

Introduction

Museums and Cultural Politics in the Habsburg World

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This book is an inquiry into museums and galleries of art in the Habsburg Monarchy, focusing on the period between 1867, when Austria-Hungary formally came into existence as a constitutional monarchy, and 1918, when it collapsed as a consequence of the First World War. Museums were some of the most important cultural institutions in European societies of the nineteenth century and, as such, played a prominent role in public life. Our study is concerned with their role as sites where questions of political and social identity were played out and where different parties, from the imperial court to individuals, sought to define and shape public culture.

The nineteenth century is often referred to as the museum age; many of the major public art museums in Europe and America were founded during this period. By common agreement, the transformation of the royal art collections of the Louvre into a public institution in the wake of the French Revolution provided the model. But much as the revolutionary politics of France played a part, its creation was more the outcome of longer effects of Enlightenment thought—in particular, the development of the concept of the public sphere and the emergence of the notion of fine art as a distinct cultural category. As with the theater and music, the emergence of public art galleries symbolized a shift away from the courts and the church as the primary sites of the display and consumption of art and toward a new type of space for the cultivated middle-class public. Other significant institutions representative of this shift included the National Gallery of Scotland (founded in Edinburgh in 1819 as the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in

Scotland), the National Gallery in London (founded in 1824), the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (1836), and the Altes Museum in Berlin (founded in 1830 and until 1845 referred to as the Royal Museum). Although they embodied a newly emerging social and civic order, such museums were still often dependent on royal patronage, and the roots of many were to be found in royal collections. After 1815 even the Louvre, for example, reverted back to royal hands and remained a royal institution until the founding of the Third Republic in 1870. Despite such caveats, museums were the agents of an important social and cultural development in which the exhibition of works of art was no longer merely a matter of aristocratic or ecclesiastical display, engineered to confirm (or bolster) the prestige of individuals or institutions, but was, rather, linked to notions of the wider public good.

During the nineteenth century, art museums came to take on a moral and pedagogical purpose and, as a result, became the subject of numerous debates about how to define it and how it might be achieved. In keeping with its assumed moral value, art itself became a kind of secular religion, and as many commentators have observed, it is no coincidence that the architecture of art museums built during the nineteenth century often adopted the language of the Greek temple.¹ A crucial factor that underpinned their rise was the increasing place of the nation in the public imaginary; the audience of museums was conceived to be a single whole, an “imagined community,” to borrow the words of Benedict Anderson.² This was not to dismiss differences of class or gender, but they were held to be subordinate to the nation, and it is for this reason that many such museums of art were referred to as national galleries. Hence, alongside examples already mentioned, one might cite institutions such as the Galeria Nacional de Pintura, founded in Lisbon in 1836, and the Prado, originally created as a Royal Museum in 1819 but redesignated the Museo Nacional de Pintura y Escultura after 1868. Museums thus played an important role in the larger process of state formation during the nineteenth century and, in particular, the creation of modern national identities.³ Frequently occupying prominent locations and consisting of physically imposing buildings, museums served as a means of projecting into the urban space the ideological values that underpinned the states that sponsored them. Tony Bennett has famously described this phenomenon by means of the concept of the exhibitionary complex.⁴ According to Bennett, museums functioned not only as spaces for the imagined community of the nation to gather, and therefore to adopt new forms and practices of sociability, but also as sites where that community could be ordered in a way that enabled a degree of social control. Through protocols of behavior that, he argues, were internalized by the visitors to these institutions, museums sought to create a new, polite and homogeneous public. In addition, displays of works of art in European and American museums conveyed a sense of a global (imperial) artistic and cultural order and of the place of visitors within that order. As Donald Preziosi has memorably put it, they propagated the notion of Europe as the “brain of the earth’s body.”⁵



FIGURE 1 | The Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Kaiserplatz. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Manfred Werner).

This idea of the nineteenth-century art museum has been subject to important criticisms; in particular, it tends to strip visitors of agency and reduce them to mere passive recipients of the museum’s “disciplinary” function.⁶ Hence, while museums were undoubtedly underpinned by their cultural authority, there were limits to their ability to shape publics as they wished. The apparatus of power-knowledge they represented was not as all-encompassing as Bennett and others have claimed. As this book argues, museum publics, while not “unruly,” nevertheless often followed their own whims and pleasures.

Further questions are raised by the idea of the museum as the locus of the imagined nation. On the one hand, Austria-Hungary might be seen as conforming to the broad outlines of Bennett’s thesis, even though Austria-Hungary was not a nation-state but a dynastic empire. The leading art gallery was the Kunsthistorisches Museum (fig. 1), which opened in 1891 and housed the Habsburg family art collections that had been previously on display in the Belvedere Palace. Situated close to the center of the city as part of a large complex of buildings associated with the imperial court, the lavish structure was an imposing spectacle that confirmed imperial authority and order. It was part of a grandiose array that included the Museum of Natural History on the other side of the square and, between them, a large-scale monument to Empress Maria Theresa completed by Kaspar von Zumbusch in 1887 (fig. 2). This arrangement deliberately set out to communicate

a sense of continuity with the past. The placing of geological and zoological specimens in the museum opposite affirmed the place of the ruling dynasty in the natural order of things.⁷

The lavishness of the internal and external decorations of the museum, as well as the sheer scale of the structure, testified, perhaps, to an anxiety felt in the capital over its relation to Berlin. Following military defeat by Prussia at the Battle of Königgrätz in 1866, Austria had been expelled from German affairs, and there was a genuine fear that Berlin would politically and culturally eclipse Vienna. The Kunsthistorisches Museum was thus testimony to the keen sensitivity of the imperial administration to the political and ideological goals that could be served by such an institution. Not only did it seek to confirm the prestige of the ruling dynasty in their role as possessors of a world-leading art collection, but it also aimed to restore a sense of pride in the city of Vienna and to bind the disparate population of Austria-Hungary to the capital by providing it with a visible symbolic center. By the time the museum opened its doors, tourism had become a popular pastime, and there were numerous discussions of how the museum would enhance the appeal of the city as a destination for tourists.

The basis of Austrian identity was not, however, the nation but, rather, the cosmopolitan dynastic state. As a multiethnic polity that included Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Czechs, Romanians, Italians, Croats, and Ruthenians, to list just some of the different groups, it could not be anything else. The basis of shared identity thus could not be the common history, language, confession, symbols, or even mythic homeland that are so often the crucial elements of a national community.⁸ Instead, it was the emperor Francis Joseph, whose portrait was ubiquitous in public spaces and buildings. The museum was consequently part of a larger-scale ensemble of cultural institutions—including, for example, the opera house—designed to create a public sphere loyal to the imperial order.

As with all historical analyses, however, ideal-typical schemata such as Bennett's exhibitionary complex are subject to revision and correction when it comes to individual cases. This pertains not only to empirical details but also to larger questions of methodology and framing. Questions of methodology concern how one describes the organization and logic of museums in a state in which numerous centers competed for cultural, social, and, ultimately, political authority. France and England were highly centralized, and it is unsurprising that they should provide the working material on which Bennett based his argument. Hence, even the practice of distributing works of art to regional museums, the so-called *envoi* system, which defined art policy in nineteenth-century France, served only to cement the power of the capital rather than to disperse cultural capital across the state.⁹ For it confirmed the asymmetry between the central and provincial museums, in which the latter received artworks as acts of state largesse, over which they had very little control. This often meant that regional museums had to accept works of lesser

quality or ones for which they lacked ample space. Due to its complex history, Germany was much more decentralized; the art collections in Berlin, Dresden, and Munich, for example, were the products of the ambitions of the local rulers in Prussia, Saxony, and Bavaria, while institutions such as the Hamburg Art Gallery and the Städel Gallery in Frankfurt were testament to the strong traditions of civic autonomy and identity. The creation of the Reich in 1871, however, meant that while such regional differences continued to be important, they were now framed by the larger all-encompassing identity of the German national state.¹⁰

Austria-Hungary, in contrast, presented an even more complex sociopolitical landscape. It had almost been torn apart by the turbulent years of 1848 and 1849, including the Hungarian War of Independence, and then, only eighteen years later, had to come to terms with the political humiliation and trauma of expulsion from Germany, with the challenge to its identity that such an event created. In 1867 the so-called Compromise devolved to Hungary almost complete power over its internal affairs and led to a lesser degree of self-rule in Galicia and Croatia, as well as resentment in Bohemia that *lack* of autonomy demonstrated disrespect for its former historic “rights.” This patchwork of autonomous and semiautonomous territories, joined with others that jealously sought the autonomy already enjoyed by others, led to the rise of significant centers competing for cultural, social, and political power in their crown lands as well as within the Empire as a whole. In addition, the Liberal government of Hungary pursued, from 1867 onward, a policy that envisaged it, linguistically, culturally, and administratively, as a unitary state in a manner reminiscent of Republican France. Our book is thus concerned to give due account to the cultural and political specificities of Austria-Hungary, starting with Vienna itself, which has often been treated as an annex of Germany.¹¹

There has been substantial debate over the political destiny of Austria-Hungary. The orthodox view that World War I merely hastened its inevitable demise has been questioned by scholars who have pointed out that loyalty to the Habsburg regime continued right until its end in 1918 (and even after that date).¹² This book is a contribution to that debate, examining the way that museums of art also sought to uphold the imperial order. As important as recognition of the continuing loyalty to the ruling Habsburg dynasty is, Austria-Hungary was nevertheless faced with constant crises of political identity in the second half of the nineteenth century. The constant rewriting of its constitution and the introduction of political reforms, both of which characterized its history during this period, are indicative of the situation, and museums did not stand apart from wider political processes.¹³

Because its political geography was in a state of flux, caution has to be exercised when describing what might be termed the “exhibitionary complex” of the Habsburg lands, most particularly given the changing status of Vienna. In England, London remained

the utterly dominant focus of cultural and political life, as did Paris in France. In Austria-Hungary, in contrast, while Vienna remained its internationally preeminent artistic center, by the end of the nineteenth century numerous other cities and territories had developed a high degree of cultural autonomy, such that their gaze was often directed abroad, to Paris, Berlin, Munich, Warsaw, or even London, rather than automatically to Vienna. Equally, historic centers such as the old Hungarian capital Pozsony (now Bratislava) lost their former importance. The period was thus one of a reconfiguration of the artistic geography of central Europe.

Budapest underwent rapid development from the 1850s onward and, by the end of the century, with the administrative merger of medieval Buda with the modern commercial city of Pest, became the fastest-growing metropolis in Europe. Its status as a cultural center was buttressed by its political role as the seat of the autonomous Hungarian government. Prague and Cracow did not enjoy the same political status as Budapest, but they nevertheless became major artistic centers in their own right. On the one hand, they continued to enjoy close links to the capital. Many Czech artists studied in Vienna, and some of the leading modernist Czech architects, such as Jan Kotěra, were pupils of Otto Wagner. Likewise, while the “Sztuka” (Art) movement turned Cracow into a notable site of modernist art, its members were also prominent participants in the Vienna Secession.¹⁴ On the other hand, the nature of the relation of such groups and individual artists to the imperial capital changed; they were no longer dependent on its support and patronage, and legitimacy was no longer automatically sought in Vienna. Indeed, the gaze of Prague- and Budapest-based artists was oriented toward Paris, both as the leading center of artistic innovation in Europe and also as a means of distancing themselves from the influence of the imperial capital.

The art world thus became dispersed across the territories of the Habsburg Empire, and this was reflected in the growth of art museums in major cities, which, far from being the spokes of a central exhibitionary hub comparable to Paris, served a diverse array of purposes that were often linked to local ideological imperatives. Thus the creation of the State Picture Gallery (Országos Képtár) in Budapest in 1871, made possible by the purchase of the noble Esterházy family’s collection of old masters, was supported by the Hungarian government in order to put Budapest on the map, both in Austria-Hungary, as a rival to Vienna, and in Europe as a whole. The National Museum was founded in Cracow in 1879 to provide a home for Polish artists and to make visible what was held to be a specifically Polish artistic tradition. Although its founders saw themselves as loyal subjects of the emperor, the museum was also invested in enhancing national prestige, a substitute for political independence.

This book therefore attempts to provide a critical account of this complex territory, in which museums functioned as actors in the public domain and were used to serve a

variety of often mutually opposed ends. When compared to the vast body of literature that has been devoted to museums in France, Germany, America, and Britain, the amount of scholarship on Austria-Hungary remains modest. By far the greatest beneficiary has been the Kunsthistorisches Museum; housing the majority of the Habsburg collections, it has been of interest not only as a stand-alone institution but also as part of the story of imperial art collecting.¹⁵ The same cannot be said of the museums and galleries elsewhere in the Habsburg Empire, where the number of studies has been limited, with few of them in English.¹⁶ Even more remarkable has been the complete lack of attention to museums in the context of Austria-Hungary as a whole. Studies have tended to focus on individual museums, with little attention to the broader museum landscape that operated under the Habsburg Monarchy. Ironically, some of the most informative sources continue to be studies conducted during the Habsburg period itself. The journal of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, for example, always set aside a section for research into the history of the imperial collections, and this invariably included articles on collections and institutions outside of Vienna. To these one can add the writings of Theodor von Frimmel (1853–1928), a curator at the museum who published numerous valuable museological studies.¹⁷

Projection of current political realities onto the past also plays a role, however. Many recent museological studies use current state boundaries as the basic framework, as if to deny the complex ties that drew cities and lands together. This study starts from the reverse premise, namely, that despite the contradictory impulses and often fragmented nature of civil society that characterized the state's later history, it is meaningful to talk of Austria-Hungary as a shared cultural space, in which museums and their employees were actors, albeit with conflicting goals. It argues that museums in present-day Hungary, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Romania, and Poland were part of a larger whole, since they were bound together by a common political and ideological arrangement. Institutions in Vienna mattered to those in Budapest; likewise, those who founded galleries in Zagreb, for example, had an eye on the Hungarian capital. Viennese cultural bureaucrats were mindful of artistic developments in the rest of the Empire, especially if these developments seemed to endanger Vienna's preeminence as the Empire's artistic center. Hence Rudolf Eitelberger (1817–1885), first chair of art history in Vienna, complained as early as 1866 about the centrifugal forces in the artistic life of the Empire: "Just as artists in Bohemia orient themselves ever more in the direction of Czechoslavism, and Hungarians have been standing up for national separatism for more than a decade, so in artistic circles in Austrian Poland a great indifference toward Austria has become evident, a decided sympathy for what in political circles is termed the idea of a Polish future. In Prague there was only one period when the idea of being part of Austria was adopted with any enthusiasm in the field of art."¹⁸

Eitelberger was articulating widespread concern in Vienna that it was losing the ability to control events in the assorted crown lands, although this is not to advance the traditional argument that Austria-Hungary was destined to collapse due to the competing nationalisms of its constituent ethnic groups or nations. For while there *were* nationalist impulses in major artistic centers outside of Vienna—painters such as Václav Brožík in Prague, Jan Matejko in Cracow, and Mór Than in Budapest pursued highly lucrative careers painting romantic images of national myths and imagined histories—this book argues that local civic pride was as much a factor in the drive to lessen dependency on Vienna. Art museums existed in a web of connections and affiliations that transcended present political boundaries, and many current institutions still betray the sociopolitical circumstances that held at the time they were founded. Hence, the picture gallery of the Brukenthal Museum, established in 1817 in Hermannstadt (now Sibiu in Romania), bears all the hallmarks of its status as the home for the collection of the Enlightenment-era courtier Samuel von Brukenthal (1721–1803), Habsburg governor of Transylvania, the predominance of Flemish, German, and Netherlandish art in its collections reflecting the typical preferences of the eighteenth-century Viennese nobility.¹⁹ In L'viv in Ukraine the modern art gallery includes an orphaned collection of works by Polish painters from the time when it was the predominantly Polish/Habsburg city of Lwów/Lemberg and when the city council sought both to reassert its Polish identity and to claim an ability to rival Cracow as a major center of Polish art and culture in Habsburg Galicia.²⁰ Museums also bore witness to the attempt to create a cosmopolitan social and cultural identity; when the Kunsthistorisches Museum was built, the Hungarian artist Mihály Munkácsy, who was based in Paris and enjoyed widespread international fame, painted the ceiling above the main staircase with the fresco *Apotheosis of the Renaissance*.²¹ Yet it is testimony to the complex nature of Habsburg culture that shortly afterward Munkácsy undertook a commission for the Hungarian Parliament building in Budapest, where he painted a large work, *Árpád Conquers Hungary* (1893), which stood for entirely opposite ideological values. Museums in Austria-Hungary were thus tied to and the expression of a complex political terrain. The same can be said of their sociocultural position. They aided in the formation of a bourgeois public sphere, particularly in the crown lands outside of Vienna, where geographical distance from the court meant that while the gentry and aristocrats were still influential, local elites were increasingly middle-rung professionals and politicians.

The development of museums reflected what has long been recognized as the wider phenomenon of professionalization during the nineteenth century. The new cultural class that resulted played a decisive role in the creation of many museums. The National Museum in Cracow, for example, was an important monument to the ability of a civic elite to organize a coherent cultural vision for their city. But to talk of a process of

embourgeoisement can be misleading if it misrepresents the continuing importance of the nobility as cultural actors in Vienna. This was most obvious in the case of the Kunsthistorisches Museum; the imperial scientific collections were turned over to the state in 1857, but the art collection was the unequivocal outward symbol of noble and imperial prestige. The same was true in Prague; its main art museum was the Picture Gallery of the Society of Patriotic Friends of Art, whose membership consisted of the Bohemian nobility who had founded the gallery in 1796 initially just to show their private collections to each other. Later it was opened to the general public, but it was still dominated by the interests of its aristocratic patrons and supporters. This situation remained unchanged until 1918.

Hence, even if, following Jürgen Habermas, the invention of the public sphere is associated with a bourgeois revolution, it was still substantially shaped by aristocratic figures. When Gustav Waagen in 1866 published *The Finest Artistic Monuments in Vienna*, he listed, alongside the imperial artworks in the Belvedere, five major aristocratic collections, namely, those of Prince Liechtenstein and Counts Czernin, Harrach, Schönborn, and Lanckoroński.²² These were all open to the public and can be legitimately counted as an important part of the museum world of the capital. In the final quarter of the century Count Karol Lanckoroński came to be an important participant in public cultural and intellectual life. An active collector, he cultivated close social and personal contacts with leading art historians in Vienna and in Cracow, in his native Galicia, sponsored numerous archaeological expeditions, wrote scholarly publications on art and archaeological topics, and used his home as a salon, where he expressly sought out middle-class artists, writers, journalists, and intellectuals.²³

Public intellectual and artistic life was thus shaped by the interests and ideologies of many different kinds of actors, from the imperial court to state ministries, aristocratic collectors, wealthy private individuals, and corporate bodies of artists and art enthusiasts. Older social structures persisted at the same time that new configurations came into existence, and this book attempts to map the history of art museums onto that complex landscape, in which issues of social class intersected with those of national, ethnic, and sexual identity. The Catholic Church, too, played a prominent role. Even though Emperor Joseph II had led a concerted campaign to lessen clerical power in the state in the 1780s, the church was still an important cultural agent in the nineteenth century, most especially in smaller cities outside of Vienna, where, in the absence of universities or other institutions of higher education, clerics constituted the local intelligentsia. In Croatia, for example, the leading cultural reformer of the mid and late 1800s was Josip Strossmayer, bishop of Đakovo, who in 1868 donated his personal collection of paintings to form the first public art gallery in Zagreb. Clerics also had an important role for public institutions as collectors and scholars; the Hungarian National Museum, for example, was originally a

library and remained so until a substantial number of artworks were donated to it in 1836 by Johann Ladislaus Pyrker, archbishop of Eger and former patriarch of Venice (at that time a Habsburg possession). Furthermore, ecclesiastical collections such as those in Esztergom (1875) and Eger in Hungary were increasingly opened up to the public, adding yet another dimension to the Austro-Hungarian museum landscape.

The museum world was consequently multilayered, with older forms of collecting and display coexisting with emergent practices, purposes, and values often in conflict with one another. This is addressed in chapter 1, which provides an overview of the museological landscape in the Habsburg domains, the origins of the most significant collections, and the evolution of museums during the nineteenth century.

Most studies of museums have tended to approach them in terms of the national and imperial states in which they were based, and those in the capital cities have received the lion's share of critical attention. In one sense this emphasis is understandable, given that they usually had the most extensive and art-historically significant collections and took on a particular symbolic importance. Yet it neglects their place as municipal institutions that made an important contribution to the formation of urban, rather than purely national, identity. The State Picture Gallery in Budapest and then, later, the Museum of Fine Arts may have been important expressions of the political aspirations of the Hungarian government, but equally they strengthened the claim of Budapest to the status of front-ranking European city. As such, not only central administrations but also municipalities had a stake in such institutions. Museums became a focus around which local elites coalesced into defined groups that sharpened municipal identity. Chapter 2 examines this specific topic: the relation between museums and the cities that hosted them. Indeed, all major museums were sited in cities, and the urban context was an important factor in the wider political and public identity of each. This was especially true in the foundation of city art galleries, a type of institution seldom studied, yet each of the municipal museums in, for example, Prague (founded in 1881), Vienna (founded in 1887), and Budapest (1889) amassed important collections of art that pertained to the history and identity of the city in question, providing an additional dimension to the museological context. The National Museum in Cracow was also a municipal institution, testament to the role of the city as a symbolic representative of the aspirations of the Polish nation as a whole. Such museums did not enter into competition with larger imperial institutions—there was no question of, for example, the Cracow National Museum's attempting to challenge the Kunsthistorisches Museum as the prime depository of art in the country—but the complex fabric of public culture in the cities of Austria-Hungary allowed them to pursue many other avenues and agendas.

Museums and galleries communicated with their audiences in a variety of ways, from publications to public educational events and talks, but undoubtedly the two most

powerful ways were through the design of the building that housed them and the ordering of works on the walls. Architectural design is the subject of chapter 3. The Kunsthistorisches Museum was the most spectacular demonstration of the recognition of what could be achieved with museum architecture; its scale and the grandiosity of its design conveyed unambiguous messages about imperial cultural and social authority. Museums have long been thought of as constituting a specific architectural type; Nikolaus Pevsner, for example, classes the Kunsthistorisches Museum as a monumental instance of a category that includes the Prado (1811), the Munich Alte Pinakothek (1836), and the Dresden Gemäldegalerie (1855).²⁴ There were counterparts in Austria-Hungary; the first public art collection in Budapest was housed in Mihály Pollack's neoclassical Hungarian National Museum (1847) before ending up in the Museum of Fine Arts (Szépművészeti Múzeum), a further neoclassical edifice that opened in 1906. Such buildings provided a clear signal of the importance attached to museums as institutions, and were placed in symbolically resonant locations. Yet the architects and founders of public museums were not only concerned with architectural language as a form of communication in its own right, they were also engaged with the relation between the buildings and the collections of objects inside them. It was debated whether lavishly embellished structures enhanced the artworks or were a distraction from them. And what might be the most appropriate language for a building that housed artifacts from a diverse range of historical periods? Architects also had to address another more pressing question: What might be the optimum internal arrangement of spaces? That is, how might the architectural design help structure the visit to the gallery and enhance the display of artworks, ensure optimal conditions for viewing the works, and how might the works be stored?

Discussions of museum architecture tend to focus on purpose-built structures, but in many instances major art museums across the Habsburg Empire occupied adapted buildings, from private dwellings to large-scale public structures originally designed for other purposes. The reasons for this were various, from contingent issues such as financial and planning restrictions to deliberate decisions to use specific sites for their symbolic resonance. Chapter 3 considers this phenomenon as well, touching on the rationale for the choice of building and the implications of decisions made.

In the late eighteenth century the imperial art collections were moved from their accommodation in the main court complex (Hofburg) in the city of Vienna to the Belvedere Palace on its edge. They were also subject to a major rehanging. This represented the early stage of an important shift that would be fully felt only much later: the rise of the professional museum curator and art historian and the emergence of modern academic art history. Until the mid-1800s most galleries and art collections, beginning with those of the emperor, were administered by artists, who, it was assumed, were best qualified to manage them. The same held for other princely collections and those of institutions

such as the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. With a substantial art collection consisting of bequests as well as works by academicians, its gallery was likewise overseen by an artist. One hundred years later, this situation had substantially changed. While still seeking imperial and aristocratic patronage, art galleries and museums were managed by art historians. The profession of museum curator was still not one for which there was a specialized training, but art historians could nevertheless lay claim to authority by virtue of their historical understanding of the works in their care.

Christian von Mechel, the Swiss publisher, engraver, and art dealer, appointed to oversee the transfer of the imperial collection in 1781, was not a trained art historian, but he was acquainted with the celebrated archaeologist and “father of art history” Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The latter undoubtedly informed Mechel’s break with traditional practice, leading to organization of works by art-historical, rather than aesthetic, criteria.²⁵ Museums provide an illustration of the colonization of the cultural sphere by the new professional middle-class intelligentsia. Yet the nature of the public sphere was constantly being renegotiated. Did it comprise the nation (however that might be defined) or the subjects of the emperor, whatever their ethnicity and nationality? It is simplistic to talk in terms of the opposition between older aristocratic patterns of artistic patronage and consumption, on the one hand, and newer forms molded by the interests of the emerging public sphere, on the other. Not only did cultural life continue to be dominated by the nobility; in addition, the interests of aristocratic gallery owners and patrons of art were not always so different from those of the museum professionals that allegedly supplanted them.²⁶ Famous collections such as those of the Liechtensteins or the Lankorońskis were often praised for being more scientific in their organization than those of public museums, routinely assumed to have embodied the new order.

Museums consequently took on a new identity, not merely as gentrified places of pleasure but also as sites for the production of knowledge. This involved the publication of catalogues and guides for the general public, as well as scholarly works of research. The Kunsthistorisches Museum’s own journals and reports were frequently the first place that many of the works in their possession were subject to in-depth analysis. Indeed, many of the articles on archival documents published in the early volumes of its annual journal, the *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, still have considerable value as sources of primary material. The major galleries thus provided an alternative to universities for art historians to pursue professional careers. This topic forms the focus of chapter 4, which explores the rise of the museum professional and the impact of this new type of scholar on the curatorial and exhibitionary practices of museums and galleries. Conversely, it asks, How did the experience of working in the museum shape the museum professional’s understanding of the history of art? Did museums provide a distinctive site for the production of art-historical knowledge?

Chapter 5 considers exhibitionary practices *inside* the museums, both what museums collected and how they chose to display the works they possessed. The bases of many public art museums were private collections and donations. Yet as soon as the museums came into existence, debates arose about the meaning of such bequests and how they shaped the identity of the institutions in question. During the debates leading up to the creation of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, for example, Rudolf Eitelberger argued that the imperial collections should be “rationalized” and reorganized on modern art-historical lines.²⁷ Yet he was opposed, and not only on the basis of a presumed loyalty to the idea of the inalterability of the collections but also because it was recognized that the museum-to-be was a vivid illustration of the history of collecting and of Habsburg cultural politics. A tension thus arose concerning what the museum meant and what its collections were supposed to illustrate: the history of art, the history of artistic patronage and collecting on the part of the founder, or some other idea?

As museums proliferated and, increasingly, as they were set up to promote local agendas and political visions, these dilemmas multiplied. Museum directors and employees were faced with questions about which works they should acquire and what the governing rationale should be. While some museums, due to the sheer scale of their holdings, had representative works of most major schools and periods of European art, it was far from automatic that this was their goal. Indeed, while the Altes Museum in Berlin is held up as the paradigmatic instance of the universalizing aspirations of European art museums, few institutions in Austria-Hungary had similar aims, and even if they did in theory, their acquisition policies were limited by their budgets, as well as the local availability of artworks. Many museums in cities outside of Vienna and Budapest were driven instead by local agendas, often based on the idea of constructing national or regional artistic canons. The nineteenth century was a period of dynamic change in thinking about how museum displays should be arranged; this pertained not only to how they should be arranged on the walls of the galleries but also to how the galleries themselves should be organized. Such considerations also informed the question of how the works should be hung, and this is also examined in chapter 5.

Museums disseminated scholarship about art to academic art historians and to other art-world professionals, but they also, with educational programs, served as instruments of mass communication about visual art. Chapter 6 therefore examines how they sought to communicate with wider audiences. How did they define their audiences, and how did they seek to educate them? How successful were their attempts to do so? The museological model deployed by Bennett has long been criticized for focusing on the agency of the gallery and for its tendency to view the public as passively fitting into the exhibitionary complex.²⁸ One of the aims of this book is to restate and demonstrate that the gallery-going public was an active participant in the museum. This participation, the relation

between the museums and their publics, is analyzed in the chapter. It is often difficult to find unambiguous evidence of visitors' responses to the experience of being in the museum, of their submission to the values projected by the displays orchestrated around them, but one can nevertheless find indirect evidence. Visual and written testimony can indicate the kinds of audiences that were envisaged, even though many such sources were themselves ideologically motivated representations. Between 1875 and 1889, for example, the Viennese painter Carl Goebel the Younger (1824–1889) executed a series of seventeen watercolor paintings of the galleries in the Lower Belvedere, where the imperial collections were housed. The documentary value of the images has been often remarked, but what is equally interesting about them is the indirect testimony they provide as to how Goebel envisaged the visitors.²⁹ Far from comprising a homogeneous gentrified group, the public is instead depicted as heterogeneous, with individuals drawn from different social classes, men and women, young and old. This was itself a projection of Habsburg values, in which a space identified with the imperial dynasty as cultural patrons was seen as accessible to all subjects. Furthermore, as the museums gradually broadened their appeal to include newer layers of the society in their pursuit of wider public appeal, the museum public also changed and expanded. It was this dynamic, changing nature of the public, its colorful, varied composition, that defined a museum's identity positively as a civic institution within the local community and the broader society.

Galleries and museums often figured prominently in the press; they were a matter of public interest, and discussion of them was not always wholly complimentary. The fact that members of the bourgeois intelligentsia felt able to criticize such institutions, even those closely linked to the imperial family, indicates the extent to which museums did not merely project Habsburg cultural authority but were part of a larger cultural field in which middle-class commentators had a stake and which, crucially, they felt they had a right to shape. Chapter 6 therefore considers the place of museums in wider political and cultural debates as they came to be articulated publicly.

Many of the museums in this book, such as the National Museum in Cracow, the Strossmayer Gallery in Zagreb, the Kunsthistorisches Museum and Albertina in Vienna, and the Patriotic Gallery in Prague, served an important role in presenting normative visions of the history of art. However, they did little to serve the needs of contemporary artists. This was perhaps of little consequence when there were extensive forms of artistic patronage. However, in the late 1890s the old patronage system gradually broke down, much as it did elsewhere, especially in Paris.³⁰ One important cause was its inability to meet the demands of the growing numbers of artists. Loyal Habsburg subjects such as Eitelberger and the Hungarian art critic Lajos/Ludwig Hevesi (1843–1910) might have praised the emperor as patron of the arts, but the imperial court was no longer willing, or even expected, to accommodate the changing art world, leading to a proliferation of

nonimperial institutions where art was exhibited. In this sense, even at its opening, the Kunsthistorisches Museum was a monument to a world that was fast disappearing. It is this fast-changing field that is addressed in the epilogue.

The establishment of museums outside of Vienna was a symptom of this changing art world; the work of artists who found no interest or support in Vienna could now be exhibited elsewhere, and the capital was no longer the automatic focus of attention for many artists, even though it had the international prestige that other cities could not match. An additional sign of change was the formation of artists' associations, which often had their own semipermanent exhibition sites. The grandest and oldest of all was the Vienna Artists' Association (Genossenschaft der bildenden Künstler Wiens), founded in 1861 on the merger of two smaller groups. In 1868 it moved into a Neo-Renaissance exhibition space (the Künstlerhaus) on the Ringstrasse, which became perhaps the most important venue for working artists.³¹ In Budapest the National Hungarian Fine Art Association (Országos Magyar Képzőművészeti Társulat) was founded in 1861, in Prague the Mánes Union of Fine Artists (Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes) in 1887, and in Cracow the Society of Polish Artists, Sztuka, in 1897. All three had the express aim of providing an institutional structure for the promotion of works by living artists. The Künstlerhaus was exceptional in terms of the level of imperial support it enjoyed, yet each of these institutions became the site of conflicts over control of the direction of art. Each had its own exhibition venue, but limitations on space, coupled with conservative selection policies by the organizing committees, led to a splintering of and a struggle over authority.

The result was the creation and proliferation of artists' groups and exhibition spaces. This transformation was synonymous with secessionism and the birth of modernism. As Jeff Taylor has recently argued, the Secession was often less directly driven by the questioning of aesthetic norms and more by the desire of artists to fulfill their career ambitions.³² Hence, the National Salon (Nemzeti Szalon) in Budapest (1894), the Secession Building in Vienna (1898), the Palace of Art (Pałac Sztuki) in Cracow (1901), and the Pavilion of the Mánes Association in Prague (1902) all functioned as alternative spaces. In Vienna the city administration, together with the Ministry of Culture, eventually recognized the inadequacies of formal institutional arrangements and set up the Modern Gallery in the Belvedere in 1903. Yet while the impulse was often entrepreneurial rather than purely aesthetic, such venues redefined museological practice. Not only did their architectural language break with prevailing norms—historicist models were discarded in favor of the striking and innovative designs of József and László Vágó in Budapest, Josef Maria Olbrich in Vienna, Jan Kotěra in Prague, or Franciszek Mączyński in Cracow—but these institutions also radically transformed exhibition design. Most famously, the Secession introduced the new concept of *Raumkunst*, in which the exhibition space functioned as an integral part of the work, a *mise-en-scène* that explored Wagnerian notions

of aesthetic totality.³³ By 1914 the conception of what a museum might be, what purposes it might serve, the role of tradition, and the nature and structure of institutional authority had been transformed. A fitting metaphor, perhaps, for the parallel political history of central Europe.

The scope of this study is not comprehensive. Some of the most significant museums in Austria-Hungary were dedicated to the applied arts. Not only did the Museum for Art and Industry in Vienna and the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest house extensive collections that were often supported by imperial patronage, but they were home as well to some of the most dynamic and original thinkers on art in Europe. The leading representatives of the Vienna School of art history, for example, including Eitelberger, Franz Wickhoff, and Alois Riegl, all began their careers at the Museum for Art and Industry.³⁴ Yet these institutions are not examined in this book. This is not in order to propose some Kantian hierarchy of fine and applied art, but rather to acknowledge the different origins of the museums of applied arts, which were founded for a specific purpose having to do with economic policy and improvement in the industrial competitiveness of the Empire. They consequently belonged to a different discursive domain and are the subject of another book-length study.³⁵