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THE STRATEGY OF SELF-PRESENTATION: THE 1930S OFFICIAL EXHIBITIONS OF AUSTRIAN AND HUNGARIAN ART IN WARSAW

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Abstract

During the interwar decades, the dynamics of travelling exhibitions in Europe were to a large extent connected to cultural policies established in the particular nation-states of the continent, substantially reconfigured after World War I. The rationale behind this article is to juxtapose the strategies of self-presentation adopted by the two former pillars of the Habsburg Empire – Austria and Hungary. A comparison of two art exhibitions staged in Warsaw, namely an Austrian exposition inaugurated in May 1930 and a Hungarian show organized in April 1939, reveals a meaningful difference between the political goals set by the respective governments: that is, the Austrians' rhetoric of openness to the cultures of other nations, as opposed to the ethno-nationalist zeal of Hungarians who kept reinforcing their statehood, simultaneously reaffirming close cultural relations with their newly gained neighbour – the Second Polish Republic. This paper demonstrates that these two events were emblematic for the cultural diplomacy of both countries in the 1930s, despite the time span separating them and the curators' personal artistic preferences.

INTRODUCTION

Pursued by governmental agencies of the nation-states newly constituted in Central Europe after the Great War, self-promotional strategies were an important cultural factor which in present day art historiography remains a significantly under-researched topic. What is missing is an exploration of the theme of touring art exhibitions exported by the particular countries of the region and circulated throughout the continent. The dynamics of staging visual arts across geopolitical borders resulted in a dense network of cultural exchange between major centres and peripheral localities. Organized on the basis of bilateral and multilateral international agreements, travelling shows – representative of the official cultural policy of political entities – constituted a form of *soft power* diplomacy and served predominantly to manifest national distinctiveness. Warsaw, as much as other Central European capitals, became an arena of self-promoting practices carried out as part of cultural diplomacy in the region.[1]

1 Irena Kossowska, *Artystyczna rekonkwista. Sztuka w międzywojennej Polsce i Europie* [Artistic Reconquest: Art in Interwar Poland and Europe] (Torun: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2017), 69–150, 159–318.

Regarding an examination of diverse strategies of artistic self-presentation adopted by the newly established states, the rationale behind this article is to juxtapose the two former pillars of the Habsburg Empire – Austria and Hungary – both of which strove to gain a new position on the substantially reconfigured map of the continent and empower their connections within the European cultural circuit. A comparison of two art exhibitions staged in Warsaw, namely an Austrian presentation inaugurated in May 1930 and a Hungarian show organized in April 1939, is very telling, if not exhaustive, in this respect. Both exhibitions were mounted at the premises of Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych (Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, further referred to as Zachęta). The focus of the discussion will be the correlation of the curatorial practices conducted by Austrians and Hungarians with the cultural policies implemented by the respective governmental agents at the time of the Warsaw exhibitions.

HANS TIETZE AND THE AUSTRIAN MENTALITY

Following the dismantling of the Habsburg Empire in the aftermath of World War I, Austria – with its substantially diminished territory and weakened economy – counted its postwar losses.[2] From being a multinational, multiethnic and multicultural power with a dual political, legal and administrative system, it was transformed into a small and politically insignificant country. Nevertheless, the *raison d'être* of the Second Polish Republic required support of the newly established Republic of Austria, since the consolidation of the Versailles system was a guarantee of political sovereignty and the future economic development of the Polish state. It was in the interest of Poland that the provisions of the Peace Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which defined the political status of Deutschöstereich (German-Austria, a name changed to Republik Österreich in October 1919) prohibiting Austria's accession to the German Reich, should be complied with.[3] Austria's merger with Germany would entail a threat of strengthening the Reich, which revealed marked revisionist tendencies towards Poland. Thus, the idea of *Anschluss*, widespread in post-imperial Austria,[4] was firmly rejected by successive governments in Warsaw, who perceived independent Austria as a crucial player in sustaining the new political order in Central Europe.[5]

2 Henryk Wereszycki, *Historia Austrii* [The History of Austria] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich,1986, 289); Wiesław Balcerzak, *Powstanie państw narodowych w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej* [The Rise of Nation-States in Central and Eastern Europe] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974), 187–213; Wiesław Balcerzak, "Polska-Austria w okresie międzywojennym," [Poland-Austria in the Interwar Period], *Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 27 (1992): 103–120.

3 Jerzy Kozeński, *Sprawa przyłączenia Austrii do Niemiec po I wojnie światowej 1918–1922* [The Question of Incorporation of Austria into Germany after World War I 1918–1922] (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1967), 202–235; Katarzyna Kołodziejczyk, "Stosunki polsko-austriackie w okresie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego" [Polish-Austrian Relations in the Interwar Period], *Studia z dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej*, vol. 12 (1978), 61–90.

4 Jerzy Kozeński, *Austria 1919-1968: Dzieje społeczne i polityczne* [Austria 1919–1968: Social and Political History] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1970), 52–71.

5 Balcerzak, *Powstanie państw narodowych*, 149; Kozeński, *Sprawa przyłączenia Austrii do Niemiec*, 23.

Proper political relations with the Second Polish Republic were also important for Austria. After the end of the rule of the Social Democratic Party, which perceived the authorities in Warsaw as antagonists of Germany and a hotbed of nationalist tendencies, the nature of Polish-Austrian relations improved. Having taken power in 1920, the Christian Social Party strove to obtain financial and economic aid for the impoverished republic not only from western powers, but also from Central European countries, including Poland. *Soft power* instruments were meant to ease diplomatic tensions and stimulate economic exchange between Poland and Austria.[6] A favourable political climate for cultural cooperation prevailed in 1929–1930 under the chancellorship of Johann Schober,[7] a non-party politician, who renounced the concept of the accession of Austria to Germany.

This article examines the extent to which the strategy of artistic self-presentation adopted by the organisers of the Austrian exhibition staged in Warsaw reflected the objectives of Schober's cabinet. The presentation, inaugurated at Zachęta on 10 May 1930, was held under the auspices of the President of the Second Polish Republic, Ignacy Mościcki, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, August Zaleski. On the Austrian side, patronage was provided by the Minister of Education, Heinrich von Srbik.[8] The main organizer of the event – the Ständige Delegation der Künstlervereinigungen (Permanent Delegation of Artists' Associations) – entrusted the function of the exhibition's curator to Teodor Klotz-Dürrenbach, who himself participated in the show with several oil paintings and prints. Monumental in scope and abundant in exhibits (474 works executed by 100 painters, sculptors, printmakers and designers), the display presented art created in the years 1918–1930 – a period distinguished by numerous efforts undertaken by the Austrian authorities to overcome the political isolation of the country and to maintain the important role Vienna had played until recently in the domain of culture. Export art exhibitions were instrumentalised by the Austrian cultural policy-makers to promote a pacifist image of Austria already during the Great War.[9] This purpose was achieved, among others, by the *Propaganda-Ausstellung* which travelled to Stockholm and Copenhagen in the autumn of 1917 and the winter of 1918, respectively.

6 Zbigniew Tomkowski, "Powstanie Pierwszej Republiki Austrii" [Establishment of the First Republic of Austria], in: *Z dziejów Austrii i stosunków polsko-austriackich*, ed. Zbigniew Tomkowski, (Łowicz: Mazowiecka Szkoła Humanistyczno-Pedagogiczna, 2000), 15–40.

7 Balcerzak, "Polska-Austria w okresie międzywojennym," 109.

8 An eminent historian and fanatical German nationalist, Srbik advocated the concept of establishing a pan-German *Reich*, which would encompass an economically and politically united *Mitteleuropa* stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea. See Alan Sked, "Re-Imagining Empire: The Persistence of the Austrian Idea in the Historical Work of Heinrich Ritter von Srbik," *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2018): 37–57.

9 Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe 1890–1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 284.

Although Austria became significantly impaired after 1918, with its borders narrowed to the German-speaking zone, the historic cultural and social ties created among the nationally, ethnically, and religiously heterogeneous population of the Habsburg Empire left a lasting mark on society. In the introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, Hans Tietze (1880–1954), a recognized art historian representing the *milieu* of the Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte, wrote: "There appeared a type of Austrian who, being in fact German, [on the one hand] obliterated many of the rough qualities of their race through numerous relationships with foreigners; on the other hand, they enriched their character with many features acquired from them."[10]

Tietze was an ideal candidate to carry out the mission of introducing the Polish audience to the contemporary Austrian art world. In his theoretical writings and critical discourse he placed emphasis on the social and cultural context of art, refraining from tackling questions of racial and ethnic purity as expressed in the visual arts. Undoubtedly, any reflection of pan-German and pro-*Anschluss* convictions in the exhibition scenario would have been devastating for the reception of the presentation in Warsaw. Assuming a socio-psychological perspective, Tietze perceived contemporary artistic phenomena as an expression of the essential characterological traits of the Austrian society. According to him, the psychological disposition that distinguished Austrians encompassed perseverance, sincerity and kindness, as well as a lack of fanaticism and chauvinism. Consequently, what Tietze regarded as typically Austrian values incarnated in the visual arts were the "lightness and liberty of creativity, suppleness and grace that blur extreme contradictions."[11]

In observance of the 'evolutionary' paradigm of the art historical models promoted by Franz Wickoff and Aloïs Riegl, Tietze presented domestic art as a continuation of the tradition of the Habsburg monarchy. As he argued,

> Despite the fact that Austrian artists include representatives of foreign nations – Italians and Dutchmen, Northern Germans and Czechs, Poles and Hungarians, who settled permanently in Austria a long time ago – Austrian art remains independent and distinct. Even though it does not strive to develop its own, idiosyncratic type at all costs, it can nevertheless leave its genuine mark on foreign influences.[12]

10 Hans Tietze, "Wstęp" [Introduction], in *Przewodnik po wystawie Towarzystwa Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych nr 54* [Guide to the Exhibition No. 54 at the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts] (Warszawa: TZSP, 1930), 5, my translation. On Tietze's theoretical and art historical writings see: Edwin Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunst ihrer Zeit: Zum Verhältnis von Methode und Forschungsgegenstand am Beginn der Moderne* [The Vienna School of Art History and the Art of its Time: On the Relationship between Method and Research Topic at the Beginning of Modernism] (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 98–110; Anselm Wagner, "Hans Tietze: Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte" [Hans Tietze: The Method of Art History], in *Hauptwerke der Kunstgeschichtsschreibung*, eds., Paul von Naredi-Rainer, Johann Konrad Eberlein and Götz Pochat (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2010), 440–443. A collection of articles authored by Tietze was published in 2007 under the title *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft: Texte 1910–1954* [Vital Art Studies: Texts 1910–1954], eds. Almut Krapf-Weiler with the collaboration of Hans H. Aurenhammer, Alexandra Caruso, Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber and Susa Schintler-Zürner (Vienna: Schlebrügge, 2007).

11 Tietze, "Wstęp," 7.

12 Ibid., 6, my translation.

Taking into account multiculturalism, which was peculiar to the Habsburg Empire, and the imprint it left on the social tissue of the Austrian republic, Tietze credited Austria as a unifying force for the artistic tendencies coming from various parts of the continent. Referring to the postwar reorganization of Vienna's museums, which he conducted himself, he remarked: "Austria's raison d'être has been and still is to be the cultural mediator between the North and the South, the East and the West (...) this remains the fundamental goal of our land."[13]

According to Tietze, a fully original and indigenously Austrian artistic idiom had not been formed; what was created instead was a conglomerate of influences, a multicultural amalgam, which was covered with a veneer of good taste and moderation. Tietze maintained that moderate realism and modest decorativeness were typically Austrian features exemplified in the works of such masters as Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach,[14] Moritz von Schwind, and Hans Makart. It would be difficult to comment uncritically on this opinion, based on the *a priori* assumption of the existence of aesthetic moderation in Austrian art. The monumentality of Fischer von Erlach's classicising Baroque, the meticulous depiction of details and complex narration of Schwind's multipartite compositions, as well as the exuberant decorativeness and sensuality of Makart's painting, do not confirm his diagnosis. Tietze considered Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller to be a typical Viennese, though, "not an Austrian in the broader sense of the word," as he observed.[15] Hence, the subcategory of Austrianness – "Viennese-ness" – that connoted the elaborate naturalism and the aura of sentimentalism evoked by Waldmüller's paintings, was inconsistent with the concept of restrained realism defined by the critic himself. More importantly, it was incompatible with the fact that the bulk of works on display at Zachęta, meant to be representative of Austrian art, came from Viennese artistic circles, while only a few participants in the show were connected with Graz or Klagenfurt. Despite the apparently objective assumptions of the exhibition's organizer, the export presentation was designed on the basis of a centralist model that marginalized provincial centres which, as a matter of fact, began to develop and strengthen after 1918, being supported by the national government.[16]

13 Hans Tietze, *Die Zukunft der Wiener Museen* [The Future of Vienna's Museums] (Wien: Schroll & Co., 1923), 12.

14 Derived from Roman Catholic tradition, Baroque was perceived, by Tietze among others, as an Austrian national style opposed to the Protestant German paradigm. See Andreas Nierhaus, "Austria as a 'Baroque Nation'. Institutional and Media Constructions," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 15 (2016): 7.

15 Tietze, "Wstęp," 6.

16 Due to the lack of documentation of the Warsaw event, which was supposedly destroyed during World War II, the rationale behind this decision remains unclear, especially with regard to artists of traditionalist profiles who quit "red Vienna" in the post-war period to settle in the provinces. Yet the selection of participants could have been the result of simplified logistics carried out during the preparation of the exhibition.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF AUSTRIANNESS

Adopting 1918 as a historical milestone in constructing the scenario for the Warsaw exhibition was essential not only for historical and political, but also for cultural reasons. The deaths of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Koloman Moser, and Otto Wagner in this particular year brought an end to the innovative era and revolutionary ferment in the artistic life of turn-of-the-century Vienna. Consequently, the audience at the Zachęta gallery could not contemplate any paintings of Schiele and Klimt; neither were works of other Expressionists – early Albert Paris von Gütersloh, young Anton Faistauer, Oskar Kokoschka or Max Oppenheimer, presented. Thus, the introduction of 1918 as the demarcation line might be perceived as an attempt to depict Austrian art as moderate and balanced, as indicated in the introductory essay by Tietze. In his 1923 book titled *Neue Malerei in Österreich,* Anton Faistauer identified Expressionism with radicalism, which implied over-intellectualization and undesirable abstraction.[17] Tietze, for his part, underscored the distance separating the works on display at Zachęta from revolutionary modernism on the one hand and from conservative academicism on the other. Moreover, his statement that no true Impressionists or Expressionists ever appeared in Austrian art starkly contradicted his own fascination with Kokoschka's idiom of Expressionism.[18] Thus, the exclusion of expressionist idioms and the specific formula of Austrian modernism – Kineticism – in favour of neo-realist exemplars might have been seen as evidence of a social and moral stabilization in the new, post-imperial Austria. On the other hand, such an approach was entirely consistent with the dominant position of neo-humanist ideology centred on the slogan of a "return to order" spreading throughout Europe in the interwar period. The overlapping trends of neo-realism and new classicism gained momentum in the visual arts at the time as a counterreaction against avant-gardism and modernist positions.[19]

Consequently, the Cézannesque tectonics of composition and the expressionist treatment of form – the features that shaped Austrian modernism in the interwar decades – manifested themselves in the artistic material presented in Warsaw to a minimum extent. The exhibition's organizers

17 Anton Faistauer, *Neue Malerei in Österreich. Betrachtungen eines Malers* [New Painting in Austria. Remarks of a Painter] (Zürich, Leipzig, and Vienna: Amalthea Verlag, 1923).

18 Paradoxically, Tietze appreciated Kokoschka's expressionist art already in 1909 when he commissioned the young twenty-three year-old artist to paint a wedding portrait of him and his wife Erica Conrat (*Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat*, Museum of Modern Art, New York). On the relationship between Tietze and Kokoschka see Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 61–82.

19 For more on this topic see Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Robert Storr et al., *Modern Art Despite Modernism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2000); Wieland Schmied, *Der kühle Blick. Realismus der zwanziger Jahre* [The Cool Gaze. Realisms of the Twenties] (München: Prestel, 2001); *Les années 1930. La fabrique de 'l'Homme nouveau'* [The 1930s: Making of a 'New Man'], ed. Jean Clair (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2008); Kenneth E. Silver, *Chaos & Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918–1936* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2011).

provided only one room for works that could be categorized as a very moderate variant of this broad trend. What is noteworthy, though, is that this narrow group of exponents of modernism included both German Austrians – among others, Oskar Laske, Ernst Huber, Wilhelm Thöny, and Alois Leopold Seibold – and non-German nationals: Heinrich Révy (a Croat by origin), Louise Merkel-Romée (of Jewish descent) and Frieda Salvendy (an artist with Slovak background).

Although the imperative of national expression in the visual arts was widely spread in interwar Europe, it did not limit the landscape and genre topics presented at Zachęta to domestic motifs. The inclusion of Czech, Slovak, Slovenian, and Croatian landscapes in the exhibition scenario could have resulted partly from an emotional attachment to the homeland in the case of those artists who were not native German Austrians. On the other hand, such a decision might have been determined by nostalgia for the lost empire, which until recently had extended over a large, multinational, and multiethnic territory of Central Europe. Moreover, it might be seen as evidence of Hagenbunds' willingness to cooperate with artists of non-German derivation from the successor states.[20] A member of the Permanent Delegation of Artists' Associations, Hagenbund might have contributed to the selection of exhibits shown in Warsaw. The exposition at Zachęta also attracted attention to landscapes painted during study trips made by artists seeking picturesque motifs in France, Italy, Germany, and even Egypt. Such a diversification of representations transcending national borders was meant to exemplify the openness of Austria to other cultures and to confirm the Europeanness of Austrian art.

In the eyes of Polish critics, the dominant aspect of the artistic material presented at Zachęta was the moderately realistic convention of representation, in some variants decorative and colour-oriented, yet in others akin to New Objectivity.[21] However, Austrian neo-realism was not treated in exclusive terms as a unique visual language predisposed to express Austrianness. In both Tietze's interpretation and Polish critics' opinions, realism was a carrier of typically Austrian mental traits on a par with muted new classicism and restrained modernism. The recognition of moderation as a superior aesthetic

20 Clegg, *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe 1890–1920*, 230. For more on the association see *Hagenbund: A European Network of Modernism, 1900 to 1938*, eds. Agnes Husslein-Arco, Matthias Boeckl and Harald Krejci (Vienna: Belvedere, Hirmer Verlag, 2014).

21 Jan Kleczyński, "Wystawa sztuki austriackiej w Zachęcie. Malarstwo i przemysł artystyczny" [Exhibition of Austrian Art at Zachęta. Painting and Applied Arts], *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 148 (1930): 18; Wiktor Podoski, "Wystawa współczesnej sztuki austriackiej" [Exhibition of Contemporary Austrian Art.], *Rzeczpospolita*, no. 139 (1930): 8; Konrad Winkler, "Wystawa współczesnej sztuki austriackiej w Tow. Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych" [Exhibition of Contemporary Austrian Art. at Zachęta], *Polska Zbrojna*, no. 141 (1930): 8; "Warszawa. Wystawa współczesnej sztuki austriackiej (Franciszek Siedlecki)" [Warsaw. Exhibition of Contemporary Austrian Art (Franciszek Siedlecki], *Sztuki Piękne*, no. 6 (1930): 239; "Warszawa. Wystawa współczesnej sztuki austriackiej (Wacław Husarski)" [Warsaw. Exhibition of Contemporary Austrian Art (Wacław Husarski)], *Sztuki Piękne*, no. 6 (1930): 239; "Warszawa. Wystawa współczesnej sztuki austriackiej (Tytus Czyżewski)" [Warsaw. Exhibition of Contemporary Austrian Art (Tytus Czyżewski)], *Sztuki Piękne*, no. 6 (1930): 239.

category in relation to contemporary Austrian art excluded extreme tendencies and attitudes that were either radically modernist or deeply conservative. Hence, the leading concept structuring the Austrian scenario was the idea of a 'middle way' neutralizing all extremes and sustaining the seminal role of Vienna as cultural centre at the crossroads of European artistic trends – a function that was successfully fulfilled during the Habsburg era. Seen from that perspective, post-World War I Austria appeared to be "the cultural mediator between the North and the South, the East and the West", as Hans Tietze claimed.[22]

MAGYARISM: ARTISTIC SELF-PROMOTION OF THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY

Assuming a comparative perspective, I now shift the focus of the article to the official exhibition of Hungarian art launched in Warsaw on 22 April, 1939. The presentation was held under the patronage of the ultra-right regime of Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya.[23] The implementation of authoritarian rule by Horthy was meant to enhance the country's national cohesion, weakened after the cataclysm of World War I.[24] In this situation, the idea of national identity – rooted in over one thousand years of Christianity – became a priority in political discourse in Hungary.[25] Kunó Klebelsberg, the Minister of Culture in the government of Count István Bethlen, was tasked with consolidating the nation institutionally and intellectually under the slogan of "neonationalism",[26] whose main points of reference were the history, culture, and religion of Magyars, who dominated Slavic and Jewish minorities. The strategy adopted in this cultural policy was conducive to the expansion of traditionalist trends at the expense of cosmopolitan avant-gardes, who were dismissed as an ethnically foreign *milieu* that supported the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic.[27] The

22 Tietze, *Die Zukunft der Wiener Museen*, 12.

23 After Admiral Miklós Horthy de Nagybánya, supported by the Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Serbian armies, overthrew the Hungarian Soviet Republic in August 1919, the National Assembly appointed Horthy the Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary on 1 March 1920. At the time of the Great Depression, this first rightist dictatorship in Europe suffered a severe economic crisis despite István Bethlen's rule that brought stabilisation to the political scene. Bethlen, who formed an alliance with Fascist Italy (1927), had to step down in 1931 to give way to the far right, supported by the Third Reich. Under the leadership of Béla Imrédy, in 1938 Hungary revised the Treaty of Trianon signed in June 1920. As a result of the First Vienna Arbitration, in which Germany and Italy played a major role, Hungary regained a part of its former territory and was allowed to build up its armaments. February 1939 saw the appointment of the government of Pál Teleki, who – while Germany annexed Czechoslovakia – took over all the region of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, thus establishing a common border with Poland. See Jerzy Snopek, *Węgry. Zarys dziejów i kultury* [Hungary. An Outline of History and Culture] (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2002), 303–396.

24 Snopek, *Węgry. Zarys dziejów i kultury*, 251–256, 303–396.

25 György Szücs, "Among the Décor of History – Pessimism and Quests for Intellectual Paths in the 1920's," in *In the Land of Arcadia: István Szőnyi and his Circle 1918–1928*, eds. György Szücs, András Zwickl and Ferenc Zsákovics (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2001), 49–54.

26 Ibid., 50.

27 After the defeat of the Dual Monarchy in World War I, the Hungarian Democratic Republic was proclaimed in 1918. Reduced territory due to the Triple Entente's demands, the dramatic economic situation, and political isolation led to the intensification of revolutionary sentiments in the society. Consequently, on 21 March 1919 Communists and Social Democrats proclaimed the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which lasted until 1 August 1919. See Éva Forgács, "History Too Fast," in *State Construction and Art in East Central Europe, 1918–2018*, eds. Agnieszka Chmielewska, Irena Kossowska and Marcin Lachowski (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 24.

idea of strengthening the national identity was also the basis of the curriculum in the Budapest Higher School of Plastic Arts, which was reformed in the 1920s and served to cultivate the domestic trend of realism moderately modernised under the influence of Western '-isms' in the artists' colony in Nagybánya.[28]

Nonetheless, subsequent Hungarian governments left domestic cultural institutions wide open to art presentations coming from abroad, thus transforming Budapest into an important exhibition centre in Central Europe.[29] Bálint Hóman, the Hungarian Minister of Religion and Education from 1932 to 1942, strove to sign bilateral cultural agreements with Hungarian allies: Germany, Italy, Austria and Poland. Several exhibitions of contemporary Polish art held in the Hungarian capital contributed to the strengthening of Polish-Hungarian cultural ties.[30] In 1927 the Hungarians upheld the dialogue by showing a travelling exhibition of their native art to Polish audiences in Warsaw, Poznań, and Krakow.[31] A bilateral agreement on Polish-Hungarian cultural exchange was signed in Warsaw in 1934. Pursuant to it, the Hungarian Cultural Institute was opened in 1935, whereas the spring of 1939 saw the opening of the Polish Institute in Budapest.[32] A subsequent phase of interstate cooperation was established thanks to the official exhibition of Hungarian art shown in Kraków in March 1939 and then transferred to the Zachęta gallery in Warsaw.[33] The political significance of this cultural event was evident due to the involvement of the highest state authorities: the members of the honorary committee included Hungarian Prime Minister Pál Teleki and the Minister of Foreign Affairs István Csáky and their respective Polish counterparts: Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski and Józef Beck. Polish President Ignacy Mościcki also bestowed his patronage on the exhibition.

Vast and retrospective in scope, the Warsaw exhibition was curated by Tibor Gerevich (1882–1954), the Dean of the Faculty of the History of Art

28 György Szücs, "Pomiędzy nadziejami a rozczarowaniami. Sztuka na Węgrzech po obchodach tysiąclecia państwa (1896)" [Between Hopes and Disappointments. Art in Hungary after the Millennium of the State], in *Złoty wiek malarstwa węgierskiego (1836–1936)*, ed. Magdalena Ludera (Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 2016), 50–52.

29 Ferenc Tóth, "The 'Novecentists' at the Műcsarnok Exhibition of 1936," in *Róma – Budapest. A Novecento művészei Magyarországon / Rome – Budapest. Artists of the Novecento in Hungary*, eds. György Szücs and Ferenc Toth (Balatonfüred: Vaszary Villa Galéria, 2013), 17, 24.

30 Wacław Felczak and Andrzej Fischinger, *Polska – Węgry. Tysiąc lat przyjaźni* [Poland – Hungary. A Thousand Years of Friendship] (Warszawa: K.A.W. 1979), 67–70; Gábor Tokai, "Kontakty artystyczne Polski i Węgier w okresie międzywojennym" [Artistic Contacts between Poland and Hungary in the Interwar Period], in *Dialog czarno na białym. Grafika polska i węgierska 1918–1939*, eds. Katalin Bakos and Anna Manicka (Warszawa–Budapest: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2009), 46–56; Lidia Klein, "Oblicze rycerskie i chrześcijańskie. Polsko-węgierskie kontakty artystyczne w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym" [Knightly and Christian Image. Polish-Hungarian Artistic Contacts in the Interwar Period], in *Dialog czarno na białym*, eds. Bakos and Manicka, 70–74.

31 Tokai, "Kontakty artystyczne Polski i Węgier," 46–61; Klein, "Oblicze rycerskie i chrześcijańskie," 70–74.

32 Tóth, "The 'Novecentists' at the Műcsarnok Exhibition," 17, 24.

33 It is worth noting that the Zachęta institution became a bastion of conservatism in the 1930s and was perceived as a beacon of national art of 19th-century derivation. See Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito, "TOSSPO – propaganda sztuki polskiej za granicą w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym" [TOSSPO – Propagation of Polish Art Abroad in the Interwar Period], in *Sztuka i władza*, eds. Dariusz Konstantynów, Robert Pasieczny and Piotr Paszkiewicz (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2001), 145–146.

and Christian Archaeology of the Budapest University of Science, an expert in the art of the 1920s and 1930s, and a successor to the doctrines promulgated by the Vienna School of Art History.[34] Conforming to the theory of diverse idioms of the collective *Kunstwollen* (artistic will) of a particular era endorsed by Riegl, Gerevich presented native artistic phenomena as embedded in a national tradition and at the same time closely related to European art. In an introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue, he ascribed the concept of national art to almost all periods of Hungarian history, simultaneously underscoring the Hungarian affiliation with Western culture, instilled in Hungary together with Christianity. Gerevich contextualized Hungarian artistic heritage in a very skilful manner. He argued that "Hungarian art processes foreign influences in line with its taste, tradition as well as financial, social, and economic conditions."[35] Yet, according to his narrative, a major breakthrough that allowed native culture to fully flourish happened as late as in 1867 – the year of the establishment of the dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Thus, 1867 constituted a threshold in the chronological order of the Warsaw presentation.

Highly recognized historical paintings by Mihály Munkácsy (*Prison Cell of the Condemned,* 1869–1870), Bertalan Székely (*Discovery of the Body of King Louis the Second,* 1860), and Gyula Benczúr (*László Hunyadi's Farewell,* 1866), shown in the retrospective part of the presentation, served to connote patriotic meanings. For Gerevich, the recognition that was shown in Europe to Benczúr – a painter who collaborated with Karl von Piloty and competed with Hans Makart – was an irrefutable proof that Hungary was a part of mainstream European art. On the other hand, the artist's *emploi* demonstrated his love for the motherland and sound knowledge of its history.[36]

Domestic landscapes, episodes from the everyday life of the people and folk motifs depicted by such renowned realists as Géza Mészöly and László Paál and such idiosyncratic impressionists as László Mednyánszky also fulfilled the role of carriers of national content.[37] Early 20th century Hungarian art was marked by Impressionism – "individualistic and national in character,"[38] as Gerevich claimed, and intrinsic to the output of the artists' colony at Nagybánya.[39] Gerevich attributed the rich chromatic palette of the exponents of this unique milieu – Károly Ferenczy, István Csók, Béla Iványi-Grünwald, József Koszta

34 Jan Bakoš, *Discourses and Strategies: The Role of the Vienna School in Shaping Central European Approaches to Art History & Related Discourses* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2013), 142, 187, 192, 199.

35 Tibor Gerevich, "Sztuka węgierska" [Hungarian Art.], in *Wystawa sztuki węgierskiej* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych, 1939), 8.

36 Jeremy Howard, *East European Art 1650–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 41–42, 45–46.

37 Anna Szinyei Merse, *Wnurcie impresjonizmu. Malarstwo węgierskie w latach 1870–1920* [In the Trend of Impressionism. Hungarian Painting in the Years 1870–1920] (Kraków: TPSP, 2000).

38 Gerevich, "Sztuka węgierska," 9.

39 *The Art of Nagybánya. Centennial Exhibition in Celebration of the Artists' Colony in Nagybánya* (Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 1966).

and János Vaszary – not only to the impact of French Impressionism, but also to their fascination with native folk art. Underscoring in almost every paragraph the importance of native elements, he employed the notion of national art as the main conceptual category of his essay, at the same time eliminating from the historiography of Hungarian art those trends which were too strongly connected with the cosmopolitan art scenes of Vienna and Paris, such as Symbolism and Secession.[40] As an adherent of Horthy's official cultural policy, he did not include in the scenario proponents of radically progressivist trends, many of whom actively supported the democratic system and communist rule of 1918–1919.[41] Moreover, he annihilated the revolutionary avant-garde in the catalogue essay, only incidentally mentioning a few representatives of early modernism.

On the other hand, in Warsaw Gerevich presented several works by István Szőnyi, an emblematic figure of the first wave of Hungarian neoclassicism that modernised the tradition of the Nagybánya colony.[42] The artists associated with Szőnyi whose works were displayed at Zachęta included Vilmos Aba-Novák, Károly Patkó, Mária (Masa) Feszty, and Nándor Lajos Varga as well as Ernő Jegesa as a representative of the younger generation. Free from a formal organisational structure and indifferent to clamorous manifestoes, Szőnyi's circle created pictorial idioms parallel to the French new classicism and the classicising wing of the German New Objectivity. However, the idiosyncratic features of Szőnyi's neoclassicism were determined primarily by the addition of cubo-expressionist aesthetics to this amalgam of stimuli. Szőnyi's acolytes depicted the topoi of museum art – iconographic motifs borrowed from ancient mythology and biblical themes, nudes inscribed in an idyllic or dramatized landscape, as well as almost sculpturesque portraits.[43] Moreover, they manifested an anti-urban attitude, glorified the native landscape and peasants, depicted local scenery and provincial surroundings. Creating images of an earthly Arcadia, they conveyed symbolic meanings by reflecting the essential relationship of human existence to nature.

TIBOR GEREVICH AND THE HUNGARIAN ROMAN STYLE

Despite its distinctive character, Gerevich did not outline, even concisely, the early phase of neoclassicism in his introduction. Instead, he focused on the second wave of the current, which was sponsored by the Hungarian

40 Judit Szabadi, *Art Nouveau in Hungary: Painting, Sculpture and the Graphic Arts* (Budapest: Corvina, 1989).

41 *Hungary in Revolution, 1918–1919: Nine Essays*, ed. Ivan Völgyes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971).

42 Tamás Kieselbach, Judit Szabadi et al., *Hungarian Modernism 1900–1950. Selection from the Kieselbach Collection* (Budapest: Kieselbach Galéria, 1999).

43 András Zwickl, "The Pictures of the Ideal and the Real – The Arcadia Painting of the Szőnyi Circle," in *In the Land of Arcadia*, eds. Szücs, Zwickl and Zsákovics, 55–56.

government and recognised as official national art in the 1930s. Referred to as the *Római iskola* (Roman School), this new formula of classicism developed as a result of scholarships in Rome funded by governmental agencies for students and graduates of the Higher School of Plastic Arts in Budapest since 1928. The scholarship system was initiated by Gerevich himself who claimed – not without satisfaction – that the Italian experience led to the rise of the "Roman Hungarian style".[44] Evocative of religious content and based on traditionalist motifs – depictions of the Hungarian provinces, picturesque towns, and villages embedded in the native landscape – the art of the young generation of Hungarian neoclassicists, following in the footsteps of adherents to *Novecento Italiano,* was interpreted as the "imperative of the moment" by Gerevich.[45] Hence, emotionalism, which was typical of the earlier phase of Hungarian Neoclassicism, was extinguished and substituted with museum clichés – *quattrocento* and *cinquecento* conventions of representation – imposed on the perception of the surrounding reality.

Members of the Roman School also included sculptors, to whom Gerevich dedicated a substantial paragraph in his essay and an important place in the exhibition. Carved portraits, quasi-portraits, genre scenes, and statues of saints on display at Zachęta oscillated stylistically between realism and historicising styles: Neo-Medievalism, Neo-Renaissance and academic Neoclassicism. Executed in a classicising convention by Dezsö Erdey, it was the sculptural bust of Regent Horthy – the leader of the nation – that constituted the ideological centre of the exhibition. What is worth noting though is that besides commemorating national heroes, the protagonists of the Roman School created religious art. "One of the happiest manifestations of contemporary artistic life in Hungary is the revival of Christian art," wrote Gerevich.[46] The revival of religious art in Hungary – stimulated by the "Christian-nationalist regime"[47] and emphasised at the Warsaw exhibition – was also praised by some Polish reviewers.[48]

However, the Roman School did not enjoy much recognition in Warsaw.[49] The policy of laying a foundation for national modern art by means of an

44 It is worth noting that Gerevich was an ardent admirer of Italian art, both ancient and modern. Serving as a director of Collegium Hungaricum in Rome, he was the main instigator of close artistic contacts between the Kingdom of Hungary and Benito Mussolini's Italy. See Tóth, "The 'Novecentists' at the Műcsarnok Exhibition," 18.

45 Gerevich, "Sztuka węgierska," 10.

46 Ibid., 11.

47 Szücs, *Among the Décor of History*, 49.

48 Mieczysław Skrudlik, "Współczesna sztuka węgierska i estońska" [Contemporary Hungarian and Estonian Art]*, Goniec Warszawski*, no. 125 (1939): 9.

49 Tadeusz Pruszkowski, "Wystawa sztuki węgierskiej w Tow. Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych" [Exhibition of Hungarian Art at Zachęta], *Gazeta Polska*, no. 127 (1939): 5; Witołd Bunikiewicz, "Węgierska sztuka w Warszawie" [Hungarian Art in Warsaw], *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 118 (1939): 18; Stefania Podhorska-Okołów, "Wystawa sztuki węgierskiej w Zachęcie" [Exhibition of Humgarian Art at Zachęta], *Przegląd polsko-węgierski,* no. 2 (1939): 6, 7; Konrad Winkler, "Sztuka węgierska w Warszawskim Towarzystwie Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych" [Hungarian Art at the Warsaw Zachęta], *Robotnik*, no. 139 (1939): 4.

institutionalised framework established for adapting foreign models turned out to be unconvincing. On the contrary, the common denominator of the critical accounts was the emphasis on Hungarians' sensitivity to colour. Impressionism was perceived as emblematic for Hungarian art, owing to the trend's specific luminism, its drift towards realism or its transformation into various idioms of Post-Impressionism. According to the reviewers of the Warsaw show, it was in this current and its offshoots that the "tribal temperament"[50] of the Magyars was revealed. However, the exploration of such qualities as the expression of attachment to the motherland and the enhanced painterly rendering of compositions did not provide an opportunity to clearly define the specificity of Magyar art. Although some critics raised the issue of "tribal" uniqueness, the discussion of the idiosyncratic features of Magyarism in art gave way to a psychologising and generalising description of the nation. Trivialising Hippolyte Taine's philosophy of culture and the Rieglean theory of nationally diversified idioms of *Kunstwollen*, the commentators relied on stereotypes under the pretext of conducting a vivisection of the Hungarian mentality. Thus, Gerevich's strategy of presenting 'Hungarianness' as expressed in contemporary art proved ineffective and failed to meet the expectations of political authorities in Budapest.

CONCLUSION

Embedded in the theoretical models of the Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte, both Tietze's and Gerevich's narratives, which underscored the specific features of their native cultures, reveal striking lapses and flaws in argumentation. It is clear, however, that both the Austrian and the Hungarian show perfectly fitted into the framework of interwar cultural diplomacy based on the instrumental treatment of official art exhibitions touring European cultural centres. In both cases the emphasis put on the identity paradigm entailed the exclusion of several sections of the domestic art scene in an attempt to synchronize the tendentiously constructed self-image of the nation with the current political agenda.

Yet, the juxtaposition of the two exhibitions hosted in Warsaw reveals a significant difference between the political goals set up by the Austrian and Hungarian governments in 1930 and 1939 respectively: namely, the Austrians' rhetoric of openness to the cultures of other nations (the successors of the Habsburg Empire in the first place), free from the issue of Germanic racial purity, as opposed to the ethno-nationalist zeal of Hungarians, who in the late 1930s continually reinforced their statehood, simultaneously reaffirming close cultural relations with their newly gained neighbour – the Second Polish Republic.

What might arouse doubts in the comparison presented in this paper is lack of temporal synchronisation: a several-year-long time span separating the years

50 Winkler, *Sztuka węgierska w Warszawskim Towarzystwie Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych*.

1930 and 1939, which was a period characterised by considerable dynamics of political changes in both countries. Nevertheless, I consider this juxtaposition as justified due to the fact that Austrians' determination to present their country as neutral in international cultural relations was a long-lasting trend that continued until the *Anschluss*. The nationalistically-profiled cultural policy of Hungary was equally enduring and reached its climax in the late 1930s. Thus, I consider both the Austrian exhibition of 1930 and the Hungarian one of 1939 to be emblematic events for the cultural diplomacy of both countries and treat the comparison thereof as a clear indicator of the differences between self-presentation strategies implemented by both states on the international scene.

The examination of both exhibitions provokes one to ask the question about the curators' personal preferences and the relations, animosities, and alliances in the artistic milieux. Due to the fact that the documentation of organisational procedures (specifically, the correspondence exchanged between the curators, ministry officials, and the institution hosting both events) have not been preserved in Polish archives, it is difficult to conclude whether the artistic priorities of individual decision-makers could be an important factor influencing the construction of the scenarios of these shows. In my opinion, export exhibitions were so essential in creating a particular country's *soft power* instruments that the organisers' personal aesthetic predilections had to be subjected to the general line of the country's self-presentation even though they could impact details of the scenarios, such as the selection of particular artworks or artists representing the same trend or sharing similar artistic attitudes. Considering the general concept and structure of the exhibitions, it was crucial to create an image of the native artistic scene that would strengthen the political message of the state authorities.