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Editorial

Linking (Art) Worlds:
Entangled Histories of
East-Central European
and American Art

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The Cold War was an undeniably transformative episode in modern art history: the promotion as well as the creation and interpretation of art came to the foreground of international, national, and local contexts in new ways. Economic and political clashes and rivalries turned ever more attention to the nuances of culture, and not least of the visual arts. Although the binary master narrative of the Cold War—which treated it as a struggle between the two major powers, the United States and the Soviet Union—has lost much of its grip on historical scholarship, the perception of the conflict still tends to emphasize borders, divisions, and incommensurability. Indeed, art historical analysis has a propensity to frame the period from the late 1940s to the end of the 1980s in terms of a stark separation between the art scenes of the political blocs. This schematic view has often (over-)emphasized the political control over art institutions in the contexts of state socialism, focusing on the instrumentalization and propagandistic use of artistic production, while art produced in capitalist contexts has often been framed as escaping from ideological control. Such a schematic approach also downplays or ignores the circulation of artworks, artists, exhibitions, and publications, as well as creative ideas and intellectual trends across a politically divided world.

More recently, the porosity of political borders during the Cold War has been amply demonstrated.¹ The emergence of a field of study often referred to as “Cold

1 For a summary of some of the characteristics of this porosity, see Beáta HOCK (ed.), *Doing Culture Under State-Socialism: Actors, Events, and Interconnections*, a thematic issue of *Comparatio: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*, Vol. 7, 2014, No. 4; and Cristian NAE, “A Porous Iron Curtain: Artistic Contacts and Exchanges across the Eastern European Bloc during the Cold War (1960–1980),” in: Ann ALBRITTON – Gwen FARRELLY (eds.), *Art History in a Global Context: Methods, Themes, and Approaches*, Hoboken NJ: Wiley Blackwell 2021, pp. 13–26.

War Cultures,”⁽²⁾ in particular, offers a framework that acknowledges that the Cold War was also a cultural contest in which the domains of high art and popular culture were drawn into the sphere of political competition. Within this context, art was ubiquitously deployed as an instrument of diplomacy and international relations. The significance and meanings that artworks took on in the Cold War years emerged amidst a nexus of debates about art criticism and historiography, policies guiding cultural exchange, and new visions of cultural internationalism (socialist, capitalist, or some universal version that would encompass both).⁽³⁾

The experiences of individual artists who sought to represent a world beyond the confines of the nation, and of the ideological blocs, were certainly a significant element in these debates as well. Generally speaking, efforts aiming to deconstruct the still-divided narrative of postwar art history resonate with broader trends that aim to “globalize” the discipline. Indeed, the Cold War era saw the birth of postcolonial discourses, which are intertwined both politically and historiographically with efforts to write both global and decolonial art histories.⁽⁴⁾ Parallel to this,

- 2 For some examples of this approach, see Patrick MAJOR – Rana MITTER (eds.), *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History*, Portland: Frank Cass 2004; Stephanie BARRON – Sabine ECKMANN (eds.), *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures*, New York: Abrams 2009; Annette VOWINKEL – Marcus PAYK – Thomas LINDENBERGER (eds.), *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies*, New York: Berghahn 2012; Patryk BABIRACKI – Kenyon ZIMMER (eds.), *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s*, College Station TX: Texas A&M University Press 2014; Mathilde ARNOUX, *La réalité en partage: Pour une histoire des relations artistiques entre l’Est et l’Ouest en Europe pendant la guerre froide*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme 2018; Simo MIKKONEN – Giles SCOTT-SMITH – Jari PARKKINEN (eds.), *Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War*, Boston: De Gruyter 2019; and Marie KLIMEŠOVÁ – Hana ROUSOVÁ, *So Near, So Far: Czech Art (1947–1960) in International Sociocultural Contexts*, Prague: Arbor vitae societates 2023.
- 3 On the development of some of these narratives of cultural internationalism, in the socialist world, see Antje KEMPE – Beáta HOCK – Marina DMITRIEVA (eds.), *Universal – International – Global: Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe*, Cologne: Böhlau 2023.
- 4 Joshua I. COHEN – Foad TORSHIZI – Vazira ZAMINDAR, “Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn,” *ARTMargins*, Vol. 12, 2023, No. 2, pp. 3–17.

the increasing attention to artistic exchanges between the “Second” and “Third” Worlds, and especially to the cultural dimensions of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), have also expanded the geographical scope of earlier accounts.⁽⁵⁾ Other efforts have used the lens of the network to show the substantial interconnectedness of socialist sites, revealing numerous points of contact between both experimental artists and those working in state-supported or state-overseen positions.⁽⁶⁾

Despite the changing perspectives evidenced by these and other approaches, the art scenes of the postwar United States and East-Central Europe are still rarely viewed within a shared framework.⁽⁷⁾ The contributions to this special issue of *Notebook for Art, Theory, and Related Zones* aim to address these gaps in historical understanding and interpretation, exploring the rich insights produced by closely examining the ways in which images, styles, and discourses took on dynamic new meanings during the Cold War. Specifically, the authors investigate how exhibitions, publications, and artworks produced in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the United States, and both the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) reflected changing ideas about

- 5 See, for example, Bojana PIŠKUR, “Solidarity in Arts and Culture: Some Cases from the Non-Aligned Movement,” *L’Internationale Online*, 30 September 2016, and Bojana VIDEKANIĆ, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*, Chicago: McGill–Queen’s University Press 2020, or the 2022 exhibition and research project “The Global GDR – A Transcultural History of Art (1949–1990)” at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- 6 See Jérôme BAZIN – Pascal DUBOURG GLATIGNY – Piotr PIOTROWSKI (eds.), *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, Bucharest: CEU Press 2016; Klara KEMP-WELCH, *Networking the Bloc*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2019; and *Red Networks: Post-War Art Exchange*, a special issue of the journal *Art History*, edited by Vivian LI (November 2022).
- 7 Investigations in this field have been helped by the recent publication of Claudia HOPKINS – Iain Boyd WHYTE (eds.), *Hot Art, Cold War: Southern and Eastern European Writing on American Art 1945–1990*, New York: Routledge 2021. This book (part of a two-volume project, with the other volume featuring writing on American art from Western Europe) nonetheless still retains a one-sided approach, looking at the reception of American art without addressing the reception of Southern or Eastern European art in the Americas.

the possible futures of art and global society. While the authors primarily approach their various case studies from the East-Central European context, their methodologies emphasize the ways that borders between American art-worlds and those of East-Central Europe shifted, dissolved, and sometimes re-appeared.

The articles in this issue have grown out of discussion topics and case studies explored during the traveling seminar series “Linking (Art) Worlds: American Art and Eastern Europe in the Cold War and Since” (LAW), which took place between 2022 and 2024 and included meetings across various sites in both East-Central Europe and the United States. The authors in this special issue—who were also among the participants of that seminar series—address a cluster of interrelated questions: How did traveling exhibitions—and most crucially their reception—challenge or re-write the narratives that governments and policymakers (in the U.S., or in the GDR, for example) sought to establish through the organization of these same exhibitions? How did the dissemination of certain kinds of images (of violence, consumption, or everyday life) allow artists to critically reassess the stakes of economics and ideology? How did questions about style or the popular appeal of certain art forms (such as Pop Art or photography) ebb and flow across boundaries? How did the movement of artists across multiple borders (for example, from Ukraine to Riga to New York) enable those artists to work with images or themes common to multiple contexts, to speak to new audiences and to reinterpret their own sociopolitical positions?

In her contribution to this volume, Stefana Djokić explores how Yugoslavia mobilized modern art to project a specific image of itself to U.S. audiences through a close analysis of the exhibition *New Painting from Yugoslavia*, the first exhibition of modern Yugoslav art to tour the U.S. from 1959 to 1962. Djokić argues that the art presented in such exhibitions was responsible for both sharpening and blurring the ideological and structural differences between the two countries, providing an opportunity both to

understand the U.S. reception of Yugoslav art, and to gauge the agency and efficacy of Yugoslav “soft power” during the Cold War.

Magdalena Anna Nowak also focuses on exhibition histories in her article, which looks at exhibitions of American art held at the National Museum in Warsaw during the 1970s, as part of the U.S. State Department’s cultural diplomacy in the People’s Republic of Poland. During this period, the museum hosted as many as seven American exhibitions, with content ranging from explorations of the American West, to surveys of American painting and monographic exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist and Pop artists. Nowak’s analysis focuses on the multivalent reception of American art in the Polish press of the time, tracing the sometimes contentious cultural dialogue between the U.S. and Poland.

Moving from exhibitions to the field of publishing, Fedora Parkmann’s article looks at the history of the photobook series *Umělecká fotografie* (Artistic Photography), launched in 1958 by the Czechoslovak state publishing house. Parkmann unpacks the ways that this publishing endeavor sought to position Czechoslovak photography within an international context, and to advance discussion of artistic photography as primarily a documentary form. Her close readings of both the images included in the volumes of the series, and of their critical introductory texts, reveal a process of co-construction between the East and West, highlighting photography’s possibilities as both an engaged and humanist artistic medium.

Ilka Rambašek’s contribution to the issue also explores an example of co-construction—in her case, the ways that Pop Art was defined, evaluated, and artistically adapted in what she calls the “art-historical dialogue” between the GDR, the FRG, and the U.S. Rambašek delves deep into the valences of Pop Art in the context of divided Germany, looking at artistic practices by both officially sanctioned and counter-cultural artists, and paying close attention to adaptations of both style and

iconography. Rambašek's discussion culminates in a layered analysis of the stylistic and iconographic references in Hans Haacke's 1984 installation *Weite und Vielfalt der Brigade Ludwig* (Broadness and Diversity of the Ludwig Brigade). In her analysis, Pop Art emerges as a key site of both aesthetic and ideological debate about the possible futures of socialist figuration in the GDR, as well as about the political function of the human image in art produced under capitalism.

The final article of the special issue shifts the focus from art-critical debates and questions of cultural diplomacy to the experiences of individual artists moving across borders in the Cold War era. Specifically, Jan Elantkowski's article focuses on the life and career of Boris Lurie, a Jewish artist originating in Eastern Europe, who was one of many who found refuge in the U.S. after World War II. Elantkowski analyzes Lurie's artistic use of photographs documenting the Holocaust, and the particularly jarring juxtapositions that Lurie made between these images and contemporary advertising images that he encountered in his new, Western, capitalist context. These works, the article argues, present a unique critique of how visual culture in the West contributed to historical forgetting of the recent past, turning to the enthusiastic advancement of consumerism rather than the more painful histories of the war.

Finally, the special issue includes two reviews. The first, by Beáta Hock, analyzes the exhibition *Modern Times. The American Dream and the Avant-Gardes of the 1920s*, held at the Archiv der Avantgarde (AdA) in Dresden (April – August 2025). The exhibition, Hock argues, provides a useful historical exploration of the ways that cultural exchanges and tensions between the U.S. and Europe during the interwar period set the stage for the exchanges (and boundaries) that would go on to characterize the Cold War years. With its focus on the movements and transformations of popular culture, the exhibition offers an archival presentation of the material circulation of both capitalist

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and socialist ideas in the so-called Roaring Twenties. The second review, by Zsuzsa László, considers the recent publication *Plural and Multiple Geographies of Modern and Contemporary Art in East-Central Europe*, edited by Caterina Preda and Magdalena Radomska (Routledge 2025). While not conceived as part of the LAW seminars, this review nonetheless provides a close reading of a book that similarly unpacks the complexities of geography and its impact on both politics and artistic production, tracing the ways that different conceptions of East-Central Europe have influenced historiography, art-making, and art-theorizing.

The questions raised by the contributions to this thematic issue of *Notebook* are crucial for re-writing the history of (art in) the Cold War, which—at the most general level—still tends to traffic in binaries, highlighting differences and divisions rather than common concerns, convergences, or mutual exchanges. The authors in this special issue analyze different instances of transnational movement, taking a close look at the social context within which art emerged in order to register hitherto neglected parallels or synchronicities. In the midst of competing narratives about the role of art as a political tool, an avenue for social expression, and a reflection of national or cultural character, a clear picture emerges: there was no predetermined course of (art) history in these years, and efforts to narrow the meaning of art to a single ideological viewpoint could not help but be undone by the mobility of ideas.

Getty Foundation

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This article examines the making and reception of the exhibition *New Painting from Yugoslavia (NPFY)*, the first exhibition of modern Yugoslav art to tour the U.S. from 1959 to 1962. It argues that art played a crucial role in cultivating Yugoslavia's relationship with the U.S.—a relationship that was characterized by distrust, prejudices, and tensions due to the two countries' opposing ideologies. Paradoxically, it will be shown that art was responsible for both sharpening and blurring these differences.

Crucially, the article demonstrates that Yugoslavia was not merely a passive recipient of American art during the Cold War, but that it also mobilized modern art for projecting a public image of Yugoslavia in cultural diplomacy. The Yugoslav government engaged with art and exhibitions to construct its national image as distinct from other communist countries and to consolidate its independent path in world politics. The article is therefore one of the first to address the U.S. reception of Yugoslav art during the Cold War, which

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Keywords:
New Painting from Yugoslavia – cultural diplomacy – art exhibitions – Yugoslavia – United States – Cold War – soft power

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Stefana Djokić

Diplomacy Through Culture: U.S. Perceptions of “Art from Tito Land” 1959–1962

Stefana Djokić

“The immediately arresting quality in the exhibition New Painting from Yugoslavia, is its clear indication that the artist in that Communist country does not function as an instrument of propaganda.”⁽¹⁾

George McCue

This article examines the making and reception of the state-sponsored exhibition *New Painting from Yugoslavia (NPFY)*, the first exhibition of modern Yugoslav art to tour the U.S. from 1959 to 1962. In the ten years since Yugoslavia’s break with Stalin and the Soviet-led Cominform (in 1948), during which it pursued its own “third way” of nonaligned socialism, President Josip Broz Tito was dealing with the difficult task of leading a country that was economically and politically isolated not just from the East, but also from the West. The arrival of leading U.S.-sponsored art exhibitions in Yugoslavia, such as *Modern Art in the United States (MAIUS)* in 1956 and *American Vanguard Painting (AVP)* in 1961, had clearly demonstrated the power of art and culture in strengthening diplomatic relations with the U.S.⁽²⁾ Importantly, Yugoslavia’s ruling party, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), recognized that if it wished to convincingly reconstruct and represent Yugoslavia’s new political order to the West (and to the U.S. in particular) it would need to assume a far more active role in cultural diplomacy. As a result, the exhibition *NPFY* was arranged at the request of the Yugoslav government and was realized as a joint effort between the Yugoslav Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (hereinafter:

1 George McCUE, “54 New Paintings from Yugoslavia: Exhibit at City Museum Marked by Absence of Red Propaganda,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 August 1960.
2 See: Stefana DJOKIC, “American Art in Yugoslavia 1945–1964,” in: Claudia HOPKINS – Iain BOYD WHYTE (eds.), *Hot Art, Cold War – Southern and Eastern European Writing on American Art 1945–1990*, London – New York: Routledge 2020, pp. 223–232.

the Commission)⁽³⁾ and the American Federation of Arts (AFA),⁽⁴⁾ as part of their expanding program to foster international cultural exchange.

By positing that culture was often infused with the politics of the Cold War, the research here builds upon the groundwork laid by revisionist art historians and scholars (most notably Serge Guilbaut), who have rejected the notion of art as a hermetic practice and argued instead that the rise and popularity of (U.S.) art movements went hand-in-hand with the specific political and ideological conditions of the Cold War.⁽⁵⁾ However, the existing scholarship lacks an in-depth investigation into Yugoslav state-sponsored exhibitions and the motivating factors behind the display of Yugoslav modernism in the U.S. in the decade after the Tito-Stalin split—a turning point that reshaped Yugoslavia’s foreign and cultural policies. Accordingly, this is the first investigation of the exhibition *NPFY* and its success as a form of “soft power” in Yugoslavia’s Cold War foreign policy. The article is written on the basis of unpublished documents from The Archive of Yugoslavia (Belgrade), the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgrade), and the Archives of American Art (Washington, D.C.), as well as

3 The Commission, established in 1953, succeeded the Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop). Its formation marked a strategic shift in Yugoslav state policy, which directed greater emphasis toward cultural exchange with Western states during the 1950s.
4 Although a nongovernmental agency, the AFA (founded in 1909) was an intermediary between the art world and the governmental United States Information Agency (USIA), who sought to use art for political purposes.
5 See: Serge GUILBAUT, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1983; Max KOZLOFF, “American Painting During the Cold War,” in: Frascina FRANCIS (ed.), *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, New York: Harper & Row Ltd 1985, pp. 130–147; Eva COCKROFT, “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum*, Vol. 12, 1974, No. 10, pp. 39–41; David SHAPIRO – Cecile SHAPIRO (eds.), “Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting,” *Prospects*, Vol. 3, October 1978, pp. 175–214.

published texts and exhibition reviews from numerous local, regional, and national U.S. American newspapers and journals.⁽⁶⁾

To examine the motivations of Yugoslav institutions, art critics, and artists in selecting, omitting, and presenting modern artworks in the U.S., this article places *NPFY* within the wider Yugoslav cultural context and engages with recent scholarship on the development of Yugoslav modernism and, in particular, the local variant of the Informel movement, which I will call here Enformel, as it was known in Yugoslavia.⁽⁷⁾ In his seminal book *In the Shadow of Yalta*, Piotr Piotrowski omitted Yugoslavia from his discussion of Art Informel in Eastern Europe, arguing that Yugoslavia developed along a different path to other communist countries and therefore did not present a good case study for the political dynamics of the post-Stalinist “thaw” in East-Central Europe.⁽⁸⁾ Indeed, the roots of Informel’s appearance in Yugoslavia were unique: it was neither a direct response to the horrors of WWII, as was the case in France, nor was it a reaction to Socialist Realism, nor a result of Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” of 1956, as it was elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Instead, as Piotrowski rightly stated, the Yugoslav Enformel was motivated by the “local character of the Yugoslav art scene, which was dominated, particularly in Belgrade, by conservative painters.”⁽⁹⁾ But Piotrowski does not elaborate further on what he means by this,

6 Most of the exhibition reviews that I discuss are taken from newspaper clippings (cuttings), without page numbers. As a result, this information is missing in some of the references.

7 My research has benefited from scholarly writing on the development of modernism in Yugoslavia in relation to wider ideological and political backgrounds and forces, such as: Lidija MERENIK, *Ideološki Modeli: Srpsko Slikarstvo 1945–1968*, Beograd: Margo-art 2001; Bojana VIDEKANIĆ, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*, Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press 2019; and Vesna KRULJAC, *Belgrade Art Informel in the Polemical Context of Serbian Culture During the Fifties and Sixties of the 20th Century* [PhD thesis], Belgrade: University of Belgrade 2015.

8 Piotr PIOTROWSKI, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, London: Reaktion Books 2009, p. 62.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

leaving the reader uncertain as to the specific conditions of Enformel’s development in Yugoslavia.

Therefore, this investigation of the making of the state-sponsored exhibition *NPFY* will also offer new insights into the politics and social functions of modernism, abstraction, and Enformel. The analysis will consider whether the transition from Socialist Realism to modernism and the so-called Socialist Aestheticism genuinely reflected Yugoslavia’s newfound freedom, tolerance, and independence—as perceived by the U.S. art critic George McCue (cited at the beginning of this article) and others—or whether it was, in fact, a politically motivated shift, carefully orchestrated, if not tightly controlled, by the LCY.

The analysis in this article of the U.S. reception and cultural translation of Yugoslav abstract art aims to assess *NPFY*’s political impact and the extent to which it succeeded in projecting an image of modernity, democracy, and openness of the Yugoslav self-governing order to American audiences. It examines how these artworks may have acquired new uses and meanings once they crossed the Atlantic, and how Cold War politics and a stereotypical image of the Balkans—as exotic and backward—underpinned U.S. responses to Yugoslav art. In doing so, the article also contributes to the field of “Balkanism,” which seeks to deconstruct dominant representations of the Balkan region. The term “Balkanism” was brought to the fore by Maria Todorova, in analogy to Edward Said’s “Orientalism,” to refer to Western perceptions of the Balkans, arguing that, much like the Orient, the Balkans also functioned as a “repository of negative characteristics” against which an idealised and self-congratulatory image of the “West” was reproduced.⁽¹⁰⁾ Unlike Orientalism, however, Balkanism emphasizes the region’s ambiguous position within Europe itself: not entirely “other” but perceived as Europe’s

10 Maria TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, p. 188.

“incomplete self,” marked by backwardness, stagnation and violence. This conceptualization has been further elaborated by scholars such as Vesna Goldsworthy, who examined the persistence of “imaginary geographies” of the Balkans in Western literature and popular culture.⁽¹¹⁾ By engaging with these debates and foregrounding U.S. attitudes towards Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe, the work reveals the extent to which American art criticism of Yugoslav art was politicized, ideologically driven, or shaped by cultural prejudice.

To examine how *NPFY* was ultimately understood in the U.S. context, the analysis will use the concepts of cultural translation and post-colonial theory to evaluate how U.S. art critics presented Yugoslav art to their readership. In this sense, U.S. cultural brokers (artists, critics, curators, organizers) are regarded as “translators,” who—using either foreignizing or domesticating strategies—interpreted, assimilated, and presented Yugoslav art in terms and idioms that could be understood by the target U.S. culture.⁽¹²⁾ In domestication, the translator prioritises adapting the text to align with the target culture, often at the cost of the source text’s cultural distinctiveness. Foreignization, by contrast, emphasises preserving the source text’s linguistic and stylistic features, highlighting its otherness and potentially distancing it from the target audience. By bringing to light the many layers of diverse and dynamic meanings associated with these works, the article aims to reveal a complex series of relationships between art and ideology, and the work of art and its audiences.

11 Vesna GOLDSWORTHY, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, New York: Columbia University Press 2013.

12 See: George STEINER, *After Babel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1976, pp. 298–299; Lawrence VENU TI, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge 2013, p. 13.

Yugoslavia’s Foreign and Cultural Policies After 1948

Following the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 and Yugoslavia’s expulsion from the Cominform, Soviet Socialist Realism was officially renounced by Yugoslav officials, allowing Yugoslav artists to reconnect with both the country’s own modernist traditions and broader European artistic currents. Artistic activity subsequently flourished in an environment that, to a certain extent, supported and accommodated modern sensibilities. The liberalization of cultural policies during this period, coupled with Yugoslavia’s alignment with international modernism, was actively exploited by the LCY to construct a national image of the country acceptable to Western powers and to signal Yugoslavia’s distinctness from other communist states. The *New Painting from Yugoslavia* exhibition is therefore to be understood as part of the larger campaign by the Yugoslav government, which focused on promoting and showcasing modernism and abstraction as the country’s official art styles, in order to demonstrate Yugoslavia’s connectedness to contemporary international art developments, particularly those in the West.

During this period, great efforts were made to represent the country in international forums, such as the Venice Biennale, the São Paulo Biennial, the Tokyo Biennale, Documenta (Kassel), Expo 58 (Brussels), and the Guggenheim International Award (New York). In 1953, five years after the break with Socialist Realism, Yugoslavia made a statement at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial by sending the Serbian artist Petar Lubarda, who exhibited several semi-abstract expressionist paintings. Yugoslavia received its first recognition on the international art scene when Lubarda was awarded the Biennial’s “acquisition prize” for

his painting *Besta Fantastica* (Fantastic Beast, 1953).⁽¹³⁾ An article from *The New York Times* written by the art critic Aline B. Louchheim commends the Yugoslav government for their Cold War cultural diplomacy exemplified in Brazil and implies that the U.S. should follow Yugoslavia's example:

One country in particular realized how emphatically art can make a point. Yugoslavia, keenly aware that the Western World queries how philosophically deep the break with Russia is, shrewdly eschewed the over-life-size bronze of Tito and the academic depictions of peasants happily toiling in flower-strewn fields which dominated the Yugoslavian pavilion in the Venice international show three years ago. Here all its eggs were put effectively in one modern basket—the work of Petar Lubarda. It was perfectly clear that these semi-abstract, expressionist and extremely forceful works indicated a freedom of expression and a modern idiom which (at least before the potential shift of cultural line under [Georgy] Malenkov) would not have been acceptable in the Soviet Union.⁽¹⁴⁾

Throughout the 1950s, the Commission worked hard to carve out Yugoslavia's own space on the international art scene by presenting a series of exhibitions in Europe and the U.S., predominantly of contemporary, but also of

13 It was possible to trace the original titles of the artworks only in certain cases. Where available, I provide both Serbo-Croat and English titles, otherwise, only English titles are listed.

14 Aline B. LOUCHHEIM, "Cultural Diplomacy: An Art We Neglect: How U. S. Artists Might Win Friends and Influence Allies is Shown in a South American Exhibit," *The New York Times*, 3 January 1954, p. 16.

medieval Yugoslav art. While exhibitions of contemporary art were important in demonstrating Yugoslavia's rejection of Soviet Socialist Realism, exhibitions of medieval art were equally valued since they affirmed Yugoslavia as an old nation with a rich cultural heritage. In January 1956, the Commission established a special Committee for Art Exhibitions, composed of several influential Yugoslav artists, critics, and museum directors who would better advise the Commission on which artists should be exhibited abroad.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Committee actively worked to construct a "Yugoslav identity" abroad, but this identity depended on which border it crossed. When sending art to state socialist countries, mostly figurative and folkloric art, as well as copies of medieval frescoes from Yugoslav churches, were chosen to align with prevailing ideological expectations. This is not to say that abstract works never went to Eastern state socialist countries, but when they were shown, their inclusion was usually met with criticism for deviating from socialist realist norms. In some instances, the Yugoslavs had declined Soviet invitations to participate in exhibitions altogether. Such was the case for the Moscow exhibition *The Art of Socialist Countries* (1958), which included the art of twelve state socialist countries.⁽¹⁶⁾

However, when organizing exhibitions in Western Europe and across the Atlantic, Yugoslavia predominantly sent examples of its leading modernist or abstract artists, whose works generally aligned with the state-supported Socialist Aestheticism, which was, in essence, a continuation of pre-war styles, such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Colourism and Post-impressionism. The term Socialist Aestheticism was first coined in 1963 by the literary critic

15 The Committee was composed of Oto Bihalji-Merin, Aleksa Čelebonović, Zoran Kržišnik, Lazar Ličenoski, Marijan Matković, Risto Stijović, Boris Vižintin and Miodrag B. Protić.

16 In addition to the Soviet Union, the other participating countries were Albania, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, North Korea, Mongolia, the GDR, Romania, Hungary, Vietnam and Poland.