

Prague: 1918–1992

1918
100
2018
CZECH AND SLOVAK
CENTURY

Prague:emotion

Introduction Prague, Czechoslovakia (1918–1992)

For seventy-four years, these two words were like a married couple. Even these days, more than a quarter of a century after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, we still find the odd foreign politician or journalist using the term for today's Czech Republic. Czech citizens are bemused, frustrated, but resigned to it: it seems the word Czechoslovakia has indelibly left its mark in our collective memory.

Prague is praised by visitors mainly for its uniquely preserved historical city centre, with an almost fairytale architectural ambience. The ancient beauty of the centre lets the visitor gloss over the dramatic and, sometimes, tragic moments of the city and country's twentieth-century history. The 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918 is thus an opportunity to reveal to our visitors those aspects of Prague history that have been overshadowed by its older and better-known mementos.

Our 'digest', which you are currently holding, will draw your attention not only to buildings, but also works of art, monuments or other things of note that bring Prague's Czechoslovak era to mind. Each year of the existence of Czechoslovakia is matched by one aspect, though not always with absolute chronological precision. Our aim and hope has been primarily to make our publication captivating, diverse and – we hope – rewarding for Prague's visitors.

Zdeněk Rykr – Prague, 1937, print, 95 x 61,5 cm,
inv. no. 79/99 © Regional Museum in Kolín



Czechoslovak history in a (very small) nutshell

The Czechoslovak Republic was one of the States that emerged from the ashes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the aftermath of the First World War. The newly established state was blessed with an exceptional and learned president – Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk; a highly developed industry; and an ethnically diverse population with numerous national minorities (the largest by far being German). Czechoslovakia faced a host of issues during the first twenty years of its existence – but made a name for itself internationally as a progressive, democratic European state, with a cultural and economic reach beyond its geographical size.

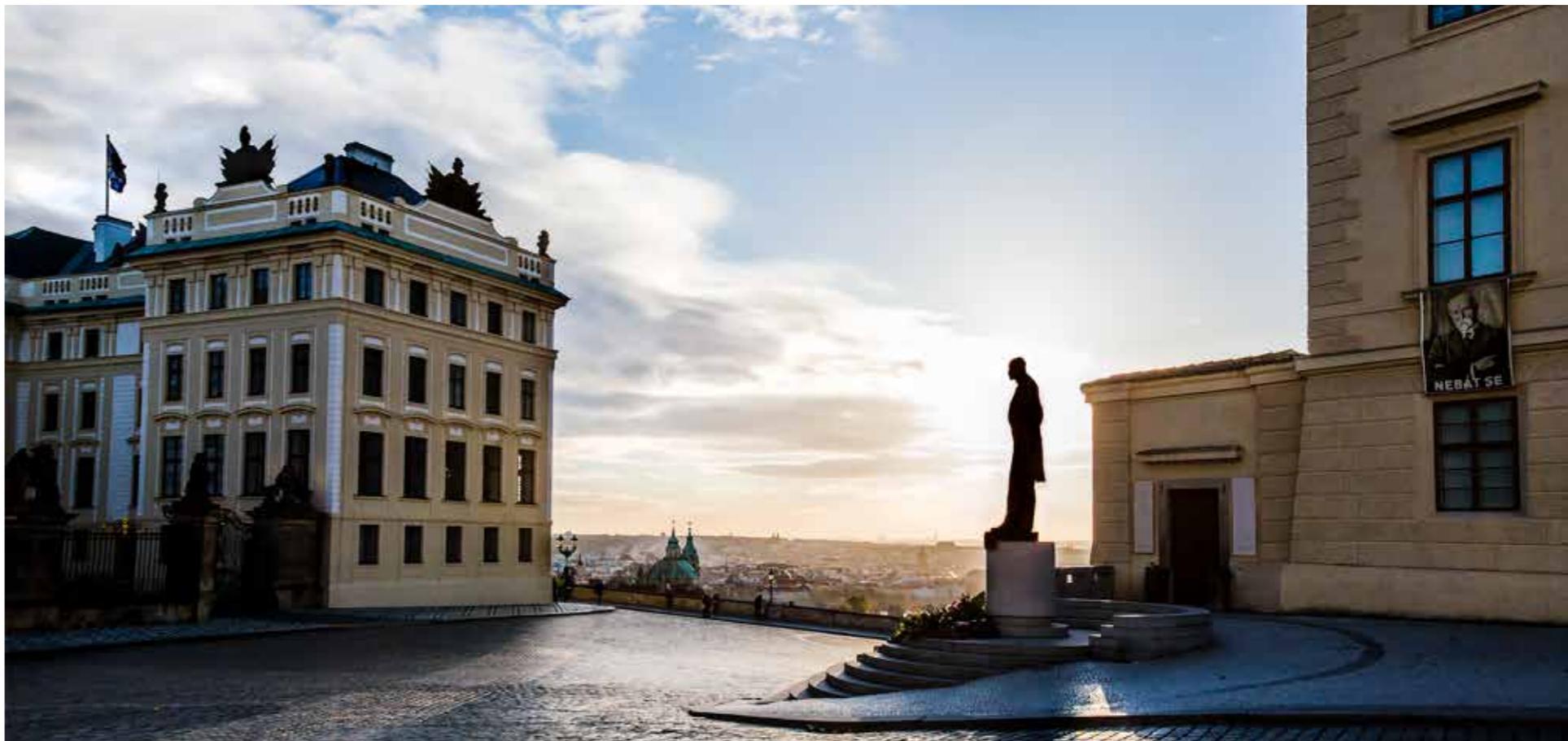
This era was cut short by the signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938 and the subsequent mauling of Czechoslovakia, with the German-speaking border regions (the Sudetenland) annexed to the Reich. In 1939, the Nazi occupation followed, and over time the occupying regime wiped out the vast majority of local Jews, and part of the Roma population. Czechoslovakia was jointly liberated in May 1945 by the armies of the Soviet Union and the United States of America.

The post-war years brought with it a political about-turn to the East. In February 1948, through the coup d'état orchestrated from Moscow, the country became part of the Soviet bloc. The

Communist regime ruled here continuously for over forty years. An all-too-brief breath of fresh air came with the hopeful Prague Spring of 1968, when the reform-minded leadership of the ruling Communist Party tried to introduce democratic changes in the country. The Prague Spring was brutally suppressed by the Warsaw Pact armies' intervention, and all who stood up to the regime were persecuted.

The Communist regime in Czechoslovakia lasted until November 1989, when it fell dramatically during events that most of the world knows as the Velvet Revolution. Incoming democracy also revived Slovak aspirations for self-determination, which the joint Czechoslovak State had never completely fulfilled. On 31 December 1992, Czechoslovakia dissolved by political agreement, and two new successors, the Czech and Slovak republics came into being, on 1 January 1993.

Statue of T. G. Masaryk in Hradčanské Square



1918

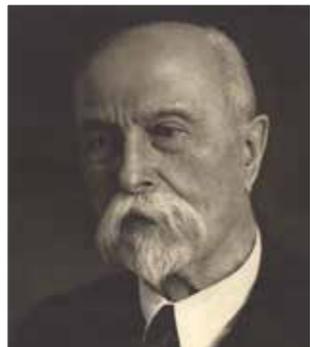
Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, first Czechoslovak President

Statue of T. G. Masaryk

📍 Hradčanské náměstí, Prague 1 – Hradčany
(see photo on pg. 3)

In the midst of Hradčany Square at Prague Castle stands the unmissable statue of the first Czechoslovak President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk ("TGM"). This charismatic leader was the 'main man' of nascent Czechoslovakia.

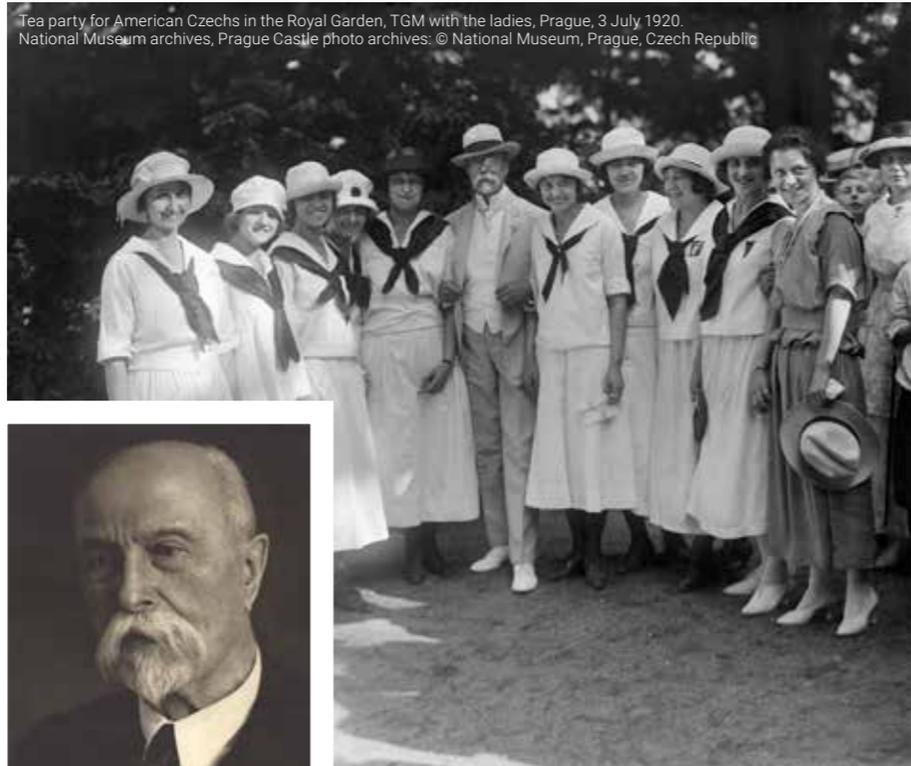
More an academic than a politician, he opted to go into exile on the brink of WWI, so that with the help of the Entente powers (France, Britain, Russia, Italy, and the USA) he would oust the Habsburg monarchy and create a separate country for the Czechs and Slovaks. His task was not only to bring round conservative opponents throughout Europe, but to get international allies for the proposed Republic. Overcoming obstacles, he made it happen. On 28 October 1918, the new country of Czechoslovakia appeared on the European map and TGM became its President. Loved and admired by his nation, he led the Republic for four electoral terms. His authority brought together political opponents, fostered fledgling democracy and kept the democratic spirit of the country going, even as Europe faced the threat of fascism.



♣ Portrait of first Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850-1937). Print issued by the Ministry of information in 1945, once owned by a veteran of the Czech legion, National Museum collections, H8-19889. © National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic

The work of sculptors Josef Vajce, Jan Bartoš and architect Jiří Rathouský was commissioned in 2000 for the square by the last Czechoslovak, and the first Czech President, Václav Havel, mindful of the

task of living up to Masaryk's visionary legacy. The location of the statue is symbolic; looking toward the seat of the Presidency, first established as such by TGM.



Tea party for American Czechs in the Royal Garden, TGM with the ladies, Prague, 3 July 1920. National Museum archives, Prague Castle photo archives: © National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic

1919

František Kupka: Cosmic Spring – Creation

Museum Kampa

📍 U Sovových mlýnů 503/2, Prague 1 – Malá Strana
🌐 www.museumkampa.cz

František Kupka (1871-1957) was an exceptional Czech painter and graphic artist, a prominent figure of modern art. After a childhood spent in Eastern Bohemia he went on to study in Vienna and then to Paris, where he settled permanently. His earliest works carried the spirit of realism and symbolism. Kupka was deeply interested in philosophical and spiritual thought and in contemporary findings in the natural sciences, as well as music theory.

After 1900, Kupka found his way to the unfettered use of colour, which became the very essence of his painting. By 1912, he was exhibiting entirely abstract works. The critics reacted to his paintings with derision, but Kupka was undeterred. His inspiration for further works came from movement and its fluidity. After that, his interest turned to abstraction inspired by organic forms, natural and cosmic, aspects of birth, formation and growth; as indeed in the painting Cosmic Spring – Creation.

Kupka's work did not find recognition for quite some time, also due to his being staunchly apart, reluctant to join group initiatives, or to align with any '-isms'. František Kupka does, however, undoubtedly belong among the most original artists of the 20th century and the world's foremost pioneers of abstract art.

Image available in printed version only.

1920

Jože Plečnik – The South Gardens of Prague Castle

The South Gardens of Prague Castle

📍 access from Hradčanské Square, from the third courtyard of Prague Castle, or the gate above the Old Castle stairs

🕒 Open daily from 1 Apr to 31 Oct.

🌐 www.hrad.cz

Prague Castle has always been the Royal residence of Czech Kings and also the seat of several Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire. Following Czechoslovak independence, the President of the Republic opted to house his office here. Remodelling the Castle with due regard to history while meeting the needs of a President of the new Republic was no easy task. The challenge was taken up by one of the best architects of interwar Europe, the Slovenian native, Jože Plečnik.

‘Bring the Castle out of Monarchy into Democracy’ was the resolute remit by T. G. Masaryk. The year 1920, when he entrusted Plečnik, sparked off a period of hectic activity. Within a few years the Castle grounds changed fundamentally, with no loss to the valuable historical buildings; the architect sensitively incorporated them. New paving, flag masts, the Columnar Hall as the entranceway to the ceremonial areas, a granite obelisk towering next to the Cathedral, and the ever-stunning Bull Staircase, through which one enters the South gardens of Prague Castle from the third courtyard.



© Prague City Archives

The idea to create gardens along the original medieval fortifications, where plants had been grown since the Renaissance, was brilliant. Indeed, this place offers a most enchanting vista of the entire city. The sunny garden terraces were

originally private, a place for the President to work and repose, but TGM had them soon opened up to the general public. This location is one of the most spectacular places in Prague, and one no visitor should miss.



1921

Lucerna Palace – the society heart of Prague

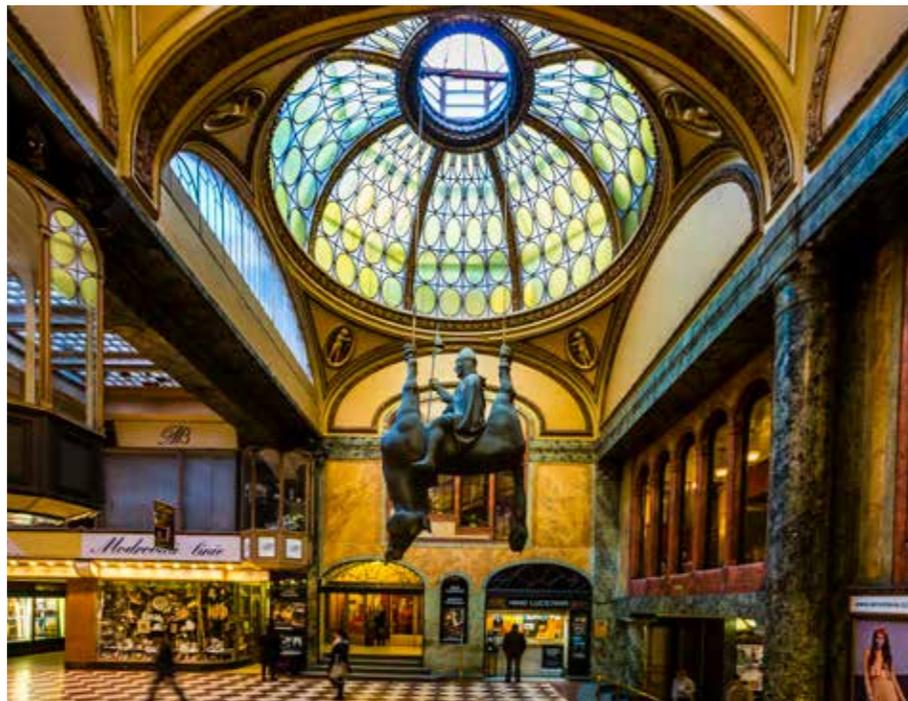
Palác Lucerna

📍 Štěpánská 61, Prague 1 – New Town
🌐 www.lucerna.cz

Lucerna Palace near Wenceslas Square stands witness to the beginnings of Czech modernism, though its eclectic design bears traces of late Art Nouveau. When completed in 1921, it became the most visited social centre of the city. This was, however, not in the lifetime of its builder, designer and entrepreneur, Ing. Václav Havel, the grandfather of President Václav Havel; his bust now adorns the staircase.

Here under one roof were offices, studios, apartments with terraces, a girls' boarding house, a cinema, two banquet halls and several restaurants. In what is now the popular Lucerna Music Bar, there used to be a cabaret, popular with the best jazz musicians of interwar Europe. The Lucerna Cinema featured Prague's first audio cinematograph. A major draw was the first mall / covered walkway in the metropolis, today featuring the provocative suspended equestrian statue of the Czech patron St. Wenceslas, by David Černý (page 84).

The Great Hall was the technical wonder of its time, with its reinforced concrete structure anchored on a concrete slab recessed 14 metres underground. The hall hosted many musical legends before and after WWII, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, and Count Basie among them. Quite a building, and no mistake!



1922

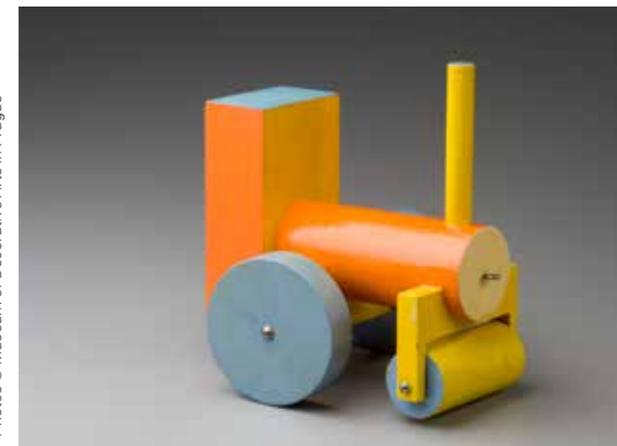
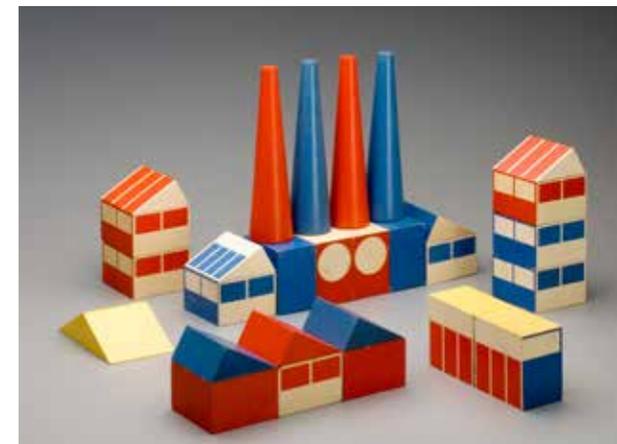
Ladislav Sutnar Toys

Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

📍 17. listopadu 2, Prague 1 – Old Town
🌐 www.upm.cz

Stylized wooden toys by the accomplished Czech graphic designer Ladislav Sutnar, whose design was custom-made for the State Education Institute in the 1920s, makes them the first truly modern Czech toys.

The development and form of children's toys at the beginning of the 20th century was greatly influenced by modern trends, with toys being perceived as art objects, while modern pedagogical theory also played a major role. The toy's purpose was not only to develop the child's imagination, sensory perception and motor skills, but also to foster good taste and aesthetic sensibility. The result was a move away from traditional naturalism toward abstract concepts, using simplified geometric shapes and bright colours. Also, traditional motifs were updated – cars, machinery, factories. Hand-made and painted replicas of Sutnar's stylized animals – the elephant, rhino, camel and walrus – can be bought to this day in shops that offer top-tier Czech design. Surviving prototypes can be seen in Prague's Museum of Decorative Arts.



Photos © Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

1923

Legiobanka – Czech national decorativism in full bloom

Palác Archa

Na Poříčí 1046/24, Prague 1 – New Town

www.palacarcha.cz

Anyone passing along Na Poříčí Street will find their gaze locking onto an unusually monumental façade. This is the Legiobanka, i.e. the Bank of the Czechoslovak Legions, in the rondo-cubist style.

When first completed in 1923 by architect Josef Gočár it became the go-to example of the style, which used geometric shapes, cubes, prisms and pyramids, but softend their edges with an arc. The monumental façade is complemented by sculptural details and reliefs. The sculptors entrusted with the decoration, Jan Štursa and Otto Gutfreund, were the very best in their time. Their sculptures remind us of the importance of the Czechoslovak Legions – troops formed during WWI throughout Europe, to support the winning Entente powers, but above all the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia.

Although the Bank is long gone, the place itself was aptly remodelled a few years ago into a pleasant space, not just for offices, but also for the experimental theatre Archa.



1924

Adria Palace – rondo-cubism with Mediterranean accents

Palác Adria

Jungmannova 31, Prague 1 – New Town

www.caffeadria.cz

Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà was the name of the Italian company for which architects Josef Zásche and Pavel Janák built this distinctive Prague HQ. The reinforced concrete skeleton is decked with a monumental façade, whose rondo-cubist style alternates arches and triangles, supplemented with figural and floral motifs. This Czech national style is topped off with impressive tower shields. Above the terrace is a Maritime sculpture – the client was a company based in the Italian port city of Trieste and its Prague branch combined marine and terrestrial insurance. The entrance into the imposing hall, adorned with polished marble, culminates on the gable wall with a figural rendition of the zodiac and symbols of day & night, and the sun & moon.

The building also left its mark in modern history. In the mid-20th century, the basement was fitted out for performances of the popular Laterna Magika multimedia theatre (page 51). Toward the end of 1989, it came to house the Civic Forum headed by Václav Havel; this political grouping, made up largely of former dissidents was able within a few weeks to bring the country from Communism into a nascent Democracy.

In the summer the pleasant terrace of the second-floor Cafe offers views of the surrounding architecture.



1925

The Liberated Theatre – the icon of Prague avant-garde

The Werich Villa

📍 U Sovových mlynů 501/7, Prague 1 – Malá Strana
🌐 www.werichovavila.cz

The Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené divadlo) was the legendary Prague avant-garde theatre scene, founded in 1925, whose popular productions were imbued with Dadaism, Futurism and Poetism.

The most famous era of the theatre is intertwined with the duo of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, abbreviated as V+W, not forgetting the composer Jaroslav Ježek (J). V+W drew inspiration from a varied mix of sources, from the clowning Fratellini brothers, through silent slapstick, to the French literary avant-garde. V+W comedy was strongly satirical, full of verbal wit and improvisation. Its strong musical component came in the form of songs by Ježek, many of which are still popular. (Jaroslav Ježek was a gifted composer and pianist, whose works included chamber and orchestral compositions as well as jazz, e.g. “Bugatti Step”).

In the 1930s, the political climate in Czechoslovakia became stifling, and the trio of V+W+J went off to the United States. After the onset of Communism, V+W went their separate ways. Jiří Voskovec emigrated to the USA, where he continued an acting career that included Sidney Lumet’s famous

movie, Twelve Angry Men. Jan Werich stayed in Communist Czechoslovakia, and despite some friction with the regime continued his literary, theatrical and film work. An exhibition on V+W+J is to be found in Jan Werich’s former villa on Kampa Island, recently opened as a cultural space and a museum.

A poster of the Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich play ‘Heaven on Earth’, the Liberated Theatre, b. d. National Museum collections, H6C-7388
© National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic →



1926

Edison transformer station: understated industrial elegance

Edison transformer station

📍 Jeruzalémská 2, Prague 1 – New Town

The building of the former Edison transformer station was among the first examples of functionalist architecture in downtown Prague. It was built in 1926-1930 as designed by František Albert Libra, an experienced architect of industrial buildings.

With the expanding electricity network in Prague, new transformer stations sprang up to serve as a link between the backbone network and the end consumer. The Edison transformer station also served in this capacity until the mid-1990s. Architecturally, the building impresses with its tiered receding façade, which lends the building a unique dynamic, as well as the reinforced concrete wall frontage with distinctive bands of steel windows.

After the building was completed in 1930, the work was crowned with a sculpture by the avant-garde Czech sculptor Zdeněk Pešánek (page 25), one of the first kinetic sculptures in Europe. Pešánek incorporated different types of electric lighting and neons in his works, and was an apt choice for the Electrical Enterprises company. His was a world-first light-sculpture in a public space; unfortunately, the original was destroyed before WWII.



1927

Praga Alfa 6 – a legendary six-cylinder beauty

Sightseeing tours in a Praga: Prague Chauffeurs

- 📍 www.praguechauffeurs.com
- 📍 Pragovka Art District, Kolbenova 923/34A, Prague 9 – Vysočany
- 📍 www.pragovka.com

The Praga company was founded in 1907. During its existence it manufactured cars and trucks, buses, motorcycles, aircraft and agricultural and military equipment. In nearly each area, Praga produced a range of models, some of which shaped history.

The Alfa brand was used by the car-maker Praga, based in Prague's Libeň, from before WWI. Until the second half of the twenties it was used for smaller cars with four-cylinder engines. In September 1927, the Praga Alfa 6 debuted in Paris at the autosalon, featuring a water-cooled six-cylinder SV 1496 cc engine. Alfa reached a top speed of 80 km/h and the car's fuel consumption was 12 litres of gas per 100 kilometres.

Alfa was produced in a large variety of bodywork designs: Prague's elite swanned through the streets in the six-seater limousine, while the young cards broke the hearts of lady passers-by in the open-top version. Alfa also came as a four-door, four-seater Phaeton or the two-seater Coupe.

These days the Pragovka factory complex in Libeň serves as an artistic and cultural centre; and is to include a museum of the brand in the near future.



Source: Jan Tuček archives



© Archiv Veteran Car Club Praha

Praga



© Praga klub z.s.



Source: Jan Tuček archives

1928

Trade Fair Palace – a functionalist temple of modern art

The National Gallery in Prague – Trade Fair Palace

- 📍 Dukelských hrdinů 47, Prague 7 – Holešovice
- 📍 www.ngprague.cz

When entering the National Gallery's modern art collections site, it seems incredible that this functionalist building – once the largest in the world – is having its 90th birthday. Its scale impressed even the father of functionalism himself, Le Corbusier. The Palace, the work of architects Oldřich Tyl and Josef Fuchs, is 120 m long, 60 m wide and 30 m high.

The Trade Fair Palace was built to host trade fairs and industrial expos, amid the industrial district of Holešovice. Its uniqueness lay not only in its scale, materials and form, but also its functionality. Some of the interiors were designed to allow for adjustable breadth, with terraces for catering, and nooks for taking a breather.

Yet Prague almost lost this architectural gem. In August of 1974, a fire broke out in the Palace, which took 13 days to put out, leaving a huge mess. The building was, however, eventually put to rights, by the acclaimed Studio SIAL. Today, the National Gallery has further great plans for the edifice; in addition to the building itself, you can admire here the works of modern 19th and 20th century painters (e.g. Picasso, Braque, Renoir, van Gogh, Klimt, and Kupka).



Photo ©National Gallery in Prague



1929

Temple of St Archangel Michael on Petřín Hill

The Temple of St. Archangel Michael

📍 The Kinsky Gardens, Prague 5 – Smíchov
50° 4' 42.3" N, 14° 23' 54.3" E

The wooden Orthodox church with its shingle roof standing in Kinsky Garden exemplifies the folk buildings from Carpathian Ruthenia, today's Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine. It was built in the second half of the 17th Century, near Mukachevo. In 1929 it passed to the city of Prague as an example of traditional folk buildings, and as a diplomatic gesture, since Ruthenia was at that time part of Czechoslovakia and Prague was its capital too.

After much deliberation, the Petřín hillside was chosen for its site, to place this wooden treasure on a height, among green trees, just like it had been back home. The timbered building has three distinct onion turrets. The main steeple stands above the space reserved for women. The spires are polychromed in three colors, white, green and red, symbolizing faith, hope and love. The floor is simple; beaten clay. A wooden awning protected any worshippers who could not fit inside from bad weather.

Today, the temple is used by the Orthodox Church. It is open to the public only at times of worship on Sundays and Mondays or for special occasions.



1930

The Müller Villa – Prague's gem by Adolf Loos

The Müller Villa

📍 Nad Hradním vodojemem 14,
Prague 6 – Střešovice

🌐 www.mullerovavila.cz

📌 Please note that visits to the villa have to be booked in advance at the above website.

This – at first glance austere – villa is one of the touchstones of modern architecture worldwide. Its owner, František Müller, then one of the leading figures of Czech society, entrusted his residence project to one of the greatest architects of the time – Adolf Loos, whose provocative notions about the prime role of function in architecture set the course of theory and practice in the field.

The villa project caused consternation at the time. The blocky building without decorations strongly contrasted with contemporary historicist architecture. The Planning Office even repeatedly refused to issue Loos with a building permit. Nevertheless, the Villa did get built, between 1928 and 1930. Its uniqueness is fully revealed inside – a fascinating, segmented space with diverse floors and rooms that flow into each other in the spirit of what Loos termed his "Raumplan". Also distinctive is his use of colour and precious materials. This peerless, luxurious and timeless house heavily influenced a whole generation of Czech architects.



Photos Martin Polák
© Prague City Museum

1931

The Prague Zoological Garden

The Prague Zoological Garden
📍 U Trojského zámku 3, Prague 7 – Troja
🌐 www.zoopraha.cz

After several failed attempts to establish a zoological garden in Prague at the end of the 19th century, the initiative was taken up by a teacher and noted ornithologist, Jiří Janda (pictured right), who saw it through to completion and became its first Director. The Zoo was opened in 1931 and is now the second most visited tourist destination in the Czech Republic, after Prague Castle. Thanks to its unique location it ranks with the most beautiful zoos in the world; its varied terrain offers up to 10 km of walking paths, taking you through the 12 pavilions and more than 150 exhibits.

The Zoo prides itself on its Valley of the Elephants, where visitors can see a sizeable herd of Indian elephants; its aquarium with the world's largest amphibians – the critically endangered Chinese Giant Salamander; or its great Indonesian jungle hot-house. Always a hit with visitors is the ever-growing family of lowland gorillas, with their charismatic alpha-male, Richard. In 2017 the Zoo was rated fifth best in the world.



The Prague Zoo main building © Prague Zoo archives



Jiří Janda, Prague Zoo's first director with an elephant named Baby © Prague Zoo archives

1932

Church of the Most Sacred heart: a Noah's Ark set in greenery

Church of the Most Sacred Heart of our Lord
📍 Jiřího z Poděbrad, Prague 3 – Vinohrady
🌐 www.srdcepane.cz

Shortly after the formation of Czechoslovakia, when Prague became the capital of the new State, it also grew substantially by absorbing its suburbs. It was then that the idea first arose to build a church for the people of the new Vinohrady district. The quality of architectural design was a major consideration and a public tender was announced. Over 30 entries were received, yet the task went to an architect who had not initially even participated – however, experts considered him the best: the Slovene Jože Plečnik, long-active as a professor of architecture in Prague (also see page 6). Going from design to implementation took a long 10 years.

Plečnik's intention was to create a kind of modern Noah's Ark from simple glazed bricks, with a dominant wide tower. The faithful were to enter an undivided plain interior, reminiscent of ancient temples. Only small crosses on the walls and windows beneath the roof with modern stained glass decorate this space, with a larger-than life portrayal of Jesus Christ. Although not overseen by Plečnik, his vision was realized. Architect Otto Rothmayer, Plečnik's trusted pupil, had a free hand in choosing sculptors and craftsmen to complete the building. The result is a temple like no other, well worth a visit.

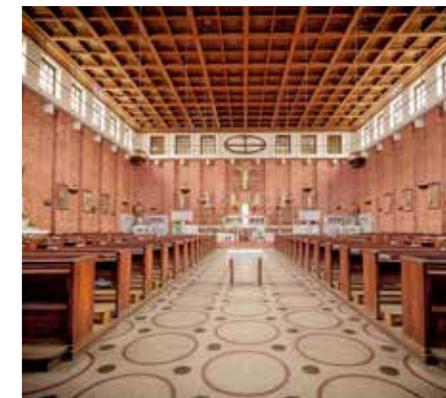


Photo by © N°8, CC BY 2.0
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30328223>



1933

Barrandov Studio – a Czech Hollywood above the Vltava

Barrandov Studio

📍 Kříženeckého nám. 322/5,
Prague 5 – Hlubočepy
🌐 www.barrandov.cz

Prague played a major role in the formation and development of Czech cinema and film. 1933 heard the first clapperboard fall in new studios at Barrandov, still the biggest film studios in the Czech Republic and among the biggest in Europe. Over more than eighty years, the Studio has helped make some 3,000 sound films – among them Mission: Impossible (2x), the James Bond film Casino Royale, two parts of the Chronicles of Narnia series and The Bourne Identity, the first Jason Bourne film.

Barrandov Studios were founded by Miloš Havel, a successful entrepreneur in the film industry, moving his studios there from Vinohrady in the 1930s. On the hill over the Vltava River his brother Václav had built the Terasy luxury restaurant, soon the top venue for Prague society. This was quickly followed by the modern film-studio complex, with its dominant central building in the functionalist style.

Barrandov Studios today are highly regarded for film production with 13 studios (incl. one of the



biggest soundproofed studios in Europe), extensive backlots, and one of the largest costume and prop collections in Europe. Since 2014, the main building features the Filmpoint exhibition space, letting visitors take a peek behind the scenes of classic and recent film and television projects.



'Ecstasy' (Director: Gustav Machatý)

The year Barrandov Studios opened Czechoslovakia hosted the premiere of the iconic film by Gustav Machatý, called Ecstasy, the internationally best known Czech film of the pre-war period.

This love-triangle drama captivated with its artistic merit (metaphorical imagery, use of light & music), while at the same time causing scandal for its provocatively erotic scenes, unprecedented at the time. The scene where the heroine, portrayed by the lovely Hedy Lamarr (soon to establish herself in the USA as a film actress and, later, inventor) bathes naked and then hides behind a bush, was one of the first cinematic female nudity scenes. The film was even denounced by the Pope; Lamarr's husband spent over \$5 million in an unsuccessful attempt to buy up all existing copies of the film. Despite the problems with censorship and fickle audience response, Ecstasy won Machatý the Best Director Prize at the 1934 Venice festival.



1934

Zdenek Rykr – a genius with a passion for chocolate

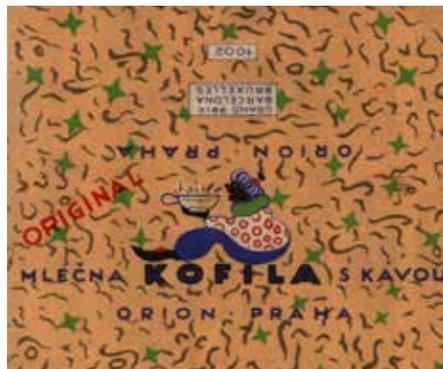
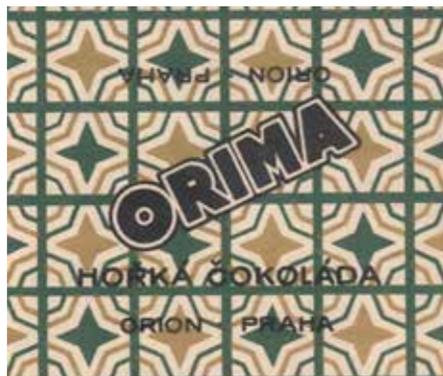
'Zdenek Rykr and the chocolate factory', publ. KANT, 2016 available at e.g. Koenig Books, National Gallery in Prague – Trade Fair Palace Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague
17. listopadu 2, Praha 1 - Old Town
www.upm.cz

Zdenek Rykr (1900-1940) is a fascinating figure in Czech fine and applied art, whose work continues gaining belated recognition. This self-taught artist, archaeologist and art historian by training was never admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts. While in his fine art he employed both classical and contemporary styles, his advertising work is clearly modern and undoubtedly visionary.

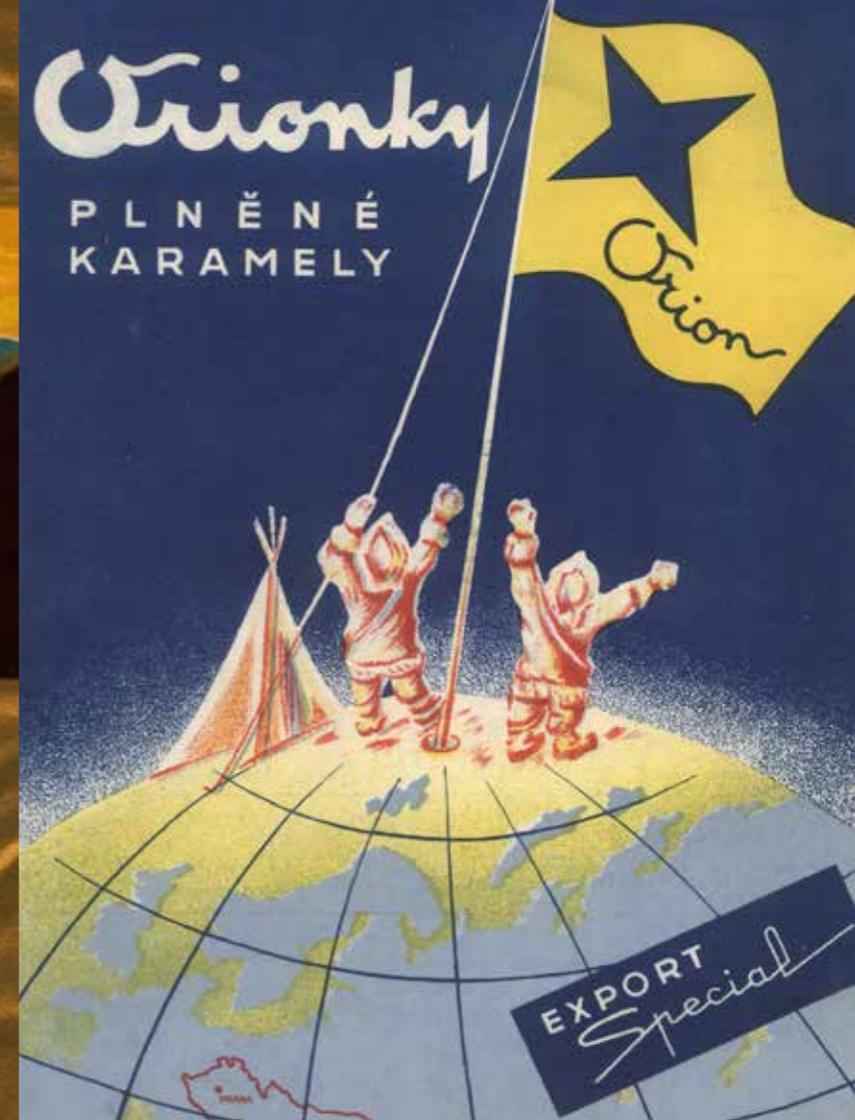
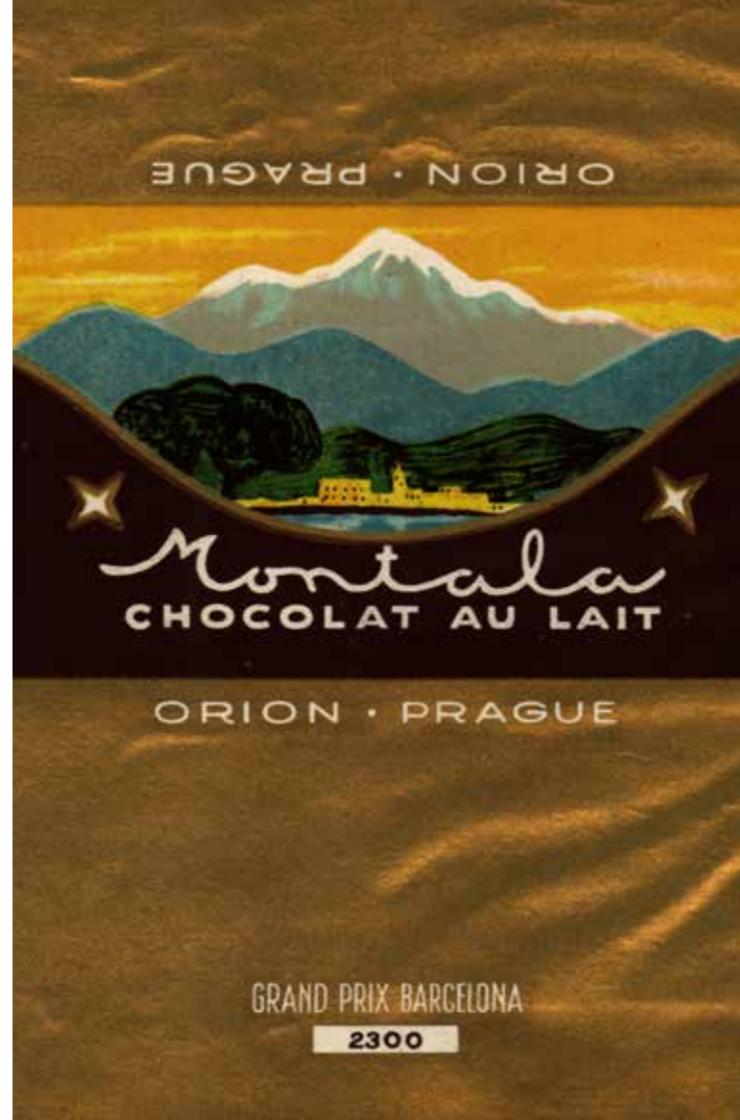
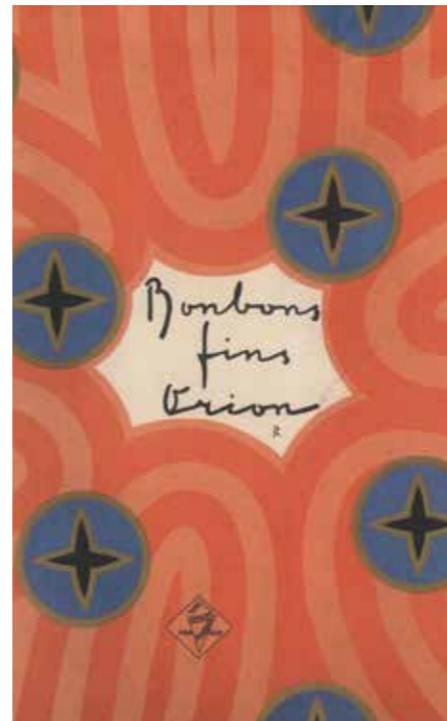
Back in 1921, aged only 21, Zdenek Rykr started out by designing wrappers, promotional leaflets and posters for the Orion company, one of the largest manufacturers of chocolate and sweets in inter-war Czechoslovakia. The refinement and creativeness of Orion chocolate packaging was peerless. The artist worked for Orion for eighteen years, until 1939. Rykr's idea of giving Orion its signature chocolate star, his signature cursive script font for the brand, theme and the motif of a Moor on the wrapper of the popular Kofila bars all testify to the young self-made artist's talent.

There is a personal tragedy aspect to the broad and fascinating creativity of Zdenek Rykr - in 1940,

the pressure of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany drove Rykr to suicide. Interest in Rykr's work is growing and he is now hailed as a genius of marketing design.



Orion chocolate and candy wrappers of the 1920s and 1930s, Paper, print, Nestlé Česko s.r.o.



1935

The Prague Electrical Enterprises building – a flamboyant palace to electrification

📍 Bubenská 1, Prague 7 – Holešovice
🌐 www.bubenska.cz

The former building of Prague Electrical Enterprises is one of the most prominent functionalist buildings in Prague, comprising a number of unique technical solutions and an interior exemplary of the technically conceived monumental architecture of the 1930s.

The project grew out of the requirement of Prague Electrical Enterprises to bring all administrative staff under one roof. The architectural competition was won by Adolf Beneš and Josef Kříž; the construction budget was for its time staggering, at 52 million crowns. The building was inaugurated on 7 March 1935, back then the biggest office building in Prague, large enough for 1100 officials.

The building pioneered some unusual technical solutions. Especially so, the 'Carrier' heating and air-conditioning system, allowing for draught-free ventilation and heating of the building. The basement, given its floodplain location, was fitted with a special drainage system. The unique façade of the building utilizes frost-proof ceramic plates.



1936

Zdeněk Pešánek's 'Reclining Torso' – a pioneering work of kinetic art

📍 The National Gallery in Prague – Trade Fair Palace
📍 Dukelských hrdinů 47, Prague 7 – Holešovice
🌐 www.ngprague.cz

Among the pioneers of kinetic art is the Czech sculptor and architect, Zdeněk Pešánek (1896-1965). His background was in classical sculpture, the principles of which he applied in his kinetic-light sculptures. He was fascinated by light aesthetics, colourful music, and cosmic visions of the future.

At the Paris International Expo in 1937 he exhibited two works, the kinetic-light sculpture cycle '100 Years of Electricity' and the 'Spa Fountain'. The exhibition was to present Czechoslovakia as a democratic state, industrially strong, and culturally refined. Prague Electric Enterprises were seen through Pešánek's works as spanning technology and art; both his works won medals.

The fountain was circular, with three human torsos in the middle. The main element of the piece was light emanating from the translucent torsos, rhythmically lit by internal light bulbs and neon tubes. After the exhibition, the work was moved to Prague; it did not find a public site, however, contrary to the author's wishes. Pešánek's works received recognition only in the mid-1960s. Today, a torso from the sculpture is exhibited in the collection of modern and contemporary art of the National Gallery in Prague at the Trade Fair Palace.



1937

Czech surrealism – Jindřich Štyrský, 'From my Journal'

The National Gallery in Prague – Trade Fair Palace

📍 Dukelských hrdinů 47, Prague 7 – Holešovice
🌐 www.ngprague.cz

The First Czechoslovak Republic period was characterized by a distinctively Western cultural orientation. It was especially the cultural goings-on in France - a major ally - that the media widely reported. Czechoslovak artists often went to Paris for inspiration.

Surrealism first came to Czechoslovakia via a news report about André Breton's 1924 Surrealist Manifesto. Within a year, the Czech painters Jindřich Štyrský (1899-1942) and Toyen (1902-1980) visited the first Paris Surrealist exhibition, made contacts and stayed on for three years. They contributed greatly to the spread of Surrealist notions in Czechoslovakia. In addition to painting, Štyrský devoted himself to graphics, collage, photography, scenography, poetry and art theory; his breadth of knowledge and ceaseless creativity greatly shaped the inter-war art scene.

When in 1934 the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was established, Štyrský and Toyen were among its founding members. André Breton himself came to give talks in Prague, and contacts continued until the beginning of the War. After WWII, the Group resumed its activities and remains active to this day. Current members include the film-maker and artist Jan Švankmajer.



Jindřich Štyrský – 'From my Journal', 1933 © National Gallery in Prague

1938

The National Memorial at Vítkov

The Vítkov Memorial

📍 U Památníku 1900, Prague 3 – Žižkov
🌐 www.nm.cz

The National Memorial, one of the most visible landmarks of the Prague skyline, was built atop Vítkov Hill in the district of Žižkov to honour Czechoslovak Legionnaires and to celebrate the creation of Czechoslovakia. The cornerstone was laid in 1928, but it was only in 1938 that the building opened to the public.

All was soon to change, however, with the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and WWII. Part of the Museum's collections had to be hidden, kept safe from the invaders. The Memorial was occupied and sealed, on the orders of the Reichsprotektor.

After the War, repairs began. In 1948, the Communists took power, and the new regime had another purpose for the Memorial – it was to become, Soviet-style, a mausoleum for the first Communist President Klement Gottwald. (Despite the assistance of Soviet experts, the embalming effort failed and Gottwald had to be cremated.) In 1950, the Memorial came to include a sculpture of the legendary Hussite military leader Jan Žižka, still one of the largest equestrian statues in the world.

Today, the Memorial houses the military-historical exhibit of the National Museum. Visitors also get to go up to the very top of the Memorial, giving a 360-degree panoramic view of Prague.



1939

Nicholas Winton statue and the Farewell Memorial

Prague Main Railway Station

Wilsonova 300/8, Prague 2 – Vinohrady

Two different memorials at the Prague Main Railway Station tell one of the most moving stories of World War II. Sir Nicholas Winton (1909-2015) was a British stockbroker and humanitarian worker who in 1939 saved 669 mostly Jewish children in German-occupied Czechoslovakia from transport to the concentration camps, by securing their departure by train to the United Kingdom.

After the Nazis came to power, several organizations were helping the persecuted to emigrate from Germany and occupied territories, among them the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC). In addition to financial assistance, these organizations sought to negotiate with the authorities of states willing to accept the refugees. In December 1938, one of the BCRC workers, Martin Blake, asked his friend Nicholas Winton to skip a skiing holiday in Switzerland and go to Prague instead, to help the BCRC Prague Office organize the children's transports. Each child needed a foster family in the UK and a deposit of £50, after which they could obtain a British Visa and residence permit. After leaving Prague, Winton coordinated the adoptions from London. He looked for foster parents, dealt with the adoption authorities and collected contributions, all alongside his daytime job. Meanwhile, the new head of the BCRC Prague branch, Trevor Chadwick, got the necessary

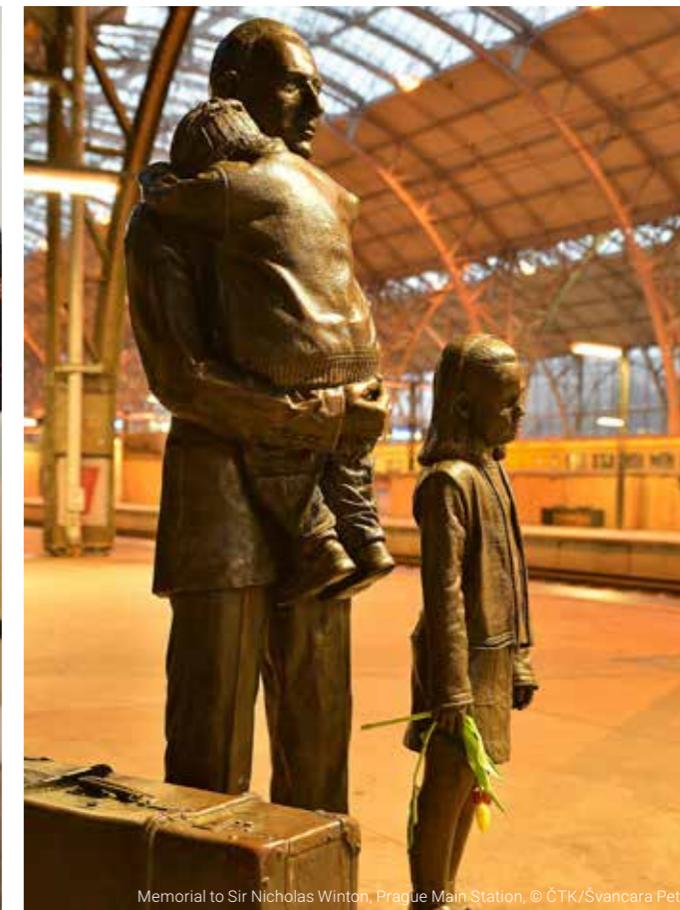
documents from parents and secured travel permits from the German occupying authorities. All this under the watchful eyes of the Gestapo.

Winton and his colleagues managed to organize eight transports between March and August 1939. The last successful 'Kindertransport' was dispatched on 2 August 1939, bringing the number of rescued children to 669. Nicholas Winton never regarded what he did as exceptional and never sought publicity. It was only in 1988 that historian Elizabeth Maxwell broke the story. Nicholas Winton was then invited to the BBC programme *That's Life*, where he unexpectedly found the audience full of now-adult Jewish children whose lives he'd helped to save.

The statue of Sir Nicholas Winton with two children is on the first platform of Prague's Main Station. The plaque reads: 'With deep gratitude, dedicated to Sir Nicholas Winton and all compassionate people who by eight train transports to Great Britain in 1939 rescued 669 children from the horrors of World War II, and to commemorate the 15,131 Czechoslovak children murdered in concentration camps.'

Since May 2017, the underpass to the platforms features a second memorial associated with Sir Winton's name. Conceived by three of 'Winton's children', the Farewell Memorial is a monument to the love and commitment of parents whose difficult decision to send their

children into the unknown ended up saving their lives. The Memorial consists of a replica train carriage door, with casts of the hands of children and parents, representing the survivors' strongest memory: children and parents pressing their hands against the door-glass to say goodbye.



1940

The Oko Cinema

Kino Oko
Františka Křížka 460/15, Prague 7 – Letná
www.biooko.net

This popular one-screen art cinema is one of the few old cinemas in Prague that have kept their original ambience. The cinema is located in the basement of a central building connecting seven functionalist apartment blocks built for the staff of the former National Bank. This building is remarkable both in terms of municipal urban planning and architecture.

Originally the complex was to have only two side buildings and an open core. Since the then regulatory plans required a unified block construction, the central building, housing the Oko cinema, was completed in 1940 and recessed about 7.5 metres back from the edge of the street, extending the pavement in front of the 800-capacity cinema to allow drop-off and pick-up parking.

The cinema has undergone extensive reconstruction, but has retained its period atmosphere. The cinema lobby on the ground floor is fitted out with various types of seating (beach chairs, bean bags, car body seats), in an arrangement by the Czech designer Maxim Velčovský. The bar-café here is a popular meeting place. The cinema specializes in art films and curated film shows.

Photos © Bio Oko



1941

National Technical Museum

National Technical Museum
Kostelní 1320/42, Prague 7 – Letná
www.ntm.cz

The predecessor of the current National Technical Museum, the Technical Museum of the Czech Kingdom, was founded in 1908. The Museum came about at the behest of technical academia, mainly professors from the Czech Technical University in Prague. After the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 it adopted a new name – the Czechoslovak Technical Museum, and thanks to public collections, donations and State financial assistance got the funds for its new building on Letná hill.

The building was completed in 1941, already in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and was immediately taken over by the occupying administration for the Postal Ministry. After the war, in 1945, it took some effort to wrest the building back for Museum purposes. At least one third of the building was used by other institutions until 1990.

In October 2013, 75 years late, the National Technical Museum was finally completed and fully furnished. The Museum charts technical ingenuity in 15(!) permanent exhibits – on Architecture, Engineering and Design, Astronomy, Transport, Photography, Mining, Metallurgy, 'Merkur' models, Chemicals around us, Interkamera, Chronography, Printmaking, Technology in the home, at play, and

Television. Apart from the Transport exhibit, one of the biggest visitor attractions is the extensive underground mockup of an ore- and a coal mine.



Photos © National Technical Museum

1942

The Crypt of the Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius

National Monument of the Heydrichiad

📍 Resslova 9a, Prague 2 – New Town
🌐 www.vhu.cz/muzea/ostatni-expozice/krypta
🌐 www.pamatnik-heydrichiady.cz

The Baroque Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius, originally dedicated to St Charles Borromeo, is a unique monument. Here, Western Christian art and Eastern Byzantine iconography meet; with its turbulent recent history, it is one of the most noteworthy places in Prague.

On 15 September 1939, the German army seized Czech territory; the following day the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was declared, followed by six years of brutal oppression and humiliation of the Czech nation. The worst period began with Reichsprotector Reinhard Heydrich in 1941, one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany, who declared martial law in the Protectorate.

The Czechoslovak Government in Exile opted for a resolute response; assassinate Heydrich. The operation, code-named Anthropoid, fell to specially trained soldiers, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš. The hit was carried out successfully in May 1942. This led to executions of resistance fighters, supporters and any who (even allegedly) endorsed the assassination. The village of

Lidice with 503 inhabitants was razed to the ground, on suspicion of aiding the paratroopers. Both paratroopers, plus five soldiers from the Independent Czechoslovak Brigade from Britain, were meanwhile hiding in this church.

Treacherously betrayed, they were surrounded by the SS and the Gestapo, and fighting ensued. After two hours, the attackers having gained the main nave, the remaining four soldiers resorted to the crypt. The SS threw tear gas and hand grenades

into the window that led out to Resslova street, then tried breaking in with a battering ram, and flooding the crypt. In their desperate situation, the soldiers, already short of ammunition, took their own lives.

The site became a National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrichiad, comprising the Church, the crypt, and an exhibit on the paratroopers. The story has been documented by the British-Czech-French co-production film Anthropoid (2016).



Crypt of the Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius © Prague City Archives



1943

Kamil Lhoták and Group 42

Monographs and exhibition catalogues

www.retrogallery.cz

Kamil Lhoták (1912-1990) was a Czech painter, graphic artist and illustrator (particularly of children's books), whose signature style is instantly recognizable.

Lhoták was self-taught. As a child, he drew only cars, motorbikes and bicycles. His work shows admiration for the Industrial Age and the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He drew inspiration from illustrations, magazines, adventure stories by Jules Verne, and walks in the urban periphery.

In 1942, he co-founded an art group which brought together 42 Czech poets, writers, artists, and photographers. The programme of Group 42 was the city, its landscape and way of life, especially the urban outskirts, factories and ordinary working people. Lhoták could depict Prague's periphery, its boardings, nooks and crannies with a dreamlike, poetic touch. His later paintings continue to feature balloons, airships, aircraft, bicycles, and old cars, but also the racecourse, smoking chimneys and railway stations. One of his works, the 'City Daughter', even impressed Pablo Picasso.

From the early 1960s, Kamil Lhoták concentrated on the effects of colour. Drawings, graphics and book illustration feature significantly in his works. He also designed stamps and was among the pioneers of Czech animated film.

Kamil Lhoták: Two balloons, 1939, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 60.5 cm, © Retro Gallery
Photo: Tomáš Dittrich



1944

'The Führer Gives the Jews a City'; and the Shoah Memorial in the Pinkas synagogue

The Terezín Memorial

[Principova alej 304, Terezín](https://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz)

www.pamatnik-terezin.cz

Pinkas Synagogue – Memorial to the Bohemian and Moravian Victims of the Shoah

[Široká 23/3, 110 00 Prague 1 – Josefov](https://www.jewishmuseum.cz)

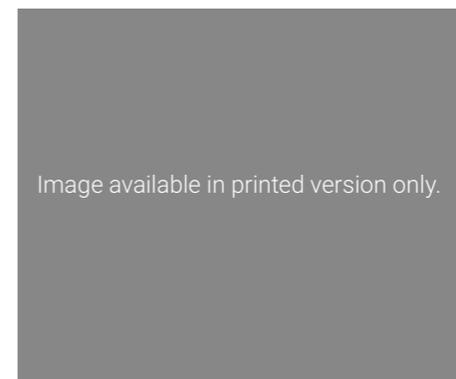
www.jewishmuseum.cz

Theresienstadt (Terezín) was the largest concentration camp on Czech soil. At the wish of Adolf Eichmann, it briefly became an instrument of propaganda, 'a jewel-case for the Press and the Red Cross to see'. In point of fact, confined within the walls of the large fortress were up to 58,500 Jews, with 1.6 m2 of living space per person. Those held there faced not just dire conditions, but the prospect of being shipped to an extermination camp. In total 155,000 people passed through the Theresienstadt ghetto, of which 118,000 did not survive the war. 35,000 died directly there.

The Director Kurt Gerron was to make a film about 'happy living' in Theresienstadt, in exchange for his and his family's safety. In the film, the Jews enjoy culture, sports or just relaxing in the park. The film entitled The Führer Gives the Jews a City was never shown in cinemas, and Kurt Gerron was murdered in Auschwitz, with his family.

Prague commemorates the horrors of the Holocaust at the Pinkas synagogue, in memory of the nearly 80,000 Czech Jews who were its victims. The walls are inscribed with names and each last

known place of residence, date of birth and of violent death. Among them are 15 thousand names of children, whose drawings are on display on the first floor of the synagogue.



1945

Battle of Prague

Prague did not suffer devastating airstrikes during WWII, unlike many other European cities. Our metropolis became the target of aerial bombing only in the last months of the conflict.

The largest Allied bombing of Prague happened on 14 February 1945, when 62 American bombers flew overhead. On that day, Western Europe had bad weather, strong wind, dense cloud; all this deflected the 1st bomber squadron off their intended course. In such inclement weather, the navigators were looking keenly for any landmarks on the ground. Their main target that day was Dresden train station; having confused Prague for Dresden, the bombers dropped 152 tonnes of bombs, killing around 700 people.

The most visible damage to the historic centre, however, was not caused by the February bombing, but the fighting during the Prague Uprising against the occupying regime. Fighting broke out on 5 May 1945, and soon spread all over the city. At this time, the Old Town Hall building became one of the centres for anti-Nazi resistance. Its immediate surroundings were a battleground between the rebels and the German army. German tanks and infantry attacked the Town Hall on 8 May, causing a devastating fire. The fire gutted the neo-Gothic wing of the Town Hall, leaving just the outer walls (later torn down). The tower and astronomical clock also suffered heavy damage.

In keeping with agreements on the demarcation line between the anti-Hitler Allies, the U.S. Army under the command of General Patton had to stop near Pilsen, while the Red Army arrived in Prague from Berlin on 9 May. Soviet soldiers coming from Ruzyně Airport met almost no resistance. Immediately after the liberation of the city, its renewal began.



Photos © Prague City Archives



1946

Prague Spring Music Festival

www.festival.cz

The opening concert of the 1st season of the Prague Spring Music Festival took place on 11 May 1946 in the Rudolfinum building. The Festival was originally meant to be a singular event, to mark 50 years of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, which first played at the Rudolfinum in 1896 under the baton of Antonín Dvořák. During the event, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra put on 14 different performances. The orchestra's conductor back then was the phenomenal Rafael Kubelík. Acclaim exceeded expectations, and gave rise to an international music festival, held annually to this day.

Kubelík's name is linked to the major orchestras of his time. He served as artistic director and conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Music Director of the Royal Opera House in London, and in the 1970s conducted the Metropolitan Opera in New York. When active abroad, he sought to spread the fame of Czech music. He returned to Prague in 1990 in triumph, to conduct the Czech Philharmonic again for the Prague Spring (pictured).

The Festival opens every year with the 'My Country' set of symphonic poems by Bedřich Smetana, on the anniversary of the composer's death, 12 May, and closes with the 9th symphony and Ode to Joy by Beethoven.



Rafael Kubelík, 12. 5. 1990 © ČTK/Matička Petr

1947

'Brotherhood' Memorial

Vrchlického sady, Prague 1 – New Town
50° 5' 2" N, 14° 26' 2" E

While walking through Vrchlického park from the Main Station to the tram stop in Bolzanova Street, you'll note a heroic sculpture on a high pedestal. It shows two men – a standing soldier in a long coat with a lilac bouquet in his hand, and a civilian, embracing him dramatically.

This work by sculptor Karel Pokorný is entitled 'Brotherhood'. The figures symbolize the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army. Soviet troops arrived in Bohemia around 8 May 1945, and the populace greeted them with bunches of lilacs, then in bloom. The motif of a Soviet soldier with a lilac bouquet became something of a period cliché, particularly after the communist coup in 1948. The statue by Pokorný is a fine example of this historical genre.

Despite its posed, studio artwork feel, the work was inspired by an actual photo from the Prague uprising (p. 36), by photographer Karel Ludwig. The Prague statue is a copy of the original, in Česká Třebová. The sculpture was used on a postage stamp in 1952 and even on a banknote, in 1953.



1948

Memorial to the Victims of Communism

Memorial to the Victims of Communism

📍 Vítězná ulice, Prague 1 – Malá Strana
50° 4' 52" N, 14° 24' 15" E

Museum of Communism

📍 V Celnici 1031/4, Prague 1 – Old Town
🌐 www.museumofcommunism.com

In February 1948, there was a coup in Czechoslovakia, through which the Communist Party seized power. Czechoslovakia thus spent the next 41 years among the countries of the Eastern Bloc, controlled by Moscow. There followed a time of purges, detention of innocent people and expropriation of their property, of show trials and murders, oppression and injustice.

At the foot of Petřín hill stands one of the most unusual memorials in Prague. It is by the sculptor Olbram Zoubek, himself a victim of Communist oppression, and the architects Zdeněk Hölzl and Jan Kerel. The Memorial consists of a narrow stairway, with seven bronze male figures ascending. The first figure is depicted whole, but each subsequent eroded – the torso breaking, the whole figure progressively eaten away.

Zoubek thus illustrates the suffering of political prisoners convicted in the 1950s, destined for destruction. At the base of the steps are plaques that read: 'Victims of communism 1948-1989': 205,486 sentenced – 248 executed – 4,500 died in

prisons – 327 killed at the border – 170,938 citizens emigrated'. The whole stairway is transected by a bronze belt bearing the same information. When passing through the memorial, you can see Národní

třída boulevard through the figures, the venue of the dramatic events of 1989 leading to the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia.



1949

Bethlehem Chapel – the Jan Hus prayer house reborn

Bethlehem Chapel

📍 Betlémské náměstí 255/4, Prague 1 – Old Town
🌐 www.bethlehemchapel.eu

Bethlehem Square recalls with its name the existence of the medieval chapel of the Holy Innocents of Bethlehem. The size of the building and its silhouette with two high peaks suggest that this was no ordinary church.

The Chapel, which stood here between 1391 and 1394, was the venue for Czech-language sermons and a critical look at the Church. The pastor here was theologian and reformer Jan Hus, a Master at Prague University. His sermons drew thousands of avid listeners. Following his dispute with the Catholic Church, and his eventual burning at the stake during the Council of Constance of 1415, the Chapel became the hub of the Hussite revolt and rejection of Catholic Church authority.

The original, medieval Chapel is long gone. In the 18th century it was demolished, with only sections of the outer walls remaining. The 20th century took the opposite approach. The architect Jaroslav Fragner achieved the well-nigh impossible, rebuilding the chapel faithfully based on meticulous research. The restored interior is decorated with murals from the Jena Codex and fragments of

Hus's teachings; the Chapel stands again as the symbolic hub of the first European Reformation.



1950

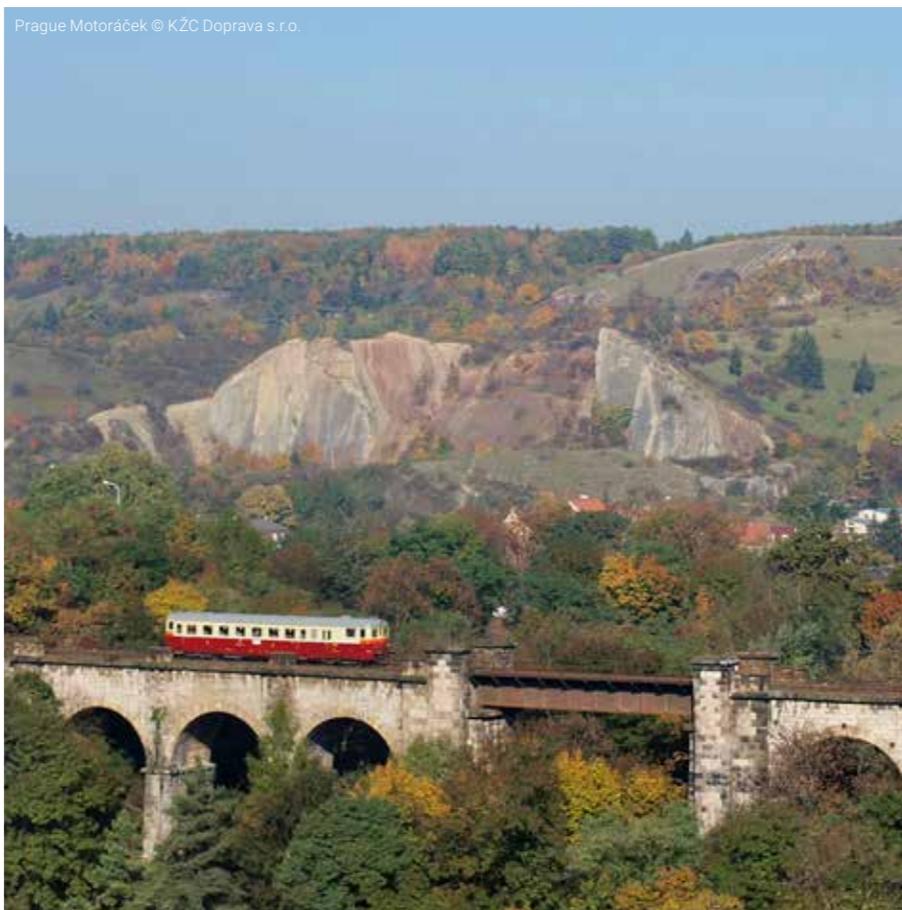
Prague's Motoráček suburban train

📍 www.prague.eu, search for "Semmering"

The Prague Motoráček is a unique part of Prague (sub)urban transport. The train cars were produced between 1949-1960 and are in regular use to this day, taking a scenic route connecting the centre with railway station Zličín. Along the route, passengers are offered beautiful views, unusual Prague vistas, natural scenery and technical curiosities.

The route traverses our longest twin-track tunnel (Vinohrady tunnel, 1145 m long) and crosses the Vltava River over the 1901 steel bridge, revealing lovely views of Prague Castle and Vyšehrad. It then leaves the industrial district of Smíchov, going up the Prague Semmering. (This nickname comes from the first European mountain railway in the Austrian Alps, which passes through the Semmering mountain saddle.)

The track takes a gentle sweep along the Prokopské Valley, over the impressive Hlubočepy viaducts, with views of the almost rustic buildings of old Hlubočepy and the distinctive Prokopské Valley biome. Winding between limestone cliffs the track passes through residential Košíře and Cibulka to the Košíře-Motol nature park and the Řepy suburb.



Prague Motoráček © KZC Doprava s.r.o.

1951

The Favorit bicycle – fast, lightweight, stylish

Favorit

📍 Pávilon a.s., Vínohradská 1200/50,
Praha 2 – Vínohrady

📍 www.favorit.cz

The Favorit bike, once the dream of every Czechoslovak boy, originated in Rokycany. The factory initially made just parts; but because the import of bike parts into Communist Czechoslovakia was a drain on scarce hard currency, it was decided to make the whole bicycle in-country. Thanks to the skill of the designers here, the result soon met all the parameters of a top-class racing bicycle.

As Czechoslovak cyclists won medals at international competitions, the Favorit gained a professional following and ever-greater recognition. In 1951, the first year of production, some 5,148 were made, four years later it was 13,531 and in 1978 the millionth Favorit rolled out. By the 1980s it was being exported to 38 countries, including the USA, Canada and Germany.

In 1989 the plant was privatised and the company changed owners several times. In 2011, the entrepreneur Richard Galovič purchased the original trademark and the brand could be revived. Today's Favorit bikes are hand-made and custom-built, fitted with the latest technology, are lightweight, hosting original features to cutting-edge design. Customers choose their model to suit their preferred riding position, or intended usage.



The logo for Favorit, featuring the word "FAVORIT" in a stylized, blue, outlined font.



© Favorit Czechoslovakia s.r.o

1952

Josef Sudek, giant of Czech photography

The Josef Sudek Studio

📍 Újezd 432/30, Prague 1 – Malá Strana

🌐 www.sudek-atelier.cz

Josef Sudek Gallery

📍 Úvoz 24, Prague 1 – Hradčany

🌐 www.upm.cz

Josef Sudek (1896-1976) is a towering figure of Czech and world photography. His extensive, original and diverse body of work features in many prestigious collections worldwide. He started out as an amateur and trained bookbinder, but as a one-armed invalid war veteran retrained as a professional photographer.

Sudek's work passed through all the styles of modern photography from the early 20th century. Since the 1920s he found inspiration in Prague, but also in the countryside. At the onset of WWII, he was also active in advertising, reproduction and portrait photography, with a considerable reputation. From 1940 he developed his highly personal style using contact prints, focussing on personal themes in extensive and time-consuming cycles. This is when his artistic contribution to the world of photography reached its apex. Some of his most acclaimed photos include views from his Újezd garden studio window. The original studio was destroyed in a fire, but has been recreated as a faithful replica. It is open to the public.



Josef Sudek, Window
© Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague



1953

Staropramen Brewery – from blue-collar Smíchov to the world

Staropramen visitor centre

📍 Pivovarská 244/9, Prague 5 – Smíchov

🌐 www.staropramen.cz

Staropramen Brewery's history dates back to 1869, when it was first established in the Prague factory district of Smíchov. Today, it is the last operating industrial-scale brewery in Prague. The brewery has always grown by introducing new technologies, e.g. one of the first bottling plants in the Austro-Hungarian Empire or accelerated cooling in cellars and brewing vats. Staropramen got its name in 1913 after one of its beers and by 1932 became the largest beer brewer in the country.

In 1953, the beer from Smíchov first began its export drive; today it covers 30 countries, making Staropramen the second largest Czech beer exporter. The flagship Staropramen brew is a pale 'ten', a lighter, but full-bodied beer once popular with Smíchov factory workers at the end of their shift. Even today it accounts for more than half the brewery's total production, and despite the rising popularity of lagers and specials, the 10° is still going strong.

Pivovary Staropramen s.r.o. run their own restaurant chain, called Potrefená husa. Smíchov brewery headquarters has an interactive visitor centre, telling the story of the Staropramen brand, the blue-collar beer from Smíchov drunk worldwide.



Photos © Pivovary Staropramen s.r.o.



The brewery at the end of 19th century.

1954

The Jalta hotel – a postwar newcomer to Wenceslas Square

Jalta Boutique Hotel

Wenceslas Square 45, Prague 1 – New Town
www.hoteljalta.com

Wenceslas Square has witnessed many dramatic moments in history. In May 1945, just before the defeat of Nazi Germany, the Luftwaffe fire-bombed the city centre. After the war, the bombed-out houses in the middle of Wenceslas Square were gradually replaced.

One of them sprang up in the years 1954-1958, giving Prague the luxury Jalta hotel. The building draws attention with its ornate façade. Architect Antonín Tenzer had a prominent backer in the then Communist President, Antonín Zápotocký; the politician, a stonemason by profession, personally selected the finest marble and travertine for the building. The luxurious interior included sculptured glass by renowned glass artist Stanislav Libenský, elegant ceramic tiles and hand-woven fabrics.

One little detail the public didn't know about was the extensive underground nuclear shelter for the Communist elite. It was designed for 250 people, equipped with an operating theatre, a water reservoir, and facilities for the military top brass. The underground also housed facilities to listen-in on hotel-room phones used by the secret police. Nowadays this section of the hotel is occasionally open to visitors.



Photos © Jalta Boutique Hotel



1955

Karel Zeman's 'A Journey to the Beginning of Time'

Photos © Karel Zeman Museum

The Karel Zeman Museum

Saská 80/1, Prague 1 – Malá Strana
www.muzeumkarlazemana.cz

Karel Zeman – film set designer and director, movie-mage and pioneer of special effects, is one of the few Czech directors known to world cinema. His vintage aesthetic, shot without the aid of digital technologies, and his boundless imagination have inspired filmmakers from Terry Gilliam to Tim Burton.

From childhood, Zeman loved puppets and performed in puppet theatre. He studied advertising design in France, fell in love with animated films and travel – journeying on foot through Morocco, Egypt, Yugoslavia and Greece. In 1955 he made his debut film, the 'Journey to the Beginning of Time', blending live action, animation and puppetry. This tale of four boys who travel against the flow of time into prehistory remains ever popular. The depiction of dinosaurs and other animals faithfully reflects the then level of paleontological knowledge.

He found international acclaim with 'The Fabulous World of Jules Verne' freely inspired by the books, which sold in 72 countries and became the most successful Czech film of all time. Arguably the best of Zeman's work is his 'Baron Munchausen' film of 1961, which went on to inspire Terry Gilliam to shoot his own version.

In 2012, the interactive Karel Zeman Museum

opened in Prague, presenting Zeman's magical world to upcoming generations of children and adults.



Journey to the Beginning of Time, work in the studio



Journey to the beginning of Time, mammoth scene

1956

Hotel International – the epitome of Prague’s Socialist Realism

Hotel International

📍 Koulova 1501/15, Prague 6 – Dejvice
🌐 www.internationalprague.cz

A Government commission: and one of the most incongruous structures of 20th century Prague was born. The Communist Defence Minister Alexej Čepička was the man with the plan: Instead of an originally intended military hostelry, a luxury hotel for incoming Soviet delegations was to be built. The hostelry idea would still be incorporated, but only serve the military top brass. Čepička even mused that the opening of the hotel would be overseen by Stalin himself; the building got nicknamed ‘Stalin’s cake’.

The sixteen-storey building, whose central tower stands at 88 meters, has become the go-to example of socialist realism beholden to Soviet templates. The interiors were decorated with high quality elements, featuring hammered and moulded metal and glass, as well as tapestries. The tower was topped off with a five-pointed star. An ingenious mechanism allowed it to be retracted and cleaned regularly – naturally in the dead of night, so as not to cause a stir.

Undergoing many changes and adjustments, the construction was completed in 1956, three years after Stalin’s death, and is still going as a hotel. The Hotel International is fitted out to modern standards, but has the undeniable charm of a historical curiosity.



Hotel International © Libor Sváček



period postcard

1957

How Little Mole got his Trousers

📖 *Books, videos, toys, games and other kinds of merchandise with the Little Mole character are widely available in bookshops and toy stores.*

One evening in 1956, the artist, illustrator and director Zdeněk Miler was walking through the woods and stumbled on a molehill. This seemingly insignificant event gave rise to by far the most famous and popular Czech animated character – Little Mole.

That year, Miler, a skilled animator, was to create an animated fairy tale on how clothes are made. He was short of a leading character, though, – and it seemed Walt Disney had already used every animal known to man for his cartoons. But just then, up popped the mole, and the idea that this cute little insectivore could appeal to children. So, in 1957, the cartoon ‘How Little Mole got his Trousers’ came into being. It won no less than two prizes at the Venice Film Festival, and more films soon followed.

Little Mole’s popularity soon crossed the border – the film soundtracks had no narrative, making them ideal for foreign distribution, e.g. to Germany, the UK, Scandinavia, and Japan. During his life, Zdeněk Miler created some 70 films and saw millions of books sold. In 2011, the legendary Little Mole even hopped aboard the space shuttle Endeavour, taken along by American astronaut Andrew Feustel.

Image available in printed version only.

1958

Expo 58 – the arrival of Brussels style

Expo 58

Letenské sady 1500/80, Prague 7 – Holešovice

1958 made its impression on Europe with a huge showpiece project – The Brussels Expo 58. The seven-month exhibition was visited by over 42 million people. Perhaps since it was the first such project in Europe since the end of the War, the participating states attached great importance to it. The triumphant success of the Czechoslovak Pavilion at Expo 58 sparked off a decade of progressive liberalization, brought to an end by the thwarting of the Prague Spring of 1968.

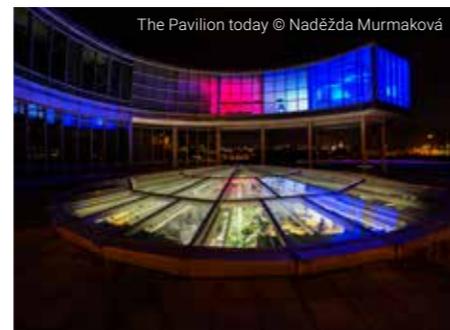
The official aim was to present Czechoslovak culture and standard of living in the best light. This allowed for the original ideas of architects František Cubr, Josef Hrubý and Zdeněk Pokorný, whose Pavilion won the top prize, partly for its strikingly modern restaurant. Back in Prague after the Expo, it was rebuilt on the slopes of Letná hill.

Also highly acclaimed was the multimedia theatre showcase, the Laterna Magika (see page 51). Expo 58 became the symbol of Czechoslovakia's return to the European cultural domain and 'Brussels' became a stylistic byword for new design, characterized by elegant rounded shapes, bright colours and modern materials: plastics, formica,

© Expo58.blogspot.cz



plywood and aluminium. The Brussels style also inspired and motivated a fresh political outlook.



The Pavilion today © Nadezda Murmaková

1959

Laterna Magika

Laterna Magika

Národní 4, Prague 1 – New Town
www.laterna.cz

The Laterna Magika, the world's first multimedia theatre, had its debut at the 1958 Brussel Expo, where the show caused a sensation. After this success, the Laterna Magika show was promptly invited to many countries, and in 1959 set up as an independent experimental theatre stage of the National Theatre, initially based at the Adria Palace (page 11).

Its basic tenet was an interactive relationship between live action on stage and concurrent film projections. The programming was the joint work of Alfréd Radok and scenic designer Josef Svoboda, who laid down the principal relations between live action and film. The original programme was composed of individual numbers, linked by a (female) moderator's commentary. The commentary was pre-recorded in several languages, the specific versions being screened in parallel to give the impression of live interaction between the actress on the stage and her images, and their interplay with one another. The same principle was used in the other show numbers, using music, dance and live drama.

The Laterna Magika stage can take many forms, ranging from drama, through mime, modern dance and acrobatics to black-light theatre. Laterna

LATERNA MAGIKA



Magika has been going non-stop since 1959 as a separate scene, and the principles it was founded on continue to evolve.

Photos © National Theatre



Filming of the choreography to 'Breakneck ride' outside the Adria Palace



Extraordinary Voyages of Jules Verne



The Magic Circus

1960

Kofola – Communist 'Coca-Cola' with a mystery ingredient

📍 www.kofola.cz

Until 1960, there were exactly two varieties of soft drinks in Czechoslovakia: a red raspberryade, and a yellow lemonade. Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola were youth culture's unattainable dream. The then Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia decided that these Western drinks must be matched by something home-brewed.

The heart of Kofola, the Kofo syrup, was created by a team from the Research Institute of Natural Medicines in Prague. Its main component was raspberry syrup; other ingredients included blackberry, strawberry and raspberry leaves, as well as cinnamon, liquorice and dried orange peel – fourteen in all. Originally the syrup was made exclusively from herbs, later replaced by essential oils and concentrates. Chief among them was caffeine. Hard currency for importing it was in short supply, which led to a creative solution: Caffeine was chemically extracted from the chimney soot of the only coffee-roasting plant in Prague at that time.

1970s Czechoslovakia was Kofola's heyday. After a period of uncertainty in the 1990s it came back into its own. Today's popular and widely available Kofola is natural in composition, in essence still based on the original Kofo syrup recipe. Its distinctive, subtly sweet flavour with herbal and spicy notes takes many first-time foreign visitors by pleasant surprise.



1961

Otto Wichterle and his 'lenscaster' machine

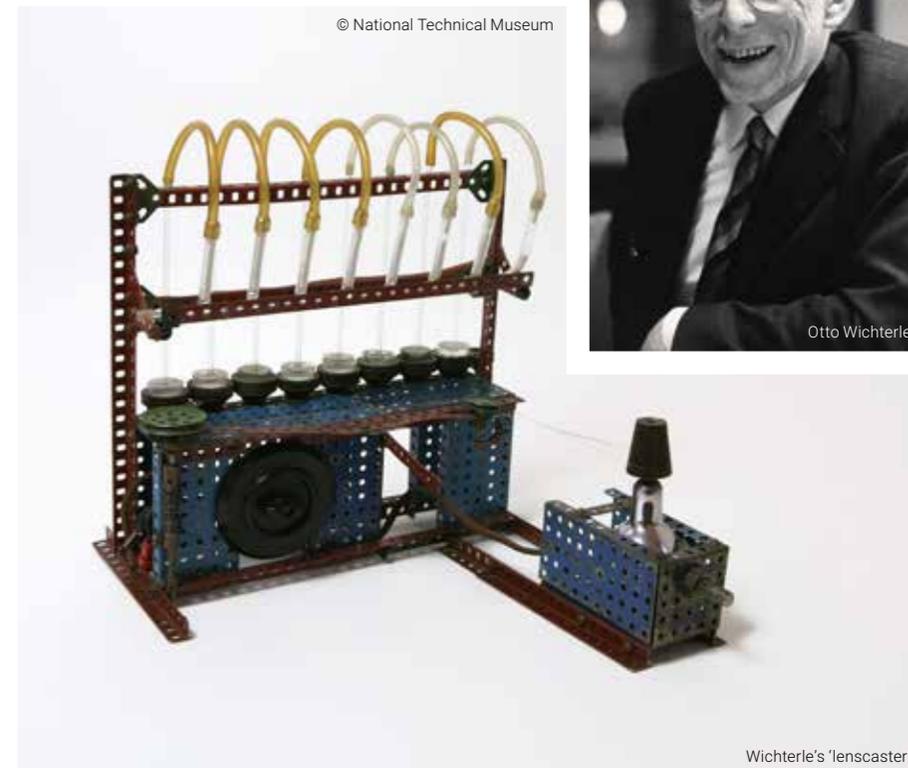
📍 [National Technical Museum](http://www.ntm.cz)

📍 Kostelní 1320/42, Prague 7 – Holešovice
📍 www.ntm.cz

Undoubtedly one of the greatest Czech scientists and inventors of the 20th century, Professor Otto Wichterle (1913-1998) was the co-founder of macromolecular organic chemistry. He is best known for the discoveries and inventions that led to major improvements and wide use of soft contact lenses.

He was spurred into the development of soft contact lenses by a chance conversation on a train, about surgical eye prosthesis options. Wichterle realized that plastic would make a better implant material than precious metals. This led to his theorizing a three-dimensional hydrophilic polymer the eye could tolerate. The most promising seemed to be HEMA gel, which absorbed about 40 percent water, was clear, and had good mechanical properties. The problem was, how to work it. When poured into moulds, the lenses ripped and had rough edges.

The Ministry of Health put a stop to Wichterle's research in 1961. Just then, a new way of processing HEMA gel occurred to him, by casting in rotating, open moulds. On Christmas day 1961 he built a turntable from the Czech meccano-style construction set, Merkur, and successfully cast the first Hydrogel lenses. The Czechoslovak State later sold the patent for this method of production to the United States; the original 'lenscaster' machine is now in the National Technical Museum (page 31).



Wichterle's 'lenscaster'

1962

Stalin's Monument – the end of a monstrous memorial

📍 Nábřeží Edvarda Beneše, Prague 7 – Letná

The largest sculpture in Europe was built in honour of the Soviet leader J. V. Stalin in the mid-1950s, the darkest days of Communism in Czechoslovakia. The construction was preceded by a contest, in which all known architects and sculptors had to take part. The sculptor Otakar Švec submitted a design of Stalin surrounded by a group of people, hoping it would be scrapped from the competition for being too demanding. However, to his horror, his proposal won. In his portrayal, symbolized to the left of Stalin were the Soviet people, to the right, the people of Czechoslovakia. It was soon known in Prague as the 'meat queue': Stalin reaching into his coat for his wallet, a hungry crowd behind him.

Otokar Švec did not live to see the unveiling in 1955, having committed suicide a month earlier. Stalin was no longer alive, either. The new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev repudiated his predecessor – so it soon became necessary to rid Prague of Stalin, too. It was eventually decided to blow it up. The blasting took place in 1962, under tight guard, with the surrounding area sealed off and photography forbidden. The Soviet leader's head had to be cut up by two stonemasons and taken down piece by piece. The monument was broken up, some of the blocks taken to the Karlín river port, and the rubble buried in the cavity under the plinth. The former plinth now besports the Metronome (page 85).



Photos © Prague City Archives



1963

Tatra T3 Tram

Public Transport Museum

📍 Patočkova 4, Prague 6 – Střešovice
🌐 www.dpp.cz

The Tatra T3 tram is Prague's most iconic model. With its typical outline and red-and-cream coat of paint, this tram car type has been cruising the streets of Prague for well over half a century. The first T3 tram began regular operations in Prague in November 1962, and over the following year these trams were deployed across the board. The T3 model, and its updates, became the most numerous type of tram in the world. Between 1960 and 1997, almost 14 thousand cars were made.

This tram car, made by ČKD Tatra Smíchov, was very modern for its time, using materials like plastic or fibreglass. The T3 was the brainchild of construction engineer Antonín Honzík and designer František Kardaš. It was the latter who gave it the timeless look with its typical round headlights and domed 'brow' above the windscreen. The tram also owed its popularity to the heated fibreglass seats that were first fitted in 1964 and made for exceptional passenger comfort.

Between 1960 and 1976 Prague ordered 892 type T3 tram cars, and in the years up to 1992 almost three hundred different updates to the original T3. There are still several hundred modernized ones, plus a renovated original T3, as a nostalgic route #23. Worth a mention; the route is charged at the regular fare.



© The Prague Public Transport Company archives



© Maks Ershov / Shutterstock.com

1964

'Lemonade Joe' – socialist cinema's exuberant bloom

📌 *'Lemonade Joe, or The Horse Opera' is available in English on DVD.*

The 1960s were the golden age of Czechoslovak cinema. New-wave movies celebrated international successes, and directors like Miloš Forman, Věra Chytilová, Ivan Passer, Jan Němec, Ján Kadár or Jiří Menzel (the latter two being Oscar winners) created works unpretentious in their (often unscripted) dialogue, intimacy, bitter-sweet comedy and well-honed aesthetics.

One of the most original works of the decade was the musical comedy 'Lemonade Joe, or The Horse Opera', by script writer Jiří Brdečka and director Oldřich Lipský, a piece radically like no other. The movie is a stylized parody of a western, while also a loving ode to this genre and the aesthetics of pulp fiction adventure novels, slapstick and kitsch. The story of a teetotaling gunslinger, Lemonade Joe, his nemesis Hogofogo and the beautiful Winnifred has a jaunty storyline, numerous catchy musical numbers and an ironic dénouement. The movie was filmed in the Barrandov backlots (page 20)

as a whirlwind flurry of colour-graded scenes, be it the rollicking bar-brawl in the Trigger-Whiskey-Saloon or the merciless torturing of a captured Joe. Excelling in the lead roles were the demonic Miloš Kopecký as the arch-villain Hogofogo, and 'Czech Brigitte Bardot' Olga Schoberová as Winnifred.

Brdečka and Lipský are sometimes dubbed the founders of the Czech parody school, yet none of their subsequent – though brilliant – films match the explosive energy of their first collaboration.

1965

Podolí swimming stadium – the biggest wave on the Vltava

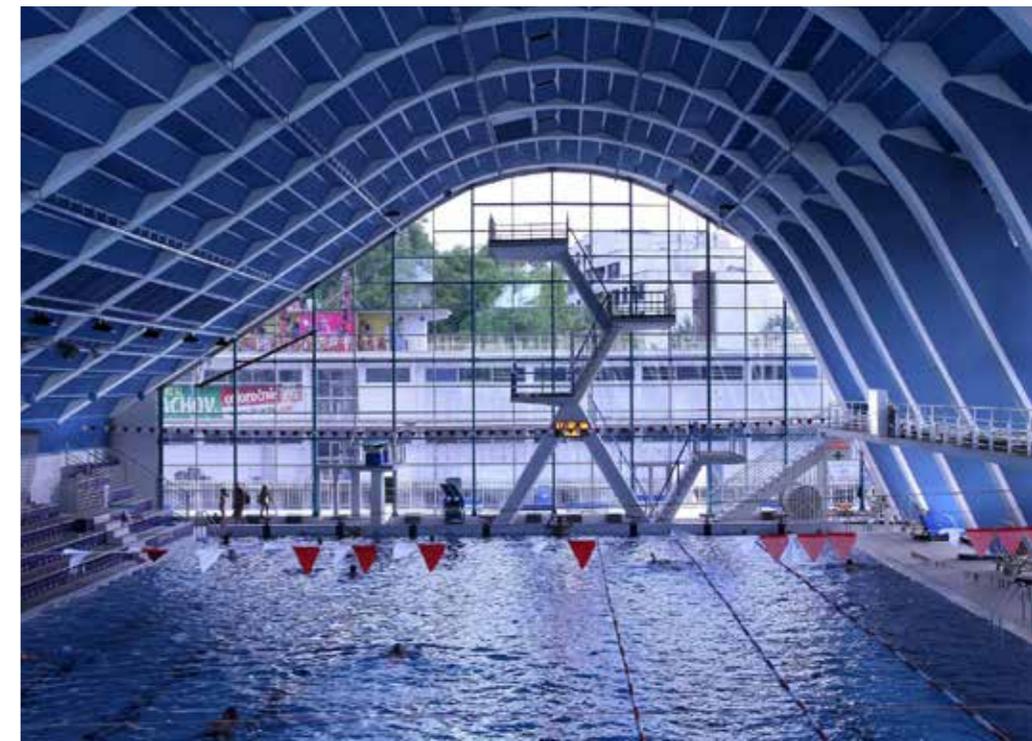
Podolí swimming stadium
📍 Podolská 74, Prague 4 – Podolí
📌 www.pspodoli.cz

The best-known Prague swimming stadium is unmissable on the right bank of the Vltava River. It stands in a former limestone quarry and is wind-sheltered from three sides, while soaking up direct sunlight for most of the day. The building complex features one indoor and two outdoor pools. It not only serves the public, but regularly hosts swimming, diving and water polo competitions.

The stadium was built in 1965 to a design by Czech architect Richard Podzemný. This elegant building of glass and concrete has a stylish roof, shaped like an impressive wave, which also has its practical use – as a windbreak and a grandstand. The design is remarkable for its pool heating technology, too. The site is connected by an underground pipe to the Czech TV building at nearby Kavčí Hory, where they bring cold water to cool their equipment; and return it warm.

Even Princess Diana went for a dip here, during her visit to Prague in 1991. She came in as a normal visitor, paid the entrance fee and went to the indoor pool, which, unbeknownst to her, was just then reserved for athletes. Being a strong swimmer, it took a while for anyone to notice she did not belong

to any of the teams in training. At that point, she was politely asked to leave the pool.



Photos © Podolí swimming stadium

Image available in printed version only.

Image available in printed version only.

1966

Botas Classic – a shoe that never lost its shine

BOTAS 66

- 📍 Skořepka 4, Prague 1 – Old Town
- 📍 Křížkovského 18, Prague 3 – Žižkov
- 🌐 www.botas66.cz

The most popular Czech brand of sports shoes, Botas, dates back to 1963; this brand set the pace not only in the former Czechoslovakia, but the rest of the former Eastern Bloc. Botas shoes entered sports history in 1964, worn at the Tokyo Olympics by the Czechoslovak volleyball team, the silver medallists. They reached the height of their popularity with the now cult model, the Botas Classic, which the company launched in 1966. The original material the shoes were made of, the hides of Mongolian horses, was gradually replaced by synthetic materials – but their design didn't change until the 1980s.

The entirely redesigned Botas Classic reappeared on the market in 2009, and this thanks to a cooperation with two young designers. Jan Kloss and Jakub Korouš chose it as the basis for their graphic design study project at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. So successful was the new collection, it won several major awards. The ever-popular Botas shoes in their four model lines, now under the BOTAS66 lifestyle label, can be bought in two Prague own-brand shops.

Botas © Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague



1967

The Jára Cimrman Theatre

The Žižkov Jára Cimrman Theatre

- 📍 Štítného 5, Prague 3 – Žižkov
- 🌐 www.zdjc.cz

4 October 1967 saw the first performance of an ensemble whose repertoire focuses on the fate of the fictional Czech genius all-rounder, Jára Cimrman. The figure of the hapless Czech genius was born as a frivolous hoax by two Prague intellectuals, Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák. Over time, however, Cimrman has gained immense popularity, as evidenced by his winning a popular poll of the 'greatest Czech' of all time. (The promoter – in a move characteristic of Cimrman's fortunes – disqualified him at the last minute, for being a fictional character.)

Jára Cimrman was an inventor, mathematician, physicist, composer, adventurer, patriot, educator, playwright, etc. – he had his hand in all sorts of pies. The pitfalls of fate, the intrigues of competitors and plain bad luck always led to the profit and glory from the fruits of his labours going to someone else. The life and works of Jára Cimrman inspired fifteen stage plays; all are still performed. The fate of this frustrated genius from the late 19th century can be deemed an allegory of the fate of a small nation with big ambitions, variously failing to fulfil them as time goes by.

Despite the parochial character of the Cimrman saga, Prague's Cimrman English Theatre ensemble has had its success in putting on a few of the plays in English.



Drama, the Nude © Žižkov Jára Cimrman Theatre archives

© Stanislav Jelen - own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1057436> →



1968

Prague Spring, and Czechoslovak Radio under fire

Czech Radio

Vinohradská 12, Prague 2 – Vinohrady

www.radio.cz

The 1968 Prague Spring is a term for the period of liberalization in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968, which lasted until 21st August. In January, the

leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia changed, headed by Alexander Dubček. Social issues were openly aired, the borders to the West were opened, censorship was abolished and cautious optimism grew throughout Czechoslovakia, with hope for change.

However, the situation was viewed by the Soviet Union as a threat to its power-base, and one not to be tolerated. After failing to bring the Czechoslovak leadership to heel, the Soviet leaders decided to use force. On the night of 21 August 1968, the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact crossed Czechoslovak borders, occupying the airport and all other key points. There were many clashes between unarmed citizens and the occupying troops.

The Czech Radio building © Ludek – own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1712182>



The biggest conflict took place in Prague outside the Czechoslovak Radio building. Radio was a strategic objective for the Soviets, since it was airing factual bulletins countrywide. In the early morning, twenty men put up an improvised barricade to defend the Radio building against incoming tanks. 17 of them were massacred by Soviet soldiers. The functionalist radio building stood in mute testimony, witnessing this intervention of 'brotherly aid'.



© Prague City Archives

1969

Memorial to Jan Palach's sacrifice

Jan Palach memorial/cross

Wenceslas Square, pavement by the National Museum fountain, Prague 1 – New Town

Jan Palach memorial plaque

Charles University Faculty of Arts, náměstí Jana Palacha 2 Square, Prague 1 – Old Town

'The House of the Mother, the House of the Son' – Jan Palach monument

Alšovo nábřeží embankment, Prague 1 – Old Town

The attempt to make Czechoslovakia a showpiece of 'socialism with a human face' ended with the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968. Many Czechoslovaks emigrated; the ones who stayed were either resigned to, or trying to accommodate the new regime. One 20-year old student, Jan Palach, found the creeping apathy unacceptable. To rouse his compatriots, he took a radical step, and on 16 January 1969, near the patron's statue on Wenceslas Square he doused and torched himself. He died a few days later from the consequences. His drastic action shook up society and even inspired a follower, Jan Zajíc – but was not able to stem the tide of history.

The Palach name was taboo until 1989, and is commemorated by no fewer than three memorials in Prague today. The bronze crucifix in the pavement in front of the National Museum quietly marks the spot where Palach immolated himself.

A plaque with his funerary mask is affixed to the façade of the Faculty of Arts on the square that now bears his name. And lastly, a short walk further away, there is the twin sculpture titled 'The House of the Mother, the House of the Son' by the Czech-American architect John Hejduk.



© Peter Zurek / Shutterstock.com



© Maks Ershov / Shutterstock.com



© Vincenzo De Bernardo / Shutterstock.com

1970

Kája Saudek (1935 - 2015): 'Muriel and the Angels', 'Muriel and Orange Death'

www.kajasaudek.com

Kája Saudek is an acknowledged comic book genius, one of the most original Czech artists. His graphic novel 'Muriel and the Angels', voted the best Czech comic book of all time, was well ahead of its time. Its progressiveness, creative ambition and artistic quality stand comparison with the world's best. Also prized and admired are Saudek's movie posters and paintings.

Saudek grew up with American comic-books. Unable to study in the 1950s for political reasons, he became a draughtsman and stage-hand at Barrandov Studios. Here he met director Miloš Macourek, from whose screenplay he created the sci-fi storybook of 'Muriel and the Angels', in 1969. Saudek based the heroine on the then Czechoslovak sex idol Olga Schoberová, and the villain Xeron took after his brother Jan. With the onset of 'normalization' back to the old political order, the book was banned and only published in 1991, becoming an immediate hit.

In 1969-1970, Saudek and Macourek had already created a sequel, 'Muriel and Orange Death', which is considered Saudek's masterpiece. The plot revolves around the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The plot revolves around Muriel and the Angel Ro trying to save the Earth from an invasion of hostile orange aliens.

The books and posters of Kája Saudek are currently on view at exhibitions.

Image available in printed version only.

Jan Saudek (b. 1935) – 'Fate Descends towards the River Leading Two Innocent Children'

www.saudek.com

Jan Saudek, with his more than 400 separate exhibitions all over the world, is the most widely known contemporary Czech photographer. He is represented in leading museums and art galleries worldwide, and in 1990 was the first Czech ever to receive the French title of 'Chevalier des Arts et Lettres' (Knight of the Arts and Literature). He is the twin of cartoonist Kája Saudek.

Jan Saudek is a singular photographer. His works are largely studio-based, with a distinctive style and atmosphere – typified by hand-tinted colouring. In his early days, Saudek's portrayals celebrated the family, childhood and the relationship between children and parents. It was during this phase that one of his best known works was born – 'Fate Descends towards the River Leading Two Innocent Children'. His later works focus on explicit, but artistically rendered nudity, the female body and physicality itself.

Saudek's work is characterized by contrasts (innocence/wickedness, youth/age, etc.) and a degree of provocativeness, making him revered and despised in equal measure. All these elements serve to bring forth fascinating images of human life, which Saudek always displays with evident enthusiasm while treating his subjects with loving care.

Image available in printed version only.

1971

The Jižní Město City – concrete housing for the masses

Jižní Město City

🚇 Metro C – Chodov, Opatov, Háje stations

The Jižní Město / South City is a complex of high-rise housing south-east of the city centre, the largest prefab settlement in the Czech Republic. Today it is home to about 90,000 residents.

The building of prefab housing projects, whose origins can be traced back to pre-war modernism, came to the fore shortly after WWII due to the postwar boom and planned migration into the cities. It was decided the zones south of central Prague would be the site of a massive housing estate. The original urbanistic concept, which treated the project as a whole, was ultimately watered down, while keeping the overall number of housing units. From 1971, a daunting number of prefabricated concrete apartment blocks were built, stacked high with near-identical features and constituent parts.

After 1989, Czechoslovakia turned away from the standardized housing culture of the Communist era and opted for unfettered construction of suburban family houses. Currently, a number of housing estates have seen a revitalization of their exteriors and interiors and their urban role is viewed rather more positively. The erstwhile Communist hostels for predominantly blue-collar workers have transformed into contemporary housing for the middle class.



© Prague City Archives

1972

Libuše Niklová toys

The toys are sold at e.g. GUMA spol. s r.o.

📍 Ječná 24, Prague 2 – New Town

📌 www.fatra.cz

Libuše Niklová was one of the most successful Czech designers. Her name is inextricably linked with children's toys. Following her series of rubber figurines and original designer animals with a concertina body, which she designed in the 1960s, she brought a new approach to toys in the 1970s. The large colourful inflatable animals were designed to be safe for kids to sit and relax on, or cavort around, without risk of injury. The designer had them patented. The best known are the red buffalo, the yellow giraffe and the blue elephant, greatly liked to this day. It is no exaggeration that the inflatable toys of Libuše Niklová, still being made by the Czech company Fatra, are among the most beloved icons of Czech design.



Foto © Fatra

1973

The Nuselský Bridge

The Nuselský Bridge

📍 Metro C – Vyšehrad station

The former Klement Gottwald Bridge, now named the Nuselský Bridge, was inaugurated on 25 February 1973. The bridge is 485 m long, 26 m wide and 43 m above ground at its highest point, and took just 6 years to build. The bridge spanned the Nusle valley and created an important traffic artery, part of the Prague inner city highway.

The first project to span the Nusle valley dated from the early 20th century, with a futuristic vision replacing the bridge pillars by thirteen-storey residential houses. The realization of yet another design from the 1930s was cut short by WWII. Bridging the valley was finally given the go-ahead in 1960. The construction method was unusual – building progressively from both sides, until the two ends met in the middle. The bridge incorporates a tubular section for metro trains, while the surface carries road traffic in six lanes.

It is known as the 'suicide bridge' due to the 300 or so lives that have come to a premature end in the Nusle valley below since it was built. (The present-day steel barriers make jumping off the bridge virtually impossible.) In 2011, a statue by the Czech artist Křištof Kintera was unveiled in the Folimanka park beneath Nuselský bridge, as a memorial to all who ended their lives here. The statue, entitled 'Own volition' takes the form of a street lamp, turned up to face the sky.



Nuselský bridge construction, (left) Spring 1969, (right) Summer 1969 © ČTK/Krejčí Bedřich



1974

Hotel InterContinental

InterContinental Prague hotel

📍 Pařížská 30, Prague 1 – Old Town

🌐 www.icprague.com

The eye-catching complex of the luxury InterContinental hotel at the end of Pařížská Street rarely fails to evoke strong emotions. The concrete building contrasts sharply with the surrounding art-nouveau and historical houses. The hotel is true to the spirit of brutalism and has a severe look to it. The asymmetrical concrete complex comprises several, largely cuboid, sections; the façade is complemented by ceramic tiles in numerous vertical stripes, segmenting it visually.

From an architectural perspective, the Hotel InterContinental is a valued building, its architects taking their cue from contemporary international trends. Also notable are the circumstances of its birth – this is probably the first building in Prague with an American investor, PanAm, who owned the InterContinental hotel chain at the time.

For many years, the InterContinental held its place as Prague's most luxurious hotel. The exclusive location was matched by the furnishings and fittings, a valuable collection of works by leading Czech artists. The renowned 'Golden Prague' restaurant on the top floor of the hotel still offers unparalleled views of Prague's rooftops and spires. The presidential suite has seen many notable guests in its time, including Michael Jackson, who kicked off his final 1996 world tour in Prague.

Photos © InterContinental Hotel Prague archives



The ninth-floor Night Club in the 1970s



1975

Kotva and Máj department stores

Kotva department store

📍 Náměstí Republiky 8, Prague 1 – Old Town

🌐 www.od-kotva.cz

My department store

📍 Národní třída 63/26, Prague 1 – New Town

🌐 www.mystores.cz

The Kotva department store is one of the hallmark buildings of Czech brutalism. It was built between 1970 and 1975 to a design by architects Věra and Vladimír Machonin. The singular floor-plan takes the form of a honeycomb. The five-storey building is a kind of geometrical puzzle, dividing up the huge bulk of the structure. The store was built by the Swedish company SIAB, something very unusual at that time. The architects were not invited to the opening due to their political views.

Another Prague department store, Máj (now My), opened just a few months later, on 21 April 1975. The building was designed by architects John Eisler, Miroslav Masák and Martin Rajniš. They were no regime darlings either – but the building was very highly rated by international experts, largely thanks to its high-tech architecture, inspired by the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. The exposed colourful air conditioning conduits along the ceilings were a novelty; notable neo-functional elements included the lightweight outer cladding, the banded windows or the expanses of glass. In 2006, the building was declared a cultural monument.



© OD Kotva



Máj department store © www.a489.cz



Kotva department store, February 1975 © ČTK/Khoř Pavel



Máj department store grand opening in 1975 © ČTK/Kruliš Jiří ▶

1976

Oldřich Hlavsa, 'Typographia 1'

🌐 www.oldrichhlavska.cz

Oldřich Hlavsa (1909-1995) was a Czech book designer and typographer, and a major influence on late 20th century Czech graphic design. He was active in the field for over sixty years, working on around two thousand book titles. He redefined the visual and semantic valence of the typeface and fundamentally changed conceptual as well as artistic approaches to book design. His name is internationally recognized in the field of typography, graphics and book design.

The book, as such, was at the centre of Hlavsa's interest. He considered it a means of communication and a work of art in itself, melding ideas, aesthetic perception, and the reader's participation. Typography was at the core of Hlavsa's artistic expression and a cardinal design element, on a par with images and illustration. Today, we distinguish graphic designers vs. typeface designers/typographers, but Hlavsa described himself as a typographer despite never having designed any fonts.

His magnum opus is a three-part work, the 'Typographia', whose first volume came out in 1976 with the subtitle 'Font, Illustration, Book'. Here Hlavsa summarized his take on classic printing-press typefaces and paid tribute to the history and values of the five centuries of visual book culture.



Examples of Hlavsa designs from a monograph by Barbora Toman Tylová



1977

Charter 77

"Kachlíkárna"

📍 Bartolomějská 7, Prague 1 – Old Town

[The Václav Havel Library](#)

📍 Ostrovní 13, Praha 1 – Nové Město

🌐 www.vaclavhavel-library.org

The term 'normalization' refers to the period between the Warsaw Pact armed intervention of 1968 (page 60), and the Velvet Revolution of 1989 (page 82). Normalization was a series of repressive measures by the Communist regime – the reintroduction of censorship, party purges, not allowing dissenters to study or getting them sacked, all justified by the need to 'get back to normal'. The most evident tool of oppression was the StB (state security, the political police), whose headquarters were in the notorious Bartolomějská Street No. 7 building, dubbed the "Kachlíkárna" ("tileworks"). It was here that many interrogations took place.

In 1977 a group of dissidents around Václav Havel circulated a document entitled the Charter 77 declaration. This criticized the regime for breaches of human and civil rights, which Czechoslovakia had signed up to uphold in the Helsinki Protocol. Charter 77 was a loose community of people, united by their resolve to defend human rights in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. The document was signed by hundreds of prominent figures as well as ordinary citizens; the signatories were harshly persecuted. The Charter 77 movement officially ended after the fall of the regime in 1992.



Charter 77 signatories © Oldřich Škádha, the Václav Havel Library

Image available in printed version only.

1978

Metro A

🌐 www.dpp.cz

The first idea to build a subway in Prague was mooted in 1898 due to the great clearance project in the Old Town. Real steps toward making this happen were taken only in the 1960s, as Prague faced ever-worsening traffic gridlock.

While the oldest Prague Metro route, the C line, opened in 1974, it was the first stretch of line A, which opened 4 years later, that had the greatest impact. Thanks to its characteristic interior decor, a distinctive overall colour scheme, and the use of fine materials, the stations on this line still rank among the most beautiful in Europe.

The stations are clad with extruded aluminium panels, featuring convex and concave lenses, designed by Prague Metro chief architect, Jaroslav Otruba. Their function is not only aesthetic, but also practical – to absorb the noise of heavy rolling stock (for more, see page 75). Line A began operation on 12 August 1978.

The Prague Metro also had its own typeface designed, called Metron. It was used for the station names as well as for the information system.



Photos © The Prague Public Transport Company archives

1979

Na Můstku / ČKD building – a gem of Prague postmodernism

[The Na Můstku / ČKD building \(the New Yorker store\)](#)

Na Můstku 9, Prague 1 – Old Town

The postmodern building at Na Můstku was built in 1977-83 to a design by architects Jan Šrámek and Alena Šrámková, and is among the landmark buildings of Czech postwar architecture. This multipurpose building was structurally designed as a steel skeleton over the rebar ceiling of the Metro, incorporating the underpass and concourse of Můstek station. This is a rather austere building but with many unusually playful elements, such as windows protruding beyond the façade, a glazed corner, an overhanging upper floor, and a giant glass clock.

The building initially had three floors for the offices of tram-builder ČKD as well as an upscale restaurant on the roof. After ČKD went under, the building gradually fell into disrepair. In 2002, it was bought by a sister company of the 'New Yorker' German apparel maker, who approached the original architect Alena Šrámková for a refit. The building now has retail space on the bottom three floors, connected by distinctive central escalators. The upper two floors are used for offices.

Alena Šrámková is a notable Czech architect with a number of buildings in the postmodernist style in her portfolio. In addition to the ČKD building, her oeuvre includes the departure hall and vestibule of Prague's Main Railway Station.



© VitVit - own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=49197841>

ČKD Building, August 1983 © ČTK/Slavík Herbert



1980

John Lennon wall

[John Lennon wall](#)

Velkopřevorské náměstí, Prague 1 – Malá Strana

A colourfully painted wall, symbolizing the resting place of John Lennon, frontman of the legendary Beatles, is on Velkopřevorské square in Malá Strana. This is a must-see for most tourists heading into this picturesque quarter, a place symbolically associated with peaceful resistance against violence and injustice anywhere in the world.

John Lennon fell victim to an assassin in New York on 8 December 1980. Immediately, people began painting graffiti of his life and thoughts on the memorial wall. This spontaneously created memorial gradually drew dozens and hundreds of people, laying flowers and lighting candles. The Communist regime saw this as fomenting dissent, so whitewashed the freedom and peace slogans, time and time again. The public always responded with more writing on the wall.

This place remains a dynamic venue for new texts and paintings. Thanks to the indulgent owners of the wall, the order of the Knights of Malta, anyone can leave their own message – about peace and love, naturally. The original painting with the portrait of John Lennon is now irretrievably lost under dozens of layers of paint. It was also seen by John Lennon's wife Yoko Ono during her visit to Prague in December 2003. She added her signature and a snippet of Lennon's lyrics: "The War is over! If you want it".



© Jiri Vaclavek / Shutterstock.com

1981

Palace of Culture (Prague Congress Centre)

Prague Congress Centre

5. května 1640/65, Prague 4 – Nusle
www.kcp.cz

For some, a symbol of totalitarianism and the megalomania of Communist leaders, for others a building of the kind every metropolis has. One of the largest buildings of its kind in Europe sprang up close to the Nuselský Bridge (page 66) at the behest of the Communist Government.

The neofunctionalist monolith of a building forms an irregular septagon, and was to be the showpiece of the regime, a role it filled until 1989. In addition to hosting Party congresses and other political gatherings, the Palace hosted standard cultural events like music festivals. After 1989, international events took their place, e.g. the NATO summit.

The building was renamed the Prague Congress Centre in 1995, and currently has 8 halls, to cater for 4500 people. The largest, the Congress Hall has a capacity of nearly 3000, with excellent acoustics. The building has its own medical centre, restaurant, underground parking, added-on hotel and even its own fire-fighting unit. An exhibition space is in the works, plus the large outdoor areas are slated for remodelling. The outdoor terrace facing the valley offers an impressive panorama of Prague, from Prague Castle to Vyšehrad, past Karlov and Nusle to Žižkov.



Photos © Prague Congress Centre



1982

Metro A aluminium cladding

✦ Metro stations Hradčanská, Malostranská, Staroměstská, Můstek, Muzeum, Náměstí Míru, Jiřího z Poděbrad, Flora.

The interiors of the first seven stations of Prague metro line A are rated among the most stylish in Europe. They owe their appearance to architect Jaroslav Otruba, the author of the geometric cladding inspired by op-art, and to graphic artist Jiří Rathouský, who designed the signature wall colours of the respective stations. Most walls are covered with extruded aluminium, shaped into convex and concave lenses (popularly nicknamed 'boobs and anti-boobs'), whose alternation was there to break up the noise from the initial, Soviet, heavy rolling stock.

The colours of the panels in each station vary in line with local symbolism. They are unified by the champagne-coloured surrounding cladding, augmented in the central part of each station wall by coloured bands in three primary hues. The station colours were to remind passengers that a section of line A passes under historically significant sites. For example, the gold used at Hradčanská station symbolizes nearby Prague Castle, the seat of Czech Kings, while green at Malostranská denotes the surrounding gardens, brown at the Museum reminds of city fortifications that once stood there, etc.



© David Pereiras / Shutterstock.com

1983

The National Theatre's New Stage: a glass crystal on a busy boulevard

The New Stage of the National Theatre
📍 Národní 1393/4, Prague 1 – New Town

The brutalist building of the New Stage of the National Theatre comes from the Karel Prager architectural studio. It is reminiscent of a crystal, intended to contrast with the adjacent historical National Theatre building. Once the first building in the country with a glass façade, it features an incredible 4306 hand-blown hollow glass elements, each weighing 25 kg.

The building, brazenly disrupting the neo-Renaissance run of the Národní třída boulevard, has a two-part U-shaped ground plan. The core and wing adjacent to the Baroque convent besport a transparent smooth cladding of heat-reflective glass. The second wing is raised above street level on massive pillars, allowing free passage into the theatre piazzeta, now named after Václav Havel. Its walls are covered with beveled glass elements to a design by the famous Czech glass artist Stanislav Libenský. The glass fittings with varying profiles make up a potent embossed relief, turning the whole construction into a sculptural statement. The glass fulfils not only an aesthetic purpose, but also muffles the noise of the busy street.

The interior features blue-green marble and grey hues. The generous internal space allows for the Theatre Cafe NONA on the third floor, with magnificent views through the glass walls onto Národní boulevard.

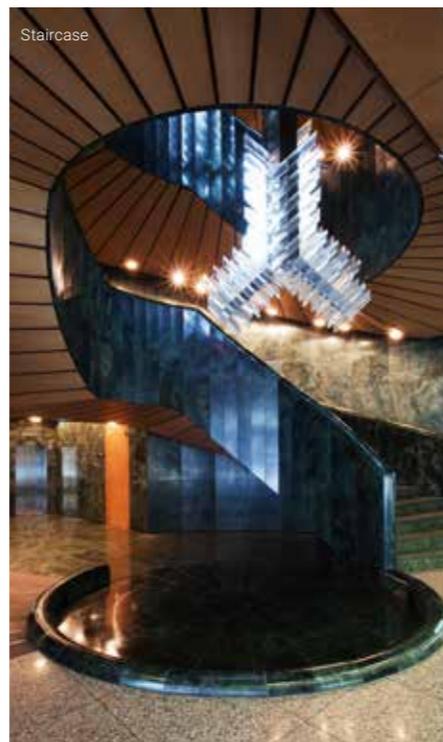
Photos © National Theatre



Staircase chandelier by Pavel Hlava



Facade detail © VIM/it, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia



Staircase

1984

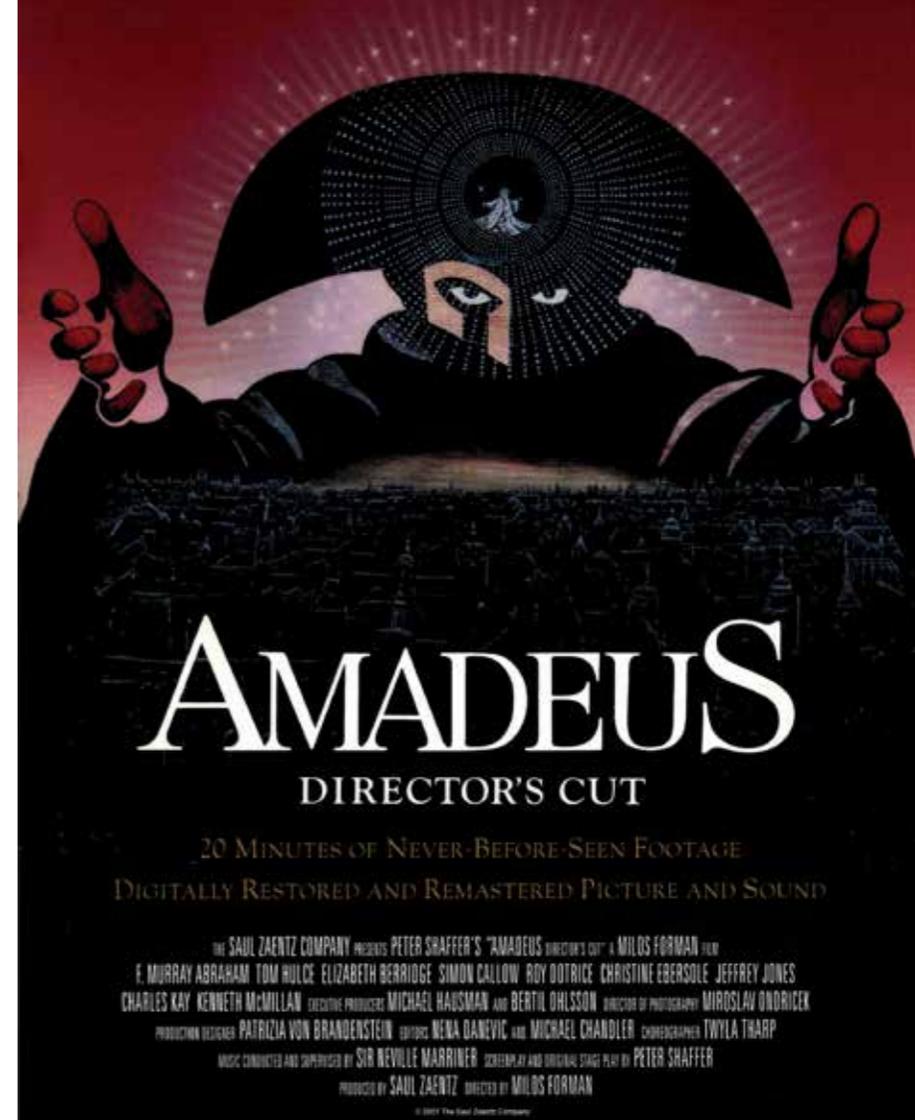
'Amadeus'

📌 www.zemefilmu.cz/en

One of the most successful films by renowned Czech director Miloš Forman, which won eight Oscars, centres around a fictional feud between the brilliant composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his rival Antonio Salieri. Forman, based in the USA since 1968, filmed Amadeus to a screenplay by the English playwright Peter Shaffer. All of the key scenes were shot in Prague between January and July 1983, under the strict supervision of State security and the Communist regime.

The production utilized a lot of Czech talent: cinematographer Miroslav Ondříček, architect Karel Černý and costume designer Theodor Pištěk (who later designed the current Prague Castle Guard uniforms.) The hypnotic film posters were by Czech artist Petr Šís, who went on to win much acclaim as a children's books author/illustrator.

Key scenes were shot at the Estates' Theatre, where Forman re-enacted the world premiere of Don Giovanni from 1787, personally conducted by Mozart. Tom Hulce, as Mozart, devoted time before the shoot to learning the piano, so that his playing might pass muster; but above all, he brilliantly portrayed Mozart's puckish, frolicsome and sparkling personality for the screen. Not to be forgotten, the sombre Salieri, as portrayed by F. Murray Abraham, personified Mozart's greatest admirer and rival, in one.



1985

Petřín funicular railway restored

📍 50° 4' 56.76" N, 14° 24' 1.15" E
📌 www.dpp.cz

The funicular railway to Petřín Hill, which, together with the observation tower at its summit, is a popular tourist attraction. Its operation, launched in 1891, was suspended twice; first in 1916 due to wartime struggles, then again in 1965 when the track was destroyed by a massive landslide. It took another 20 years before the funicular was running again. It was put back into operation in 1985 as part of Prague's integrated public transport system.

It was originally propelled by water, the upper car drawing water to act as a counterweight to pull up the lower one, a system converted to electric power in 1932, remaining so to this day. At one point it was the longest funicular in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, taking 32 people on a ride lasting 6 minutes.



© The Prague Public Transport Company Archives

The funicular connects Malá Strana with Petřín Hill and is popular with both domestic and foreign visitors. The cable car ride goes along the 510 m



© Prague City Archives

Újezd-Nebozítek-Petřín Hill route with great views of the city and Prague Castle. The elevation is 130 m and the pace, 4 m/s.

1986

Jaroslav Seifert, the irrepressible poet

Memorial plaque
📍 on Bořivojova 104, Prague 3 – Žižkov
Memorial
📍 by the Lipanská tram stop (Seifertova Street), Prague 3 – Žižkov

The works of Jaroslav Seifert (1901-1986), one of the most loved Czech poets and a Nobel Prize Laureate, spoke to generations of Czechs. Seifert also won respect for his civic stance, which brought him into conflict with the Communist regime.

A native of the working-class district of Žižkov, his literary career began with proletarian poetry. He was, however, soon expelled from the Communist Party, and the gulf widened in the 1950s, when he criticized the imprisoning of unpliant authors. He was one of the first signatories of Charter 77 (page 70). For many years, he couldn't publish, so his works spread in samizdat. When he received the Nobel Prize in 1984, the official media scarcely mentioned it. After Seifert's death in 1986 the regime tried to usurp the popular poet and organized a solemn state funeral, but excluded the poet's family from the preparations. A subsequent private religious ceremony was held under the watchful eyes of State security.

The character of Seifert's poetry changed over time. The formerly upbeat, playful lyricist enthralled with life ('On the waves of TSF') and writing in rhymed verse, became a poet of deep reflection

and free-verse stanzas, striking a melancholy tone ('Halley's Comet'). Yet his love of women remains a constant theme, permeating his works.

'On the Waves of TSF', 1925

Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986)

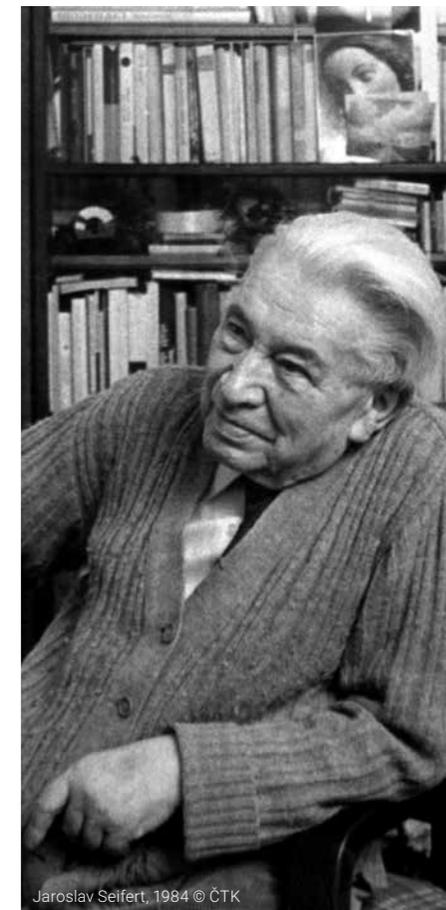
Počítadlo lásky

POČÍTADLO	
○ Tvůj pes	je jako jablko z Austrálie
● ● Tvé prsy	jsou jako 2 jablka z Austrálie --
○ ○ ● ●	jak mám rád tuto počítačovou lásku? --

Na vlnách TSF, 1925.
In: Poetismus, roč. K. Chvatík & Z. Pešat, Praha 1967.

THE ABACUS

Your breast
is like an apple from Australia
Your breasts
are like two apples from Australia
How I like this abacus of love!



Jaroslav Seifert, 1984 © ČTK

1987

The Czech pub phenomenon

www.prague.eu/pivo

The end of the 1980s in Czechoslovakia dragged on by, in the bizarre limbo of late Communist timelessness. The Soviet Union was thawing, thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev, while easing was evident in other Eastern European countries; Communism was in its death-throes. Society was sick and tired of the regime, which nobody expected to last, but the ruling Comrades showed no sign of willingness to give way or allow any change. The Czech nation thus turned to the one place for relatively free discussion and sitting things out till they got better – down the pub.

The pub holds a place like no other in Czech society. This public space was always not just somewhere to down a few beers (per usual), but also to discuss public affairs and take refuge from the outside, hostile world. The pub is the launch-point of the most famous Czech novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik* by Jaroslav Hašek; also immortalized by another notable writer, Bohumil Hrabal. The smoke-filled air of urban and rural pubs was no-less filled with debate, dreams and mute deliberations in the 1980s. There was typically only one type of beer on tap, with goulash, pickled sausages, herrings or Hermelín (ersatz Camembert) on the menu. Women were tolerated only as escorts to men and the TV showed ice hockey. To hold out in there for two years, till November 1989, was a fair option to many.



Modern versions of Czech pub food classics. Photo Honza Zima © Lokál, Ambiente

1988

Tony Ducháček and Garáž band

www.garageband.cz

In the late 1980s, no one in Czechoslovakia had any illusions about the Communist regime's ability to govern anymore - and yet the end seemed forever out of sight. But the dreary, grey fog of ennui and resignation that hung over the nation was punctured with some bright spots. One of the brightest was a band called Garáž.

Rock bands certainly didn't have an easy time of the 80s. The programming schedules of local clubs were vetted by bureaucrats who ensured their ideological compliance. The threat of a ban was real, especially after the Communist party press published a screed titled 'A "New" Wave with Old Content', whose author demanded that cultural workers be especially vigilant against the corrupting influences of Western punk rock and New Wave music.

The straightforward, slightly sloppy rock of Garáž followed no trends, however. Its unique appeal was largely due to its charismatic frontman, Tony Ducháček. His laid-back yet flawlessly confident delivery, insouciant image of a playboy from blue-collar Žižkov, and surreal lyrics dotted with American pop culture references made Garáž stand out among the rest as visitors from another planet – a more fun, colourful, and infinitely cooler one.

In 1988, Garáž released its first official recording on a cassette tape. Their first album, an LP, featuring their greatest hits from the 80s, didn't come out

until 1990 under the title 'The Best of Garáž'. Nowadays, the band performs under the name Garage and Tony Ducháček.



Album cover by © Michal Cihlár

1989

November 17th – the Velvet Revolution commences

The 17th November Memorial

📍 Národní 16, Prague 1 – New Town

On busy Národní třída the attention of passers-by is drawn to a plaque on a Baroque house façade. Raised hands and the date 17. 11. 1989 remind us of events that sparked the so-called Velvet Revolution. Although in 1989 the process Mikhail Gorbachev called perestroika relaxed conditions in the Soviet Union, and the Berlin Wall fell, in Czechoslovakia, the hard-line Communist regime tried to cling to power at any cost. They came down hard on civil disobedience and dismissed any discussion.

A demonstration by college students on Friday 17th November, initially to commemorate the violent closing of Czech universities during the Nazi occupation, soon became an opportunity to show peaceful resistance to the regime. That evening, half way down the Národní třída boulevard, armed special forces encircled the demonstrators and brutally beat them down. This was the last drop, and the cup of public patience overran. There followed a student strike, mass demonstrations and a general strike – the nation for the most part siding with the students. The Civic Forum was established as an anti Communist political platform. Attempts to make merely cosmetic changes to the Communist regime were roundly rejected. The

incredible had come to pass – on 29 December 1989 the Presidency of Czechoslovakia passed to Václav Havel, elected as the best guarantee of democratic change. There was a light at the end of the tunnel.



Václav Havel announces the resignation of Communist Party leadership © ČTK



© ČTK/Simánek Vít



© ČTK/Krumpáňzi Michal



17 November 1989, photo © Tomki Němec

1990

'Quo Vadis' – the walking Trabant

The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany

📍 Vlašská 19, Prague 1 – Malá Strana

David Černý (b. 1967) is one of the best-known Czech artists working today, ever the enfant terrible of the Czech art scene. He often creates figural sculptures reflecting the social and political issues of the day. Černý's work often outrages some, whilst enthralling others, but always provokes a lively debate.

The first major public stir by Černý was his Walking Trabant, called Quo Vadis, symbolizing the mass exodus of thousands of East German citizens to West Germany via the Federal Republic of Germany Embassy in Prague in the summer and autumn of 1989. In 1990 the sculpture was exhibited on Old Town Square. In 2001, its bronze casting was permanently affixed in the grounds of the German Embassy in the Malá Strana.

Černý has created other provocative works. His 'Babies' have since 2001 been part of the Žižkov TV Transmitter (page 86), and two of them are also in the park outside the Kampa Museum. In Jilská street we find his 'Hanged Man' (1996), in the Lucerna passage his Horse (1999), in fact St. Wenceslas astride the belly of a dead horse. The Herget brickworks feature his fountain, the 'Pissing Figures', while the space behind the Quadrio mall boasts the kinetic head of Franz Kafka.



© David Černý



East German refugees climbing the fence of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Prague, November 1989
© ČTK/PICTURE ALLIANCE/SVEN SIMON

1991

'Time Machine' / the Metronome

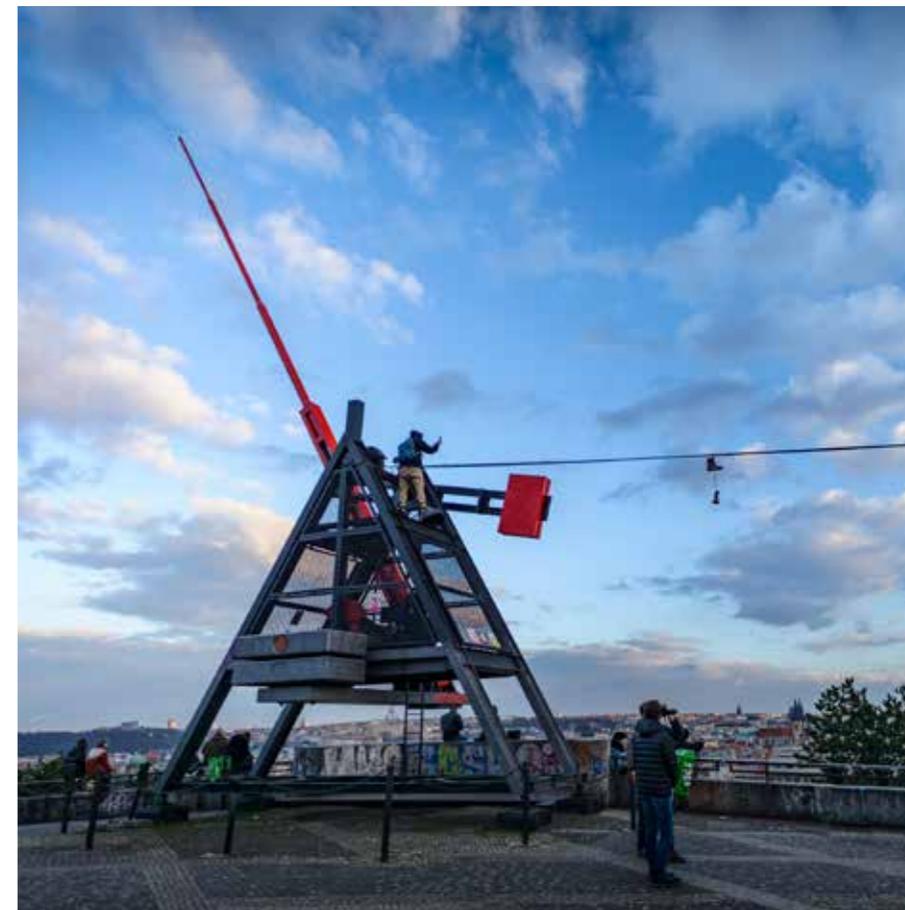
Time Machine

📍 Nábřeží Edvarda Beneše, Prague 7 – Holešovice

This kinetic work by Czech sculptor Vratislav Karel Novák has since 1991 stood on the site of the former Stalin Monument on Letná hill (page 54) and is one of the modern symbols of the city. Its original title was the 'Time Machine', but is now known as the Metronome. It symbolizes the unstoppable passage of time, warns of past tragedies and the fall of idols, and in its own way stands in modern counterpoint to the Prague astronomical clock.

The platform on the southern edge of Letenské Sady park, where the Metronome stands, is now a popular destination for locals and visitors, who come here to enjoy the views of historical downtown Prague, the Vltava River and its bridges. The Metronome is also a popular place for skateboarders, who hone their tricks on the smooth paving.

Letná Park and the adjacent Letná Plain have always been an important place to gather, have fun and take time out. They also saw some major historical events, such as the largest demonstration against the Communist dictatorship at the end of 1989. Today, the area plays host to numerous events and festivals, e.g. Letní Letná, an annual festival of new circus. The cavity under the base of the Metronome hosts the seasonal cultural centre Containall Stalin.



1992

Žižkov TV transmitter – the Baby Rocket takes off

Tower Park

📍 Mahlerovy sady 1, Prague 3 – Žižkov
🌐 www.towerpark.cz

The Žižkov television transmitter is a modern-day Prague landmark. Its construction began toward the end of the Communist regime, and was completed under democratic stewardship. Its unforgiving aesthetic, the somewhat recklessly imposed and implemented construction, disturbing the graves of the local Jewish cemetery, and its unmissable imposition on Prague's panorama, makes the Žižkov Tower one of the most controversial buildings in Prague, with passionate opponents, but also its fans.

The three-pillar design, the work of architect Václav Aulický, brings to mind a rocket about to take off. The total height of the transmitter with the antenna on top is 216 metres; suspended from the three pillars are three separate cabins on a trefoil floorplan; comprising (from the bottom up) a restaurant, an observation cabin and off-limits facilities for broadcasting technology. Directly above the restaurant is an exclusive 'one suite hotel' dating from 2012.

Very much part of the look of the transmitter is its sculptural decoration by the artist David Černý (page 84), added to the Tower in 2000. Huge fibreglass babies, crawling up and down with no regard for gravity defy any clear-cut interpretation, making any view of the Tower all the more gripping.



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