**Filla, Emil (1882 – 1953)**

Born April 4, 1882 in Chropyně in Moravia

Died October 6, 1953 in Prague

Emil Filla is regarded as one of the main leaders of Czech Cubism in early twentieth-century Prague. Best known for his 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 *Osma* (The Eight, active 1907-1908), of which he was a founding member. In 1909 he joined the *Mánes Society* 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 *Devětsil* member Jindřich Štyrský.

Following early schooling in Brno, Filla completed his artistic training at the Academy of Fine Arts, Prague, 1903-1906, after which he 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 Arts* in 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*. Also in 1911 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 main representative and aesthetic leader of Czech Cubism. It also led to Filla’s staunch anti-pluralist position that recognized only the art of Picasso and Braque as true Cubism, igniting tensions that resulted in *Skupina*’s split in late 1912. The years 1914 to 1920 display a shift toward political activism for Filla. On July 2, 1914 he traveled to Paris with his wife Hana Krejčová and Otto Gutfreund, visiting the studio of Braque. 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 he exhibited at Herwarth Walden’s Sturm Gallery and the *Freie Secession* in Berlin, and with the *Tvrdošíjní* (Stubborn Ones) in Prague. In 1926 he exhibited in Dresden, Venice, and New York. At the onset of 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 is appointed as professor at the Academy of Applied Arts, Prague. In 1948 he joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and committed his painting to the cause of realism. His work until his death in 1953 is dominated by realist landscapes.

**List of Works**

Filla, Emil, “Domenico Theotocopuli El Greco. Notes from an exhibition of El Greco in

Munich,” Matthew Rampley, trans. and ed. *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 8 (June 2013): 1-13.

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1996.

Lamač, Miroslav. *Osma a Skupina výtvarných umělců 1907-1917*. Prague: Odeon, 1988.

Pomajzlová, Alena, ed. *Expresionismus a České Umění 1905-1927*, translated by Ivan

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Prahl, Roman and Lenka Bydžovská. *Volné Směry / Freie Richtungen: Die Zeitschrift der*

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Vlček, Tomáš. *Emil Filla (1882-1953)*, exh. cat. Prague Castle Riding Hall and Olomouc

Museum of Art. Prague: Národní galerie v Praze, 2007.

**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>