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Cut Relations? Henryk Stażewski's Art between 1945 and 1950.

A Case Study of Avant-garde in the Time of the New Political Divisions

The aim of this thesis is to describe the art of Henryk Stażewski made between 1945 and 1950. The study focuses on the specific conditions of the art life in Poland in the period 'just after the war'. This was a time of political, social and artistic changes in Poland and the whole Central Europe that influenced the artist's output. Based on archival research, the thesis provides insight into many overlooked facts connected with the subject. The study starts with an analysis of the impact of the World War II on the artist's work from the year 1945, which was for him the 'year zero'—the time to start his career again after the almost complete destruction of his oeuvre during the war. The aim of the text is to explain the ground-breaking changes in the artistic life, which occurred after the descent of the Iron Curtain and presents the new European geography—the constitution of new cultural centres and peripheries. This problem seems to be crucial for the subject. How year 1945 influenced Stażewski's all activities? Before 1939 the artist was a member of international groups of abstract painters such as: Cercle et Carré and Abstraction Création established in Paris. He published his texts in the groups' periodicals and took part in theoretical discussions on the modern art's shape. Having acquainted with Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, Kazimir Malevich and other prominent artists Stażewski could have considered himself as a member of "artistic centre" of the time. The thesis shows a case study of the problem of the new centres and peripheries established after the World War II. What was the fate of avant-garde artists located on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain? How did their position change? How did it influence their art? Changing political, geographical and artistic relations between Western and Eastern Europe after 1945 are the main theoretical problems of this thesis.

The second part deals with the artist's paintings, their formal, theoretical and social aspects. This section includes also the analysis of the connections between Stażewski's works from the interwar period and those made after 1945. It shows the dialogue between pre- and post-war artistic forms and ideas and new meanings acquired by the old forms in new conditions.

The contextual approach also turns attention to Stazewski's artistic affinities. It emphasises the problem of political limits imposed on the cultural life by the new communist authorities in post-war Poland. The study reveals also less known aspects of the artist's oeuvre such as furniture and graphic design. The narrative ends in the moment of the imposition of the Social Realism as an external factor shaping the art of the period. The thesis argues that some ways to express modern form and content persisted in spite of the political oppression.