

# Art around 1900 in Central Europe

## #10 End of the century

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# Art around 1900 in Central Europe

In this popular culture series we will examine one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture.

The turn of the 19th and 20th century was a **special period for the art of Central Europe**, with various artistic trends occurring in a short time and an intensified cultural exchange between countries politically connected with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

We will deal with paintings, architecture and sculpture, but also other important cultural phenomena, such as international exhibitions and art collections. We present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** by comparing artists from Central European countries.

Wojciech Weiss (PL), *A melancholic person*  
(*Totenmesse*), 1904, National Museum in Cracow



## *Fin de siècle*

The 19th century ended with a strong **feeling of decline** and premonition of the **end of the world**. As discussed in the presentation devoted to main artistic trends of the time, this atmosphere was particularly reflected in the works of the Symbolists.

The motif of **death** – and the feeling that the world as it was known at the time would fall apart – was very strong. However, it was not specified what could happen.

Jakub Schikaneder (CZ), *Symbolic scene*, first half of the 1890s,  
National Gallery Prague





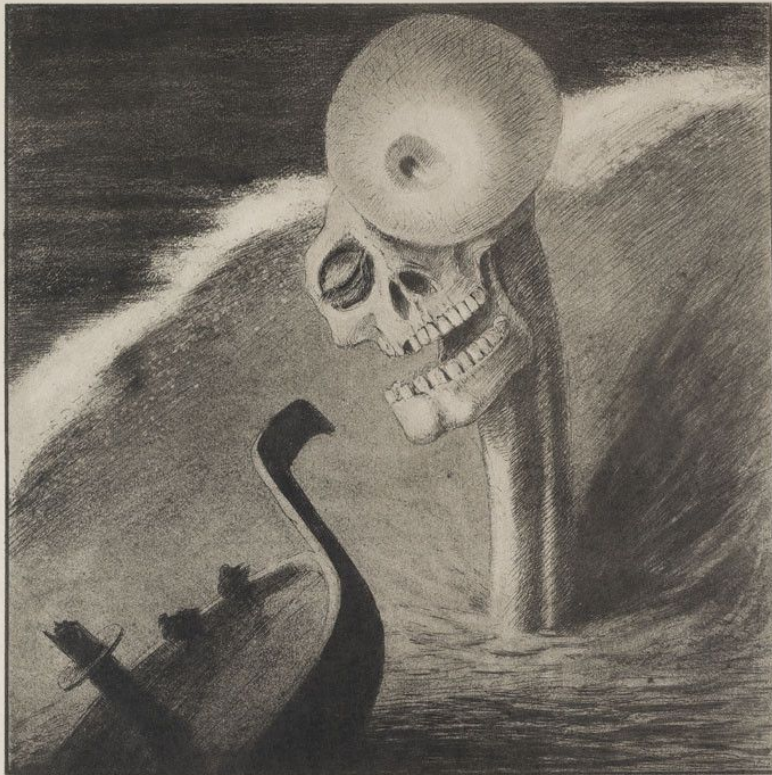


Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl (HU), *The Souls of Acheron*, 1898,  
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Jacek Malczewski (PL), *Death*, 1902,  
National Museum in Warsaw





Alfred Kubin (AT), *Horror*, 1903, National Gallery Prague



Ladislav Mednyánszky (HU), *Memento. Terror Scene*, 1895, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava

This **pessimism** was described with two terms – *fin de siècle* – the end of the century, and thus the present world – and **Decadence** – the feeling that the period in which humanity finds itself is the moment of its decline.



Wojciech Weiss (PL), *The Demon (In the café)*, 1904, National Museum in Cracow



Elemír Halász-Hradil (HU),  
*Study of a girl lost in thought*,  
1903, Slovak National Gallery,  
Bratislava



Lajos Deák-Ébner (HU), after Ferenc Eisenhut (HU), *Strange dream*,  
1891, Ernest Zmeták Art Gallery in Nové Zámky, Slovakia





Leon Kaufmann (PL), *Night moth*, 1898–1899,  
Mazovian Museum in Plock, Poland



Cabaret poster, 1890,  
Albertina, Vienna



# Long 19th century

Paradoxically, however, the end of the **century did not come with the year 1900** as everyone expected. Nothing had changed. In a symbolic way, this era ended several years later.

In retrospect, we can see that the 19th century lasted more than a hundred years – of course in terms of the totality of social, cultural, and political changes.



Beneš Knüpfer (CZ), *Fauns fleeing before an automobile*, 1905, National Gallery Prague

The so-called “long nineteenth century” thus began with the **French Revolution** (1789) and ended with the outbreak of **World War I** (1914) or its end (1918).

With regards to the history of Poland, the beginning is also considered to be 1795 – the Third Partition – after which the Poland disappeared from the map of Europe.

Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune (FR), *The troelfth cake*,  
chalcography by Nicolas Noël Le Mire (FR), 1773,

National Museum in Warsaw



Gravé par Sady.

THE TROELFTH CAKE. | LE GÂTEAU DES ROIS.

Sold by Robt. Sayer, N<sup>o</sup> 53, in Fleet Street.

et se trouve à Paris chez les Libraires, rue St. Clement des Grèves.



# Modernity

This time was also the beginning of modernity and many phenomena that shaped the **modern world**.

The Enlightenment marked creation of the **first constitutions**, and in many countries universal suffrage (still limited by sex, wealth or skin colour) and **compulsory education** were introduced.



Károly Ferenczy (HU), *In front of the posters*, 1891, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

The modern **concept of the nation** was formed in Romanticism. The works of romantic artists remain a canon to this day, just like the repeatedly screened novels from this period.

The **industrial revolution** and successive breakthrough of inventions changed our everyday life forever. To name a few; the railway, electric bulb, and telephone.

Ludwik de Laveaux (PL), *Place de l'Opéra in Paris*, circa 1893,  
National Museum in Warsaw





# The Great War

This **development of civilization**, celebrated, for example, at world exhibitions, was **interrupted** by the outbreak of the Great War.

The immediate cause of war was the murder of the Austrian heir to the throne.

Alfred Roller (AT), World War I poster showing a soldier in a trench holding a grenade (text: “And you? Subscribe to the 7th war loan at the k.k. pr. Öst. Creditanstalt f.H.u.G.”), 1917, Library of Congress









The impact of the development of industry and science (especially chemistry and metallurgy) on the realities of war turned out to be tragic. Improved, **mass-produced equipment** was more lethal than ever before. **Chemical weapons** were also used for the first time.

Thanks to the ability of individual countries to maintain production capacity, the war – instead of lasting only several months – ended after **four long years**.



Karl Friedrich Gsur (AT), *Defensive battle of machine gun division at Gora Sokal on the Bug, July 20, 1915*, 1915, Museum of Military History, Vienna

# Artists in the trenches

Artists were also among soldiers. Oskar Kokoschka, who joined the Austrian army as a volunteer, was seriously wounded on the Eastern Front.

László Mednyánszky worked as a war correspondent on the Austro-Hungarian frontlines.

Artists often utilized their talent in the service – they **portrayed comrades-in-arms**, designed **propaganda posters**, documented war damage, and more.

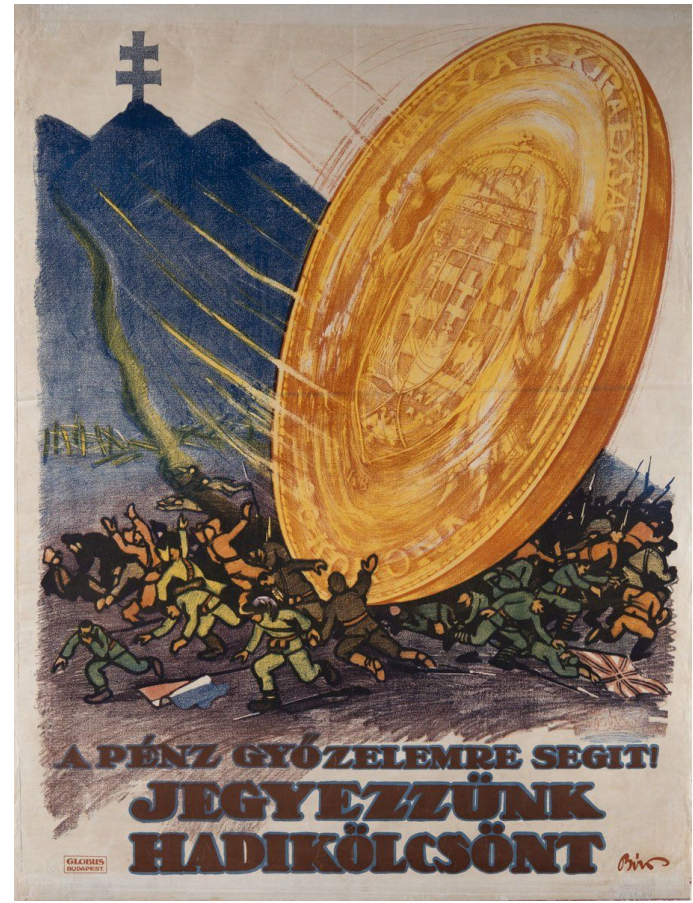


Oskar Kokoschka (AT) as a military volunteer, 1915





Alfred Offner (AT), World War I poster showing soldiers and their weapons behind a barricade of Austrian coins (text: “Subscribe to the 7th war loan, Vienna Commercial Bank”), 1917, Library of Congress



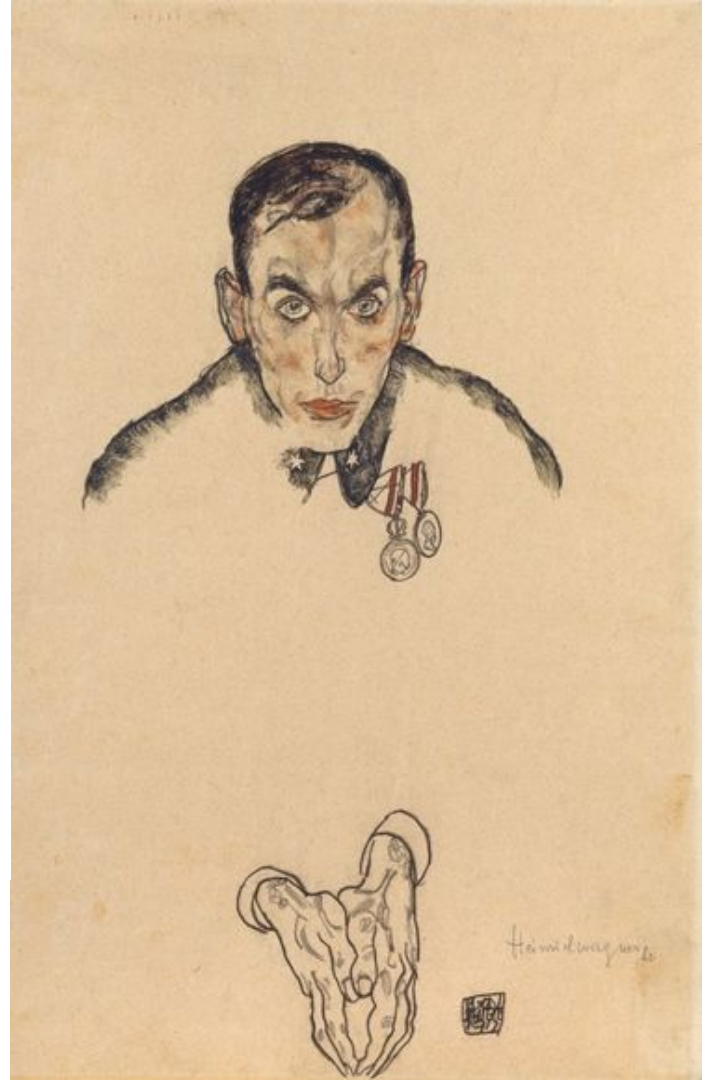
Mihály Biró (HU), World War I poster (text: “Money helps us to victory! Subscribe to war loans!”), 1917, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





László Mednyánszky (HU), *Prisoners of war*,  
1917, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava

Egon Schiele (AT), *Lieutenant Heinrich Wagner*,  
1917, Museum of Military History, Vienna





Leopold Gottlieb, a Polish artist with Jewish roots, served as an official painter in the Polish Legions. He created dozens of portraits that were then reproduced on postcards.



Leopold Gottlieb (PL) portraying colonel Stanisław Schuster-Kruk, 1916, KARTA Center Foundation



Leopold Gottlieb (PL), *In cantonment*, 1915,  
National Museum in Cracow



Leopold Gottlieb (PL), *Portrait of Jan Pryziński*,  
1915/1916, National Museum in Cracow



The Croatian artist Oskar Alexander, also of Jewish origin, likewise became a war painter. He mainly portrayed the soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Aviation Troops.

He was awarded the Imperial Austrian Order of Franz Joseph for his service in the Austro-Hungarian army.



Oskar Alexander (HR), *Military pilot Bernath*, 1916, Museum of Military History, Vienna



Oskar Alexander (HR), *Fokker aircraft in attack*,  
1916, Museum of Military History, Vienna



Oskar Alexander (HR), *Military pilot Stanger*,  
1915, Museum of Military History, Vienna



# Brutality of war

In the art the **horror and cruelty of war** was reflected, represented either literally or symbolically.



Leopold Widlizka (AT), *Family fate*, 1918,  
Museum of Military History, Vienna



Hans Larwin (AT), *Defensive fighting position*, 1915,  
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Alois Hans Schramm (AT), *Guardian of Carpathian Mountains*,  
1914–1915, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



One of the most moving works on this subject was created by the Austrian artist, Albin Egger-Lienz, who briefly served on the front in 1915, but soon became an official war painter.

He painted in 1916 *The Nameless 1914*, showing a number of similar, grey soldiers – cogs in a senseless war machine.



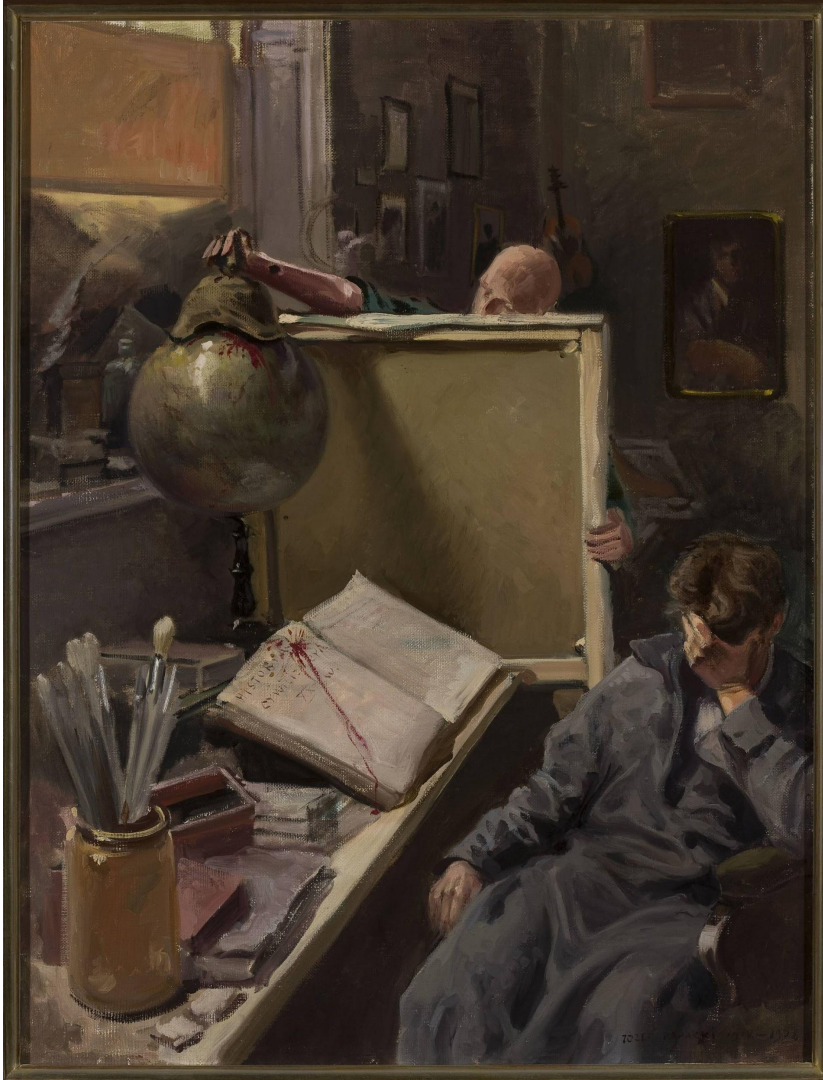
Albin Egger-Lienz (AT), *The Nameless 1914*, 1916, Museum of Military History, Vienna

# Disrupted careers

The war brutally interrupted the careers of many artists, both old and young.

Tadeusz Ajdukiewicz, a painter at the Romanian court since 1904, joined the Polish Legions despite being over 60 years old. He died in 1916 of pneumonia in a military hospital in Cracow.

Józef Rapacki (PL), *Scene in the painter's studio*, 1918–1924, National Museum in Warsaw





The **Spanish flu pandemic** of 1918–1919, however, took the biggest toll. It claimed even more lives than the war itself.

Egon Schiele died in Vienna in 1918. The artist was only 28 years old. A few days earlier, his wife Edith, who was six months pregnant at the time, also passed away.

In the same year, Gustav Klimt also died having suffered a stroke and pneumonia due to the Spanish flu.



Gustav Klimt (AT), *Death and life*, 1910/1915, Leopold Museum, Vienna

Egon Schiele (AT), *Self-portrait*,  
1914, National Gallery Prague



Egon Schiele (AT), *Wife of the artist (Edith Schiele)*, 1917,  
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna





# New European divide

This long and devastating conflict had completely changed the face of Europe. The biggest loser turned out to be **Austria-Hungary**, which **broke up into several countries**.

Treaty of Trianon (1920) marked the new, heavily restricted territory of **Hungary**.



“Distribution of Races in Austria–Hungary” from the *Historical Atlas* by William R. Shepherd, 1911



In a sense, Poles could be considered the winners. It is true that the war had a particularly tragic dimension for them, as many Poles fought in the armies of the invaders (Russia, Germany, Austria) against themselves. In 1918, **Poland** reappeared on the map of Europe – after 123 years of subservience.

After the collapse of Austro-Hungary, **Czechoslovakia** and the **Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes** (later referred to as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) were also established.

Zdzisław Jasiński (PL), *Allegory of the [Polish] victory in 1920*, 1920, National Museum in Warsaw





# Culture after WWI

The end of World War I also brought about changes in art and culture.

Many avant-garde artists around 1900 began to be **regarded as classics** of art and were universally **respected**. They also became mentors and teachers for the next generations.



Wojciech Weiss (PL) during the classes at Cracow Academy of Fine Art, 1933, National Digital Archives, Warsaw

Paris continued to be the main cultural centre of Europe for some time, attracting artists from all over Europe. In the 1920s, other cities, like Berlin or Weimar with the **Bauhaus** also began to play an important role.

In Poland and Czechoslovakia, it was especially important to create **new institutions related to art**, such as art schools or exhibition spaces. It was one of the elements of building an independent and modern state. Part of these activities was the **promotion of national art** abroad, i.e. at world exhibitions.

Polish Hall and sculpture by Henryk Kuna (PL)  
*Rytm* [Rhythm] in the atrium, International Exhibition of Modern  
Decorative and Industrial Arts, 1925, photo by Henri Manuel (FR),  
National Museum in Warsaw

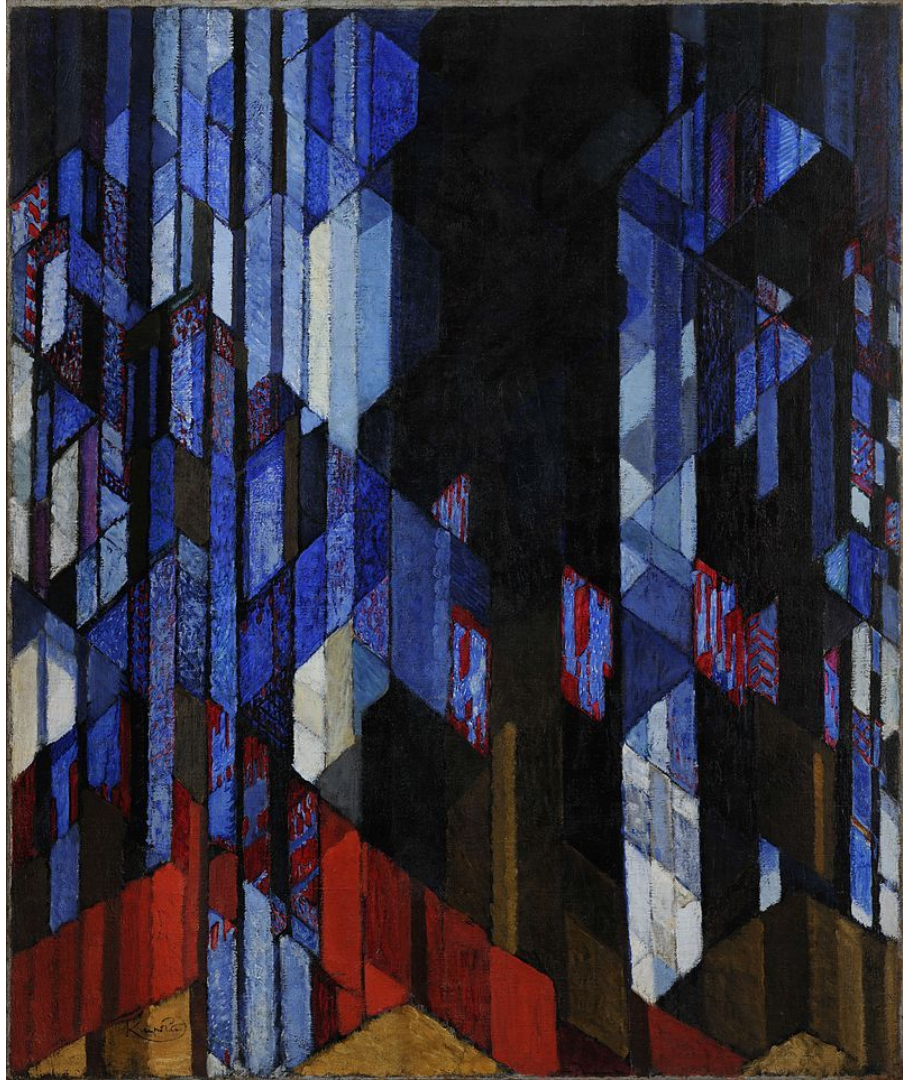




# New styles

At the beginning of the 20th century, new styles of art appeared, including **cubism**, **futurism**, and **expressionism**. Some of them were shaped in opposition to realism, impressionism or symbolism.

František Kupka (CZ),  
*The Cathedral*, 1912–1913,  
Museum Kampa, Prague

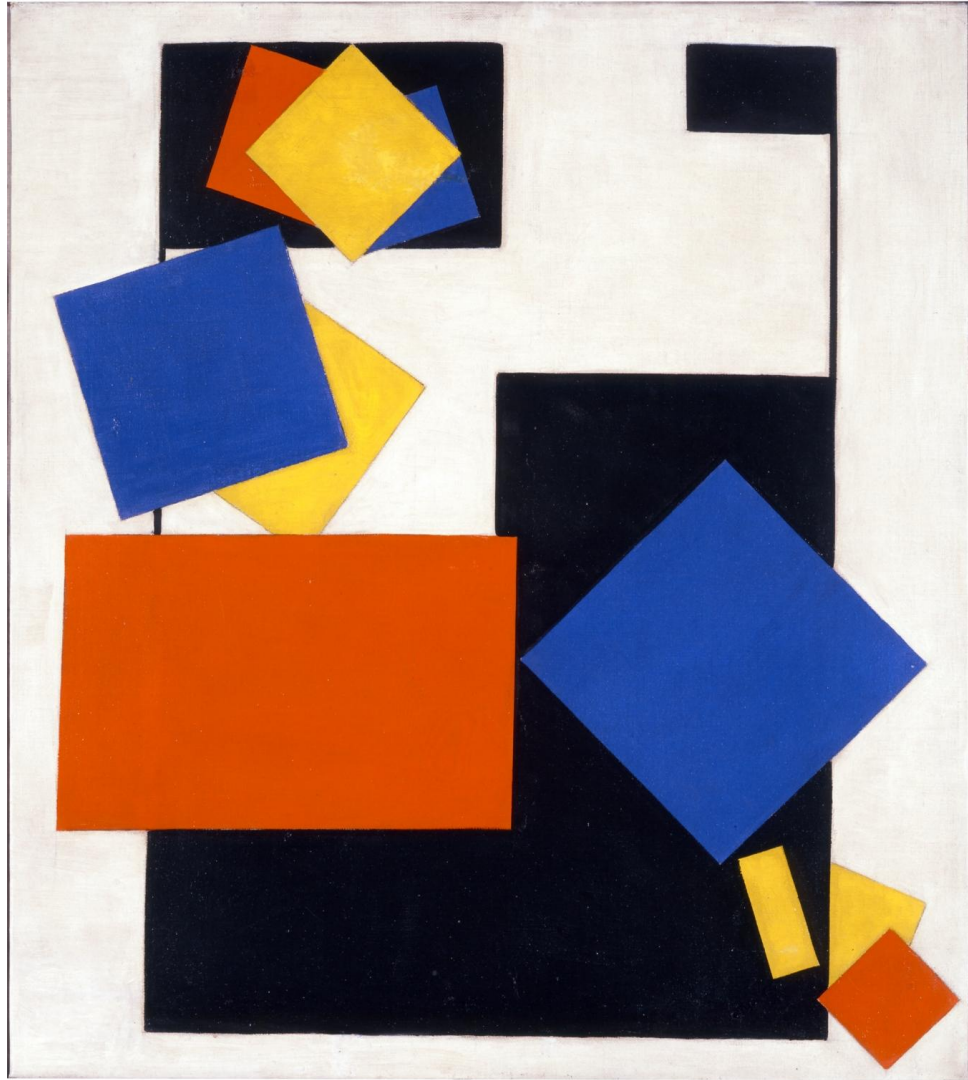


It is especially worth noting the emergence of **abstract art**, who's main assumption was to abandon the need to paint objects or figures.

The finished painting could only be a **composition of colours and shapes**. This trend turned was so ground-breaking that it ignited a new era in the history of art.

Central European artists also created abstract works – for instance Hungarian Vilmos Huszár or Czech František Kupka.

Vilmos Huszár (HU), *Composition – human figure (Sitting Woman)*, 1926, Museum of Art in Łódź





# Austro-Hungarian nostalgia?

After some time, the assessment of the break-up of Austria-Hungary became more complicated. At first it was welcomed with great joy, especially by the Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Croats, who thus could create their own independent states. For them Austria-Hungary was considered as a “prison of nations”.

Over time, these opinions became more nuanced and a **nostalgia for the old empire** emerged. Although Austria-Hungary was a country of numerous social inequalities, political and national tensions, after the difficulties experienced in the 20th century, it began to be considered a land of peace and prosperity.

Ludwig Koch (AT), *Thanks from the Emperor*,  
1915, Wien Museum



Hipolit Lipiński (PL),  
*The Emperor in the Sukiennice  
(Cloth Hall) among the people  
of Cracow*, from the series  
*Inspection trip of Emperor  
Franz Joseph I around Galicia  
in September, 1880*, National  
Museum in Cracow





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