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Formation of Canon of Czech Modern Art

The issues of canon and art exhibitions are amongst the most interesting in the field of current art history. Both are connected to the critical approach to the discipline itself and opens the debate about its foundations. The questions raised deal with the popularity of certain artists, the display strategies and also where and how the value of certain artworks is generated. The digital humanities and the work with datas are amongst the biggest challenges in this field. In my thesis I want to describe how is the canon of Czech modern art formatted using the quantitative methods.

The main issue of my thesis is how the canon is build and what exactly is the canon. My argumentation follows that there is one part of the canon created by certain images - reproduced in almost all publications about the topic, while the second part is created by names of certain artists whose works are displayed at all the exhibitions described as the exhibitions of Czech modern art.

One of the basic theses of this approach is that the aesthetic value, either given by a traditional or original approach, is only a part of the success. The motivations behind the display of particular image or at least of particular artist could be very different. Opinions on what affects the display vary widely and include a wide range of choices ranging from social and political pressures to the artist's personality. At the same time, the question is how the popularity of artists could be measured and whether, apart from general awareness or professional beliefs, is it possible to determine which artists do or do not belong to the canon.

The aim of my thesis is to find how the term "Czech modern art" was defined through the 20th century. The main source of information comes from exhibition catalogues and the literature that explicitly wants to define this topic. As in many countries of Eastern Europe the definition of the national canon was in the program of many galleries, not only in Prague but also in the regions. That was also important because it supported the official interpretation of the national history. The interpretation changed and shifted different directions during the 20th century according to the turbulent historical events in Czechoslovakia and in the whole area of Eastern Europe.

The usage of qualitative methods, their visualization and other methods of digital humanities can be very helpful in this kind of research. Thanks to the various databases of exhibitions that are being developed as research projects it is easier to obtain the relevant data. For my project the key information is, who was displayed at these exhibitons. Than I can widen these informations and find how much were these artists displayed during the followed era.

The comparison of different exhibitions with the same topic can show, which artists were preferred in different eras. Together with the interpretation of political, social, cultural and art-historical transformations, it is possible to end the main trends that influenced the formation of the canon. The other important issues that will be discussed in this thesis are about the authority in this context and the relation between national and regional galleries. The disadvantages of this approach will also be discussed. There is definitely the question of availability of certain artworks and the difference of interpreting the living artists or the deceased ones. It is also definitely important to discuss the methods and how the interpretation and visualization of data can influence the results.

My topic ranges between the history of art exhibitions and digital humanities. It is important to implement these new methods to the classical research. There will be more and more data in the art history and finding the right way how to interpret them will become really necessary. The databases and their interpretation methods will be one of the tools in the near future not only for students but also for academics.