**Filla, Emil (1882 – 1953)**

Emil Filla (born April 4, 1882 in Chropyně in Moravia; Died October 6, 1953 in Prague) is regarded as one of the main leaders of Czech Cubism in early twentieth-century Prague. Best known for paintings that interpret Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in a Czech context, Filla also produced accomplished sculptures, drawings, and prints. His early career was inaugurated by exhibiting with the group Osma (The Eight, active 1907-1908), of which he was a founding member. In 1909 he joined the Mánes Societ*y* and became co-editor of its journal *Volné Směry* [*Free Directions*; ed., 1909 – 1911]*.* Filla was a founding member and leading figure of Skupina výtvarných umělců(The Group of Fine Artists, active 1911–1914) and assumed editorship of the group’s journal *Umělecký Měsíčník* (published 1911–1914). From 1914 to 1920 Filla resided in the Netherlands, where he was active in anti-war politics. In 1920 Filla returned to Prague and resumed work with the Mánes Society. He collaborated with Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg on the first issue of *De Stijl* in 1917. After 1920 he left behind the analytic and synthetic cubist aesthetic for which he is best known and turned to figural themes. He was briefly influenced by Surrealism in the 1930s as the result of his friendship with Czech Surrealist and Devětsilmember Jindřich Štyrský.

Following early schooling in Brno, Filla completed his artistic training at the Academy of Fine Arts, Prague (1903-1906), then traveled through Germany, Holland, France and Italy studying Old Masters artworks. Like other Osma members, Filla was heavily influenced by Edvard Munch, whose paintings were exhibited in 1905 at the Mánes Society of Fine Artsin Prague. During his period of ‘Lyrical Expressionism,’ Filla’s paintings capitalize on symbolic color and subject matter, accompanied by fluid line and simplified form, for example *The Reader of Dostoyevsky* (1907). Filla’s 1911 article ‘O ctnosti novoprimitivismu’ [On the Virtue of Neo-Primitivism] in *Volné Směry* caused uproar among elder members of Mánes, an event that contributed to the secession of young artists, some of whom founded Skupina. That same year, Filla traveled several times to Paris, where he met major figures of the Parisian avant-garde, including Picasso, Braque, Juan Gris, Guillaume Apollinaire and others. This encounter with Parisian Cubism signaled Filla’s ‘Cubist Period’ and set the path for his reputation as the main representative and aesthetic leader of Czech Cubism. It also led to Filla’s staunch anti-pluralist position, which recognized only the art of Picasso and Braque as true Cubism, igniting tensions that resulted in Skupina’s split in late 1912.

The years between 1914 and 1920 showed a shift toward political activism for Filla. On July 2, 1914, he traveled to Paris with his wife Hana Krejčová and Otto Gutfreund, visiting Braque’s studio. When war was declared he left Paris for Belgium and later took up exile in the Netherlands. There Filla became involved in anti-war politics as member of Czechoslovak anti-Habsburg resistance group ‘Mafie’ and associated with other avant-garde artists who had sought asylum in Holland. With the creation of the first Czechoslovak Republic, Filla was appointed secretary of the Czechoslovak Embassy in The Hague (1919-1920) upon the recommendation of President Tomáš Masaryk. In 1921 Filla exhibited at Herwarth Walden’s Sturm Gallery and the Freie Secessionin Berlin, and with the Tvrdošíjní (Stubborn Ones) in Prague. In 1926 he exhibited in Dresden, Venice, and New York. At the onset of the Nazi Occupation, Filla was arrested due to anti-fascist activities and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp (1939-1945). There he wrote memoires of his experience (*O svobodě* [*On Freedom*]); he later painted emotionally wrenching canvases referring to his time in Buchenwald. Upon his return to Prague in 1945, he was appointed as professor at the Academy of Applied Arts. In 1948 he joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and committed his painting to the cause of realism; thus, his work until his death in 1953 was dominated by realist landscapes.

**List of Works**

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**Online Resources**

National Gallery in Prague, Collection of Modern Art, Veletržní palác

<http://www.ngprague.cz/en/objekt-detail/veletrzni-palace/>

The Athenaeum (large selection of images)

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/list.php?m=a&s=tu&aid=4837>

The Art Newspaper, 26 November 2011

<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Prized-works-by-Czech-painter-Emil-Filla-stolen/25127>

Emil Filla, *Reader of Dostojevsky* (image file)

<http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/reader-dostoevsky-emil-filla-1907>