The Representation of American Visual Art in the USSR during the Cold War (1950s to the late 1960s)

by

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a Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ vii

Statutory Declaration (on Authorship of a Dissertation)................................................................. ix

List of Figures .................................................................................................................................... x

List of Attachments ........................................................................................................................... xiv

Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 1

PART I. THE SOVIET APPROACH: MAKING AMERICAN ART ANTI-AMERICAN......................... 11

Chapter 1. Introduction to the Totalitarian Art Discourse: Politics and Aesthetics in the Soviet Union ................................................................................................................................. 11

Arts under Administrative Control................................................................................................... 11

Arts Under Ideology .......................................................................................................................... 14

Soviet Art versus ............................................................................................................................... 17

Chapter 2. Criticizing the Unseen: Denouncing American Modernism ........................................ 21

The Aesthetic War and American Art............................................................................................... 23

Insane Artists ..................................................................................................................................... 34

Laughing at Modernism ................................................................................................................... 37

Chapter 3. Advocating Realism and the First Non-English History of American Visual Art ........ 46

Tracing the History of American Art ................................................................................................. 48

Between “Objective” and “Prejudiced” ............................................................................................ 55

Chapter 4. At Home Among Strangers: The Myth of Rockwell Kent ........................................... 57

1953–1957: Assembling the First Kent’s Show ............................................................................... 58
1957 Exhibition and/as Politics ...............................................................62
Ignored at Home, Welcomed Abroad ..................................................66
The Gift ..............................................................................................70
More Than a Great Artist .....................................................................73
The Myth of Rockwell Kent .................................................................77

Chapter 5. More American Art in the Soviet Union ..................................83
Exhibiting American Art from Soviet Collections: Protesting the 1959
American National Exhibition in Moscow .............................................83
“In the Name of Peace! In the Name of Friendship!”: Gifting Art to the USSR
..............................................................................................................85
“A Small Pebble Making Waves” ............................................................92
Anton Refregier: Another “Big Friend of the USSR” ...............................96

Conclusion Part I ..................................................................................105

PART II. THE AMERICAN APPROACH: EXHIBITING ANTI-SOViet ART ....110
Chapter 6. Politics and Exhibitions in the United States ...........................111
American Art Abroad: A Difficult Start .................................................111
Modernism and Communism .................................................................114
USIA and Visual Art in the Soviet Union ................................................118

Chapter 7. The American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959 ..............121
Assembling Art .....................................................................................124
Freedom, Diversity, and Peoples’ Art on Display ......................................127
Reception and Response .......................................................................136
What Was It? .......................................................................................146

Chapter 8. The Exhibition Graphic Arts: USA, 1963–1964 .......................150
The Exhibition Design ...........................................................................150
Arranging the Tour ...............................................................................159
Soviet Inspection................................................................. 163
Travelling Around the Soviet Union....................................... 165
Impact.................................................................................. 171
Conclusion Part II............................................................... 176

Afterword ........................................................................... 179
Figures ............................................................................... 186
Attachments ........................................................................ 220
Bibliography ........................................................................ 222
Abstract

During the first two decades of the Cold War, Soviet institutions hosted dozens of exhibitions of American art. These exhibitions introduced works of a variety of styles, from figurative to abstract, to millions of Soviet citizens. Based on unique original materials from American and Russian archives, my thesis examines this extensive showcasing of American art.

In my thesis, I argue that American visual art in the Soviet Union was subject to two distinct approaches to representation. The first approach was epitomized by Soviet-organized exhibitions of American leftist figurative artists such as Rockwell Kent. When promoting Kent, hardly a leading artist in the postwar United States, Soviet propaganda maintained that Kent’s art was underappreciated in America because of the artist’s sympathies for socialism and adherence to figurativeness. Soviet propaganda further argued that American bourgeois society preferred abstract art and was unable to appreciate genuine realist art. Ultimately, by representing Kent as a marginalized artist suffering under capitalism, the Soviet Union accused America's capitalist society of suppressing Kent—a genuine and genius artist from the Soviet point of view. As a result, Soviet discussions of Kent became intertwined with criticism of the United States and served as anti-American propaganda. The intersection of the Soviet discourse on American art with Soviet anti-Americanism was not limited to the case of Kent but was also relevant to other figurative and abstract artists, among them Anton Refregier, Emmy Lou Packard, Jackson Pollock and many others, whom I examine in my thesis.

The second approach was that of American institutions such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) which organized exhibitions showcasing contemporary American art, from figurative painting such as those by William
Glackens to abstract expressionist painting such as by Willem de Kooning. The organizers assumed that the diversity of styles in America would contrast with Socialist Realism—the only officially accepted artistic method in Soviet art. American art would reveal to the Soviet people that American artists had significantly greater freedom of expression than their Soviet counterparts. The curators expected these contrasting levels of freedom of expression to be particularly obvious for a visitor who compared experimental American abstract expressionism with relatively conservative Socialist Realism. Thus, American art, highlighting the issue of freedom of expression within capitalism, became subversive and anti-Soviet: it implicitly criticized the totalitarian Soviet Union where official artists lacked freedom and were obliged to work within a single artistic framework: Socialist Realism.

Analyzing the organization and promotion of exhibitions as well as discussions of American art in academia and in the press, this thesis will demonstrate that both Soviet and American approaches to the representation of American visual art in the USSR involved intentionally complex campaigns. Ultimately, this thesis will reveal how the two superpowers established two signature canons for one concept: American art.
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During the majority of my research I was based at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Jacobs University Bremen. I want to express my gratitude to Jacobs University and its academic community for welcoming me. I also wish to thank the members of the international and inter-institutional Dissertation Committee—Corinna Unger from the European University Institute, and Roman Grigoryev from the State Hermitage—for their valuable feedback.

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The Terra Foundation for American Art funded my fellowship at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and this fellowship turned out to be crucial in making feasible a project which relied on a large body of American state and private archival resources. With regard to the latter, I also wish to thank Jack Masey and Beverly Payeff-Masey who have been extremely welcoming and supportive during my visits to the Masey Archives. My research also took advantage of Russian
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Finally, I want to thank many wonderful people who helped me and my project, supported me and inspired me at different stages of my postgraduate research. I want to thank Leonid Foukson and Yurii Mikhailov who encouraged me, by their personal example, to pursue an academic career, when I graduated from Kemerovo State University, Russia. Yuri Leving has been extremely helpful and supportive both academically and personally during my periods of research in Germany and America, and I value him highly as a friend and as a colleague. Tony Swift, Ruth Jahertz, Mikhail Meilakh, Vladimir Paperny, Andrey Shabanov, Alexei Fominykh, Amelia Goerlitz, Joseph Madura, Diana Greenwald, Joann Moser have all played important roles at different times. Last but not least, I want to thank my family and friends.
Statutory Declaration (on Authorship of a Dissertation)

I, Kirill Chunikhin, hereby declare that I have written this PhD thesis independently, unless where clearly stated otherwise. I have used only the sources, the data and the support that I have clearly mentioned. This PhD thesis has not been submitted for conferral of degree elsewhere.

I confirm that no rights of third parties will be infringed by the publication of this thesis.

Berlin, July 4, 2016

Signature ___________________________________________________________
List of Figures

FIGURE 1. NAUM LISOGORSKII, UNTITLED DRAWING. Krokodil, 1962 .................. 186

FIGURE 2. BORIS LEO, UNTITLED DRAWING. Krokodil, 1963 .......................... 186

FIGURE 3. KUKRYNIKSY, KAK V NATURE, DRAWING. Krokodil, 1956 .............. 187

FIGURE 4. IVAN SEMENOВ, SHEDEVRI EGO TSENITELI, DRAWING. Krokodil, 1962 .... 187

FIGURE 5. M. SOKOLOВ, NASMOTRELIS', DRAWING. Krokodil, 1963 ..................... 188

FIGURE 6. VLADIMIR DOBROВOL'SKII, KOPIST ABSTRAKTNOI SHKOLY, DRAWING. Krokodil, 1963 .......................................................................................... 188

FIGURE 7. EВGENII MIGUNOV, SAM SEBIA VYSEK, DRAWING. Krokodil, 1963 ........ 189

FIGURE 8. EВGENII SHUKAEV, CHISTOE ISKUSSTVO, DRAWING. Krokodil, 1960 ...... 189

FIGURE 9. QUIZ ON ABSTRACT PAINTINGS IN Krokodil, 1963 .......................... 190

FIGURE 10. EВGENII SHUKAEV, UNTITLED DRAWING. Krokodil, 1963 .............. 190

FIGURE 11. NAUM LISOGORSKII, UNTITLED DRAWING. Krokodil, 1959 ................ 191

FIGURE 12. KUKRYNIKSY. ABSTRAKTIVIST. MOLODYE SVISTUNY MODAM ZAPADNYM VERNY, wall-poster. 1965 .................................................................................. 191

FIGURE 13. FRANZ KLEIN. New York, N. Y., Oil on canvas. 1953, Albright-Knox Art Gallery .......................................................... 192

FIGURE 14. A COUPLE DANCING THE TWIST .................................................. 192

FIGURE 15. FYODOR RESHETNIKOV, TAINY ABSTRAKTSIONIZMA, OIL ON CANVAS. 1960, LOCATION UNKNOWN .................................................... 193

FIGURE 16. JOHN TRUMBULL, THE DEATH OF GENERAL WARREN AT THE BATTLE OF BUNKER'S HILL, JUNE 17, 1775, OIL ON CANVAS. 1834, WADSWORTH ATHENAEUM, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT ........................................................................ 193

FIGURE 17. THOMAS EAKINS, THE GROSS CLINIC, OIL ON CANVAS. 1875, THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ARTS AND THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS ........................................................................ 193

FIGURE 18. MARY CASSATT, MOTHER AND CHILD, PASTEL. 1893, THE PUSHKIN MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS .................................................................................. 194

FIGURE 19. SOVIET JURY DISCUSSING KENT'S ART DURING A VOKS SESSION, 1960... 195

FIGURE 20. ROCKWELL KENT, THE GREENLANDERS, OIL ON CANVAS. PRIVATE COLLECTION .................................................................................. 195
FIGURE 21. The Greenlanders on the catalog cover of Kent’s 1958 exhibition at the State Hermitage ................................................................. 196

FIGURE 22. Rockwell Kent, Workers of the World, Unite!, wood engraving. 1937, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco ........................................ 196

FIGURE 23. A Soviet postcard reproducing Rockwell Kent’s I v shlemakh soldat golubi mira sov’yut svoi gnezda mira [The doves of peace will make nests in soldiers’ helmets] .............................................. 196

FIGURE 24. Kent’s drawing My God! Can that be the American Eagle? Sovetskaia Kul’tura from May 21, 1960 .................................................. 197

FIGURE 25. Rockwell Kent receiving the Lenin Peace Prize in Moscow, June 1967 ...................................................................................... 198

FIGURE 26. Evgeny Vuchetich making a bust of Rockwell Kent .......... 198

FIGURE 27. Emmy Lou Packard, Peace is a Human Right, print. 1953 .......... 199

FIGURE 28. The opening ceremony of Refregier’s exhibition at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts ................................................................. 199

FIGURE 29. Anton Refregier, Beating the Chinese, mural History of San Francisco at Rincon Center, San Francisco, California, accomplished in 1948 ................................................................................... 200

FIGURE 30. Anton Refregier, World War Two, mural History of San Francisco at Rincon Center, San Francisco, California, accomplished in 1948 .... 200

FIGURE 31. Anton Refregier, Two Friends, acrylic on cardboard, 1966, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts .................................................................. 201

FIGURE 32. Anton Refregier, Back to School, acrylic on cardboard. 1966...201


FIGURE 34. An anti-military caricature by Refregier. Sovetskaia Kul’tura, December 20, 1969 ........................................................................ 202

FIGURE 35. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Circus Girl Resting, oil on canvas. 1925, Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn University, Alabama ....203

FIGURE 36. The Geodesic Dome at the ANEM, 1959 .................................. 203

FIGURE 37. Floor plan of the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow 204

FIGURE 38. William Glackens, Soda Fountain, oil on canvas. 1938, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts ......................................................... 204
FIGURE 39. JACKSON POLLOCK, Cathedral, oil on canvas. 1947, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts
........................................................................................................205

FIGURE 40. SECOND FLOOR PLAN FOR GLASS EXHIBITION HALL AS OF MAY 18, 1959
........................................................................................................205

FIGURE 41. A SOVIET VISITOR IN FRONT OF GASTON LACHAISE’S Standing Woman
(1932) AT THE 1959 ANEM .................................................................206

FIGURE 42. ROBERT FALK, Obnazhennaya v kresle, oil on canvas. 1922, The State
Tretyakov Gallery ..............................................................................206

FIGURE 43. JACQUES LIPCHITZ, Mother and Child (1941–1945) AT THE 1959 ANEM
........................................................................................................207

FIGURE 44. ILLUSTRATION “V KOMNATE SMEKHA” FOR M. SERGEEVA’S “‘UGOLOK
AMERIKI’ V SERDTSE MOSKVY,” Sovetskai kul’tura, July 30, 1959 ........207

FIGURE 45. MORRIS GRAVES, Flight of Plover, oil on composition board. 1955,
Whitney Museum of American Art ..................................................208

FIGURE 46. VISITORS AT THE ART SECTION OF THE 1959 ANEM ...........208

FIGURE 47. POSITIVE COMMENTS GLUED ONTO THE LAST PAGE OF Comment Book One
........................................................................................................209

FIGURE 48. RICHARD BLUME, The Eternal City, oil on composition board. 1937,
The Museum of Modern Art ................................................................210

FIGURE 49. BLACK-AND-WHITE REPRODUCTION OF ANDREW WYETH’S CHILDREN’S
Doctor, tempera on panel. 1949, Collection of Brandywine River
Museum ...............................................................................................210

FIGURE 50. THOMAS GEISMAR. Poster for the exhibition Graphic Arts USA ....211

FIGURE 51. DEAN MEEKER, Icarus. Date unknown ...................................212

FIGURE 52. FRITZ EICHENBERG, The Night Watch. 1961 ..........................212

FIGURE 53. RICO LEBRUN, Crucifixion, Lithograph. 1961 ..........................213

FIGURE 54. BEN SHAHN, Shopping Day. 1957 ........................................213

FIGURE 55. ADJA YUNKERS, Composition N – 1957, woodcut on paper. 1957.....214

FIGURE 56. BOXES AT THE EXHIBITION Graphic Arts: USA ......................214

FIGURE 57. FABRICS AT THE EXHIBITION Graphic Arts: USA ....................215

FIGURE 58. INTERIOR DESIGN OF THE EXHIBITION Graphic Arts: USA ........215

FIGURE 59. INCOMING TELEGRAM (Department of State from Embassy),
December 12, 1963 ..............................................................................216

xii
FIGURE 60. NORMAN ROCKWELL PORTRAYING A SOVIET VISITOR OF THE EXHIBITION
GRAPHIC ARTS: USA .................................................................................................................. 217

FIGURE 61. SOVIET VISITORS AT THE PRINT SECTION OF THE EXHIBITION GRAPHIC ARTS:
USA ............................................................................................................................................. 217

FIGURE 62. CUES AT THE MOSCOW DISPLAY OF GRAPHIC ARTS USA ....................... 218

FIGURE 63. HILARY KNIGHT’S DRAWING OF THE KREMLIN IN KAY THOMPSON’S ELOISE
IN MOSCOW .................................................................................................................................. 219

FIGURE 64. HILARY KNIGHT’S DRAWING OF THE KREMLIN IN KAY THOMPSON’S ELOISE
IN MOSCOW, DETAIL .................................................................................................................. 219
List of Attachments

ATTACHMENT 1. LIST OF EXHIBITIONS OF AMERICAN VISUAL ART IN THE SOVIET UNION FROM THE LATE 1920s TO THE LATE 1960s .......................................................... 220

ATTACHMENT 2. BREAKDOWN OF SOVIET VISITORS’ REACTIONS TO THE ART SECTION OF THE 1959 AMERICAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION IN MOSCOW. SOURCE: THE FOUR ORIGINAL COMMENT BOOKS PLACED AT THE EXIT OF THE AMERICAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION IN MOSCOW ................................................................. 221
Introduction

During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the United States approached culture as a weapon in the ideological confrontation between the capitalist Western and socialist Eastern blocs. ¹ Unable to obtain supremacy through military confrontation and acknowledging the potential of cultural diplomacy in the ongoing battle for hearts and minds, the two superpowers exploited art, in a variety of forms, as soft power, to an unprecedented degree. Thus, despite the ideological opposition between the two camps and the existence of the Iron Curtain, which was meant to prevent cultural exchange, more American art than ever before was exhibited in the USSR during the Cold War. Prior to the Cold War, with no Iron Curtain separating

¹ An extensive literature on Soviet and American cultural policies during the Cold War has been published. In this footnote, I outline the major volumes, and many other publications are considered throughout the dissertation within relevant sections. In the early 1960s, Frederick C. Barghoorn was one of the first to examine the historic and contemporary Soviet cultural policy in Frederick C. Barghoorn, _The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). In the late 1990s, Walter L. Hixson published his book _Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961_ (Basingstoke: McMillan, 1997) which ultimately became a milestone study of American cultural policy during the Cold War. For a discussion of the CIA’s approach to culture, see Frances Stonor Saunders, _Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War_ (London: Granta Books, 1999). David Cau te’s _The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) is, probably, one of the most comprehensive explorations of both Soviet and American cultural policies during the Cold War. Yale Richmond, a Foreign Service Officer for thirty years, provides an insightful account of the American-Soviet cultural exchange in _Yale Richmond, Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain_ (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). For a study of cultural exchange during the Thaw, see also Amanda Aucoin, “Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to Cultural Exchange and American Information Activity during the Khrushchev Years” (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2001). Richard T. Arndt, a practitioner of cultural diplomacy for the USIA and the Department of State, uncovers crucial subtexts and details of American cultural policy during the Cold War in Richard T. Arndt, _The First Resort of the Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century_ (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005). The same be said about Eduard Ivanian, a Soviet Americanist and a figure of authority involved in American–Soviet cultural exchange, who published his valuable account of the history of American-Soviet cultural relations as Eduard Ivanian, _Kogda govoriat muzy. Istoriia rossiisko-amerikanskikh kulturnykh sviazey_ (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia, 2007). For the role of American international exhibitions, see Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, _Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War_ (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008); Andrew Wulf, _US International Exhibitions during the Cold War: Winning Hearts and Minds through Cultural Diplomacy_ (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015). Most of the outlined above monographs consider various kinds of art from dance to cinema, and when speaking about visual arts, choose to examine selected cases of art and the cultural Cold War such as the ANEM rather than provide a comprehensive account of visual art. For an inclusive account of exhibitions of US visual art and the Cold War up to the late 1960s, see Michael Krenn, _Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War_ (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
the USSR from the capitalist West, the Soviet Union hosted only a few individual exhibitions of American art. These had minor aesthetic significance, were poorly attended, and had a limited impact. However, by the third decade of the Cold War, despite the existence of an Iron Curtain and pervasive anti-Americanism, Soviet museums had hosted numerous exhibitions, introducing American art to millions of Soviet visitors.

State of Research

Of the exhibitions of American art shown in the USSR during the Cold War, the 1959 *American National Exhibition in Moscow* (ANEM) has been the most thoroughly examined. This show, organized by the United States Information Agency (USIA) within the framework of an official American-Soviet cultural agreement, has been widely acknowledged as a symbol of a significant change in relations between the two countries. The official goal of the exhibition was to increase friendship and understanding between the two countries. The ANEM aquatinted the Soviet people with America by introducing consumer goods, from cars to musical instruments, as well as forty-nine twentieth-century American paintings, from figurative works by William Glackens and Jack Levine to abstract expressionist works by Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.

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2 Attachment 1 outlines exhibitions of American art in the USSR.

3 I characterize the pre-Cold War exhibitions such as Louis Lozowick's in 1928, as “minor”, due to their relatively low impact and low publicity compared to American shows to take place in the 1950 to the 1960s. That it not to say, however, that there were few cultural contacts, other than exhibitions of fine art, before the Cold War. For a comprehensive outline, see Michael David-Fox, *Vitriny velikogo eksperimenta. Kul'turnia diplomatiia Sovetskogo Soiuza i ego zapadnye gosti, 1921–1941 gody* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2015).

4 For an analysis of art section of the ANEM, see Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters*, 155–178.

5 For more on the agreement and on the cultural significance of the exhibition, see chapter seven of this thesis.
However, alongside the agenda of peace and friendship which framed the exhibition, the ANEM had a “subversive” subtext. The organizers assumed that contemporary American art would showcase “freedom of choice and expression in America. . . . [T]he most important thing . . . which the Soviet citizen is denied.” The diversity of contemporary artistic styles in the United States would stand in stark contrast to Socialist Realism as the only officially approved contemporary artistic method in the Soviet Union. Moreover, experimental American modernism would contrast with canonic and conservative Socialist Realism, so that the Soviet people would have to acknowledge radical differences in the freedom of expression given to artists within democratic and totalitarian regimes. As scholars such as Eva Cockroft and Michael Krenn, among others, have demonstrated, the subversive anti-Soviet implications of American visual art were characteristic of international American cultural policy during the Cold War.

Other exhibitions of American visual art in the USSR during the Cold War have been explored in significantly less detail, with research on them only now emerging. Julia Bailey, in her recent doctoral thesis “The Spectre of Communist Art: American Modernism and the Challenge of Socialist Realism, 1923–1960,” examines the history of American attitudes towards leftist art. Bailey has provided a valuable account of some of the exhibitions of American art which took place in the Soviet

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INTRODUCTION

Union in the late 1950s. However, the exhibitions of American art which took place after 1960 remain poorly examined. Moreover, no scholar has focused solely on the history of American visual art in the Soviet Union—America’s main ideological enemy during the Cold War. Despite over a dozen of exhibitions introducing American art to the Soviet people from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, the complex representation of American art has not received any comprehensive analysis. My research attempts to propose a new narrative for the history of the representation of American art in the USSR during the Cold War.

Thesis

My research demonstrates that American art was exhibited to such a great extent during the 1950s and 1960s because not only the United States but also the Soviet Union exploited American visual art as a weapon of ideological warfare. In fact, the Soviets started organizing exhibitions of American art in the USSR before the 1959 ANEM. The 1957–1958 touring exhibition of realist artist Rockwell Kent (1882–1971) was organized exclusively by the Soviet side, which managed all stages of the show, from approaching the artist, selecting the works, and organizing their transport to covering the expenses and advertising the exhibition. Kent’s touring exhibition was announced as a “step toward friendship between the American and Soviet people,” and it took place in the context of the cultural Thaw initiated by Khrushchev in 1956. This exhibition of an American artist demonstrated the contrast between a more liberal cultural policy under Khrushchev and the previous Soviet cultural self-isolationism in the early postwar era. Through this exhibition of an American artist, the USSR attempted to establish its international reputation as a country open to the West.
Kent’s 1957–1958 touring exhibition would be followed by displays of his art in the USSR in the late 1950s and 1960s, but the Soviet promotion of Kent would take the form of an intentionally anti-American campaign mainly due to Kent’s biography. Since his early years, Kent was a committed socialist and an admirer of the Soviet Union. In 1953, Kent’s sympathy for socialism and the Soviet Union led to an investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee under the infamous senator Joseph McCarthy. Accused of being “un-American” and of “being a communist,” Kent’s reputation in the States was compromised: one of the reasons he became an outsider in the art world of the 1950s and 1960s. Soviet propaganda took advantage of Kent’s misfortunes in the United States. In the Soviet Union, Kent, a victim of American politics, was given an aesthetic refuge; his story was advertised as evidence of the “hostility of the capitalist bourgeois society towards genuine realist artists,” and the Soviet interpretation of Kent's case became intertwined with anti-American propaganda. Thus, Soviet enthusiasm for Kent demonstrates that the Americans were not the only side willing and able to exploit the political and ideological potential of American visual art during the Cold War. Indeed, most studies, when raising the issue of the exhibiting of American art in the USSR, focus on the ANEM and on the American approach to the representation of American art. As a result, the Soviet approach to representation which, besides Kent, considered a number of other American figurative and abstract artists such as Anton Refregier, Jackson Pollock, and many others, has not been subject to an inclusive analysis until that in my thesis.

9 In my dissertation, I distinguish the terms “un-American” and “anti-American.” The US anti-communist politicians such as Joseph McCarthy coined the term “un-American” to denounce, among others, American artists such as Kent for their allegedly “subversive” activities. Therefore, I employ the term “un-American” to characterize the attitude of American politicians to particular American artists. The term “anti-American” refers to anti-Americanism, i.e., to a discourse aimed at denouncing the United States. Since, as I will show in my thesis, the Soviet Union exploited American art to criticize the United States, I characterize the Soviet approach as anti-American.
The case of the 1959 ANEM, when the United States advanced subversive, anti-Soviet art, and the case of Soviet-organized shows, such as exhibitions of Kent's work, which promoted an anti-American agenda, allow me to argue that:

American visual art in the Cold War Soviet Union was subject to two distinct approaches to representation. Both the United States and the Soviet Union exploited American painting, graphics, and sculpture in order to achieve immediate political goals, advance ideological values, and criticize the other's political system. As a result, interpretations of American visual art varied from anti-American to anti-Soviet.

My thesis shows that this argument about the two approaches holds true when discussing the ANEM and Kent’s exhibitions, as well as various other cases when the Soviet Union made American art anti-American, and when the United States exploited the subversive, anti-Soviet potential of American art.

I examine Soviet and American approaches to American visual art as intentional, complex campaigns which included a series of actions ranging from organizing, advertising, and promoting exhibitions to discussing American art in academia, the press and other media. I employ the term “representation” after Stuart Hall,10 and I treat exhibiting works of art in a museum or discussing them in a newspaper or an academic monograph as genuinely representational practices—actions meant to produce a particular meaning through language. Focusing on various means of producing knowledge on American art during the Cold War, from press and caricatures to exhibitions reviews, this thesis is the first to undertake such an inclusive analysis. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates how the two Cold War parties constructed knowledge on American art, and how two different canons were established through discussions in academia and newspapers and through exhibitions.

Introduction

Structure

My two-part argument about the Soviet and American approaches to the representation of American art during the Cold War determines the structure of this thesis. Part one focuses on the Soviet approach, and part two examines the American approach.

The opening chapter of part one introduces the crucial factors in determining the Soviet approach to American art: the totalitarian nature of relations between politics and aesthetics in the USSR; the framework of Marxist-Leninists aesthetics which determined Soviet art history; the opposition to the West which was essential to the Soviet art discourse. Chapter two discusses the negative Soviet criticism of American modernist art; it demonstrates how the Soviet ideological conception of the aesthetic war, evoked at the outset of the Cold War, was at the foreground of discussions of American art. The chapter also comprehensively analyzes the Soviet arsenal of anti-modernist rhetoric in its verbal (academic texts and the press) and visual (caricatures) manifestations. Chapter three introduces the comprehensive apologetics of American realist art Iskusstvo SSHA: Ot Voiny za nezavisimost’ do nashikh dnei (Art of the USA: From the American War of Independence to Our Days), 1960, by the prominent Soviet art historian and popularizer of American art, Andrei Chegodaev.11 The chapter examines Chegodaev’s unique and comprehensive attempt to historicize American realist art and further explores his contributions to the discourse on American art as well as some flaws in his argument. Chapter four discusses the promotion of Rockwell Kent in the Soviet Union, introducing unknown material about Kent’s engagement from the Archives of American Art as well as from other sources. Analyzing the political and aesthetic reasons for his incredible Soviet

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success, the chapter considers his unique symbolic position in Soviet culture. Chapter five sheds new light onto a series of solo and group exhibitions of American artists organized by the Soviet Union from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, some of them poorly examined and some absent from scholarly discourse. The chapter further explores the organization of these exhibitions and ultimately demonstrates the connotations with which these exhibitions were received in the Soviet art discourse. The conclusions of part one highlight the specifics of the Soviet approach to the representation of American art. The section shows the unique organizational specifics of the Soviet approach and its essential interrelation with the anti-American propaganda that foregrounded and guided the representation, making American art in the USSR “anti-American.”

Part two considers the US strategy of showcasing American visual art in the Soviet Union. Chapter six surveys the key steps and historical conditions which led to the establishment of the American overseas exhibition programs and, particularly, the two Soviet exhibitions undertaken within the timeframe of my research. Chapter seven examines the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. The chapter sheds some new light onto the exhibition by introducing unknown details about the art section and its maintenance. The chapter also provides some insights into the reception of the exhibited art by examining the original comment books, which have not been considered previously. Chapter eight builds on my access to the Masey archives and interviews with Jack Masey, the “USIA’s trade-fair dynamo ... who used US participation in commercial fairs around the globe to display American art, design, and architecture;” and Beverly Payeoff-Masey, the Masey archives keeper. The chapter introduces the exhibition Graphic Arts: USA, 1963–1964, which design

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12 Arndt, The First Resort of the Kings, 366.
and conception has received little attention. Comparing Graphic Arts with the 1959 ANEM, this chapter also shows the evolution of the American representation of American art in the USSR. The conclusions of part two discuss the specifically “subversive” nature of the American approach to the representation of art, designed to be a vehicle for anti-Soviet ideas, and the role of contemporary art in the American representation of American art. The afterword summarizes the research, discussing the fate of the two strategies in the 1970s and outlining possible directions for further research.

Chronological Framework

My research focuses on the period from the early 1950s to the late 1960s. The Soviet discourse on American art began to take shape in the early 1950s. However, it stemmed from previous discussions of Western art. Thus, Soviet criticism of American art needs to be seen in a broader historical context; and to interpret the Soviet debates on American art, I trace some of their antecedents. Likewise, although the first postwar exhibitions of American art in the USSR took place in 1957, in order to interpret these exhibitions and the ones that followed, one should consider the historical context, both pre- and post-World War Two.

The final show I examine is from 1967. I end my analysis of exhibitions in the late 1960s because after 1967 there was a hiatus in exhibitions of American art in the USSR: between 1967 and 1972 there would be no significant exhibition of American art in the USSR, and those which took place in the 1970s would occur within a different Cold War context. My analysis of the Soviet discussions of American art ends in 1969 when the milestone collection of articles Modernism: Analysis and Criticism of the Main Tendencies (Modernizm: Analiz i kritika osnovnykh...
was issued. This source, valuable for understanding the logic of the Soviet reception of American art, was assembled from articles, some of which were written during previous decades.

Archival Sources

My outline of exhibitions of American art in the Soviet Union is the product of extensive research in multiple archival collections. These include American archives such as the National Archives and Records Administration, the Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution Archives, and the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. The private archive of Jack Masey, a leading long-term exhibition designer for USIA, and the interviews with Beverly Payeff-Masey and Jack Masey, were a great asset to my research. Whilst the basic empirical materials mainly come from American sources, some findings are derived from Russian archives such as the State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, or GARF), and the Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kinofotodokumentov, or RGAKFD).

\[^{13}\text{Modernizm. Analiz i kritika osnovnykh napravlenii, ed. Viktor Vanslov et al. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1969).}\]
PART I. THE SOVIET APPROACH: MAKING AMERICAN ART ANTI-AMERICAN

Chapter 1. Introduction to the Totalitarian Art Discourse: Politics and Aesthetics in the Soviet Union

To interpret Soviet texts on American art and Soviet exhibitions of American art, one should begin by examining the language used to conceptualize American art; that is to say that initially, one needs to understand the rules of the game in which American art was engaged. Therefore, before analyzing the representation and reception of American visual art in the USSR, I will review the specifics of the Soviet art discourse, i.e. “the group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment.”

Arts under Administrative Control

The most crucial feature of the official Soviet art discourse was its totalitarian nature—total subordination to the Soviet government. Attempting to create a complex, extensive, and self-sufficient picture of the world, totalitarian ideology sought to use propaganda to influence all spheres of life, and the arts were not an exception.

Attempts to assert state control over the arts began in revolutionary Russia,

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2 For an iconic account of totalitarian art, see Igor Golomstock, Totalitarnoe Iskusstvo (Moskva: Galart, 1994).

3 As Aleksandr Fateev maintains in his study of Soviet propaganda during the early Cold War: “[I]n order to achieve an effective ideological influence on the masses, the content of the propaganda was meant to penetrate all aspects of ‘informational reality’: the totality of ideas, symbols, and ways of interpreting the world. This ‘reality’ is formed by the currents and sources of information, and determines mass and individual performance.” Aleksandr Fateev, Obraz Vraga v Sovetskoi Propagande. 1945–1954 (Moskva: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii RAN, 1999), accessed February 12, 2014, http://psyfactor.org/lib/fateev0.htm.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOTALITARIAN ART DISCOURSE:
POLITICS AND AESTHETICS IN THE SOVIET UNION

when various artistic groups and political factions struggled for cultural authority. However, the crucial episode in the establishment of total state control over the arts took place on April 23, 1932, when the state decree “On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations” (“O perestroike literaturno-khudozhhestvennykh organizatsii”) was issued. The decree ordered the "liquidation" of all existing literary groups and the creation of the Union of Writers, which became the only officially approved literary organization. Thus, the Soviet government established a framework for institutional control over literature in the USSR.

The decree affected not only literature, but also all other arts, which were reformed and unified in a similar manner. On June 25, 1932, the Moscow Regional Union of Artists was established and analogous regional organizations emerged in other parts of the country. The unions controlled various stages of the production of art, including commissions, censoring and the exhibition of art in the USSR.

Moreover, the unions provided spaces for the production of art by supplying union members with studios. As a result, undesirable artists were excluded from the official art scene, which became centralized and monopolized by the state.

The decree had a significant influence on art criticism and art history. Along with the liquidation of various artistic groups, the print issues of such groups (journals, magazines, newspapers) were discontinued. Instead, official print issues were established. For the visual arts, the magazine Iskusstvo (Art, established in 1933)

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4 For an account of the struggles over culture in revolutionary Russia and the USSR, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).


6 For some details on the engagement of artists with the unions of artists, see Caute, The Dancer Defects, 519–521. See also Golomstock, Totalitarnoe iskusstvo, 95.
became a major tribune for official Soviet art critics. Also, through the 1932 decree, the Soviet state sought to subordinate agents who were central to the dissemination of knowledge. For example, art critics were obliged to organize in professional groups—sections of art criticism—within the unions of artists.

The administrative subordination and nationalization of the visual arts and art criticism continued after World War Two. On August 5 1947, the decree of the USSR Cabinet of Ministers on the establishment of the USSR Academy of Arts was issued. The Academy became a governing institution and consolidated most educational organizations dealing with artists and art critics—from art colleges to artistic institutes—under its control. Finally, in 1957, the Union of Artists of the USSR, which centralized all regional unions, was established.

Seeking total control over domestic art production, the Soviet state also controlled artistic exchange with other countries. In 1925, the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov SSSR) established the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Vsesoiuznoe obshestvo kul’turnoi svyazi s zagranitsei, or VOKS), which would administer major official international cultural contacts. VOKS, initially created for the dissemination of pro-Soviet sentiments around the world, contributed to arranging displays of American art in Soviet museums during the Cold War.

Thus, various stages of visual art production, representation, and the reception

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7 This Soviet organization was responsible for cultural exchanges with foreign countries. Established in 1925, VOKS was restructured in the Soyuz sovetskikh obshestv druzhby (the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Contacts), or the SSOD in 1958. The organization was disbanded in 1992. For more on VOKS, see Caute, The Dancer Defects, 29–30. David-Fox throughout his Vitriny velikogo eksperimenta analyses VOKS of the interwar period. See also Natalia Yegorova, “The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) and the Early détente, 1953–1955,” in Une Europe malgré tout, 1945–1990: Contacts et réseaux culturels, intellectuels et scientifiques entre Européens dans la guerre froide / Cultural, Intellectual and Scientific Contacts and Networks among Europeans during the Cold War, ed. Antoine Fleury et al. (Bruxelles: Peter Land, 2009), 89–102.
of the visual arts in the USSR, were under state control. The unions of artists and the Academy of Arts played the major roles in governing the arts, whilst other Soviet agencies such as the State Committee on the Arts, which had been established in 1935 and which was replaced by the Ministry of Culture of the USSR in 1953, were also involved.

Thus, the Soviets established a complex administration, allowing state control over the production of art. But what form should this art take? Which art exactly was to be produced? Which ideology would guide the production of Soviet art?

**Arts Under Ideology**

In 1947 the Research Institute of Theory and History of Fine Arts (Nauchno-issledovatel’skii institut teorii i istorii izobrazitel’nykh iskusstv Akademii khudozhestv SSSR) was formed within the USSR Academy of Arts. The Institute was among the most significant contributors to the theory of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics—the one and only officially approved approach to the interpretation of the

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8 From the point of view of the totalitarian state, there were practical didactic reasons for the subordination of art, which were directly expressed by Khrushchev: “Why does the party pay so much attention to the problems of literature and art? Because literature and art play exceptionally significant roles in the ideological activities of our party and in the communistic upbringing of the working people. . . Our people demand works of literature, paintings, and music which reflect the pathos of labor, which are understandable by the people.” Nikita Khrushchev, * Za tesnuiu sviaz’ literaturi i iskusstva s zhiz’iu naroda* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1957), 19–20.

9 The philosophical system known as Marxist-Leninist aesthetics has very little to do with the actual intellectual heritage of Marx or Lenin. None of them left any systematic perspective on culture and arts, and Marxist-Leninist aesthetics was constructed *a posteriori*. Soviet philosopher Mikhail Lifshitz played a crucial role in establishing Marxist-Leninist aesthetics when, in 1933, he systematized writings by Marx which were related to culture. See Mikhail Lifshitz and Franz Shiller, comp. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ob iskusstve* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Literatura, 1933). In 1938, Lifshitz issued Lenin’s writings on art. See Mikhail Lifshitz, *Lenin o kul’ture i iskusstve* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Izobrazitel’nikh Iskusstv, 1938).

Lifshitz also published numerous articles on Marx’s and Lenin’s aesthetic views and from the 1930s, Lifshitz and the prominent Marxist thinker Georg Lukacs, among others, began to establish Marxist-Leninist aesthetics: “With these tools – Hegel’s aesthetic theory, Marx’s early ontology and anthropology, Engels’s definition of realism and Lenin’s concept of reflection . . . the two thinkers developed a model of aesthetics and realism that could be applied to the entirety of history, starting with cave paintings.” Stanley Mitchell, “Mikhail Lifshits: A Marxist Conservative,” in *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left* ed. Andrew Hemingway (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 42.
arts in the Soviet Union. The personnel of the Institute were to develop the ideological-aesthetic theory of Soviet art, a theory which would provide the basis for the Soviet interpretation of various artistic problems, from the evolution of styles to the genesis of contemporary artistic culture. However, by that time, the key concepts of aesthetics and art in the Soviet Union had already been established and even actively employed.

A crucial group of statements, which became the actual foundation of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, is the theory of Socialist Realism. This concept was officially introduced at the First Congress of Soviet Writers (August 17–31, 1934). As an aesthetic system it was the only acceptable paradigm for the arts in the USSR from the 1930s until the collapse of the Soviet Union. On September 3, 1934, Literaturnaia


When building Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, the Soviets frequently took advantage of pre-Soviet precedents beyond the classics of Marxism. Discussing the methods employed to create of Soviet culture, Fitzpatrick argues: “[W]e must note that the cultural orthodoxies established in the 1930s virtually never had any Marxist (or Marxist-Leninist) content and often involved the canonization of a non-Communist authority figure who was held in respect within the profession and belonged to the intelligentsia’s conservative mainstream.” Fitzpatrick, The Cultural Front, 10.

Within the Soviet aesthetic pantheon, there were specialized authorities. Thus, the Russian social-democratic intellectual and materialist Nikolai Chernyshevsky, with his book Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality (1855), was considered to be a predecessor of Soviet aesthetics. The prominent critic Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1846), with his focus on realist art, was a pioneer in literary criticism. The famous Tsarist Russia critic Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906) was an authority on the visual arts. By the 1950s, Soviet art critics acknowledged Stasov as a predecessor. Both Soviet critics and Stasov appreciated the Russian Realists of the nineteenth century (particularly of Peredvizhniki, or the Wanderers)—representing the historical Russian artistic movement, which, from the official Soviet perspective, was closest to Socialist Realism. More generally, the basics of Stasov’s aesthetic position with its pro-realist/pro-Russian and anti-modernist/anti-Western criticism foreshadowed those of Soviet critics. To understand how Soviet critics approached Stasov, see, Elena Suvorova, V.V. Stasov i russkaia peredovaia obshestvennaia misl’ (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1956). See also Andrei Lebedev and Aleksandr Solodovnikov, Vladimir Vasil’evich Stasov. Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1981). For more on the Soviet assimilation of the nineteenth-century revolutionary democrats, see Osnovi marksisko-leninskoi estetiki, 118–134.

10 For more on the emergence of Socialist Realism, see Irina Gutkin, The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890–1934 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999).
Gazeta (Literature Gazette),\textsuperscript{11} the official print issue of the USSR Union of Writers, reported on the newly established Soviet artistic method and its main attributes, Socialist Realism, being the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of ideologically remolding and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism.\textsuperscript{12}

The main concepts of this method can be outlined as follows:\textsuperscript{13} 1) ideinost’—a work of art must accord with the political agenda of the Communist Party; 2) narodnost’—a work of art must be accessible by ordinary people and must focus on the people’s problems; 3) konkretnost’—a work of art must be historically concrete, reflect the contemporary condition of society and present this society as being on the path to communism; 4) klassovost’—a work of art must reflect class struggle and class consciousness.

The terminology described above was a set of rules appropriate for producing and evaluating art. At the same time, this terminology was not capable of describing art from an historical perspective. To interpret the development of art over time, historical materialism was applied.\textsuperscript{14} However, in practice the application of historical

\textsuperscript{11} Although the Congress primarily united writers and the delegates mostly discussed literary problems, the method, proclaimed by the Communist Party, was later applied to all other art forms.

\textsuperscript{12} Hereafter, the Russian quotations were translated into English by the author, unless specified otherwise.

\textsuperscript{13} My account is an inevitable over-simplification. However, as I will show, it is surprisingly adequate when speaking about most Soviet critics of modernist art, who had a very basic and vulgar understanding of subject.

\textsuperscript{14} “Without leaning on materialist theory of the historical process, on historical materialism, it is not possible to adequately solve problems regarding the origin and evolution of aesthetic consciousness in general and of art in particular. It is not possible to correctly understand the basic mechanisms for the historical development of art and its social role. In other words, a fruitful development of aesthetics is possible only through an organic connection with Marxist-Leninist philosophy.” Osnovy marksistsko-leninskoj estetiki, 10–11.
materialism in aesthetics led to *vulgar* Marxism, i.e. to a rough reduction and simplification of the history of art. Stemming from the basic “Marxist” premise that being determines consciousness, art was approached as ideology and therefore determined directly by the economic and political base. As a result, Soviet critics interpreted the history of art from perspectives grounded in economic and class determinism: changes in art were explained as a result of “general tendencies” such as economic and social crises. Cold War-era propagandists would demand such “straightforward” explanations and these paradigms would determine Soviet criticism of American visual art.

**Soviet Art versus …**

Another crucial element which underpinned the Soviet approach toward American art during the Cold War was strong opposition to Western modernist art—this opposition fundamentally shaped the Soviet discourse on art. Soviet anti-modernism was often legitimized through the case of Lenin’s artistic taste. Soviet critics represented Lenin as a consistent fighter against modernism although he himself did not leave an aesthetic system. Nevertheless, the following arguments, which he delivered to Clara Zetkin, were often referenced:

> But then, we are Communists, and ought to stand idly by and give chaos free rein to develop. We should steer this process according to a worked-out plan and must shape its results. We are still far, very far from this. It seems to me that we too have our Doctors Karlstadt. We are too great ‘iconoclasts in painting’. The beautiful must be preserved, taken as an example, as the point of departure even if it is ‘old’. Why turn our backs on what is truly beautiful, abandon it as the point of departure for further development solely because it

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15 Negative attitudes towards Western contemporary art and culture were already present in nineteenth-century tsarist Russia, and were most clearly epitomized within the debates between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. The debate always existed within the framework of a broader opposition between Russia and the West. For a comprehensive outline of the history of debates on Russia and Europe, see Ivar B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996).
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOTALITARIAN ART DISCOURSE: POLITICS AND AESTHETICS IN THE SOVIET UNION

is ‘old’? Why worship the new as a god compelling submission merely because it is ‘new’? Nonsense! Bosh and nonsense! Here much is pure hypocrisy and of course unconscious deference to the art fashions ruling the West. We are good revolutionaries but somehow we feel obliged to prove that we are also ‘up to the mark in modern culture’. I however make bold to declare myself as ‘barbarian’. It is beyond me to consider the products of expressionism, futurism, cubism and other ‘isms’ the highest manifestation of artistic genius. I do not understand them. I experience no joy from them.16

Since utterances by figures of authority were always crucial for the totalitarian discourse, it therefore comes as little surprise that Soviet art historians frequently sought the origins of anti-modernism in the visual arts in Lenin’s philosophy.

In 1936, after the arts had already been administratively subordinated to the Soviet state, anti-modernist rhetoric finally became part of the official Soviet agenda. The disparaging article “Sumbur vmesto muziki” (Muddle Instead of Music),17 which was published in response to Shostakovich’s opera “The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District,” marked the most infamous stage18 of the anti-formalist19 campaign aimed at,

16 English translation of the quotation from Vladimir Lenin, Lenin on Literature and Art (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2008), 230. For a Russian quotation, see Klara Zetkin, Vospominaniia o Lenine (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1955), 13. One should note that this popular statement on modernism by Lenin comes from a book of recollections by Klara Zetkin, a secondary source. The book was originally published in German, the language Zetkin and Lenin used for communication. Although Lenin’s writings on Russian heritage fill several tens of volumes, he did not write anything insightful about the visual arts. This shows once again that debates around painting were of limited relevance to him. However, this did not stop Soviet critics from representing Lenin as a crucial figure for Soviet criticism of the visual arts. Considering the fact that his quote was a popular starting point for Soviet aesthetic discussions, one can once again see the nature of the totalitarian discourse, with its cult of authority, which did not have to argue or prove anything to express the “truth.” In fact, Lenin’s quote is a genuinely total criticism. If the greatest thinker of the nation dismissed modernism as something beyond rationalization or even emotional sympathy, than who could do anything with it?

17 “Sumbur Vmesto Muzyki,” Pravda, January 28, 1936. The text turned out to be so infamous that its 60th anniversary was “celebrated” within a special article in a major contemporary Russian newspaper Kommersnat. Petr Pospelov, “K shestidesiatiletiiu stat’i ‘Sumbur vmesto muzyki,’ ” Kommersant, February 3, 1996.

18 The exact dates of the anti-formalist campaign are disputable. Golomstock argues that the first episode of the campaign was within the exhibition Artists of the RSFSR for the 15 Years which took place in Leningrad in 1932 and in Moscow a year later. The first Leningrad exhibition had formalist art but the works were removed and not displayed at the Moscow show. Comparing this step with the infamous 1937 Munich show “Degenerate Art,” the author claims that after 1933, articles criticizing formalism became more and more frequent. See Golomstock, “Glava 3. Terror: Totalitarizm protiv modernizma,” in Golomstock, Totalitarnoe iskusstvo, 102–112. This stage still can be regarded as a preliminary stage, because anti-formalism was only officially approved and incorporated into the state.
among others, “improving” Soviet art and making it more accessible for a mass audience by suppressing Western “harmful” formalistic influences. The author of the article claimed:

The danger of this trend to Soviet music is clear. Leftist distortion in opera stems from the same source as Leftist distortion in painting, poetry, teaching, and science. Petty-bourgeois "innovations" lead to a break with real art, real science, and real literature. The composer of Lady Macbeth was forced to borrow from jazz its nervous, convulsive, and spasmodic music in order to lend "passion" to his characters.

The article’s contribution to the Soviet art discourse is twofold. First, it openly and publicly divided art into the good Soviet and bad Western. Such an account was state sanctioned because the article was published in Pravda, the official newspaper of the CPSU. Therefore, within the article, the aesthetic opposition between the West and the USSR or between realist Soviet art and formalist Western art was proclaimed at the highest level. Second, the article emphasized the connotation of menace in Western “formalist” art which was, according to the author, spoiling Soviet culture. 20

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19 The history of the word “formalism” is complex. In the Soviet Union, “formalism” was a concept which was negatively marked and used when talking about art works, which, according to Soviet critics, focused on form and neglected the importance of subject matter. Cumulatively, the word formalism described modernist movements. The Soviet connotations of formalism should not be confused with the American Greenbergian term “formalism.” Formalism as accusation should also not be confused with Russian formalism as a literary movement. See how Greenberg defined the differences in Clement Greenberg, “Complaints of an Art Critic” (1967), in Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays. Volume 4. Modernism with a Vengeance, ed. John O’Brien (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 268–269.

20 “Sumbur vmesto muziki” had concrete administrative effects within Soviet society, and that is what made the text remarkably infamous. The article introduced arguments which did not merely constitute aesthetic debates but which were also used as a tool of repression against numerous artists whose works did not respond to the demands established by the Communist Party. This Soviet State campaign against Western formalism resulted in a whole range of actions, including books being removed from libraries, paintings being destroyed, harsh personnel decisions being made, criminal proceedings being conducted. Governmental support for the ideas outlined in the article (the fact that the state actually prosecuted artists for their art) strengthened Soviet anti-formalism more than distinguished rhetoric ever could have done.
The article prompted similar pieces on other kinds of arts. Vladimir Kemenov, in a Pravda article, dated March 6, 1936, took over anti-formalist criticism while focusing on the visual arts in his article “Against Formalism and Naturalism in Art” (“Protiv formalizma i naturalizma v iskusstve”). He argued that formalist art in the Soviet Union originated from Western bourgeois art. Furthermore, the Pravda article of March 1, 1936, titled “On Artists-Daubers” (“O Khudozhnikakh-Pachkunakh”) was issued. The text criticized the work of Vladimir Lebedev, an illustrator of children’s books, by focusing on the negative effects his allegedly “formalist” art would have on children and implying that his formalism was subverting Soviet children.

This linking of formalism with contemporary Western art and with subversive activities in the 1930s, outlived the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) and would be actively exploited in the late 1940s when the Cold War began. Thus, the institutional and theoretical framework discussed in this chapter would determine the Soviet state-administered representation of American visual art.

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21 Those articles denouncing music, theatre, literature, and other art forms would be published in a single issue Protiv formalizma i naturalizma v iskusstve: Sbornik statei (Moskva: OGiZ-IZOgiZ, 1937).
Chapter 2. Criticizing the Unseen: Denouncing American Modernism

Discussions of US modernist painting emerged in the early 1950s and stemmed from the criticism of European modernist art. Although most Soviet people would not have an opportunity to see American visual until the first exhibitions of the late 1950s,¹ the negative criticism of American modernism was already unprecedentedly extensive in the early 1950s. For example, the state publishing house Znanie (Knowledge) issued 150,000 copies of P.S. Trofimov’s twenty-four-page lecture, “Contemporary Bourgeois Americano-English Aesthetics on the Serve of the Enemies of Peace, Democracy, and Socialism” (“Sovremennaia burzhuaznaia amerikano-angliiskaia estetika na sluzhbe vragov mira, demokratii i sotsializma”), in 1953. Such significant attention from Soviet critics towards “formalist” works of art, which were excluded from public displays in the USSR and thus inaccessible to most Soviets, is challenging. The paradox of the disproportional Soviet reception of American modernism is even more challenging when considering that simultaneously, many more works of realist art by American artists were regularly and widely shown all over the Soviet Union, but they were subject to significantly fewer studies.² Oliver Johnson, a specialist in Soviet visual culture from the University of Sheffield, explains such an emphasis on modernism as a necessity of Soviet culture to retain an

¹ The milestones of the representation of American modernist art are the two exhibitions organized by the USIA: the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, and the 1963–1964 travelling exhibition Graphic Arts: USA. In 1957, during the 6th World Youth Festival in Moscow, visitors also could see American avant-garde art: the two paintings by a minor abstract artist Harry Colman which were on display in the Gorki Park along with 4500 works from sixty-two countries. European and Russian modernist art was likewise rarely exhibited. In 1956, an exhibition of works by Picasso took place, which was a rare exception. For more on the exhibition, see Eleonory Gilburd, “Picasso in Thaw Culture,” Cahiers du Monde Russe 47, 1 (2006): 65–108.

² The Soviet promotion of American figurative art in the 1950s to the 1960s is discussed in chapters three, four, and five.
antonym. He argues the precedent of false Western art was crucial for creating the Soviet aesthetic system of Socialist Realism.

Given the importance and the significant scale of Soviet anti-modernism, its rhetoric should be explored in depth. Focusing on both academic studies and publicity articles raising the issue of American avant-garde art, this chapter examines the Soviet rhetorical tradition of anti-modernist criticism and sheds some new light on its inner logic.

From various available sources, this paper focuses mainly on the newspapers Sovetskaia Kul’tura (Soviet Culture), Pravda (Truth), and Literaturnaia Gazeta (Literature Gazette) because these were the official Soviet print media. Therefore, these papers served as the primary transmitters of the official ideology; they were indicative of the party’s stance on the arts. In terms of art magazines, I focus on Iskusstvo (Art) because it was the official forum of the USSR Academy of Fine Arts and Union of Artists. I also consider several books, including milestone publications such as Against the Reactionary Bourgeois Art and Art History (Protiv reaktsionnogo

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4 Not all these texts focused exclusively on American art. Whereas some had American art as the main and only subject, others considered American art within general discussions of Western art and with discussions of European art. The discourses should not be forcefully detached from each other because they complement each other. I consider both the texts focusing only on American art and the texts discussing American art with European art.

5 Whereas the basic concepts of Soviet anti-modernist rhetoric such as “formalism” are well known, the chapter introduces lesser explored patterns of negative criticism such as linking modernist art to insanity, and some others.

6 For my research perspective, there is no danger in approaching Soviet press publications and Soviet art history as if they were the same discourse. Academia and propaganda were interrelated because 1) most authors advanced their ideas in both the press and scholarly studies; and 2) these authors exploited the same ideas, commonly in the same rhetorical manner.
burzhuznogo iskusstva i iskusstvznaniia),7 The Crisis of Ugliness: From Cubism to Pop Art (Krisis bezobraziiia: Ot kubizma k pop-art),8 and Modernism: Analysis and Criticism of its Main Tendencies (Modernizm: Analiz i kritika osnovnykh napravlenii).9 In analyzing these sources, I will first contextualize the discussion. I will then extract the typical argumentation and commonly used patterns of declaring the bankruptcy of modernist art.

This chapter’s focus is not limited to verbal expressions, as the Soviet cultural offensive on Western and American art was a complex phenomenon, which also manifested through images. Both verbal and pictorial manifestations should be considered for a more complete account of the Soviet anti-modernist canon.

The Aesthetic War and American Art

Simultaneously with the beginning of the Cold War in the late 1940s, the Soviet propaganda was detecting more internal and external ideological enemies of various types, including aesthetic enemies.10 The key document for the art discourse of those years was the CPSU Central Committee Resolution, “On the Magazines ‘Zvezda’ and ‘Leningrad’” (“O zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad’”), of August 14, 1946.11 In the resolution, Andrei Zhdanov, then the number one Soviet ideologist, subjected poet Anna Akhmatova and writer Mikhail Zoshchenko to severe criticism

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7 Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuznogo iskusstva i iskusstvznaniia, ed. Igor’ Grabar’ et al. (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1951).
10 For a detailed account of the concept “enemy” during the early Cold War, see Aleksandr Fateev, Obraz vraga v sovetskoi propagande. 1945–1954. The emergence of the “aesthetic war” is discussed in Johnson, “Aesthetic Enemies.”
11 “Postanovlenie orgburo TSK VKP(b) o zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad,’ August 14, 1946,” Pravda, August 21, 1946.
CHAPTER 2. CRITICIZING THE UNSEEN: DENOUNCING AMERICAN MODERNISM

and insulting insinuations because according to Zhdanov, they were creating "apolitical," "formalist," and "bourgeois" art. In his September 1946 report at the meeting of writers in Leningrad, Zhdanov elaborated on the ideas outlined in the resolution and claimed the authors were the Soviet Union’s internal enemies. He further argued that Akhmatova and Zoshchenko were the subversives because they attempted to “poison the consciousness of our youth.” Thus, the writers were represented as agents of the West and as disseminators of anti-Soviet propaganda.

The resolution stated that such an un-patriotic art could not be tolerated and the editorial boards and propagandist organizations had to increase their control over the publications issued in the Soviet Union. Most noteworthy from Zhdanov’s speech and onward was that Soviet propaganda was becoming more frequent in criticizing in-house formalist writers, artists, and other intellectuals who were arguably the transmitters of the Western ideology, and hence, the agents of Western imperialism. (Nevertheless, in 1946, when speaking about the “Western imperialism,” the Soviets were thinking generally of some collective abstract West. They hardly discussed anything specifically American and scarcely singled out anything specifically American within the West.)

The Cold War stimulated the thinking within binary oppositions. The Soviets considered the ideological confrontation between the two camps in a warlike mode. Thus, the 1947 article “The Aspects of Two Cultures,” written by Vladimir

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Kemenov, a highly influential Soviet art historian and art functionary, officially and internationally declared the aesthetic war with the West. *The VOKS Bulletin*, the official print issue of VOKS, published the article. *The Bulletin* underwent distribution abroad in four languages: English, French, German, and Russian; thus, it was accessible to a wide international audience.

Kemenov bases his argument on the binary opposition of Western and Soviet arts and cultures. Within this opposition, Soviet art has exceptionally positive traits (progressive: the people’s, genuine, etc.), whereas Western art is characterized by only negative features (reactionary: formalistic, decadent, etc.). The author claims social factors caused these different or opposing cultural situations. Bourgeois society was dying, or in decay, and its art was therefore decadent. In contrast, the Soviet Union has chosen the path to communism. The success and achievements of Soviet art were consequences and evidence that the Soviet society had taken the correct path.

For a Western audience, Kemenov’s theory was a remarkable, sudden, and probably unexpected gesture, if not in terms of the arguments introduced (it explained the social and cultural genesis in terms of vulgar Marxism), then certainly in terms of its radical expression of the arguments and extreme rhetoric used throughout the article. Because Kemenov exercised harsh and rude criticism of Western art and...

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14 Born in 1908, Vladimir Kemenov was the Deputy Minister of Culture in 1954–1956. In 1960, he became the Head of the Section of Contemporary Foreign Art at the State Institute of Art History. Kemenov was one of the most notable opponents of modernism in the Soviet Union.

15 Kemenov develops this idea of the supremacy of the USSR claiming that Soviet people have a crucial mission within world culture: “The road travelled by Soviet art in overcoming formalism is of inestimable importance to the art culture of the whole world. The experience accumulated by Soviet artists will time and again stand the artists of other countries in good stead when they begin to look for a way out of the impasse of formalism and to create a genuine people’s art.” Kemenov, “The Aspects of Two Cultures,” quoted hereafter from Vladimir Kemenov, “Aspects of Two Cultures,” in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 649.
culture, the article was not only a declaration but also an attack, i.e., an episode of the declared ideological war:

As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, hypocritically hiding its reactionary class nature behind phrases such as ‘pure art’ and ‘art for art’s sake,’ Soviet artists openly espouse the ideas of Bolshevism expressing the advanced ideas of the Soviet people who at present represent the most advanced people of the world, for they have built up Socialism, the most advanced form of contemporary society.¹⁶

In the same year 1947, the conception of an aesthetic war became essential to the Soviet internal cultural policy. Thus, the article on the establishment of the Academy of Arts of the USSR outlined, among the goals of the institution, the struggle with bourgeois formalist art and with pseudo-scientific idealistic aesthetical theories.¹⁷ The article conceptualized the development of Soviet art as a continuous aesthetical struggle that had started during the first days of the “Great October Socialist Revolution.”¹⁸ Moreover, several pages in the article stressed the importance of the internal Soviet fight against subversive artists.

From the late 1940s to the early 1950s in the Soviet Union, the conception of an ideological war and its variants, such as aesthetical battles, aesthetical struggles, cultural warfare, and other aspects, gained power, popularity, aggressiveness, and forcefulness. In 1948, the aesthetical polarization between Socialist Realism and (Western) modernism reached an apogee within the liquidation of the Moscow Museum of New Western Art, with its rich collections of Impressionism and Cubism. The closure was due to the infamous anti-cosmopolitan campaign, which started in 1948 and which aimed, among others, to diminish the harmful cultural and artistic

¹⁸ Ibid.
influences of a broadly defined West.\(^\text{19}\)

The dynamic evolution of article titles is also representative of how more explicitly warlike the official Soviet discussions of art and culture were becoming. Whereas the title of Kemenov’s 1947 article, “Aspects of Two Cultures,” only highlights the fact that the two cultures existed, from 1949 onward, Soviet article titles began to agitate openly for fighting against cosmopolitanism, formalism, decadence, bourgeois art, and other similar aspects. Both the domestic anti-cosmopolitan campaign and the Cold War provoked the emerging “against-articles,” such as the 1949 “Against Cosmopolitanism and Formalism in Poetry” (“Protiv kosmopolitizma i formalizma v poezii”) by Nikolai Gribachev,\(^\text{20}\) and other articles.\(^\text{21}\)

In their entirety, such articles covered all branches of art, from music to literature and the visual arts. Concerning the latter, in 1951 a collection of articles issued a book Against Reactionary Bourgeois Art and Art History (Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia) focused already exclusively on the visual arts. Kemenov, one of the lead editors, published the flagship article “Against Bourgeois Art and Art History” (“Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia”), which title reveals that the idea of war flourished in the discourse on the visual arts. The cultural war became specified and localized within the visual arts so that a single volume of criticism was published; And the article’s language became more aggressive and hostile than before: “The struggle against reactionary bourgeois art and art history requires a

\(^\text{19}\) The campaign’s major practical goal was the increasing of patriotism among Soviet people. To do so, Soviet propaganda glorified Soviet culture and science but simultaneously denounced Western culture and science. Those who praised Western (from art to scientific theories) were accused of nizkopoklonstvo. For more on the anti-cosmoplitie campaign, see Aleksandr Vdovin, “Nizkopoklonniki i kosmopoltia,” Nash Sovremennik 1 (2007), accessed October 9, 2014, http://nash-sovremennik.ru/p.php?y=2007&n=1&id=7.


\(^\text{21}\) For example, Dmitrii Eremin, “Protiv kosmopolitizma v muzikal’noi kritike,” Literaturnaia Gazeta, February 26, 1949.
systematic and constant effort, as well as the publication of many articles and books.”

Treating art history and art criticism as a battlefield became essential to the Soviet art discourse. Denouncing pro-modernist theories and histories of art was crucial for a theoretical de-legitimizing of modernist art in the USSR. Soviet criticism of Western art history was normally expressed through the topos of falsified art history, which was a common starting point for Soviet scholars:

United within the shared hatred of realism, the bourgeois art historians have chosen the path of direct falsification of the history of art. They take advantage of numerous manipulations and juggle with words in order to represent the history of art as an objective history of the development of anti-realism.

The Soviets constantly emphasized that bourgeois art history was not only false but also falsified, i.e., distortions of history were a result of a particular conscious activity rather than an accident. Soviet art historians and art critics argued that Western scholars intentionally created a falsified, corrupted, and a perverted history of art to excuse and conceal the crisis of the arts in the West. Consequently, the mission of

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22 Vladimir Kemenov, “Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia,” in Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia, 3.

23 In the West, the post-World War II rise of American abstraction was accompanied by the emergence of theories and histories contextualizing and explaining American avant-garde art. A significant body of scholarship and criticism was carried out with the implication of the “triumph of American abstract art,” which was probably most clearly stated in the writings of Clement Greenberg, who pioneered such a frame. Such a historicizing of modernism was crucial for its legitimation, and important American intellectuals such as Alfred Barr, Harold Rosenberg, and many others contributed to the theory and history of the new styles. European critics such as Herbert Reed also significantly contributed to establishing pro-modernist theories. Soviet art historians and critics were doing the opposite—they were criticizing such theories to delegitimize modernism. For more on the history of criticism of modernist art in the United States, see Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

24 Kemenov, “Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia,” 5.

25 “Bourgeois art historians and critics, no matter their genre of work, have a goal given in advance—being the apologetics of all those forms of disgusting decay and putrefaction, which constitute the numerous loud schools and movements of contemporary bourgeois painting, sculpture, and architecture.” Kemenov, “Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia,” 4–5.
Soviet scholars was the opposite: to restore the just and objective view.

Let us now focus on an example of Soviet criticism of “false” Western art history. One of the most representative aesthetical debates was over the term “revolutionary art,” a term crucial for Soviet theory of art. In the USSR, the term was officially attached to Socialist Realism, the only accepted genuine style; it is needless to say how important revolution was for the whole of Soviet mythology. The Soviets also claimed that the concept of revolution was central to Western pro-modernist aesthetics, which argued the radical breakup with previous artistic conventions was the logic of modernism’s evolution. Western theories treated revolution in art as a radical reconsideration of previously established visual languages. For Soviet aesthetics, such a perspective was wrong. However, Soviet art historians acknowledged and accepted modernism as a revolution in the arts, but they specified the results of this revolution were negative. Thus, they argued modernist art was not a genuine revolution in art; rather, it was a reverse revolution. It was, to some degree, an anti-revolution because modernism aimed:

[A]gainst all progressive, democratic, materialistic traditions of European culture, beginning with the Renaissance; against all traditions of realism and peoples’ art for the sake of establishing mysticism, dark nightmares of the sub-consciousness, delirious hallucinations of paranioacs; for the sake of advocating misanthropy; and for the sake of cultivating the beast in man and evoking the most vile animal instincts.26

Criticizing the idea of modernist art as revolutionary or as something progressive, Soviet critics instead maintained that modernist “decadent” art was a symbol of the collapse of the West. This idea foregrounded the Soviet reception of modernism:

If all historical documents revealing the crisis and sunset of capitalism had disappeared, it would be enough to look at bizarre symbols inherent to

26 Kemenov, “Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia,” 11.
CHAPTER 2. CRITICIZING THE UNSEEN: DENOUNCING AMERICAN MODERNISM

contemporary Western painting in order to understand the condition of the bourgeois world in the mid-twentieth century.27

As the Cold War progressed, the face of the Western aesthetic enemy was becoming more precise, concrete, and recognizable—the Americanness was showing through.

Since 1947–1948, the Soviet propaganda maintained ardent anti-Americanism, which ultimately influenced Soviet art discourse considerably. For example, in 1951, Vladimir Kemenov, a contributor to the aforementioned collection, already argued the United States was the center of bourgeois art and culture:

The United States is the center of the most reactionary ideas in politics and philosophy, as well as in art and aesthetics. Reactionary American art absorbed the worst of the decadent movements of twentieth-century European art, including French Post-Impressionism and Cubism, French and English Surrealism, German and Swiss Dadaism, German Expressionism and ‘New Objectivity,’ Belgian abstractionism, and others.28

In the same collection, I. A. Kuznetsova criticized within her article not the broad notion of Western modernism but particularly American art and art history. In her article “US Painting and Art Criticism Serving the Imperialist Reaction” (“Amerikanskaia zhivopis’ i khudozhestvennaia kritika na sluzhbe imperialisticheskoi reaktsii”), she distinguished American modernism as a separate propagandistic tool in the ideological confrontation: “Now, under the conditions of the post-war era, formalist American art plays a reactionary role and serves as a form of propaganda for the cosmopolite theories of American imperialism.”29 Furthermore, the same

27 Lidiia Reingard’s 1949 article “Modernizm posle Vtoroi mirovoi voiny” (“Modernism after World War Two”) was published as a chapter in Mikhail Lifshitz and Lidiia Reingardt, Krizis bezobrazzia. For more on the idea of the collapse of the West in Russian culture, see Aleksandr Dolinin, “Gibel’ Zapada: K istorii odnogo stoikogo verovaniia,” in K istorii idei na Zapade: ”Russkaia ideia” (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel’stvo Pushkinskogo Doma, Izdatel’skii Dom Petropolis, 2010), 26–76.

28 Kemenov, “Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvovniania,” 7.

29 I. A. Kuznetsova, “Amerikanskaia zhivopis’ i khudozhestvennaia kritika na sluzhbe imperialisticheskoi reaktsii,” in Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvovniania, 45.
collection of articles presented probably the most straightforward speculation on modernist art as an American weapon:

They [the Americans] plan to achieve world domination, and in order to achieve their goals, they are eager to use all: the atomic bomb, the Marshall plan, and . . . Surrealism. . . . Surrealism is one of the means of expressing American imperialist aggression; this means completely corresponding to the ideology of a monopolistic capital. The reactionary American bourgeoisie is scared most of all by the growth of the self-consciousness of the masses, awaking in working people the feeling of human worth. That is why with such devilish consistency, the bourgeoisie is leading the politics of spiritual disarmament, of stupefying people, and of diminishing the peoples’ will to resist.

Thus, in the early 1950s, the conception of an aesthetic war was finally and completely established: it had a theoretical Marxist-Leninist justification in terms of the class struggle, and it had concrete enemies (America, West, subversive artists). It was assumed that art and art criticism could be used as ideological weapons.

Officially, this war never ended during the USSR’s existence. Although the anti-formalist and anti-cosmopolitan campaigns were reconsidered after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, and regardless of the breakthroughs in the Cold War such as peaceful co-existence which impacted Soviet debates on the arts, the Soviet art discourse permanently echoed Soviet propaganda in interpreting world culture and the arts within the conception of an aesthetic war. Thus, in 1957, during one of the most liberal times for the arts, the program document of the CPSU For the Firm Connection of the Literature and the Arts with the Peoples’ Life (Za tesnuiu

Footnotes:
30 Why was surrealism American? Probably, due to Salvador Dali, who moved to the United States when World War Two broke out. In the Soviet art discourse of the late 1940s to the 1950s, the Spanish artist Dali was often claimed to be an American artist. For example, Boris Vipper called him an American artist and “the most glorified chief of American surrealism.” Boris Vipper, “Surrealizm i ego amerikanskie apologety,” in “Protiv reaktsionnogo burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniia,” 30, 40.

31 Vipper, “Surrealizm i ego amerikanskie apologety,” 34.

32 For a discussion of Soviet debates on Socialist Realism in the 1950s, see Reid, “(Socialist) Realism Unbound,” 261–275.
CHAPTER 2. CRITICIZING THE UNSEEN: DENOUNCING AMERICAN MODERNISM

sviaz’ literatury i iskusstva s zhizn’iu naroda) was issued. The brochure reprinted the speech by the relatively liberal architect of the Thaw Nikita Khrushchev, who nevertheless, still interpreted Soviet culture and the arts within the terms of the “struggle,” “subversiveness,” etc.:

The Party is leading an irreconcilable struggle against the penetration of foreign ideology in literature and the arts, against hostile attacks on socialist culture. The current complexity and peculiarity of the ideological struggle in the fields of art and literature is that, among others, we have to protect literature and arts not only from outside inroads, but also from attempts of certain artistic workers to push literature and arts onto the incorrect path, to lead away from the main line of development.  

Although essential and permanent, the conception of an aesthetic war was modified; it would be updated to consider the most recent achievements in Western art. For example, in the 1960s, the conception of the aesthetic war responded to the newly emerging retreat to mimesis in non-abstract styles such as Pop Art. Soviet art critics argued that “representational” Pop Art, such as American and Western non-figurative art, was one more stage in decadence. Although Pop Art paintings represented “real life” objects, the style was essentially anti-realist. According to Soviet critics, Pop Art painters did not thoughtfully rework the reality but rather copied it mechanistically, or even substituted art with real objects. Thus, Pop Art was not a genuinely realist art form but essentially modernist. From the Soviet perspective, Pop Art was another

33 Nikita Khrushchev, Za tesnuiu sviaz’ literatury i iskusstva s zhizn’iu naroda (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1957), 20. In 1969, the introduction of one of the most comprehensive Soviet monograph on modernist art would still argue: “The artistic culture of our epoch is characterized by the struggle of reactionary and progressive tendencies. This struggle, after all, is an expression of the ideological fight between capitalist and socialist systems, as well as of the struggle that takes place in every imperialistic country between people and imperialistic bourgeoisie, which defends the historically exhausted, self-outlived way of society development.” Introduction to Modernizm: analiz i kritika osnovnykh napravlenii, 7. Such a frame would guide the majority of the critics in the 1970s and the 1980s as well, although these periods had some crucial specifics and should undergo analysis accordingly in a separate study.

34 See, for example, Lidiia Reingardt, “Fenomenologiia konservnoi banki,” in Mikhail Lifshitz and Lidiia Reingardt, Krizis bezobrazia. The author updates Soviet anti-modernist canon by considering the emerged Pop Art.
enemy; it was pseudo-realism masked as realism.

Such a mode of criticism of so-called pseudo-realism was apparently first established with the discussion of American Regionalism—another figurative style which arose in the 1930s: decades prior to Pop Art. Soviet art historians were not satisfied with this “revival of realism” and were constantly emphasizing that this style was a continuation and offshoot of avant-garde art. The title of Reinhardt’s article, “‘New Objectivity’ and Regionalism. To the Question of Some Fake Forms of Realism in Contemporary Painting” (“‘Novaia veshchestvennost’ i ridzhionalizm. K voprosu o nekotorykh formakh mnimogo realizma v sovremennoi zhivopisi”) mirrors the author’s stance on American Regionalism. Reinhardt argues, “One more reactionary art movement, American Regionalism, emerges in the 1930s under the guise of a return to reality.” She refuses to see any crucial distinctions between modernist paintings and this movement:

[I]t would be naïve to see a real turn to the real world in various forms of neo-traditionalism. . . . Such a rehabilitation of subject matter and real form is still fictitious and demagogical. Modernism is far from leaving its basic guiding line [decadence]; on the contrary, modernism twirls its line in a more complicated curve.

Thus, within the Soviet art history, Western non-abstract styles such as American Regionalism or Pop Art were claimed to be pseudo-realist and were seen as probably more dangerous than pure abstraction. Whereas abstraction was a straightforward

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35 Kuznetsova, “Amerikanskaia zhivopis’ i khudozhestvennaia kritika na sluzhbe imperialisticheskoi reaktsii,” 46–47.

36 Lidiia Reingardt, “‘Novaia veshchestvennost’ i ridzhionalizm. K voprosu o nekotorykh formakh mnimogo realizma v zapadnoi zhivopisi” in Modernizm: Analiz i kritika osnovnykh napravlenii, 179.

37 Ibid., 172.
manifestation of the crisis of capitalism, pseudo-realism was an attempt to bypass this crisis, to conceal it, to deceive the audience.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{Insane Artists}

Linking the discussion of contemporary art with the discourse on madness was extremely widespread in the Soviet Union. Reviewing the section of contemporary art at the ANEM in 1959, Vladimir Kemenov commented on works by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Jack Levine, and many others:

\begin{quote}
Let’s imagine a hospital for the insane. (We can afford ourselves such a comparison. . . [A]ccording to the concept of modernism, comparing an artist to a madman is not insulting but complimentary.) So, it is a hospital where everyone goes mad in his own way, where everyone is constantly grimacing. One is constantly shaking the head; the other, curtsying; the third, blowing the cheeks; the forth, sticking out the tongue; etc. Would we be glad to see so many of these ‘individualities’ forming such a tragicomic diversity? No, this very diversity (if one may talk seriously about such a ‘diversity’) is just an illusion because this behavior is caused by a loss of the ability to think normally, to feel normally, and to express thoughts and feelings normally.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Essentially, Kemenov utilized the topos of madness to dismiss a key idea delivered within the art section at the ANEM: the freedom and diversity of an artist’s expression in the United States.\textsuperscript{40} According to Kemenov, the unconventional visual language of modernist artists, although indeed diverse and individual, rather exemplifies deviant

\textsuperscript{38} The culmination of such criticism would occur with the Soviet denouncement of Hyperrealism after 1970, which goes beyond the chronological frame of this study. This style was treated as a sign of final decay and an acknowledgement of a missing future for modernism, which had to return to figurativeness from abstraction. This retreat was yet another evidence of the crisis of the decadent art produced by decadent Western societies. For example: “The modernist artists argued against copying external forms in the beginning of the twentieth century. . . [N]ow, after seventy years of fruitless searching, modernist artists have come to what they had been against at the dawn of their movement—they declared super detailed copies . . . to be the ‘highest achievement’ of art, ‘discovery’ of modernist avant-garde, success of Hyperrealism.” Irina Kulikova, \textit{Filosofiiia i iskusstvo modernizma} (Moskva: Politizdat, 1980), 233–234.


\textsuperscript{40} See chapter seven for a detailed account of the conception of the art section of the ANEM.
behavior of mentally diseased people instead of expressing a strong aesthetic position. Thus, comparing modernism with madness and claiming this to be so, Kemenov excludes it from serious Soviet aesthetic debates and de-aesthetizes the phenomenon. Kemenov actually implies that modernist art is insane and has no aesthetic justification, so that it does not contain an artistic nor an aesthetic dimension. Like a madman’s babble, modernist art cannot and should not be understood because it contains no sane logic.

The potential effectiveness in the application of this topos becomes evident when considering the newspaper’s target audience. The general target group of Sovetskaia Kul’tura was the working-class people. Most of them had never seen abstract art in a museum; neither had they seen adequate reproductions of abstract art. A typical newspaper reproduction of Pollock would be black-and-white, 2 x 2 inch in print, which hardly provided an impression of the original work. Such low-quality reproductions would rather contribute to the negative reception of modernism than to advancing it. Moreover, a typical reader lacked any theoretical framework for a positive reception of modernism. The pro-modernist theories of abstract art were published only as objects of negative criticism and were themselves likewise often proclaimed insane. Thus, a Sovetskaia Kul’tura reader had few opportunities to see any positive logic in modernism, which appeared to be senseless, absurd, and consequently, insane.

To grasp a fuller meaning of the topos of the insane artist in Soviet culture, the

41 For example, according to Lidiia Reingardt, the theory of modernism was a phenomenon similar to occult sciences, religion, and pathologic conditions. The author represents the theory as something irrational, anti-scientific, idealistic, and based on false assumptions: “Let’s try to present it [the theory of abstract art] as a system. If one wants to analyze this theory of abstract art, one has to analyze it in the way various mental disorders and mystical beliefs of religious sects are analyzed. Such an approach makes it easy to realize that the various manifestations of abstraction are not accidental. Similarly, they are not accidental various pathologic conditions, studied by neurophysiology or the history of mysticism and ‘occult sciences.’” Reingardt, “Abstratsionizm,” 126–127.
reader should consider that aesthetic madness was completely de-romanticized in the Soviet Union. Whereas Western discourses supported the idea of a connection between genius and madness, the connotations of madness were predominantly negative in the USSR. Instead of romanticizing the insane, the Soviet discourse emphasized the pathological disease connotation. The widespread medical vocabulary emphasized the medical aspect of artistic insanity. Lidiia Reingardt, in her article “Abstraktsionizm,” used the following medical terms for the description of Modernism: maniac, psychic epidemics, diseased imagination, mental disorder, neurosis, neuropathy, etc.

Such an intrusion of medical vocabulary into the art discourse was due to the central Soviet propaganda idea of the collapse of the West. Arguing the West had outlived its time and was dying out, Soviet critics compared the capitalist world with an old and dying organism. Old capitalist Europe and the United States, like an elderly person, lost their sanity because of their age. The West’s dementia was seen as one explanation as to why bourgeois society accepted these insane modernist theories and art:

What stage of dementia [marazm] should contemporary bourgeois culture have reached that its ideologists could develop such delirious ideas—could consider the babbling of a psychopath, recognizing within it the supreme philosophical wisdom, and sincerely believe in mystical-pathological gallimatia, which they embody in their production! They are examples of the symptoms of social insanity, which by the way, has much in common with the

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42 When speaking of Western culture, the right to be mad had been recognized for some social groups, including painters, by the end of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche and Van Gogh further legitimized the idea of the insane genius, and high artistic achievements began to be justified with madness. Practically all modernist artists, including the surrealists, the American Abstract Expressionists, and others, used the topos of the insane artist in one form or another. Such romanticized madness was accepted.

In official Soviet culture, a genius artist would be rather someone completely sane and rational, for example, Leonardo—the multi-gifted person, a realist artist creating within a scientific perspective rather than the expressionist Van Gogh. See chapter four which explores the Soviet Myth of Rockwell Kent and the representation of him as of a contemporary Renaissance-epoch man.
decay of the psyche, typical for insanity unique to paranoiacs and schizophrenics.\textsuperscript{43}

It was not only art historians and art critics—the professional diagnosticians of culture—who were classifying art as insane. Soviet people were given their own opportunities to state the diagnosis. For example, the first 1963 issue of the Soviet satirical magazine \textit{Krokodil} included a quiz to identify three modernist paintings (Figure 9). The editors joked they had confused three abstract works by artists such as Willem De Kooning, Alfred Manessier, and Afro Basaldella with three paintings produced, reportedly, by the mentally diseased. The editors encouraged readers to figure out the origin of the six works. In practice, a reader inexperienced in abstract art would hardly be able to identify the works and see any difference between the art of insane or sane artists. Such a quiz would assure the reader that he or she personally, within such an experiment, made it certain that abstractionism and mental diseases are very similar, that both abstractionism and mental diseases are psychiatric phenomena rather than art.

This allegedly entertaining quiz which was issued in a major satirical magazine demonstrates that modernist art was a subject of laughter in the Soviet Union.

Laughing at Modernism

Whether laughter under socialism has interested many scholars, laughing at modernism has not undergone much examination.\textsuperscript{44} This section casts new light on the

\textsuperscript{43} Vladimir Kemenov, “Cherty dvukh kul’tur,” \textit{Iskusstvo} 4 (1947): 44.

issue and demonstrates that laughing at modernism was a specific form of representation of American visual art in the Cold War USSR.

Major Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil* consistently mocked modernist art. From the 1950s to the 1960s, frequent caricatures denounced modernism by showing how it differs from figurative art. Caricatures mocked avant-garde paintings for the dissimilarity of a modernist painting to the model or object (Figure 3, Figure 6, Figure 7). Such pieces appealed to the readers’ common senses, being encouraged to dismiss modernism as a serious style because it distorted visible reality.

Soviet caricaturists often satirized the mode of modernist production: artists were often portrayed in an upside-down position, drawing with their legs (Figure 6, Figure 8). Unconventional techniques typical for avant-garde styles were exaggerated and ridiculed. Such unusual techniques contradicted common sense because the viewer would expect a genuine painter to draw with a pencil or paint with a brush in a traditional manner.

Soviet caricatures demonstrated there is no specifically aesthetical value in abstract art, thus, again, convincing the reader that modernism is not “genuine art.” For example, a caricature entitled “At an Exhibition of American ‘Art’” portrays two men and a woman discussing a ventilation texture as if it were an abstract painting from a museum collection (Figure 10). A verbal text below the image represents their dialogue. One of the persons in the image asks for the name of the artist who had painted the “ventilation.” The comic effect is achieved when the person is told that it is not a painting but a ventilation. The visitors do not grasp the difference between modernist art and a utilitarian object, and their approach to ventilation texture, taking it as if it were an artwork, ridicules non-figurative art, which turns out to possess no aesthetic value. Simultaneously, the caricature ridiculed and denounced expertise in
abstract art, “modernist connoisseurship,” thus excluding the possibility of understanding modernism. The bearers of pro-modernist knowledge, as well as the public, did not escape mockeries: caricatures ridiculed people who were trying to find the proper viewpoint of a work of art (which is not possible) (Figure 4). Such visitors would experience certain aftereffects of their encounter with abstract art. Having spent some time in peculiar poses in search of the work’s correct viewing perspective, the visitors’ figures have contorted abnormally, etc. (Figure 5).

Some caricatures of the 1960s manifested the idea of the conflation of religion and modernist art. In the image illustrated here (Figure 1), both religion and art are subjects of worship. In the picture, one sees an old woman kneeling and praying in front of modernist art works. Now observe the boy at the door. He symbolizes youth and the future, thus standing in opposition to the reactionary old woman and her beliefs. The boy says, “What backward people!,” condemning the anti-revolutionary ideals and counter-revolutionary practices of the old woman. Both religion and modernist art are identified as distractions from real life, and therefore, counter-revolutionary. To paraphrase Marx: Modernist/Avant-Garde art is opium for the people.

Americanness was often explicitly presented in caricatures. For example, a drawing by the distinguished Soviet caricaturist Boris Leo portrayed an abstract artist wearing sunglasses that resembled classic American Ray Ban glasses; and the two

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45 More generally, Soviet critics frequently linked and compared modernism to religion. Both modernist art and religion were seen as reactionary phenomena and as offshoots of philosophical idealism—the main enemy of Soviet Marxism. Using the label “idealist” was a serious rhetorical move, considering the negative connotation of the term “idealism” in Soviet culture. Not merely used as a philosophical concept, it was used as an umbrella term for numerous, negatively colored phenomena. By employing the words mystical, religious sects, beliefs, etc. to describe modernism, the authors linked such art with religion, with the counter-revolutionary reactionary phenomenon of Tsarist Russia. Thus, the authors placed modernism within the powerful Soviet discourse of counter-revolution. See, for example, Reingardt employing such lexis in her article “Abstratsionizm,” in Modernizm. Analiz i kritika, 126–127.
CHAPTER 2. CRITICIZING THE UNSEEN: DENOUNCING AMERICAN MODERNISM

dollar signs in the upper corners furthermore refer to American capitalism (Figure 2).
The incorporated text introduced the artist’s speech: “And they dare to say that I have no personal vision on art.” The glasses—the metaphor for the artist’s worldview or ideology—are held by a man with a cigar, a typical attribute for an American within Soviet iconography.\textsuperscript{46} The caricature represents the widespread concept in the Soviet art discourse concerning the connection between abstract art and “capitalist bosses,” who always stood behind the promotion of abstract art.\textsuperscript{47}

The multiple examples highlighted above demonstrate that caricatures were a considerable part of Soviet anti-modernist rhetoric. In a way, caricatures supplemented verbal academic and public criticisms of modernist art. Like Soviet verbal texts, caricatures frequently delivered anti-modernist arguments. However, unlike verbal texts, caricatures required much less time and effort for the reader to get the message. A typical caricature provided one clear idea, and an understating of it required common sense rather than any serious aesthetical background. Moreover, caricatures were potentially more effective than texts, as they introduced anti-modernism not only by means of argument and by means of logic but also through positive emotions such as laughter, for example. The caricature, after a recipient decoded it, would reward him or her with pleasure. Thus, hundreds of thousands of issues of \textit{Krokodil}, which millions of Soviet citizens read, turned anti-modernism into a matter of leisure.

Those who would not read \textit{Krokodil} would, nevertheless, have a chance to get

\textsuperscript{46} For example, see covers for the book \textit{Mister Twister} by Samuil Marshak. This 1933 poem which significantly contributed to the establishing of the Soviet mythology of the United States was reissued continuously, and Mr. Twister with a cigar would present in the illustrations. See the covers for the 1937, 1948, 1951, and 1961 issues in Yuri Leving, “Mister Twister v strane bol’shevikov: Istoria v 24 chemodanakh,” in Yuri Leving, \textit{Vospitanie optikoi} (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010), 117.

\textsuperscript{47} See also the same idea in Reshetnikov’s painting (Figure 15). I analyze the painting below.
exposed to the anti-modernist satire: Soviet cartoons also maintained ridiculing abstract artists. For example, the 1962 cartoon *Once Happened to an Artist (Sluchai s khudozhnikom)*\(^{48}\) mocked at the story of an American realist artist who was doing realist art that no one would buy. One day, when the artist was selling his paintings in the street, it began raining. The rain wet his canvas and daubed the paints, turning his painting into an abstraction. A rich man passing by liked the abstract work and bought it. After this incident, the artist decided to switch to modernist styles such as Cubism, Expressionism, and abstraction, and his later works were always a success. However, one night, he saw a nightmare: He dreamed that he was living inside the world he had painted; he was dealing with “distorted” expressionist and cubist objects; he was walking in the abstract universe he had created. This frightened him greatly, and the cartoon ends when he wakes up and reconsider his modernist approach to art. Overall, the cartoon’s message was as follows: in the United States, it is hard for a realist artist to make a living unless he switches to modernism, which the rich capitalists support. However, the artist who betrays authenticity for the sake of financial success will inevitably regret it.

Not all the visual satire, which was exploiting anti-modernist ideas, had the visual arts as their main target. Frequently, anti-modernist ideas went along with attacking broader notions of the West, of the American way of life, and of the Soviet phenomenon of liking the West [*nizkopoklonstvo*]. One of the best examples of this is the 1965 poster *Abstrakttvist* by the proponents of the Soviet visual satire, the *Kukryniksy*\(^{49}\) (Figure 12). In the poster, one can see a man and woman; they are the

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\(^{48}\) *Sluchai s khudozhnikom*. Director: Grigorii Kozlov (Moskva: Soiuzmul’tfil’m, 1962).

\(^{49}\) The Kukryniksys was a collective of three distinguished Soviet caricaturists: Mikhail Kuprianov, Pofirii Krilov, and Nikolai Sokolov. From the late 1930s, the artist were among the most popular and officially recognized visual satirists.
**CHAPTER 2. CRITISIZING THE UNSEEN: DENOUNCING AMERICAN MODERNISM**

*stilyagi* (a Soviet subculture characteristic of sympathizing with the West and, hence, banned by the Soviet authorities), as the viewer can extract from their costumes.\(^{50}\) The couple is dancing the twist—a dance style (Figure 14) denounced by USSR officials. One can see above the dancers a reproduction of the 1953 painting *New York* by the American Abstract Expressionist Franz Klein (Figure 13). The precise reproduction (most likely a photocopy) repeats the broken movements of the twist. Both the fragmented choreographic and visual languages emphasize the vagueness of modernist artistic languages and its abnormality when comparing it, for example, to classical ballet and realist painting. It is noteworthy that this caricature by Kukryniksy was issued as a wall poster produced by the publishing house Sovetskii Khudozhnik in 8,000 copies. The poster format demonstrates that Soviet anti-modernist satire was not limited to magazine or newspaper caricatures but took advantage of various propagandistic media. However, visual satire had surprisingly unconventional manifestations, such as the 1961 painting *The Mysteries of Abstractionism* by the celebrated Soviet Socialist Realist painter Fyodor Reshetnikov (Figure 15).

The work consists of three panels. The left panel portrays two historical scenes, which according to the artist, took place in 1913. The top scene represents the notable episode when French students used a donkey’s tail to draw an abstract painting, *The Sunset over the Adriatic*.\(^{51}\) They further submitted the painting to *Salon des Indépendants*, and the painting was well appraised. In Reshetnikov’s painting, behind the canvas and the donkey, the viewer can see the laughing artists wearing their typical neck scarfs. The bottom scene contrasts this: it shows the bourgeoisie

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\(^{50}\) For more on the subculture of *stilyagi*, see Mike O’Mahony, “Juvenile delinquency and art in Amerika,” in *Art On The Line* 1, 1 (2004): 1–15.

\(^{51}\) In fact, it happened at the 1910 Salon des Indépendants.
seriously approaching the painting and not understanding it is a joke. Thus, according to Reshetnikov, abstraction as a style started from a joke and was not the result of serious aesthetical experiments or art evolution.

The central panel also consists of two scenes. The upper scene takes place in Venice during Biennale (either in 1956 or in 1958). The Venetians, symbolizing high-classic culture, are running away from the screaming anonymous crowd. Under pressure from the supporters of contemporary art, the Venetians are pushed out towards the water. An orator with a loudspeaker guides the crowd. The orator belongs to another group of persons portrayed—the group of bourgeois bosses, dealers, and artists. Situated within the bourgeoisie, the orator not only visually connects the upper and lower scenes, but he also connects them conceptually, showing the mottos the orator delivers and the impetus originating from a bourgeois or elitist milieu and from the capitalist bosses.

The capitalist boss is lying in front of an abstract work of art recently created by a monkey. The animal is an American chimpanzee named Betsy, who drew with her finger several works of art that gained publicity in the United States and were purchased. This is another famous anecdote about abstraction that circulated in the USSR.\(^\text{52}\) Betsy—a mammal incapable of critical thinking—is touching her head as if she were contemplating over the painting. Critics and art dealer experts surround the boss. In the lower right corner of the central section, the viewer can see an artist with a hat; he apparently asks a capitalist for money. This part represents the idea that abstraction and its success depend on the rich who sponsor it.

The left panel is a series of variations on the unconventional artistic techniques of modernists. The viewer can see an artist spitting the paint onto the canvas out of his

\(^{52}\text{Caute, The Dancer Defects, 539.}\)
mouth, an artist drawing a being in an upside-down position; etc. The scene at the bottom portrays an exhausted artist lying in front of his dripping or tachiste canvas. The artist, unable to invent a new original technique, represents the idea that abstraction has reached its dead end.

This caricature-triptych was a milestone of Soviet anti-modernist satire. Reshetnikov’s painting is one the most thorough and comprehensive visual representations of the ontology of modernism because it incorporated not one but several crucial anti-modernist arguments, such as its dependence on capitalism, insanity, and others. Moreover, the work represents the eschatology of modernism. Unlike most magazine caricatures, the triptych provided a narrative—the fifty-year-long history from a joke to disillusionment. Noteworthy, Reshetnikov’s manifestation of avant-garde bankruptcy delivered anti-modernist ideas to the visitors in a simplified manner and more accessible manner. Just as church triptychs in medieval Russia served as the Bible for the illiterate, the painting provided a series of scenes from the history of avant-garde art for visitors to grasp visually. Thus, Reshetnikov’s work had the potential to provide a complete ontology and eschatology of modernist art for the aesthetically illiterate visitors. When targeting such aesthetically unprepared visitors, Soviet anti-modernism definitely considered children. Children would likely accept the explanations of the nature of figurative art easily by laughing at ridiculed animals drawing gibberish. Targeting children is especially evident when considering that in 1963, Reshetnikov issued 18,000 copies of a thirty-page brochure, *Mysteries of Abstractionism (Tainy abstraktsionizma).* The publication primarily

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addressed children and enhanced the ideas from his triptych with extra drawings and verbal texts.

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American modernist art, “unseen” by most Soviet people, was subject to permanent negative criticism in Soviet academia and press since the early 1950s. As a result, a complicated and diverse tradition of criticizing US modernism was established. Within this tradition, Soviet critics had constructed an in-house negative variant of the history of American modernist art. The conception of the collapse of the West and the idea of the aesthetic war foregrounded Soviet negative criticism of modernism. From the Soviet perspective, decadent art was a proof of dying capitalism; criticism of modernism was simultaneously implicit and explicit regarding the United States. Anti-modernist rhetoric was all over: through words and pictures it targeted major social groups from children to working-class and academics.

However, simultaneous to the creation of this canon of “bad” modernist American art, Soviet critics were surprisingly establishing its opposite—the canon of “good” realist American art.
Chapter 3. Advocating Realism and the First Non-English History of American Visual Art

Soviet discussions of American realism emerged in the late 1950s within exhibition reviews, catalog publications, and newspaper and journal articles. These texts were typically several pages long, mostly introductory, and thus descriptive.¹ However, Soviet Marxist-Leninist aesthetics did ultimately produce a signature and comprehensive account of American realism. The most representative study is the 1960 monograph *Art of the USA: From the American War of Independence to Our Days (Iskusstvo SSHA: Ot Voiny za nezavisimost’ do nashikh dnei)* by Andrei Chegodaev, a leading Soviet art historian, and ultimately, the top Soviet specialist in American art.²

This monograph, distributed throughout 20,000 copies, presents a milestone within the Soviet art discourse because it is the first comprehensive art historical study focusing on American realist art. Chegodaev’s 116-page text provided a sufficient and detailed overview of eighteenth- to twentieth-century American paintings, graphics, and sculptures (and even some architecture), thus heavily contrasting with the preceding, relatively short Soviet publications on American visual art. The book is also outstanding in its design; it included several hundred

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¹ As a rule, such publications were part of the Soviet promotion of American realist art and should be interpreted in accordance with their functions. They are discussed with Soviet exhibitions of American art in chapters four and five.


Chegodaev extensively published on American art. For the highlights of Chegodaev’s publications, see Rokoell Kent (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1964); Rafael’ Soier (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1968). I do not consider these monographs because I focus instead on Chegodaev’s *Iskusstvo SSHA* as on the most inclusive Soviet study of American art.
reproductions, so the volume amounted to 324 pages.

The monograph was also a milestone within European scholarship on American realism, which was rarely discussed outside the United States. Chegodaev clearly acknowledged this state of affairs:

This book [Art of the USA] is not only the first history of US art to be issued in Russian but also the first to be issued outside of America and England. There has not been anything except . . . highly concise pages in some general art histories in any other European or Asian country.  

According to Chegodaev, American scholars had done “enormous” work systematizing various facts of American art history. Chegodaev claims this because he has apparently examined the historiography of American art comprehensively; he enlists 178 positions in his bibliography. The author is highly critical of the most recent trends in American art history, such as the pro-modernist art criticism by Alfred Barr Jr. Claiming contemporary American art history to be tendentious, Chegodaev argues that US scholars mainly support modernist art, and consequently, underappreciate American figurative styles. Accordingly, American scholarship had ignored numerous significant masters. Therefore, he believes American art history needs to be revised, re-considering the role American realism played in American

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3 Most of them were black and white.
4 Chegodaev, Iskusstvo SSHA, 5.
5 Ibid.
6 Judging by the Chegodaev’s extensive bibliography, the author had the access to a significant body of literature on American art. Being a high-ranked Soviet art historian, he could use the best Soviet libraries where rare foreign literature was kept. He also traveled to the United States several times. In the Unites States, Chegodaev discussed American art with American leftist artists such as Emmy Lou Packard and might have purchased a number of American books. Moreover, Rockwell Kent, a good Chegodaev’s friend, might have supplied the author with relevant information.
culture. Chegodaev was convinced that his outsider position enabled him to make an “objective” revision:

As the proverb says, ‘Lookers-on see most of the game.’ At least, they see something unperceivable by the players. That is why scholars from the Old World can make their own analysis and conclusions. Based on the facts established by American art history, one can risk and reach some sort of different conclusion; one can apply a different methodology. Such a conclusion may contradict some opinions popular among American scholars. ⁸

The quotation above demonstrates that Chegodaev intended to make a novel contribution to the discussion of American art. Let us now focus on his monograph to reveal what methodology he used, which results he achieved, and what contributions to the history of American art he ultimately made.

Tracing the History of American Art

Chegodaev’s history of American art is generally based on the political and social history of the United States. His periodization begins ⁹ in the colonial period of the eighteenth century, when according to Chegodaev, American art was provincial. He treats provincialism as both geographical alienation and as generally low artistic skillfulness (comparing it to artistic production in Europe). Comparing American artists with “professional” European artists, he claims the former were generally dilettanti and amateurs. However, Chegodaev highlights several colonial artists, such as John Singleton Copley, Robert Feake, Joseph Blackburn, and some others, as highly skilled professionals. ¹⁰ According to him, paintings such as Copley’s The Boy with a Flying Squirrel, Feake’s The Reverend Thomas Hiscox, and Blackburn’s

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⁹ Technically, the first period Chegodaev singles out is the pre-colonial art of the Native Americans. However, the author does not go beyond mentioning the pre-colonial period in the introduction. Ibid., 11–12.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.
CHAPTER 3. ADVOCATING AMERICAN REALISM AND THE FIRST NON-ENGLISH HISTORY OF AMERICAN VISUAL ART

Mrs. Jonathan Simpson show how “genuinely professional and artistic portraiture was being established.”\(^\text{11}\) With their works, which were professionally executed and therefore competitive with European art, these artists laid the foundation for what Chegodaev calls throughout his study, “national art,” because:

Lively characters, naturalness of poses and gestures, an inimitable identity of pure American types replaced static template figures and the dilettantish helplessness of portraits of a previous time. These new characteristics became ingrained in the further development of American painting.\(^\text{12}\)

The first significant rise of American art occurred after the American Revolutionary War, which:

[D]rew a heavy line between the past and the future and gave birth to the first significant flourishing of American art and literature, correlative to the birth of a new nation. . . . [C]oming from the depths of a national patriotic uplift, the new art spoke a language full of bright and naturally organic originality. This initial flourishing of the art of the new country—established as the United States of America on July 4, 1776—was also supported by the defensive American-English War of 1812–1814. This blossom lasted approximately until the early ‘20s of the nineteenth century.\(^\text{13}\)

Chegodaev claims the American Revolution led to a democratization of American society and to a flourishing of progressive ideology. He implies these social changes had a crucial impact on the arts, although he does not actually explain the mechanics of this process. According to Chegodaev, the late nineteenth-century post-Revolutionary Gilbert Stuart’s portraiture and John Trumbull’s chronicles of the American Revolutionary War (Figure 16) significantly contributed to establishing what Chegodaev claims to be “genuine American realism.” However, Stuart and Trumbull did not establish genuine American art thus far because they were still using

\(^\text{11}\) Chegodaev, Iskusstvo SSHA, 14.

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 14–15.
outdated classicist templates, and they had oriented themselves towards previous European art rather than producing distinctive American art. Those who eventually formed and established the principles of a national American realism were Charles Peale, Mather Brown, and Thomas Sully.\(^\text{14}\) These three artists formed the principles because of their portraiture, which, according to Chegodaev, was “permeated with the united intention to create a new, genuinely realistic \([\text{realisticheskii}]\) and purely American type of portrait, a type inspired by the great events of the epoch and understood in their mostly democratic sense.”\(^\text{15}\)

According to Chegodaev, the rise of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was succeeded by a decadence in the arts because “the capitalist relations were rapidly developing”\(^\text{16}\) in the United States. Chegodaev argues the bourgeois middle class was becoming more numerous and consequently influential within the art market.\(^\text{17}\) He also argues the bourgeoisie possessed little culture and education to appreciate “genuine” realist art. Instead, such \emph{nouveau riche} demanded portraits that pictured models in an idealized manner. Numerous artists such as Samuel Morse and Chester Harding produced art which idealized a model and thus distorted the reality to please the vainglorious commissioners.\(^\text{18}\)

The second rise of American art, according to Chegodaev, occurred during the second part of the nineteenth century and was likewise prompted by crucial political changes—the Civil War, which allowed the progressive democratic forces to flourish. Due to and after the Civil War, American art became more concerned with peoples’

\(^\text{14}\)Chegodaev, \emph{Iskusstvo SSHA}, 20, 22.
\(^\text{15}\)Ibid., 20.
\(^\text{16}\)Ibid., 24.
\(^\text{17}\)Ibid., 24.
\(^\text{18}\)Ibid., 24–26.
lives, and the human being moved into the artists’ center of interests. Consequently, the greatest three artists of the period—James Whistler, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins—put American art on a new level. Their art presents the highest point of development of American visual art, the best art ever created during the 350-year history of the United States. A good example of this trend is Eakins’ *The Doctor Gross Clinic* (Figure 17), which is a genuinely realist work representing the “ruthless realism” and “all the severity of non-embellished truth” where “a surgeon holding a bloody lancet embodies the inspired intellectual strength.”

After all, Chegodaev claimed that in the second half of the nineteenth century, American art acquired more “original elements which separated it from English art,” and that it became not provincial but fully competitive with the best contemporary pieces throughout the world. As a result, the self-sufficient American art expressed “national spirit.” It is not fully clear what Chegodaev meant with a genuine national American art, but it seems to be a mixture of realism, critical social commentary, representation of the most important social events and tendencies, and patriotism:

[A] genuine national artistic culture was formed and blossomed in America only due to those artists who truly and frankly, deeply and correctly expressed in their art the progressive ideas; great and important thoughts and feelings for their nation; and a love for the country, its people, and nature with all the peculiarities of appearance and character.

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19 Chegodaev, *Iskusstvo SSHA*, 50–51. Again, Chegodaev claims the Civil War impacted the arts but he never explains how exactly it happened. The abolition of slavery and the struggle for freedom and equality were indeed social trends that had a strong impact on art, but the author does expand on the problem.

20 Ibid., 44.

21 Ibid., 57.

22 Ibid., 74–75.

23 Ibid., 75.
Chegodaev further asserts the artistic achievements of Whistler, Homer, and Eakins had a strong positive impact on further American art; but despite this, reactionary forces became stronger later in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{24} Avant-garde art, which had infiltrated the United States at the Armory Show,\textsuperscript{25} flourished. Evoking Soviet anti-modernist rhetoric, Chegodaev discusses American modernist art movements and emphasizes that simultaneously with those, several strong realists emerged in America. The group “The Eight” and the Ashcan school were the most notable. According to Chegodaev, artists such as George Bellows\textsuperscript{26} and Robert Henri continued the positive trend of American realism; Chegodaev especially valued them and other members of the movements for their essential social criticism and attention to the life of “ordinary” people.\textsuperscript{27} Finally, Chegodaev argues that his contemporary artists such as Kent, to whom he dedicates the book,\textsuperscript{28} inherited and advanced the great realistic tradition further.\textsuperscript{29}

Chegodaev’s periodization, as outlined above, demonstrates that his approach to the history of American art was a tribute to the Marxists-Leninist history of art and aesthetics. The author interpreted the changes in art as consequences of social changes; he believed the struggle of progressive forces against capitalism determined

\textsuperscript{24} This is the premise of Chegodaev’s account of the twentieth-century art. See Chapter IV in Chegodaev, \textit{Iskusstvo SSHA}, 77–116.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 91

\textsuperscript{26} Chegodaev argues Bellows was the most American artist because of the critical social commentary typical for his oeuvre. Ibid., 84.

\textsuperscript{27} For more on the Ashcan school and on The Eight, see Ibid., 80–85.

\textsuperscript{28} Chegodaev dedicates the book to Sally and Rockwell Kents. Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 78.
the development of art in the United States.\textsuperscript{30} Throughout the book, Chegodaev maintains that a reactionary capitalist environment that is hostile to “progressive” artists has always been a fundamental obstacle for the flourishing of realist art. Claiming that Western “bourgeois” art critics did not appreciate artists such as Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, Robert Henri, Rockwell Kent, and Anton Refregier the way they deserved, Chegodaev pointed out various reasons for an American artist to be marginalized. First, they were ignored because of the critical social commentary, which showed the bourgeois people who they were:

[G]ood American painters were not so successful and recognized in their homeland: The conservative and dull bourgeoisie, which was so afraid of the incriminating pamphlets of Mark Twain, ignored or openly rejected for them, the unpleasant art of Eakins or Homer. Instead, [they] preferred the school of ‘tender realism’\textsuperscript{31} in literature, and with homebred variations of Paris salon and art nouveau in painting.\textsuperscript{32}

Second, some artists such as William Morris Hunt were aesthetic outsiders because they did not want to accept the rules of the capitalist society and the art market:

Shortly before his tragic end, he told his followers: ‘In another country, I could have been a painter.’ Hunt complained that “in America, there is no atmosphere of art and everything comes down to obtaining money.’ In his complaint, one might not find a disappointment in unsuccessful life but a menacing prediction about the faith of true creative art in a bourgeois regime.\textsuperscript{33}

The wide occurrence of stories claiming that Western bourgeois society is unable to appreciate genuine realist art allows one to speak about the topos of the American

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} “[T]he face and essence of American art were shaped by peculiarities of life and the historical fate of the American people. American art was formed inseparably from the feelings and thoughts of the best American people.” Ibid., 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} “Tender realism” is a calque from Russian \textit{nezhnyi realizm}. The phrase does not occur in American historiography.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Chegodaev, \textit{Iskusstvo SSHA}, 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 46.
\end{itemize}
realist painter as a victim of the capitalist order. Chegodaev championed underappreciated artists and represented them as fighters against bourgeois reaction:34

The entire life of Eakins was a continuous series of encounters with reactionary bourgeois surroundings. The endless offences, mockeries, and derisions, which he met, could turn anyone away from creating art. We should do justice to the nobleness of this wonderful painter, who has never made any concessions to philistine tastes and the bourgeois narrow-mindedness of his contemporaries.35

Ultimately, Chegodaev’s book interprets the history of American art in terms of the ideological struggle between progressive and reactionary forces. However, unlike his Soviet colleagues, who specialized in denouncing twentieth-century modernism, Chegodaev does not simply oppose realism to abstraction. He extended his binary framework by interpreting several figurative styles as reactionary. Thus, according to Chegodaev, American progressive art was struggling with reactionary art at any given moment. At different historical periods, the “best” of American realism by Gilbert Stuart, Winslow Homer, and Rockwell Kent clashed with several reactionary movements, from academic salon paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to Romantic art of the Hudson River School in the nineteenth century and American Regionalism and abstract art in the twentieth century. Chegodaev denounces the allegedly reactionary styles of each epoch for a particular reason in each case. Thus, when he speaks about academic painting, he criticizes the idealization of the model typical for such art. When he speaks about the Hudson River School, he denounces its artists for their idealism and spiritualism, along with the distortion of the landscape and an improper depiction. When he speaks about Regionalism and the naïve artist

34 The victimization and heroization of certain American realist artists was crucial for Soviet-organized exhibitions of American art which are discussed in chapters four and five.

such as Cane or Moses, he criticizes the exaggerated expressions. When he speaks about abstract art, he focuses on the ignorance of representation of real life in such art.\textsuperscript{36}

**Between “Objective” and “Prejudiced”**

Chegodaev’s rough binary conceptualization of American art in terms of good and evil challenges the premise of his book: to provide an “objective” perspective contrary to the dominating pro-modernist narratives. Chegodaev turns out to be not less tendentious than the Western pro-modernist scholars he criticized. For example, focusing on realist art, he simultaneously argues for the exclusion of several significant masters of modernism from his canon of American art. Noteworthy, he does not simply omit modernist painters from his story, and he actually does dedicate several pages to their art.\textsuperscript{37} However, after providing a brief outline of modernist art, he ultimately dismisses it altogether. He denies modernist art to be a part of his history of art: “[T]he history of American art will not lose anything if an analysis of contemporary artists such as Toby, Gorki, Pereira, Glarner, Motherwell, Rothko, or Kooning is omitted.”\textsuperscript{38}

On the other hand, Chegodaev’s research is indeed more “objective” because it focuses on many well-known and lesser-known realist artists who did not enjoy much attention within the dominating contemporary American pro-modernist historiographies. Moreover, American realist art was generally unknown to the Soviet audience, and Chegodaev’s monograph actually introduced a plenitude of visual and

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\textsuperscript{36} For Chegodaev’s criticism of academic painting, see *Iskusstvo SSHA*, 25–26; for criticism of the Hudson River School, see Ibid., 30; for criticism of naïve artists and the Regionalists, see Ibid., 95–96; for criticism of abstract art, see Ibid., 100–102.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 89–102.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 101.
factual material on American realist art to the Soviet people. Chegodaev’s account was indeed a milestone in the studies of American art, and living contemporary American artists acknowledged it as such, arguing the monograph provides an “excellent and comprehensive survey.”

That said, the book should be seen as a last brick in the Soviet canon of American visual art, which by the early 1960s included styles from figurative to abstract, from the pre-colonial period to the present.

The Soviet representation of American art, however, is not limited to verbal discussions. Soviet history of American art was created not only with the academic studies and with debates in the press but also with the exhibitions that Soviet authorities organized.

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Chapter 4. At Home Among Strangers: The Myth of Rockwell Kent

A discussion of exhibitions of American art organized by the Soviet Union should start from the case of Rockwell Kent who enjoyed an unprecedentedly warm welcome in the Cold War USSR. The following Kent’s solo exhibitions relevant for the chronological frame of my research should be singled out as the key ones:

1) the 1957–58 touring exhibition which visited Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and some other Soviet cities;

2) the 1960 Moscow and the 1961 Leningrad exhibitions organized after Kent had bestowed 900 of his works to the Soviet people.1

This significant amount of solo exhibitions indicates at an unexampled loyalty of the official USSR towards Rockwell Kent because works of no other American artist could have been displayed in Soviet museums so frequently before the Cold War or in post-Soviet Russia; what to speak about the Soviet Union, maintaining essential anti-Americanism and isolated by the Iron Curtain from the West.

The artist’s Soviet success naturally stemmed from his figurative art and from his personal socialist background and sympathies for the USSR. By introducing unknown material from the Archives of American Art, as well as other sources concerning Kent’s engagement with the USSR, this chapter expands on the existing scholarship2 on Kent and provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex aesthetic

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1 Other major Kent’s shows include the 1966 show of Kent’s collection at the USSR Academy of Art (Moscow) and the 1982 Moscow exhibition which celebrated 100 years from the date of Kent’s birth. Alongside with “key” exhibitions in main Soviet cities, a number of less significant shows took place in Kuibyshev, Novosibirsk, and other locations in the 1960s to 1980s. Examining how the Soviet propaganda established the myth of Rockwell Kent, this chapter focuses on the major late 1950s and early 1960s exhibitions.

and political factors that made him a super-star in the Soviet Union. In doing so, the chapter seeks to advance existing research on Kent, focusing on the results of his promotion that are still exempt from thorough analysis. In a final step, the chapter demonstrates that Kent occupied a specific symbolic position in Soviet culture, as Soviet propaganda re-conceptualized Kent’s history to establish the Myth of Rockwell Kent, which among others, was exploited for anti-American propaganda.

1953–1957: Assembling the First Kent's Show

The first significant show of American art in a Soviet museum, *Rokuell Kent: Zhivopis’ i grafika* (*Rockwell Kent: Paintings and Graphics*), opened at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow on December 12, 1957. This “large retrospective exhibition . . . in honor of . . . [Kent’s] seventy-fifth birthday” \(^3\) included 55 landscape paintings and 163 graphic works. The exhibition catalog demonstrates\(^4\) that all official institutions involved in the organization were Soviet and significant: the USSR Union of Artists, the monopolist of official artistic practices; the Pushkin Museum, a major museum; and VOKS, the party responsible for major international cultural contacts who initiated Kent’s show. The acting Cultural Attaché of the Washington embassy,

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In his letter of response, Roberts congratulated Kent and emphasized the significance of the exhibition for the development of peaceful cultural dialogue between the two Cold War superpowers. Roberts was very enthusiastic about the idea of Kent’s Moscow exhibition and decided to contribute to the undertaking. Roberts offered Kent his service in contacting various cultural authorities in leading European and Asian countries in order to organize a world tour of Kent’s art. Kent thought that Roberts’s initiative was worthwhile and, therefore, enclosed a copy of a proposal by Roberts in a letter to Soviet representatives. Ultimately, the idea of a world tour did not work out. Roberts to Kent, April 10, 1957. Kent papers. Alphabetical files: American Russian Institute, Inc. (see also: Alexander, Gross W.), 1942–1969. Reel 5156. Frame 399. AAA.

\(^4\) *Vystavka proizvedenii Rokuella Kenta. Zhivopis’ i grafika*, exhibition catalog, introduction by Andrei Chegodaev (Moscow, 1957), 1. Likewise, Rockwell Kent in his numerous letters to fellows and colleagues admitted that the Soviet Union authored the project of exhibiting his works in the USSR.
Tamara Mamedova, managed the project. In March 1957, she invited Kent to the Soviet Representation Headquarters in New York City\(^5\) where they made an oral agreement for the exhibition.\(^6\)

The Soviet side was in charge of all organizational activities, except for selecting works, which they left to Kent’s discretion. The artist intended to prepare a cross-section of his over fifty-year-long artistic career and included landscape paintings created in Maine, landscapes of Alaska and Ireland, and numerous graphic works from different years. While twenty to thirty paintings for the show were a part of Kent’s personal collection, some belonged to various American museums and private collections.\(^7\) Consequently, some of the paintings had to go on loan.


Few documents indicate that Kent had been approached with a draft project of a possible show before June 1953. In his 1970 letter to Morford the artist recalled that Mamedova first asked (no date given) to send photos of his works to the USSR to be considered by “the committee of the Academy.” Kent “in a course of time” received photos and translations of comments. Kent’s papers include a photo picturing several professionals gathered around a “long table” (Figure 19). Archives of American Art dates the photo as of 1960, which is hardly correct considering the translation of comments from a VOKS (not Academy) session from June 1953. However, Kent’s 1970 letter is not a fully reliable source. Giving no dates, confusing “Academy” and “VOKS,” Kent, being in his eighties recalls events to take place tens of years prior to 1970. Kent to Morford, October 7, 1970. Kent papers. Alphabetical file: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc., cont. 1964–1971. Reel 5216. Frame 1030–1031. AAA; Stenographic Record of a Meeting of the VOKS Section of Fine Arts on June 5, 1953. Kent papers. Alphabetical file: Kent Collection 1953–1947 (sic!), 1960–1961. Reel 5199. Frame 124–131. AAA.

Nevertheless, it is very likely that a VOKS representative approached Kent before 1953, especially when considering that the artist had been communicating with the institution on peace and anti-fascist issues since the 1940s. The exact story and motivations of the Soviet side are not known but within the overall mission of VOKS to establish international cultural contacts, an idea to show Kent’s works in the USSR seems quite logical. However, Kent’s show was hardly possible in early 1950s because the state demand on foreign art to the USSR was not on agenda until during the Thaw; and that is when previous connections with Kent and a draft project of his show might have been easily evoked. (A separate section of the article discusses this context.)

In Kent’s letter to Mamedova, dated March 21, 1957, the artist enclosed a list of the works not in his possession and provided her with the owners’ addresses. The list included twenty-seven paintings, with thirteen paintings from nine museums such as the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney, and fourteen paintings from eight private collections.\(^8\) Assuming the Soviet Union, as the acting organizer, would contact the private owners and museums to arrange a loan, Kent thought he had made his contribution to the organization of the exhibition. Therefore, he was optimistic about the forthcoming “monster retrospective exhibition.”\(^9\)

However, the Soviet side was slow in the beginning to assemble the pictures. The project required authorization by VOKS and embassy authorities, and it took Mamedova more than a month to acquire permission. Kent’s attempts to talk with Mamedova about the exhibition in detail were unsuccessful, as the latter ignored their two scheduled appointments. On April 13, 1957, Kent wrote to Mamedova that her silence worried him; he said he hoped that no problems with collecting his works from the owners had been encountered.\(^10\) In fact, in April, the Soviets were not even ready to start assembling. To expedite the process, Kent involved his fellow art dealer, Robert McIntyre, who would help Mamedova assemble the collection by making use of his network of acquaintances in the art community. In addition, Kent and McIntyre wrote a number of requests for the paintings.\(^11\)

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\(^11\) Most Kent’s requests to loan paintings were satisfied. However, several museums refused to provide works of art for the Soviet show because paintings had been already announced for various exhibitions.
On May 25, two months after the initial oral agreement, Kent finally received an official letter from the Soviet Embassy, which clarified that the exhibition was to open at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in September 1957. The Soviet side suggested the paintings go on loan for three to four months. Mamedova claimed that all preparatory activities, such as packaging, insurance, and other aspects, were on behalf of VOKS and that the Amtorg Trading Corporation\textsuperscript{12} would transport the art collection.\textsuperscript{13}

Finally, in July, a compilation of Kent’s paintings and graphic works was ready for transportation to Moscow.\textsuperscript{14} Shipping to Moscow took longer than expected; therefore, they had to postpone the exhibition until December. Due to the delay, Kent and McIntyre had to write numerous letters to private owners and museum directors, apologizing for the failure to return the works on time, which initially went on loan for three months. In addition to the delays in assembly and transportation, there was another reasonable excuse for prolonging the loan: the Soviet side now wanted to show Kent’s paintings not only at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, but also at the State Hermitage in Leningrad. Having barely finished organizing the Moscow show, across the United States. Some of the private collectors rejected Kent’s request as well. Thus, Hans Hinrichs refused to submit either of his two Kent’s paintings because the owner had anti-communist sentiments provoked by the Soviet suppression of the recent 1956 Hungarian Uprising. Nevertheless, the forthcoming Soviet exhibition did not lack paintings critically because Kent could easily add works from his large personal collection, which he ultimately did.

To expedite the process, besides contacting the owners, Kent ultimately had to contribute to the organization of his show in several ways from suggesting the shipping company to suggesting an American publicist Jessie Jordan who, according to Kent, was qualified enough to cover the show in media. For more on the preparation of the exhibition, see the alphabetical file “Exhibition Correspondence, 1926–1971” in Kent papers.

\textsuperscript{12} Amtorg (Amerikanskia Torgovlia), also known as Amtorg American Trading Corporation. Established in 1924, this organization was involved in trade between US private companies and the Soviet Government.


\textsuperscript{14} Ferris and Pearce, Rockwell Kent's Forgotten Landscapes, 74.
which was to open soon, the Soviet cultural authorities arranged an additional
presentation, turning Kent’s solo show into a touring exhibition throughout various
Soviet capitals.

The Soviet intention to show Kent’s art to larger Moscow and Leningrad
audiences, as well as the cooperation between a private party (Kent) and USSR
officials, demonstrated that the Soviets put great hope into the forthcoming shows. To
organize the first exhibition of American art on display in the Soviet Union, the USSR
had to carry out a long series of actions and procedures, such as approaching an artist;
assembling, insuring, and shipping the works; and covering expenses. Moreover, this
was only the first stage of the enterprise. After being delivered to the USSR, Kent’s
paintings would need to be hung, advertised, transported from city to city, and finally
sent back to the United States. Clearly, the Soviets pursued this time- and money-
consuming, laborious project not only due to a love of the arts; the ideological and
political motives, as well as the significance of this cultural contact, can be fully
understood only in the context of the Cold War.

1957 Exhibition and/as Politics

In Kent’s extensive personal correspondence of 1957 and in subsequent years,
the artist maintains that the Moscow show had been designed not only as an
exhibition, but as “a step towards peace, friendship and better understanding.” This
and similar phrasing occurs in most official documents relating to the exhibition and
in miscellaneous, printed material from that period. This cliché was a significant part

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15 For example, Kislova in her November 28, 1957, letter to the Deputy Minister of culture Nikolai
Danilov proposes an estimate for the Moscow exhibition as of 34,500 rubles. Kislova to Danilov,
November 28, 1957. F. 9576. Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul’turnoi sviazi s zarubezhnymi
Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF). Hereafter materials from the collection cited as document title, fond,
opis’, delo, list, GARF.
of the Cold War rhetoric, often repeated merely as an automatic gesture. However, the meaning and interpretation of this cliché were not immutable because they reflected a concrete historical-political situation. Let us consider the significance of Kent’s exhibitions as “a step towards peace and friendship” between the United States and the USSR in 1957.

Immediately after World War II, Soviet isolationist politics minimized cultural contacts between the United States and the USSR. The Iron Curtain cut the world into two blocs, literally preventing cultural exchange, save for a few circumstances controlled by Soviet official institutions. This kind of foreign policy echoed the Soviet anti-Western domestic policy that was at its peak during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of 1946–1953. As a result, the Soviet government technically prevented most possible foreign influences, be it an academic or an artistic exchange, leaving people largely unaware of all things Western. The United States, although to a lesser extent than the Soviets, also largely contributed to the alienation of the two countries. The 1947–1954 Second Red Scare, the trials of the House of Un-American American Activities Committee, and activities of the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy contributed to demonizing the USSR. Consequently, the citizens from both countries lacked basic information about one another’s cultures. The only exception was excessive news about nuclear arms or the Space Race.

In the Soviet Union, the situation started to change with Nikita Khrushchev announcing a de-Stalinization at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956.\textsuperscript{16} This liberalization in Soviet politics is known as the Thaw. At first, this policy heavily contrasted to previous explicit anti-American

attitudes. Soviet propaganda of the mid-1950s reflected the new ideological trend, among others, by reconsidering the concept of peace. According to the recently actualized concept of “peaceful coexistence,” Marxism-Leninism admitted the Soviet Union could co-exist and even cooperate with capitalist countries to take advantage of their technologies, and therefore, speed up the advent of communism. To initiate contact with the Western Bloc, the borders had to crack open. As a result, isolationist nationalist policy switched to a policy of friendship and peace, allowing a cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as with other countries.  

The Thaw influenced Soviet foreign cultural contacts significantly. In 1957, the 6th World Festival of Youth and Students took place in Moscow, hosting 34,000 people from 131 countries. The festival’s slogan, “For Peace and Friendship,” clearly stated the agenda. The festival signified the increasing of artistic contacts between the Soviet Union and foreign countries, as can be seen from the Gorki Park exhibition consisting of 4,500 works from sixty-two countries, including two canvases by Richard Colman, a minor abstract artist from the United States.

The shift in Soviet policy can be perfectly seen when considering the dynamics of changes in the May Day slogans: “The most striking over-all difference between the post-Stalin slogans and those of the late Stalin period was the reappearance and growing frequency of “internationalist” symbols. This trend was signaled by the May Day slogans in 1953 which were issued about six weeks after the death of Stalin. The very first slogan contained the exhortation, ‘Raise higher the banner of proletarian internationalism!’ In every subsequent year following the death of Stalin this exhortation was repeated. Until 1962 it was contained either in the first slogan or in one of the first three. . . . However, in 1962, it dropped to seventh place in the listing, perhaps reflecting a certain disillusionment in Moscow with the results of cultivating the foreign ‘internationalist’ audience.” Frederick C. Barghoorn, The Soviet Foreign Propaganda (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 36–37.

For more on international cultural contacts of the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev Thaw, see Eleonory Gilburd, “The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the 1950s,” in The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s, ed. Denis Kozlov et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 362–401; Aucoin, “Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to Cultural Exchange and American Information Activity during the Khrushchev Years.”

In my thesis, I do not focus on the case of Colman for the following reasons: 1) this display of the two works by Colman was not a “pure” exhibition of American art: the works of this secondary American artist were incorporated in the grand international display of art; 2) the showcase of the two
 Besides the festival, various previously unthinkable forms of cultural exchanges became possible, and a significant number of them were between the Soviet Union and the United States. Student and cultural exchange programs launched, allowing Soviet troops to perform at the Broadway and for American scholars to conduct fieldwork within Soviet archives. The United States and the Soviet Union both appreciated these contacts, and this would eventually lead to the signing of the Lacy-Zarubin cultural agreement in 1958, which would legitimize the exchange and encourage further contacts. The American press optimistically responded to this new policy of the Kremlin: “MOSCOW, May 21—The Soviet Union looked at its western window today and saw an Iron Curtain. The fabric appeared to be Western, the Government said, and it appointed a committee to haul it down.”  

Within this newly emerged agenda, Kent, who had been in touch with VOKS concerning socialist and anti-fascist issues since at least the 1940s, was one of the most convenient American artists for the Soviet Union to exhibit (he was practical in terms of already established connections). The optimistic political climate of friendship and peace was turning Kent’s show into a significant act of Soviet international and domestic policies. Considering the Soviet Union’s previous cultural isolation from the United States, Kent’s exhibition was indeed a sign of a particular improvement in the relations between the two superpowers. In this respect, the paintings by Colman was not organized by Soviet or American officials as a display of American visual art. Thus, the 1957 display of Colman’s works within the 6th World Youth Festival is beyond the scope of my research: neither American nor Soviet officials approached Colman in order to exploit him in the Cold War cultural warfare.


21 For telegrams from and to VOKS, see Kent papers. Alphabetical file: USSR 1941–1950. Reel 5242. AAA.
exhibition established the international reputation of the Soviet Union as a country open to the West, a country that overcame cultural Stalinism. As for internal policy, Kent’s art answered the demands for Western art and acquainted the Soviet people with art that claimed to be genuinely American. Clearly, Kent realized his mission, and in his official statement for VOKS, he argued:

That at this time an American painter, and in particular a realist, should through his work have been chosen to be invited guest to the Soviet Union is to me, and will be held by millions of others to be, a matter of great significance. My paintings—the paintings of a man born and reared in America, conditioned by the deeper values of American life—will be seen and understood, and maybe even loved, by Soviet people. So may our peoples come at least to know and understand and love each other.  

Ignored at Home, Welcomed Abroad

Whereas, this chapter has shown the meaning of Kent’s exhibition for Soviet cultural policy, this section will focus on the reception of the Moscow show in the artist’s homeland—in the United States. Kent’s position in American society is one of the key factors to understand further the nature of Kent’s engagement with the Soviet Union.

In his letter to Joseph and Trudy Bunzel, dated March 26, 1957, the artist claims that people would interpret his acceptance of the Soviet offer to exhibit in Moscow as subversive. Kent had his reasons for expecting such a domestic reaction because he was both a popular and controversial figure in American society.

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24 In 1937, the New Yorker commented on Kent’s popularity in America as follows: “That day will mark a precedent, which brings no news of Rockwell Kent.” Cite by: Constance Martin and Richard West, Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 1.
Kent was not only known as a landscape painter or as a prominent book illustrator, widely recognized in 1930 after he created a series of illustrations for Herman Melville’s novel, *Moby Dick*. He was also known for decades as a brave explorer who gained fame thanks to his expeditions to Greenland, Tierra del Fuego, and other regions, and thanks to the paintings and books he created during and after his trips. However, Kent and his enterprises were not always a source of positive news regarding geographical or aesthetic victories. Since his early years, Kent was a staunch socialist struggling for labor rights. Throughout his life, he involved himself to various leftist organizations such as the National Committee of People’s Rights, the International Workers Order, and other associations. Kent participated in the leftist movements not only by creating paintings and graphics on social issues but also by his frequent direct, social-political actions. For example, in 1927, he boycotted the state of Massachusetts over the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Protesting the execution, Kent decided not to send his works to an exhibition in Massachusetts.

Kent’s pro-socialist stance provoked a wide range from his contemporaries’ reactions, from solidarity with the Soviet Union to aggression from certain US authorities. The latter trend culminated in 1953 when Kent became a subject of Senator McCarthy’s commission investigating the pro-communist books kept in US overseas libraries, which included writings by Kent. McCarthy initiated a hearing and Kent appeared before the senator. When asked whether Kent was a communist (in fact, he never was),\(^{25}\) the artist did not answer, pleading the Fifth Amendment. However, Kent’s response was interpreted as his confession, and the trial had a

serious effect on his position in the United States, making him a persona non grata.\textsuperscript{26} Kent’s position became even more complicated when in 1955, the State department canceled his foreign passport, and therefore, Kent found himself both undesired at home and unable to go abroad.

Considering Kent’s opposition, all preconditions existed for Americans to treat his exhibition as subversive because the “unfavorable” artist was going to exhibit in the museums of America’s Cold War enemy. However, Kent overdramatized the anticipated reaction, as in 1957 and 1958, American society practically overcame McCarthyism. Kent’s show was neither denounced nor favored; instead, it was left practically unnoticed.\textsuperscript{27} Shortly before the exhibition opened on December 10, Kent informed Holland Roberts, director of the American Russian Institute, that the State Hermitage requested the exhibition after Moscow, and that this was a definite sign of success. Nevertheless, the artist doubted whether the American press would cover the show, and he complained people in the United States underestimated its significance:

I am wondering if our press will give it even a notice. If we can’t even launch a pill into space, we have at least launched a show of American pictures into the heart of Russia. That is at least something that we might well show ourselves proud of.\textsuperscript{28}

Kent’s prognosis was correct. Notwithstanding a few articles published in American pro-communist press, such as \textit{People’s World},\textsuperscript{29} there are only a couple of brief


\textsuperscript{27} This is not to say that the press ignored Kent only for political reasons. His position within the art scene was also crucial; and it is discussed in consequent sections of the chapter.


announcements found for the forthcoming show in American mass media.\textsuperscript{30}

In contrast to the silence of the American press, the Soviet media provided a strong and positive support for the show.\textsuperscript{31} A number of leading Soviet newspapers and magazines, such as \textit{Sovetskaia Kul’tura}, \textit{Pravda}, \textit{Iskusstvo}, and \textit{Ogonek}, reviewed Kent’s exhibitions.\textsuperscript{32} The articles’ language is rich with strong, positive connotations such as “outstanding American artist,” “the author of remarkable landscapes,” “great master Rockwell Kent,” and even “one of the most respected and prominent artists-realists in the United States.”

The exhibition was a success, not only in terms of the official recognition of the Soviet cultural establishment, but also in terms of attendance. In Moscow and Leningrad alone, 300,000 people visited the show. Initially assembled only for a two-month display in Moscow, the exhibition travelled to the State Hermitage in early 1958. Afterwards, it went on to show at the Odessa Museum of Western and Eastern Art and the Riga Museum of Fine Arts. At the end of 1958, the show even travelled to Ukraine to the Kiev Museum of Western and Eastern Art, and Kent, whose right to travel had just been affirmed, even attended the show in person.\textsuperscript{33}

In total, during the whole 1957–1958 tour, more than 500,000 Soviet people

\textsuperscript{30} For example, a six-sentence announcement “Kent’s Art to Moscow,” \textit{New York Times}, May 10, 1957.

\textsuperscript{31} Thus, as early as on June 4, 1957, six month prior to exhibition, a large article about Kent and his forthcoming was published in \textit{Sovetskaia Kul’tura}. See K. Chugunov, “Khudozhnik, publisist, borets za mir!” \textit{Sovetskaia Kul’tura}, June 4, 1957. Along with this article, a number of press releases were published.


\textsuperscript{33} Although he had been invited at the very beginning, he could not accept the invitation until his passport case was solved in 1958. It is interesting whether his success in the USSR could have influenced the decision of the Department of State.
visited the show. Due to the improvised tour of his works, the paintings—initially loaned for three months—finally returned two years later in late April of 1959. When the paintings finally returned the United States, Kent undertook one of the most unexpected enterprises in the history of cultural relations between the United States and the Soviet Union: In 1960, he bestowed approximately 900 of his works to the Soviet people.

The Gift

“The Great Kent Collection” is how Kent joked about his vast, personal collection of paintings and graphic works during an interview with Soviet correspondents. Forty years later, in the 1990s, Scott Ferris, a prominent Kent researcher, would frequently use this proclamation as an academic term without any shadow of humor, which indeed represents the historical and aesthetic value of the collection, encompassing Kent’s works from the early 1900s to the late 1960s.

In his profound research on the provenance of the collection, Ferris outlines that Kent’s personal sympathies for the Soviet Union, which stemmed from Kent’s leftism, influenced his decision to give the collection to the Soviet people. Indeed, Kent’s sincere pro-Soviet stance guided him; he used to express his admiration for the USSR in multiple interviews and particularly emphasized that his gift coincided with the Soviet call before the United Nations for complete and lasting world

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36 Ferris and Pearce, Rockwell Kent’s Forgotten Landscapes, 75.

37 Ibid., 74–75.
disarmament. However, these altruistic motives were not the only factors that drove Kent.

Kent’s position on the American art scene of the late 1950s was yet another reason to prompt the gift. In a 1960 letter to Andrei Chegodaev, the artist recalled the incredible success of his 1957–1958 touring exhibition in the Soviet Union and complained that after returning to the United States, his paintings were still unpacked and placed in a shed at his farm in the Adirondacks. Kent complained that after the notorious 1953 hearing, dealers and museums were not interested in his art. Before the hearings, Kent had a preliminary agreement with the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, Maine, about constructing a separate wing to showcase works from his vast personal collection. The museum terminated the agreement right after the hearing, and since then, he had not a single show. However, the decline of Kent’s artistic popularity should not be seen only a result of his activism.

Kent was an aesthetic outsider of the American art establishment of the 1950s when American avant-garde scored its biggest successes. In contrast to Pollock’s action paintings and Rothko’s multiforms, Kent’s realism appeared old-fashioned, if not obsolete (Figure 39, Figure 20). Kent argued that even if he could construct a special exhibition hall for his works, it would have been as useless as if “Oistrakh would have started playing the violin somewhere in the Sahara.” This metaphor is a good example of Kent’s outsider position in the American art culture of the 1950s. Considering the fact that from 1942 until 1966, i.e. for 24 years, Kent practically did

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38 “Dar Rokuella Kenta sovetskому narodu. Press-konferentsiia v Ministerstve kul’tury.”


Kent did indeed experience exclusion from the artistic life of that period, and he acknowledged that his devotion to realism was one of the reasons for his exclusion: “In the last years, I did not contribute to exhibitions because American shows mainly focus on modernist-abstrac tendencies. . . . At such an exhibition realist art would look like a horse among a herd of cattle.” Finding himself in a hostile, American modernist-oriented art market, Kent could not help but appreciate the advantages of cooperation with the Soviet Union, where his realist art was welcome.

In 1958, seeing no opportunities to exhibit his works in the United States in the immediate future and recalling his Soviet success, Kent decided to present most of his paintings, drawings, prints, and books to the Soviet people. At a press conference, Kent admitted that his gift should be interpreted as a both a peace act and a particular gesture aimed at criticizing internal American policy: “I can only hope that the American people, who have often shown their liking for my work as a painter, realizing that their access to it is hindered by institutional and governmental control, will understand the compelling motives of my gift.”

Kent’s gift prompted his second Soviet exhibition, which opened at the Moscow Academy of Arts on November 19, 1960. The show occupied thirteen halls.

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41 Except the 1955 show “Right to Travel” at Art of Today Gallery which seek to stick public attention to the passport case. For more, see the Brochure of the exhibition in TAM.134. Box 1. Folder 8.

42 The first in 24 years Kent’s exhibition in the United States finally would be opened only in 1966.


44 Kent delivered his offer through Chegodaev. On June 20, 1960, highest-ranked Soviet cultural authorities wrote Kent a collective letter. Signed by Ekaterina Furtseva, Minister of Culture of the Soviet Union; Sergei Gerasimov, First Secretary of the USSR Union of Artists; Nina Popova, Chair of SSOD; Boris Ioganson, President of the USSR Academy of Arts, the letter acknowledged the acceptance of the Kent’s gift.

and contained almost 900 works; it was four times larger than the previous 1957 show. At the opening ceremony, Kent, who had spent two months in the USSR travelling throughout Russia, Georgia, Armenia, read aloud his donation. As with his first 1957–1958 touring exhibition, the gift was framed within the context of American-Soviet friendship. Khrushchev personally appreciated the gift as a sign of friendship in a June 20, 1960, issue of Sovetskaia Kul’tura.

When organizing Kent’s first comparatively small show in 1957, few could hardly predict the extent to which Soviet contacts with the artist would develop. Kent’s pro-Soviet position and his opposition to the American political and aesthetic mainstream helped him pass a kind of ideological clearance, facilitating his promotion in the Soviet Union. And what about his art? How did the Soviets deal with it?

More Than a Great Artist

That the official reception was exclusively positive is no surprise when considering that Kent’s promotion was, in a way, a State project. Numerous official institutions (e.g., VOKS, museums, etc.) involved in the promotion of Kent were advancing the artist; hence, the absence of any negative criticism is logical.

Although Soviet critics extensively published on Kent since 1957, the discussion concerning his art did not evaluate considerably. Articles on Kent consisted of clichés, involved standard arguments, and ultimately reproduced the same narrative. To summarize, Soviet critics argued that Kent was one of the best

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46 Kent estimated only his eighty paintings as $200,000–300,000. This figure does not consider the gifted graphic works and other miscellaneous objects.
48 In some exceptional cases, the articles on Kent were not only compositionally or semantically alike—they consisted of identical passages. For example, the two articles dedicated to different occasions (Kent’s 1957 show and 1960 gift), authored by different writers (Evgenii Levitin and E. Krivich), and published in different newspapers (Sovetskaia Kul’tura and Literatura i Zhizn’) include lengthy word-to-word repetitions when discussing Kent’s biography and art. Evgenii Levitin,
contemporary artists of America. His figurative art was progressive as opposed to the decadent modernism that was widespread in the “Mecca of abstractionism”—the United States.  

Soviet critics also hailed Kent as a versatile artist, who during his more than fifty-year-long career, had worked in various techniques, from graphics to painting.

Similar articles in newspapers and exhibition catalogs often reproduced illustrations of Kent’s oeuvre. Which ones were most common and why?

_The Greenlanders_ (Figure 20) illustrated several articles on Kent’s first 1957 exhibition in the Soviet Union. The cover page of Kent’s Soviet catalog for 1958 exhibition at the Hermitage (which took place within the 1957–1958 touring exhibition) also reproduced the painting portraying three Greenlanders roping something up a hill (Figure 21). Soviet critics argued _The Greenlanders_ showed “the courageous struggle with the severe nature” and that the painting hailed the people’s labor. Therefore, his work introduced Kent to the Soviet audience as a poet of labor. Such representation was potentially effective considering that the aesthetization of labor was one of the goals of official Soviet art. The audience, familiar with the labor themes in art, would conclude that Kent as an artist somewhat resonated official

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50 See, for example, the article “Vystavka proizvedenii sovremennogo amerikanskogo khudozhnika Kenta,” _Pravda_, December 13, 1957. See also Levitin, “Vystavka Rokueilla Kenta.”


52 Some articles straightforwardly acknowledged Kent as a poet of labor. For example, B. Volkov, “Pevets truda i bor’by” (“The Singer of Labor and Struggle”), _Uchitel’ skaia Gazeta_ [Moscow], November 22, 1966.

Soviet art.

Another reason for using that image to display the representation of Kent is that *The Greenlanders* was representative of Kent’s art in general. The painting illustrated well what the Soviets argued to be typical for Kent’s art, that is, Kent’s focus on man and nature:

Kent’s favorite hero—the acting and struggling man—goes through all his art. That is why he might be attracted so much by the austere nature of Extreme North–Greenland, or of Extreme South–Terra del Fuego, because there the constructive role of human labor can be seen especially comprehensively and stately.\(^{54}\)

Kent’s political graphics frequently illustrated articles to support Soviet representation of Kent as a peacemaker and as a socialist. For instance, his “Dove of Peace” (Figure 23)—a picture showing a dove nesting in a military helmet—manifested the peaceful agenda essential to Kent’s Soviet exhibitions and Kent’s reputation as a peacemaker. As a visual proof of Kent’s socialism, the Soviets often used the *Workers of the World, Unite!* (Figure 22)—a translation of the number one Soviet slogan into visual language, featuring a worker preparing to hit two abbreviated swords.

Noteworthy was that the Soviet press never subjected Kent’s art to thorough stylistic or formal analysis,\(^{55}\) and a typical article would dedicate just a few sentences to provide a concise, descriptive account:

Kent’s works attract with their thorough execution of details, with the loving attitude of the author toward the subject of depiction; at the same time, they distinguish with their romantic excitement, which is typical for the artist when he tells the viewer about what he had seen.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{54}\) Levitin, “*Vystavka Rokuella Kenta.*” Also, the painting looked like the Repin’s.

\(^{55}\) The only researched document when Kent’s style was discussed is the 1953 VOKS stenogram (see footnote 9 of this chapter). Leading Soviet artists such as Gerasimov, Shmarinov and many others participated in the session. The general opinion of Kent was positive but the style of his paintings was insignificantly criticized for generalization and oversimplification.

\(^{56}\) Levitin, “*Vystavka Rokuella Kenta.*” The same in Krivich, “*Iskusstvo Rokuella Kenta.*”
Instead of discussing Kent’s style, an article would heavily focus on Kent’s biography. Thus, paradoxically, in the Soviet press, the art of this American artist was never the central theme of an article. Moreover, typical dialogue regarding Kent’s socialism, peacemaking, and travels overshadowed discussion of Kent’s art. Rather than focusing on Kent’s artistic biography, the Soviets would represent him as a diverse personality. Kent was portrayed as a versatile, multi-gifted man—a convinced socialist who managed to survive the McCarthy years in the United States. He was someone who visited the southernmost point of South America, spent six months in the snows of Greenland, an adventurous nomad who was:

A brilliant painter and master of graphic works, an excellent writer, an inexhaustible and courageous traveller, a notable fighter for peace, Rockwell Kent is one of those universally gifted and full of stormy creative energy who are plenteous in the twentieth century, probably not less than in Renaissance.57

This quotation is a perfect example of Kent’s reception in the Soviet Union for two reasons. First, it shows the degree of respect for Kent. Comparing him to the Renaissance man indicates the high position Kent occupied in Soviet culture, which had a certain cult following of the great Renaissance Man.58 Second, the quotation demonstrates that in the Soviet culture, Kent was more than just an artist; he was a romanticized hero. Soviet critic Chugunov argued, “Kent’s qualities have been discussed so much, that stories about Kent have become a legend.”59 Indeed, Kent ultimately became a certain social myth.

59 Chugunov, “Khudozhnik, publitsist, borets za mir!”
The Myth of Rockwell Kent

In the case of Kent, his image and reputation became enshrouded through a myth constructed by Soviet propaganda in the late 1950s to the 1960s. He was a frequent subject in the Soviet press; his books and autobiography were translated into Russian and issued in thousands of copies. Furthermore, he was a frequent subject of Soviet newsreels.\textsuperscript{60} One of the apogees of this mythmaking is the movie *The American Artist’s Gift* [*Dar Amerikanskogo Khudozhnika*], which shows Kent’s 1960s visit to the Soviet Union, his walks around the Kremlin, discussions with high-ranking Soviet authorities, meetings with the Soviet people, and other associations.\textsuperscript{61} One of the most significant episodes of the movie shows the famous Soviet sculptor, Evgeny Vuchetich, making a bust of Kent.\textsuperscript{62} For the number one Soviet sculptor to create a bust of a living American artist during the Cold War was an unprecedented event and a sign of the extreme championing afforded to Kent.

Along with championing him in the mass media, Soviet institutions frequently encouraged Kent for his achievements in the arts and in public activities. Thus, as a sign of his recognition as a painter, they elected Kent an Honorary Member of the USSR Academy of Arts in 1962. As a social activist, peacemaker, and friend of the Soviet Union, in 1967, Kent was awarded the International Lenin Peace Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples—the highest state award issued to a foreigner by the Soviet government (Figure 25). After all, what ideological benefits did the Soviet State receive from championing him? These benefits were complex.

\textsuperscript{60} Kent was the central character of a number of episodes in Soviet newsreel *Novosti Dnia* (no. 52 (1957); no. 28, 41, 48 (1960), and many others). Films are stored at the Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kino- i Fotodokumentov (RGAKFD). No. 15355; No. 18592; No. 18605; No. 18612.


\textsuperscript{62} Photos of the Kent and Vuchetich session also occur in Soviet newspapers. See, for example, Figure 26.
The myth of Kent included two main coexisting connotations. The first was Kent as a peacemaker. This connotation contributed to representing the Soviet Thaw policy from a favorable perspective; Kent’s exhibitions in the Soviet Union proved an openness towards the West, and this aspect has been discussed in previous sections. The second connotation—Kent as a victim of bourgeois society—emerged as a result of the Soviet press and art history focusing on the ideological troubles Kent encountered in the United States. While the first “peaceful” connotation was inherent in the myth of Kent from the beginning, the second one flourished only in 1959–1960. In articles published during his 1957–1958 touring exhibition, the idea of friendship between the nations prevailed, and they did not emphasize Kent’s opposition.63 However, texts from the 1959–1960 period altered the representation of Kent. Although the idea of “friendship between the two nations” remained, numerous Soviet articles discussed Kent as a victim who found refuge in the Soviet Union.64 Emphasizing the dark side of Kent’s story, the USSR took advantage of representing Kent as an underappreciated genius resisting the world of McCarthyism and abstraction.

Thus, in the first non-English history of American art, Andrei Chegodaev, the Soviet’s number one specialist in American art, as well as Kent’s friend, canonized Kent as a political victim within a discussion of the reasons for Kent’s works being absent from the seminal ANEM:

[O]ne of the most prominent contemporary America artists Rockwell Kent wrote me that . . . his works had not been included in the show obviously because of political reasons. He also added that he, as well as William

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63 One of few exceptions is an article by Chugunov, who briefly discussed the passport issue and did not focus on the political story. Chugunov, “Khudozhnik, publitsist, borets za mir!”

64 See, for example, Chlenov, “Polotna Rokuella Kenta,” Moskovskii Komsomolets, November 26, 1960.
Gropper, was absolutely hostile to “careless abstractionism” which was “current fashion here”—in the United States! . . . The jury did a very bad service for the American people when they decided to represent the nation’s artistic achievements and tastes in a wrong and comic manner.\textsuperscript{65}

Finally, let’s question how adequate the Soviet treatment of Kent was. One the one hand, the artist did indeed suffer due to his political affiliation. On the other hand, that is not to say that Kent’s popularity as an artist declined solely due to his political activism. The history of assembling art for the ANEM is a beneficial corroboration that refutes the above, given Chegodaev’s treatment of Kent.

Chegodaev’s passage asserts that Kent was not included in the ANEM due to “political reasons.” The author implies that the curators intentionally omitted Kent due to his pro-socialist background. This is false because an artist’s political affiliation was not the key factor for the ANEM curators when assembling the show. The ANEM’s guiding conception was to assemble contemporary art representative of the US scene. In doing so, the curators included dozens of artists with past communist or socialist affiliations such as Ben Shahn, Peter Blume, and many others. Ultimately, thirty-four of the sixty-seven artists had communist affiliations, and this fact provoked the well-examined controversy over the exhibition.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, it is clear they did not omit Kent’s art due to politics. More likely, his conservative figurative works did not fit into the conception of the exhibition, which was that of a contemporary art show. As for Kent’s claim that he was not included because he was not an abstractionist, this is also false. Contemporary realist art, such as Andrew Wyeth’s \textit{Children’s Doctor}

\textsuperscript{65} Chegodaev, \textit{Iskusstvo SSHA}, 6–7.

(1949), was indeed included in the show (Figure 49).

Nevertheless, in Soviet art discourse, the interpretation of Kent as a political victim underappreciated in his homeland dominated, and the myth of Kent occasionally worked as a distinct counter-American propaganda. Supporting Kent, the Soviets not only strengthened the peace efforts, but also championed an American artist with an “anti-American” stance. Represented as a convinced socialist, a great artist, and a fighter for peace, Kent became a symbol of the progressive forces in the United States. Simultaneously, Kent’s story showed how reactionary the United States was, and the Soviets used the troubles Kent encountered to demonstrate the disadvantages in American society, culture, and politics for explicit and implicit criticism of the United States from the position of Marxism-Leninism.

Soviet propaganda actively exploited not only Kent’s biography but also his selected art for anti-Americanism. A good example is Kent’s drawing *My God! Can that Be an American Eagle?* (Figure 24) showing the American eagle hunting for a pigeon carrying a laurel branch—the double symbol of peace. On May 21, 1960, the front page of *Sovetskaia Kul’tura* reproduced the drawing. Within the page, the drawing correlates to the article, “The Screen Unmasks the Provocateurs” (on the left), which discusses the recent Soviet documentary about the 1960 U-2 incident. Another article below the image provides a reportedly foreigner’s opinion about the benefits of life in the Soviet Union and the disadvantages of life in the United States. Appearing amid materials with explicit and implicit anti-Americanism, Kent’s drawing worked as a visual case of anti-American propaganda.

Thus, the Soviet myth of Kent embodied a contradiction. Paradoxically, the USSR represented the artist simultaneously as an American artist and as an anti-American artist. This ambiguity stemmed from Soviet mythology conceptualizing the
American people not as a single nation but rather within the theory of class struggle: the working class against capitalist bosses. Victimized Rockwell Kent, the comrade fighting for all-human democratic values and the artist who created universally understandable art, symbolized this class war in America. In a way, the case of Kent revealed the ongoing class conflict in the United States; Kent’s story showed the Soviet people that progressive American democratic forces were already carrying out the inevitable communist revolution in the United States:

But Kent was hammered out of some phenomenal material, which was a hard nut to crack for American reaction. The reason for this lies in a firm connection of the artist with the working class, whom Rockwell Kent is committed to. That is why in the name of Kent we greet the genuine progressive America, America of hardworking and gifted people, whose contribution to the development of world art and science we highly appreciate and whose final victory over the internal forces of reaction and militarism we trust in.

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In 1957, the Soviets arranged an exhibition of Rockwell Kent making him the first American artist to hold a large personal one-man show in a Soviet museum. Although Kent was involved in some organizational activities, the Soviet Union initiated and undertook the whole project. The friendship between Kent and the USSR was at its apogee in 1960, when the artist gifted a large part of the Great Kent’s Collection to the Soviet people. Such extensive representation of an America artist in the Cold War Soviet Union was unprecedented for the history of American-Soviet cultural relations.


A sum of factors made Kent’s Soviet success possible. First, it was his political opposition to the official United States and struggles with the House Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthy. Second, it was Kent’s aesthetic opposition with contemporary American artistic mainstream and his exclusion from cultural life. These two factors prompted Kent to work so closely with the USSR and made possible representation of him as a victim of the capitalist society.

In the Soviet Union, the championing of Kent was a complicated project; simultaneously, it was a matter of domestic and foreign cultural policies. Kent’s late 1950s exhibitions were both a sign of the cultural Thaw and definite anti-American propaganda. Kent’s works acquainted the Soviet people with American art, and Kent’s biography, as well as his selected art in Soviet interpretation, demonstrated the controversies of American social and political life. Therefore, the myth of Kent was embedded with Soviet anti-Americanism and strengthened Soviet anti-American sentiment. A highlight of Soviet promotion of American art, Kent was nevertheless only one of American realist artists exhibited in the Soviet Union from the late 1950s to 1960s.
Chapter 5. More American Art in the Soviet Union

Exhibiting American Art from Soviet Collections: Protesting the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow

In his 1960 monograph, Andrei Chegodaev took just one passage to cover the highlights of American art in Soviet museum collections:

There are practically no works by American artists in Soviet museums: three portraits and one mythological painting by Benjamin West; a portrait by Gilbert Stuart; three studies by [James] Whistler; a wonderful pastel by Mary Cassatt; two paintings by [Rockwell] Kent; three sculptures by Mitchell Fields; some nineteenth- to twentieth-century graphic works. That is all we have in Moscow and Leningrad.¹

Nevertheless, Soviet art historians and curators used the few works available to organize two exhibitions of American art in summer and autumn 1959. Both shows were provoked by the ANEM which took place from late July to early September 1959. The art section of the ANEM, with its focus on contemporary modernist art, omitted the work of realist artists, such as Rockwell Kent who was well respected in the Soviet Union. Therefore, for Soviet critics, the ANEM was a prejudiced representation of the actual state of affairs of American visual art.

To re-establish a “fair account” and challenge the pro-modernist perspective on art advanced within the ANEM, Andrei Chegodaev arranged an American Room at the Pushkin Museum.² This “scant” display exclusively consisted of American realist art: the pastel Mother and Child by Mary Cassatt (Figure 18) and black-and-white prints by Rockwell Kent, William Gropper, Fred Ellis, Joseph Pennell, James

¹ Chegodaev, Iskusstvo SSHA, 11. Chegodaev’s account, however, is not complete because he does not consider the Great Kent Collection gifted by the artist to the Soviet Union in 1960.

Whistler, and Charles White. Chegodaev’s “realist” American Room, running simultaneously with the ANEM, was a straightforward “protest to omissions” in the art section of the latter.

A similar anti-ANEM stance was relevant to the second Soviet-organized exhibition of American art, which opened at the Pushkin Museum on October 29, 1959. The catalog of the exhibition highlights more than 150 paintings, drawings, and sculptures: nearly all the material on American art available in Soviet museums. This exhibition, significantly larger than Chegodaev’s Room, included pre-twentieth-century art such as paintings and reproductions of works by Benjamin West and Gilbert Stuart, sketches by James Whistler, and the pastel by Mary Cassatt. However, the largest part of the exhibition consisted of works from the early twentieth-century, a period when, according to the catalog, “modernist movements swept over American art.” Works by Kent, Gropper, the New-York Silk Screen Group, and San-Francisco Graphic Arts Workshop represented the “realistic trend which is being formed in a persistent struggle with abstractionist tendencies” and which had been absent from the ANEM. At the opening ceremony, Alexander Zamoshkin, Honored Art Worker of the Russian Federation and Director of the Pushkin Museum, framed the exhibition within the context of peaceful exchange while simultaneously interpreting the history.

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6 Apparently, the works of the San Francisco Graphic Art Workshop were the ones gifted to the Soviet Union by the American-Russian Institute in 1958. The next section of this chapter examines this donation along with other similar gifts.

7 Vystavka proizvedenii amerikanskih khudozhnikov, 4.
of American art within the framework of an aesthetical-ideological war: “the exhibits prove that in spite of the opposition it encountered, American realistic art continued to develop throughout the twentieth century.”

These two exhibitions, developed in opposition to the ANEM, demonstrate that Soviet art historians directly challenged the pro-modernist canon of American art advanced within the ANEM. Since there are no documents revealing the reception of the two Soviet-organized exhibitions available at this stage of my research, it is hard to ascertain how competitive these Soviet shows turned out to be in relation to the ANEM, and what impact they had on the Soviet audience. One can, however, speculate that Soviet realist exhibitions lost the battle against the ANEM: they received little publicity in 1959 and they are nearly absent from Cold War historiography today. Indeed, advancing American realist art through the few secondary works from Soviet collections, was a difficult task, especially when faced with many iconic contemporary paintings at the ANEM. However, Soviet critics were not the only ones who focused on highlighting the American realist tradition. Prior to 1959 they already had ideological and aesthetical allies in the United States: pro-Soviet organizations and leftist artists.

“In the Name of Peace! In the Name of Friendship!”: Gifting Art to the USSR

A Pravda article of May 7, 1958, announced an exhibition of American art which had opened in the Moscow Division of the Union of Soviet Artists the previous day. The article also reported that the exhibition had been assembled of a set of posters, prints, engravings, and etchings gifted to the House of Friendship in

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Moscow—the headquarters of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Contacts (SSOD)—by the unofficial pro-Soviet organization American Russian Institute (ARI), which was based in San Francisco.  

Established in 1926 as a “Communist front organization,” ARI was an organization engaged in disseminating information about the Soviet Union among Americans. ARI had working connections with Soviet institutions such as VOKS and later, SSOD, which provided information for booklets and pamphlets about life in the USSR. Attracting individuals sympathetic to socialism and the Soviet Union, ARI had, among others, connections with a group of West Coast figurative and Social Realist artists such as Victor Arnautoff, Emmy Lou Packard, Byron Randall, and others, mainly members of the Graphic Arts Workshop. These artists took advantage of ARI’s connections with SSOD to donate works of art, on behalf of the organization, as a sign of friendship to the Soviet people.

The works exhibited included Peace is a Human Right by Emmy Lou Packard (Figure 27), Man in the Rain by Victor Arnautoff, and others. Although these prints

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10 The gifted works present at the display included those which an American sculptor Beniamino Bufano had transported to the Soviet Union during his visit to the USSR in November 1957. Bailey, “The Spectre of Communist Art,” 237.


14 Among other works gifted: A Principled Talk, and Fisherman, Kerman Farm by Arnautoff; California Morning by Packard; Masons by Randall; works by Avram Rubenstein; several modernist and abstract compositions by Charles Safford. Exhibition of American Graphic Art in Moscow,
were hardly among the highlights of American visual art—most having been produced by little known, West Coast artists with limited international recognition—the ARI gift was nevertheless a considerable event in the USSR. Before 1958, the Soviet Union had hosted few exhibitions of American visual art. Moreover, Soviet museums kept few works of American visual art, none of which were internationally recognized as masterpieces. Against this background, the gift of several dozen prints looked like a notable gesture. Arguably, the gift was indicative of improving relations between the two countries. At the opening ceremony in the Moscow Division of the Union of Soviet Artists, Dementii Shmarinov, the Vice President of the Fine Arts section of SSOD, predictably framed the exhibition within the agenda of peace and American-Soviet friendship.¹⁵

Exploiting art and culture in order to strengthen the friendship between the United States and the Soviet Union was essential to another American pro-Soviet institution—the National Council of Soviet-American Friendship (NCASF).¹⁶ Established in 1943 and based in New York, this fundraising organization had among its goals to provide “US citizens with information on life and activities of the Soviet Union through written material, photo exhibits and documentary films.”¹⁷ NCASF also participated in scientific, commercial, and cultural exchange between the two countries, organizing tours for Soviet ballet companies, academic and artistic


CHAPTER 5. MORE AMERICAN ART IN THE SOVIET UNION

exchanges,\textsuperscript{18} and visits for Soviet art historians, among them Vladimir Kemenov or Andrei Chegodaev.\textsuperscript{19} NCASF had a large network of contacts with pro-Soviet institutions from all over the world and naturally, from the USSR.

More specifically, NCASF was in contact with SSOD. In 1960, NCASF gifted prints and reproductions by American artists to the Soviet people. Although the NCASF gift came from an American institution, it differed from the ARI donation.

Whereas the idea of the ARI gift emerged among leftist artists affiliated with the Institute in the United States, the NCASF gift was a result of preliminary negotiations between Soviet officials and Kent, an American artist. During his visit to the Friendship House in 1959, Kent talked to Lidiia Kislova, SSOD officer for American affairs, who expressed her regret that the Soviet Union had so little American art.\textsuperscript{20}

She asked Kent whether he could help to solve the problem, and Kent decided to do

\textsuperscript{18} NCASF was among the pioneers of American-Soviet exchange in the visual arts during World War Two. NCASF had a special committee for arts, led by Paul Manship, chairman, and John Sloan, vice-chairman. Since 1943 the committee gathered notable pro-Soviet artists on the East coast such as Leon Kroll, Max Weber, Rockwell Kent, Moses Soyer, and others who initiated first artistic and cultural contacts with the USSR. For example, in December 1943, the committee launched a campaign to collect art materials and funds for purchasing art materials for Soviet artists. For more on the project, see Report by the Director to the Members of the NCASF on the Activities. July 5, 1945. Pages 7–8. TAM 134. Box 1. Folder 64. On February 1, 1946, an exhibition of reproductions sent as a gift to VOKS opened at the Architects Club in Moscow [apparently, that was in Tsentral’nyi Dom arkhitektorov]. There are few materials on the show in TAM 134. Box 5. Folder 7. Although it took place in 1946, the latter exhibition was rather a consequence “allied” American-Soviet relations which emerged during World War Two. The show is, therefore, beyond my research, focusing on the Cold War “antagonistic” relations between the countries.

\textsuperscript{19} For example, Chegodaev visited the United States in December 1960 to January 1961. When in New York, he visited the ACA Gallery and Soyer’s studio where he met artists such as Levine, Refregier, and others. Refregier to Morford, January 21, 1961. Refregier papers. Box 7. Folder: NCASF, inc. 1959–1961. AAA.

\textsuperscript{20} Bailey argues that it was Kent who proposed the idea of the show to Kislova. The author further tends to approach the exhibition as Kent’s project. However, in his official appeal to American artists to donate their works for the exhibition, Kent claims that the Soviet side suggested the idea of the show. In his correspondence, Kent likewise implies that the idea of the donation came from Kislova. Moreover, in October 29, 1959, in a letter to Refregier, Kent again claims: “The fact is that it was Mme. Kislova’s suggestion that the National Council assemble the collection of reproductions. . . . The Union of Soviet Societies For Friendship, etc. has asked the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship to send them a collection of reproductions.” Bailey, “The Spectre of Communist Art,” 242; Kent’s appeal to American artists sent through NCASF, February 29, 1960. Kent papers. Alphabetic file: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc., cont. 1959–1964. Reel 5215. Frame 186. AAA; Kent to Director of Pennsylvania Academy of Art, September 19, 1959. Refregier papers. Box 7. Folder: NCASF Exhibition (1960) 1959–1960. AAA; Kent to Refregier, October 29, 1959. Ibid.
so. As the Chairman of NCASF, Kent suggested to Kislova that he would appeal to American artists through the Council and would encourage them to gift their works to the Soviet Union as a sign of friendship. Kent decided not to carry out the project himself but asked Anton Refregier to assemble the works and arrange for their transportation to the USSR. Kent’s idea was to assemble exclusively American figurative art: “I would suggest that we sedulously avoid not just abstractionism but formalism – though we should, of course, include contemporary deviationists from matter-of-fact realism like yourself [Refregier] or Gropper.” 21 Kent also suggested to Refregier that they appeal for works which could be cheaply shipped—prints, rather than oil paintings. Kent suggested that the pictures be mailed to the New York office of NCASF and then be forwarded to Moscow for an exhibition to be held in the House of Friendship. On the Soviet side, Lidiia Kislova was to be in charge of the project.

For Refregier, the project turned out to be a difficult task from the very beginning because many artists were “unwilling to send pictures through the National Council.” 22 One of the artists to whom Refregier and Kent had appealed—William Gropper—assumed that the project would be more successful if the artists were paid for their contributions. He also suggested composing an official NCASF appeal which would be more effective than sending mere personal letters. 23 Kent rejected Gropper’s idea of providing economic incentives for artists to take part in this exchange. But


Gropper’s second proposal seemed appropriate to Kent and he therefore\textsuperscript{24} prepared an official appeal highlighting the significance of the project for American-Soviet cultural relations in the Cold War. After the official appeal, more artists responded: among others, Harry Bressler and Philip Evergood, contributed works to the project. However, they were still few in number: in March 9, 1960, of the eighty artists who had been asked, only sixteen had sent their donations. Moreover, the contributions tended to be “second-rate stuff.”\textsuperscript{25}

Whilst shipping was being arranged, more artists joined the project, among them Moses and Raphael Soyers, Nikolai Cikovsky, Paul Sample, Philip Reisman,\textsuperscript{26} and by April 21 there were already 25 contributors.\textsuperscript{27} On April 21, 1960 Refregier met with Mr Safirov, a representative of the Soviet Embassy, in order to discuss the shipment details,\textsuperscript{28} and it was decided that the Friendship House might make a reciprocal gift. Furthermore, Safirov suggested that Refregier create a special text for the gift exhibition. Refregier ultimately composed a five-page text, briefly outlining the history of the project and introducing each contributor. However, he omitted the controversies that had emerged during the assembling process. Instead, he claimed


that American artists had responded enthusiastically to NCASF appeal.  

On July 6, 1960, the exhibition of fifty-six works by twenty-five artists opened at the House of Friendship in Moscow. At the opening ceremony, Kislova and Chegodaev stressed the significance of the exhibition for American-Soviet friendship. In an English-language article, published in the international bulletin of the SSOD, G. Kolobova highlighted art works such as Portrait of Harry Benner by Rockwell Kent for its focus on the working-class people. In the article, the “peaceful” interpretation of the exhibition prevailed. However, the author conceptualized contemporary American art within the framework of the aesthetical-ideological war, which was central to the Soviet art discourse. She argued that the art exhibited had a deeper meaning for the Soviet people: it shows that despite the dominance of abstract and modernistic art fostered by fashionable criticism and museum patrons, America’s genuine artists are fighting, through the medium of their work, for realism and humanism in art.

Chegodaev’s lengthy article in Sovetskaia Kul’tura, however, paid much more attention to examining the exhibition’s contents and, in particular, to the idea that "genuine" American realist art was being suppressed by a bourgeoisie which was unable to appreciate it:

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30 Press Release of USSR Embassy in DC, Exhibition of Contemporary American Art in Moscow. July 8, 1960. Refregier papers. Box 21. Folder: Printed Mated Material about Refregier, 1960s (1 of 3). However, at the opening as well as in subsequent press coverage of the show, Refregier’s contribution to the project was not highlighted. Instead, it was assumed that NCASF and Kent did everything. As my account shows, Refregier did most of the work. Kent, regretting this, would write to Refregier on September 16, 1960 that he was “indignant at the injustice that clearly has been” done to Refregier “in the Moscow publicity on the gift.” Kent to Refregier, September 14, 1960. Refregier papers. Box 7. Folder: NCASF Exhibition (1960) 1959–1960. Kent further promised that he would do his best to restore the actual account. One should not overestimate the contribution of Kent and NCASF. For highlighting Kent’s contribution and ignoring that of Refreiger in the official press, see Andrei Chegodaev, “Dar amerikanskikh khudozhhnikov,” Sovetskaia Kul’tura, July 26, 1960.

American museums do not collect such [realist] artists. And fashionable art criticism ignores them. It does so because it serves the art-merchants and the rich patrons of the arts and because it only seeks to promote abstract and surrealist art.  

To sum up, both exhibitions discussed in this section emerged as a result of the gifting of art “in the name of the peace” by American pro-Soviet institutions, namely ARI and NCASF. Whilst the West Coast ARI gift was a result of the initiative of American leftist artists, the East Coast NCASF was a consequence of Soviet request. Both ARI and NCASF had been in touch with VOKS and SSOD, and these connections produced a significant channel for the transmission of art through the Iron Curtain.

The two exhibitions, however, do not represent the practice of gifting American art to the Soviet Union in all its aspects. Some gifts, like Kent’s gift, discussed in chapter four, came directly from American artists without involvement from American institutions, official or otherwise.

“A Small Pebble Making Waves”

The exhibition of twenty-two works by Emmy Lou Packard and twenty-six works by Byron Randall took place at the Pushkin Museum in 1964. Packard and Randall, figurative artists from California, sent a set of graphic works directly to Chegodaev, as a sign of friendship and peace. Chegodaev and Shmarinov appraised the works and suggested the idea of arranging a show at the Pushkin Museum or the Friendship House to Packard and Randall. Chegodaev and Shmarinov asked the artists if they would gift their works directly to the Pushkin Museum. Ultimately, forty-eight

32 Chegodaev, “Dar amerikanskikh khudozhnikov.”

pieces became part of the museum’s Graphic Arts division collection. Running at a major Soviet museum, the exhibition received considerable publicity: the show was well advertised in the press, on the radio and on television.34

The exhibition was subject to a complex representation. Firstly, Packard’s and Randall’s gift was a gesture of friendship, and the Soviet critics acknowledged it as such. For example, Chegodaev started his article in the exhibition catalog by discussing the “peaceful” premise of the show, claiming that the gift was “from the bottom of their [Packard’s and Randall’s] hearts” and that it expressed “the feeling of profound respect for the Soviet Union that they have held for a long time.”35 At the same time, the representation of Packard and Randall in the Soviet Union included a victim-aspect. For example, Rockwell Kent, who was a guest in the Soviet Union in 1966, spoke on Radio Moscow on the occasion of the exhibition:

I have just learned that two American artists – Emmy Lou Packard and Byron Randall – have given a large collection of their work to a Soviet museum. I once did likewise, and it was pleasant for me to learn of this event. It is regrettable, however, that American artists are compelled to seek audiences outside the confines of their own country. It is difficult for genuine realist art to find its way to the people in our country, and it is very good that works by realist artists of ours, sent to the Soviet Union, will be seen and, I hope, loved by hundreds of thousands of people.36

Chegodaev, however, further dramatized and victimized both artists.37 In order to do so, he first mentioned that both Packard and Randall were socialists (although

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34 “Obrazy Kalifornii,” Izvestiia, June 16, 1964; Aleksandr Pavlov, “Grafika E. Pakkard i B. Rendolla v Moskve,” Iskusstvo no. 1 (1963): 55–60. The show was also announced on the TV as is clear from Packard, “Person to Person Call!”


36 Kent’s words quoted by Packard’s “Person to Person Call!!” Reel 5817. Frame 806. AAA.

Chegodaev did not expand on their activities) and stressed that their art was “humanistic.” Then Chegodaev represented the artists as heroes fighting against abstract art in a world where such art was dominant:

[O]nly if one grasps to the full the fact that profoundly reactionary abstract trends are dominant in the “Bay Area,” may one arrive at a proper understanding of the morality and spirit of those artists who are struggling for an art permeated with the feelings and ideas of the plain people of American, an art that respects the beauty of the world in which we live and that defends with conviction truly human values. Emmy Packard and Byron Randall fall precisely into this category.  

The Soviet representation of Packard and Randall as brave fighters against abstract art clearly tapped into ideas about an ongoing ideological conflict within the United States: between capitalists supporting abstraction and working-class people supporting realist art. In this conflict, Packard and Randall stood for “truly human values”—similar to those of the Soviet Union. Such a representation was not technically false, but it was not wholly adequate either. To challenge the simplistic narratives advanced by Soviet critics, let us consider Packard’s own perspective on her artistic career.

Generally, Packard’s art enjoyed limited popularity and she felt this was the case for two interconnected reasons: 1) the taste for abstract art in the United States, and 2) the general public’s suspicion towards socially critical art.  Packard’s 1965 text “The Truth about Revolutionary Painters, the People the USA and All that Jazz if You Really Want to Know” manifests the latter idea. In the text, she speculated on the public reactions which might emerge were she to create work which was critical of contemporary US policies, for example, the War in Vietnam.

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39 For an example of her Social Realist approach, see Figure 27.
CHAPTER 5. MORE AMERICAN ART IN THE SOVIET UNION

If I put on a canvas even a small portion of what I read in the papers or in contemporary fiction or non-fiction I would be ostracized as a dangerous element in society. . . . Already the FBI has called on my neighbors and asked them if I’ve been talking too much about peace, causing other trouble or looking like a communist. ⁴⁰

At this stage of my research, due to the lack of data, it is not possible to assess how adequate this self-analysis of career was, but it is quite clear that Packard found herself on the periphery of the art market and consequently lacked publicity. Against the background of the more recent achievements of American modernism, her comparatively traditionalist pieces looked quite dim, and, ultimately, Packard did little to contribute to the development of American art. The details of her actual position in the United States, however, are not crucial for a research into Soviet representations of American art, which often frivolously exploited facts in order to create a particular image of individual artists. For example, Chegodaev’s text stresses the idea that Packard was “one of the most widely-known and respected masters of contemporary realist art in the United States.” ⁴¹ This characterization is hardly accurate. Instead, Packard—as well as Randall—both nearly absent from contemporary historography should be seen as an artist respected on the local scene

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⁴⁰ Emmy Lou Packard, “The Truth about Revolutionary Painters, the People the USA and All that Jazz if You Really Want to Know.” Packard papers. Series 7. Writings by Packard, 1953–1984. Box 5. Folder: The Truth about Revolutionary Painters, the People the USA and All that Jazz if You Really Want to Know, 1965. Reel 5817. Frame 834–842. AAA. When envisioning the troubles with FBI, Packard, apparently, considered her own past. A devoted socialist since her youth, she had a rich experience of participating in leftist activities in California. Consequently, during McCarthyism she was suspected of being a communist. In 1956, FBI officers interrogated her because of her socialist sympathies, and Packard speculated that the case might have had a negative impact on her further artistic career—her commissions and projects decreased immediately after. See also Emmy Lou Packard, “McCarthyism: Attack on the Arts and Mass Media,” (drafts for Meiklejon Symposium, October 16, 1980). Packard papers. Series 7: Writings by Packard. Folder: American Graphic Art Exhibit in Uzbekistan, 1977. Reel 5817. AAA.

and acknowledged within the American Social Realist movement.\textsuperscript{42} When sending the package of prints directly to Chegodaev, Packard and Randall could hardly have imagined that their gift would become such a successful enterprise—a well-reviewed exhibition at a major Soviet museum. In an article dedicated to the history of this exhibition, Packard called the show “a small pebble making waves.”\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, Packard’s and Randall’s exhibition was “a small pebble,” unlike, for example, Kent’s great gift of nearly 800 pieces in 1960. And indeed, Packard’s and Randall’s gift made rather “big waves,” although the publicity of their exhibitions, as well as the attendance, can be hardly compared to that for Kent’s grandiose shows. Packard’s and Randall’s show was the last significant gift-exhibition during the 1950–1960s, but not the last exhibition of American art organized by the Soviet Union.

\textbf{Anton Refregier: Another “Big Friend of the USSR”}  

In June 1966, the Soviet Embassy in the United States sent an official invitation to Anton Refregier—the artist was invited to send his paintings to the USSR for an exhibition.\textsuperscript{44} On July 4, the paintings were shipped from Montreal aboard the Soviet liner \textit{Alexander Pushkin}. Refregier arrived in the USSR on August 10 for the opening ceremony of his exhibition (Figure 28), which

\textsuperscript{42} But this exaggeration of the artists’ aesthetic significance definitely made the Soviet story of an encounter between good and bad artists more appealing.

\textsuperscript{43} Packard, “Person to Person Call!!” Reel 5817. Frame 807–808. AAA.

\textsuperscript{44} The Official Letter from the Embassy of the USSR in DC from Alexei Stepunin, First Secretary for cultural Affairs, to Anton Refregier (Undated). Refregier papers. Box 9. Folder: Soviet Union Visit, 1965–1966. The letter, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and the Union of Friendship Societies, invited Refregier to bring his paintings to the Pushkin Museum by August 1. The letter recommended sending the works by ship \textit{A. Pushkin} from Montreal on July 4, 1966. The letter also invited Refregier for a six-week visit in the USSR. Refregier requested this official letter from Stepunin in his May 9, 1966 letter because the official invitation was required for the Canadian border custom officials. (Refregier to Stepunin, May 9, 1966. Refregier papers. Box 9. Folder: Soviet Union Visit, 1965–1966.) The correspondence from Refregier papers implies that the artist and Stepunin had met in person to discuss the details of the project and that it had happened before the official invitation was sent.
subsequently opened on August 30. The show, jointly organized by the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and the Institute for Soviet-American Relations, included thirty-eight paintings and forty drawings, designs, and studies spanning twenty-five years of work. During the week, the exhibition attracted 2,000 daily visitors. On Sundays the attendance increased to 6,000 people and visitors spent hours queuing outside the museum to get a chance to see the show. The exhibition in Moscow was prolonged until October 16, 1966, and the total attendance reached 110,000 people.

Subsequently, the exhibition spent three weeks in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, before the works were returned to the United States in June 1967.

Refregier enjoyed a warm reception from the Soviet press, which praised him as an “outstanding artist,” “remarkable painter,” and “great master” whose works, according to Soviet art criticism, were

[A]mong the best representation of the genuine artistic culture of the American people, of a culture hostile to any political, ideological, or artistic reaction. In Refregier’s works we see another America—we see the America which progressive humankind respects: the America of [Albert] Einstein and Linus

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45 On the cover page, the Soviet catalog of the exhibition highlights the two institutions as the organizers. *Vystavka proizvedenii Antona Refrezh’e. Katalog*, exhibition catalog, preface by Andrei Chegodaev (Moskva: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1966).


48 “Currently, there are three shows here in the [Pushkin] Museum: Japan, Cyprus. . . [A]nd only your hall is overcrowded. . . . [A]lready by 11.45 a.m. there was a line in the street.” Godmother of Refregier [E.V. Shleifer or Sheifer: the handwriting is not decipherable] to Refregier, September 28, 1966. Refregier papers. Box 9. Folder: Soviet Union Correspondence 1959–1967. AAA.


50 On June 16, 1967, Refregier received a telegram from the Director of the Hermitage Boris Piotrovskii who reported that the paintings had been placed aboard to leave that day. Refregier to Mr. Erick. June 16, 1967. Refregier papers. Box 18. Folder: Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, 1967. AAA.

The quote demonstrates that Refregier was at the pinnacle of the Soviet hierarchy of American representatives of art and culture. What were the reasons for such great success?

Refregier's popularity among the Soviets was largely due to his leftist political affiliations and close engagement with the USSR. For decades, Refregier had sympathized with socialist causes and in particular with the Soviet Union and had belonged to various American and international leftist organizations such as the John Reed Club or NCASF.\footnote{It would take forty-five minutes to read aloud all of Refregier’s “communist affiliations” which were tabled at the 1953 public hearings about the removal of his murals from the Rincon Annex Post Office. Gray Brechin, “Politics and Modernism: The Trial of the Rincon Annex Murals,” in On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950, ed. Paul J. Karlstrop (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 79. The controversy over Refregier’s murals is outlined below.} As a member of the latter, Refregier was involved in American-Soviet cultural exchange: in 1959 he contributed to the NCASF gift-project discussed in the previous section. Moreover, in 1959, after Refregier had participated in the World Peace Council in Stockholm, the artist spent three weeks in Moscow as a guest of the Soviet Union. During his visit, Refregier met Soviet artists and gave several lectures introducing himself to the Soviet artistic and cultural establishment.\footnote{His invitation must have been initiated by Kent who contacted Kislova and suggested inviting Refregier. During his visit, Refregier left Ivan Semenov—an artist from the Office of the Krokodil—a group of his Guatemala series. Refregier thought his drawing would have been published in the magazine Moskva or would be exhibited. Neither happened and Refregier requested his works back. Also, during his 1959 visit he lectured and presented his works on color slides in the House of Friendship. Refregier to Kislova, June 3, 1960; and Refregier to Kislova, April 20, 1959. Refregier papers. Box 9. Folder: Soviet Union Correspondence 1959–1967. AAA.}

Although the exact mechanisms on the Soviet side of selecting him are not known, one can speculate that during his visit Refregier managed to establish personal and professional connections and to promote himself as a socialist and Social Realist
Another factor crucial to Refregier’s Soviet success was his biography. Refregier’s past had a martyr-aspect which was to be actively exploited by Soviet representatives. Due to this Social Realist art, Refregier had been a victim of McCarthyism. In 1946, Refregier had started working on a Works Project Administration commission: a series of twenty-seven murals at the Rincon Annex Post Office in San Francisco. In 1949, he completed the murals, depicting a number of key-events in the history of California, among them the discovery and the conquest of the state, the Golden Rush, World War Two (Figure 30), and the ratification of the United Nations Charter on October 25, 1945. The San Francisco Art Association praised Refregier’s work claiming that his murals were some of the best examples of contemporary American art. However, alongside this positive reception, a countervailing trend emerged. A number of local organizations such as The Veterans of Foreign Wars and Native Sons of the Golden West denounced the murals because they objected to Refregier's portrayal of Californian and American history. During the Second Red Scare, 1953, this discontent expanded, as Congressman George Dondero launched a special campaign against “modern communistic art.” A hearing on the murals was organized and Republican senator Hubert B. Scudder attempted to prove that Refregier’s art was subversive and, therefore, should be removed from a public 

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54 Work Projects Administration (WPA) was a New Deal agency, established during the Great Depression, tasked with hiring the unemployed. A special project within WPA—the Federal Art Project provided commissions for artists.


56 For more details about the political and aesthetic controversies in America during the Cold War, see chapter six.
federal building.

Ultimately, the main controversy stemmed from Refregier's conceptualization and representation of American history. For example, among others, the murals depicting the 1877 anti-Chinese Sand Lot Riots\(^{57}\) (Figure 29) and the 1934 San Francisco Waterfront Strike\(^{58}\) caused particular discontent because of their heavy focus on social inequality, racial conflict and violence. This critical representation stemmed from Refregier’s Social Realist method but could hardly satisfy those who expected a public building to display a more positive interpretation of Californian history. As well as Refregier's selection of controversial episodes, the execution of particular murals was criticized. It was pointed out, for example, that in the mural depicting World War Two, the flag of the United States was lower than the British one (Figure 30). Accordingly, the murals were denounced as un-American, subversive and pro-communist. The accusations of subversion and communism were even stronger when Refregier’s origins were taken into account: born in Russia in 1905, Refregier was a child when his family moved to Europe and subsequently to the United States, where Refregier gained citizenship in 1930. Nevertheless, the attempts to remove the murals were unsuccessful and still remain on the Rincon Building.

Soviet critics appreciated Refregier’s “visual history” of the United States for the same reasons it had been criticized in America:

In his Rincon Annex murals, Refregier shows the whole history of California: from the first arrival of Spanish monks and soldiers, to World War Two. This history is full of dramatic conflicts and shocks. This is a history where the romanticized life of the first Wild West settlers and gold-miners is intertwined

\(^{57}\) During the two-day pogrom, the white population of San Francisco struggled against the Chinese immigrants who were targeted as one of the causes of unemployment and a financial crisis.

\(^{58}\) The strike took place on the West coast and led to the unionization of all West-coast ports in the United States.
with monstrous predatism [khishchnichestvo], racism and all other manner of oppression and harassment. Refregier depicted this with no fear and in a beautiful, expressive manner, making his murals a subject of continuous attacks from the political reactionaries and, simultaneously, turning them into the number one artistic sightseeing in San Francisco.\(^59\)

Moreover, the story about a Social Realist artist coming into conflict with “reactionary” US officials, allowed Soviet art critics to represent Refregier as a victim of a bourgeois society, which suppressed his “genuine” art.\(^60\) Thus, the life-story of yet another American artist story fuelled criticism of the Unites States. Refregier had already used his art to criticize the United Sates so the Soviets did not need to re-contextualize it. Since Refregier frequently focused on problems such as inequality, human rights abuses, and American militarism, his art was already deemed anti-American. In his 1966 Soviet exhibition, Refregier, as a socially-engaged artist, sought to communicate a message which was critical of the United States. For example, he acknowledged the anti-segregation appeal of his paintings *Back to School* (Figure 32), and *Two Friends* (Figure 31) (both 1966). The first painting, depicting a black girl surrounded by surrealist-style figures was, according to Refregier, portraying “the prosecution of the Negro children by segregationist elements.”\(^61\) By contrast, the second painting—picturing a white girl teaching a black boy to play the guitar—demonstrated an ideal state of interracial relations. Soviet propaganda welcomed Refregier’s works, which echoed one of the main Soviet arguments in anti-American rhetoric: the presence of racial segregation and the social injustices faced by black Americans. Refregier’s “anti-Vietnam” works were also welcomed by the


\(^60\) For an example of the victimization of Refregier in the Soviet press, see V. Zhitomirskii, “Druz’ia i vragi Antona Refrezh’e,” *Neva* no. 7 (1968): 209–211.

Soviet press and used as visual support for another criticism of American society: the so-called bourgeois warmongering (Figure 33, Figure 34).

Due to Refregier’s martyr-biography and socially critical art, official Soviet discourses eventually acknowledged him as an ally of the Soviet Union. It was argued that Refregier and other representatives of a “progressive humanity” were actually struggling for similar positive values, and, importantly, fighting against “American aggressors.” For example, N. Ponomarev, Secretary of the Board of the Union of Artists put it as follows:

We [the Soviet people and Soviet artists] are completely at one with the artists of heroic Vietnam who are at the forefront of the struggle of the Vietnam people against American aggressors. We are happy to propagandize the art of D. Siqueiros, D. Manzù, A. Fougeron, R. Guttuso, A. Pizzinato, R. Kent, A. Refregier, D. Katsikoyanis, and of many other progressive artists.62

When speaking in a language other than the Soviet language of the ideological warfare, Refregier’s role in Soviet culture is best described with the Soviet cliché “best friend of the Soviet Union.” One of the brightest contemporary Russian intellectuals Grigorii Revzin commented on the in-country goals of the policy of “best friends of the USSR”:

‘[B]est Friend of the Soviet Union.’ This was a special ideological institution. . . . Each time the image of our Motherland became completely shitty, we found some foreign celebrity did him or her a favor. In return, the celebrity would love our country, would travel around our country and would try our bread and salt; the celebrity would be dressed in shirts with ethnographic ornaments and would pose in front of the cameras. All this gave us some solace and showed the advantages of our way of life.63


Indeed, Refregier, with his tours around the Soviet Union in 1959 and 1966, was among the *Best Friends of the USSR*. But the policy of the *Best Friends* had another important aspect on which Revzin’s article does not focus. Foreign guests such as Refregier or Kent would disseminate information about life in the Soviet Union when back in their home country. Refregier was no exception and, after his visits to the USSR, he would contribute to reshaping existing opinions about the USSR. He argued that his 1959 visit, for example, was “an invaluable experience in gathering information which” was lacking in the United States and that he was using this information and the color photographs he took on his travels, for a series of lectures.64

Besides lecturing and personal interactions, Refregier published books and articles about his trips. For example, after his first 1959 visit, he started working on the book *The Artist’s Journey*, which was issued in 1965.65 The book included drawings made during his travels around the countries of the socialist bloc, including the USSR. The book avoided anything negative or controversial and portrayed the USSR as a country of equal and happy people. After his 1966 visit to the USSR, Refregier published a lengthy article in a local newspaper *Woodstock Record Press*. Although this was hardly a major print issue, it nevertheless communicated information about the Soviet Union to a certain audience and provided a friendly apologetic narrative. For example, with regard to the visual arts, Refregier wrote,

> It is a mistake to think there is no liberty so far as the artist is concerned in the Soviet Union. . . . He is not concerned with formalization . . . but rather concerned with dealing intensity . . . finding new ways of dealing with life and subject matter which surrounds him, it is also a mistake to think that a painter

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like Picasso is not seen. In Moscow museums there is a large room of Picasso and in Leningrad there are three rooms.\textsuperscript{66}

Clearly, Refregier’s perspective on the issue of freedom of artistic expression in the USSR can be challenged because the artist tends to reach a judgment regarding the overall situation based on a few exceptional visits to Soviet museums. Such a fragmentary understanding was quite typical for the Friends of the USSR because the Soviet hosts always ensured that visits were carefully arranged to only demonstrate the achievements of the Soviet system, concealing its disadvantages.\textsuperscript{67}

Finally, one should not forget that besides spreading positive information about the USSR, its Best Friends, particularly Refregier, would contribute to the American-Soviet cultural exchange upon their return. After his 1966 trip, Refregier returned to the United States with 114 prints by Leningrad Workshop artists such as Boris Ermolaev, Anatolii Kaplan, Valentin Brodsky and others. The A.C.A. Gallery in New York hosted this show which opened on January 17, 1967, and lasted for one month.\textsuperscript{68} Refregier’s pro-Soviet activities in the United States were an added bonus of his engagement with the USSR.


\textsuperscript{67} The strategies of showcasing the USSR to foreigners were shaped during the interwar period. See, for example, Michael David-Fox, \textit{Vitriny velikogo eksperimenta}.

Conclusion Part I

Part one of this thesis comprehensively demonstrates that the representation of American art in the Soviet Union from the 1950s to late 1960s reached an unprecedented degree. As chapters two and three have demonstrated, the Soviet debate on American art was essentially twofold: it consisted of a rich tradition of verbal and visual anti-modernist criticism, and of an apology for American realism. The official Soviet history of American art was inclusive: it considered styles from the early colonial to the contemporary and explained them from a single official Marxist-Leninist perspective. This comprehensive history emerged within a totalitarian state where all major sources for the production of knowledge were under singular control by the ruling party. The reception and representation of art were both determined by official ideology, and as a result, it is no surprise that Soviet views on American art were infused with anti-Americanism: within the Soviet art history, modernist painting served as a proof of the collapse of the bourgeois West, and realist painting revealed the hostility of the American “reactionary” society toward genuine art.

The exhibitions of American visual art, discussed in chapters four and five were supported by numerous publications in the press and in academia and contributed ever more to the production of Soviet knowledge of American art. For example, as can be seen from the 1959 Chegodaev’s American Room and the exhibition of American realist art at the Pushkin Museum (the two shows introducing American art from Soviet collections and protesting against contemporary art at the 1959 ANEM), the exhibitions were used both to advance Soviet perspectives on American art and to challenge competing alternatives.

Soviet art critics and art historians framed the exhibitions of American art
within the agenda of peaceful exchange and increased mutual understanding. However, close scrutiny of the rhetoric applied when discussing the exhibitions, reveals the actual subtext of exhibiting American visual art during the Cold War. For example, the oxymoronic collocation “struggle for peace and friendship between the nations,” when used to describe an exhibition, clearly demonstrates that for the Soviet Union, “peaceful” artistic contacts never existed beyond the framework of ideological war. The exhibitions officially signified increased mutual understanding but always implied that an ideological clash was taking place. Consequently, Soviet-organized exhibitions of American realist art were an opportunity for Soviet propaganda to once again present the binary opposition of the Soviet Union and the United States as one of good against evil. This binary frame guided and determined the representation of American realist artists, whose “socialist” biographies and leftist art, when nuanced by Soviet critics, echoed and supported Soviet anti-Americanism. When displayed in Soviet museums, realist art by “suppressed” and “underappreciated” American artists such as Packard, Kent, or Refregier highlighted controversies taking place within the United States. Their art drew attention to issues such as the opposition between abstraction and realism, the conflict between genuine art and political censorship, American militarism and human rights abuses within the United States. Paradoxically, American realist art in Soviet context was made anti-American.

Noteworthy, the majority of exhibitions and in particular, the ones which received the most publicity consisted of art from the United States, rather than from local Soviet collections. There were two means of getting American art to the Soviet Union in the late 1950s to the 1960s. The first was through exhibitions which took

1 Kolobova, “A Gift from Friends.”
place following a Soviet invitation towards an individual artist—Kent’s 1957–1958 travelling exhibition and the 1966 Refregier exhibition are two examples. The second was through shows arranged by American pro-Soviet institutions (ARI and NCASF) and/or leftist artists (Kent, Packard, Randall) who gifted works to the Soviet people as a sign of friendship and peace. All exhibitions were similar in that the only official institutions to be involved in their organization were Soviet, with American ones being bypassed. These exhibitions were not part of an official exchange, which normally involved, on the American side, official institutions such as the Department of the State or USIA. The fact that these shows did not take place within a framework of official exchange of reciprocal exhibitions had two important consequences, which facilitated extensive representation of American realist art in the USSR.

First, bypassing the State Department and the USIA when getting American art to the Soviet Union, meant that organizing the project took much less time. The Soviets did not need to agree on anything with an American side which could easily denounce the show simply by remaining passive. Moreover, nobody knows whether the exhibitions would have taken place had the two countries engaged in official negotiations over the exhibitions. This point is all the more salient if one considers the controversial biographies of such artists as Kent or Refregier, or the controversial

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2 The exhibitions of American art, which took place as part of official American-Soviet cultural exchange, are discussed in part two.

3 I demonstrate the complexity of the official American-Soviet negotiations over exhibitions with the case of the Graphic Arts: USA, 1963–1964 in chapter eight. Another case which illustrates the problems which emerged when the two governments were involved in artistic exchange is Alfred Barr’s 1956–1957 attempt to organize an exchange exhibition. In his article “Soviet-American Art Exchanges during the Thaw: From Bold Openings to Hasty Retreats”, Simo Mikkonen demonstrates how Barr failed to obtain some Picassos from Soviet museums and to exhibit nineteenth-century American art in the Soviet Union. He argues that the project was cancelled at the final stages due to the inability of the United States to provide official guarantees for Soviet loans. Mikkonen concludes that the exchange in visual arts between American museums and the USSR had to be postponed till 1970s. However, as I have shown, the Soviets did not necessarily need to organize an official American-Soviet exchange in order to show American art in the USSR. Simo Mikkonen, “Soviet-American Art Exchanges during the Thaw: From Bold Openings to Hasty Retreats,” Proceedings of the Art Museum of Estonia: Art and Political Reality 8, 3 (2013): 57–76.
“pro-communist” reputation of the pro-Soviet ARI and NCASF.

Secondly, by working directly with an artist or with an American unofficial non-government institution, the Soviet Union was free to represent American art the way it wanted. In other words, there were no limitations placed upon the Soviets by the State Department or the USIA. In practice, the Soviets were free to choose any artist they wanted; works could be exhibited for as long as necessary and in cities chosen by the Soviets. For example, in the cases of Kent and Refregier, the exhibitions were postponed, rescheduled and prolonged. It is doubtful whether such organizational delays would be forgiven had these exhibitions taken place under a signed agreement between the United State and the Soviet Union. Moreover, such an agreement might have influenced the representation of American realist artists which was, in fact, a subject of Soviet myth-making. Hence, in bypassing the State Department, the Soviet Union avoided any possible restrictions on its freedom to advance a selective narrative of American art. When exhibiting American art from America, the Soviets enjoyed the same freedom as when they created exhibitions of American art from Soviet collections or when discussing American art in Soviet press and academia. After all, the canon of American realist art in the Soviet Union was

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4 Or to face no consequences when rejecting an artist who had approached the USSR. American realist artists would constantly approach VOKS to propose an exhibition in the Soviet Union. For example, in the late 1950s, an American artist Max Cossak had his solo exhibitions and his lectures (he spoke Russian) rejected. He believed that his enterprise would well fit in the paradigm of exchange within the peaceful agenda. Cossak to Kent, January 3, 1959. Kent papers. National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc., 1943-1959. Reel 5214. Frame 1402. AAA. Cossak wrote to Soviet Ambassador in DC and to SSOD but he was told that it was impossible to organize his one-man show because the Soviets received a “thousand requests from all over the world.” The Ambassador claimed that he would be invited to an exhibition of American art. Cossak to Kent, January 21, 1959. Ibid. Reel 5214. Frame 1417–1418. AAA.
exclusively a Soviet enterprise.

The Soviet canon of American art, however, did have a competing alternative. From the late 1950s to the 1960s, official American institutions such as the United States Information Agency and the Department of State organized two exhibitions in the Soviet Union, which introduced another interpretation of American art.
PART II. THE AMERICAN APPROACH: EXHIBITING ANTI-SOVIET ART

Part two examines the US approach to exhibiting American art in the Soviet Union. In order to do so, this part focuses on the two exhibitions organized by American institutions. Chapter seven examines the milestone 1959 *American National Exhibition in Moscow* (ANEM), and chapter eight provides, for the first time, a comprehensive analysis of the traveling exhibition *Graphic Arts: USA*, which took place in 1963–1964. However, by the first American-organized exhibition in the USSR—the 1959 ANEM—the US policy of advancing American art abroad had a long and complex history.\(^1\) To explain why and how the ANEM and *Graphic Arts: USA* were undertaken, chapter six highlights several key episodes of American policy concerning the visual arts during the Cold War.

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\(^1\) The history of exhibiting American art abroad has been examined as both transinstitutional and transnational. Official agencies such as the Department of State, the CIA, and the USIA were openly and discretely engaged in international art programs at different times. Critics and kulturtragers such as Alfred Barr Jr. and Lloyd Goodrich operated independently or on behalf of American museums such as the National Gallery of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art and significantly contributed to foreign exhibitions of US art. Michael Krenn’s monograph *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* reveals the complexity of the history. Krenn examines the emergence, success, and fading away of American international art programs in the 1940s to the 1970s. Krenn’s thorough research is, in a way, a concluding study—he advances the previous scholarship on the arts and the Cold War in the United States.

The geography of the history of exhibiting American art abroad is likewise complex with hundreds of local exhibitions which took place in dozens of countries on the four continents. See, for example, a monograph on American art in Latin America by Claire F. Fox: *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

Chapter 6. Politics and Exhibitions in the United States

The first post-World War II overseas exhibitions of American visual art organized by American institutions marked the emergence of a special international policy of exhibiting American visual art abroad. One of the initially stated major goals of American overseas exhibitions was to contribute towards establishing the international reputation of the United States as a country with considerable achievements in the arts and not just in technology.\(^1\) Paintings by US artists should have conquered the widespread myth of America as a capitalist, soulless nation inexperienced in high art but obsessed with gadgets and kitschy, popular culture.\(^2\) Conquering the overseas myths within exhibitions started as a series of failures.

**American Art Abroad: A Difficult Start**

In 1946, upon the Tate request, the National Gallery sent a collection of more than 200 paintings assembled by recognized experts such as John Walker, Duncan Phillips, Alfred Barr Jr., and others.\(^3\) The show opened on June 14, attracting crowds of visitors and receiving considerable attention from the British press until it closed on August 5. However, the general response to the show was negative. British critics denounced the collection because it did not showcase anything specifically nor characteristically American in art: the major criticism was that one could rather see secondary imitations of European art. Such a reception dominated because the exhibition focused on American realism rather than American modernism. Concerning the latter, the show included very few works by contemporary American

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\(^1\) For more on the goals of US art programs, see Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters*, 9–26.


\(^3\) For more on the exhibition, see Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters*, 24–26.
modernist artists, among them Stuart Davis, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Georgia O’Keeffe, to demonstrate to the British that America had its specific visual art which was not merely an offshoot of the European tradition.  

Even before the opening of the Tate show, in the spring of 1946, the Department of State started purchasing works by the most recent contemporary US artists for another overseas exhibition titled *Advancing American Art.* The exhibition included seventy-nine paintings by artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe, Arthur Dove, William Baziotes, and others, purchased for $49,000. Moreover, an additional thirty-five watercolors were purchased for $5,585. The Department of State curated the exhibition with the goal to demonstrate the freedom of expression in the United States, as could be seen in the variety of works by contemporary artists working in different contemporary styles.

The exhibition opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in October of 1946. The initial response by the press and art establishment was positive, and after the New York venue closed, the collection split into two parts, one traveling to Latin America and the other to Eastern Europe. *Advancing American Art* received publicity whenever it traveled. With regard to American-Soviet cultural warfare, the most significant venue was in Czechoslovakia. The Prague audience welcomed American contemporary art so warmly that the Soviets immediately launched a simultaneous Soviet exhibition of Socialist Realist art, *Pictures of USSR National Artists.*

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4 But regardless of the failure to represent America as a country with achievements in the arts, the Tate show, nevertheless, taught a good lesson: It made obvious that the National Gallery was “incapable of running an international art program” and that such a program required more governmental guidance. Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters,* 26.

Soviet exhibition meant to diminish the success of the American show and to compete for audience loyalty in pro-socialist Czechoslovakia. Although both shows attracted vast audiences, American contemporary art generally received praise, whereas the Soviet display, which included comparatively conservative paintings, hardly interested the audience. This encounter of American modernism vis a vis Soviet Socialist Realism clearly demonstrated the differences of artistic styles within the United States and the USSR. It also revealed the potential of such a juxtaposition for the ideological battle of the Cold War. Michael Krenn called this show the “first shot in the USSR within the art war.”

As Advancing American Art received its highest scores abroad, in its homeland, the initially favorable reception switched to a negative. The avalanche of negative criticism in the mass media generally centered on the idea that modernist paintings did not adequately represent the state of affairs in American art. Such art was not indicative of the general public’s taste, which preferred more traditional figurative art. Opponents of contemporary art further argued that taxpayers’ money should not have been spent on such an exhibition. Contemporary art insulted the taste of the general public, and Truman’s quotation on one of the exhibition’s paintings—Kuniyoshi’s Circus Girl Resting (1925) (Figure 35)—perfectly manifests this kind of perception: “If that’s art, then I’m a Hottentot.”

The controversy over the exhibition further arose because the opponents of Advancing American Art linked modernist art displays to communist propaganda; some of the artists had communist affiliations. Of the forty-seven artists exhibited, eighteen names had appeared in the records of the House Un-American Activities

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6 Krenn, Fall-Out Shelters, 34.

Committee and three of the eighteen belonged to the Communist Party of the United States of America.\(^8\) This was reason enough to suspect modernist artists as being agents of the communists and to treat the exhibition as a subversion. As the public clamor increased, the Congress—bombarded with letters from outraged taxpayers, conservative art lovers, and anti-communists—decided to call a hearing to discuss whether federal money should have been spent on modernist art for the exhibition. This pressure led to the show’s suspension and an interruption of its tours in 1947. The following year, the collection of more than one hundred items was sold for $6,000.

**Modernism and Communism**

Censorship and intrusion of politics into aesthetics,\(^9\) such as the case of *Advancing American Art*, was systematic in the post-World War II United States, although “opposition to works of art never assumed the proportions . . . that it did in totalitarian countries.”\(^10\) From the late 1940s to the 1960s, communism was underneath most episodes of censorship of the arts. Anti-communist hysteria, which strengthened after World War II, reached one of its apogees in the 1950s through the terror of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee, whose policy had multiple repercussions in the world of arts and letters.

In America of the late 1940s to the late 1950s, nearly any contemporary work of art could be technically accused of communism for several reasons. First, few

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\(^8\) Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters*, 42.


contemporary artists could pass biographical-ideological “clearance.” Many American artists—from conservative realists such as Kent, to Social Realists such as Refregier, and to radical modernists such as Pollock—had some past or present affiliations with communist or socialist organizations. Individuals such as McCarthy ardently detected and exaggerated socialist backgrounds of American artists. An artist’s connections with communist or socialist organizations were used as proof that an artist was an agent of the communists, and hence, was a subversive. Second, a work of art could be accused of communism because of its social criticism pinpointing at social problems, and due to an “incorrect” representation of history, such as in the case of Anton Refregier. Third, a work of art could be accused of communism merely because it was modernist. Congressman George Dondero was the most infamous person to link avant-garde art with communism. The harsh perspective of this ardent anti-communist is ironically close to that of the officials in the Soviet Union. Dondero’s equally straightforward position implied the same arguments about insane, subversive, unpatriotic art. The only difference is that the Soviets treated modernism as anti-Soviet, whereas Dondero argued it was pro-Kremlin and certainly un-American:

Dadaism aims to destroy by ridicule, Surrealism—by denial of reason, Cubism—by designed disorder, Futurism—by the machine myth, Expressionism by aping the primitive and insane. . . Abstractionism aims to destroy by the creation of brainstorm. The four leaders of the “isms” were Picasso, Braque, Leger, and Duchamp. Leger and Duchamp are now in the United States to aid in the destruction of standards and our traditions. Communist art aided and abetted by misguided Americans is stabbing American art in the back with murderous intent.11

Whereas some were attacking modernism, others were defending it. The best example of the latter trend is the manifest article, “Is Modern Art Communistic?” by Alfred Barr, which was published in *The New York Times Magazine* on December 14, 1952. To challenge the widespread associations of modernism with communism, Barr starts by focusing on anti-modernist quotations by leaders of world democracies, such as Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Winston Churchill. He then argues that anti-modernism is essential for totalitarian regimes such as the USSR or Nazi Germany. Barr further claims that modernist art is not communistic because the Soviets suppress it. He recalls cases such as that of the artist Marc Chagall suffering under the Soviet regime. The demonstration of hostility of the Soviet Union toward avant-garde art was effective. Barr drew parallels between the contemporary United States’ attempts to censor modernism with that of totalitarian countries. His article, a defense against McCarthyism in the arts, effectively compromised the Dondero-type opinions about the subversive, pro-Kremlin nature of modernism.

The issues of censorship and freedom of expression in the arts also concerned the highest-ranked US officials. On October 19, 1954, during the 25th anniversary of the MoMA, a message that Eisenhower had recorded was played. The president spoke about freedom of the arts and appealed to avoid censorship, criticizing the “artists-slaves under tyranny,” among other aspects. Three days later, on October 22, the American Federation of Arts issued the Statement of Artistic Freedom, which argued that art must be free within a democracy and should be judged by its own qualities and not on political merits. Most noteworthy, the document already acknowledged the

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potential of exploiting art and culture as a medium capable of transmitting particular ideas and as an ideological weapon in cultural warfare:

Freedom of artistic expression in a visual work of art, like freedom of speech and press, is fundamental in our democracy. . . . [Freedom] exists irrespective of the artist’s political or social opinions, affiliations or activities . . . work . . . should be judged on its merits. . . . We believe that in opposing anti-democratic forces throughout the world, the United States should do so by democratic methods, and give no cause for accusation that it is adopting the methods of its opponents. We believe that in such cultural activities our nation should demonstrate the artistic freedom and diversity which are inherent in a democratic society. We believe that such freedom and diversity are the most effective answers to totalitarian thought control and uniformity.  

Nevertheless, the intrusion of censorship into the arts and overseas exhibitions remained in place until the 1960s, and the history of the success of US art abroad intertwines with a history of domestic encounters. Although shows such as Highlights of American Painting and some others were constantly circulating around the world in the 1950s, others were being cancelled. For example, in 1955, the American Federation of Art assembled the exhibition Sport in Art, which was to start in the United States and then travel under the USIA auspices to Australia for the Olympics. During the display in the Dallas Museum of Art, from March 25 to April 20, 1956, the show prompted negative reactions from local anti-communists, conservative artists, and art lovers who demanded the exclusion of four works by communist-affiliated artists: Ben Shan, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, William Zorach, and Leon Kroll. Hearings were

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14 In 1951, a show of sixty-five works including abstract paintings took place in West Berlin. The reception of the show was positive: The exhibition was received as “genuine” American art. The show of contemporary American modernism attracted audience because it contrasted the fascist attitudes to modernist art, still fresh in public memory. The West Berlin show was not cancelled because it took place outside the Unites States and because the State support of the exhibition was concealed, thus, automatically preventing the possible public criticisms of spending the tax-payers money on representing America by modernist art. After the German show, a series of exhibitions incorporating modernist art took place in Italy (1952), India (1953), and France (1954).
initiated, and ultimately, Theodore Streibert, the Head of the USIA, decided not to send the show to the Olympics, unwilling to provoke similar anti-communist-based criticism that would have challenged the agency’s reputation and the Congress’ eagerness to fund it. Afterwards, several other overseas exhibitions were cancelled, among them *American Art 1900–1950*. Domestic attacks on modernist art continued even in 1959 during the assembling of the show for the Soviet Union and after a successful showing of Abstract Expressionism at the American pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World Fair.

However, by that time, regardless of all the controversies occasionally accompanying American contemporary art, US officials had already been seriously concerned with modernist American art in overseas exhibitions. Of all official US institutions, the USIA would have played the greatest role in exhibiting American visual art in the Soviet Union.

**USIA and Visual Art in the Soviet Union**

In 1953, Eisenhower established the USIA as the major official propagandistic institution for the Cold War. The USIA was responsible for American foreign policy, and due to the Smith-Mundt Act, it operated only abroad. The Agency’s motto, *Telling America’s Story to the World* (naturally, this story included the history of American art), straightforwardly expressed the official mission.

The structure of the USIA changed over time, but there always existed several key divisions for the cultural Cold War with the Soviet Union. The first one was

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15 The controversy is discussed in chapter seven dedicated exclusively to the 1959 ANEM.

responsible for broadcasting, and, among others, it managed the radio Voice of America (VOA), a symbol of the cultural Cold War. The second key division was responsible for press publications, including the magazine *Amerika Illustrated*, issued in Russian especially for distribution among the Soviet people. The third was the Division of Libraries and Exhibits, initially focusing only on overseas libraries—books were seen as an effective tool for disseminating information about the United States abroad. Overseas libraries hosted the first USIA exhibits in the 1950s. The potential of exhibitions for attracting large audiences and for advancing American culture concerned the USIA increasingly more, and finally, a special Office of Exhibits was established. In the late 1950s to the 1960s, Robert Sivard headed the Office of Exhibits, and Jack Masey served as the leading designer.

Throughout the Cold War, the Office of Exhibits undertook dozens of overseas shows, including the 1959 *American National Exhibition in Moscow* and the 1963–1964 *Graphic Arts: USA*, which are central to part two of this thesis. These Soviet shows took place within the official American-Soviet cultural exchange program adopted within the Lacy-Zarubin agreement, signed on January 27, 1958. The agreement turned a previously exceptional exchange of artists, scholars, students, and other intellectuals into a systematic process. Within the framework of this newly emerged initiative, a “protocol agreement” concerning two reciprocal exhibits for 1959 was signed on September 10, 1958. *Exhibition of Soviet Achievements in Science, Technology, and Culture* was to take place in New York; and the *American National Exhibition* was to take place in Moscow. Thus, within the 1959 *American

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17 The agreement is named after a State Department Officer William Lacy and the Soviet Ambassador to the United States Georgii Zarubin. These authorities signed the agreement which would be prolonged every two years until June 19, 1973, when the General agreement between the two countries would be signed. Yale Richmond, “Chapter 3. Cultural Agreement,” in Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*, 14–20.
National Exhibition in Moscow, the United States got an opportunity to represent American art in the Soviet Union for the first time.¹⁸

Chapter 7. The *American National Exhibition in Moscow*, 1959

On July 24, 1959, the *American National Exhibition* opened in Sokolniki Park, located in northeast Moscow. This six-hundred-hectare area had no major constructions and was suited perfectly for creating a special exhibiting environment. USIA officer Jack Masey headed the design group, which consisted of recognized architects and designers, among them Buckminster Fuller, George Nelson, and Charles and Ray Eames. The US site in Sokolniki occupied 3.7 ha (Figure 37), where American engineers, supervising Soviet workers, erected the following buildings:

1) a Geodesic Dome\(^1\) of 30,000 square feet (Figure 36);

2) a 50,000-square-feet Glass Pavilion; and

3) three plastic “umbrella” pavilions covering 15,000 square feet.

During the show, the buildings were property of the United States, but upon the closure of the exhibition, the USSR purchased the Dome and the Glass Pavilion for half price, i.e. $375,000. Although these American buildings passed into Soviet possession, they would remain a prominent architectural spot within the Moscow cityscape, a reminder of the 1959 cultural contact.\(^2\) It was a unique precedent during the Cold War that Soviet officials gave an American institution permission to occupy

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\(^1\) Buckminster Fuller, a prominent American architect and designer, originally developed this type of dome for *The Jeshyn International Fair*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 1956. The out-of-edge Dome has become the face of US international exhibitions since Kabul. Fuller’s design bureau was suggested to create a similar dome for the 1959 ANEM but Fuller was unable to do with the set deadline. The Moscow construction required an upgrade so it would be able to withstand the snow, and Fuller could not develop it within seven months. George Nelson, however, took and completed the project. Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, Metaform Design International: the Masey Archives, November 21, 2014. Hereafter: The Masey Archives. For more on the history of the dome, see also Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, 170–183.

\(^2\) After the 1970s, the Dome was demolished and the Umbrella pavilions were removed.
such a large territory, just five miles from the Red Square, and to erect several great buildings to display American culture right in the Soviet capital. Why did the Soviets give Americans such freedom?

The Soviet motivation was its eagerness for cultural exchange, a consequence of the Thaw, initiated by Nikita Khrushchev. In addition to declaring peaceful intentions, Krushchev had a particular pragmatic motivation to become acquainted with technological achievements in the West and to stimulate trade. Masey argues that Khrushchev himself initiated the exchange when, in 1957 during an interview on CBS’s *Face the Nation*, the First Secretary appealed to the United States and invited the country to engage in academic, scientific, and cultural exchanges. His initiative was further legitimized with the Lacy-Zarubin agreement of January 27, 1958 which agreement became the framework for American-Soviet reciprocal cultural exchange, including the ANEM and the reciprocal Soviet exhibition in New York.

Lengthy negotiations preceded the two exhibitions. The American side offered for the Soviet exhibition a convenient New York exhibition space, the Coliseum; and the Soviet side could not offer an equally suitable venue, most likely because such ones were not available in Moscow. The Soviet side proposed Gorky Park, but the site did not satisfy the Americans because the facilities were not adequate for large exhibitions. The stairs at the buildings in the park were not able to bear the weight of the anticipated crowds. Finally, the Soviet side offered Sokolniki Park, where Americans could construct the necessary buildings on their own. The Americans accepted this offer because they immediately acknowledged the benefits of creating

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3 For more on Khrushchev’s and Soviet expectations from the show, see Masey and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, 154–155; Reid, “Who’ll Beat Whom,” 860–865.

4 Masey and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, 154.
an exhibiting environment from scratch.\textsuperscript{5} On December 29, 1958, an American-Soviet agreement, outlining the details of the Moscow and New York exhibitions, was reached.

The American side took maximum advantage of the given opportunities. Creating an exhibition environment from scratch, the design group attempted to represent “a realistic and credible image of America to the Soviets through exhibits, displays, films, publications, fine arts, performing arts. . . . In a sense this . . . [was] a ‘corner of America’ in the heart of Moscow.”\textsuperscript{6} The displays of thousands of American goods from furniture to books, events such as jazz concerts and fashion shows, and the engagement of seventy-five Russian-speaking American guides contributed to the overall credibility of this simulation of America, which was to be very much appreciated by the Soviet visitors, who left hundreds of comments in comment books, among them such as: \textit{I have been to America!}

This bridge-building act was shaped as a peaceful undertaking with the officially declared goal to increase a mutual understanding between the people.\textsuperscript{7} However, this narrative of friendship concealed a concrete covert mission. Unlike official releases and catalogs, the secret internal documents of the USIA clearly state this subversive intentions. The declassified \textit{Basic Policy Guidance for the U.S. Exhibit} reveals the show’s primary theme was to promote freedom of choice and expression.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, November 21, 2014.


\textsuperscript{7} As it is put on page one of the “Facts About the National Exhibition in Moscow,” the purpose is “To strengthen the foundations of world peace by increasing understanding in the Soviet Union of the American people, the land in which they live, and the broad range of American life, including American science, technology and culture.” Soviet propaganda used similar rhetoric for statements on the ANEM both in the official documentation and in the press.

The representation of numerous goods unavailable to the Soviet people was to provoke implicit criticism of the Soviet regime. The show prompted the Soviet people to compare the highly developed consumerist culture and people’s capitalism in the United States with their lives under socialism. The outcomes of this forced comparison are still disputable, but there is a general assertion in the historiography of the ANEM that the intended contrast of the ANEM with Soviet “black-and-white” daily prose was achieved. Irma Weinig, one of the guides at the show, recalls:

[T]he exhibition was a carnival: the most colorful spot in Moscow. Usually deadly serious and law-abiding, living in a world of clearly marked ‘don’ts’ and ‘do not touch’s,’ they were free to follow their own bent at the exhibit. This contrast was largely due to the exhibition of American visual art.

Assembling Art

Through internal USIA correspondence, Robert Sivard acknowledged the importance of the art section:

The Cultural section will be one of the most important sections of the show, and the one offering the most challenge and opportunity if done correctly. It is never too hard to sell the high standard of American production . . .

9 A sarcastic and telling remark: “The objectives outlined in the memo are good. However, the phrase ‘Create in the minds’ [create the desire for a wider choice of quality goods and services than are presently available for them] . . . is inaccurate, since the desire . . . is already the most dominant factor in the mind of the average citizen. The first two objectives might be rephrased as follows: (1) The primary aim of the exhibit is to stimulate further aiming the peoples of the Soviet Union their desire for a wider choice of quality goods and services than is presently available to them, thereby creating additional pressure on the regime to bring about modification of its economic plan at the expense of the USSR’s aggressive potential.” Office Memorandum, from Sivard to Roberts. Comments on your memo on the Gorki Park Exhibition, October 9, 1958. RG 306. Entry: UD-UP 10. Moscow Exhibition. Box 1 (of 1). Folder: USA: 1965. American National Exhibition in Moscow. NARA II. See also the project of the show “US National Exhibit, Gorki Part, Moscow, 1959” located in the same folder.

10 For example, Reid challenges the dominant interpretations of the ANEM as of an unquestionably efficient ideological subversion of the Soviet people. Reid argues that the significance of the show is often overstated because Western scholars tend to approach the ANEM “from a standpoint of victors.” Reid, “Who’ll Beat Whom?,” 857.

11 Cite by: Masey and Morgan, Cold War Confrontations, 214.
standard-of-living. . . . [The Soviet Citizen] is less convinced, however, that America has any culture. . . . [T]he exhibition could go toward convincing him. . . . Intellectual ferment in the Soviet Union centers primarily around a resistance against the oppressive bonds of Socialist Realism. . . . Together with presenting a wide selection of American talent in the cultural field, the entire exhibition should be designed to emphasize freedom of choice and expression in America. This is the most important thing we have which the Soviet citizen is denied, and, as he becomes better educated, increasingly resents denied. In the cultural section, we should point out, just as we should do in the section showing consumer’s goods, the wide range of choice which the American ‘consumer’ had at this disposal. . . . [W]e should suggest the showing of a good exhibition of contemporary American art, which clearly shows the evolution from realism through impressionism, expressionism to abstractionism and surrealism.12

In order to assemble the art works for the ANEM, the USIA hired a non-governmental commission of professionals from the field of the visual arts, which was headed by Franklin C. Watkins, a painting teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The jury included Henry R. Rope, chair of the Fine Arts Department of Indiana University; Theodore Roszak, a sculptor; and Lloyd Goodrich, Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art.13 The jury selected forty-nine paintings by twentieth-century contemporary artists, from William Glackens’ figurative Soda Fountain (1938) (Figure 38) to Jackson Pollock’s abstract canvas Cathedral (1947) (Figure 39). The display of this collection occupied four cubicles on the second floor of the Glass Pavilion (Figure 40). Twenty-three contemporary sculptures by Gaston Lachaise (Figure 41), Jacques Lipchitz (Figure 43), and other sculptors were placed both in the pavilion and outside in the park.

Edith Halpert, a US dealer of Russian origin and a curator from Downtown Gallery, New York City, traveled to Moscow on her own expense to hang the

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13 For more on the history of the assembling, see Marilyn S. Kushner, “Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959.”
collection. She served as acting curator and stayed in the USSR for more than three weeks. Upon her arrival, she found the working conditions extremely inappropriate, observing, “[T]he space seemed so inadequate that I was on the verge of tears.”

The lighting was poor, and the walls were painted in green, orange, and purple, casting a “terrible light” onto the pictures. It took her four days and required the assistance of six preparers from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts to prepare an adequate environment and hang the collection.

The assembled collection of contemporary art did not escape in-house criticism, which was rather typical for US art exhibitions since the late 1940s. The art section provoked a considerable domestic controversy because the jury had been subject to criticism by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Since many artists such as Pollock and Shahn had formerly had affiliations with communist or socialist organizations, they were treated as subversives. Moreover, the assembled collection consisted only of works of contemporary art. American eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings were missing, it was therefore argued that such an exhibition would not be representative of American art. The congressional hearings on the ANEM art section took place on July 1, 1959. However, unlike similar previous cases, and thanks to Eisenhower’s personal involvement, none of the works was removed. Instead, an additional group of twenty-eight paintings of realist pre-World War I art were sent to Moscow. This collection of works by John Singleton


15 Ibid.

16 For more on the controversy, see Kushner, “Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” 10–17. See also Krenn, Fall-Out Shelters, 155–173.
Copley, Maurice Prendergast, and others was displayed on the first floor of the Glass Pavilion.

Altogether, one hundred works of American art, covering American art history from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, were on display. This was a milestone in the representation of American art in the USSR, particularly if one considers that, with the exception of figurative art, i.e. Kent’s grandiose shows and a few gift-exhibitions, American art had hardly been shown in the USSR by 1959. As a part of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, which displayed thousands of items and attracted hundreds of thousands of people, the art section was guaranteed to be well attended. Thus, the art section of the ANEM was an excellent opportunity to deliver a particular perspective on American art to a larger Soviet audience that was practically unaware of it, especially of American modernist art.

Freedom, Diversity, and Peoples’ Art on Display

The art exhibition within the ANEM was titled Contemporary American Art, and it was a curated show with a specific concept, as can be seen in the catalog and the brochure issued for the show.\textsuperscript{17} The high-quality ninety-page catalog, edited by Edith Halpert and published with funds raised by the Archives of American Art, included a ten-page introductory text by Lloyd Goodrich and a reproduction of each work exhibited along with a biographical summary and brief comment on each artist’s style, written by Edith Halpert.\textsuperscript{18} Most of the reproductions were in black and white, but selected works, among them Pollock’s Cathedral (1947) and Kuniyoshi’s The Amazing Juggler (1952) were reproduced as color plates. A smaller version of the

\textsuperscript{17} Both the catalog and the brochure were issued for the initial collection of contemporary art, assembled by the jury. Therefore, these issues did not cover the additional pre-World War I paintings. My focus now is on the collection of contemporary American art represented as a conceptual unity.

\textsuperscript{18} Amerikanskaia zhivopis’ i skulptura. Amerikanskaia natsional’naia vystavka v Moskve, 25 iul’ia – 5 sentiabria 1959 goda, exhibition catalog (Detroit, Arkhiv Amerikanskogo Iskusstva: Meridian, 1959).
catalog, a fourteen-page brochure titled *Contemporary American Art*, including Goodrich’s text and several black and white reproductions, was also published.\(^\text{19}\) This edition included reproductions of only few representational works, most likely because the quality and the size of the publication were by no means adequate for reproducing abstract art.

The catalogs and the brochures were distributed among the visitors. Gretchen Simms, in her PhD thesis dedicated to the artistic reception of the ANEM in the USSR, notes that some 400,000 art catalogs were issued for the show,\(^\text{20}\) and the circulation of the brochure is not known. Thus, considering an estimated attendance of around three million people, every seventh visitor would have received a copy.\(^\text{21}\)

Everyone who received a catalog or a brochure would take it home, and most likely, he or she would show it to friends and acquaintances who had not attended the show, thus increasing the number of Soviet people who became acquainted with American art. Like other objects from the ANEM, the catalogs and brochures would undergo preservation\(^\text{22}\) and remain in the USSR after the show, thus becoming a valuable

\(^{19}\) *Sovremennoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo*, brochure for the Art Section of the ANEM, text by Lloyd Goodrich, 1959. Hereafter: *Sovremennoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo* (brochure).


\(^{21}\) The report “Facts about the ANEM” estimates the attendance as 3.5 million. The papers from the Masey Archives give 2 million. (US Government Exhibitions Supervised by Jack Masey. The Masey Archives. Hereafter when citing materials from the Masey Archives, I do not specify an exact box number or folder title. I received the documents in a single email from Beverly Payeff-Masey with no exact location specified.) Other USIA reports from RG 306 frequently give around 2.7 million. One can safely assume that the attendance was about 3 million people.


Vladimir Paperny, who attended the show, recalled that he had preserved the objects from the ANEM, like many other visitors. Vladimir Paperny in a skype-conversation with the author, June 15, 2013.
source of visual information about American art, which had previously been practically unavailable.

Another factor that contributed to the significance of the catalogs and the brochures was that they included a study of American art that went beyond Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. Thus, a Soviet citizen could look at American art not through the lens of official Soviet negative criticism, but through an article by an American art historian, who delivered his argument with a comparatively low level of distortion because his text was not subject to Soviet censorship. Let us have a closer look at how Goodrich represented American art to a Soviet audience.

The Russian text of the Moscow catalog was not written specially for the ANEM, but a revised version of Goodrich’s earlier article “What is American in American Art?”23 published in Art in America in 1958. In the summer of 1959, an English version of the text, now revised for the ANEM, was published in College Art Journal.24 This article was translated into Russian and then printed in the Russian catalog. In 1963, Goodrich would republish his essay “What is American in American Art?” in Art in America.25 Comparing several versions of the text enables us to understand whether Goodrich was consciously adapting his text when writing for a Soviet audience.

The 1958 text from Art in America is significantly longer than the consequent versions prepared for the ANEM, it also covers a larger time period: from colonialism to contemporary times, whereas the editions for the ANEM focus mainly on

twentieth-century movements. The reasons for omitting the historical part become evident when considering the jury, which wanted to show the Soviet people a cross section of the best works of contemporary art, representing various trends in twentieth-century American art.26

In the opening paragraph of his Russian-language article, Goodrich argues that twentieth-century contemporary American art is a reaction against idealism and academism in the arts, which led artists such as John Sloan or William Glackens to focusing on the social life in the United States.27 He also emphasizes that numerous artists, from Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood to Edward Hopper and Raphael Soyer, were committed to socially critical art.28 He furthermore emphasizes that during the Depression era, the Federal Art Project helped many artists by providing artists with commissions. Goodrich argues that this activity was entirely socialist because it was an example of the official state support of the arts in the United States. Throughout the article, Goodrich outlines that there is a particular social aspect in the art of Ben Shahn, Edward Hopper, Jack Levine, and others, and that these artists, within their oeuvre, were concerned with commenting on the social life in the United States. It becomes evident Goodrich was emphasizing whatever social there was about American art. Goodrich knew that within Soviet aesthetics, “genuine” art was socially engaged art, it focused on peoples’ lives and was supported by the state and; it was socially critical. Thus, the main strategy was to emphasize what was similar about American and Soviet art – a strategy Goodrich followed throughout the entire article. This strategy of finding similarities rather than focusing on differences was

26 This primary goal of the exhibition is clearly stated in the opening paragraphs of the Russian-language catalog and brochure. Sovremennoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo (brochure), 2.

27 Ibid.

28 When claiming this, Goodrich removes the negative evaluation of Regionalism of Benton and Wood which the author provided in his earlier articles.
more adequate for the general idea of the show as a step towards understanding and friendship.

On pages three and four of the Russian-language text, Goodrich introduces modernism. He argues that American artists have significantly contributed to the avant-garde movements, and he presents American modernism as a successor of European modernism, thus inscribing the United States into the great European tradition. According to Goodrich, artists such as Max Weber, Morris Prendergast, and Joseph Stella significantly contributed to world art. He provides an overview of expressionist art, arguing that discoveries in psychology, for example the discovery of the unconscious mind, showed and opened up new “worlds” and turned the artists’ attention away from portraying the “objective world.” Gorky and Kuniyoshi are presented as influential examples of this trend, since as Goodrich puts it, these artists began to pay less attention to the “objective world.”

In the following, Goodrich argues that abstraction has become the dominating trend since 1930. He provides a “formalist” definition of abstraction, characterizing it as discarding representation in order to just work with form, color, and language. In his history of American art, he then moves on to American Abstract Expressionism, which became the first world-recognized style of American origin. He concluded his account with Hopper and Wyeth, whom he portrays as contemporary “creative” realists who managed to rethink academism. Goodrich’s variant of the history of American art is followed by a resume stating that American art is rather diverse:

> What with representationalism, expressionism, abstraction, and all their variations, contemporary American art is among the most diversified of any nation. . . . We have individuals and whole schools of many differing viewpoints, all having their measure of validity. This pluralistic character of American art gives the full freedom for individualism and experimentation.29

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29 Sovremennoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo (brochure), 11–12. The Russian-language version of this passage from the brochure and the English version from College Art Journal are nearly the same,
According to Goodrich, diversity is an essential trait of American art. He argues that diversity is possible due to the freedom given to artists who can work in any style, be it abstract or figurative. In fact, Goodrich proposes a contrasting scheme according to which realism could co-exist with abstraction within one national art; such a perspective contradicted Soviet ideas of the struggle between realist and non-realist art.

This 1959 Russian text, unlike the English version of the same year, has one extra passage. In this passage, Goodrich claims that there exist various kinds of support for modernism in the United States. He highlights that the people’s interest in contemporary modernist art has increased and “contemporary art in the United States receives significant support from various sides.”

Evidently, this passage about the broad acceptance of modernism in the United States was designed especially for the Soviet readers: they were used to judge art based on its popularity among the people because popular response to art was an important parameter in socialism. Goodrich wanted to show that in the United States, contemporary art, including the displayed at the ANEM modernist works, is the art of the people, not something elitist. Placed at the end of the article and functioning as a second conclusion, this passage provides important evidence on how Goodrich wanted to advance American art among the

except that Goodrich, in the last sentence of the Russian text, does not claim American art to be an expression of “democratic society.” He simply puts: “Etot mnozhestvennyi kharakter amerikanskogo iskusstva predostavliaet polnui svobodu individualizmu i eksperimentirovaniu.” However, in the English version, Goodrich argues: “What with representationalism, expressionism, abstraction, and all their variations, contemporary American art is among the most diversified of any nation. . . . We have individuals and whole schools of many differing viewpoints, all having their measure of validity. This pluralistic character of American art is the appropriate expression of a democratic society, giving wide scope to individualism and experimentation [italics–mine].” The omission is significant because it demonstrates that the author had been proofreading the text for the Soviet audience, who would be definitely disturbed by the claim that the United States was a democracy. According to Soviet propaganda, the USSR was the “genuine” democracy. For the English version of the passage, see Lloyd Goodrich, “American Painting and Sculpture 1930–1959: The Moscow Exhibition,” College Art Journal 18, 4 (1959): 300.

30 Sovremennoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo (brochure), 12.
Soviet people. The latter assumption can be proved once more when comparing the 1959 Russian text with the first 1958 and the last 1963 versions. Ironically, in the English articles written and produced for Americans audiences in *Art in America*, Goodrich makes an opposite claim, there he argues that contemporary art in the United States lacks support:

> [O]ur art is still individualistic, produced for private collectors, museums and the art public, with a minimum of official patronage. Whatever vital art is being done is mostly for business and industry.\(^{31}\)

The text’s rhetoric and revisions show that Goodrich considered the specifics of the Soviet audience and wanted American art to be well received. Attempting to explain modernism, he avoided a possible discussion that might have treated it as idealistic and bourgeois. Instead he came up with arguments about the similarities between art in the United States and in the USSR. Goodrich also wanted to convince the Soviet audience that the American public was supporting contemporary American art such as on display at the ANEM, including abstract art.

Anticipating the reception of American modernism in the USSR, Goodrich was definitely aware of the general hostile attitude of Soviet art criticism towards abstract art, and he took advantage of this possibility to facilitate the Soviet reception of American art. He knew the Soviets lacked expertise to understand abstract art and he wanted to overcome it. Thus, unlike in his articles for *Art in America*, he found some parallels between abstract works of art and figurative pieces in the Russian text. He argued that the large canvases of American the abstract expressionists looked like landscapes seen from a bird’s eye view, reflecting the “openness and space of

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America.”32 And when speaking about the Morris Graves’ expressionistic work Flight of a Plover (Figure 45), Goodrich argued that the painting depicts a flock of birds in motion.33 Since the Soviet audience was experienced only in viewing realist art, Goodrich was trying to use it. Such a simplified, naïve, and accessible explanation of contemporary art targeted an average visitor with an anticipated lack of expertise in modernism.

However, the anticipation of a general low level of readiness to encounter American contemporary art among Soviet visitors does not mean that the curators approached their potential audience as a monolithic group. They were conscious that the actual audience of the so-called “classless society” was rather uneven and also included some people who were interested in the visual arts and more ready for modernism. In fact, the curators had an ambiguous approach to the audience. Although the curators undeniably wanted to find a common language with the general public, basically lacking expertise in modernist art, the curators’ priority was to introduce contemporary art to the cultural elites. For example, Halpert’s lecture and McLanthan’s report show that the curators considered the intelligentsia and the cultural establishment as a key audience, more ready for an encounter with modernist art. Advancing the American art within the intelligentsia was strongly desired, the curators even changed the exhibition’s daily schedule to satisfy the interests of Soviet artists by providing them with a better access to contemporary American art. One of the measures to do that was to close the gallery from 1–3 p.m. and open it only to artists. By doing this, Halpert wanted to prevent overcrowding of the art section. The groups were not to exceed two hundred people, and “the Soviet uniformed guards did

32 Sovremennoe amerikanskoe iskusstvo (brochure), 7.
33 Ibid.
the screening.” People from such groups were handed out the large catalogs that “were intended only for those having a special interest in the arts, which, because of its handsome design, typography, and reproductions was much sought after.”

Whereas the small brochures were given to most of the visitors, the large, well-printed publication “reached those for who they were specifically intended.” To acquire such a catalog, one had to provide a name and an address, so the catalog could be sent by mail. This procedure was to prevent jams of people willing to get a catalog. Also, by sending catalogs directly to concrete people, the organizers seek to prevent the Soviet agitators from having catalogs: the Americans knew that the agitators would get the catalog just to someone else from having it. Eventually, the Soviet authorities prohibited this procedure, and regardless of the American attempts to restore the distribution of the catalogs, many people apparently did not receive a catalog.

This focus on people with a specific interest in the arts went along with the overall USIA public policy on conceptualizing the target audience as a pyramid, with the intellectuals on the top. Although the USIA attempted to influence a wide audience, there was always a particular focus on the intellectual and cultural elites. The intelligentsia were important to reach because, firstly, they could potentially be more loyal to Western ideas, and, secondly, they could be among the agenda-makers within the USSR: they could potentially influence the mindset in the USSR.

Thus, the art section of the ANEM communicated to both to the general audience and to those potentially more open to contemporary American art the


35 Report by McLanathan, 3.

36 Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, February 16, 2015.
message that contemporary American art was individualistic, pluralistic, socially accepted, and in some ways also socially critical. What were the visitors’ reactions?

Reception and Response

The art exhibition was an extremely popular site, with daily attendance measuring in tens of thousands of visitors, coming up to one million in the end.37 Due to the jams created by the crowd at the art section on the second floor, Halpert had to set up special rails preventing people from being pushed into the canvases. The official Soviet reception of the show was predictably negative, with numerous articles denouncing the exhibition. The reviews of the art section were not exempt from hostility. The best example is Kemenov’s lengthy overview, “Вystavka sovremennogo iskusstva” (“Exhibition of Contemporary Art”), published in the August 11, 1959, issue of Sovetskaia Kul’tura, which parroted traditional Marxist-Leninist attitudes towards modernism, as discussed in Part One. Generally, it once again reproduced the official negative stance on Western contemporary art.

However, the reception should not be measured by official publications only. Although each source has its limitations, other materials such as comment books, reports of the USIA, recollections, and other forms nevertheless allow for the reconstruction of a detailed account of the responses provoked by the ANEM.

Comment Books

The responses in the comment books were more diverse than the reception in the official newspapers, albeit still with few positive comments against a dominating negative trend. However, the classification and interpretation of comments from the books is a challenge as has already been encountered and acknowledged within Cold

37 More estimates in Report by McLanathan. For more information on the art section proceedings, see also Halpert’s lecture, October 19, 1959.
War studies.\(^\text{38}\)

First, the credibility of the comment books is problematic; it is an open question of how adequately the books reflect the Soviet peoples’ attitudes towards the exhibition. The Soviet side influenced the account by sending special agitators to leave “fake” negative comments. Moreover, specially prepared Soviet affiliates stood near the comment books, and their presence provided psychological pressure on those visitors willing to leave positive comments. In practice, someone caught leaving a good comment might have encountered further career problems. Spying on “loyal” commentators made visitors suspicious of commenting, and this minimized positive responses. The last page of \textit{Comment Book One}, located at the exit of the ANEM, is valuable proof that positive commentary was a challenge (Figure 47). One can see that a piece of paper was glued onto the book’s last page. The text praises American culture and points at the supremacy of capitalism over communism. Most likely, such an “anti-Soviet” comment had been written in advance and had been given to an American guide, thus bypassing Soviet controllers. Second, the comments examined by previous scholars are actually not a “pure” primary source: they are not the original comment books but excerpts. Moreover, most of the comments are translations from Russian into English. Thus, the representativeness of the available NARA II and AAA separate lists, compilations, and other materials has been compromised by the very fact of their selections by USIA officers (we do not really know the parameters of the selection). Furthermore, one should not ignore the inevitable losses in translation.\(^\text{39}\)

Third, the lists are unreliable in terms of figures because it is impossible to

\(^{38}\) Susan Reid was one of the first to discuss the limitations of the ANEM comment books. See Reid, “Who Will Beat Whom?,” 870–876.

\(^{39}\) For example, punctuation and spelling can help determining a person’s background. Such errors are normally omitted when translating the comment books from Russian into English.
acquire credible statistics from a translated selection and with no access to the complete, original books. The available statistics, created by the USIA, state that art was the second popular subject of commentary, with 7 favorable and 37 (with an additional 5 commentaries regarding sculptures) as unfavorable.\textsuperscript{40} Obviously, these numbers come from an analysis of a translated, selected set of comments, not from the original books, because 49 written comments are a small number for a six-week show with several million visitors.

Last but not least, the commentators’ social status is hard to determine and interpret statistically because most comments were unsigned, except few comments signed to identify the author as a “worker” or an “artist.” Although it is possible in some cases to speculate on the authorship of unsigned comments depending on the spelling, punctuation, and style of the argumentation, nevertheless, attribution of comments is not available to an extent to make any credible statistics. However, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Aleksei Fominykh,\textsuperscript{41} who retrieved the four original books,\textsuperscript{42} it is now possible to provide some further insights into the visitors’ reactions, giving a more detailed account and overcoming some of the difficulties scholars have encountered.

The four discovered books are more credible and a pure source of information.

\textsuperscript{40} See a reprint of USIA quantified breakdown of comments on specific exhibits in visitors’ books for the ANEM issued in Reid’s “Who Will Beat Whom?,” 872.

\textsuperscript{41} I am indebted to Alexei Fominykh for sharing the original comment books with me. For more on the history of the original comment books, see Aleksei Fominikh, “ ‘Pictures at an Exhibition:’ Comment Books from the 1959 American Exhibit in Moscow, a Recovered Source (Introduction to the Archival Publication),” \textit{Ab Imperio} 2 (2010): 151–170. See also a selection of original comments published in the same issue of \textit{Ab Imperio} (p.187–217).

\textsuperscript{42} In my dissertation, I examine the full four original sources: \textit{Book One}, 118 pages, July 28–August 5; \textit{Book Two}, 146 pages, August 6–15; \textit{Book Three}, 178 pages, August 16–27; \textit{Book Four}, 119 pages, August 27–September 4.
The books were placed at the show’s exit\(^{43}\) only on the fourth day. The organizers anticipated that the first visitors would be privileged ones, i.e., the Party establishment and not average Soviet citizens. Indeed, officials controlled the distribution of tickets, so well-established people received them first. A guide at the ANEM, John R. Thomas, reported on the first visitors:

> In the first week of the Fair, the visitors were heavily weighted on the elite side starting with Khrushchev and Kozlov. This was evident (1) from their dress (among the men many good-quality, pressed suits and white shirts and ties, among the women many tailored suits and fur pieces); (2) from their language (more refined and educated); (3) from other external signs (many sported Orders of Lenin and Red Flag insignias with inscriptions denoting Supreme Soviet deputies); and (4) from the general hostility with which questions were asked and answers received.\(^{44}\)

Reactions from such privileged visitors were more representative of the Party line than those of the common people; hence, bypassing some of the political elite’s comments, the four books are closer to the actual reception of the Soviet people.\(^{45}\)

The books also provide us with new firsthand quantitative data. Within five

\(^{43}\) The location at the exit has benefits for interpretation of the reception of American art. The books at the exit allow seeing the general reception of art within the whole show. People leaving the ANEM could potentially write about any section or exhibit, so their selection of focusing on one or several topics from dozens represented at the ANEM is important. In addition to the four books placed at the exit, other comment books were placed at each section, including art section. However, apparently, they have not been preserved, except several selections of comments from art section available in Halpert’s papers (Downtown Gallery records, AAA). Goodrich papers from AAA also include some of the pages and comments preserved. Some of the lists are from original Russian comment books whereas others are translations by the USIA. These papers can’t be used for any statistical conclusion. They also hardly show any trends in reception, other than the ones found in the full four Russian books central to my research.


\(^{45}\) It is an open question how to characterize the audience and to go beyond a generalization “Soviet visitors.” Reid’s article “Who Will Beat Whom?” demonstrates the both geographical and social diversity of the visitors. However, no social or demographic statistics is available because not all the comments were signed. My examination of the four original books placed at the exit allows me to speculate that the majority of the commentators were the working class people. I conclude this from the argumentation of commentators, from the frequent grammatical errors in comments, from the language-usage, and from the vocabulary. Signed comments are rare and show that the exhibition was attended by various professionals from doctors to engineers. Only two visitors indicated in their comments that they were professional artists.
CHAPTER 7. THE AMERICAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION IN MOSCOW, 1959

weeks, the four books accumulated 1,454 comments (277; 383; 479; 315).46

Commentators shared impressions on various aspects of the show, from management
to architecture, and 112 comments mention the visual arts.47 Only 16 comments
openly express sympathy for American art. Most of the remaining comments are
explicitly negative; and only several comments are neutral because they contain no
positive or negative judgment.

Negative Receptions

Negative commentary of art should not be seen as monolithic, and the reader
should be skeptical towards the frame favorable/unfavorable when speaking about
aesthetical judgments. The illustration for the newspaper article regarding the
ANEM48 evidences that unfavorable is rather an umbrella term for several different
reactions to be specified (Figure 44). One can see a collage of visitors’ photos, which
belts the three modernist sculptures from the ANEM. The heading says “The Room of
Laughter.” That was a popular Soviet attraction where false mirrors distorted a
visitor’s image, thus making him or her appear to be laughing or scared, depending on
the character of distortion. American visual art, like a false mirror, distorted the
image, provoking various emotions of anger, surprise, fear, disgust, incomprehension,
and other. All photographed reactions can be interpreted as unfavorable and the
comment books likewise evidence the same diversity of unfavorable responses. Let us

46 A special note on the figures required. Several comments are unreadable, some comments comment
on each other and, therefore, can be thought of being one or two separate comments. Therefore, there is
a certain measure of inaccuracy.

47 20 comments in Book One; 35 in Book Two; 29 in Book Three; and 28 in Book Four. For my
typology of the comments from the four books, see Attachment 2.

now focus on the most widespread reactions and patterns of criticism.

Of all the sections of the ANEM, the art section was most frequently denounced. Dozens of commentators emphasized *the only thing (they) disliked was art.* One even compared art *with a toothache in a healthy organism.* Attempting to get a fair overview of the show, visitors wanted to put onto paper their thoughts about both good and bad things to seem objective, and art was commonly said to be the worst part of the ANEM. (Indeed, without vulnerable and provocative art, what could be criticized that easily?) Thirty-seven comments were built upon the following scheme: *I liked/it was great (especially autos), but I disliked art.* For example:

I liked the show very much. Especially autos, household items, and many other things. But your abstract paintings provoke indignation among the majority of visitors. They are not resistant to any criticism. In our understanding, this is extinction [degeneration] of genuine art. And these paintings can be named slapdash. 1/VIII-1959 visitor

Ugly art and beautiful cars were the extremes well grasped by one commentator, who ironically suggested Henry Ford to be elected the President of the Academy of Arts of the United States because Ford, unlike American artists, knew what real beauty was.

The next frequent complaint was that the art works exhibited were not understandable. Not understanding was typical of the overall reception, and not accidentally, Halpert titled her lecture on ANEM as “Chto Eto?” At least 22 commentators put it in similar terms as the following one shows:

I have learnt a lot about the life of talented American people having visited this wonderful exhibition. The only thing which produced not too pleasant an effect on me is the section of contemporary American art; it might be that I just do not understand this type of painting. 9.08.1959

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49 Russian phrase meaning, “What is it?”
This comment is an example of a negative/unfavorable reception because the visitor disliked the art: it produced a “not too pleasant effect.” However, not understanding was not always “negative.” Not all who did not understand art argued it was bad. For example, three commentators claimed *I do not understand art, but I regret this; I wish I could:*

> We do not understand abstract art: painting, sculpture. It is hard to understand what an artist wanted to depict. This is also because there is no Russian translation. I wanted very much to learn what abstract art is, what drives abstract artists. . . . [I]t is hard to understand it; that is why it is not surprising that many visitors of the show are very harsh towards it. . . . [W]hy none of the guides could explain it. . . . [I]f organizers wished . . . they could have done more. 14.08.1959

The curators anticipated such troubles of the Soviet peoples’ encounter with modernism, and they tried to prevent the cognitive dissonance caused by the lack of an appropriate framework for interpreting abstract art not only by issuing catalogs. Special supporting articles appeared in the magazine *Amerika.* Moreover, Halpert, acting as on-site curator, also tried to soften the Soviet encounter with abstraction. She hung paintings chronologically, from the early 1928 works by Benton to the later 1958 works by Marca-Relli, to show some progression. She also interspersed abstract works with figurative ones (Figure 46), so the former would be less striking than if put all together.50 After opening the show and receiving multiple complaints about not understanding, Halpert started writing special explanatory labels on specific works of art, and Richard McLanathan eventually started taking over this activity. During the first days of the show, Halpert was giving lectures and answering visitors’ questions. The guides turned out to be poorly trained to explain this art (this was also a frequent comment), and during lunch times, McLanathan would instruct them on how to

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50 Halpert’s lecture, October 19, 1959, 5.
comment on the art.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, special audio lectures and comments on art were recorded; they were played several times a day for the visitors.\textsuperscript{52} Finally, a series of fifteen-minute explanatory videos on the exhibited works were recorded. The video itself became a great attraction because it was shown on a color television, which was a curiosity in that time.\textsuperscript{53} However, the Soviet reaction to art should not be analyzed by only focusing on the second floor collection and on the activities that took place there.

\textit{Insulting Sculpture}

Contemporary historiography tends to present art at the ANEM as a collection of paintings, which abstract artists such as Pollock and Rothko dominated. One should not forget the significant collection of twenty-three sculptures on display. Comment books indicate the sculptures were, in some sense, even more provocative than abstract paintings. The sculptures were not only one of the most disliked aspects but also one of the most insulting counterparts of the show. We have sixteen negative comments versus one positive comment mentioning sculptures. Here is a typical example:

I do not understand why they show not the beauty, not the grace but the ugliness in the United States? The sculptures motherhood [\textit{Mother and Child} by Lipchitz], woman [\textit{Standing Woman} by Lachaise] and stepping woman [\textit{Walking Figure} by Hugo Robus (1957)] [indecipherable handwriting] – simply offends, insults all women of the world. 30.08.1959

Or,

\textsuperscript{51} Report by McLanathan, 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 6.
And one more thing: do you really think that woman deserves such a deriding (glooming) which you show in your sculptures. 7.7.1959 (sic!)

The sculptures’ negative attainment was due to the following reasons. First, many sculptures were located outside, and therefore, they were seen by most of the visitors arbitrarily when visiting the ANEM. Second, modernist sculptures such as *Standing Woman* (Figure 41) were, in some sense, even a harder violation of “reality” than abstract painting. Abstraction did not really distort the image: Pollock and Rothko did not represent reality but constructed a new one. However, the sculptures “distorted” real prototypes. Paintings broke aesthetic taboos and sculptures of nudes broke certain social and ethical taboos as well as aesthetical ones. The nude body shocked just because of the nudity; moreover, the clothes that should have concealed the beauty were absent, revealing ugliness. Precisely, the sculptures of women at the ANEM insulted the sacral concept of femininity, which was important in Soviet culture.54

Thus, it becomes clear now why people literally felt indignation (five comments). They were insulted (four comments) by the sculptures that violated not only aesthetical feelings but also ethical taboos. This violation was so strong that it caused much discomfort, making the Soviet visitors uncomfortable with the sculptures, with many commentators asking to have the sculptures removed and not brought back.

Similarly, there were also several requests to remove abstract paintings. Such requests were accompanied by many of the anti-modernist topoi discussed in Part

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54 My speculations on how the sculptures of nude females violated against the Soviet visitor’s taste are inspired by Susan Reid’s analysis of the reactions provoked by Robert Falk’s nude portrait *Obnazhennaya v kresle* (Figure 42) displayed at the infamous exhibition *30 let MOSKh* at the Manege, 1962. Susan Reid, “In the Name of the People: The Manege Affair Revisited,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian History* 6, 4 (2005): 673–716.
One, such as art of the insane (five comments), degenerate art (three comments), low-skilled painters (four comments), and other aspects.55

Any Good?

Positive comments in the four original comment books were few, but sometimes unexpectedly grand:

I would like to say a little bit about the display of sculpture . . . In general, I liked the exhibition. It mirrors all the styles, shows the diversity of existing trends in the field of sculpture. I liked the group Family of the Miner by Mean Garkovi. This is good in its realism, truthfulness of images, wholeness of the sculpture. Sculpture Mother and Child by Jacques Lipchitz is wonderful. This is a very original and mighty monument. Here, everything has been simplified in the name of the most important. Very expressive, very talking. Also I liked one sculpture—I draw it because there is no tag. A particular mood whiffles from this abstractionist piece; it is well executed, very whole. Finally, I liked, although less, Adam and Eve by B. Reider. This seems to be not just a subject from the Bible (or from somewhere else, I do not know for sure) but to be a personification of the “tree of life.” However, this is my personal reception.

August 31
Student of historical faculty56

Obviously, the few positive commentaries in the comment books are only partially indicative of the overall response. In numerous recollections and reports of the show, it is put that frequently, positive comments on art were oral.57 Such reactions were especially frequent in conversations with the guides and during the special gallery hours established by Halpert from 1–3 p.m. when only artists were invited. Halpert created a special situation in which people ready for encountering contemporary American art felt free to discuss it and were not afraid to talk about it like they were

55 For a complete breakdown of the comments in the original comment books, see Attachment 2.

56 More similarly sympathetic comments can be found on the disjointed lists from the Downtown Gallery and Goodrich Collections. Intelligentsia—students, artists, and academics—would most frequently write such comments.

57 See, for example, Halpert’s lecture, October 19, 1959.
afraid of leaving comments in the visitors’ book; these discussions would frequently continue in her hotel or in their homes. That may have been the time when the intelligentsia, which had been targeted by the show, would be able to share most freely its thoughts on art and instead of denouncing it. With this variety of responses and reactions to the art, how can one ultimately estimate whether the show was a success?

What Was It?

For the curators, art at the ANEM was an unquestionable success. In his report to Sivard, McLanathan puts it as follows:

The Art Exhibit at the American National Exhibition in Moscow proved to be an especially important part of the whole because the paintings and sculpture(s) provided the most obvious demonstration in the Fair is freedom of expression of choice in America, and the very strangeness to the Russians of some of the more abstract art merely served to emphasize this further. In this the art exhibit was more effective even than the book exhibit.  

He then argues that the message about freedom in art was well received:

The art exhibition as a dramatic proof of freedom of expression and of choice in America, seemed to be a widely understood and accepted than I could ever have expected. The idea of the great variety of the works shown representing the vitality of American art also seemed to find ready acceptance.

Finally, refraining from approaching the reception as negative or positive, let us instead preserve a critical distance to the curator’s report and try to figure out whether the central message of the show—the idea of a diverse, and hence, free art—was received, as McLanathan argues. My analysis of the four books shows this key message was hardly acknowledged. Only two of several thousand commentators

58 Report by McLanathan, 1.
59 Ibid., 5.
mentioned the diversity and freedom in contemporary American visual art. For most commentators, the whole art section appeared as a show of abstract art, despite the large percentage of various artistic styles on display, i.e., many figurative styles such as Regionalism, Expressionism, Precisionism, etc. Abstract paintings overshadowed the others; the figurative art on the second floor practically went unnoticed, although it hung alongside abstract works. Only a single commentator praised Andrew Wyeth’s *Children’s Doctor* (1949) (Figure 49); and surprisingly, several comments praised Peter Blume’s *Eternal City* (1937) (Figure 48), whose social anti-fascist agenda overshadowed his modernist style. As for the first floor section with ten realist works by George Caleb Bingham, Childe Hassam, John Singer Sargent, and others—something that must have attracted the Soviet people—it seems to have remained absent from collective memory. Nevertheless, simultaneously, McLanathan’s account is not completely false. Indeed, one should not neglect that those who did not leave their written comments but talked to the ANEM staff may have received the ideas of freedom in art. However, generally, the idea was rather overlooked.

What about the general mission of American art to conquer the myth of the United States as a soulless nation? Did the show prove to the audience that Americans were “cultured?” Halpert believes it did because “[t]his show had proved in part that our civilization is not entirely materialistic but that culture holds an important place.”

However, Reid in her analysis of the show puts it that the “art exhibition at ANEM did nothing to mitigate the widespread prejudice that the United States was vulgar, lacking in taste and culture.” With the dominance of negative commentaries

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in the comment books, Reid’s conclusion looks to be stronger than Halpert’s account. Moreover, one should be skeptical of the curators’ reports because the authors were naturally prejudiced. Both Halpert and McLanathan were involved in the show and were therefore responsible for its success. Hence, they always had considerable motives to exaggerate the achievements and disregard the failures. Their motives were even stronger because as curators they were under certain pressure in the United States, where American art abroad programs received constant criticism. To some extent, the future of overseas exhibitions and legitimacy of censorship and intrusions depended on the success of the ANEM. With this in mind, enthusiastic reports by Halpert and McLanathan are no surprise.

Nevertheless, the art section should be treated as a success within the ANEM, mainly due to the considerable publicity it received. The dominating negative trend in the reception hardly compromises the show’s success. Vice versa, the hotness was a major attraction; it was the reason for its success. Controversial art pushed visitors to react to the show; abstract paintings and modernist sculptures provoked questions, encouraging interaction between Soviet visitors and American guides. Art also triggered harsh disputes between the Soviet visitors who would disagree over abstraction during conversations at the ANEM. Furthermore, even in the comment books, a visitor would comment upon a previous writer’s negative or positive commentary on the art; crossed out, the commentators would call each other idiots and other names. Thus, American contemporary art, radically contrasting Soviet art, was challenging the taste of the majority who still disliked it. Simultaneously, contemporary art definitely found a few fans among the cultural intelligentsia who
were more ready for modernism.62

Another reason to treat the show as a success was that for the USIA, the
ANEM was a good lesson in organizing overseas exhibitions. The show clearly
revealed the potential pros and cons of exhibiting modernism in the USSR.
Consequently, the ANEM’s positive and negative experiences were considered within
the next exhibition, Graphic Arts: USA, to open in 1963.

62 For more on the artistic impact of the exhibition, see Gretchen Simms, “The 1959 American National
Exhibition in Moscow and the Soviet Artistic Reaction to the Abstract Art”; Lola Kantor-Kazovsky,
“Vtoroi russkii avangard, ili Vizual’naia kul’tura epokhi kholodnoi voiny,” Artgid, April 29, 2014,
Chapter 8. The Exhibition *Graphic Arts: USA*, 1963–1964

On March 8, 1962, the Soviet Union and the United States prolonged the 1958 Lacey-Zarubin agreement on American-Soviet cultural exchange. As a part of this program, two exhibitions, took place: a Soviet show, titled *Soviet Graphics*, toured the United States, and the reciprocal American exhibition, *Graphic Arts: USA* toured the USSR. The *Graphic Arts: USA* show was the second USIA-organized exhibition to introduce American visual art to a large Soviet audience. Sponsored and managed by the Office of Exhibits, *Graphic Arts: USA* had a significant budget of $1.4 million¹ and was shown in four Soviet cities—Alma-Ata, Moscow, Yerevan, and Leningrad—drawing 1.6 million visitors in 1963–1964.²

In this chapter, I will examine the poorly known history of *Graphic Arts: USA*. Relying on unique materials from the Masey Archives as well as on my interviews with Jack Masey and Beverly Payeff-Masey, I will examine the design and conception of the show. Thanks to unique documents discovered at NARA, I will then reconstruct the official American-Soviet negotiations over the exhibition. Thirdly, I will trace the official Soviet response and popular reception of the exhibition. Finally, I will speculate on the impact of *Graphic Arts: USA* and its significance within the cultural Cold War.

The Exhibition Design

USIA officer Jack Masey, in 1963 Chief of the East-West Exhibits Exchange, International Cultural Services, was the designated director of *Graphic Arts: USA*. His

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¹ List of US Government Exhibitions Supervised by Jack Masey. The Masey Archives.

approach to arranging exhibitions was crucial for the ultimate conception of the show. Treating design, particularly exhibition design, as an effective medium for promoting a pro-American ideology across the Iron Curtain, Masey was one of the first to acknowledge the high potential of travelling exhibits for transnational cultural exchange during the Cold War.³ Masey had been involved in USIA international exhibitions since their emergence in the 1950s and therefore had excellent opportunities to practice exploiting design within the Cold War. By 1963, he had already organized and contributed to several key overseas shows:⁴ He had been the project leader of the US Pavilion “How Industry Serves Men” at the 1955 Indian Industries Fair (New Delhi) and of the US Pavilion at Jeshyn International Fair in Kabul (Afghanistan, 1956). He was also the project design leader at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. In this role, he managed the design in its totality and did not focus on the art section per se, which was assembled by a non-governmental commission and curated by Halpert and McLanathan.

Masey considered both the negative and positive experiences of previous American shows and allowed his insights to influence Graphic Arts: USA. For example, in 1955 after the Indian show, Masey wrote a thirty-one-page report, thoroughly analyzing the pros and cons of America’s present approach to exhibition design and comparing the US exhibition to those of others countries.⁵ Consequently,

³ For more on Masey’s exhibitions during the Cold War, see Masey and Morgan, Cold War Confrontations. See also Wulf, US International Exhibitions.

⁴ During 1950s to 1970s, Masey supervised more than thirty American exhibitions worldwide with budgets ranging from several hundred dollars to millions. For more information, see List of US Government Exhibitions Supervised by Masey. The Masey Archives.

many of the ideas developed in this report shaped subsequent USIA shows, including *Graphic Arts: USA*, which ultimately turned out to be a step forward in displaying American visual art in the Soviet Union, certainly when compared to the 1959 ANEM art section.

The first crucial feature of *Graphic Arts: USA* was its focus on a single subject: American graphic art was the only theme, unlike ANEM in which the visual art section was just one of many. This radical shift from extensive displays of heterogeneous items to single-theme shows occurred after the success of ANEM. From the 1960s, the USIA started sending only single-theme displays to the USSR: *Plastics: USA* and *Transportation: USA* in 1961; *Medicine: USA* in 1962; *Technical Books: USA* in 1963. *Graphic Arts: USA* continued this trend.

Several factors influenced this shift from a broad to a focused representation. To some extent, it was a result of Soviet policy. The Soviets were unlikely to let Americans repeat such colossal shows as that of 1959, when the Soviet people had been bombarded with a range of goods, from clothes to cars, which demonstrated the limited variety of products available under Socialism. However, this shift can be traced back to the 1955 Kabul exhibition which, besides the atomic section central to the show, included displays of technology and electronics. Masey found such diverse large-scale representation hard to maintain and not all that persuasive. Thus, he suggested focusing on one single aspect within a show:

> In making future participation plans at Indian Fairs, the US government should concentrate on presenting one feature powerfully, instead of exhibiting a variety of insignificant features in shot-gun pellet fashion.⁶

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Graphic Arts: USA followed up on this trend of representing a single theme. The show included approximately 1000 examples of graphic art by one hundred artists, among them Fritz Eichenberg, Adja Yunkers, Ben Shahn, and many others. The American Institute of Graphic Arts provided the content; Ivan Chermayeff and Thomas Geismar from the New-York design firm Chermayeff & Geismar Associates were recruited by Masey to select the works. Chermayeff and Geismar were part of the design crew headed by Masey and were also responsible for the design of the show: for arranging the selected items within an exhibition space.

When looking closely at the conception and the actual content of the show, one finds that the curators proposed an unconventionally “diverse” interpretation of the term “graphic arts”:

The graphic arts were formerly limited specifically to painting, engraving, etching, and drawing. . . . [T]he term “graphic arts” in the modern world has been broadened from its earlier fine arts significance to include many related processes and skilled crafts used in various fields such as magazine and book illustration, films and packaging design.

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7 Among the works selected, engravings on metal and wood cuts such as Whirlpool by M. Pounce de Lenn; Vis-à-vis by Seung May; Cycle of the Open Sea: The Unanswered Question by Arthur Dashaies; White on White by Angelo Savelli; Man of Peace by Leonard Baskin; Man by Mish Kohn; Icarus by Dean Meeker; Composition N – 1957 by Adja Yunkers; five works by Norman Rockwell; Shopping Day by Ben Shahn; The Night Watch by Fritz Eichenberg; Crucifixion by Rico Lebrun; and many other works. Rockwell Kent’s World Sorrow was included when the show was already on tour. Figure 51, Figure 52, Figure 53, Figure 54, Figure 55, Figure 61.

8 Collaboration between Masey and Chermayeff and Geismar within US international exhibits merits a separate research. For Graphic Arts: USA, Masey sought professional designers, capable of working with graphic art, typography, colors, two- and three-dimensional objects. Peter Blake, an American architect and critic, suggested Masey hiring Chermayeff and Geismar. This collaboration turned out to be fruitful. Masey, Chermayeff, and Geismar were all influenced by Joseph Albers’ 1949 project with plastics at Yale, where they studied. This shared “Albers experience” served as a common aesthetic reference-point, allowing them to understand each other. Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, November 21, 2014.

By expanding the concept of “graphic arts” and treating it as an umbrella-term for various items traditionally considered to be rather applied arts and part of the decorative arts, the curators turned an anticipated display of American prints into an exhibition of American material culture. This transformation was crucial for the success of the show because it allowed the organizers to include, among others, miscellaneous printed matter, advertisements, boxes, fabrics (Figure 56, Figure 57, Figure 58). Attempting to showcase consumer goods of significantly higher quality than their Soviet equivalents, Chermayeff and Geismar selected items of the highest possible aesthetic quality; “such items spoke for themselves and showed the contrast between the two superpowers.” This contrast was important because the show was staged as part of the Cold War cultural warfare and existed within it: USIA exhibits carried propaganda messages and Graphic Arts: USA, together with its counterpart, the reciprocal Soviet Graphics show, should be seen as an episode in this competition for cultural supremacy.

The exhibition had no narrative and was arranged thematically by item: the fabrics section, prints section, books section, etc. The absence of an obligatory guided tour allowed visitors to move freely from section to section, viewing and examining each object for as long as necessary. There were both theoretical and practical reasons for the absence of a set route. In terms of exhibition theory, this was a tribute to Misha Black’s work, which acknowledged that different people move with different speed and require different amounts of time to grasp the same information. Consequently, a designer should consider the traffic within a show and acknowledge that jams might emerge at well-attended exhibits because some people would stop at several popular

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10 Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, November 21, 2014.
11 Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, November 21, 2014.
objects. The absence of narrative as well as the alternative thematic grouping preferred by Masey for Graphic Arts: USA, diminished potential traffic problems.

Taking into account USIA mission to create a positive image of the United States abroad, Graphic Arts: USA was a rare and promising opportunity to introduce America to a large Soviet audience and to expose the Soviet people to the American way of life. In order to achieve a maximum impact on the visitors, the curators, as in 1959, did not simply display objects but, at the same time, tried to create a “corner of America” in the Soviet Union. They wanted their simulation of America to be as credible as possible; they strove to provide the Soviet visitor with an authentic experience, so that s/he would get a feel for the country.

To achieve maximum credibility, all exhibits were set within a special environment, designed by Jack Hall. This fully autonomous display system, with lighting equipment was approximately 8000 square feet and consisted of 216 panels each 4 by 10 feet. This intended to be a “real corner of America” which could be transported and mounted wherever desired. This autonomous environment could also be justified practically: the construction allowed organizers to use various spaces, which had previously been unsuitable for an exhibition and gave them as much

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12 That might have been the case in 1959 at the art section at Sokolniki. Here, the chronological arrangement of the works created logistical problems, as the most appealing and popular pieces were interspersed throughout the exhibition, creating jams. This is not to say that the narrative structure alone caused the jams. However, these logistical problems could have been minimized, had the appealing, abstract works been hung far enough from each other not to create jams or grouped in a single area. This was not possible in an exhibition with four cubicles and thousands of daily visitors. Masey encountered and acknowledged logistical problems as such already at the 1955 Indian Fair where visitors were expected to watch a special movie about atomic energy before examining the exhibit. This movie provided an introduction for the poorly-educated majority who would next see exhibition about nuclear energy. However, by no means all attendees wanted to see the movie. As a result, traffic problems emerged, and many people failed to grasp the exhibition's meaning, as they had not watched the explanatory film. This experience was another challenge to the narrative structure. See Masey’s report on the United States Participation in the Indian Industries Fair. The Masey Archives.

13 At the same time, that is not to say that all sections were equally important. The specifics of the reception of the central print section with contemporary figurative and abstract art are discussed later in the chapter.

independence from their Soviet hosts as possible, thus preventing unexpected technical and organizational troubles.

Instead of exhibiting only examples of American “graphic arts,” the curators incorporated various items which together constituted a perspective on an aspect of life in the United States: they demonstrated how the American design industry operates. A special photo-essay “The Artist at Work” illustrated daily, routine activities of American artists, and a special eleven-minute film—_{Litho}_ produced by Amalgamated Lithographers of America—was showing the lithography methods in action. The movie had no narration but did have a jazz sound track by Chico Hamilton Quintet, and the viewers, therefore, could not only see but also hear America. The visitors also could communicate with real Americans—the American guides who enlivened the exhibition and helped give it an authentically American feeling.15

The graphic art industry was not shown statically but rather in action. This representation increased the credibility of the simulation of the “real corner of America”—it showed how the works were produced, rather than simply treating them as ready-made products. Norman Rockwell, a star in the United States and also well-respected artist in the Soviet Union, drew portraits of visitors (Figure 60).16 Richard Ziemann, an instructor at the Art School at Yale University, offered workshops, in which a 1,100-pound press produced prints to be distributed among the audience.

Just like at other USIA shows, the distribution of materials was crucial for promoting the exhibition. No exhibition catalog as such was published, but the show

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16 Initially, organizers attempted to arrange a session for producing a portrait of Khrushchev.
was accompanied with a specially designed portfolio issued in 200,000 copies. Each portfolio consisted of five individual brochures: *Humorous Illustration*, *Graphic Designers. Artists at Work*, *Illustration*, and *Prints* representing the American Design Industry. Furthermore, inside each portfolio one could also find a large-format wall calendar and two posters with prints and drawings on both sides.

The absence of a traditional museum catalog for the show is quite understandable, as such a publication would not have reflected the conception of the show. *Graphic Arts: USA* was a simulation of America through design rather than just an exhibition of graphic works. Moreover, a catalog-type publication with explanatory texts on contemporary American art would not have been as popular with most visitors as the folders with prints and calendars, which could be hung on a wall.

Probably, the most crucial lesson learnt from the ANEM was the exploitation of the critical potential of contemporary American visual art. Masey claimed that the content of the show was to oppose Socialist Realism: “While the graphics exhibited had no overt political content, the contrast between the diversity of American design styles and the codified imagery of the Soviet state would not be lost on visitors.” The principle “the more abstract – the more disrupting” was considered, and Masey

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17 200,000 is the first print. Apparently, several more prints followed but the exact circulation is not known.

18 The calendar reproduces the portraits of great American and Russian people who are grouped in pairs: composers (Tchaikovsky and Gershwin); dancers (Nijinsky and Duncan); naturalists (Mechnikoff and Carver); painters (Bakst and Hicks); cinema directors (Eisenstein and Griffith); writers (Gogol and Twain). This is to show that both countries had been made by their great people. This idea of comparing the countries is continued on the back of the calendar. There are pictures of two national folklore heroes: Ilya Muromets and Paul Bunyan. Both personify the power of the people, as implied in the bilingual texts provided.

19 Masey and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, 292. Generally, the exhibition avoided any obviously political content, except for the brochure *Illustration and Humor*, which focused on the idea of friendship between the two countries. A two-page comic entitled “Fable” by R.O. Blackman recounts that once upon the time, a Russian and an American met each other in heaven. They did not know each other’s languages but step-by-step they managed to communicate. The fable ends with optimistic words “this is how co-existence began.”

20 Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, November 21, 2014.
clearly acknowledged that the most important goal of the show was to generate a response. The character of the response was secondary.

Although Graphic Arts: USA exploited the function of the avant-garde art to create controversies and thus gain publicity, this exhibition used very different art forms in comparison to those used for the same goal in 1959. Whereas paintings and sculptures—fine art from museums—were displayed at the ANEM, in 1963, contemporary art was represented by a broad selection of prints, usually seen as more peoples’ art. Less elitist and more quotidian art forms were seen as more representative of the United States and of the artistic taste of American people.21

Another difference is that, in 1963–1964, abstraction was represented not only through art works (prints) but also through a variety of material items such as, for example, boxes and fabrics. In 1959, large abstract canvases by Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko were immediately denounced as art for art’s sake because they were seen as useless and as a manifestation of elitism. In Graphic Arts: USA, the boxes and fabrics were intended to demonstrate that abstraction could also be something useful that could be incorporated into everyday life. Such a presentation of abstract art, through consumer goods, could potentially provoke many more positive comments from the target audience, whom Masey saw as “anyone.”22 Seeing the utility of abstract styles, opponents of abstraction might have experienced its practical use and become reconciled to it.

However, the show should not be treated solely as an exhibition of abstract art. Works of numerous other artistic styles, from abstract to figurative, were also included. The inclusion of these various styles diminished by no means the contrast

21 Canaday, “Show of Graphics Will Tour.”

22 Jack Masey in a phone-conversation with the author, February 16, 2015.
between Soviet art and American art. Generally, most works of contemporary American art on display would serve to contrast with “conservative” Socialist Realism, although, within abstract art, the differences between art in the United States and in the Soviet Union would be mostly evident.

**Arranging the Tour**

The show was initially not planned as a four-city tour. During the first phases of the negotiations only three cities were discussed, and by early 1963 only two venues—Alma Ata and Yerevan—had been agreed upon. The tense negotiations were guided by a quid pro quo principle. *Graphic Arts: USA* was to be a reciprocal show and the Soviets would send an exhibition of Soviet graphics to three cities in the United States. Both sides haggled over every detail of the reciprocal exchange—including venues, contents and the size of crews. Each side wanted the best possible conditions for its exhibition and neither wanted to cede; every concession came at a price.

High-ranking Soviet and American authorities were involved in the negotiations. On the American side, these were officers from the American embassy in Moscow led by Foy D. Kohler, Ambassador to the Soviet Union. The embassy coordinated various aspects of the enterprise with, among others, Dean Rusk, United...

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23 The negotiations over the third city would take place only when the Alma Ata exhibition was already running. Internal correspondence (telegrams) between the Department of State and the American embassy in Moscow sheds some light on the lengthy and hard negotiations. RG 59. General Records of the Department of State. Central Foreign Policy File, 1963. From EDU 7 Visits USSR to: EDU 8 Fairs, Expositions (USSR (LE). Box 3252. NARA II; RG 59. General Records of the Department of State. Central Foreign Policy File, 1963. From EDU 8 USSR (MO) to EDU ZANZIBAR. Box 3253. NARA II; RG 59. General Records of the Department of State. Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964–1966. Culture and Information. Education and Culture. From EDU U9 (NE) 1/1/64 to EDU 13 Fine Arts USSR 5/27/64. Box 380. NARA II. Hereafter the materials from the collection are cited as follows: document title, RG 59, box, folder, NARA II.

24 The Soviet side wanted New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. But this did not happen and the show toured in provincial cities.

25 For example, the Soviets insisted on having one hundred staff members for all three shows whilst the Americans claimed that this would not be enough to maintain their large exhibits.
States Secretary of State. On the Soviet side, the organization Romcom and Alla Butrova, Head of the Division of Relations with Capitalist Countries of the Foreign Relations Department of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, were responsible for the exhibition.

There was general disagreement regarding the choice of the third city for Graphic Arts: USA. The American side wanted to show the exhibition in a major city such as Moscow or Leningrad. They argued that their demands were fair because the first two venues were the provincial cities Alma Ata and Yerevan (although the Americans also acknowledged the importance of showing the exhibit “in provincial cities which have had little or no American exposure heretofore”\textsuperscript{26} for a more diverse dissemination of the “American way of life”). On the other hand, the Soviets wanted to minimize the potential impact of the American show, so they argued against presenting the exhibition in major cities with a larger and more educated population. Instead, they proposed provincial venues such as Tashkent, Odessa, Baku, and Voronezh. Finally, the Americans secured Moscow as the third city and the negotiations moved on to discussing the exact venue.

The Americans proposed several locations in Moscow: Gorky Park, the Exhibition of the Achievements of the Peoples’ Economy (VDNKh), and Sokolniki Park.\textsuperscript{27} All three were large park areas, which could host thousands of visitors. The Muscovites as well as Soviet citizens from further afield knew the venues very well. The parks normally hosted several shows simultaneously. Thus, visitors, who might have come simply to take a walk in the park or to visit another show, would inevitably

\textsuperscript{26} Outgoing Telegram (Department of State to American Embassy in Moscow), February 5, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 Fairs, Expositions, 3/11/63. NARA II.

\textsuperscript{27} Two of the locations—Gorky Park and Sokolniki—were familiar to the Americans who had examined them when preparing the 1959 ANEM.
learn about the *Graphic Arts: USA*. Potentially, this would have been a useful way to advertise the show and to increase attendance – all the more important in light of the Soviet desire to minimize advertising for the show, for example, by removing Geismar’s posters (Figure 50). None of the three locations was a traditional museum space, instead, they were parks and had grand permanent pavilions with large halls—interiors suitable for *Graphic Arts: USA* and its special exhibiting environment.

Another venue the Americans considered was the Manege. Located at the very center of Moscow, it was both easy accessible and symbolically significant as it was close to the Kremlin, “the heart of the state.” Moreover, the venue reminded visitors of Khrushchev’s infamous 1962 visit when he insulted avant-garde artists and denounced experimental art of the group *Novaia Real’nost’* (The New Reality), headed by Ely Bielutin.28 The Americans wanted their exhibition to resonate with these events. Thus, American modernist prints, once hung in the Manege, would have emphasized the distinct perspectives on art held by the two superpowers.

The Soviets were against providing the American side with such a significant exhibition space and, therefore, offered more traditional museum venues such as the Polytechnic Museum, the Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Fine Arts, the galleries of the Pushkin Museum, and some others. As the Soviets assumed that the US show would offer a traditional interpretation of “graphic arts,” they proposed traditional museum spaces for America’s exhibition.

During the negotiations, a group of officers from the American embassy, headed by Masey and supported by Bruno Bertagnoli, specialist from Masey’s crew responsible for the construction and installation of the show in the USSR, inspected

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28 For a comprehensive analysis of Khrushchev’s visit and its consequences, see Yurii Gerchuk, “Krovoizlitanie v MOSKh”, ili Khrushchev v Manezhe (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2008).
the proposed locations and found them unsuitable because of the limited space available, the restricted floor-plan and the fact that interiors consisted of many small rooms rather than a single large hall, divided through columns, which was desired for Graphic Arts: USA. Finally, the Uzbek Pavilion at the VDNKh was chosen as an appropriate venue for mounting the display system.

In late January 1964, when the show was traveling from Alma-Ata to Yerevan, negotiations led to the scheduling of a fourth show in Leningrad. Graphic Arts: USA was the only USIA show to be extended. The Americans decided to extend the show as it was turning out to be a great success, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors and receiving a great variety of responses. By late December 1963, the USIA had informed the State Department that,

> EMBASSY AND MASEY BELIEVE GRAPHICS [exhibit] IS BEST VEHICLE WE WILL HAVE IN EXHIBITS FIELD FOR LONG TIME FOR GETTING ACROSS WIDELY FAVORABLE AND EXCITING IMAGE OF AMERICAN LIFE.30

The use of a “vehicle” metaphor for the show is very appropriate. On the one hand, Graphic Arts: USA was a vehicle because it transported ideas from one place to another: from the United States to the USSR. On the other hand, the metaphor highlights that the show was a moving mechanism with a printing press at work and guides and artists in action, rather than a static display. The Soviet side would try to control the operation of this vehicle.

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29 The Americans wanted to get as much benefit from this exhibition as possible, so they extended the Soviet tour and organized shows in Eastern Europe after.

30 Incoming Telegram (Embassy to Department), December 20, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 Fairs. Expositions. USSR USIA. NARA II. The block quotes from USIA telegrams preserve the original style of communication. Hereafter, the caps lock is preserved, as well as original spelling, punctuation, and syntax used in internal USIA and Department telegrams. For an example of a telegram, see Figure 59.
Soviet Inspection

During the negotiations, the Soviets repeatedly requested materials on the exhibition in order to familiarize themselves with it before its arrival. The American side provided the Soviet officers with a brochure-portfolio illustrating the overall absence of political content. The Soviets also insisted on inspecting the show prior to its opening. They were particularly concerned with the presence of abstract art which was a traditionally controversial issue. The American embassy reported:

KUZNETSOV, [DEPUTY OF FURTSEVA] “SPEAKING MOST FRANKLY,” SAID CURRENT LINE WITH “HOME-GROWN ABSTRACTIONISTS” WOULD BE QUESTIONED IF AMERICANS WERE TO SHOW ABSTRACT ART. HE MADE IT OBVIOUS HE AND MINISTRY CULTURE IN GENERAL FEELS HEAD IN NOOSE AND CLAIMED HIS HAIR STOOD ON END” WHEN HE SAW PORTFOLIO. 31

The telegram signed by Kohler also suggested that it was possible to consider the removal of several items but that if the Soviets requested the removal of all abstract works, they should consider withdrawing the exhibition. 32 They would have to stop the whole show because a removal would not only provoke a range of criticism from the American press but would also show that censorship existed in the United States.

The inspection took place before the show opened in Alma Ata on October 2, 1963. 33 Guided by Masey and American embassy officers, eight Soviet officials from

31 Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), August 19, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 FAIRS, EXPOSITIONS 6/11/63. NARA II.

32 Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), August 19, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 FAIRS, EXPOSITIONS 6/11/63. NARA II. “ALTHOUGH THEY MAY . . . SWALLOW PORTFOLIO, I ANTICIPATE TROUBLE WITH PRINTS SECTIONS OF EXHIBIT WHICH I UNDERSTAND CONTAINS SEVERAL OUTSTANDING EXAMPLES OF ABSTRACT ART. WHEREAS I AM OBVIOUSLY OPPOSED TO SUCH ‘CENSORSHIP,’ WE MAY BE FORCED TO REMOVE A FEW PIECES DESPITE INEVITABLE PRESS UPROAR. HOWEVER, IF SOVS DEMAND COMPLETE REMOVAL ABSTRACT ART I THINK WE MUST MAKE DECISION IN PRINCIPLE TO WITHDRAW EXHIBIT ON BASIS WE CANNOT EXCLUDE SUCH IMPORTANT ASPECT MODERN AMERICAN GRAPHIC ARTS.”

33 For more on the inspection, see Incoming Telegram (Embassy to Department of State), October 3, 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 (MO). NARA II.
the Ministry of Culture, representatives of Romcom and of the Union of Artists
examined the show for several hours. The discussion was moderate and continued
over lunch. Surprisingly, there was minimal controversy over abstract art although the
Soviets argued that their people would laugh at it and the Americans should have
removed it for the sake of their own exhibition.

Instead, the Soviets objected to Hilary Knight’s figurative drawing for Kay
Thompson’s book “Eloise in Moscow.” The drawing showed the Kremlin, the Red
Square, and Saint Basil’s Cathedral, and one tiny detail significantly confused the
Soviets. In a humorous manner, the work showed one visitor raising his hands before
the guard in front of the Spasskaia Tower (Figure 63, Figure 64) – a gesture the
Soviets called “violently anti-Soviet.” Masey and the embassy officers inspected the
drawing and realized that this criticism was caused by a minor detail. The Soviet
concerns were surprising because this print was far from being a central exponent of
the exhibition and because it was quite hard even to find the small “anti-Soviet”
detail. Having decided that the print could not be removed without destroying the
overall panel, Masey found another solution: the exhibition staff “at [their] own
initiative artistically inserted four-inch strip blue paper over offending right side of the
drawing.”34

Surprisingly, the most lengthy discussion and hottest debate were provoked by
the working printing press.35 The Soviets argued against the distribution of prints36 and
were against the idea of a working press. They did not want any materials to be

34 Incoming Telegram (Embassy to Department of State), October 3, 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder:
Education + Culture EDU 8 (MO). NARA II.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.
distributed, although the catalogs were. Their position was quite weak but they insisted on this. Finally, a compromise was reached: they accepted the press being displayed and operated but no prints were to be distributed.37 Thus, an agreement was reached with no significant censorship.

**Travelling Around the Soviet Union**

The *Graphic Arts: USA* tour started in Alma Ata, the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, on October 6, 1963, and drew more than 100,000 visitors within the first week.38 Subsequently, 202,346 visitors, nearly half the population of Alma Ata, attended the show during its twenty-three day run.39 Official reports indicate that the overall atmosphere at the show was “friendly” and emphasized the successful interaction between guides and visitors.40

The communication between the Americans and the Soviet citizens was crucial for the show and the organizers considered it an important achievement. Tomas Tolvaisas, the author of an article about the role of guides within USIA exhibitions, argued that personal contacts were a highly effective aspect of USIA shows in the USSR.41 The guides were effective disseminators of information, including ideas which could not be expressed in the show because of censorship. The reactions in the official Soviet press indirectly supported the notion that guides were extremely important for *Graphic Arts: USA*. An article of October 9, 1963 in the local

37 Jack Masey in a phone-conversation with the author, February 16, 2015.


41 Tolvaisas, “Cold War ‘Bridge Building’: US Exchange Exhibits.”
newspaper *Leninskaia Smena* (Lenin’s Youth), avoided any focused discussion of the show’s content, but focused on negative criticism of the guides. The article characterized the guides as uncultured people, ignorant of both the United States and the USSR:

> The guides are the face of the exhibit. They are, if you wish, the face of the country, its culture and its knowledge. But at the American Graphic Arts Exhibit, the guides were selected according to some incomprehensible principle: ‘Ask me – I won’t answer!’

The art on display did not fully escape harsh criticism in the press. On October 13, another article, dedicated to the graphic works displayed in the show was published. The article denounced the art as “incomprehensible,” and argued that the majority of the visitors was unable to deal with abstraction.

Anticipating this mode of reception, the Americans had issued a special edition of the magazine *Amerika*, dedicated to the show. The magazine attempted to introduce and explain this kind of controversial art. It was intended to promote the show and prepare visitors for attending. The radio Voice of America also contributed to introducing art to the Soviet people. In order to oppose the anticipated negative

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44 A report on the first week of the exhibition indicates that most visitors did not understand or appreciate abstract art and that they had expected to see a display of technology. Department of State Airgram. Report on the First Week Showing, October 6–13, 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture Edu 8 Fairs Exposition 6/1/63. NARA II.

45 The Soviets argued against the distribution of the magazine. Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), December 28, 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 USSR (MO). NARA II.

reception, the American embassy had requested informational support for the show before its opening, one month in advance:

REQUEST EXTENSIVE VOA COVERAGE AMERICAN GRAPHIC ARTS EXHIBITION TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED SHOW ALMA ATA MOSCOW YEREVAN BEGINNING OCT.5 SUBJECT THIS EXHIBITION OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE IN LIGHT OF CURRENT ART CONTROVERSY USSR. SUGGEST PROGRAMMING EMPHASIS BE PLACED ON BROAD AMERICAN DEFINITION GRAPHIC ARTS NOT EXCLUSIVLEY LIMITED TO PRINTS BUT INCLUDES ADVERTISING, PAPERBACKS, PACKAGES, ETC. IN SHORT, THIS IS ESSENTIALLY ART OF THE PEOPLE SINCE THESE GRAPHICS FIND THEIR WAY INTO ALL ASPECTS ONE’S DAILY LIFE.

EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE, THROUGH INTERVIEW WITH OUTSTANDING GRAPHIC ARTISTS, ART CRITICS AND EDUCATORS, TO EXPLAIN VARIOUS ELEMENTS EXHIBITION INCLUDING ABSTRACT-EXPRESSIONIST WORKS WHICH APPEAR PRINT SECTION. SUGGEST SPECIFIC INTERVIEWS WITH DIHENBERG, CHERMAYEFF, FEDERICO, KRIKORIAN, CATO, BEALL, ALL OF WHOM INVOLVED IN PLANNING AMERICAN GRAPHICS EXHIBITION.47

During the second week, attendance decreased from 1,500 visitors per hour to 400. This made it easier for visitors to stay longer in the show; lengthy discussions took place, most of them in the print section. Frequently, the Soviet people supported freedom of expression and criticized the official doctrine of Socialist Realism.48

Nevertheless, the reactions to the art were rather diverse: “One meets literally all

47 Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), September 10, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 Fairs. Expositions. USSR USIA. NARA II. Consequently, the Department of State and the embassy officers evaluated the effectiveness of the Alma Ata exhibition and concluded it had been a success. That is why the VOA support was requested again. They provided more details of pro-modernist arguments to be delivered to the Soviet people: 1) a focus on experimentation had been essential for art since cave art; 2) every nation except the USSR had abstract art and abstract art was not an American invention; 3) the Soviet avant-garde tradition; 4) the fact that one does not like something does not make it a priori bad; 5) American freedoms. Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), November 19, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 Fairs. Expositions. USSR USIA. NARA II.

48 Department of State Airgram. Highlights of the First Fifteen Showing Days of “Graphic Art USA” in Alma Ata. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 12 Culture Cultural History USSR. NARA II.
variations of acceptance, indifference, and outrage.\textsuperscript{49}

The print section turned out to be the most controversial part because of its contents\textsuperscript{50} as well as its location at the beginning of the show. Most discussions were held there and the popularity of the section was acknowledged and exploited by the Americans. To increase the controversy, Walter Stoessel, an officer of the embassy, proposed to enlarge the section with another twenty color prints from representational to abstract styles,\textsuperscript{51} but this extension was only included in the second Moscow venue.

The second Moscow show opened on December 6, 1963, and also did not escape preliminary inspection:

\textbf{OPENING FOLLOWED TWO DAYS OF INTENSIVE INSPECTION BY SOV TEAM HEADED BY KUZNETSOV, BUTROVA AND KRYLOV AND THEY DID NOT OBJECT TO ADDITION NEW PRINTS (WHICH HAS DOUBLED SIZE OF PRINT SECTION AND MADE IT AN EXTREMELY HANDSOME AND COMPREHENSIVE SHOW ITSELF) BUT CONCENTRATED THEIR EFFORTS AT TRYING TO GET US TO REMOVE KREMLIN DRAWING.}\textsuperscript{52}

This time the Soviets argued that the Kremlin drawing came from an anti-Soviet book, and ultimately, it was discretely replaced.\textsuperscript{53}

The Moscow show drew 16,311 visitors on the first day (Figure 62).\textsuperscript{54} Kohler

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{49} Department of State Airgram. Highlights of the First Fifteen Showing Days of “Graphic Art USA” in Alma Ata. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 12 Culture Cultural History USSR. NARA II.
    \item \textsuperscript{51} Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), October 29, 1963. RG 59. Box 3252. Folder: EDU – Education + Culture 2/11/63 USSR (AL). NARA II.
    \item \textsuperscript{52} Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), December 6, 12:51 p.m., 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 USSR (MO). NARA II.
    \item \textsuperscript{53} Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), December 7, 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 USSR (MO). NARA II.
    \item \textsuperscript{54} Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), December 6, 4:48 p.m., 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 USSR (MO). NARA II. After 8 days 37,967. December 16, telegram. 14 days 359, 643. December 23. Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and Aleksandr Kuznetsov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Culture, attended the opening. The initial reception of the Moscow show puzzled the State Department officers: “SOV MEDIA HAVE GIVEN THE EXHIBIT A SURPRISINGLY AND INDEED UNPRECEDENTED FAVORABLE SEND-OFF.” On December 7, 1963 two informational reviews-announcements, which included no negative criticism, were published in Sovetskaia Kul’tura and Pravda.

The absence of negative criticism and just a few articles on the opening were indeed atypical for the Soviet official reception. Tolvaisas argues that this happened because the Soviets wanted to conceal the show. In fact, negative criticism occasionally served as an additional advertisement which attracted more people: paradoxically, Soviet denunciations risked increasing attendance. This feature of Soviet propaganda is indirectly supported by USIA reports from the show:

Conversations with guides, entries in the Comment Book, and questionnaires, indicated that a number of visitors were prompted to see this “horror” by this very attack in the central press.

Another possible explanation for this shift in the shows’ official reception is that the internal Soviet policy towards the visual arts in 1963 was comparatively liberal. After Khrushchev’s infamous encounter with abstraction in December 1962, abstract art was removed from the Manege and an anti-modernist campaign was initiated.

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55 Incoming Telegram (Department of State from Embassy), December 6, 4:48 p.m., 1963. RG 59. Box 3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 USSR (MO). NARA II.

56 Moreover, on December 29, Khrushchev's wife visited the show and, according to American sources, did not have “one unkind word” to say about the exhibition of abstract paintings. This was striking, because normally abstraction would be criticized. “Nikita’s Wife Views US Art with Approval,” Chicago Tribune, December 28, 1963.


1963, however, the campaign was already subsiding. A Soviet intellectual,” who was also an American informant, noted that some of the Bielutin artists, who had been targeted during the campaign and who had had their paintings withdrawn from the Manege, ultimately had their art returned to them and were told they could continue working as long as they do not try to sell their works abroad. The Airgram concluded: “The statements reported above are the strongest evidence to date that the authorities have decided to soften further the ‘hard line’ toward creative intellectuals which began a year ago.” Two weeks later, the same source stated that Bielutin was allowed to paint and that a relaxation in the arts was underway.

One of the few stronger criticisms of abstract art was a review of the Moscow show in Ukrainskaia Pravda (Ukrainian Truth). The article argued that by January 7, the show had already become unpopular among the Soviet people because no queues for the exhibition could be seen; the reason for the decline was the art on display. The author put it that several pieces such as Kent’s World Sorrow, Jacques Hnizdovsky’s Field, and Dean Meeker’s Daedalus were worth seeing, whereas other works were not because they were abstract. The article concluded that worthy works were “seen as small islands amidst a stormy sea of abstraction.” The author also claimed that the

59 For more on the campaign, see Gerchuk, “Krovoizliianie v MOSKh.”


Lastly, the mute Soviet reaction might have been caused by the assassination of Kennedy, which happened on November 22, 1963 when the Alma Ata exhibit was wrapping up before heading to Moscow. (Such an interpretation was very widespread although not documented among the people involved in the show.) Lee Harvey Oswald had been in the USSR and had a Russian wife and the Soviet Leaders were very concerned that the assassination might have had an impact on the Cold War, turning the conflict into something more serious. This news of Kennedy's death might have increased the Muscovite interest in the show. Soviet propaganda might have been mute with hostile criticism of the United States because they did not know what to do and what would happen in America in the ensuing weeks and months. Beverly Payeff-Masey in conversation with the author, the Masey Archives, February 16, 2015.
exhibition did not show the American people through art unlike the successful Soviet show in the United States.\textsuperscript{62}

The Moscow exhibition was the culmination of the tour, both in terms of attendance (around 700,000 visitors) and in terms of the significance of location. NARA and SIA keep single documents on the subsequent exhibitions in Yerevan and Leningrad. The documents available are insufficient for a thorough analysis, but it is obvious that the Yerevan and Leningrad venues were less popular than the Moscow exhibition. For example, 234,462 people visited the Yerevan show in 27 days and brought the total attendance of the three shows up to 1,162,753 people.\textsuperscript{63} The Leningrad show had more than 400,000 visitors. In total, more than 1.6 million people visited the exhibition during its Soviet tour, meaning that Graphic Arts: USA was one of the most popular shows within the USIA program.

Impact

Evaluating the effectiveness of Graphic Arts: USA is challenging. One can only provide a thorough account by considering a number of parameters and relying on a variety of sources. In the case of Graphic Art: USA, only fragmentary evidence of the reception is available. Thus, when tracing some possible effects of the show, one should bear in mind that the available sources and historical evidence significantly limit all conclusions.

The exhibition crew attempted to collect feedback and therefore distributed questionnaires in Alma Ata. The Soviet officials did not want to allow the Americans


\textsuperscript{63} Department of State Airgram, Highlights of Yerevan Showing of Graphic Arts: USA. March 17, 1964. RG 59. Box 380. Folder: EDU 8. 1/1/64. NARA II.
to undertake such a kind of survey and, therefore, stopped it. However, 152
questionnaires had already been returned, 103 with a completely favorable response,

A comment book was also placed at each of the four exhibition venues. The
original Russian books are not available and we have only selected translations by
USIA:\footnote{The reliability and limitations of comment books at USIA exhibitions in the Soviet Union are
debatable as has been discussed in Chapter Seven with regard to the ANEM.} only 91 from the 3000 Moscow comments;\footnote{Comments by Visitors to the Moscow Showing of Graphic Arts: USA. (Department of State for USIA.) RG 306. General Records of the USIA. Historical Collection. Subject Files, 1953–2000. Don Kingman Exhibit, 1956–1958 to Opinion, 1958. Box 130. Folder: Exhibits and Fairs, Graphic Arts, 1963–1964. Hereafter: Moscow Comments to Graphic Arts: USA.} 135 from the 2500 in Yerevan;\footnote{Comments by Visitors to the Yerevan Showing of Graphic Arts: USA. (Department of State for USIA.) The Masey Archives.} and 83 comments without specification of their origin.\footnote{American Graphic Arts Exhibit. Selection from Comment Book. The Masey Archives.} From the available comments
one can only trace the general character of the responses and not draw statistically
firm conclusions.

The most negative criticism was on abstract art, and the negative reception of
the central print room overshadowed all other aspects of the show. The room turned
out to be the main hub for intensive discussions and hot debates between guides and
visitors. There were no specific patterns of criticism of abstract art which had not
appeared in the USSR with regard to the ANEM in 1959. Most comments indicated
that the people lacked a proper framework for dealing with abstract art and, therefore,
found it incomprehensible. Visitors also frequently claimed that the guides were
unable to explain abstraction; although several commentators argued the opposite.
Another widespread complaint was the poor organization: messy logistics and a lack of available souvenirs such as brochures.

Other comments claimed that the exhibition did not show “America”:

A graphic exhibit can and should give a representation of the life of the people. This did not occur. Excellent poligraphic possibilities, talent, and creative artists are directed toward advertisement of automobiles, symphonies, bed pans, eggs and God knows what. In the exhibit there was not presented any practical work reflecting the basic questions facing the world, and of course people of America.

This comment is highly representative of the expectations of the Soviet people. They expected figurative art to provide an easily understandable image of America, an illustration of American life:

We waited impatiently for the American exhibit and were very disappointed by the lack of works of art reflecting the life of American people. There are no portraits of Americans whatsoever. There are too many advertisements. We await real works of art by American realist artists.

Significantly, both the official Soviet press and the visitors criticized the show for not representing the “real America.” Whereas the press’ motives are clear, the visitors’ reactions were not merely based on anti-American sentiment but reflected sincere cognitive dissonance. Arguing that the show did not represent America, some visitors, in a way, meant that the image displayed by the show did not match their expectations. Indeed, the Soviet people had already been introduced to Soviet myths about America, with Rockwell Kent among its best representatives. Not surprisingly,

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69 “Visiting the exhibit was like being in the dense woods: we did not know where we were going and neither the prints nor the cartoons made sense.” Moscow Comments to Graphic Arts: USA, 2.

70 Moscow Comments to Graphic Arts: USA, 1. Hereafter, citing comments from the document, I preserve the original spelling and style of the comments translated by USIA staff from Russian into English.

71 Ibid., 4.
complaints about the absence of Kent’s art were very widespread. Thus, to succeed in
the battle for the hearts and minds of the Soviet people, Masey and his crew had not
only to represent America credibly but also to penetrate Soviet minds with a USIA-
constructed image of America and to conquer the Soviet myth of America; this was a
hard task.

The achievements of the show were manifold and cannot be dismissed. First,
*Graphic Arts: USA* was the winner in the duel between the two graphic arts shows:
the Soviet exhibition travelled across America but did not provoke significant
reactions, and is fairly absent from the Cold War history. Secondly, the show fulfilled
its goal of allowing millions of visitors not only to see art, but also to experience
America, plunging them into an American environment. Visual art played a
traditionally crucial role in the show: modernist American art contrasted with the
official Soviet art and provoked numerous responses. Finally, besides fond memories,
hundred thousands of objects were left in the Soviet Union. These were souvenirs
such as the distributed portfolios and the books from the library, which the visitors
were encouraged to steal. The staff of the exhibition, when moving back to the
United States, left in the USSR various items treated by the Soviets as anti-Soviet
propaganda. Thus, a 1964 KGB report argued:

Much foreign literature, filled with anti-Soviet insinuations and propaganda of
the American way of life, is left by foreign tourists and members of
delegations in hotel apartments, train compartments, etc. . . . [F]or example,
the staff of *Graphic Arts: USA* left more than 250 issues of various books,

72 The telegram from December 12, 1963, reported that brochures should be given to this intelligentsia
and that the party of 100,000 for the Yerevan show should be better shipped to Moscow. RG 59. Box
3253. Folder: Education + Culture EDU 8 USSR (MO). NARA II.

73 Several requests for new books were sent to the United States during the tour; and the embassy
contributed its library to the show.
magazines, and newspapers in English and Russian, in their hotel apartments.\textsuperscript{74}

Conclusion Part II

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the USIA organized two exhibitions, introducing American visual art to the Soviet people—the 1959 ANEM and the 1963–1964 Graphic Arts: USA. Both shows took place within the context of an official American-Soviet exchange program. Omitting any obvious political content, the exhibitions were framed within an agenda of friendship between the nations and increasing mutual understanding. Attended by millions of people from across the Soviet Union, both exhibitions received significant publicity and are among the USIA most successful overseas operations.

The two exhibitions analyzed here demonstrate that exploiting contemporary art was the most crucial feature of the US approach to the representation of American visual art in the Soviet Union. American visual art carried an ideological charge within the American approach. The stylistic diversity of contemporary American art demonstrated the freedom of artistic expression in the democratic United States. Contemporary American art was implicitly critical of the Soviet regime, which appreciated a single method of Socialist Realism rather than encouraging diverse, individual artistic approaches. American art contrasted with official, conservative Soviet art, hence revealing the differences between totalitarianism and democracy. This contrast in freedom of artistic expression was especially evident when comparing experimental American modernist art with Soviet figurative official art. Thus, American art shown in Soviet exhibitions was an ideological subversion; it actually worked as anti-Soviet propaganda.

USIA officers and curators acknowledged the critical potential of contemporary American art, especially of American modernist art, and consciously exploited it within the framework of ideological warfare. In fact, modernist art,
central to American exhibitions, did not actually require any special re-conceptualizing or re-framing by the Americans to be subversive or anti-Soviet. The Soviet ideology had already acknowledged formalist art as subversive within a comprehensive negative discourse on Western art. On Soviet soil, American modernist art, therefore, challenged the established aesthetic norms, valid in the Soviet Union. Showing prohibited art, which had been excluded from the public domain in the USSR for some time, in American-organized exhibitions was essentially ideological subversion.

The analysis of the two exhibitions demonstrates that modernist art, although central to both cases, worked differently each time. At the 1959 ANEM, the art section, curated by a non-official committee, was only a single section of a grand display of the American way of life. The main purpose of the art section was to showcase freedom of and diversity in artistic expression; the curators did their best to ensure that the Soviet visitors interpreted the section in this way. Turning out to be one of the most controversial and well-attended sections, contemporary art once again revealed its potential power in cultural warfare.

The lessons learnt from 1959 as well as from previous USIA exhibitions, shaped the design and conception of 1963–1964 Graphic Arts: USA. This exhibition already solely focused on art; the room with contemporary graphic works turned out to be the single biggest draw. However, this is not to say that Masey arranged the exhibition as a display of art for art’s sake. Instead, he used art to demonstrate how contemporary styles could be integrated into daily life through prints, fabrics and advertisement, etc. Thus, controversial art also served to showcase the consumerist culture of the United States. Graphic Arts: USA aimed to force its visitors to compare the developed American way of life with its Soviet equivalent – a comparison which
was central to USIA overseas propaganda.

American exhibitions failed to turn the public at large into lovers of abstract art. In fact, it is likely that they rather did the opposite: people who came to a show with negative expectations towards abstract art, left the exhibition being even more convinced anti-modernists. The comment books, filled with negative comments demonstrate that the audience at large hardly changed its aesthetic taste. At the same time, this is not to say that the curators’ primary goal was to force the Soviet masses to fall in love with modernism, although the curators did their best to facilitate the reception of American avant-garde art by the Soviet visitors. For example, Halpert’s attempts to communicate with the artistic elites demonstrate that the cultural establishment was among the target audiences. The idea of influencing the cultural and artistic elites—the people responsible for the Soviet mindset—and exposing them to a pro-American ideology, is yet another indication of the subversive ambition of the shows.

Popular reception, however, be it positive or negative, is hardly a key factor in evaluating the success of the exhibitions. The crucial function of controversial, modernist art within the USIA exhibitions was to attract people, be they opponents or proponents of contemporary styles. As I have shown, when at an exhibition, visitors entered a carefully designed special “corner of America” where they could get a feeling for the country, taste and try its goods, and talk to American guides. Whether they loved the art or not, they had been exposed to the USIA representation of America. Thus, American art at the USIA exhibitions aimed to advance the American way of life and was a crucial aspect of America’s Cold War propaganda campaign: a subversive and anti-Soviet activity, covered with the rhetoric of friendship and peaceful coexistence.
Afterword

In my thesis, I have demonstrated that both the Soviet Union and the United States pursued special approaches to the representation of American visual art in the USSR during the period from the 1950s to the late 1960s. Soviet art critics and art historians established a comprehensive, signature Soviet account of American visual art through extensive discussions in academia and the press. Initiating exhibitions of American figurative art from local collections and from the United States, the Soviets bypassed official American institutions to arrange and manage their own program for the exhibition of American art. These exhibitions contributed to the legitimization of the Soviet perspective on American art. In turn, the official United States—the USIA Office of Exhibits in collaboration with museum employees and designers—advanced American visual art within the framework of an official American-Soviet cultural agreement.

Both “American” and “Soviet” exhibitions of American art were framed by an agenda of peacemaking and friendship between the two superpowers, which emerged within the Thaw. However, concurrently, the representation of American art was shaped by an ongoing ideological clash between the superpowers, and both sides used the visual arts for propaganda purposes. The Soviet Union embedded American art with its anti-American agenda, arguing that decadent modernist art, a symptom of the collapse of the West, flourished in the United States. Advancing American realist art, with an emphasis on socialist and leftist artists, the Soviets demonstrated that they had ideological allies in the United States, fighting for the advent of a revolution, and that the hostile bourgeois, unable to appreciate genuine art, were suppressing figurative artists. Official American institutions such as the USIA and the Department of State, in turn, intentionally focused on modernist styles which were treated as subversive in
the USSR. The Americans advanced contemporary art, setting its free, diverse, and cutting-edge character in opposition to comparatively conservative and traditionalist Soviet art, which existed within the stiff framework of Socialist Realism. Exhibiting modernist art, which was officially denounced in the USSR, and primarily targeting the cultural elites, who were potentially more receptive to such art, the Americans used American art as a vehicle for anti-Soviet ideas. Thus, within the two approaches to representation, American art was subject to polar interpretations ranging from negative to positive, from anti-American to anti-Soviet.

Given the propaganda underlying both American and Soviet approaches to American art, it is still difficult to estimate the efficacy of the American art which was used for propaganda. A separate study, based on primary sources and employing sociological methods rather than those of art history, would be necessary to analyze the effectiveness of Soviet discussions of American art in the press and of Soviet-initiated exhibitions for anti-American propaganda, as well as the effectiveness of American-organized exhibitions, encouraging anti-Soviet sentiments within Soviet society. Research into how American art actually contributed to anti-American or anti-Soviet sentiments, instead of how it was supposed to contribute, would be an extremely valuable contribution to the history of the cultural Cold War. However, the impact of the exhibitions should not be evaluated purely based on the effectiveness of propaganda. It might be worthwhile to examine the artistic impact of American artists on Soviet artists. While there are some studies by Gretchen Simms and Lola Kantor-Kazovsky, shedding light onto the influence of American contemporary art such as by Pollock on Soviet unofficial art,¹ the impact of American realist artists is essentially unknown.

¹ See footnote sixty-two in chapter seven.
Illustrating the dominant trends in the representation of American art in the Soviet Union during the two first decades of the Cold War, the two approaches central to my thesis—making American art anti-American and making it anti-Soviet—characterize most of the exhibitions of the period from the 1950s to the late 1960s. My analysis of these exhibitions, based on catalogs, press reviews, archival materials, and other sources, however, omits a few insignificant, individual exhibitions, due to a lack of primary sources at this stage of my research. For example, the accounts of the exhibitions of works by Victor Arnautoff in Zhdanov (currently Mariupol, Ukraine) in 1965, and of Margaret Taylor-Burroughs in Moscow in 1967 did not provide sufficient material for a fair reconstruction and interpretation of these events. This deficit of primary sources already speaks for the relatively limited impact of these exhibitions and indicates that they were not crucial for understanding the general trend.

The same can be said about exhibitions of American art in the USSR: for example, the major exhibitions held in Moscow and Leningrad, which I discuss in this thesis, would frequently be followed by minor shows in provincial cities such as Kuibyshev (currently Samara) or Novosibirsk. An analysis of the impact of these local exhibitions of American art would require research in local archives and museums. It could provide an interesting direction for further research as well as an account of how American realist artists might have influenced the local art scenes of Socialist realist painters across the USSR.

The exhibition of works by Grandma Moses, which opened in Moscow on November 12, 1964, requires a special note because it did not have a catalog and no articles discussing the show were published in any of the major newspapers such as Pravda, Sovetskaia Kul’tura, or Literaturnaia Gazeta. Therefore, it is impossible to
determine the official representation of this exhibition through mass media. Moses’ show was most likely not subject to any considerable promotion because her art and her biography were not explicitly linked to any “socialist” contexts. Thus, the possibilities to turn her into an ally of the Soviet people and make her art anti-American were limited. However, the main reason for the exclusion of this exhibition from my account is that it should be analyzed within a discussion of the American-Soviet artistic exchange of the 1970s and 1980s. On the American side, this exhibition was initiated by the famous “red capitalist” Armand Hammer who undertook the project in order to further his personal business goals in the Soviet Union.\(^2\) By organizing American-Soviet cultural contacts, Hammer sought to gain prestige among Soviet officials and, consequently, curry favor. He continued to organize exhibitions throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and his ventures deserve an independent evaluation within the relevant contexts of the Cold War and his own biography.

Finally, what happened to the two approaches to representation I have discussed? From 1967 to 1972, major Soviet museums and institutions did not organize any exhibitions of American art. Despite the close engagement of artists such as Kent and Refregier with the Soviet Union in the 1970s (they corresponded with Soviet institutions and individuals and paid regular visits to the USSR) and despite the fact that the Soviets were in touch with National Council of American-Soviet Friendship and American Russian Institute, there were fewer exhibitions of American leftist realist art and the heroes of the late 1950s and 1960s would slowly fade into obscurity. This is not to say, however, that these heroes would be completely forgotten: for example, in 1982, an exhibition of Kent's work would commemorate

Nevertheless, the reduction in Soviet-organized exhibitions of American art demonstrates that the Soviet promotion of American realist artists lost its former consistency. One can speculate that by the late 1970s, creating an alternative canon of American art was no longer on the Soviet agenda because, as I have demonstrated, the many exhibitions and publications of the 1950s and 1960s had already established the Soviet canon of American art. However, to find out the exact reasons for this change in the Soviet approach, one should examine the history of the representation of American art in the USSR in the 1970s. When exhibitions of American art in the USSR started again in 1972, the exhibiting strategies would differ from those of the 1950s to the late 1960s. Besides Hammer’s shows, exhibitions of American art in the USSR during the 1970s and 1980s would take place within the context of American-Soviet museum exchanges. Examining these new patterns of exhibiting and contextualizing them within the relevant historical contexts would demonstrate what changes took place in the representation of American art in the USSR, why they took place, and, ultimately, why some strategies became dominant.

Soviet debates on American art also changed in the 1970s. Although the Soviet discourse would generally be guided by the negative premises established in the 1950s, much less ideologized scholarship would begin to emerge in the late 1960s. The highlights of this new tendency can be found in the writings by Tatiana Yurieva and Elena Matusovskaia, which provided new narratives on American realist art.

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American modernist art would also be a constant subject for academic discussion; Soviet art critics would consider the most recent trends from conceptualism to land art. Furthermore, paying tribute to the official anti-modernist rhetoric, some 1980s Soviet scholars would provide new interpretations of modernist art along with the traditional, negative narratives. Thus, the Soviet discussion of American art in the 1970s and 1980s is yet another direction for further research.

What about exhibitions of American art, organized by the official United States? Did they continue? After Graphic Arts: USA in 1963–1964, USIA exhibitions in the USSR would not focus on American contemporary fine art any more. Although USIA shows would be constantly travelling in the Soviet Union during the Cold War, they would, above all, present American architecture, agriculture, education, photography, and many other aspects of American life, but not focus on contemporary painting, graphics or sculpture. A general reason for the absence of American contemporary art within USIA exhibitions was that, in the mid-1960s, the USIA, uncertain about the effectiveness of art programs as propaganda and tired of years of domestic criticism, began to pass on most art-related activities to the Smithsonian. This Institution would later take over the USIA management of international art programs. At this stage of research, it is not clear if the Smithsonian was engaged in the 1970s and 1980s exhibitions of American art in the USSR. Nevertheless, with
AFTERWORD

exhibitions such as the 1978, *American Painting of the Second Half of the 19th-20th centuries from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Other Collections*,
undertaken as part of a collaboration between American museums and the State Hermitage, it is safe to assume that in the 1970s to the 1980s new patterns for exhibiting American art emerged. Such patterns are to be explored in more depth.

***

As the two approaches to representation faded away by the late 1970s, this major episode in the history of the ideological encounter between the institutions of the Soviet Union and those of the United States, seemed to come to an end. However, history seems to be repeating itself. Today, within the emergence of the so-called Cold War 2.0, contemporary Russian propaganda is reviving the ideas about internal and external ideological enemies. Comment books from exhibitions of nonfigurative art again collect the same statements about decadent Western art and mad artists, which also penetrate the media-discourse. This demonstrates that the modernist nerve is not dead in contemporary Russia; it is quite possible that American visual art will again be used as a tool of ideological warfare, and we will see a new American exhibition of Pollock and DeKooning, demonstrating freedom of expression, in a Russian museum; or we may find Kent’s works, previously split between Soviet museums, taken up from basement storages to the main galleries, to show how realist art in contemporary America is still being ignored.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. List of exhibitions of American Visual Art in the Soviet Union from the late 1920s to the late 1960s

1928. Louis Lozowick solo exhibition, the Moscow State Museum of New Western Art

1932. Artist of the John Reed Club, the Moscow State Museum of New Western Art

1946. Exhibition of photographs of American art sent as a gift to VOKS from NCASF, the House of Architects in Moscow

1957–1958. Rockwell Kent’s touring exhibition, Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Riga, Kiev

1958. The American Russian Institute gift-exhibition at the Moscow Division of the Union of Soviet Artists

1959. The American National Exhibition in Moscow

1959. Solo room of American art organized by Andrei Chegodaev at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

1959. Exhibition of paintings and graphics by American Artists, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

1960. The National Council of American-Soviet Friendship gift-exhibition, the Friendship House, Moscow


1963–1964. Graphic Arts: USA, Alma-Ata, Moscow, Leningrad, and Yerevan

1964. Exhibition of works by Emmy Lou Packard and Byron Randall, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Art

1966. Exhibition of Rockwell Kent, the USSR Academy of Arts, Moscow

1966–1967. Exhibition of Anton Refregier at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and at the State Hermitage in Leningrad

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1 The list is not complete. To outline all the shows, one would have to trace the circulation of American art around the Soviet Union, which is not at my stage of research and requires examination, among others, the local provincial archives in the countries of the former USSR. Instead, the list outlines the key exhibitions in terms of attendance, publicity, and impact.
Attachment 2. Breakdown of Soviet visitors’ reactions to the art section of the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. Source: The four original comment books placed at the exit of the American National Exhibition in Moscow

Total comments on art: 112

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>great show / great cars but bad art</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art not-understandable</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a visitor felt indignation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did not like sculpture</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degradation of art</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insane art</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slapdash [maznia]</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guides can’t explain art</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good / interesting art / liked art</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why bring / take away / do not want to see it again / you better not have shown art</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom and diversity of art</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sculptures of women insult</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Archive Sources


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