

# Revising Stalinist discourse of art: Mikhail Liebman's academic networks and his social art history

Krista Kodres

It was the year 1958. Years later a German Democratic Republic art historian Peter H. Feist writes of his first visit to Moscow:

At 10pm we finally landed at Vnukovo Airport in Moscow. There was a snowstorm and -24C. I saw a giant map on the wall in the terminal. The depiction differed from all I had been used to seeing in Germany: The gigantic territory of the Soviet Union enveloped the North Pole, and in comparison, Central and Western Europe were small areas on the left edge. From that time on, I knew how different the view of the world from Moscow was.<sup>1</sup>

Feist would later return to Moscow and travel elsewhere in the USSR a number of times. In his memoirs, he describes these visits quite colourfully. He writes of people, but especially one who became an 'important person in my life'<sup>2</sup> – the art historian Mikhail Liebman (1926-2010), who was a 'leading Germanist'<sup>3</sup> in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s, an expert on Renaissance art. The close relationship between the two scholars is demonstrated by the fact that Feist quite often mentions Liebman in his memoirs, and Liebman's colleagues mention the friendship as cherished by for him.<sup>4</sup> The meetings between the two art historians lasted past the fall of the Berlin Wall, Feist visited Liebman in the 1990s as well, when Liebman was already in Jerusalem, where he would publish some books and his last monograph.<sup>5</sup> There is probably no doubt that the Jewish origin of both men (Feist's mother was Jewish and Liebman was from a Jewish family in Riga) played an important role in their friendship.

<sup>1</sup> Peter H. Feist, *Hauptstrassen und eigene Wege. Rückschau eines Kunsthistorikers*. Berlin: Lukas Verlag 2016, 76.

<sup>2</sup> Feist, *Hauptstrassen und eigene Wege*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> Александр Н. Немиллов, 'О книге и ее авторе' [Alexander Nemilov, On the book and his author], in М.Я. Либман, *Очерки немецкого искусства позднего средневековья и эпохи Возрождения* [М. Я. Liebman, *Studies in German art of the medieval period and the Renaissance*]. Москва: Советский Художник 1991, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Немиллов, 'О книге и ее авторе', 11.

<sup>5</sup> See В. А. Либман, Е.М. Либман, Е.Д. Матусова, 'Научное творчество Михаила Яковлевича Либмана' [Scientific work of Mikhail Liebman], in Евгения В. Шидловская, *От классической античности до модерна. Сборник статей сектора классического искусства Запада. Посвящается памяти Михаила Яковлевича Либмана (1920-2010)* [Yevgenya Shidlovskaya, *From classical antiquity up to modernism. Collection of articles of the department of classical Western art. Dedicated to the memory of Mikhail Liebman*]. Москва 2018, 9; М. Я. Libman, *Italian Sculpture of the Renaissance: A morphology*. Jerusalem 2010.

However, the topic of this article is not the relationship between the two art scholars, each of whom was prominent in his own country, but about Mikhail Liebman's 1960s and 1970s texts, which present his understandings of the discourse and methodology of art history. It was a time when the Soviet art history avant-garde, called 'revisionists', encouraged by Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation policy began critically reappraising art and art history's Marxist-Leninist/Stalinist approach.<sup>6</sup> This article seeks to show why and how Liebman's art history discourse changed in this new political situation. Could a kinship with the approach to Marxism taken by his friend Feist who in 1966 published 'On Principles and Methods of Marxist Art History'<sup>7</sup> be identified? The latter question also gives impetus for describing the official system of internationalisation during the socialism era, which, as we see, allowed Liebman to travel and attend international forums in their discipline.

Before beginning to discuss the effect of soviet/socialist foreign policy, the political environment in which art historiography took place should be mentioned. Also in the post-Stalinist era, it was the communist regime(s) that gave the art history its institutional possibility and likewise watched over its content.<sup>8</sup> This means that all art history texts passed through filters of control before publication: first the author's own self-censorship (overshadowed of 25-years Stalin-era politics of terror), and secondly – every text that was scheduled for publication, had to undergo obligatory review by GLAVLIT (state censorship board). Hence, it is not justified automatically equate the author of the text with the position the author is presenting in the text. Yet the time factor is also important. The long period of late-stage socialism had its own internal dynamic, which was typified by the weakening of control by the Communist Party of humanities content, which in turn encouraged scholars to a freer expression and made possible a limited discursive pluralism on the art history field, among others.<sup>9</sup>

The third aspect relates to cultural exchange, the cross-border connections in the art history discipline. The new foreign policy established under Khrushchev meant fewer restrictions on travel and created a space for face-to-face meetings and exchanges between members of the international art historian community. Importantly, socialist regimes were unable to control this field effectively. Naturally, the content of such personal interactions did not leave a trace behind in archives.

Given the paucity of sources and the ideologically ambivalent conditions in which art historical research was practiced and texts were created, how one can find the right code for reading socialist art histories?

<sup>6</sup> Krista Kodres, 'Toward a New Concept of Progressive art: Art History in the Service of Modernisation in the Late Socialist Period. An Estonian Case', in Piotr Korduba, Agata Jakubowska, *Turning Points: Histories of Art History in Poland and in Europe*. Artium Quaestiones XXX, Special Issue. Poznan: Universitet im. Adama Mickiewicza 2019, 211-224.

<sup>7</sup> Peter H. Feist, *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft. Versuch eines Abrisses*. Leipzig: E. A. Seemann Verlag 1966.

<sup>8</sup> See Thomas M. Bohm, Rayk Einax, Michel Abesser, *De-Stalinisation Reconsidered. Persistence and Change in the Soviet Union*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Krista Kodres, 'Translations: The Dissemination of Socialist Art History in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s', in Marina Dmitrieva, Beata Hock, Antje Kempe, *Universal – Global – International. Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe*. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag (forthcoming 2022).

Memoirs written and interviews conducted after the collapse of the socialist system give insight into people's views and attitudes back then. Mikhail Liebman did not write memoirs but fortunately a number of his colleagues have characterized him. The art historian and dissident Igor Golomshtok recalls Liebman as a unique 'factologist' who, working at Pushkin Museum in Moscow, 'brought a healthy dose of Western correctness that was not very typical at Russian institutions'.<sup>10</sup> Liebman's long-time colleague Marina Sviderskaya wrote about him and his legacy as a scholar most thoroughly. She worked with him for years both at Pushkin and the Moscow Institute of Art History and Theory. Sviderskaya described Liebman as an erudite art historian and connoisseur who had a strong German-language background from his Riga (Latvian Republic) classical gymnasium days, an 'international man' who travelled around as a 'European' and knew most of the prominent Western art historians in his field.<sup>11</sup> Lelya Kantor (Kazovskaya) on the other hand has described on Liebman as the 'most anti-Soviet person who at the same time was not opposed to the Soviet system'. Liebman is said to have given Lelya, then a young prospective student, the advice of studying art history at evening school, as that way she would avoid the pointless Party history course and 'other hassles'.<sup>12</sup> I would add my own recollection here. Namely, Mikhail Liebman was the official supervisor on my candidate of sciences (PhD) dissertation. When I sent him the draft of the introduction in 1989 (Gorbachev was already in power!) which started with some sort of Lenin quotation that I imagined was definitely obligatory, Liebman told me, shaking his head: 'Krista, you don't need that – really!'. So of course, I cut that part. When I finally defended my thesis in Moscow in 1992, Liebman had already left for Israel. That personal contact and the recollections of Liebman's colleagues are, I find, telling and offer a key additional dimension for reading his texts. And as said, also process of internationalisation of culture and sciences gives an important context for understanding Liebman's art history works from the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Cross-border academic relations in socialist times**

In 1973, a West German embassy staffer in Moscow, Wolfgang Kasack, wrote that 'observation of Soviet cultural policy must always study both of its Janus faces',<sup>13</sup> calling for the power of interpersonal relations not to be overlooked. Indeed, this is a suggestion worth following.

The 'socialistic internationalism' policy that enabled previously non-existent interaction between scholars of Socialist block countries took a definite form during the de-

<sup>10</sup> Golomshtok refers to Liebman's Riga roots. See <https://artguide.com/posts/758>

<sup>11</sup> Марина И. Сви́дерская, 'О Михаиле Яковлевиче Либмане' [Marina Sviderskaya, About Mikhail Yakovlevich Liebman], in Шидловская, *От классической античности*, 12-43; Марина И. Сви́дерская, Утешение искусствоведением. Западная классика в отечественном искусствоведении XX-XXI веков [Comforting art history. Western Classical art in Russian art history in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> centuries]. Москва: ГИИ 2022, 142-168.

<sup>12</sup> <https://arzasamas.academy/mag/869-kantor>

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Kasack, 'Kulturelle Aussenpolitik', in Oskar Anweiler, Karl-Heinz Ruffmann, *Kulturpolitik der Sowjetunion*. Stuttgart: Alfred Körner Verlag 1973, 347; Kodres, 'Translations' (forthcoming 2022).

Stalinisation and modernisation process in the USSR in 1954-1955.<sup>14</sup> In 1956, the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union declared from the podium that revolution could not be exported and that the main foreign policy initiative had to be increasing the appeal of socialism.<sup>15</sup>

For Soviet art history scholars the new foreign policy provided for mutual exchange of specialists from other countries and visits to conferences. Few travelled independently outside of the Soviet Union, they were usually part of 'specialised groups', especially when going to the West. The USSR Academy of Arts journal *Iskusstvo* (Art) devoted a news section to covering official travel of artists and art historians and joint international events but, in the absence of research into archives, it is not known how thoroughly. One of the earliest meetings between art historians in communist countries was probably in 1956 in Moscow, in the USSR Academy of Art' Research Institute of Theory and History of Fine Arts. The topic of the meeting was a planned three-volume work that was supposed to treat the rise of national schools of art in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> The concept of this cooperation was also discussed at a joint meeting held in Prague in 1958, where it was decided that the work would be translated into every language in the Eastern bloc.<sup>17</sup> As far as I know, nothing came of the planned work in the end. There was more success on the GDR side when it came to *Lexikon der Kunst*, written in collaboration with art historians from all of the socialist countries; in fact, a few Western authors also contributed.<sup>18</sup> Several major international conferences that served as a meeting place for scholars were also organized in the GDR: The 1964 Michelangelo conference at Berlin's Humboldt University,<sup>19</sup> the Dürer conference at Leipzig's Karl-Marx-University in 1971,<sup>20</sup> an event in Wittenberg in 1972, 'Lucas Cranach. Artist and Society – the early bourgeois revolution and GDR's socialist culture'<sup>21</sup> and a conference in Greifswald in 1974 dedicated to Caspar David Friedrich, 'Fine art during the era between the 1789 French Revolution and the 1848 bourgeois democratic revolution'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin. Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, 4. See also Сергей К. Романовский, *Международные культурные связи СССР* [Sergei K. Romanovski, Foreign relations of the USSR]. Москва: Международные отношения 1966, 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Nõukogude Liidu Kommunistliku Partei ajalugu (neljas, täiendatud trükk)* [History of the Communist Party of USSR. Forth edition]. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat 1975, 557-560.

<sup>16</sup> *Искусство* [Art], 1959, No 1, 76

<sup>17</sup> *Искусство* [Art], 1959, No 1, 76.

<sup>18</sup> See: *Lexikon der Kunst*. Leipzig: E.A. Seeman Verlag 1976. Autorenverzeichnis des 1. und 2. Bandes, no page number.

<sup>19</sup> See: Gerhard Strauss, Peter H. Feist, Herbert Zschelletzschky, *Michelangelo heute*. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Sonderband 1965. Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin Verlag 1965.

<sup>20</sup> *Albrecht Dürer. Kunst im Aufbruch. Vorträge der kunstwissenschaftlichen Tagung mit internationaler Beteiligung zum 500. Geburtstag von Albrecht Dürer*. Herausgegeben von einem Kollektiv unter Leitung von Ernst Ullmann. Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität 1972.

<sup>21</sup> Peter H. Feist, Ernst Ullmann, Gerhard Brendler, *Lucas Cranach. Künstler und Gesellschaft*. Wittenberg: Lutherhalle 1973.

<sup>22</sup> Hildegard Schacht u.a, *Caspar David Friedrich. Bildende Kunst zwischen der Französischen Revolution von 1789 und der bürgerlich-demokratischen Revolution von 1848*. 1. Greifswalder Romantik-Konferenz.

My protagonist here, Mikhail Liebman was a participant in all these conferences and subsequent publications. He was also a frequent contributor to the journal *Bildende Kunst*, informing readers of German artworks in Soviet museums. Several Liebman articles were published in the GDR journal *Kunst und Literatur: Zeitschrift zur Verbreitung sowjetischer Erfahrungen* (Art and Literature. Journal disseminating the Soviet experience), which was published from 1953 by the German-Soviet friendship society's board. Two monographs by Liebman were also published in the GDR: *Giuseppe Maria Crespi* (1976) and *German sculpture 1350-1550* (1982).

Alongside exploration of Renaissance themes, the art historians from the Eastern bloc also met at exhibitions of contemporary art and symposia. In 1968, the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena hosted a conference with 50 art historians, 'Bildnis und Menschenbild'.<sup>23</sup> 1973 saw a symposium in Erfurt, attended by GDR and Soviet art historians and featuring a very wide spectrum of topics.<sup>24</sup> In 1977, Moscow hosted a joint conference of art critics and art historians from nine communist countries,<sup>25</sup> and in 1979, the 1<sup>st</sup> symposium of the artist unions of the USSR and GDR took place in Berlin.<sup>26</sup> Half of the participants in this event were art historians and besides problems of contemporary art (i.e. of Realism) the problem of 'Modernism as a form of contemporary bourgeois ideology' was also raised as a topic. Also, Mikhail Liebman sometimes dealt with the contemporary art of the GDR, publishing articles in the Russian-language *Brief Encyclopaedia of Art*, and writing about the sculptor who designed the Buchenwald memorial, Fritz Kremer, as well as on the painter Hans Grundig and the graphic artist Werner Klemke.<sup>27</sup>

The new foreign policy also made it possible to meet Western colleagues at international forums.<sup>28</sup> Afore mentioned Peter Feist's memoirs recount such encounters in great number and he also wrote about them in the form of brief dispatches for *Bildende Kunst*. For example, Feist reported that he had taken part at the CIHA's 1964 Bonn, 1969 Budapest, and 1973 Granada congresses; he attended AICA congresses from 1965, including

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[Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald. Sonderband]. Greifswald 1976.

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Möbius, 'Kunstwissenschaft und Hochschulreform. Bemerkungen zur Jenaer Arbeitskonferenz "Bildnis und Menschenbild"', in *Bildende Kunst*, 1968, No 9, 496-498.

<sup>24</sup> 'Симпозиум искусствоведов ГДР и СССР' [Symposium of art historians of GDR and USSR], *Советское искусствознание*, 1973, 372-274.

<sup>25</sup> Анна В. Морозова, 'Отечественное искусствознание 1964-1985' [Anna V. Morozova, Art history of USSR in 1964-1985], in *Вестник СПбГУ, Серия 2: История*, 2014, 123-136.

<https://artsjournal.spbu.ru/>

<sup>26</sup> Horst Weiss, P. Lebedev, 'Nutzbringende Formen sozialistischer Zusammenarbeit', in *Bildende Kunst*, 1979, No 6, 283-284.

<sup>27</sup> The bibliography of M. Liebman's writings until 1989 can be found in Либман, *Очерки немецкого искусства*, 193-196.

<sup>28</sup> See also Немиллов, 'О книге и ее авторе', 7-13.

as head of the GDR delegation.<sup>29</sup> At the CIHA congresses, he undoubtedly met Liebman, who also reported on the congresses upon returning to Moscow.<sup>30</sup>

To sum up, it can be said that in general, academic staff from the central (Moscow, Leningrad) art history institutions were able to travel relatively frequently abroad and attend conferences, both in the East and West. Among other things, this lends additional weight to the idea that the Soviet art history elite must have been quite well informed about developments in the art history discipline in the West.

In the Soviet Union conferences on the state of art history's international scene were organized from time to time<sup>31</sup> and collections of articles were published. For example, 1964 saw the publication of a collection entitled *Contemporary art history abroad: Articles*,<sup>32</sup> a 1977 collection was called *Contemporary Western art history regarding classical art*<sup>33</sup> and in 1979, *Criticism of contemporary bourgeois' art sociology*.<sup>34</sup>

In parallel, interest in the history of the art historiography and methodology of art history intensified in the 1960s. A three-volume *History of European Art History*<sup>35</sup> was compiled and in 1973, and a voluminous almanac, *Soviet Art History and Art Theory (Советское искусствознание)*, began publishing. Liebman contributed articles to all of these. In addition, it should be mentioned that Liebman's articles were also published in Western art history journals (*Burlington Magazine*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, *Pantheon*), where he reported about artworks of Western artists found in Soviet museum collections. So, it could be said that Liebman's academic network and publication geography were wide-ranging and through German in particular but English as well, his expertise made it further than the Eastern bloc art historians' community.

### Mikhail Liebman as a revisionist of 'Socialist Realist' art history

As we know, art historians use linguistic means to create a general code, image or perspective for an art work, art phenomena and era. This code serves as a filter for viewing and experiencing art and understanding its meaning. Stalinist ideology had adapted Marx's famous Thesis Eleven ('The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it') also to art history: the Communist Party believed that

<sup>29</sup> See Feist, *Hauptstrassen und eigene Wege*.

<sup>30</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, 'XX международный конгресс истории искусства, Гранада' [Mikhail Y. Liebman, Twentieth international congress on art history in Granada], in *Советское искусствознание*, 1974, 369-372.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. 'Научно-теоретическая конференция 'Русское и советское искусство в освещении западного искусствознания'. Москва 31 мая-1. июля 1979' [Scientific-theoretical conference 'Russian and Soviet art in the light of Western art history'], in *Советское искусствознание*, 1979, vol 2, 454-459.

<sup>32</sup> Борис Р. Виппер, Тамара Н. Ливанова (eds), *Современное искусствознание за рубежом. Очерки*. Москва: Наука 1964.

<sup>33</sup> Мария А. Чегодаева (ed), *Современное искусствознание Запада о классическом искусстве XIII-XVII вв*. Москва: Наука 1977.

<sup>34</sup> А.В. Михайлов (ed), *Критика современной буржуазной социологии искусства*. Москва: Наука 1979.

<sup>35</sup> Борис Р. Виппер, Тамара Н. Ливанова (eds), *История европейского искусствознания*. I-III. Москва: Наука 1969.

the supreme goal of art and art historiography, which aimed to articulate art in words, was to produce a new human, a communist citizen.<sup>36</sup> They mandated both the right frame for interpreting art history – class relations – and the aesthetic basis for judgments on art – Realism. The Khrushchev Thaw brought a loosening to the strictures of this disciplined environment. Revisionist art historians took their place alongside orthodox Marxist-Leninists. By re-reading Marx's and Engels' works<sup>37</sup> they undermined the thus far obligatory explanations of art as superstructural, i.e., something that was entirely dictated by the base, the system of economic ownership. They also proceeded to repudiate the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which organized art styles into a hierarchy based on their style of depiction and historically positive class position. In short, revisionist Soviet art historians strived to create the new regimes of knowledge<sup>38</sup> and visuality, the perspective from which people ought to regard art.

Mikhail Liebman would be classified as a moderate revisionist. Like many of his contemporaries, he had, in his early treatise on Dürer (1957), described artwork from the position of Marxist-Leninist historical materialism and realist aesthetic.<sup>39</sup> Now, however, he revised his positions, probably inspired by Heinrich Wölfflin's approach to stylistic periods,<sup>40</sup> writing for example in the article on 'The problem of evolution of style in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century German art' (1963) about the national characteristics of the Renaissance in different countries, and linking formal idiom to local history and to art traditions, not to class struggle.<sup>41</sup>

At present, the part of Liebman's voluminous art history production I am most interested in is his 1960s-70s positions on what should be studied in the history of art and how it should be studied. He did not write much on these topics, but the reason might have

<sup>36</sup> Krista Kodres, Kristina Jöekalda, 'Introduction to Socialist Art History: On Formulating the Soviet Canon', in Krista Kodres, Kristina Jöekalda, Michaela Marek, *A Socialist Realist Art History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades* [Das östliche Europa: Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte, Bd.9]. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag 2019, 11–35.

<sup>37</sup> The first collection of Marx and Engels works was starting to be published in Moscow in 1920s (MEGA), after II WW major collection was starting to be published in DDR in 1956 (MEW). See Eric Hobsbawm, *Wie man die Welt verändert. Über Marx und Marxismus* [2011]. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 2012, 136-137. Marx' *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts from 1844* was translated into Russian in only 1956.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press 1980, 114, 31; Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* Cambridge: Polity Press 2016, 25-28.

<sup>39</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, *Дюрер* [M.Y. Liebman, Dürer]. Москва: Искусство 1957; See also Krista Kodres, 'Stil und Bedeutung: Über die konkurrierende Renaissancemodelle in der polarisierten Welt des Kalten Krieges', in *ARS. Journal of Institute of Art History of Slovak Academy of Sciences*, vol No 48, 2015, 2, 118–135.

<sup>40</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunsthistorische Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* [1915]. Dresden: Verlag der Kunst 1983, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, 'Проблема эволюции стиля в немецком искусстве XV-XVI веков', in Тамара Н. Ливанова, *От эпохи Возрождения к двадцатому веку: проблемы зарубежного искусства* [Tamara N. Livanova, *From Renaissance to the Twentieth century: the problems of foreign art*]. Москва: Издательство АН СССР 1963, 90-103. Reprint in German: *Kunst und Literatur*, vol No 12, H. 11, 1964, 1215-1224.

also been the fact that until the 1960s, Soviet art history traditionally fell into three fields: aesthetics was dealt with by philosophy, the history of art stood by history, and third was art criticism. This trichotomy began to be problematised mainly in the late 1960s and 1970s when first the relationship between art history and art criticism came into focus.<sup>42</sup> In these years, Liebman wrote three texts that dealt with the theoretical and methodological principles of art history: 'Iconology' in 1964,<sup>43</sup> 'The Vienna School' in 1969<sup>44</sup> and 'Social factors in art their role in research methodology' in 1978.<sup>45</sup>

### Critical iconology

It is evident that Liebman developed an interest in the theory and methodology of art history in connection with the initiative to compile the *History of European Art History*. The idea for this undertaking came from Boris Vipper from the Institute of Art History and Theory (*Институт Искусствознания*), where Liebman was employed from 1960 on. Vipper,<sup>46</sup> who had worked for a long period in Latvia between the wars, was Liebman's professor at Moscow University and later a colleague at the Pushkin Museum. The first volume of the *History* was a history of art historiography from antiquity to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was published in 1963; and the parts on art historiography in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1969.

An already mentioned collection from 1964, *Contemporary art history in the abroad*, constituted a close-up study of the positions of 20<sup>th</sup> century art history that had not been covered by the history collection series. In the article entitled 'Iconology' published in this collection, Liebman thoroughly described the levels and control mechanisms of Erwin Panofsky's method and also treated the interpretation of Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1495) at length.<sup>47</sup> At the outset, he accepts Panofsky's conclusion that the painting was an

<sup>42</sup> In 1976 the roundtable on 'Problems of contemporary art and methodology of art history' was organized by the editorial board of the journal 'Soviet Art History and Art Theory'. See: *Советское искусствознание, 1977/1, 345-358*.

<sup>43</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, 'Иконология', in Борис Р. Виппер, Тамара Н. Ливанова, *Современное искусствознание за рубежом. Очерки* [Boris R. Vipper, Tamara N. Livnova, *Contemporary art history in the abroad: Articles*]. Москва: Наука 1964, 68; M. J Liebmann, 'Ikonologie', in *Kunst und Literatur*, 1966, n 1228-1243.

<sup>44</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', in Борис Р. Виппер, Тамара И. Ливанова (eds), *История европейского искусствознания. Вторая половина XX века-начало XX века. В двух книгах. Книга первая*. [Boris R. Vipper, Tamara N. Livanova, *History of European art history. Second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*]. Москва: Наука 1969, 62-88.

<sup>45</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, 'Социальные факторы в искусстве и их роль в методологии исследования. На примере позднего средневековья и эпохи Возрождения' [Mikhail Y. Liebman, *Social factors in art their role in research methodology. The examples from Late Medieval and Renaissance period*], in *Советское Искусствознание, 1978, 2, 227-238*.

<sup>46</sup> Тамара Н. Ливанова. 'Борис Робертович Виппер и его научное наследие' [Tamara N. Livanova, *Boris Robertovitch Vipper and his scientific legacy*], in Борис Р. Виппер, *Статьи об искусстве* [Boris R. Vipper, *Articles on art*]. Москва: Искусство 1970, 5-58.

<sup>47</sup> See also Marina Dmitrieva, 'Iconology and the Art Historical Discourse in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s: Mikhail Liebman and Mikhail Sokolov'; Krista Kodres, 'Sneaking in: Iconology and the Discursive Re-construction of Soviet Estonian Art History'. Both articles will be published in:

'intellectual self-portrait of Dürer as an artist living during a complicated and conflicted period', adding that: 'Panofsky analysis, like a microcosm, reflects the e n t i r e e r a (my emphasis – K.K.) of the Northern Renaissance'<sup>48</sup>. Panofsky was also praised by Liebman because the iconological method represents a reaction 'against the subjective aestheticism of art history typical in the West'<sup>49</sup>.

In the thorough criticism that followed, Panofsky was however chastised for considering the theme/motif the main object of interest from an art history standpoint, i.e. he equates the content (*содержание*) of the work with its theme, and that relying without exception on a neo-Platonic approach to art, incites researchers to see artworks solely as metaphorical representations that have a concealed ulterior meaning. Liebman also stressed that neither Panofsky nor other iconologists were interested in 'matters of the aesthetic value of artworks'.<sup>50</sup> This, in turn, Liebman argued, led to a 'monstrous association of different artworks with each other, and the loss of a boundary between brilliant artists and those who were merely good, average and poor-quality'.<sup>51</sup> In connection with this assertion, Liebman cited, alongside Panofsky's interpretation of Titian's 'Sacred and Profane Love' in *Studies in Iconology*, his own interpretation in which he emphasised the work's 'romantic freshness, its redolence of real life and *joie de vivre*'.<sup>52</sup> Another one of Liebman's conclusions was that 'poor-quality iconologists' often commit 'iconological violence' against art.<sup>53</sup>

In sum, Liebman argues that the use of iconological method can hardly encompass the essence of the entire era. He particularly emphasised the 'total lack of social analysis' when applying the iconological method, although 'Panofsky promises it'.<sup>54</sup> In fact, in the Dürer interpretation, the social environment, the Reformation and the struggle of the peasantry had not been paid attention at all.<sup>55</sup> As a good practice of interpretation Liebman highlights the approaches to the Renaissance taken by Arnold Hauser's *Social History of Art* and the Americans Herbert Weisinger<sup>56</sup> and Berthold Lui Ullman<sup>57,58</sup>.

At the end of his article Liebman generalises iconology as a rule-governed reflection of the development of art history discipline, which is related to the 'tragic dilemma of Western culture: 'Formal analysis is too primitive for iconologists, the Dvořákian art history as history of the spirit lacks a scientific foundation, iconography is not deep enough. The shamanism of theoreticians of psychoanalysis, surrealism and abstractionism cannot even be

Wojciech Balus, Magdalena Kuninska, *Art Historiography and Iconologies Between West and East*. (Forthcoming Routledge 2023).

<sup>48</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 68.

<sup>49</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 72.

<sup>50</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 73.

<sup>51</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 73.

<sup>52</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 69.

<sup>53</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 73.

<sup>54</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 73.

<sup>55</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 73.

<sup>56</sup> Liebman highlights Herbert Weisinger's articles 'Attack on the Renaissance in Theology' (1955) and 'Renaissance Theories of the Revival of Fine Arts' (1943).

<sup>57</sup> By Berthold Lui Ullman he highlights the article 'Renaissance, the Word and the Underlying Concept' (1955).

<sup>58</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 75.

considered. Fearing social analysis, giving up a materialist approach to objective research, they increasingly often wind up in the world of subjective speculations. [...] Because of all this, iconology cannot be considered a universal method. [...] With a few minor exceptions, the iconological method is not applicable to genre painting, paysage, still-lives and portraits...'.<sup>59</sup>

### On the legacy of the Vienna School

The art historians in the focus of Liebman's article that studied the historiographic legacy of the Vienna school were Alois Riegl, Max Dvořák and Hans Tietze. Written five years later than 'Iconology', here Liebman's analysis is much balanced, manifesting a thoughtful equilibrium between critique of its protagonists' views and historicizing their art history production ('the Vienna school is a characteristic phenomenon of its time'<sup>60</sup>). Liebman has a great respect for (late) Dvořák, who drew his ideas from Hegel and Dilthey in particular.<sup>61</sup> In Liebman's opinion, Dvořák rightly condemned the tendency of art historians to interpret artworks from the position of their own era, demanding that the focus of interpretation be placed on the *intellectual content* of the time in question (the italics are Liebman's – K.K.). He thus accepted Dvořák's fundamental position that emphasised the power of theoretical constructs to create interpretation/meaning. Liebman appears to have also taken a positive attitude to the idea that 'art is nothing permanent, it develops within a style [...], but the *mentality* changes and thereafter influences form and this is a basis for the evolutioning of art'.<sup>62</sup> Liebman admires Dvořák's erudition (much as he did Panofsky's) and his ability to link philosophical and religious views of the era, which together become interwoven into the spirit of the times. He cited the posthumous collection *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte* (1924), where Dvořák unequivocally took the position that 'always and everywhere, intellectual needs are primary – both in art and in the intellectual development of the whole human race'.<sup>63</sup> It is precisely in art that Dvořák sees the spirit of the times manifested more completely and clearly, and Liebman notes that it is namely because of this that he was most interested in 'art eras with an idealistic worldview and a heightened intellectual spirit: early Christianity, the Gothic and Mannerism'.<sup>64</sup> The main thing was that Dvořák adopted a 'dialectical position',<sup>65</sup> by which Liebman meant that he brought out the dialectical connection between the intellectual spirit and art, and the ditching of long-dominant one-dimensional formalist analysis.

From analysis of the great accomplishments of the Vienna school, Liebman, at the end of his article, included a critical summary, in which he sees that the idea that *Kunstwollen* and/or the *Zeitgeist* is the only catalyst for the evolution of art is the most

<sup>59</sup> Либман, 'Иконология', 75-76. See also Kodres, 'Stil und Bedeutung'.

<sup>60</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 88.

<sup>61</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 76.

<sup>62</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 77.

<sup>63</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 79; Max Dvořák's, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*. München: Piper Verlag, 152.

<sup>64</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 80.

<sup>65</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 88.

worthy of censure. Particularly in the case of Hans Tietze,<sup>66</sup> who stressed that the economy and politics were not related to art, Liebman asks ironically whether 'the vision of the development of art he (Tietze – K. K.) proposed has any room for real life at all, for the living surroundings of the artist and his work?'<sup>67</sup>

### Liebman's social art history

So, Mikhail Liebman, both in his iconology criticism and observation of the Vienna school of art history, clearly points to a shortcoming – the fact that the writers gave up engagement with the actual art environment, the problems of the 'social analysis' of art.

Liebman himself tried to fuse analysis of artist, art and social environment in his doctoral dissertation defended in 1970, *Albrecht Dürer and his time*,<sup>68</sup> a summary of which was also published in 1971 in the GDR, in a Dürer collection.<sup>69</sup> In an article published in the Lucas Cranach anniversary collection, 'The Artist's Signature in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century as an object of Sociological Research',<sup>70</sup> Liebman articulated his Marxist position in specific terms: he considered Lucas Cranach the Elder's workshop to be 'hypothetically the first early capitalist art factory of the Renaissance era'.<sup>71</sup>

In a theoretical article published in 1978, 'Social Factors in Art and their Role in the Researcher's Methodology (Based on the Example of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance)' Liebman went on to more sweeping generalisations. The main goal of the article was to critique the 'fantastic and dubious stereotypes' of early art historiography, 'which have developed over centuries and are still characteristic for the general public and specialists'.<sup>72</sup> These 'stereotypes' are related to clichés of the artist *cum* genius and the method of creating art as purely an individual activity. In both cases, art historians transpose 'the cultural views of their own time' to a historical period, thus creating a fallacious image of it. Liebman emphasised that he did not wish to repeat the misstep of 1920s Soviet 'vulgar sociology', which 'considered art to be a generalised illustration of the prevailing socioeconomic conditions'.<sup>73</sup> His own critical method lay in using more recent empirical knowledge to describe the creative environment and process of the art of the late medieval era and Renaissance, which debunk stereotypes. In his article, he lists three factors whose treatment should be reconsidered. They tie in with the understanding of creative liberty, individuality of artwork and the artist's status.

Liebman writes that largely different to contemporary creative freedom, the artist was bound by the tradition of working from predefined pictorial models and based on the

<sup>66</sup> Liebman points here at Hans Tietze's 1913 book *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte. Ein Versuch*.

<sup>67</sup> Либман, 'Венская школа искусствознания', 85.

<sup>68</sup> Михаил Я. Либман, *Дюрер и его эпоха. Живопись и графика в Германии конца XV и первой половины XVI века* [Mikhail Y. Liebman, *Dürer and his time. Painting and prints in Germany at the end of the 15th and first half of the 16th century*]. Москва: Искусство 1972.

<sup>69</sup> Michail J. Liebmann, 'Die Persönlichkeit Dürers', in *Albrecht Dürer*, 47-54.

<sup>70</sup> Michail J. Liebmann, 'Die Künstlersignatur im 15.-16. Jahrhundert als Gegenstand soziologischer Untersuchungen', in *Lucas Cranach*, 129-134.

<sup>71</sup> Liebmann, 'Die Künstlersignatur im 15.-16. Jahrhundert'.

<sup>72</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 34.

<sup>73</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 36.

wishes of the customer, and thus was not free. Viewing the creation of art as individual, original work also requires critical reappraisal, as late medieval and Renaissance art generally sprang from collective work. Thus, the status of artists at that time cannot be seen through the 19<sup>th</sup> century trope of the romantic and suffering artist; it was generally more related to 'bourgeois-artisanal lifestyle'.<sup>74</sup>

The analysis of all three factors is supported on by empirical material, as noted. For example, Liebman writes how Lorenzo Ghiberti was not free in his art, considering that the chancellor of the Florentine republic Leonardo Bruni was instrumental in the programme for the third set of doors for the Florence Baptistery.<sup>75</sup> Liebman also cited numerous examples from practices at workshops, including in the case of the lone 'geniuses': even the Sistine Chapel ceiling was not the sole work of Michelangelo.<sup>76</sup> As to the problem of the status of the artist, Liebman cited examples of very different statuses that existed in parallel during the period in question; especially in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, humanist guild masters, architects and painters (Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci, Dürer) worked side by side with aristocrat-artists (Raphael) and so on. Again, Liebman emphasised here that all creators of art were, contrary to belief, not 'iconologists', artists steeped in the humanist tradition, whose every work depicts a learned allegory.<sup>77</sup>

At the end of the article, Liebman asks what kind of challenge his statements of the problem posed for art history methodology. And he provides an answer: art had to be 'approached historically, for no matter how brilliant an artist is, he remains a person of his era, who creates in a specific environment and thinks in the categories of that age'.<sup>78</sup>

### Some conclusions

As we have seen, as Liebman tackled the research assignments at his institute, he began to realise how the interpretation of the artistic heritage depended on the theoretical and methodological traditions of the discipline. Put another way, he perceived how the definition of the object of study – the response to what defines the nature of art – itself creates meaning for an artwork. He also articulated how the meaning making is related to the writer's own era. All this clashed with the long-dominant official view that an 'objective', universal approach was an attainable goal for every earnest scholar.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, Mikhail Liebman as a revisionist of Marxist-Leninist approach is characterised by his abandonment of class struggle as the engine behind the development of art and the doctrine of realism as the yardstick of the aesthetic quality of art. In their stead, he posited 'social factors', which for him meant linking environment – dependent on the art's geographical location, economic conditions, the specific customer and the artist's own social status – to substantive and formal characteristics. Although he himself did not express

<sup>74</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 40.

<sup>75</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 37.

<sup>76</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 39.

<sup>77</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 40.

<sup>78</sup> Либман, 'Социальные факторы', 40.

<sup>79</sup> See e.g. Richard Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism. Rethinking the Intellectual Sources of Nazism and Stalinism 1945 to the Present*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, MacMillan 2012, 179-198.

it that way, 'cultural factors' were just as important for Liebman: the spirit of the era, the culture/art tradition, understanding of art theory. Liebman's believed that the 'basis of interpretation of late medieval and even Renaissance art cannot be (formal – K.K.) innovation, because in fact it could have been the customer, religious writer, theologian or mystical visionary that determined choice of formal style'.<sup>80</sup> Style, period and aesthetic quality still remained specific key concepts in art history for Liebman but he forwent art history aimed at progress of art forms and instead saw the 'unevenness and unequal intensity' of the artistic process.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, it is noteworthy that in none of the articles I have looked at does Liebman even once refer to the classic thinkers in Marxist-Leninist theory to somehow legitimise his arguments in anyone's (read: censor's) eyes. At the same time, he cast himself in opposition – sincerely, I feel – with 'bourgeois art historians', whose writings observe art one-dimensionally and insufficiently.<sup>82</sup>

In his views on art as a phenomenon intertwined with society and culture, Mikhail Liebman was not alone in the Soviet Union either among art historians<sup>83</sup> or as a humanitarian scholar. The Khrushchev Thaw marked the beginning of a revision of Marxist-Leninist/Stalinist discourse in other humanities disciplines, including history<sup>84</sup> and philosophical aesthetics.<sup>85</sup> Sociology also came out of hiding and enjoyed a 'Renaissance' after having been in disfavour during the Stalin era as 'vulgar sociology'.<sup>86</sup> Art history was very much a part of this process. According to the 'Short Bibliography of Art Sociology' published in the collection *Questions in the Sociology of Art* (1979), the new sociological view of art history was associated, among other works, with Howard Becker and Alwin Boskoff's monograph *Modern Sociological Theory: In Continuity and Change* (1957), translated into Russian in 1961. The bibliography also included philosophy, general sociology, social psychology and aesthetics related writings, given that 'art sociology is today still in its formative period and sociological problems and ideas also come up and are discussed in the interdisciplinary environment'.<sup>87</sup> I. Levshina writes in another article in the collection,

<sup>80</sup> Либман, Социальные факторы, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Либман, Социальные факторы, 40.

<sup>82</sup> See the article on 'Western Art Around 1400' in Чегодаева, *Современное искусствознание Запада*, 55-65.

<sup>83</sup>See Natalja Zlydneva, 'Rereading the 1920s. The Alternative Paths of Soviet Art History During the 1950s and 1960s', in Kodres, Jõekalda, Marek, *A Socialist Realist Art History*, 130-142; Kodres, 'Toward a New Concept of Progressive Art'.

<sup>84</sup> See Mikhail Krom, 'From the Center to the Margin: The Fate of Marxism in Contemporary Russian Historiography', in Q. Edward Wang, Georg G. Iggers, *Marxist Historiographies. A Global Perspective*. London and New York: Routledge 2016, 59-75.

<sup>85</sup> Леонид Столович, 'Начало дискуссии об эстетическом' [The beginning of discussion on aesthetics], in Леонид Столович, *Философия. Эстетика. Смех* [Leonid Stolovich, Philosophy. Aesthetics. Laughter]. Санкт-Петербург, Тарту 1999, 109-138; Krista Kodres, 'Soviet Thaw-Marxism. Revision of Stalin-era Discourse on Aesthetics and Art History' (Forthcoming, Routledge).

<sup>86</sup> See: Борис Фирсов, *История советской социологии: 1950–1980-е годы. Очерки: (учебное пособие)* [Boris Firsov, History of Soviet Sociology: the years 1950 up to 1980s. Articles (Study book)]. 2-е изд., испр. и доп. СПб: Издательство Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге, 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Н. Н. Корниенко (ed), *Вопросы социологии искусства. Теоретические и методологические проблемы*. [N. N. Kornienko, Questions in the sociology of art. Theoretical and methodological problems]. Москва: Наука 1979, 333.

'Concerning the Object of Art Sociology (The Reciprocal Effects of Sociology and Art History)' that for art history, the most important is the mindset drawn from sociology, which encourages a focus on functioning of phenomena and connections with the surrounding environment, and also the sociopsychological aspect, which is engaged in studying the principles of experiencing art and art taste.<sup>88</sup> This collection of articles was compiled by the Institute of Art History and Theory, where Liebman was employed. Back in 1973, a department of sociology of art had been established there.<sup>89</sup>

Secondly, as mentioned previously, the sociological direction was part of a wider process of redefining the art history discourse in Soviet Union. Already in 1971, one of the most prominent Soviet art scholars, Viktor Lazarev, wrote in *The American Art Journal* in response to a questionnaire on the *State of Art History*:

If I had to name the principal shortcomings of contemporary history of art as a science I would say it is a one-sided approach to the subject, and that it would be useful to synthesize the variety of currently existing research methods – which include iconography, iconology, formal analysis, *connoisseurship*, sociology and source criticism.<sup>90</sup>

Methodology was a hot topic. In 1976, the almanac *Soviet Art History and Art Theory* convened a roundtable on the topic 'Problems of methodology in Soviet contemporary art and art history' and there, the authoritative professor of aesthetics, Moissei Kagan, defined the science of art (*наука об искусстве*) as an 'entire array of scientific disciplines', including 'aesthetics, psychology of art, sociology of art, semiotics of art etc.'<sup>91</sup> (the 'etc.' is Kagan's – K.K.).

Thus, did art historians in Soviet Union – or more precisely part of them – stealthily jump the fence of the Marxist-Leninist dogma of art as a pure reflection of class struggle, and not only in the sociological sense like Liebman, but also forming other discursive subcultures.<sup>92</sup> The process of theoretical renewal was slow, of course, sometimes clumsily and mainly cautiously reaching for new ideas – there were also setbacks from the regime<sup>93</sup> – but the process did take place. There is no doubt that some art historians had adopted a reflexiveness in terms of their own activities, having been able to enter in dialogue with both Russian avant-garde humanist scholars who had been repressed during Stalin and Western

<sup>88</sup> Ирина Лёвшина, 'О предмете социологии искусства (К проблеме взаимоотношений социологии и искусствоведения)' [Irina Levshina, About the subject of sociology of art (On problem of the relation of sociology and art history)], in Корниенко, *Вопросы социологии искусства*, 33-57.

<sup>89</sup> *Государственный институт искусствознания* [State Institute of Art History and Theory]. Москва 1994, 24.

<sup>90</sup> Victor Lazarev, 'The State of Art History', in *The American Art Journal*, 1971, vol. 3, 101. In Russian: 'О методологии современного искусствознания' [On methodology of the contemporary art history], in *Советское искусствознание*, 1977, 2, 311-314.

<sup>91</sup> 'Проблемы современного советского искусства и методология искусствознания. Круглый стол сборника 'Советское искусствознание'' [Problems of contemporary soviet art and the methodology of art history. Roundtable of journal 'Soviet Art History and Art Theory'], in *Советское искусствознание*, 1977, 1, 346.

<sup>92</sup> Zlydneva, 'Rereading the 1920s', 139.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. the 'Picasso-Case': Marina Dmitrieva, 'The Riddle of Modernism in the Art Historical Discourse of the Thaw', in Kodres, Jõekalda, Marek, *A Socialist Realist Art History*, 143-169.

and satellite-state colleagues: it is sufficient just to cast a glance at the international networks or look at the list of translations of Western authors and at references in research articles of art historians of that period.

There is no doubt that the two socialist-era art historians Mikhail Liebman and his friend Peter H. Feist exchanged ideas. It is sufficient to read Feist's work *Principles and Methods of Marxist Art History* (1966). In its final section, Feist devotes several pages to methodology, including all Western art history interpretation theories as 'our relationship to dialectics requires us to have a sensibility of the maximum complexity'.<sup>94</sup> His list of authors contributing to this goal includes Soviet art historians Boris Vipper, Mikhail Alpatov, Viktor Lazarev, Andrei Chegodayev, Yuri Kolpinski and – Mikhail Liebman. Feist closes by expressing the desire for contemporary art history to also 'use the fruits of other disciplines and collaboration with them'. A long list follows, quite similar to the one enumerated by Soviet colleagues above. Feist stresses: 'Today; the importance of *sociology* (his emphasis – K.K.) in particular is undoubtedly growing in more precisely defining the functioning of social bodies, the creation of value systems, catalysis of activity etc.'<sup>95</sup>

At this point, it is not possible not to mention the rise of critical social and disciplinary self-awareness in Western art history from the 1960s on<sup>96</sup> and – especially in regard to Liebman – the CIHA congresses which a number of other Soviet art historians took part.<sup>97</sup> As already mentioned, Liebman attended the congresses in Bonn (1964), Budapest (1969), Granada (1973), and Vienna (1983). The Bonn congress had the theme 'Style and Tradition in the Art of the West'; Budapest, 'General Evolution of Art History and Regional Developments'; and Granada, 'Spain Between Mediterranean and Atlantic'. At all of them, the interpretation of art's history was discussed. Quite a few art historians from communist countries were active in these discussions (e.g. Atanas Stoykov from Bulgaria, Mikhail Alpatov from the USSR), emphasizing the insufficient hermeneutic potential of the history of style and of iconological method, and the need to include a component of the social environment into interpretation of art.<sup>98</sup> In his overview of the Granada CIHA congress,

<sup>94</sup> Feist, *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft*, 29.

<sup>95</sup> Feist, *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft*, 32.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. writings of Arnold Hauser on sociology of art and Meyer Shapiro articles on patron-artist relations and style in 1960s and 1970s. T. J. Clark published his monographs *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848–1851* and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848–1851* in 1973 and in the latter one he dedicated a chapter to his approach – 'On the Social History of Art'. The collective term of socially oriented art history, New (also Critical) Art History, was later internationally adopted (see: Jonathan P. Harris, *The New Art History. A Critical Introduction*. Psychology Press 2001). In Germany the young scholars organised into *Ulmer Verein* (see: Otto K. Werckmeister, 'The Turn from Marx to Warburg in West German Art History, 1968-90', in Andrew Hemingway, *Marxism and the History of Art. From William Morris to the New Left*. London and Ann Arbor MI 2006, 213-220).

<sup>97</sup> Virve Sarapik, 'CIHA Congresses and Soviet Internationalism', in Kodres, Jõekalda, Marek, *A Socialist Realist Art History*, 240-259.

<sup>98</sup> See Jennifer Cooke, 'CIHA as the Subject of Art Theory. The Methodological Discourse in the International Congresses of Art History from Post-War Years to the 2000s', in *RIHA Journal* 0199, 30 Sept 2018. <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/rihajournal/article/view/70278/69946#sdfootnote69sym>

Liebman wrote with regret that there were not that many methodology-related presentations on that occasion, but 'the sociology of art deserves more lasting attention'.<sup>99</sup>

Hence, the academic life and work of Mikhail Liebman also shows that the metaphor of impermeable Berlin Wall between the Eastern bloc and West does not always pass the reality test. However, the distinctions within the USSR that included fifteen national republics cannot be ignored – not everyone had the opportunities of disciplinary internationalisation as Liebman, Lazarev, Alpatov and some others from the central institutions of art history did. For example, my own compatriots, professors and scholars of the 'peripheral' Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic never got chance to participate at CIHA congresses.<sup>100</sup> Thus the borders were not porous for everyone, and this is best to keep in mind while addressing also other fields of humanities in the multicultural Soviet Union.

On the other hand, of course, the case of Liebman shows the principal cultural potential of the de-Stalinisation policy. The Thaw era saw the beginning of the internationalisation and depoliticization of the humanities, including art history, in Soviet Union, and the process continued in the late 1960s and further on. Revisionist art historiography of the 1960s and 1970s had very little in common with the previous packaging of art's history into a Socialist Realism and class-struggle framework.

Finally, at this very moment, in the context of Mr. Putin's politics of war and the accompanying attempt to once again re-write Russian (and world) history from his 'objective' imperialistic point of view, we might ask what kind of consequences this all will have for our Russian academic colleagues who are working in the field of art history. Does history repeat itself and has Stalinism returned in Russia?

**Krista Kodres** is professor at the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture of Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn, Estonia; she is the editor-in-chief of "History of Estonian Art" (7 volumes). Her fields of research include: history and theory of art historiography; history of art and architecture of the Baltic region in Early Modern period; history of architecture, design and heritage protection of the Soviet period. Her Publications on historiography are: Chapters in the book *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe. Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks* (eds. M. Rampley et al., Brill 2012) and *Universal – Global – International. Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe* (eds. M. Dmitrieva, B. Hock, A. Kempe, Böhlau 2022). Edited international books: *A Socialist Realist Art History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades* (co-editors K. Jõekalda, M. Marek, Böhlau 2019)

krista.kodres@artun.ee



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<sup>99</sup> Liebman mentions the presentations of Piotr Skubiszewski from Poland and of Italian scholars Roberto Salvini and Pier Luigi Cervellati. See Либман, 'XX международный конгресс истории искусства', 370-371.

<sup>100</sup> Krista Kodres, 'Teadmisjanu ja dialoogivajadus: Eesti NSV kunstiajaloolased kirjutavad Sten Karlingile' [Hunger for knowledge and the need for dialogue: Art historians of Estonian SSR writing to Sten Karling], in *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi/Studies on Art and Architecture*, 2021/1-2 (30), 39-64.