

An exhibition is a medium for the presentation and communication of art that speaks specifically about a given time. Within the new discipline of exhibition histories, the attention of art historians is focused on these ephemeral historical moments. This study therefore examines the ways in which past exhibitions are approached in the rewriting of art history, above all within the context of Central and Eastern Europe. One possibility is a remembering exhibition in the form of a physical return to an iconic exhibition of the past. Drawing

transnational art history, allows for a more complex immersion in the past and its connection with the present. Remembering exhibitions in exhibition form is thus an important tool for the re-contextualization and examination of a previously excluded art located outside the main art centers, through the lens of the contemporary globalized and decolonized world, as the study illustrates using the example of Jens Hoffmann's recent curatorial projects.

Keywords
Exhibition histories – the remembering exhibition – Jiří Padrta – the exhibition *New Sensitivity* – the exhibition *Somewhere Something* – comparative history – Jens Hoffmann – riff – exhibition as medium – margins versus centers

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Remembering Exhibitions in Exhibition Form. Czechoslovak Exhibitions as Active Co-Creators of the Art History Narrative at the End of the 1960s⁽¹⁾

1 Translated from the Czech by Phil Jones.

The exhibition as a specific medium⁽²⁾ is a basic tool for the presentation, legitimation, communication and distribution of art and plays an important role in the reconstruction of its history. As the unit that defines artistic meaning, the exhibition is also, according to the German art critic and philosopher Boris Groys, the only legitimate instrument capable of determining what art is.⁽³⁾ Each exhibition is a particular spatial arrangement of selected works that bear witness to the forms of art of a given time. Exhibitions are therefore important traces of specific historical events. In contrast to earlier universalist art histories, the linear narrative of which was based on an examination of the uniqueness of solitary works of art, the production of artistic personalities and the development of styles, the histories written within the new discipline of exhibition histories are conceived of through the interpretation of past exhibitions. This discipline views the exhibition as a partial image of the society it represents in a set of selected artworks, recording events that are socially, politically and culturally determinative in relation to a particular place and time. The traces of ephemeral exhibition events defined by time and place are gradually disappearing from the historical memory with the often limited number of surviving archival materials. Targeted returns to past exhibitions are therefore becoming a conscious struggle against historical forgetting – Hans Ulrich Obrist even speaks of “the protest against

- 2 The term “medium” is defined in dictionaries primarily as a means of mass communication mediating the transmission of information to a wider audience. The exhibition *qua* medium is described by Paul O’Neill, for instance, as the primary communication tool of contemporary art. Cf. Paul O’NEILL, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, London – Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2012, pp. 89–91. A similar approach is taken by the authors of the first comprehensive publication on the history of Czech exhibitions of the second half of the 20th century: Pavlína MORGANOVA – Terezie NEKVINDOVÁ – Dagmar SVATOŠOVÁ, *Výstava jako médium. České umění 1957–1999*, Praha: VVP AVU 2020.
- 3 Boris GROYS, “Multiple Authorship,” in: Barbara VANDERLINDEN – Elena FILIPOVIC (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2005, pp. 93–95.

forgetting”⁽⁴⁾ – and are one of the tools by which existing “narratives of art” can be reinterpreted, supplemented and rewritten.

An important visual form of exhibition histories are physical reconstructions of past exhibitions, often accompanied by recent texts in catalogs or within the exhibition itself, which explain the broader period context to viewers. These reconstructions represent a specific kind of personal experience and allow for a more comprehensive experience than that offered by the many books on exhibition histories now available. According to British art historian Claire Bishop, it is precisely this kind of repetition that is one of the basic ways of constructing history, though Bishop is otherwise critical of writing art history only through past exhibitions.⁽⁵⁾ Reesa Greenberg, a Canadian art historian who has been interested in exhibitions since the 1990s, particularly the issue of “physical returns,” uses the term “remembering exhibition” for such reconstructions and recollections of one or more past exhibitions. The current trend for reconstruction, she argues, is evidence of the growing importance of exhibitions. She regards this specific type of memory as an important self-reflexive means of reconstructing our individual and collective identity. Moreover, this memory is represented spatially and materially in the physical forms of remembering exhibitions, which sets it apart from other methods. However, according to Greenberg, physical reconstructions face fundamental questions regarding how to convey a given historical exhibition in exhibition form, but also how best to address the present through it. In this context, she proposes three categories of reconstructive exhibition form: replica, riff and reprise:

- 4 See Hans Ulrich OBRIST, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Curating but Were Afraid to Ask*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2011.
- 5 Claire BISHOP, *Radical Museology, or, What’s “Contemporary” in Museums of Contemporary Art?*, London: Koenig Books 2013, p. 51.

The replica attempts to recreate, either partially or in entirety, the contents and form of a past exhibition; the riff uses an historic exhibition as a take-off point, often privileging a contemporary connection or interpretation; and the reprise re-presents or remembers exhibitions in the form of catalogs or online manifestations with visual and verbal information such as maps, diagrams, installation views, photographs or descriptions of the art on display, video tours, essays, timelines and entries on individual artworks.⁽⁶⁾

Replicas tend to reconstruct the original exhibition or at least part thereof through the original artworks or their reproductions in the same spatial arrangement. This can therefore involve a re-presentation, a more or less faithful and historically accurate repetition of a previous exhibition event based on research and often supplemented by archival documentation, such as photographs of the original exhibition, facsimiles of contemporary reviews, etc. The aim of replicas is most often to pay homage to a key exhibition event. In contrast, riffs on a past exhibition merely refer to it as a basic point of reference. They acknowledge the historical significance of a given exhibition, but are variations, digressions and additions reflecting contemporary contexts and interpretations. They use elements of reconstruction as commentaries on more complex statements. The last category, reprise, according to Greenberg, refers to the ways in which exhibitions construct their own memory, whether this is by means of the accompanying catalog or a detailed presentation of the exhibition on a website. Paradoxically, within the environment of the web, all of these past and future remembering exhibitions become simultaneous

6 Reesa GREENBERG, "Archival Remembering Exhibitions," *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, Vol. 1, 2012, No. 2, p. 159.

presences and thus enter the wider cultural consciousness. Reese Greenberg's categorization can be viewed critically in light of individual examples, though, it is so far the only significant attempt to define constructive exhibition forms.⁽⁷⁾ Her categorization forms the basis for a number of foreign art historians working on the issue of exhibition reconstructions. However, it has not yet been taken up to any great extent in Czech art history.⁽⁸⁾

Physical reconstructions of exhibitions have clearly become an important exhibition strategy in the contemporary art world. They are a type of self-reflexive, art-historical genre based on the idea that is possible to re-enact a historical event through repetition, thus linking the present with the past. The many examples of replicas, riffs and reprises of past exhibitions realized in the West continue to confirm the paradigm of a universalist art history. What role in this context do reconstructions of exhibitions of Central and Eastern European art of the second half of the twentieth century, which often remain outside the main narrative of post-war art history, play? How might they contribute to its contemporary reinterpretation and to the creation of an updated narrative of the national and regional history of Central and Eastern Europe? This study is based on the premise that remembering exhibitions can become an essential tool for writing a horizontal art history of our region. Taking the example of two selected Czech exhibitions and their foreign counterparts, it attempts not only to interpret and compare these formative period events, but to offer concrete forms of their contemporary reconstructions in accordance with Reesa Greenberg's typology. Finally, it outlines the main arguments as to why we should return to them today.

7 The sole example is the French art historian Elitza Dulguera, who draws on Greenberg and expands her categories to include sub-variants, see Elitza DULGUERA, "L'expérience et son double: Notes sur la reconstruction d'expositions et la photographie," *Intermédialités. Histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques*, 2010, No. 15, pp. 53–71.

8 See only MORGANOVÁ – NEKVINDOVÁ – SVATOŠOVÁ, *Výstava jako médium*, p. 27.

*The contexts of (not only)
post-war Czech art*

Post-war art in Central and Eastern Europe was shaped in relation to the Western canon despite the changing political conditions. In thinking about this period, the normativity of the West is a valid historical point of reference for artistic production in Czechoslovakia. This is one reason why some international scholars, with an interest in formally proximate expressions of art from peripheral regions, have often regarded them as part of artistic movements emerging in Western centers. The Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski, in his work on issues surrounding post-war art in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, proposed new tools of critical analysis in the form of horizontal and transnational art history. He believed that it was necessary to first deconstruct universalist Western influences, and then to reconstruct their meanings within a specific local context, before finally resituating Western and East-Central European output within a comparative perspective.⁽⁹⁾ His model of comparative history, based on a non-hierarchical alignment of the positions of center and former peripheries, allowed for a more precise localization and contextualization of a given place, as explained by the art historian Marie Rakušanová, who, inter alia, attempted a similar transnational approach in her interpretation of the work of Bohumil Kubišta, a leading Czech modern painter of the early twentieth century: “[Piotrowski] emphasizes that every place is actually a periphery because it is embedded in a certain context. If we are aware of this in the case of Western centers too, we succeed in depriving them of their universality and de-territorializing them.”⁽¹⁰⁾

9 Piotr PIOTROWSKI, “Jak psát o umění po roce 1989,” in: Pavlína MORGANOVÁ – Martin ŠKABRAHA (eds.), *Umění a emancipace. Výbor z textů Piotra Piotrowského*, Praha: VVP AVU 2022, p. 127.

10 Marie RAKUŠANOVÁ, “Writing on the History of Modern Art: From Particularism to a New Universalism,” *Umění*, Vol. 59, 2021, No. 2, p. 169.

The major Western centers, such as Paris in the early twentieth century or New York in the post-war years, must therefore be viewed with the question in mind of what role they played on the margins. This is not a question of influence, but rather of their utilization for the emergence of locally specific art. In one of his last interviews Piotr Piotrowski clarified that the globalization of art opens up a space for comparing local art scenes with related debates on art around the world.⁽¹¹⁾ According to Piotrowski, this transnational art history would allow for a better interpretation of specific local narratives and overcome the universalist internationalism and nationalism of particular margins.⁽¹²⁾ His methodology was the first serious attempt to discuss decolonization in the art history of Central and Eastern Europe and one of the first attempts at a newly written – horizontal – art history of these regions.⁽¹³⁾ Within the context of the current postcolonial impulse,⁽¹⁴⁾ a new rethinking of this history is called for, one that analyzes its specificity from within and reveals the emancipatory potential of its own localism, as argued by Milena Bartlová, who repeatedly draws attention to the need to update the methodological approaches of Czech art history:

It will be necessary to understand the concept of decolonization in a way that is appropriate to local conditions, created both in the past and in the present, to acknowledge one's own situation (including the linguistic

11 Richard KOSINSKY – Jan ELANTKOWSKI – Barbara DUDÁS, “A Way to Follow: Interview with Piotr Piotrowski,” *Artmargins.com*, January 29, 2015, <https://artmargins.com/a-way-to-follow-interview-with-piotr-piotrowski/> (accessed March 2, 2023).

12 See the first important text published on this topic: Piotr PIOTROWSKI, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History?,” *Umění*, Vol. 56, 2008, No. 5, pp. 378–383.

13 RAKUŠANOVÁ, “Writing on the History of Modern Art,” p. 172. See also Marie RAKUŠANOVÁ et al., *Degrees of Separation: Bohumil Kubišta and the European Avant-Garde*, Prague: Karolinum 2021.

14 For an analysis of postcolonial impulses in relation to Central and Eastern Europe, see Ondřej SLAČÁLEK, “Postkoloniální střední Evropa? Kunderův ‘unesený Západ’ v zrcadle postkoloniální kritiky,” *Slovo a smysl*, Vol. 17, 2020, No. 34, pp. 105–130.

aspect), and to analyze and take into account the local power relationships. The authority of the West is not based on an “objectively higher” quality of art or scholarly argumentation, but on the context of power politics, which includes the economic situation. [...] It is necessary to avoid both the universalistic debasement of the local, and of course a regression to conservative identitarianism. The periphery cannot be satisfied with insufficiently informed art-historical thinking. At the same time, it is just as counter-productive to denigrate local values and not to recognize the periphery as a legitimate place from which to view the world.⁽¹⁵⁾

I should point out that when I speak here about Central and Eastern Europe, this is reductively only from the position of Czech art, precisely because of the specific conditions of that time and my own linguistic situatedness. In similar historical moments and comparable artistic production, even in neighboring Central and Eastern European countries, different meanings were produced and parallel discourses emerged that shaped the individual narratives of national art histories. The latter are unreservedly shaped by specific historical assumptions, such as individual national historical milestones and the socio-economic structure of society. Defining art history in terms of the contextualization of national identities remains one of the basic methodologies for the interpretation of local art. Paradoxically this includes non-local art, some of which must therefore be interpreted as belonging to other nations, and some as “global.” We must therefore acknowledge, as Milena Bartlová writes,

15 Milena BARTLOVÁ, “From which Vantage Points Does an Art Historian Look? The History of Central European Art and the Post-Colonial Impulse,” *Umění*, Vol. 69, 2021, No. 2, p. 182.

that we are still bound to the format of art history conceived of in accordance with the borders of modern national states.⁽¹⁶⁾

The different historical rhythms that determine the development of art in individual countries therefore inevitably support the emergence of nationally written histories, despite their limitations and shortcomings and the attempts of some contemporary art historians to overcome them in favor of a transnational conception, as proposed by Piotrowski since the early 2000s. The challenge of art history today is to replace individual national narratives with a European or at least Central European perspective. Attempts at a Piotrowski-esque transnational conception of history are often unsuccessful and as a result turn into “mere” parallel narratives of the development of art in various peripheral and marginal regions. So far, the most successful attempt to come to terms with globalization and the decolonization of contemporary art history in Central and Eastern Europe is contained in the book *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, which offers alternatives to the national framework often used in the region’s art history.⁽¹⁷⁾ The book’s editors, Beáta Hock and Anu Allas, refuse to accept the established model of the world order as comprising center versus periphery, and propose replacing the prevailing traditional approach with an examination of global mobility and transnational tendencies.⁽¹⁸⁾ Similarly, Polish art historians Magdalena Radomska and Agata Jakubowska extend the existing national framework while building on Piotrowski’s thinking in their recent

16 See Milena BARTLOVÁ, *Naše, národní umění*, Brno: Barrister & Principal 2009, pp. 104 and 107. One of the fundamental reasons for such contextualization of artistic development is that the existence of a coherent national story of art history maintains, *inter alia*, the necessary national self-awareness.

17 Beáta HOCK – Anu ALLAS (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, New York: Routledge 2018.

18 Beáta HOCK, “Introduction,” in: *Ibid.*, pp. 5–7.

publication *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Practices*.⁽¹⁹⁾

Physical returns to past exhibitions could contribute significantly to overcoming the “fundamental distortion of the view of Central European art.”⁽²⁰⁾ Indeed, the creation of a remembering exhibition or series of exhibitions could become an essential tool for reinterpreting regional and global art history. The recent performative trend in other areas of culture also points to this, reflecting the individual need of the contemporary viewer to relive a particular segment of history.⁽²¹⁾ Even in the case of remembering exhibitions, there is an intensive immersion in the past, a kind of lived experience, which is their great advantage and strength. In contrast to classically written art history, these “exhibition returns” offer the possibility of personally experiencing a physically reconstructed past or certain fragments thereof, which may be close in time, form or content, but have not yet been approached for various reasons within the context of rewriting art history. From the perspective of our region, the most appropriate form for the revision of universalist art history through exhibition reconstruction according to Reese Greenberg is the riff, in which the original exhibition is merely a referent or starting point for contemporary interpretation. This reconstructive form best allows us to recognize the local specificities of each exhibition, to legitimize the distinct narratives of national histories, and ultimately, through critical reflection, to create the transnational art history called for by Piotr Piotrowski.

The historical events of the post-war period led to the asynchronicity of the development of art in

Czechoslovakia, the geopolitical situatedness of which is an essential factor not only in terms of the emergence of locally specific art, but also the writing of its history. The period of the late 1960s, which is the focus of this case study, was the culmination of a process of democratization in local society that began in the latter half of the 1950s after denunciation of the Stalinist cult of personality. After 1964, free creative activity was restored in Czechoslovakia and exhibition operations commenced, especially in the smaller galleries run by the Union of Czechoslovak Artists. These were now managed by exhibition commissions, headed by a gallery commissioner, and the position of relatively independent curator and exhibition organizer gradually came into being. In parallel with these developments, local artists and art historians began to re-establish contacts with other countries, especially within Europe.⁽²²⁾ The magazines *Výtvarná práce* (Artwork) and *Výtvarné umění* (Visual Arts) published more critical texts and for the next five years reported intensively, not only on activities at home, but also on contemporary art around the world.

The Czechoslovak art scene of the 1960s is characterized not only by the emergence of various art groups, but above all by a more complex constellation of several parallel artistic currents with completely contradictory programs (imaginative art, new figuration, constructive art, action art, rational “objective” tendencies, etc.). The internationalization of Czech art was further assisted by exhibitions organized abroad by Czechoslovak curators such as Jindřich Chalupský, Jiří Kotalík, František

19 Agata JAKUBOWSKA – Magdalena RADOMSKA (eds.), *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Practices*, London – New York: Routledge 2022.

20 BARTLOVÁ, “From which Vantage Points,” p. 176.

21 See for example Inke ARNS – Gaby HORN, *History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance*, Frankfurt am Main: Revolver – Archiv für aktuelle Kunst 2007, pp. 37–63; Robert BLACKSON, “Once More... with Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 66, 2007, No. 1, pp. 28–40.

22 For more, see Marianna PLACÁKOVÁ, “Emancipation Despite Circumstances: The Prague Spring, (Dis)engagement on the Art Scene and the Emergence of Feminist Consciousness among Women Artists,” *Umění*, Vol. 70, 2022, No. 4, pp. 383–405.

Šmejkal and Eva Petrová,⁽²³⁾ and numerous exhibitions of contemporary international art held in Czechoslovakia.⁽²⁴⁾ The democratization process of the 1960s came to an end with the invasion of troops of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968 and subsequent changes to state policy, culminating in the start of what is known as the “normalization period” of the 1970s. The possibilities for more progressive art were thus officially closed down in Czechoslovakia for the next two decades.⁽²⁵⁾

*Remembering exhibitions:
the exhibitions New Sensitivity
and Somewhere Something,
their foreign parallels and
contemporary returns*

Some of the Czechoslovak exhibitions of the late 1960s significantly shaped local developments and in many ways represent art formally similar to world art at the time. Their Western counterparts are these days repeatedly revisited through exhibition reconstructions. With a few exceptions,

- 23 For example, the exhibitions: *Tschechoslowakische Kunst heute. Profile V*, curators Jiří Kotalík and Miroslav Mičko, Bochum: Städtische Kunstgalerie 1965; Baden-Baden: Staatliche Kunsthalle 1965; *Tschechoslowakische Kunst der Gegenwart*, curator Jindřich Chalupecký, Berlin: Akademie der Künste 1966; *Mostra d'arte contemporanea cecoslovacca*, curator Jaromír Zemina, Turin: Castellodel Valentino, March 1967; *Nouvelle génération tchécoslovaque*, curator František Šmejkal, Brussels: Galerie Maya, 29 September – 19 October 1966; *L'art tchéquie actuel*, curator Miroslav Mičko, Paris: Galerie Renault-Élysées 1969; *Arte contemporanea in Cecoslovacchia*, curator Jindřich Chalupecký, Roma: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea 1969.
- 24 Of foreign exhibitions: *Premio Gaetano Marzotto 1967. Figurativní malířství v Evropě*, curators Jiří Kotalík and Soprano Edoardo, Praha: Národní galerie, Valdštejnská jízdárna 1967; *Yves Klein 1928–1962*, curator Petr Spielmann, Praha: Národní galerie, Městská knihovna 1968; *Martial Raysse. Obrazy a objekty*, curator Pierre Restany, Praha: Národní galerie, Městská knihovna 1969 or *The Disappearance and Reappearance of the Image: American Painting after 1945*, curator Ruth Kaufmann, Praha: Národní galerie, Valdštejnská jízdárna 1969.
- 25 For more on the contemporary context, see, for example: Rostislav ŠVÁCHA – Marie PLATOVSÁ (eds.), *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1, 1958–2000*, Praha: Academia 2007; Jiří ŠEVČÍK – Pavlína MORGANOVÁ – Dagmar DUŠKOVÁ (eds.), *České umění 1938–1989. Programy, kritické texty, dokumenty*, Praha: Academia 2001.

these returns confirm the established paradigm of universalist art history and do not reflect its changing geography. The exhibition reconstructions realized by curator Jens Hoffmann, which consciously transcend the Western canon in favor of individual “margins,” offer an inspiration for thinking about possible forms of reconstructions of exhibitions of Czechoslovak art of the period in question. They represent a contribution to a more global image of art history in the second half of the twentieth century, which is inclusive of the art of the Central and Eastern European region.

For the Czechoslovak art scene of the latter half of the 20th century, two exhibitions curated by the art theorist Jiří Padrta, namely *Nová citlivost* (New Sensitivity, 1968) and *Někde něco* (Somewhere Something, 1969), which even back then were pivotal moments and clearly transcended local borders in respect of curatorial conception, played an important anticipatory role. The exhibitions were responding to current trends and found a formal and aesthetic proximity with world art. In the case of *New Sensitivity* this involved New Tendencies associated with the reduction of form, a new sensibility and rational directions in art. In contrast, the exhibition *Somewhere Something* worked with conceptualism, the environment, actions and happenings. In their time, both were radical exhibition gestures, as were the legendary exhibitions *Primary Structures*⁽²⁶⁾ curated by Kynaston McShine (1966) and *When Attitudes Become Forms*⁽²⁷⁾ curated by Harald Szeemann (1969), both of which are referenced here and to which Jens Hoffmann also refers with his reconstructive projects.

Jiří Padrta was not a curator in the true sense of the word like, for example, Harald Szeemann or Kynaston McShine. Instead, his occasional forays into exhibition

26 *Primary Structures. Younger American and British Sculpture*, curator Kynaston McShine, New York: Jewish Museum 1966.

27 *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form. Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information*, curator Harald Szeemann, Bern: Kunsthalle Bern 1969.

activities were offshoots of his work as art theorist and critic. Although he did not study art history, he became one of the most respected art historians in 1960s Czechoslovakia. He promoted objective and rational trends in art, and was the theoretician with the art group *Křižovatka*,⁽²⁸⁾ whose program he formulated. From the mid-1950s onwards he also worked as art editor at the magazine *Výtvarná práce*, the editorial team of which also subscribed regularly to specialist magazines from abroad.⁽²⁹⁾ He was well versed in contemporary Western art, which he communicated to the Czechoslovak art scene through his theoretical texts and actively presented through the medium of exhibitions. As early as 1957, for instance, he published in instalments in *Výtvarné umění* the pivotal text “Umění nezobrazující a neobjektivní, jeho počátky a vývoj” (“Non-representational and non-objective art: its origins and development”), which made a significant contribution to the rehabilitation of abstract art in Czechoslovakia at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s.⁽³⁰⁾ As art historian Terezie Nekvindová notes, Jiří Padrta was an important advocate of “current trends” and an example of a theoretician who found inspiration abroad and attempted to track down examples of such trends in his own country.⁽³¹⁾ In *Somewhere Something* he even referred in the typed introduction to the catalog to the exhibition

- 28 The Křižovatka (Crossroads) art group was founded in 1963 and its first exhibition was held at the Václav Špála Gallery in Prague in 1964: *Křižovatka*, curator Jiří Padrta, Praha: Galerie Václava Špály 1964. Exhibiting artists: Vladimír Burda, Richard Fremund, Jiří Kolář, Běla Kolářová, Karel Malich, Pavla Mautnerová, Vladislav Mirvald, Zdeněk Sýkora. The group's program was a reaction to the subjectively oriented wave of informal and structural abstraction of the 1950s. In the exhibition catalog, Padrta attempted for the first time to define a new artistic sensibility. This was the first presentation of a rational, emotionally impersonal expression of geometric abstraction and concretism in Czechoslovakia.
- 29 Zdeněk PRIMUS, “Jiří Padrta – věnovat se umění je třeba umět,” *Bulletin UHS*, Vol. 25, 2013, No. 1, p. 25.
- 30 Jiří PADRTA, “Umění nezobrazující a neobjektivní, jeho počátky a vývoj,” *Výtvarné umění*, Vol. 7, 1957, No. 4, pp. 175–181; part two, No. 5, pp. 214–221.
- 31 For more details, see Terezie NEKVINDOVÁ, “Od komisaře ke kurátorce? Tvůrci výstav v českém umění ve druhé polovině 20. století,” in: MORGANOVÁ – NEKVINDOVÁ – SVATOŠOVÁ, *Výstava jako médium*, pp. 171–175.

When Attitudes Become Form, which had taken place a few months earlier, and offered a personal reflection on the changing face of world art at that time:

The artists who are responding to it [the new situation] can hardly be said to represent a distinct tendency. Rather, they are scattered groups around the world, asserting themselves through actions of the most diverse kind, such as the one recently presented at the Kunsthalle Berlin revealingly titled “When Attitudes Become Form.” [...] It is difficult to speak of any common features or even goals.⁽³²⁾

Padrta was therefore familiar with Szeemann's exhibition, despite mistakenly locating it in Berlin, though from what sources can no longer be ascertained, since his estate has not survived to provide a satisfactory answer. No review of this groundbreaking exhibition ever appeared in the official Czech press, and it is surprising that Padrta himself did not report on it in his capacity as art editor of *Výtvarná práce*.⁽³³⁾ Interestingly, at the time of the Bern exhibition, Harald Szeemann's assistant was Padrta's former colleague, the Czech art historian Zdenek Felix.⁽³⁴⁾ However, Felix had by this time gone into exile and was not in a position to inform Padrta of the exhibition.⁽³⁵⁾

- 32 Jiří PADRTA, *Někde něco*, typescript exhibition catalog, Praha: Galerie Václava Špály 1969, p. 5. A copy is stored at the Archive of the Institute of Art History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Fund Jiří Padrta.
- 33 Only Jindřich Chalupecký in his reflections on the exhibitions *Op Losse Schroeven* and *When Attitudes Become Form* published a personal consideration on the form of contemporary art a year later, see: Jindřich CHALUPECKÝ, “Tragické umění,” *Výtvarná práce*, Vol. 18, 1970, No. 10, p. 7.
- 34 Zdenek Felix was a colleague from the editorial offices and collaborated with Jiří Padrta as co-curator on several exhibitions.
- 35 See NEKVINDOVÁ, “Od komisaře ke kurátorce?,” p. 173. See also Lenka DOLANOVÁ (ed.), *Nejedna rodina: Jirousovi, Padrtovi, Ságlovi*, Humpolec: 8smička 2020.

The exhibition *Somewhere Something* took place in August 1969, i.e., around the first anniversary of the occupation by forces of the Warsaw Pact, at the Václav Špála Gallery in Prague, and represented a kind of culmination of the curatorial and exhibition activities associated with Czech art in the 1960s.⁽³⁶⁾ It displayed works by Jiří Kolář, Běla Kolářová, Zorka Ságlová and Jan SágI, which crossed the boundaries of contemporary art into conceptualism, processualism, action art and the use of raw and natural materials. In addition to his collages and assemblages, Jiří Kolář, who was by this time already a renowned poet and artist, presented his monumental environment *Chameleon*, in which he worked with the particular surroundings of the Špála Gallery. His original plan was to transform the color of his processual work in its identical visual form every day. In the event, he did so only once, from the white version to black.⁽³⁷⁾ Běla Kolářová, whose experimental work was created at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s in parallel with her husband's, exhibited small installations and objects in which she used everyday foodstuff as a material. These works on the border of Eat Art also underwent their own transformation during the course of the exhibition due to the ravages of time. The photographer Jan SágI, who documented exhibitions for art periodicals in the 1960s, put on display his original photographs depicting land-art events or visual records of musical performances by indie rock bands. He and his wife Zorka Ságlová collaborated on the visual form of their concerts from the mid-1960s onwards.⁽³⁸⁾ In SágI's case, this was the first ever Czech gallery

36 *Někde něco*, curator Jiří Padrta, Praha: Galerie Václava Špály 1969.

37 This fact was documented by Jiří Padrta himself in one of his later texts on Jiří Kolář, where he writes: "This bleak scenery was to change every day into color: one day the objects were to be painted white and the walls black, the second day both black, the third day the objects black and the wall white, and the fourth day both white. In the event, two of these variations saw light of day – all white and all black." see Jiří PADRTA, "Báseň nového vědomí," in: Milada MOTLOVÁ (ed.), *Jiří Kolář*, Praha: Odeon 1993, p. 90. Thanks to Pavlína Morganová who brought this to my attention.

38 Jan SÁGL, *Tanec na dvojitém ledě*, Praha: Kant 2013.

presentation of the documentation of action art. However, the most radical work was by the pioneer of Czech land art Zorka Ságlová, who conceived her work *Seno, Sláma* (Hay, Straw) as a permanent happening and environment.⁽³⁹⁾ She visited the gallery regularly with friends in order to turn and rearrange the hay.

We can therefore see that the exhibition *Somewhere Something* drew on similar principles of working with the gallery space and new forms of art as the show by the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann, which in March 1969 at the Kunsthalle Bern featured nearly seventy artists from America and Western Europe, including Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, Eva Hesse, Richard Serra, Mario Merz, Daniel Buren, etc. In retrospect it is clear that this was a somewhat randomly selected group of artists, united by the fact that they were radically challenging the artistic norms of the time in their diverse work. Szeemann's exhibition established an entirely new relationship between curator, artist and gallery and heralded the emergence not only of conceptual art, but also land art, arte povera and post-minimalism. It became one of the formative exhibitions of the recent past, even though it was in some respects eclectic, a fact that is often forgotten, as curator Jens Hoffmann observes in a later interview:

To give you an idea of the situation: Many artists who are represented in the publication never made it into the show, and many of the artists who participated are artists we do not really think about that much anymore. There were no non-Western artists, and only three female artists, something that is utterly

39 For more, see, for example, Lenka BUČILOVÁ, *Zorka Ságlová*, Praha: Kant 2009; or Martina PACHMANOVÁ, "Laying Diapers, Loving Nature: Maternity as a Private Act and Political Gesture," in: Katja KOBOLT – Lana ZDRAVKOVIĆ (eds.), *Performative Gestures, Political Moves*, Ljubljana – Zagreb – Beograd: Red Athena University Press 2014, pp. 57–63.

impossible to imagine today and hardly progressive even at that time. Szeemann also included a lot of artists who were just around in Europe at the time so that he did not have to pay for travel expenses. All in all, it was a bit of a mess and a lot of it was simply very arbitrary.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Despite this, *When Attitudes Become Form* has been repeatedly revisited as a pivotal exhibition event in art history, and in 2013 it was even physically replicated at the Fondazione Prada in Venice.⁽⁴¹⁾

For the same reasons, Jiří Padrta spoke about the exhibition in 1969 in the introduction to the catalog accompanying the exhibition *Somewhere Something* and declared that the exhibited works were not a local illustration, but an attempt at a personal contribution to the transformation of art taking place at that time. The fact that this was a similarly radical gesture as Harald Szeemann's exhibition is evidenced by the surprised and dismissive reactions that were to be heard from all corners of the Czechoslovak art scene at that time. For example, Luboš Hlaváček, one of the representatives of so-called official culture, in his long essay summarizing the development of Czech art in 1972, dubbed the exhibition a "haystack" that merely highlighted the absurd conviction of the exhibitors and the organizer regarding their "non-conformism and worldliness."⁽⁴²⁾ And similarly critical voices were to be heard on the independent scene, even from the curator and head of the Špála

40 See "Tim Lee, Nina Beier & Jens Hoffmann on Remaking Szeemann's Attitudes," *Canadian Art*, 11 October 2012, <https://canadianart.ca/features/when-attitudes-become-form-become-attitudes/> (accessed March 31, 2023).

41 *When Attitudes Become Form. Bern 1969 / Venice 2013*, curator Germano Celant in collaboration with Thomas Demand and Rem Koolhaas, Venezia: Fondazione Prada 2013.

42 See Luboš HLAVÁČEK, "Dilema našeho výtvarnictví," *Tvorba*, Vol. 37, 1972, No. 5, p. 10, (completing the article from No. 4).

Gallery, Jindřich Chalupecký, later recalled by Jan SágI.⁽⁴³⁾ Chalupecký had probably not been informed of the final form of the exhibition by Jiří Padrta.

It was not only the processual installations by Jiří Kolář and Zorka Ságlová that would have been shown at the Bern exhibition in spring 1969 had Harald Szeemann been interested in current Czech art and the wider context of Central and Eastern Europe at that time. Not even Jens Hoffmann took that step, who in 2012 revived Szeemann's exhibition with his project *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration – A Remake – A Rejuvenation – A Rebellion*⁽⁴⁴⁾ for the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art in San Francisco. Although Szeemann's exhibition had been the subject of various research projects, scholarly studies and publications, this was the first time it had been reconstructed in exhibition format. The impetus for the project came from a conversation that Hoffmann had with Szeemann in 2002.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The original exhibition was the starting point for Hoffmann's own curatorial research into the development of art at that time. Its recollection reflected the gradual globalization taking place through the selection of eighty international artists continuing the conceptual legacy of Szeemann's exhibition.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Not a single Czech artist was included in the extensive list of contributors (though the Slovak conceptual artist Roman

43 For more see SÁGL, *Tanec na dvojitém ledě*, p. 152.

44 *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration – A Remake – A Rejuvenation – A Rebellion*, curator Jens Hoffmann, San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art 2012.

45 A transcript of the interview from 2002 is included in the catalog for the San Francisco exhibition, see "Form of Attitudes and Attitudes of Form – A Conversation between Harald Szeemann and Jens Hoffmann," in: Jens HOFFMANN, *Life in your head – When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes (A restoration – A remake – A rejuvenation – A rebellion)* (exh. cat.), San Francisco: Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art 2012, pp. 5–6.

46 "Tim Lee, Nina Beier & Jens Hoffmann on Remaking Szeemann's Attitudes."

Ondák, born in 1966, was represented).⁽⁴⁷⁾ One section of the show was devoted to the original exhibition, and was dominated by a large-scale model of the Kunsthalle Bern with a detailed installation of scaled-down versions of the originally exhibited works. It also featured video interviews with the original exhibiting artists filmed by Swiss television, and period photographs that captured the course of the installation and the final form of the exhibition. Hoffmann's exhibition riff, which he himself calls a re-collection and remake, focused on artists whose work includes elements of performance, minimalism and conceptualism, and uses everyday materials and expresses itself through simple sculptural gestures. However, the selection of works is expanded so as to include a contemporary global perspective on the development of art, and so this project can be considered a kind of art-historical corrective to the original exhibition.

A similar exhibition reconstruction would have been beneficial in the case of Padrta's *Somewhere Something* from 1969. In its time, this event heralded a radical shift in the existing boundaries of art. It was an original experiment working quite explicitly with the gallery space, a bold curatorial concept and, on the domestic art scene, it

47 Exhibiting artists: Zarouhie Abdalian, Pablo Accinelli, Meriç Algün Ringborg, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Jonathas de Andrade, Kathryn Andrews, Nazgol Ansarinia, Nicolás Bacal, Christopher Badger, Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck, Yto Barrada, Taysir Batniji, James Beckett, Nina Beier, Erick Beltrán, Walead Beshty, Cezary Bodzianowski, Matthew Buckingham, Johanna Calle, Arabella Campbell, Juan Capistran, Mariana Castillo Deball, Etienne Chambaud, Marcelo Cidade, Claire Fontaine, Nicolás Consuegra, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Alexandre da Cunha, Maria Eichhorn, Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, Cevdet Ereğ, Annika Eriksson, Lara Favaretto, Aurélien Froment, Simon Fujiwara, Meschac Gaba, Dani Gal, Ryan Gander, Mario GarcíaTorres, João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva, Alexander Gutke, Jeppe Hein, Emily Jacir, Maryam Jafri, Alicja Kwade, Luisa Lambri, Adriana Lara, Tim Lee, Mateo López, Renata Lucas, Marie Lund, Kris Martin, Vincent Meessen, Simon Dybbroe Møller, Jonathan Monk, Shahryar Nashat, Roman Ondák, Fernando Ortega, Christodoulos Panayiotou, Nicolás Paris, Pratchaya Phinthong, Amalia Pica, Kirsten Pieroth, Wilfredo Prieto, Pablo Rasgado, Nicolás Robbio, Will Rogan, Pamela Rosenkranz, Fabrice Samyn, Kim Schoenstadt, Tino Sehgal, Sean Snyder, Mark Soo, Mateo Tannatt, Ron Terada, Hank Willis Thomas, Jan Timme, Clarissa Tossin, Guido van der Werve, Natasha Wheat, Carey Young, Akram Zaatari.



Dagmar Svatošová

↻
Installation view of *Někde něco*, 1969.
Photo and courtesy Jan Ságl.

Remembering Exhibitions
in Exhibition Form

↻
Zorka Ságlová, *Seno, sláma*, 1969.
Photo and courtesy Jan Ságl.



↻
Jiří Kolář, *Chameleon*, 1969.
Photo and courtesy Jan Ságl.

↻
Jiří Kolář, *Chameleon*, 1969.
Photo and courtesy Jan Ságl.



Dagmar Svatošová



↩
Installation view of *Nová citlivost*.
Photo and courtesy Jan SágI.

Remembering Exhibitions
in Exhibition Form

↩
Installation view of *Nová citlivost*.
Photo and courtesy Jan SágI.

represented the birth of the curator as artist in their own right. It is an early example of an exhibition that displayed works that were active in the transformation of the contemporary aesthetics of the subsequent development of art in Czechoslovakia. From these various perspectives, it now represents a unique spatial situation and an important historical moment in the presentation of Czech art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which must also be re-examined through the physical return of the exhibition. For this purpose, the form of the riff with possible extension to include manifestations of contemporary art from neighboring Central and Eastern European countries or from artists who today work on the basis of similar artistic principles and can be seen as following the same trajectory, would be the most suitable vehicle. An equally inspiring return would be an exhibition riff for the domestic scene, supplemented by references to Harald Szeemann's project, as in Hoffmann's project, or – even better – presented through original works by some of the artists exhibiting at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969. The reconstruction of the exhibition *Somewhere Something* would not meet with major obstacles today, as there is extensive photographic documentation in Jan SágI's private archive and the exhibition itself has been the subject of much research on the part of art historians.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Indeed, a limited commemorative riff recalling one of the most radical works of this exhibition, the processual installation by Zorka Ságlová, was organized in 2023 by the Jindřich Chalupecký Society.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In a project

48 Pavlína MORGANOVÁ, "Někde něco," in: MORGANOVÁ – NEKVINDOVÁ – SVATOŠOVÁ, *Výstava jako médium*, p. 462–473; Pavlína MORGANOVÁ, "Somewhere Something," in: Agnieszka CHMIELEWSKA – Irena KOSSOWSKA – Marcin LACHOWSKI (eds.), *State Construction and Art in East Central Europe, 1918–2018*, New York: Routledge 2022, p. 185–194.

49 *Seno, sláma, skládka*, SJCH collective, Praha: Galerie Václava Špály 2023; exhibiting artists: Nikola Brabcová, Ines Doujak, Justyna Górowska & Ewelina Jarosz, Hanna-Maria Hammari, Anna Hulačová, Martin Hurych, Petra Janda, Michal Kindernay, Věra Kotlárová-Chovancová, Diana Lelonek, Jumana Manna, Tamara Moyzes & Shlomi Yaffe, Tadeáš Polák, Ruta Putramentaite, Jan SágI, Zorka Ságlová, Dagmar Šubrtová, Jakub Tajovský, Marie Tučková, David Vojtuš.

entitled *Seno, sláma, skládka* (Hay, Straw, Dump), the curators at the Václav Špála Gallery attempted to reinterpret and hook up freely to her work from the perspectives of contemporary ecology, eco-feminism and, more generally, the relationship between humankind and nature. The works on display made reference to Ságlová in various ways, from the natural materials used, the creation of a natural environment, and the utilization of interaction and cooperation with the audience. Reminders of Ságlová's original installation from 1969 were only presented here through the photo-documentation taken by Jan SágI at that time, which served as an introduction to a contemporary international group exhibition. This recent exhibition return demonstrates that such recollections of past exhibitions can be successfully updated through the lens of contemporary themes resonating at present in society.

Padrta's second exhibition, *New Sensitivity*,⁽⁵⁰⁾ which he organized in collaboration with Miroslav Lamač, Zdenek Felix and Vlasta Čiháková, does not refer directly to its Western counterpart, as in the case of *Somewhere Something*. However, it was an equally important manifestation of contemporary trends, in this case the rational current of so-called objective tendencies. It featured around twenty-five Czech artists,⁽⁵¹⁾ who worked with a wide range of styles from geometric abstraction, new realism, kineticism and constructivism, to environmental and conceptual art, and even included various forms of visual and experimental poetry. Artists included Jiří Kolář, Běla Kolářová and Zorka Ságlová, all of whom appeared a few months later at the exhibition *Somewhere Something* at the

50 *Nová citlivost*, curators Jiří Padrta, Miroslav Lamač, Zdenek Felix, Vlasta Čiháková, Brno: Dům umění města Brna 1968; *Nová citlivost. Křížovatka a hosté*, Karlovy Vary: Galerie umění 1968; *Nová citlivost. Křížovatka a hosté*, Praha: Mánes 1968.

51 Exhibiting artists: Zdenek Barborka, Václav Boštík, Vladimír Burda, Hugo Demartini, Milan Dobeš, Stano Filko, Milan Grygar, Jiří Hilmar, Josef Híršal – Bohumila Grögerová, Josef Honys, Jiří Kolář, Běla Kolářová, Stanislav Kolíbal, Jan Kotík, Radoslav Kratina, Jan Kubíček, Alena Kučerová, Kamil Linhart, Karel Malich, Vladislav Mirvald, Ladislav Nebeský, Jindřich Procházka, Zorka Ságlová, Otakar Slavík, Miloš Urbásek.

Václav Špála Gallery. The premiere of *New Sensitivity* took place in spring 1968 at the Brno House of Arts. One of the exhibitors, Stanislav Kolíbal, a prominent Czech sculptor of the post-war period, working in collaboration with Padrta, created an impressive exhibition architecture. Each of the exhibitors was represented by several examples of their work, which had the intended effect of creating largely independent installation units in the gallery space. Although miscellaneous variations on a new type of art came together here, this carefully thought out installation concept lent the exhibition a unity, as noted by the art historian Igor Zhoř:

Even the larger number of artists, who are not members of a single group, does not have the effect of engendering a chaotic conglomerate, but a compact unity. This is also thanks to the outstanding installation, which forms a kind of circular chain, the central link of which is the hall of the "strict" and which extends to both sides [...].⁽⁵²⁾

In one section of the gallery, for instance, sculptures by Karel Malich encountered paintings by Václav Boštík and point light variations by Milan Dobeš. In the opposite section there were works by Zorka Ságlová, paintings by Jan Kotík and objects by Stanislav Kolíbal. The latter even placed his seven sculptures in the central hall and one of the side rooms. Běla Kolářová exhibited photograms and assemblages of ordinary objects forming geometric patterns, Jiří Kolář displayed chiasma objects, spatial collages and examples of what he called *zmizáž* or disappearance, Hugo Demartini contributed spatial variations on convex mirrors, Milan Grygar's acoustic scores foreshadowing the latter conceptualization of his work, etc. The Slovak section

52 Igor ZHOŘ, "Svět reality a princip slasti. Nová citlivost," *Výtvarná práce*, Vol. 16, 1968, No. 7, p. 5.

was most prominently represented by the conceptual artist Stano Filko with his environmental *Ložnice* (Bedroom, 1967), a work that belonged more to the following decade. Finally, *New Sensitivity* presented a range of concrete, evident and experimental poetry, which became an important artistic current in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s.⁽⁵³⁾ Even at the time, the exhibition was perceived by some as an event that transcended local boundaries: “More than the individual artists – most of them already well known – it is the exhibition as a whole that should be appreciated. It represents the anti-romantic current of Czech and Slovak art production in a very sensitive selection with a truly European character to it,” wrote Zhoř in his review.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The importance of the new opinion base of Czech art presented at the exhibition was also supported in an article for *Literární listy* (Literary Papers) by one of its co-curators, Miroslav Lamač, who understood it as a significant attempt to define the new relationship of humankind to the surrounding world and its own future.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Although in many of his theoretical texts⁽⁵⁶⁾ Jiří Padra touched upon the ideas of the French New Realists and the Düsseldorf group Zero,⁽⁵⁷⁾ I myself would compare *New Sensitivity* to the exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, curated by Kynaston McShine in 1966. This was an exhibition that foreshadowed, within a Western context, the emerging minimalism

53 For more on the interpretation of the exhibition, see Dagmar SVATOŠOVÁ, “Nová citlivost,” in: MORGANOVÁ – NEKVINDOVÁ – SVATOŠOVÁ, *Výstava jako médium*, pp. 416–431.

54 ZHOŘ, “Svět reality a princip slasti,” p. 5.

55 Miroslav LAMAČ, “Nová citlivost. Nová angažovanost,” *Literární listy*, Vol. 1, 1968, No. 3, p. 10.

56 In one of his seminal texts, Jiří Padra wrote that constructivist tendencies are the most current contemporary manifestation of world art: JIŘÍ PADRTA, “K situaci,” *Výtvarné umění*, Vol. 18, 1968, No. 1, pp. 69–81.

57 The Nouveaux Réalistes group was founded in 1960 in Paris on the initiative of art critic Pierre Restany, who was also one of the foreign correspondents to Czech art journals in the mid-1960s. The Düsseldorf group Zero was founded in the late 1950s by Heinz Macke and Otto Piene. Later it became an international movement with artists from various European countries.

and the transformation of the art aesthetic of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the Czech case, *New Sensitivity* played a similarly initiatory role, giving a name to the broader current of contemporary art, prefiguring the following period, and providing an important benchmark for modern re-interpretations of the development of art of that decade in East-Central Europe. There is also a striking formal connection between the two exhibitions in respect of their utilization of reduced geometric and abstract forms, though the work of the Czech artists at *New Sensitivity* cannot be simply interpreted through the lens of American minimalism, nor by the works of its Western representatives, as compared by Tomáš Pospiszyl in his 2005 study “Východní a západní krychle” (The Eastern and Western Cube):

In Eastern European countries, independent cultural production had a political subtext, even if this only involved opposition to the official artistic production referred to by [Hans] Belting. Art without content or message was virtually unimaginable here. For the American minimalists, in turn, Eastern European “minimalism with emotions” was unacceptable. It evoked an antediluvian impression and they viewed it with suspicion.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Pospiszyl rests his case on a comparison of the artwork of two sculptures: Stanislav Kolíbal, one of the main participants in *New Sensitivity*; and Richard Serra, a key figure in American minimalist sculpture. Though the two men’s aesthetics may seem similar, Pospiszyl shows that they were embedded in different political and cultural contexts. On the one hand, there is Serra’s deliberate emptiness

58 Tomáš POSPISZYL, “Východní a západní krychle,” in: Tomáš POSPISZYL, *Srovnávací studie*, Praha: Agite – Fra 2005, pp. 136–137.

of context, and on the other, the pointed literariness of Kolíbal's work, which, in addition to its minimalist reduced form, also conveys "dramatic content and a spiritual message."⁽⁵⁹⁾

The 1966 exhibition *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York introduced to the public forty Anglo-American sculptors of the emerging minimalism, who are now internationally renowned figures such as Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, et al. It is considered one of the pivotal sculpture shows of the post-war period and was positively received by critics from the very start. As Hilton Kramer, art critic for *The New York Times*, wrote:

Confronting the multitude of objects that comprise this exhibition, there is no mistaking the fact that we are in a realm of feeling and of ideas utterly removed from the pieties and assumptions that have governed a good deal of Modern Art. Everything about the works of art included here – their scale, their materials, their radical renunciations – is a reminder that a new aesthetic era is upon us.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The art of "primary structures," characterized by stripped down forms and the use of smooth, shiny materials, was considered both a radical and visionary gesture. The historical significance of the exhibition is evidenced by the attention paid to it by many contemporary art historians and curators. James Meyer, for example, dedicated the introduction to his book on minimalism to it,⁽⁶¹⁾ and Bruce

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.

60 Hilton KRAMER, "Primary Structures' – The New Anonymity," *The New York Times*, 1 May 1966, p. 147.

61 James MEYER, *Minimalism Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2001, pp. 13–30.

Altshuler, specializing in exhibition histories, has a chapter on the show in his publications on twentieth-century exhibitions that he considers significant in art history.⁽⁶²⁾ It is clear from subsequent developments that it was also thanks to *Primary Structures* that this kind of sculpture came to dominate not only the New York art world in the latter half of the 1960s and minimalism acquired the status of new lifestyle.⁽⁶³⁾

In 2014, Jens Hoffmann also turned to *Primary Structures* for his re-collection *Other Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Here, the original exhibition was recalled in the form of a scale model of the museum featuring an accurate reconstruction of the installation and miniatures of the works, which this time round could be viewed through the open apertures of tiny windows. Within the context of the "minimalist moment" that emerged in the 1960s in various countries, Hoffmann framed the exhibition by asking what would have been included in *Primary Structures* had the world not been divided geopolitically, culturally and economically at that time. It was therefore an updated view of different types of exclusion. His curatorial "expansion" of McShine's exhibition included artists from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Central and Eastern Europe, and featured names such as Lygia Clark, Gego, Hélio Oiticica, Rasheed Araeen, Edward Krasiński, Branko Vlahović, and others. The project was divided into two parts. The first, titled *Others 1*, presented works by contemporary artists from 1960–1967, belonging to the exhibition of that time from the perspective of today's globalized world. The

62 Bruce ALTSHULER, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1994, pp. 220–235; Bruce ALTSHULER, *Bienials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962–2002*, London: Phaidon 2013, pp. 51–64.

63 Bruce ALTSHULER, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*, p. 235.

64 David BALZER, "Jens Hoffmann on Structures, Primary and Otherwise," *Canadian Art*, 13 March 2014, <https://canadianart.ca/features/jens-hoffmann-on-structures-primary-and-otherwise/>, (accessed April 16, 2023).

second part, *Others 2*, dealt with works from 1967–1970, on whose final form Hoffmann attempted to demonstrate the influence of the previous exhibition.⁽⁶⁵⁾ In both cases, the titled *Others* referred not only literally to additional artists, but, especially within the context of post-colonial discourse, to those “Others” marginalized at that time from the position of the hegemonic Western canon. And so the Czech sculptor Stanislav Kolíbal found himself represented at both re-collections by two objects displayed at *New Sensitivity* in 1968 (*Křídla / Wings*, 1963; *Pád / Fall*, 1967). In a brief biography accompanying the catalog, Hoffmann justified the selection of Kolíbal by pointing out that his work reflected the minimalist and conceptual artistic practices that emerged in America and Western Europe, without, however, articulating the difference within the content of Eastern European “minimalism with emotions,” as Tomáš Pospiszył called it. Nevertheless, Hoffmann’s riff on *Primary Structures* is important precisely for the way that he extends his gaze to take in our own contemporary art, standing back then, as so often now, on the “margins.”

As in the case of *Somewhere Something*, an updated re-collection of *New Sensitivity*, preferably in the form of an exhibition riff, would be a much needed tool for writing art history for several reasons. On the Czechoslovak art scene it was an early example of the plurality of forms that could be termed manifestations of individual mythologies, following the example of Kassel’s *documenta 5* (1972).⁽⁶⁶⁾ In its time, it exemplified and summarized a distinctive trend in 1960s art that had parallels abroad. With its focus on variations on New Tendencies, but also on art of a conceptual character, it also foreshadowed the aesthetics of at least the next two decades. Although it covered the entire

65 *Other Primary Structures: Others 1*, curator Jens Hoffmann, New York: The Jewish Museum 2014; *Other Primary Structures: Others 2*, curator Jens Hoffmann, New York: The Jewish Museum 2014.

66 See Josef HLAVÁČEK, “Nová citlivost,” in: ŠVÁCHA – PLATOVSKÁ, *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění*, p. 231.

spectrum of artistic expression, it was clearly a curatorial project involving a strict selection procedure applied to a smaller group of artists. Art theorist Josef Hlaváček refers to it as a fundamental platform of what was known as the second avant-garde in Czechoslovakia.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Its significance to present times is also evidenced by the fact that it retrospectively named an entire current of Czechoslovak fine art. As one of the few key presentations of Czechoslovak art of the latter half of the 1960s, it was commemorated after 1989 with a series of traveling exhibitions prepared by Josef Hlaváček for several regional galleries.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Its concept respected Padrta’s original selection, without attempting a literal reconstruction of the spatial installation. It turned to a historicization of *New Sensitivity* within Czech art history and an interpretation of the specific period context, which it presented more broadly in the accompanying catalog and in a collection of contributions from the parallel discussion on the development of art in the 1960s.⁽⁶⁹⁾ This form of exhibition return corresponded to the interest displayed following the Velvet Revolution in the progressive art of the period under discussion, which in the 1990s was being rediscovered by the art scene and art historians in the Czech Republic and beyond.

Conclusion:
remembering exhibition(s)
as active co-creators of history

Remembering an exhibition in exhibition form is a fundamental feature of contemporary art history. In the study of post-war art in Central and Eastern Europe, it has great

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Nová citlivost*, curator Josef Hlaváček, Litoměřice: Galerie výtvarného umění 1994; Pardubice: Východočeská galerie 1994; Jihlava: Oblastní galerie Vysočiny 1994, Opava: Dům umění 1995; Brno, Moravská galerie 1995.

69 *Nová citlivost* (exh. cat.), Litoměřice – Praha: Galerie výtvarného umění – Nakladatelství Oswald 1994; *Nová citlivost* (exh. cat.), Litoměřice: Galerie výtvarného umění 1994.

potential to analyze, deconstruct, reconstruct and overcome the specific localism of individual national art narratives. Parallel to this it opens up space for a deeper revision of the basic paradigms of what was previously the universally valid Western canon. In this context, the examples of Czechoslovak exhibitions under discussion – *Somewhere Something* and *New Sensitivity* – are active co-creators of the narrative of art history of the end of the 1960s as well as of contemporary attempts to write new horizontal or transnational histories as advocated by Piotr Piotrowski.

This study offered a short presentation of the main arguments as to why we should continue to return to these curatorial projects by Jiří Padrta today, including through physical reconstructions. In Czech art history, both exhibitions occupy the position of formative events with a significant influence on the subsequent development of domestic art. In the case of *Somewhere Something* this involved the transformation of artistic forms and the expansion of the existing boundaries of art; in the case of *New Sensitivity* it is about a plurality of means of expression and a semantically ambiguous art of abstraction, geometry and concept. These artistic principles are in many ways intrinsic to the current generation of artists, a fact borne out by the recent project organized by the Jindřich Chalupecký Society referencing the performative installation by Zorka Ságlová from 1969.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Returns to similarly iconic exhibitions of Czech art are therefore important today. They materialize historical, aesthetic and socio-political influences not only within the domestic narrative, but also find parallels in world art, as was demonstrated in the case of Padrta's exhibitions by means of a comparison with their foreign counterparts.

The “remembering exhibition” today represents one of the intersections of curatorial, art historical and artistic practice. It obliges us to self-reflexively consider the past and the present and how to relate to the past from our

present position. By means of specific forms drawing on Reesa Greenberg's typology, past exhibitions can be interpreted and their possible previous exclusion overcome, much like Jens Hoffmann, for example, has done with his curatorial projects from the perspective of today's globalized and decolonized world. Above all, through riffs on past exhibitions, remembering exhibitions offers new perspectives on writing the art history of our region's post-war period. Compared to other interpretative and analytical tools, remembering exhibitions allows for a more intense immersion in the past, providing not only historians and curators, but viewers themselves, a more all-encompassing experience. The remembering exhibition is therefore also a suitable tool for the re-contextualization of the narratives of Central and Eastern Europe, which may ultimately be a transnational, European and even global art history.

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70 For more see <https://www.sjch.cz/en/hay-straw-dump/> (accessed September 5, 2023).