

**CZECH**  
**CONTEMPORARY**  
**ART GUIDE**





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## INTRODUCTION

This Guide to Contemporary Czech Art is the latest in a series of publications devoted to different aspects of Czech culture. Both the concept and contents of this book are the result of the collaboration of its five-member editorial board made up of Lucie Drdová, Edith Jeřábková, Pavlína Morganová, Jan Skřivánek and Silvie Šeborová, who between them cover the roles of art historian, theoretician, curator, gallerist and editor.

The backbone of the guide is a historical survey of the development of Czech art from 1900 to the present day, along with profiles of 40 artists. The illustrations included are intended to illuminate aspects of the text and offer a condensed understanding of the development of Czech art. The guide also lists the most important institutions and provides links to museums and galleries, theoreticians and curators, media, art schools, prizes and a bibliography. Individual entries include a short commentary and a description of the infrastructure and historical development of the sphere in question.

The breadth, variety and potential of the Czech art scene exceed the scope of this publication. Please regard this guide as a primer pointing the way forward to further knowledge and appreciation. The reproductions, lists of institutions and artists' profiles are an invitation to familiarise yourself in greater depth with Czech art, either in the Czech Republic or abroad, where older and now contemporary generations of artists are being displayed more and more often and becoming a fixture of many foreign collections, museums and galleries.

## ABOUT THE CZECH REPUBLIC

### The CR in numbers

The Czech Republic is a landlocked country with a surface area of 78,865 m<sup>2</sup> lying in the centre of Europe. The country borders Poland, Germany, Austria and Slovakia, and is currently divided into 14 regions. Since 2004 the CR has been a member of the EU. At the end of 2011 there were 10.5 million people living in the CR, broken down by age as follows: 1,541,000 aged 0-14; 7,263,000 aged 15-64; 1,701,000 aged 65+. Approximately 15% of the population has a university education and the proportion is growing. The capital city is Prague with a population of approximately 1,241,000. In 2011 GDP per capita was CZK 365,961 (CZK/EUR = 25.1) and inflation was 1.9%. In 2012 the country had a flat individual income tax rate of 15% and a corporate tax rate of 19%. Pension and investment funds pay 5% corporate tax. In 1992 the corporate tax rate was 45% as compared to the present rate of 19%. The minimum wage in 2010 was CZK 8,000 and the average monthly wage was CZK 24,436. This figure was CZK 22,233 in the cultural sector. The current unemployment rate is approximately 8.6%.

### History in brief

The history of the Czech state goes back to the 9th century (Greater Moravia) and the 10th century (the first Bohemian State). Historically, the periods of greatest political and cultural influence were in the 13th and 14th centuries (the last Premyslids, Charles IV) and in the 16th century (Rudolf II). In 1526 the Habsburg dynasty ascended to the Czech throne and retained it thereafter, incorporating the land into the Habsburg Empire. In the late 18th century the first stirrings began of the Czech National Revival, an attempt to gain political power through parties representing the ethnic Czech population. In 1918, after the First World War, centuries as provinces of the Habsburg Empire (from 1620) ended when Bohemia and Moravia joined with Slovakia to form Czechoslovakia, an independent nation state. Between the two world

wars Czechoslovakia was a democratic state with a highly developed economy. In September 1938 Czechoslovakia was forced to accept the Munich Agreement. On 14 March 1939 Slovakia declared independence, and the next day the German army took control of the remaining territory under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The communist period started in 1948. The country became a totalitarian state and part of the Soviet bloc. Civil society structures were destroyed. The Velvet Revolution took place on 17 November 1989 and Czechoslovakia changed its political regime. Václav Havel became president and later was the first president of the new Czech state, when in 1993 the country was peacefully divided into two independent states: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Czech Republic began joining Western European political structures. In 1999 it became a member of NATO and in 2004 it joined the European Union and signed the Schengen Agreement.

### Cultural sector

The central body of the public administration in the field of culture is the Ministry of Culture, which supports the arts and cultural activities and looks after the cultural heritage. It oversees 30 state-managed organisations and one benevolent organisation. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the management of fund finances. However, in 2009, for example, public expenditure on culture as a share of GDP was only 0.74%. The regional and local authorities also play a role in cultural policy. Culture is included in the Development Programmes of all 14 regions. Cultural policy is of course also shaped by civil society and initiatives that have emerged over time in the Czech Republic. Non-profit organisations play a very important role. Since 1989 these have taken the form of civil associations, not-for-profit companies, endowment funds, and religious organisations involved in the provision of educational and cultural services. The majority of these are civil associations. In 1996 Forum 2000 was founded in Prague as a joint

initiative of the Czech President Václav Havel, the Japanese philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, and the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel. Since 2000 the Forum 2000 Foundation has been supporting the international NGO Market.

Since 2004 in Prague especially several initiatives have arisen in ad hoc response to critical situations in the sphere of culture brought on by cuts in funding, the ignorance of officials, corruption, failure to adhere to binding concepts approved by the bodies of representative democracy, and a lack of transparency in the policy and distribution of funding. Another problem is the lack of communication with the professional community. One of the boldest recent initiatives is the informal For a Cultural Czech Republic. This arose in March 2009 in direct response to drastic financial cuts in the sphere of culture.

## ABOUT THE ARTS INSTITUTE

The Institute was founded as an autonomous department of the Theatre Institute in 2005. Its mission is to develop and raise the social prestige of the arts. The Arts Institute supports the exchange of information and experience among various art disciplines, offers information and consultancy services, organises educational activities, and presents and promotes Czech art abroad.

Provides information and consultancy services regarding the possibility of financial support for artistic and cultural projects from Czech and foreign sources (with the emphasis on European Union resources).

The institute runs the Artists in Residency Programme, which coordinates reciprocal residencies for artists, and a residency programme in the Egon Schiele Art Centre in Český Krumlov for young artists working in the Czech Republic.

It also works on projects from the field of cultural policy, e.g. The Concept for More Efficient Support for the Arts 2007–2013 (2006), An Input Analysis the Cultural Sector (2008), Study of the State, Structure, Conditions and Financing of Arts in the Czech Republic (2011), The Social-Economic Potential of the Cultural and Creative Industries in the Czech Republic (2011) and Czech Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping (2011). The institute organises educational activities in the form of seminars and publications, especially in the field of arts management and cultural policy. It promotes and presents Czech art abroad.

### THE ARTS AND THEATRE INSTITUTE RUNS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WEBSITES:

**culturenet.cz** offers up-to-date information regarding culture and the arts, provides information about grants and job opportunities in the field of culture, holds a database on cultural policy materials and the possibility of financial support for projects, and runs a Czech-English database of cultural stakeholders.

**czechmusic.org** provides information about people, organisations and musical life in the Czech Republic in both Czech and English.

**czechlit.cz** promotes Czech literature abroad and in the Czech Republic. It provides information on contemporary Czech authors and their works.

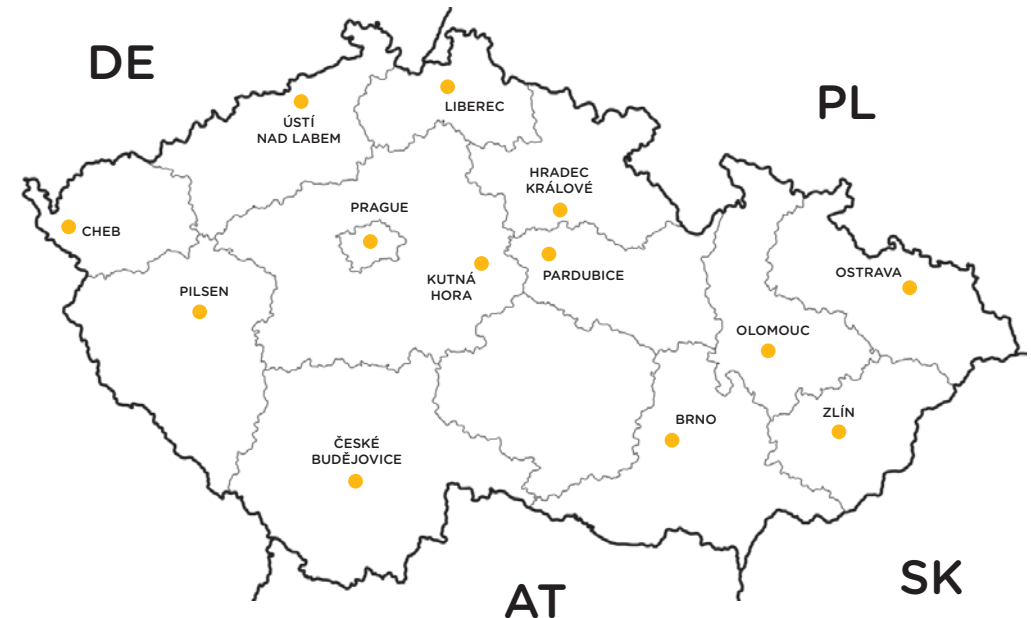
**czechdance.info** promotes Czech dance on an international level. The portal contains a calendar of events, a database of all active bodies covering all genres, and publishes documents relating to the situation on the Czech dance scene.

**theatre.cz** offers news translated into English, the Czech Theatre Today newsletter published three times a year, a virtual study of ATI's materials accessible online, a commentary on Czech theatre production, and facts about Czech theatre.

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## CZECH ART OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES



[1] A view of the exhibition of 20th and 21st century Czech art at Veletržní Palace, the National Gallery, photo © 2013 National Gallery in Prague

### 1900–64

At the beginning of the 20th century the Czech lands were part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. The largest Czech cities, such as Prague and Brno, were simply small islands of culture on the map of a multinational realm covering European territory from the former Yugoslavia, via Austria and Hungary, the Czech lands and Slovakia, to Northern Poland and Ukraine. Thanks to its richly diverse history, its rise to prominence in medieval times under the government of Charles IV, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Hussite protestant revolt, and its subsequent flowering during the baroque period, Prague was always an important cultural centre at the heart of Europe. In 1799 the Academy of Fine Arts was founded in Prague, which at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries played host to many Czech and German artists belonging to a variety of associations. One of the most important of these was the Mánes Union of Fine Arts, which systematically ensured that the Czech art scene maintained its links with the outside world. The Union organised an exhibition in Prague of the work of August Rodin in 1902 and of Edvard Munch in 1905. The first of these exhibitions provided an important stimulus for the development of modern Czech sculpture, while the second was to inspire Czech painters.

At the start of the century Czech culture was inextricably bound up with Vienna, the capital of the Habsburg Empire. However, as far as fine art was concerned perhaps the most important relationship was between Prague and Paris. Many Czech artists looked to the energy of modern French art in an attempt to overcome the academicism, naturalism and descriptive historicism of the 19th century still prevalent at that time. As well as en plein air painting and illusory realism, impressionism and styles associated with the broad current of secessionism featured large at the turn of the century. The Czech painter Alfons Mucha was making a name for himself in Paris, and his work became one of the outstanding examples of international Art Nouveau. Paris was also home to František Kupka, who became one of the pioneers of abstraction around 1910. In 1912 his monumental, radically abstract canvas *Amorfa - Dvojbarevná fuga / Amorpha. Fugue in Two Colours* (1910–1912) was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne, Paris, and can be seen today at the National Gallery in Prague [1].

### Founders of modern Czech art

The exciting transformation of traditional art into what we think of as modern art only took place on the Czech scene in the first decade of the 20th century. The exhibition of Edvard Munch provided the impulse for the birth of Czech expressionism. Young artists of the up-and-coming generation, such as Emil Filla and Bohumil Kubišta, were awestruck by Munch's expressiveness, the simplification and distortion of form, and the psychological impact of colours. In 1908 they formed the group *Osma / Eight* and exhibited what were shocking paintings within the Prague context of the time. However, the interest of this founding generation very quickly turned toward Cubism. In 1910 Bohumil Kubišta encountered the Cubist paintings of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque when helping to organise an exhibition of modern French art for the Mánes Gallery. In paintings such as *Zátiší s nálevkou / Still Life with Funnel* (1910) he combined an expressionist style with Cubist forms in an unusual way, thus anticipating the shift in the founding generation of modern Czech art toward Cubism. As well as Bohumil Kubišta we find the best examples of Czech Cubist-expressionism in the work of the sculptor Otto Gutfreund. His *Úzkost/Anxiety* (1911), which depicts a girl wearing an expression of despair and shrouded in drapery featuring noticeably Cubist pleats, is perhaps the best example of this short phase, and evokes the feeling of insecurity prevalent at that time during the lead-up to the First World War. The spirituality characteristic of this period is also to be found in the work of the second symbolist generation, especially in those artists belonging to the group *Sursum*. It was in this group that the highly original graphic designer and mystic Josef Váchal encountered Jan Zrzavý, an equally distinctive artist. However, the most important coalition at this time was the Group of Fine Artists, which included *Osma* and other young progressive painters, sculptors and architects with an inclination toward Cubism. Within a few short years these developed French Cubism into a universal style. Czech Cubism was witness not only to the creation of unique paintings and sculptures, but architectural projects and applied art. In autumn 1912 both groups, the Group of Fine Artists and *Sursum*, held independent exhibitions at the Municipal House in Prague. The Municipal House was built as a multicultural centre serving the Czech population of Prague. If we wander through its dazzling Art Nouveau and historicising interiors these days it is clear that the founding generation of Czech modern artists was working against public, mostly conservative taste. The chasm between the traditional and

the modern is clearly visible if we compare the Municipal House with the Cubist architecture of the House of the Black Madonna, built by Josef Gočár, a member of the Group of Fine Artists, only a few years after the Municipal Building was opened and in the same location. The impact that Cubism had on the Czech scene was also due to the influence of the art historian and collector Vincenc Kramář, who in the early years of the 20th century had the prescience to buy up works by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. His activities led to the creation of a unique collection of modern French art within the region of Central Europe and later to the National Gallery in Prague itself.

### The interwar avant-garde

The First World War was one of the most extensive military conflicts in human history. Among other things it led to the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the birth of an independent Czechoslovakia. As a consequence, despite the devastating effects of the conflict and subsequent economic crisis, the period between the First and Second World Wars saw Czech culture and national pride flourish. In the immediate post-war years there was a clear move away from radical pre-war directions such as Cubism and expressionism. Czech fine art reacted to the trauma of the war by returning to realist, albeit modern images. Artists took a renewed interest in social issues and humanism predominates overall. In terms of subject matter priority is given to familiar themes such as family, work and landscape. Formally speaking we find naive primitivism, magic realism and neo-classicism. The shocking change in the post-war approach to art



[2] Otto Gutfreund – Cubist Bust, 1912–13, bronze, 65 × 50 cm, photo © 2013 National Gallery in Prague

is best documented by the transformation in the work of the sculptor Otto Gutfreund [2]. Prior to the outbreak of war, in works such as *Kubistické poprsí / Cubist Bust* (1912–13), Gutfreund had drawn on the most radical Cubist forms. During the war, while imprisoned as a member of the Foreign Legion in France after demobilisation, he fashioned the Cubist *Ležící žena / Reclining Woman* (1916) from a piece of wood. However, after his return he began working in a traditional spirit using traditional materials. For instance, he cast the naively primitivising group sculptures *Obchod / Business* and *Průmysl / Industry* (1923) from coloured plaster. A sense of continuity with pre-war avant-garde energies is basically to be found only in the work of representatives of the group *Tvrdošijní / Stubborn*, comprising adherents of a moderate Cubism such as Josef Čapek, Václav Špála and Jan Zrzavý.

The renewed development of the avant-garde only takes place at the beginning of the 1920s. A new generation of fine artists and writers demanded to make their voices heard within the framework of the association *Devětsil / Butterbur*. Over a few short years this became a recognised avant-garde organisation with links to the international avant-garde network, whose members worked intensively on finding contemporary forms of expression. A key role was played by poets such as Josef Seifert and Vítězslav Nezval, along with the universal figure of Karel Teige. Notable members of *Devětsil* included Adolf Hoffmeister, František Muzika, Toyen and Jindřich Štyrský. The first phase of the movement's output is strongly influenced by poetism, as well as an admiration for the Russian revolution and proletariat. Members of *Devětsil* had a keen interest in everything new and closely followed developments in the spheres of technology, photography and film, architecture and fine art. They admired constructivism and Dadaism and forged links with European avant-garde groups and schools. The architectural section of *Devětsil*, at the centre of which was the Prague "purist four" comprising Jaroslav Frágnér, Karel Honzík, Vít Obrtel and Evžen Linhart, later formed the core of Czech functionalism.

A key figure in *Devětsil* was Karel Teige, not only as its main theoretician and editor of the magazines published by the group, but also a talented typographer. Teige published essays on architecture, fine art and modern culture in general. In one essay he announced the end of the traditional picture and called for image and text to be combined in visual poetry. Visual poems mostly took the form of collages combining photography, reduced let-

tering, fragments of reality and painted elements. *Devětsil* believed in "poetry for all the senses", an allusion to the original meaning of the Greek word *poesis*, i.e. creativity in the widest sense of the word. The concept is most eloquently captured by the visual poem *Abeceda / Alphabet* (1926) by Vítězslav Nezval [3], created using the individual letters of the alphabet and then typographically modified by Teige. The typography includes photographs of interpretations of individual letters by the dancer and choreographer Milča Mayerová.



[3] Karel Teige - Typography for the poem *Alphabet* by Vítězslav Nezval, 1926, photo © 2013 Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

The level of Czech interwar typography was also given a boost by the publishing house *Družstevní práce / Work Cooperative*, whose aim was to provide its members with affordable, good quality literary and graphic books. The typographic style was largely created by Josef Sutnar. Later on a shop called *Krásná jizba / Beautiful Room* was opened as part of the publishing house, which sold artworks and interior accessories, as well as books. The cooperative had a broad membership base and combined aesthetic values and top quality design with a focus on social issues. It continued to flourish until World War Two, though the association *Devětsil* basically collapsed at the end of the 1920s. A host of interesting personalities were active on the Czech art scene around this time. In this respect mention should be

made of the sculptor Zdeněk Pešánek, who from the 1920s onwards was involved in illuminated kinetic art. In 1930 a work by Pešánek in the form of a sculpture combining light, colour and movement was installed on the Edison transformer station not far from the Main Train Station in Prague. During the 1930s the first kinetic sculpture in the world



[4] Zdeněk Pešánek - *Female Torso*, 1936, neon - glass - Plexiglas - artificial stone - wood - wires, 140 × 64 × 39, photo © 2013 National Gallery in Prague

adorned the centre of Prague with its changing light. Many of Pešánek's designs, such as *Pomník letců / Monument to Pilots* (1926), which even contained an audio element, have not survived. The illuminated kinetic sculpture *Ženské torso / Female Torso* (1936) [4] from the *Fontána lázeňství / Spa Fountain*, created for the World Exhibition of Art and Technology in Paris in 1937, can be seen at the National Gallery in Prague. The sculpture includes coloured light bulbs, neon lights and electrical installations allowing it to be gradually illuminated.

At the beginning of the 1930s the Czech art scene moved in the direction of surrealism. In 1934 Vítězslav Nezval founded the group of Czechoslovak surrealists, which brought together the poets Konstantin Biebel and Jindřich Heisler, the theoreticians Karel Teige and Bohuslav Brouk, and above

all the painters Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen and the sculptor Vincenc Makovský. This group had been especially influenced by the second manifesto by André Breton from 1929 and had close links to French surrealists. However, many other artists were interested in surrealism during the 30s, such as Josef Šíma, Zdeněk Rykr and František Janoušek. Avant-garde photographers like Jaromír Funke fell under the surrealist spell, while Karel Teige and Jindřich Štyrský worked with surrealist photographic collages. Surrealism as the last universal avant-garde movement prior to World War Two put down deep roots in the Czech art scene.

### CZECH ART UNDER THE FASCIST GOVERNMENT

Soon after the Munich Agreement was signed in 1938, which established the right of Nazi Germany to the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, the rest of the country became part of the Third Reich in the form of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Though spared the worst of the fighting, Czechoslovakia languished under Nazi despotism and censorship. Like other modern forms of art, surrealism was deemed *entartete kunst* (degenerate art). Nevertheless, it survived below the radar of official Protectorate culture and the young generation of artists regarded it as their natural base. The group Ra, made up of poets and artists such as Josef Istler, Václav Tikal and Václav Zykmond, openly espoused it, though the group antedated its anthologies and activities during the war as pre-war for understandable reasons. A basis in surrealism can be found in the key figures of Group 42, František Hudeček and František Gross. Alongside the artists Kamil Lhoták, Jan Kotík, Stanislav Zívr and Jan Smetana, they attempted to preserve the achievements of pre-war modernism. The group's programme was set forth in an essay by Jindřich Chaloupecký entitled *Svět, v němž žijeme / The World in Which We Live*, which expressed the interest of Group 42 in modern life, albeit under the conditions of wartime insecurity. Members of the group depicted the modern city and its peripheries in their paintings.

Prague was liberated on 9 May 1945, one day after the official end of World War Two. It was already within the zone of Soviet influence, and so the American army was forced to halt at Pilsen in West Bohemia. The brief period in the aftermath of the war that saw the reunification of the Czech lands and Slovakia, split up during the war, proved to be a false promise of the renewal of democracy. A left-leaning political orientation coupled with



gratitude to the Soviet Union, whose Red Army had liberated Prague, led to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia winning the elections in 1946. Under pressure from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia withdrew from the conference on the Marshall Plan and to the amazement of the majority of the population a communist putsch took place in February 1948. All attempts to pick up the threads of the inter-war avant-garde and restore a multi-layered democratic art scene, with its associations and magazines, were vigorously suppressed. The original hopes of many and their subsequent disillusionment were summed up in 1987 by Jindřich Chalupecký, one of the key theoreticians of the unofficial post-war scene: "We were socialists, and given the choice of East or West we chose East. Not without misgivings. But we believed that the socialist system would spread to Western Europe and that with this behind us we could try to find a conception of society different to the Soviet one. Our attempt to defend the original idea quickly foundered. We had placed our hopes in the great liberation of human initiatives. Instead of that, professional politicians presented socialism to us as conceptual and artistic uniformity. Some adapted, while others could not. It was a brutal awakening from a dogmatic doze, but it was beneficial."

### Art under communism

In April 1948 the National Culture Congress was held, at which the new Czechoslovak cultural policy was drawn up. All existing arts associations and groups were disbanded and a single Union of Czechoslovak Fine Artists established. The creation of any groups both within and without the Union was officially banned until 1956. Membership of the Union was the only way to lead an active artistic life. Socialist realism was declared the only officially sanctioned artistic style. Culture was to be fully under the control and at the service of the communist regime. Contact with centres of art around the world was inevitably lost as artists were forbidden to travel or engage in a confrontation of ideas. The dogma of socialist realism was too narrow for the Czech, interwar avant-garde influenced culture, and so many artists sought refuge in the seclusion of their studios, in the safety of circles of friends with shared ideas. It was here that what we call the unofficial scene began to emerge. However, this did not involve radically anti-totalitarian art, but rather oases of freedom within the desert of totalitarian cultural dominance.

During the 1950s the communist regime experienced rapid development and many political

U-turns. Immediately after the Czechoslovak coup d'état (Victorious February) in 1948, industry was nationalised, agriculture collectivised, and a centrally planned economy installed. Klement Gottwald, leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, became president. Show trials were conducted of opponents of the regime and opposing forces within the party. These Stalinist methods were confirmed by the huge monument to General Stalin erected in 1955 above Prague. The death of Stalin in 1953, followed by the denunciation of the cult of personality at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, led to a certain thaw in the Soviet zones of influence. However, this was a very slow, complex process, well illustrated by the fate of the Stalin monument. At the turn of the 1950s and 60s the fifteen-metre high statue of the mass murderer accompanied by a granite crowd of Czechoslovak and Soviet workers and peasants still towered above Prague. The Czechoslovak communist regime put off resolving this paradoxical situation. It was only in 1961, when Stalin's embalmed body was removed from its mausoleum in Moscow, that a special commission was set up to sort things out. The commission considered replacing the central figure of Stalin with another personality, but in the end a decision was taken to demolish the monument completely. To this day there remains a fifteen-metre high socle and architectural stairwell leading to the top of Letná Hill. Now, at the start of the 21st century, this empty site on a hill in the centre of Prague stands as a reminder of the complex history of the Central European region and the traumas experienced.

### The unofficial scene in the 1950s

During the 1950s the continuity of artistic activity was maintained only within small, inward-looking circles. One of these was the post-surrealist circle surrounding Karel Teige, which included Václav Tikal, Josef Istler, Vratislav Effenberger, Libor Fára, Jan Kotík, and Mikuláš and Emila Medek. Unable to publish its work publicly the circle released the samizdat anthologies *Znamení zvěrokruhu / Signs of the Zodiac*. These typewritten anthologies were illustrated and signed by members of the circle. After the death of Karel Teige in 1951 the circle split up, though its members continued to play an important role on the Czech unofficial scene. Vratislav Effenberger kept the spirit of surrealism alive and the painters Jan Kotík, Josef Istler and Mikuláš Medek moved, each in his own way, in the direction of abstraction, which was current on the Czech scene at the turn of the 1950s and 60s. Other artists worked on a more solitary basis,



[5] Vladimír Boudník - Structural Graphics, 1965 II, 155 x 260 mm, from the collection of the Ztichlá klika Gallery

Vladimír Boudník [5] being one such. This highly original graphic designer, sensitive artist, and supporter of the proletariat believed that everyone was born with imagination and creativity and had it in them to be an artist. During the 50s he organised more than a hundred events in the streets of Prague, at which he explained and demonstrated the principles of Explosionalism to any interested passers-by on his easel in front of peeling walls. In his Explosionalist manifestos Boudník proclaimed the necessity of freeing oneself from traditional ideas about art. Even though he was primarily concerned with the aesthetic initiative of every individual and promoting his own creative ideas, viewed through the prism of the development of action art in the 60s it is clear that these events represented the first happenings. However, at that time it was Boudník's graphic work that resonated more powerfully. In 1960 a group of young artists interested in abstraction took him as their model. Along with Boudník himself they organised two private exhibitions entitled *Confrontations*, at which they introduced work revealing overtones of structural abstraction, i.e. what became known as Czech Art Informel. This was a style that could not be exhibited on the official scene, and thus can be seen as the most authentic reaction to the

situation at that time. Young artists and sculptors such as Jan Koblasa, Zdeněk Beran, Zbyšek Sion, Aleš Veselý and Čestmír Janošek created dark, wilfully non-aesthetic structures that took the form of painted canvases, objects and reliefs. These artists admired Vladimír Boudník's graphics, in which he used all kinds of non-artistic techniques, materials and tools. He would press metallic objects and different materials onto a graphic matrix, which were then printed as a monotype. He processed panels using a hammer or other tools that he had used as a toolmaker at the factory where he worked during the 50s.

At the turn of the 1950s and 60s, after a decade of stale, figural, socialist realism, structural abstraction became embedded in the Czech unofficial art scene. As well as the circle around the private *Confrontations*, other personalities soon appeared who developed abstraction in secret. Václav Boštík leaps to mind, as well as many other young artists who longed to try out this liberating way of working for themselves, such as Zbyněk Sekal, Jiří Balcar and Hugo Demartini. After experimenting with surrealist painting and despite a strong figural phase during the 50s, Mikuláš Medek also moved toward structural abstraction at the turn of the 50s and 60s. In 1964 Exhibition D was held in the New Hall Gallery in Prague, at which the key figures of Czech abstraction at that time were officially shown (e.g. Mikuláš Medek, Jan Koblasa, Václav Boudník, Jiří Valenta, Aleš Veselý, Robert Piesen, Jiří Balcar and Čestmír Janošek). The exhibition provides eloquent witness to the paradox of that time. Even though abstraction was at its zenith on the unofficial scene, this was the first time in many years that it was possible to see it in Prague at an officially sanctioned exhibition. Crowds of largely unprepared and often shocked visitors flowed through the gallery. The more relaxed atmosphere on the Czech scene was clear, though it remained constrained by censorship to an extent. The exhibition catalogue was destroyed, as was the custom during the entire period of the totalitarian regime with books that the censor subsequently deemed inappropriate for the masses. Nevertheless, Exhibition D indicated that significant changes were taking place around the middle of the 1960s on the Czech art scene.

### 1964-89

#### Czech Art of the 1960s

Though 1964 represents a kind of milestone in Czech post-war culture, it was not a turning point

in any wider historical sense. If we were looking for such a political turning point, we would have to go back, for instance, to 1956, when the cult of personality surrounding Stalin was denounced, or forward to 1968, when the hopes induced by reforms being made to Czech socialism were violently dashed. The year 1964 stands in the middle of the liberalisation process, when the harshest totalitarian practices of the 1950s were gradually being transformed into the relatively freely functioning culture of the second half of the 60s.

For Czechoslovakia the sixties represented a time of reform and the liberalisation of society. From the end of the fifties the establishment of creative groups within the framework of the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists had been tolerated. The up-and-coming generation of artists was first to react, forming the groups Máj, Trasa and UB 12. Their members had attended art school after the Second World War and, despite their strict socialist education, yearned for the restoration of a modern form of artistic expression. Isolated from Western art, they attempted to distance themselves from official Czechoslovak culture and to reconnect with the heritage of the wider avant-garde. Though their work from the end of the 1950s and start of the 60s might appear tame in comparison with what was going on in the rest of the world, within a Czech context it represented a firm foundation for the development of the oppositional creative opinion of the 1960s and 70s. A strong generation came into being, which included Adriena Šimotová, Karel Malich, Václav Boštík, Stanislav Kolíbal, and Květa and Jitka Válová, nowadays regarded as leading representatives of Czech post-war art.

The development of creative groups led to the formation of an oppositional force, the embodiment of which, the Block of Creative Groups, managed to push through changes to the way the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists operated at its congress of 1964. The gradual liberalisation of society went hand in hand with the liberalisation and democratisation of culture. Against the wishes of politicians, highly regarded personalities from the world of culture became leaders of the Union for the first time since 1948. It now became possible for non-members of the Union to register as professional artists with the Czech Fund of Creative Artists, which allowed many hitherto politically unacceptable artists to operate officially on the Czech art scene. Despite ongoing albeit very moderate censorship, from 1964 to 1968 the Union permitted a wide range of exhibitions to be held. It transferred the administration of the programme

of individual galleries to selected exhibition commissions. The Václav Špála Gallery in Prague was a beneficiary of this policy, and during the second half of the 60s under the leadership of Jindřich Chaloupecký mounted an exciting programme that included exhibitions by Marcel Duchamp, the Gutai Group, as well as key figures of the Czech art scene such as Jiří Kolář, Běla Kolářová, Mikuláš Medek, Libor Fára, Zbyněk Sekal, Jitka and Květa Válová, Jiří Balcar, Adriena Šimotová, Jan Kubiček and Zorka Ságlová.

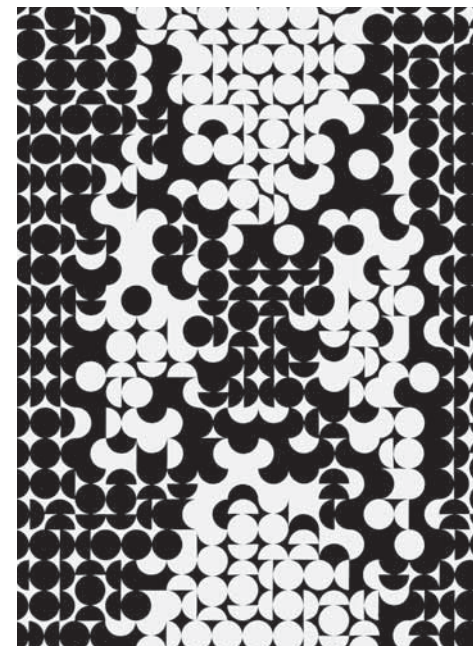
By midway through the 60s the Czech art scene was highly stratified. Post-surrealist, Art-Informel oriented abstraction gradually branched out into broadly conceived "imaginative-art" trends, alongside which the dominant roles were played by neo-constructivist tendencies on the one hand, and new figuration on the other. Action and conceptual art arose in parallel.

### New sensitivity and new figuration

New Sensitivity is the name of an exhibition organised in 1968 by Jiří Padrta, an art historian specialising in suprematism and the work of Kazimir Malevič, and one of the key figures in Czech post-war art theory. His interest in constructivism and its offshoots saw him join forces with artists from the group Křižovatka / Crossroads, which at the start of the 60s brought together artists such as Jiří Kolář, Karel Malich, Zdeněk Sýkora and Vladimír Mirvald. A fascination with concrete and visual poetry, the structure of visual codes and the intellectual position of artistic expression put the group at loggerheads with the interest in Art-Informel abstraction prevalent at that time. Members of the group took the traditional elements of geometric abstraction and moved them to a level related to the kineticism and op-art of the time, as well as to the development of computer technology in the case of Zdeněk Sýkora. Their interest was not so much in romantic and existentially oriented structural and Informel abstraction but in the world formed by human culture and technology, i.e. in the new natural order that humanity had constructed in opposition to the original prelapsarian world. They reintroduced to Czech art order, rationality, as well as a kind of new sensitivity unencumbered by old models, myths and symbols and the artistic forms related to them. On the one hand this new sensitivity was cold and mathematically precise – see the work of Zdeněk Sýkora, Jan Kubiček and Karel Hilmar – while being lyrical and poetic in the case of Karel Malich, Milan Grygar, Stanislav Kolíbal and Václav Boštík.

The exhibition New Sensitivity offered an overview of the neo-constructivist tendencies in Czech art of the second half of the 1960s. Jiří Padrta deliberately incorporated examples of Czech concrete poetry and Lettrism in the exhibition. Artists who devoted themselves to visual poetry during the 60s included not only Jiří Kolář, founder of Křižovatka, but the future Czech president, Václav Havel. However, the central role in this sphere was taken by personalities such as Jiří Hiršal, Bohumila Grögerová and Vladimír Burda, who in addition to their poetry and translation work systematically ensured that information regarding experimental poetry and new progressive artistic trends was made available in Czechoslovakia.

The path to new sensitivity can be seen in the work of the painter Zdeněk Sýkora [6] and the sculptor Hugo Demartini. At the start of the 1960s Demartini created plaster and wooden structural reliefs whose monochrome colour scheme (often a deep red) resonated with the structural abstraction of the turn of the 60s. However, he gradually inclined to a more rationalist oriented style. In the mid-60s he began creating rectangular structured reliefs featuring chrome spheres. He used prefabricated parts when creating these objects,



[6] Zdeněk Sýkora - Black and White Structure, 1965, oil on canvas, 220 x 160 cm, at present owned by the Jan and Meda Mládek Foundation, Museum Kampa, Prague

thus wilfully eliminating the much-revered element of craft in the production of an artwork. Demartini worked imaginatively with these simple elements, for instance availing himself of the fact that the chrome spheres reflected their surroundings or the viewer moving in front of the object. In his *Demonstrace v prostoru / Spatial Demonstrations* (1968–69) Demartini reduced the character of the creative gesture even more radically. He threw wooden rods into space, creating random constellations that existed only for a fleeting moment. The ephemeral nature of these acts is caught in black-and-white photographs, as in the case of conceptual and action art then and later. During the 60s the subjective element of the artist's intervention was dissipated even more in the work of Zdeněk Sýkora. From the mid-60s onward Sýkora collaborated with the mathematician Jaroslav Blažek and carefully calculated the mutual positions of several elementary elements, which he varied according to a precisely defined structure of an image. The complex combinations of relations eventually led Sýkora to use the first computers. On these he generated more and more complex structures in terms of shape and colour, which he then carefully transferred to canvas using painterly techniques. This new positive rationality is one of the most important values of the new sensitivity. Marginal activities, such as work with sound and movement, form an independent subheading in the sphere of new sensitivity. During the second half of the 60s, Milan Grygar created a series of acoustic drawings in which he investigated the spatial quality of sound. He concentrated on the drawing process itself, as well as on the elementary creative gesture, whose traces he captured on paper and in the form of an acoustic recording. The result is a new interconnection of audiovisual form. In several drawings Grygar used the physical action of his own body, while in others he recorded the movements of different items or mechanical toys. Milan Dobeš from Slovakia, who was also on show at the New Sensitivity exhibition, drew on the principle of kinetics in an interesting way. The presence of Slovak artists was a natural part of the Czech art scene throughout the existence of Czechoslovakia.

In parallel with the wave of abstract art, be this of an Informel or neo-constructivist character, figurative paintings and sculptures formed a strong current on the Czech art scene of the 1960s. "New figuration", as it was called, drew on many different sources. It was based on French narrative figuration, as well as pop art, even though the latter never caught on within the Czech context (the criticism of advanced capitalist society, with

its consumerism and media world, did not resonate in a country held back by centralised planning and a chronic lack of even the most basic goods). New realism, which figured in an exhibition of Yves Klein in Prague in 1968, had a certain influence. However, new figuration above all entailed the rehabilitation of the figure held in contempt by socialist realism and a movement beyond the modernism of the 50s, in which post-cubist and post-surrealist elements still appeared.

New figuration was not associated with one specific group, but was the combination of several currents of thought on the Czech art scene. An important exhibition in respect of the formulation of this movement was that curated by Eva Petrová and Luděk Novák in 1969 entitled *New Figuration*. The exhibition included artists spread across generations, groups and personal styles. When selecting exhibits the curators laid emphasis on a feeling of newness, on feelings and situations prevalent at that time that had characterised the 60s. In the text accompanying the exhibition Petrová and Novák drew attention to a new anthropocentrism. However, this does not mean that new figuration is more humanist or optimistic: quite the contrary. In the pictures by Jiří



[7] Eva Kmentová – Hands II, 1968, plaster relief on wooden panel, 76 x 56 cm, photo © Museum Kampa, Prague

Načeradský and the sculptures by Karel Nepraš we find drastic deformations and black humour. Many of the pictures and sculptures thematize the absurdity of the period using grotesque hyperbole (Jiří Sopko, František Janoušek, Věra Janoušková, Naděžda Plíšková, Bohumil Zemánek), but with a new emphasis on existentialism (Jitka and Květa Válová, Adriena Šimotová, Eva Kmentová [7], Olbram Zoubek, Zdeněk Palcr). It was these properties that made of new figuration one of the dominant elements of the Czech art scene in years to come, when the harsh totalitarian regime returned.

### Action and conceptual art of the 1960s

Traditional forms of art were being undermined from all sides during the 1960s. The most important idea was that the artwork could take any subject, assume any form, and could be created using any resources. With the liberalisation of the regime in the mid-60s information began reaching Czechoslovakia about progressive Western trends, about the Fluxus movement, new music and experimental poetry, about the sheer variety of manifestations of conceptual art. However, even prior to this a group called Actual Art had been created in Prague centred around Milan Knížák. The group organised several happenings in the streets of Prague, such as *První manifestace AU / First Manifestation of AA* (1964) and *Procházka po Novém Světě – Demonstrace pro všechny smysly / A Walk Around Nový Svět – Demonstrations for All the Senses* (1964). All of these events took the form of a radical artistic performance that expressed the utopian thinking of the group. Later on the Aktual movement attempted not only to transform art but the qualitative life of every individual, as is clear, for example, from the manifesto *Aktual – Žít jinak / Aktual – Live Differently* (1965).

Thanks to the theoretician Jindřich Chaloupecký, Milan Knížák was soon connected with the Fluxus movement and in 1966 was one of the organisers of the Fluxfestival in Prague. It was now possible in Prague to experience live the full force of the most avant-garde Western conceptual art. Other action artists were working during the second half of the 60s, such as Eugen Brikcius, Jan Steklík and Zorka Ságlová. All of these artists moved in underground communities comprising not only artists, but musicians, poets and other personalities who refused to engage with official culture. Like Milan Knížák, Eugen Brikcius, Jan Steklík and Zorka Ságlová used the free happening form, alternative

environments, and attempted to transform the traditional role of artist and viewer. Prague Spring, the name given to a series of reforms that the Czechoslovak Communist Party approved at the start of 1968, was a unique attempt to democratise the socialist regime within the Soviet zone of influence. However, on 21 August 1968 the process was terminated with the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops. Soviet forces maintained a permanent presence in Czechoslovakia and were only withdrawn after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. At the turn of the 1960s and 70s Czechoslovakia entered the second phase of the totalitarian regime. This was to have far-reaching consequences for Czechoslovak society and culture.

### Normalisation

The term "normalisation" is contained in the Moscow Protocol, which representatives of the Czechoslovak state were forced to sign on 27 August 1968. Among other things the protocol described the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces as the fraternal assistance of the USSR. Normalisation then became the official term for the purges and other repressive measures which followed the occupation. In January 1969 Gustáv Husák took over the function of First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from Alexander Dubček, the central figure of the Prague Spring, and as the Czechs say "socialism with a human face" was transformed into "socialism with goose pimples" (the name Husák could be translated as Gooseman). The reforms of spring 1968 were repealed, and this was followed by a huge wave of emigration, the dissolution of civil associations and organisation, purges in the Communist Party (more than 300,000 members were expelled), and mass layoffs. Harsh censorship was introduced and the level of civil rights returned to the state which had prevailed in the second half of the 1950s. Czechoslovak society became Janus-faced, with one opinion being expressed in public and another in private. Even little children quickly learned to play the game of pretence, which Václav Havel, for instance, unmasked in his well known essay *The Power of the Powerless*. Soon after the start of normalisation the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists was reorganised, with only eight percent of its original founders able to remain members. The level of official creative production reflected this and was again dominated by socialist realism, albeit considerably less strict as regards form. The quality of work took second place. The main

criterion was the approach of the individual artist to the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the subsequent changes of normalisation. This fact led to an unprecedented deterioration in official art during this period.

Within society as a whole, as in the 50s, this led to a retreat into the private, into the safety of small circles of friends, where it was possible to trust those around and live relatively freely given the straitened circumstances. Many artists whose work during the 60s had shown promise, such as Stanislav Kolíbal, Karel Malich, Zdeněk Sýkora, Adriena Šimotová and Aleš Veselý, as well as Jiří Sopko and Hugo Demartini from the younger generation, closed themselves in their studios and created unique works during the wilderness of normalisation. Others joined forces in alternative communities, such as the underground *Křižovnická škola čistého humoru bez vtípu / Crusaders' School of Pure Humour Without Jokes*. A wide variety of personalities in the art world met here, such as Karel Nepraš, Jan Steklík, Eugen Brikcius and Rudolf Němec, as well as several important theoreticians of the 70s such as Ivan (Magor) Jirous, Věra Jirousová and Olaf Hanel. A distinctive circle of artists formed around the theoretician and artist Jiří Valoch in Brno. From the 60s onwards Valoch devoted himself to visual poetry, conceptual drawing and textual installations, and as a curator supported conceptual artists from around the whole of Czechoslovakia.

Czech artists resolved the dilemma of not being able to exhibit in various ways. Some left for the countryside and developed a Czech form of land art within an uncensored environment (e.g. Miloš Šejn, Zorka Ságlová, Ivan Kafka). Others, such as Petr Štembera, Jan Mlčoch and Karel Miler, shifted the focus to their own body and the situation of humankind as such. They organised secret evening performances in alternative spaces, e.g. the cellars of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, where Štembera worked as a night porter. The exalted form of body art perhaps best expressed the oppressive atmosphere of the first half of the 70s, when hopes of a change disappeared from the Czechoslovak horizon.

Midway through the 70s Jiří Kovanda [8] joined forces with what was known as the Prague body-art trio. However, as opposed to the others, Kovanda also mounted what at first sight seem commonplace, almost banal, performances in public spaces, operating on the very boundary of being recognised as such. In 1976 he organised several events in the centre of Prague. In *Untitled* (1976),



[8] Jiří Kovanda – Untitled, Wenceslas Square, 19 November 1976, Prague, performance

when he simply spread his arms for a moment and stood as the crowds flowed past him on the main promenade of Prague's Wenceslas Square, he came close to making a political statement. In 1969, not far from the place where Kovanda stood, Jan Palach self-immolated in protest against developments in normalised Czechoslovakia. However, Kovanda's intention was apolitical. He wanted to overcome the anonymity of the city and disrupt the barriers that everyone erects around them. At a time when nobody trusted anyone else, by making this gesture Kovanda sought to open himself to other people and to strike up contact. The rest of Kovanda's street actions are completely unobtrusive, virtually indistinguishable from the surrounding flow of reality. Only careful documentation and the artist's intention make of them key works of Czech art of the 1970s.

### The Grey Zone

At the end of the 1970s Czech art began to awaken from the shock of normalisation and what would later be termed by art history the "grey zone" slowly began to emerge. The term was used in 1988 in the samizdat magazine *Historical Studies* to designate historians who after 1968 remained within official structures, i.e. in research institutions and universities. Nevertheless, they remained in contact with those of their former colleagues who had been expelled during the purges of normalisation and were willing to meet them, discuss matters, and on occasion help them. The "dirtiness" of the colour grey was symptomatic of the sometimes less than clean compromises which the totalitarian regime forced upon its citizens. In the end the term grey zone became associated first and foremost with

fine art. It describes those artists who during the 1970s and 80s could not officially operate in public or for whom only a marginal, semi-official or completely alternative zone of public presentation was reserved. The term is usually used to cover a range of alternative activities by which the Czech art scene attempted to revive "normal" artistic production after the wilderness of the occupation. Private meetings and confrontations, events linked to peripheral cultural institutions or attempts to break into official institutions took place side by side. This basically entailed a set of ingenious ways of circumventing the censorship of the time. Although from today's perspective a few significant events a year would appear to be sporadic in nature, at that time each of these was of immense importance for the entire art scene. A role was also played by the samizdat publications *Sborníky Památce / Anthologies In Remembrance* (first published in 1984) and *Někdo Něco / Someone Something* (first published in 1985), which became an important information platform. In this respect the legendary publication *Šedá cihla / Grey Brick* deserves a mention. Because most samizdat publications lacked good quality reproductions, the idea was hatched by a close circle of artists surrounding the Jazz Section to publish off their own bat a catalogue of Czech painters and sculptures belonging to the grey zone. Work began on this publication, which included 78 artists, in 1983, though it was only first published under the title *78/1985* in 1987. Key personalities of the older and middle generation of Czech post-war art were represented in *Šedá cihla*. Only Margita Titlová and Vladimír Merta were featured from the younger up-and-coming generation of the 80s.

During the 80s Jindřich Chaloupecký was a respected theoretician and critic of grey-zone art. He faced the same isolation and difficulties in publishing his opinions in public as did the artists with whom he was in contact and about whom he wrote. For Chaloupecký art was the religion of modern Man. He believed that Czech art arose under conditions different to those in the West, practically uninfluenced by the art market, and possessed not only a different character but a different mission. This idealistic and avowedly transcendental model continued to resonate powerfully on the Czech art scene into the 90s, though critical voices began to be heard with the arrival of postmodernism. Chaloupecký was a universally respected figure and after the revolution lent his name to the prestigious Jindřich Chaloupecký Award, the Czech equivalent of the Turner Prize.

During the 1970s and 80s the main issue on the art scene was the schism between official and unofficial culture and the prejudices regarding the value and meaning of each. The underground had been defined by Ivan (Magor) Jirous in his *Zpráva o třetím hudebním obrození / Report on the Third Czech Music Revival*, which had been circulating in samizdat copies since the mid-70s. Jirous effectively bridged the anti-regime music and art scenes and propagated the idea of non-compromise regarding both: "As soon as the devil (who today speaks through the mouth of the establishment) says – change the title and you can continue to play what you play, you have to say 'no, in that case we won't play.'" This was mainly a reference to the approach taken by the Czech underground group Plastic People of the Universe, which was later criminalised by the totalitarian regime. During normalisation, when survival often depended on a host of humiliating compromises, the ethos of the underground sent out an important moral message, namely that it is better not to be involved in art at all than to be involved in art that does not originate from one's own convictions. For certain radical representatives of the underground even the "soiled" grey zone was in many cases an unacceptable compromise, on the basis of which artistic quality was judged. The underground attempted to create its own structures, a "second culture", independent not only of official communication channels but of the social acceptance and hierarchy of values of the first (official) culture. The complex relations between the first and second culture, as well as between the official and unofficial, the underground and the semi-official grey zone, were perhaps most aptly analysed by Václav Havel in his essay *Šest poznámek o kultuře / Six Assides About Culture* (1984). Havel makes a distinction between the first "official" culture and the second "parallel" culture. He defines parallel culture as that which for various reasons the state-controlled media does not want to or cannot use. Under the totalitarian regime it was formed by thousands of different people with limited resources at their disposal for communicating with the viewer or reader. It is therefore defined externally; no common ideology or aesthetic links it. Havel takes issue with many stereotypical opinions regarding the value and function of the first and second cultures. Among other things he reacted to Jindřich Chaloupecký, who as well as official and anti-official (clearly dissident) culture spoke of genuine, modern culture, which is detached from political and all other ideologies.

At the start of the eighties the activities of the parallel culture expanded to an unprecedented

extent. Czech society learned how to exploit any chinks in the structures of the regime. As well as exhibitions of the older generation of artists at various out-of-the-way places where it was still possible at the start of the 80s to catch reverberations of new figuration, neo-constructivist tendencies, as well as Czech Imaginative Art, the new generation of the 70s made its appearance. This was mainly represented by painters (e.g. Ivan Ouhel, Michael Rittstein, Tomáš Švéda, Jiří Načeradský and Jiří Sopko) and sculptors (e.g. Kurt Gebauer, Jiří Beránek and Ivan Kafka) from the later formed group 12/15 Pozdě, ale přece / Better Late than Never. But other artists appeared, such as Magdalena Jetelová, Adéla Matasová, Jitka Svobodová, Jiří Sozanský and František Hodonský. Although this generation worked mainly with traditional painting, it expanded considerably the medium of drawing, while in its sculpture there is a clear emphasis on objectivity and installation. Many artists created sculptures and installations on the borderline of being land art, as well as working in public urban spaces. Works were created and exhibited wherever it was possible, whether this be on tennis courts in Stromovka Park in Prague (*Setkání na tenisových dvorcích / Encounters on Tennis Courts*, 1982) or in the hop plantation near the Karlovy Vary arterial road (*Chmelnice '83 / Hop Plantation '83*). Action art continued to grow in significance, with figures like Milan Kozelka, Margita Titlová and Tomáš Ruller expanding the possibilities of body art. An entire group of artists perpetuated and developed the conceptual art of the 70s (e.g. Dalibor Chatrný, J. H. Kocman and Marian Palla).

During the first half of the 80s more and more unofficial and semi-official exhibitions took place in private studios and apartments, in homes outside Prague in Malechov (1981) and Netvořice (1981), as well as in marginal cultural institutions. Both in and out of Prague small gallery spaces began to operate that, thanks to the commitment of their operators, as well as the tolerance extended to them by people in official structures that were supposed to control them, put together strong programmes. These spaces often enjoyed but a fleeting existence. Nevertheless, they formed an important presence in the events surrounding the Czech art scene during those years and provided an important space for the presentation of artists working in the grey zone. Good examples would be the gallery space in the foyer of the Opatov Cultural House or the corridor of the Institute of Macromolecular Chemistry in Petřín. Both these institutions are located

on the edge of Prague, in areas where nobody would have expected quality culture. Nevertheless, thanks to the enlightened, often stubborn commitment of individuals they became two of many centres of the grey zone of the 80s.

### The arrival of postmodernism

Postmodernism appeared in the grey zone in the mid-80s. However, harbingers of the postmodern revolution can be traced back as far as the end of the 70s, when translations appeared in samizdat publications of several key texts by Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks. Postmodernism was much discussed in architectural circles, while it only burst onto the painting and sculpture scene in connection with exhibitions of pictures by Vladimír Skrepl and Martin John from 1984 and 1985 and the private exhibitions entitled *Confrontations* which took place in private studios and homes between 1984 and 1987. The series entitled *Confrontations* announced the arrival on the art scene of the up-and-coming generation of the 80s, which drew on the energy of "Neue Wilde", the primitivism of German neo-expressionism, and the Italian transavantgarde. The pictures of this postmodern generation are both wild and mythical. They mark a rupture with the traditional canon of figural and abstract painting developed by the generations of the 1960s and 70s. It is interesting to observe the way the artists undermine the visual and thematic integrity of a picture. They were unafraid of fragmenting and subsequently combining what had hitherto been considered incompatible. If we look today at photographs of the first exhibition of *Confrontations* (1984), which was held in the painter Jiří David's studio, we are privy to the atmosphere typical of encounters of the grey zone. The exhibition is above all an important meeting of like-minded spirits, a moment of free communication and the presentation of officially unexhibitable works. However, in paintings that are hung wherever it was possible – in the studio, but also on the staircase, on the building facade and in the small courtyard – we see the birth of a new aesthetic, one which emphatically rejects the canon of preceding generations, with its emphasis on professional technical execution. While in some respects primitive, these pictures and sculptures are also romantic and naive. Jana and Jiří Ševčík, the key theoreticians of Czech postmodernism, wrote the following: "These works were provocative but did not arouse anxiety. They made demands on the space around them in order to be appreciated. They were personal and yet collectively intelligible. They exhibited humour and irony,

but did not sneer, and they had their own special magic." As opposed to preceding generations the postmodern generation of artists took an active interest in events in the West. They read magazines such as *Flash Art*, *Kunstforum*, *Art in America*, and *Artforum*, and many sought out the opinions of theoreticians who were monitoring events in the West. The rapid rise of the postmodern aesthetic, adopted intuitively to be begun with, was gradually cultivated by research into Western theory and practice.

In June 1987 the artists at the heart of the private confrontations in Prague (Jiří David, Stanislav Diviš, Petr Nikl, Jaroslav Róna, František Skála, Čestmír Suška, et al.) decided to form the group Tvrdohlaví / Stubborn and submit an official report of the fact to the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists. Perestroika was loosening the restrictions of normalisation, and what was basically an impudent gesture passed by the authorities without being challenged. Soon afterwards the Union was informed of the establishment of Volné seskupení 12/15 Pozdě, ale přece / Free Coalition 12/15, Better Late than Never, a group of friends/artists of the 70s generation (Ivan Ouhel, Michael Rittstein, Jiří Načeradský, Jiří Sopko, Jiří Beránek, Ivan Kafka, et al.). The somewhat convoluted name of the group was a response to the creation of Tvrdohlaví, which had already pinned its colours to the mast of the postmodern aesthetic. Members of Volné seskupení 12/15 Pozdě, ale přece, on the other hand, were interested in pursuing the modernist aesthetic of previous decades and proudly traced their antecedents back to the generation of the 60s. Leaving aside other less influential or later group initiatives, Tvrdohlaví and 12/15 can be seen as representing the aesthetic antitheses of that time.

The 12/15 generation represented art harking back to the aesthetic of the sixties and adhering fully to the modernist format. This is art based on classic modernism formed by the experience of totalitarianism. The emphasis is on individual style and purity of technique. Figurative painting predominates, which in the works of Václav Bláha, for instance, possesses an existential urgency, while it is the expressive line of Czech humour and a sense of the grotesque that feature in the works of Michael Rittstein, Jiří Načeradský and Jiří Sopko. Abstract elements also appear in the work of Ivan Ouhel, Tomáš Švéda and Petr Pavlík. Sculpture occupies a special place in 12/15. In his figural works Kurt Gebauer straddles the boundary between the new figuration of the 1960s and 70s and eighties postmodernism, while Ivan Kafka and Jiří Beránek concentrated on installations that are site-specific

in terms of material and object. As opposed to 12/15, Tvrdohlaví arrived on the scene with little of the burden of the normalisation period, having shaken off the political and social restrictions that had handicapped preceding generations. Membership of either the official or unofficial scene ceased to be a key criterion for them. They responded simply to the space of the postmodern aesthetic. Although older generations of artists had always perceived the postmodern visual language to be a fashionable import, it quickly took on an important status. As well as Tvrdohlaví it was taken up by many other artists, such as Milan Knížák, Jiří Kovanda, Daniel Balabán, Antonín Strážek, Tomáš Císařovský, Martin Mainer, Jan Pištěk, Martin John, Otto Placht and Vladimír Skrepl.



[9] Jiří David - INRI, 1987, oil on canvas, 160 × 135 cm

If we examine the eighties generation from today's perspective, it is clear that a new, confident style of painting dominates, whether this takes the form of a primitivising expressive gesture (Otto Placht, Vladimír Skrepl) or fragmented figuration (Daniel Balabán, Tomáš Císařovský). A feeling for banal subjects depicted with a new mythifying force appears, such as in the figural paintings of Antonín Strážek or works thematising abstraction and ornament (Stanislav Diviš, Petr Kvíčala, Martin John). We rarely find works reacting to the present as lived in the pictures of this generation, most of which are concerned with issues of form. They interrogate their own mythology or explore different visual styles. If they touch upon political and social issues, it is always in a completely non-participatory, aestheticising way. An example of this would

be the cycle of pictures by Jiří David [9] from 1988, such as *Domov / Home*, *Koruna* and *Bohemia*, in which symbols of Czech statehood appear alongside allusions to traditional folk-socialist decor still to be seen at that time.

David is an example of a postmodern artist who experiments with both style and medium, constantly changing both. The original form of Czech postmodernism is represented not only in the work of painters, but of sculptors such as Jaroslav Róna, Čestmír Suška, Michael Gabriel and František Skála. Starting in the 80s Skála has been using various natural and commonplace items to create objects infused with a charming retro aesthetic. In his early works Gabriel was inspired by Egyptian and Assyrian art. However, like Jaroslav Róna, for example, he interweaves inspiration from the ancients and a modern sculptural expressiveness. He uses not only wood and bronze, but also polyester resins, laminates, wax, walnut shells, and other materials. Petr Nikl created a distinctive visual style drawing on the myths of his childhood. Drawing on a spirit of play Nikl moves from the creation of pictures to unusual objects and installations, which he then reworks into improvised theatre performances. Even though this generation draws on an infinite range of styles, materials and approaches, the unifying link remains a kind of new energy, which dismantles the rules of traditional creative approaches while forging the postmodern tradition of which artists of the next generation will be a part.

### Czech art from 1989 to the present day

The demonstrations held in Prague throughout the whole of 1989 culminated on 17 November. The brutal tactics used by the police against the march by students on Národní třída in Prague was the last straw for the citizens of Czechoslovakia and the powder keg was lit. The subsequent strike by university students and senior school pupils, theatres and even television employees activated the whole of society. Hundreds of thousands of people marched daily to demonstrate on the squares of their towns and cities and jingled their keys indicating that the communist leadership had to go. The rapid course of the Velvet Revolution as it was known in what was at that time the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic took not only the leadership by surprise, but the opposition too, which took over power. On 1 January 1990 the newly elected president, Václav Havel, gave his first New Year's address to the citizens of Czechoslovakia: "My dear fellow citizens, for forty years you heard from my

predecessors on this day different variations on the same theme: how our country was flourishing, how many million tons of steel we produced, how happy we all were, how we trusted our government, and what bright perspectives were unfolding in front of us. I assume you did not propose me for this office so that I, too, would lie to you. Our country is not flourishing. The enormous creative and spiritual potential of our nation is not being used sensibly. Entire branches of industry are producing goods that are of no interest to anyone, while we are lacking the things we need." Havel wanted to stress that, despite the euphoria gripping the nation at the newly acquired freedom, the seriousness and complexity of the political, economic and social transformation process which Czech and Slovak society faced in 1989 must not be forgotten. In 1993 Czechoslovakia dissolved and Václav Havel became the first president of the Czech Republic. Although for more than half a century the Czech and Slovak cultures had successfully coexisted side by side, these days the art history of the two countries is written separately. This text will therefore examine the Czech art scene exclusively and regard Slovak culture as its parallel.

### Art after the Velvet Revolution

The first post-revolutionary years wrought many changes on the Czech cultural scene. Gone was censorship, along with organisations associated with the totalitarian regime, such as the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists and other institutions (galleries, magazines and publishing houses), which in the best-case scenario were transformed into new democratic institutions and in the worst disappeared or were asset-stripped under the poorly conceived legal system of early capitalism. A revolution in art itself had taken place before the political revolution, when the eighties generation had arrived on the scene with its postmodern programme. This generation was also best prepared to adopt the new operating mechanisms of the art scene and to assert itself on it. The group Tvrdohlaví (Jiří David, Stanislav Diviš, Michal Gabriel, Zdeněk Lhotský, Petr Nikl, Stefan Milkov, Jaroslav Róna, František Skála, Čestmír Suška), which came into being following the unofficial pre-revolutionary series of exhibitions entitled Confrontations, held an exhibition at the National Gallery in Prague in 1991. Young postmodern artists became reputable figures in their middle age. Postmodern painting took over the Czech art world. Mature pictures by members of Tvrdohlaví, as well as by Antonín Strážek, Tomáš Čišařovský, Vladimír Kokolia, Martin Mainer and Vladimír Skrepl, bore witness

to the range of stylistic opinions and themes. As well as Vladimír Skrepl, who in the 1990s set about developing a neo-expressionist approach that disdained aesthetic refinement and beauty, Vladimír Kokolia and Martin Mainer attracted great attention. From the start Kokolia's painting represented the search for the energy systems of this world, and initial figural motifs quickly became systems of connected lines enabling us to see beneath the surface of reality. Spiritual subtexts and glimpses of other worlds are strong elements in Mainer's work too. As well as these artists other painters and sculptors reworked their early material in the postmodernism of the 90s into a personal creative vision, e.g. Jan Merta, Václav Stratil, Čestmír Suška and Michael Gabriel.

The loss of faith in "universal narratives" opened up the possibility of a pluralistic view of reality. Although information regarding the postmodern discourse had been entering the Czech environment throughout the 80s (through the first samizdat translations, and even earlier), postmodernism became a widely debated topic only after the Velvet Revolution. It was dismissed by some, while discovered and explored by others. The result was the definitive rupture between the visual and conceptual integrity of the artwork. Fragmentation, the combination of the hitherto incompatible and the loss of the aura surrounding the final artwork made new approaches possible, which were played out on many different levels, be this in the field of medium, form or concept. It was this situation that the new generation reacted to. The transition between the postmodernism of the 1980s and the new generation of the 90s, comprising artists such as Veronika Bromová, Kateřina Vincurová, Jiří Příhoda, Lukáš Jasan-



[10] David Černý - Pink Tank, 1991

ský - Martin Polák, Markéta Othová, Federico Díaz and Jiří Černický, was basically overseen by David Černý and the Pondělí Group founded by students of the Academy in 1989.

David Černý first made a name for himself with his sculpture of a walking Trabant entitled *Quo vadis* (1990), a reaction to the exodus of Eastern Germans to West Germany via the West German Embassy in Prague prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. This public sculpture was a portent of Černý's approach to sculptural installation, which is more interested in social and political situations than in aesthetic form. Typically his work is installed within a public context and deliberately sets out to provoke the general public and attract media attention. Černý managed this in other works, the most important of which include *Pink Tank* (1991) [10]. Tank no. 23, which after the Second World War was placed on a five-metre high plinth in a square in Prague as a memorial to the liberation of Prague by the Red Army, was transformed by David Černý into an artwork by being painted pink. This gesture, a reaction to the Velvet Revolution and the inability of Czech society to radically confront its communist past, opened the space for new politically engaged art.

At the start of the 90s the group Pondělí returned social themes to art as part of a subtle examination of the social terrain (Milena Dopitová, Pavel Humhal, Petr Lysáček, Michal Nesázal, Petr Písařík, Petr Zubek). However, they processed burning social issues of the day not as openly engaged projects, but more through private reflection, intimate messages and testimony. The very name of the group - Pondělí / Monday - evokes something run-of-the-mill but common to all. It is precisely on the border between the private and public that this generation was most often located. Its members used a variety of materials to create objects either by hand or using industrial processes, which they then combine with photographs or other new media. This approach would not have been possible without the lesson of postmodernism. The breakdown of the picture as a whole, the democratisation of the creative process and its liberation from traditional models - all this opened up new possibilities that young people quite understandably seized upon. Compared to the preceding generation these are almost unacceptably commonplace objects, whose sole claim to being art is their inclusion within an artistic context (e.g. photographs of consumed chewing gum in *Žvýkačka* / *Chewing Gum* (1993) by Milena Dopitová, or *Hvězdy mého těla* / *The Stars of My Body* (1993) by Pavel Humhal, a series of photographs in which the artist circled the freckles

on his body). Of course, such elements are not completely new within the context of Czech art. One only has to think of Jiří Kovanda's conceptual work based on the aesthetic of minimal differences, which had been continuously evolving since



[11] Petr Lysáček - With ČSAD (Czechoslovak Bus Transport) in 100 Different Manners, 1990, mixed media, 30×60×60 cm

the 1970s. Humhal's text *Nový zákon* / *New Testament*, published in 1991 in the magazine *Výtvarné umění* / *Fine Art*, is regarded as the manifesto of the Pondělí Group. One of the works reproduced in connection with this article is the object *Chci, aby nám lidé rozuměli* / *I Want People to Understand Us* (1989-1990), a small wooden tablet containing this inscription. The works of other members of the group share a similar character. They do not involve artificially or artistically created forms, but are combined with ordinary items that have a certain significance for the artists, be this a coat hanger, hand mirror and torch in *Civilní instalace* / *Civil Installation* (1990) by Pavel Humhal, or toy figures standing on a bus in the object by Petr Lysáček *S ČSAD stokrát jinak* / *With ČSAD (Czechoslovak Bus Transport) in 100 Different Manners* (1990) [11]. Such combined installations create a whole which is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Though the concept is fundamental, it is not the main content of the work but is present in the background. This method of work, be it in the form of sculptural objects, monumental installations or minimal interventions in the existing environment, quickly took root on the Czech art scene and is at present being developed by the latest in a long line of young post-conceptual artists.

These perceive themselves as artists in a new way. The artist ceases to be a suffering genius unrecognised in their own time, but a normal individual whose work is perceived as belonging to a certain community, as a form of communication regarding certain topics. If we leave aside the documentation of performances and other conceptual works, the face of the artist first becomes part of the artistic utterance only in the 1990s. This might



[12] Václav Stratil – The series Monastic Patient, 1991, photo-performance

involve the photo portraits of Václav Stratil, who had himself photographed in a variety of costumes in communal photo studios in the series entitled

*Řeholní pacient / Monastic Patient* (1991) [12]. Or it might include the digitally manipulated large-scale photographs by Veronika Bromová, in which the artist herself often appears in various bizarre positions flaunting an often deliberately problematised sexuality. We also find feminist overtones in the work of Milena Dopitová, in which the artist's own identity is interrogated through cooperation with her identical twin sister. One of the first installations in which Dopitová combined an object (a pink crocheted table and two stools) with large-scale photography depicts the artist and her sister in bathing caps. There are subtle, almost imperceptible differences in the character of their faces. Though it might appear that computer manipulation is involved, the photograph captures two separate human beings, each with an individualised fate and existence. During the nineties Jiří Surůvka, a performer and conceptual artist living in the industrial city of Ostrava, also incorporated his own identity into his work. His approach is typical for the first half of the 1990s. Surůvka creates pictures, objects, photographs, digital images and video. His main aim is to critique social phenomena. The artist's personality is manifest in a host of works in which Surůvka includes his less than ideally proportioned figure with a disarming irony. His performances dressed in a Batman or Policeman costume are unforgettable.

All of these artists drew on new media, especially new digital technology, which started to appear on the Czech market after the revolution. Vilém Flusser, the important Czech-born theoretician of photography, who died in 1991 in a car accident while on his way home from a lecture he had given in Prague, had a strong influence on the Czech environment, in which a critical postmodernism was developing after the revolution using the methods of appropriation and simulacrum, replacing reality by representation. Conceptual work with photography took a variety of forms. The greatest interest was shown in digitally manipulated colour pictures, as seen in the work of Veronika Bromová and Jiří Surůvka. This introduced a Western visual style into the post-totalitarian drabness of a public space still unaffected by advertising. However, a strong current of classical black-and-white photography ran in parallel. In the post-revolutionary period this current expanded out of a closely delineated context of professional photography and onto the art scene mainly thanks to the work of the duo Lukáš Jasanský and Martin Polák. Jasanský's and Polák's postmodern conceptual approach to classical photography stands at the head of a long line of artists working on the Czech scene from the 1990s to the present day. In this



[13] Michal Kalhous – Untitled, 2000, photography on fomaspeed, 150×108 cm

respect one could mention Markéta Othová or Michal Kalhous [13], whose photographs capture the most ordinary subjects from their surroundings. However, they suppress classical photographic layout using large-scale blow-ups, which they did not hesitate to attach directly to the wall in sensitive installations. Writing of this wave of conceptual photography Pavel Vančát coined the term “non-photography”, in order to point out how these works differ from classical photography, which until that time had been developing in a kind of parallel fashion sealed off from other fine



[14] Lukáš Rittstein – Eyes, 1998, in the National Gallery in Prague, rubber, wood, epoxy, perspex, 700×500×300 cm

art. “Non-photographers” tend to lack a traditional training in photography and to ignore the precepts of professional precision and technological processing. This allows them to experiment with layout and installation and interrogate the medium of photography from various perspectives.

As far as sculpture is concerned, as well as David Černý great attention should be paid to Kateřina Vincourová, Jiří Příhoda and Lukáš Rittstein [14]. The work of these artists best documents the shifts taking place in the post-revolutionary period. Rittstein works with a wide range of materials, creating monumental object-based constellations with links to post-minimalist sculpture and the lessons of postmodernism. Příhoda works with space and is known for his complex installations/environments. In the 90s he was inspired by film,



[15] Jiří Příhoda – Shot/Shutter 02, Flood, 1995-96



[16] Kateřina Vincourová – About Sculpture, 1994

which gave rise, for instance, to the installation *Záběr / klapka 02, Potopa / Shot/Shutter 02, Flood* (1995–96) [15], a kind of mock-up of an underwater film scene. It is difficult to characterise Kateřina Vincourová's work as sculpture. It is more appropriate to speak of a trinity comprising sculpture-object-installation. If we take her early works *Neděle / Sunday* (1992) or *O soše / About Sculpture* (1994) [16] as examples, these are sculptures continuing in the best tradition of Czech sculpture of the 1970s and 80s (see for example Magdalena Jetelová), and only their materials and installation method might surprise us somewhat. Parts of *Neděle* (a table and chair, stool, curtains and vase) are made of rubber, a material regarded as non-artistic in the traditional sense of the word. These are objects for the simple reason that Vincourová treats them as such. The table and chair, only slightly larger than ordinary furniture, were arranged on the floor when exhibited at the Behe-mót Gallery in Prague. In *O soše* Vincourová placed a theatre prop of a horse in a suspended membrane. These are installations whose location in space is as important as their individual parts. An emphasis on the spatial context in which the works are presented is fundamental to the 90s. Many works were created for a specific space and often drew on a locally specific situation. During the nineties fine art was created against the backdrop of hectic and sometimes chaotic changes in society. Not only the political and economic system, but individual cultural institutions and the media space were being transformed. As well as the psychological changes wrought in society by the freedom to travel, democratisation of the media space and access to information, and a gradual habituation to multiculturalism and themes based around gender, ecology and globalisation, it was the adaptation to capitalist mechanisms that impacted most on art after the revolution (in 1991 prices were deregulated and the privatisation project initiated). The commercial side of art was still a traumatic affair for most of the art community. Before the revolution trading in art had only been officially possible via the Czech Fine Arts Fund, which during the period of normalisation had kowtowed to the regime and the ideas of socialist realism. The grey zone therefore logically lived with the feeling that "true" ideologically unburdened art was created only for a close circle of friends and that to create it for the general public and for money would be a betrayal of one's own truth (morality). This myth, though understandable in Czechoslovakia under normalisation, had a paralysing effect in the 90s. The post-revolutionary transformation of Czech fine art could perhaps be summed up as the necessity to transcend this attitude. It was some

time before the idea took hold that even "true" art could be a state-supported element of culture, paid for from public and private funds, with all the restrictions ensuing therefrom. It was more difficult for the Czech art scene to get used to the fact that art is also a commodity. During the whole of the 90s this state of affairs was complicated by



[17] David Černý - Horse, 1999, photo ©Jan Rasch

the non-existence of a market for art. Private commercial galleries and auction houses only began to develop on a stable basis in the second half of the 90s. The number of enlightened individuals who supported art from the money they had earned through other activities had been negligible during the years of state-controlled culture and communist propaganda. An awareness of the prestige linked with cultural sponsorship and patronage had first to be aroused in Czech society.

### Dispersed concentration of the mid-90s

During the mid-90s Czech society entered a critical phase. The post-revolutionary euphoria gave way to a nation-wide "bad mood" as Václav Havel dubbed it in a speech he gave in Prague in De-

cember 1997. This state of affairs was perhaps best depicted by the sculpture *Kůň / Horse* (1999) by David Černý [17]. Černý's reworking of the national monument of St Wenceslas, patron saint of the Czech lands, which stands on Wenceslas Square in Prague, where the most important demonstrations had taken place against the old regime, speaks for itself. St Wenceslas, gazing into the future, sits proudly on a worn-out nag hung upside down. Among other things this was a reaction to the tightening of belts, when the first item of public expenditure to be subject to cuts was culture. In addition, during the mid-90s the Open Society Fund discontinued its support for the Czech Soros Centre, which had played a key role in the development of standard art activities after the revolution.

If from today's perspective we try to characterise the period around the middle of the 90s, it seems that the most apposite term would be "dispersed concentration", a term proposed by Jiří Ševčík, a key theoretician of that time. He was describing a certain lack of focus and fragmentation of post-revolutionary developments, which the Czech art scene began to recapitulate in the mid-90s. The feeling prevails that postmodernism has been overcome and Czech art is beginning to find itself in a different situation. This attitude can be interpreted either as a rejection of postmodernism as being a short-term error or as its ongoing transformation. A host of projects attempted to capture this moment, ranging from the curatorial exhibitions *Zkušební provoz. Má umění mladé? / Test Run. Does Art Have Young Ones?* (1995), *Respekt. Vzpomínky na budoucnost/Memories for the Future* (1996), *Villa* (1996), the first years of the festival *4+4 dny v pohybu / 4+4 Days in Motion, Jitro kouzelníků? / The Morning of the Magician* (1996–1997) at the National Gallery, to the exhibition DUM in a non-gallery space in Prague (1997). Though these are very diverse projects enjoying different levels of institutional support, taken as a mosaic they illuminate well the range of artistic activities taking place. If we compare them with the exhibitions which drew attention in the first half of the 90s, we see a clear shift both in the form of the exhibition and the content on show. The first half of the 90s was dominated by retrospective exhibitions reconstructing the history of the pre-revolutionary unofficial scene, thanks to which the history of Czech post-war art began to be written. Only sporadically are they supplemented by the first curatorial exhibitions, e.g. those of Jana and Jiří Ševčík, Milena Slavická and Vlasta Čiháková-Noshiro, which gradually established the role of curator on the Czech art scene.

At this time the greatest attention on the Czech scene was concentrated on new media and post-conceptual procedures. Exhibitions were dominated by installations, objects, videos, texts, audio works, and various combinations thereof. The picture as a traditional medium, elevated by modernism to the pinnacle of "high" art, became in the eyes of many symbolic of a traditional, outmoded form of expression. Even so, painting found its champions. During the 90s imposing figures of the 80s generation such as Jiří David, Vladimír Skrepl, Antonín Střížek, Stanislav Diviš, Petr Nikl and Jan Merta coexisted alongside younger painters. The nineties was a time when a generally recognised aesthetic consensus ceased to apply, and so painting takes many forms during these years. Despite many outstanding examples of abstraction (Petr Pasterňák, Kateřina Štenclová), the Czech art scene in the 90s is dominated by objectivity and figuration. Standing side by side we find immediately expressive figural painting (Jakub Špaňhel, Jiří Typlt, Vít Soukup), compositionally cleansed painting based on the photographic image (Petr Malina), or a personal mythology of the grotesque (Martin Kuriš). These styles are joined by photo-realist painting (Roman Franta) and a wide range of experimental work, such as that of František Matoušek [19] using ripped denim or Josef Bolf's paintings on plastic.

When the curator Milena Slavická prepared the exhibition *Poslední obraz / Last Painting* in 1997, in her introduction she asked: "Does it still make sense to paint pictures? Is this not the first time in the history of 20th century European art when the artist is asking him or herself this question. (...) Indeed! Why paint a picture? Why learn to draw and paint, when you have photography and computers? Why learn to play the violin or compose an original piece of music, when you have readymade compositions and recordings and you can mix them electronically and create new works? Mastering a musical instrument, composition and likewise mastering the art of drawing, painting and pictorial composition is so difficult! It's absurd, you're simply wasting your time and energy." At the exhibition Slavická introduced artists of the youngest generation who had updated the form of traditional illusory image, either through references to historical painting and academicism (Lubomíra Kmeťová, Karel Balcar, Tomáš Kubík) or to modern, realist painting (Milan Salák, Vít Soukup). Terms and topics began to appear on the Czech art scene that had been taboo in the post-revolutionary period as characterised by the restoration of Czech modernism and the promotion of postmodernism. Otto Urban updated decadence, Marie Rakušanová



exhibited Czech academic paintings, and other exhibitions expanded the already broad span of contemporary art.

Postmodernism disrupted the traditional hierarchy and through its emphasis on pluralism called into question the criteria by which we reach evaluations. This makes it difficult to specify the predominant creative opinion of the second half of the 90s. However, we can point to one of the most symptomatic attitudes of this period in the works of the young generation of post-conceptualist artists such as Michal Pěchouček, Ján Mančuška, Krištof Kintera, Tomáš Vaněk and Zbyněk Baladrán. It is visible here that, despite the advancement of globalisation eradicating the most sensitive differences between East and West, Czech society is not going to surrender its post-totalitarian identity without a fight. As opposed to the spectacular aesthetic of the first post-revolutionary generation, the work of these artists, who appeared on the Czech art scene in the second half of the 90s, aims for intimacy, both through the formats used and modes of expression. Many of the works are deliberately made not to look like art. They are often fashioned from cheap materials lying around the home, using methods which we could dub "high-minded DIY". The roots of this strategy go back to the pre-revolutionary period. The members of this generation spent their early childhood watching on as their parents and friends used their own ingenuity to refashion their homes and cottages, improvising as they went along, creating original results and using all kinds of ersatz materials in place of materials which were unavailable on the socialist market. For the generation of the second half of the 90s it is completely natural to use traditional, hand-crafted methods (embroidery, needlework, cutting, pasting). Zbyněk Baladrán created the



[18] Zbyněk Baladrán - Cactuses, 1999, combined techniques, photo ©Zuzana Štefková

object *Kaktusy / Cactuses* (1999) [18] from plastic waste and the ambivalent stands entitled *Screen* (2001). More important than the object itself are the instructions that the artist provides the viewer for its assembly in the style of IKEA. An artwork no longer has to be purchased. You simply have to pop into a DIY shop, pick up a few necessary parts and put them together yourself at home. Other artists also undermined established principles for the creation of art. Tomáš Vaněk simply sprays his works onto the wall. However, he does not draw on the aesthetic of graffiti, but is interested in commonplace objects and subjects. A sprayed switch or coat hanger with a fabricated shadow might comprise a work. Michal Pěchouček embroiders certain of his pictures, and the recent series *Time for Bed* (2009) is completely sewn. It is clear that, though this does not directly involve "ostalgie" (i.e. the German term for nostalgia for life under the communist system), we must nevertheless look for the sources of this new style in the totalitarian and post-totalitarian experience.

This generation operated in the interstice between institutional cultural structures, which budgetary cuts had left in a critical situation, and an as yet poorly developed private gallery sector. It created its own scene, not only in Prague, but in Brno, Ostrava, Ústí nad Labem and Olomouc. At the turn of the millennium young artists and curators established small alternative gallery spaces in empty apartments, derelict shops, clubs, coffee bars, or the vacant premises of various institutions. The operations of these spaces often relied on the self-sacrifice of their operators, the occasional grant, and above all the enthusiasm of the community which formed around them. Many of them soon disappeared for various reasons, while some were transformed into stable institutions that continue to operate today.

### The beginning of the 21st century

The turn of the millennium was accompanied by the end of the optimistic phase of globalisation. Upon acceding to the European Union in 2004 the Czech Republic was definitively integrated into the Western world and began to face the same problems. During the first decade of the 21st century, on the Czech as on the global art scene, a host of different creative opinions and approaches emerge.

The comprehensive and intermedial character of art at the beginning of the century affected traditional media too. The image in its various manifestations still dominates the art scene, though these

days it no longer matters whether it is painted or photographed. The hierarchy of art has crumbled and each medium offers different possibilities. Shifts in technique, technologies and topics are typical of contemporary painting. The conceptualisation of this traditional medium is ubiquitous, even though it retains the tactility and materiality that is the consequence of the immediate contact between painter and canvas. In most digital media this quality has been lost, and for this reason painting remains attractive and important for a certain part of the scene. Personalities who had made a



[19] František Matoušek - The Rolling Stones, 2012, ripped denim, 30 x 50 cm

name for themselves at the end of the 90s, such as Jakub Špaňhel, František Matoušek, Petr Malina, Jan Šerých, Josef Bolf and Vít Soukup, are now joined by painters of the Noughties generation, e.g. Evžen Šimera, Daniel Pitín, Jakub Hošek, Ladislava Gadžiová, Luděk Rathouský, Jaromír Novotný, Alice Nikitinová and the duo Vasil Artamonov and Alexej Klyuykov. Since the 1990s Czech artists have added a host of new and updated approaches to classical procedures. The traditional brush is now joined by the spraycan and paint roller. Artists operating under pseudonyms such as Masker, Point and Pasta bring the energy of graffiti and street art to the Czech art scene. An important role is played by cultural centres run by artists, e.g. Trafačka and Meetfactory. Alongside these the Czech art scene is supplemented by private initiatives such as the Wanieck Gallery, Divus, Karlin Studios, Futura, or institutions of a new character such as tranzit.

The Czech art scene around 2000 was dominated by what are known as "unobtrusive tendencies", in which young artists sought inspiration in the pioneering work of Jiří Kovanda. Just as Kovanda had done in his installations from the turn of the 1970s and 80s, so these young artists elevated the principle of imperceptibility to the level of a creative imperative. At the end of the 90s the work of

artists such as Ján Mančuška, Michal Pěchouček and Tomáš Vaněk typically displays civility, lack of ostentation, and is anchored in the local social context and everyday lived experience. This in turn is mirrored both in the materials and formal procedures selected, as well as in the themes of the works themselves. Many other artists also concentrated on how to create art using run-of-the-mill resources rather than depicting the commonplace. To this end they abandoned traditional artistic media and began to formulate new creative methods influenced by everyday activities, in which they used functional items and cheap, easily accessible materials. This position then leads directly to the development of post-conceptual art at the beginning of the 21st century. The radical dematerialisation of the artwork typical for the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 70s was not to be seen on the Czech scene even at the end of the 90s, but in the new millennium is definitively superseded by a new emphasis on the visual aspect of a work and its presentation. An example of this would be



[20] Eva Koťátková - From the Stories from the Living Room series, 2010, drawing and collage on paper, 42 x 29,7 cm

the work of Eva Koťátková or Ján Mančuška. Eva Koťátková [20] takes as her starting point her immediate surroundings, i.e. home, family and school, as well as the rituals and patterns of behaviour

to which this specific community is bound. For Koťátková art is an instrument for interrogating her own position within these mechanisms and a field within which to analyse them. She creates her own structured wholes and systems that comprise items, scenes and situations that are intimately known but transposed into a new sequence and context. These take the form of paintings, collages, objects, photographs or videos, from which Koťátková creates greater aggregates of imaginative installations. Ján Mančuška also moved in the direction of complex conceptual installations at the beginning of the 21st century. In works such



[21] Ján Mančuška – The Space Behind the Wall, 2004

as *Prostor za zdí / The Space Behind the Wall* (2004) [21], *While I walked* (2005) and *True story* (2005) Mančuška worked not only with space but above all with texts providing a commentary on the state of affairs. He managed to transform even a banal description into an extraordinary story by means of both his narrative style and an imaginative visual form. He worked with the shadow, size and form of the text. In several instances the text is written on the wall, while in others it is printed on strips of rubber, punched out of aluminium, or cut into wooden boards or metal plates. Text becomes both symbol and object. Other conceptual artists working with text during the Noughties include Zbyněk Baladrán, Jiří Skála and Tomáš Svoboda. In many of their projects they both draw on and deconstruct the medium of film. They examine the non-linear reading of a story and new forms of installation and performance. Toward the end of his prematurely terminated creative life Mančuška was even moving into the sphere of theatre. Zbyněk Baladrán is also one of the protagonists of the “documentary turn” on the Czech scene, employing pseudo-documentary procedures that we are familiar with from archives, archaeology or journalism. Barbora Klímová and many other artists also draw on these procedures. Their output

often entails exhibition projects that cross freely from artistic practice to the history of art or social and historical research. This is reflected in the form in which their art is presented, which can be text, video or installation.

If we attempt an overview of the aesthetic of the turn of the century, we find several predominant themes. The procedures established by modernism and postmodernism of the 20th century continue to be subject to formal development. These procedures are linked with traditional and current topics and are unequivocally dominated by conceptual methods and new, at present digital media. An important phenomenon of the current Czech scene is art based on photography. Since the 1990s photography has broken free of its “secondary” status and become a tool used in



[22] Jiří Thýn – Untitled, Test strip, series 50% Grey, 2009, b/w photograph on baryta paper, 70 × 100 cm

the most cutting-edge artistic forms. Many young photographers, such as Jiří Thýn or the duo Aleksandra Vajd and Hynek Alt, are interested in the medium of photography as such, in its technical, historical and social contiguities. In his cycle *O fotografii / On Photography* (2009) Jiří Thýn [22] thematizes the technical procedures of photography. In the series entitled *50% šedé / 50% Grey* he disrupts the illusory effect of photography by incorporating elements referencing the process of the origins of analogue photography. He incorporates test strips into large-scale photographs or uses coloured strips as part of the scene depicted that professional photographers use to monitor the colours during processing. He creates glass negatives that he then presents along with framed photograms featuring various shades of grey. An important trend at the turn of the century is the renewed activism of Czech art. The art of the 1990s had been more or less apolitical, with politically engaged art appearing only sporadically.

The re-politicisation of Czech art at the turn of the century is a consequence of the activation of individuals and groups who began more and more to address the problems of society and transformational politics through their works and projects. The group Póde Bal made a splash with its project *GEN – Galerie etablované nomenklatury / GEN – Gallery of Established Nomenclature* (2000). The project comprises 36 portraits of persons who had previously collaborated with the StB (State Security Service) and KGB but who continued to be active in public affairs after the revolution and occupied important places in Czech society. The portraits included biographical information informing the viewer of the activities of each of these figures both prior to and after the revolution. Póde Bal used advertising and marketing strategies in its work and did not hesitate to confront contentious political questions. Along with Kamera Skura, Póde Bal is the first Czech group to appear as an anonymous collective. Although we know the names of individual members, this is not important as far as the group’s activities are concerned. Traditional coalitions of individuals, such as the groups UB 12, Trasa, Tvrdohlaví and 12/15, took on a collective creative identity at the turn of the millennium. How this new principle on the Czech art scene developed during the first decade of the 21st century is clear from the example of the Rafani group. Without the slightest irony this group underpinned its collectivism by wearing uniforms and maintaining the absolute anonymity of individual members. As well as Rafani and Póde Bal, other groups such as Guma Guar and



[23] Jan Kotík – Speculation Study, 2006, upholstery, mixed media, 80 × 130 × 90 cm

Ztohoven address current political topics. Important pioneers of engaged art during the Noughties include Jan Jakub Kotík [23], Martin Zet, Tamara Moyzes, Michal Šiml, Petr Motyčka, Zdena Kolečková, Ondřej Brody, Viktor Frešo and Radim

Labuda. Many of these artists address gender inequality and the problems of social exclusion or minorities. These themes also appear in works by feminist artists such as Lenka Klodová, who is concerned with pornography, Milena Dopitová, or Lucie Tkáčová and Aneta Mona Chisa, a duo working in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Sculpture in its pure form plays almost no part in the work of the Noughties generation. What predominates is objectivity, work with non-traditional materials, and multimedia combinations. The new sculpture of the turn of the century is best represented by artists such as Křištof Kintera, Dominik Lang and Pavla Sceranková. DIY and more



[24] Křištof Kintera – My Light is Your Life (model: Shiva Samuraj 5kw/50Hz), 2009, old lamps, cables, electro

recently light play an important role in the work of Křištof Kintera. His monumental *My Light is Your Life* [24] (model: Shiva Samuraj 5kw / 50Hz) (2009) or the memorial to suicides beneath Nusle Bridge in Prague entitled *Of One’s Own Volition – Memento Mori* (2009–2011) are amongst the best works created over recent years. If we accept the fact that the materials of new sculpture may be streetlights, extension leads or mountain bikes, we can include Křištof Kintera’s works in the category of sculpture. If not, we have to look to other terms from the glossary of 20th century art, such as object, installation or environment. Since the start of the Noughties, Dominik Lang has made sculptural interventions in his surrounding environment. A discreet shift in scale and materials suggests the aesthetic of the “unobtrusive tendency” and links up to the work of the generation of the second half of the nineties. At the same time it presages Lang’s criticism and deconstruction of the art industry and its institutions. With his monumental *Pohyblivá stěna / Moving Walls* (2006) and *Místo pro diváka / Space for the Viewer* (2009) Lang moved sculpture to the boundary of architecture. New sculpture is a

kind of hybrid of several media, a claim best borne out by the work of Pavla Sceranková, who creates demanding, mobile objects out of wood and other simple materials. Though works such as *Umzug (Nastěhování. Vystěhování) / Umzug (Moving in, Moving out)* (2007) and *Jdi pryč. Vrať se / Go Away, Come Back* (2009) have a sculptural quality, they only acquire further significance when manipulated. The artist's physical actions are an essential part of these projects, which she captures on video. Sceranková's work spills over into sculpture, action art and video art.

The use of media in the 21st century is more and more thought out. Conceptual and performance elements, photography, video, painting, objects and installations can all feature in individual projects. The combination of photographs, video and life performance, which in the work of Jiří Surůvka in the 1990s seemed frivolous, is now regarded. The use of media in the 21st century is more and more thought out. Conceptual and performance elements, photography, video, painting, objects and installations can all feature in individual projects. The combination of photographs, video and life performance, which in the work of Jiří Surůvka in the 1990s seemed frivolous, is now regarded as a given by younger generations of artists. Perhaps the only difference is that the Noughties generation pay heed to technical perfection and either have a professional mastery of their medium or cooperate with someone who provides the technical backup. The turn-of-the-century DIY aesthetic has given way during the Noughties to professional precision. And if handmade elements are still present, they will be consummately constructed products rather than botched jobs. The work of Eva Koťátková, Ján Mančuška and Jiří Černický exemplifies this trend. Since the mid-90s Černický has moved freely between painting and objects, via performance to video. The professionalization referred to above is most clear in his video works.



[25] Jiří Černický – ABS video

In the mid-Noughties Černický created a cycle of videos entitled *ABS* [25], in which he works with invisible aspects of the image. One of the videos offers the viewer a shot of a platform of the Prague metro, which gradually fills up with people. Each of these persons is thinking or worried about something, or is simply hanging around. Along with his collaborators Černický conducted a survey into the thoughts of each person in the image. After they left the shot he asked each one what they had been thinking about. In post-production he then incorporated the textual thoughts back into the image, which unwind in the form of a white strip from the head of each passenger until there are so many of them they cover the entire scene. Detailed work with video can also be found in the work of Marek Ther. During the Noughties Ther virtually turned himself into a film director. He explores the possibility of an acted story and works resourcefully with both narrative and the visual. His videos thematize the space of alternative gender orientations, as well as issues surrounding Sudeten Germany. However, above all they are a pure visual experience.

The work of both Jiří Černický and Marek Ther makes it clear that on the Czech art scene in the 21st century video appears in a variety of roles. This includes not only self-contained video stories, but also video performance and videos documenting more extensive projects. The form in which video is presented is similarly varied. It might be shown in cinemas, presented on television, on the internet, as part of a projection in a gallery, or as a video installation. During the Noughties documentary video that simply records events, as was still common during the 1990s, disappears. If video does play a documentary role, at the beginning of the century it is presented as one of several possible resources alongside photography, drawing, object, text, etc. Video performance occupies a special role during this period. We find it in the work of Michal Pěchouček, Eva Jiříčka, Daniela Baráčková, Eva Koťátková and Pavla Sceranková. Many of their films are multilayered, with physical performance, conceptual narrative elements and the manipulation of the medium itself rubbing shoulders together. Perhaps the most comprehensive example of this is Michal Pěchouček's video entitled *Sběratel / Collector* (2003). Pěchouček himself features in the video as he gradually introduces large pictures to an invisible collector. The story is painted on these pictures, which are revealed frame by frame as on a film strip. The last image contains the closing credits of the video we have just watched. Other artists experiment with different projection methods, often in parallel, and work with space and

sound. They link up the video image with installations and photographs, thus creating a comprehensive video installation. An example of this would be the video installation by Jiří Skála and Zbyněk Baladrán entitled *Archivář / Archivist* (2009) or Ján Mančuška's *Odlesk / Reflection* (2009). Alena Kotzmannová combined video and photography in an interesting way in several of her installations, for instance in *Famke* (1999) [26], in which she counterposes a photograph of a drowsing woman with the landscape passing by the window of a



[26] Alena Kotzmannová – Famke, 1999, video installation, photo © Martin Polák

moving train, or in *Cesta do háku / Path to the Hook* (2000), in which she projected the same film onto a large-scale black-and-white photograph of a man standing in a tram, but with both movement and time now contained within the video format.

## Current situation

At present the Czech art scene is a multi-layered system of state, private, commercial and non-profit galleries, auction houses and media. Several generations of artists work within this system, including the youngest generation just leaving the country's several art schools. Looking at the individual media and their hybrids present on the art scene of the first decade of the 21st century, the observer will soon come up against artistic activities which are very difficult to grasp. Their forms seem to defy stable categorisation. In 1999 Tomáš Vaněk came up with the term *particip* [27] to describe them. As he says, *particip* utilise symbiotic and parasitic norms, relationships, in the sense of connecting themselves to something that is established, given and commonplace and is thus located on the margins of everyday perception. *Particip*s have no ambition to resolve anything, but simply attempt

to make this marginal zone visible. They may take all kinds of different forms, from sprayed interventions in public spaces to gallery audio-situations. One of Tomáš Vaněk's activities that has achieved the status of classic is the public collection of sentences – *Particip no. 39* (2004). Since 2004 Vaněk has been collecting sentences describing simple situations each one of us knows from their own life. For instance: "When I use adhesive tape, I can never find the end of it." He then presents these sentences in various forms. He sprays some



[27] Tomáš Vaněk – Particip no. 142 (drawing of the field of vision of employees of the Slovak National Gallery), 2011

of them on the wall using stencils, prints others on paper, and just as importantly requests viewers to send him more examples.

The remarkable shift of contemporary art into extra-artistic spheres is described by current theory from various angles. As well as activism and engagement, terms include an expanded cultural field, relational aesthetics (Nicolas Bourriaud) or participative art (Claire Bishop). Many contemporary artists work with social and political reality and use methods and procedures that are characteristic of other disciplines, although we find many points of contact with conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s. For instance, Kateřina Šedá, Tomáš Vaněk, Rafani and Barbora Klímová draw the reality around them into the world of art. They do not simply reproduce the world, but create new situations, micro-utopias as Claire Bishop calls them, in which they use human relationships and needs as their raw material. A typical example of this approach would be Kateřina Šedá's projects. Her creative method on the intersection of the artistic concept, along with consummate production values and personal presence in communication with people, could not be called a performance, happening or environment. Through her projects she creates a complex social "sculpture", which

finds its culmination in the documented event. She touches reality as experienced over a long-term horizon that includes the period both before and after the event. Šedá communicates with individuals, undermines their stereotypes and manages to persuade them that an unusual collective event makes sense, and not only within the context of art. As far back as her early work *Tady nic není / There's Nothing Here* (2003), she persuaded all the inhabitants of a small Moravian village to spend one day of their lives together in accordance with a timetable given in advance that was based on their typical Saturday activities (a morning shopping trip to the local supermarket, sweeping the pavement in front of their house, lunch with the family, etc.). The resulting documentary captures not only this unbelievable happening, but also the reaction of the local people, who began to think of their lives in different ways. Šedá used similar techniques in other projects, for instance *Furt dokola / Over and Over* (2008) [28]. The project is based in the environs of her native Lišeň, these days a suburb of Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic and the capital of Moravia. Detached houses in Czech municipalities are separated by high fences and walls, which isolate their inhabitants from their neighbours and enclose them within their privacy. To a certain extent this is the consequence of the totalitarian experience. Šedá attempted to overcome this. For six months she persuaded all the neighbours in her street to become participants in the project. On a specified day she then climbed over all the fences with the assistance of the assembled neighbours. The project was presented at the international Berlin Biennale 2008, which Šedá took her neighbours to on a special bus trip. Using various aids that they had brought with them these neighbours then climbed over mock-ups of their own fences, which created



[28] Kateřina Šedá – Over and Over, 2008

a circular object made of various materials laid out precisely in accordance with the fences of the houses in Brno-Líšeň. As well as Kateřina Šedá's projects a range of other works are making their presence felt on the Czech art scene that are difficult to classify using the established terms of art history. In this respect we could cite, for instance, the way that members of the Rafani group joined the Communist Part of Bohemia and Moravia in *My / We* (2002–2003), and for a year became part of the Czech political scene and as young people without experience of the communist regime prior to 1989 found out what it meant to own a communist ID card. Or there is the project entitled *Výměna rukopisu / Exchange of Handwriting* (2006) by Jiří Skála, who had two volunteers teach one another each other's handwriting and thus swap part of their identity, a project which is again difficult to describe using ordinary art-history terminology. Problems occur in respect of other key figures of the Noughties.

Artists not only reflect their situation outwardly but inwardly too. Criticism of the institutional situation and the deconstruction of the art industry is one of the important aspects of art at the beginning of the century. Dominik Lang, for instance, has thematized the operations of the art scene and its more or less concealed principles. Since 2008 he has been creating a *Jmenný seznam návštěvníků / List of Names of Visitors* to his exhibitions, which also functions as an artwork. During the Noughties he implemented a range of projects in which he toys with the institutional context and literally deconstructs the space of the gallery and its operations. From projects such as *Pohyblivá stěna / Moving Wall* (2006), *Bez určení místa / Without Specifying the Place* (2007) and *Monument* (2007), in which he worked directly with the gallery space and linked it to the surrounding world, he moved onto to more sophisticated projects that work directly with the structures and functions of gallery operations. In 2009 he prepared a project for the Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín entitled *Výběr / Selection* (2009). Each of the 23 gallery employees was to select their favourite work from the depository. This was then exhibited for a week at a time with the name of the person who chose it alongside the caption Dominik Lang – *Selection* (2009). Lang's projects are typical for post-conceptual art of the start of the century. They penetrate beneath the surface of phenomena, work with their signifying character, but do not seek recourse in text. Everything they need to say they do so purely using creative speech. They are activities that link individual media, formal procedures and worlds of significance.

Nicolas Bourriaud has compared contemporary artists to DJs. At their mixing desk they freely handle forms that we can trace back through postmodernism and conceptual art of the sixties to interwar modernism. The final artefact ceases to be an isolated tangible whole, but is bound strongly to the context in which it arose and becomes more of an activity that is presented within the framework of the art world. However, it might equally well operate within other contexts too. Bourriaud even compares art to a team sport. He knocks it off its pedestal and incorporates it into ordinary life.

During the Noughties art does not involve the production of items for consumption, but a space for transformation. In previous decades it would have been difficult to view the projects of Kateřina Šedá, Rafani, Dominik Lang and Tomáš Vaňek as art. These days art is more and more difficult to encompass and grasp. It is complicated not only by its operations, but by its themes and forms. It recycles and appropriates, though instead of terms like "appropriation" and "collage" it uses terms like "sampling" or "remix". Artists use more and more complex methods that they take from the worlds of technology, business and social life, and politics. They thematize the present and the past, archive, conceptualise, and narrate. They create new situations, processes and information. They hybridise traditional media through infinite combinations of new materials, forms and procedures. However, radical changes are taking place in the sphere of new media too. Digital technology is changing irrevocably the face of the image and binary code is more and more engulfing the analogue visual forms of the 20th century. We are becoming used to virtual images, to their dematerialisation, and to the ever-increasing influx of such images. We are living through a change of paradigm, the consequences of which are hard to anticipate.

## PROFILES OF ARTISTS



### Jiří Kolář

(\*1914, Protivín, +2002, Prague)  
Co-founder of the artistic as-  
sociations Group 42, UB and  
Křížovatka. From 1980 Kolář  
lived in Paris, where he sup-  
ported the publication of Revue

K. He participated at Documenta IV in Kassel. He experimented with various forms of collage based on Dada principles, Art Informel and constructivist tendencies. His working methods included collage, chiasmage, confrontage, etc. However, he always worked with paper covered either with text or reproductions of artworks, events or news items, which he constructively crumpled, destroyed and glued together again. He erased certain parts of well known pictures or covered certain areas with black tape. He often covered these fragments with common items such as washboard, eggs and bottles. His work often displays a sense of play, but above all is a testimony to the situation of man.



### Běla Kolářová

(\*1923, Terezín, +2011, Prague)  
A pioneer of Czechoslovak pho-  
tography. In 2007 Kolářová was  
exhibited at Documenta 12 in  
Kassel. The first large group of  
her works comprises what she

herself called artificial negatives. She printed small items she found around her in a layer of paraffin on a piece of cellophane. She soon moved over to circular forms created without any negative as recordings of the movement of a light source. This was followed by photographs of assemblages comprising the compositional organisation of common objects. She often integrated very personal themes into her material assemblages. A frequent theme of her work is that of positive/negative, the tension of antitheses as two distinctive entities creating a whole. Her work displays a sense of play, deformation of the original meaning, and humour.



### Jan Kotík

(\*1916, Trutnov, +2002 Berlin)  
A member of Group 42. Kotík  
participated at the Czecho-  
slovak pavilion at Expo '58 in  
Brussels and from 1969 lived  
in Berlin. His work was under-

pinned by a deep intellectualism and wide-ranging knowledge and always reflected current events. He worked hard on composition and incorporated an internal system into the surface of his paintings. The gradual removal of the canvas from the wall and its development in space saw a rethinking of the conceptual relationship between different

types of visual structures. He created spatial ob-  
jects covered in bright colours that in themselves  
introduced an element of variability. He gradually  
expanded the way he thought of the basic ele-  
ments of a picture, of surface, line and colour, with  
a temporal dimension. After phases of conceptual  
and minimalist art, he moved more and more in the  
direction of neo-expressionism. Some of his estate  
is managed by the Jiří Švestka Gallery.



### Karel Malich

(\*1924, Holice v Čechách)  
Malich studied at the Faculty of  
Education of Charles University  
and the Academy of Fine Arts  
in Prague. He was a member of  
the Hollar Society of Graphic

Art and the Křížovatka Group, and was exhibited at  
the Czechoslovak pavilion at the Vienna Biennale  
(1970, 1995). From the end of the 1950s his work  
became more and more abstract and geometrical.  
He began to work with monochrome surfaces and  
his work did not reflect external reality. In the 60s  
he was involved with collages, and this led him  
to reliefs and to spatial sculptures. He created his  
first spatial models of clouds, three-dimensional  
wire compositions that, regardless of the inspira-  
tion of nature, retained their own technical and  
magical character. His spatial sculptures gradually  
became dramatically thicker, with the structures of  
the wires resembling cosmic lines of force. Malich  
thinks intensively about his own system of vision.  
He perceives his internal cosmos both from within  
and without and makes written notes. He is repre-  
sented by the Jiří Sklenář Gallery.



### Zdeněk Sýkora

(\*1920, Louny, + 2011 Louny)  
Sýkora studied art education  
and descriptive geometry at  
the Faculty of Education of  
Charles University in Prague. In  
1963 he was co-founder of the

Křížovatka Group and in 1968 participated at Doc-  
umenta in Kassel. In 2005 he received the Herbert-  
Boeckl-Preis lifetime achievement award. Sýkora  
is a representative of Czech geometric painting. In  
the mid-60s he was one of the first in the world to  
incorporate the computer into preparation of an  
artwork. In the 60s he used computers in accord-  
ance with precise rules and sought the position  
of elements within their structures. However, from  
1973 the computer was simply the source of ran-  
dom number sequences that Sýkora incorporated  
into his new system. This system gave rise to line  
pictures that he painted until his death. Though  
he worked with systems, he remained a painter

concerned in an original way with form, colour and  
their mutual relationships.

[www.zdeneksykora.cz](http://www.zdeneksykora.cz)



### Stanislav Kolíbal (\*1925, Orlová)

A graduate of the Academy of  
Arts, Architecture and Design,  
the Scenography Studio at  
DAMU. Since the end of the  
50s he has linked up formal  
elements to the expressive

content of a work in a highly original way. He uses  
the language of abstraction and geometry, with  
references to minimalism, conceptualism, and the  
Arte Povera movement. An important develop-  
ment was his cooperation with contemporary  
architects and his move toward the perspective  
of abstract language. He was attracted by the  
procedural qualities of abstract sculptures and  
the problematic of stability, instability, the fall, and  
the convergence of organic and inorganic forms.  
In time he began to examine the principle of time,  
duration and extinction. His year-long residence in  
West Berlin (1988/89) saw a transformation in his  
work. He now uses a more expressive geometrical  
language of straight lines, circles and points of  
intersection, through which he looks for order and  
concordance.



### Milan Grygar (\*1926, Zvolen)

Grygar graduated from the  
Academy of Arts, Architecture  
and Design. His work is char-  
acterised by a highly original  
concept of the relationship  
between image, sound and

space. He gravitates toward free expression and  
work with controlled randomness and in a highly  
unique way combines an interest in the audio and  
visual aspects of an artwork. Since the mid-60s  
he has been creating acoustic drawings that are  
the consequence of the performance process,  
during which technical instruments move across  
the surface of paper. The role of the artist is thus  
relegated to controlling partially random pro-  
cesses. Alongside visual works an audio recording  
is created or photographic and film documenta-  
tion. Over the next few decades Grygar developed  
a specific concept of the relationship between  
sound and image in many, often very distinct  
relationship analogies. He is represented by the Jiří  
Sklenář Gallery.



**Jan Švankmajer** (\*1934, Prague) Švankmajer studied at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design and the Academy of Fine Arts. He is best known as a film director and animator and the leading representative

of late Czech surrealism. He began by creating assemblages and had a close relationship with Art Informel. He started working with film in the 60s and since then his oeuvre has been closely linked with distinctive, highly original films, in which he works with the themes of childhood, food, dreams, eroticism, and puppet theatre. As well as puppets and other props, which feature large in his surrealist films, he has created cycles of graphic designs that he calls his Švankmajersbilderlexikon, i.e. mystifying, pseudo-scientific illustrations of fantastic creatures. In 2011 the City Gallery Prague organised an extensive retrospective of his work.



**Milan Knížák** (\*1940, Pilsen) Knížák is a member of the art group Aktual and since 1990 has been working at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he was dean from 1990 to 1996. At present he heads the Intermedia School

Studio and from 1999 to 2011 was director of the National Gallery in Prague. His artistic activities often feature performance and short exhibitions, and during the 60s he organised public events during which he sought new expressive devices and forms of creating art. He is known for his self-presentation and provocation. For instance, in his *Demonstrace jednoho / Demonstration of One* (1964) he lay on the ground and placed a sheet of paper next to him with the words "I would ask passersby to crow if possible when walking past this place". In 1968 he travelled to New York, where he participated in events organised by Fluxus and became the group's treasurer. He later expanded his expressive resources with pictures (during the 80s) and sculpture (during the 90s), and also designs jewellery, fashion collections as well as collecting and documenting puppets.

[www.milanknizak.com](http://www.milanknizak.com)



**Jiří Kovanda** (\*1953, Prague) Kovanda is head of the Performance Studio of the Faculty of Art and Design of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. He is regularly exhibited at

prestigious institutions and shows around the world, e.g. Secession in Vienna, Tate Modern London, São Paulo Biennial 2012, and Documenta 12. He made a name for himself on the global art scene with his events and interventions from the 70s and 80s, which were featured in projects charting and incorporating the art of the former Eastern bloc back into an international context (East Art Map, Body and the East, Parallel Actions). His minimalist events and interventions in public or private environments were based on a detailed scenario and could be seen as protocols of a general record. They were often so subtle as to be almost imperceptible and differ significantly from older Czech Fluxus activities or from those of his contemporaries. From the mid-80s under the influence of postmodernism Kovanda devoted himself to drawing and painting, and later the object. In the latter instance he reworked the minimalism and conceptualism of the 70s, shifting them to their current position of transience, ephemerality and DIY. In doing so he heralded the unobtrusive tendency of the generation at the turn of the millennium. He is represented by the gb agency Paris, Krobath, Vienna and Berlin, and the Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York.



**Magdaléna Jetelová** (\*1946, Semily)

Jetelová studied at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 1985 she emigrated to Germany, where she still lives. She has lectured at many Germany universities, and is at present professor at the Munich Academy. In 1987 she participated at Documenta 8 in Kassel. She made a name for herself in the 70s and 80s with her monumental, archaic sculptures. Her engagement with architecture and the relationship between object and space is clear even in this early work. She gradually began working with specific spaces, uncovering their suppressed history and attempting to retrieve their lost memories. In her ephemeral light installations she uses fire and later laser. One of her best known projects is the cycle *Domestikace pyramid / Domestication of the Pyramid* (1992), in which a pyramid with a lava surface intersected the premises of the Museum of Applied

Arts in Vienna, or the *Islandský project / Iceland Project* (1993), in which she made an underwater intercontinental mountain range visible by means of laser.

[www.jetelova.de](http://www.jetelova.de)



**Vladimír Skrepl** (\*1955, Jihlava)

Skrepl graduated from the Department of Art History and Ethnography of the Philosophical Faculty of Masaryk University in Brno and as a painter is self-taught. He won the Jiří Kovanda Prize in 2007 and the Michal Ranný Prize in 2009, and since 1994 has worked at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he heads the Painting II Studio. Skrepl arrived at painting via his theoretical background (from 1981 to 1991 he was curator at the City Gallery Prague). He created a characteristic style featuring the layering of paint and a clear, garish colour scheme. His commonest subject matters are slightly deformed figures with elements of caricature, which can be shocking to an unsuspecting viewer. Skrepl's pictures give the impression of having been created without preparation (as though the only preparation was on the canvas itself), and gesture and topical expression play an important role.



**Petr Nikl** (\*1960, Zlín)

Nikl graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts. He is a member of the Tvrdohlaví Group and winner of the Jindřich Chaloupecký Award (1995), as well as several prizes for most beautiful book of the year (1997, 2001, 2002). He is also a curator, the best known of these projects being the interactive exhibitions *Hnízda her / Nest of Games* (2000) and *Orbis pictus* held in the Rudolfinum Gallery, actor, singer and instrumentalist, and the author of idiosyncratic poetry and small prose works that he himself illustrates. He entered the art scene as a painter, and exhibited his first works in the 80s at student exhibitions forming part of the *Confrontations* series. Nikl's paintings are characterised by a monochrome background and realistic portrayals of heads, bodies and characters. In several pictures he does without colour altogether and works only in black and white. His work features a playful temperament that has made it popular amongst the general public.

[www.petrnikl.cz](http://www.petrnikl.cz)



**František Skála** (\*1956, Prague) Skála graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design and is a member of the Tvrdohlaví group. He won the Jindřich Chaloupecký Award in 1991 and represented the Czech

Republic at the 45th Biennale in Venice in 1993, where he exhibited a set of diaries written during the course of his month-long walk from the Czech Republic to Venice. He most often creates objects in which he combines natural materials with components from old, non-functioning appliances. He combines a serious approach to his art with elements of satire, something borne out by his membership of the art group B.K.S. (*Bude konec světa / The End of the World is Nigh*). His sensitive relationship with nature is also evidenced in his illustrations of children's books. He is also a musician and dancer. His most successful exhibition in terms of numbers of visitors was his solo exhibition at the Rudolfinum Gallery in 2004, for which he won the award for Personality of the Year. In 2012 the Museum of Art in Olomouc devoted a large exhibition to his work.

[www.frantaskala.com](http://www.frantaskala.com)



**Jan Merta** (\*1952, Šumperk)

Merta graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts. He arrived with a bang on the Czech art scene in the mid-80s with the arrival of the generation of Tvrdohlaví, though he himself is several years older than the members of this group. It is difficult to categorise his work: each picture is created on an entirely independent basis, and its subject matter, composition and realisation aim to offer a message and to create a distinctive universe. The subject matter of his pictures tends to be individual objects and solitary figures freed from a literal depiction of seen reality. The relationship between the visual subject and its space becomes a neuralgic interface of the painter's strategy. A tension arises between the realistic and the abstract. This is accentuated by means of Merta's transparent style of painting. He is represented by the Johnen Gallery in Berlin, the Rüdiger Schöttle Gallery in Munich, and the Martin Janda Gallery in Vienna.



**Václav Stratil** (\*1950, Olomouc) Stratil graduated from the Philosophical Faculty of Palacký University in Olomouc in 1975. In the 80s and start of the 90s he worked in Prague, though these days his name is more associated with Brno, where he has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts since 1998, since 2003 as head of the Intermedia Studio. In 2010 he won the Prize from Lukáš Jasanský and Martin Polák (The Artist Has Got the Prize). Painting is combined with drawing, photography, happenings and musical performances in Stratil's works. During the period of normalisation he created the oft-cited cycle of demanding ballpoint pen drawings comprising vertical, diagonal and horizontal lines while working as night watchman. His work after the revolution is dominated by paintings (see his series of paintings of foxes), and at present he alternates media, placing particular emphasis on performance. Stratil is represented by the AD Astra Gallery.



**Vladimír Kokolia** (\*1956, Brno) Kokolia graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in 1981. He was the first winner of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award in 1990 and since 1992 heads the graphic design studio at the Academy of Fine Arts. He is one

of the leading contemporary painters, as well as a graphic designer, draughtsman, poet and lyricist. In the 80s and 90s he sang with the alternative, experimental rock band E. He is part of the Tvrdohlaví generation, though he has always been a loner and does not often exhibit. His life is most influenced by his interest in tai chi and nature. His pictures most often depict various basic structures that can be understood as models of natural processes, the arrangement of forces and the flow of energy. The coloured lines of layered structures represent a universe of both connections and disruptions. They find their analogy in nature, microcosmic formations, as well as in technical and digital configurations.

[www.kokolia.cz](http://www.kokolia.cz)



**Vasil Artamonov** (\*1980, Solnechnogorsk, RUS) and **Alexey Klyuykov** (\*1983, Vladimir, RUS) Artamonov and Klyuykov are graduates of the Academy of

Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. They have been exhibiting as a duo since 2005 and in 2010 they won the Jindřich Chalupecký Award. They are members of the association of artists and theoreticians P.O.L.E.. They explore the processes of the social transformation of the cultures of the Eastern bloc and make reference to historical styles as transparencies of ideologies and a depository of forms. Using installations, videos, pictures, murals and objects they return the utopia of modernism to everyday reality. They review the idea of the interwar and post-war avant-garde and its recuperation by market neo-liberalism, pessimism and the loss of an alternative. The aesthetic emancipation of Poldi Kladno industrial forms in their winning installation for the Jindřich Chalupecký Award confirmed the new seriousness of artistic visuality and form for the contemporary social and political concept. They are represented by the SVIT Gallery, Prague.



**Zbyněk Baladrán** (\*1973, Prague) Baladrán studied art history at Charles University in Prague and the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He was co-founder of Display – a Space for Contemporary Art in 2001, is a curator for tranzitdisplay, has been exhibited at Manifesta 5, and was a member of the team of curators (tranzit.org) for Manifesto 8 (2010). Along with Vít Havránek he curated the exhibition *Monument to Transformation* (City Gallery Prague, 2009), a three-year research project into social and political transformation. He is concerned on a practical and theoretical basis with the theme of artistic and cultural archives and the metaphor of archaeology forms the basis of his working method. He works with video, text and installation. His work could be characterised as the analytical search for the links between the past and its construction in relation to predominant epistemological paradigms. He is represented by hunt kastner artworks in Prague.

[www.zbynekbaladrán.com](http://www.zbynekbaladrán.com)



**Josef Bolf** (\*1971, Prague) Bolf graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He is a member of the group Bezhlavý jezdec / Headless Horseman (1996–2004) and was voted 2010 Artist of the

Year for his exhibitions *Personal Disposition* at gallery hunt kastner and *I Won't See You Anymore* at a former funeral chapel in Volyně. From a formal point of view he uses various media from painting and drawing via film, sculpture to installation in order to depict traumatically romantic content. However, the focal point remains at the intersection between painting and drawing. Though the scenes and individual characters catch our attention for their charged emotionalism, the world that Bolf depicts is the place of our collective depression, neuroses and subcultural powerlessness. This is a world after the mental end of the world, childishly cruel, without vision or structure. Bolf is represented by hunt kastner artworks, Prague.



**David Černý** (\*1967, Prague) Černý graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. He won the Jindřich Chalupecký Award in 2000 and is the creator of many large and controversial sculptures in public places. He aims to provoke the viewer and test aesthetic and social limits. He appeared on the art scene at the end of the 80s as a participant in the activities of Bullshitfilm. He and his friends created short-term installations and performances on the border of soirée and artwork. He set off a nationwide discussion with his Pink Tank, in which he repainted a tank that stood as a memorial to the Soviet Red Army (1991). He achieved international renown with his project Entropa (2009), which he created to mark the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union. This sculpture, which depicts the stereotypes associated with individual EU Member States, provoked much discussion in the CR and abroad. Černý is represented by the Dvorak Sec Contemporary Gallery, Prague.

[www.davidcerny.cz](http://www.davidcerny.cz)



**Jiří Černický** (\*1966, Ústí nad Labem) Černický is a graduate of the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague and winner of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award (1998). He is an all-round

artist who ventures into the spheres of installation, performance, painting, sculpture and video. His works contain political themes, social engagement and criticism, and often operate on the boundaries of fiction. This is exemplified in one of his first events, now etched on the memory of the art scene, *Slzy pro Etiopii / Tears for Ethiopia* (1993–94), in which the artist gathered the tears of the inhabitants of a North Bohemian industrial town Ústí nad Labem in a container, which after several months of travel he handed over in person to the superior of a monastery in Ethiopia. Černický's objects often seem like perfectly made industrial objects in which, however, something has been deliberately and poorly transformed in comparison with reality. Jiří Černický is represented by the Dvorak Sec Contemporary Gallery, Prague.

[cernicky.com](http://cernicky.com)



**Federico Díaz** (\*1971, Prague) Díaz studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and now leads the Supermedia Studio at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. He represented the Czech Republic at EXPO 2010 in Shanghai with an exhibit entitled *LacrimAu*, a sensor-monitored object of a human tear covered by 24-carat gold. At the 54th Biennale in Venice the installation *Outside Itself* was created over four months, which comprises thousands of black pellets grouped into a huge form on the basis of the transformations of the surrounding world in the premises of the Arsenale. Díaz is interested in art that combines computer generated forms and sound with work in space. Multimedia installations and works relating to biomorphic architecture and site-specific projects are the central point of his oeuvre. His works are often interactive, the viewer becoming not only part of the artwork but directly influencing it through the shape, appearance and movement of their body.

[www.fediaz.com](http://www.fediaz.com)



**Milena Dopitová** (\*1963, Šternberk)  
Dopitová studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and now teaches at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. She was awarded a prize from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, INC. and the Michal Ranný Prize. She was a member of the group Pondělí, which at the start of the 90s represented a transition point between postmodernism and incipient post-conceptualism. After 1989 she participated at many exhibitions in prestigious institutions around the world and international art shows. Her installations combine object, photograph and later video, and reflect the social situation and position of women in a newly transforming society. She examined the contemporary problematic of identity through her personal relationship with her sister and twin. This relationship featured in later themes, such as intimate hygiene and the ageing process. Furthermore, all other spheres of her interest, namely the ageing process, death, insecurity and violence involve general phenomena that to begin with she exhibited as a contrast with the image of scientific method and social research, though resolved with her customary personal participation. Milena Dopitová is represented by the Polansky Gallery, Prague.  
[www.milenadopitova.cz](http://www.milenadopitova.cz)



**Lukáš Jasanský** (\*1965, Prague)  
and



**Martin Polák** (\*1966, Prague)

Jasanský and Polák studied at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and since 1986 have worked as an artistic duo. They were prize-winners in The Artist Has Got the Prize competition in 2009. The first neo-Dadaist series from the 80s alternated with their own variant of topographic photography and large aggregates that brought post-conceptual considerations into Czech photography and incidentally became an important commentary on the times. Jasanský and Polák were inspired by the non-aesthetic of scientific and police registration photography. They use the documentary genre (as well as other normative methods of depiction) with irony. They photograph (in large, analogue resolution) every item in absurd quantities. They comment not only on the socio-political reality but the medium of photography and art in general, all the way to its

exhibition, documentation and mythologization. Their work is based on the dialectic of lucid clarity and refined extremities. Jasanský and Polák are represented by the SVIT Gallery, Prague.



**Krištof Kintera** (\*1973, Prague)  
Kintera graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague in 1999. He is the founding member of the alternative association Jednotka / Unit, and co-founder of the NOD Universal Space in Prague. He

also occasionally works as a curator. His work is characterised by an interrogation of the role of art and an analysis of the surrounding world and the system of consumer society. He creates technically demanding objects and installations using everyday items, to which he gives a new significance and shifts them into a different perspective. His best known works include *Spotřebiče / Appliances* (1997-1998), the grumbling figures commenting on contemporary events of *Mluviči / Speakers* (1999), or the boy banging his head against a wall in *Revolution* (2005). His sculpture of a lamp entitled *Z vlastního rozhodnutí / Off His Own Bat* located in the park beneath Nusle Bridge that he dedicated to people who ended their lives by jumping from the bridge saw him win the prize for Personality of the Year 2011. Krištof Kintera is represented by the Jiri Svestka Gallery, Prague and Berlin and the Schleicher Lange Gallery, Berlin.  
[www.kristofkintera.com](http://www.kristofkintera.com)



**Barbora Klímová** (\*1977, Brno)  
Klímová is a graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Brno, where she is a lecturer at present. She won the Jindřich Chalupický Award in 2006 for her project *Replaced*, in

which she repeated certain well known performances from the 70s and 80s within the context of the new millennium. She works with archives, time shifts, remakes and reinterpretation, and is involved in other projects, e.g. *Personal Events* (2008), in which she had persons repeat the activities they were carrying out in old photographs. She also makes small interventions in public space with the character of events or installations.

[www.barboraklimova.net](http://www.barboraklimova.net)



**Alena Kotzmannová** (\*1974, Prague)

Kotzmannová studied at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. She introduced into a subsiding post-modern tendency new themes

of temporal asynchrony, gaps in time-space, the parallelism of worlds, and alternative and virtual reality. She conceptually analyses the medium of photography and penetrates to the older temporal layer of imaginative black-and-white photography, which she subjects to open confrontation with other media in the form of adjustment, installation, etc. However, she takes account of what remained of the genre of interwar panoramic photography (*Klasika / Classic*, 2001-2004). Rather than representing documentary research her series draw on film direction and create an atmosphere that stands in for narrative. Travel and the sea are important aspects of her work. Alena Kotzmannová is represented by hunt kastner artworks, Prague.  
[www.kotzmannova.cz](http://www.kotzmannova.cz)



**Eva Koťátková** (\*1982, Prague)

Koťátková graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague and won the Jindřich Chalupický Award in 2007. She participated at the

6th Liverpool Biennial, 11th Biennale de Lyon and the 18th Sydney Biennale. She examines the relationship of the individual to the structured system and their physical presence in patterns of behaviour. She reveals archetypal and learned relationships within the framework of the community and in the direction of society as a whole (the community of the family, school, old people, children, mentally ill people). She does not use individual strategies of research (reconstruction, archaeology, archive, direction and script) and media (drawing, collage, object, video, installation, event) in an abstract way, but makes them contingent upon the topic. She monitors intensively problems of social isolation. She is concerned with the formation of the human personality through education and external influences and the functioning of memory, which is selective and subjective. Using traumatic manifestations and the voluntary entry of the view into the "game" she attempts to remedy social distortions. Eva Koťátková is represented by hunt kastner artworks, Prague and Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe and Berlin.



**Dominik Lang** (\*1980, Prague)

Lang studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and heads the Sculpture Studio at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. He

created the project *The Sleeping City* for the 54th Venice Biennale. He works within the framework of post-conceptual, minimalistic and contextual tendencies and is interested in both the political level of art in public space and institutional criticism. General perceptions of space, the internal relationships and the consequences of their realignment play a fundamental role in this work. He exhibits space itself through construction (scaffolding) and deconstruction (holes into the basement) and dictates psychophysical changes and other movement by means of space, a new perspective. He works with the environment he knows: his home, his father's studio, the gallery, its past and present. He investigates the historical stages of gallery operations from exhibition halls and furniture to the strategy of exhibiting, and reconstructs and deviates from established artistic, institutional, spatial and viewer-based plans. Dominik Lang is represented by hunt kastner artworks, Prague, and Krobath, Vienna and Berlin.



**Ján Mančuška**

(\*1972, Bratislava, +2011, Prague)  
Mančuška graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He was a member of the Bezhlavý jezdec / Headless Horseman group and won the

Jindřich Chalupický Award in 2004. He exhibited at the 51st Berlin Biennale, Berlin Biennial 4, etc. The beginnings of his work introduced conceptual procedures into art at the end of the 90s, firstly within the framework of painting, which was soon torn from the canvas and inserted into the space itself. His installations and objects advocate non-spectacular opposition to the previous post-revolutionary wave and are accompanied by a shift toward a DIY aesthetic. Mančuška believed that common-or-garden items and fragments could say more about reality in the era of post-revolutionary disillusionment than exclusivity and entireties. Fragmented reality, in which absence has greater power than presence, is later composed into rhizomatic installations in which text and dialogue took centre stage as the basis of his later films and theatre performances. He was interested in the asynchrony of temporal strata, the non-linear nature of reading and the possibility of adapting



Brechtian theatre techniques to modern society. Ján Mančuška is represented by the Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe and Berlin.

[www.janmancuska.com](http://www.janmancuska.com)



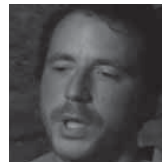
**Markéta Othová** (\*1968, Brno) Othová graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague and won the Jindřich Chalupický Award in 2002. She works with large-format black-and-white photography applied without distance to the wall. This is already indicative of her ambivalent relationship to the very basis of photography, which is at once image, but also a series of enlarged snapshots with a nomadic and voyeuristic narrative played out in European streets. The method of perceiving and memorising the world and its civil appearance forms the subject matter of her photographs, as though looking at reality meant understanding it. She single-mindedly looks for her own visual language in which the atmosphere of pictures is not the result of simply intuition but deliberation too. She reevaluates the security of modern language in a melancholic reflection, which, however, retains the uniqueness of the image. Markéta Othová is represented by the gallery Nicolas Krupp Contemporary Art, Basel.



**Michal Pěchouček** (\*1973, Duchcov) Pěchouček graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and in 2003 won the Jindřich Chalupický Award. He is also a lecturer, curator and film and theatre writer. His work is situated between two main interests, i.e. telling a story and analysing the media and the story within it. These positions are alternated and sometimes combined. He has always worked with sets, arrangements, sequences and direction and even, though he painted large figural canvases from a hospital context, made a film of them. Later, enchanted by cinematography, he animated photographs into photo-films with every narrative spliced with sophisticated twists and codes. He is interested in transitory forms. He interrogates by what means individual media are able to recount a story, and then combines their procedures. In his last large exhibition at the Prague City Gallery entitled *Lessons in Art* in 2011 his textile and embroidered images encountered filmograms, i.e. photographs of cinema films.

[www.pechoucek.cz](http://www.pechoucek.cz)

**Rafani** – a group created at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague in 2000. Strictly democratic rules reinforce the idea of the collective, which was undermined in the period after 1989. At a time when there was a dearth of exhibition premises and information, the group's members ran the gallery CO 14 and organised lectures by artists at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague. Through their first events and demonstrations they opened up sensitive themes, such as the relationship between Czechs and Germans, rightwing extremism, the current leftwing, immigration, and the state of democracy. They unsettled the general public with the appearance of the radical right (uniforms, rules, methods speeches). In 2002 they joined the Communist Part for research purposes. At exhibitions they presented a precisely delineated spectrum of opinions, whose margins they deliberately intensified and the overall impression of which they reinforced through their visual staging. They did not put forward their own opinion, preferring to place their faith in the strength of the contradictions on show. In 2006, dissatisfied with the dominance of conceptual presentations they stopped using text as being too defining and ideological and blacked out all of their texts, including their website. They now concentrate on image-based metaphors and their own introspection. In 2011 they made their first film entitled *31 konců 31 začátků / 31 Endings 31 Beginnings*.  
[rafani.blogspot.com](http://rafani.blogspot.com)



**Pavel Sterec** (\*1985, Prague) Sterec graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and at present is a student on the doctoral programme at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. He combines performance, object, installation, photography and other media in his works. He examines questions of science, museums and archives, social structures, and our dependency on tangible and symbolic capital. His projects also regularly address the question of the artist's dependence on his or her own craftsmanship and the issue of cooperation and appropriation. An example would be his solo exhibition in the Moravian Gallery, Brno, at which by using a three-metre stone paddlewheel used as legal tender on the island of Yap he interrogated the significance and meaning of payment systems. He is a member of the federation of artists and theoreticians P.O.L.E.

[www.pavelsterec.org](http://www.pavelsterec.org)



**Jiří Surůvka** (\*1961, Ostrava) Surůvka is a graduate of the Department of Czech Language and Literature at the Philosophy Faculty of Ostrava University. Since 2003 he has been working at Ostrava University as head of the New Media studio and is a member of the Lozinski František group. His work is characterised by his typically ironic humour. Since the mid-80s he has focussed on performances at which he often dresses up in symbolic costumes. He is especially known for his Policeman and Batman. However, there is an intelligible criticism of society in his paintings, objects, photographs, digital pictures and video.



**Kateřina Šedá** (\*1979, Brno) Šedá graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. In 2005 she won the Jindřich Chalupický Award. She alternates between the local surroundings of Brno and international artistic institutions such as Tate Modern, 10th Lyon Biennale, Manifesta 2008, documenta 12, the 5th Berlin Biennial, etc. She is part of the generation of conceptual artists at the start of the millennium affected by the social turnaround in art. She systematically works on community-based projects, which are site-specific and intended to make an avant-garde intervention in life. In an effort to counteract the atomisation of society she persuades large numbers of people to perform collectively their endemic habits, which in her most recent projects she has then transferred to the context of international artistic projects. Many of her events highlight the hermetic character of the art world and attempt to force it to confront the opinion of people who are not involved with art. Kateřina Šedá is represented by Franco Soffiantino Contemporary Art Productions, Torino.



**Mark Ther** (\*1977, Praha) Ther graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. In 2011 he won the Jindřich Chalupický Award for his film *Das wandernde Sterlein*, which combines the controversial topic of paedophilia with the story of the disappearance of children in the last years of the war on the Czech borderlands. He exhibits within the context of film festivals, though mainly in galleries and museums. He works exclusively with video and film and cinema presentation. He adheres to the aesthetic quality of image and sound, which intensifies the

viewer's experience. He consciously disrupts a realistic storyline with mystery. His work is characterised by its sensuous interpretation of traumatic themes and social and historical taboos related to sexual deviation, gender and queer issues, and the Sudetenland identity. His early short videos drew on the aesthetic of clips and flirted ambivalently with popular culture and its icons (Madonna, Andy Warhol). An important figure whose identity he borrowed was the popular opera diva Maria Callas.



**Jiří Thýn** (\*1977, Prague) Thýn graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. He is a photographer who interrogates the possibilities of photography and tests the boundaries between photography and the seen. Some of his work is of an abstract character, a quality he achieves through his choice of subject matter or the fragmentation thereof. However, in his pictures we always encounter a new reality, even though some photographs might at first sight seem "ordinary" because of the choice of theme. This would include photos in which he processes one of the unconventional motifs that pervades his work, namely plants and views of botanical gardens. Jiří Thýn is represented by hunt kastner artworks, Prague.  
[www.jirithyn.cz](http://www.jirithyn.cz)



**Tomáš Vaněk** (\*1966, Počátky) Vaněk graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. In 2001 he won the Jindřich Chalupický Award. He is a member of the Headless Horseman group and one of the founder members of the PAS group. Since 2010 he has been senior lecturer at the Intermedia 3 studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He works mainly in public spaces, either as a member of the PAS group, with which he was one of the first in the CR to initiate street window exhibitions, or as an artist who uses templates which he sprays onto exteriors and interiors. He often takes a concrete subject as his theme that could genuinely appear in the location of his exhibition (electrical installations, building facades, nails in a wall, etc.). Because he is interested in activating the viewer's perceptions, at the end of the 90s he began using the designation Particip for events conceived for a particular place or situation. His Particips are numbered in ascending order. Tomáš Vaněk is represented by hunt kastner artworks, Prague.  
[www.particip.tv](http://www.particip.tv)

## THEORETICIANS AND CURATORS

In the Czech Republic as in the rest of the world the role of curator has developed from the positions of art historian, theoretician, gallerist and collector looking after the depository of a cultural institution. The emergence of curatorship in this country was linked to the modernist programme. Any mention of this period should not overlook Vincenc Kramář, a First Republic theoretician and promoter of Cubism who is responsible for acquisitions of enormous value. His private collection of Cubist art that he bequeathed to the National Gallery forms the basis of the internationally recognised Modern Art Collection. An important milestone in the formation of contemporary art curator is to be found in the 1960s. General cultural efforts were accompanied by significant changes in the policy of organising exhibitions. A gallery had an exhibition commission set up that was led by a commissioner, i.e. the main curator of the exhibition space. A leading role was played by the programme of the Václav Špála Gallery, put together by Jindřich Chaloupecký, an important Czech art and literary critic, theoretician and historian, author of philosophical essays and translator, as well as a post-war advocate of modernism. He was the first, for instance, to present events and happenings within the Czech gallery environment. However, the driving momentum of this period was brought to a halt by normalisation and Chaloupecký banned from public activities. Another important figure is the theoretician and critic Ludmila Vachtová, who during the 1960s encouraged a host of kinetic art practitioners. She also headed Platýz, a unique type of sales gallery within the framework of the communist regime.

The 1980s saw unofficial exhibitions being held in apartments as well as what were dubbed Confrontations (1984 -1987). These were salon-style exhibitions lasting several days organised by Jiří David and Stanislav Diviš, students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, in apartments, studios, homes and exteriors mostly rented by artists. This type of "social curatorship", in which the main criterion was direct artistic confrontation and the social events associated therewith, even left an impression on the operations of several official cultural institutions of the normalisation period. In her study of the Grey Zone Jiřina Šiklová noted that, after the possible overthrow of the regime, the art industry would be transferred into the hands of representatives of this zone, i.e. for the most part employees of art institutions such as the National Gallery and the Prague City Gallery. These maintained contact with the development of curatorial practice and the gallery environment, while not being part of the establishment.

However, neither large cultural institutions nor regional galleries underwent a transformation process. Leaving aside the fact that important historians, theoreticians and curators had worked for several years in these institutions, their structure remained almost unchanged. Instead of the formulation of a cultural policy there was simply a revival of an exhibition programme and the slow penetration of contemporary art into the institutional environment. One of the important figures in curatorship both prior to and after the revolution was Karel Srp (1988-2013 at the Prague City Gallery). Srp worked in tandem with Olga Malá, with whom he founded and curated the first years of the Zvon Biennale of Young Artists in the 1990s. Jana and Jiří Ševčík were the main curators and theoreticians of the post-revolutionary generation of contemporary artists, linking them up with the pre-revolutionary generation, helping create their programme, and defining the important themes of the transformation process from postmodern theory to the political and social concepts of the end of the 90s.

After the revolution in 1989 a new art industry had to be established from scratch. An important role was played by newly created galleries featuring various kinds of hybrid programmes. In 1990, as in other countries of the former Eastern Bloc, the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art was established in order to support the development of an art infrastructure (since 1999 the Foundation and Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague). Ludvík Hlaváček, director of the centre, implemented many extensive and demanding international projects on topical themes involving new media, political art, and art in public spaces. An important institution for the presentation of internationally renowned figures that in the post-totalitarian period seemed simply but logically a priority, was Prague Castle. The head of the programme was Ivona Raimanová, who subsequently incorporated the local exhibition strategy into the conception of the Rudolfinum Gallery, where it remains to this day. In 1994 Petr Nedoma took over leadership of the Rudolfinum with its concept of a "kunsthalle", and he continues in the post to this day laying an emphasis on classical exhibitions of world art. Nevertheless, in the 90s several curators were already working independently at their base institutions or completely on their own and conceiving projects in other galleries and non-gallery premises. Representatives of the new generation of curators arriving on the scene around the mid-90s, such as Radek Váňa, Tomáš Pospiszyl and Vít Havránek, have often acquired many years' experience at the City

Gallery Prague or the National Gallery. It is only during the Noughties that we see the arrival of curators completely independent of larger institutions. These would include Václav Magid and Pavlína Morganová, even though they work in the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, and Karel Císař, who is essentially a philosopher and whose curatorial activities investigating contemporary aesthetic trends has a distinctly international flavour. Jiří Ptáček, Jan Zálešák, Edith Jeřábková and Pavel Vančát operate partially within the institutional framework, which is on the one hand marked by the rigidity of the existing pre-revolution structures and on the other by the need for maximum flexibility of the workforce, mobility, short-term contracts, etc. The youngest "independent" curator working within the institutional environment is Ondřej Chrobák, at present employed at the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

A phenomenon on the art scene in the third millennium involves curators and artists who founded or head small, non-profit galleries and alternative premises. These too have their direct predecessors: the artist Jiří David from the 80s and Milana Saláka from the 90s and Noughties, bringing political engagement and themes to curatorship, or the artist Jiří Valoch from the 70s, the former curator of The Brno House of Arts and the National Gallery, and Michal Škoda, who heads the House of Art in České Budějovice, which offers a top quality international programme. A new topic is women's art, feminism and gender studies, introduced to Czech curatorial and critical practice above all by Martina Pachmanová and Zuzana Štefková. As well as independent curatorship Pachmanová and Štefková also lecture extensively at universities. It is from universities that the new generation of curators is arriving, which is the first to have completed courses geared specifically toward work as a curator. Over the last few years it has been possible to study curatorship at Master's degree level at the Faculty of Art and Design of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem and at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague as part of a programme entitled The History and Theory of Design and New Media. The Academy also offers a doctorate in the sphere of The Curator and Critic of Design and Intermedia. This generation has a keen interest in critical curatorship and its relationship with institutional criticism.

## PROFILES OF THEORETICIANS AND CURATORS

### Vjera Borozan (\*1977)

Borozan is an art historian and curator. She studied art history at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague. She has lectured at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno and is currently a lecturer at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. From 2005 to 2011 she collaborated on the tranzit initiative and since 2012 has been head of the online platform Artyčok.TV. She is interested in the politics of representation in art and a critical rewriting of modern and contemporary art history. Her texts have been published in art magazines and various publications.

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### Vít Havránek (\*1971)

Havránek is a curator, critic and art historian. He studied Art History at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague. From 1995 to 1998 he was curator of the National Gallery in Prague, from 1998 to 2002 curator of the City Gallery Prague, from 2000 specialist assistant at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague, and since 2002 executive director of the Czech section of the Tranzit initiative. He is a member of the PAS association and co-creator with Zbyněk Baladrán of the project Monument to Transformation. In 2010 he was a member of the team of curators at the Manifesta 8 art show. He follows the development of the artistic avant-garde of the 20th and 21st centuries on the basis of post-colonial theories and documentary forms of art of the third millennium.

[kiki@tranzit.org](mailto:kiki@tranzit.org)

### Ondřej Chrobák (\*1975)

Chrobák is an art historian and curator who studied the art history at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague. From 2000 to 2008 he was curator and director of the Collection of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery in Prague, from 2001 to 2006 co-curator of the Display Gallery, from 2009 to 2011 main curator of GASK in Kutná Hora, and since 2012 he has been head of the Methodology Centre at the Moravian Gallery in Brno. He is interested in contemporary art and the contemporary interpretation of 20th century art, often through work with the collections of Czech art institutions.

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### Edith Jeřábková (\*1970)

Jeřábková is a curator and critic who studied art history at the Philosophy Faculty of Palacký University in Olomouc. From 2006 to 2009 she was curator of the collection and assistant director of the Galerie Klatovy/Klenová, from 2010 to 2012 she worked at the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and the Fotograf Gallery in Prague (from 2011 as the main curator), and since 2011 she has been working at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague as head of the Sculpture Studio (with Dominik Lang). She is concerned with the interpretation of the themes of contemporary art by means of exhibitions and writes criticism on the subject for specialist periodicals, publications, and catalogues. She has followed the transformative processes in Czech art over the last thirty years.

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### Michal Koleček (\*1966)

Koleček is a curator and theoretician who studied at the Faculty of Education of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem and the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University in Brno. From 1994 to 2002 he was director of the Emil Filla Gallery in Ústí nad Labem, from 1997 to 1999 curator of the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague, from 2002 to 2003 curator of the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art of the National Gallery in Prague, from 1994 to 2007 head of the Faculty of Art History and Theory, and since 2007 has been dean of the Faculty of Art and Design of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. In his curatorial and theoretical activities he follows the social aspects of contemporary fine art. His research and teaching activities focus on the problematic of the status of art in totalitarian regimes during the 1970s and 80s and the subsequent transformative process.

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### Václav Magid (\*1979)

Magid is an artist, theoretician and critic. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design, did a course in the liberal arts and the humanities at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague and studied philosophy at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague. Since 2006 he has been working at the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and since 2012 at the Faculty of Fine Art in Brno. He has been editor-in-chief of the magazine Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones since 2007. In 2010 he was a finalist in the Jindřich

Chalupecký Award. In his curatorial work and publications he looks for the relationships between theory, philosophy and contemporary art, monitors the consequences of conceptualism on contemporary art, and is interested in activism, avant-garde forms and social programmes.

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### Pavčina Morganová (\*1974)

Morganová is a curator, critic and art historian. She studied art history at the Philosophical Faculty in Prague. Since 1997 she has been working at the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. She lectures at the Academy and at the Anglo-American University in Prague. She is interested in Czech action art from the 1960s to the 1980s and has published a definitive monograph on the subject. She is also interested in the period of transformation and has participated on many anthologies devoted to this. In her curatorial work she mainly follows the post-conceptual trends of the generation of the 90s and Noughties.

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### Tomáš Pospiszył (\*1967)

Pospiszył is an art historian, curator and critic. He studied the Theory of Culture and the History of Art at the Philosophical Faculty of Art in Prague and was a postgraduate at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. From 1992 to 1993 he was production manager of the exhibition programme of Prague Castle Administration, from 1997 to 2002 curator of the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Gallery in Prague, and in 2000 a research assistant at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Since 2003 he has been a lecturer at the Film and TV School at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and since 2004 has participated in the organisation of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award. In his theoretical and curatorial work he focuses on the central themes of modern and avant-garde art of the 20th and 21st century and on the interpretation of marginal cultural phenomena. He is also intensively involved in journalism.

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### Jiří Ptáček (\*1975)

Ptáček is a curator and critic. He studied art history at the Philosophical Faculty of Palacký University in Olomouc. From 2003 to 2006 he was editor-in-chief of the magazine Umělec / Artist, from 2007 to 2008 dramaturg of the NoD Gallery in Prague, from 2009 to 2011 a lecturer at the Video Studio at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Brno University of Technology, from 2010 dramaturg of

the Zutý Mánes Gallery in České Budějovice and in 2011 curator of the Gallery of the Young in Brno. Since 2012 he has been curator of Fotograf Gallery in Prague. In his curatorial work and publications he follows current events on the Czech art scene and comments on social, political and individual phenomena. He has long collaborated with artists belonging to the tradition of the art of positive gestures in public space.

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#### **Mariana Serranová (\*1976)**

Serranová is a curator and critic. She studied art history at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague. From 2003 to 2012 she worked as a freelance curator and critic, cooperating with the Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague, the Jelení Gallery, the festival 4+4+4 Days in Movement, Funke Kolín, Futura, the Prague Biennale, Artyčok, TV, etc. In 2005 she was an external lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Brno. She is interested in the political and social aspects of contemporary art. Her exhibition Indications was devoted to the post-conceptual inconspicuous tendency and social conceptions in Czech art at the start of the 21st century.

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#### **Zuzana Štefková (\*1977)**

Štefková is a curator, critic and art historian. She studied art history at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague. Since 2002 she has been lecturing at the Council on International Educational Exchange in Prague, since 2007 she has been a lecturer at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, and she has also given lectures at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno and the Anglo-American University in Prague. She is co-founder of the C2C Circle of Curators and Critics. Since 2008 she has been curator with the Artwall Gallery and has also worked for the Centre for Contemporary Art Prague. She is interested in political, gender and minority questions in art and art in public places.

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#### **Pavel Vančát (\*1976)**

Vančát is a curator and journalist. He studied at the Institute of Humanities of Charles University in Prague. From 2000 to 2004 he was an external lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Design at the J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, from 2008 to 2010 curator of the Klatovy/Klenová Gallery, and from 2010 to 2011 curator of the MeetFactory residential programme in Prague. Since 2008 he has been curator of the project StartPoint prize for emerging artists. He is interested in contempo-

rary art and the history of photography. His monitoring of the development of the photographic medium since the 1970s has included an attempt to incorporate more precisely photography into the free sphere of art and visual culture.

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#### **Petr Vaňous (\*1975)**

Vaňous is a curator, critic and art historian. He studied art history at the Philosophy Faculty of Masaryk University in Olomouc. From 2000 to 2001 he was editor of the magazine Atelier and from 2006 to 2009 editor of the cultural weekly A2. He is interested in the relationship between traditional creative media (especially painting) and new visual trends and monitors the transformation of painting under the conditions of an information society.

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#### **Jan Zálešák (\*1979)**

Zálešák is a curator and critic. He studied at the University of Hradec Králové and Masaryk University in Brno. From 2008 to 2010 he was curator at the Gallery of the Young Brno and since 2011 he has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno. He is interested in collaborative and participatory projects in contemporary art and art at the turn of the millennium, the social and archival reversal in Czech art, as well as the romanticising return of subjectivism and emotionalism.

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## MUSEUMS OF ART

The Czech Republic boasts a relatively dense network of publicly funded museums of art (the word "gallery" is mostly used in Czech to describe a museum of art). As well as the Big 4 museums, i.e. the National Gallery in Prague, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, the Moravian Gallery in Brno and the Olomouc Museum of Art, the founder of which is the state as represented by the Ministry of Culture, the backbone of this network comprises twenty regional galleries administered by the regions.

Most of the institutions administered by the regions came into being in the 1950s and 60s as state museums established by the Communist Party. Their distribution around the country is based on the old territorial classification of the former Czechoslovakia, and the result is that the Ústí nad Labem region, which is the centre of the mining and chemical industries, is these days the founder of four museums of art (in Litoměřice, Louny, Most, and Roudnice nad Labem).

There are considerable differences in the level and profile of individual regional galleries. Several feature permanent exhibitions charting art from the Middle Ages to the present day, while others organise temporary exhibitions. Several are devoted to artists of the region in question, while others offer a programme covering the entire country. Only some of these galleries focus on contemporary art.

The fact that, with the exception of the municipal galleries in Prague and Ostrava, these institutions are not based in buildings geared specifically toward exhibitions is a drawback. At present several ambitious conversions of historical buildings into gallery spaces are being planned (in Liberec, Zlín and Kutná Hora) and new buildings are in the planning stage (in Pilsen, Olomouc and Ostrava).

Museums of art are federated in two professional organisations: the Association of Galleries of the CR ([www.radagalerii.cz](http://www.radagalerii.cz)) and the Association of Museums and Galleries ([www.cz-museums.cz](http://www.cz-museums.cz)). Co-operation on the organisation of exhibitions has no

set rules but is always subject to individual agreements reached between the institutions involved. There are several travelling exhibitions, though the route differs from project to project

### National Gallery in Prague

This is the largest and oldest museum of art in the Czech Republic. The roots of the National Gallery stretch back to 1796. The gallery has no central building. Instead its collections are distributed around several historical palaces in the centre of Prague. The collection of modern and contemporary art is based in Veletržní Palace, a beautiful example of functionalist architecture from between the two world wars.

**Palác Kinských  
(administrative headquarters)  
Staroměstské nám. 12  
110 15 Prague 1**

**Veletržní Palace  
(collection of modern and contemporary art)  
Dukelských hrdinů 47  
170 00 Prague  
[www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz)**

### Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

The Museum of Decorative Arts is based in a building from the end of the 19th century. As well as its collection of applied arts it houses an important collection of photography (focusing on the Czech interwar avant-garde) and glassworks. The museum is limited by insufficient exhibition space caused by the endless delay in the construction of a new depository.

**Ulice 17. listopadu 2  
110 00 Prague 1  
[www.upm.cz](http://www.upm.cz)**

### Moravian Gallery in Brno

With a population of 380,000 Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic. The Moravian Gallery operates not only as a museum of art but also as an important collection of applied arts and design. Its collection of photography, which includes more than 25,000 exhibits, is one of the oldest in Europe. The highlight of its calendar is

the Biennale of Graphic Design, which has been running since 1963.

**Pražákův palác**  
**Husova 18**  
**662 26 Brno**  
**www.moravska-galerie.cz**

## Olomouc Museum of Art

With a population of 100,000 Olomouc is a university town with a long cultural tradition. At the core of the museum is its collection of old European painting put together by the Bishops of Olomouc from the 18th century onwards. Over the last few years the museum has been creating an ambitious collection of post-war and contemporary art from Central and Eastern Europe known as the Central European Forum Olomouc. A new building to house the museum is being planned.

**Denisova 47**  
**771 11 Olomouc**  
**www.olmuart.cz**

## City Gallery Prague

The City Gallery Prague manages several exhibition buildings in the city centre, of which the best conditions are offered by the galleries on the upper floors of the Municipal Library. The Dům U Zlatého prstenu / House of the Gold Ring houses a permanent exhibition of post-war and contemporary art. The gallery focuses on Czech and foreign art from modernism to the present day. It offers a systematic overview of the contemporary Czech art scene. It is also the organiser (though not at completely regular intervals) of the Zvon Biennale.

**Revoluční 1006/5**  
**110 00 Prague 1**  
**www.ghmp.cz**

## Gallery of Fine Art Ostrava

Ostrava has a population of 300,000 and is a city with a long industrial tradition. The gallery is housed in the House of Art built in the 1920s. It hosts a good collection of modern Czech art, though it does not have the space for a permanent exhibition. There are plans for a new wing that would expand the exhibition space considerably.

**Poděbradova 1291/12**  
**702 00 Ostrava**  
**www.gvuo.cz**

## Museum Kampa

The museum came into being thanks to the efforts of the art collector Meda Mládková and her husband Jan Mládek. It was opened in 2003 in Kampa Park, Prague, in the former Sova's Mill, which was completely refurbished and these days is a landmark on the embankment of the River Vltava. The Jan and Meda Mládek Foundation manages an extensive collection of two icons of 20th century art, František Kupka and Otto Gutfreund, as well as the Collection of Central European Modern Art.

**U Sovových mlýnů 2**  
**118 00 Praha 1 – Malá Strana**  
**www.museumkampa.cz**

## West Bohemian Gallery in Pilsen

Pilsen has a population of 170,000 and is the natural centre of Western Bohemia. In 2015 it will be the European Capital of Culture. The gallery is based in two historical buildings in the city centre that it uses for temporary exhibitions. It features a strong collection of 19th century art and Czech Cubism, though it has no permanent exhibitions. The project to build a new section has been postponed indefinitely for financial reasons.

**Pražská 13**  
**301 00 Pilsen**  
**www.zpc-galerie.cz**

## East Bohemian Gallery in Pardubice

Pardubice has a population of almost 90,000. The gallery is based in two historical buildings in the city centre. It offers a wide range of exhibitions, ranging from book illustrations to large exhibitions of contemporary artists.

**Dům U Jonáše**  
**Pernštýnské nám. 50**  
**530 02 Pardubice**  
**www.vcg.cz**

## Aleš South Bohemian Gallery

With its population of 90,000 České Budějovice is the centre of South Bohemia. In the town itself the gallery only has a small exhibition space for a permanent exhibition focusing on older art. Premises for larger exhibitions are found in the grounds of the chateau in the nearby town of Hluboká nad Vltavou, which is a popular tourist destination.

**Wortnerův dům**  
**U Černé věže 22**  
**370 01 České Budějovice**  
**www.ajg.cz**

## Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region

Kutná Hora has a population of 20,000 and is on the UNESCO cultural heritage list. The gallery is located in the former Jesuit College, which is gradually being refurbished. The town is a frequent destination of tourists from Prague. For this reason the main exhibitions take place in spring and summer at the height of the tourism season.

**Barborská 51-53**  
**284 01 Kutná Hora**  
**www.gask.cz**

## Gallery of Fine Art in Cheb

Cheb has a population of 30,000 and is the westernmost point of the Czech Republic. The gallery recently reinstalled its permanent exhibition and is attempting to offer a wide range of exhibitions from the 19th century to the present day. It is co-organiser of the European prize Start Point, the brainchild of Marcel Fišer, gallery director.

**náměstí Krále Jiřího z Poděbrad 16**  
**350 46 Cheb**  
**www.gavu.cz**

## Liberec Regional Gallery

Liberec has a population of 100,000 and is situated in Northern Bohemia. It was home to the German-speaking minority until the end of the Second World War. The gallery attempts to respect this tradition and renew links with the German cultural environment. It is housed in a luxury villa dating from the end of the 19th century in which there is space for a permanent exhibition and temporary

exhibitions. The plan is for the gallery to relocate to the building of the former municipal spa, built at the beginning of the 20th century, which is being refurbished at present.

**U Tiskárny 81/1**  
**460 01 Liberec V**  
**www.ogl.cz**

## Gallery of Fine Arts in Zlín

Zlín has a population of 70,000 and is situated in the east of the Czech Republic. It is proud of its commercial history. In 2013 the gallery is set to relocate to refurbished premises of the sometime factory of the company Baťa. The gallery organises two triennials (the Zlín Salon of the Young and the New Zlín Salon), which focus on contemporary art from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It also publishes its own art and literary quarterly entitled Prostor Zlín.

**Dům umění**  
**náměstí T. G. M. 2570**  
**762 27 Zlín**  
**www.galeriezlín.cz**

## EXHIBITION HALLS AND NON-COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Exhibition halls have a long history in the Czech lands. At the start of the last century there were already several good quality exhibition halls in Prague, which acted as arbiters of the art of the time. One of the main centres of cultural events was the building housing the Mánes Union of Fine Arts, built in 1930 as the union's headquarters on the embankment of the River Vltava. After the communist putsch the union's activities were closed down. They briefly started up again in the second half of the 1960s, before again stagnating during the period of normalisation. It was only in the 1990s that monographic exhibitions of representatives of the pre-revolutionary unofficial scene appear on its programme, along with more broadly conceived curatorial projects. However, the union was again to lose its position, and at present the famous Mánes building is being refurbished. Nová síň / New Hall was built by the Union of Creative Artists in the 1930s. It became the focus of more attention in the second half of the 90s, when it curated a series of quality exhibitions featuring both Czech and foreign names. The now legendary Václav Špála Gallery was very important during the late 60s, with a clear concept of an exhibition programme. At that time the respected art theoretician Jindřich Chalupecký was responsible for the programme. During the period of normalisation exhibitions of mainly official art acceptable to the political regime were held in the gallery. After 1989 the gallery again focused on contemporary Czech art. The very first Jindřich Chalupecký Prize was awarded here and the gallery still plays host to an annual exhibition of the competition laureates. All three of these galleries are still in operation today, though they do not play such an important role as in the past.

These days important exhibition halls in the Czech Republic represent good quality institutions financed from state and municipal subsidies, grants, and their own fundraising activities. Their programmes concentrate on contemporary art with an overlap into other spheres of culture and art. Larger institutions with a relatively long tradition include the Rudolfinum Gallery and the Brno House of Arts, which given their quality and exhibition profile are the equivalent of museums. Their programme is basically more flexible and more able to reflect the situation on the art scene. A courageous initiative of the last few years was the Centre for Contemporary Art DOX, the brainchild of a group of private investors that saw a large, multifunctional complex created in a newly refurbished industrial building. However, its programme is fragmentary and despite a series of successful exhibitions it still lacks a clear overarching structure.

After 2000 many organisations were created, largely civic associations, with the aim of expanding and promoting activities in the sphere of contemporary art and encouraging international linkups. These institutions concentrate on an interdisciplinary programme and often take the form of cultural centres that organise concerts, theatre performances, etc. alongside exhibitions. They also run residential programmes and rent studios to artists. The most important of these are MeetFactory, Futura and Karlin Studios. An interesting feature peculiar to the Czech Republic is the large number of small, non-commercial galleries or non-profit spaces offering an excellent programme. These were created in response to the needs of the art scene and the inability of large institutions to offer space for the most up-to-date art projects. These galleries now enjoy the same respect as traditional institutions. Their exhibition programmes feature almost exclusively young artists and this in turn offers young curators an opportunity to make a name for themselves.

### Rudolfinum Gallery

The current form of the Rudolfinum Gallery is very much the work of its director and curator Petr Nedoma. The gallery focuses on contemporary art and could be characterised as a *Kunsthalle*. It does not have its own collection and focuses on exhibitions and cooperation on an international level. It also publishes catalogues and brochures, as well as organising lectures, seminars, and many accompanying events.

**AIšovo nábřeží 12**  
**110 01 Prague 1**  
**[www.galerierudolfinum.cz](http://www.galerierudolfinum.cz)**

### Brno House of Arts

For more than one hundred years the House of Arts has long been one of the most important drivers of Brno-based culture. It is an open-plan, modern institution that mediates and encourages contact between artists and the general public. Its ambition is to become a dynamic space linked into a network of prestigious European galleries. It oversees the activities of two other galleries, the House of the Lords of Kunštát in Dominikánská Street, and Gallery 99 in the basement of that building.

**Malinovského náměstí 2**  
**602 00 Brno**  
**[www.dum-umeni.cz](http://www.dum-umeni.cz)**

### House of Art České Budějovice

Since 1998, under the leadership of its curator Michal Škoda, this gallery has focused on contemporary art and architecture. It mounts exhibitions of a range of Czech and foreign artists. The latter very often receive their first exposure not only in the Czech Republic but in the whole of Eastern Europe. Over the last few years there has been a gradual movement in the direction of minimalism and geometric or conceptual art and its offshoots.

**Náměstí Přemysla Otakara II. 38**  
**370 01 České Budějovice**  
**[www.mucb.cz](http://www.mucb.cz)**

## Tranzitdisplay

Tranzit.org is an independent initiative that supports and organises contemporary art projects in Central Europe (as well as in the CR it operates in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia and is supported by the Erste Foundation). Tranzit creates a dynamic interdisciplinary platform that allows for dialogue between artists, curators, critics and other interest groups on the one hand, and the general public on the other. Tranzit aims to provide direct support to artists and to create the conditions for the understanding and communication of contemporary art within a broader social framework. Display is a non-profit organisation that exhibits contemporary visual art.

**Dittrichova 9**  
**120 00 Prague 2**  
[www.tranzitdisplay.cz](http://www.tranzitdisplay.cz)

## Jelení Gallery

This gallery was opened in 1999 as part of the Centre for Contemporary Arts Prague. It focuses on exhibiting contemporary artists who are sometimes still at art school. The gallery also organises workshops by established artists.

**Drtinova 15**  
**150 00 Prague 5**  
[www.galeriejeleni.cz](http://www.galeriejeleni.cz)

## DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design

DOX was founded in 2008 as a private initiative of several investors. It profiles itself as a dynamic cultural platform encouraging confrontation between different approaches and tendencies on the Czech and international art scene. It aims to promote dialogue between various artistic disciplines, from painting and sculpture, to photography, design, architecture, film, video and new media.

**Poupětova 1**  
**170 00 Prague 7**  
[www.dox.cz](http://www.dox.cz)

## Futura

The Futura Centre for Contemporary Art is a non-profit organisation. It presents the work of internationally renowned artists, both from the Czech Republic and abroad. It has also launched a programme of residential courses and cooperates with foreign institutions. Foreign artists are able to implement their projects in Prague and Czech artists have the opportunity to travel abroad.

**Holečkova 49**  
**150 00 Prague 5**  
[www.futuraproject.cz](http://www.futuraproject.cz)

## Karlin Studios

This is a large complex housing almost twenty studios that are rented to selected artists. Along with the Entrance Gallery, the Karlin Studios Gallery exhibits the work of young Czech and foreign artists. The founder and initiator of this non-profit project is Futura. One of the studios is used by foreign artists invited to Prague as part of the residential programme organised by Futura.

**Křížkova 34**  
**186 00 Prague 8**  
[www.karlinstudios.cz](http://www.karlinstudios.cz)

## MeetFactory

MeetFactory was established in 2001 by the artist David Černý and since 2007 has been based in an industrial building in Prague. This is an all-encompassing project, the aim of which is to run an art and cultural centre bringing together genres and creative minds. MeetFactory is the venue for encounters between fine art, theatre, film music and educational programmes. It also organises an international residential programme and rents studios to local artists.

**Ke Sklárně 3213/15**  
**150 00 Prague 5**  
[www.meetfactory.cz](http://www.meetfactory.cz)

## Školská 28

Školská 28 Communication Space is an exhibition and education centre. Since 1999 it has focused on Czech and foreign fine art, contemporary music, the work of filmmakers, and new media. An important part of its activities are evening programmes in the form of lectures, topical broadcasts, and creative workshops.

**Školská 28**  
**110 00 Prague 1**  
[www.skolska28.cz](http://www.skolska28.cz)

## Fotograf Gallery

The Fotograf Gallery is a multifunctional centre that brings together several activities intended for the cultural public in the sphere of creative photography. Amongst its important activities is the publication of the magazine Fotograf, which was launched in 2002. The gallery also exhibits the photographic projects of artists published in the latest edition of the magazine and organises thematic lectures.

**Školská 28**  
**110 00 Prague 1**  
[www.fotografgallery.cz](http://www.fotografgallery.cz)

## Galerie mladých/ Young Artists' Gallery

This space for the presentation of work by young artists was opened in 1967. It exhibits the work of students and recent graduates of Czech and Slovak art schools. Exhibitors must be aged up to 35. As well as solo and group exhibitions, it attempts to promote thematically linked curated shows. The gallery is overseen by the Tourist Information Centre, which also runs the Gallery U Dobrého pastýře and Gallery Kabinet in the same premises.

**Galerie TIC**  
**Brno Tourist Information Centre**  
**Radnická 4, 658 78 Brno**  
[www.galerie-tic.cz](http://www.galerie-tic.cz)

## Wannieck Gallery

Its main focus is on exhibiting contemporary Czech and world painting and object art. The gallery is also engaged in building a collection of works of the 1980's and 1990's generation of Czech painters and of those representing the latest trends in painting. The gallery concentrates its efforts on collecting works of top representatives of the young generation of Central European artists. Wannieck Gallery is based in a factory hall from the 19th century.

**Ve Vaňkovce 2**  
**602 00 Brno**  
[www.wannieckgallery.cz](http://www.wannieckgallery.cz)

## PRIVATE COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

The situation on the contemporary art market, i.e. the activities of private galleries that operate as an artist's exclusive representative, cooperate with them over the long term and try to promote them on an international level, has moved on significantly only during the last few years. The process began in the nineties, and although commercial galleries were created, it would be difficult to refer to them as the traditional type of representative institution, but more as parties selling various types of art. This dilettantism, caused mainly by lack of experience, continues to have an influence. It created an atmosphere of distrust between artists and art dealers, with many artists still preferring to sell their work directly from their studio.

Nevertheless, during the 1990s three Prague galleries were opened that represent the first professional commercial galleries in the true sense of the word. The first of these was the MXM Gallery. This was opened in 1991 and cooperated mostly with artists from the Tvrdohlaví and Pondělí groups as well as with individuals (e.g. Jiří Kovanda, Jan Merta and Vladimír Skrepl). It also concentrated on selected artists from the older (Karel Malich) and younger generation (Ján Mančuška, Kamera skura). It was regularly represented at foreign art fairs and played an important role in the promotion of Czech art of the 1990s abroad. MXM was closed down after the flooding which afflicted a large part of Prague in 2002. In the mid-90s the Jiří Švestka Gallery and the Zdeněk Sklenář Gallery (see below) opened their doors. For a long time these eponymous founders were the only curators, and it was only after 2000 and 2005 respectively that others began to appear. The currently most successful gallery, Hunt Kastner Artworks, which concentrates exclusively on contemporary art and represents more than ten artists, was opened in 2005. Since then other galleries have been established, such as Svit, Dvorak Sec Contemporary, and the Drdova Gallery. Recently several galleries have been opened that operate only on the Czech market. Only time will tell how successful they will be. They include Prinz Prager, the Chemistry Gallery, Laboratorio, and the Polansky Gallery.

### Jiří Švestka Gallery

The gallery was founded in 1995 by the art historian Jiří Švestka. In 2009 it opened a branch in Berlin. The gallery holds a wide portfolio of the young and middle generations of both Czech and foreign artists. It also manages part of the collection of Vicenc Kramář. The gallery regularly participates at important art fairs in Europe and the USA.

**Biskupský dvůr 6**  
110 00 Prague 1  
[www.jirivestka.com](http://www.jirivestka.com)

### Zdeněk Sklenář Gallery

Zdeněk Sklenář began working as a gallerist during the 1990s in Litomyšl and was one of those responsible for creating an art market in the Czech Republic. These days he heads two galleries in Prague. He represents post-war Czech artists such as Zdeněk Sýkora, Milan Grygar and Karel Malich, and younger artists such as Federico Díaz. He is also involved in publishing.

**Smetanovo nábřeží 4**  
110 00 Prague 1  
[www.zdeneksklenar.cz](http://www.zdeneksklenar.cz)

### Hunt Kastner Artworks

This gallery was opened in 2005 by Katharine Kastner, an American, and Camille Hunt, a Canadian. It represents contemporary Czech artists such as Zbyněk Baladrán, Josef Bolf, Eva Koťátková, Dominik Lang and Jiří Thýn. The gallery has participated at international fairs such as Frieze Frame (2009, 2011), Art Statement Basel (2010, 2012), Paris Photo (2010), and Liste Basel (2007, 2008, 2009).

**Kamenická 22**  
170 00 Prague 7  
[www.huntkastner.com](http://www.huntkastner.com)

### SVIT

Since 2010 the Svit Gallery has been run by the gallerist Michal Mánek and curator Zuzana Blochová. It represents both Czech (Artamonov/Klyuykov, Jasanský/ Polák, Marek Meduna) and foreign artists (Andrew Gilbert, Markus Selg). The gallery has participated at fairs such as Frieze London (2012), abc art berlin contemporary (2012), and NADA Cologne (2012).

**Štefánikova 43a – 2nd floor**  
150 00 Prague 5  
[www.svitpraha.org](http://www.svitpraha.org)

### Drdova Gallery

The gallery was opened in 2012 by the art historian Lucie Drdová. It represents contemporary Czech and Slovak artists such as Václav Kopecký, Pavla Sceranková, Jan Pfeiffer, and the duo Aleksandra Vajd and Hynek Alt. It has participated at ViennaFair, The New Contemporary (2012)

**Křížkovského 10**  
130 00 Prague 3  
[www.drdovagallery.com](http://www.drdovagallery.com)

### Dvorak Sec Contemporary

This gallery was opened in 2008 by the gallerist Olga Dvořáková and the businessman Petr Šec. It manages a portfolio of both middle-generation Czech artists such as Jiří David and Jiří Černický, and young talents such as Jakub Matuška aka Masker and Ondřej Brody, as well as several foreign artists. It participated at ViennaFair, The New Contemporary (2012), and Scope Basel (2010).

**Dlouhá 5**  
110 00 Prague 1  
[www.dvoraksec.com](http://www.dvoraksec.com)

### Vernon Gallery

Monika Burian opened this gallery in 2001. It features a heterogeneous programme and represents Czech and foreign artists of all generations. It participated at Volta Basel, ViennaFair, The New Contemporary (2012), and Scope Basel (2010).

**U Průhonu 22**  
170 00 Prague 7  
[www.galerievernon.com](http://www.galerievernon.com)



## ART SCHOOLS

The oldest art school in the Czech Republic is the Academy of Fine Arts (AVU) in Prague. Its traditional "competitor" and the second oldest art school is the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (VŠUP). It was only after the fall of the Iron Curtain that other university faculties devoted to fine art were established in other cities: Brno was followed by Ústí nad Labem and Ostrava.

AVU was established in 1799 originally as a painting academy, and officially commenced its activities a year later. Though VŠUP is the second oldest art school in the country it is the first state art school. It was founded as the School of Applied Arts in Prague in 1885. However, when AVU was nationalised in 1896, the School of Applied Arts lost the prestigious status of the only Czech state art school, a number of its staff resigned, and the school devoted itself mainly to applied skills. The Academy's status was given a further boost in 1926, when it was the first in what was at that time Czechoslovakia to be awarded the status of tertiary-level art school.

Like other universities, during the Second World War AVU was closed and its role taken over to a certain extent by the Secondary School of Applied Arts. In 1946, the School of Applied Arts was made an institution of tertiary education and renamed Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design. However, when the communists took power in 1948 both institutions were taken under the control of the state, which decided who would teach and study at them. Opponents of the regime and artists from families known to be against the system were basically banned from studying. In 1968, when the principles of the communist regime were liberalised in Czechoslovakia, it seemed that AVU too could expect the necessary reforms. However, the invasion by Warsaw Pact forces and the period of normalisation meant these changes were only made after 1989. The structure, concept and staff of the institution were changed, and VŠUP underwent similar changes.

After the revolution new art schools and faculties were established. The first of these was the Faculty of Fine Art (FaVU), part of the Brno University of Technology. In 1992 a Department of Drawing and Modelling was opened at the Architecture Faculty of the Brno University of Technology, which provided the embryo for FaVU, which opened its doors on 1 January 1993. The second such art school is the Faculty of Art and Design of the Jan Evangelist Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. In 1992 a Glass Studio was opened as part of the Department of Art of the Faculty of Education.

Subsequently, an Institute of Creative Culture was established, further studios added, and in 1994 the idea was mooted of expanding the institute into an independent Faculty of Art and Design. This idea finally bore fruit in 2000. The youngest such art school is the Faculty of Art of Ostrava University, opened in 2007. Art is also taught as a separate discipline in Pilsen, Liberec, Zlín and Opava.

### Academy of Fine Arts in Prague

AVU offers Master's degrees and doctoral programmes in the sphere of fine art, new media, the restoration of art and architecture, and related research and creative activities. At present it is home to 18 studios. The Academic Research Centre (VVP AVU) operates under the auspices of the Academy.

**U Akademie 4  
170 22 Prague 7  
www.avu.cz**

### Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design

VŠUP offers Master's degrees and doctoral programmes. At present it comprises five departments covering 23 studios in the spheres of architecture, design, free art, applied art and graphic design. The sixth department teaches art history and aesthetics.

**náměstí Jana Palacha 80  
116 93 Prague 1  
www.vsup.cz**

### Faculty of Fine Art of the Brno Technical University

FaVU offers Master's degrees and doctoral programmes. At present two studios offer seven different accredited disciplines: sculpture, graphics, graphic design, industrial design, conceptual tendencies and video-multimedia-performance. Painting is an exception, which is taught in three studios.

**Rybářská 125/13/15  
603 00 Brno  
www.ffa.vutbr.cz**

### Faculty of Art and Design of the Jan Evangelist Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem

The faculty aims to provide an applied-arts education through its Master's degree and doctoral programmes. It has seven departments: photography, electronic image, visual communication, applied arts, design, general training, and art theory.

**Pasteurova 9  
400 96 Ústí nad Labem  
www.fud.ujep.cz**

### Faculty of Art of Ostrava University

The faculty offers two Bachelor's and two Master's degree programmes and comprises nine departments: intermedia, graphic design and drawing, painting, sculpture, and art theory and history. The remaining departments offer music and singing.

**Dvořákova 7  
701 03 Ostrava 1  
fakultaumeni.osu.cz**

## ART EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The history of art at the level of Master's degree is taught at six places of higher education in Prague, Brno, Olomouc and Ostrava. However, most art departments are fairly conservative, with some avoiding contemporary art altogether. For the moment the most progressive department in terms of its approach to contemporary art is the Department Art History and Aesthetics of the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. The most specialist approach to contemporary art is taken by a quartet of research and documentation centres, namely the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts, the independent initiative Tranzit, the Centre for Contemporary Art, and the Archive of the Fine Arts.

There is a fairly wide range of specialist periodicals available, though it is impossible to speak of a clear editorial line being taken in the case of most of them. Editorial boards are understaffed and the circles of external collaborators somewhat hazy in outline. Individual writers often take it in turns to write for all the magazines. Print runs are in the order of a few thousand at most. None of the magazines is financially self-supporting and all are jostling for grants from the Ministry of Culture. During the last few years several specialist art websites have been created.

The daily newspapers devote almost no space whatsoever to art, and instead of meaty reviews tend to print texts of an informational character. Only two of the five national dailies employ their own journalists to write about fine art. Most attention is paid to stories involving record levels of auction sales, museum thefts, or sensational revelations regarding hitherto unknown works of celebrated artists.

### SPECIALIST INSTITUTIONS

#### Department of Art History and Aesthetics of the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague

Karel Císař and Martina Pachmanová, both active curators, are members of the department. The academy places great emphasis on the active involvement of students in the creative process by organising exhibitions or publishing specialist anthologies.

**náměstí Jana Palacha 80**  
**116 93 Prague 1**  
**www.vsup.cz**

#### Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts

A specialist institution focusing on the history of post-war and contemporary art. It is headed by the curator Jiří Ševčík, and other members of the centre are also active curators. Amongst the centre's outputs are editions of primary documents pertaining to 20th Czech art.

**U Akademie 4**  
**170 22 Prague 7**  
**vvp.avu.cz**

#### tranzit.cz

A branch of the Central European initiative tranzit.org, financed by the Erste banking group. Tranzit charts conceptual tendencies in art from the 1970s to the present day. The director of the Czech office is Vít Havránek. In 2010 Tranzit was one of the collective of curators of Manifesta in Spain. It runs the Tranzitdisplay Gallery in Prague in collaboration with the association Display.

**Dittrichova 9/337**  
**120 00 Prague 2**  
**www.tranzit.org**

### Centre for Contemporary Art

The centre was opened at the start of the 1990s with support from the American philanthropist George Soros. These days it is financed mainly by grants from the Ministry of Culture. It is led by Ludvík Hlaváček and runs the Jelení Gallery and the internet database artlist.cz, which offers a portfolio and short profiles of contemporary Czech artists in both Czech and English.

**Jelení 9**  
**118 00 Prague 1**  
**cca.fcca.cz**

### Archive of the Fine Arts

This is an archive of printed material relating to the fine arts that was set up in the mid-80s. Originally the private initiative of Jiří Hůla, the archive has gradually taken on an institutional character. Its materials are processed into the abART database (abart-full.artarchiv.cz). The archive's library is based at the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art.

**Poupětova 1**  
**170 00 Prague 7**  
**www.artarchiv.cz**

### MAGAZINES

#### Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones

This periodical focuses on contemporary visual art within a broader cultural and theoretical context. It is published twice a year by the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts. The texts published are peer reviewed.

**U Akademie 4**  
**170 22 Prague 7**  
**vvp.avu.cz**

#### Ateliér

A fortnightly journal of reviews and curatorial texts about exhibitions in smaller galleries and outside Prague, which otherwise tends to remain beneath the radar of other media.

**Londýnská 81**  
**120 00 Prague 2**  
**www.atelier-journal.cz**

## Flash Art

The Czech-Slovak version of the well known international magazine of the same name. Flash Art offers original texts reflecting events on the art scene in both countries and abroad. It is published two or three times a year.

**Prague Biennale Foundation**  
**Budečská 3**  
**120 00 Prague 2**  
**www.praguebiennale.org**

## Umění/Art

A bimonthly periodical published by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (ÚDU AV ČR). The magazine offers peer-reviewed texts focusing mainly on older art and often written in English or German. It has given up reviewing exhibitions and at most examines exhibition catalogues.

**Husova 4**  
**110 00 Prague 1**  
**www.umeni-art.cz**

## Umělec/Artist

An international magazine published in several languages twice a year. The Czech-based publisher Divus now has branches in London and Berlin. The magazine deliberately ignores current events and discourses in the art world in favour of establishing its own topics.

**Divus**  
**Bubenská 1**  
**170 00 Prague 7**  
**www.divus.cc**

## Art+Antiques

A conservatively inclined monthly journal focusing on current events on the Czech art scene. As well as exhibitions (from Old Masters to contemporary art), it deals with architecture and the art market.

**Ambit Media**  
**Klicperova 8**  
**150 00 Prague 5**  
**www.artcasopis.cz**

## INTERNET

### artalk.cz

A website charting current events on the Czech art scene that places an emphasis on contemporary art and the institutional operations of museums and galleries. Over the last few years this has become an important source of information in this sector.

### artyčok.tv

An internet video gallery and TV news channel charting events on the contemporary art scene in the form of short video clips (reports are accompanied by English subtitles). The Academy of Fine Arts in Prague is a project partner.

### jlbjlt.net

An independent information portal focusing on events in smaller galleries. The website calls itself an "elite cultural listings magazine".

### artmap.cz

A guide to exhibitions and associated events both in and outside Prague (also in English).

# ART PRIZES

In the years prior to the Velvet Revolution (1989) there was no special prize for artists in what was then Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, fine artists, like other artists, could be awarded the honorary title of Meritorious Artist by the state. The highest award was the title of People's Artist. Examples of the holders of such titles would include the sculptor, Communist Party politician and sometime rector of the Academy of Fine Arts loyal to the regime, Miloš Axman, or the artist Jiří Trnka, who was internationally renowned as an illustrator of children's books and animated film director.

At the beginning of the nineties, thanks to the efforts of the first Czechoslovak president Václav Havel, the artist Jiří Kolář and the scenographer Theodor Pištěk, the Jindřich Chalupecký Award was created. This is now the most important and prestigious art prize in the CR. It has been awarded every year since 1990 and is intended for young artists aged up to 35. Up until 2000 its organisers cooperated with the National Gallery in Prague on awarding the prize. Subsequently the exhibition of finalists travelled between Prague and Brno. In Brno it was taken under the patronage of The Brno House of Arts and in Prague it was once held in the Prague City Gallery but otherwise in various independent galleries. For three years (2009–2011) the exhibition of finalists was held in the Centre for Contemporary Art DOX, and in 2013 it is set to return to the National Gallery, where there has since been a change of management.

There exist another two prizes that were set up partly to answer criticism of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award. The first of these is the Critics' Award for Young Painting (awarded since 2008), whose organisers were reacting to the fact that very few artists who were involved exclusively with the medium of painting appeared amongst the finalists of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award. The other prize for young artists is (or rather was) the Prize NG 333 (in 2011 renamed the Prize 333 National Gallery and ČEZ Group), which from 2007 to 2011 was awarded by the National Gallery in Prague. The application requirements for both prizes were almost identical, the only difference being the age limit (artists had to be aged up to 33 to compete for the Prize NG 333). The question of whether two such prizes should exist side-by-side in the CR was resolved with the disbandment of the Prize NG 333 in 2012 and the planned relocation of the exhibition of finalists of the Jindřich Chalupecký Award to Veletržní Palace of the National Gallery.

The Artist has a Prize competition was established as the antithesis to the Jindřich Chaloupecký Award. The competition awards a prize from ... (the name changes according to the name of the previous winner). The prize is awarded by artists and theoreticians younger than 35 to an artist who has already passed this age limit. The Michal Ranný prize for merit is organised by the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

Shortly after the turn of the millennium several awards organised with the patronage of mainly regional galleries appeared on the Czech art scene. Like the competitions already referred to, most of these concentrate on young artists and differ only in respect of the entry qualifications which a candidate must fulfil. These include the Václav Chad Award (Gallery of Fine Arts, Zlín), EXIT (Emil Filla Gallery, Ústí nad Labem) and the project Start Point, which is an international award for the best art school undergraduate. Students at Czech art schools and from other European countries participate in the project. The prize is a month's residence in Prague the following year and a solo exhibition in the Gallery of Fine Art in Cheb. The same gallery is co-organiser with the magazine Art+Antiques and the internet portal artalk.cz of the award for Personality of the Year for the best artwork of the season.

### Jindřich Chaloupecký Award

This has been awarded every year since 1990 to young Czech fine artists aged up to 35. It is named after the renowned art critic and philosopher Jindřich Chaloupecký. It is administered and organised by the Jindřich Chaloupecký Society. The prize is awarded by a jury comprising Czech and foreign theoreticians, curators and artists.

[www.cjch.cz](http://www.cjch.cz)

#### Winners:

1990 Vladimír Kokolia  
 1991 František Skála  
 1992 Michal Nesázal  
 1993 Martin Mainer  
 1994 Michal Gabriel  
 1995 Petr Nikl  
 1996 Kateřina Vincourová  
 1997 Jiří Příhoda  
 1998 Jiří Černický  
 1999 Lukáš Rittstein  
 2000 David Černý  
 2001 Tomáš Vaněk  
 2002 Markéta Othová  
 2003 Michal Pěchouček  
 2004 Ján Mančuška

2005 Kateřina Šedá  
 2006 Barbora Klímová  
 2007 Eva Kotátková  
 2008 Radim Labuda  
 2009 Jiří Skála  
 2010 Vasil Artamonov and Alexey Klyuykov  
 2011 Mark Ther

### The Artist has a Prize (Prize from...)

An event initiated by a group of young theoreticians and artists. The prize, the title of which changes every year depending on the name of the last winner, is awarded as a gesture by the younger generation of artists and theoreticians to the older generation (aged 35 and older). A survey of artists and theoreticians younger than 35 nominates the finalists and selects the best solo exhibition, group exhibition and artwork organised or created in the previous year.

[www.laureat.cz](http://www.laureat.cz)

#### Winners:

2006 Jiří Kovanda  
 2007 Vladimír Skrepl  
 2008 Adriena Šimotová  
 2009 Lukáš Jasanský and Martin Polák  
 2010 Václav Stratil  
 2011 Dalibor Chatrný  
 2012 Vladimír Kokolia

### Critics' Award for Young Painting

This is a prize awarded by the Society of Art Critics and Theoreticians, the Czech section of the AICA and the Critics' Award Fund. The exhibition of the finalists is organised by the Critics' Gallery. Applicants must be involved in painting and related activities and be aged up to 30. The jury comprises Czech artists and critics.

[www.galeriekritiků.cz](http://www.galeriekritiků.cz)

#### Winners:

2008 Ladislava Gadžiová  
 2009 Evžen Šimera  
 2010 Vladimír Houdek  
 2011 Adam Štech  
 2012 Josef Achrer

### Personality of the Year

The prize for Personality of the Year has been awarded since 2002 for important work on the Czech art scene over the previous year. This work may be a solo exhibition, a publication, participation at an important foreign show or a specific artwork. Originally a wide range of critics and art historians were asked to vote for the winner. However, since 2010 a decision has been reached by ten specialists representing various generations, regions and spheres of fine art.

[osobnostroku.triodon.com](http://osobnostroku.triodon.com)

#### Winners:

2002 Jiří Sopko  
 2003 Kamera Skura  
 2004 František Skála  
 2005 Jan Merta  
 2006 Pavel Brázda  
 2007 Jiří Kovanda  
 2008 Rafani  
 2009 Jan Merta  
 2010 Josef Bolf  
 2011 Krištof Kintera

### Michal Ranný Prize

The Moravian Gallery in Brno awards this prize, named after the prematurely deceased painter Michal Ranný (1946–1981). It is intended for Czech fine artists and there is no age limit. Each two years someone receives the award who has enriched Czech visual culture both in form and content and for whom the Moravian Gallery in Brno organises an extensive solo exhibition.

[www.moravska-galerie.cz](http://www.moravska-galerie.cz)

#### Winners:

2001 Dalibor Chatrný  
 2003 Miroslav Šnajdr Sr.  
 2005 Stanislav Kolíbal  
 2007 Jiří Kovanda  
 2009 Vladimír Skrepl  
 2011 Milena Dopitová

### Václav Chad Award

Every three years the Regional Art Gallery in Zlín organises the Zlín Salon of the Young, an exhibition of the work of artists aged up to 30. The Václav Chad Award is given to the best work in the exhibition. The winner has a solo exhibition in Zlín. In 2012 the competition was held for the sixth time. The jury comprises Czech theoreticians from various regions of the CR.

[www.galeriezlin.cz/cz/galerie/zlinsky-salon-mladych](http://www.galeriezlin.cz/cz/galerie/zlinsky-salon-mladych)

### EXIT Prize

This nationwide competition for art school students in the Czech Republic is organised by the Faculty of Art and Design of the J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. It takes the form of a biennale and was first held in 2003. An exhibition of the finalists is organised by the Emil Filla Gallery, and the jury comprises Czech and foreign curators, critics and artists.

[fud.ujep.cz/ex](http://fud.ujep.cz/ex)

### Awards of the Ministry of Culture

Every year since 2002, on the occasion of the national holiday of October 28th, the Ministry of Culture has been presenting The Awards of the Ministry of Culture for contributions to the fields of theatre, music, the visual arts, and architecture; nominations in dance are included within the field of theatre. The award can be given either for outstanding artistic creation or interpretation or for lifetime artistic achievement.

[www.mkcr.cz](http://www.mkcr.cz)

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Laura J. Hoptman (ed.), *Beyond Belief. Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, (exhibition catalogue), Chicago : Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995

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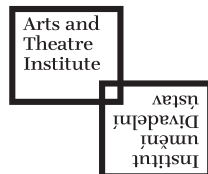
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## CZECH CONTEMPORARY ART GUIDE

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*(Profiles of Artists, Private Commercial Galleries,  
Exhibition Halls and Non-commercial Galleries)*  
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Silvie Šeborová  
*(Profiles of Artists, Art Prizes, Art Schools)*

**Translation:** Phil Jones

**Design:** Colmo

**Photo:** National Gallery in Prague  
Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague  
Hunt Kastner Gallery  
Muzeum Kampa  
Ztichla klíka Gallery  
Dvorak Sec Gallery  
Association of Jindrich Chapulecky  
Archives of artists and curators

**Printed by:** in2U print

Published by the Arts and Theatre Institute

© 2012 Institut umění - Divadelní ústav  
Arts and Theatre Institute  
Celetná 17  
110 00 Praha 1  
[www.idu.cz](http://www.idu.cz)  
[www.culturenet.cz](http://www.culturenet.cz)  
E [info@idu.cz](mailto:info@idu.cz)

ISBN 978-80-7008-294-2  
as its 651st publication