

The Institute of Art History and the Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS would like to invite you to a workshop organized as part of the Strategy AV21 research programme The City as a Laboratory of Change:

The Bourgeois Public Discusses Art

Institutions, Networks and Critical Practice in the Czech Lands during the 19th Century

Prague, Academic Conference Centre, 23–24 November 2023

With the emergence of the modern public during the 19th century, the debate around art in Central Europe began to branch out from the narrower milieu of the elites to the public urban space (Reinhart Koselleck, Jürgen Habermas). Here, against the backdrop of media and institutional transformations, the debate around art became one of the catalysts of public self-identification, as well as participating in the creation of the modern national community. Artistic operations, including criticism and the promotion, transfer and exchange of artworks, tended towards the nationalisation and autonomisation of literature and art (Pierre Bourdieu). This process can be seen as the birth of a modern geography of art based on centres defined by intense artistic operations, symbolic “commercial exchange”, and competition between each other and between regions deemed at that time to be artistic peripheries (Pascale Casanova). The implications of a geography of art stratified in this way for the subsequent self-conception of individual communities can be confronted with the critique of a hierarchically oriented art history (Piotr Piotrowski), as well as with alternative considerations regarding the cohesion of a community built on the basis of cultivation and the sharing of values and emotions (Barbara H. Rosenwein, Cristian Nae).



The aim of the conference is to explore, taking the example of the Czech lands and in confrontation with the broader European context, the formation of public or semi-public spaces for discussions about art (the museum, gallery, exhibition hall, shop premises, salon, theatre foyer, concert hall, club and association) and the corresponding media scene in communication networks (criticism, translation, exhibiting, promotion, and magazine exchanges and polemics). We will trace their relationship to the development of national literature and art, in other words their autonomisation as a precondition for the gradual articulation of modernist trends in art. We will also examine the development of ideas regarding the artwork, its specific “politics” in conflict with both traditional ideas of the “positive” impact of art as well as with the basic emphasis placed on its imperfection by critics (Steffen Martus). We will touch upon the question of what strategies were generated by the urban environment, its media and art institutions, and how these strategies (e.g. mechanisms of competition by means of periodicals or exhibition activities) were manifest in the construction of modern communities. Our aim is not only to reflect on the historical and political context of the diversification described, but also to address critically its consequences, which can still be observed today in various forms of competition, comparison and exclusion.

We will pay special attention to the following spheres:

- the urban space of the debate around art in the Czech lands, its actors and specific features, and communication networks within local and European contexts;
- public versus private in the art debate and mechanisms of (self)censorship;
- the institutions and media of the bourgeois public from the perspective of a discussion of different art forms;
- the languages of the debate around art in the Czech lands, their regional and transnational contexts and forms of intercultural transfers;
- strategies of promotion, competition or cooperation between individuals, communities and centres, including “ideological” and not firmly institutionally organised associations

Please send your proposals for papers along with an annotation of up to 900 characters to:

dobias@ucl.cas.cz and machalikova@udu.cas.cz by **30 June 2023**. You will be notified of the selection of papers during July 2023. Final contributions should not exceed 20 minutes in length. The conference will be a two-day event with international participation. The languages will be English and Czech. We plan to publish the selected and subsequently edited papers in printed form.

The conference is taking place with the financial support of the Strategy AV21 research programme The City as a Laboratory of Change and the GAČR grant project Literary Criticism in the Czech Lands at the Time of the Formation of National Canons (1806–1858) (GA ČR 23-05437S).