

the fact that *Sztuka* artists could not be contained by the designation *unsere Polen* was readily apparent.³⁸ The *Sztuka* show emphatically demonstrated that Polish artists did not see themselves as Austrians. Alone or as a group, at the Secession or at other foreign venues, they were first and foremost Poles. After gaining international recognition as a distinct national group, they could no longer be satisfied with the status of an Austrian ethnic minority.

The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis afforded a unique opportunity to further assert Polish art's unique identity and independence. It also revealed the extent to which Polish artists' priorities differed from those of the Secession's leadership. By 1904, the Secession's national agenda was to a large extent replaced by a purely aesthetic one. The Secession's leaders' commitment to the pluralistic ideal of Austrian art had given way to an overarching concern for unity of vision. The Secession's plan for the Austrian art section at the St. Louis World's Fair, submitted to the Austrian government by the organization's two leaders, Josef Hoffmann and Gustav Klimt, reflected this shift in priorities. The pluralism and inclusiveness were superseded by an overriding concern for stylistic cohesion and unity of design. Conceived in the spirit of a *Gesamtkunswerk*, the Austrian art exhibit was to include works by only five Secessionists.³⁹ Six paintings by Gustav Klimt were to be accompanied by a few sculptures and decorative objects by four other members.⁴⁰ Recognizing this shift in priorities, the Austrian Ministry of Culture rejected the Secession's proposal on the grounds that it was not representative enough. Refusing to alter its plan, the Secession officially withdrew from participation.⁴¹ The Polish artists, however, embraced this opportunity to bring their art to a truly international audience. Polish Secessionists Axentowicz, Fałat, Mehoffer, Stanisławski, Wyczółkowski, and Wyspiański, together with twenty-two other artists (Kraków members of *Sztuka* and invited guests), ignored the Secession's boycott of the exposition and organized a show of Polish art at the Austrian Government Pavilion.⁴²

Faced with the Secession's withdrawal, the government turned to other Austrian artists' associations to organize the exhibition. Due to the late arrival of the works, the exhibit was not allotted sufficient space in

the St. Louis Art Palace.⁴³ It had to be divided between two sites: the East Pavilion of the main Art Hall and the Austrian Government Pavilion. The latter display was further subdivided into four galleries, each occupied by a different organization (Fig. 10). To the right of the entrance, Viennese artists were represented by the Hagen Artists' Association (*Hagenbund*) and the Austrian Artists' Association (*Künstlerhaus*). On the opposite side, Polish artists of *Sztuka* (Fig. 11) and Czech artists (identified as Bohemian) of the *Manes* society each occupied a separate gallery. This arrangement presented Austrian art not as a homogenous entity, but as a heterogeneous composite. The distinct national character of each group was stressed not only by ethnic identification, but also by the placement of the two Slavic (Polish and Czech) and the two Germanic galleries on the opposite sides of the building's main axis. The official guide to the art exhibits at the fair noted that fact, declaring that "Art in Austria is organized into four great societies of national scope, each so distinct from the other that their individuality was strictly observed in the grouping of the pictures. Aside from the exhibit of the two Austrian societies, . . . works of Polish and Bohemian artists were displayed, each showing distinctive national traits."⁴⁴

Ironically, by refusing to participate in the St. Louis Exposition, the Secession, an organization that previously claimed to represent all Austrian artists, forfeited its role in defining Austrian art. For the American audience, Austrian art was the art of the German artists represented at the Austrian Government Pavilion by the *Hagenbund* and the *Künstlerhaus* groups. Contrary to the Austrian government's intentions, the exhibits of Polish and Bohemian art were defined in opposition to "the two Austrian societies." In other words, Polish artists were perceived not as Austrians, but as Poles. The assertion that their works possessed "distinct national traits," implied that they represented a distinct nation. Therefore, once again in the process of claiming a unique national identity for their art, Polish artists symbolically asserted their country's right to independent existence.

In addition to being acknowledged as representatives of a unique national group, Polish painters and sculptors received recognition as artists. As a group, they were awarded six medals: one gold, three silver, and two bronze.⁴⁵ Axentowicz also received a Special Commemorative Award "in