

## **Prague sculpture exhibitions 1898 – 1916**

### **A contribution to the theme of gallery sculpture presentation**

#### Dissertation synopsis

Sculpture as an artistic discipline experienced a dynamic rise in the Czech lands at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This followed the much admired example of France, where Charles Morice, referencing Rodin and his pupils, asserted the dominance of modern sculpture over painting in 1910. Thanks in large part to major art world figure and educator J. V. Myslbek, the Czech lands also saw the development of a highly ambitious group of sculptors poised to address a growing social demand for monumental works (particularly memorials) that recaptured the city's public space. Sculptors worked on architectural commissions for decorative sculptures and on orders for funerary objects, which guaranteed them an income and enabled them to pursue their own creative work. However, it was chiefly this "flood of monuments" that attracted public attention to sculptors and garnered them social prestige. Sculptors became more deeply involved in art events and played a major role in addressing contemporary art world issues. The public boom enjoyed by sculpture carried over into exhibition halls, where works of sculpture claimed a highly visible place and, in contrast to commissioned sculptures, could be very modern in form and content. Gallery presentations of sculpture works changed significantly and ventured beyond the parameters of the historicizing Glyptothek. Exhibitions of, or including, sculpture became modern, sophisticated affairs whose authors had in mind the creation of a highly compact artistic spectacle.

This dissertation deals with the presentation of works of sculpture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Through catalogue research, I find sculptors who participated in

Prague exhibitions held by the Fine Arts Union (Krasoumná jednota) and the Mánes Association of Fine Artists (Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes) as of 1907, I also look at the Artists' Group (Skupina výtvarných umělců). I deal with the representation of particular artists and the subsequent reflection of their participation in contemporary journalism (K. B. Mádl, F. X. Šalda, Miloš Jiránek, K. Čapek, A. Novák et al.). By analysing photographs published in art journals and popular magazines of the time (e.g. Volné směry, Dílo, Český svět, Zlatá Praha), I assess changes in the modes related to the exhibition of sculptures as works of art. I am also interested in looking at the atmosphere of the large Prague exhibitions of the work of foreign artists (Rodin, Bourdelle, Meunier), the local public's reception of these events and an evaluation of the knowledge applied in holding sculpture shows of Czech artists. I use available sources (records of the Fine Arts Union in the National Gallery in Prague Archive and of the Mánes Association of Fine Artists in the City of Prague Archives) to examine the promotion of small-scale sculptures on the art market. I also deal with the changing social and artistic status of sculptors and look at the degree to which they played an active role in organising and reforming contemporary exhibition practice.