

Lidové muzeum:
 Marxismus, dějiny umění
 a institucionální praxe

naopak zavrhována coby
 projev formalismu a ká-
 nonem se stal angažovaný
 socialistický realismus.
 Minich, který byl ředite-
 lem ložského muzea v le-
 tech 1935 až 1965, přesto
 dokázal i v mantinelech
 vymezených státní ideolo-
 gií a propagandou navázat
 na radikální teze avant-
 gardistů o zrušení hranice
 mezi uměním a životem.
 Minich, kreativně propo-
 jující marxismus s myšlen-
 kami Heinricha Wölfflina,
 vypracoval koncepci
 vzdělávání laického pub-
 lika, zdůrazňující histo-
 ricky podmíněný rozvoj
 umělecké formy oproti
 oficiálnímu důrazu na

snadno srozumitelný ob-
 sah uměleckého díla. Člá-
 nek věnuje pozornost jak
 Minichovým teoretickým
 úvahám, tak navazující
 výstavní a popularizační
 praxi, kterou zasazuje do
 dobového kontextu.

Klíčová slova: museum
 moderního umění – pol-
 ská avantgarda – muzejní
 edukace – exteriérové vý-
 stavy – lidové muzeum

Keywords: Modern
 Art Museum – polish
 avantgarde – museum
 education department
 – exterior exhibitons
 – people’s museum

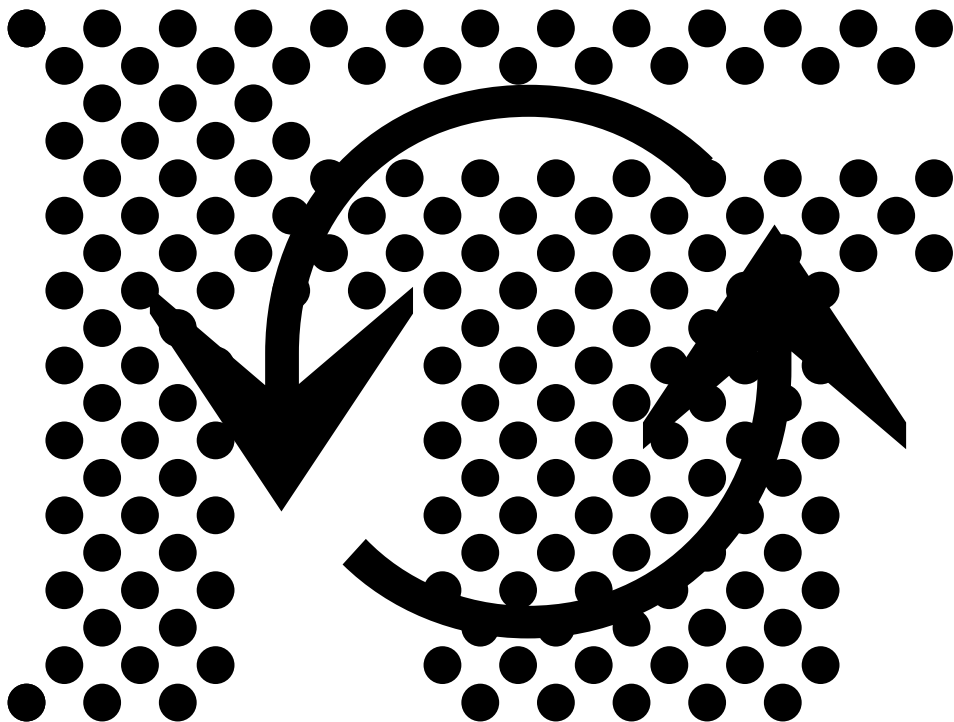
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 (A Time of Debates: An
 Anthology of Artistic Cri-
 ticism 1945–1954).

The article is a longer ver-
 sion of paper presented at
 conference "Marxism(s)
 at Art Historiography
 (Humboldt Universität
 Berlin, 2020).

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People's Museum: Marxism, Art History and Institutional Practice

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The institution of the museum was put under particular scrutiny in the twentieth century, especially by the avant-garde, which saw the institution as an obstacle to achieving one of their main goals: uniting life and art. In his 1919 text titled *On the Museum* Kasimir Malevich was unequivocal in his condemnation of the petrification and alienation of art that in the artist's opinion was endorsed in museums:

In the street and in the house, in oneself and on oneself— this is where living comes from, and where our living museum lies. I see no point in setting up sarcophagi of treasure or Meccas for worship. (...) Instead of collecting all sorts of old stuff we must form laboratories of a worldwide creative building apparatus, and from its axes will come forth artists of living forms rather than dead representations of objectivity.¹

Further in his text Malevich positioned the museum on the side of the morbid rather than the lively and described the institution as a site of senseless accumulation, conservation and finally conservatism as it archives the bygone ways of life. Contrary to this, artistic practice is placed in the centre and at the core of human activity and should rather be housed in a laboratory than stored in a museum.

Ideas binding art and life were of course emerging in the context of the communist revolution and they resonate with a well-known passage from Marx in which the philosopher stated that: “In a communist society, there are no painters, but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.”² If art is not conceptualised as distinctive and

1 Kasimir MALEVICH, “On the Museum”, in: Arseny ZHILYAEV (ed.), *Avant-Garde Museology*, Minneapolis: e-flux 2015, p. 272.

2 Karl MARX – Friedrich ENGELS, *The German Ideology*, New York: International Publishers 2004, p. 109.

autonomous from other types of human praxis then there is also no need for a special place to preserve it. Even though the liquidation of museums never came to be realised, institutional critique, inspired by re-readings of Marxist theory became an important part of the avant-garde legacy and later part of a methodology used by the neo avant-garde artists throughout the late twentieth century. Most recently museums have been taken to task for providing refuge and receiving funding from global capitalist enterprises implicated in warfare, or manufacturing addictive substances.³

However, this paper proposes a different approach seeking to ask how a reception of Marxism in art history changed the institution of the museum by shifting its relationship to the public and how it contributed to rethinking the museum as a public space. This question will be analysed in the case of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, specifically the post-war activities and writings of the museum's director Marian Minich. The reception of marxism in the 1940s and 1950s Poland was not an intellectual choice but a political reality that cultural workers had to operate within. Yet the article seeks to find agency in implementation of official doctrine, which in the case of Minich manifested itself in a fascinating and heterogenous art historical and museological approach that combined marxism with the writings of Heinrich Wölfflin, as well as the pre-war imperative of making art part of human life.

Museum of the avant-garde

Muzeum Sztuki is distinguished by its progressive and impressive collection of the artworks of the international avant-garde. The origins of Muzeum Sztuki date back to

3 Angelique CHRISAFIS, "Artist Nan Goldin protests against Sackler wing at the Louvre", *The Guardian*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/01/nan-goldin-protests-against-sackler-wing-at-the-louvre> (access 31. 8. 2020); Andrea FRASER, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2018.

1930, when the J. and K. Bartoszewicz Municipal Museum of History and Art was established in Łódź.⁴ A breakthrough moment for this institution occurred when it was gifted an unprecedented collection of modern art created through the efforts and connections of the artists gathered in the “a.r” group, famously among them Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński.⁵ The artists established the collection using international networks of the European avant-garde. For example, the writer Jan Brzękowski and artist Henryk Stażewski were at that time active in Paris and used their connections to artists united in groups such as Cercle et Carré or Abstraction-Création in order to obtain artworks for the collection.⁶ The collection grew over a couple of years and eventually gathered more than a hundred artworks by artists such as Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, Sophie Tauber-Arp, Louis Marcoussis, Fernand Léger, and Max Ernst.⁷ The collection was meant to popularise the achievements of the avant-garde art. It was exhibited for the first time in 1931. As the museum was growing, in 1934 a competition was announced for the position of director of the museum.⁸ In 1935 it was won by Marian Minich, an art historian based previously in Lviv; he was put in charge of the institution and

- 4 The museum is named after Kazimierz Bartoszewicz who donated his family (his father's name was Julian) collection to the museum in the period 1928–1930; for more on the history of the museum before 1950 see: Paulina KURC-MAJ, “Jakie muzeum? Uwagi na temat historii Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi do 1950 roku”, in: Aleksandra JACH – Katarzyna SŁOBODA – Joanna SOKOŁOWSKA – Magdalena ZIOŁKOWSKA (ed.), *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi. Monografia*, vol.1, Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki 2015, p. 124–176.
- 5 For a detailed history of the museum see: Jack OJRZYŃSKI, “Historia Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi”, in: Ryszard BRUDZYŃSKI, Urszula CZARTORYSKA et al., *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi. Historia i wystawy*, Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki 1998, p. 6–40. On the history of the “a.r” collection see: Iwona LUBA, *Utworzenie Międzynarodowej Kolekcji Sztuki Nowoczesnej „a.r.” – kontekst polski*, in: JACH – SŁOBODA – SOKOŁOWSKA – ZIOŁKOWSKA, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 16–36.
- 6 OJRZYŃSKI, *Historia Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 9–10.
- 7 The artworks that belong to the collection are available at the website of Muzeum Sztuki: https://zasoby.msl.org.pl/_miedzynarodowa_kolekcja_sztuki_nowoczesnej_grupy_read-desc (access 4. 11. 2020)
- 8 KURC-MAJ, *Jakie muzeum?*, p. 156.

carried out this function until his death in 1965.⁹ After the Second World War the museum was relocated to a new building, the former Palace of the Poznański family and in 1948 the minister of culture Władysław Sokorski officially opened the museum at this new location.¹⁰ The highlight of the highly original display conceptualised by Minich with the purpose to illustrate the stylistic development of art, was the Neoplastic Room designed by Władysław Strzemiński. It displayed the sculptures by Katarzyna Kobro, as well as works of prominent members of the pre-war avant-garde. However, only two years later, in 1950, the same minister Sokorski was at the forefront of implementing socialist realism, which brought an official condemnation of avant-garde art as formalism. In October 1950 the Neoplastic Room was painted over, and the avant-garde artworks had to be put into storage, since the museum was obliged to present the so-called critical or engaged realism as the main artistic paradigm.¹¹ The room was reconstructed after the Thaw, and since 1960 it has been open to the public again.¹² During the period of socialist realism the main display of the museum reflected the official artistic canon, avant-garde artworks were moved into storage and nineteenth century realism became the main focus of display. The museum also exhibited examples of Russian painting and presented artefacts relating to the development of the textile industry in Łódź.¹³ In the former Neoplastic Room paintings by nineteenth century masters such as Aleksander Gieryski or Stanisław Witkiewicz were shown.¹⁴

9 OJRZYŃSKI, *Historia Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 13.

10 Marian MINICH, *Szalona galeria*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie 1963, p. 156.

11 KURC-MAJ, *Jakie muzeum?* p. 168–170.

12 OJRZYŃSKI, *Historia Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 21.

13 KURC-MAJ, *Jakie muzeum?* p. 172.

14 See: OJRZYŃSKI, *Historia Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 19–20, Janina ŁADNOWSKA, “Sala Neoplatyczna – z dziejów kolekcji sztuki nowoczesnej Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi”, in: JACH – SŁOBODA – SOKOŁOWSKA – ZIOŁKOWSKA, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 339–340.

Marian Minich created a very particular museological strategy that was strictly based on his theoretical writings, his understanding of style formation and its relationship to society. Before 1950 and after 1960, the Neoplastic Room was at the centre of this narrative, representing almost an end point of artistic development, and its readings remain the focus of most of the interpretations of Minich's museological work. The core exhibition of the museum created by Minich and its relationship to art theory was extensively analysed in detail by Marcin Szelaż and Paulina Kurc-Maj.¹⁵ This text exposes other aspects of Minich's activity as a director, namely, the very vivid and engaged educational efforts of the museum and presents them as crucial in Minich's adaptation of Marxism and instrumental in exercising resilience during the period of socialist realism.

Engaged formalism

The foundation of Minich's theory was laid out in his article titled "For a New Organisation of Art Museums", which was published post-mortem in 1966 and was based on an extensive text written by the art historian in 1958.¹⁶ First and foremost the writing of the art historian is marked by a deep conviction about the social role of museums: they

- 15 Paulina KURC-MAJ, "Teoria widzenia' Władysława Strzemińskiego i, 'O nową organizację muzeów sztuki' Mariana Minicha, czyli jak patrzeć na sztukę", in: Aneta PAWŁOWSKA – Eleonora JEDLIŃSKA – Krzysztof STEFAŃSKI (eds.), *Acta Artis. Studia ofiarowane Profesor Wandzie Nowakowskiej*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2016, p. 125–153, DOI: 10.18778/8088-239-3.10 [accessed 30. 8. 2020]; Marcin SZELAŻ, *Testament muzealny Mariana Minicha*, in: JACH – SŁOBODA – SOKOŁOWSKA – ZIOŁKOWSKA, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 268–302.
- 16 Marian MINICH, "O nową organizację muzeów sztuki", in: Józef DUTKIEWICZ (ed.), *Sztuka współczesna 2: Studia i szkice*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1966, p. 70–190. The full, unedited manuscript was published as Marian MINICH, "O nowy typ muzeów sztuki", in: Paweł BROŻYŃSKI – Magdalena KUNIŃSKA (eds.), Kraków: UNIVERSITAS 2018. This article uses fragments of both the final article as well as the unpublished draft.

should assist people in expanding what Minich called, echoing Alois Riegl, “the artistic consciousness”, a task that according to his assessment, institutions have so far rather failed to deliver.¹⁷ How this problem could be addressed? According to Minich, firstly by focusing on analysing the development of style rather than content of artworks, and secondly by combining this analysis of style with Marxism, by which he meant showing art’s social function and context, entailing artistic questions into everyday realities. Such an approach would lead to making the seemingly most inaccessible artistic practices, such as abstraction, possible to comprehend and above all to enjoy by all people, regardless of their class background, because the audience would possess the necessary skills to grasp such works.¹⁸

According to Minich, such a status quo was due to the way museums organised viewers’ experience, presenting artworks in a linear exhibition that is based on history and chronology, and which favours displaying spectacular masterpieces by famous masters, rather than focusing on collective artistic processes that led to the creation of important artworks. Such a museological approach also continuously emphasised content over form, which Minich saw as un-educational since he found that reading iconographic themes is easier for lay viewers than appreciating form, as the narrative of an art work is usually readily accessible and the emotional content of the story oftentimes obscures the formal content.¹⁹ For Minich studying formal aspects of figurative artworks cultivated an approach that would allow for people to understand abstraction. Thus, a viewer educated in the development of form will benefit from a greater understanding of both Leonardo da Vinci and Malevich. It is important to keep in mind this view on education, as it sheds a new light on Minich’s efforts during the period of

17 Marian MINICH, “O nowy typ muzeów sztuki”, p. 5–6.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 12–13.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 12. See also: SZELAĞ, *Testament muzealny*, p. 284–285.

socialist realism when he could neither exhibit nor educate people about abstract art. However, he could and did educate the public on the artistic value of form, even if the examples he could use were limited.

In keeping with the materialistic paradigm Minich wrote in his text that the fact that museums fail to provide a graspable synthesis is “against the idea of a humanistic relationship to the people, who go to a gallery to study, to rationally experience artistic emotions”.²⁰ The emphasis on the rational against the metaphysical is repeated in Minich’s distaste for overrating singular artistic geniuses – any formal development in art is, for the author, larger than a personal effort.

In his definition of form Minich refers to Wölfflin and credits him as the first art historian who “abstracted form from the iconographic content” and extracted stylistic qualities that contribute to what he called the “development of artistic seeing.”²¹ This development was a rational process, that was ruled by certain laws and could be divided into stages. This is why in his exposition at the Muzeum Sztuki Minich used high quality reproductions when he felt that he lacked a suitable artwork, which could adequately depict an important stylistic shift. But what was equally significant for him was the fact that the process of the creation of forms was entangled in contemporaneous social issues, so that art produced during capitalism reflected on the issues of capitalist societies. However, unlike in the official doctrine of that time, the connection between art and society was not equal with a simplifying condemnation of capitalist, bourgeoisie art. On the contrary, it offered a deeper engagement in artistic practices, since Marxism for Minich was not reduced to a set of prescribed rules, but constituted

20 MINICH, “O nowy typ muzeów sztuki”, p. 27–28.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 51. On Minich’s relationship to Wölfflin see: Paulina KURC-MAJ, “Marian Minich (1898–1965)”, *Muzealnictwo*, 59/2018, p. 163–174, available online DOI:10.5604/01.3001.0012.2320 (30. 8. 2020); SZELAĞ, *Testament muzealny*, p. 271–272.

a dynamic way of thinking. In one of the passages of his articles on museums Minich wrote:

If historical materialism grasps the role of social development in a non-schematic way, as a generalised, abstract content derived from the concrete development of societies. Then the development of artistic forms, which is conditioned by the laws of social development, will also be a development of a concrete, yet generalised formal content, depicting the reaction of artists to changes which occurred in social life.²²

He redefined the museum worker not only as a custodian but also as a dialectical thinker, whose role is to seek what drives the “artistic imperative” of a given time and by an imperative Minich understood as that which pushed artists into a given way of organising physical and emotional phenomena into concrete forms.

Donald Preziosi defined art historical formalism as founded by Wölfflin as a way of organising artworks in “an internally coherent system of differences, according to measured and in theory predictable variations in the underlying distinctive features of objects”,²³ Marxism provided for Minich a way out of such a strict formalism focused solely on permutations of style. In his text, Minich uses the methodology of Marxism in a loose way to open up this strict understanding of form to the social and economic context. In the official doctrine of socialist realism, aspects of Marxism and especially Lenin’s reflection theory were used to introduce a normative system of evaluation of works of art, which emphasised content over form. For

22 MINICH, „O nowy typ muzeów sztuki“, p. 85.

23 Donald PREZIOSI (ed.), *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford 2009, p. 117.

Minich, to the contrary, elements of methodology taken from Marxism open up the field of art historical speculation and allows for situating art in a given historical moment. Form is consequentially understood as the organisation of the aesthetic space that is necessarily linked to politics. This intuition remains close to the later definition of the “distribution of the sensible” as a political act proposed by Jacques Rancière.²⁴

The affinity between the methodology used to create an exhibition in a museum, which removes artworks from their context and arranges them into a certain process, and the method of Marxism, which organises history in a similar manner observed by Minich also evokes other historical links with the Russian avant-garde. Arseney Zhilyaev wrote how a similar approach to museums was theorised in post-revolutionary Russia and specifically underlined how the museum’s way of organising resembles materialism as both make sense “of elements extracted from reality and presented according to the stages of their development.”²⁵ Importantly, the role of the museum as perceived by Minich reached beyond providing a certain type of progressive narrative towards engagement in educating people, giving them necessary resources to become receptive viewers. Quoting Dewey’s dictum that one does not see what one is not aware of, Minich put forward the notion of “rational propaganda” as one of the main goals of the museum.²⁶ He wilfully used the term propaganda, which after the end of socialist realism and the official change of course in cultural politics had rather negative connotations, and redefined it not as a way of disseminating political slogans but a means of achieving equality through education. For

24 Jacques RANCIÈRE, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London: Bloomsbury Academic 2013, p. 7–15. Marcin Szelag proposes also that the particular reading of Marx and Wölfflin created a platform of understanding between Minich and Władysław Strzemiński, see SZELAĞ, *Testament muzealny*, p. 285–288.

25 Arseny ZHILYAEV, *Avant-garde Museology*, p. 42.

26 MINICH, “O nowy typ muzeów sztuki”, p. 103.

Minich believed that to make aesthetic experience available to all people one needs to provide them with adequate intellectual frameworks to grasp artworks' relationship between form and content, between artistic individuality and society. Thus, Minich wrote at length about the importance of museum educators and complained that they usually failed to do their job well. Instead of delivering their knowledge they tended to deliver anecdotes about the lives of famous artists or re-tell stories depicted in the artworks. Thus, when they faced abstract artworks that provided very little potential to recall amusing tales, they were truly helpless and what was worse transmitted their helplessness to the public. Minich saw the educational mission of the museum as connected to economic modernisation enacted by the state, something that should be done together with raising people's wages and providing them with better infrastructure.²⁷

*Beyond the Museum:
Travelling Exhibitions*

The post-war period brought significant changes in the organisation of museums in Poland. In 1950 all museums, including those run privately, by foundations, or operated by the local governments were nationalised, meaning that they were subordinated directly to the Ministry of Culture.²⁸ As a consequence, the museums were put under pressure to propagate the current ideological postulates, which resulted in re-designing the core exhibitions of the national museums, in such a way that illustrated the inevitable triumph of

27 *Ibid.*, 126–127.

28 Franciszek FIDURA, "Rozwój muzealnictwa w okresie czterdziestolecia PRL", *Muzealnictwo* 30/1986, p. 5.

socialist realism.²⁹ This meant the exclusion of any non-figurative artworks and a focus on particular themes in painting, such as convenient depictions of the working class. Another important task put to the museums by the new regime was that of education. The early post-war years in particular were a time of an intense debate about how culture could be made accessible to the workers and farmers. The museums were entrusted with the task of educating the masses, which was carried out, among other things, by organising guided tours for workers, but also traveling exhibitions shown in factories or at community centres in small towns and villages. While the postulate to promote socialist realism was devalued with the end of Stalinism, the postulate to promote culture and education was implemented by museum institutions over the subsequent decades.³⁰

This new understanding of the role of the museum was reflected in changes to the functioning of the Muzeum Sztuki. Starting from 1950/1951 the institution had to realise what was at that time an obligatory policy for all institutions, namely organisation of the so called “ideological training courses” for the museum’s staff.³¹ The courses at the museum also included administrative personnel and were designed to present the foundations of historical materialism.³² The content of more advanced classes, supervised by Minich and dedicated to higher level museum employees, was strictly devoted to aesthetics and interestingly diverged at points from officially sanctioned topics, as

29 Magdalena ZIOŁKOWSKA, “Muzeum sztuki nowoczesnej (1946–1966) – postulaty, projekty i idee”, in: JACH – SŁOBODA – SOKOŁOWSKA – ZIOŁKOWSKA, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 373–378.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 378–381. For a detailed analysis of the educational activities undertaken by Muzeum Sztuki during the Polish People’s Republic see: Marta MADEJSKA, “Szesnaście minut wolnego czasu. Wybrane działania oświatowe Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi w okresie PRL”, in: JACH – SŁOBODA – SOKOŁOWSKA – ZIOŁKOWSKA, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 396–438.

31 Marian MINICH, “Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi”, in: Marian MINICH – Maria Gabriela RUBCZYŃSKA – Janina ŁADNOWSKA, *Rocznik Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi 1930–1962*, Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki 1965, p. 53–54.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

it contained the analysis of thinkers who at that time would be condemned as bourgeois. According to the Minich's reports one of the first topics, titled "Fundamental achievements of bourgeois science of art history and aesthetics", in keeping with Minich's theory, also focused on connecting interpretation of style with Marxist analysis.³³ In 1953 the classes encompassed readings of William Morris, Theodor Lipps, or Oscar Wilde.³⁴ As Minich wrote that juxtaposing different theories and methodologies allowed to not only "deal with different variations of bourgeois idealism but also to abandon pseudo-Marxist doctrines of faith served up as absolute truths."³⁵ Furthermore, the museum's staff reported in their later memoirs that the director was giving them unofficial lectures about the art of the avant-garde.³⁶

In 1950, a new department was created, which in 1952 eventually became the Educational-Scientific Division (Dział Naukowo-Oświatowy).³⁷ The head of the department was sociologist Władysław Cichocki.³⁸ The department was responsible for what we call today outreach activities, which were divided into the following sections: attendance, propaganda, travelling exhibitions and talks, film and methodology.³⁹ The department collaborated with local schools, and organised and developed different ways of bringing art closer to the people. For example, between 1954 and 1956 it organised a street exhibition that took place in the central part of Łódź, on Piotrowska street.⁴⁰ During the summer of 1954 the museum used thirty shop windows in order to exhibit around one hundred paintings

33 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 59–60.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

36 Paulina KURC-MAJ, "Marian Minich (1898–1965)", p.163–174.

37 OJRZYŃSKI, *Historia Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 20.

38 *Ibid.*, On the involvement of the sociologist from the Łódź University see:

MADEJSKA, "Szesnaście minut" p. 415–416.

39 Władysław CICHOCKI, "Praca oświatowa w Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi", in: MINICH – RUBCZYŃSKA – ŁADNOWSKA, *Rocznik Muzeum Sztuki*, p. 123, 124.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

from the collection, an event that was met with great enthusiasm.⁴¹ The department was responsible for organising educational displays and travelling exhibitions. The first type of exhibition consisted of reproductions of artworks, as well as wall text, and was accompanied by lectures, guided tours etc. The second combined original artworks with reproductions. These were larger scale shows that travelled to smaller museums.⁴²

Given the limited financial means the exhibitions were made with rather basic materials, and they were put together using mainly colour or black and white reproductions of famous paintings.⁴³ Importantly, the images did not imitate the original paintings, as their sense of scale was different and reproductions were presented in simple frames. The head of the museum's educational section emphasised their function in his report: "A good facsimile is a very important tool in educational work."⁴⁴ Indeed the reproductions allowed for greater mobility and less concern about the conditions in situ, which were often very rudimentary. Since education was the main task of those exhibitions, museums' art educators travelled together with images, delivering talks and engaging with people, teaching viewers how to look at artworks in order to comprehend their content and form. The exhibitions were expected to bring new audiences to the museum. Understood in this way, the educational activity was framed not so much as "enlightening" the uneducated masses but making the museum an appealing place for people, arousing their curiosity about art in the hope that they would become museum regulars.

Between 1951 and 1961 the museum organised 207 educational displays, which attracted an impressive amount of visitors, 443,583 people, most of whom would not be

41 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 142–144.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

regular museum goers.⁴⁵ The themes of the shows were rather aligned with the official cultural policy of the state – the first exhibition was titled *Social Issues in Plastic Arts* (1951), other titles include *Matejko and Riepinin, the Propagators of Patriotism and Humanism* (1953) – but after the Thaw the programme also shed light on modern art and included exhibitions on Henri de Toulouse Lautrec (1964), or Picasso (1964).⁴⁶

Museums' instruction for the workers delegated to be in charge of the travelling exhibitions from 1950 laid bare the ideological underpinnings of the whole enterprise. The document claimed that the question of mass education was never taken seriously in capitalist systems and put this very issue at the core of establishing socialism in Poland.⁴⁷ The argument that travelling exhibitions were uncommon in capitalist countries was, however, a false claim. In fact, travelling exhibitions were propagated at that time as a model for educating the masses across East/West and North/South Cold War divisions. The 1953 UNESCO publication titled *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions* is a testimony to the global relevance of this trend.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the travelling and educational exhibitions in question were conceptualised as an original way for art institutions to join the specific socio-political changes happening at that time in the country. The above-mentioned document made a claim that “today’s activity is a revolutionary

45 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 142, 144; State Archive in Łódź, f. Muzeum Sztuki, Plany i sprawozdania z działalności naukowo-oświatowej w 1964 r., sign. 39/2448/0/-/606. I would like to thank Natalia Słaboń for her help in researching the collection of the State Archive in Łódź.

47 State Archive in Łódź, f. Muzeum Sztuki, Działalność naukowo-oświatowa. Instrukcja dla kierowników Muzealnych Wystaw Objazdowych, sign. 39/2448/0/-/606 and sign. 39/2448/0/-/632.

48 Elodie COURTER OSBORN ed., *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions*, Paris: UNESCO 1953; See also: Agata PIETRASIK – Piotr SŁODKOWSKI, “Promoting Culture in the Polish People’s Republic in the 1950s at the Meeting Point of Practice and Ideology. The Case of Travelling Exhibitions”, to be published in: Joanna KORDJAK, Jérôme BAZIN ed., *Cold Revolution*, Zachęta National Art Gallery Warsaw 2021.

activity, for which we need to find new ideas and forms of organisation”.⁴⁹

The travelling exhibitions provided an answer to the demands of the time, as they offered new ways of redistributing not only knowledge but also interest in art. However, this mode of dissemination of art and culture was strictly subordinated to the central state institutions, and was at risk of being reduced to a meaningless exercise in ideology. For example, the 1950 travelling exhibition *Mickiewicz-Puszkina* concerned (or rather retroactively postulated) the friendship of two great writers and was one of the most publicised undertakings of this kind. The exhibition was shown in small towns and villages, using the infrastructure of community centres and libraries but also a museum bus (*Muzeobus*) specially constructed for the purpose of the circulating of such exhibitions.⁵⁰ Its message was in line with the socialist realist revision of the canon, one of the main goals of which was to establish closer links between Polish and Russian culture. The preserved documents show how much emphasis was placed on the ideological overtones of the exhibition. Firstly, the exhibition materials were verified by the relevant delegation from the Ministry of Culture and Art.⁵¹ What is more, a text was developed which was to be delivered by the exhibition manager in a given locality through a megaphone installed in the museum bus. The text emphasised mainly the merits of the new system in spreading culture:

Our bus exhibition (...) visited by hundreds of thousands of peasants is one of the expressions of the lively care of our

49 William HOGARTH, *Wystawa oświatowa*, photograph, 1954, Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, <https://zasoby.msl.org.pl/mobjects/view/30> (30. 8. 2020).

50 See: PIETRASIK – SŁODKOWSKI, “Promoting Culture”.

51 Archiwum Akt Nowych Warsaw, *Wystawa objazdowa Mickiewicz – Puszkina*, *Sprawozdania, korespondencja*, List z 6. 2. 1950 do Związku Historyków Sztuki i Kultury, inventory number 2/366/0/6/VI 17.

people's state for cultural life and is a telling testimony that the socialist system is fighting not only to improve the economic well-being of the working masses, but also, in the first place, access to culture and education.⁵²

The theme of the exhibition and the images and documents presented were used as the carriers of similarly appropriate ideological content.

The travelling exhibitions organised by the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź had neither such propagandistic reach nor such means as those shown in the museum bus. However, they mostly differed in their approach to education and the audience, and their understanding of what an educational exhibition is. The exhibitions organised by Minich reflected the art historian's heterogenic theory of art and even as their topics consisted of the officially approved themes of realism etc., they maintained a rare focus on form and style and a genuine interest in captivating their audience. For example, in the materials prepared for the exhibition titled *European Painting of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries from the Collection of the Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz* (1964) the art of the baroque is described as emerging from "violent socio-economic, political and religious conflicts". Thus, its dramatic and varied formal character is related not to artistic personalities but the social conditions of art production. For instance, the emergence of portraiture and still lifes in the Netherlands was theorised alongside the increasing role of the middle class.⁵³

In museums' archives there are photographs documenting the educational displays in which we can see the provisory character of the exhibitions, as well as the

52 Archiwum Akt Nowych Warsaw, Wystawa objazdowa Mickiewicz – Puszkina, Sprawozdania, korespondencja, Tekst przemówienia kierownika wystawy autobusowej Mickiewicz-Puszkina, inventory number 2/366/0/6/VI 17.

53 State Archive in Łódź, Deposit of Muzeum Sztuki, Wystawy czasowe. Malarstwo europejskie XVII i XVIII wieku (wystawa objazdowa), sign. 39/2448/0/-/799.

audience that they were targeting. The exhibition from 1954 titled *William Hogarth – The Satirist of His Times* took place at the museum in Piotrków Trybunalski. The photograph depicts a cultural worker, Wanda Nowakowska, pointing to the reproductions of Hogarth's drawings. It shows also a modest, yet crucial part of the exhibition's design – the wooden movable panels. The use of panels enabled a greater freedom in organising displays, as even the walls were no longer necessary for installation. It also allowed for the arrangement of the given space in a chosen manner. At the same time, the design of the travelling exhibitions was not attempting to recreate a particular space, or evoke any sense of institutional prestige. The modern construction allowed rather for mobility and the reproducibility of settings.

The exhibitions also travelled outside of museums – the 1960 display titled *From Weit Stos to Stanisław Wyspiański* was mounted in the Łódź factory of furniture.⁵⁴ It consisted of small reproductions of artworks framed behind glass, and an educational worker (Joanna Lupińska) delivered a talk to the workers. This time the display utilised the space of the factory room: the images were mounted on a kind of a wall unit, which likely would be used for displaying occasional bulletin boards, a practice very common at that time. The event was part of a larger cooperation between the museum and the factory, which took place between 1960 and 1964.⁵⁵ The photographs documenting the display depict a lecture, which took place during a breakfast break. We see some workers smoking, or eating prepared food as they listen to the cultural worker explaining the form and content of the works.

54 For documentation of the exhibitions see: Od Wita Stwosza do Stanisława Wyspiańskiego. Wykład dla robotników w Łódzkiej Fabryce Mebli, photographs, 1961, Muzeum Sztuki Resources, <https://zasoby.msl.org.pl/mobjects/view/52> [accessed: 30. 8. 2020]

55 Janina OJRZYŃSKA, "Praca oświatowa w Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi", in: JACH – SŁOBODA – SOKOŁOWSKA – ZIOŁKOWSKA, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi*, p. 48.

Finally, some of the most ambitious educational exhibitions took place in small villages, in which reproductions of paintings had to be presented outdoors, hanging directly on the fences of local buildings. Such exhibitions took place in Lipnica Mała, Jabłonka Orawska in Orava region (1964) and later in Stare Juchy in Masuria region (1965).⁵⁶ They were organised together with the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association and, as Marta Madejska points out, they were a part of a larger political action dedicated to the “repoloniasation” of the parts of the country that had a difficult and multicultural history.⁵⁷

These exhibitions lay bare the complexities inherent in the organisation of travelling exhibitions. On the one hand, the idea of travelling exhibitions evokes a sentiment described by Julian Marchlewski, Polish communist thinker and revolutionary, who wrote that art is not “a luxury, but daily bread, not an embellishment of life, but life itself.”⁵⁸ On the other hand, the exhibitions operated within a strictly defined and controlled ideological framework. However, the projects realised by Muzeum Sztuki under the directorship of Marian Minich, rather than petrifying those oppositions set them in motion and succeeded in creating a grey area in between, which facilitated not only the process of education but also of resilience.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

57 MADEJSKA, “Szesnaście minut”, p. 412.

58 Quoted in: Andrzej WALICKI, *Polska, Rosja, marksizm: studia z dziejów marksizmu i jego recepcji*, Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza 1983, p. 181.