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*Universal – International – Global. Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern
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Central to today's art history of East, Central and South-East Europe are discussions of international, transnational, and even transregional connections and exchanges. Conferences, research projects, and publications over the past two decades or so exploring cultural and aesthetic encounters have shaped the academic landscape of the region's investigation.¹ The conference *The State-Socialist World Turned Global: Cultural Encounters during the Cold War*, organized in October 2023 in Bucharest, is an example that included transfers based on the concept of socialist friendship and established meeting points of European, American, and Asian representatives of socialist politics and art scenes, yet also spanned 'intellectual trade' in scientific fields that inspired a variety of cultural players in broader Eastern Europe.² Within the context of this academic direction of drawing new contours and structural frameworks in centre-periphery dynamics and the destabilization of the Cold War bipolarity and the East-West divide which have been activated and projected retrospectively and into post-socialist times, it is increasingly difficult to detect original and game-changing art historical narratives and methods.

Universal – International – Global. Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe takes the themes briefly outlined above and applies them to the field of art history. This volume is a conscious investigation of tendencies, concepts, and activities in art historical discourse against the background of an expanded geopolitical and geocultural context that often transcends Europe's continental borders. Antje Kempe and Marina Dmitrieva introduce a collection of essays organized around the idea of '... exchange and connectivity in national, transnational, and international dimensions' (p. 23). A 'comparative approach' is the structural

1) See, e.g., Beata Hock and Anu Allas, eds, *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present*, New York and London: Routledge, 2018; Jérôme Bazin and Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, 'Introduction: Geography of Internationalism,' *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe [1945 – 1989]*, Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, eds, Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2016; *Resonances: Regional and Transregional Cultural Transfer in the Art of the 1970s*. Artpool Art Research Center Budapest/Comenius University Bratislava/Academic Research Center of the Academy of Fine Arts Prague/Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central Europe at the Adam Mickiewicz University, research project, 2021–2024; *Die globale DDR: eine transkulturelle Kunstgeschichte (1949–1990)*, conference, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen and Technische Universität Dresden, June 9–11, 2022; Bojana Videkanic, *Nonaligned Modernism. Socialist Postcolonialist Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020; Caterina Preda, *Art and Politics in Modern Dictatorships. A Comparison of Chile and Romania*, London and New York and Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; *ARTMargins*. Special Section: Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe, 1: 2–3, June–October 2012; *Socialist Exhibition Cultures. International Exhibitions in the Socialist World, 1950–1991*, 2021–, research project and workshop series, <https://socialistexhibitions.com/>.

2) *The State-Socialist World Turned Global: Cultural Encounters during the Cold War*, organized by Irina Natasă-Matei and Catarina Preda, 5–6 October 2023, University of Bucharest, conference program.

principle of the volume which offers a ‘history of art history under the aegis of Socialism’ (23). Contributions spanning a period stretching from the post-war years into the reform-driven era of Perestroika in the 1980s all demonstrate that many of art history’s now common methods and approaches were already established and practiced in the Cold War years by art historians from socialist Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Essays by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, Elena Sharnova, and Corinne Geering in *Universal – International – Global* confirm that plenty of platforms and approaches in state socialist countries went beyond the geographic and ideological boundaries implied by Cold War stereotypes. Non-hierarchical global accounts as inscribed into the international spread of Pop Art, and ‘examples of specific episodes of creative contact, influence and borrowing’ (p. 160) in the historiographical account on nineteenth-century Russian painting, demonstrate that the current insistence on a transnational art history of East Europe is anything but new. *Universal – International – Global* does an excellent job of focusing attention onto the historical fact that non-Western-dominated and Western-initiated communication channels and exchange forums paralleled the conflictual East-West axis of socialist and capitalist worlds. Transfers and encounters in the arts and art historiography happened between related and distant regional cultures and often reached beyond Europe. Similar to *A Socialist Realist History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades* (2019), edited by Krista Kodres, Kristina Jõekalda and Michaela Marek, the volume discussed here also offers a rereading of the negatively stigmatized style of socialist realism and its discourse, presenting this aesthetic directive both as heterogeneous and possessing a concise social and political function.³

Universal – International – Global, with its special focus on Socialist Internationalism, stands out among the admittedly few publications and research outputs concerned with the art historiography produced in state socialist times.⁴ As an official program to connect socialist regimes across the globe and an alternative to decolonial discourses, the Socialist Internationalist framework offers this volume on decentred artistic exchange and critical art historical cartographies the ideal point of reference. In their contribution to the volume Douglas Gabriel and Adri Kácsor produce the following definition: ‘Socialist Internationalism, when defined as a mode of knowledge production, operated through artworks, theories, and institutional practices that were set in a multitude of places around the world fostering a critical and at times bellicose stand against the imperialist political and economic structures of capitalism’ (p. 242). While non-western art and cultures were, according to Socialist Internationalism, to be discussed ‘... in relationship to a Socialist materialistic world art...’ (p. 18), this program and concept nevertheless underlines another core idea of this volume, namely, that the art and art history of East, Central and South-East Europe should not feel obliged to ‘answer’ to the West. (Art) historical narratives of Eastern European backwardness and belatedness

3) Krista Kodres, Kristina Jõekalda and Michaela Marek, eds, *A Socialist Realist History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades*, Wien and Cologne: Böhlau, 2019.

4) See, for instance, the conference paper by Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus entitled ‘How to challenge Polish art history writing from a critical perspective?’ and Cristian Nae’s ‘We Don’t Need Another Hero: Horizontal, Entangled and Constellational Approaches to Writing Transnational Art Histories in Central and Eastern Europe’ at the *Rethinking Art Historical Narratives and Canons* conference, Ateneum Art Museum and University of Helsinki, 9–10 November 2023. It should nevertheless be noted that these presentations only marginally fall back on historical models of art history writing invented in the former Eastern Bloc.

should be left behind to reinvent the area's own position.⁵ In this regard, Éva Forgács's chapter in the book is perhaps the most important. In her reminder of the European integration which occurred in East and Central Europe following the end of the 1939–45 war, Forgács spells out that internationalism was always present in the region's art development. The real disruption in the (historiographical) perspective was introduced by western scholars who exaggerated the bipolar divide of the Cold War. The image of a backward Eastern Europe later outlasted the Cold War period. Mária Orišková's chapter similarly confirms that the former Czechoslovakia has always had tight cultural connections with western Europe. In the introduction, Kempe and Dmitrieva quote Nikos Hadjinicolaou, who encourages cultural historians to disregard power relations as quality relations.

Even more convincing than the decentralized art historical approach outlined above is how essays in this volume (re-)discover and introduce forgotten networking figures and key players in art history active in socialist states. Ján Bakoš, Dmitri V. Sarabianov, Lajos Vayer, Jan Białostocki, and Adolf Hoffmeister, to mention just a few names, either organized or initiated innovative methods and fostered discussions on microhistory and new art historical geographies.

Across the volume, Vayer and Białostocki's methodological contribution to the 1979 congress of the International Committee of Art History (CIHA) is repeatedly cited as an outstanding model for actual transnational debates in the discipline. These actors are also intellectually contextualized in their respective circumstances, including references to other, mostly western European, gatekeepers of art history such as the experts of the Vienna School, Ernst Cassirer, and Aby Warburg. Inspirations from these renowned art historians and how their theories and 'historical-critical' or 'cultural-historical' methods (p. 231) resonate with their Eastern and Central European counterparts underline the entanglement of the art history discourse which is so important to the editors and authors of *Universal – International – Global*.

The key statement of the volume, that transnational and decentral approaches in art history were already present in the state socialist period, is elevated to another structural level. Through adding source texts written by the abovementioned cultural players, and critically reflecting on them from today's knowledge and perspective, the editors successfully bridge the gap between past methods and the screening of those methods to enrich the field of Eastern European art historiography. By re-publishing the source texts within the current scope of knowledge on globalized Eastern Europe, East European art history discovers a genealogy distinct from a dominating Western view.

Universal – International – Global is divided into three sections. Section one (Platforms of Exchange and Knowledge Transfer) focuses on processes of idea transfer, while section two (Integration and Adaptation) investigates the relationship between 'universal' and 'national discourses of art history' (p. 23) that rarely existed without confrontation and hierarchies. Section three (Intercontinental Encounters) aims to draw new cultural (and political) maps along the lines of Socialist Internationalism and beyond. In it, the role of international

5) Sven Spieker argues 'that Eastern Europe, even during the time of its geo-political isolation, never stopped being a part of the European *Kulturraum* ...' Sven Spieker, 'Conditional Similarities: Parallax in Postwar Art from Eastern Europe,' Tomáš Pospiszyl, *An Associative Art History. Contemporary Studies of Neo-Avant-Gardes in a Bipolar World*, Zurich and Dijon: JRP Ringier and Les presses du reel, 2017, 4–11, here 7–9.

organizations such as CIHA or UNESCO is assessed regarding the extent to which scholarly exchange was made possible and can be deemed successful.

The volume begins with Maja and Reuben Fowkes' insightful essay on how bipolar narratives outlived the Cold War in art history and considers the effect decolonized approaches can have on understanding Pop Art as a phenomenon with equal weight in all corners of the globe, including Eastern Europe. When approached from a decentred angle, East and Central European artists devoted to Pop Art appear as empowered, conscious 'co-producers' (p. 48) operating within a global art movement. Then, Krista Kodres's chapter takes translation strategies and publication practices as examples of Socialist Internationalism in the Soviet context. The Socialist Internationalism project is presented as a framework within which cultural models and the achievements in art history as a discipline were exchanged among socialist states. Kodres follows the trends and specificities that help to define when and which cultural (linguistic) landscape was most prominent in knowledge transmission. Although unable to provide insights on the impact of translated scholarship on local art histories, Kodres interestingly identifies a translation and publication practice that allowed access to ideologically problematic art historical sources. This strategy was present in other state socialist contexts too. Mária Orišková's work on Socialist Internationalism is more sceptical than those of Kodres or Douglas and Kácsor, for example. In her contribution from the field of exhibition history, Orišková understands exhibitions under the aegis of Socialist Internationalism as tools of socialist (national) ideology and diplomatic propaganda. Her work walks through selected exhibitions from different periods in the history of socialist Czechoslovakia, but also covers the more recent isolation and limits of integration in international art history.

Peter H. Feist's is the first source text in *Universal – International – Global* to elaborate upon the contact points between art historians of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and East and Central Europe. According to Feist, scholars from East Germany conducted a limited, exclusive discussion of the region's art. Feist had the opportunity to network with his colleagues from the Eastern Bloc and regarded Jan Białostocki's methodical advances as progressive. Both Feist and his discussant, Antje Kempe, highlighted the relevance of the *Lexikon der Kunst*, a five-volume collaborative enterprise published in the late 1980s, as a valuable encounter platform for East and Central European and German art that was non-hierarchical, decolonial and non-racist. Kempe also comments on how Feist's notion of heritage can enrich today's discipline of critical heritage studies.

Section two begins with an assessment of alternative strategies in Czechoslovak art history. Ivan Gerát investigates the challenges encountered in discussing the aesthetics and iconography of medieval religious art in the overtly anti-religious setting of Czechoslovak socialism. Gerát follows the implementation of creative approaches to the analysis of 'spiritual concepts' (p. 125) by art historian Karel Stejskal in the inconvenient circumstances of supervised academic work. In describing the political and cultural climate of the period between 1945 and 1948, Éva Forgács's contribution to *Universal – International – Global* demonstrates how the most diverse artistic expressions shared the common denominator of internationalism. In the Hungarian European School, it did not matter whether artists worked with abstraction or figuratively; they produced art in a context that 'value[d] ... knowledge, intellectual progress, and freedom of expression ... [yet] reject[ed] the ideology of fascism' (p. 140).

Elena Sharnova takes the reader to the 1970s Soviet Union and engages in the debate on nineteenth-century Russian painting embedded in the European context. Her central reference, which is critically approached, is the work of Dmitri V. Sarabianov, who is included in the republished source texts of the volume on this topic. Sharnova also guides the discussion through exemplary exhibitions and museum policies from the 1970s and 1980s. Readers can retrace the process through which ‘after a long interval of neglect, Russian modernist paintings were hung next to works by contemporary European masters’ (p. 154), a development which peaked in a ‘breakthrough exhibition’ entitled *Moscow-Paris 1900–1930* staged in Moscow in 1981. Neatly linked to Sharnova’s discussion is an excerpt from Sarabianov’s book *Russian Nineteenth-Century Painting among the European Schools. A Comparative Approach* (1980) and Marina Dmitrieva’s comment on the book’s introduction, which is republished here. Both Sharnova and Dmitrieva praise the inclusive approach Sarabianov takes to bring Russian and western European painting into dialogue with each other, even though the concept of the nation remains the main cultural container in his thinking. Despite the numerous shortcomings of the book, including various methodological problems, Sarabianov stages a critical assessment of Russia’s cultural geo-artistic position. Another positive is the thoroughness with which Sarabianov examines appropriation and recycling in his own national art and culture.

The task of Section three was to draw new maps of art historiography. The UNESCO Cultural Studies program was productive in bringing neglected and overlooked cultural landscapes onto the map and enabling socialist scholars to take part and shape international art history debates. Corinne Geering demonstrates that scholarship and cultural politics were often intertwined during the Cold War. Close cooperation between global regions, such as the Soviet Union and India, and the improvement and promotion of socialism as a model for success, mirrors today’s academic interests. Lajos Vayer’s source text relates regional discourses of art history to more comprehensive discourses and engages with the dynamics of changing centres and peripheries. Importantly, Vayer consistently used the term ‘Central Europe’ instead of Eastern Europe and sought to establish methodological connections with areas not usually associated with the former socialist states; in doing so, in the words of his discussant Robert Born, he pursued a non-nationalist art historiography. Vayer was not only an ambassador of little-known Central European art history, he also played a crucial role in overcoming the bipolar Cold War cultural oppositions. This shift in geopolitical and geocultural view is key to Douglas Gabriel and Adri Kácsor’s case study on the exchange between Hungary and North Korea, in which they discuss different levels of cultural and political contact. Despite Socialist Internationalism’s intended aim of peaceful coexistence and mutual learning among socialist cultures, some misunderstandings occurred, for instance, concerning Socialist Realist art’s purpose when transferred to a different culture.

Piotr Juskiewicz’s essay investigates Polish interest in Mexican art between 1949 and 1972, where the latter was considered ‘an ideal example of communist art’ (p. 260) and a perfect alternative to Socialist Realism Modernism. From around 1955 until 1965, Mexican art exhibitions and publications on Mexican art served as inspirations for the reformation of local Socialist Realism. Despite the seemingly idealized presentation and reception of Mexican art, it was conceived as primitive and exotic and, as Juskiewicz writes, as an

art that allowed a distanced view on modern, industrialized societies. The connection of Juszkiewicz's chapter to Jan Białostocki's source text commented upon by Antje Kempe is again organic. *Universal – International – Global* includes an extract from Białostocki's 1972 book *On the Art of Early America. Mexico and Peru*. In this monograph, Białostocki provides some novel insights into the early art on Mexico and Peru that add up to an asynchronous interpretation of art history. Back in 1972, the Polish art historian succeeded in establishing a dialogue between local Latin American traditions and appropriated, recycled influences coming from outside, mostly from colonizing powers. However, he does not deny Peruvian and Mexican art their independence and agency. In Antje Kempe's interpretation, *On the Art of Early America* is an 'art-historiographical contribution on how to overcome Eurocentric superiority' (p. 291). Closing the book with Białostocki must have been a conscious editorial decision since his methods succeed in repositioning Eastern European art history as a leader of decentralizing approaches with a willingness to establish an art historiography founded on the idea of contact and mutual enrichment among distant cultural epistemes. Comparative art history as practiced by Białostocki, Vayer, and Sarabianov can generate regional, alternative archetypes opposing dominating discourses. However, in every instance, it is essential to critically re-examine the contexts of these methodical models both to avoid misestimating their impact, and to understand the position of Eastern, Central, and South-East European art history within a broader spatial and temporal framework.



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