

# Beyond Dvořák's 'The Last Renaissance': on the beginnings of Slovenian scientific art history inspired by modern art<sup>1</sup>

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The old border between East and West (from the Roman *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* to the Iron Curtain) was also reflected in the research and pedagogical approach of the Vienna School of Art History and its successors.<sup>2</sup> Today, this dividing line is almost an anachronism from the viewpoint of the humanities. However, because war is once again raging within this territory, it is still a border that separates and divides Europe, preventing it from experiencing the richness of its cultural heritage in complete unity. At the University of Vienna, this border was also reflected in the creation of an additional chair of art history in 1909,<sup>3</sup> as the existence of two chairs can be seen as both a division and an opportunity for rapprochement since better knowledge also means better understanding. Interestingly, from the research

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the conference 'The Influence of the Vienna School of Art History III: Origins, Modifications and Influences of Its Theoretical Concepts', organised by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Science from 19 to 20 April 2023). The paper is a part of the research project titled Bourgeois Art Commissions in Carniola and Styria in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, J6-3136, co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency from the national budget.

<sup>2</sup> See: Robert Born, Adam Labuda and Alena Janatkova, eds, *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2004; Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847–1918*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013, 166–185. For the tensions within individual countries, see Marta Filipova, 'Between East and West: The Vienna School and the Idea of Czechoslovak Art', *Journal of Art Historiography* 8, 2013. The division was intensified by the art geography (*Kunstgeographie*) method, employed as of the 1920s, and by the establishment of the institutes for the so-called 'Ostforschung', see Beate Störtkuhl, 'Paradigmen und Methoden der kunstgeschichtlichen "Ostforschung" – Der "Fall" Dagobert Frey', in: Robert Born, Adam Labuda and Alena Janatkova, eds, *Die Kunsthistoriographien*, 155–173. It is important to note that the Faculty of Arts in Vienna was also concerned with maintaining the proper balance. Among other developments, the favourable socio-political climate in 1848 also allowed for the establishment of the Chair of Slavic Philology, headed by the Slovenian expert Fran Miklošič (1813–1891), and the Chair of Slavic Archaeology, which, however, was abolished after the death of Ján Kollár (1793–1852). Slavic studies represented an important access point for Slovenian students. See Stanislaus Hafner, 'Die Kulturgeschichtliche Bedeutung und Wissenschaftliche Leistung der Österreichischen Slawistik', *Jahresbericht*, 10, Klegensfurt: Das Bundesgymnasium für Slowenen in Klagenfurt, 1967, 91–103; Tone Smolej, *Zgodovina doktorskih disertacij slovenskih kandidatov na dunajski Filozofski fakulteti (1872–1918)*, Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2019, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Sorensen, 'Strzygowski, Josef Rudolf Thomas', *Dictionary of Art Historians*, <https://arthistorians.info/strzygowskij>

viewpoint, the Prague conference, dedicated to the Vienna School of Art History, confirmed the continued geographical division between the successors of Max Dvořák's (1874–1921) pupils and Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941). In addition to the Czech lands, the former mainly represented the German-speaking provinces of the former Monarchy (with Hungary), while the latter was joined by many pupils from the Balkans and Eastern Europe as far as the Baltic Sea.<sup>4</sup>

The development of the art-historical profession after 1914–18 war in the newly established successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was strongly influenced by the so-called first Vienna School of Art History. This is especially true of the advancement of the Slovenian academic profession, whose beginnings were shaped by the art historians educated in Vienna at the same time: Izidor Cankar (1886–1958), France Stele (1886–1972), and Vojeslav Mole (1886–1973).<sup>5</sup> Stele, who later developed the regional geography method, and Mole, who pursued his career at the Jagiellonian University,<sup>6</sup> underlined the importance of what were fundamentally completely different methodologies of the two professors, which they themselves combined in their later works.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This division was also evident at the last Prague conference through the presentations of the participants as a legacy. 'The Influence of the Vienna School of Art History III: Origins, Modifications and Influences of Its Theoretical Concepts' (Conference in Prague, 19–20 April 2023).

<sup>5</sup> About the beginnings of the Slovenian art historical science and its representatives see France Stelè, 'Slowenische Kunstgeschichte seit 1920', *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes der Universität Graz, III–IV*, 1968/1969; about the connections with the Vienna School of Art History see Barbara Murovec, 'Zwischen Methodologie und Ideologie. Slowenische Kunsthistoriker der Wiener Schule nach 1945', *RIHA Journal*, 0117, Jan-Mar 2015, available at <https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2015/2015-janmar/murovec-zwischen-methodologie-und-ideologie>, accessed on 16 July 2019; Vesna Krmelj, 'France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence z Izidorjem Cankarjem', *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, 23:1, 2018, 133–183; Katja Mahnič, 'Max Dvořák and the Founding of the "Ljubljana School of Art History"', *Journal of Art Historiography* 26, 2022. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2022/05/mahnic.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> In 1926, Mole took over the newly established Chair of the Art History of the Slavic Nations at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. After the outbreak of 1939–45 war in September 1939, he retreated to Lviv and shortly afterwards moved to Ljubljana, where he headed the Chair of Byzantine Studies between 1940 and 1945. After the war, he returned to Poland. In 1950, he assumed the leadership of the Institute of Art History at the Jagiellonian University and the Chair of Medieval Literature. See Stanko Kokole, 'Vojeslav Molè in začetki umetnostnozgodovinskega študija grško-rimske antike na Univerzi v Ljubljani. Del 1'. *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, 53, 2017, 191–214, with the relevant bibliography in note 1; Gašper Cerkovnik, 'Neznana Knjiga spominov Vojeslava Moleta', *Arhivi*, 38: 2, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> About the question of the influence of Dvořák and Strzygowski on Slovenian art history, see Mahnič, 'Max Dvořák', 4. In his memoirs, Vojeslav Mole describes how the two seminars differed: 'If I had to use a metaphor to compare the two seminars, I would say that Dvořák's had a bit of the atmosphere of Raphael's Platonic Academy, where everything was calm, dignified, sunny and clear, while Strzygowski's seminars resembled modern international political and diplomatic conferences, consumed by controversial problems whose resolution

The present article explores the relationship between the formulation of the method and the object of research among art historians, artists, and architects at the end of the twentieth century's first decade. In the course of Vienna School's development, the contact between modernity – the current artistic trends – and older art became inevitable at both institutes. As Hans Tietze (1880–1954) wrote in his *Methodologie der Kunstgeschichte*, one of the characteristics of the Vienna School of Art History was the conviction that "... living art includes the key to the dead".<sup>8</sup> Just as history gains insights from observing life that keeps moving forward, art history can only find the key to the riddles of the past in direct relation to living art. While older generations of scholars distanced themselves from contemporary art, the younger ones wrote about it and incorporated the new principles of modern art into art historiography. In its attitude towards the older artworks, modern art that is connected to life 'is not merely defined in relation to the old, but is in fact the only bridge leading to its understanding'<sup>9</sup> ... for art historians, the conclusion that stems from all of this is that only those researchers who are sensitive to the artistic will (*Kunstwollen*) of their time can steer the science in new directions'.<sup>10</sup>

Studies have long connected theoretical insights and methodologies with contemporary creative experience, also in the case of the Vienna School of Art History.<sup>11</sup> Edwin Lachnit's 1984 dissertation on the influence of 'the scientific attitude towards the contemporary creative object in the case of the early Vienna School of Art History' was pioneering in at least two aspects.<sup>12</sup> Firstly because it

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calls for superhuman wisdom that none of the diplomats normally possess'. Vojeslav Mole, *Iz knjige spominov*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica. 1970, 90–91.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Tietze, *Die Methode Der Kunstgeschichte: Ein Versuch*. Leipzig: Seemann, 1913, 8: '... die lebendige Kunst den schlüssel zur toten erhalte'.

<sup>9</sup> Tietze, *Die Methode*, 161: 'denn die moderne ist im Verhältnis zu dieser kein blosser Abschnitt, sondern die einzige Brücke, die zu ihrem Verständnis führt'. 162: 'Die Folgerung, die sich aus alledem für den Kunsthistoriker ergibt, ist, dass nur die für das Kunstwollen ihrer Zeit empfindlicher Forscher der Wissenschaft die neue Richtung zu geben verögen, die der Zeit entspricht'.

<sup>10</sup> Tietze, *Die Methode*, 162.

<sup>11</sup> Edwin Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunst Ihrer Zeit: Zum Verhältnis von Methode und Forschungsgegenstand am Beginn der Moderne*, Wien; Köln; Weimar: Böhlau, 2005; Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992; Matthew Rampley, 'Readings of Modern Art: Historicism, Impressionism, Expressionism', *The Vienna School*, 141–165; Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind and Brain: From Vienna 1900 to the Present*. NY: Random House, 2012; Amanda Wasielewski, 'Interfaces of art: Meyer Schapiro, Fernand Léger, and the role of the art historian in anachronistic artistic influence.' *Journal of Art Historiography* 26, 2022, with bibliography in note 4.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2022/05/wasielewski.pdf> About architecture at the time of the first Vienna School of Art History, see Jindřich Vybíral, 'The Vienna School of Art History and (Viennese) Modern Architecture', *Journal of Art Historiography* 1, 2009.

[https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media\\_139133\\_en.pdf](https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media_139133_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Lachnit defended his dissertation, titled *Kunstgeschichte und zeitgenössische Kunst - Das wiissenschaftliche Verhältnis zum lebendigen Forschungsgegenstand am Beispiel der Ältern Wiener*

explicitly addressed the interaction and collaboration between scientists and artists, and secondly because it proceeded from the very theoretical basis of the Vienna School. Post-modernism pushed the research of historical sources – the 'combination of historical and empirical methods'<sup>13</sup> – of the Viennese art history and art itself to the background of ideological interpretations. Only in the last three decades have these sources once again become the basis for positioning methodological and theoretical starting points in a broader cultural-historical context. From the opposite perspective, which problematises precisely this cultural milieu, the relationship between 'draughtsmen and scholars' was analysed by the Slovenian art historian and sociologist Braco Rotar in his analysis of the ideology of interwar urbanism.<sup>14</sup> In this case, we are interested in the discussion mainly because of its early reception of the issue of the relationship between the artist, the architect Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), and the representative of the Vienna School of Art History France Stele, the author of the first overview of Slovenian art, but less so because of its Marxist analysis and theory of urbanism, which would require a specific examination.<sup>15</sup>

The question of how the connection between artists and art historians was reflected in the historiography of art in the case of small nations on the Monarchy's periphery, specifically Slovenians, who achieved their sovereignty relatively late and did not possess a developed or conscious view of their own art, can be linked to

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*Schule der Kunstgeschichte*, at the University of Vienna in 1984, twenty-one years before its publication. Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Diana Reynolds Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875–1905: an institutional biography*. London, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Braco Rotar, *Risarji in učenjaki*, Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> In 1985 (the year of Plečnik's major exhibition in Paris), Rotar used the exploration of the relationship between art, epistemology, and ideology to devalue Plečnik's art, while Stele's theoretical premises were labelled as 'blood and soil ideology', and, as such, unsuitable for further scientific work; see Braco Rotar, *Risarji in učenjaki*, especially 131–181, 94–95, 157, 217, 219–220. About the negative evaluation of Plečnik's work after his death, see France Stele, *Jože Plečnik v Italiji*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1967, 287–291. Plečnik's art was first recognised and appreciated abroad in an exhibition mounted by Boris Podrecca at the Society of Architects in Vienna in 1967. The exhibition was also displayed in Trieste and Prague. This was followed by an exhibition at the National Gallery (the authors included Anton Bitenc and Lojze Gostiša) and a book by Marko Pozzetto, published in Italy. Marco Pozzetto, *Jože Plečnik e la scuola di Otto Wagner*, 1968. Podrecca also co-authored (together with Damjan Prelovšek and François Burckhard) the major Plečnik exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1985. The exhibition was also presented in Ljubljana, Vienna, Venice, Milan, and New York. Prelovšek's two monographs represented a major step forward in the research into Plečnik. However, it is noteworthy that at the time of their publication, no Slovenian publishing house wanted to include them in its publishing plan. The first one (Prelovšek, Damjan, *Josef Plečnik: Wiener Arbeiten von 1896 bis 1914*, Wien: Tusch, 1979) has thus never been published in Slovenian, while the second one was only published as late as twenty-five years after the original. Prelovšek, Damjan. *Jože Plečnik: arhitektura večnosti: teme, metamorfoze, ildeje*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2017. My thanks to Franci Lazarini for his assistance of this topic.

the modern approach of art to the formation of national identity.<sup>16</sup> Slovenians began to write their own history of art as late as in the second decade of the previous century, when art historical research, like art itself, was already completely intertwined with the national discourse.<sup>17</sup> The Viennese period of the first Slovenian art historians and artists before 1914–18 war decisively contributed to the shaping of strict professional and ethical criteria that regulated the tendencies between nationalisms and created the conditions for the economic and cultural boom during the interwar period.

The situation that Slovenians found themselves in after 1914–18 war had a profound influence on Stele's first overview of Slovenian art.<sup>18</sup> In the new state integration with other South Slavic nations, the aspirations to assimilate them all into a single Yugoslav nation were immediately expressed.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, in accordance with the Treaty of Rapallo (November 1920) and the Carinthian plebiscite (October 1920), Slovenia lost more than a third of its territory, its access to the sea, and the city of Trieste, which had the largest Slovenian population of any Slovenian cities in 1910. These historical circumstances and the denationalisation pressures in Italy after the Fascist Party came to power (1921) encouraged a debate on what national art meant and how Slovenians lived with it. The booklet's engagement in contemporary issues and its political relevance was evident from the

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<sup>16</sup> Brejc, Tomaž. *Temni modernizem: slike, teorije, interpretacije*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1991, Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, Nadja Zgonik, *Podobe Slovenstva*, Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2002; Filipová, Marta. *Modernity, History, and Politics in Czech Art*. Routledge, New York, London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> About the national in Slovenian art and art history, see Tomaž Brejc, *Temni modernizem*; Nadja Zgonik, *Podobe Slovenstva*; Barbara Murovec, 'Why (Not) National Art History?: The Case of Slovenia'. *Acta Historiae Artium*, 49, 2008, 360–69. Blaž Zabel, 'Steletov Referat k problematiki Jugoslovanske nacionalne umetnostne zgodovine in svetovna umetnostna zgodovina'. *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, 52, 2016, 271–287. About the national in architecture, see Franci Lazarini, 'Nationalstile als Propagandamittel in der Zeit der Nationalbewegungen: Slowenische und Andere Nationalstile in der Architektur um 1900. Likovna umetnost v Habsburških deželah med cenzuro in propagando', *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 25: 2, 2020, 249–267. Parallels could be drawn with the numerous nations on the border, many of whom remained 'behind the Iron Curtain' after 1939–45 war. See for example: Ieva Zake, *Latvian Nationalist Ideas and Intellectuals 19<sup>th</sup> century–1939*, dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2004. Robert Born, Alena Janatková, Adam S. Labuda, eds, *Die Kunsthistoriographien*. Krista Kodres, 'Freedom from Theory? An Attempt to Analyse Sten Karling's Views on (Estonian) Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography* 3, 2010. [https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media\\_183177\\_en.pdf](https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media_183177_en.pdf) Matthew Rampley et al, *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> France Stele, *Oris zgodovine umetnosti pri Slovencih: kulturnozgodovinski poskus*, (An Outline of the History of Art among the Slovenes: a cultural history experiment), Ljubljana: Nova založba, 1924.

<sup>19</sup> Also in this case, the relevant nations were renamed to tribes, which would supposedly unite into a triune Yugoslav nation. About Slovenian history, see Štih, Peter, et al. *Slowenische Geschichte: Gesellschaft – Politik – Kultur*, Graz: Leykam, 2008, especially 283–343.

fact that a large part of it was devoted to modern and contemporary art, which addressed these issues more explicitly.

From the Illyrian Movement (1835–1850) onwards, the networking between the Yugoslav nations' scientists and artists had its place within Slovenian culture.<sup>20</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, the political changes taking place in the Balkans also affected cultural contacts, which took on a very concrete political background.<sup>21</sup> Since literature mainly had a national function until the end of the nineteenth century – i.e., a function of encouraging the consolidation of the Slovenian national identity and defence against any threats to it, especially against the German pressure – many culture professionals and writers opposed unification at the level of language.<sup>22</sup> The pressures of propaganda were therefore most intense in fine arts.<sup>23</sup> They manifested themselves during the preparation of the first Yugoslav exhibition in Belgrade in 1904, which was organised on the centenary of the first Serbian uprising and made no attempt to conceal Serbia's aspirations to assume the political and cultural primacy in the area (region).<sup>24</sup> The only Slovenians to participate in the exhibition included the Vienna-based club called *Vesna*, which strived to promote national art, and the older generation of impressionists, gathered under the name *Savani*.<sup>25</sup> The impressionist Rihard Jakopič (1869–1943) in particular stood out in terms of his cultural engagement. In 1909, he had the first exhibition space in Ljubljana built at his own expense, thus creating the conditions for the development of contemporary art and criticism in Carniola. [fig. 1] The plans for the venue were drawn up by the renowned Viennese architect of Slovenian origin Max Fabiani (1865–1962). The artistic awakening encouraged the young art historians in Vienna to study modern and contemporary art and write critical reviews. A year later, in his pavilion, Jakopič set up the exhibition *Eighty Years of Fine Arts in Slovenia*, the first historical overview of Slovenian painting. Izidor Cankar, who had

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<sup>20</sup> Illyrianism advocated for the creation of a unified ethnic community of South Slavs based on a common literary language and a single 'Illyrian' national consciousness. Jurij Perovšek, 'Jugoslovanstvo in vprašanje narodov v južnoslovanski problematiki 19. in 20. stoletja', *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 39:1–2, 1999, 7–24. Nenad Makuljević, 'Funeral Culture and Public Monuments', *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 18:1, 2013, 89–105.

<sup>21</sup> After the coup d'état in Serbia in 1903, which brought the Karađorđević dynasty to power, the Serbian foreign policy towards the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy changed radically. Hence, Serbia was called the Yugoslav Piedmont. See Aleksandar Ignjatović, 'Images of the Nation Foreseen: Ivan Meštrović's Vidovdan Temple and Primordial Yugoslavism', *Slavic Review*, 73: 4, 2014, 830 note 7.

<sup>22</sup> Igor Grdina, 'Ivan Cankar, Slovenci in Jugoslovani' in Marjan Drnovšek, France Rozman, Peter Vodopivec eds, *Slovenska Kronika XX. stoletja*, 1995, 135.

<sup>23</sup> Nenad Makuljević, 'The Political Reception of the Vienna School: Josef Strzygowski and Serbian Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography* 8, 2013.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/makuljevic.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Ante Gaber, 'Prva jugoslovanska umetniška razstava', *Dom in svet*, 17, 1904, 690–692, 754–756, 159–161, 300–302.

<sup>25</sup> Beti Žerovc, 'Vesna ob izviru umetnosti' in Barbara Borčič, Jure Mikuž, eds, *Potlačena umetnost: zbornik*, Ljubljana: Open Society Institute, 1999, 50–77.

started studying in Vienna that year, wrote about the event in the *Dom in svet* magazine:

This is a peculiar development: in our country, Mr Jakopič collected and edited the history of painting before we had even written a reasonably accurate and comprehensive outline of our painting development. Only recently have a few more thorough and scientifically reliable art history monographs been written, while other sources are very scarce. However, this energetic artist has gone beyond the call of duty and gathered materials that will also substantially support the scientists. This is indeed somewhat strange, but it certainly proves that Mr Jakopič's aspirations are absolutely serious and realistic.<sup>26</sup>

The older generation of Slovenian art historians – Avguštin Stegenšek (1875–1920) and Avgust Žigon (1877–1941), who had studied in Graz under Strzygowski, as well as Riegl's and Wickhoff's student Josip Mantuani (1860–1933), later the director of the National Museum in Ljubljana,<sup>27</sup> – maintained close connections with the Austrian scientific arena but were not professionally interested in modern art. Art criticism was mostly in the domain of writers and literary critics.<sup>28</sup> Although Slovenian art history remained strongly associated with language and literary creativity,<sup>29</sup> the attitude of the representatives of the generation born in 1886 towards modern art – Izidor Cankar, France Stele, and Vojeslav Mole, who had already been interested in modern art during their studies – was exceedingly affirmative and subject to the analytical perception of the modern form and its historical evolution.<sup>30</sup> As both Dvořák and Tietze also worked on the topography of Austrian art (their topography of Vienna was published in 1908)<sup>31</sup> and especially

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<sup>26</sup> Izidor Cankar, 'Jubilejna umetniška razstava', *Dom in svet*, 24:1, 1911, 41. Throughout history, artists were often collectors and organisers of the first public exhibitions. Thus, they influenced the development of the art historical methodology. Such was also the case of the Viennese sculptor Joseph Daniel Böhm (1794–1865).

<sup>27</sup> Allegedly, Žigon was even expected to assume the position of Strzygowski's assistant. Vidmar Luka, 'Josef Strzygowsky und seine Doktoranden Avguštin Stegenšek und Avgust Žigon', Alois Kernbauer and Tone Smolej, eds, *Gemeinsamkeit auf Getrenten Wegen. Die Slowenischen Doktoranden der Grazer Philosophischen Fakultät im Zeitraum 1876–1918 und die Gründung der Universität in Ljubljana*, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 2021, (239–261), 241–249.

<sup>28</sup> Tomaž Brejc, *Realizem, impresionizem, postimpresionizem*. Ljubljana: Narodna galerija, 2006; Tomaž Brejc, 'Ivan Prijatelj in likovna umetnost'. *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, 51, 2015, 111–173.

<sup>29</sup> Vesna Krmelj, 'France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence, 133–183; Vesna Krmelj, 'Ekspressionistično obdobje revije *Dom in svet* v luči korespondence Franceta Steleta z Izidorjem Cankarjem', *Kronika*, 71:2, 2013, 379–396.

<sup>30</sup> See Tomaž Brejc, 'Assunta, Izidor Cankar in moderna umetnostna zgodovina', *Sodobnost*, 36:6–7, 1988, 669–677. Tomaž Brejc, 'Terminologija Izidorja Cankarja. Geneza štirih pojmov: umetnina kot organizem, umetnostno hotenje, forma in stil', *Umetnostna kronika*, 20, 2008, 2–25.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Tietze, Heinrich Sitte, Max Dvořák, eds, *Die Denkmale der Stadt Wien (XI.-XXI. Bezirk) [Österreichische Kunsttopographie, Band II]*. Wien: Anton Schroll & Co. 1908.

because of their role in the monument service, where spatial issues were associated with tradition and modern architecture,<sup>32</sup> it is understandable that a significant part of the interest in modern art during the studies of the Slovenian trio, especially France Stele and Izidor Cankar, was related to architecture and space. The letters exchanged among the Slovenian students suggest that the basic theoretical concepts of the Vienna School were at the core of the debates at least as early as the end of 1911 and not only after the publication of Tietze's book *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte* (1913).<sup>33</sup> However, Hans Tietze definitely played a crucial role in implementing the new concepts in practice. As a young assistant professor, he was in collegial contact with the Slovenian trio.<sup>34</sup> Cankar's article titled *Najnovejša umetnost* (The Latest Art), published in the *Dom in svet* magazine, in which he relied entirely on the contribution in the *Kunst für Alle* magazine that Tietze had written on the occasion of the publication of *Der blaue Reiter* almanac, supports the assumption that Tietze was exceedingly influential precisely because he maintained a constant connection with contemporary art.<sup>35</sup>

### The Vienna years

The meeting of the three Slovenian students in Vienna was not entirely accidental. Stele was encouraged to study art history at the Institute of Austrian Historical Research by his professors at the grammar school in Kranj, and he met Izidor Cankar while still studying there. Their correspondence began while Cankar studied aesthetics at the Catholic University of Leuven and simultaneously attended lectures in art history at the University of Brussels. Cankar's travels to London and Paris significantly broadened his interests from the predominantly literary field to fine arts and art history.<sup>36</sup> In the first letter that Cankar sent from Belgium to Stele in Vienna, he reproached him: 'It's high time, and we've had our literary tail tucked between our legs for too long. Why don't you write anything about art history?'<sup>37</sup> Izidor Cankar enrolled at the University of Vienna in the academic year 1911/12, when Vojeslav Mole also returned there after Dvořák himself had invited him to his seminar on the recommendation of the Istrian-born Croatian classical archaeologist

<sup>32</sup> Hans Tietze, 'Der Kampf um Alt-Wien. III. Wiener Neubauten', *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft: Texte 1910–1954*. Wien: Schlebrügge, 2007, 10–26.

<sup>33</sup> About Tietze's influence on Izidor Cankar's subsequent theory, see Tomaž Brejc, 'Kaj je umetnostno pomembno? Prvi kolegiji docenta Izidorja Cankarja. Izpiski iz letnega semestra 1920', in: Ana Lavrič, Franci Lazarini, Barbara Murovec (eds.), *Patriae et orbi. Študije o srednjeevropski umetnosti. Jubilejni zbornik za Damjana Prelovška*, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015, 645–651.

<sup>34</sup> Vesna Krmelj, 'France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence', 157.

<sup>35</sup> Hans Tietze, 'Der blaue Reiter', *Kunst für Alle. Malerei, Plastik, Graphik, Architektur*, 27: 23, 1912, 543–550. Tietze's article was published on 1 September 1912, while Cankar's appeared in the *Dom in svet* magazine only twenty-five days later. Izidor Cankar, 'Najnovejša umetnost', *Dom in svet*, 25:9, 1912, 351–352.

<sup>36</sup> Tomaž Brejc, 'Izidor Cankar na razstavah moderne umetnosti', *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 22, 2017, 111–136.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of Izidor Cankar to France Stele to Vienna, Leuven, 5 January 1910; Biblioteka SAZU, R100/VI-1:15:2a, see also Krmelj, 'France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence', 150.



Mihovil Abramić (1884–1962).<sup>38</sup> France Stele entered the University of Vienna in 1907<sup>39</sup> and graduated with a doctoral thesis on medieval mural painting in Carniola under Dvořák's mentorship in 1912. In the same year, he was appointed a trainee at the Vienna Central Commission for the Protection of Monuments, while in mid-July 1913, he took up the post of Provincial Conservator for Carniola. After Izidor Cankar left for diplomatic service in 1938, Stele took over as professor of art history at the University of Ljubljana.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of the 1910s, the most prominent Slovenian architects – Maks Fabiani, Ivan Vurnik (1884–1971), and Jože Plečnik – worked in Vienna. All three were at one time associated with Otto Wagner's (1841–1918) seminar at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. Fabiani, who originated from the Kras region and was the town planner of post-earthquake Ljubljana, was one of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's personal consultants and a sort of an unofficial cultural attaché for the Slovenian artists in Vienna.<sup>41</sup> Ivan Vurnik, the youngest of the three, still strived to establish himself in Vienna. Meanwhile, he already had commissions from his homeland, on which he collaborated with France Stele.<sup>42</sup> Although the personal ties between the architects and art historians would only consolidate in Ljubljana after the 1914–18 war, their formative years in Vienna were decisive for the post-war development of art and science in the new political entity. With their sensitive attitude to heritage

<sup>38</sup> Mole studied Slovenian philology in Vienna as early as 1906/07, then art history at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and the Sapienza University in Rome. Kokole, 'Vojeslav Molè', 197–198.

<sup>39</sup> About France Stele's and Izidor Cankar's study years, see Krmelj, 'France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence'.

<sup>40</sup> Stele was an expert in all periods of art history, but he focused particularly on medieval mural painting and his contemporaries, the artists of the first half of the twentieth century. A selection of literature on Stele: Letopis SAZU, 1, 1938/42, Ljubljana 1943, 113–123; Emilijan Cevc, 'France Stele – umetnostni zgodovinar', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. v. 5–6, 1959, 5–19 (with bibliography until the end of 1958); France Stele, 'Iz konservatorskih spominov', *Varstvo spomenikov*, 10, 1965, 13–38; Luc Menaše, 'Osemdeset let profesorja dr. Stelèta (in slovenske umetnostne zgodovine)', *Sinteza*, 4, 1966, 85–87 (with bibliography until the end of 1966); France Stele, 'Moje življenje', *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 2, 1997, 161–174; Emilijan Cevc, Stele, France, *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, 12, 1998, 308–309; Tone Smolej, 'Dunajska študijska leta Moleta, Steleta in Cankarja', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. v. 48, 2012, 181–183, 189–192; Metka Košir, 'Sto let načrtnega dokumentiranja nepremične dediščine', *Varstvo spomenikov*, 47–48, 2014, 41–58; Željko Oset, 'Prvi člani SAZU iz vrst umetnostnih zgodovinarjev. Izidor Cankar, France Stele in Vojeslav Mole', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. v. 52, 2016, 289–301; Damjan Prelovšek 'Umetnostni zgodovinar France Stelè ob 130. obletnici rojstva', *Umetnostna kronika*, 53, 2016, 3–8; Barbara Murovec, 'France Stele', v Uroš Skalerič, ed, *Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti ob osemdesetletnici: Bibliografski zbornik pokojnih članov*, Ljubljana 2018, 69–70; Vesna Krmelj, 'France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence'; Vesna Krmelj, *Korespondenca Franceta Steleta kot vir in izhodišče za umetnostnozgodovinsko interpretacijo in ugodovino umetnostne zgodovine na Slovenskem: doktorska disertacija*. Ljubljana, 2021, especially the biography, 40–63; Krmelj, 'Ekspressionistično obdobje, 379–96.

<sup>41</sup> Marco Pozzetto, *Maks Fabiani – vizije prostora*. Kranj: L.I.B.R.A., 1997, 34–35.

<sup>42</sup> Krmelj, *Korespondenca Franceta Steleta*, 201–208.

and their vision of city development, the students of the Vienna School of Art History and Wagner's school – whose parallels had already been noted by Dvořák<sup>43</sup> – played a vital role in the modernisation, the formation of national identity, and the establishment of the city of Ljubljana according to the principles of Central European capitals.<sup>44</sup>

### The critique of historicism and the new Renaissance

Although the Slovenian trio studied in the period after Riegl's death, the latter's influence was actually a part of a pattern transferred from Vienna to Ljubljana and other university centres. Riegl was a harsh critic of nineteenth-century historicism, which was implemented before his very eyes in the architecture on the site of the demolished Roman walls on Ringstrasse street, where every public building evoked one of the historical styles. In the nineteenth century, the relationship between Antiquity and the Renaissance was a crucial artistic issue. Despite the revival of Antiquity, the Renaissance managed to retain its individuality and became an example of a constructive transmission of historical influences. Much like Burckhardt and Wölfflin, Riegl also believed that Italians had maintained their independence because of their lack of detailed knowledge. He claimed that continuity and transformation, rather than a return to pure style, allowed for improvement.<sup>45</sup> Renaissance artists used the past to shape the future rather than merely imitating Greek temples.<sup>46</sup>

In his lecture titled *Über Renaissance der Kunst*, given in December 1894 at the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna,<sup>47</sup> Riegl deliberated on why the German Renaissance had not borne the desired fruits despite the nation's efforts to express itself artistically.<sup>48</sup> He concluded that the excessive accumulation of knowledge

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<sup>43</sup> Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne Architektur: Bemerkungen zum Vortrag Die letzte Renaissance (1912)', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 50, 1997, 23–39, here 29. See also: Vybíral, Jindřich, 'The Vienna School of Art History and (Viennese) Modern Architecture', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 1, 2009, especially note 6. [https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media\\_139133\\_en.pdf](https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media_139133_en.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Branko Korošec, *Ljubljana skozi stoletja: mesto na načrtih, projektih in v stvarnosti*. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga, 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Olin, *Forms of Representation*, 32–33.

<sup>46</sup> Alois Riegl, 'Über Renaissance der Kunst', *Mitteilungen des K.-K.Oesterreich. Museums für Kunst und Industrie*, N.F. 10, 1895, 342–348, 363–371 und 381–393, 367. In Riegl's opinion, the influence of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) was fatal for German artists and scientists, who became arbiters of taste and guardians of knowledge instead of independently thinking experts. Riegl distinguished between art history that promoted art and art history as a science that destroyed the creative spirit. He was convinced that this trend in scientific art history had suppressed any attempt at a true flourishing of a new Renaissance. Riegl, 'Über Renaissance', 385–386.

<sup>47</sup> In the same year, Riegl published an important book on folk art, titled *Volkskunst, Hausfleiss, und Hausindustrie*, which proved that the so-called folk art was worthy of serious study in its own right rather than merely as a source of contemporary fashion. He saw folk art as the result of the primary (family) economy and as an expression of the sense of beauty, which is one of the most elementary human needs; see Reynolds Cordileone, *Alois Riegl* 109.

<sup>48</sup> Reynolds Cordileone, *Alois Riegl*, 160–172.

during the period of historicism had stifled modern creativity. Riegl argued that historical renaissances had three conditions in common: dissatisfaction with the present, adaptation rather than imitation, and the artists' self-confidence and selective abilities.<sup>49</sup> The knowledge that could help them was not in the details and rigid rules but rather in the historical evolution.<sup>50</sup> Artists borrow forms because they have no knowledge of their own historical genesis.<sup>51</sup> Riegl strived to build a bridge between Antiquity and modernity and thus place contemporary art in the context of a holistic development process. Perhaps it is no mere coincidence that only two years after the publication of Riegl's lecture, the Vienna Secession was established – a group of artists led by Gustav Klimt, which, dissatisfied with the outdated canon and censorship, broke away from the Society of Fine Artists with its own programme.

### France Stele's *Apology of Modern Art*

In Vienna, France Stele was clearly influenced by the topical debates about the outdated historicism and the modern architecture.<sup>52</sup> His article, titled *Apologija moderne umetnosti* (The Apology of Modern Art), published in the scientific journal *Čas* in 1911, reveals how art history students would train their eye to enter the increasingly complex contemporaneous visual landscape and representational models while simultaneously seeking a balance between what were often contradictory theories. Stele discussed the principles of modern art, the use of new materials, and design trends using contemporary architecture as an example. He focused on Otto Wagner's Church at Steinhof (1905–1908), which was the target of much criticism at the time, first and foremost from Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Stele in his article emphasised the new way of designing and building Secession architecture from the inside out, thus highlighting the architect's relationship with the artwork itself, which, according to Stele, had not been so very personal ever since the Renaissance. Wagner's church was not only modern on the outside but also in terms of its construction. Wagner was the first to stand up to the speculations of building contractors and engineers

... and used every occasion to demand that the artists themselves once again be allowed to have their say when it comes to public buildings, the layout of urban areas, etc. This aspiration is quite modern ... and in this manner, the modern architect-artist wanted to have a say in the issues that fall within his domain and to influence the individual details. Such an intense connection between the artist and the artwork can only be found during the Renaissance. And this is supposedly regression.<sup>53</sup>

In the article, Stele used the terminology of the Vienna School of Art History for the first time, influenced by Strzygowski's book *Die Bildende Kunst Der*

<sup>49</sup> Alois Riegl, *Über Renaissance der Kunst, Mitteilungen des K.-K.Oesterreich. Museums für Kunst und Industrie*, N.F. 10, 1895, 342–348, 363–371 und 381–393) 366.

<sup>50</sup> Olin, *Forms of Representation*, 33.

<sup>51</sup> Olin, *Forms of Representation*, 32.

<sup>52</sup> France Stele, 'Apologija moderne umetnosti', *Čas*, 5: 9, 1911, (401–415), 411–412.

<sup>53</sup> Stele, 'Apologija moderne', 410.

*Gegenwart*<sup>54</sup> and by Wagner himself, whose work *Die Groszstadt* he also quotes.<sup>55</sup> Stele developed his deliberations about modern architecture and followed it in its honest attitude and respect towards older buildings and monuments.

The selected Wagner quotation suggests that in connection with him, Stele was also referring to something other than merely the church in Steinhof. The quotation mainly reveals Wagner's urban planning opinions regarding the redevelopment of the old parts of the city. His goal was to preserve what was beautiful and integrate it rationally into the cityscape ... For Wagner, the predetermination of the future building lines in the existing part was thus highly desirable, just as it was self-evident that for any new plans in such areas, an artistic appraisal had to be obtained from the city administration ... The selected Wagner quotation perfectly aligns with the principles advocated for by the Central Commission headed by Dvořák, and we do not yet know why Stele supported Wagner so resolutely already as a student. Given that in his article, Stele did not consider Otto Wagner as the inventor of the modern architectural style,<sup>56</sup> we can assume that he was well aware of his professor's critical stance towards Wagner's architecture between 1907 and 1910, especially after the conflict regarding Wagner's plan for the erection of the Emperor Franz Joseph City Museum in Karlsplatz next to Fischer von Erlach's Baroque church.<sup>57</sup>

Stele's positive attitude towards modern art, which represented an advance in the development of art, sparked a debate in Carniola and opened the first public controversy about modern art among Slovenian art historians. Stele's initial struggles with formal analysis and the placement of Wagner's Church within the logical architectural development were met with a tumultuous response at home.<sup>58</sup> The *Čas* journal also published a rather conciliatory 'supplement' by Josip Mantuani.<sup>59</sup> Mantuani pointed out the difference between the older objective aesthetics, synthesised by the nineteenth century, and the modern subjective aesthetics that supported the artist's individuality, to which everything in modern art was subordinated and adapted. In the continuation, he referred to the illogical

<sup>54</sup> Josef Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*. Quelle und Meyer: Leipzig, 1907, 15–18; see Jindřich Vybíral, 'The Vienna School'

<sup>55</sup> Otto Wagner, *Die Groszstadt: eine Studie über diese*, Wien: Schroll, 1911.

<sup>56</sup> Stele, 'Apologija moderne', 410.

<sup>57</sup> Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne', 29–30; See also Rostislav Švácha, "'A higher architectural unity": Max Dvořák on new buildings in historical settings', *Journal of Art Historiography* 25, 2021. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2021/11/svacha.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> The editorship summed up some of the most severe comments. Among others, the architect Jože Plečnik also voiced his opinion, condemning the 'abnormality' of a critic admiring the church in Steinhof without thinking 'that for this money, the Viennese could build a few churches in districts where there are none, where the people are at the mercy of socialism'. See 'Opazke k "Apologiji moderne umetnosti"', *Čas* 5: 10, 1911, 480.

<sup>59</sup> Josip Mantuani, 'Apologija umetnosti', *Čas*, 5:10, 469–475.

469–475. About Mantuani as an art historian, see Katja Mahnič, 'Josip Mantuani, First Slovenian Student at the Vienna School of Art History and his long obscurity within Slovenian Art Historiography', *Journal of Art Historiography* 21, 2019. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/mahnic.pdf>

behaviour of those individuals who, on the one hand, adored the buildings of bygone eras and strived to preserve them in every possible way, even as ruins, while at the same time supporting and defending modern art.<sup>60</sup>

Mantuani's critique points to the gap between nineteenth-century aesthetics and modern art, which was also the starting point of Alois Riegl's study *Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst* (1899).<sup>61</sup> Riegl believed that the disjunction arose from the conflict between harmony, which the modern onlooker felt with a distant gaze – Riegl called this 'the mood' (*die Stimmung*) – and knowledge (of development and transience), which, as a realisation, interfered with the mood and disturbed the sense of harmony. Riegl resolved this gap in the theoretical field by equating the modern mood, which conveyed a sense of a soothing harmony, with modern science (with the necessary distance to allow for a sense of attunement) and art, especially painting, on which hinged 'the reassuring conviction of the immovable rule of the law of causality'.<sup>62</sup> Stele registered this subtle but crucial shift in the evaluation of modern art, present in the teachings of the Vienna School, very accurately.

The modern outlook on heritage and contemporary architecture, which possessed its own sense of integration, mood, and ambience and which Stele internalised immediately,<sup>63</sup> was introduced into the field of monument conservation by Max Dvořák. Already in 1907, in his article 'Francesco Borromini as a Restorer', Dvořák wrote that the most important source of creative engagement in any work of architectural art was no longer the individual form but rather the overall appearance of the monument in relation to its surroundings.<sup>64</sup> In 1911, Dvořák supported a reform of modern architecture, emphasising the classical foundations, the understanding of space, and the consideration of function to preserve the cultural heritage and the image of the city. He was aware that modern architecture had to be included in monument protection.<sup>65</sup> The more conservative Mantuani could not accept Dvořák's focus on artistic value (*Gegenwartswerte*) rather than on age value (*Alterswert*). This very liveliness of heritage combined with its contemporary artistic value was crucial for the life and work of France Stele, who fulfilled his rich life with exhaustive studies and protection of cultural heritage while actively striving to affirm modern art.

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<sup>60</sup> Mantuani, 'Apologija umetnosti', 147.

<sup>61</sup> Alois Riegl, 'Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst', *Die graphischen Künste*, vol. 22, 1899, 47–56.

<sup>62</sup> '... die beruhigende überzeugung vom unverrückbaren Walten des Causalitätsgesetzes'. Riegl, 'Die Stimmung', 54.

<sup>63</sup> See France Stele, 'Stara župna cerkev v Žireh', *Ljubitelj krščanske umetnosti* 1: 1, 1914, 18–22.

<sup>64</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Francesco Borromini als Restaurator', *Kunstgeschichtliche Jahrbuch der k. k. Zentral-Kommission*, 1907, 89–98.

<sup>65</sup> See Sandro Scarrocchia, 'Dvořák and the Trend in Monument Care', *ARS*, 44:1, 2011 (45–67); Švácha, "'A higher architectural unity'".

The article's title relates to a lecture held by Dvořák at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry on 22 February 1912 entitled *Die letzte Renaissance*.<sup>66</sup> This lecture, which was first published by Hans H. Aurenhammer with an in-depth commentary,<sup>67</sup> is a rare example of Dvořák directly focusing on modern art or architecture, as he did in his introduction to Oskar Kokoschka's paintings in 1920 and an earlier article on Czech painting.<sup>68</sup> In this lecture, Dvořák criticised the historical-academic architecture of the late nineteenth century and also showed a polemical attitude toward Wagner's architecture because he saw this as a prelude to a wider historical development.<sup>69</sup> He perceived modern monumental German architecture as a novelty and an opportunity for further development because it established a constructive, even brotherly relationship with the earlier monuments, without imitating or surpassing them. Dvořák recognised the potential for a true artistic renaissance in the fusion of old tradition and modern sensibility. Architects like Alfred Messel (1853–1909) and Bruno Schmitz (1858–1916) have thus completed the circle and linked modern architecture to the issues that surfaced during the Renaissance.<sup>70</sup>

Although Dvořák's lecture was not published at the time, it is of high importance for Slovenian art history. It also reveals two of Dvořák's lesser known standpoints. The first is connected with the preservation of monuments. As the head of the Central Commission in 1912, he agreed to restore a monument using elements of modern architecture. In his lecture, Dvořák endorsed the completion of Freiberg Cathedral according to plans made by the contemporary architect Bruno Schmitz,<sup>71</sup> which means he accepted the solution of a combined restoration of the historic monument with modern architectural elements. 'The secret lies in the act of creation, which is able and allowed to absorb everything created by previous generations because the artist comprehended and raised it to a new life, giving it a new contemporary value (*Gegenwartswerte*)'<sup>72</sup>. The second standpoint is related to the fact that Aurenhammer directly linked Dvořák's lecture to the question of who

<sup>66</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance'. Vortrag, gehalten am 22. Februar 1913 im Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie von Max Dvořák, ed, Hans H. Aurenhammer in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 50, 1997, 9–21. As early as 1902, Dvořák published an article with the same title which focused on the historiography of the arts of antiquity. He concludes that the parallel development of antique and modern art is one of the strangest and most significant historical phenomena. Max Dvořák, 'Poslední renaissance'. *Česky časopis historický*, 1902, 30–51; 51: 'Parallelismus vyvoje umění v antice a v nové době je jeden z nejpodivnějších, nejdůležitějších dějepisných fenomenů.'

<sup>67</sup> Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne', 23–39.

<sup>68</sup> Max Dvořák, 'Von Manes zu Švabinský', *Die graphischen Künste*, 27: 4, 1904, 29–52.

<sup>69</sup> Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance', 15.

<sup>70</sup> Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance', 20.

<sup>71</sup> The façade of the west tower of the medieval cathedral in Freiberg, Saxony, was meant to be completed by the modern architect Bruno Schmitz, but this was never realised due to the outbreak of the 1914–18 war. Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance', 32, see also note 44.

<sup>72</sup> Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance', 17: 'Das Geheimnis liegt in der schöpferischen Tat, die alles aufnehmen kann und darf, was vorgehende Generationen geschaffen haben, weil es der Künstler künstlerisch neu bezwungen und zum neuen Leben, zu einem Gegenwartswerte erhoben hat'.

would succeed Wagner as professor at the Vienna Academy. Based on the publication of Theodor Brückler's sources, the heir to the throne already appealed to the Central Commission in 1910 'to have the dreadful secessionist direction removed from the state architectural schools',<sup>73</sup> which would mean that the fate of the professorship that was meant to be occupied by Plečnik after Wagner, was already sealed long before the controversial invitation to Belgrade in 1913,<sup>74</sup> while the post of Wagner's successor was still open. There will be more on this subject below.

### **Plečnik and the monument protection**

In 1913, Stele was sent to Carniola as an unofficial conservator to visit the old parish church in Žiri and write a report on the architectural value of the monument. The architect Jože Plečnik had written to Dvořák, warning him that the old church was falling into disrepair.<sup>75</sup> According to Zuzana Güllendi-Cimprichová, this is one of the earliest indications that Plečnik was committed to conserving historical monuments.<sup>76</sup> In his letter, Plečnik alerted Dvořák to three sacral objects that were being left to decay: the old parish church in Žiri and two Karst buildings – the old church in Col and the chapel in Vipava.<sup>77</sup>

Stele was obviously already collecting everything connected with the Slovene architect. He copied out the letter and even went to great efforts to reproduce Plečnik's signature.<sup>78</sup> [figs 2 & 2a] His article for the first Slovene art history journal focused more on the atmosphere of the inner spaces and the ambience created by light in the sacral space, than on describing the historical styles that give the church its art historical value.<sup>79</sup> He tried to capture the ambience through photographs that accompanied the article, which revealed his talent as a photographer. Stele began

<sup>73</sup> Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne', 34: '...um die schauerhafte sezessionistische Richtung aus den staatlichen Architectenschulen herauszubringen.'

<sup>74</sup> Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne', 33–34.

<sup>75</sup> The letter was first translated and published by Marjan Mušič, see: Marjan Mušič, *Jože Plečnik*, Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1980, 152. Stele copied out Plečnik's letter, which is stored in the France Stele Institute of Art History, Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts. Steletov prepis Plečnikovega pisma Maxu Dvořáku, 1 March 1913, Hemeroteca umetnikov, Mapa: Plečnik.

<sup>76</sup> Zuzana Güllendi-Cimprichová, *Architekt Josip Plečnik und seine Unternehmungen in Prag im Spannungsfeld zwischen denkmalpflegerischen Prinzipien und politischer Indienstnahme*, Dissertation, 2010, 49.

<sup>77</sup> In his translation, Mušič also cites Dvořák's reply: 'Very Honourable Sir: a) please accept my sincere gratitude for your benevolent word of advice. I took action so the Central Commission will take due care b) and try to save what can be saved. Once again, thank you, Yours respectfully', Max Dvořák... see Mušič, *Jože Plečnik*, 153.

<sup>78</sup> Stele copied letters from artists and especially Plečnik, which he collected and published until his death. See: France Stele, *Arhitekt Jože Plečnik v Italiji 1898–1899*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1967

<sup>79</sup> France Stele, 'Stara župna cerkev', *Ljubitelj krščanske umetnosti*, 1: 1, 1914, 18–22.

using photography as an obligatory art historical tool as early as 1912, when he purchased a camera from Hans Tietze.<sup>80</sup> [figs 3 & 4]

With these images, I wanted to show that the preciousness of monuments does not exist only in the preciousness of the material, in artistic or craft perfection. There are other values that are often, as in this case, completely equivalent to the material or artistic ones, and replace them to a great extent. The moods for which the monument is only the ground, on which they are brought to life by the light, in our case, and the subject of them is pure emotion that perceives them directly and is also the bearer of the emotion.<sup>81</sup>

### Attunement of Izidor Cankar

Izidor Cankar also devoted some early publications on the visual arts to modern architecture. After the 1914–18 war, Cankar, who was very linguistically skilled and had a systematic methodology, devoted himself as professor to the systematics of style, and used it to create a fundamental survey of Western European art.<sup>82</sup> His methodology was based on Dvořák's *Geistesgeschichte*, which helped him address art history 'in an evolutionary and organic manner, as a series of events that co-determine each other in chronological succession, but remain in organic contact with the rest of the spiritual life's progress, as works of art are the inevitable

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<sup>80</sup> From Cankar's letter to Stele. Biblioteka SAZU, R100/VI-1:15:27. Cankar presumably wrote the letter in the period between 28 June and 4 July 1912. See: Krmelj, *Korespondenca Franceta Steleta*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> Stele, 'Stara župna cerkev', 22: 'S temi slikami sem hotel pokazati, da dragocenost spomenikov ne obstoja samo v dragocenosti materiala, umetniški ali rokodelski dovršenosti, ampak, da so še druge vrednote, ki so pogosto, kot v tem slučaju, popolnoma ekvivalentne materialnim ali umetniškim in jih v obilni meri nadomeščajo; razpoloženske namreč, za katere je spomenik samo podlaga, na kateri jih oživi v našem slučaju svetloba, njihov subjekt pa je čisto čustvo, ki se jih neposredno zave in je tudi njihov nosilec'.

<sup>82</sup> On Izidor Cankar: France Stele, 'Izidor Cankar', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, 13: 1–4, 1934–1936, 97–99; France Stele, 'Izidor Cankar, the founder of the Ljubljana School of Art History', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. v. 4, 1957, 9–30; France Stele, 'Izidor Cankar' in: Izidor Cankar, *Uvod v likovno umetnost. Sistematika stila*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1959, 231–277; Tone Ferenc, Frane Jerman, Marjan Dolgan, Nace Šumi, 'Cankar, Izidor', *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, 1, 1987, Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 415–416; Andrej Rahten, *Izidor Cankar. Diplomati dveh Jugoslavij*, Ljubljana, 2009; Tomaž Brejc, 'Kaj je umetnostno pomembno? First board meetings of the lecturer Izidor Cankar. Excerpts from the annual semester 1920, Alenka Puhar ed., *Izidor Cankar. Mojster dobro zasukanih stavkov. Življenje in delo Izidorja Cankarja 1886 – 1958*, Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga 2016; Tomaž Brejc, 'Izidor Cankar na razstavah moderne umetnosti', *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 2, 2017, 22/1 p. 111–136; Rebeka Vidrih, 'The scope and ambition of Izidor Cankar's 'systematics of style'', *Journal of Art Historiography* 22, 2020.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/vidrih.pdf>; Rebeka Vidrih, 'The Indebtedness of Izidor Cankar's 'Evolution of Style' to Max Dvořák's *Geistesgeschichte*', *Acta historiae artis Slovenica*, 27: 2, 2022, 167–183.



consequences of the spiritual moods of different eras, expressing these moods and the spiritual state of the era.'<sup>83</sup>

In addition to the exhibition entitled *Die Ausstellung für Kirchliche Kunst*, which was open to the public in the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Vienna in 1912 as part of the World Eucharistic Congress,<sup>84</sup> he focused predominantly on Plečnik's Church of the Holy Spirit in the Viennese district of Ottakring. [fig. 5] He knew the area well because his cousin Ivan Cankar (1876–1918), one of the most prolific and sensitive Slovene writers, lived there for several years.<sup>85</sup> In his description, the art historian confidently deals with the major artistic styles, situating Plečnik's work in space and time with a particular social sensibility and haptic experience.

If a Romanesque basilica, as solid, calm and austere as a knight's castle, stood here among the airless workers' houses, it would arouse resentment and hatred. The Gothic, reaching up to the sky, would be an irony, its high towers would look like an anachronism in the sooty mist of the suburbs; the joyful, light-hearted Renaissance would provoke envy and contempt. There was no problem with metropolitan pastoralism when these forms were created; if they had been, they would not have arisen.

And then goes on to say:

Plečnik approached the problem in his own way. The church is lost among the houses; it is their companion and sister; it lives with them in modesty; it does not want to be distinguished by glitter and wealth. However, if you come closer, you see how solid it is, how it holds itself up and carries itself, and how the words on its forehead are written out of self-confidence and conviction. The exterior is very simple and yet powerful; it is mainly just an expression of the internal tectonic forces, giving the building an expression of monumental stability. A façade without all the non-essential prettiness, just a simply formulated construction idea. The doors are very low; they look compressed to the minimum; one is afraid they are too low, so a person will have to bend down when entering the church. It is high enough, but one feels as if one was being pressed to one's knees when entering the house of God. This expression of the great disproportion between the divine and the human element is the basis of the monumentality of the facade, which, despite the modest height of the church, is immediately revealed.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Izidor Cankar, *Zgodovina likovne umetnosti v Zahodni Evropi. 1: Razvoj stila v starokrščanski dobi in zgodnjem srednjem veku. Od početkov krščanske umetnosti do l. 1000*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1926. 5–6.

<sup>84</sup> Izidor Cankar, 'Razstava za cerkveno umetnost', *Dom in svet*, 26: 2, 1913, 60–66. See also Brejc, 'Izidor Cankar na razstavih', 119–122.

<sup>85</sup> Ivan Cankar lived in the Ottakring district in the years 1899–1909. Ivan Grafenauer: 'Cankar, Ivan (1876–1918)', in Izidor Cankar et al., eds, *Slovenski biografski leksikon: 1. zv. Abraham - Erberg*. Ljubljana: Zadružna gospodarska banka, 1925.

<sup>86</sup> Cankar, 'Razstava', 62: 'Če bi stala tu med brezračnimi delavskimi hišami romanska bazilika, tako solidna sama v sebi, mirna in stroga kot viteški grad, bi budila odpor in sovraštvo; v nebo stremeča gotika bi bila ironija, kakor anahronizem bi izgledali njeni visoki

When Izidor's cousin, Ivan Cankar wrote about the exhibition of Slovene impressionists at the Viennese Miethke gallery, he felt for the first time a soothing Slovene mood when looking at the pictures, something he had never felt before at home.<sup>87</sup> The example inadvertently reminds us of Riegl's discussion entitled *Die Stimmung als Inhalt der moderne Kunst* from 1899. In it, the art historian calmly gazes from a summit in the Alps, down into the valley, and likens the harmony of this distant view to the mood that contemporary art offers the viewer.<sup>88</sup> Similarly to the way Alois Riegl described his experience in the Alps, Ivan Cankar too had to step away from the original to see the essence of modern painting.

### Monographs

The first monograph on Jože Plečnik was not written by Izidor Cankar or France Stele but by Kosta Strajnić (1887–1977), a Croat of Serbian origin, who studied Art History in 1911/12 with Strzygowsky. Strajnić was also the author of a monograph on Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962),<sup>89</sup> which was written in the complete shadow of the Vidovdan myth,<sup>90</sup> in the sense of romantic Yugoslav nationalism. Unlike the monograph on Meštrović, with which Strajnić touched the extremes of an ideologised and mystified concept of art,<sup>91</sup> [fig. 6] his monograph on Jože Plečnik is the result of professional and diligent work, also in terms of contemporary

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stolpi v sajasti megli predmestja; vesela, lahkega življenja polna renesansa bi izzivala zavist in zaničevanje, V časih, ko so nastajale te oblike, ni bilo problema velikomestnega dušnega pastirstva, in ko bi bil, bi ne bile nastale...Plečnik se je problema lotil po svoje. Cerkev se izgublja med hišami, tovarišica jim je in sestra; v ponižnosti živi z njimi, neče se odlikovati z leskom in bogastvom. Toda če stopiš bliže, vidiš, kako je krepka, kako se sama drži in nosi, kako so iz samozavesti in prepričanja napisane besede, ki jih ima na čelu. Zunanost je zelo preprosta in vendar silna; v glavnem je samo izraz notranjih tektonskih moči, kar daje stavbi izraz monumentalne trdnosti. Fasada brez vsega nebistvenega lepotečja, zgolj enostavno formulirana konstrukcijska ideja. Vrata zelo nizka, izgledajo stlačena na minimum; bojiš se, da so prenizka, da se boš moral skloniti, kadar stopiš v cerkev. Dovolj so visoka, toda človek čuti, kakor bi ga tiščala na kolena, ko stopa v hišo božjo. Na tem izrazu velike disproporcioniranosti božjega in človeškega elementa sloni monumentalnost fasade, ki se kljub skromni visočini cerkve takoj razodene'.

<sup>87</sup> Jure Mikuž, 'O recepciji prvih nastopov slovenskih impresionistov', *M'ars*, 3: 2–3, 1991, 2–6.

<sup>88</sup> Riegl, 'Die Stimmung', 47–56.

<sup>89</sup> Kosta Strajnić, *Ivan Meštrović*, Beograd: Čelap i Popović, 1919.

<sup>90</sup> Serbian national myth based on legends about events related to the Battle of Kosovo (1389). It has been a subject in Serbian folklore and literary tradition. The battle took place on the Christian St. Vitus Day, known in Serbia as Vidovdan.

<sup>91</sup> On Meštrović's work The Vidovdan Temple see Vinko Srhoj, 'Ivan Meštrović i politika kao prostor ahistorijskog idealizma', *Ars Adriatica*, 4, 2014, 369–384. Vinko Srhoj, 'Ivan Meštrović i problematika nacionalnog stila u umjetnosti', *Radovi*, 26: 13, 2018, Jelena Uskoković, 'Monumentalizam kao struja hrvatske moderne i Mirko Rački', *Život umjetnosti*, 78/79: 2, 2006, 198–215. Ignjatović, 'Images of the Nation, 828–858; Irena Kraševac, *Meštrović i secesija: Beč – München – Prag*, Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, Fundacija Ivana Meštrovića, 2002.

architectural history.<sup>92</sup> [fig. 7] If we compare it with Tietze's monograph on Otto Wagner,<sup>93</sup> Strajnić's monograph has a more ambitious format but also presents Plečnik's work systematically and situates it in the context of local architecture (Zagreb and Ljubljana), and the development of (universal) modern architecture. Just like Izidor Cankar, Strajnić also highlights Plečnik's social dimension and his architectural ethical goal, 'to help every human being to live healthily and in comfort.'<sup>94</sup> Stanić's book also fulfils the criteria for a monograph from an art historical point of view.

When Meštrović arrived in Vienna in 1899, Plečnik, who was ten years his senior, had already created a number of works that had earned him some recognition.<sup>95</sup> Their rise to become the most recognised and prominent artistic figures of the time, took place under the conditions Alois Riegl found lacking in the renaissance blossoming of modern German art. They were like two blank pages, dissatisfied with the unrealised potential of their nations' cultural wealth, while being surrounded by great historical nations, and at the same time filled with the desire and determination to develop their artistic profiles in the centre of cultural ferment that Vienna was at the time.<sup>96</sup>

Meštrović's main plan was to realise the *Vidovdanski hram* (*Vidovdan Temple*, c. 1906–13, unfinished circle) as a kind of national shrine to South Slavic unity. The architectural-sculptural Gesamtkunstwerk was born out of the belief in the 'apotheosis of an awakened consciousness of the national character and greatness of the South Slavic ethnos',<sup>97</sup> nurtured by political propaganda. Its visuality and public reception were crucial to the cultural imagination and political instrumentalization of the primordialist variant of Yugoslavism in the 1910s.<sup>98</sup> Meštrović's art enjoyed great public and professional support.<sup>99</sup> However, Vinko Srhoj points out the paradox that Meštrović's early style most closely resembled the contemporary tendencies of a monumental style that developed in Germany – the state that fought the Yugoslav idea of an autonomous Slavic nation.<sup>100</sup>

Ivan Meštrović and Kosta Strajnić invited Plečnik on several occasions to actively join the formation of the Yugoslav idea. Plečnik, who was in favour of the

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<sup>92</sup> Kosta Strajnić, *Josip Plečnik*, Zagreb, Čelap i Popovac, 1920. The book was reprinted in Ljubljana in 2020 on the hundredth anniversary of its first publication.

<sup>93</sup> Hans Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, Wien: Rikola Verlag, 1922.

<sup>94</sup> Strajnić, *Josip Plečnik*, 16.

<sup>95</sup> Damjan Prelovšek, *Jože Plečnik: dunajski čas (1892–1911), doktorska disertacija*, Univerza v Ljubljani, 1977.

<sup>96</sup> Marjan Mušič, 'Meštrović i Plečnik', *Mogućnosti*, 10: 11, 1983, 918.

<sup>97</sup> Srhoj, 'Ivan Meštrović i problematika', 201.

<sup>98</sup> Ignjatović, 'Images', 832.

<sup>99</sup> Josef Strzygowski wrote several studies on Meštrović, see Makuljević. 'The political reception';

Ignjatović, 'Images of the Nation', 846, note 66.

<sup>100</sup> Srhoj, 'Ivan Meštrović i politika', 202. On the similarities between Strzygowski's theoretical descriptions and Meštrović's Vidovdan temple see: Ignjatović, *Images of the Nation*, 844.

sovereignty of the Slavic peoples, was also aware that by supporting Serbia, all his activities and projects in Vienna would come to a halt. The 'Committee for the organisation of artistic operations of Serbs and South Slavs' was established under the auspices of Crown Prince Alexander in Belgrade, right after the Balkan War in 1913. Plečnik was allegedly appointed to the Committee Presidency, without even being asked, and this was immediately published by the Austrian weekly, the *Ostdeutsche Rundschau*.<sup>101</sup> Plečnik's student Marjan Mušič (1904–1984) presumed that this appointment to the Serbian Committee was the reason why Plečnik was not appointed as Wagner's successor at the Vienna Academy,<sup>102</sup> which turned him down three times despite enjoying the support of both professors and students (the whole academic board expressed its support for him on three occasions). Historical records and Dvořák's lecture (*Die Letzte Renaissance*, 1912) nonetheless indicate that the question of succession at the academy had been decided at least a year before. Plečnik was obviously aware of the situation, because even before being turned down by the Vienna Academy, he accepted an invitation from the Czech architect Jan Kotěra (1871–1923), his fellow student in the Wagner seminar, to assume a professorship at the School of Arts and Crafts in Prague.

Plečnik was already forty-eight years old when he, after the 1914–18 war, accepted the invitation of architect Ivan Vurnik - the first professor Ljubljana's Technical Faculty - to come to Ljubljana to take up the professorship. Despite being relatively unknown in his homeland and having undertaken no major projects there, Plečnik kindly refused a second invitation from sculptor Ivan Meštrović to establish an architecture department in Zagreb (he did, however, accept Masaryk's invitation to renovate Prague Castle). Stele used Strajnič's monograph on Plečnik, published in 1920, to introduce a new professor of architecture to the Slovenian public.<sup>103</sup> Stele emphasized Strajnič's view that it is not enough for a nation to have great artists, 'their activities must also be exploited. What good is the genius of Meštrović and the great Plečnik if we are unable to understand their work'.<sup>104</sup> This thought will be particularly vivid in Oris (*The Outline of the History of Art among the Slovenes*).

From the letter that Vurnik sent to Stele after his first visit to Plečnik, we can see the mood Plečnik was in in Ljubljana:

... his sorrow at not having been at home was immense, hence it would delight him if you paid him a visit. He lamented not having anyone to share his dreams with. You shall soon get to know his thoughts if you decide to speak with him. It is all about the renaissance of our national culture. I hope

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<sup>101</sup> Mušič, 'Meštrović i Plečnik', 919.

<sup>102</sup> Mušič, 'Meštrović i Plečnik', 919.

<sup>103</sup> France Stele, 'Kosta Strajnič: Josip Plečnik; Zagreb 1920', *Dom in svet*, 33: 11–12, 1920, 312–315.

<sup>104</sup> Stele, 'Kosta Strajnič', 314: »Što nam koristi i posedovat i genialnoga Meštroviča i velikoga Plečnika, kada nismo u stanju, da shvatimo njihov a dela?«

you find much pleasure in conversing with him. If you have time, pay him a visit as soon as possible.<sup>105</sup>

France Stele first wrote about the Ljubljana School of Architecture in the leading Slovenian cultural journal, *Dom in svet* (Home and the World), which he edited during the interwar period.<sup>106</sup> Stele and Plečnik together created two fundamental monographs: *Architectura perennis*<sup>107</sup> [fig. 8] and *Napori*<sup>108</sup> which are still awaiting detailed analysis.<sup>109</sup> Stele's book *The Architect Jože Plečnik in Italy*, an unrivalled monograph on the artist from the perspective of his personal correspondence, has recently been reprinted. Even more important than the monographs, however, was their friendship and professional collaboration. France Stele referred to Plečnik's work in the young and growing capital – which was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021 – simply as Plečnik's Ljubljana. Stele's role in the planning and implementation of Plečnik's plans in his homeland is only now being studied in more detail.<sup>110</sup>

### **Oris zgodovine umetnosti pri Slovencih** (An Outline of the History of Art among the Slovenes: a cultural history experiment)

In 1922, the National Gallery Association organised a *Historical Exhibition of Slovene Paintings*,<sup>111</sup> which was the direct inspiration for Stele's art historical overview *Oris zgodovine umetnosti pri Slovencih* (An Outline of the History of Art among the Slovenes). Stele's booklet is very small, almost too small to outline the history of art of a nation. In 1923, it appeared in the *Dom in Svet* magazine and was published in book form a year later.<sup>112</sup> It was reprinted with addenda and corrections at Stele's eightieth anniversary in 1966.

<sup>105</sup> Letter of Ivan Vurnik to France Stele, 3 September 1919. Biblioteka SAZU, R11/XXVI– 759: '... jako mu je bilo žal, da ga ni bilo doma in veselilo bi ga, če ga obišeš. Tožil je, da nima nikogar, s komer bi se pogovarjal o svojih sanjah. Kake so te njegove misli, boš kmalu spoznal, če boš ž njim govoril. Vse se suče o renesansi naše narodne kulture. Upam, da boš našel mnogo užitka v občevanju z njim. Če imaš čas obišči ga čim preje'.

<sup>106</sup> Franci Lazarini, 'France Stele in raziskovanje slovenske arhitekture. *Studia Historica Slovenica*', 19: 1, 2019, 153–180.

<sup>107</sup> France Stele, Jože Plečnik, Anton Trstenjak, *Architectura perennis*, Ljubljana: Mestna občina ljubljanska, 1941.

<sup>108</sup> France Stele and Josip Plečnik, *Napori=Efforts. Esej o arhitekturi*. Ljubljana: Slovenska Akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1955.

<sup>109</sup> See Damjan Prelovšek, *Jože Plečnik, Architectura Perennis, Napori*, Ljubljana: Dessa, 1993.

<sup>110</sup> Damjan Prelovšek, 'Jože Plečnik in France Stele ali kako je nastajala Plečnikova Ljubljana'. *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, 22: 2, 2017, 101– 111; Krmelj, *Korespondenca Franceta Steleta*, 100–102, 212–219; Franci Lazarini, France Stele in prenova arhitekturnih spomenikov. *Dialogi*, 59: 1– 2, 2023, 42–57.

<sup>111</sup> Renata Komić Marn, "'Razodetje, na katero se je treba šele privaditi": zgodovinska razstava slikarstva na Slovenskem (1922)', *Bilten SUZD*, 41:2, 2022, <http://www.suzd.si/bilten/prispevki/1615-bilten-suzd-41-2022-2>

<sup>112</sup> It was published in the *Dom in svet* magazine in 1923 under the title '*Umetnost in Slovenci (Kulturnozgodovinski poskus)*', *Dom in svet*, 36, 1923.

The Stele's book forever changed the perspective on Slovene art and history.<sup>113</sup> [fig. 9] Stele achieved this with two methodological choices. Firstly, he avoided detailed definitions of monuments in terms of periodisation, style or provenance and focused on creativity as a fundamental human quality that all humans and nations possess. Secondly, he dedicated almost one third of the book to modern art which is unique in consciously using the national expression as a constitutive element of an aesthetic message. However, according to Stele, we cannot say that any of the past or present artistic forms (styles) are especially ours or particularly suited to us. An artistic form is suited to us to the extent we managed to experience it, to the extent it has become a form of expressing the feelings and creativity of the nation or to the extent that it is tied to a significant national cultural historical process.<sup>114</sup>

The historical overview also demanded a clear standpoint on questions of folk art versus so-called high art, which was often associated with a foreign ruling hegemony. Like Riegl, Stele saw folk art as distinct from universal art forms, while the economic structure and history of an individual culture defined the relationship between them,<sup>115</sup> at the same time, he was aware of its important role in the development of modern art. In *Oris zgodovine umetnosti pri Slovencih* (An Outline of the History of Art among the Slovenes), Stele introduces a theory of two currents that flow in separate layers, but there is constant communication between them that can be conscious or unconscious. The first stream is deeply rooted in the nation and its past; it is conservative, retrospective, and includes the remains of thousands of years of cultural past. This stream is constantly infiltrated from the upper stream which, at least in its essence, is never of nationally closed in character, but is international and universal in its deepest sense and nature.<sup>116</sup> The relationship of the individual to art is also twofold: active or passive. Stele's viewpoint that every person is to some extent an artist and somehow artistically active because art is the result of overflowing emotion,<sup>117</sup> reflect's the direct influence of Lev Tolstoy's *What is art?*<sup>118</sup>

In his *Oris*, Stele referred primarily to human creative nature and the basic purpose of art which is to transmit feelings and awake feelings in others, hence an artist can be anyone who is able to give expression to their artistic inclination, to

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<sup>113</sup> The architect Fedja Košir recognised it as a kind of 'national architectural program', see Fedja Košir, *K Arhitekturi*. Booklet 3, Ljubljana: Fakulteta za arhitekturo, 2006, 49.

<sup>114</sup> Stele, *Oris*, 158–160.

<sup>115</sup> For Riegl, folk art does not represent a source of national self-awareness or a historical background of high art but the contrary; folk art is a reflection of the conservatism of peasant culture which, for certain economic and cultural reasons, remained isolated from modern civilisation. Riegl, Alois: *Volkskunst, Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie*. Berlin: Georg Siemens 1894, 75.

<sup>116</sup> The theory of two origins of art might have resonated among ethnocentric and cosmopolitan tendencies in the literary theory of the 1990s on the double origin of Slovene literature. Pirjevec, Marija. *Dvoje Izvirov Slovenske Književnosti*. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1997.

<sup>117</sup> Stele, *Oris*, 10–14.

<sup>118</sup> Lev N. Tolstoj, *Was is Kunst?*, übersetzt von Michael Teofanoss, Leipzig: E. Diederich.

make their feelings and the pleasure they find in forms, in their artistic essence... accessible to fellow human beings. So art is a way for people to communicate with each other ...<sup>119</sup> As Stele wrote, it was only his experience of the harsh conditions of Russian captivity during the 1914–1918 war that allowed him to connect the formal problems of art with the contextual challenges of life in the time and circumstances he witnessed.<sup>120</sup> Although he later modified the highlights and individual formulations several times, Stele never denied the theses and cognitions from *Oris*. Moreover, he substantiated his findings in his article in 1957.<sup>121</sup>

In the mid 1930s, Izidor Cankar persuaded his father-in-law, the industrialist and publisher Dragotin Hribar (1862–1935), to use the money he had set aside to have a tomb built by Ivan Meštrović for the construction of the Slovene Museum of Modern Art, to be designed by Plečnik. Before the construction works began, Cankar assumed a diplomatic post in Argentina and left all the plans and preparations of the Museum of Modern Art to France Stele.<sup>122</sup> Cankar, who was well aware of the financial limitations and knew clearly what he expected from a modern gallery, was not fond of Plečnik's plans, so he ordered them from a young student and Plečnik's assistant Edo Ravnikar (1907–1993). Ravnikar completed the building in an original architectural style that connected the classical architecture of the Plečnik School and Le Corbusier's functionalism. [fig. 10] This made modernism even more prominent in Slovenia, proving that it is important that art historians keep abreast of contemporary art. The construction of the Museum of Modern Art was not completed until after the 1939–45 war, when the relationships between art historians and artists began to change completely under socialism.

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<sup>119</sup> Stele, *Oris*, 8.

<sup>120</sup> For Stele's attitude to art, see Stele, 'Moje življenje', 170. Stele confided to Vladimir Bartol that he himself had written poems in the spirit of Walt Whitman in Siberia, see 'Vladimir Bartol, Iz razgovorov s Francetom Steletom.' *Primorski dnevnik*, 11. 4. 1962, str. 3.

<sup>121</sup> France Stele, 'Narodnostni moment v zgodovini umetnosti. S posebnim ozirom na slovensko umetnostno zgodovino,' *Peristil: zbornik radova za povijest umjetnosti*, 2: 1, 195, 19–28. Stele's implementations were supported by the Czech art historian František Žákavec (1878–1937), professor at Bratislava University.

<sup>122</sup> Krmelj, *Korespondenca Franceta Steleta*, 172–176.