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Is there a non-aligned art? Politics of exhibitions and artistic relations in socialist Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1968 (Working title)



The Gusle Player painted by Petar Lubarda in 1952 could be seen as an iconic image of this Yugoslav « non aligned art », modern in its form, individual in its expression, but deeply rooted in the local tradition both in its materiality by the use of medieval fresco technique and in its subject, Gusle players being epic singers of oral history. At Non-Aligned Conferences, politicians often proclaimed the same need for valorising local tradition within a set of progressive universal values. The particularity of Yugoslav art in the Cold War period was that it tried to be both Socialist and Modernist. My thesis focuses on the relations between art and politics in socialist Yugoslavia during the Cold War period. More precisely, I analyze cultural policy from the perspective of international exhibitions, relational networks and artistic practises that emerge after the 1948 break with the Soviet Union. This analysis will be confronted with the foreign policy program of Yugoslavia, which positioned the country as a socialist state independent from Moscow in a bi-polar Europe, and made it an active promoter of a global grouping of recently decolonised countries under the banner of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Methodology

The methodological challenges consist of bringing together the sources that can recreate an accurate assessment of the relationship between art and politics in Yugoslavia. More specifically, it is an analysis of texts (theoretical and critical texts, exhibition catalogues, newspaper articles, political speeches, archival documents) and images (art works, photographs, designs and layouts). Another part will focus on exhibitions as medium, both international exhibitions of Yugoslav artists abroad and their reception in host countries, as well as international exhibitions inside Yugoslavia.

My primary sources of research are located in the archives of former Yugoslavia countries, mainly in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, such as the archives of the Museum of Contemporary

Art in Belgrade, the archives of the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art, the archives of the Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art, the archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, the holdings of the national libraries of Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana and the archives of major newspapers of the time. It is important to stress the pioneering aspect of this research in light of the absence of any exhaustive transnational analysis bringing together archival material after the countries' independence. Consequently, the inventory of archival documents and their detailed analyses will be of significant importance not only for this doctoral research but hopes to put the result of such a revisited part of Eastern European history to the benefit of the scholarly community.

The role of intellectuals and artistic networks in the implementation of Yugoslav cultural policy

This research proposes to address the change in orientation operated after 1948 in all its complexity by a thorough appreciation of the intellectual climate of the late 1940s and early 1950s. My initial hypothesis is that the change in cultural orientation would not have been possible without the active role of intellectuals who already advocated avant-garde and modernist ideas in the interwar period. At the end of the Second War, they would take up high ranking important political positions in the new country, as can be seen in particular with the members of the pre-war group of Belgrade surrealists. I would like to underline the historic particularity of this situation: only too rarely have intellectuals been invited by politicians to help shape the future society.

Case studies: Exhibition as medium

International exhibitions were highly important to showcase the artistic tendencies the organising countries wanted to promote, especially in Yugoslavia where cultural exchange was exclusively regulated by the state. This part will attempt to create an exhaustive inventory of all major international exhibitions and present a selection with great detail, from their organisation through the content to the critical reception.

Exhibitions coming from Western countries to Yugoslavia include *French contemporary art* (1952) organised by French national Museum of Modern Art directed by Jean Cassou; *Henry Moor* (1955) with a catalogue preface written by Herbert Reed; *Modern Art in the United States* (1956) with works from New York's MoMA collection presenting the first generation of Abstract Expressionism. Exhibitions coming from the USSR and Eastern countries including *Four soviet painters* (1947) and *Contemporary art from USSR* (1959). Finally,

exhibitions coming from Non-aligned countries included *Contemporary Indian art* (1960) or *Art from the United Arab Republic* (1962).

At the same time, the 1950s marked the return of Yugoslav artists to the international scene, notably through their participation in the biennials of Venice, Sao Paulo, Tokyo and Alexandria, as well as through exhibitions in many Western countries and those that were members or sympathizers of the Non-Aligned Movement. During the exhibition *Contemporary Art in Yugoslavia* at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris in 1961, French critic Michel Ragon said that « in Yugoslavia living art is official art ».