

Editorial

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The art of the early 19th century and especially the question of its directions after the year 1800 has repeatedly been the subject of attention and interest of art historians in recent decades. The conventional image of the 19th century as a century of varying historicist styles, insisting on academic rules, including linearism in many aspects, sentimental and/or heroic religious and historic imagery and bourgeois taste seems to have more to it than just being a prelude to the modernism that emerged. The underlying currents that shaped the visual arts were deeply connected with the formation of modern as well as conservative European society and thought, which had undergone a major transformation at the turn of the 18th century and broke from the past, ushering in new times of the European nations. Nevertheless, in retrospect, Nazarenes were not part of any progressive movement. On the contrary, their views on what was acceptable as valuable religious art was rigid and borderline messianic.

In Central European visual arts, the question of transition from the late 18th century into the modern era is related to the study of a series of long undervalued artists whose names have (now) either almost vanished or were dismissed (in the past) as unsuitable for the increasingly nation-centred discourse of future preference for national art histories. The reason for this was often that these artists were born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and their patriotic feelings were mostly incompatible with the demands of the nationalists of the mid-century. Their 'vagrant' fate took them from one art centre to another, being it Prague, Vienna, Dresden, or Rome, but also from the narratives of the national art histories (or on their peripheries), which were unable to find a place for figures who stood on the margins of a nation.

The founder of the Nazarene movement was Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789 – 1869) from Lübeck. As a student of the Vienna Academy he had conflict with the Director Heinrich Friedrich Füger who, in Overbeck's view, did not regard Christian subjects with deep enough devotion. In 1809 he was forced out of the Academy after he founded the Brotherhood of Saint Luke in Rome, rejecting his contemporaries and focusing on artists active before Raphael. He and his followers – Nazarenes, known also as monk-artists, rented an abandoned monastery of *San Isidoro* where they stayed eight years. Overbeck then stayed in Rome, and changing address from time to time, he was visited by artists from all over the Europe. Marginalised at first, they step by step became, in some respects, the leading artists when it came to religious painting and art. Several of Overbeck's supporters and disciples established Nazarenism on Academies of Fine Arts, especially in Germany and Austria.

This was the fate of one of the leading figures in the Nazarene movement in Habsburg Monarchy, artist Joseph Führich, who was born to German parents in northern Bohemia. He started his career as a prominent painter in Prague, then moved on to Rome and finally found a permanent position in Vienna. Führich was in some respects key figure in Central European visual art after the year 1800 and he was instrumental in the development of painting in the Czech Lands, Austria and elsewhere in the Monarchy, and more widely also in the “spread” of Nazarenism among the German-speaking artists. Despite this fact, he has largely remained outside the viewfinder of art history everywhere. The reasons for this are, of course, manifold and range from a lack of information on his early career when he was a leading figure in the Prague scene to continuous decline of the artistic potential of his style, which remained almost unchanged after 1834 when he settled in Vienna. This is important example of an influential “national Nazarene”, in this case Czech, but most European countries have their own “Nazarene”, or at least epigones of Nazarene art.

A joint project of the Institute of Art History, Prague, the Regional Gallery Liberec, and the National Gallery in Prague, sought to carry out an up-to-date study of Führich’s position both in Czech art history and more broadly in a European context. In 2014 the two galleries held an exhibition of Joseph Führich’s work, prepared by Pavla Machalíková from the Institute of Art History in Prague, which showed the scope and variety of Führich’s artistic efforts (most of which occurred in Bohemia, the land of his birth), and which was the first monographic exhibition of the artist’s work since the show that was organised shortly after his death in 1876. The exhibition was based on extensive research, which also resulted in a book co-authored by Pavla Machalíková and Petr Tomášek and published under the same title as the exhibition: *Joseph Führich (1800 – 1876). From Chrastava to Vienna* (Prague 2014, parallel Czech/German editions). The questions raised by the research on Führich, on his place in Czech and European 19th-century painting and on his role in the formation of European Nazarenism also led to the organisation of a colloque held at the Regional Gallery in Liberec in September 2014.

This issue of *Forum Historiae*, first entirely in English, is devoted to studies which focused on the topic opened and discussed at the colloque in Liberec. The authors of the papers examine European Nazarenism and Führich's role in it from various points of views and perspectives, taking into account the autonomous reception of Nazarenism in different countries, but also the unifying role of the model images produced by key Nazarene artists. The wide spread of their art and style was aided by the cooperation of Johann Friedrich Overbeck and Peter Cornelius (1824 – 1874), which resulted in nearly mass production of reproductions of Nazarene art – engravings/graphic sheets, illustrations of religious publications and holy cards, gaining unprecedented popularity at the time. These often became the sources and models for religious artworks, altar paintings etc. On one hand, Nazarene art became an example of very successful “marketing”, but on the other hand, in views of many, it caused *Ars Sacra* – religious art to head into a blind street, getting stuck and approximating this kind of art to kitsch.

The discussions at the colloque shed light on the many facets of Nazarenism, including both its mostly religious and representative contents and stylistic forms, and the dissemination of both.

Several researchers touched upon the universalism of Nazarene themes and the uses of historical and religious-historical iconography transposed to contemporary contexts, although no one addressed the question of the links between religion, politics and ideology more specifically (cf. Max Hollein – Christa Steinle /eds./, *Religion Macht Kunst. Die Nazarener*, Köln 2005). The validity of the ideas, techniques, and the varying quality of Nazarene art was nevertheless repeatedly demonstrated on the basis of the multiplication of its imagery reused in religious art and on the basis of the longevity of late Nazarenism throughout Europe and especially in Germany and the lands of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Beňová, Herucová, Klinerová, Štěpánek). Although there has been an ongoing discussion about the applicability of the term ‘nazarenism’ for the enduring and much modified clichés of specific religious art, the authors showed that different versions of religious art, that share some features in common traceable back to Nazarene imagery. Another side of the issue is the artistic quality of this imagery and many of the examples of course showed that Nazarene imagery has recurred in various forms in religious art. Nevertheless, the enduring demand for Nazarene art is evidence of to the legibility of such paintings in the sense of ‘pictura laicorum scriptura’ and to the fact, that even the simple, almost ‘vulgar’ versions of Nazarene influence were accessible even to artists of lower ranks. The long life of late Nazarenism does not automatically mean that it was welcomed unconditionally, as extensive research on a more distant and different milieu – the French art scene of the 19th century (Saint Martin) – has revealed. Apart from the general notion of Nazarenism that formed in French art, the author also focused on the criticism and conversely the enthusiasm that Führich’s images evoked in different instances. While some of the authors focused on the reception and spread of Nazarene models, others brought up topics that touched more on the continuity of (this) artistic tradition: questions of style, schooling, and artistic emulation († Reiter), an iconographic analysis evaluating the role of tradition in Nazarene compositions and disentangling it from their innovativeness (Lovecky), and the question of patron-artist relations still valid in the Romantic era (Tomášek). Many of the art works were never published before, and many of the facts were previously not known. The first historiographic works about Nazarenes were written and published in the Interwar period, especially in Germany. After longer pause, Nazarenes became the matter of research and “rehabilitation” towards the end of 1970s (Gallwitz 1977; Steinle 1977, Quesada 1979), and again at the beginning of the 2000s (above mentioned Hollein – Steinle 2005; as well as Hölzl Stifter 2013; Grewe 2015), not to mention monographies focused on the separate representatives of the movement. In the frame of Central Europe, the credit for opening the topic in wider contexts is due to Pavla Machalíková from the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Pavel Tomášek from the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

The papers cover a long period that stretches from around 1820 to the turn of the 19th century and they touch on the different media of visual art (painting, drawing, printmaking, fresco), including reproductions and replications, thereby raising one issue that grew in importance during the 19th century. That is the increasing publicity of art, which ceased to be just the pastime of the wealthy and increasingly became an interest and attraction for the masses. Shows, exhibitions, criticism, and the mass reproduction and public appreciation of their work came to play an important role in the career of every artist. The case of Nazarenism shows how the movement managed to present itself by making more or less conscious use of reproductive media. This is one of the features that opens

Nazarenism up to research from angles typically used to study modern art: artist – critique – public relations, mass production and reproduction techniques, art as a means of spreading ideology, but also as a source of interrelation between tradition and the avant-garde. The more we think about past art, the more that art opens up to the new and current questions that we ask in an effort to understand it better – not only as an art form of the past, but also as an activity that can be traced back to real and vivid personalities.

Dedicated to the memory of Cornelia Reiter