

Na cestě k modernosti: Umělecké sdružení Osma a jeho okruh v letech 1900–1910.

By Nicholas Sawicki. Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2014. 192 pp. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Kč 255.00, paper.

This very readable book is a concise yet detailed history of the artistic group *Osma*, or *Die Acht* (the Eight), widely viewed as the first modernist movement in Prague. Bringing together new archival research and detailed analyses of works and painterly technique, *Na cestě k modernosti's* primary audience is specialists in the field of Czech painting. This is consistent with Nicholas Sawicki's decision to have the book, based on his doctoral dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 2007), come out in Czech translation. Despite its specialized focus, the work will also interest scholars of modernism, as it offers an interesting case study for theorizing the rise of modernism in central Europe.

Sawicki's book begins with a chapter on the teaching methods and culture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, where the members of the Eight met as students in 1904. The second chapter covers the influences that prompted the Eight to break with the academy between 1905 and 1906, including exhibitions of foreign artists in Prague (the French impressionists, Edvard Munch). Using archival materials, correspondence, and memoirs, Sawicki documents the Eight's expulsions from the academy and first travels abroad. The third and fourth chapters cover the Eight's two exhibitions, held in April 1907 and June 1908, followed by the members' decision to join two of the more established artistic societies in Prague: the *Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes* (Mánes Union of Fine Arts) and the *Verein deutscher bildender Künstler in Böhmen* (Association of German Visual Artists in Bohemia). Sawicki's book concludes with the Eight's efforts to introduce their Prague audience to increasingly radical artistic experimentation, which led to a decisive split within *Mánes* in 1911 and the exodus of the younger generation from the society.

A highlight of the book is Sawicki's discussion of the reception of the Eight's first exhibition, featuring works inspired by Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Pierre Bonnard, and Henri Matisse, among others. What is particularly interesting is the unusual fact that the Eight was made up of both Czech- and German-speaking students (7 and 3, respectively) from Christian and Jewish families (8 and 2, respectively). The Eight's multiethnic character made it a unique phenomenon in Prague, where culture was overwhelmingly seen through the prism of national, political competition between Germans and Czechs. This character also appealed to Max Brod, one of the group's most vocal champions. In his optimistic review of the 1907 exhibition, Brod claimed that "in Prague, it's now hard to talk about pure Germans or pure Czechs, instead we can only talk about Praguers" (106). The more common response, however, was that the Eight were too foreign and, for some, too Jewish. In reality, as Sawicki tells us, these new, cosmopolitan "Praguers" were largely from the Bohemian and Moravian provinces. Their early paintings predominantly featured rural scenes and family members; they began to paint Prague only in 1908. The book thus asks us to consider not only the significance of the group's multiethnic makeup but also the trajectory of its members (from the provinces to Prague via Paris and Germany) for the emergence of a modernist movement in the city.

What, we might then ask, bound this diverse group together? Sawicki argues that their *raison d'être* was an effort to create "a space in which artists could openly and freely assert their individual ideas and opinions, without having to adhere to a single artistic style" (11). While the Eight thus differed in their individual artistic development, Sawicki highlights points of commonality, such as the primacy of color as means of expression and the influence of Julius Meier-Graefe's discourse

of a “painterly” approach. In the opening and the conclusion, Sawicki refers to Karel Teige’s assessment of the Eight as a group that broke with academicism but remained “on the margins of public life” (7). Sawicki disputes the latter claim, calling attention to the ties the Eight established between Germany, Paris, and Prague, the exhibitions they organized, and their work within more mainstream artistic institutions. For Sawicki, the Eight’s import derives precisely from their social engagement.

The pre–World War I impressionist and decadent movements in Prague are widely understood to have been more socially oriented than their counterparts in Vienna or Budapest because, even as the Czechs rejected nineteenth-century conceptions of “Czech” art, they embraced modernism in the name of modernizing Czech identity. Sawicki’s welcome contribution both affirms and complicates this narrative, demonstrating that the relationship between nationalism and modernism in Prague was more complex than we might have imagined.

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Jazz in Poland: Improvised Freedom. By Igor Pietraszewski. Trans. Lucyna Stetkiewicz. *Jazz under State Socialism*, vol. 2. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014. 157 pp. Bibliography. Index. Tables. \$42.95, hard bound.

Igor Pietraszewski, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wrocław, has written a concise and valuable history of jazz in Poland from the interwar period to the present. He uses theories from Pierre Bourdieu to trace the processes of social reproduction in the jazz world and the relation of that milieu to political power. A dense first chapter defines Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital, and field and begins to link them to the Polish jazz community. A second chapter offers an overview of the “field of jazz . . . the processes and social changes which shaped the fate of the jazz phenomenon” (35) over the last hundred years. With a particular focus on jazzmen (always rendered as such, and seemingly appropriately so) active from the 1960s through the present, the third chapter explores the musician’s habitus—his “incessant process” of relating to the world (22–23) and “dynamic structure formed throughout one’s individual life” (92). The final chapter describes the contemporary jazz audience through the use of a survey distributed at a 2009 jazz festival in Wrocław. Throughout, the author uses participant observation and especially interviews to provide an overview of the jazz music community.

The book hinges on the Stalinist period 1948–56, when, Pietraszewski writes, jazz emerged in opposition to political power and the “myth” of jazz as the music of rebellion and freedom took root. He argues that this myth informed subsequent history and is still prevalent in the jazz milieu today. But Pietraszewski insufficiently explains why this period is so formative in the worldviews of the jazz community then and now, in light of his frequent references to how memories of the Stalinist-era repressions are exaggerated or incorrect. Furthermore, his description of earlier periods in which jazz faced significant resistance also highlights the discrepancy between memory and fact. Jazz emerged in 1920s Poland in opposition to the prevailing music of the day, and Pietraszewski shows how most of the listening audience as well as institutions like the Polish Musicians Trade Union opposed the playing of jazz. Similarly, he writes of the repression of the jazz world during the Nazi occupation but notes that “jazz music thrived . . . [and] became the most popular accessible form of