

# Czech Language News

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## Message from the President

Dear Members and Friends of NAATC,

As the academic term draws to a close I want to join with you in welcoming the approach of summer with its promise of time at last for travel and extended research. Interest in Czech among American and Canadian undergraduates continues to rise, and although our departments are often hard-pressed to find time and staffing, Czech programs continue to develop and in some cases even to thrive. In the coming months I look forward to meeting many of you in the Czech Republic and at the SVU World Congress convening in August in Washington, where our organization will be represented by an exciting panel on Czech Linguistics and Pedagogy. For details on the Congress, see the flyleaf of the newly published special issue of *Czech Language News* (Brown Slavic Contributions, Volume XIII: Modern Czech Studies). This volume, edited by Alexander Levitsky and Masako Fidler, and partially supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, marks the second year in a row that Brown has published our plenary papers, this time featuring three on "Czech Literature in Transition" and two on Czech linguistics. The volume also contains four articles by Brown Slavists. We owe the editors a debt of gratitude and extend to them our warmest thanks for this good work.

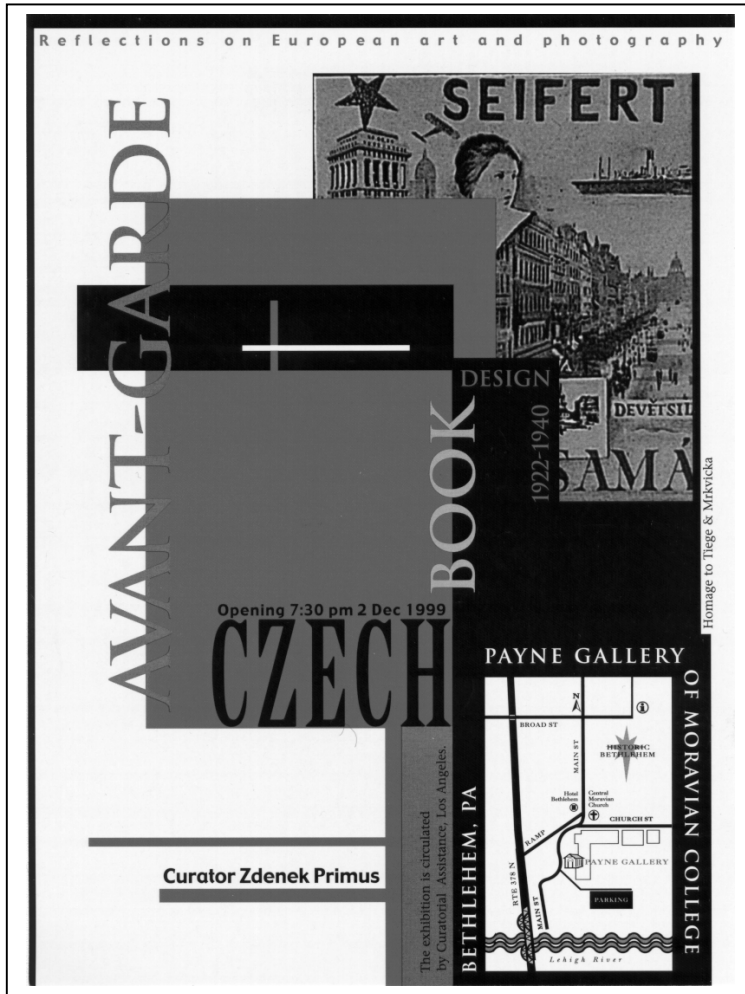
We will be returning to Washington again at year's end for our organizational meeting, once again in association with AATSEEL. Our panels are still in development. So far a Czech literature panel is being formed. As for the Czech linguistics panel, it is currently under consideration, and I would like to encourage submission of papers. If you are interested, please contact Malynne Sternstein ([msternst@midway.chicago.edu](mailto:msternst@midway.chicago.edu)) for literature and Alla Nedashkivska ([alla.nedashkivska@ualberta.ca](mailto:alla.nedashkivska@ualberta.ca)) for linguistics. The abstract deadline is August 1, 2000.

The present issue of *Czech Language News* may be one of the last you will hold in your hands. The editorship plans electronic publication beginning perhaps as early as the fall of 2000, but will publish a limited number of hard-copy issues for those who require them. I would like to remind you that member dues are a principle source of funding for this publication and for other activities of our organization. Please remember to submit your annual dues if you have not already done so. I wish everyone a fruitful and pleasant summer of 2000!

George Cummins, Tulane University

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poster made by Lori Brennan

**New Art for Mass Audiences:  
A Review of the Exhibit "Czech Avant-Garde:  
Reflections on Art and Photography in  
Book Design, 1922-1940"**

**By Alisa Gayle Mayor  
Independent Scholar**

With the current explosion of developments in cyber-art, Web pages, dynamic HTML, and multimedia, one can easily forget similar revolutions that fused art with technology in the earlier part of the twentieth century. One such revolution was that of the avant-garde movements in European art between the two World Wars, particularly in Eastern Europe. Bedazzled by the stunning technological developments in photomontage, printing, and mass production, Czech artists put these developments to use as they created a completely new form of book design. The exhibit, "Czech Avant-Garde: Reflections on Art and Photography in Book Design, 1922-1940," showcases the full spectrum of accomplishments in this field by the most prominent graphic artists of the time. This set of 800 works from the collection of Zdeněk Primus, a graphic arts professor at the Czech Republic's Vysoká Škola Umělecko-průmyslová, features

most prominently the works of Czech artists who belonged to the 1920s avant-garde group Devětsil and the 1930s Surrealists. Artists such as Karel Teige, Jindřich Štyrský, Otakar Mrkvička, Ladislav Sutnar, and Zdeněk Rossman are especially well represented.

The scope of the collection is broad and contains illustrations of books in almost every possible subject area. The books range from poetry collections and mystery novels to technical manuals, cookbooks, and architectural studies, and they give an idea of what the reading public in interwar Czechoslovakia found particularly noteworthy. This exhibit features many popular translations of writers from outside Czechoslovakia, such as Jack London, Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Baudelaire, and Soviet avant-garde writers, including Vladimir Maiakovskii. For those who are interested in the works of Karel Teige and Vítězslav Nezval, this exhibit contains a particularly large number of poetry volumes by Nezval that Teige illustrated. Some of the books and covers are also interesting for their socialist subject matter. Several Great Depression-era books that excoriate United States capitalism also have designs that none too subtly depict motifs such as peasants with axes who are chasing away men in top hats and tails who have sacks of dollars in their hands. Nevertheless, as the range of the exhibit also demonstrates, the art on the cover did not always have to match the content of the book itself. For the artists of the avant-garde movement, the book cover provided a new type of canvas for bringing art to the growing reading public.

The exhibit is divided into four primary categories based on the types of book covers in the collection: "Photography and Photomontage," "Constructivist Design," "Isms and the Book," and "Picture Poems of Poetism." The section on "Photography and Photomontage" features book covers that used new techniques of combining photographs in a collage. "Constructivist Design" showcases the use of circles, squares, lines, arcs, and diagonals in book cover design. The division of "Isms and the Book" contains works that followed the artistic principles of movements such as Surrealism, Purism, and Lyrical Abstraction. The section on "Picture Poems of Poetism" contains book covers that used different forms of typesetting and mixing fonts.

The exhibit has tags for each book that give its title in English and the name of the artist who created the cover. For visitors without a background in Czech art or literature, probably short biographies of the main figures in this artistic movement would help to create a context for understanding the diverse talents and accomplishments of these artists.

"Czech Avant-Garde" is worthwhile for a wide variety of specialist and student audiences. At

Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the exhibit was on display from December 2, 1999 to February 6, 2000. It served as the basis for courses for graphics arts and literature students. "We really used this exhibit as a teaching exercise," said Dr. Diane Radycki,

Assistant Professor of Art History at Moravian College and Curatorial Director of the Payne Gallery. "A college has a gallery in order to educate the students, not simply fine arts students, but also in graphic arts and literature." Graphic arts students had the assignment