

**Zdenka Volavka, *The Bowdoin Sculpture of St. John Nepomuk.*  
Brunswick, Maine, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1975.  
32 pp., 21 illus.**

Rigas N. Bertos

Volume 6, Number 2, 1979–1980

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076941ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076941ar>

[See table of contents](#)

**Publisher(s)**

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

**ISSN**

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

**Cite this review**

Bertos, R. N. (1979). Review of [Zdenka Volavka, *The Bowdoin Sculpture of St. John Nepomuk*. Brunswick, Maine, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1975. 32 pp., 21 illus.] *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 6(2), 142–142. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076941ar>

Storia dell'arte » et l'éditeur Longo d'avoir offert aux archéologues et historiens de l'art des instruments de travail de qualité et au public intéressé des ouvrages bien illustrés, de consultation facile et à prix abordable.

TRAM TAN TINH  
*Université Laval*  
*Québec*

ZDENKA VOLAVKA *The Bowdoin Sculpture of St. John Nepomuk*. Brunswick, Maine, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1975. 32 pp., 21 illus.

The author approaches the subject matter with the verve and systematic analysis which characterizes her work in general. Although the topic is confined to a single wooden sculpture (Fig. 6) by Ferdinand Maximilian Brokov (baptized 1688—died 1731), the well known Bohemian sculptor of the early eighteenth century, the reader of this densely written essay of thirty-two pages gains an interesting insight into the complicated problems of Bohemian sculpture during the last decades of the seventeenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries.

One of the first problems which the author had to solve was the attribution of St. John Nepomuk's statue to F.M. Brokov and its dating; both his father and his brother were sculptors too and had worked with him for most of his life in the same workshop. In order to demonstrate the difficulties of attribution it would suffice to mention that 'the complex situation in the Brokov workshop has been revealed through the patient analysis of Brokov works by three generations of Czech art historians' (pp. 7-8). Professor Volavka, aided only by scanty records, succeeds through her fine iconographic and formal analysis in demonstrating that the St. John Nepomuk statue should be attributed to F.M. Brokov (pp. 8-21). In the next chapter (pp. 21-24) the results of this formal analysis are used to throw new light on some problems concerning the apprenticeship of the artist, whose work, in the past, has been related to the Prague sculptor F.O. Quitainer or to the Studl workshop



FIGURE 6. F.M. Brokov, *St. John Nepomuk*. Volavka, fig. 1.

in Vienna. The author points out evidence linking the work of the young F.M. Brokov to the Prague workshop of F. Preiss (1660-1712), mainly on the similarity of the pattern of structure of the figure in the work of both artists.

In the last chapter (pp. 24-27) Volavka discusses an interesting question which could have important ramifications on the understanding of F.M. Brokov's quiet 'classical' style. As has been pointed out repeatedly in the past, F.M. Brokov does not use the garment in his sculptures as a means of activation of the figure, the major structural and expressive element being the body of the figure. 'Brokov's sculptures are constructed with a dramatic yet balanced distribution of mass. The fervour of Brokov's figures is introverted. They are serene and worldly; not ecstatic, yet suggesting activity. The basic Brokov form is round and convex, the volume bulgy' (p. 6). Totally different from this style are the passionate figures of Braun and his followers, members of a Prague school who played a certain role in

the development of the European Baroque, a school even more dramatic than Bernini's in form and content. Their turbulent figures with extremely animated garments reflect the Catholic effort to convert heretics, i.e. the Protestants.

It is known that Brokov's father Jan was, in his young years, a staunch Protestant. His conversion to Catholicism occurred later in his life, and it is probable that his Catholic wedding in 1686 was the re-enactment of an earlier Protestant one. His children were baptized later. Both F.M. Brokov and his brother remained single, and they seemed to avoid contacts with the Catholic authorities. By comparing these indications with the substantial changes F.M. Brokov introduced in the iconography of the sculpture of St. John Nepomuk (pp. 12-13), representing him as a figure full of energy and activity (like Jan Hus) instead of the traditional passive, resigned martyr, Volavka raises an extremely interesting question: 'Do F.M. Brokov's interpretive deviations from the norm say anything about the artist's personal attitude and intention, or do they merely indicate the approach of a great artist who only reluctantly accepts an iconographic stereotype?' (p. 26). One might also point out the possibility that F.M. Brokov's quiet 'anti-Berninesque' style could be seen as the artistic manifestation of an attitude very different from the prevailing official artistic and religious ideas of this period in Bohemia.

One can only wish that Volavka would pursue further the exciting new aspects she has revealed in this excellent study.

RIGAS N. BERTOS  
*McGill University*  
*Montreal*

PAUL GAUGUIN *The Writings of a Savage*, edited by Daniel Guérin, with an introduction by Wayne Andersen, translated by Eleanor Levieux. New York, Viking Press, 1978. \$21.95.

Gauguin wrote a great deal; to a greater extent than the Impressionists and Realists before him, he