

# Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Avant-Garde and Modernism: The Impact of WWI

Abstracts

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## The Trojan Horse in the Fair Trade Palace: The Slav Epic versus the Czech Avant-Garde

Sharp clashes and unexpected alliances between nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism in art manifested themselves in the extreme around a cultural event that took place on the occasion of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of an independent Czechoslovak Republic: in the autumn of 1928, in a curious symbiosis, two works of art were completed and presented to the public, each seeming to emerge from an altogether different intellectual world: the Trade Fair Palace (Veletržní palác, 1924–1928), a pioneering work of functionalist architecture by architects Oldřich Tyl and Josef Fuchs, and the *Slav Epic* (1912–1928), a series of twenty monumental paintings by Alfons Mucha, exhibited in their entirety for the first time in the Great Hall of the Trade Fair Palace itself. While the Trade Fair Palace was praised even by Le Corbusier during a visit to Prague and was an impressive and current example of the transnational style, the Czech avant-garde considered the *Slav Epic* as an anachronism (both in terms of its content and its artistic style) even before Mucha began painting it prior to the First World War. With the passage of time, however, a more nuanced assessment is called for. Alongside the sharp position of the avant-garde it is necessary to take into account the motivations of Václav Boháč, founder and director of the Prague Trade Fairs Company (Pražské vzorkové veletrhy), who was behind the idea to build the Trade Fair Palace and the idea to exhibit Mucha's painting series in it. A number of questions arise. Can a client project an ideology with national undertones into a purely functionalist structure? How did the artistic and political responses sparked by the *Slav Epic* before the First World War change after the foundation of Czechoslovakia? Why did Czech art history in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ignore the *Slav Epic* while curators and researchers in Germany, Austria, and the United States showed their interest in it? Why do current Czech artists at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century relate to the *Slav Epic* and how?

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## 'A Bridge Too Far?': The War Effect in Portuguese and Spanish Avant-Gardes

The Iberian Peninsula is not a usual reference in existing accounts of the critical reception of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde and modernism. Art historical approaches on the avant-garde's intense dialogues, debates, and exchanges have focused on its Parisian cradle and its central territories – Italian, German and Russian – and left the study of its 'peripheral' reverberations aside, as a secondary, local subject matter.

There is hardly any room left to analyse the avant-garde's 'side effects' and the responses that, for instance, cubism sparked in other geographies. Regionally-focused art-historical writing holds to the idea of cubism's Parisien-ness as denoting an insurmountable distance from local 'peripheries'. *Parisien-ness* is a bridge too far, it is a synonym for good painting, or at least a synecdoche for the avant-garde and modernism's main debates, investigations, and propositions. This kind of constant reduction of regional contexts infects the initial reception of modernism and the avant-garde and explains why, even nowadays, Spanish artists like Picasso and Gris are regarded as part of a cosmopolitan trend in art history (despite the chauvinism and artistic rivalries of pre-WWI France), one that does not belong to the history of Spanish art. This paper looks at the contribution of Iberian countries' artistic milieus to the dynamics, critical reception, and dissemination of international modernism and the avant-garde. The reconsideration is

twofold. On the one hand, it takes into account the aesthetic resources, production, debates, and networking of indigenous avant-gardes; on the other hand, it considers the effect of the war, as many Parisian émigrés were driven to Lisbon, Madrid, and Barcelona by WWI, and meshed with those regional, putatively ‘peripheral’ scenes. These émigrés gathered Portuguese and Spanish-born artists and poets already established in Paris, as well as renowned foreign avant-garde figures such as Francis Picabia, Albert Gleizes or the Delaunays.

‘Local’ case studies, focused on the work of the Portuguese Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, the Catalanian Juan Miró, and the Uruguayan (Barcelona-based) Rafael Barradas, will be presented, while taking into account the impact of the Delaunays’ sojourn in Portugal and Spain during the war.

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## **Éva Forgács**

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### **The Concept of ‘National Art’ and World War I in Hungary: Lajos Fülep and the Dynamics of ‘National’ and ‘International’**

While a cosmopolitan culture and artistic production thrived in Hungary prior to World War I, ‘cosmopolitan’ became a bad word after the Great War. Prior to the war Hungarian artists did not think that art was more national than mathematics: they travelled to study and live in Paris or Munich, but always returned to their native country, which they perceived, at least as far as its culture was concerned, as no less European than any other part of the continent. Art critic Lajos Fülep (1885–1970) and philosopher Georg Lukacs (1885–1971) published a journal of aesthetics together, *A szellem* (The Spirit), which was a forum for art and literary theory regardless of where the work originated.

All this changed during and after the war. Reference to, let alone praise for, the artists of Hungary’s war enemies was considered unpatriotic, and even an open-minded art critic such as Fülep had to seriously entertain the question: what exactly makes art national? What is the particular, unique contribution of a nation to the art of humankind? Are there specific forms, styles, or contents that characteristically distinguish Hungarian art from the arts of other nations? Is the national feature folkloric, or historic, or something beyond both?

I will examine Fülep’s 1916 essay ‘Magyar Művészet’ (Hungarian art) on this question and outlay the trajectory of some of the leading Hungarian artists before, during, and after World War I, when most of them were forced to emigrate from their native country – a circumstance that makes the issue of national art even more complicated.

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## **Irina Genova**

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### **Modernism and the National Idea – Reflections of WWI: The Case of Bulgaria in the Context of South-Eastern Europe**

World War I was a traumatic experience, which changed artistic predispositions and thinking in art. The European map was redesigned. In South-Eastern Europe Albania emerged before the war, and after WWI there arose the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians; Romania significantly expanded. In the countries in South-East Europe the period from the end of WWI until around the mid-1920s was characterised by intense activity in the modernist and avant-garde movements. Their protagonists returned to their home countries. Artists with multiple identities, formed by and members of more than one cultural milieu (Georges Papazoff and

Nicolay Diulgheroff from Bulgaria, and many others), were a common phenomenon in the post-war years. However, few Bulgarian artists, finding themselves within influential artistic centres, openly embarked on the adventures of modernism. The very selectivity of their interest in European art is indicative of the nature of the art scene in Bulgaria. The common primitivist tendency in the 1920s, for instance, interacted to varying degrees with an interest in folk art and icon painting (Ivan Milev, Ivan Penkov, Ivan Lazarov, Vasil Zahariev, Pencho Georgiev, Sirak Skitnik, etc.). The aspirations of the new wave in Bulgarian art in the 1920s were not limited to mediating the lost 'native'. This wave swung between 'the native' and 'the universal', between the hand-made and the unique, on the one hand, and the industrially manufactured and distributed, on the other; it generated a new attitude towards the applied and mass arts. Some of the most renowned Bulgarian critics of the time, such as Geo Milev, Chavdar Mutafov, and Sirak Skitnik, devoted attention to these issues.

From the end of the 1920s the interest in local visual culture, which was intertwined with the modernisms of the previous years, began to be reflected more often in a commonly accepted imagery of nationalist pathos.

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### **Ginta Gerharde-Upeniece**

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#### **Art and the New Latvian State (1918–1920): Modernism as a Cosmopolitan Idea and a Substantive National Factor**

In Latvia the First World War was characterised by intense warfare, the participation in battle of Latvia's Riflemen units, the destruction of land, and the flight of refugees. Declaration of the Latvian state on 18 November 1918 can be viewed as a positive factor. The war did not end in 1918, however, but was followed by a crucial period of battle for an independent state, the Battles for Independence, with the final victory on 11 August 1920 (concluding with the Peace Treaty between Latvia and Russia).

In 1921, artist Romans Suta wrote the following in the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*: 'New Latvian painting was born in the brief periods between horrible battles.' The First World War was undoubtedly the dividing line in the developmental processes of Latvian art – a convincing introduction to modern art.

It should be added that this period also saw the rise of a new generation – an innovative, even revolutionary attitude to traditions, an interest in the pre-war directions of the European avant-garde, and modifications to those movements. European cosmopolitanism was the impulse for manifestations of the new art. The language of modernism was not just a new kind of form and aesthetic category, but, in a paradoxical way, it also expressed national aspirations, with a favouring of patriotic themes, and it attempted to find a place for itself by creating a visual image and symbols for the national ideal.

The year 1920 was significant for marking the beginning of the state's actual functioning in peacetime conditions. The great achievement of the new artists was the first exhibition by the Riga Artists' Group at the Riga City Art Museum.

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### **Lidia Głuchowska**

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#### **The Great World and the 'New Art' in Poland: Between the Patriotic Ethos, the Nationalisation of Modernism, and International Experiments in Aesthetics**

The Great War was, for Polish art, a time of breakthroughs, but also a time of references to tradition. Artists transposed their experiences of military service onto art, not only in order to document them, but also to draw on the retrospective and romantic utopia of the revival of the nobles' Republic of Poland, which in 1795 lost its national independence and was divided between Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary. Many of these artists were drafted into the armies of the annexationist countries and regarded the role they were forced to play with ambivalent feelings. They gave expression to the exceptional experience of fratricidal war, which became the fate of hundreds of Polish soldiers who were drafted into foreign armies.

The voluntary enlistment of almost two hundred painters and sculptors into the Polish Legions formed by Marshal Józef Piłsudski to fight against Russia on the side of Austria-Hungary was an exceptional phenomenon on a European scale. They proudly created the legend of the Legions in word and in image.

Some artists supported politicians in clarifying their vision of the new country, and outside the mainstream of socially and artistically traditional production there were manifestations of a pacifist, cosmo-national spirit, such as the exhibitions of the Bunt group in Poznań and Berlin in 1918, with its provocative poster with the motif of the tower of Babel. Some artists contributed to the internationalist aesthetic movement by writing multilingual manifestoes, others, such as Kasimir Malevich, from a Polish family of nobles, expressed their multi-ethnic self-identification by exhibiting their work in the Polish section at international exhibitions.

Finally, Poland's unfavourable geo-political location led to the nationalisation of the 'new form'. The internationalist avant-garde never became fashionable and the 'new state's' hallmark became the 'national style' centred on folk art and art deco.

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**Annika Gunnarsson**

Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden

### **'Cosmonational' – Neither National Nor Cosmopolitan, but a Tinge of Avant-Garde Modernism**

Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, has a collection of Swedish avant-garde art that reflects writings in Swedish art history on avant-garde artists. It is built on a rhetoric that named those who belonged to the avant-garde movement and defined what modernism was and still is from the perspective of the collection.

This paper aims to discuss the institutional construction of avant-garde modernism. The focus will be on both the reception of the avant-garde over time, and on how avant-garde works made their way into the collection. For example, the Swedish artists that visited the school of Matisse are still discussed as his pupils and their work is hung alongside that of the master to show the linkage between them and him – a practice frequently used to indicate who is a part of an international movement or setting. Though this was not the way these artists made their way into the collection. The common denominator in this particular case of Matisse and 'friends' would be the use of colour, but there is more to be said about the use of the 'Fauvistic palette' than is ever discussed in the museum.

But a more rash description of Swedish avant-garde artists from a contemporary point of view would be that they were 'acting' as cosmopolitans in national settings and as nationalistic when out in the so-called cosmopole. Looking back on how the Swedish avant-garde movement was defined and what it actually was, questions arise about the visuality of the works. One way to look at them would be to speak of an adaptation of the 'worldwide' definition of what constitutes the avant-garde and modernism from the perspective of national art institutions.

**Nina Gurianova**

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### **War as Medium: The Great War in Russian Avant-Garde**

I would like to explore the relationship between Russian art and ideology, aesthetics and politics during the Great War (1914–1918). In a sense, artists and poets responded to Maiakovsky's call not so much to 'write about war' but to 'write by means of war' (by analogy with ink), using war not as a subject but as a medium for their creativity. In the final analysis, the modernists' efforts to grapple with how best to render the shocking fact of this War amounted to a serious meditation on such enduring questions as the social function of art, its proper sphere of influence, and the artist's role in society.

Scholars of art and literature have traditionally tended to pay little attention to the theme of the Great War in Russian modernism and avant-garde. Nonetheless it remains one of the most important refrains, and it offers us the possibility for a deeper understanding of the poetics of avant-garde culture on different levels – social, political, and aesthetic. Neither the war nor any other external event could substantially alter the inner artistic process, but history was variously refracted in the world-view of the artist, in particular, having an immense power on shaping his or her social position. My approach allows one to project the major theoretical and critical issues of modernism against the historical background of the Great War. How does the artist's or writer's social and political agenda change the environment around him/her? What does it take to make art political, and how far can the aestheticization of politics go? Where does the borderline between art and propaganda lie? These questions are as important now as they were at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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**Benedikt Hjartarson**

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### **Abstract Constructivism: Universal Language – National Idioms**

In historiographies of the early avant-garde, the movement of European Constructivism in the 1920s is traditionally described as a prime example of the transnational impetus of the avant-garde project. Of central importance in this respect is the vision of a new, universal language that was meant to transcend or contest national, linguistic, and cultural borders in the construction of a new, profoundly universal idiom of modern art – described in terms such as 'international hieroglyphs' (Karel Teige) or 'modern *Biblia pauperum*' (Krisztina Passuth). The paper will subject to critical scrutiny this view of the universal language of abstract constructivism, which has served to confirm terms our rather comfortable image of the historical avant-garde as a radical, internationally oriented and transnationally organised project. The paper will focus on a case study of the early abstract works of the Icelandic artist Finnur Jónsson made during his time studying at Edmund Kesting's art school 'Der Weg' in Dresden in the early 1920s and shown at an exhibition of *Der Sturm* in 1925. Jónsson was one of three Icelandic artists (along with Emil Thoroddsen and Tryggvi Magnússon) who studied at Der Weg in the period 1922–1925. The paper will explore the question of what role the nationalist ideology predominant in right-wing conservative circles of German avant-garde artists connected to Der Weg played in opening up possibilities for young Icelandic artists to enter progressive currents in the German art field in this period. Special attention will be paid to references to the nationalist and Germanic character of Jónsson's work, which were rather current in the 1920s, but have been largely ignored by scholars, who choose to focus rather on Finnur's entry into the new 'international' language of abstract constructivism.

**Vendula Hnídková**

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## **Respect and Triumph: The Intentions and Meanings of Czech Architecture before and after WWI**

Architecture is always a compelling reflection of its social, economic, and political context. The case of the Czech lands before 1914 and after 1918 represents an extraordinarily turbulent period of changed intentions that were vividly manifested in architecture. I shall present a few selected examples through which I will try to describe a new approach to cubism and the national style in architecture, representing two almost contradictory positions on the scale from cosmopolitan to national.

There is a fundamental distinction that differentiates the Czech pre-war and post-war architecture that we call cubist and the national style. While the former was shaped by close interaction with the cubist movement in Paris, the latter followed opposite objective and was programmatically based on local tradition. The war period could be regarded as a catalyst for this kind of radical development, which I postulate stemmed from a shift in the attitude of architects to historical context. Artistic intentions might then be described and interpreted according to the concepts of 'respect' for the period before 1914 and 'triumph' after 1918. The new political situation had a direct impact on architecture, which redirected its focus away from the international movement towards national celebration.

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## **Cut-and-Paste in Exile and War: Otto Gutfreund's Parisian Collages**

By the time Prague artist Otto Gutfreund travelled to Paris in spring 1914, he had developed a highly sophisticated theory and practice of sculpture. He experimented with confusing the perception of two- and three-dimensional form in bronze reliefs and sculptures to engage viewers on a metaphysical level. In early 1914, while he was in Paris, Gutfreund began experimenting in pasted paper collages as well. In these two-dimensional images he not only responded to works he saw during his first visit to Picasso's studio, but he extended his play with the ambiguities of figure and ground that he had been exploring in sculpture. And as European tensions rose that summer, Gutfreund increasingly deployed newspaper scraps in still-life images to conjure an experience of the metropole and his own identity in conflict with his surroundings. I look closely at a few of Gutfreund's works on paper to show how they register the shift in his experiences from travel to exile and from cosmopolitanism to alienation.

In *Head*, (c. April, 1914), Gutfreund used newspaper to wittily suggest the ephemera filling the mind of the metropolitan man. The sports page, which serves as the collage's ground, reports on competition results under the headings 'Automobilisme' and 'Cyclisme', which must have almost farcically reminded Gutfreund of the ever-expanding invention of art-world '-isms'. But in works such as *Still Life with Bottle* (c. July or August, 1914), Gutfreund used the dislocations of cut-and-pasted newspapers to register estrangement from Austria, now cast daily in the French news as enemy aggressor. He kept suggestive headlines intact and strategically bisected others to call attention to the continuities and shifts he perceived in his cultural and political surroundings. Gutfreund deftly created still-life collages of café life to conjure the complexities of a Central European artist's conflicted experience of displacement in wartime Paris.

## Nationalist and Internationalist Discourses Surrounding the Modernist Breakthrough in Danish Art and Culture during World War I

During World War I the cultural life in the Danish Capital of Copenhagen paradoxically went through a period of prosperity. Because of the country's neutrality, Danish merchants were able to trade with England and Germany, and the war-time economy created great fortunes, some of which were invested in art. For a short time Copenhagen enjoyed a reputation as the 'Nordic Paris' attracting a considerable number of Nordic modernist artists. Herwarth Walden's Berlin Der Sturm Gallery organised two shows of international avant-garde art in Copenhagen in 1917 and 1918, and in the same years debates on modernist art and aesthetics occupied a prominent place in the Danish public space. This peculiar cultural climate served as the backdrop to a short-lived modernist breakthrough in Danish art and culture, the most important collective manifestations of which were the 1918 Artists' Autumn Exhibition (Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling, or KE) and the emergence of the avant-garde magazine *Klingen* (The Blade, 1917–1920), which came to serve as a platform for young and experimental Nordic artists and poets. In these contexts, modernism was mostly conceived as an international movement within the arts and as a purely autonomist art form, yet at the same time modernist art and aesthetics were enrolled and appropriated as arenas for a subtle propaganda war between German and French influences. In my paper, I will try to map this somewhat overlooked political sub-text of early Danish modernism.

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### The Use, Abuse and Misuse of Cubism in the Romanian Avant-Garde

In November 1924, M. H. Maxy and Marcel Janco mounted the First International Exhibition of *Contimporanul*, which exhibited work by Klee, Brancusi, Segal, and Schwitters. *Contimporanul* emulated *Der Sturm*, the progressive journal also engaged in exhibiting art. *Der Sturm* promoted expressionism as the radical, international avant-garde. In *Contimporanul's* strategy, cubism received the place given to expressionism by *Der Sturm*. Cubism's apparent aim to systematise modern experience in an intellectual framework was seen as the 'style of the new'.

In 1925 Maxy founded *Integral*, which was even more radically cubist-constructivist in its stance than *Contimporanul*. Back from Italy, Corneliu Michailescu processed futurist standpoints into cubist frameworks, and contributed to establishing cubism as a mainstream direction in the mid-1920s. Victor Brauner's early output, including the one-issue *75HP* magazine, was a cubist-like fantasy on Dadaist schemes.

Around the mid-1920s, cubism was 'de rigueur' in modern-looking art and visual culture, in painting and engraving, and even in advertising and printing, and in modern furniture, carpets, dishes, and cutlery (produced by *Studio Maxy*, the artist's own manufacture), and notably in the 'cubist' architecture of Marcel Janco, the most visible, and still surviving imprint of cubism in Bucharest. The need for clarification was propelled by abuse of the words 'cubism' and 'cubist' in literary and theoretical methods and excessive coverage of the public visual space with 'cubist' products, as a sort of modern-looking, creative esperanto (bolstered by the decorative cubism of the art deco show in Paris in 1925). Cubism, as well as expressionism, became the subject of ridicule by the more classicising section of modernists, such as Ion Iorgulescu-Yor, who mockingly portrayed cubism and expressionism as paraded tokens of cosmopolitanism.



By the end of the 1920s, because of the boom in an impoverished form of cubism, and other factors, cubism began to be criticised in various publications advocating for a move beyond cubism in order to achieve a 'more modern' synthesis. Next to the rising influence of neo-traditionalist art, this contributed essentially to the effacement of cubism – in the local art scene during the 1930s, when M. H. Maxy turned his attention to realism, Marcel Janco to functionalism, and Victor Brauner and Corneliu Michalescu to surrealism, putting an early end to an influential, visual innovation.

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### **Migrating Signifiers – Socialist Yugoslavia Post-WWII Art History and Its Relation to the Inter-War Avant-Garde**

The stance towards the avant-garde articulated in the discourse of Yugoslav post-WWII art history – and for that matter in art history of the other Yugoslav republics at the time – was rather complicated, but was more on the level of semantics than actual cultural politics. Yugoslav cultural policy after the break with the USSR was rather tolerant towards different types of experimental art practices – 'old' and new ones alike – but almost to the end of the 1950s the notion of the avant-garde was directly associated with the radical and revolutionary social and political practices of the Yugoslav Communist Party and thus became an 'unavailable' cultural signifier. The lack of unambiguous terminology and proper analytical apparatus considerably affected the clear perception and description of inter-war modernism, which was re-framed in a number of complicated ways by the appearance of new art phenomena in the early post-war period that also claimed to occupy the avant-garde position in regard to both the political order and the signifying order of art.

This paper seeks to examine the consequences of such claims in relation to the very concept of the avant-garde – how it was understood, described, interpreted, and applied during the 1950s, and in the 1960s when it was finally dislocated from the realm of politics and re-established within the discourse of culture. It also seeks to explain why after gaining momentum in the early 1970s the interest in the avant-garde among artists, art historians, and the general public grew constantly and culminated in the early 1980s with a series of exhibitions presenting local 'non-paradigmatic' avant-garde movements and their networking practices.

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### **Transnational or National Cubism? Vincenc Kramář on Cubism**

Vincenc Kramář was a major collector of the work of Picasso, studied himself at the Vienna school of art history, and was an art theorist who was interested in cubism as the most current and most eloquent art trend of his time. In 1913 he published his first substantial text on cubism 'A Chapter on Isms' for the Fauconnier exhibition in Munich. In it he compares the derived and, in his opinion, dated expression of Le Fauconnier with an exhibition of Picasso at that time at Tannhauser Gallery. Picasso represented 'painting in the full sense of the word', the painting as a play of colour and form, which, according to Kramář, was interpreted by epigone formalists (so-called cubists) as unartistic geometry or philosophy. In his book *Kubismus* (Cubism, 1921) Kramář regards the cubism of Picasso and Braque as yet a 'pure demonstration of plasticity and spatial relations', writing elsewhere that the principle of Picasso's image was 'the lyricism

of the whole'. Cubism's emphasis on values of form and shape points to its universal and thus transnational character. Czech national art, sprung from Czech soil, is rejected by Kramář, who claims that 'genuinely meaningful national art was and is always universally human.' This paper traces how Kramář's uniting of the concepts of national and transnational was a strategy parallel to that of T. G. Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia, who, in his study *Nová Evropa: Stanovisko slovanské* (The New Europe: The Slavic Viewpoint), enquires into the position of the Czechoslovak nation in Europe (in Czech 1920, in German in Berlin 1922). He wrote that there is an alignment not opposition between the national and the international. Masaryk stressed that the 'internationalism' of his day was something different from the 'cosmopolitanism' of the 18th century, which was 'essentially French' and limited to the aristocracy. 'Internationalism is not an impediment to small nations', wrote Masaryk. His strategy of reconciling these two poles parallels Kramář's post-war efforts to understand cubism as the outcome of a fusion of the national (Czech) and the transnational.

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### **Estonian Cubists: A Focus on the Political Aspect**

In Estonia the term 'avant-garde' has a complicated history that can be traced back to the 1920s and it has been defined in various ways, including political, early on reflecting a contest between Estonian artists competing for power in Estonian cultural policies. After WWI Estonian cubists came together in the Group of Artists of Estonia, active in the 1920s, whose activities culminated in the publication of a book that essentially constituted their manifesto. These artists were active in a period of great political turbulence, with WWI, which some of them took part in, the developments in Russia and leftwing ferment, and the War of Independence in Estonia in 1918-19, in which some Estonia artists were also involved. In the 1920s the political views of these artists were twofold – both national and international. National in the sense that they supported the newly founded nation state and tried to define the new aesthetics for a state that had never ever existed before in world history. They identified themselves as international artists because of their aesthetic choice to support the modernist 'progress in art' and the international 'universal' style that had much in common with mathematics and geometry, and therefore an 'objective worldview'. This made them look for international contacts both in Latvia and in Europe. At the same time the Estonian nation state considered cubists 'alien' and refused to support them. There were also some tragic developments. The 'geometrical' modernist poet Johannes Vares Barbarus, whose books were designed by cubists, was offered by Russian occupiers to head the state in 1940, so he set up a puppet government. In 1946 he was found dead, probably killed by the Soviets, who no longer needed his favours. Cubist-constructivist artists then passed the baton to the functionalist architects who were defining Estonian architecture in the 1930s. The artists and architects had no ties to each other, yet the succession of aesthetic principles is easily detected. (Also, cubist sculptor Juhan Raudsepp made two idealised realist sculptures, *Work* and *Beauty*, for the façade of the functionalist Art Hall building in Tallinn in the 1930s). During the Stalinist period the only cubist who made no compromises at all, Arnold Akberg, kept silent as an artist until 1980s. He worked as an art teacher at a school. One of his students Toomas Rein became an architect and belonged to the heroic Tallinn 10 group in the 1980s. The self-consciousness of cubist artists and urge to join in the international dialogue was very high, but it was somehow never fully fulfilled. Recently, however, the exhibition 'Electromagnetic: Modern Art in Northern Europe 1918–1931' at Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn (2014) brought cubist-constructivist art works together from different countries, creating a new context also for Estonian Cubist artists.

**Bela Tsipuria**

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## **Georgian Modernists Rethink Nationalism: The Impact of WWI and the Russian Revolutions**

The historic circumstances that developed during WWI caused the collapse of a few European empires, the Russian Empire among them. The war made possible two revolutions in Russia in 1917; after the Bolshevik Revolution the Russian centre lost control over few national territories, including Georgia.

In Georgia efforts towards national independence were initiated in the 19th century by Georgian cultural figures under the leadership of Ilia Chavchavadze, and WWI created the historic opportunity for it. After a century under Russia, the Georgian nation started rebuilding its statehood and establishing a free, democratic state, and began to share the social and cultural values of the West. The map of Europe fundamentally changed after the 1917 and the Georgian Democratic Republic (1918–1921) appeared. Although the state had its political leadership, as the result of a tradition from the 19th century, when Georgian poets were regarded as national leaders, it was now the turn of a new generation of Georgian writers to gain a voice, and to verbalize the new, post-colonial goals of the nation. By that time, this new generation had already taken shape as the Georgian Modernists. In their essays and poems they had already formulating and developing approaches to the ideas of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, the re-establishment of Georgia as a nation, and integration within European culture. Georgia's political choice to form as a Western-style state was indeed based on values familiarised within Georgian culture. While the leading Social Democratic (Menshevik) party was propagating the ideas of transnational and cosmopolitan politics, Georgian modernists – Grigol Robakidze, Titsian Tabidze, and others – were articulating national ideas and viewing its own cultural mission also from the perspective of developing a new national identity. The language of modernist aestheticism was in fact applied towards the aspirations of spiritual and national renewal.

Although after the 1921 Sovietisation of Georgia modernism was harshly suppressed, the cultural tendencies developed by the modernists have continued to serve as an important factor and argument for Georgia's current Western cultural and political orientation.

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## **Decentred Cosmopolitanism and the Visual Discourse of Modernity in Finland in the 1920s**

After a long period of 'national awakening', in which a major role was played by artists trained in Paris who were nonetheless working on Finnish themes (e.g. Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Eero Järnefelt), Finland gained its independence in 1917, taking advantage of the opportunity provided by WWI and the momentary decline in Russia's geopolitical power. However, the declaration of independence was followed by civil war in 1918. As a result, the unity of the young state was merely a myth, and the young generation of artists, writers, and intellectuals participating in the revues *Ultra*, *Tulenkantajat* and *Quosego* felt that the cultural and spiritual life of Finland had to be regenerated and the lost link with artistic modernism in Europe re-established. They adopted a strategy of internationalisation, seeking to overcome what they perceived as belatedness and critically appropriating the modernistic and avant-garde art movements of the 1910s and early 1920s. While the traditional centres such as Berlin and Paris remained attractive, the young generation also sought contacts with the other new nations, such as Estonia, the other Baltic States, and Czechoslovakia, which were perceived as more vital and interesting than the 'old' capitals. The visual arts, architecture, theatre, and literature in these countries were often

presented as the models to follow. This decentring or recentring was accompanied by an effort to shift the power balances in Finland by promoting the provincial cities that were left in the shadow of Helsinki. Cosmopolitanism was thus not necessarily antagonistic to nationalism, but rather complementary to it, yet it was also complicated by the struggle for cultural hegemony between the Finnish-speaking and the Swedish-speaking Finns. In my presentation, I will look in more detail at these shifts in imagined and real geographies by analysing the discourses that justified the new orientations and the circulation of texts and images it produced and which had an important role in introducing the Finnish public to modernism and avant-garde. I will focus on the discourses of rupture and renewal stemming from the experience of WWI and its specific perception in Finland, as well as on the visual discourse of modernity as it developed in the reviews *Ultra* and *Tulenkantajat* in articles on painters, reports on exhibitions, images of modern and avant-garde artworks, and the inventive use of illustrations and layout.

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### **‘Uncanonical’ Impulses to the ‘Canon’: Polish and Belgian Contribution to International Constructivism**

Among artistic movements emerging during or after the First World War, constructivism is one of a few currents that did not originate in one particular country, but was shaped in parallel by various formations in the supranational network of the avant-garde. Contrary to the non-hierarchical character of this network, post-WWII historiography has canonised certain concepts and creations – such as Dutch *De Stijl* – while other contributions have been marginalised and ‘peripheralised’. This paper looks at two historiographical ‘peripheries’ of constructivism – namely Belgium and Poland – and the impact they had on its development.

Although the abovementioned nodes in the avant-garde network all had an untimely relation to contemporary mainstream artistic movements, only the Dutch contribution has been generally acknowledged and *De Stijl* has been recognised as the ‘centre’ of constructivism. My aim is to revise the historiographical status quo of the analysed constructivist nodes as well as the often assumed one-sided cultural transfer from canonical ‘central’ formations to the side-lines of the art-historical canon pointing instead to the reciprocal character of their mutual relationships and influences. I will analyse how uncanonical, ‘peripheral’ nodes enhanced the development of constructivism in view of their shared similarities and key differences such as geographical proximity, cultural and linguistic affinity, or the posterior historiographical East-West and centre-periphery categorisation.



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