

Abstract

The thesis deals with fine arts in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. It analyzes Czech fine art during the Nazi occupation of World War Two, concentrating on its official component that has not yet been deeply researched. The author surveyed archives, press and literature of the period. The aim was to identify key themes in the public discussion about artistic issues and to trace developments in the legal status of Czech fine art under the occupation.

First, a brief portrait of the historical context of 1938 to 1945, accompanied by identifying several pathological phenomena that occupation and the war brought to Czech society. Those that crept into the fine arts are interpreted from a psychoanalytic point of view. Next the author focuses on the official cultural policy of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. He notes the short and long-term objectives of Nazi policies and their impact on the workings of cultural life in Czech society. He speaks about radical conservative critiques of modern art, which accused the avant-garde of mercantilism, of politicizing art, of being foreign, and arbitrary. So-called “degenerate” art (Entartete Kunst) is also briefly mentioned. A term that was used to defame and denounce modern art. For the first time, an unknown list of Czech “degenerate” painters is introduced. Mention is made of the Protectorate’s “cultural boom” was characterized not only by high cultural activity, but also by a decline in quality. This is the period when the notion of Kitsch surfaces, and results in a broad public debate lasting in the 1940s. Thesis presents a Soviet propaganda film which was based on the protectorate’s performance. It also addresses the controversy over so-called historicism, which was then made an issue by former avant-garde artists who had worked in artistic styles, such as the Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque. The final section focuses on the functioning of two important Prague cultural institutions Mánes Association of Fine Artists, and the private gallery known as Topičův salon. In both cases the author demonstrates how the two institutions coped with the pressure of the occupation regime. Among the figures is a table of exhibitions organized by galleries in Prague from 1938 to 1944.

The thesis demonstrates the varied ways in which Czech fine art culture responded to the changing political and economic conditions from the Munich Agreement to liberation of Czechoslovakia. An example can be the people’s intense interest in fine art, an artistic overproduction accompanied by a general decline in quality, and the business of kitsch and counterfeits. The text also makes clear that it was under the Protectorate that key theoretical framework for the post-war ideas of so-called socialization of modern art and coping with kitsch in Czechoslovakia were made.

Keywords

Fine Arts. Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The occupation. Nazi cultural policy. Entartete Kunst / degenerate art. Antimodernisms. Censorship. Kitsch. Historicism. Psychoanalysis. Mánes Association of Fine Artists. Topič Salon.