# Artistic contacts after WW II in Central Europe (Kalisz, 18-19 Oct 2019)

Kalisz, The Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts - Adam Mickiewicz University, Oct 18–19, 2019
Deadline: Nov 15, 2018

PD Dr. Beate Störtkuhl

Conference: Artistic contacts between political blocs after World War II in Central Europe: visual arts, power, cultural propaganda

Conference Programme Assumptions

The resolutions of the Yalta Conference left the part of Europe that was geographically closer to the Soviet Union under the control of Kremlin's politics. The „Big Brother's" oversight stretched over Poland in its new borders, East Germany (GDR), Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. This traumatic political change led to far-reaching economic, social and cultural transformations. Years later, Piotr Piotrowski, in his now classic work „In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe" asked, as if defiantly: is there, in fact, such a thing as Eastern Europe? Is it something real or just a phantasmagoric projection? Does its culture function as something 'other' than European culture? Certainly, Eastern Europe has been a political construction which in part contains the contours of the historically determined Central Europe, and its tradition is vital to this discussion [about art]. For this scholar, „the work of art is not approached as an autonomous aesthetic form, but rather as a dynamic structure involved in various relations of power, social processes, and political tensions of the post-war years. (id., Meanings of Modernism). Who is then the author whose work's structure reveals „ various relations of power"? Is he writing his own biography, or is it an outcome of social mechanisms and political processes that utilise art as a tool for its own purposes, and are his works of art actually artefacts designed to serve politicians? Is the biography of an artist in East-Central Europe of the post-war era „swept away by the great history" and does the author become a hostage of his own creation? Is it possible to evaluate his heritage without reading into the political context and political ties? The artistic biography of Tadeusz Kulisiewicz (1899-1988), a draughtsman and graphic artist born in Kalisz, presents a tremendous opportunity for scientific exploration of these complex issues.

In the year 1988, Tadeusz Kulisiewicz dies, aged nearly 90, having lived half a century in the reality of the socialist state. Undoubtedly, his heritage places him among the classics of Polish draughtsmanship and graphic arts of the 20th century. The positive evaluation of the artistic quality of Kulisiewicz's work, with the exception of the series created clearly as a commission for political purposes („Bojownicy o wolność i demokrację" [„Fighters for freedom and democracy"], 1951) does not in any way alter the fact that he was a beneficiary of a system that promoted „socialist

culture approachable for the masses" and, at the same time, excluded the creators who did not share the enthusiasm for „the builders of people's Poland". What does this double heritage amount to today: a national treasure or a burden, a cause for criticism or pride, or perhaps a call to extend more care towards the processes that govern culture today?

The „case" of Tadeusz Kulisiewicz is not an isolated one. The joint history of East-Central Europe, the countries under the influence of the Soviet Union, brings to mind a multitude of artists who, for years, balanced the tension between receiving recognition and maintaining faithfulness to self. Museums, galleries and private collections all house works which constitute this (un)embarrassing heritage. The natural passage of time probably softens our perception of the choices made by these top authors of the past years, even though political change – constantly transforming the world, and that including the balance of power in Europe – demands repeated re-evaluation of the content and the artistic and scientific value of the received heritage.

During the international Conference – which we would like to invite you to attend in Kalisz on 18-19th October 2019 – we want to engage in a closer examination of the strategies used to promote artists in the political systems of the countries of East-Central Europe under the control of the Soviet Union in the post-war period. Unconventionally, we encourage you to take a look into their sketchbooks, personal notes, itineraries – both inspired by their subjective choices and by the agendas imposed by politicians. What we find especially interesting is the issue of international contacts and the role of artists in the international politics of the Cold War era (East-West contacts, but also North-South contacts, including transcontinental travels). We are interested in the strategies involved in artistic choices, forms, traditions, politicisation of art and indoctrination of artists, as well as the „export" of creators as a part of cultural politics.

We are not imposing strict time boundaries as far as the subjects of the presentations are concerned, apart from indicating a general time frame as suggested by the term of East-Central Europe after 1945. We are interested in the development, persistence and transformations of the suggested issues up to the 1990's.

The key issues of the proposed programme include:

- Artists' choices in the time of totalitarisation and ideological oppression. Ways and strategies of "protection" of artistic freedom in the face of politicisation: relations with the state authorities, actors, negotiation; the influence of politics on the direction of artistic creation, feigning compliance or criticism of political systems by artists and the consequences of their actions.
- Transatlantic travels, new and old contacts, changing maps. Journeys of the artists from the Eastern bloc – to the west, across the ocean and transfers in the opposite direction. The contexts and the political goals of these travels, means of politicisation of artistic exchange and contacts. How did the routes of artistic journeys and their destinations change after 1945, compared to the artistic travels in the art tradition of the inter-war period? Transatlanticity: contacts of the artists from the Polish People's Republic and other countries of the Eastern bloc with the states supportive of the USSR or maintaining neutrality in the East-West contention.
- Reception of art and approaches to art criticism. What, where and why was considered valuable, what kinds of artists were esteemed, invited or promoted in neighbouring countries or internationally? What was the aim of these decisions and choices?
- Places and ways of meeting beyond the political curtains. Biennales, triennials – what kinds and

where? What was participation like, who organised exhibitions of „socialist art" and where? How did Bureaus of Artistic Exhibitions and other institutions of this type promote the „art of the brother states" and „progressive traditions" outside the socialist countries?
- Political education, ideological transfer. What sorts of parties or groups strived to impose participation in the state's cultural politics on artists and in what ways? Responses towards such actions and the effects in the area of art brought about by the penetration of the field by the mechanisms of police states after 1945. The outcome of artists' participation in politics or the effects of politicisation of art on transborder contacts and on the routes of artistic travels, on the destinations selected and on the traditions and the modes of perception of history of art and its role.
- Journals. Personal or other people's stories concerning artistic journeys and their political role, but also about the routes of travel, the experiences involved or the role of travelling in the development of one's artistic creativity. Confrontation of personal reflections/notes with the texts written by the historians of art.
- Omissions and exclusions. How is the history of art of the countries of the former Eastern bloc changing after 1945 and after the break-up of the Cold War blocs? What sorts of subjects and artists are being „hushed" in monographs, synthetical and cross-sectional studies? How do art historians handle the political burdens and the ideologisation of art and artists such as Kulisiewicz? What does this message teach us about the present?

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES:

We invite you to send proposals for 20-minute papers – please fill in the enclosed form with a 250-word abstract and a brief curriculum vitae, including mailing address, telephone number, e-mail address and affiliation.

Proposals may be submitted by email or post by 15th November, 2018.
Symposium languages: Polish, English or German (bilingual abstracts are to be included)

By email:
Conference Secretary Ewa Kowalczyk-Wiśniewska,
kaliszconference2019@gmail.com
Please note that the proposals may be e-mailed or sent by post - e-mail submission is preferred (DOC, DOCX files).

By post:
Kaliskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk
ul. Bankowa 9
62-800 Kalisz
POLAND
Please place a note on the envelope: „Kalisz Conference 2019".

CONFERENCE TIMELINE AND DETAILS

The accepted papers will be selected competitively on the basis of the proposed abstracts by the Organisers and the Scientific Committee.

The Organisers will notify the Authors about the decisions concerning their submissions by 31st

January, 2019.

The symposium volume will be prepared in 2020, based on the full versions of papers and discussions.
During the Conference, a guided, conversational tour through Kalisz interwar old town will be organised by the Art & Culture Studies Section of The Kalisz Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences.

Active participation in the symposium will require a fee of 250 PLN. The fee will cover the costs of preparation and printing of the conference materials, including the Kalisz 2019 Conference Guidebook and the costs of coffee breaks, lunches and the Thursday's Evening Reception for all participants. Organisers will help arrange cheap and comfortable accommodation for the participants, located in the academic hotel of the UAM campus in Kalisz.
Official platform of the event:
http://kaliszconference2019.wordpress.com/

On behalf of the Organizers
Anna Tabaka, KTPN, District Muzeum in Kalisz (MOZK)
Makary Górzyński, KTPN, University of Warsaw

Conference Secreatry:
Ewa Kowalczyk-Wiśniewska, KTPN
kaliszconference2019@gmail.com

Reference:

CFP: Artistic contacts after WW II in Central Europe (Kalisz, 18-19 Oct 2019). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 24, 2018 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/18477>.