10-31-2019

A Quiet Valley at Roztoky: Testimony of Singularity in the Landscape Imagery of Zdenka Braunerová

Zdislava Ungrova

University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
A Quiet Valley at Roztoky:

Testimony of Singularity in the Landscape Imagery of Zdenka Braunerová

by

Zdislava Ungrova

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Art and Art History
College of the Arts
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Elisabeth Fraser, Ph.D.
Sheramy Bundrick, Ph. D.
Helena Szépe, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
October 25, 2019

Keywords: Bohemia, woman artist, nineteenth century, Prague, Paris, Czech art

Copyright © 2019, Zdislava Ungrova
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my advisor Dr. Elisabeth Fraser for her kind support and patient advice. Her guidance through this thesis and numerous past projects was instrumental in my advancement as an art historian, and for that I will always be grateful. I would also like to express my gratitude to my two readers, Dr. Sheramy Bundrick and Dr. Helena Szépe. Their valuable feedback on my thesis is very appreciated, as is their continuous encouragement throughout my studies. Additionally, I am thankful to Dr. Esra Akin-Kivanç and Dr. Maria Cizmic for their inputs which expanded my perception on the researched subject.

My sincere thanks goes to the employees of the Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy. My research could not have been successfully completed without their kind assistance. Their responsiveness and willingness to help me is very appreciated. Special thanks belongs to the wonderful Mr. and Mrs. Halas, who welcomed me to their home and shared their stories with me. I will always cherish our conversation which revealed to me the culture of Zdenka Braunerová’s era. I am also grateful to my mom Jana, my aunt Martina and my sister Gabriela. Without their enthusiastic search for out-of-print material and our discussions about Braunerová’s art, my research would lack personal element.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the art history faculty and my graduate colleagues, who expanded my understanding of the art history. I am especially grateful to Ashley Williams and James Cartwright for tirelessly rectifying my use of the English language in numerous drafts and presentation texts.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ................................................................. ii

Abstract .................................................................................. v

Introduction................................................................................ 1

The Significance of Roztoky Landscape within Braunerova’s Imagery ..........11

Visual Modes of Negotiating the Self in *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* .................. 18

*A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*: Selections and Omissions .................................... 27

Conclusion .................................................................................. 35

References .................................................................................. 39

Appendix: Figures ......................................................................... 43
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Zdenka Braunerova. *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*. 1886. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain .......................................................... 43

Figure 2: Zdenka Braunerova. *The Brauner Family Salon*. 1879-1880. Oil on Canvas. Location Uncertain .......................................................... 44

Figure 3: Zdenka Braunerova. *Landscape in Italy*. 1883. Watercolor Sketch. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy .................................................. 44

Figure 4: Zdenka Braunerova. *Liquor Glass*. 1904. Paint of Glass. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery .......................................................... 45

Figure 5: Zdenka Braunerova. *V Kolnách Street, Former Prague Ghetto*. Undated. Etching on Paper. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery ............................................. 45

Figure 6: Zdenka Braunerova. *Book Graphics*. 1910. Woodcut on Paper. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery .................................................. 46

Figure 7: Zdenka Braunerova. *Cherry Tree Orchard at Roztoky*. 1880-1883. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague .......................................................... 46

Figure 8: Zdenka Braunerova. *From the Surroundings of Roztoky*. 1895-1900. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy .................................................. 47

Figure 9: Zdenka Braunerova. *Motif from Roztoky*. 1894-1895. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy .................................................. 47

Figure 10: Zdenka Braunerova. *Cayeux-sur-Mer*. 1887-1894. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection .......................................................... 48

Figure 11: Jaroslav Čermák. *Raněný Černohorec (copy after)*. 1874. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague .......................................................... 48

Figure 12: Soběslav Hippolyt Pinkas. *In the Studio*. 1854. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain .......................................................... 49

Figure 13: Viktor Barvitius. *Place de la Concorde in Paris, study*. 1866. Oil on Wood. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain .......................................................... 49
Figure 14: Jakub Schikaneder. *The Funeral*. 1889. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection

Figure 15: Antonín Mánes. *Landscape with the Belvedere*. 1830. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain

Figure 16: Josef Mánes. *Elbe Landscape*. 1863. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague

Figure 17: Amálie Mánesová. *The Harvest*. After 1856. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain

Figure 18: Antonín Chittussi. *Landscape in Fontainebleau*. 1879. Oil on Wood Panel. Olomouc Museum of Art

Figure 19: Antonín Chittussi. *Autumn at Fontainebleau*. 1885-1886. Oil on Wood Panel. National Gallery in Prague

Figure 20: Judith Leyster. *Self-Portrait*. c.1630. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Figure 21: Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun. *Self-Portrait*. 1790. Oil on Canvas. Uffizi Gallery

Figure 22: Marie Bashkirtseff. *Self-Portrait with Palette*. 1880. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice

Figure 23: Map of Roztoky with Indication of the Cherry Tree Orchard

Figure 24: Image of Small Teasel (*Dipsacus Pilosus*)

Figure 25: Zdenka Braunerova. *Studio in Roztoky*. After 1905. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy

Figure 26: Zdenka Braunerova. *Diváky Village*. Undated. Pen on Paper. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery

Figure 27: Zdenka Braunerova. *Samois after Rain*. 1887. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain

Figure 28: Adolf Kosárek. *Country in Central Bohemia (Scenery with a Stone Bridge)*. 1855. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain

Figure 29: Slaviček Antonín. *In the Autumn Fog*. 1897. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague

Figure 30: Václav Brožík. *Goose Girl*. c. 1885. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain
Figure 31: Jean-François Millet. *Gleaners*. 1857. Oil on Canvas. Musée d’Orsay, Paris ............58

Figure 32: Jules Breton. *Returning from the Fields*. 1871. Oil on Canvas. The Walters Art Museum. Public domain .................................................................................................59

Figure 33: Antonín Chittussi. *Winter Landscape*. 1883–1884. Oil on Canvas. The Gallery Of West Bohemia in Pilsen .................................................................................................59

Figure 34: František Kaván. *A Cloudy Sky*. 1894. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague .........................................................................................................................................60

Figure 35: Zdenka Braunerova. *Wood Picking in Forest*. 1880. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy .................................................................................................60

Figure 36: Zdenka Braunerova. *London- Thames*. 1886. Oil on Canvas. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery .........................................................................................................................................61

Figure 37: Braunerova’s Studio. Renovated in 2003-2005. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy .........................................................................................................................................61

Figure 38: Braunerova’s Studio- Interior. Today’s Layout. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy .........................................................................................................................................62
ABSTRACT

Although Czech artist Zdenka Braunerova (1858-1934) has been recognized by scholars for her contributions to the Czech cultural scene, thorough visual analyses of her artworks are rare. By investigating a single landscape painting, *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*, and placing it into the visual and contextual frame of its creation, this thesis thus approaches Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre in an uncommon way. I argue that if understood within its social, cultural and historical context, the painting transcends the purely optic qualities of a landscape genre and acquires instead the self-referencing character of a self-representation.

By subjecting the chosen painting to a multilayered analysis through selective methods of biographical, sociological and psychological approaches, I demonstrate an alternative way of viewing Braunerova’s art. Through discussion of the importance of the depicted location, reflection on the period of artist’s life during which the painting was created, and visual analysis of stylistic and subject choices, I propose that *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* is a statement of singularity, both of the painting and the artist herself.

While figuratively absent from the image, Zdenka Braunerova projects her experience and awareness into landscape painting by selecting a personally significant location and depicting it in a style which synthesizes her respect of Czech art tradition with the newly experienced visual expression of Barbizon school artists. As Braunerova’s artistic focus shifts thematically and materially throughout her life, I believe that such thorough, multilayered analyses of a single painting offer an innovative possibility for future research.
INTRODUCTION

“Intimate landscape is perhaps [Braunerová’s] artistic expression, because in the muted painting, in its tonal quality, she can express her interest in the subject, she can capture permanently the impression and the experience of the moment and embody it into a form. It is important to enhance this life-long interest of hers, her personal association to the motif, because it explains much of her art.”

Václav Vilém Štech, 1931/1932

The visual clues of personal connection to a specific location have been observed in landscape images of several European artists of the nineteenth century. Escaping the responsibilities of the family business and difficulties in love, John Constable, for instance, sought refuge in the countryside of Dedham Vale. Maximilian Haushofer likewise repeatedly depicted the reflective surface of Chiemsee Lake, tenderly capturing the cherished nature of his native Bavaria. Dramatically executed, Vincent van Gogh’s images of olive trees in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence reflected the emotional and spiritual struggle of the Dutch artist near the end of his life. As elsewhere in Europe, Czech landscape painting of the late nineteenth century was primarily men’s domain; however, perhaps no other artist utilized the notion of personal

---

1 Václav Vilém Štech,” O Zdence Braunerové,” Hollar 13 (1931/1932): 51. Each section of this thesis is introduced with a brief excerpt of reviews of Braunerova’s art in order to familiarize the reader with contemporaneous critical views on Braunerova’s art and personality. I have translated these excerpts from Czech language to English to the best of my abilities, aiming to maintain their tone and character.
association with a specific location more profoundly than Zdenka Braunerova (1858-1934).\(^2\) Her images created in Roztoky near Prague during the last two decades of the nineteenth century testify to Braunerova’s personal and professional maturation as facilitated by her recent encounter with a French artistic environment, and demonstrate the wide range of social, cultural and historical awareness of the artist.

Two types of Czech scholarship, distinct in their approaches to Zdenka Braunerova and her career, surfaced during my research. The first, more recent and encouraged by the increased interest in the nineteenth century cultural scene, tends to focus on Braunerova’s life and relationships. Although acknowledging her artistic achievements, authors seem to be more interested in her decision to become a professional artist and the struggles she faced during her career. The common approach of these biographically oriented scholars is associating Braunerova with notable men she encountered during her life and highlighting her romantic relationships when present.\(^3\) While these connections were undeniably important and sometimes even career altering,\(^4\) their prioritization in textual material often positions Braunerova’s career in a somewhat secondary role. The other scholarly approach, common in documents about Braunerova written during her life or shortly after her passing, emphasizes the artist’s ability to mediate the atmosphere of her era through her art and praises the sensitivity with which she

\(^2\) Baptized as Zdislava Rosalina Augusta Braunerová, the artist adopted the name of Zdenka in honor of her much admired contemporary Zdenka Havlíčková. An orphan after Czech patriotic politician Karel Havlíček Borovský, Zdenka Havlíčková lived with Braunerova’s family for a short period of time during the artist’s childhood. The artist often preferred to sign her paintings as Braunerova instead of the grammatically correct Braunerová. Historically, the a (so-called short a), indicates that the last name of said woman is inherited from her father, and not received from her husband in the occasion of marriage. This choice of the last name spelling will be further respected in this thesis.

\(^3\) Similarly, this approach, perhaps with the intention of spiking the interest in modern audience, has been taken by the organizers of the recent exhibition in Hodonín. While certainly well researched and encompassing a great amount of Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre, the title of the exhibition, ‘Zdenka Braunerova a Deset Mužů na Paletě Jejího Života’ (loosely translated as ‘Zdenka Braunerova and Ten Men on the Palette of Her Life’), deprives Braunerova of the independence she deserves.

\(^4\) Her close relationship with numerous writers encouraged her interest in book graphics.
constructed her images. Although I believe that such poetic method often captures Braunerova’s creative production with more accuracy than the biographical methods adopted by more recent literature, neither of the two modes described above considers the significance of any specific image in the circumstances of its creation. Simply put, comprehensive visual and contextual analyses of Braunerova’s paintings are rare, I daresay non-existent. This thesis thus aims to showcase the value of such a multilayered analysis of a singular image within Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre, *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* from 1886 (Figure 1).

Late nineteenth-century art and culture of the French metropolis has been subjected to extensive research in the publications of several Western scholars. Robert Herbert’s *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* provides insight into the mindset of the Impressionist community through visual and contextual analyses of selected images. Particularly significant for my thesis is the discussion of suburban leisure of Parisians. The concept of travelling to the countryside in search of pleasure and recreation is essential to my understanding of the early importance of Roztoky in Braunerova’s life, and much of Herbert’s theory on the French bourgeoisie can be applied to the artist’s own social class. The methods of visual representation of nature are further examined in Nina Lübren’s book, *Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe, 1870-1910*, which conveys the multi-cultural aspect of landscape imagery and various modes of its depiction. While Bohemian art is not discussed in this context, the notion of immersive quality of Barbizon school paintings can be selectively applied to the landscape imagery of late nineteenth-century Czech artists, including Braunerova. Additionally, this publication provides extensive background for Lübren’s essay in *Visual Culture and Tourism*,

---

5 Most commonly, these publications are exhibition catalogues.

6 In this context, Western scholarship refers to publications written in English and published in United States or Western Europe.
“North to South: Paradigm Shifts in European Art and Tourism, 1880-1920.” In this piece, a thorough visual analysis of images depicting various geographical locations demonstrates the intentional selectiveness of the artists, their preferences for specific weather conditions and the desire for authentic experience. While Lübbren’s writing contributes to rectifying the scholarship which often prioritizes French landscape artists over their European colleagues, the artist’s individuality and the personal significance of the depicted location is secondary to her research. In contrast, Ann Bermingham delves into the symbolism of specific landscapes in the imagery of John Constable in her book *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*. The emotions and internal struggle on the British artist, projected into pictorial depictions of his father’s land, are identified by Bermingham as the creative force behind the repetitions of his Dedham Vale imagery. The examples of scholarship mentioned above demonstrate possible approaches to the study of landscape art, especially in the study of non-French artists.

I considered several investigative methods in the undertaking of this project. Initially, a biographical approach to the artist’s work offered the most promising potential due to its prevalence in recent scholarship. The idea that the selected image would somehow straightforwardly reflect on Braunerova’s individuality and mindset was appealing. Her life events, relationships and extensive travels are well documented through her own correspondence as well as through the writings of her friends and family, and thus offer insight into her private world. At first, I regarded this seemingly comprehensive account of the artist’s biography as objective testimony to her character, but faulty presumptions and lack of crucial evidence supporting reflective biographical theory became apparent in the early stages of my research. Soon, factual and data inconsistencies emerged during an attempt to establish a detailed
timeline. Furthermore, although created within a period of the artist’s professional and personal growth, this image was no reaction to a specific event; *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* supersedes comparable Roztoky landscapes in quality, but the subject itself is frequently tackled in Braunerova’s work. Sources such as personal correspondence and artist’s diaries, although abundant with Braunerova’s life facts, thus provided no answers as to the significance and symbolism of *A Quiet Valley* within her artistic oeuvre.

As potentially speculative as the biographical approach threatened to be, dismissing it completely would mean losing an essential point of reference for analyzing *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*. Braunerova’s work was undeniably in dialogue with her current life situation. Immensely perceptive to her social and cultural surroundings, the artist navigated through environmental challenges by negotiating the style and subject of her artistic expression. The biographical data hence must be taken into consideration when investigating the landscape painting, as the canvas manifests both the artist’s engagement with the history of Czech landscape tradition and her acute awareness of the contemporary art scene in Prague and Paris in a specific moment in her life. The strong personal connection to the French capital, which Braunerova frequented between 1881 and 1893, with firm rootedness in a Czech environment also calls for the need of overlapping approaches in analyzing the chosen painting, as the cultural setting in which an artist matures and produces her work forms their social identity.  

---

7 For example, the dates of her trips to Paris vary from source to source. Some misinformation created by writers during Braunerova’s life still prevails in today’s scholarship, often due to Braunerova’s own intentionally misleading statements.

8 Due to the spatial limitations of this thesis, only a brief review of Braunerova’s extensive art production with selected examples will be provided in the following section.

social identity from an alternative point of view and that the painting was created in the context of this self-realization, if not in a direct response to it.

Realizing the limitations of a biographical approach in the analysis of *A Quiet Valley*, I considered the wider context of contemporaneous culture in Bohemia in establishing the circumstances of its creation. Here, the sociological approach was immensely valuable as I believe that the painting is in a way a claim of individuality within the conditions of prevailing Czech social norms. The prominent public position of Braunerova’s family and her own activity in societal spheres justify the large amount of surviving documentation that provides not only their author’s personal reaction to Braunerova’s life and character, but also reflects on the public response to her art. In this textual material, one can begin to see the danger of a sociological approach that exists in a close relationship with a psychological mode of investigation. One external, the other internal, both methods are built on subjectivity and intentional construction. The large number of personal testimonies and the intimate nature of much of the scholarship that focuses on Braunerova further tempt researchers into presuming knowledge of the artist’s thought processes, feelings and emotions. I delineate this thin line between guessing and knowing through a synthesis of biographical, sociological, and psychological methods on the one side, and the cultural, historical, and social context on the other. My visual analysis of *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* occupies the middle ground and I draw conclusions from information either confirmed by multiple sources or not disputed by any of them.

---

In order to illustrate the individualistic character of *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* and the unique position it occupies within Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre and Czech landscape art in general, this thesis tackles several related issues. One cannot understand the significance of the Roztoky landscape without a proper insight into the socio-historical context of contemporaneous French and Czech culture. Prior to World War I, the region of today’s Czech Republic has been divided into Bohemia and Moravia, both parts commonly known as Czech Lands, sharing language and history. Together with Slovakia and Hungary, Czech Lands belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which discouraged social exchange with Western Europe.\(^\text{11}\) While several Czech scholars note the liberating atmosphere that late nineteenth-century Paris offered to Czech artists of either gender, the rare analyses of cross-cultural interactions between these two nations lack details and seldom focus on the ‘woman question’ in this context.\(^\text{12}\) As being a woman in Paris meant something different than being a woman in Prague, it is imperative to at least briefly reflect on the opportunities and limitations of each culture to illustrate the appeal Paris held for Central and Eastern European women artists.

As I argue for the psychological proximity of painting and artist, Braunerova’s educational and social background is inseparable from her artistic expression in the discussion of *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*. Born into the family of significant Czech lawyer and politician František August Brauner, Zdenka had been exposed to contemporaneous cultural exchanges since early childhood. Prominent writers, politicians and artists frequented the Salon of her

---

\(^\text{11}\) In my thesis, I use both Bohemia and Czech Lands as the main location of Braunerova’s origins. I also use the adjective “Czech” as Braunerova was by both birth and upbringing a Czech citizen.

\(^\text{12}\) A notable exception is Milena Lenderová’s book *K Hříchu i k Modlitbě: Žena v Devatenáctém Století*. This publication has been immensely helpful in my research as it provides a larger picture of the position of nineteenth century women in Czech society and a small portion of the writing is even focused on women artists.
mother, Augusta Braunerová. A highly educated woman of aristocratic German origins, Augusta was one of the few Prague women capable of providing not only an appropriate physical location for such activities, but a stimulating intellectual environment in an era when Prague women rarely ventured into political and cultural debates. The Brauner Salon, renowned for its patriotic climate, became an important part of Zdenka’s life, and this setting both contributed to the formation of the young woman’s cultural awareness and facilitated her first encounters with prominent Czech intellectuals (Figure 2). Thanks to the relatively stable financial situation of the Brauner family, the young artist was able to visit museums in Italy, Germany, Austria, England and France, gaining education in art history as well as familiarity with contemporary developments in European art. As a result, the extent of Braunerova’s knowledge of foreign art surpassed that of the average academically educated Czech artist. Her artistic choices must therefore be appreciated as deliberate, since she was fully aware of various methods of expression.

A trip to Paris in 1878 marked a turning point in the life of the young woman from a Prague bourgeois family and solidified her decision to become a professional artist. The art capital of the nineteenth century, with its culture and the opportunities it offered to women artists, symbolized Braunerova’s desire for freedom from social prejudices of Czech society, and enabled her personal and professional growth. During the next sixteen years, she frequently visited Paris, often staying for extended periods of time to study art. Thanks to her sister’s

---


15 *The Brauner Family Salon*, one of her early works and a rare interior image, illustrates the artistic environment of Braunerova’s youth. Notable is the presence of the piano, which Zdenka played well, or the interest in *japonisme* apparent in decorative objects.

marriage to Élémir Bourges, a French novelist and Zdenka’s longtime supporter, the artist was exposed to French cultural environment through the eyes of French writers and artists, such as novelist Paul Margueritte and painter Jean-Charles Cazin. Bourges’s relocation to Samois near Fontainebleau forest in 1886 granted Braunerova access to the French countryside and contributed to her affection for French landscapes of the Barbizon school artists, especially Camille Corot and Théodore Rousseau.

Although still-lifes and flower imagery continued to be prioritized as appropriate subjects for European women artists, Braunerova’s main focus in the late nineteenth century was landscapes. Despite her encounters with Impressionism during her stay in Paris, Braunerova chose to depict the landscape of her native country in the somber colors of Realism. While numerous images of the locations she visited exist, the ones depicting the nature surrounding her family’s residence in Roztoky near Prague hold primacy in her artistic oeuvre. What is more, they testify to her intentionality as she makes statements through the visual choices in her paintings. This thesis investigates the symbolism of *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* by combining contextual and visual analysis and selectively utilizing biographical, sociological and psychological methods in order to establish Zdenka Braunerova not only as an immensely significant personality of the Czech culture but also a prominent Czech artist.

I chose *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* as the main focus of this thesis for several reasons. The high quality of the work and the fact this painting was preceded by a similar version indicate the importance that the painting held within the Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre and for herself personally. Its size, 83 cm x 110 cm (approximately 32 inch x 43 inch), exceeds the average

---

17 The earlier painting, in the collection of the National Gallery in Prague, is mentioned in this thesis and a black and white photocopy is brought in for comparison. As I was unable to obtain a quality color version of this painting, the discussion about differences between the two Roztoky paintings is limited.
size of comparable Roztoky images encountered during this research. The accessibility of a high-quality reproduction has allowed for a detailed visual analysis, and knowledge of the specific place and year of its production has enabled precise positioning of the image within the socio-historical context of its creation, and within the scope of Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre. The surface of A Quiet Valley at Roztoky demonstrates Braunerova’s confrontation with the contemporaneous culture of her social class, and simultaneously offers an intimate insight into her inner consciousness. The subject and execution of the artwork together reflect Braunerova’s own dual character, and as such, the painting is as much a self-representation as a self-portrait. Immensely progressive yet faithful to tradition, Braunerova transformed a respectable genre of landscape into a testament of her individuality, while remaining true to the visual vocabulary of Czech art.

---

18 Generally, these paintings do not exceed the width of 24 inches.
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROZTOKY LANDSCAPES WITHIN BRAUNEROVA’S IMAGERY

“Zdenka Braunerová is in her artistic core a landscape painter. Nature, city, air, those are the primary forces she delves into work with. [...] It is not enough to say that she observes; she fuses with the country, she becomes one, she becomes its magical circle and encompasses its magic within her art, and on her canvas she thrusts its mood intervened with her dreams and her silent confession.”

Růžena Jesenská, 1916

The variety of subjects and media within Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre testifies not only to her professional adaptability, but also, and more importantly, to the intense self-perception of the artist. Functioning as a private journal, her art documents each phase of her life and provides a reflection of external stimuli through creative expression. Watercolor sketches of Italian landscapes (Figure 3) are a youthful illustration of an 1883 trip to the South, glass decorations from the early twentieth century a testament of increasing interest in local folklore (Figure 4). The redevelopment of old Prague, perceived by Braunerova as a great loss of tradition and culture, is criticized through etchings depicting the old city’s nooks (Figure 5), and graphic works, occupying most of the last three decades of the artist’s life, signify a concern for and revival of Czech book design (Figure 6). I believe that due to the dynamic nature of

---

Braunerova’s art production it is imperative to perceive *A Quiet Valley* not only as evidence of her artistic maturity, but also as an individual statement made during a specific era in the artist’s life through a depiction of a personally significant location.

*A Quiet Valley in Roztoky* was created eight years after Braunerova’s first trip to Paris, during a time period generally recognized as the artist’s first creative era (1885-1894). By then, the twenty-eight year old artist had experienced numerous European cultural centers and established her second home in the French capital with the intention of self-improvement and professional development in the field of art. Apart from the socially liberating environment of Paris (albeit somewhat idealized by the artist), Braunerova particularly cherished the learning opportunities the city provided through its museums and galleries and a number of educational institutions. While Prague offered only one studio where women could paint, Paris flourished with *Académies payantes*, run by male artists and frequently accepting students of both genders. At the time of Zdenka’s arrival in Paris, the most popular studio accepting female and often foreign students was the *Académie Julian*, founded by Rodolphe Julian in 1868. This *Académie* was particularly sought after by women for the rare opportunity it offered to study the human figure, specifically the nude. Other studios still instructed on mostly draped figures and nudes were reserved for men. Despite the great popularity of the *Académie Julian*, Braunerova chose to attend the slightly less popular *Académie Collarossi*, where she studied in 1881 and

---

20 This nine-year long period was not abundant with financial success, but it was most significant for absorption of new inspirations and learning. It began with Braunerova’s extended stay in Paris and ended with her permanent return to Bohemia.

21 Lenderová, *Zdenka Braunerová*, 77. The author states that according to memories of artist Karel Mašek, a studio led by a landscape artist Alois Kirnig, established in 1866, allowed women artists to attend.

22 In her chapter “Reason and Resistance: Women’s Entry into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts,” Garb lists several private studios and names their instructors, including Léon Cogniet, Charles Chaplin, Stevens, Carolus Duran, Henner, Robert-Fleury, Barrias, Boulanger, Lefebvre, Giacomotti and Flandrin. Although most of these names are perhaps unknown to today’s scholars, the long list indicates that women were more readily accepted into private studios in Paris than in Prague.
with interruptions between 1885 and 1893.\textsuperscript{23} Her decision can be perhaps partially deduced from her letter to Anna Bourges written in 1888. In this letter, apart from describing her daily work schedule, Braunerova expresses satisfaction over the possibility of studying draped figures, which also attracted students from Académie Julian and École des Beaux-Arts.\textsuperscript{24} From this time period, studies of draped figures as well as nudes appear among Braunerova’s artworks.\textsuperscript{25}

These early artistic pursuits in the years leading up to the creation of \textit{A Quiet Valley in Roztoky} were also marked by a growing fondness for the landscapes of Barbizon school artists. Already in 1883, during her trip to Naples, Braunerova admired the tonal qualities of exhibited paintings by Corot.\textsuperscript{26} Through the study and application of concepts of direct observation and experiencing nature, Braunerova joined the growing number of Czech artists who discovered and adopted the visual vocabulary of Barbizon school artists.\textsuperscript{27} Although the prime days of the Barbizon movement had passed, increasing migration in the second half of the nineteenth century enabled Czech artists to physically visit the Fontainebleau forest and encounter the nature philosophy of Théodore Rousseau. Corresponding with Romantic ideas about the instability of human existence and melancholy, French-style landscape images by Czech artists gained popularity with the domestic audience towards the end of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Braunerova2015} Here lies an interesting discrepancy. While sources claim that only the Académie Julian offered students the opportunity to study the nude, Braunerova’s 1885 oil sketch of a nude woman from Académie Collarossi suggests otherwise (in the collection of Středočeské Muzeum v Roztokách u Prahy).
\bibitem{TravelDiaries} See Travel Diaries from Italy, May 9th, 1883.
\end{thebibliography}
A Quiet Valley in Roztoky was created in the midst of Braunerova’s artistic explorations and experimentations conditioned by adherence to the principles of the Barbizon school. Paris facilitated space and means for improvement, and enabled the young artist to define her own artistic style in an objective environment, showcasing past and present multicultural visual expressions through its abundant museums and galleries. Braunerova’s preference for the landscape genre upon her return to the native setting is therefore indicative of the sensitive perception with which Braunerova distinguished the shifting conditions of each culture. Although the nature of Roztoky is not the only countryside subject among Braunerova’s landscapes, the frequency of this motif testifies to its significance for Braunerova. Apart from the highly skillful execution of A Quiet Valley in Roztoky, the importance of this location is further documented by a preceding version of the same scene, created in 1882 or 1883 (Figure 7). While this painting is not a subject of this paper, it will be useful in demonstrating the visual modifications and selectiveness of the artist in a subsequent discussion.

Acknowledging the cosmopolitan character of Zdenka Braunerova, one must ask what unique trait may have generated such repeated devotion to the pictorial portrayal of Roztoky. Its geographical location is the first clue to its favorable treatment in Braunerova’s landscapes. This small agricultural village, lying some eight miles north of Prague, experienced unprecedented social and physical changes with the development of a railway system in the middle of the nineteenth century. Much in the same way that Parisians were savoring the pleasure of leisure activities in Asnières or Bougival,29 the Prague bourgeoisie began uncovering the benefits of fresh air and strolls in nature. The cultural and social life of the village reached new heights as

---

the wealthier members of the Czech middle class established their summer residencies in newly built villas. The ones who could not afford to own, could at least afford to rent.\textsuperscript{30} The summer days were thus spent in an enjoyable company of select individuals, free from the social constraints of city life.

Among those able to establish a more permanent residency in Roztoky was Braunerova’s father, František August Brauner, who purchased an old mill and its surrounding properties in 1861. Despite his frequent absence from the family due to the requirements of his profession, Brauner’s relationship with his children was by all accounts warm and encouraging.\textsuperscript{31} His connection to Roztoky was perhaps intensified by his close relationship with peasants and farmers, whose rights and freedom he defended throughout his career. Brauner’s presence resonated in the Roztoky family residence long after his death, and the significance of the bond between Braunerova’s father and beloved location is underlined in an anecdote recounted by Zdenka’s grand-nephew Vladimír Hellmuth-Brauner. During his visit to Roztoky, he and Zdenka walked through the garden behind the mill, observing trees planted near the stream by Brauner himself. The artist pointed to willows and poplars, now fully grown, and declared: “These resemble him more than I do.”\textsuperscript{32}

Roztoky became a place of happy childhood memories and joyful rule-breaking. In the beginning of summer, a horse-drawn cab transported the Brauner family from the heat of the city to the refreshing nature of Quiet Vale. According to Braunerova’s diaries, painting, reading and “having fun” filled the days of Brauner’s children during these summer months. Liberated from

\textsuperscript{31} Letter from F.A. Brauner to his daughters, Anna and Zdenka. From Archives in Středočeské muzeum v Roztokách.
the ever-present scrutiny of Prague society, Zdenka and her sister Anna experienced freedom unconventional for young ladies of their social status. Particularly memorable, for example, was a visit to the pub where the Brauner’s sisters enjoyed “cheese, good bread and beer.”\(^{33}\) The relaxed atmosphere of countryside and benevolent nature of Augusta Braunerová provided ideal environment for maturation and self-realization of young woman.

While the good childhood memories and personal freedom experienced in the rural village undoubtedly contributed to the charm Roztoky held for Zdenka, the importance of emotions associated with this place must not be ignored. Here, Braunerova undertook her first real art lessons and for the first time considered the profession of an artist. Here, she enjoyed her first \textit{plein-air} experience with Antonín Chittussi, her teacher and first romantic interest.\(^{34}\) In the spring of 1880 Braunerova established her first studio in Roztoky in the attic of the mill, alternatively using her Paris and Prague locations. Bittersweet must have been the sale of some family properties and remodeling of the mill into summer apartments, which was orchestrated by Zdenka’s brothers Vladimír and Bohuslav after her father’s death in 1880.\(^{35}\) While the resulting profit provided much needed money during her studies in Paris, the sense of intimacy and privacy at Roztoky was for the time being shattered.

Over the next two decades, Braunerova visited Roztoky when she could. Her study trips in Paris and frequent travels around Europe often prevented her from visiting the family estate, as did her brother’s growing family, who inhabited Roztoky in summer months. Cold winter temperatures further discouraged residing in the low-lying valley, which does occasionally flood

\(^{33}\) Diary of Zdenka Braunerova, 10/22/1873.

\(^{34}\) Lenderová, \textit{Zdenka Braunerová}, 59. Although just like her mother Augusta, Chittussi thought of Zdenka’s interest in painting only as a hobby. His resentment of the idea of married professional woman artist had been one of the reasons for eventual break-up.

due to spring snow melting. As the frequency of Paris trips lessened towards the end of the nineteenth century, a question of permanent housing and professional space arose. In 1897, Braunerova decided to build her own studio in Roztoky, inspired by English week-end cottages. Due to financial difficulties and a prolonged decision process, the building was not completed until June 1904. From her extensive surviving correspondence it is evident that Roztoky remained an important place of private and even more public meetings up until Braunerova’s death in 1934. Through her letters we also sense the pride and love she felt towards the nature surrounding Roztoky and, as the family members grew and relocated, the seclusion from people it offered.

In her book *Landscape and Ideology*, Ann Bermingham argues that by depicting the landscape of East Bergholt, John Constable symbolically recovered from the negative circumstances of his social life. I believe that in a similar way, Zdenka Braunerova sought sanctuary and refuge from societal pressures and her busy social life. Throughout the artist’s life, Roztoky changed status from holiday destination during childhood, to temporary residence while visiting Bohemia, to finally becoming a permanent home. In 1886, during the second stage of its role, Roztoky offered to Braunerova solitude and nostalgic memories of younger years. As such, the painting *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* became a reminiscent sign of holding on to the past by depicting the modified present.

37 See for example letter to Julius Zeyer on 5/21/1887 or 4/12/1897.
VISUAL MODES OF NEGOTIATING THE SELF
IN A QUIET VALLEY AT ROZTOKY

“Miss Z. Braunerová is Chittussi’s talented student, who captures on her canvas the impression of a simple landscape motif with artistic precision, using a boldly male manner of painting while doing so.”39

F.X. Harlas, 1896

The highly conservative environment of late nineteenth-century Bohemia was not welcoming towards women whose professional ambitions departed from contemporaneous social norms. The notion of an economically active unmarried woman was unacceptable until the social changes brought on by the two world wars,40 and while Braunerova was not the first Czech woman to choose an artistic career,41 the social position of her bourgeois family predisposed her for the role of wife and a mother. This unfulfilled duty remained a topic of conversation in Prague salons long after her professional debut and public recognition. The fact that her landscape paintings were acknowledged and even praised by the Bohemian audience

40 Notable exceptions were doctors Anna Bayerová and and Bohuslava Kecková. Both graduated abroad early in 1880s and their diplomas were not recognized by the Austrian-Habsburg until over a decade later. Especially Czech male doctors spoke out against employing women in Czech hospitals. The only profession in which a celibacy was somewhat required, were teachers.
41 These women were generally painters, no women sculptors or architects have been documented. For example, Barbora Krafftová was sucessfully selling her portraits to rich citizens, aristocracy and even church on the brink of the nineteenth century. Sisters Pipenhagen, Charlotta and Luisa, were succesful landscape painters and perhaps the most famous woman artist was Amálie Mánesová, a daughter of immensely popular painter Antonín Mánes. Her quality work focused on landscape and flower and fruit still-life, abiding to the wishes of her father.
therefore testifies not only to her artistic abilities, but also to her understanding of the language of Czech artistic expression, for Braunerova not only depicted a personally significant place in a precise and skillful manner, she represented it in a style that was readable and comprehensible to the culture in which it originated. I believe that this context is essential for an insightful reading of A Quiet Valley at Roztoky, for the visual vocabulary that Braunerova used is as important as the one she rejected.

Although Impressionism had been in full swing during Braunerova’s stay in Paris, her personal attitude towards this modern mode of artistic expression seems to have been indifferent. Neither A Quiet Vale at Roztoky or other Roztoky landscapes created around the same time show any acknowledgment of the visual vocabulary of Impressionism (Figure 8 and Figure 9). Although the color palette of some images created during her stay in France brightened up, for example in Cayeux-sur-Mer (Figure 10), the colors of Roztoky landscapes are noticeably muted and toned down. While it is possible she had not had a chance to visit one of the four Impressionist exhibitions that might have potentially coincided with her stays in Paris between 1879 and 1886, her awareness of contemporary art developments makes her complete ignorance of the modern movement highly improbable. Scholars who do acknowledge the artist’s familiarity with Impressionism generally dismiss its significance as a “formal play, foreign to her [Zdenka’s] own artistic delivery.”42 In this sense, then, Braunerova approximated her art to that of her Nordic colleagues who rejected Impressionism as the only possible style that could truly depict their native landscape.43 Recognizing Braunerova’s awareness of developments in modern art, one must wonder what lay behind her preference for more naturalistic colors.

42 Vlk, Zdenka Braunerová 1858-1934, 20.
The first clue to intentional selectivity arises from a brief reflection on the cultural context of contemporary Czech art. During Braunerova’s years of artistic development, Czech artists were educated in academic Classicism, drawing on the late Romanticism of the Düsseldorf school of painting. The association with Germany, somewhat contradictory to patriotic tendencies of the time, was further enhanced by extensive cross-cultural interactions on personal and professional levels. Prominent Czech artists, such as Josef Mánes, studied at German schools. Even French oriented artists began their artistic education with the study of German art. For example, painter Hippolyt Soběslav Pinkas spent four years in the Academy in Munich prior to his prolonged stay in Paris. As Germany and Bohemia developed in close historical and cultural proximity, German Romanticism was visually more relatable to Czech art than French Romanticism. When one realizes the close ties between Czech and German art, and the tonal qualities of German paintings are taken into consideration, one begins to understand Braunerova’s preference for more realistic colors.

The acceptance of French art, increasingly popular even beyond French borders, was slow in Bohemia. Artists were encouraged to produce images promoting nationalism, and the hermetic Prague art world rejected works inspired by modern Western European fashion. It was not until 1893 when Prague exhibited the works of Gustave Courbet and some other French artists, that the public was first introduced to French art. However, it took another decade for the public to have full access to modern French artistic expression. The Mánes Artistic

45 In Bohemia, German was the official language, education followed German example, and literature of both nations, especially poetry, was close in focus and expression.
46 Lenderová, Zdenka Braunerová, 74.
47 Ibid., 185.
Association organized the first foreign exhibition of Auguste Rodin’s drawings and paintings in 1902. Impressionism was introduced in 1907 through works by Monet, Degas, Renoir, and Sisley, and finally, Czech society was exposed to the art of David, Ingres, Delacroix, Rousseau, Courbet, Manet, Seurat, Redon, and Picasso in an exhibition of 1923.

The Czech public’s late recognition of modern French art does not imply individual ignorance of contemporaneous Czech artists. In March 1854, previously mentioned Pinkas joined his colleague Jaroslav Čermák in Paris (Figure 11). During his prolonged stay in the French capital, Pinkas most likely familiarized himself with Courbet’s work, which was being displayed in Paris exhibition halls. The admiration of a Realist attitude, but also a certain loneliness and feeling of anonymity can be read in his painting In the Studio (Figure 12).

Viktor Barvitius, Pinkas’s colleague and temporary flatmate while in France, captured the light effect of evening Paris in his impressionistically oriented Place de la Concorde (Figure 13). Jakub Schikaneder, a contemporary of Braunerova, was also impressed by the late nineteenth-century Parisian art scene during his stay there from 1878 to 1880. His knowledge of Géricault’s and Courbet’s work is evident through the execution of several of his paintings (Figure 14).

---


49 Cathleen M. Giustino, “Rodin in Prague: Modern Art, Cultural Diplomacy, and National Display,” Slavic Review 69, no. 3 (2010): 591-592. This exhibition was strategically planned by modern Czech artists with the purpose of advancing national developments. Rodin himself visited Czech lands at the beginning of the exhibition and at the occasion, toured Moravia. Coincidentally, one of his guides was Zdenka Braunerova, who was Rodin’s friend from her previous visits to Paris.


51 Kristýna Brožová, Hippolyt Soběslav Pinkas (Hluboká nad Vltavou: Alšova jihočeská galerie; Řevnice: Arbor vitae, 2016), 51-60.

This brief historical reflection on the long process of the acceptance of French art by Bohemian audience, with the selection of a few contemporaneous Czech artists, reveals a striking pattern in personal and cultural preference for socially themed subjects and a natural color palette. While numerous young Czech artists were indeed familiar with the avant-garde movements in Paris, they intentionally chose to adhere only to the visual vocabulary of Realism (even Barvitius’s impressionistically toned painting adheres to a natural color palette), a phenomenon that begs for an explanation. One motive for this stylistic preference surely lies in the environment of culturally inward-looking Prague. The need for earnings and commissions, a daily concern of every artist, influenced the direction of artistic development in Prague. Muted and sober colors were prioritized over the brightness of an Impressionist palette, and focused brushwork depicting clearly distinguishable subjects was favored over the loose handling of paint in modern Western European art. As Braunerova’s aim was to sell her paintings, she had to cater to her potential clientele and take local tastes into consideration. Additionally, being raised in an artistic environment oriented towards German and Dutch art, the colorism of Impressionist paintings must have seemed like a foreign language to the young Czech artists. While Braunerova could have appreciated the style, it might have been challenging for her to express herself through its methods.

Regarding the color palette, an additional note on the actual climate and nature of central Bohemia is in order. As Nina Lübbren has so accurately observed, the grey color present in paintings of artists such as Braunerova refers to “both to the mixing of pigment on a painter’s palette and to actual meteorological conditions in real places.”

---

not changed in the past century, Prague experiences on average 184 days of precipitation per year, and Paris slightly less with 164 days of precipitation per year.\

Cloudy and rainy days are therefore common in central Bohemia and the depiction of grey sky in Roztoky paintings is not a product of the imagination. However, the fact that Prague also experiences 3331 average annual hours of sunshine (compared to Paris ‘only’ 1779) suggests that the grey tones are an intentional choice of the artist and not a reflection of everyday weather conditions. Braunerova clearly preferred the even light of overcast days when depicting the atmosphere of Roztoky, as is apparent on other Roztoky images, such as From the Surroundings of Roztoky (Figure 8) or Motif from Roztoky (Figure 9).

The color palette and handling of paint that Braunerova chose in A Quiet Valley at Roztoky also demonstrates a technical negotiation of visual terms between tradition as defined by the history of Czech landscape paintings and progress she discovered in the landscapes of Barbizon school artists. Since the early nineteenth century, Czech landscape art had been defined by painters who directed their attention first to Italian, then German and Dutch paintings. One of the early Czech landscape painters, Antonín Mánes, combined the Neo-Classical concepts of ideal landscape composition and natural rendering of light with the influence of seventeenth-century Dutch artists (Figure 15). Several decades later, the images of Antonín Mánes’s son Josef, demonstrated a fascination with light and atmosphere, indicative of the interest of the next generations of artists (Figure 16). Josef also incorporated into his paintings the element of personal connection as he represented places with which he was familiar. Although nearing reality, his paintings are still an “ideal synthesis,” rendering Czech landscape

in an extremely unifying and visually pleasing manner. Similarly, Josef’s sister Amália created romantic versions of the countryside (Figure 17).

The landscapes of the Mánes family and German artists comprised a traditional framework of reference for a younger generation of artists who became increasingly interested in France and its Realist art. These artists travelled in large numbers to Paris and Barbizon and by the late 1870s became intimately familiar with the Barbizon school approach to landscape, many of them adopting its visual tools into their artistic vocabulary. Among these artists was Antonín Chittussi, Braunerová’s first teacher and longtime friend, who travelled to France in 1879 on her recommendation. His images, created in Fontainebleau with heavy brown and red hues and modeling of light, aim to render the mood and atmosphere of specific locations, which he visited during different seasons to capture the diversity of the French countryside. His loose brushstrokes demonstrate his encounter with Impressionism and a subsequent rejection of its foreign visual vocabulary in favor of Realism of Barbizon artists preferred by the Czech audience (compare Figures 18 and 19). Indicative for Chittussi’s decision in this matter might have been the growing market for Barbizon school art, which by the 1880s extended beyond the borders of France.

Keeping in mind the landscapes of the Mánes family and Chittussi’s Fontainebleau scenes, we can observe the careful negotiation with which Braunerova constructed her *A Quiet Valley in Roztoky*. There is no trace of Amália’s blue sky in Braunerova’s grey clouds; her leaves lack the precise brushwork of Antonín’s flora. Thus, while adhering to the naturalistic temperament of the Czech color palette, Braunerova approximated herself to the somber

---

58 Ibid., 205-206.
melancholy of Barbizon landscape images. Furthermore, although nowhere near abstract, certain areas of the landscape display a looseness of hand which was uncommon in preceding traditional Czech art. This quality is apparent in the tattered sketchiness of the immediate leaves, as well as in the blurriness that hinders the viewer’s ability to distinguish individual grass stems near the bottom of the painting. Braunerova’s stylistic choices thus contributed to her goal of depicting an atmosphere, a mood of an intimate place, rather than the picturesque quality of the countryside as mediated through images of traditional Czech landscape artists.

A Quiet Valley at Roztoky is not only a space of negotiation between ‘old’ and ‘new,’ but also a deliberation of terms in which female artists of late nineteenth-century Bohemia could have expressed themselves. Readers familiar with the developments in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western European art might justifiably ask: “Why not a self-portrait?” Surely, an artist as enlightened as Braunerova would be familiar with the self-depictions of Judith Leyster (Figure 20) or more recently Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun (Figure 21). Self-advertising images were not the exclusive domain of the Western European woman artist, and they were definitely not a trend of the past. Just four years prior to Braunerova’s Roztoky landscape, Marie Bashkirtseff, an artist of Ukrainian origin, confronted her viewer with the directness and confidence of a professional artist (Figure 22). Helene Schjerfbeck, a Finnish painter and Braunerova’s friend from the Atelier Collarosi, painted at least thirty-six self-portraits during her career, several of them during her Paris studies. Why is it then, that there appear to be only two self-portraits of Zdenka Braunerova? 60

---

60 During my research, I have found one mention of a self-portrait, without further details of its present location or reproduction. Additionally, a front cover of contemporary exhibition catalogue showcases Braunerova’s profile image, identifying the image as a charcoal self-portrait. No further detail is provided, and it is therefore uncertain if these two images are one and the same.
As Anne Higonnet points out, self-portraits were constrained by the limitations of the society in which they are produced, and therefore a brief reflection on the Czech ‘woman question’ is in order. Late nineteenth-century France was experiencing relative freedom and optimism, enhanced by the Republican victory in 1887. The reforms in female education, the question of divorce and women’s professionalization were seriously debated in publications, political gatherings and on private occasions. Meanwhile, in Czech lands, the situation much resembled the previous century. The process of improving women’s education was slow and laborious and met with resistance, mostly from the male population. While in Paris women artists were exhibiting and even painting male nude subjects, women in Prague were still trying to persuade politicians to support a project of a girl’s high school. Very much in the spirit of the early nineteenth century, women artists were meant to occupy themselves with flowers and other feminine motifs. Braunerova’s claim of a profession through a visual vocabulary of self-portraiture would certainly be scandalous and provocative. It is very probable that such direct confrontation of social norms would harm Braunerova’s career rather than advance it. Within this socio-historical context, her choice of landscape as a primary focus follows as logical.

---

62 With the ban of gatherings lifted, more organizations focusing on feminist issues were established.
64 Lenderová, *K Hříchu i k Modlitbě*, 195.
"Miss [Braunerová] looks upon nature with unprejudiced, bright, and perceptive sight, she sees the color of vegetation, water and soil correctly in its finest nuances, how it appears under different light, in a different atmosphere. What she observes and evaluates, she aims to present in a grand and energetic manner, with full objectivity, not searching for romantic motifs nor areas with glamorous subject …"\(^{66}\)

Renáta Tyršová, 1887

The Quiet Valley, or sometimes called Roztoky Grove, is located on the south side of Roztoky. A state nature reserve since 1992, the Quiet Valley attracts visitors due to its undisturbed nature, boasting maple and ash trees that fringe the meandering Unětický Potok (Unětický Stream). Its water, once used to drive the mills on its flow, is the first clue to the specific location depicted in Braunerova’s painting. The second clue is provided by the alternative title under which the painting was sold to the National Gallery: *Plum Orchard in Roztoky*.\(^{67}\) Assuming that the depicted trees are indeed plums, and not the more common alder, maple or ash trees, the depicted view positions the artist’s easel facing slightly southwest, with the family residence closely behind (Figure 23). The limited amount of leaves, redness of the middle-ground trees and yellowish tones of the birches in the upper middle left side of the


\(^{67}\) I have not yet been able to determine when and by whom was the title of the painting changed. More detailed information about the establishment of the plum orchard is also lacking.
painting lead me to propose that the painting was created sometimes during the fall of 1886. This supposition is justified by biographical information, according to which Braunerova returned to Bohemia in the middle of July after visiting the Bourges family, and short trip to England, and stayed until August 1887. But the painting also suggests the subjective selectivity of the artist.

Plum trees, resisting the force of the wind, threaten to overgrow the frame of the painting. Looming over the reflective surface of Unětický Stream, they are more prominent in this painting than in the other Roztoky landscapes inspected during this research. The character of their crooked structure echoes the vegetation depicted in Chittussi’s *Autumn at Fontainebleau* and is perhaps a reminiscence of plein-air sessions with a close friend, at that point no longer present in Braunerova’s life. The spacing between the plum trees functions as a somewhat contradictory indicator of both human activity and social isolation. The trees were positioned near rivers and streams to support the water ecology, and whether plums or ash trees, the shrubbery depicted in Braunerova’s painting was planted there by people, thus indicating their presence. The visual isolation of the nearest trees could symbolically refer to the loneliness Braunerova experienced after her return from Paris. Prague gossip of small-minded bourgeois stood at odds with the friendly reception the artist had received in the French capital. Thus, in the spirit of Josef Mánes’s *Říp and Surroundings* and similar images which provide a frame of reference for *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*, Braunerova chose to depict a seemingly empty countryside which, in fact, has been altered by human activity.

---

69 After Chittussi’s relocation to Paris, the contact with Braunerova slowly ceased. Five years after this painting was completed, Chittussi died due to tuberculosis, believed to be partially caused by the extended time he spent outdoors.
I believe that the white blooming flowers on the bottom left corner are most likely small teasel *Dipsacus pilosus* (Figure 24), an endangered species of plants that grow in the meadows of the low-positioned Quiet Valley. Absent in the earlier version, the plants are awarded a dominant place in the 1886 painting. Indeed, they enter the viewer’s immediate space. Blooming flowers were rarely portrayed in the landscapes of Czech male artists, who paid more attention to the monumental or allegorical qualities of the countryside. On the other hand, flower imagery was an encouraged theme for women amateur artists. For example, Zdenka’s mother was a skilled flower painter and her sister also experimented with the genre. In 1883, Braunerova submitted her painting *Pansies* (image unavailable) to a local Prague exhibition, but the artwork attracted no positive attention from the audience. Such lack of response to a “feminine” subject led the artist to negotiate the flower motif in her later works. Flowers are given mostly a supporting role in her images, yet their continuous inclusion testifies to the artist’s intentionality (Figure 25). As most these flowers are decorative, colorful species, I speculate that the inclusion of flower with no apparent aesthetic qualities was indeed purposeful. Due to Braunerova’s interest in and familiarity with plants and herbs, it is reasonable to assume that she would be depicting a specific kind of flower fully aware of its character. The thorny texture of its stem and the stout disposition of its body open up the possibility of a symbolic reading, and the prominent positioning of the plant demonstrate the significance of this specific plant. Small teasel, thriving in the Quiet Valley, indicates the artist’s own feeling of belonging, and its sturdy character alludes to Braunerova’s persistent and spirited nature.

However, what is omitted from the painting is as important as what is represented. Most significantly, Braunerova chose to depict the local landscape without any signs of modernity or

---

tourism. As discussed in the first section, Roztoky was easy to access thanks to the train station or horse-drawn cab, and members of the Prague bourgeoisie and “day trippers” were frequent visitors to the village. But Braunerova’s images captured no such sign of modernity. By this omission, the artist joins her French colleagues who declared their anti-tourism stance through images of landscapes by capturing the unique experience of a traveler as opposed to the familiar sights frequented by tourists.\textsuperscript{72} Braunerova also limits depiction of buildings. The subject of village cottages and farms is fairly common in her paintings and drawings (Figure 26 and Figure 27), but only a roof of a building is sketched in the middle of A Quiet Valley in Roztoky. This elimination of human-made structures is especially striking when comparing this image with its earlier version. The trees now cover a previously exposed building in the right middle ground, and the small wooden traverse laid over the stream is completely erased. As a result, Braunerova omits the clues of modernity and obvious human presence, beyond the purposely planted trees.

Braunerova goes even further with her exclusion of humans and animals. Not even a peasant, a figure so frequently depicted in landscape images of the late nineteenth century, is present here. As Nina Lübbren argues in her book, Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe, 1870-1910, the peasant functioned as a surrogate for the artists themselves.\textsuperscript{73} The inclusion of a nostalgic figure of a poor and simple, but “pure” individual embodying qualities of tradition and resistance to modernity, was a tool utilized by numerous nineteenth-century artists. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, many French and British landscapists sought the tranquility of “true” nature unspoiled by recent changes. In the Netherlands, peasants were connected with emerging

\textsuperscript{72} John House, “Framing the Landscape,” in Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: An Anthology, ed. Mary Tompkins Lewis (Berkeley, Calif: Univ. of California Press. 2007): 79-80. “Day trippers” were workers, artisan or petit bourgeois who travelled to the countryside for a short period of time. Braunerova’s family belonged into the higher class of citizens, who utilized maisons de campagne for their retreat from the city.

\textsuperscript{73} Nina Lübbren, Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe, 1870-1910 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 104.
nationalism and the question of identity; in the visual imagery of western Ireland, rural women suggested the link between nature, nurture and femininity, symbolizing moral purity. Even in Bohemia, peasants, captured for example during harvest activities, appeared in the landscapes of later nineteenth-century artists. From Adolf Kosárek’s *Country in Central Bohemia* (Figure 28), which demonstrates his detachment from Haushofer’s painting school and orientation towards Realism, to Antonín Slavíček’s *Fall in Fog* (Figure 29), fully embracing Impressionist interest in light and color, peasant imagery was slowly on the rise.

It must be noted here that, with few exceptions, peasants never became the main subject of nineteenth-century Czech landscape painting as they did in the imagery of some Western European artists. Executed as a feature of rural landscapes rather than their protagonists, Bohemian peasants do not convey the social criticism of Millet’s 1857 *Gleaners* (Figure 31) or the idealization of peasant life in Breton’s 1871 *Returning from the Fields* (Figure 32). No symbolism of purity or nationalism is associated with Czech peasants. Historically, Bohemian peasants were subjected to serfdom until 1848 as the aristocracy and church, the main landowners, still held much power over their subjects. The perception of peasants then logically differed from that of Western Europe, where the liberation of agricultural workers already during the fourteenth century brought about changes in the social structure of rural communities. While the nineteenth-century Western European peasant became a tool of artistic interpretation, Central European society was only beginning to get accustomed to the free status of its peasants. Bohemian peasants were thus depicted as part of nature and in connection with it, but scarcely as

---


76 One of the exceptions was Václav Brožík’s imagery, who lived in France since 1876 and experienced Millet’s and Breton’s imagery. See Figure 30.
a device of the artist’s political or idealistic notion. Therefore, while rural areas and villages similar to Roztoky were represented by Braunerova’s contemporaries, the absence of their inhabitants is fairly common. The focus of these images is on the atmosphere, the mood of the place, and the picturesque harmony of rural life. (See for example Figure 33 and Figure 34.)

Peasants of Western landscapes were not only linked to nature, they were perceived as embodiments of the past, when the connection between people and nature depended on understanding and proximity. As Nina Lübbren suggests, by projecting themselves into the figure of a peasant, artists left behind the social conventions imposed on them by life in the city and became essentially a part of nature. I argue that devoid of such a tool, *A Quiet Valley in Roztoky* as a whole becomes the indicator of Braunerova’s own presence. The stylistic choices invoke her formal education and cultural awareness; the location and the selective portrayal of its appearance exposes the artist’s memories and emotions.

Furthermore, Braunerova’s exceptional handling of the landscape successfully establishes a connection between the viewer and the picture plane as if forging a link between the viewer and the artist herself. To initiate the encounter, Braunerova introduces the technique known as *sous-bois*. Generally used in forest scenes of the Barbizon school artists, *sous-bois* paintings aim to introduce the viewer not only to the visual aspect of the landscape, but also to its character. They seek to provide a multi-sensual experience, in which the viewer can imagine physically being present within the portrayed landscape.

In *A Quiet Valley*, a little stream with calm water, reflecting the cloudy sky and crooked trees on its surface, draws in the viewer’s attention from the bottom right part of the painting,

---

77 Many of these rural images are nowadays difficult to trace, as due to their size and subject, they are popular with collectors and are in private collections.

78 Lübbren, *Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe*, 98.
and leads it to the point of disappearance, like a path leading into the picture’s depth in her earlier *Wood Picking in Forest* from 1880 (Figure 35). The force of the wind is discernible not only through the bending branches; the loose leaves in the upper right corner further indicate the hostility of upcoming weather. On the right side of the tree trunks, ochre patches indicate the source of light. Here, the geographical position of the depicted location aids the interpretation, as we know that the right side of the painting faces west. The setting sun is reflected on the surface of the bark, briefly warming up the visitor before disappearing over the hills. Here, Braunerova’s perceptiveness about the specific nature of light in different geographical settings is particularly apparent in comparison with her other paintings from the same time period (Figure 36).

A feeling of proximity and movement is facilitated not only through the size and execution of the trees, but also through the loose brushstrokes near the bottom edge of the painting. The close-up flowers and grass in the front ground invoke the feeling of instability as their shape is only hinted at rather than clearly defined. The resulting effect is the effect of immersion. Viewers experience nature as if they were not observers, but participants.79 In contrast to the landscapes of the Mánes family, which are approached from an elevated position, the viewpoint here is on the same level as the greenery. The viewer is not gazing down on landscape, but he or she is standing in it, indeed, is a part of it. We stand in the wind, while looking at the still surface of the Unětický Stream, protected from the wind by the elevated shore. Clouds feel heavy as they move quickly above our heads, enclosing the last remains of a clear blue sky. The seemingly inconsistent quality of detailed trees, flowers and stream, and loosely depicted patches of grass and cloudy sky result in an illusion of a possible existence within the painting. Our eyes perceive the various shades of nature anticipating winter; our skin

seeks the warmth of the setting sun. We inhale the chilling evening breeze and hear the rustling of falling leaves and gurgle of slowly moving water. The viewer is fully immersed into the landscape of the Quiet Valley as if standing in the place of the artist, while the artist is embodied in the nature she depicts.

On April 21, 1932, on the occasion of exhibition of Zdenka Braunerova’s artworks, Václav Vilém Štech described the content of her landscape paintings as “inner excitement, quiet dialogues between soul and nature.” 80 Perhaps nowhere else is this statement more valid than in A Quiet Valley at Roztoky. Braunerova’s character, formed by social conventions, cultural encounters and personal relationships, imprints itself on the visual imagery of a beloved place. Selective adoption and subsequent alteration of certain elements from the landscape paintings of her contemporaries testify to artistic experience and individualistic projection of emotions. As a result of her encompassing approach to landscape painting, the viewer is elevated into the position of a participant, experiencing the sensual qualities of her image.

CONCLUSION

“So, at those times, ugly gossip was circulating about Zdenka Braunerová... Then, when I met her, discovering her magnificent core, I understood how the volcanic nature of my new friend could have easily led to these opinions. Truly, she cared for fates of exceptional people with joy and passion, she attached her whole soul to a friend, she never covered her mouth with a napkin, and she was always trembling with justice. She had exceptional humor and sarcasm; she didn’t know sleek, opportunistic denial to her own judgment…”

Jaroslav Maria, 1937

Although figuratively absent in her landscape imagery, Zdenka Braunerova’s character is referenced within the painting by every stylistic choice she makes. She constructs her scene as one would stage a self-portrait: depicting intimate subject matter in a manner demonstrating one’s skills, selecting and excluding visual clues to her identity. In *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*, Braunerova transcends the optical quality of landscape painting and offers her viewer a tangible experience of nature. However, the viewer is not only invited to sensually experience the landscape, they are invited to experience the artist’s perception of the landscape from within. Within the visual capacity of landscape painting, Braunerova combines her skills, knowledge, personality and experience. As all these are characteristic of a traditional self-portrait, I argue that Braunerova’s Roztoky landscape painting acts as an agent of self-representation.

---

The creation of *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*, acquired by National Gallery in Prague in 1950,\(^8^2\) falls within the prolific period following Braunerova’s encounter with French art, and most importantly with the paintings of Barbizon school artists while in Paris. As I demonstrated above, this stay in the French capital was crucial for the artist’s development, not only because it contributed to the expansion of her theoretical and practical artistic knowledge, but because it allowed her to view the Czech art scene and society from something like an outsider’s point of view. This change in perception enabled Braunerova to consider her own position within the Czech environment, as an artist, a woman, and a Central European individual. The cultural setting of Paris contributed to expanding the young artist’s horizons, but it also led to a realization of her own cultural background and to cementing her artistic expression through selective choices of style and subject. Paris of the late nineteenth century thus became a catalyst of Braunerova’s personal and professional maturation.

While her lifestyle and individual choices signal a progressive, modern individual, Zdenka Braunerova was by her beliefs and opinions a traditionalist. Raised in a progressive environment of a prominent Czech politician and his well-educated wife, Braunerova benefited from an extensive cultural background while she was simultaneously subjected to the constraints of her social class. *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky* embodies the artist’s negotiation of modernity and tradition and illustrates a dialogue between her individualistic nature and societal expectations. From the color palette of the painting, to the brushstroke, choice of subject and composition, the

---

\(^{82}\) Most of Braunerova’s artworks (and her private collection including personal gifts from Rodin and Chittussi) was bequested to the Association of Czech Graphic Artists Hollar, whose member had Braunerova been since its founding in 1917. The Association sold most of her artworks, some were acquired by the National Gallery in Prague and other galleries at the end of the artist’s life. Much of her artistic oeuvre is still dispersed in various private collections today. According to the records in NG Archives, this painting was purchased on December 22\(^{nd}\), 1950, for 6000 Kcs (app. $4,500).
Roztoky landscape painting is a deliberately self-referential statement of an artist aware of her cultural, historical and social background.

During my 2019 summer research trip to the Czech Republic, I ventured to Roztoky to examine the archives of the Středočeské Muzeum v Roztokách and to see in person Braunerova’s paintings, hanging on display on the walls of her reconstructed studio (Figure 37). A fittingly rainy day conjured up well the atmosphere of past days and the hot coffee was almost as pleasant as the conversation with the museum’s employees. My access to the textual material was facilitated by Mgr. Martina Hůlková, who also provided additional information pertaining to the history of the museum. During our conversation, the subject of Braunerova’s art in current academic research was brought up. It would seem that Braunerova has been one of the trendy “rediscovered” female artists in recent decades; the resulting abundance of theses and dissertations by Czech students focused on her and her art now prompt professors to discourage their students from pursuing this line of research. Some of these papers have indeed been particularly helpful to my research as they present comprehensive accounts of the chronological development of Braunerova’s artistic expression and position her well within the rather short history of Czech women artists.

As mentioned in the introduction, scholarship focusing on individual works by Braunerova is rare and the scholarly theses, as detailed as they are, fail to provide any in-depth contextual, historical and visual analysis of a single or of multiple works in their survey approach. Furthermore, while the recent writings succeed at underscoring the significance of Zdenka Braunerova as a person and an artist within Czech culture, her position within the wider context of European art needs further attention. Apart from brief mentions in the scholarship that

---

83 In Czech Republic, the “MA” title is positioned before the name as a “Mgr.” (from Latin magister)
focus on Rodin or Claudel, non-Czech sources lack knowledge of Braunerova and her art. Thanks to the artist’s own correspondence and contemporaneous records of events she partook in, scholars are aware of her socio-historical context. Future scholars might want to apply this knowledge to her paintings, as those too record the various stages of her life. This thesis has aimed to indicate new, potentially illuminating directions of possibility for research which must equally focus on the product as well as the circumstances of its creation.

Finally, a note must be made about a particular set of challenges this approach brings upon the potential researcher. First, the availability of sources needed for a comprehensive study is hindered by several factors. Textual material provides information only in the native language and requires physical access to archives. Contemporary and even more recent literature is out of print, and only a small number of primary sources have been digitalized. Secondly, paintings, drawings, and other art are spread through museums and galleries, but much of Braunerova’s work is also in private collections. Therefore, Braunerova’s artistic oeuvre still awaits a full recounting. Particularly challenging is also the search for a common language that would enable writers to place Braunerova in the context of Western scholarship. Perhaps due to historical and cultural differences, the scholarly expression of Central Europe differs from the English-language art history in its tone and focus. More significance is placed on emotional qualities of the art rather than its technical aspects, and combining the methodologies of both cultures while doing justice to both has been one of the most difficult tasks of this thesis. However, I believe that such approach in studying Central European and Eastern European women artists, with due sensitivity and respect, will not only lead to expanding our art historical knowledge, but also contribute to our better understanding of other cultures.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: FIGURES

Figure 1: Zdenka Braunerova. *A Quiet Valley at Roztoky*. 1886. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain.
Figure 2: Zdenka Braunerova. *The Brauner Family Salon*. 1879-1880. Oil on Canvas. Location Uncertain.

Figure 3: Zdenka Braunerova. *Landscape in Italy*. 1883. Watercolor Sketch. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy.

Figure 5: Zdenka Braunerova. *V Kolnách Street, Former Prague Ghetto*. Undated. Etching on Paper. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery.

Figure 7: Zdenka Braunerova. *Cherry Tree Orchard at Roztoky*. 1880-1883. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague.
Figure 8: Zdenka Braunerova. *From the Surroundings of Roztoky*. 1895-1900. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy.

Images are not included in this version due to copyright

Figure 10: Zdenka Braunerova. *Cayeux-sur-Mer*. 1887-1894. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection.

Figure 11: Jaroslav Čermák. *Raněný Černohorec (copy after)*. 1874. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain.
Figure 12: Soběslav Hippolyt Pinkas. *In the Studio*. 1854. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain.

Figure 14: Jakub Schikaneder. *The Funeral*. 1889. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection.

Figure 15: Antonín Mánes. *Landscape with the Belvedere*. 1830. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain.
Images are not included in this version due to copyright.

Figure 16: Josef Mánes. *Elbe Landscape*. 1863. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague.

Figure 17: Amálie Mánesová. *The Harvest*. After 1856. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain.
Images are not included in this version due to copyright

Figure 18: Antonín Chittussi. Landscape in Fontainebleau. 1879. Oil on Wood Panel. Olomouc Museum of Art.

Images are not included in this version due to copyright

Figure 19: Antonín Chittussi. Autumn at Fontainebleau. 1885-1886. Oil on Wood Panel. National Gallery in Prague.
Figure 20: Judith Leyster. *Self-Portrait*. c.1630. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Figure 21: Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun. *Self-Portrait*. 1790. Oil on Canvas. Uffizi Gallery.
Figure 22: Marie Bashkirtseff. *Self-Portrait with Palette*. 1880. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice.

Figure 23: Map of Roztoky, 2019. Yellow circle indicates Brauner’s residence.
Figure 24: Small teasel (Dipsacus Pilosus), source: Saxifraga-freenatureimages.eu. Photo credit: Peter Meininger (left) and Rutger Barendse (right).

Figure 25: Zdenka Braunerova. Studio in Roztoky. After 1905. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy.


Images are not included in this version due to copyright

Figure 29: Slavíček Antonín. In the Autumn Fog. 1897. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague.
Figure 30: Václav Brožík. *Goose Girl*. c. 1885. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery in Prague. Public domain.

Figure 31: Jean-François Millet. *Gleaners*. 1857. Oil on Canvas. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Figure 32: Jules Breton. *Returning from the Fields*. 1871. Oil on Canvas. The Walters Art Museum. Public domain.

Figure 33: Antonín Chittussi. *Winter Landscape*. 1883–1884. Oil on Canvas. The Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

Images are not included in this version due to copyright.
Images are not included in this version due to copyright


Images are not included in this version due to copyright

Figure 35: Zdenka Braunerova. *Wood Picking in Forest*. 1880. Oil on Canvas. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy.
Figure 36: Zdenka Braunerova. *London-Thames*. 1886. Oil on Canvas. On-line Collections of Moravian Gallery.

Figure 37: Braunerova’s Studio. Renovated in 2003-2005. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy.
Figure 38: Braunerova’s Studio- Interior. Today’s Layout. Central Bohemian Museum in Roztoky u Prahy.