

Scientific Baroque – for everyone. Constructing and conveying an art epoch during the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union and in Soviet Estonia

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Thomas da Costa Kaufmann once remarked that the Princeton University library alone contains over 5000 books with the word 'Baroque' in their titles.¹ On reading just a few of the writings on the Baroque, it appears that from the end of the eighteenth century onwards – when the problematic nature of the style first began to torment men of letters – the works of art and architecture of the era have been described in vastly dissimilar ways, with the result that the texts on the subject can give the impression that their various authors were writing about entirely different works and eras. It is precisely such obvious differences in the treatment of the Baroque (or of any other period, of course) that make the corpus of work in the discipline so challenging as an object of study. Regrettably, one must admit that, despite the long-abiding strength of historiography since the historiographic turn in art history occurred, research into the historiography of the Baroque is still only in its infancy. Accordingly, and among other topics, the art history of the immediate post-war period – i.e. of the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union – including the treatment of the Baroque style during that period, is now buried under a rather thick layer of dust.² In Estonia, one of the former republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, research into socialist-era art history has only recently begun to arouse interest among scholars.³

The current article attempts to examine interpretations of the Baroque made by the leading art historians working in the central institutions of art history in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist period, as well as texts penned by art historians in Estonia. This body of professional texts cannot, of course, be tackled as a hermetic linguistic corpus. Such an approach is even less likely to bear fruit in the context of a totalitarian regime than with the backdrop of any other social system. In the Stalinist Soviet Union, the entire purpose, not just of art or art history, but of all institutions in that society was to serve in the effort to realise the aims proclaimed by the ruling

¹ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, 'Discomfited by the Baroque: A Personal Journey', in Helen Hills, ed., *Rethinking the Baroque*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, 83–98, here 85.

² See: 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, here 294.

³ Anneli Randla, ed., *Studying Medieval and Early Modern Art in Soviet Estonia*. *Mai Lumiste 80. Special Issue of Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi / Studies in Art and Architecture*, 22: 3–4, 2013; Mari Nõmmela, *Stiiliajaloolise ja marksistliku kunstiajalookäsitluse konflikt Voldemar Vaga kunstiajalookirjutuses 20. sajandi teisel poolel*, (Dissertationes Historiae Universitatis Tartuensis 31), Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 2013.

power: i.e. to assist in the creation a new communist world order. For the regime, the whole of human existence was therefore regarded as a field of action in which the goal of changing society was to be pursued; a society that currently remained imperfect and tormented by the relics of capitalism.⁴ The communist party took on the role of supervising the process of achieving these changes on a scientific basis, elaborating the steps along the road through central research institutions under the party's control in all specialized fields of research. Research results were then conveyed to the people via institutions especially established for the purpose, supplemented of course by the state media. These mediators of the results of academic activity constitute the other object of interest of the current paper.

Aiming to trace out the mechanisms involved in the creation and dissemination of knowledge on art history to a broader audience, this paper addresses the following questions: how did Marxist-Leninist art history in the Soviet Union after the 1939–1945 war regard the Baroque style, and what was the core emphasis of the discourse on the Baroque during that time? Who were the main authors and what sorts of arguments did they use? How was the Marxist-Leninist approach to the topic established in Soviet Estonia and how were the resulting treatments expressed? Did any shift occur in the image of the Baroque through the dissemination of academic knowledge to the wider public? The main arguments of the current article include, firstly, that the conceptual gist of the 'Stalinist Baroque' discourse was in fact characterised specifically as the doctrine of realism; secondly, that the image and meaning of the Baroque as mediated via academic and popular media was described and discussed in a largely similar way by all the various media channels through which the topic was presented.

The Stalinist Baroque

In a state exercising power through a highly centralised system, guidelines were created under the supervision of that state power for practically all human practices. For this reason, any analysis of the treatment of the Baroque in the Soviet Union after the 1939–1945 war must begin with an examination of how and on what basis the art history canon in the USSR was established. Soviet art history had its roots in pre-war Marxist-Leninist theory of history as well as the discourses on art of the time connected to that theory.⁵ The core of the historical discourse was based on historical materialism, the main thesis being that the socio-economic base of the society of any particular period – referred to as its 'social formation' – forms the foundation of the society. The character of that social formation is determined by ownership of the means of production. Secondly, the socio-economic base of a

⁴ Karl Marx, 'Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*; es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu *verändern*. – Marx über Feuerbach. Version von Friedrich Engels von 1888 Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie', in Renate Merkel-Melis, ed., *Friedrich Engels. Werke. Artikel. Entwürfe. Mai 1883 bis September 1886*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011, 792–794, here 794.

⁵ See: Edward M. Swiderski, *The Philosophical Foundations of Soviet Aesthetics: The Theories and Controversies of Post-War Years*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishings, 2012.

society forms a unity with its cultural superstructure, including its arts, which depend upon that base, at the same time as reflecting it. As all socio-economic formations have historically been class societies, class character too is reflected in the art that a society produces. Lenin's thesis was that since every society in history has consisted of two antagonistic classes, this implies that every society contained two antagonistic cultures.⁶

The ideology of this new approach to art and its history relied heavily on two significant collections published in the 1930s: *K. Marx. F. Engels. On Literature and Art*, edited by Mikhail Lifshits and Franz Schiller in 1933,⁷ the first compilation of its kind published anywhere in the world, and *Lenin on Culture and Art* a similarly unique compilation edited by Mikhail Lifshits in 1938.⁸ Hungarian György Lukács, who lived 1930 and again in 1933–1944 in the Soviet Union, was a well-known contributor to the socialist discourse on art. His theory of realism made a significant contribution to the process of shaping socialist realism.⁹ The cornerstone of Lukács' theory was his belief in the total unity of society, meaning the total dependence of a society's superstructure on the underlying socio-economic formation. At the same time, every society always contains a class that harbours progressive aspirations. Given the theme of the present article, this claim in Lukács' theory is very much worthy of note. In the era of absolute monarchy, the most progressive class in society was the bourgeoisie. Its historically progressive character was reflected in the emergence of 'big realism' in the art production of the Baroque era. During the historical period that followed, in which capitalism began to develop, the bourgeoisie was to lose its progressive character, a process reflected in its turn by the emergence of non-realist styles in later art. This thesis was re-stated by Lukács's friend Mikhail Lifshitz, who was to become one of the main theorists of Soviet art.¹⁰

In Soviet art history, it seems that the strict requirement upon scholars to place their reliance on the two mighty theoretical pillars described above – historical materialism and socialist realism – only came into practical force after the war, in the late 1940s. The coercion of immediate change formed part of a wave of ideological attacks made against all scientific and artistic fields in the Soviet Union,¹¹

⁶ Lenin developed his concept of two opposing cultures in several articles: 'Party Organisation and Party Literature' (1905), 'Leo Tolstoy as the Mirror of Russian Revolution' (1908) and 'Critical Remarks on the National Question' (1913), reprinted in Estonian in Vladimir Iljits Lenin, *Kirjandusest ja kunstist*, Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1964, 91–95, 131–151, 250–254.

⁷ Mikhail Lifshits and Franz Schiller, eds, *K. Marks i F. Engel's ob iskusstve*, Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1957 (1st edition 1933).

⁸ Mikhail Lifshits, ed., *Lenin o kul'ture i iskusstve*, Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1956 (1st edition 1938); see also: Leonid Stolovitš, 'Marxi ja Engelsi esteetilised vaated', in Leonid Stolovitš, *Esteetika, kunst, mäng*, Tallinn: Kunst, 1992, 12.

⁹ See: Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, 55–60; Jaak Kangilaski, 'Realismi mõiste metamorfoosid nõukogude kunstiteoorias', *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi / Studies on Art and Architecture*, 12: 1–2, 2003, 11–24, 16–17.

¹⁰ Kangilaski, 'Realismi mõiste', 17.

¹¹ Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy. A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, Toronto: The

known as the *Zhdanov doctrine* or *zhdanovshchina*, a cultural initiative named after its initiator, Andrei Zhdanov.¹² In 1947, for example, a discussion on philosophy was held in which Zhdanov personally took part. The outcome of this debate was a confirmation that Marxist-Leninist theory was an indispensable tool in the development of Soviet reality and in reshaping 'the consciousness of the masses'.¹³

As part of this process, art historians were expressly accused of supporting the wrong sorts of contemporary art and of misunderstanding artistic heritage. As early as in 1948, the journal *Voprosy Filosofii* published a course curriculum for universities: the *Foundations of Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics*.¹⁴ Thus, all judgements on art history were clearly expected to rely on the use of 'correct' social theory and on the 'progress' of a suitable realist approach to depiction in the course of history. In 1949 issues of art theory and criticism were discussed at the third session of the Academy of Arts of the USSR.¹⁵ The views expressed during this session were published in a lead article titled 'The Duty of Soviet Art Historians' in the central journal of the Academy of Arts, *Iskusstvo*, in 1950.¹⁶ These views were based on Stalin's *Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics* (1950).¹⁷ The principles of this approach were more thoroughly explained in an article in the same issue of the journal by the art historian Anatoliy Shtambok, 'Against the Idealistic Treatment of the Development of Art'.¹⁸ An article was also published by one of the most prominent art historians in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Alpatov, in which he publicly repented of the theoretical ideas he had previously held, as outlined in the first volume of his *General History of Art*, which had appeared in 1948.¹⁹ Finally, *Against Bourgeois Art and Art History*, a collection of articles written by leading art historians, was published in 1951.²⁰ This book can be regarded as representing the completion of the Stalinist discourse on art and art history, which had, of course, become the required standard for every art historian in the Soviet Union.

The approach's strictly formulated rules of interpretation were applied to every artistic epoch in history, the Baroque included. Both the above-mentioned articles and the university course programmes in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics made it

Free Press, 1994, 294–295.

¹² From 1946 on Andrey Zhdanov (1896–1948) was responsible for Soviet cultural politics and initiated the subsequent struggle against formalism in music, theatre and art.

¹³ Fyëdor N. Konstantinov, 'Roli teorii marksizma-leninizma v razvitii sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva. K desyatiletiiyu knigi I.V. Stalina 'Istoriya VKP8B). *Kratky kurs*', *Voprosy Filosofii*, 2, 1948, 31–49, here 43–44.

¹⁴ 'Projekt programmy kursa "Osnovy marksistko-leniskoi estetiki"', *Voprosy Filosofii*, 1948, 2, 338–348.

¹⁵ Azatyan, 'Cold-War Twins', 294.

¹⁶ Anonymous, 'Dolg sovetskikh iskusstvedov', *Iskusstvo*, 5, 1950, 3–6.

¹⁷ Joseph Stalin, *Marksizm i voprosy jazykoznanija*, Moskva: Gos. izd-vo politicheskoi lit-ry, 1950.

¹⁸ Anatoliy Shtambok, 'Protiv idealisticheskogo istolkovaniya razvitiya iskusstva', *Iskusstvo*, 5, 1950, 55–64.

¹⁹ Mikhail Alpatov, *Vseobshchaya istoriya iskusstv*, Moskva: Iskusstvo, 3 vols, 1948–55; Mikhail Alpatov, 'Po povodu vseobshchey istorii iskusstv', *Iskusstvo*, 5, 1950, 84–88.

²⁰ Igor Grabar and Vladimir Kemenov, eds, *Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvooznaniya*, Moskva: Izdatel' stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1951.

clear that the cornerstone of art history interpretation was the concept of realism, a concept that marked every progressive development in society in general, and in aesthetics in particular. The golden era in art history was therefore judged to be the Renaissance and all other eras had to be measured against that yardstick. Art historian Vladimir Kemenov, then a research secretary with the Stalin Prize Committee, wrote: 'The entire history of art is the history of a struggle between the development of realism and all manner of anti-realist tendencies.'²¹ The gravest sin propagated by 'Friedländer, Panofsky, Antal, Pinder, Hamann and others' was to have attributed features of mannerism and of the Baroque to the Renaissance, which attribution, according to Kemenov, involved a 'false exaltation and anti-humanism typical of Jesuit art'.²² Mikhail Alpatov's article 'In Defence of the Renaissance' in the same collection *Against Bourgeois Art and Art History* also claims that Renaissance art represented the principle pinnacle of realist art, although Alpatov is more nuanced than Kemenov in his evaluations. The treatment, set mainly against the 'mannerism-mania' of western art history, allowed Alpatov to highlight, for example, the work of Rubens (specifically relying on *Perseus and Andromeda* in the Leningrad Hermitage collection), which, he claimed, 'extols human heroism'.²³

The new principles of 'scientific' research into the Baroque are most vividly displayed in the twenty-odd-page article written in 1950 by Viktor Lazarev's and Mikhail Il'in for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*.²⁴ The article's second sentence – the first determines the temporal boundaries of the style's dominance as being from the late sixteenth century to the mid-eighteenth century – straightaway defines the Baroque as a phenomenon belonging to the culture of the nobility during the heyday of absolutism and the era of struggles for national unity. This information is immediately followed by a criticism of the western formalist school of art history (as exemplified by Heinrich Wölfflin, Paul Frankl, Albert Erich Brinckmann and Wilhelm Pinder), which they accused of wishing to generalize the concept of the Baroque by allowing it to apply to the whole seventeenth/eighteenth-century European culture. The authors were especially angered by their perception that such an attitude constituted an expression of the notoriously aggressive German spirit. Instead of swallowing this view, wrote the authors, we ought to concentrate on the fact that different societies had different levels of development. Quoting Marx and Engels, who in 1854 had written that 'in the other great States of Europe absolute Monarchy presents itself as a civilizing centre, as an initiator of social unity',²⁵ they based their argumentation on the differences in the levels of development of the societies over the ages. Thus while monarchies that relied on the culture of their

²¹ Vladimir Kemenov, 'Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniya', in Grabar and Kemenov, *Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva*, 3–21, here 5. All translations are my own.

²² Kemenov, 'Protiv reaktsionnogo', 5.

²³ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', in Grabar and Kemenov, *Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva*, 129–154, here 140.

²⁴ Viktor Lazarev and Mikhail Il'in, 'Barokko', in *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Moskva: Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1950, vol. 4, 254–261.

²⁵ Lazarev and Il'in, 'Barokko', 255. The quote is originally from: Anonymous (Karl Marx), 'Revolutionary Spain', *New York Daily Tribune*, 14: 4, 9 September 1854, 4.

nobility may be regarded as having been a progressive influence in earlier times on the general development of history, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this role was played by the bourgeoisie. According to Lazarev and Il'in, the Baroque was full of contradictions, as it 'described the struggle between the national unity preferred by the people and the ideology of the nobility, who wanted to exploit the great ideas [of the Baroque] for their own class interests'.²⁶

Based on this statement, Lazarev and Il'in then went on to characterise the Baroque more precisely, first listing a group of countries in which the Baroque had existed and excluding those countries in which the phenomenon was held to have been absent: 'In countries where national bourgeois culture had developed – in Holland, England and partly also in France – the Baroque style never really took root.' In such countries a 'bourgeois-aristocratic classicism and bourgeois realism' was present in its stead.²⁷ This last-mentioned artistic style was regarded as being both socially and aesthetically progressive. Further reading reveals that the artistic style practiced in countries where the 'real Baroque' had a presence was not looked upon with a profoundly negative attitude by the authors. The cornerstone of this strategy of positive argumentation was expressed in the classic Marxist thesis quoted above on national unity. Thus two Baroques were born: a progressive Baroque in countries where the goal national unity could be said to be being pursued (France in the seventeenth century and Russia in the eighteenth century), and a reactionary Baroque, in which 'aspirations to national unity were absent' and in which the Catholic Church prevailed. This last actor, in addition, 'artificially' enforced its style through its counter-reformation activities in countries that did not possess the socio-economic conditions required for national unity (including Germany and Austria).²⁸ The authors thus concluded that there was no foundation for regarding the Baroque style as the apex of artistic development, on the grounds that it had lost much of what had been achieved by the Renaissance: 'classical clarity, the bourgeois and human spirit... its [Baroque's] main feature is exaggeration...'.²⁹ According to the authors, another characteristic of the Baroque was an idealistic relish in beauty, an external theatricality, and an empty decorative overall style. The Russian Baroque, on the other hand, was appreciated as a progressive style due to its 'heroic and nationally original content' – due to Peter the Great's reforms and the country's aspirations to national unity. These conditions produced a result that has no analogy in the western Baroque.³⁰ Like the exceptional case of the Russian Baroque, however, the progressive wing of the western Baroque was deemed to include artists of even the 'Baroque countries' such as Rembrandt and Velázquez, on the basis of the realist traits in their work.

Velázquez was indeed one of the few Baroque-era artists to whom post-war Soviet authors paid special attention. Ksenija Malitskaja's 1947 monograph, *Spanish*

²⁶ Lazarev and Il'in, 'Barokko', 255.

²⁷ Lazarev and Il'in, 'Barokko', 255.

²⁸ This was obviously a criticism aimed at Werner Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation*, Berlin: P. Cassirer, 1921, whose book is listed in the bibliography: Lazarev and Il'in, 'Barokko', 261.

²⁹ Lazarev and Il'in, 'Barokko', 259.

³⁰ Lazarev and Il'in, 'Barokko', 260–261.

Painting of the XVI–XVII centuries, focuses not only on Velázquez, but also on Ribera and Zurbarán and on realism as a feature connecting all three.³¹ Malitskaja sees Spanish realism as being realized primarily in its acceptance of Caravaggio's art, in showing simple 'working' people, in the adoption of a humanist psychology in portraiture and in its remarkably expressive treatment of colour and light.³² The author, however, clearly gets confused in her attempts to associate the artistic realism of the first half of the seventeenth century with society's material and social development, which, according to Marxism-Leninism, the art of that time and place was supposed to reflect. Her solution to this problem was a somewhat contradictory construction: although Velázquez worked all his life as court artist for Felipe IV, he nevertheless remained a 'popular' painter, who, while portraying the nobility, still managed to maintain a critical view of the canon of portrait art based on social standing that was imposed upon him, and was thus still able to paint his subjects 'as people'³³. However, it should be emphasised that Malitskaja's book was published in 1947 (the manuscript had been completed earlier), when the requirement upon scholars to abandon any formalist treatment of art history had not yet gained a firm foothold.

This same Malitskaja was to write an article on Velázquez for the *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* of 1951. In this later treatment, the painter is clearly shown as an opportunist in relation to the royal court who, despite his position, never gave up his realism in his style of depiction and who 'stood close to Spanish democratic culture', whose interests his art (the author alleged) in fact served.³⁴ The expression 'the Baroque' was prominent by its absence, both from the monograph and the later encyclopaedia article.

The Baroque in Soviet Estonia

But what was happening at the time in Estonia, which in 1944 had been forced to become a 'fraternal republic' within the Soviet Union? It should be emphasised that most of the Estonian intelligentsia of the time were under no illusions whatsoever about the new power. During the initial Soviet occupation in 1941, the communists had deported about 10,000 'bourgeois nationalists' to Siberian prison camps. Besides the *kulaks* among them,³⁵ a large number of these deportees were intellectuals.³⁶ Among them was the director of the State Art Museum, Villem Raam. For these reasons, and despite the optimistic slogans of the party and the new government, the return of the Soviet occupation in 1944 evoked quiet fear for the future.

The authorities immediately began telling everyone how they should behave

³¹ Kseniya Malitskaya, *Ispanskaya zhivopis' XVI-XVII vekov*, Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Gosudarstvennogo Muzeya Izobrazhitelnykh Iskusstv im. A. S. Pushkina, Moskva, 1947.

³² Malitskaya, *Ispanskaya zhivopis'*, 67–73.

³³ Malitskaya, *Ispanskaya zhivopis'*, 125.

³⁴ Kseniya Malitskaya, 'Velaskes', *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Moskva: Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1951, vol. 7, 131–134.

³⁵ *Kulaks* were 'bourgeois elements', the peoples' enemies, who had to be separated from 'ordinary citizens'.

³⁶ Jelena Zubkova, *Baltimaad ja Kreml 1940–1953*, Tallinn: Varrak, 2009.

under the new circumstances. Historians, including art historians, were given clear instructions by Nikolai Karotamm, First Secretary of Soviet Estonian Communist Party, in 1945: they were primarily required to describe the history of the party and the working class movement, the historical struggles between Germans and Estonians and the historical friendship between the Estonian and Russian peoples, as well as criticising the inter-war bourgeois period of independence.³⁷ The chairman of the Soviet Estonian Arts Council, Johannes Semper, proclaimed that 'the former art heritage must be examined critically and re-evaluated [...]'.³⁸

The party leaders' instructions are included in the earliest Soviet-era text on the Baroque style, 'Works of Russian architects and sculptors in the Baroque and Classicist periods in Estonia', which was published in 1947.³⁹ The text was written by Voldemar Vaga, a professor of art history at Tartu State University. Vaga had graduated from that same university in 1927 and in the late 1930s had published both the 800-odd-page *General History of Art*, and his monograph *History of Estonian Art*, which examined the production of Baltic German and Estonian national art.⁴⁰ Vaga applied to the relevant committee in Moscow for a doctoral degree in art history on the strength of his 'Works of Russian architects and sculptors in the Baroque and Classicist periods in Estonia'.⁴¹ This 20-page paper on Baroque and Classicism contained a half-page-long introduction in which the author wrote that

... unity with Russia signifies an immensely progressive turn in the history of our country [Estonia] in all fields of life, but primarily in art. With that unity, the artistic life of Estonia discards its former provincial backwardness and isolation [...]. The works of Russian sculptors are the only works of real artistic value created during that period: German and local masters produced only trivial trinkets that smacked of handicraft.⁴²

The main text of the study, however, lacked the sufficient number of 'correct formulations' and the list of literature employed did not contain a single classic of Marxist-Leninist literature. All in all, it was just a rather dry overview of a chronology listing the Baroque and Classicist heritage available on Estonian territory. The author characterised the Baroque through the use of a number of constructions in the manner of Wölfflin and Max Dvořák that he had already presented in his *General History of Art* (i.e. that Renaissance art was linear, the

³⁷ Nikolai Karotamm, 'Intelligentsi ülesanded majanduslikus ja kultuurilises ehitustöös Eesti Nõukogude Sotsialistlikus Vabariigis. Kõne I eesti intelligentsi kongressil 28. jaanuaril 1945. a.', in *Nõukogude Eesti kultuuri küsimusi. Kõnesid ja kirjutisi 1942/1947. a.*, Tallinn: Poliitiline Kirjastus, 1947, 14–44, here 38.

³⁸ Anonymous, 'ENSV kultuuritegelaste aktiivi konverents', *Sirp ja Vasar*, 2 Mai 1945, 19.

³⁹ Voldemar Vaga, *Vene arhitektide ja skulptorite teoseid baroki- ja klassitsismi-ajajärgust Eestis*, Eesti NSV Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli Toimetised, Ajalugu I, Tartu: Tartu Riiklik Ülikool, 1947.

⁴⁰ Voldemar Vaga, *Üldine kunstiajalugu*, Tartu: Loodus, 1937; Voldemar Vaga, *Eesti kunst: kunstide ajalugu Eestis keskajast meie päevini*, Tartu: Loodus, 1940.

⁴¹ Mari Nõmmela, *Voldemar Vaga (1899–1999) ja eesti kunsti ajalugu*, Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus, 2008, 120.

⁴² Vaga, *Vene arhitektide ja skulptorite teoseid baroki- ja klassitsismi-ajajärgust Eestis*, 3.

Baroque picturesque and that each era had its own artistic spirit). The use of Wölfflin's concept of the independent development of an 'artistic spirit' as a basis for Vaga's general treatment was criticised in 1948 by the above-mentioned leading Soviet Estonian cultural politician and writer Johannes Semper. Semper's article 'Marxist-Leninist Art Doctrine' appeared in the main cultural journal *Looming*, providing the first comprehensive and systematic explanation of the new discourse on art in the Estonian language.⁴³ Semper wrote on the relations between the economic base and superstructure of society, and on Leninist reflection theory, the concept of two cultures, the class nature of art, and also listed the features of socialist realism. It was quite obvious that professor Vaga knew nothing of these concepts and it truly seems strange that a critical overview in *Soviet Book* in 1947 never mentioned this ideological lapse.⁴⁴ However, we would do well to keep in mind that at the time the 'cultural revolution' initiated by Zhdanov was not yet in full swing.

Considering all this, though, it was no surprise that Vaga's doctoral degree failed to meet the approval of Moscow. In 1947–1949 Professor Vaga was ordered to take a course in Marxism-Leninism at night school, and he was eventually to write a public letter of repentance in the party paper *Rahva Hääl* entitled 'Against Bourgeois Relics in Art History'. In it he condemned everything he had written in the 1930s,⁴⁵ claiming that 'the development of art cannot occur independently of the material conditions in society, art gets its special features through every social formation, and art also always vividly reflects the class struggle in the relevant social formation'.⁴⁶ Probably fearing the prospect of being stuck in the same position as Vaga, another art historian of 'bourgeois' origin, Helmi Üprus, wrote an article for the widely circulated *Edasi*, 'Fighter for democratic art: 200 years since Rembrandt's death'. The article presented Rembrandt's work as 'a banner against the Baroque's aristocratism and glorification of the ruling class, and of the doctrine that art 'stands above life'.⁴⁷ The text thus provides an ideologically perfect reflection upon the Leninist concept of two cultures – with Rembrandt representing the progressive side of the equation – as well as upon the idea of realism as an artistic method to be attributed to artist.

In short, the above-mentioned new cultural politics expressed in the *Zhdanov doctrine* was applied to Soviet Estonia just as it was to the rest of the Soviet Union. The Estonian Communist Party plenary session, held in 1949–1950, decided to send a large new consignment of Estonian 'nationalist intellectuals' for deportation to Siberia.⁴⁸ Both Vaga and Üprus were spared, but they were to receive no commissions to write anything of any importance subsequently: in fact, the two leading art historians of the time were forced into silence and published very little in

⁴³ Johannes Semper, 'Marksistlik-leninlik kunstiõpetus', *Looming*, 12, 1948, 1947–1517.

⁴⁴ N. N. Kovalenskaja, 'Utsonõje zapiski Tartuskovo gosudarstvennovo universiteta', *Sovetskaja Kniga*, 2, 1947, 117–120.

⁴⁵ Voldemar Vaga, 'Kodanlike igandite vastu kunstiajaloo', *Rahva Hääl*, 14 June 1949, 3; Nõmmela, *Stiiliajaloolise ja marksistliku*, 63.

⁴⁶ Vaga, 'Kodanlike igandite vastu', 3.

⁴⁷ Helmi Üprus, 'Demokraatliku kunsti eest võitleja: 200 aastat Rembrandi surmast', *Edasi*, 4 October 1949, 2.

⁴⁸ Zubkova, *Baltimaad ja Kreml*, 217–231.

later years. The same can also be said of other art historians educated during the first Estonian Republic in the 1920s and 1930s, who were unsure of their knowledge of the requirements of the new dispensation. In 1953, the main cultural periodical of the time, *Sirp ja Vasar* (Sickel and Hammer), published a critical article in the form of an anonymous editorial, 'To overcome the backwardness of art historians'. The article complained about low standards among professionals in the discipline, and of the random way in which new research staff were prepared for their tasks. The editorial claimed that as early as 1951 – that is to say, after a criticism published in the Soviet journal *Iskusstvo* – a commission had been established to remedy the situation, but that no improvement had so far been made. One of the suggestions of the editorial was to send young people to further their education in Moscow.⁴⁹

The swansong of Stalinist art history in Soviet Estonia is represented by the texts published in the three-volume *History of the Estonian SSR*, published in 1955.⁵⁰ It was written by Elfriide Mägi, who had graduated from the University of Tartu in 1949 and at the time held the directorship of the State Art Museum. She emphasised that the Baroque in Estonia had happened in two stages: before and after the country's unification with Russia. She asserted that the Swedish-era Baroque was quite worthless, and that a progressive style had only developing after Peter the Great had taken over the country.⁵¹ The bias in her judgement is utterly clear here as, although seventeenth-century Swedish art was – as Mägi must have known – strongly influenced by 'democratic' Dutch architecture and art, which was seen as progressive according to the Stalinist discourse on art history, the hero in her account remained Peter the Great, as a significant historical figure who had revolutionised every aspect of life in the societies under his rule. Her opinion on these matters as presented in the *History of the Estonian SSR* contrasted strongly with an earlier 'bourgeois' treatment: way back in 'bourgeois' times, the Swede Sten Karling, art history professor at the University of Tartu, had devoted an entire monograph to the stylistic development of the Estonian Renaissance and Baroque in sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.⁵² While it is true that Karling did not have a very high opinion of the aesthetic quality of the local Baroque, which he saw as rather artisan, he nevertheless valued it as a part of the historical national heritage of Estonia.

From academia to the people

Soviet art history, in opposition to the aesthetic formalism of western art history, regarded itself as a branch of objective science, because it was based on a 'true,

⁴⁹ Anonymos, 'Ületada kunstiteadlaste töö mahajäämus', *Sirp ja Vasar*, 9 October 1953.

⁵⁰ Gustav Naan, ed., *Eesti NSV ajalugu. I köide, kõige vanemast ajast kuni XIX sajandi 50-aastateni*, Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1955.

⁵¹ Naan, *Eesti NSV ajalugu*, 727.

⁵² Sten Karling, *Holzschnitzerei und Tischlerkunst der Renaissance und des Barocks in Estland*, Dorpat: Õpetatud Eesti Selts, 1943; Krista Kodres, 'Freedom from theory? An attempt to analyse Sten Karling's views on (Estonian) art history', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 3, accessed 17 August 2016
https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/media_183177_en.pdf.

scientifically objective social theory', as was stressed in the above-mentioned 1950 article, 'The Duty of Soviet Art Historians'.⁵³ That article criticises the absence of general works based on Marxist-Leninist theory, especially the absence of suitable university textbooks. As with all disciplines in the humanities, art history belonged to the 'sphere of social ideology'.⁵⁴ Arguing from the same position, the article 'Against the Idealistic Treatment of the Development of Art' condemns the inactivity of museums as 'a part of the system of art education', and criticised their activities as being founded on an incorrect 'eclectic' approach.⁵⁵

The general reason for the concerns expressed in such writings was the understanding by the Stalinist leadership of the historical journey of Soviet society towards communism. While that journey was inevitably rather bumpy, at the same time it proved the Leninist thesis that development of a society's base and the superstructure would be uneven.⁵⁶ Despite radical changes in the economic base that had occurred in socialist society, the corresponding changes among the people and in the overall culture had not yet been achieved. In order to overcome this backwardness, therefore, the people had to be educated. The party's first priority was to educate its own members, and so in 1946–1952 an extensive system of education of party members was established, including party schools, study circles on party history, political economy and philosophy, district party schools and Marxist-Leninist universities. According to this strategy, the task of developing the awareness of the rest of society was to be achieved under the guidance of the party members. The cultural revolution thus needed to be pushed on and strategies and methods needed to be developed to achieve it:

Socialist society – in contrast to all other social formations – does not develop haphazardly, but according to consciously employed laws, based on the granite foundation of Marxism-Leninism. As an end result, the communist society requires that the intellectual development of the whole population rise to the level of the intelligentsia [...].⁵⁷

The foregoing is an excerpt from a paper by Eduard Päll, ideological secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, titled 'The Role of Intellectuals in the Development of Society', which was presented at the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge in Soviet Estonia. The society was founded in 1947 in Estonia (and in all other Soviet republics) as a local subsidiary of the all-Union society established in the same year, which – together with the print media – was tasked with conveying knowledge to society. The new society defined itself in its constitution as a 'political-educational social organisation whose aim is to spread

⁵³ Anonymous, 'Dolg sovetskikh iskusstvovedov', 3.

⁵⁴ Shtambok, 'Protiv idealisticheskogo istolkovaniya', 56.

⁵⁵ Shtambok, 'Protiv idealisticheskogo istolkovaniya', 59.

⁵⁶ Mikhail T. Jovtšuk, *Ebäühtlus inimese teadvuse arengus sotsialismi tingimustes, vana teadvuse igandite juured ja nende säilimise põhjused kommunismi madalamas faasis*, Tallinn: Poliitiliste ja Teadusalaste Teadmiste Levitamise Ühing, 1959, 1.

⁵⁷ Eduard Päll, *Intelligentsi osa ühiskonna arengus*, Tallinn: Eesti NSV poliitiliste ja teadusalaste teadmiste levitamise ühingu väljaanne, 1949, 7–8.

political and scientific knowledge among the Soviet Estonian population'.⁵⁸ The main working methods of the new body were to be public lectures, radio programmes and recorded lectures, scientific and popular-scientific films, exhibitions, and activities involving print media, as quite a few stenographic records of lectures were issued as booklets. The society included collective memberships, supporters and individual members in its ranks, including academics, who were guaranteed for higher fees for their lecture work in return for their membership. The all-Union society's activities during its first two years can to some extent be seen through taking a look at a few statistics: it held a total of 210,000 lectures all over the Union, with a total audience of 29 million, and printed 600 brochures, with a total print run of 35 million. It also established over 3,500 auditoriums across the USSR. By 1949 the society had a full membership of 40,000 as well as another 20,000 supporters.⁵⁹

Art was among the topics listed in the constitution of the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge. The 1949 plenum of the society stipulated that

propaganda for Marxist-Leninist theory must be carried out more widely [...]. Outstanding works of Soviet literature and art and the achievements of Soviet science must be promoted more vigorously; at the same time, all attempts to depreciate the contributions of Soviet people and the importance of their culture in human history must be decisively suppressed [...].⁶⁰

This decree governed the work in the Estonian branch of the society as much the Union-wide organisation. In art history the instruction did not directly imply that the topic should be introduced in terms of various different styles and periods, but primarily through conveying to the people the theoretical foundations that lay behind the historical-dialectical development of art. In the late 1940s and early 1950s a number of basic booklets were published in Estonian: *Lenin's Reflection Theory* (1948), *Base and Superstructure* (1951) and *J. V. Stalin's Teaching on the Bolshevik Party in Theory* (1951).⁶¹ All of these were translations of lectures given by Moscow professors in the central lecture hall of the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge. Lectures were organised in Estonia as well, including talks on 'Lenin and Stalin in Art' and 'Soviet Aesthetics'.⁶² Ordinary people were thus taught the 'correct' way of viewing and experiencing art, as were museum staff and school teachers, who were considered ignorant of Marxism-Leninism as they had

⁵⁸ J. Bahmat, ed., *Eesti NSV poliitiliste ja teadusalaste teadmiste levitamise ühingu põhikiri ja pleenumite otsused*, Tallinn: Riiklik Kirjastus 'Poliitiline Kirjandus', 1949, 3.

⁵⁹ Bahmat, *Eesti NSV poliitiliste ja teadusalaste teadmiste*, 17–18.

⁶⁰ Bahmat, *Eesti NSV poliitiliste ja teadusalaste teadmiste*, 22–23.

⁶¹ Aleksander Sobolev, *Lenini peegeldusteooria ja kunst*, Tallinn: Poliitiline Kirjastus, 1948; Grigori Glezerman, *Baas ja pealisehitis nõukogude ühiskonnas*, Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1952; Boris Tšagin, *J. V. Stalin bolševistlikust parteilisusest teoorias*, Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1951.

⁶² *Temaatiline plaan 1950.aastal [loengud]*, Pärnu : Eesti NSV Poliitiliste ja Teadusalaste Teadmiste Levitamise Ühing 1950.

acquired their education in 'bourgeois Estonia'.

Besides the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, a number of other institutions were needed to disseminate the truth about art and its history to the people. A decree issued by Soviet Estonia's Arts Council stipulated that art museums, together with the Artists' Union, should 'organise lectures in factories, show slides and arrange travelling exhibitions and public encounters with artists'.⁶³ In order to make their efforts in promoting the sciences more effective, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR passed a special decree at its September plenum in 1953 compelling all research institutions to undertake the role of mentors, through adopting schools and/or collective farms as partners that the former had a responsibility to look after. The decree included museums in this requirement, of course.

All these activities were kept under the strict control of political apparatus. For example, in order for lectures to be accepted, art historians were always required to present their texts to the Agitation and Propaganda Bureau of the Central Censorship Office, or Glavlit (Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel'stv).⁶⁴ The focus of the current article, i.e. the Baroque period and its artists, was absent from the list of lecture topics, although the subject of the Renaissance was a rather popular one – 1952 was Leonardo da Vinci's jubilee year, an occasion that was celebrated all across the Soviet Union⁶⁵ – as was the topic of nineteenth-century Russian realism.

Travelling exhibitions were also a significant tool in the 'scientific enlightenment work'⁶⁶ going on throughout the Soviet Union. Exhibitions were organised at schools, factory clubs, community centres and theatres. Such exhibitions displayed Baroque-era art very rarely, as the main focus was obviously on showing 'positive' art. The records of the Tartu State Art Museum travelling exhibitions are quite revealing: in 1954 the museum organised thirty exhibitions on the following themes: *Soviet Painting, Peace in Soviet Painting, Collective Farm Life in Soviet Painting, The Great Socialist October Revolution in Soviet Painting, Soviet Estonian Painting, Estonian Realist Art* and *Johann Köler 1826–1899*.⁶⁷

The most extensive exhibition of Stalinist-era western art history took place in 1953 at the Tallinn State Art Museum. Under the title *Realist Art of Western European Nations*, 211 paintings and approximately forty sculptures (including copies of antique works, and works by Michelangelo and Canova) were displayed, along with a large number of graphic pieces. The period of the exhibits ranged from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, although the bulk of the works consisted of seventeenth-century art. In contrast to the usual practice during the 1950s, the exhibition was provided with a catalogue including an introductory foreword.⁶⁸ The

⁶³ Estonian State Archive: R-1205.2.830, 18–19.

⁶⁴ Estonian State Archive: R-1797.1.77, 137.

⁶⁵ Krista Kodres, 'Stil und Bedeutung. Über konkurrierende Renaissancemodelle in der polarisierten Welt des Kalten Krieges', *Ars*, 48: 2, 2015, 118–135.

⁶⁶ Estonian State Archive: R-1797.1.77, 2.

⁶⁷ Estonian State Archive: R-1797.1.226, 26.

⁶⁸ Boris Enst, ed., *Lääne-Euroopa rahvaste realistlik kunst. Näituse kataloog*, Tallinn: Tallinna Riikliku Kunstimuuseumi väljanne, 1953.

author of that foreword was young art historian Boris Bernstein, who had graduated from Leningrad University, but was then working in Tallinn. On occasions, he actually repeated the above-mentioned views of progressive bourgeois realism verbatim. Of the Baroque era, Bernstein wrote:

The complicity of events in European history in the seventeenth century generated contradictions in the art of that century. The decline of towns and the triumph of Catholic reaction in Italy brought about a virtuoso but idealising art that was direct at achieving external effect. This is made quite clear through the paintings and reproductions of works by Carlo Dolci, Domenichino, Guido Reni and others contained in the exhibition [...]. The revolution in the Netherlands in the second half of the sixteenth century divided the country into two parts: Flanders in the south, which remained dependent on Spain and preserved the feudal order, and Holland in the north, which became a progressive independent country. Flemish art was to reach its apex in Rubens's exquisite and buoyant work. Among his disciples, van Dyck produced a number of realist portraits, although his works often bear an aristocratic stamp. [...] The quickly developing Dutch art [of the period] almost totally abandoned religious and mythological topics and began depicting the world as it was, in all its diversity and mutability. [...] The idea of absolute monarchy emerged in France in the seventeenth century, playing a positive role in overcoming feudal disunity and eventually precipitating the establishment of a single-nation republic. In French art, created in the service of the interests of the idea of absolutism, classicism dominated [...] (Poussin and Lorrain). [...] The crisis of absolute monarchy in France in the eighteenth century and the downfall of the French aristocracy found expression in François Boucher's splendid and emphatically sensuous work, in which, however, there are not too many ideas involved.⁶⁹

As one might expect, Bernstein's text emphasises the supreme importance of the 'great realists' Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Rembrandt and Velázquez, who are described in the introduction as the main heroes of the exhibition.

Altogether it seems that the *Realist Art of Western European Nations* exhibition was built upon an opposition between 'good and evil', with art depicting 'real' everyday life contrasted against 'mystical' biblical scenes. It is remarkable that most of what was exhibited consisted in copies from the Leningrad State Hermitage Art Museum, with only a few small-format original paintings and sculptures being displayed. This fact apparently did not bother the organisers from a conceptual point of view: the aim was to illustrate 'objective scientific' values, which could be conveyed via copies just as well. As was routine, the *Realist Art of Western European Nations* exhibition was accompanied by a number of lectures relevant to its content. Altogether, 34,792 people were to visit the event.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Boris Bernstein, 'Eessõna', in Enst, *Lääne-Euroopa rahvaste realistlik kunst*, 5–6.

⁷⁰ Estonian State Archive: R-1797.1.77, 100.

Naturally enough, the school system was also expected to operate in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist scientific understanding of art, a requirement that necessitated new textbooks to provide the 'correct' grounding, as provided by the relevant academics. Plans were therefore made to draw up general treatments of Soviet Estonian architectural and art history as early as the late 1940s. The corresponding conceptual designs for such were discussed in the press. Among the requirements of architectural history was, for example, the requirement to 'research real [historical] traditions, potentially fruitful links with Russian architecture,' and 'the need to unmask the machinations of bourgeois academic research.'⁷¹ Yet no such texts on art and architectural history were to appear during the Stalinist period. The first Marxist-Leninist treatment on history of Estonia also designed to serve as a university textbook was first published only in 1952. The book dedicated only a quarter of a page to the Baroque era, and the passage in question was in perfect harmony with the hegemonic discourse of the time:

In art, uniting the Baltic countries with Russia signified a great success [...]. The most outstanding achievement [of this unity] in architecture is the Kadriorg Palace, initiated by Peter the Great in 1718. The work of master builders Michetti and Zemtsov, it is the most beautiful building in the Baroque style on the territory of Soviet Estonia. The palace is especially remarkable for the decoration of its interior, its wealth of decorative motifs and the diversity of the paintings it contained. In 1719, Moscow architect, sculptor and painter I. P. Zarudnyi produced a splendid iconostasis for the Tallinn Preobraženski Church. It is Estonia's sculptural masterpiece.⁷²

Perhaps the most direct demonstration of the above-described approach to Baroque art history is provided by the decisions made on heritage protection during the 1940s and 1950s. According to the Leninist view, the proletariat was the lawful heir to the existing culture and would inevitably develop it further, because 'proletarian culture must be the outcome of the lawful development of those reservoirs of knowledge which humankind has worked out under the pressure of the capitalist society, the society of manor lords and functionaries'.⁷³ The Leninist decree on protecting and conserving cultural heritage in Russia had been passed as early as 1918. During the second half of the 1940s, regulations on architectural heritage protection were passed in Soviet Estonia as well. The rules stipulated that historically valuable objects belonged to the people and mandated that all heritage of special scholarly, historical or artistic value was to be preserved and protected. In addition, the Scientific Restoration Workshop was established in Tallinn. The task of Estonian historians of architecture was to determine national features and motifs in Estonian architecture and cast aside everything reactionary that had been introduced by the mental slave drivers of the Estonian people, i.e. the Germans.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Leo Gens, 'Arhitektuuripärandi uurimise puudustest', *Sirp ja Vasar*, 12 June 1953, 5.

⁷² Naan, *Eesti NSV ajalugu*, 97 and 133–134.

⁷³ Vladimir Iljitš Lenin, Proletaarsest kultuurist, in Lenin, *Kirjandusest ja kunstist*, 459.

⁷⁴ See: Gens, 'Arhitektuuripärandi uurimise puudustest', 5.

At the top of the 1949 list of Soviet Estonian heritage objects to be protected were two early eighteenth-century objects: Peter the Great House and the Kadriorg Palace in Tallinn, the latter also featuring on the list of first-rank monuments of the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ Peter the Great House Museum had in fact been opened straight after the war, its architecture described in the newspapers of the time as 'aptly representing the simplicity typical of Peter the Great'.⁷⁶ The initiator of the Kadriorg palace's construction had also been Peter the Great, who had intended to use it as his summer residence. It was designed by Niccolò Michetti, a disciple of the Roman architect Carlo Fontana. The construction supervisor was Russian Mikhail Zemtsov. In an Estonian daily newspaper, the latter was presented as the real author of the Palace:

Michetti's name is written on the plaque in the entrance hall [...]. But concealed behind this is the work of the real creators, talented masters among simple people [...]. History shows that the contribution of the Italian Michetti in building the Kadriorg Palace was exaggerated by bourgeois art historians, whereas the efforts of architect Zemtsov were under-appreciated [...].⁷⁷

Further down the same article, other artisans with Russian names are stressed, and the fact that all the truly wonderful stucco décor was created by the Berlin master Matthias Scheidtinger and Riga native Heinrich von Bergen⁷⁸ is entirely ignored.

Summary

In conclusion, the treatment of the art and architecture of the Baroque era after the 1939–1945 war perfectly matches contemporary practice in writing Stalinist art history, just as the environment in which the discourse thus produced was disseminated and used matched the atmosphere of the rest of the Soviet Union. The work contains all of the cultural techniques typical of the totalitarian regime: its habit of hijacking and monopolising access to the objective truth, including its claims to be using scientific principles, its centralisation, instrumentalisation and insistence on controlling all knowledge.⁷⁹ There are no data available on how art history discourse among professionals in the discipline was disseminated in other areas of the Soviet Union, but it would seem that it took place all over the state on a wave of massive centralised ideological coordination in the second half of the 1940s, a period during which the regime established a kind of general 'educational

⁷⁵ Krista Kodres, 'Restaurierung und das Problem der nationalen Identität. Paradoxa der sowjetischen Kulturpolitik in Estland', *Nordost-Archiv. Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte. Neue Folge*, 4:1, 1997, 241–272.

⁷⁶ L. Siimo, 'Peeter I maja Kadriorus', *Sirp ja Vasar*, 11 August 1945, 8.

⁷⁷ A. Gronski and O. Riss, 'Kadrioru lossi ehitaja', *Õhtuleht*, 27 January 1951, 3.

⁷⁸ These names were known already in the 1930s, see Alfred Vaga, Kadrioru loss, *Olion*, 2:1, 1930, 18–23, here 23.

⁷⁹ Richard Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism. Rethinking the Intellectual Sources of Nazism and Stalinism, 1945 to the Present*, London: Palgrave, 2012, 179–189.

dictatorship'. Within this frame, art was thought to be a significant factor in educating the masses along their path to communism, although it was never viewed as being as crucial as such media as literature or cinema. Nevertheless, only one correct interpretation was to be permitted (even) for art, one that relied on the scientifically objective theoretical foundation of Marxism-Leninism. Scholars at central research institutions in Moscow and Leningrad were given the task of providing a scientifically based meaning to works of art and to the history of art. All leading scholarly authors of these model interpretations were of course also controlled by the party. Through a state-constructed network – consisting of societies for the dissemination of knowledge, schools, universities, museums, heritage conservation bodies and print media – the correct interpretations were then disseminated to the wider masses, who in turn, having been 'scientifically educated', were then enjoined to help lead society to its inevitable perfection: communism and the New Man.

The official Stalinist discourse on art history examined the architecture and art of the Baroque era – and, of course, the whole of the Union's historical artistic heritage – as an illustration of the historical development of western society. Within this frame, Soviet interpreters described the Baroque as a negative rather than a positive art phenomenon. It is true that the aesthetics of the Baroque were also condemned within the 'bourgeois' discourse of art history, mainly in the nineteenth-century. However, in the Soviet Union the Baroque was considered a negative style for much more complex reasons. For Soviet art history, the Baroque was borne by the wrong class – the nobility and the Catholic Church – and also represented the incorrect aesthetic values, especially as compared against the absolute favourite of the art history of the period: the 'realist' style best exemplified by the humanism of the Renaissance period. It is thus understandable that Baroque-era art was not frequently made a research topic in its own right by researchers in Stalinist art historiography. Instead, it tended to be tackled as a tool within the discourse on Renaissance art, as a sort of a negative 'other' to be compared against the Renaissance.

There were, however, exceptions allowed to this general view. Such exception were made necessary by the national sentiment inherent to the discourse on Soviet history and art history, which acquired a chauvinistic character under Stalin's rule. During the 1930s it was established who the 'great heroes' of Russia (and, of course, of world history!) were to be included in the official historical narrative: Ivan the Terrible (Groznyi) and Peter the Great.⁸⁰ Consequently, it was simply unacceptable for the art produced in Peter's era, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, to be evaluated in a negative light. What therefore happened was that the art of the eighteenth-century Baroque also acquired a positive meaning within the Soviet Estonian art historiography of the Stalinist period, because it was essentially perceived as an accomplishment of Peter the Great. According to this treatment, it was also Russian culture that had connected the entire Baltic area up with European centres of art, and thus enabled the progressive development of art

⁸⁰ See: Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 233–237; Arup Banerji, *Writing History in the Soviet Union. Making the Past Work*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2008, 64–66.

in the region.

This ideologically motivated elevation of Peter's Baroque was also reflected in Soviet Estonian cultural policy, in its making the Kadriorg Palace available to the Estonian State Art Museum and in its ranking of the building at the top of all heritage lists for historical monuments. This perfectly reflects the way in which the process of protection worked: the selection of monuments depended on the value judgements expressed in the 'scientific' terms of Soviet art history, a discipline which was in turn guided by the much broader system of values required by the higher order ideological apparatus. In sum, there was only one truth and there was no essential gap between the 'academic' and 'popular' image of the Baroque as constructed in the Soviet Union. In the case of the Kadriorg palace, party-led art history and theory attached meanings to this indeed splendid piece of Baroque architecture that it had in fact never had historically. A closer comparison of the academic and popular discourse, however, would lead one to the conclusion that the latter expressed the character and meaning of the art of the Baroque by polarising the discourse even more strongly, contrasting the aristocratic against the popular, the catholic against the rational, aesthetic excess against realism and the Baroque against the Renaissance. On the other hand, this kind of vivid contrast probably does not indicate any difference in understanding, but simply reflects the choice of specific language by the media – the 'jargon' of mass media is after all constantly reducing and focusing, and process of distillation may well help make the gist of the discourse much clearer.

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