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EASTERN, WESTERN OR  
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NON-ALIGNED MODERNISM?  
THE CASE OF YUGOSLAVIA\*  
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In recent years, there has been a lively discussion about the definition of visual art that emerged on Yugoslav soil after the Second World War. The rediscovery of art in the European East after the fall of the Iron Curtain, which had previously been hindered by Cold War tensions, led to a simplistic definition that referred to the artistic production of the second half of the 20th century in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as “Eastern art”. This definition applies to Yugoslavia as well as to other post-communist countries, regardless of its specific situation, since it was not part of the Warsaw Pact. But there was also a bipolarity within Eastern art itself: on the one hand, this was the period of ideologically controlled art directed by the ruling power, i.e. politico-programmatic or ideologically supported art, to which the entire public space was devoted, and on the other hand, it is the era in which politically subversive guerrilla art emerged at the same time, created underground by supporters of cultural alternatives. In the art historical literature dominated by the Western canon at the time, the political changes in Eastern Europe triggered research interest in a previously overlooked segment of the art of a large part of Europe; thus,

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the defining socio-political framework became the interpretive substructure from which the art of specific geostrategic positions, such as the territory of Yugoslavia, could hardly escape. However, in recent academic conferences and debates in the field, increasing attention has been paid to the study of definitions related to the development of Yugoslav art and, more broadly, popular culture. Yugoslavia's political identity was characterised by a number of peculiarities. It was socialist, but adopted elements of a market economy and introduced social ownership instead of state ownership. It was also a politically non-aligned country. In problematising the term "former East," Igor Zabel was one of the first to point out the little-reflected problem of the interchangeable use of the terms "post-communist art" and "Eastern art," which are taken for granted as identical, with "East" not being determined by geographic location or the "cultural essence" attributed to it, but understood as a political label.<sup>1</sup> He wondered why something from the past that had been abandoned (socialism) should define the present, especially since the difference in political order between East and West no longer existed. Zabel described the period after 1980 as a turning point in the history of art, and went on to argue that due to the changed socio-political circumstances (the death of President Tito, the introduction of a market economy and democratisation on the one hand, and the return of centralism and ideological control on the other), Yugoslav art of that period began to take on the identity of socialist art, which it had not developed in the past.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it can be hypothesised that the newly defined identity was imposed on Yugoslavia as an instrumentalisation of the new geopolitical relations, since in the 1980s, when the "West" emerged victorious from the Cold War, its interest in seeing Yugoslavia as a country "somewhere in between" waned.

While a few decades after the end of the Cold War the acceptance of the definition of Yugoslav art as Eastern seemed unproblematic, today, with a changed view of the global art aspect, the situation is different. This image is no longer limited to the binary system of Western and Eastern art. With the inclusion of the Global South in the integral scheme, the model of evaluation is also changing. The black-and-white image of a world consisting of areas characterised by artistic freedom in the West and politically and ideologically controlled art in the East (provoked only occasionally by underground artists) is a phenomenon of the past. Awareness of far more complex global contexts is increasingly asserting itself.

1 Zabel, *Intimacy and Society*, p. 81.

2 *Ibid.*

Under these new mental conditions, the situation of Yugoslavia in the period from 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall appears as specific, and this specificity is symptomatic and deserves special attention because of the elements on which Yugoslavia's participation in the (cultural) Cold War was based. In the framework of postcolonial research, we focus on the cultural-political practices of the Non-Aligned countries, while the crisis of liberal capitalism leads us to examine other forms of property, such as social property. The key element in this case is the principles of global cultural exchange and, in particular, the process of tracking its flows in the specific conditions of the political organisation of the world in the post-World War II period.

After the year 2000, historians in the countries that emerged after the collapse of the socialist federation of Yugoslavia gradually began to take an interest in the specifics of Yugoslav international cultural policy and the forms of intercultural relations. In the process, the question of the extent to which the United States, as a capitalist power, shaped the socialist Yugoslav reality came to the fore. Croatian historian, Tvrtko Jakovina was the first to address these issues, from US economic aid immediately after Yugoslavia's exclusion from the Cominform and break with the Eastern Bloc to US propaganda campaigns on Yugoslav soil, such as the installation of the *Supermarket USA* exhibition at the 1957 Zagreb Fair. In 2002, Jakovina published his first monograph, *Socijalizam na američkoj pšenici (1948–1963)* [Socialism on the American Grain (1948–1963)], followed in 2003 by his second work, *Američki komunistički saveznik: Hrvati, Titova Jugoslavija i Sjedinjene američke države 1945–1955* [The American Communist Ally: Croats, Tito's Yugoslavia and the United States 1945–1955]. The same year also saw the publication of his treatise *Narodni kapitalizam protiv narodnih demokracija: američki super-market na Zagrebačkom velesajmu 1957. godine* [National Capitalism versus National Democracy: American Supermarket at the Zagreb Fair in 1957] published in *Zbornik Mire Kolar Dimitrijević* (2003). In Serbia, the influence of American popular culture, especially music and film, on Yugoslav culture was studied by Radina Vučetić before 2010; her articles *Rokenrol na zapadu istoka – slučaj Džuboks* [Rock and roll in the West of the East – the Case of Džuboks] and *Džez je sloboda: džez kao američko propagandno oružje u Jugoslaviji* [Jazz is Freedom: Jazz as an American Propaganda Weapon in Yugoslavia] were published in 2007 and 2009 and appeared in the journal *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*. Her third article from this early period, *Kauboji u partizanskoj uniformi: američki vesterni i partizanski vesterni u Jugoslaviji šezdesetih godina 20. veka* [Cowboys in Partisan Uniforms:

American and Partisan Westerns in Yugoslavia in the 1960s] was published in 2010 in the journal *Tokovi istorije*. Until then, such topics were, if at all, the subject of specialised international research that focused mainly on political and economic history and paid less attention to culture.

The exhibition *Socialism and Modernity: Art, Culture, Politics 1950–1974* (Socijalizam i modernost: umjetnost, kultura, politika 1950–1974), shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb in late 2011, was the first to go beyond simply examining the Americanisation of Yugoslav culture. It can be described as groundbreaking in several respects. Its focus encompassed all areas and examined the views and connections between politics, culture, and art. This approach made it possible to draw certain conclusions about the identity of art in this period and opened a space for its identification that went beyond the definition based on its geopolitical Easternness or the concept of Americanised popular culture. The mere thesis of the continuity of postwar Yugoslav (socialist) art with the prewar art of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia shifted its definition into the context of examining Western connections through the prism of traditional cultural influences that dominated in previous centuries as the basis for the postwar development of Yugoslav art.

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Despite the change of political system and social revolution, it was possible to confirm postwar Yugoslav cultural individuality on the basis of relations with prewar culture; however, this question had to be posed anew. Ljiljana Kolečnik continues to argue for the definition that a process of reconstruction of modernity was underway in Yugoslavia in the early 1950s. In doing so, she points to the need to connect to the experience of prewar modernism, which attempted to deconstruct the brief period of socialist realism. She completely excludes the experience of partisan art, since it cannot be placed in the historical context either as an attempt at modernisation or as mere political art. Kolečnik also uses the syntagma “process of reconstruction of modernism” to affirm the realisation of a process that ended in the mid-1950s with a successful “reconstruction of the means of expression of modern art, overcoming the initial resistance to abstraction, and establishing a relationship of trust between art criticism and abstract art”.<sup>3</sup> She notes that

**the process of reconstruction of modernism in Yugoslavia after the break with the Soviet Union was undoubtedly determined by a very similar**

3 Kolečnik, *Konfliktne vizije moderniteta i poslijeratna moderna umjetnost*, p. 130.

(political) expectation, and in this sense the emergence of abstract art in the Yugoslav cultural scene and its acceptance was not only a reaction to the necessity of the domestic environment, to 'modernise' artistic production, but also a confirmation of art's actual departure from the totalitarian doctrine of socialist realism and the acceptance of a cultural policy that brought Yugoslav society—through the aforementioned symbolic meaning of abstraction—closer to the ethos of the free world.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s, such an amalgamation of political and artistic motifs could be observed everywhere in Europe (with the exception of the Eastern Bloc countries), which could also be seen against the background of developments in the domestic art scene.<sup>5</sup>

The programme of the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia, adopted at the Seventh Congress held from 22 to 26 May 1958 in Ljubljana,<sup>6</sup> already emphasised the liberation of artistic and cultural life from the administrative interference of the authorities and from etatist and pragmatic views of cultural creation, as well as "the struggle against the bourgeois class mystification of the history of culture and of cultural values, and also against the ignorant, primitive and sectarian underestimation of the cultural heritage of the past, which the socialist society, being the natural historical heir of the cultural heritage, accepts and cultivates, as one of the elements for building a classless civilization".<sup>7</sup>

The exhibition *Socialism and Modernity* was conceived by Ljiljana Kolečnik and curated by Sandra Križić Roban, Tvrtko Jakovina, Dejan Kršić and Dean Duda, who also provided extensive scholarly contributions to the catalogue. In the joint editorial, they emphasised the sociological basis as a fundamental aspect of the analysed art epoch and posed the question of the nature of the connection between the cultural modernisation processes in the society of the former Yugoslavia and the international visual culture of modernism. The curators brought to the fore the question of whether this connection could have led to an identification with modernism.<sup>8</sup> They hypothesised that in the post-war period the socialist society of Yugoslavia assumed the role of producer of its own vision of modernity. The main goal of the exhibition was

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 *Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije* (Program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia), p. 245.

7 Ibid., p. 246.

8 Kolečnik, *Socijalizam i modernost*, p. 5.

to neutralise, at least partially, the consequences of twenty years of trivialisation of the emancipatory effect of the socialist concept of culture, or, in other words, to examine some new interpretations of post-war modern Yugoslav art that emerged within the framework of the narratives associated with the new national art histories of the former Yugoslav countries.<sup>9</sup>

46 The decisive political turning point and impetus for the changes in postwar Yugoslavia that led to the situation described above was the dispute with the Cominform in June 1948, which culminated in Yugoslavia's exclusion from the Warsaw Pact. Since the Soviet Union no longer provided economic aid, Yugoslavia was forced to seek it in the West. The country received it not from the pro-communist Western democracies, but from the anti-communist United States. In fact, Yugoslavia and the United States had a mutual interest in cooperation. Yugoslavia needed help in the economic sphere, and the United States wanted to strengthen its political position in Eastern Europe. US economic support was critical for Yugoslavia to get back on its feet. At a time when the world was dominated by Cold War doctrine, Yugoslavia's situation was unique in the polarised picture of the world because it could occupy a special position between the blocs. In the United States, Yugoslavia was referred to as "America's communist ally". The country quickly began to experiment with forms of socialist development. It rejected the basic principles of Soviet socialism, i.e. central administration and state ownership, and instead introduced social ownership, gradual decentralisation, and workers' self-management.<sup>10</sup> The gradual raising of living standards and the building of a welfare state were the goals by which policymakers sought to demonstrate convincingly to the world that there was a different kind of communism than that of the Soviet Union and that a socialist social order could also be attractive. The innovations that Yugoslavia introduced into the socialist system undermined the ideological monolithicity of the Eastern Bloc and provided the country with political alliances in the West that it desperately needed-but only insofar as they did not threaten its sovereignty.

In order to become acceptable to the West and so that the products of its economy, which it wanted to export to Western markets, were no longer perceived within the framework of an unattractive socialist design mediocrity that made them uncompetitive on the market, Yugoslavia began to pay more attention to the laws

9 Ibid.

10 Repe, *Vpliv zahodnih držav na domači sceni/The Influence of Western Countries on Yugoslavia's Internal Situation*, p. 361.

of the market. Orientation to modernism embodied by the West was also an experiment aimed at testing possible ways of allowing forms of Western culture to penetrate a country whose system, due to its specific political position, found itself in a space between the principles of Eastern art production, socialist realism, and the Western currents steered into abstract art by the United States. When asked about the attitude of politics towards the pro-Western activities of the galleries, Zoran Kržišnik, initiator of the International Graphic Exhibition of Ljubljana in 1955 and long-time director of the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, as the event was called from 1973 on, replied: "Art was used as a bridge to overcome the mistrust of foreign countries. The motive was economic penetration."<sup>11</sup> With the gradual departure from socialist realism and the acceptance of Western modernism, a new artistic field began to develop that allowed Yugoslavia to present itself abroad through its travelling exhibitions as a non-(Eastern) bloc country that did not dictate artistic expression and allowed artistic freedom. After all, Yugoslavia had two different "customers": the liberal and democratic Western world, to which it had to present the shiny "brand" of socialism, and, on the other hand, the orthodox Marxist political majority at home. Marketing was something Yugoslavia began to learn at an accelerated pace in the late 1950s. Politicians realised that modern art was a necessary element in international circles and in communicating with the world to overcome distrust of the young socialist state. This was not only part of Yugoslavia's efforts to market its symbolic capital in foreign policy terms, to gain prestige and recognition for the country's political relevance, but also played an important role in monetising the "Yugoslavia" brand as a prerequisite for the successful marketing of its products, which were to be characterised by modernity and progressiveness. The country's presence on international markets acted as a "melting pot" that produced a Yugoslav identity that did not exist domestically and was as suitable as possible for external communication. Cultural diplomacy proved to be very effective in implementing the soft power policy, especially by supporting the image of the Yugoslav economy for the purpose of trade in goods and obtaining foreign currency, which was important for economic development.

The country's ambition in terms of the policy of cultural exchange with the West is reflected in its adaptability and openness to the systems of artistic presentation adopted by the Western world. In the spring of 1966, the exhibition *Yugoslavia: Contemporary*

11 Unpublished written interview with Zoran Kržišnik, Nadja Zgonik, 2004 (record kept by the author).



*Tendencies: The Younger Generation* opened at the invitation of the Corcoran Gallery, Washington. It was the most comprehensive exhibition of contemporary Yugoslav art in the United States up to that time. Yugoslavia's presentation was the seventh in a series of exhibitions—after Germany, Japan, France, and others—that offered national surveys of contemporary art and that the gallery, which otherwise focused primarily on the art of earlier periods, had begun to organise under the leadership of director Hermann Williams, Jr.<sup>12</sup> The Yugoslav side refused to accept the condition that the selection of works for the exhibition be made by an American curator,<sup>13</sup> and the gallery did not object. The result was a revised list of artists, a combination of the curator's preliminary selection and new names added after Williams' six-week summer stay in Yugoslavia and visits to the artists' studios in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the selection of Yugoslav artists made by a foreign curator could be confirmed testifies to the willingness of state cultural policy to rely on an outside view in determining the evaluation criteria for identifying artistically important works. What is also clear is the acceptance of the position that it is not political but professional criteria that are decisive for the successful inclusion of artists in the international art system. The comprehensive exhibition of fifty-one works by thirteen artists was a positive surprise to American audiences. Critics noted that it "resoundingly ignores the official dogma of socialist realism which for 40 years has hamstrung artists in Soviet Union"<sup>15</sup> and that "the art now being produced in communist Yugoslavia is anything but what we commonly think of as Communist art".<sup>16</sup> They noted that artists in Yugoslavia are remarkably free, as Yugoslav Ambassador to the United States Veljko Mićunović<sup>17</sup> also pointed out in his speech opening the exhibition. In communication with the West, the adoption of modernism and the pro-Western orientation proved beneficial; the fact that a communist state fully adopted the Western canon of art and, above all, implemented the concept of personal freedom—at least in the sense of allowing a variety of artistic expressions, from abstract tendencies to figurative art—really impressed Western audiences.

12 AJ 559, box 89. Letter from Hermann Williams to Aleksandar Zambeli, 8 October 1963.

13 AJ 559, box 89, Letter 03-55/79, 24 May 1965.

14 Ibid.

15 Blumenfeld, *Slavs without Marx*.

16 Getlein, *Out of Yugoslavia*.

17 AJ 559, box 89, Remarks by Yugoslavian Ambassador. In: Micunovic at the preview of the exhibition, 7 January 1966.

In the field of cultural exchange with the West, there was no real basis for integrating the cultural policy of non-alignment that Yugoslavia began to pursue in the 1960s. The popular trend of exhibiting naive art all over the world could be a first attempt to promote an art that, by its deformalisation, escapes the Western canon of high art and allows artistic expressions even by people who do not have the opportunity to receive an academic education. However, the fact is that for Yugoslav art, the Western art market and art institutions were the only existing network to fall back on in order to give local artists the opportunity to establish themselves worldwide and gain visibility and recognition, but also to test their value on a competitive art market that did not exist in the East. The motivation of Yugoslav cultural policy to test the validity of the artistic corpus through the lens of the free market can be seen in the attempt to establish a “state” sales gallery, namely the Adria Art Gallery, which was founded in New York in 1967 in an exclusive location on Madison Avenue and was active for just over a year.<sup>18</sup> It was founded in cooperation with the business community, but it was the business community’s lack of understanding of the specifics of the art market that led to the gallery’s rapid demise. Its initiator was Zoran Kržišnik, a brilliant promoter of pro-Western Yugoslav art in the West and a champion of national political concepts at a time when it became necessary to organise a global art image of the world at home and to confirm Yugoslavia within the framework of domestic politics—in terms of non-aligned ideology—through a globally oriented art event.

The Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, founded in 1955, was the most important art event in Yugoslavia, which, according to Bojana Videkanić, contributed to the consolidation of the idea of non-alignment.<sup>19</sup> With its inclusive policy, free of political divisions and accepting individual (and not only national) requests for participation, it was the event that gave expression to the idea of non-aligned modernism in Yugoslavia.<sup>20</sup> In the introduction to the catalogue prepared on the occasion of the second exhibition in 1957, Zoran Kržišnik wrote that art can be not only an aesthetic experience, but also a means of mutual learning and promoting understanding between nations around the world that have different world views.<sup>21</sup> For him personally, the Biennial was a springboard to

18 For more information, see Zgonik, *Jugoslovanska socialistična umetnost na ameriškem trgu*.

19 Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism*, see chapter 4, *The Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts: Articulating Nonaligned Modernism*, pp. 176–213.

20 Ibid.

21 Kržišnik, *Il. mednarodna grafična razstava*, p. [7].

establish contacts with museum directors and private gallery owners from the West, as well as a medium to support the penetration of Yugoslav art in the West; and although he did not strive to develop a platform dedicated to the exhibition of Third Way art, unknown worldwide, thus contributing to its global recognition, the event he directed nevertheless created a place that could have become the nucleus of Third Way art had it provided adequate reflection.

Lilijana Stepančič analyses the positive impact of the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts on the culture of African countries and raises the question of whether the event was needed more by artists or by politicians.<sup>22</sup> African artists from the diaspora did not have the opportunity to participate in the presentations of the countries in which they had previously lived, nor to appear as representatives of the countries to which they had immigrated, so the possibility of applying individually to participate in the Biennial was a practical solution.<sup>23</sup> For example, after the adoption of the General Assembly resolution UN in 1962, which condemned South Africa's apartheid policy and called on other nations to boycott this African country, the Ljubljana Biennial was the only event where, in contrast to Yugoslavia's official political stance, it was possible to exhibit works by South African artists that could be described as examples of alternative or underground art, since they expressed a critique of apartheid.<sup>24</sup> According to Stepančič, participation in international events was part of the processes that took place in the newly established African countries and were associated with the formation of national cultures—in line with the belief that art can successfully reflect the existence of a particular nation.

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Stepančič concludes the article with the idea that the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts played a pioneering role in advocating new definitions of African art, and that the definition of postcolonial modernity can also be largely based on the hierarchisation between the leading art produced in art centres and the art that is distant from these centres—that is, on the division between central and peripheral art that unites forms of artistic production in marginal political geographies.<sup>25</sup> This phenomenon can also be observed in Europe, which is divided into artistic leading and marginal actors.

Apart from the Biennial of Graphic Arts, the most tangible result of the Non-Aligned Movement in Yugoslavia was the impulse to collect postcolonial art. However, due to the prevailing mentality at

22 Stepančič, *Pionir sprememb*, p. 52.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

the time, sculptures and paintings from the non-aligned countries did not end up in Yugoslav museums of modern art, but in ethnographic museums. In fact, there was no clear opinion about what interest these objects served. Were they objects of ethnographic or anthropological interest, crafts or works of art, examples of folk art, naive art, or art experimentally exploring the fusion of Western influences with indigenous cultural tradition? In Yugoslavia, the founding of the Museum of Non-European Cultures in 1964 in the Goričane Manor near Medvode, Slovenia, was the turning point that promoted acquaintance with the cultures of Asian, African and Latin American countries, which, despite excellent contacts, were relatively unknown due to a lack of information.<sup>26</sup> In the field of culture, it was the first public state institution that reflected the aspirations of the non-aligned political movement in Yugoslavia. From its beginnings in 1964 until the end of 1990, this successful and well-visited museum was headed by the ethnologist Pavla Štrukelj. Until the establishment of the Museum of African Art – The Veda and Dr. Zdravko Pečar Collection in Belgrade in 1977, it was the only Yugoslav museum focused on the presentation of non-European cultures, especially from non-aligned countries. It should also be mentioned that in these new public museums the collections of non-European cultures were built according to the principle of a collection policy that went beyond the colonial collecting. The collections were not built from the top down, but on the basis of relationships between museum staff and amateur collectors, and in contact with students from non-aligned countries. In addition, they were supplemented by donations from students, artists, and, to a considerable extent, the Yugoslav presidency.<sup>27</sup> The trend of replacing the term “ethnographic museum” with “museum of world cultures” has only gained worldwide acceptance in recent decades.

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The only institution in Yugoslavia dedicated to non-aligned art (which is reflected in its name) was the “Josip Broz Tito” Art Gallery of Non-Aligned Countries, founded in 1984 in Titograd (now Podgorica), Montenegro, which specialised in collecting and presenting the art and cultures of non-aligned and developing countries. In 1994, it was renamed the “Gallery of Contemporary Art”, but retained its collection of art from non-aligned countries.

Recently, it has been observed that the concept of non-alignment has successfully moved from the sphere of political ideology to the sphere of art historical terminology and has also gained popularity and a presence in literature. The Museum of Contemporary

26 Palaić, *Muzej neevropskih kultur v Goričanah*.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 200–202.

Art (Muzej savremene umetnosti) in Belgrade led the research project “Non-Aligned Modernism” (Nesvrstani modernizmi) starting in 2011, which was financially supported by the Erste Stiftung and resulted in six booklets examining various aspects of the movement published between 2015 and 2016. The term “non-aligned modernism” was used by Bojana Videkanić in the title of her 2013 dissertation *Nonaligned Modernism: Yugoslavian Art and Culture from 1945–1990*, which was published in book in 2019 as *Non-Aligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*. Its central theme is the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts. The term “non-aligned modernist art movement” was used in Armin Medosch’s 2016 monograph on the aesthetics of the New Tendencies,<sup>28</sup> while the two exhibitions of artworks from the Marinko Sudac Collection of Yugoslav and Eastern European Art were titled, the first in Milan FM Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea in 2016 *Non-Aligned Modernism* and the second at the Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art in Budapest in 2017 *Non-Aligned Art*. In 2016, the exhibition *Slovenia and Non-Aligned Pop*, curated by Petja Grafenauer, was held at the Maribor Art Gallery. In recent years, numerous events, scientific conferences and exhibitions have been dedicated to the cultural phenomena of the Non-Aligned Movement, carefully avoiding using a term that would associate non-alignment with a specific artistic expression. In this context, I would like to refer to the exhibition *Southern Constellations: The Poetics of the Non-Aligned*,<sup>29</sup> curated by Bojana Piškur, which was shown at the Metelkova Museum of Contemporary Art in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2019 and moved to Gwangju, South Korea, in 2020 and Rijeka, Croatia, in 2021. In 2021, the 60th anniversary of the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade, the number of different events and discussions around the movement greatly increased.

Bojana Videkanić examines non-aligned modernism in art from the end of World War II to 1980 and reconstructs the cultural movement of Non-Aligned countries as a path that paralleled political and global cooperation in the field of culture. She links the concept to the characteristics that shaped Yugoslav society, such as the struggle for national liberation and postcolonialism, and points out the tendency to adopt the Western canon, highlighting the awareness of its shortcomings, as it did not take into account colonisation and the experience of the war of liberation. Moreover, the concept highlights the need for Non-Aligned countries to put

28 Medosch, *New Tendencies*.

29 A catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition: Soban, *Južna ozvezdja/Southern Constellations*.

their own stamp on the Western model and create an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist and transnational culture, or in other words, it points out how the aspirations of progressive political movements could be reflected in art in order to break away from colonialism and capitalism.<sup>30</sup>

The fact is, however, that the term “non-aligned art” is a contemporary terminological product that did not exist as a label to describe developments in the art field during the historical period of the Non-Aligned Movement, i.e. the 1960s and 1970s. Although the political and social principles of the Non-Aligned Movement were theoretically explored, especially by Edvard Kardelj, who summarised them in the book *Yugoslavia in International Relations and the Non-Aligned Movement* (1979), their cultural aspect remained without programmatic basis; the term did not even prevail terminologically, and cultural policy showed no real interest in its identification. The alternative art scene did not react to it with movements or artistic manifestos either, although it strongly identified itself with the processes of decolonisation and the liberation movements, especially in the 1960s. Ivana Bago argues that in defining the phenomenon of non-alignment in the cultural sphere, one could draw in particular on the existing anti-colonialist theories of Frantz Fanon, which have recently received much attention. In addition, she mentions the theoretical attempt of literary theorist Stanko Lasić, who used the term “Fanonist vision of Yugoslav culture” to describe Krleža’s rejection of both socialist realism and Western modernism as an appropriate path for Yugoslav culture as early as 1968, the year of student unrest and Yugoslavia’s first serious socio-political crisis.<sup>31</sup>

In recent decades, a political reading of art production has prevailed over aesthetics, fundamentally changing the perception of the artistic past. Instead of examining the conceptual world of an autonomous art field, the focus is now on visual art as a sub-field of the broader field of visual culture, which is understood as another social symptom of a particular socio-political or economic system—in this case, a socialist social order with underpinning elements of market capitalism, a non-aligned, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist state that, due to the specifics of its political system, asserted itself on the international stage as a leading player in the Non-Aligned Movement and gained considerable prestige worldwide. On the international cultural scene, on the other hand, it established itself by adapting as much as possible to the Western

30 Vasile, *Nonaligned Modernisms*.

31 Bago, *Yugoslav Fanonism and a Failed Exit from the (Cultural) Cold War*, p. 285.

canon and adopting the models of modernism, especially abstraction, which was seen as an art that affirmed and expanded artistic freedom. Previously, modernism had already enabled the fusion between the art of non-European cultures and the Western artistic line of development, drawing from traditional Japanese printmaking and African sculpture, searching for Oriental models in Art Nouveau, and discovering previously unknown geographies through art; however, it remained limited to the appropriation of aesthetic models and bore a strong resemblance to the politics of exploitation, similar to the politics of the emerging capitalism of the time.

54 In order to reconstruct the “non-aligned style”, it is necessary to go beyond the sphere of art history and enter the realm of the anthropology of visual art and the visual, for which the media reports on the presidential couple Tito and Jovanka Broz are particularly suitable, dealing with their travels around the world, their peace missions aboard the ship *Galeb* and their personal image. It was their travels that had the greatest influence on the politics of the Non-Aligned Movement. Photos of sumptuous receptions where Tito was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd, or pictures of gala dinners published in all the world’s media, were part of the media communication that tended to present the combination of Tito’s dandyism and Jovanka’s exquisite style, which, according to the former director of the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, Mirjana Menković, was a true fashion icon in the Eastern world and elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> Her particular fondness for integrating embroidery and patterns from folk art into garments draws attention to the need to articulate the relationship between non-aligned aesthetics and folk art. The great interest of state cultural policy in naive art and the promotion of art production by self-taught artists should also be seen in this context. This is in line with the communist ideology that art for the people should be created by the people, which found theoretical support in the writings of one of the greatest Yugoslav art experts, Otto Bihalji-Merin.

The search for an independent, third way in art that would co-exist with Western and Eastern idioms was a unique challenge that the dominant cultural milieus that dictated the politics of interpretation in art did not accept as their own. Yugoslavia’s situation was probably unique in that it was able to create the basis for new forms of cultural participation of decolonised and marginalised areas from its mainstream position, as well as in the realm of politics, where it helped open up possibilities for a new global political model. The political principles that Yugoslavia pursued as a member of

the Non-Aligned Movement—socialism, federalism, self-government, movement for national liberation, and strengthening of Third World political power—could be experimentally confronted with the art phenomena in socialist Yugoslavia. The political concept of non-alignment, which was never fully realised, was not able to foster an art that would undermine the Western canon through the further development of socialist globalism; in fact, the movement was too short-lived to create the necessary infrastructure, i.e. a comprehensive system of art institutions that would allow the creation and establishment of new art currents. However, it was the catalyst for processes that are taking place today, where interest in the study of postcolonial cultures and in the study of the art of the Global South is increasingly coming to the fore in the context of the previously incomplete picture of world art. It is necessary to overcome the initial theoretical deficit—non-aligned art was not a movement that emerged from manifestos or art programmes, nor was it the subject of a coherent critique, but the phenomena they represent, although disparate, are a good platform for the construction of a new worldview of art. Even before modernism, art movements were named in a backward-looking way.



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