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The Question of Folk Art in the Interwar Period

Four Texts by:

Sergei Makovsky (1877–1962)

Drahomíra Stránská (1899–1964)

Zdeněk Wirth (1878–1961)

Karel Teige (1900–1951)

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Abstract

The processes of modernization in Europe led, in the early twentieth century, to an increasing degree of interest in the status of folk art. If it represented a superseded stage of social and cultural development, what role did it have in modern society? The four texts here illustrate the different kinds of ideas that circulated in Czechoslovakia the interwar period, and they testify to the fact that it remained a continuing subject of fascination. The authors, ranging from the Russian art critic Sergei Makovsky to Karel Teige, one of the leading members of the Czechoslovak avant-garde, deal with a range of issues, to do with the nature creativity in folk art, the role of women as makers, the relation between folk and high art, and the commodification of folk art in modern urban life. The texts are prefaced with an introduction that outlines the broader context of debate in which these texts belong.

Keywords

folk art; gender; society; avant-garde; craft; creativity; progress; conservatism

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The Question of Folk Art in the Interwar Period

Introduction

Marta Filipová

Is conservatism a distinguishing feature of folk art, or can folk art contain some genuinely inventive quality? This was one of the questions that preoccupied the four writers featured here, who, from strikingly different positions, consider the role, place and meaning of folk art in the contemporary society of interwar Czechoslovakia.

In the early twentieth century, a time when folk art was seen as disappearing from its traditional locations in the countryside, it became a focus of interest for many commentators. Some still felt it had contemporary value, some rejected it as outdated and irrelevant to modern society. The four views translated here represent this scale and its nuances. Simultaneously, they show that authors who engaged with the topic came from a range of positions and comprised not only ethnographers but also art historians and leftist art critics.

One of the reasons for turning to folk art through these translations is historiographical. The predominant interest in the art of interwar Czechoslovakia (and many other new states of Central and Eastern Europe) has for a long time turned to the avant-garde, international exchanges and embrace of socially and politically progressive ideas in art, architecture and design.¹ More recently, however, attention has also been paid to tendencies that may be labelled more conservative, historicising and resisting change.² They range from efforts to identify regional modernisms and a return to figurative expression to the implementation of traditionalist forms in architecture. Whenever folk art of the first half of the twentieth century became a matter of concern for art historians and not ethnographers, it has been mostly interpreted through the lens of urban modernism, and it has been dismissed, following the outlook of the avant-garde. Some interest has been devoted to folk art as an inspiration for modern artists and to folk art as a curiosity showcased to international audiences on various occasions, but not many scholars have stepped beyond such constraints of primitivism and exoticism in art.³

1) Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale, 1907–1927*, Paris: Flammarion, 1988; Steven A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Ryszard Stanislawski and Christoph Brockhaus, eds, *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, 4 vols., Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994; Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

2) Beata Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Jonathan Owen, eds, *A Reader in East-Central European Modernism, 1918–1956*, London: Courtauld Books Online, 2019; Beate Störtkuhl and Rafał Makala, eds, *Nicht nur Bauhaus – Netzwerke der Moderne in Mitteleuropa / Not Just Bauhaus – Networks of Modernity in Central Europe*, Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2020; Hubert F. van den Berg and Lidia Głuchowska, eds, *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, Leuven, Paris, Walpole: Peters, 2013; Peter Baeckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, eds, *Decentering the Avant-Garde*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014; Shona Kallestrup et al. eds, *Periodization in the Art Historiographies of Central and Eastern Europe*, New York - London, Routledge 2024.

3) Winter, Tomáš et al. *Jdi na venkov! výtvarné umění a lidová kultura v českých zemích 1800–1960* [Go to the countryside! Fine arts and folk culture in the Czech lands, 1800–1960], Řevnice: Arbor vitae societas, 2019; Hana Dvořáková, Magdalena Juříková, Helena Musilová and Vít Vlnas, *Pražská Pallas a Moravská Hellas 1902: Auguste Rodin v Praze a na*

The purpose of the following translations is therefore to show the breadth of intellectual concerns about folk art that went beyond pure rejection in the name of modernism. The main focus of the texts is Czechoslovakia of the interwar period, a time when the new state was formed and presented as a modern democracy of progressive art and culture. Yet similar tendencies could be detected elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, and Czechoslovakia serves as an example of the discussions of folk art in a society undergoing crucial political and cultural transformation. Questions such as where folk culture and heritage belong, does folk art even exist in the modern day and why we need to be concerned about it, drove enquiry in Czechoslovakia and beyond. Apart from texts like those presented here, conferences took place across Europe. In 1928 Prague, for instance, hosted the first congress on folk art, organised by the French art historian Henri Focillon and attended by international scholars.⁴ Such exchanges suggested that folk art was regarded an important and relevant subject.

Folk art and political geography

‘Folk art is far from being banal,’ claims Sergey Makovsky in his text ‘The Folk Art of Subcarpathian Ruthenia,’ and he was not alone in identifying noteworthy aspects in folk art that had relevance even for contemporary culture and society. Makovsky (1877–1962) was a Russian art critic who helped to organize various art exhibitions. Amongst them was the exhibition *The Art and Life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia* which he put together for the School Department of the Uzhhorod Civil Administration. In Prague, the exhibition opened in 1924 with objects that Makovsky selected and photographed in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.⁵ This region, now in western Ukraine, became part of Czechoslovakia as a result of negotiations between Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the American President Woodrow Wilson, and Rusyn-Americans during the First World War. This alliance was meant as a temporary solution to the postwar turmoil and Subcarpathian Ruthenia was promised prompt autonomy. This, however, did not happen until 1938. Even though many books and articles on the region were published, it kept its status as a somewhat mysterious, unexplored land, especially from the point of view of the Prague authorities.⁶ Several exhibitions were therefore organised to change the lack of awareness of the region and its culture. This included Makovsky’s *Art and Life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia*.

Moravě = Prague Pallas and Moravian Hellas 1902: *Auguste Rodin in Prague and Moravia*, exhibition catalogue, Prague: City Art Gallery, 2022.

4) Henri Focillon, ed., *Folk Art: Artistic and Scientific Works from the First Congress on Folk Arts, Prague, 1928*, Paris: Duchartre, 1931, I, vii–xvi. See, too, Christopher S. Wood, ‘Introduction,’ *West 86th A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 29: 1, 2023, 97–120.

5) Michael Selivatchov, ‘Folk Art of the Carpathians Through the Eyes of Serge Makovsky,’ *The Ethnology Notebooks* 155: 5, 2020, 1189–1201.

6) For example, Jaroslav Zatloukal, *Podkarpatská Rus: Sborník hospodářského kulturního a politického poznání Podkarpatské Rusi* [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia: a compendium of economic, cultural and political knowledge of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia], Bratislava: Klub přátel Podkarpatské Rusi, 1936; Amálie Kožmínová, *Podkarpatská Rus* [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia], Prague: Josef Zeibrdlich, 1919–1939; Václav Drahný and František Drahný, *Podkarpatská Rus, její přírodní a zemědělské poměry* [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, its natural and agricultural conditions], Prague: Českoslovak Ministry of Agriculture, 1921.

His goal for the exhibition and the ensuing publication was to map the local culture that he presented as one that was predominantly rural and comprised of rustic peasants. It was his attempt to popularize the best examples of ‘the rural arts’ and to raise interest among the general public in the rest of Czechoslovakia in the people who, in his view, preserved traditional artistic forms and customs. The Ruthenia that Makovsky showed therefore conforms to the somewhat limited view of the country held in Prague. The remoteness from the capital also encouraged the perception of an unspoiled, ancient heritage that had survived here: ‘The villages and individual farmsteads sitting on the promontories of the Carpathians in still untouched forest solitude are better at protecting the heritage of ancient handicraft.’

Isolation as a prerequisite for folk art

The view that the geographical isolation of folk art was responsible for its historically backward state was common to many writers. It was also shared by Czechoslovak politicians, who saw the western parts of the country as significantly more culturally developed. This was based on the fact that Bohemia, especially, was more industrialised compared to the eastern parts of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and most of Slovakia. The physical remoteness and economic neglect that the region had suffered under the Hungarian government prior to 1918 were presented as the main reasons for the preservation of folk art. Such a view was also held by Drahomíra Stránská (1899–1964) an ethnographer based in Prague at the Náprstek museum and Charles University, who focused on the ‘true folk art’ of Slovakia, Subcarpathian Ruthenia and other Slavic regions.⁷

This understanding helped to identify ‘typical’ features of folk art. In ‘The Work of Women in Folk Art,’ Stránská argued for the conservatism and timelessness of folk art, as well as its tendency to imitate and simplify complex forms. Yet, she saw certain traits in folk art that could be identified as modern, and she was not alone in such a view. While she found folk art purposeful and having the ability to adapt to material and technique, Makovsky added emphasis on permanency, durability and flawlessness, which were important in the economy of the rural environment. These required characteristics were not far from modernist ideas of functional design, yet aesthetic properties, including a sense of colour, were also key for folk art, Stránská noted.

The authors nevertheless did not agree on the degree to which the alleged geographical and cultural remoteness was responsible for other characteristic features of folk art, including its conservative character. The Czech art historian Zdeněk Wirth believed that folk art was intellectually and materialistically conservative as a result of not only the geographical isolation, but also its place in the social structure in which it was born. Wirth (1878–1961) was a Czech art historian responsible for cataloguing monuments in Bohemia and Czechoslovakia. His methodological and meticulous approach to material including folk art produced many studies that had international distribution as official publications on the art of Czechoslovakia.⁸

7) Drahomíra Stránská, *Lidové kroje v Československu* [Folk costume in Czechoslovakia], Prague: J. Otto, 1949; Drahomíra Stránská, *Lidové obyčeje hospodářské: Zvyky při setí* [Folk economic customs: crop sowing habits], Prague: D. Stránská, 1931.

8) For example, Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth, *L'art tchèque contemporain*, Prague: Jan Štenc, 1920; Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth, *Modern and Contemporary Czech Art*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1924.

Folk art in social structures

With his interest in the so-called peasant class, Wirth addressed the social aspects of the origins of folk art. The peasant class, he argued, was historically subjected to servitude to local rulers, with little exchange with the outside world; this led to a lack of innovation in art-making, both formally and the use of materials. It was only in the last two centuries, he argued, that contact with the town and the markets created conditions for the adoption of high art forms and specialisation in specific crafts. However, Wirth pointed out, the needs and tastes of the peasant, as the recipient of the works in question, still remained conservative.

Elsewhere, Wirth emphasised other key factors that explained the state of folk art, including patriarchal family social structures and the slow pace of life.⁹ This was a view shared by others, including Makovsky, who pointed to the specificity of the village environment in the creation and reception of folk art, especially related to a different lifestyle. Outside of cities, he held, time passes more slowly, and people have more time to engage in folk art and craft.

The patriarchal nature of rural society, Wirth suggested, was a crucial issue that explained why folk culture was gendered. Most interwar commentators viewed rural communities and their arts as clearly split into male and female domains. Stránská illustrates this split well: in her view, women of the eastern regions were skilled in weaving, embroidering and lace-knitting, painted decoration on house walls, furniture painting, and decorating Easter eggs. Bound to the home and traditional roles in it, they make and decorate household items. Faithful to the belief in a West - East trajectory, from industrialisation / urbanisation / civilisation to ruralism / traditionalism / the primitive, Stránská also noted that the patriarchal divisions in folk art change. In more 'advanced' rural regions in closer proximity to the West, the greater emphasis on individualised craft as well as advanced technical skill was apparent. As a result, embroidery and lacemaking in Bohemia was no longer the collective women's craft known in the so-called East, but had become more specialised and creative.

Creativity and individuality

The gendered aspect of folk art is obvious in the other texts, however implicitly. It is Stránská, though, who explicitly focused on folk art created by women in the villages, and by doing so she stresses the creative input of women makers. They never repeat exactly the same pattern, she says, and continually create new variations of older themes. Her answer to the question of whether folk artists can be inventive and innovative is therefore clear: almost no work of folk art is absolutely identical to another, it is always a modification or improvement of an earlier version. The women that Stránská talks about have an artist's creative relationship to their work.

Others were of a different view. The most critical account of folk art and its potential creative aspects was that of the avant-garde artist and art theorist Karel Teige (1900–1951). As a Marxist and representative of Poetism and the Devětsil group of artists, he argued that art is the product of ordinary people, but not people in the villages. Instead, he praised the

9) Zdeněk Wirth, 'Lidové a moderní umění,' *Styl* 1: 2, 1909–10, 10.

practices of the working class in the cities as unspoilt, urban production.¹⁰ His article ‘New Art and Folk Creation’ therefore adopts a sarcastic tone when talking about the peacefulness and humble work of the peasants and the idyllic life of the village folk. He clearly associates folk art with kitsch both in its original rural form and in its adoption by fine art. Alfons Mucha’s use of folk references becomes, for Teige, ‘inexhaustible and inartistic slush.’ He sees little creativity in such art and has a similar approach to the ‘wholly inartistic fever’ of using folk motifs in fashion, furniture or textiles. Modern times, in his view, produce a different kind of popular art, that of the everyday in the suburbs, a new kind of folk, or popular, art that is oriented towards the future, is free and collective. In this, Teige was highlighting the close links between ‘the people’ and ‘folk,’ both expressed with the term ‘lid’ in the Czech language.¹¹

The collective nature of artistic creative work seems to be the only issue that all four authors agree on in relation to ‘folk’ art, even though they link it to different sections of society. Teige vehemently dismissed the folk art that Wirth, Stránská and Makovsky were concerned with. In contrast, the other three authors did find that rural makers and artisan exercised various levels of autonomy and creativity in the designs and objects they produced and, as a result, were rather less inclined to dismiss folk art as irrelevant. Wirth questioned the active intellectual and artistic input of the peasants and saw folk art as mainly derivative. He nevertheless acknowledged a degree of skill and quality in the works, as well as an aesthetic natural taste and sensibility on the part of the creators. They were able to recreate patterns and apply them creatively to different objects and thereby make each work into an original piece. Makovsky likewise placed importance on the ability to alter each and every work despite the prevalence of traditional, customary, habits and rules. Folk artists with their skills do not passively copy templates, he argued, but rather actively and skilfully turn them into new works. ‘Craft remains art,’ Makovsky believed.

The four authors differ significantly in their opinion of the relevance of folk art and its creativity and inventiveness in interwar Czechoslovakia. The texts nevertheless reveal the political motivations of the authors; while Stránská stressed the contribution of women, Makovsky’s aim was to bring attention to the new geographical composition of the interwar state. Wirth combined a similar attempt to find a place for Subcarpathian Rusyns and Slovaks in the Czechoslovak narrative with class awareness. Teige went furthest in his call for a societal revision and bid farewell to peasant art of the olden days in favour of workers’ suburban art of the future. The attention they paid to folk art therefore demonstrates that the phenomenon was not only a historical concern but a topical issue for debate about contemporary art and society.

10) Karel Teige, *Jarmark umění*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964.

11) For a discussion of the linguistic distinction and semantic similarity of ‘popular’ and ‘folk,’ see Marta Filipová, *Modernity, History and Politics in Czech Art*, London – New York: Routledge, 2020, 57.

Sergei Makovsky

The Folk Art of Subcarpathian Ruthenia,

translated into Czech by Ant. Poláček

Originally published as *Lidové umění Podkarpatské Rusi*, Prague: Plamja, 1925, 9–16.

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

My impulse for writing this book was the exhibition titled *The Art and Life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia*, which was organized in Prague in the spring of last year by the educational department of the Uzhhorod Civil Administration. While compiling various objects for it as the exhibition's commissioner and 'folk art expert,' I became acquainted with Subcarpathian artistic folklore in places ranging from Nová Stuzica, the most beautiful northwest point of the Verkhovyna (the mountainous region bordering Poland to the north and passing south to the Marmaroš [now: Maramureş] lowlands) to Jasina [now: Yasinya] the main village of the Hutsuls – and its widely scattered shingle-roofed cottages and wickerwork fences on the eastern Galician border.

In searching for all the things that in some way or other fall into the category of 'folk art,' I travelled for over half a year through this territory, passing from place to place along the winding streams flowing to the Tisa river. I usually travelled on foot; the railway intersects the region only in one direction, if we are not to count several narrow-gauge short-distance tracks. Aside from this, here like everywhere else, the artistic character and life of the village is wiped out by the proximity of railway signals. The villages and individual farmsteads sitting on the promontories of the Carpathians in still untouched forest solitude are better at protecting the heritage of ancient handicraft.

In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, I explained the goals of the exhibition as follows: 'Just as it is its scholarly and pedagogical goal to collect museum material for the further systematic study of the local crafts of Subcarpathian Ruthenia together with its whole way of life, its goal is also to attempt to popularize the best examples of these rural arts and to raise interest among the general public in the people, who despite their age-long servitude, have preserved the tradition of their forms and customs in life.' I believe this is also the primary task of this book, which has been printed by a Russian publishing house in Prague.

It is perhaps unnecessary to emphasize that, when mentioning scholarship, pedagogy and popularization, I already had in mind the high artistic appraisal of Subcarpathian folklore when putting together the exhibition catalogue. However, doesn't the high appreciation of rural creative practice signify its energy, its ability to impregnate urban culture, even though it seems to be somewhat archaic? For folk art, especially that which does not live only in museum collections but has persisted until today, is a living force. In our times, such art is not only an anachronism, but it is a true source of charm today, an oasis of captivating barbarism with gurgling springs within the loose sand of the civilization of factories ... The beauty of

a village is nurtured by the folk spirit of the church, its mysterious roots, all the juices of the soil, the works of countless male and female artists, tied together by tradition, passed on since time immemorial from one generation to the next. Is it not a healing spring for the art of urban centres, which is becoming impoverished by the banality of bourgeois monotony or as a result of overly individualised affectation? The enthusiasm is not irrelevant when we acknowledge that ‘revealing’ the Subcarpathian village can partially influence contemporary decoration practices and can on all accounts strengthen good taste in the attentive observer.

Folk art is far from being banal. It captivates with its grandness of shades and diversity despite its canonical persistence. It is never vulgar, as everything in it springs from the overflowing heart of the people and is always warmed with creative emotion despite repeating age-old patterns. In this lies its magic: it links collective custom with the non-recurring originality of its products; it is not individualized – as we conceive it in the city – yet at the same time possesses a singular accent. The most deeply ingrained ‘template’ of the village does not exclude a certain freedom of creation. On the contrary, freedom gives rise to inimitable beauty. It is the same each time, but also minutely altered. Folk art is linked, like no other art, to customary rules and the inertness of the peasant soul, and captivates with its nearly unrecognizable deviations like no other art, as it is not a crafted copy and thus does not degenerate into soulless fabrication: craft remains art. Although the village maker copies the same object one hundred or one thousand times, he is still partially improvising as a true artist. In his perhaps crude work, which copies to an almost ridiculous degree what his fathers and grandfathers did, we still always feel the living fantasy of the artist.

While travelling in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, I saw thousands of embroideries on rural shirts and created a collection from them according to the Russian patterns of one village, but not once did I find a pair of completely identical *naplechniky* or two of the same *farametliky* (the embroidered chest area of a man’s shirt).¹² There is something identical in them, but it is always altered in some way. It is the same pattern ... but at the same time it is not, it has a deviation, one of the many countless variations of a traditional theme. Here we find an unnecessary curl, there a doubled row of ‘crosses’ and expanded or narrowed strips on the edge of the ornamentation. Yes, even woven towels are almost always ‘individual’ in this sense, although they have been mechanized by the very technique; after all, male weavers sometimes improvise just as well as female embroiderers.

The inventiveness of the domestic artisan is remarkable... Would it not, however, be more accurate to call it spontaneous? Invention assumes a conscious impulse: ‘I shall not try to do it this way, but in a different and new way.’ All ‘individual’ deviations from rural products are not invoked by the rural woman embroidering a *naplechnik* or a potter drawing cornflowers on a ceramic cup, even though they yearn to create ‘in some new fashion’; a great role is played here by the subconscious creative will (similar to a child’s imagination) of the village artists, who transform themselves, their naïve feelings, their proximity to nature full of terrible and gracious miracles into either a long, jagged *krivulka* or into stitches on linen that are twisted into ‘palm rings’ or branch out like ferns.¹³ Who can tell us what some Verkhovyna or Marmaroš ‘brides’ are pondering over as they embroider in the long winter twilight, sitting by the window

12) Editor’s note: a *naplechnik* was an embroidered shoulder-pad.

13) Editor’s note: a *krivulka* was a type of stitch.

of the cottage covered in snow? What bewitching plants appear before their eyes in the layout of these branch-like threaded paths and how many secret thoughts, sad and merry, do they put into their work? This is why, despite all the author's pretention, we are so moved by this work, which is unwittingly pervaded by spiritual life. Therefore, this work does not degenerate into craftsmanship, even when it is meant for sale and not for home use.

The relationship to work often explains other values of goods produced by the calloused hands of villagers: technical durability, form corresponding to matter, purposefulness. These values are so mutually connected in this context that we cannot imagine them being separated from one another. Does this creative spontaneity not mean, within a tradition that is hundreds of years old, permanency and high quality? Can an object created following the example of so many predecessors be bad, especially if it is meant for one's own use, one's own house? Is impermanent that into which countless hours of spiritual being are invested? The city is shrewd, the village is permanent, and the swiftness and power of the villagers' hands cannot be compared at all to a skill that has been learned. Usually, the simplest of tools is enough for the technical conventions inherited in the village, but at the same time, what ancient experience there is here! These conventions do not advance helter-skelter but move forward together with the majesty of the centuries. The local creator is not one to hurry. Haste and negligence arise in mass production, even in the home, and that is in fact an infection from the city. There is enough time in the village and time also passes more slowly than in the cities. The idea of becoming rich quickly does not eclipse the joys of a work completed down to its most minute, 'unnecessary' details. Folk art enchants just as much with its careful production, which often seems unnecessary, as it does with its high quality. Both stem from the richness of emotion, from a sufficient amount of time, and also wise, from prudent calculation: Is it desirable to make something carelessly and in haste? A product that is durable, flawless, and impossible to tear and whose deficiencies have never been an eyesore is certainly desirable.

How possible is it to use poor material, or how can form not follow a certain object, if this object is to last for centuries? It is permanency, after all, that is partially conditioned by the harmony of material and shape. And furthermore: is the purposefulness of the object not a similarly important condition for its permanency? It is indisputable that beauty has its own logic, which combines art with material, permanency and designation – what is beautiful must correspond to its purpose. In this sense, folk art has nearly always been a lesson in taste. Its forms correspond to the purpose in life. There is nothing here to show off, for outward effect, nothing redundant. Although decorative extravagancies and, yes, even unsightly asymmetry occur, this is certainly excusable by living conditions, faith and superstition; by some deeply rooted anachronism, some historical cause working from afar. It is a general rule that art in the village gravitates towards symmetry and modesty. These virtues and a sense for beauty can certainly not be denied in Subcarpathian artistic folklore in any way, a fact which even further stirs our interest, be it ethnographic or other. In selecting objects for the Prague exhibition and also for this publication, I proceeded as an aesthetician closely familiar with ethnography which reveals for us new areas of beauty... The crafts of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, the beauty of embroidered, woven and carved patterns and the songs, legends and fairy tales – is all this not a mysterious chest of treasures?

It is mysterious because it remains an almost unexplored area to this day from ethnographic and even less so art-historical perspective. It can be said that there is a lack of scientific literature on these matters. Attempts have been made, but they have either not been completed (by Hungarian folklorists, who were the most knowledgeable) or are of random nature. A lot has been written of Subcarpathian village churches, and it should be said that much of it is amateurish, but there is hardly anything else. Several Ukrainian and Czech artists have taken an interest in objects of domestic use and woodcarving, but sketches from their travels remain inaccessible to the wider public. No systematic description of clothing or decorations according to individual areas and villages has been published (giving even greater value to M. Tůmová's summary, which is attached to the Prague exhibition catalogue which supplements the fragmented information collected by A. Kožmínová and, many years earlier, by J. Golovacký and H. Bi[e]rderman).¹⁴ Lastly, the fabric embroideries so characteristic of Subcarpathian Ruthenia have not yet been subjected to stylistic analysis, nor has the highly intriguing issue of their origin been dealt with in connection to the indisputable oriental nature of all Russian folk ornament.

The roots of the 'Russian style' of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, primarily the style of clothing and embroidered patterns, run very deep, despite the more or less evident borrowing from neighbors (often of a completely new date), despite all the various historical additions and imported fashion. I am thinking of those roots that grow from a certain primeval soil and are partly common to all Slavic folklore.

This problem is alluring. A question presses on the mind: where and how far do the paths of this patterned tradition lead, which speaks so strongly to the heart of the Ruthenian and, simultaneously, breathes with Eastern diversity, old kingdoms and the raids of Asian hordes? Where to? ... Not towards the Hungarian oppressors, one thousand years into the past, although it is obvious that many a thing was adopted from them. Where then? To the travelling *kibitkas* of the nomads that struck fear into medieval Europe?¹⁵ Perhaps towards the Parthians and Sarmatians as assumed by H. Weiss, the author of the well-known *Kostümkunde*, towards the shores of Lake Maeotis, Tanais, the Tyras, the Lower Ister [now: Danube], and to the warlike land of the Alans,¹⁶ to the Scythian lowlands where Slavic races mixed with Finns, who at the time inhabited a massive area from the Baltic and White Sea to the upper course of the Dniepr long before the invasion of the Goths, Huns, Khazars, Hungarians, Polovtsians and Tatars?¹⁷ Do these paths not continue further into the twilight of the mythical East: over the Carpathian hills towards the Black Sea, to the old Mohammedanized land of the Circassians to the Caucasus

14) M. Tůmová, 'Národní kroj na Podkarpatské Rusi' in Sergej Makovský, eed., *Umění a život Podkarpatské Rusi* [The art and life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia], Prague: UPM, 1924, 24–54; A. Kožmínová, *Podkarpatská Rus* [Subcarpathian Ruthenia], Pilsen: self-published, 1922; J. Th. Holovackij, *О народной одежде и уборах Русинь или Рускихъ Въ Галичинѣ и сѣверо-восточной Венгрии* [On the folk clothing and decoration of the Rusyns or Russians in Galicia and northeastern Hungary], St. Petersburg, 1877; H. T. Biedermann, *Die ungarischen Ruthenen, ihr Wohngebeit, ihr Erwerb und ihre Geschichte*, Innsbruck: Wagner Verlag, 1862.

15) Editor's Note: A *kibitka* was a type of Russian sledge.

16) See Prof. J. Kulakovskij, *Аланы по цвѣдѣніямъ классическихъ и византійскихъ писателей* [The Alans according to classical and Byzantine writers], Kyiv: St. Vladimir Imperial University Press, 1899; N. Jakovlev, *Новое въ изученіи Сѣв. Кавказа* [New issues in the study of the Northern Caucasus], Novy Vostok: Scientific Association of Oriental Studies, 1924.

17) Editor's note: Lake Maeotis was the ancient Greek name for the Sea of Azov, in which was situated the city of Tanais. 'Tyras' and 'Ister' were the ancient Greek and Scythian names for the River Dniestr.

and Central Asia through the Kirghiz steppe and there to the cradle of civilization, through the gates of the migration period, to the bluish mountains of the Altai, in the ancient cradle of Iran, India, Tibet and Mongolia?

After all, this question of ancient origins is highly complex and can hardly be solved given the present state of the ethnography of art. Not only do the hidden corners of Subcarpathia remain unexplored, so, too, is the whole territory inhabited by western Slavic populations (Galicia, Bukovina, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, etc.). After an explanation and stylistic division, this tremendous material should be compared with the richness of the villages in our eastern Kievan Rus and ‘Little Russia.’ Only then would it be possible to touch these roots, which reach back to the depths of the ages. The roots of the Subcarpathian people in general, although not of its present population (as the question of its local antiquity remains an open one after historical research by A. Petrov)¹⁸, are the roots of their adopted artistic and life culture. The time for an answer has not yet come. Toilsome preliminary works are necessary for the accumulated material to appear in its original historical perspective. The opinion defended by V. V. Stasov at the time on the Finnish-Persian origin of Russian ornamentation cannot be considered final.¹⁹

This work primarily means the popularization of the material, i.e. material systematized to only a certain degree. In organizing the Prague exhibition, the compiled collections were divided according to geographical areas in accordance with the most distinct variations of Subcarpathian ethnography. Although the borders of these areas, which do not exist on the map, do not fit completely onto the ideal map of Subcarpathia’s artistic-ethnographic borders (which still needs to be drawn) and do not fit into a racial categorization in the country, they at least correspond in their main traits with the true grouping of the ‘Ugro-Ruthenians’ in keeping with the family of taste. After all, racial nuances hardly have a decisive significance in the case in hand. The influence of geographical and climatic conditions and greater or lesser differentness from neighbors are much more important.

It is best to see which embroideries and individual parts of clothing change by region and, yes, even by village. This is understandable when we realize that clothing is more strongly linked to a place than, for instance, wooden products or pottery are. Plates produced in Khust decorate cottages throughout nearly all of the Verkhovyna region, and the ‘Hutsul’ wooden cross can be found in the churches of any parish, from Stavná [now: Stavne] to Trebuše [now: Kruhlyj], but a difference in the seam or pattern embroidered on a shirt will astonish

18) Alexei Petrov, ‘Когда возникли русскія поселенія на угорской “Дольной земль”?’ [‘When did Russian settlements appear on the Hungarian “Dolnaya Zemlya”?’], *Гл. Изъ VI, Выш. Матер. для исторіи угор. Руси*, St. Petersburg: Senate Printing House, 1911: ‘the greater number of settlements beyond the Carpathians, on the Hungarian Lowlands (*Alföld*), as well as the band of downhill slopes of the Carpathians near to them, cannot be considered to be the remnants of an ordinary Russian population. Rather, it arose in a markedly later era, in the sixteenth century, predominantly in the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth (p. 2). By the same author: *Объ этнографической границъ русскаго народа въ Австро-Угрии* [On the ethnographic border of the Russian people with Austria-Hungary], Petrograd: no publisher, 1915, and *Къ вопросу о словенско-русс. этнографической границъ (Русск. Земля)* [On the issue of the Slovenian – Russian ethnographic border (Russian land)], Uzhhorod: no publisher, 1923, 26, 27, 28.

19) V. Stasov, *Русскій народный орнаментъ* [Russian national ornament], St. Petersburg: Society of Art Patrons, 1872: ‘The eastern motifs, with which ours have most in common, divide into two main groups: Finnish motifs and Persian ones.’ Even though this claim was controversial, Stasov’s general conclusions remain valid: ‘Russian ornament is a late echo of Asian ornament, it is a fragment preserved from the ancient world (p. xvi).

a woman from a distant village, which is home to other seams and pattern details that are linked to the place by firm custom.

I have selected the embroideries published here from thousands of variations, and as a whole they provide a scale of typical patterns according to regional diversities and types. Almost all patterns that are evidently foreign have been almost completely omitted and, as a result, whole regions in which the oldest motifs have been nearly displaced by Moravian-Slovak, Hungarian and Romanian fashion.

[...]

Whatever is the case, the Hutsul region, the picturesque southeastern corner of the Subcarpathians bordering Polish Galicia and Romanian Bukovina deserves special attention. It is strikingly similar in the character of its culture and life to the Galician Hutsul region. To those who have never been to the mountains near Yavorov or Sokolovka, I would recommend reading the book by Szuchiewicz to confirm this.²⁰ At the upper course of both of the Tisa rivers, over the whole length of the Polish border, there is basically an identical way of life and the same decorative tendencies as on the other side: this also includes weaving, wood-carving and the type of Russian dress – long women's shirts with *zapasky* in place of skirts, and men's shirts drawn up and over the trousers and held in place with a belt. Whichever way we deal with the issue concerning the ethnic makeup of these Subcarpathian highlanders (they themselves dislike the name 'Hutsul,' for they use the name for their small ponies and in mockery of their neighbours), there is no doubt that they are the successors of one culture shared with that of Galicia. The difference is in the nuances and the fact that artistic productivity is considerably greater on the other side of the border.

These thoughts have also inspired me to supplement the present publication with images of the Galician products that have made their way to the Prague exhibition from the Ethnographic Museum and the Náprstek Museum: a series of wooden altar crosses (undoubtedly manufactured at the time somewhere in the Przemyśl region), copper gunpowder-flasks with tasteful engravings and inlays, picturesque *keleva* axes and pottery from somewhere in Jaroslav [now: Jarosław], Mikolajev [now: Mykolajiv] or Galicia.²¹ The latter had long been renowned for its potters when Hungarian Ruthenia was dominated by Hungarian pottery works. Home production, remaining outside this influence, did not advance farther than the most basic products from clay, which lacked enamel and drawings (such is the pottery now in Drahovo [now: Dragovo]). Old Galician bowls from the time, which still decorate cottages along the banks of both Tisa rivers, are an excellent supplement to the general image of artistic crafts in the Subcarpathian Hutsul region. Cups and plates from Khust far better complement Vrchovina households, as the pottery industry of Khust, Uzhhorod and Sevljuš [now: Vynohradiv] has been Magyarized to the highest degree.

Nonetheless, the ceramics of all these pottery centres are represented in the book. The hand of the home producer inadvertently brings local characteristics even into an adopted motif, such as the petal of an iris or tulip. True Hungarian ceramics do not tend to be so

20) Włodzimierz Szuchiewicz, *Huculszczyzna* [Hutsul matters], Cracow: Dzieduszycki Museum, 1902, 4 vols.

21) *Келевы* [kelevy] – sticks with copper handles, used instead of axes. See Holovackij, op. cit., 70.

strongly naïve in their design and so synchronised in colour, although its forms are sometimes reminiscent of the fairy-tale-like East. After the embroideries of the Hutsul region, which – and this should be pointed out immediately – are in no way inferior to those of Galicia (some characteristic patterns from Jasina or Kobyli Poljana [now: Kobyletska Poliana] are distinguished by their more subtle beauty), the most interesting products are those made of wood. The truth is that the new is not the best. At present, woodcarving here is more of a tradition from the past than a living craft, and it is very difficult to find bottles, spoons, butter churns and spinning-wheels with carved and burned ornaments. Yet, the tradition has not died out, and excellent woodcarvers and people burning ornaments into wood can still be found; the shapes of some objects themselves are proof of the sophistication of this tradition, for instance the shapes of *paskovtsi*, i.e. bread baskets for Easter sweetbread.

In this introduction, I have aimed to provide a broad overview of the material published here in order to then proceed with the description of details according to individual branches of national creative work. The four chapters correspond to these branches: Woodcarving, Ceramics, Costume and Decorations, and Embroideries and Weaving. I mention wooden churches only in passing – their decorative character is to a large degree a secondary phenomenon that is less linked to the ethnography of the country. It is true that the same unique taste is reflected in church building as in everything created by the village; however, the significance of this local authenticity or local imitation should not be exaggerated.²²

22) Vadim Shcherbakovski, *Українське мистецтво* [Ukrainian art], Kyiv: V. M. Shcherbakivskiy, 1913; Viktor Myszkovsky, 'Holzkirchen in den Karpathen,' *Mitteilungen der K.K. Zentral-Kommission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und Historischen Denkmale*, VI, 1880, xxvi-xxxv; Jul. Zikmund: 'Dřevěné kostelíky pod Užockým průsmykem' [Wooden chapels under the Užok pass], *Památník III. Sjezdu československých inženýrů a architektů*, Košice: Unie, 1923, 283–285, tab. 29–33); Florian Zapletal, 'Dřevěné chrámy jihokarpatských Rusínů' [The wooden churches of the south Carpathian Ruthenians], Josef Chmelař, Stanislav Klíma and Jaromír Nečas, eds, *Podkarpatská Rus*, Prague: Orbis, 1923, 117–21; V. Zaloziecky, 'Dřevěné cerkve v Podkarpatské Rusi' [Wooden churches in Subcarpathian Ruthenia], *Umění a život Podkarpatské Rusi*, ed. Sergej Makovský, Prague: UPM, 1924, 55–70.

Drahomíra Stránská

The Work of Women in Folk Art

Originally published as 'Práce ženy v lidovém umění' in Anna Roškotová, ed., *Sborník Kruhu výtvarných umělkyně*, Prague: The Women Artists' Circle, 1935, 55–59.

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

The more independent a nation, in terms of its culture, and the more it is separated off from the influences of its neighbours, and dependent on itself, the livelier and more distinctive is its folk art. For ordinary people do not easily adopt foreign products, but, rather, create them according to the needs of their own environment. The more independent the cultural life of a certain area, the more capable talented individuals are of applying their abilities and the more encouraged they are to undertake creative work.

There are regions in which folk art is still alive, namely in the Carpathians and in the foothills of the mountains. In Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, some areas are still home to true folk art, which ordinary people need, just as much as the intelligentsia, and which signifies the healthy spiritual life of the rural classes.

Women play an important role in folk art and are not only the protectors of traditional decoration and traditional forms; they are also the exclusive creators of whole sectors of labor. Some areas are solely reserved for women and they are the only creative forces in them, upholding old traditions and further developing them. This not only concerns embroidery, needlework and other similar handiwork, which has long been in the hands of women and is still considered to be the domain of female labour. It also includes weaving and all textile production, which, in those regions where true folk art still flourishes, are primarily created by women. For example, in Slovakia, in regions with patriarchal characteristics, a woman is tasked with weaving all fabrics for the family, including linen, cloth and more. She needs to prepare all the material for this, to make the fabric, turn it into garments, and decorate it. This circumstance creates an interesting difference between the lands that are a part of the advanced Central European culture and those ones of a more traditional disposition. In western regions, Bohemia, Moravia and in some more advanced areas of Slovakia, weaving is the domain of male craftsmen, who make a living from it. On the other hand, in the patriarchal areas of Slovakia, hand looms are used only by women while each *gazděna*²³ makes fabric only for her own family, spending the whole winter at her distaff and loom. In keeping with tradition, she also decorates the woven fabrics either simply with stripes, or with more complex floral and bird motifs, etc., which are frequently adopted under the influence of the male weavers. In earlier times, woven woolen fabrics were richly decorated; today, however, decorative weaving is limited to

23) Editor's note: the woman in charge of a rural Slovak household, usually the wife of a *gazda* (farmer).

flat sheets, towels and aprons or, on much rarer occasions, shirts and headscarves and swaddle scarfs.

Women thus uphold the ancient tradition of making and decorating. It is also their conservatism that has preserved some traditional knitting and weaving techniques that have already died out in many regions of Europe and that have survived until today only in patriarchal areas. These include techniques such as knitting on a sewing frame or a sprang, in which women's agile hands create very fine and complex patterns by picking and braiding threads of the warp. The white bonnets of the Trenčín and Hont regions stand out, whereas elsewhere women knit only simple strips. Ribbon weaving is also undertaken by women. In contrast, the production of gloves and solid woolen *zapiastky*,²⁴ done by looming the warp with the use of a wooden mold, is the work of men, which is quite a striking phenomenon.

In addition to weaving, embroidering and lace-knitting continues to be a field reserved for women. Artistic creativity has developed most richly in these areas, where there are the most variations and patterns. However, in this area, too, the folk artistic creation is mostly imitative and relies on older patterns while changing them according to established tastes and current needs. Conservatism is a distinguishing feature of folk art and it clings to inherited forms and preserves their motifs for long periods. There is also a tendency to imitation, which accepts patterns from high art without hesitation but simultaneously strives to simplify complex forms and motifs into abbreviated folk-art form; and timelessness, which preserves elements and forms from long-gone styles and mixes them together to create a new form. On the other hand, the indisputable advantage [of folk art] is its distinctive sense of purposefulness, its unconditional ability to adapt to material and technique, and its animated, sophisticated sense of color. Whole generations work on creating folk art and a whole score of skillful individuals shape them, creating products that are balanced, harmonized and usually tasteful. The same traits that are characteristic of folk art are also found in embroidery and lace, mainly in places where artistic activity is still alive today, which talking about this country is primarily in Slovakia. Even there, however, embroidery and lace are subject to external influences, influences from higher classes, monasteries, towns and so forth. Next to this, however, the old tradition lives on, which transforms and adapts new motifs to the local character. It is noteworthy that in these regions each woman and girl engages in embroidery, although they leave more complex work to more capable embroiderers. Therefore, in such cases we can truly use the term 'collective folk art,' since everyone takes part in its co-creation. However, the more egalitarian the culture of a people is and the more advanced the techniques and patterns that are used, the more art distances itself from the broad collectivity of the people and becomes the specialization of certain especially skilled individuals until it most often finally becomes an object of profit and trade. In such cases, embroidery and lace are created by skilled and usually poor embroiderers and laceworkers, who may master the technique but artistically they deteriorate. The artistic side either stagnates or the old patterns and techniques are abandoned and replaced by quite new and fashionable ones that the embroiderer is happy to adopt from the towns and spread amongst her clients.

24) Editor's note: A *zapiastka* is a sturdy protector made of thickly knitted wool and used to cover wrists, legs, or feet that was often used in forestry work in the mountainous regions of Slovakia.

Folk embroidery in Bohemia reached this phase of development when it began to decline and die out and when the work of skilled seamstresses and embroiderers started copying the Rococo and Empire patterns of the town. Folk art is reaching a similar phase in some regions of Slovakia, too. However, artistic work in which all the women of the village take part, and which is transformed by the direct participation of all of them, still flourishes in some remote areas. In such an environment, each woman creates and feels all the joy of the work of art she creates with her hands, even though creative individuality is limited to modifying, arranging and adding new elements. Womenfolk²⁵ never repeat the same things, they continually create new variations. Amongst the hundreds of folk embroideries, we hardly find pieces that are identical. Women have an artist's relationship to them and feel the joy of creative work; thus, we can consider this to be art.

Another interesting area of folk art that belongs to the field of women's work is colorful painted decoration on house walls, especially the archways around the main doors in Moravian Slovakia and over kitchen fireplaces in the region around Bratislava. In this cheerful region, which is fertile, rich and full of sunshine, where wheat turns gold and grapes ripen, people love color and rich ornamentation on their folk dresses and in their dwellings. If we enter into the kitchen of a well presented home, we are met with the gleam of rich painting of various colours overflowing with flowers and leaves that cover the whole arched wall, and sometimes the side-walls, corners, and so forth, too. The painting of walls with richly coloured decoration is a characteristic trait of the southern European zone of earthen whitewashed structures reaching all the way to Ukraine. In our country it can also be seen in the regions of southern Slovakia, where women, due to their conservative nature, have maintained this beautiful branch of folk art. In it is practiced a love for color and sense of rich ornamentation, which is not carried out generously by first outlining the design across the whole surface but rather it emerges gradually by the addition of motifs and supplements to them until the surface is filled. This is why these ornaments are so complex, so detailed, so varied, and so diverse in form. The sense of ornamentation amongst women in these regions is so lively that it even appears in the way water is sprinkled on walkways and in rooms; girls sprinkle the ground with water so as to create simple ornaments in the soil.

Womenfolk are diligent participants in decorative painting. Women have helped paint furniture, cabinets and chests; women have painted or helped paint images on glass and sometimes the ceramic products made by potters. We lack information on their role in illustrating books, and they have not taken part in working on religious buildings. Work with wood and wood-carving has remained distant from women in folk art, and women have not been known to work with metal.

However, there is one more field of painting that has long been the exclusive field of women's work, a conservative field in its archaic technique and patterns – the painting of Easter eggs. In regions with historic, traditional culture, women paint single-colored Easter eggs with the help of wax; they use simple motifs of crosses, hooks and twists and divide the surface with straight lines, and so forth. Once again, this is done by all the women in the village as Easter time approaches. In regions where folk art is still flourishing and has

25) Editor's note: The old-fashioned term 'womenfolk' corresponds to the somewhat archaic phrase 'ženy z lidu' Stránská uses in the original.

evolved into sophisticated forms, Easter eggs are decorated in diverse colors only by skillful *malérečky*²⁶, who make use of very rich ornamentation and detailed motifs that cover the whole surface of the egg. However, in Bohemia and regions with advanced culture, the decline of folk art means that only simple techniques have been preserved, with motifs mostly of a more modern character and more individualised than those in Slovakia, or new methods of scratching motifs of naturalistic flowers, of pasting, and so on have been introduced. In addition, such Easter eggs often tend to be the work of men, which is a true sign of new influences on their creation.

This brief overview has made it possible to point out merely the most important traits of women's participation in folk art. However, it makes it fully clear that women play an important role in folk art. Women have not only preserved folk art, but significantly participated in its creation; they have done so not only today, but also in the past, as some fields have exclusively belonged to women since time immemorial.

26) Editor's Note: *malérečka* is a term for women painters of traditional female Easter-eggs.

Zdeněk Wirth

The Art of the Czechoslovak People

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Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

Until recently, alongside the development of high art in Czechoslovak, a second – temporally and stylistically belated – artistic layer of art was developing, a layer of so-called folk art which at first glance is wholly original and certainly pleasing in its forms, colors and intellectual content. It had almost been doomed to extinction by the natural development of social conditions when it became the subject, first, of a romantic view of national life, then, of the museum curator's conservation practice and care, and, finally, of the cold analysis of the art historian who analyzed its age, the origins of its elements, and what relation it had to high art.

Romanticism (the influence of this opinion has been long-lasting) caused confusion of the concept of 'folk' art with the concept of 'national' art, in which it saw the sustained forms of racial art in contradiction to contemporary European art and managed productively not only to influence Czechoslovak visual arts and music in the second half of the nineteenth century, but also attempted artificially to extend the tradition of this timeless art to the present day. This endeavor strikingly and positively influenced the study of folk art and, at the time of its greatest efforts in the great exhibition of 1895 and later in rich museum collections, it collected the most beautiful evidence of it and hence material for its objective study.

Scientific study has however not justified the view among romantics that a distinctive folk culture is the authentic bearer of national purity and that its art is the truest manifestation of the national soul. If the art historian assumes that there is only one artistic foundation and creative instinct in all mankind and in the artistic creations of all periods and cultures, that although every cultural region has its own differing forms of artistic expression and development, each knows the difference between art and non-art at all levels, created by the quality of artistic expression, then the art historian will view the art of the whole Western European cultural sphere as a single entity, whose highest quality – in times pertinent to us – is determined by the genius of Italy and France, rarely by Germany. Such art develops in several centres and spreads from them throughout this whole area in the form of nationally tinted artistic cultures of the Romanic, Germanic and Slavic nations. The historian has established that alongside work on the level of high art, every national art has a whole score of categories of high standard artistic professions stretching from the national centre to the cultural peripheries and from there to the villages and hamlets, and even further to categories of dilettante, all the way to the complete barbarism of the simplest autodidacts.

Folk art is then only one of the categories in the art of a nation and not the national art in itself. It is the product of the countryside, of the mostly rural environment in contrast to

the art of the aristocratic, bourgeois and urban classes. The 'folk' here is understood almost exclusively as the population of the villages, which, in the nineteenth century, dwelled in settlements with a population twenty times greater than cities and made up 90% of the nation, or it is sometimes understood as the population of small agrarian towns where the economic conditions are relatively the same and the formal taste is similar. The working classes, arising as a result of change in the social conditions of the nineteenth century, therefore, do not come into consideration here. The concept of Czechoslovak folk art should be explained in this sense and within the boundaries defined by its absolute quality and character.

The historical foundations of folk art, for which almost all documentary evidence and material landmarks are missing up until the seventeenth century, can only partially offer an answer to the question that is crucial to establishing the age of this art: when was it that both branches of national art, i.e. high and folk art, broke in two, only to come back together as late as the twentieth century in the general levelling off of national culture in today's democratic society?

Roughly speaking, the population of the lands of Czechoslovakia, which had practiced agriculture since prehistory and whose culture, cultivated from primitive pagan conditions, did not reach the level of the west and south of Europe, was at first socially and culturally united and made up a single class that differed only in ethnic affiliation. In the natural method of farming, the people self-sufficiently carried out all types of agricultural and craft work – and also artistic work in a certain sense – on their own. The father, with the help of the family, relatives and neighbors, and even the chief of the tribe did not differ from the nation other than in the possibility of delegating this work to slaves. This state of a single cultural class persisted until the creation of a military and bureaucratic nobility and, later, of a clerical class created a new social stratification in the nation, in which the continual servitude of those who worked the land significantly changed the living conditions of most of the population in relation to the lifestyle of a small number of privileged families and individuals. The more quickly the privileged class caught up with European culture in the first centuries of the Czechoslovak nation's history, the more social and cultural differences accumulated. Certainly, by the time Romanesque culture matured in Czechoslovakia, the concept of manorial culture arose alongside that of folk art, and the consequent rapid development, during which castles and finally cities emerged, then clearly differentiated the higher classes of lords, clerics and burghers from lower classes, thus creating three cultural categories whose simultaneous and mutually separated lives survived with certain transformations until the nineteenth century.

The chasm between the aristocratic and peasant class, as it emerged in this way already in the early Middle Ages, was deepened further by natural living conditions and psychological causes. How could a peasant – bound to servitude on the soil and thus intellectually and materialistically conservative, placed under aristocratic and divine subordination, increasingly excluded from active participation in forming the fates of his own tribe, land and nation – keep up with the development of higher cultural classes, whose intellectual outlook continued to grow, with those who had continual contact with the world and eagerly received the intellectual and material influences of more cultured lands abroad? The cultural backwardness of the peasant has been permanent since the Middle Ages, and not even the

extensive colonization by the culturally adept rural German element or the great social revolutions in the Hussite era and after the Thirty Years' War, changed much about this. On the contrary, these conditions of backwardness perhaps even increased.

Theoretically, in the sphere of artistic activity in the Middle Ages, we must also assume the same fissure of the cultural categories. Unfortunately, to be able to make this assumption, we lack documentation on folk art up to the seventeenth century. Thus, a probable explanation of this phenomenon is found in the almost paradoxical assumption that it was only with the Baroque period that the peasant was culturally elevated to such a degree that even he developed a need for genuine art, i.e. in his case, primarily the decoration of forms and typical objects, which had been reduced to simple expediency and efficiency. Proof of this assumption is also found in the fact that all the templates for decorative details that can be proven by analysis to have served as patterns for the folk art for which we have documentation, were created after 1600. At the same time, all older elements found in folk architecture and dress concern only the typical material, and typical elementary forms, frameworks and constructions, that had been the intellectual property of the people from time immemorial, some of them from a time when the nation had a single cultural class.

The second basic question that is crucial for defining the concept of folk art can be answered with greater certainty – to what extent is this art the spontaneous creation of talented individuals of the people working without commission, made only for their own needs or to satisfy their creative instinct?

Only for the oldest period of natural economy, in this country perhaps until the thirteenth century, can we assume that the commissioner, draughtsman and creator of the work of art was the same person. Although perhaps primitively, the peasant was able to build a wagon, horse trappings, rough furniture or an oven, and his wife could make linen cloth and woolen blankets; with the help of his family members, relatives and neighbors, who worked for food, he was equally capable of building a house. Just as almost every rural person today is still able to work from a young age with a team of horses and understands cattle, field crops and gardening. And just as the peasant who lives high in the mountains and in the forests, is a wheelwright, carpenter, saddler, weaver and woodcarver in one, so the person commonly found in the countryside in the oldest times would do all other work of craft or even artistic character, as long as he was spontaneously forced to carry them out himself.

This primitive state, in which the peasant lagged behind the nobleman, priest and burgher by centuries, had already changed in the Middle Ages in the sense that, in certain areas of craft, the peasant gradually became the commissioner and was continually dependent on cooperation with a specialist or craftsman and an artist in a certain limited sense of the word. We must place the emergence of the village craftsman to a very early period, although mention of it in documents is found only from the fourteenth century on. First, only as an accidental folk artist working not for profit but for his family, such a peasant stood out in certain work by virtue of his dexterity, technique and combined ingenuity. While remaining an inhabitant of the village, he was gradually abandoning other peasant work and increasingly began to devote himself to specialised craft activities. He started being called upon as an expert in this craft work, and thus developed into a craftsman who stood outside of guilds and who created the transition from the former

self-sufficient peasant with universal skills to a guild craftsman in the town. The village craftsman then completely mastered certain crafts that fulfilled only daily peasant needs, which were, however, technically more difficult and generally more artistic. Therefore, a peasant who could still skillfully lay down a roof, fix a cart or build a fence and oven could hardly construct a house from scratch, sew all his garments and shoes, shoe horses, trim his wagon, make harnesses, furniture and tableware and carve or paint his gable. Progressive organization later arranged these conditions very precisely. It was the younger son of the family who commonly became a craftsman – usually a tailor, shoemaker, saddler, carpenter, wheelwright or smith – and received permission from the nobility to be trained. He wandered about and worked on farmsteads and cottages. He was not allowed to produce goods for the market. When the general guild regulations were established in 1738, he was finally allowed to become a member of the closest urban guild.

The elevation of the peasant's cultural level from the seventeenth century led to his need – generally speaking – for a festive life that neither his own work nor the product of village craft could satisfy anymore. An exception here is the delicate handiwork of women, primarily the production and decoration of linen and clothing, which surely always displayed better taste than a man's manual work and therefore resisted professionalism in the village for the longest amount of time.

Around 1700, the peasant cultivated comfort brought from the city to cottages not only simple pots, but also glazed and painted products of the potter, not only a table, chest and a bench made by the carpenter but also chests decorated and inlaid by a joiner, later, cupboards and chairs with backs shaped and decorated by the woodcarver; in place of coarse serging, artificially sewn costumes and leather coats with color application and, on top of that, embroidery, lace and golden bonnets made by embroiderers; jewelry and metal plated prayer books from smiths and glassmakers; and even statuettes for the niches of cottage facades and paintings on glass for the walls of the common room made by woodcarvers and painters. In this way, the peasant gradually and increasingly became the consumer of urban crafts after coming into contact with them at markets or directly by ordering them in the workshop if this involved a product not just for everyday use. From the above concerning the relationship between aristocratic and peasant culture, it is evident that, at the same time, the peasant did not tend to seek out the workrooms of master craftsmen who created fashionable and high-quality products for the castle, church, town hall or the rooms of rich burghers. Aside from the manifestations of peasant vainglory, which appears in all periods in the peasant's effort to balance his appearance with that of the lords, he instinctively sought out workshops that suited his simple taste, conservative view and the coarser character of the village. However, even the masters and their workrooms tried to adapt to the peasant's taste if, on exception, they were to deliver a spectacular piece to the village. In the same way, the former painter of cards or teacher attempted writing and decorating village women's prayer books, in order to express in color and ornament their naïve understanding of beauty; and even factory producers of ceramics, glass, printed textiles and wall or pilgrimage images made special goods to please the eyes and hearts of the rural folk.

Thus in the Baroque period, by the latest, so-called folk art became an art form that was created and produced for the rural environment; it became a derivate of cultures higher in

quality. It did not have the same artistic goal in all regions and slowly died out when the cultural level of classes began to level out.

Since we are not able to assess the artistic creations specific to the common people, the remains of which are either wholly absent or, within the small amount of historic material, have yet to be differentiated from the artistic products of higher cultural classes within the small amount of historic material, we can only focus on the records of art for the people by seeking to establish its basic characteristics. At the same time, we must first realize that our knowledge lacks a more accurate delimitation namely in terms of periodization, as this art does not have the singular character of an artistic totality in a precisely defined period, and it does not comprise a stylistic epoch.

Generally speaking, just like every folk art, Czechoslovak art is highly conservative if we measure it by the period of its origin and the state of contemporary high artistic culture; furthermore, it is primitive in its expression, technique, color, etc. We can ultimately establish its lack of authenticity in terms of its subject and stylistic form. This all provides an answer to the question of its artistic quality and its only apparently anonymous character.

The conservative nature of the folk artist can best be explained to us by the nature of the village environment, which differs from urban life or life in a castle. In material terms, this environment was, until the mid-nineteenth century, very poor despite its relative development from the Middle Ages. It was familiar with the hardest work and the least comfort; it had coarse intellectual inspirations and a slow tempo of life. The peasant's physical and intellectual horizon did not reach past the boundaries of the lordship or the closest small town, which, in the eighteenth century, before the intervention of industry – especially in the mountains – was culturally close to the village and was not expanded significantly by either school or church but more by multiple years of military service or involuntary journeys accompanying troops. It is no surprise that in all aspects of life, the peasant held on tenaciously to inherited views and forms and thus, in all aspects of intellectual and physical life, maintained the timeless constructs created by the shared work of whole generations. This conservatism applied not in the sense of artistic typification, but rather in the sense of life's persistence, not only in the ground plan of the village, the disposition of the farm, and the ground plan of the farm, but in all objects that the peasant used, down to the tiniest tool; this conservatism also determined his attitude as the commissioner of art. Whenever a folk artist – whether a peasant trained in a trade or a petty master-craftsman living in a town – returned from his wanderings filled with various technical and artistic notions and trained in the techniques of his field, he failed to bring the commissioner from the rural environment to accept contemporary stylistic forms without hesitation; the craftsman applies the novelties he has encountered only slowly and almost stealthily, but in the end this development stagnates and repeats what he has learned for a whole generation.

Conservatism causes a continuous belatedness (which was certainly greater in earlier times) in the stylistic character of folk art. During the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, we estimate this belatedness to be that of roughly half a century, and therefore we still find echoes of the early Baroque period in folk art of the mid-eighteenth century and stylistic elements of Rococo up to the mid-nineteenth. However, next to this almost regular belatedness behind the primary stylistic character of the period, irregularities appear in the

periods in which various stylistic forms – chronologically unconnected and contradicting in nature – tend to be adopted from observation.

We immediately find the primitive nature of folk art in the technique or, as the saying goes, ‘according to the apron,’ in simple, non-economic construction, in situations and measures defined more by instinct than by calculation, and in the selection of material; however, this trait is even more striking when it concerns the understanding of the stylistic form, the higher principles of artistic composition and stylization, and the sense of color. As we have already established, the folk artist does not receive a contemporary artistic form, and neither does he decide to use a single older form. The remnants or fully adopted new or old forms appear in his work in the same way that the cultural anachronisms of old superstitions reverberate within his soul or the anachronisms of uneconomical farming appear in his work in the fields. His naïve sense of color knows only a small number of primary tones, with no halftones, and he does not in his compositions sketch out the surfaces nor balance the substance. Instead, he places individual elements and motifs next to each other, one after the other, over and under each other, opposite each other, knowing only absolute symmetry – if this is possible with his imperfect tools and a ‘rule of thumb’ manual work – and seeing only in two, not three dimensions.

If there is a certain trait of folk art that refutes the romantic opinion that it is a true treasure of national art, it is its lack of formal originality, namely in decorative detail. The peasant artist does not adopt an observed pattern precisely or completely; he does not copy originals but selects only what suits his taste or what he manages to imitate. At the same time, his memory is limited and his observation naïve, and thus, not knowing the stylistic canon, he often mixes older and younger forms or confuses a subordinate element with a main one.

If we are looking for the specific sources of the folk imagination, we find them primarily, following art historical principles and according to the environment in which the peasant lives, in his surroundings and the influence exercised within the boundaries of the lordship’s estate and the distance of his journeys as a journeyman, and rarely further. There can be no doubt that these elements are spontaneously adopted from high art. This includes everything that the peasant sees at the country fair and the market in the closest town; it includes the impulses that the lord of the underling peasant brings to the village. As a patron, the lord builds for the peasant a parish church, the priest’s dwelling or a school; he builds his own residence for summer habitation in the village or near it or equips the church with lavishly painted and gilded furniture, embroidered vestments, paintings and sculptures. In addition, we discover elements in the eager attention paid to the work of bourgeois and urban craftsmen, in the distant pilgrimages to miraculous statuettes and paintings at Svatá Hora, Svatý Kopeček, Chlumek, Wambierzyce or Mariazell, where trade in the artistic pilgrimage industry is blooming, or during occasional visits to fairs, the products of which help to create peasant housing culture.

The means by which all these elements make their way to the village are neither theoretical (via school education) nor literary (via literature), but are purely practical, and depend only on imitation of what was observed (often long-ago) drawing on memory and influenced by the imagination and natural manual dexterity. The point when the influence of creative art of the time begins to come under more pervasive influence is convincingly established by the

development of graphic art in the seventeenth century, when ornamental and hagiographic engraving became an article of trade.

Patterns adopted from models of high art by the peasant for the architectonic forms are preserved in large number in Renaissance and Baroque façades until the nineteenth century; forms of urban and aristocratic or bourgeois costumes in various periods of fashion from the beginning of the sixteenth century were decisive for garments, folk dresses and their decoration; we find models for painted, carved, embroidered and coated ornamental decoration in late Renaissance and Baroque ornamental painting and woodcarving, in seventeenth-century prints with arabesque or Dürer-style ornamentation, and in popular illustrated books from the printing works of Landfrass, Tureček and Steinbrenner.²⁷ For painting and sculpture, we find models in the illustrated bible, in pilgrimage images with engravings printed in large number from plates and in the copies of Madonnas in images and sculptures for fairs.

Despite their primitive, conservative and derivative character, works of folk art cannot be denied their intrinsic quality. Although the process whereby a specific work of art affected the anonymous folk artist and, through it, became a model for a whole multitude of other works, is not the same as in high art, in which the demand for originality began to increase from the sixteenth century onwards, there is a certain creative process here on the part of the commissioner and the maker, influenced by a marked imagination which is a great source of feelings and natural taste. Yet, not everything primitive, especially when created without purpose or need, is folk art in the proper sense of the word. The folk artist has a sense for natural measure, for material and for technique, which, so to speak, have long been the property of the people. He is able to vividly capture an observed pattern with ease, re-stylize and simplify it in his own way, and apply it to the most various materials and objects. One spirit and one form rules the pattern of an embroidery, an Easter egg, a painting, pottery, on a board and while dripping and pouring sand to form an ornament, but what diversity of patterns and motifs there are in the details! The pattern is almost never repeated with the help of a break in the design, a *dessin* or a *pendant*; in each case it is created anew from the beginning once more. The folk artist does not usually work to stockpile goods and does not have the same tendency to produce a standard as industry does. In places where at first glance we encounter a group of similar creations, they are in no case a slavish copy, but rather always the new variation of a type, and this freedom and individuality becomes larger the farther back into history we go. Although it is difficult to identify a folk artist as the author of a certain work of building, sculpture, painting or industrial art is difficult and, in most cases, impossible, we can often nonetheless discern personal talent in the works of the folk artist and certain degrees of creative power.

27) Editor's note: This refers to the printer and bookseller Josef Jan Landfrass (1769–1840), based in Jindřichův Hradec, in southern Bohemia; Václav Tureček (? – 1822), based in Litomyšl, and Jan Steinbrenner (1835–1909) of Vimperk.



69. ŽDIAR (SLOVENSKO). -
Chalupa. Maison de paysan. Cottage. Bauernhaus.

70. ČIČMANY (SLOVENSKO).
Statek. Ferme. Farm. Bauernhof.

**Figure 1: (Above): Nineteenth-century decorated farmer's cottage, Ždiar, nr. Kežmarok, Slovakia;
(Below): Nineteenth-century decorated farmer's cottage, Čičmany, Slovakia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



61. KOLNÉ (ČECHY).
Státek. Ferme. Farm. Bauernhof.

62. OPATOVICE (ČECHY).
Státek. Ferme. Farm. Bauernhof.

Figure 2: (Above): Early nineteenth-century farm building, Kolné, nr. Lišov, southern Bohemia; (Below): Front façade of a farm building, first half of the nineteenth century, Opatovice, nr. Hluboká, southern Bohemia.

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



83. NEŠKAREDICE (ČECHY).
Brána. Porte. Gate. Tor.

84. VRÁTNO (ČECHY).
Brána. Porte. Gate. Tor.

Figure 3: (Above): Farm gateway, second half of the eighteenth-century, Neškaredice, nr. Kutná Hora, Bohemia; (Below): Farm gateway (1838), Vrátno, nr. Běla pod Bezdězem, Bohemia.

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



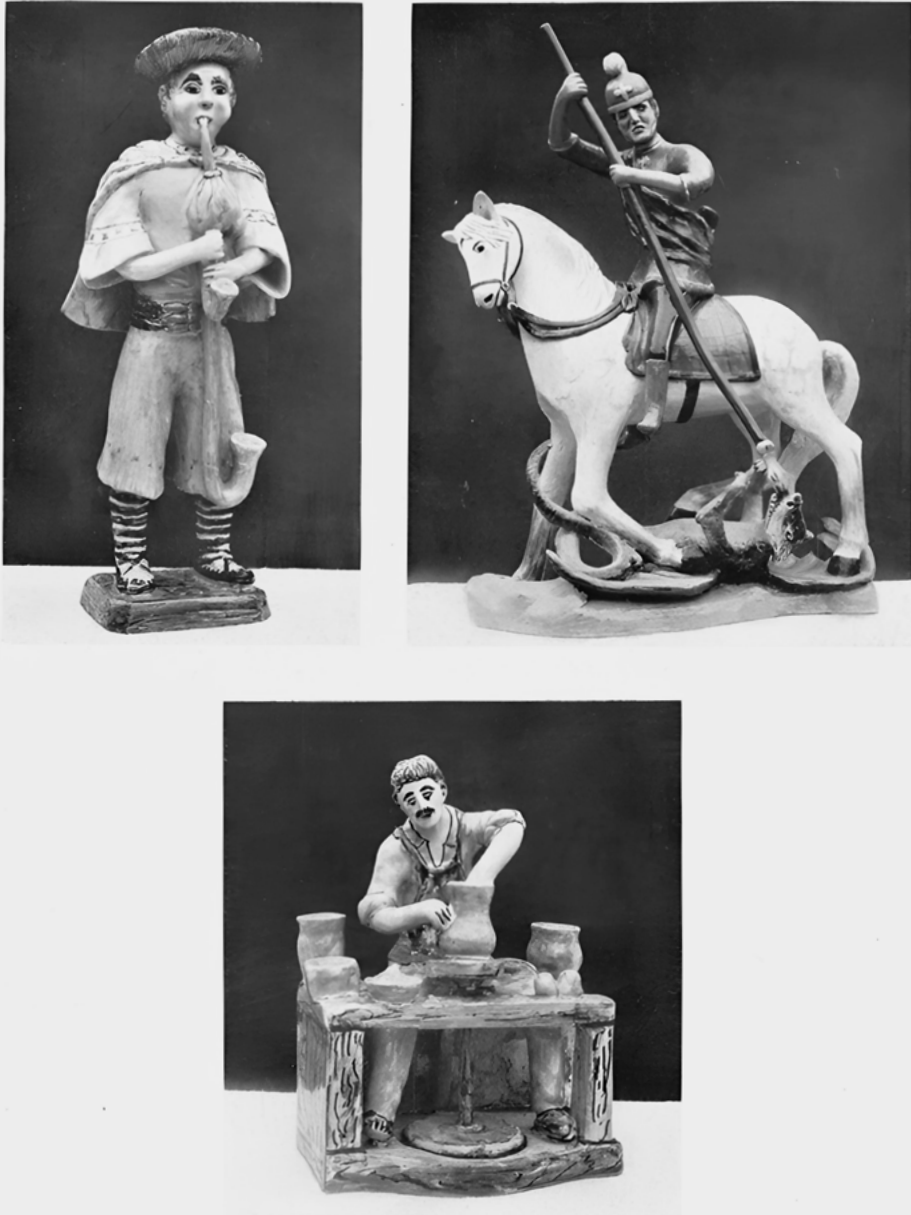
*Majolika česká, moravská a slovenská.
Bohemian, Moravian and Slovak Majolikaware.*

114.

*Fayence tchèque, morave et slovaque.
Böhmische, mährische und slowakische Majolik.*

**Figure 4: Majolica plates from Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia,
mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



131.—133. STUPAVA (SLOVENSKO).
Keramika F. Kostky. Fayence par F. Kostka. Ceramics by F. Kostka. Keramik des F. Kostka.

Figure 5: Early twentieth-century ceramic figures by the peasant sculptor Ferdiš Kostka (1878–1951), Stupava, nr, Trnava, Slovakia.

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



117.—118. SLOVENSKO.
*Červená keramika z Lubietová. Fayence rouge de Lubietová.
Lubietová Red ceramics. Rote Tonnware aus Lubietová.*

Figure 6: Red engobé decorated ceramic plates from Lubietová, nr. Baňská Bystrica, Slovakia, second half of the eighteenth century.

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



143.—144. ČECHY A SLOVENSKO.
Malby na skle. Peintures sur verre. Glass paintings. Glasmalereien.

Figure 7: Glass paintings of (above) St. Isidor of Seville and the miracle of the plough, (below) Janosík and his band of brigands, ca. 1800, from Soběchleby, nr Olomouc and Baňská Bystrica, Slovakia.

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.



169. ČECHY.
Kroj blatský. Costume de Blata.
Costume from the Blata. Tracht aus Blata.



170. ČECHY.
Kroj chotěšovský. Costume de Chotěšov.
Costume from Chotěšov. Chotěšauer Tracht.

Figure 8: (Left) Wedding costumes, late nineteenth century, from Blata, nr. Tábor, Bohemia; (Right): Woman's dress, late nineteenth century, from Chotěšov, nr. Pilsen, Bohemia.

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

Karel Teige

New Art and Folk Creation

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Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

Folk art? Oh, yes, our beautiful national costumes for which, we think, the whole world should envy us, the folk costumes of Slovácko and Moravia, abounding with bright and red color, the most inherent product of the Czechoslovak people's artistic work! What a feast for the eyes it is when national and Slavic flags flutter and tint all the otherwise grey and inhospitable facades of high houses, when the parade of village striplings and girls pours through the wide streets during any celebratory event, as it is customary to express national consciousness and the Hussite traits of our tribal character by donning the Slovácko folk costume.²⁸ When the sun is shining, the image calls out for the rich and glowing palette of Joža Uprka, and it is impossible not to recall his gaudy, theatrical painting. Even the grand master Mucha himself sweetens his inexhaustible and inartistic slush with the ornamental motifs of embroideries. Or in other cases: Behind the shop window of a Prague furniture wholesaler, we see 'modern and practical' designs and, all of a sudden, Slovácko-style embroidery ornaments wink at us from under the cornices of a wardrobe, on the head board of a bed or the backrest of a chair. This is the result of fashion and a patrioteering and wholly inartistic fever! Alas, you might say, it is art that has been abused rather than applied! Indeed, this mania for distinctiveness has given many a distaste for the ornamentation of our folk costumes. And this should come as no surprise.

Folk art! Growing from a joyful life, from peacefulness and humble work, from the idyllic life of our village folk, once, long ago, it was a beautiful and ardent song, a cheerful hymn of the gracious passing of days and, as the lost joy of the past, purer and fuller life it was conserved in the coffin of the ethnographic museum and it continues to powerfully affect our perception. In addition to the richness of folk costumes, which are, however, more interesting from an ethnographic perspective than from an artistic or psychological one, we find here genuine and honest pictures, fresh and bright amateur paintings, imbued artificially with the moving magic of the simplicity and peacefulness of the rustic Czech idyll of the past. Colorful and highly intense folk paintings, as simple and lovable as folk songs, this rural art of the folk people begs for your attention and affects your sentimentality the same way here in the museum, it conjures up before your eyes some

28) Editor's note: Slovácko is a region in eastern Moravia, known for its folk traditions and customs.

glorious past life, for example a year in the village more than a century ago.²⁹ But as we have already stated, in the coffin of the museum, it is itself the past.

In front of the museum, vast and plain factory buildings tower up with their smokestacks, the industrial quarter of the metropolis; just step over the threshold and you find yourself in the midst of the chaotic, hurried present, overflowing with a myriad shapes and immediate realities. You do not even have time to measure the distance between the blissful quiet of the idyll of the past and the din of the civilization of the present. The art of the present is supposedly based on conceptual and psychological tendencies that stem from Impressionism, which started this ‘technical revolution.’ In formal terms it seeks to derive its surface from the precipitous ferment of this industrial and Americanized world: modern painters have painted images that are as geometric and machine-like as everything that surrounds us in cities today. The once ridiculed paintings of Umberto Boccioni †, which, with a unique method not based on the naturalistic vision of bare reality, attempted to interpret the rhythms of life and lines of force of the grand, populated avenues, the forms of which amaze with their momentum and immediacy, these paintings are – as we can see – the most truthful and faithful imprints of this environment. It is something fundamentally different and hostile, distant from the freshness of rural folk art, and it is no surprise that the general opinion that folk art is dead or dying was born in these times, and that it will certainly be completely eradicated by the era of unyielding civilization of factories and industrial conquest and expansion.

Today, when art, undergoing a critical and inter-directional, inter-stylistic interregnum, is preparing to draw elementary and valid lessons and support for new work from primordial and folk art, when Lunacharsky is founding a state organization in Russia in support of folk art, on which young Russian painting in many respects relies (as we learn from K. Umansky’s book *New Art in Russia*), today, Josef Čapek’s small book *The Humblest Art* shows us that folk art has survived, despite perhaps having had to eke out a living in the barren land of life and culture, and the book strives to appreciate it warmly, to grant it what it deserves, to pay respect to it that, as Vildrac beautifully put it, we are obliged to give to the smallest beauty.³⁰ He is not concerned with that past folk art; the folk art of the present in our country is far more an urban and suburban art, which is often as rigid, inelegant and drastic as a common vulgar tune or anecdote exchanged by people on the streets. For example, [Čapek] discusses painters of shop signs that are often closer to the famous works in galleries and more worthy of such comparison than a common salon painting: Before them, we can recall the Primitivists, or some Gothic and Empire painting, and indeed, last but not least, Henri Rousseau. The author gives equally passionate attention to artistic work beyond the borders (borders acknowledged by tradition) of the visual arts: photography, film, craft furniture and tools, seemingly lacking taste and ‘inartistic.’ Aside from visually artistic beauty, we can find the beauty of work and the general beauty of the world. – This book points out work that has been neglected and

29) Editor’s note: a year in the village refers to a popular realist novel of the same name by Alois and Vilém Mrštík, who describe the customs, people dialect of a fictitious village in Moravia over the course of a year. Alois and Vilém Mrštík, *Rok na vsi: Kronika moravské dědiny* [A year in the village; the chronicle of a Moravian village], Prague: Máj Publishing House, 1903–1904.

30) Editor’s note: Charles Vildrac (1882–1971) was a French poet, novelist and playwright. Konstantin Umansky, *Neue Kunst in Russland 1914–1919* [New Art in Russia 1914–1919], Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1920; Josef Čapek, *Nejskromnější umění* [The Humblest Art], Prague: Aventinum, 1920.

lingers in a melancholic separation from life and the bustle of exhibitions, the art that is immersed in its solitude, which nonetheless enters silently but vigorously as an active element of today's creation and the birth of new art.

For we live in a moment when we are experiencing the twilight of one great art, which culminated in the naturalistic nineteenth century. Impressionism was followed by a split into diverse, sometimes contradictory tendencies and movements, which – despite sometimes opposing Impressionism in form, however radically – necessarily stemmed from it with their ideas and content, as we have mentioned above, and even escalate it at times. And in this individualistic art, we were surprised by the mysterious and incomprehensible solitude of the doyen of folk production, the humble customs officer from a Parisian district, a pure man of the people, father Henri Rousseau. Contrary to the paintings in the *Salon des Indépendants* (the only place that allowed him to exhibit), which were merely aggregates of the forms of sharp, modern taste, a dynamic interpretation of the *sujet* and the *mise-en-scène* of the environment, his honest, modest and cordial (so wholly non-Impressionistic!) masterpieces spoke of the eternal human meaning of art, the very fascination, fundamentality and mysteriousness of the soul. His era, his generation, his peers could not entirely comprehend Rousseau; aestheticians stood before him somewhat puzzled, and critics felt their standards were failing. His monographer Wilhelm Uhde concluded correctly that the generation that was quick to power and violence and which had only derision for the painter of love and goodness can only partially understand his significance.³¹ Today the name Rousseau is famous, but perhaps its true time will come when it will be possible to describe the meaning of the century in the words: 'peace on earth to people of good will!', which can be used to describe his whole life, reminiscent of the legends of saints.

Art is ruled by a certain reticent misunderstanding, a victorious and irreversible inner security that triggers all the powers of the world into a collective whole. Something unified, homogenous and kindred, despite racial individual nuances, is emerging; a new spirit is being created from all forms. From the desperate, material and spiritual misery of today, an unmistakable dream of the future is nascent in the mind of the suffering mankind.

The hidden courage of all working spirits springs just as much from desire as it does from the need to build a new world. It is truly necessary to revise all values, which have been so intensely revalued by the vortex of war, and bring back their most fundamental meaning, especially in art. It is necessary to start from the beginning with everything, from the original foundations and original law, and from here it is possible to explain more than just the formal attention that contemporary art gives to all manifestations of primal creativity. Painters paint, as you can hear, no longer only for art, but for people. They do not paint self-serving, perfect and ostentatious works, but poems of a new, free and collective life and its deep and truthful harmony. They believe, perhaps, that they will be able to become folk artists once again; indeed, a stylistic era is emerging, one that in history last existed in the Gothic period, when one single stem of art existed, when there was no difference between the so-called great, ruling art and overlooked, minor, second-rate, folk art.

At a decisive moment, when the old intellectual and spiritual world is sinking into the depths like a massive and monstrous transatlantic ship, and when the symbol and image of

31) Wilhelm Uhde, *Henri Rousseau*, Dresden: Rudolf Kaemmerer, 1921.

tomorrow is being elaborately and strenuously constructed, the dawning of which provides a valid support for artists addressing tasks in their own work which they have drawn from the character of the era, there is the artistic creativity of ordinary people, the art that does not withhold the warmth of its near biblical scale, whose meaning is perhaps this: ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...!’³²

32) Editor’s note: Teige’s conclusion is a quotation from Matthew, 11.28.



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