**Janák, Pavel (1882-1956)**

Pavel Janák was an architect and architectural theorist whose work and writing defined the development of Czech cubist architecture. Trained in Prague and Vienna, where he studied under Otto Wagner, he was one of the leading Czech architects of his generation. His built projects and published writings exemplified the distinctive mode of architectural modernism that he and his Czech contemporaries pioneered in the early 1910s. Equated by critics and audiences at the time with Parisian Cubism, it fused local building traditions with a new and emphatically abstract vocabulary of architectural forms.

Janák began his training at the Czech Technical University in Prague, and in 1906 continued on to Wagner’s class at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. After completing his studies he worked in Prague for the architect Jan Kotěra, and subsequently established an independent architectural practice of his own. Janák’s early commission for the Fára House on the baroque town square of Pelhřimov (1912-13), together with Josef Gočár’s House of the Black Madonna in Prague (1911-12), are among the earliest examples of the new, more abstract architectural language pioneered by Janák, Gočár, and their Czech colleagues Josef Chochol and Vlastislav Hofman. The four architects shared similar ideals and worked together closely, and they were members of the Group of Fine Artists (*Skupina výtvarných umělců*), an association that served as the main local forum for news of Parisian cubist artists including Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Janák edited the organization’s magazine, the *Art Monthly* (*Umělecký měsíčník*), and went on to design a cubist frame (1914) for a Picasso painting owned by the Czech collector Vincenc Kramář, to this day the only known example of a picture frame specifically created for Picasso’s work by another artist.

Although the Czech public perceived a close link between Janák’s architecture and Cubism, Janák did not openly identify with the term, and his connection to the new Parisian art form was generally more circumscribed and selective. It centred mainly on the parallels between his own use of shallow relief forms to enliven the appearance of building facades, and the simulated sculptural relief and overlapping planes of Picasso’s synthetic cubist paintings. Janák traced the former practice back to local baroque building traditions, an idea that he posited in his article “The Renewal of the Facade” (*Obnova průčelí*). Another key publication of the period, Janák’s article “The Prism and the Pyramid” (*Hranol a pyramida*), is today regarded as a foundational text in the history of both cubist and expressionist architecture. Apart from his writing and architectural works, Janák also had significant expertise in the applied arts and furniture design. In 1912 he and Gočár established the Prague Art Workshops (*Pražské umělecké dílny*) to manufacture and market their designs for furnishings, tableware and textiles.

After World War I and the formation of an independent Czechoslovakia, Janák gradually traded the abstract play of forms in his earlier projects for an even more historically informed vocabulary of columns, arches, and pediments, at once modern and at the same time strongly classicizing. Later termed rondocubism for its rounded, softer forms, the new architecture was also distinctive for its conspicuous use of colour, a feature absent from Janák’s earlier work. Among the hallmark projects of this period were Janák’s designs for the Pardubice Crematorium (1921-23) and for the Prague headquarters of the Italian insurance company Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà(1922-24). Janák continued to work on large institutional projects through his later career, and in 1936 was named to the post of chief architect for Prague Castle, the administrative seat of the Czechoslovak government.

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**Illustration Caption**

Pavel Janák, Fára House in Pelhřimov, Czech Republic (1912-13). Photograph by the author, 2001.

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