

**Tereza Vernerová Volná**

Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague

**Rituals of Representation – Insignia of Czech Universities since 1882**

The aim of the doctoral research is to study insignia of Czech universities and to interpret their role within the academic ceremony as well as in the representation and self-determination process of the institutions. In broader context the goal is illustrate how art and craft objects accumulate social and political value and how they take part in institutional history through a ritual.

One of the objectives of the project is to document and analyse art objects and specifically jewellery in their official (public, socio-political, monumental, depersonalized) form. Although we notice this position of artwork from the beginning of human society, the use and perception of such phenomena has significantly changed in the past decades. On one hand, regalia became an archaic form in the liberal democratic state as Czech Republic; on the other hand, church, university or municipality still use insignia as a part of their living rituals. The paradox is visible on the example of academic insignia. The academic ceremony follows rules grounded in a hundreds-years old tradition. However, the insignia still play irreplaceable role in the present self-definition of modern institutions and even the newly established faculties find it relevant to incorporate them to their newly formed rituals.

The time range of the research is working with three periods. Although the Czech academic tradition is far longer, the beginning of modern university education is set to 1882 when Czech and German parts of the Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague separated. The questions of emancipation of Czech universities and their independence were vital between 1882 and 1945. This urgency of Czech institutions to define themselves against the German ones faded away after 1945, but soon new challenge appeared with the rise of the communist regime. The relationship between science, academic world and totalitarian politics, the degree of conformity or striving for independence were features that influenced the form of representation and rituals connected to academic insignia. After 1989, not only the organizational structure of a university, but also its rituals and visual presentation were determined by the fact how academics dealt with the change of ideology. Opening of the economics and massive establishment of new institutions affected presence and possibly future of insignia.

To draw full picture, it is necessary to view academic insignia from two angles. First, we can see them as independent representational objects; second, their existence is closely bond with ceremony they are a part of. The ritual part plays crucial role in interpretation of the objects. If we expose it through the lens of visual theory, it appears as a spectacle

where specific costumes and properties hierarchize the role of participants, mark important moments and symbolize position of the institution.

The research is based on analysis of available archive material followed by broader reflection using methods of contemporary art history. The project does not omit the connection of insignia and its authors to the broader context of visual arts. It juxtaposes different art approaches based on timeless representational stylization on one hand, and on the other hand on affiliation to the period trends and tendencies. Contextual and comprehensive approach offers deeper insight into the evolution of socio-political position of the universities and their representational strategies. During the research process some universal questions arise. It is necessary to reflect the relationships between customer, designer, manufacturer and investor, the change in canon of depiction of scientific fields and methods of visual hierarchization through an art object.