Abstraction in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945

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Abstraction in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945: Migrations of Meanings, Revisions, Challenges.

The problem of abstraction is among the most thoroughly examined fields in twentieth-century art history. Yet its dominant conceptual frameworks—including the theories of Clement Greenberg, Herbert Read, and Michel Seuphor, as well as interpretations associated with the journal October—derive primarily from a historiography of modernism developed in Western Europe and North America. The explanatory value of the knowledge produced within these frameworks remains inadequate when applied to artistic production from other regions of the world. Consequently, these frameworks have been subject to rigorous criticism over the past few decades by scholars such as Edit András, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunell, Beáta Hock, Partha Mitter, Maria Orišková, Krisztina Passuth, Piotr Piotrowski, Matthew Rampley, and many others. Working within the field of studies on alternative modernisms, we seek to frame the problem of abstraction within a more local context in order to take seriously the historical specificities of Central and Eastern European countries that were within the Soviet sphere of influence after 1945.

In his now-classic study Avant-Garde in the Shadow of Yalta (2005; English edition: 2009), Piotr Piotrowski argued that, under totalitarian regimes, abstract art had diverse origins, followed different trajectories of development, and acquired different meanings in different geo-historical contexts. Analogous forms could therefore carry different meanings. However, more than twenty years have passed since his study, prompting the question of how scholars today approach abstraction in Central and Eastern Europe. We welcome nuanced local and comparative approaches, case studies, reconstructions of the evolution of ideas and theories, histories of reception and migrations of meanings, the role of abstraction in institutional histories, and its shifting positions in relation to specific cultural policies. Moreover, the example of the Hungarian Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale invites us to move beyond the symbolic watershed of 1989 and to question the persistence and potential contemporary relevance of abstraction in the region, particularly in the face of growing anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies.

We invite contributions addressing the following specific thematic areas:

- Abstraction and cultural policies: abstraction as a language of resistance, emancipation, and the critique of power, as well as a countercultural tool (the unofficial cultural circuit)
- The apolitical versus the political dimension of abstraction
- The institutionalisation and academisation of abstract tendencies

- Geographies of influence, entanglements, and migrations of meanings within the Eastern Bloc and in relation to the West
- Diachronic approaches: the longue durée, decline, and recurrence of abstraction in relation to local traditions of modernity
- The formation of networks and the circulation of people and ideas: biographies, groups, and artistic milieux
- Discourses of and about abstraction: manifestos, theories, utopias, and philosophical foundations; methods of analysing abstract works; abstraction in art criticism and historiography
- Abstraction and identity politics: postcolonial, feminist, queer, and other forms of critique
- Abstraction and institutional infrastructures: exhibitions, galleries, collections, and the art market
- Abstraction and the decline of modernism: the collapse of grand narratives, reinterpretations, pastiches, appropriations, and neo-avant-garde tendencies
- Abstraction in the expanded field: architecture, sculpture, and design
- The material dimension of the abstract artwork
- The utility and relevance of abstraction in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe

We also welcome proposals addressing other topics related to the theme of the call.

We welcome contributions from scholars, artists, and practitioners at all stages of their careers, and are particularly interested in cross-disciplinary approaches. We invite you to submit proposals for academic papers (double-blind peer reviewed), exhibition and book reviews, visual materials, and interviews. Please see the detailed profile of the journal as outlined in the „Aims and Scope" section: https://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/o-nas/

Editorial guidelines: https://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/wymogi/

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Please submit proposals by 22 November 2026 to piotr.slodkowski@cybis.asp.waw.pl

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