, photographer and teacher at the Bauhaus

work and ideas. Vydra himself primarily taught color harmony and composition at ŠUR. As part of his teaching, he promoted non-manual techniques that at the time were still futuristic and had only been brought to the visual arts in the twentieth century. Vydra's conception of the school was built on the combination of the tradition of folk-art production with functionalist-constructivist language, which gave ŠUR a privileged position in the context of the European avant-garde of the time. Vydra managed to disprove the general hypothesis that avant-garde modernism must principally and always negate tradition.<sup>32</sup> Although his contribution for modern Slovak visual art was focused on his pedagogical activities, his promotion and apology of avant-garde Slovak visual art cannot be ignored.

The name of the Prague publisher **Leopold Mazáč** undoubtedly resonated significantly in Slovak culture during the interwar period. As a publisher, he was an important patron of young Slovak writers in the 1920s and 1930s, when his publishing house had its own Slovak editorial office specializing in publishing Slovak books, particularly from aspiring young authors. Mazáč became synonymous with the success of the young Slovak literature and a well-established brand. He was the first publisher who broke the long-standing myth about the unprofitability of publishing Slovak literature and also initiated a wave of interest in new and older Slovak literary works.<sup>33</sup>

Among Slovak writers, he collaborated directly with the Prague-based Ján Smrek (1898–1982) and Štefan Letz (1900–1960). The Modernist writer Ján Hrušovský (1892–1975) recalls Mazáč as a friendly and helpful young man who had a positive relationship with both young and older Slovak writers. Whenever possible, he met with young writers, particularly if they were in an unfavorable financial position: "Rarely did anyone leave him empty-handed, or better said, with an empty wallet." With his financial support of young, beginning and impoverished writers, Mazáč was not acting strictly out of charitable motives, but approached them in a spirit of business. He even published the works of young radical left-wing authors such as Laco Novomeský (1904–1976), Ján Poničan (1902–1978), Fraňo Kráľ (1903–1955) and Peter Jilemnický (1901–1949).

Within Mazáč's editions of Slovak literature, the priority is the Edition of Young Slovak Authors (EMSA), which published a total of 61 volumes by

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School of Art; Hannes Mayer (1889–1954) – Swiss architect and second director of the Bauhaus in 1928–1930.

<sup>32</sup> Kavčáková, "Organizátorské a teoretické dílo Josefa Vydry v kontextu umělecké a výtvarně pedagogické avantgardy 20. století," 21–22, 26–27.

<sup>33</sup> Monika Kapráliková, "Takmer zabudnutý nakladateľ Leopold Mazáč," [The All But Forgotten Publisher Leopold Mazáč] *Slovenská literatúra* 58, 2011, no. 2, (February 2011): 143–144.

28 authors in the years 1925–1937.<sup>34</sup> Although Matica slovenská dominated the publishing of original Slovak literature, Leopold Mazáč published contemporary works of modernism.<sup>35</sup> Mazáč's authors' fees were also a sensation, as they enabled previously impoverished authors to earn for themselves through their work.<sup>36</sup> Although prior to 1928 Leopold Mazáč was the only Czech publisher offering the original work of Slovak authors, inspired by his example, additional Czech publishers gradually began to realize that publishing Slovak literature need not be automatically unprofitable.<sup>37</sup>

In the scope of publishing Slovak authors, Mazáč insisted on the principle that they should be published in the original Slovak language; he thereby also wanted to strengthen the Czech-Slovak intercultural dialogue in the spirit of the state-building idea. Mazáč not only served to increase the interest in Slovak authors among Czech publishers but also triggered the same process among Slovak publishers and booksellers. A major milestone in this context was the opening of the Slovak book store in the building of Mazáč's publishing house in 1934.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the Slovak book store, the editorial office of the magazine *Elán*, headed by Ján Smrek, was also located in the building, as was a lecture hall for Slovak authors and an exhibition hall for *Elán*, in which they mainly exhibited the work of artists who took part in the graphic processing of Mazáč's books. The Slovak book store, together with the *Elán* lecture hall and exhibition hall, thus finally fulfilled the function of representing modern Slovak culture in Prague.<sup>39</sup>

Leopold Mazáč often traveled to Bratislava to arrange the necessary details with his sales representative Karol Müller. After finishing with all his duties, Mazáč used to then visit Bratislava's wine bars in the afternoon hours. During one meeting in a small wine bar directly under the castle, on Zámocká Street, Mazáč was pleased to hear the guests present – ordinary Bratislavans – passionately discussing Jožo Nižnánský's (1903–1976) novel *Čachtická pani*. On an impulse, he had his publishing house increase the print run of this novel.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The chief editor of the edition was Ján Smrek. EMSA represented the largest interwar edition of new original Slovak work and, in addition to prose, also published poetry and essays.

<sup>35</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Ján Smrek, sign. 181 F 38.

<sup>36</sup> Kapráliková, "Takmer zabudnutý nakladateľ Leopold Mazáč," 148.

<sup>37</sup> The publishing house Družstevní práce became the biggest follower and competitor of Leopold Mazáč in this regard. The Czech publishing houses STAN, Fr. Pine or Melantrich also occasionally published Slovak authors.

<sup>38</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Ján Smrek, sign. 181 F 38.

<sup>39</sup> Kapráliková, "Takmer zabudnutý nakladateľ Leopold Mazáč," 153–154.

<sup>40</sup> SNK–LA, o. f. Alexyovci, sign. 153 AO 6.

Thanks to Mazáč's remarkable managerial skills, several representatives of the young literary generation came to the attention of the wider domestic public.

Czech assistance with the development of modern Slovak culture did not bypass the eastern part of Slovakia either. Košice in the 1920s was a city whose cultural life was comparable to any other European city of the same size. As the cultural center of eastern Czechoslovakia, Košice represented a typical Central European conglomerate of religious confessions and nationalities. A major turning point in this regard was the founding of Czechoslovakia, which brought with it the arrival of Czech officials loyal to the central government in Prague.<sup>41</sup> One of them was the young lawyer and cosmopolitan intellectual **Josef Polák** (1886–1945), whose name is indelibly linked with the establishment of the East Slovak Museum and with the support of the group of artists known as the *Košická moderna* [Košice Modernism]. He also devoted himself to the history of Slovak visual arts as well as promoting Slovak cultural monuments, theaters and libraries. Polák compiled a history of Slovak visual arts in the publication *Výtvarné umění na Slovensku* [The Visual Arts in Slovakia]. Often forgotten about Josef Polák is the fact that he was also a photographer who in the 1920s and 1930s liked to document various events and activities as part of everyday life in eastern Slovakia.

Polák's most important contribution, however, undoubtedly lay in his merits in founding the East Slovak Museum. It was Josef Polák who laid the grounds for the establishment of the East Slovak Museum in Košice. He had visited Košice as early as the beginning of 1919 and had become intensely interested in the museum collections there. Not long after, on 9 March 1919, he was commissioned to run the East Slovak Museum, which continued the activities of the defunct county museum. During his time running the East Slovak Museum, Polák proved to be an excellent administrator and manager, despite not having adequate education to perform such a function. In the 1920s, he intensively built up the museum's collections, despite a variety of obstacles: he did not have, for example, even a director's salary, and always had to apply for state subsidies every time anew and deal with a complex administrative procedure. The East Slovak Museum was specifically a state museum that had, on the one hand, been under the authority of the Ministry of Education and National Education since 1921,<sup>42</sup> but at the same time, the

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<sup>41</sup> Zuzana Bartošová, "Medzivojnové Košice ako centrum umeleckého diania," [Interwar Košice as a Centre of Artistic Happenings] in *Košická moderna a jej presahy* [The Košice Modern and Its Influences], ed. Zuzana Bartošová, and Lena Lešková (Košice: Východoslovenská galéria, 2013), 43.

<sup>42</sup> At that time, there was no separate Ministry of Culture, and this area fell under the authority of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment.

situation from a formal point of view was complicated by the fact that it was located in Slovakia, which had a certain limited form of self-government. In this context, it should be noted that the East Slovak Museum was the first, and for a long time the only, state museum in Czechoslovakia.<sup>43</sup>

Thanks to Josef Polák, a graphics school was also established within the East Slovak Museum and was open to the general public during its existence from 1921–1927. Polák commissioned the painter Eugen Krón (1882–1974), who was one of the founders of Košice modernism, to manage it. Without Polák's work, Košice would not have acquired the status of an important art center in the interwar period, not only in the domestic but also in the European context. Under his leadership, the East Slovak Museum organized around a hundred exhibitions in the 1920s, and through these exhibitions, also presented the current work of personalities and groups focused on modernism and the avant-garde.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

Based on the survey of the examined representative sample, one can conclude that Czech artists and intellectuals who worked in Bratislava in the interwar period were able to create a network of personages that was to a certain extent largely interconnected. They thus left the most significant traces in the Bratislava environment behind them. A similar model could be expected in the Košice environment, but there, based on preserved traces of memory, only Josef Polák showed a more notable response and influence. The fact that Czech artists and intellectuals were concentrated in the two largest Slovak cities (Bratislava and Košice) can be considered a phenomenon that also fits closely into the European modernist tendencies of the time and is not only associated with the administrative importance of these two Slovak cities during that period. The example of the publisher Leopold Mazáč demonstrated that a great deal of work for the development of modern Slovak culture could be done directly from the center of the country – in Prague. Thus, a personal presence in Slovakia was not an essential condition.

One can find the most significant results of Czech artists and intellectuals in the development of modern Slovak art in the field of fine arts and literature. This encompassed a wide range of activities: mainly participation in the crea-

<sup>43</sup> Magda Veselská, *Muž, který si nedal pokoj* [A Man Who Did Not Rest] (Prague: Židovské muzeum, 2005), p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Bartošová, "Medzivojnové Košice ako centrum umeleckého diania," 44, 70.

tion of new institutional frameworks for modern Slovak culture, patronage activities towards Slovak artists, promotion of modern Slovak art and publishing activities. Therefore, it can be stated with complete objectivity that the contribution of Czech artists and intellectuals in the development of modern Slovak art in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic was significant, and the previously mentioned protagonists often performed an irreplaceable acceleration function in this regard.

### Abstract

On the basis of examining a representative sample of Czech artists and intellectuals (Alois Kolísek, Jaroslav Jareš, Ludmila Rambouská, Josef Vydra, Leopold Mazáč and Josef Polák), one can conclude that the contribution of the above-mentioned personalities to the development of modern Slovak art operated synergistically. One can note the most significant results in the development of modern visual arts and modern literature. The contribution of Czech artists and intellectuals in the development of modern Slovak art can be perceived in the following three main levels: 1. Share in the founding of new art institutions, schools and associations (e.g. the House of Art, the Slovak Art Forum, the School of Arts and Crafts, the East Slovak Museum), 2. Broad-spectrum patronage activity towards modern Slovak artists, writers and musicians, 3. Publishing activities stimulating the development and promotion of modern Slovak literature. In this context, the help of Czech artists and intellectuals was shown to have significantly contributed to the dynamics of the development of modern Slovak art during the First Czechoslovak Republic.

**Key words:** Czech artists; Czech intellectuals; Slovakia; modern Slovak art; First Czechoslovak Republic

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