**The Eight (*Osma*, or *Die Acht*)**

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Known in Czech as *Osma* and in German as *Die Acht*, the Eight was an artistic association at the forefront of the modern movement in Prague in the early twentieth century. It is best remembered for its exhibitions of 1907 and 1908, and for facilitating the local proliferation of Post-Impressionism and Cubism. Bilingual in composition, the group included the artists Vincenc Beneš, Friedrich Feigl, Emil Filla, Max Horb, Otakar Kubín, Bohumil Kubišta, Willi Nowak, Emil Artur Pittermann-Longen, Antonín Procházka, and Linka Procházková. Other associations with the same name formed in Budapest and New York, but the Prague Eight was the first to adopt the naming, and the three groups had no interaction with one another.

The artistic agenda of the Eight differed sharply from that of other associations in Prague at the time, and the group advanced a pioneering new vision of artistic modernism that did not yet have wide local acceptance. It believed that the art of painting, the most heavily circumscribed artistic medium of the time, was in pressing need of transformation, and had to be expanded beyond its conventionally academic forms if it was to become a relevant instrument of expression for modern times. The Eight also argued that such a reinvention of painterly practice, rather than being confined to the private space of the studio, required an equally strident new engagement with the public sphere. The group put this idea into practice by organizing bold new exhibitions, promoting itself in the periodical press, and building an extensive network of local and international contacts, inside as well as outside the art world.

The nucleus of the Eight coalesced at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, where the majority of the group’s artists trained. Dissatisfied with the prevailing mode of academic realism in the school’s painting program and the conservative outlook of their teachers, many of them quit or were ejected from their studies. These departures precipitated the formation of the group, which took its name from the number of participants in its first exhibition. The exhibition opened in April 1907 in a rented storefront in Prague, and was followed by a second exhibition in June 1908. Breaking with the local custom of artists showing their work with established artistic institutions, the two exhibitions were independently organized and promoted by the Eight. They showcased the group’s loosely rendered and vibrantly coloured landscapes, cityscapes, and portraits in the Post-Impressionist manner, reminiscent of the paintings of Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Edvard Munch, and Vincent Van Gogh, whose art the Eight followed closely.

Local audiences and critics were scandalized by the group. They perceived the art of the Eight as a threat to academic conventions as well as to Impressionism, a modern style of painting by then increasingly accepted in Prague. The Eight was also criticized for its ethnic composition, which brought together artists of both Czech and German backgrounds, Christian as well as Jewish, at a time when the local artistic community was strongly divided along national lines. The Eight had more notable support in the literary world, from Prague critics such as Max Brod and František X. Šalda. Brod wrote the first major article on the Eight, a response to the group’s inaugural exhibition titled “Frühling in Prag” (1907). The Eight also cultivated significant ties abroad. The group’s early contacts included Paul Cassirer, Julius Meier-Graefe, and the Brücke in Germany, as well as Matisse and André Derain in Paris.

In 1910 the Eight helped organize the Prague debut of Derain and Matisse, as well as Georges Braque, at an exhibition entitled “Les Indépendants,” which first brought key examples of Parisian Post-Impressionist and Cubist painting to local attention. The Eight would gradually dissolve that same year. Several of its members reunited in 1911 to establish the Group of Fine Artists (*Skupina výtvarných umělců*), widely represented in scholarship as a successor to the Eight.

**References and Further Reading**

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**Illustration Caption**

Broadside catalogue of the first exhibition of the Eight, Prague, 1907. Photograph courtesy of the Library of the Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague.