

Baroque for a wide public: Popular media and their constructions of the epoch on both sides of the Iron Curtain

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Editorial

This special section of the *Journal of Art Historiography* aims at exploring the communication of art historical content in popular media during the Cold War era.¹ In seizing on this subject we acknowledge the important role of popular art histories in the forming of persistent concepts of local patrimony and national past in the public opinion. In the decades of the cultural competition of the communist and capitalist systems in the second half of the twentieth century an integral part of the efforts on both sides to propagate the respective world views was the imagination of history. To reach a global public was one of the prominent features to win 'the battle for men's minds'. With the rise of magazines and illustrated books, radio, fictional and documentary films as well as large photo and art exhibitions touring the world from the 1950s on stories of art and of artists found a mass public. In the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, exhibitions, but also study trips, public lectures, journal articles, books, radio broadcasts, documentary and fictional films aimed at educating millions of people culturally – and at the same time ideologically.

The study of popular art history enables us to recognize the historical narratives in both Western and Eastern Europe which were developed after the 1939–1945 war and were supposed to serve as legitimate antecedents of the new political and societal organization of the continent. After the war the societies of Eastern and Western Europe faced the challenge to redesign their own histories in order to create adequate images of the past based on shared values pointing to a joint future. Research in this field allows us to shed light on how scholars and cultural functionaries addressed this challenge. Thus, the largely neglected topic of how political constellations were echoed in the humanities – that is in its fields of study, epistemological interests, methodological approaches, and models of interpretation – is brought into focus.² The essays presented here share the

¹ This collection of essays has its origins in a workshop of the same title, held in June 2015 at Humboldt University, Berlin, which served as a concluding event of the research project 'Asymmetrical Art History? Research and Mediation of "Precarious" Monuments in the Cold War' initiated by Michaela Marek at the Institute of Art and Visual History of Humboldt University, Berlin. For the program consult the project website, accessed 17 October 2016 <http://www.kunstgeschichte.hu-berlin.de/forschung/laufende-forschungsprojekte/asymmetrische-kunstgeschichte/symposium/>. The project ran from 2013 to 2015 and was generously funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media of the Federal Republic of Germany.

² Cf. Nikola Doll, Ruth Heftrig, Olaf Peters and Ulrich Rehm, eds, *Kunstgeschichte nach 1945. Kontinuität und Neubeginn in Deutschland*, Köln, Weimar and Wien: Böhlau, 2006.

assumption that popular media communicating the national art history not only need to be understood as a leisure pursuit for locals and tourists, but rather as tools to serve educational aims.

From the 1980s on a critical research of the cultural Cold War and art history's share in it has developed, but it has concentrated – for many years almost exclusively – on modern art and its use as a vehicle for cultural policy.³ In turn in recent years the corresponding cultural policies of the USSR and its satellites, and to a lesser extent their implications for the academic field of art history, have gained some attention.⁴ Nevertheless, research of forms of communicating art historical knowledge on earlier epochs like the Baroque is still at the beginning.⁵ And despite the fact that the study of popular art histories has lately enjoyed increasing attention,⁶ it is lacking so far comprehensive and comparative analyses. Thus in selecting this topic we have entered an utterly under-researched field of study.

³ Notably Serge Guilbault, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, and Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, New York: New Press, 1999; for a more recent study compare Andrew James Wulf, *U.S. international exhibitions during the Cold War winning hearts and minds through cultural diplomacy*, New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

⁴ See for example Ulrike Ziegler, *Kulturpolitik im geteilten Deutschland. Kunstaussstellungen und Kunstvermittlung von 1945 bis zum Anfang der 60er Jahre*, Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006; Joes Segal, Giles Scott-Smith and Peter Romijn, eds, *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (electronic resource). On art historiography in the Cold War see Robert Born, 'World Art Histories and the Cold War', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 9:12, 2013, accessed 24 October 2016 <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/born.pdf>; Vardan Azatyan, 'Cold war twins: 'Mikhail Alpatov's A universal history of arts and Ernst Gombrich's The story of art'', *Human Affairs*, 19:3, 2009, 289–296, Andreas Puth, 'Art histories, cultural studies and the Cold War/Cold War cities. Conference and study day at the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, London, 24–25 September 2010' (review), *Kunsttexte.de/Ostblick*, 1, 2011, accessed 24 October 2016 <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/kunsttexte/2011-1/puth-andreas-8/PDF/puth.pdf>.

⁵ A number of international meetings held in recent years testify to this new interest, for example the workshop 'Art Historical Research in Context: Teaching and Exhibiting Modern Art before and after 1945', organized by the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art RIHA, 14–16 December 2014 at the France Stele Institute of Art History in Ljubljana, or the international workshop 'Renaissancen der Renaissance. Die Aneignung einer Epoche in der marxistischen Kunstgeschichtsschreibung', organized at the Alfred Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald within the scope of 32. Deutscher Kunsthistorikertag "Ohne Grenzen", 19–20 March 2015 (published: Katja Bernhardt and Antje Kempe, eds, '(Dis)Kontinuitäten. Kunsthistoriografien im östlichen Europa nach 1945', *Kunsttexte.de/Ostblick*, 4, 2015, accessed 20 November 2016 <http://www.kunsttexte.de/index.php?id=721&ausgabe=42370&zu=651&L=0>, and the conferences 'Politics, State Power and the Construction of Art History in Europe after 1945', organized by the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid 18–20 June 2015 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, and 'Art History And Socialism(s) After World War II: The 1940s Until The 1960s', organized by the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, in cooperation with Humboldt University, Berlin, 27–29 October 2016 in Tallinn.

⁶ See Doris Berger, *Projected art history. Biopics, celebrity culture, and the popularizing of American art*, New York, London and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015.

The following essays can thus be read as a first attempt to bring together case study examples from a wide range of geographic contexts – from Soviet Estonia in the 1950s to today's USA – and to cover popular media such as exhibitions, fictional films or university textbooks.⁷ In order to enable comparison we have focused on the popular presentation of art and architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which in the socialist context had multiple burdens to bear. Its construction as an epoch of absolutism and of Counter-Reformation rather impaired its positive reception in state socialism. This 'deficiency' was doubled in strength, when the objects under scrutiny were linked with a non-national historical background, as was the case in many border regions of Central and Eastern Europe. The texts of this special section address popular art history writing in the decades of the political division of the world into capitalist and communist camps as an East-Western intertwined discourse. They explore the actual discursive limitations in contrast to prevailing assumptions, such as that research and media in the West were 'free', while in the East they exclusively served the regime. Thus the essays collected here take into account the different narrative structures according to media, time and places of production, and the underlying evaluations of art and epochs, also in relation to those appearing in contemporary academic writing. The study of the relationship between academic art historiography and the popular forms of its communication offers an opportunity to gain insight into the significance of historical art and culture within the different post-war societies of Europe: into the interpretations of their own past as well as into the diverse and occasionally conflicting mechanisms of taking control over them, their main actors and driving forces.

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