Considering an artwork as a site of memory and as a focus of identity construction is not at all an obvious approach. The conference “Common Artifacts” aimed at bringing to the fore the recognition of visual artworks as very special objects which have valuable social roles besides their ability to create esthetic contemplation. In my contribution, I will approach images first of all as agents. I do not intend to deny that art works are created with the intention to express ideas, in the case of medieval or early modern art they are usually religious ideas. Once considered individually, however, images and especially artworks may possess communicative roles beyond the ones that are usually encountered in the primary situation of production and consumption. In this framework, I would like to demonstrate the role played by a statue of Pietà in the communal life of its hometown from the 14th century until present. My focus will not lie on the process of creation, but on the social aspects of images that were significant throughout the decades and even centuries after the art works’ making. Images can be found communicating in situations that are rather distant from the context for which they were initially created and in which they were originally comprehended. Such a secondary meaning needs not to be considered as something accidental and external. In fact, we can assume that it is this meaning that brings the capability to enter into new and challenging structures of meaning that in turn assure an old artwork to stay alive, or become alive once again, for new generations to observe. In so far as a recipient is a constitutive element of any artwork, I believe, that research accomplished in the frame of the social agency of artworks is a significant part of art historical research.

One particular aspect of the social agency of artworks in Central and East-Europe is their national character. While knowledge of language divides groups of speakers, visual images, which do not rely on words and texts, may connect. The use of Latin in pre-modern times or nowadays’ large use of English obviously cannot be dismissed but still, I argue, that in contrast to language, artistic images appeal more easily to emotional and subliminal levels of perception without need for specific preliminary education, and thus may have a much stronger impact. Seen from another point of view, art history in Central and Eastern Europe since the 19th century has often used mute artworks as examples and even as proof for competing and mutually excluding national identities. Whoever could claim that early art works of a certain region belonged to their ethnic group, has felt entitled to proclaim his right to rule the land. Too many art historical texts were involved in ethnic, national and racial struggle in our part of Europe. Our current attempt to find a discursive position beyond the national divides requires a reconsideration on a methodological and terminological basis that would prevent us, on the one hand, to disguise the conflicts of the past, and at the same time, enable us to provide a European perspective for our topic.

In order to investigate the communicative agency of a medieval artwork during the six centuries of its existence, the concept of historical memory can be employed. It is possible to recognize more than a singular historical memory in a given place, to consider them not as mutually exclusive, and, consequently, to operate with the concept of multiple identities. In fact, such an approach may be the most adequate one if we were to deal with pre-modern societies whose identity structure differed profoundly from that of the era of modern nationalism. An artwork can be approached as a site of memory: it is an object emotionally charged and physically, even bodily concrete, remaining - more or less - the same materially while entering into different contexts and meanings. The focus of my contribution will be the monumental wooden sculpture of Pietà from the parish church of St James in Jihlava (Iglau) (fig. 1). During the restoration completed in the year 2005, rather thick secondary surface layers were removed and as a result, large areas of original polychrome have been revealed.
and hence, formal analysis was finally made possible. 

On the basis of a close stylistic correspondence to 
the donor’s relief of Ludwig der Bayer and his wife 
from the former chapel of Altes Hof in Munich, and 
based on the fact that the Munich court art and the 
Bohemian artistic scene stood in a close artistic rela-
tionship during the rule of king John of Luxembourg, 
the Pietà from Jihlava can be dated to before or 
around 1330. With its detachable, somewhat puppet-
like figure of Christ it represents a relatively early ex-
ample of the appropriation of the new Lamentation 
iconography, mediated by the Alpine regions from Italy.

The Pietà was first mentioned in an art historical con-
text in 1931, when it was stripped bare of its devotio-
nal clothing and the Czech scholars compared it to 
the group of the so-called mystical German Pietàs’.
William Pinder and Georg Dehio coined this term in 
the 1920s, making it a typical expression for the ge-
\[\text{roughly studied was in the authoritative Czech volume}
\text{on Gothic sculpture in Bohemia by Albert Kutal in 1962. Kutal supposed that attempts to obtain a more}
\text{precise dating on the basis of stylistic grounds were}
\text{impossible as he thought the religious function com-
pletely obscured the artist’s style. In addition, he re-
moved the Pietà from the scope of Czech art history,}
\text{due to its affiliation to the German mystical iconogra-
phy as well as its origin, that is to say a town domina-
ted by Germans.}

Jihlava is a town on the border of Bohemia and 
Moravia, also known under its German name Iglau. 
Founded as a royal mining town in the course of the 
Bohemian silver rush around the middle of the 13th 
century, Iglau had a German-speaking majority ever 
since the dominant language of communication (if not 
always the mother tongue) of its inhabitants can be 
determined. During the German nation building move-
ment in the 19th and 20th centuries, Iglau became the 
focal point for the concept of the so-called “German 
language islands” (Sprachinsel) inside Bohemia and 
Moravia. After the forced expulsion of Germans from 
Czechoslovakia in the wake of World War II, Jihlava’s 
German character was sentenced to be forgotten. It 
was only after the fall of the Communist regime and 
the ensuing split of Czechoslovakia that Germans 
were gradually allowed a place in the communal his-
torical memory: e.g., as the first of its kind, the Jihlava 
regional museum includes a room dedicated to local 
German culture.

Little is known about the situation in which the 
Pietà was carved and painted. Its sheer volume sug-
gests a local production, but the first documented 
written evidence of active artists in Jihlava dates to 
the 1430s, i.e. a century later. The town seems never 
to have been so economically strong as to sustain a 
resident artistic workshop and even the relatively high 
quality decorations for the parish church in the 1490s 
seem to have been either imported or provided by a 
temporarily settled workshop*. The parish in the weal-
thy mining town was incorporated to the Premonstra-
tensian monastery in Želiv (Seelau) prior to its loss of 
power during the Hussite wars between 1420-1434. 
Only a few years before, the town commune had final-
ly managed to gain at least partial and shared authori-
ty over the parish church after decades of bitter ar-
guing with the monastery. As a result of the conflict, local burghers habitually chose their burials to not take place in the parish church, but rather in the two mendicant churches and their cloisters. Donations to the parish church only began after 1402, the year when the famous St Catherine sculpture was acquired for a tabernacle of the singers’ brotherhood from a prestigious Prague workshop. The Pietà from Jihlava, on the other hand, was made 70 years earlier, for one of the two rich Jihlava mendicants cloisters. The local tradition claims it comes from the Franciscan monastery of Our Lady. The fact that the style of the Pietà conforms to the artistic orientation of the Prague Luxembourg court towards Munich might suggest a possible royal donation, but there is no further information to support such hypothesis.

There is another medieval Pietà group in Jihlava that now belongs to the Jesuit church but originated from the abolished church of the Holy Cross with a Dominican monastery. This provenance may provide an indirect confirmation of the origin of the earlier Pietà from the Franciscans. Typical for high medieval towns, the two orders competed for the favor and attention of the townspeople and located their monasteries as far as possible from each other. The later Jihlava Pietà represents an important example of the type of the Beautiful Style Pietàs that became popular across the whole of Europe around 1400. Like the St Catherine sculpture from the parish church, the Pietà of the Dominicans in Jihlava is cut from marly limestone, typical for Prague workshops and associated with the aura of the imperial city. It is one of the largest of its type.

We are equally at loss concerning the liturgical contexts and religious performances centered on both Pietà sculptures. Still, it seems probable that the Dominicans and burghers who preferred their monastery wanted to obtain an artwork that could successfully compete with the older Franciscan sculpture of the same iconography. The communal identity around 1400 was still divided between the Franciscans and Dominicans, but just 30 years later, after the Hussite wars, the split shifted to a divide between the Roman and Bohemian Catholics – the second term being a self-description of the Hussite, or Utraquist church. The Dominican monastery was never revived again and the new and formally actual Dominican Pietà might have simply lacked time to gain its own significance in the religious life of the Jihlava community. The older Franciscan Pietà, on the other hand, faced a challenging future.

In 1522, Iglau became the first town in the Bohemian Kingdom to become Lutheran and in 1564 the Prague Premonstratensians felt prompted to take over the neglected legacy of the Želiv monastery. The rich and powerful Strahov monastery pursued a policy of re-catholization that could prove successful only after the defeat of the non-catholic party in Bohemia in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War. While the Beautiful Style Pietà remained neglected in the former Dominican church, the older Franciscan Pietà acquired an active role in the re-catholization process. It was moved to a cemetery chapel attached to the parish church and possibly on this occasion a new layer of polychrome was applied around 1600. In that chapel, before the end of the 17th century at a date that wasn’t precisely recorded, the monumental Virgin turned her head away from a priest who performed the mass in spite of being in the state of mortal sin. The religious community of Iglau, that had been unified in their Catholicism for one or two generations by that time, had thus received a special sign from heaven: the moral lesson was mediated by a miraculous image.

Hence, the Pietà acquired a special status. A new, sumptuously decorated chapel was built on the site and the sculpture was integrated into a Baroque altarpiece (fig. 2). Both figures were painted in uniform blackish paint with light red blood traces, which were changed back into polychrome in 1784 by the painter Tobias Süssmayer. But layers of ritual clothing and devotional objects, among which only the two faces of the Virgin and Jesus could be seen, now covered the sculpture. At least two sculptural copies were made, one of them matching the superhuman scale of the original (both are listed in the inventories of the Jihlava regional museum, but they cannot be located). The Pietà became a center of religious festivities and pilgrimages, as well as the subject of devotional books and prints (fig. 3). It was venerated as a holy patron of the town, the spiritual center of the community, one that draws its members together and provi-
des an axis for their identity, anchored both transcendentally in heavens and locally in the concrete site.

The silver mines of Jihlava ran out before the middle of the 15th century and the town economy was re-oriented towards textile industry and trade. The town prospered during the 17th and 18th centuries, but was unable to sustain during the industrialization period. The town’s industry stagnated due to poor railway connections and the lack of natural resources. In 1930, Jihlava lost its self-government and the county whose center it used to be was administratively abolished. The decision of the same year to strip the miraculous Pietà of its devotional clothes and paraphernalia might be related to this loss only symbolically. The sculpture was radically restored by the local carver Johannes Eigl who covered it with layers of double chalk, thus rendering the sculpted form as “strong, severe and sober” – a formal character typical in the period opinion for Germanic art (fig. 4). The devotion to the sculpture, although significantly weakened, continued up until the spring of 1946, when trains going to the American occupation zone in Germany transported the last of approximately sixteen thousand Germans of Iglau. Sudetendeutscher Landsmannschaft der Sprachinsel Iglau is now active in Frankfurt am Main.

The devotion of the miraculous Pietà in the parish church of Iglau seems not to have been particularly strong in the 1930s and 40s and the identity of local Germans was more intensely formed by folklore and language, which were both strongly stressed by the political movement of Sudeten Germans. We thus do not have the kind of modern legend like the one concerning the Black Madonna from Brno. The panel painting of the Virgin, originally a Byzantine icon, was said to have left the town with the forcibly evacuated Germans in 1945. The image returned the following year, moved to do so by the fervent prayers of the Augustinian convent, but appeared “dark and sad” ever since. The legend, in fact, reflects the restoration of the Brno Virgin undertaken in the Moravian National Museum between 1945 and 1947. The Iglau Pietà could not, after all, leave with the Germans, as it was stored in a safe deposit during the last months of the war. It was painted with a new layer of polychrome before being returned to the parish church in 1946.

(fig. 2) Altarpiece of the Sorrowful Virgin in the side chapel of the parish church of St James in Jihlava.

(fig. 3) Bildnuß der Wunderhülitigenn Mutter Gotteß in Iglau, copper engraving, second half of the 18th century.
For sixty years then it stood in its altar, without being particularly venerated or considered in an art historical context. The sculpture, in fact, looked rather like a plaster cast of itself.

In 2005, the Pietà was restored and exhibited for two weeks in Prague at Strahov, where a small international colloquium was held in its presence\textsuperscript{12}. Immediately after, it was closed off in its baroque altarpiece again. This is arguably the safest place for the sculpture. Unfortunately, it remains virtually inaccessible as it can be rarely seen at all behind the glass pane and decorative grating; even the access to the chapel itself is strictly limited. The communal Highlands Art Gallery in Jihlava published a book on the restoration and new art historical evaluation of the Pietà in Czech for local readership. Unfortunately, my hope that the sculpture may become a focal point of a reframed local identity proved illusory, because there were no further local activities that would promote it. First, both the Highlands Art Gallery and the Strahov monastery, which administers the Jihlava parish, consi-

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig3.jpg}
\caption{Bildnuß der Wünderthätigen Mutter Gottes in Iglau, copper engraving, second half of the 18th century.}
\end{figure}
Zusammenfassung

The Pietà from Jihlava/Iglau is larger than most lifesize wooden sculptures dating from the 1330s. The contribution deals with the history of the artwork which extends over nearly seven hundred years. During this time, the Pietà served primarily as an object of religious devotion but also played an important role as a focus of communal identity for the inhabitants of Jihlava. If perceived as a specific site of memory, the sculpture relates to the changing loyalties in the town: between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the Catholics and the Reformation, and in modern times between the German and Czech speakers.

AutorIn

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Titel


Abbildungen

Fig. 1: Photo: Jakub Hynek, Prague, 2007.
Fig. 2: Photo: Johannes Haupt, Jihlava, 1896.
Fig. 3: Photo: Collection of Libor Štuc, Prague.
Fig. 4: Photo: Národní památkový ústav Brno.

Endnoten

1. For further details, see Milena Bartlová, Naše, národní umění: Studie z dějin dějepisu umění [Our own, national art: studies in the history of art history], Brno 2009. A German translation is in preparation at GWZO Leipzig.
4. For all the relevant references and arguments cf. publications as Note 3.
12. Contributions from the colloquium were published as Bartlová 2007, Die Pietà aus Jihava / Iglau.