

militiamen shot at Polish fighters, but a wide range of Jewish sources (including those written by ardent Polish patriots) refute this, and all attempts by Polish organizations in the interwar period to present conclusive evidence or have Jewish militiamen sentenced in court failed. There were good reasons why the Jewish community declared and kept its neutrality in the conflict. This did not preclude some Jewish Poles from fighting on the Polish side and—mostly after the pogrom—some Zionists from joining Ukrainian units. Siding with Ukrainians would have led to reprisals from Polish society in cities like Lwów or in West Galicia, whereas siding with the Polish side might have led to antisemitic violence in East Galicia, controlled at the time by Ukrainian troops. The pogromists, who consisted of Polish soldiers and inhabitants of the city, used stories about “Jewish treason” or “Jewish attacks on Polish soldiers” to justify their violence against the Jewish population, but these were often simply a cover for robbery, plundering, rape, extortion, and murder. It was the responsibility of the Polish military commanders to stop the violence, but they did not see this as a priority. After the pogrom, accusations against the Jewish militia were used to defend the violence. M. quotes several cases of violence against Jews, but he underestimates its extent. The true number of victims is difficult to establish: while the Polish police directorate reported 44 civilian fatalities in February 1919, the Jewish support committee counted 73 deaths resulting from pogrom violence.

M. also provides conflicting information about the Polish death toll during the 22 days of fighting in the city. The most reliable data can be found in the third volume of *Obrona Lwowa*, originally published in the 1930s by the Polish organization studying the events: the Society for the Study of the History of the Defense of Lwów and the Southeastern Voivodeshiops (Towarzystwo Badania Historii Obrony Lwowa i Województw Południowo-Wschodnich). After many years of research, a Polish verification commission concluded that during the month of November 1918, 202 Polish defenders of Lwów lost their lives and 170 civilians were incidentally killed or murdered. During the subsequent Ukrainian siege of the city, which lasted until summer 1919, another 178 Polish fighters were killed or mortally wounded. The volume also provides data on the daily Polish death toll, which does not match the numbers given in the memoirs M. relies on and uses in his day-to-day account of the fighting.

In the final chapter, the author discusses the importance of the fight for Lwów in Polish interwar war remembrance. Highly interesting is his account of the destruction of the Polish military cemetery (Cmentarz Obrońców Lwowa or Cmentarz Orłat Lwowskich) under Soviet rule and the history of its reconstruction which shines a light on the ongoing differences in the perception of this fight in Poland, Lviv itself, and Ukraine in general.

This is a book for those interested in the military side of the Polish-Ukrainian fight for Lwów/Lviv. The author tries to give a multi-perspective view of this battle but falls somewhat for the legends and myths surrounding the defense of Lwów/Lviv and the Lwów eaglets.

Coventry

Christoph Mick

Esther Levinger: Constructivism in Central Europe. Painting, Typography, Photomontage. Brill. Amsterdam – Boston 2022. XI, 370 S., Ill. ISBN 978-90-04-50555-1. (€ 162,18.)

Is there a common movement that might be identified as a Central European avant-garde, or are art movements in the region so disparate that it is difficult to find a common denominator? Esther Levinger poses this question in her introduction. She suggests that artists in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland shared common concerns about new directions in art that position Central Europe as a unified cultural space even though artists from the region “rarely recognized one another as preferred interlocutors” (p. 2). In relation to Constructivism, Levinger finds parallels in artists’ fascination with non-objective art and its perceived potential to represent art for a new society in the first decades of the twentieth

century. The author's focus is on artists in Warsaw (Katarzyna Kobro, Teresa Żarower, Władysław Strzemiński, and Mieczysław Szczuka), Prague, and Brno (Karel Teige and Jaroslav Švrček), and Hungarian émigré artists (Lajos Kassák, Sándor Bortnyik, and László Moholy-Nagy). Assessing typographic works, paintings, and architectural drawings, Levinger argues that Central European artists adopted highly dynamic interpretations of Constructivism in their work and, despite their leftist political convictions, rejected Socialist Realism "to proclaim that human life and freedom are more important than even the most appealing theory" (p. 8).

The book is divided into four chapters with color illustrations that each have a thematic focus defined in terms of Russian Constructivism's offshoots in Central Europe. They include the duality of Teige's Poetism and Constructivism, Strzemiński's Unism, and Kassák's Picture Architecture. An appendix also includes translations from Hungarian and Polish of three longer source texts, adding to the extensive referencing of textual primary sources throughout the volume and its underlining of the importance of printed matter for avant-gardists discussing and circulating their ideas. Levinger draws out similarities and differences in the artists' theoretical writings as well as their visual works. Ultimately, her analysis confirms that artists hardly adopted constructivism in any uniform way in their attempts to find a suitable form of representation for a utopian (socialist) future. Rather, each group—each artist even—selected the aspects of Constructivism that seemed to best represent their ideal vision of such a future. This process of adaptation most clearly comes to the fore in the first chapter, in which the author addresses the fact that artists rarely encountered Russian Constructivism first hand. Rather, they garnered information from writers such as Ilya Ehrenburg and the German critic Adolf Behne. Essentially, the "doubly mediated" (p. 14) reception of Constructivism in Central Europe led to a productive misinterpretation of it that allowed avant-garde artists in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary (or in Viennese exile) to come to their own conclusions about this new art, unified by a common vision of the potential for non-objective work to forge an art for the masses in line with the artist's personal brands of political idealism. Moving between close visual and textual analysis, Levinger gives insight into the discussions taking place between Uitz and Kassák, for example, and looks at the different outcomes of abstract compositions in the work of Strzemiński and Henryk Stażewski.

Producing a book encompassing such diverse debates and artworks must have been no small challenge. This is especially true given that there were often no tangible connections between the artist groups in focus here, as the author points out at the outset: they are linked, in simple terms, by having similar political outlooks and having taken inspiration from Constructivism, which they perceived as a movement closely linked to socialist ideals. As such, the book is primarily concerned with ways in which reinterpretations of Constructivism informed artistic production in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and it focuses exclusively on the avant-garde. Although the geographic scope of the book is remarkably wide, given that Central Europe's avant-gardes were still rarely directly linked to one another, the actual question of Constructivism's variability turns out to be much more narrowly focused on a highly select group of theorists and artists. Indeed, the book contains few insights that delve beyond well-established figures.

Indeed, given that Levinger implicitly aims to challenge misconceptions about centers (in this case Moscow) and peripheries (Central Europe) in art history, it is surprising that the book does not touch on the more recent debates situating Central European art in a wider context. References to the work of scholars who have revisited the framing of Central European art in the years since Steven Mansbach's *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* (1999) and Timothy Benson's *Central European Avant-Gardes* (2002)—including Piotr Piotrowski, Beáta Hock, Jonathan Owen, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Matthew Rampley—would have helped to situate the book in the crucial debates about where, and how, the

avant-garde positioned itself within Central Europe and in broader geographical contexts.¹ The book's bypassing of challenges to the exclusive framing of Central European avant-garde groups such as Devětsil, the Má circle, and the Blok group is also striking. While it is undoubtedly necessary to delimit material in a project spanning barely connected groups in three countries, the question remains as to what wider impact the Constructivist ideas these artists developed had on their broader environment. And, more importantly still, the question persists of how this revisiting of Constructivism in the region can challenge, rather than affirm, established narratives.

In this sense, the book offers a detailed reconsideration of Constructivism in Central Europe with an astonishing use of primary sources in different languages—a remarkable achievement in itself given that they have all been put together by a single author. However, the book continues to follow the established paradigm of writing the history of the avant-garde as an exclusive and almost exclusively male group of artists and its close focus leaves little room for grounding the analysis in the social and political realities of the day. The book thus primarily functions on a theoretical level as a history of ideas from different avant-garde groups in the region. As it makes little reference to more recent critical debates about art history in the region, *Constructivism in Central Europe* represents an impressive overview of constructivist ideas, but its readers will need extensive knowledge to succeed in situating these debates within a wider critical framework.

Brno

Julia Secklehner

¹ BEÁTA HOCK, JONATHAN OWEN et al. (eds.): *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918–1956*, London 2019; PIOTR PIOTROWSKI: *On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History*, in: *Umeni/Art* 56 (2008), 5, pp. 378–383; MATTHEW RAMPLEY: *Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe*, in: *Umění/Art* 69 (2021), 2, pp. 145–162.

If This Is a Woman. Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust. Hrsg. von Denisa Nešřáková, Katja Grosse-Sommer, Borbála Klacsmann und Jakub Drábik. Academic Studies Press. Boston 2021. XX, 271 S., Ill. ISBN 978-1-64469-710-8. (\$ 119,—.)

In June 1942, Emanuel Ringelblum, founder of the Oyneg Shabes archive established in the Warsaw Ghetto, noted, that “the historian of the future will have to devote a fitting chapter to the role of Jewish women during the war. It is thanks to the courage and endurance of our women that thousands of families have been able to endure these bitter times.” Quoting him, Hannah Wilson, a contributor to *If This Is a Woman*, reminds the reader that attention to female experiences and a greater understanding of gender dynamics more broadly have been all but a given in both Holocaust scholarship and memory. The volume is therefore a welcome and useful reminder of the necessity and value of a gender-sensitive approach to the study of the Holocaust. Nearly 40 years after the spat about Joan Ringelheim’s article discussing a feminist approach, it is time to take stock of scholarly achievements in the by now identifiable field, and *If This Is a Woman* does a great job doing so.¹

The volume results from contributions to the 2019 “XX. Century Conference: If This Is a Woman” at Comenius University Bratislava. Unlike many other conference volumes, the book is coherent; it offers a focused investigation of various dimensions of the Holocaust and World War II. As the editors note in the Introduction, both the conference and book are a response to the assault on democratic value and rights, including reproductive rights and the rights of the LGBTQ community, in several Eastern and Central European countries that prominently targets individual scholars and institutions dedicated to the study of gender. Critically exploring the experience of females, gender relations, representation and

¹ JOAN RINGELHEIM: *Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research*, in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10 (1985), 4, pp. 741–761.