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Almost America: Travelling Visual Art Exhibitions from the USA at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana Between 1953 and 1979



The initial starting point for reflecting on the exceptionally rich corpus of American art exhibitions presented in socialist Yugoslavia from the early 1950s until the end of the 1970s are the two countries themselves, explicitly interested in cultural exchange, which recognised cultural diplomacy as a crucial mechanism of foreign policy manoeuvring. Leaning on the local iteration of high modernism – a cultural movement that the capitalist world, in the ideological game of the Cold War, promoted as a herald of freedom, progress and the future – Yugoslavia sought to present itself in its relations with the US in precisely that light. Thus, it hoped to shape and maintain its specific “third way” position in the precarious geopolitical juggling between the two ideologically opposing camps. The US, on the other hand, accepted this game and used it to its own advantage. By exporting their cultural goods, they consciously and deftly implanted their cultural phenomena, including their value system, into other countries – the fundamentally non-capitalist Yugoslav society notwithstanding.¹ Here the Yugoslav art system proved a very receptive ally, as it faithfully adhered to the value categories of the Western art system. The new socialist state failed to decisively articulate and implement its own specific model of cultural production, so the Yugoslav visual art scene – after a brief period of more direct influence of Soviet cultural models² – continued its orientation towards the Western models that it had opted for in its previous state formations.

Exhibitions of American art, which were a regular feature of the Yugoslav cultural offer since the early 1950s, played an important role

- 1 The procedures of the American foreign cultural policy were gradually revealed already during the Cold War while in-depth, comprehensive and individual studies of the phenomenon have been gaining visibility from the late 1990s onwards, for example, Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, The New Press, New York, 2000. The interest in the topic has not waned and has expanded beyond narrow academic circles. For example, in 2023, Amei Wallach's film *Taking Venice* addressed the role of American cultural policy in awarding the 1964 Venice Biennale Grand Prize to Robert Rauschenberg. This is significant in the light of this study, because the same artist won the award at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts a year earlier. For the first comprehensive study about Yugoslavia's response to the US Cold War cultural policy and the “Americanisation” in the field of culture, see Radina Vučetić, *Koka-kola socijalizam: Amerikanizacija jugoslovenske popularne kulture šezdesetih godina XX veka*, Službeni glasnik, Belgrade, 2012.
- 2 To understand this brief era in Slovenia, see the chapter by Katarina Mohar, “Exchange of Fine Art Exhibitions Between the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and the Soviet Union” in this book, pp. 28–66. For a general overview of the Yugoslav shift from the Soviet cultural model to the cultural policy that enabled the intensive connections between the Yugoslav and US cultural sectors discussed in this chapter, see Ljiljana Kolešnik, “Cultural Models and Cultural Policies in Socialist Yugoslavia”, in: Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc (eds.), *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia*, Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory and Archive Books, Ljubljana and Berlin, 2023, pp. 59–90. For an overview of visual art production and events that critically includes the Americanisation and American

in this process.³ The dissemination of American artistic models through organised exhibition tours was a part of the broader protocol of Cold War “soft power” strategies.⁴ It relied on the strategies used to expand American political influence, including the systematic and planned export of cultural content from both high culture and mass culture.⁵ A key role was played by the US diplomatic network, particularly the government propaganda agency of the US government, the United States Information Service (USIS), which operated through an extensive network of branches affiliated with US embassies around the world. The USIS represented the propaganda extension of the US diplomatic network and through its four departments – informative programmes, cultural content, media and film – consistently promoted the key ideological aspects of the American way of life. The USIS activities were very well-developed, expansive and well-financed.

influence in Slovenia and Croatia, and wider, see Jure Mikuž, *Slovensko moderno slikarstvo in zahodna umetnost: Od preloma s socialističnim realizmom do konceptualizma*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1995; *Socijalizam i modernost: Umjetnost, kultura, politika 1950.–1974.*, Ljiljana Kolečnik (ed.), Muzej suvremene umjetnosti and Institut za povijest umjetnosti, Zagreb, 2012.

- 3 In addition to the studies about individual exhibitions, Stefana Djokic was the one who most comprehensively studied the phenomenon of the American-Yugoslav visual art exchange, particularly in Stefana Djokic, “Art and Politics: The Role of Art in US-Yugoslav Relations During the Cold War (1948–1970)” (doctoral dissertation), The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2022. Two people in Slovenia studied this exchange in more detail: Gregor Dražil with “*Menedžer da sem? Sem?*”: Zoran Kržišnik in začetki prodiranja slovenske moderne umetnosti na zahodno likovno prizorišče, Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana, 2020; Nadja Zgonik, “Jugoslovska socialistična umetnost na ameriškem trgu: Primer prodajne galerije Adria Art v New Yorku 1967–1968”, *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in novo antropologijo*, vol. 49, no. 283, 2021, pp. 30–43. See also lecture: Asta Vrečko, “Razstavljanje likovne umetnosti ZDA na Slovenskem v 60. letih”, igorzabel.org, 22.4.2022, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvOsRhCM3-Q> (accessed 30.6.2025).
- 4 For the concept of “soft power”, see Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, Basic Books, New York, 1990.
- 5 In their cultural policy, the US employed the exhibition format across a broad spectrum, ranging from exhibiting hermetic high art to glittery American consumerism, including entire supermarkets, for example, as a part of the large trade fair exhibitions. For this reason, these seemingly diverse manifestations should be read in relation to one another. At the Zagreb Fair in 1967, the Americans exhibited a supermarket, and then transferred it to Belgrade as a functioning supermarket. Radina Vučetić, “Potrošačko društvo po američkom modelu (jedan pogled na jugoslavensku svakodnevicu šezdesetih)”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2012, pp. 291–292 and throughout. Several similar projects also arrived in Slovenia; due to their proximity to design and visual culture, it is worth mentioning the exhibitions that took place at the Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre: *The Art of Design in the USA (Umetnost oblikovanja v ZDA)* in 1959 and *Advertising in the USA (Oglaševanje v ZDA)* in 1960, the latter of which also travelled to the Maribor Art Gallery. Bogdan Pogačnik, “Umetnost industrijskega oblikovanja”, *Delo*, vol. 1, no. 152, 2.10.1959, p. 5. *Informator*, Društvo likovnih umetnikov uporabne umetnosti Slovenije (DLUUUS), 1961, p. 11.

They included expanding the impact of American artistic production, often through preparing travelling exhibitions that presented the most current, “modern”, and up-to-date visual art production.⁶

These mechanisms are of key importance to the present chapter, as they merge the aggressive cultural imperialism of the United States on the one hand, and, on the other, the receptiveness of the Yugoslav cultural scene to the products of the capitalist art system and the implementation of its influence, both on the levels of the immediate cultural production and of structural and ideological dimensions. The US recognised modern art as a potential Trojan horse for unloading the ideological cargo into Yugoslavia through seemingly neutral content. At the same time, the local art scene perceived Western influences as the only relevant criterion and persistently tried to shape the local art system according to the Western model.⁷

The art exhibition thus represented a very direct input of the integral, “rounded” cultural product into foreign environments, in our case, a country with a different ideological orientation. In practice, this meant that the exhibition, in terms of concept, content and participating artists, was prepared in the United States. That regularly involved the most eminent American institutions and cultural workers, curators and other art professionals. Contextualisation was usually provided in the form of accompanying essays, brochures and catalogues; it often also included lectures by American experts and screenings of educational films related to the exhibition. Such an “exhibition package” was then sent to the “consumers” abroad, to the interested, ideologically more or less distant countries or their cultural institutions.⁸

6 Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008; *Public Diplomacy: Looking Back, Looking Forward – A Commemoration*, The United States Information Agency, Washington, DC, 1999.

7 Beti Žerovc, “Can the High Modernism of Yugoslav Monuments Be Viewed as a Trojan Horse of Capitalism in Socialism?”, in: Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc (eds.), *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia*, Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory and Archive Books, Ljubljana and Berlin, 2023, pp. 375–397. Žerovc emphasises that the purpose of this policy and the ideological matrix supporting it was not only to export its ideology but also, at the same time, to discredit any type of anti-capitalist, collectivist systems and thinking: these were, on the one hand, painted as limiting to freedom and, on the other, as inhibiting serious creations. In this context, modernist abstract art was seen as some sort of litmus test, able to gauge the level of democracy and freedom in a particular state. Žerovc succinctly sums up this ideological matrix that not only spreads specific ideology and destroys the “opponent” but also prevents their inclusion and success in the desired, seemingly universal Western artistic canon. See Barbara Smajila, “Intervju z Beti Žerovc: Futuristični spomeniki Jugoslavije – trojanski konj kapitalizma?”, *n1info.si*, 16.2.2025, URL: <https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/futuristicni-spomeniki-jugoslavije-trojanski-konj-kapitalizma> (accessed 30.6.2025).

8 A broad palette of different agencies that worked under the auspices of the CIA, the legal and illegal modes of influence and their targets are defined in the

The itinerary of these exhibitions was often not fixed in advance. Most often, their touring schedule adapted to the situation in the field, making the most of politically favourable moments, possibilities that opened on the go and the responsiveness of the targeted institutions. In this way, many of them also arrived in Yugoslavia.⁹ Ljubljana was often the entry point and the first stop on the Yugoslav part of the tour for exhibitions of graphic art, which are discussed in the first chapter. The exhibitions of paintings, tackled in the second chapter, mostly arrived via Belgrade or Zagreb and are of later date. They were more clearly defined in terms of style and offered the Yugoslav audience, among other things, insight into Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, the two phenomena, which, with their ideological and referential framework rooted in individualism and consumerism, were seen as essentially contradictory to the values of a socialist society. A similar ideological dissonance applies to the exhibitions presented in Chapter Three, which expands the focus to include exhibitions of applied arts. With these, the question of a direct clash between capitalist imaginary and socialist values becomes even sharper.

aforementioned book by Frances Stonor Saunders. She meticulously follows how the proponents of intellectual freedom were co-opted into the international network of the ideological collaborators of the US administration and its anti-communist agenda. Saunders, 2000 (see no. 1), pp. 5–115. The collection of essays *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War* records the different parapolitical activities and projects of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). Besides the format of an exhibition, which is the focus of this chapter, the CCF engaged in various activities to support different formats of launching and disseminating desired ideological patterns, such as magazines, conferences, contemporary music and theatre productions, etc. In this way, the CCF systematically and methodically created ideological fronts and operated according to worldviews that fit its agendas. See “A Chronological List of Activities of the CCF and IACF”, in: Anselm Franke et al. (eds.), *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt and Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2021, pp. 22–25; Antonia Majaca, “Odysseus of the Nimble Wits: The Spirits of Totalitarianism and the Cultural Cold War’s Entscheidungsproblem”, in: Anselm Franke et al. (eds.), *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt and Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2021, pp. 123–149.

- 9 This is how the very first and most illustrious exhibition of American art of the 20th century came to Yugoslavia, but it didn’t make it all the way to Ljubljana. Ljiljana Kolešnik writes that: “The exhibition *Modern Art in the U.S.A.* – a smaller-scope version of the exhibition *50 Years of Art in the United States of America: Collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York* (*50 ans d’art aux États-Unis: Collections du Museum of Modern Art de New York*) which was mounted in Paris in 1955, was scheduled to finish its European tour in Vienna in 1956, after stops in Zurich, Barcelona, Frankfurt, London and The Hague. The organiser’s rather sudden decision to extend the tour to Belgrade in July and August of that year should, in my view, be seen as part of the effort to strengthen the American presence in Yugoslavia, following the re-establishment of Yugoslav-Soviet relations a year earlier, which were further strengthened by Tito’s visit to Moscow in June 1956.” Kolešnik, 2023 (see no. 2), p. 75. About the exhibition, also see footnote 76; about the relationships between the diplomatic manoeuvres and travelling exhibitions see footnote 132.

Using the sample of representative group exhibitions created within the broad and multifaceted project of spreading American cultural and political influence, the text examines the openness of Slovenian institutions and individuals to exhibitions of American art. These exhibitions provided an opportunity to not only learn about the most recent and progressive artistic phenomena of the time and to engage with them on the artistic level but also to become acquainted with how they were established, exhibited and institutionalised.¹⁰ Despite the frequent ideological and general discrepancy between the phenomena of American art and art system and the premises of the socialist Yugoslav state, the state did not suppress their influence – at least not directly. On the contrary, it often tried to use them to show its openness and modernity, both outwardly and inwardly.¹¹ We would nevertheless be hard pressed to claim that the Yugoslav state and the visual art scene were uncritical of American artistic influences – the responses from the critical public as well as public officials clearly testify they understood the discrepancies – but they most certainly underestimated the efficiency of the ideological apparatus into which the imported phenomena were embedded. In that respect the influence of the prominent protagonists in the Yugoslav art system would prove decisive, as they were engaged in ongoing dialogue with the state's decision-making structures that trusted them, but also constantly searched for footholds within the capitalist art system.¹² The visiting US exhibitions were thus an excellent opportunity for them to build and deepen ties with the US art clique and to align the Yugoslav scene as closely as possible with the premises of the Western art system, that is, the American art system, which had become its post-war core. In that respect they were quite successful throughout

10 Mimicking Americans went so far that even the key museum for modern art in the country, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, was designed and built under a strong US influence. Its director, Miodrag B. Protić, in particular, developed the 1958-designed museum that opened in 1965 in consultation with the then director of the MoMA, René d'Harnoncourt, and its previous director, Alfred H. Barr. Protić spent several months conceiving the museum in New York. See Zoran Erić, *50 umetnika iz zbirki Muzeja savremene umetnosti: Jugoslovenska umetnost 1951–1989 / 50 Artists of the Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art: Yugoslav Art from 1951 to 1989*, Muzej savremene umetnosti, Belgrade, 2016, p. 31.

11 Vučetić, 2012 (see no. 1), pp. 6–15. Nadja Zgonik describes how creating the “image” of the country at the same time leaned on ideological concepts of social justice stemming from Marxism, and standard social welfare which had its personification *par excellence* in the lifestyle that was embodied by the USA. Zgonik, 2021 (see no. 3), pp. 32–33.

12 Beti Žerovc, “The Development of Public Monuments and Monuments to the Fallen on the Territory of Yugoslavia from the Late 19th Century to 1941”, in: Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc (eds.), *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia*, Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory and Archive Books, Ljubljana and Berlin, 2023, pp. 52–57.

the studied period; the entire Yugoslav visual art scene accepted American influences with sustained interest, the state permitted their consolidation within the broader cultural landscape and even provided some support for it, often at the expense of its own ideological message.¹³

The American group exhibitions that reached Slovenia, which are discussed in this chapter, have not yet been the subject of focused and systematic research. Although at least some of them visited several locations in Slovenia, the text will predominantly focus on their stops at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, and mention the rest of their documented Slovenian stops as needed. It is worth mentioning that the quantity of the American group exhibitions during the socialist period was so great that in Ljubljana alone, we can find venues that more or less regularly showcased contemporary American visual (or other) art production. For example, by 1979, the City Art Gallery (est. 1962) had shown *American Watercolours (Ameriški akvarel)*; courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in New York – MoMA) in 1964, *Visual Arts Education in the USA (Likovno izobraževanje v ZDA)* in 1965, *American Psychedelic Poster (Ameriški psihadelični plakat)* in 1970, *Contemporary American Graphic Art (Sodobna ameriška grafika)* in 1972 and the *Selection of New American Graphic Design (Izbor novejšega ameriškega grafičnega oblikovanja)* in 1976.¹⁴ We must not forget that there were also exhibitions by individual artists that are not the subject of our research – in addition to the solo exhibitions by the winners of the Grand Prix of the graphic biennials at the subsequent biennials (regularly since 1959), and these were Americans several times. For example, the 1963 winner, Robert Rauschenberg, even had two exhibitions in 1965 in Ljubljana: one as the Grand Prix winner from the previous biennial at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, and another one at the City Art Gallery, where an exhibition package of Rauschenberg's illustrations on the topic of Dante's *Inferno*, which came from the MoMA, was exhibited.¹⁵

13 Vučetić, 2012 (see no. 1), pp. 6, 10, 14. Vučetić hints that the authorities consciously tolerated several phenomena of "Americanisation" as visible signs of the desired standard of living. She also draws attention to them because the emergence of Americanisation successfully crossed the borders of the federal republics (and the emerging ethnic antagonisms), and was, in a way, a unifying moment. Ibid., pp. 10, 14.

14 See "Razstave 1962–2012", in: Mateja Podlesnik (ed.), *Razstava: 50 let Mestne galerije v Ljubljani*, Muzej in galerije mesta Ljubljane, Ljubljana, 2013, pp. 83, 85, 89, 93.

15 Ibid., p. 85.

1. Ljubljana as the World Capital of Graphic Arts: Exhibitions of American Graphic Arts in the 1950s and 1960s

1.1 International Biennial of Contemporary Color Lithography in Cincinnati – The First Point in the Exhibition Exchange

The first group of exhibitions of US art in Slovenia were the exhibitions of graphic arts. Graphic art was the first and, for a long time, the most dominant medium through which Americans were introduced to the Slovenian visual art audience. The story of the American graphic arts exhibitions is largely parallel to the story of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts and the life project of the curator and art historian Zoran Kržišnik: the establishment of Ljubljana as the international centre of graphic arts. The text thus follows the exhibitions of American graphic arts parallel to the presence of the American artists at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, particularly in the 1950s and the 1960s. We will focus on travelling American exhibitions that reached Ljubljana through a combination of networks, those of the US propaganda machine and the professional networks of the Slovenian and American protagonists of the art system, particularly the already mentioned director of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana and the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, Zoran Kržišnik.¹⁶

This segment will look at the first two exhibitions in this series. Linked to the establishment of a long-term collaboration between Kržišnik and the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana with the Cincinnati Art Museum, they were a part of a broader, reciprocal exhibition exchange between Ljubljana and the USA.¹⁷ The Museum of Modern

16 The key person behind the exhibition exchange between Yugoslavia and the USA in the 1950s was the then curator of the Cincinnati Art Museum Gustave Von Groschwitz (1906–1991). Von Groschwitz completed his studies in art history on the topic of the development of colour lithography in the 19th century, and remained attached to the graphic medium throughout his career. In the 1930s, he led the graphics art division at the Federal Art Project in New York and, before arriving in Cincinnati, he was curator of prints at Wesleyan University. He also organised big international exhibitions, such as the Carnegie International, when he moved on to his next role as the director of Pittsburgh Museum of Art. “Von Groschwitz, Gustave”, [aspace.lib.uiowa.edu](https://aspace.lib.uiowa.edu/agents/people/257), URL: <https://aspace.lib.uiowa.edu/agents/people/257> (accessed 9.7.2025). Even a cursory look at Von Groschwitz’s biography shows his experience with large projects of the US government, which can at least hypothetically be read in relation to his engagement in American-Yugoslav exhibition exchanges.

17 According to Von Groschwitz, his impromptu visit to Ljubljana in 1955 and the deep impression that the first edition of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts left on him triggered the later intense exchange between the institution that he led with the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts and the Yugoslav visual art scene (Gustave Von Groschwitz, “Uvod”, *Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija: Izbor iz III. Biennale v Cincinnatiju U.S.A.* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1956, pp. 7–8). We explore Von Groschwitz’s participation in the Biennale juries in footnote 67, while the chapter “Reverse Views: Yugoslavs in the USA” (pp. 177–182) touches upon his

Art in Ljubljana maintains an extensive archive of the circumstances surrounding the conception of the mentioned exhibitions, which includes a variety of materials. This demonstrates systematic efforts on the part of both the sender and the recipient to bring exhibitions to Yugoslavia, presenting them in various towns and venues, thereby popularising the graphic art medium and expanding its influence.¹⁸ The interests of the American side and Kržišnik aligned fully on this point, supported by a very similar line of reasoning: graphic art is a flexible medium and an excellent intermediary between painting and the general public; graphic prints are financially accessible and economical, easily distributed and circulated; graphic art, with its commercial orientation, efficiently spreads the modernist expression; and, finally, graphic art is a medium with great potential for artistic experiments.¹⁹ All this was directly and without reservation stated also by the Cincinnati Art Museum in their press releases when opening the *Second International Biennial of Contemporary Color Lithography* in 1952, a selection from which then circulated as a travelling exhibition and reached Ljubljana.²⁰

A travelling exhibition titled *International Exhibition of Color Lithography (Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije)* was thus hosted in the most eminent halls of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana between 20 July and 9 August 1953.²¹ Although the selection of artists was international, we're including it at the beginning of the overview of American exhibition projects in Slovenia, as it was not only the first in the series of presentations of the Cincinnati biennial in the country but also one of the first contacts of the post-war Ljubljana audience with contemporary American art. What is more, there were many American artists among the exhibitors and, with the next "edition" of the travelling selection from the Cincinnati biennial, this collaboration became a presentation of (just) US graphic arts production. Another important figure to reinforce the ties with Cincinnati, besides Zoran Kržišnik,²² was the painter and graphic artist Riko Debenjak, whose

introduction of Yugoslav graphic arts to the American audience in the 1950s. For a detailed study of that see Jennifer Noonan, "A Two-Way Street: International Print-making Exchanges Between Yugoslavia and The United States at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts and Beyond, 1950–1990", in: Nevenka Šivavec and Gregor Dražil (eds.), *70 let Grafičnega bienala Ljubljana: Zbornik / 70 Years of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts: A Reader*, Mednarodni grafični in likovni center, Ljubljana, 2025, pp. 271–309.

18 See footnote 26.

19 Folder Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije, Subfolder Različna korespondenca, "Poročilo Cincinnati art museum", Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

20 Ibid.

21 *Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1953.

22 The preserved correspondence shows that the ties between Kržišnik and the museum in Cincinnati go back to at least 1951, because Kržišnik, as the director of the Museum

works were selected for three editions of the biennial in Cincinnati.²³ His prints were also part of the travelling selection from the second Cincinnati biennial and the Cincinnati Art Museum bought some of his exhibited works for its collection. The Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana archive keeps a telling letter from 1952 in which the curator Gustave Von Groschwitz, in addition to listing the technical details regarding the purchase of Debenjak's work, also offered him the possibility of touring the selection from the second Cincinnati biennial in Yugoslavia. He asked Debenjak to convey the offer to the interested museums in the country.²⁴ Because the tour did in fact reach Yugoslavia in the following year, we are justified in thinking that Debenjak played an important role in it.²⁵

The selection of 74 works featured in the *International Exhibition of Color Lithography* exhibition toured London, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, West Berlin, Groningen and Vienna. The exhibition's stop in Yugoslavia was not a part of the original plan – which, as explained in the beginning, was not unusual for US travelling exhibitions as their itinerary often changed on the go: some planned visits were cancelled and, at the same time, new ones were arranged.²⁶ The exhibition featured

of Modern Art in Ljubljana, was the one who organised for the works of Debenjak and Maleš to be sent to the second edition of the Cincinnati biennial. The Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana covered the cost of shipping, and works were selected by the council of the Društvo upodabljajočih umetnikov. Folder Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije, subfolder Udeležba Rika Debenjaka na razstavi (razno), "Korespondenca med Kržišnikom in muzejem v Cincinnatiju", Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

- 23 Besides Debenjak, the other artist who participated in the second biennial in 1952 was Miha Maleš (Folder Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije, Subfolder Udeležba Rika Debenjaka na razstavi (razno), "Priloga k izvoznemu dovoljenju, no.1, /2072/51" and "Seznam litografij", Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM). The works by Debenjak and Maleš were exhibited at the Cincinnati biennials also in 1954 and 1956. L. A., "Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija", *Slovenski poročevalec*, vol. 17, no. 86, 11.4.1956, p. 5. Following the catalogue, Jennifer Noonan also lists France Mihelič as one of the ten Yugoslav artists exhibiting at the 1954 biennial. Noonan, 2025 (see no. 17), p. 278.
- 24 Folder Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije, Subfolder Udeležba Rika Debenjaka na razstavi (razno), "Pismo von Groschwitzu Riku Debenjaku, 6.6.1952", Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.
- 25 This is confirmed in Debenjak's response to Von Groschwitz, kept in the archive of the Cincinnati Art Museum, in which Debenjak informs the curator that he has conveyed the suggestion to the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, which will pass it on to the Ministry of Culture. Noonan, 2025 (see no. 17), p. 278.
- 26 It is often difficult to work out how the tours of the exhibitions were actually realised at that time. For the exhibition in question, its announced presentation in Zurich was most likely cancelled. It came to us from the Frankfurter Kunstverein, and the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana only had to pay for the customs costs and loan, as well as loading and transport to Groningen, the next stop on the tour. They tried to organise further presentation in Yugoslavia from Ljubljana. The Croatian Visual Artists' Association (ULUH) in Zagreb and Serbian Visual Artists' Association (ULUS) in Belgrade offered to host it, but the plans didn't materialise, because their venues

artists from 18 countries, with Americans and Europeans being the most numerous. There was a significant segment of established “masters” among them, including Arp, Léger, Masson, Picasso, de Staël, Villon, Marini, Dix, Miró, Moore and Ernst (figs. 38–39).²⁷

Even a cursory glance at the reproductions in the catalogue reveals that several modernist movements were represented in the exhibition. A reader might get the impression that one of the curator’s main tasks was to present how successfully the technique of colour lithography can convey very diverse modernist artistic approaches. The two catalogue texts confirm this impression: both the brief address by the Cincinnati Art Museum’s director Philip R. Adams and the curator Von Groschwitz’s remarks underline colour lithography’s dexterity in the translation of modernist painting’s influence as one of its greatest virtues and, because of the graphic art’s immense distribution potential, the consequent dissemination of that influence beyond political limits.²⁸

Von Groschwitz did an exemplary curatorial job in the catalogue: by invoking the greatest names, from Toulouse-Lautrec and the Post-Impressionists, via Rouault, Vlaminck and the German Expressionists, he established and legitimised the line of development of colour lithography until its flourishing after the Second World War, especially as part of the École de Paris. From there, he charted the influence of colour lithography on the Anglo-American world, particularly via English artists such as Sutherland and Moore. For Von Groschwitz, the obvious ideal was that of the “spiritual unity” of modernism around the world but, at the same time, its iteration in a series of vernacular local versions. As can be discerned from the text accompanying the exhibition, the fundamental scope of the exhibition was to encourage such development of the artistic idiom.²⁹

The local media covered the exhibition quite intensely, but not particularly in depth. Among the mass of reports, announcements, notices and reproductions, Karl Dobida’s review in *Naša sodobnost* stands out. He provides a brief account of the show along with a more complex evaluation. Despite the presentation of “all the movements around the world” at the exhibition, he notices the dominance of the “most radical ones”, meaning mostly abstract art from Western Europe and the USA.³⁰ Despite the high quality of the presented work, he also notices oscillations, particularly in the cases of empty artism, unlike

couldn’t make the available dates work. Folder Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije, Subfolder Različna korespondenca, “Pismo ULUH-a Karlu Dobidi, 24.4.1953” and “Telegram ULUS-a Karlu Dobidi, 27.4.1953”, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

27 *Mednarodna razstava barvne litografije*, 1953 (see no. 21).

28 Von Groschwitz, 1956 (see no. 17), pp. 7–8.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

30 Karel Dobida, “Tri razstave”, *Naša sodobnost*, vol. 1, no. 12, 1953, p. 1150.



38–39

Installation views from the *International Exhibition of Color Lithography* at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 1953.

with the Yugoslav representatives, Maleš and Debenjak, who supposedly surpassed the median with their technical excellence and the quality of execution. After a brief overview of the history of the graphic art technique, Dobida comes to the key conclusion that colour lithography has freed itself of its applicative function and developed into a pure art so:

it becomes, in our time, an actual painting on paper, created with distinctly graphic methods, but with greater freshness, directedness and effect. Due to transparency, the viewer can enjoy the shimmer of the lower layers, while the graphic elements make the colour lithography more easily readable. Its constitution can also have a strong decorative impact, occasionally with calligraphic, ornamental, gentle drawing. At times, it begins to lose the character of the graphic print, shifting colour lithography almost to the realm of painting itself.³¹

Colour lithography thus carries the possibility of efficient and quick dissemination of quality visual art production to a wider audience. Dobida also reveals his criterion of evaluating graphic production: the highest quality is the one that expresses national, even folkloric, traits of the space in which it is created, but the more it moves towards pure abstraction, the harder it is, in his opinion, to recognise the artist's personality. "It is ultimately up to human uniqueness, the individuality and the artistic prowess of the artist to make their work retain its value and importance even after the charm of novelty and revolutionary impact has worn off."³²

The second in the series of graphic art exhibitions that presented the selection of colour lithography from the Cincinnati biennial in the 1950s, this time from its third edition, took place at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana between 7 and 26 April 1956 under the title *Modern American Colour Lithography (Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija)*.³³ Compared to the previous one, this exhibition represented a step in a more specific direction, both in terms of content and production. Firstly, this means that the international cast of the biennial in its travelling reiteration morphed into an exhibition of exclusively American colour lithography, while, at the same time, the circumstances of its international circulation were more clearly formalised

31 Ibid., p. 1151.

32 Ibid., p. 1152.

33 *Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija: Izbor iz III. Biennale v Cincinnatiju U.S.A.* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1956. The studied exhibitions occasionally appear under different names. The one presented here is also one such case, with the cover page of the catalogue calling it *Ameriška barvna litografija* [American colour lithography] and the inner cover adding "contemporary" to the title.

within the framework of the US propaganda and diplomacy machine. While the 1953 exhibition arrived in Yugoslavia by way of emerging professional contacts and occasional mediation by the American diplomatic missions with solving organisational issues, it seems that *Modern American Colour Lithography* in 1956 was completely integrated within the established scheme of the cultural agenda of the US foreign policy.³⁴ This is clear from the fact that the USIS participated in almost every phase of the project – from initial/provisional negotiations to coordinating logistics and organisational questions, as well as in establishing the expert, art historical – often conjointly ideological – superstructure of the exhibition. Alongside that, there was also the organisation of accompanying events that the USIS encouraged and for which the US side provided materials, promotional films about the US art institutions or experts who lectured on topics connected to the American exhibitions. The archive sources also provide information that, upon the opening, Corinne Spencer, “the aide to the cultural attaché at the US consulate in Zagreb [...] had a lengthy lecture about the event.”³⁵ The correspondence with the USIS director at the US Consulate in Zagreb, John Crockett, also reveals an offer for three promotional films about American museums, which the Americans offered to the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana as part of the accompanying programme, and were supposed to come with some additional lectures.³⁶

The exhibition *Modern American Colour Lithography* consisted of 77 graphic prints by 66 American artists. Among the participants, we do find some resonant names, such as Calder or Ernst, although the new generation of American artists prevailed – almost half were under thirty.³⁷ In his introductory text for the Slovenian version of the catalogue the curator Von Groschwitz justified his selection in terms of the “experimental spirit” of the American graphic art of the 1950s, the fact that the United States doesn’t have a technical heritage and the circumstance that American graphic artists often print their works

- 34 The preserved archive documentation of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana shows that, with this exhibition, the US diplomatic missions already served as a unique service of “exporting” American exhibitions, as they very directly participated in the organisation and realisation. Folder Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija, Subfolder Korespondenca, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.
- 35 Folder Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija, Subfolder Korespondenca, “Pismo Karla Dobide kulturnemu atašeju pri ameriškem konzulatu v Zagrebu, 4.5.1956”, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.
- 36 The archival documentation shows that the films were even already translated into Serbo-Croatian, and thus ready for propaganda purposes in Yugoslavia (Folder Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija, Subfolder Korespondenca, “Poročilo, 9.7.1956, gl 836/56” and “dopis Karlu Dobidi iz Ameriškega konzulata v Zagrebu, 4.5.1956”, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM).
- 37 *Ameriška sodobna barvna litografija*, 1956 (see no. 33), pp. 7, 9–14.

themselves, as they are dispersed throughout a vast country and mostly don't have access to specialised printers who operate in larger cities. The exhibition is thus representative of "all the regions from the east to the west", which makes Von Groschwitz conclude: "This is thus a typically American exhibition and its subjects are often determined by local motifs."³⁸ The curator was said to have also followed the outstanding flourishing of colour lithography in the United States: while its first peak at the end of the 19th century was linked to Europe, this second, post-1945 one was very international, but nevertheless points to the irrefutable fact that America is already sovereignly on par with "the best of what Europe has created in the last forty years."³⁹

The contemporary responses to the exhibition in the Slovenian press were relatively numerous, but only rarely did they contribute more than an enthusiastic summary of the curator's explanations on the pioneering position of American graphic art production. *Slovenski poročevalec* thus conveyed Von Groschwitz's interpretations that the lack of tradition in this genre in the USA encourages technical experimenting, new colour combinations and expressive and design possibilities. The circumstance of the American graphic artists printing their lithographs by themselves was particularly underlined, and that was supposed to allow the "artistic perfection and individuality to come to a more direct expression. The exhibition is thus typically American."⁴⁰ As a particular quality, they highlight the closeness of colour lithography to painting: each lithography is an original, "which, with its colourist values at times does not lag behind oil painting at all".⁴¹ But because it is financially accessible, they also recognised its "artistic-educational mission among the people".⁴² The announcement of the exhibition in *Ljudska pravica* highlighted the same aspects – its closeness to painting and, at the same time, financial accessibility – and recognised its great potential for "universality". They also note the technical deftness and experimentality as well as strong modelling after European examples, particularly when it comes to the artists who studied in France.⁴³

Considering all the aspects mentioned so far, *Ljubljanski dnevnik* focused on analysing the exhibition itself. They stressed the "very wide

38 Von Groschwitz, 1956 (see no. 17), pp. 6–7.

39 Ibid. In the same breath, in the catalogue, Von Groschwitz speaks about his visit to the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts in 1955 and his fascination with the quality of the event, which he calls "one of the most important in the entire world". He mentions fruitful meetings with local protagonists and the artistic production, as well as the participation of Yugoslav artists at the biennial in Cincinnati. Ibid., p. 7.

40 L. A., 1956 (see no. 23), p. 5.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 L. A., "Ameriška barvna litografija", *Ljudska pravica*, vol. 22, no. 69, 22.3.1956, p. 6.

base of the visual art impulses of the American lithography,” which made a unified exhibition difficult, a claim that was illustrated by listing stark differences between different works. Nevertheless, they recognised abstraction or “abstractions of different types” as the “general formal tone of the exhibition”.⁴⁴ They found the explanation in the fact that the American artists focused predominantly on solving technical problems, an area in which the critic felt they excelled. They nevertheless warn of “a certain shortcoming in regard to what is essential to the European art lover, namely, the relatively widespread sticking to the surface and superficial effects, which for now still leaves us questioning the author’s creativity”.⁴⁵ They concluded that the exhibition nevertheless fulfilled the public’s aesthetic criteria, even if it could not truly fulfil visual ones, by which they probably meant that successful technical solutions apparently were not always able to successfully convey the artistic message.⁴⁶

1.2 American Graphic Arts Exhibitions After the Founding of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts

The third in the series of exhibitions from the 1950s was created within a slightly different framework, but was realised with the help of very similar organisational networks. The eclectic exhibition *American Graphic Art of the 20th Century* (*Ameriška grafika 20. stoletja*) was open between 6 February and 2 March 1958 at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana.⁴⁷ The archive documentation shows that the organisers were the Jakopič Pavilion in collaboration with the USIS based at the US Consulate in Zagreb.⁴⁸ The title itself indicates a somewhat wider focus, both temporal and technical: it included American graphic production from the beginning of the 20th century in all graphic arts techniques – which the organisers understood to include drawing

44 M., “Cincinnati–Ljubljana: Razstava sodobne ameriške barvne litografije”, *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, vol. 6, no. 95, 21.4.1956, p. 5.

45 Ibid.

46 The author happily concluded with a reference to the firm cultural relations with the Americans. These were reflected in what was simultaneously taking place at the Cincinnati Art Museum: the ongoing 4th edition of the Cincinnati biennial (with Debenjak and Maleš among the participants) and the simultaneous exhibition of the selection from the first edition of the Ljubljana graphic biennial (featuring 11 Yugoslavs, 7 Slovenians among them). Ibid.

47 *Ameriška grafika 20. stoletja* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1958.

48 Among the rare preserved archival documents, there is a rental agreement between the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana and the Jakopič Pavilion, “represented by comrade Rastko Poljšak”, in which the Jakopič Pavilion is listed as the organiser of the exhibition, and the USIS at the US Consulate in Zagreb as the co-organiser. The Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana did not charge rent, just electricity for the duration of the exhibition and the costs of security and cleaning. Folder *Ameriška grafika 20. stoletja*, “Najemna pogodba med Moderno galerijo in Jakopičevim pavilijonom”, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

and watercolour – although it was mostly the artistic production of the 1950s. When older works were included, it seems it was primarily an attempt to show the development of American graphic art, which some of the Slovenian authors writing about it noticed.⁴⁹ A very large selection was presented: 150 graphic prints, drawings and watercolours by 112 artists that the organisers selected from different American museums. It was yet another travelling exhibition that had, before arriving in Ljubljana, visited France, Poland and the Netherlands, and Ljubljana represented its entry point into Yugoslavia, as afterwards, it went on to Rijeka, Split, Sarajevo and (probably) Dubrovnik.⁵⁰

Slovenian newspaper responses do include a number of news, reports, announcements and reproductions, but only one short – conditionally speaking – review. In it, Melita Stele mentioned the ambition to present the development of the American graphic print and despite the fragmentation of the material – the majority of artists were only represented with a single piece of work – she recognised different movements: from the realism of the early American graphic, grafted with European models of Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Symbolism, Surrealism and abstraction, all the way to the watershed point when the influential English graphic artist S. W. Hayter transferred his famous Atelier 17 to the USA.⁵¹ Stele found the exhibition interesting, and it seems that what most attracted her were the specific American “views”: their “almost naïve attitude to nature and objects that surround the artist, his joy of life and a hundred tiny things” as well as the existential musings of certain presented artists.⁵²

Following the intense American “graphic print” era at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in the 1950s, there was an almost ten-year hiatus.⁵³ The most likely reason was the growing importance of the

49 Melita Stele, “Ameriška grafika XX. stoletja,” *Ljudska pravica*, vol. 24, no. 41, 18.2.1958, p. 5.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid. Hayter established Atelier 17, an influential graphic art school and art workshop, in Paris in 1927, where he had an important role in encouraging modernist experimentation in the graphic medium. Once the war started, he moved Atelier 17 to New York for ten years and there importantly influenced the establishment of the graphic medium among the new generations of American artists, particularly Abstract Expressionists. For the precise timeline of Atelier 17, see “Atelier 17”, atelier17.com, 2000–2024, URL: <http://www.atelier17.com/a173.html> (accessed 1.7.2025).

52 Stele, 1958 (see no. 49), p. 5.

53 During this time, the exhibitions of American graphic prints occurred at other venues around Slovenia. The most ambitious among them was *Graphics of the USA (Grafika ZDA)*, which was on display at the Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre from 17 June to 17 July 1965. The vast exhibition included art prints – which, similar to the *American Graphic Art of the 20th Century*, also included watercolours and drawings – as well as examples of using graphic print in industry and advertising, which, considering the significant number of reactions in the media, gave the exhibition a popular and educational character (Janez Mesesnel, “Življenjska vloga umetniške

Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, which at that time took over the role of exhibiting graphic arts. Within it, American artists had a prominent role, which will be explained in the next chapter. Despite that, at the end of the 1960s, we come across three exhibitions of American graphic arts but, compared to those from a decade prior, they left a significantly smaller mark – both in archive materials and in contemporary public reactions.

These are the exhibitions from 1968: *Contemporary American Graphic Prints* (*Sodobna ameriška grafika*; also known as *American Graphic Prints I*) and *40 American Graphic Prints* (*40 ameriških grafik*; or *American Graphic Prints II*).⁵⁴ We know very little about the first one: only the day of the opening of the Ljubljana iteration is known, 4 June 1968, and there are several photos preserved from its opening in the small halls in the basement of Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana.⁵⁵ However, the exhibition clearly didn't reach only Ljubljana since a modest leaflet attests to its stop in Kranj from April of that same year.⁵⁶ In it, we find the names of 27 participating artists and the organiser of the exhibition, the already known USIS from the US Consulate in Zagreb.⁵⁷ We have slightly more information about the second exhibition that was open between 5 and 24 November 1968. The print brochure with a brief introductory text in Serbo-Croatian would have us believe that it was a travelling exhibition with a slightly different itinerary than was usual for previous graphic art exhibitions, as it did not enter Yugoslavia through Ljubljana.⁵⁸

We can attempt to reconstruct the *40 American Graphic Prints* exhibition from the aforementioned sparse accompanying brochure

grafike", *Delo*, vol. 6, no. 170, 26.6.1965, p. 5). The newspapers tell us it was a travelling exhibition aimed predominantly at the countries behind the Iron Curtain – before Yugoslavia, it had visited the Soviet Union, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland – where over 2 million visitors were said to have seen it. It was said to have come to Yugoslavia with the mediation of the US Embassy in Belgrade and co-organised with the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts. The full experience of American graphic prints was completed with a film that presented colour lithography, as well as a direct presentation of using graphics in industry in different ways, which were organised at the exhibition itself. "Grafična umetnost v ZDA", *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, vol. 15, no. 161, 17.6.1965, p. 5. After Ljubljana, the exhibition moved to the Belgrade Fair in the autumn of that same year.

54 Folder 40 ameriških grafik/Ameriška grafika II., "Obrazstavna brošura 40 ameriških grafik", Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

55 Folder 11.653 /1-14/, "Otvoritev razstave Sodobna ameriška grafika", photographer unknown, Fotoarhiv, MG+MSUM.

56 *Sodobna ameriška grafika* (exhibition catalogue), Gorenjski muzej, Kranj, 1968. The very scant brochure states, besides the names of the 27 exhibiting artists, many of whom were already known to the Ljubljana audience, that the exhibition was "mediated by the department of press and culture at the US consulate in Zagreb."

57 Ibid.

58 Folder 40 ameriških grafik/Ameriška grafika II., "Obrazstavna brošura ...", (see no. 54).

and brief reviews by Janez Mesesnel in *Delo* and Aleksander Bassin in *Ljubljanski dnevnik*. The brochure tells us that the exhibition presented 40 works by 33 artists from the last decade. The introductory text emphasises the general popularity, widespreadness and (qualitative and quantitative) productivity of graphic arts in the USA. The list of artists reveals that many of them were already familiar to the Ljubljana audience, as it had the opportunity to see them either at the exhibition in the 1950s (Francis, Albers, Altman, Corita, d'Arcangelo, Barnet, Stanczak) or at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts (Motherwell, Rauschenberg).⁵⁹ In addition to the well-known names, in *Delo* Mesesnel highlighted the new generation of American artists, who were expected to bring with them "new twists, the conceptions of new artistic movements, new notions of art."⁶⁰ His review takes examples from the exhibition to show a very broad range of approaches, the racially and ethnically diverse "composite of the national selection of the American visual artists – graphic artists" – but despite his best attempts, he failed to recognise the nascent "'national' or 'territorial' or at least 'continental', truly American art."⁶¹

In his reaction in *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, Bassin focused on the unclear context of the exhibition *40 American Graphic Prints*. The title of his article was "Why such graphic art from the USA?" which Bassin opened by noting that it was unclear who did the selection for the exhibition. Bassin brainstormed about potential better options of graphic arts presentations than the "meagre selection" presented in Ljubljana.⁶² His indignant question about how it is possible that Ljubljana, which crowned itself "the world graphic arts centre", was overlooked by three contemporary, representative graphic arts exhibitions that were shown in Europe that year, with one of them, prepared by the renowned visual art critic Gene Baro, even being on view in Belgrade.⁶³ He wanted a deeper, more studious insight. The same author concluded the exhibition year 1968 with another, somewhat unusual piece in *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, in which he first identified the problems in the structure of "spreading graphic arts culture here" and found that *40 American Graphic Prints* veered from the quality production seen at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts.⁶⁴ He also mentioned that the Slovenian side had allegedly already contacted the American cultural

59 Ibid.

60 Janez Mesesnel, "Med možnostmi in dosežki: Ob razstavi sodobne ameriške grafike v Moderni galeriji", *Delo*, vol. 10, no. 320, 22.11.1968, p. 5.

61 Ibid.

62 Aleksander Bassin, "Čemu taka grafika iz ZDA?", *Dnevnik*, vol. 18, no. 309, 12.11.1968, p. 10.

63 Ibid.

64 Aleksander Bassin, "Likovno pismo iz Ljubljane", *Večer*, vol. 24, no. 305, 31.12.1968, p. 10.

attaché in Zagreb to secure a promise that in the upcoming year, Ljubljana would once again be able to see “quality presentations of experimental graphics,” while Belgrade was to host a retrospective by Jasper Johns, a recent Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts laureate.⁶⁵

The graphic arts decades at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana closed with the exhibition *New Expressions in American Graphic Arts* (*Novi izrazi v ameriški grafični umetnosti*), which was open between 10 and 30 October in 1969. The brief exhibition catalogue tells us that 20 American artists were presented, and the selection was done by Una E. Johnson, the prints and drawings curator at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. In her accompanying text, the curator emphasised the “burgeoning vitality” along with the innovations related to experiments with colour and surface relief.⁶⁶

1.3 American Art at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts

The presence of American visual art at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts would warrant a separate chapter, so the multi-layered presence of Americans at this graphic arts event will only be introduced schematically, with the intent to paint a more wholesome picture of presentations of American art in Slovenia. The connections with the US art system were strong and branched out since the first editions of the biennial in the 1950s: American artists often exhibited there and won awards, and renowned American art professionals participated in the juries. Zoran Kržišnik established important collaborations with renowned US art institutions (for example the MoMA), as well as a series of private galleries (among them, Brooke Alexander, Inc.), graphic publishing houses (Pratt Graphic Art Center, Multiples, Gemini G.E.L. and Universal Limited Art Editions) and others. They either suggested artists for the American section (i.e. worked as consultants) or lent works for exhibitions.⁶⁷

The very fact that the first biennial in 1955 gave the Grand Prix to an American graphic artist, Armin Landeck, clearly shows in which direction it turned to seek its legitimisation. In the years that followed, many of the now very famous American artists appeared among the participants and laureates, debuting at the Biennale in the very beginnings of their international breakthroughs.⁶⁸ The fifth biennial in 1963

65 Ibid.

66 *Novi izrazi v ameriški grafični umetnosti* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1969.

67 One of the consultants was the often mentioned Von Groschwitz, who was a member of the international juries of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts in 1957 and 1961 and prepared the selection of 42 American artists for the edition in 1961. Noonan, 2025 (see no. 17), p. 280.

68 A cursory overview of American presence at the Biennial suffices to show the unbelievably current echo of contemporary tendencies in American visual art, with its

awarded Robert Rauschenberg, which indicated the gradual decline in awarding informel aesthetics at the biennial and the beginning of the rise of the Western European and American new figurative tendencies.⁶⁹ A mere four years later, in 1967, one of the awards went to Jasper Johns, which continued the trend of American new figuration. That year, the American section also introduced James Rosenquist and Larry Rivers and, at the end of the decade, another founder of Pop Art, Ronald Kitaj.⁷⁰

In 1969, the American section was mostly figurative art,⁷¹ with the exception of Frank Stella for whom this was the first appearance at the Biennale, and he also won an award. This announced new trends that led, via rational abstraction, to Minimalism and Conceptual Art. American artists brought new energy to the Biennale at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s precisely with Conceptual Art. The Belgrade-based visual art critic Ješa Denegri thus opined that some Conceptual Art pioneers, among them Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt and Antonio Dias, introduced a “lively, active component within the general physiognomy of the Biennale,” in its 1971 edition.⁷² It is also worth mentioning the first appearance of Edward Ruscha that same year.⁷³ In 1973, they were joined by Brice Marden and Robert Ryman, who was also the recipient of one of the awards. The second half of the 1970s seemingly aligned the American presence at the Biennale with the local discourse of primary painting⁷⁴ with the works of the American artists such as Fred Sandback, Edda Renouf, Mel Bochner and Robert Mangold.⁷⁵

most propulsive and renowned artists. This, in turn, poses a complex question of what the actual circumstances were for the best of the American visual art production to reach Yugoslavia, and the actual capacities for its reception by the local public. A more serious address of this question would require broader and more interdisciplinary research, so it will not be a subject of deep interest in this contribution.

69 See chapter “Oris umetniških premen na grafičnem bienalu med letoma 1960 in 1980” in Gregor Dražil, “Pomen in značilnosti ljubljanskega grafičnega bienala v šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih dvajsetega stoletja” (doctoral dissertation), Univerza v Ljubljani, Ljubljana (forthcoming).

70 Gregor Dražil, “Nagrajenci in premene likovne umetnosti od prvega bienala do leta 1977”, in: Gregor Dražil (ed.), *Premene v kanonu: Značaj in pomen nagrad mednarodne žirije na ljubljanskem grafičnem bienalu*, Mednarodni likovni grafični center, Ljubljana, 2020, pp. 60–61.

71 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69).

72 Ješa Denegri, “IX. Međunarodna izložba grafike”, *Polja*, no. 154, 1971, p. 11.

73 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69).

74 Tomaž Brejc, “Grafika v letu 1977”, *Naši razgledi*, vol. 26, no. 13, 1.7.1977, p. 341.

75 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69).

2. Travelling Representative Exhibitions of American Art: Between the Imperialism of the Cold War and the Consolidation of the Western Canon

The *American Vanguard Painting* (*Sodobna ameriška umetnost*; also known as *Sodobno ameriško slikarstvo*) exhibition was the first large-scale presentation of the most current production of the most privileged medium of modernism – painting – at the time. Because the extensive and representative overview of American painting of the 20th century, *Modern Art in the United States*, shown in Belgrade in 1956,⁷⁶ never made it to Slovenia, the exhibition *American Vanguard Painting* was an important event: it provided the local art scene with an insight into the latest American visual art production from the second half of the 1950s. When considering the influence of American art, an important fact is that the exhibition was shown in six other cities in Yugoslavia. It began its tour at the Cvijeta Zuzorić Art Pavilion in Kalemegdan (Belgrade), continued at the Art Pavilion in Skopje and at the Modern Gallery in Zagreb, and then in Slovenia at the Maribor Art Gallery (fig. 40) and the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, where it was on display between 11 December 1961 and 7 January 1962. It concluded its tour around Yugoslavia at the Gallery of Fine Arts in Rijeka.⁷⁷

Although the exhibition's custodian Jerome Allan Donson claimed, in the article that was published after the exhibition tour in *Art Journal*, that the exhibition was created on the initiative of Yugoslavia,⁷⁸ this is almost certainly not true. The exhibition was a typical American export product from the time of the Cold War, which the USA conceived with the intent of attaining the widest possible circulation through the European countries, both those that were already in the orbit of American influence and those that the USA wanted to pull into it.⁷⁹

76 The exhibition called *Modern Art in the U.S.A.: A Selection from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York* was prepared by the museum's then director René d'Harnoncourt, Dorothy Miller and Alfred H. Barr, who selected the works, and the execution was made possible by the US Embassy in Belgrade and the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, at the time led by Marko Ristić. It was a very extensive travelling exhibition of American art, with more than three hundred objects, which visited France, Switzerland, Germany, England, the Netherlands, Austria and also Francoist Spain before coming to Yugoslavia. Branislav Dimitrijević, "Iron Curtain Raiser" – An Exhibition of American Modern Art in Belgrade and its relation to 'Socialist Modernism' and 'Socialist Consumerism' in SFR Yugoslavia in the 1950s", *Different Modernisms, Different Avant-Gardes: Problems in Central and Eastern European Art after WW2*, Eesti Kunstimuseum, Tallinn, 2009, pp. 326–342. See also footnote 9.

77 Jerome Allan Donson, "The American Vanguard Exhibitions in Europe", *Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1963, p. 242.

78 Ibid., p. 242.

79 Besides Yugoslavia, where the exhibition visited the most cities by far on the entire tour, the exhibition was also supposed to go to Poland, but this never materialised. According to Donson, the agreement with Poland was not reached. Donson, 1963 (see no. 77) p. 242.



Speech by Branko Rudolf, director of the Maribor Art Gallery, at the opening of the exhibition *American Vanguard Painting* at the Maribor Art Gallery in 1961.

The exhibition was prepared by a group of experts, gathered in a committee chaired by the renowned art historian H. Harvard Arnason, the vice president for art at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.⁸⁰ The group also included John I. Baur from the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Adelyn D. Breeskin, the director of the

80 Ibid. We know Arnason primarily as the author of the famous overview of modern art and, thus, one of the founding authors of the canon of modernism, whose books were formative for generations of art historians. For example, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, which was often reprinted and translated into many languages. Emily Crockett and Lee Sorensen, "Arnason, H. H.", in: *Dictionary of Art Historians*, Duke University, Durham, URL: <https://arthistorians.info/arnasonh> (accessed 9.7.2025).

Baltimore Museum of Art, and Henry R. Hope from the Art Department at Indiana University, who was also responsible for the selection of the participating artists.⁸¹ The group selected 33 artists and, in the next phase, Arnason selected 84 of their works that they loaned either from the artists themselves or the collections of private collectors, museums and galleries.⁸² Jerome Allan Donson, the director of the Long Beach Museum of Art, then travelled with the exhibition and took care of the set up and the presentation of the exhibition in every city. Before the exhibition arrived in Yugoslavia, it was shown in Vienna and Salzburg and, before it returned home, also in London and Darmstadt. The fact that a whole third of the exhibition tour was reserved for Yugoslavia, and the rest generally allocated to the cities in the immediate vicinity of the Eastern Bloc is hard to understand as a coincidence: quite the opposite, it shows the clearly political, propaganda mission of the exhibition.⁸³

The exhibition presented 33 American artists or artists living in the United States, two of whom were women artists (figs. 41–45). A cursory look at the list of participating artists is very telling, because even an art lover who is not an expert can recognise most of them as eminent representatives of 20th-century art.⁸⁴ Both the selection of the artists and the mostly brand new works,⁸⁵ as well as the accompanying text in the catalogue that openly and in superlatives praises Abstract Expressionism⁸⁶ along with its ideological undertone, explicitly reveal that the exhibition was undertaking the mission of founding

81 Donson, 1963 (see no. 77), p. 242.

82 Ibid.

83 Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 70.

84 A look at the photo documentation of the exhibition as well as the list of the participating artists show the pinnacle of high modernist painting: Josef Albers, Milton Avery, William Baziot, James Brooks, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, Robert Goodnough, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Grace Hartigan, Hans Hofmann, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, Loren MacIver, Conrad Marca-Relli, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, David Park, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Milton Resnick, Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Clyfford Still, Mark Tobey, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Jack Tworkov and Esteban Vicente. See the exhibition catalogue: *Sodobna ameriška umetnost* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1961 and Folders 8192/1-/1-20/ and 8192/1-/21-40/, *Razstava Sodobna ameriška umetnost*, photographer unknown, Fotoarhiv, MG+MSUM.

85 According to the catalogue and photo documentation cited in footnote 84, it was a relatively unified selection of the production from the 1950s, with a few exceptions that were included to underscore the explanation of the development of the style with examples of the broader artistic and spiritual relations.

86 “[T]his exhibition doesn’t focus on those masses of recognised American artists that work in a more or less representational style, but instead showcases the most important experimental style in history – abstract expressionism.” Harvard Arnason, “Sodobna ameriška umetnost”, *Sodobna ameriška umetnost* (exhibition catalogue), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 1961, n. p.

a new artistic canon. The texts that accompany the exhibition don't lack megalomaniac statements, either, and they all testify to the propagandist orientation of the exhibition and reveal its ambitions. One such statement is in the already mentioned article by the exhibition's custodian, Donson, in which – immediately after the end of the tour – he compared the exhibition's impact on the European visual art scene with the impact that the *Armory Show* had on Americans in 1913!⁸⁷

The specifically defined focus and agenda of the exhibition *American Vanguard Painting* thus became a subject of substantial interest and curiosity, as well as the target of criticism, in the contemporary Slovenian and Yugoslav press. The commentators generally recognised something fresh and new in the exhibition, but they were not entirely sure what to actually make of what they saw.⁸⁸ For this reason, the responses often show attempts at addressing the stylistic groups into which the organisers categorised the selected artists, with the purpose of showing the development curve of Abstract Expressionism, with these segments being inconsistent, poorly defined and quite sparse in comparison to the dominant presence of Action Painting.⁸⁹ Wishing for a clearer definition, some critics attempted to reconstruct for themselves the line of development that led to the selection presented at the exhibition.⁹⁰ Generally speaking, everyone agreed that the exhibition was a first-rate cultural event that presented the works of “first-class painters” of the moment to the Yugoslav audience, but it seems that they all had some difficulties evaluating

87 Donson, 1963 (see no. 77), p. 242.

88 The Yugoslav visual art scene was, generally, very receptive to the most progressive innovations and knew how to read them really well. This exhibition thus showed them that the Abstract Expressionists were no longer truly contemporary; the novelties were in fact presented by the works of Rauschenberg and Johns. Lazar Trifunović, “Američko slikarstvo”, *Nin*, 23.9.1961, n. p. A comparison of expert responses to the exhibition in Ljubljana and London, which Djokic cites, testifies to this: “In contrast to the hostile reception of *Modern Art in the USA* and Abstract Expressionist works in countries such as Britain, where some critics had compared Pollock's abstractions to art created by animals, the Yugoslav reception illustrates a general acceptance and appreciation of US modern art. In fact, the influential art critic and painter Miodrag Protić even implied that the exhibition had successfully placed New York on the Yugoslav radar, replacing Paris as the leading point of cultural reference.” Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 67.

89 In the brief introduction to the improvised brochure listing the exhibited works in Slovenian, the following stylistic subgenres/segments are identified: Pioneers of the Modern Expression, Transitional Style, Lyrical and Surrealist Style, Action Painting, Mathematical Structure, Influence of Cubism, Action Painting Studying the Human Figure and Nature, Abstract Impressionism, Abstract Design, and Surrealist Exploration. Arnason's text for the exhibition was also translated into Slovenian and included in the Serbo-Croatian catalogues. Arnason, 1961 (see no. 86), n. p.

90 See Katarina Ambrozić, “Izložba američke umetnosti”, *Književne novine*, 22.9.1961, p. 5.



American flag above the entrance to the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, during the exhibition *American Vanguard Painting*.

the production beyond the propagated attributes of expression, freedom and individuality.⁹¹

This is obvious from the two longer reactions in the Slovenian press by Špelca Čopič in *Naša sodobnost* and Aleksander Bassin in *Naši razgledi*.⁹² Both have an expert grasp of the issue, but from different points of view. Čopič attributes the “inconsistency of selection” to the tendentious attempt to justify Abstract Expressionism, which, on the one hand, arbitrarily cuts off a large segment of contemporary painting production and, on the other, offers too few works by individual artists to convincingly justify the movement.⁹³ Bassin finds the selection even more problematic, based on the relatively hollow, formalist foundations that, in his opinion, do not enable true possibilities for artistic development.⁹⁴

91 Špelca Čopič, “Sodobno ameriško slikarstvo”, *Naša sodobnost*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1961, pp. 177–179.

92 Ibid.; Aleksander Bassin, “Evolucija, ki je zaman”, *Naši razgledi*, vol. 10, no. 23, 9.12.1961, p. 562.

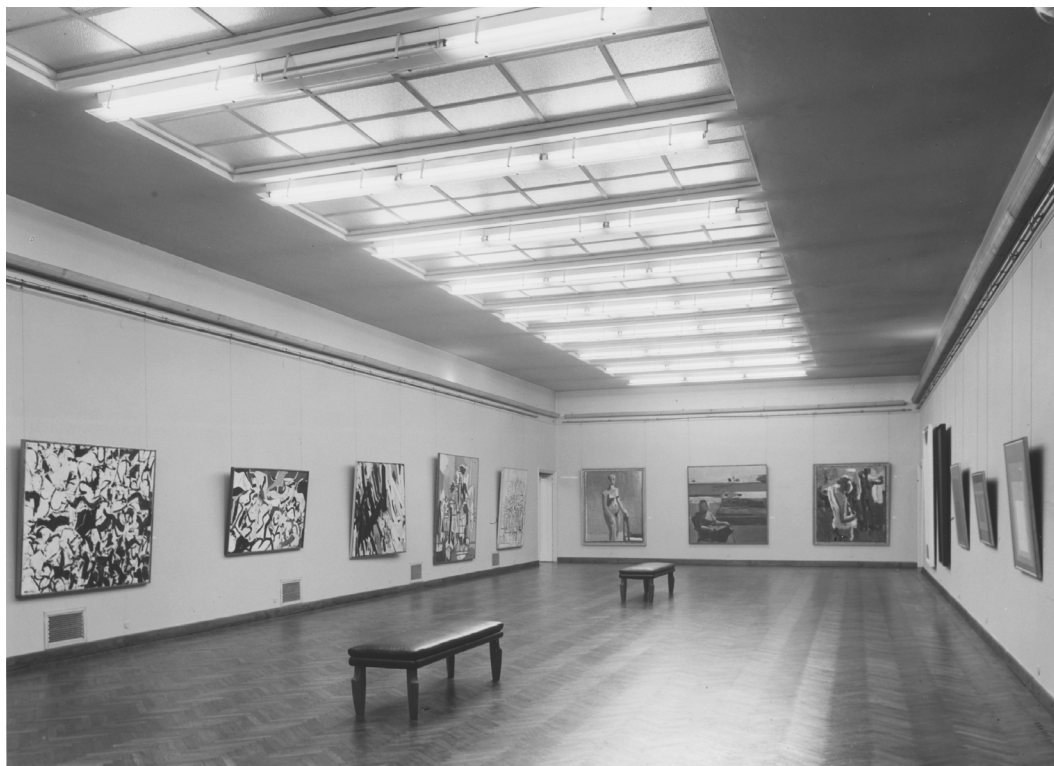
93 Čopič, 1961 (see no. 91), pp. 177–179.

94 Bassin, 1961 (see no. 92), p. 562.



42–45

Speech by Zoran Kržišnik, at the opening of the exhibition *American Vanguard Painting* in December 1961, and installation views of the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana.



What newspaper reviews show is that the central problem the Yugoslav critics had with the mentioned exhibition was that – unlike with the 1956 exhibition in Belgrade – it was not even an attempt to present a more wholesome image of American painting, but rather a narrow, new and extremely individually conceived “brand”. The Yugoslav expert public, familiar with the models of the Western art systems, was longing for as broad an insight as possible into their visual art production and the criteria of its evaluation, so it seems that the commentators felt slightly short-changed, expecting more comprehensive information.⁹⁵ This is not surprising as the painting production at the *American Vanguard Painting* exhibition lacked the context that would allow the expert public to evaluate what they had seen. It was a transplant from a completely different cultural climate and a system that was structured differently, so it is unsurprising that this transplant, despite the clear interest of the local art scene, was neither self-evident nor unproblematic. In this sense, we can understand the exhibition as an exemplary model of cultural imperialism, which, under the ideological assumption of the presumed universalism of cultural goods, imposed its own cultural products as self-evident facts, intended for uncritical consumption and imitation.⁹⁶

Similarly complex is the question of the reception of Pop Art in Yugoslavia, which was focused around the exhibition *Pop-art*. In 1966, it toured the cities of Yugoslavia, and it was, after the premiere in Zagreb and a presentation in Belgrade, on display in Ljubljana between 22 April and 9 May of that year. Although the Yugoslav visual art scene had been relatively well acquainted with the phenomenon of Pop Art for several years, it followed the exhibition, despite the divided reactions to the movement and its complex reception, with considerable interest.⁹⁷

95 Čopič, 1961 (see no. 91), pp. 177–179.

96 Vučetić, 2012 (see no. 1), p. 160.

97 Not only did Rauschenberg win an award at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts as early as 1963, with the Venice Biennale the following year, Pop Art became a subject of general interest, including among the Yugoslav cultural public. Besides, as Denegri states, the seminal book by Lucy Lippard on Pop Art from 1966 was translated in Yugoslavia that same year (that is, the same year as the exhibition) and became, according to his testimony, a cult book for the younger generation of artists. Ješa Denegri, “Pop-Art”, *Umetnost*, no. 15, 1968, p. 115. The Belgrade artist Olja Ivanjicki explicitly called herself a pop artist when she returned from her residency as a Ford Fellow in the United States in 1962. The critical responses to her work were generally negative and critically warned of the Americanisation of Yugoslav society, although the interest in her shows was significant. In the article by David Binder for the *New York Times* from 1965, Olja Ivanjicki stated that while the US pop artists get money for their work, all she gets are articles, despite the fact that the artist was, at the time, living and working in a studio paid for by the state. David Binder, “Pop Artist in Belgrade Finds Buyers (Sob) Scarce”, *The New York Times*, 24.10.1965, p. 85. This example is a colourful representation of the paradoxical attitude of (at

The exhibition was smaller in scale, consisting of 33 graphic works by 11 American artists who are today, without exception, considered the founders of the style.⁹⁸ Curated by the American critic Max Kozloff, it consisted of striking, colourful screenprints and a few lithographs, seldom of a large format (Lichtenstein) and typically with the recognisable imagery of American popular culture, advertising and consumerism.⁹⁹ Both the content and the organisational structure can be recognised as a symptom of the already mentioned US agenda of spreading their own cultural influence through soft-power strategies on the one side, and the openness of the local art scene to the influence of the American art system, which it held as a benchmark, on the other. In Ljubljana, the exhibition was displayed at the Museum of Modern Art, which preserves the correspondence between its director, Zoran Kržišnik, and the director of the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art, Miodrag B. Protić. The correspondence reveals that this exhibition also arrived in the country with the mediation of the US diplomatic channels and was – which is stated explicitly – financially supported by the US side.¹⁰⁰ But this time, its producer was not an American art institution, as was the habit before, but directly the American industry, more precisely, the Philip Morris International corporation. The exhibition also included a telling congruence between its visual content and its organisational background: some exhibited works included direct references to products by Philip Morris International, including the famous screenprint *Tobacco Rose* by the artist Mel Ramos (figs. 46–47).

Although we can follow the local reception of Pop Art in Yugoslavia several years before the exhibition, the immediate media reactions to its Ljubljana iteration are relatively scarce. The only notable contribution about it was published in *Ljubljanski dnevnik*. In it, Aleksander Bassin stressed that this was the first occasion for the audience to see a more comprehensive presentation of Pop Art, which tells us that audiences – at least the experts – were at least indirectly familiar with the new art movement. For this reason, he anticipated the response from the general public to range from “shock [...] to partial

least a part of) the Yugoslav art scene towards the system in which they lived and worked. Stefana Djokic, “Yugoslav Perceptions and Translations of Pop Art during the 1960s”, *Art in Translation*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2022, pp. 142–172.

98 Allan D’Arcangelo, Jim Dine, Allen Jones, Gerald Laing, Roy Lichtenstein, Peter Phillips, Mel Ramos, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol, John Wesley, Tom Wesselmann. *Pop art* (exhibition catalogue), Press and cultural service of the American Embassy, Belgrade, 1966.

99 Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 119.

100 Folder Pop-Art, Subfolder Korespondenca, “Pismo Miodraga Protića Kržišniku, 30.10.1965”, “Pismo Miodraga Protića Kržišniku, 22.2.1966” and “Telegram Zorana Kržišnika Generalnem konzulatu ZDA Zagreb, 19.5.1966”, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

46



47



46–47
Installation views from the exhibition *Pop-Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 1966.

acclamation or total negation.”¹⁰¹ He defined Pop Art as a (justifiable?) response to the hermeticism of Abstract Expressionism and its radical commercialisation. He underlined its sourcing from advertising imagery and sexual content and its leaning on drawing and collage. He praised some exhibited artists who surpassed the “average level”, whether as a testimony to a disoriented modern human or in “the new, pure symbolism” that was, for him, the most crucial contribution of the new painting genre.¹⁰²

However, from today’s perspective we could hardly count “pure symbolism” as the greatest contribution of the *Pop-art* exhibition, since, in reality, the show represented the most explicit case of the implantation of American ideological agenda into the Yugoslav public sphere via the format of an exhibition.¹⁰³ It seems that Yugoslav public officials largely agreed on this point and recognised, in the ideological node of the exhibition, its fundamental incompatibility with the

101 Aleksander Bassin, “Pop-art v ameriški grafiki”, *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, vol. 16, no. 113, 26.4.1966, p. 7.

102 Ibid. The question of the reception and influences of Pop Art on the Yugoslav visual art scene and the (non-)critical traits of this reception remain complex. See Branislav Dimitrijević, “Pop Art and the Socialist ‘Thing’: Dušan Otašević in the 1960s”, *Tate Papers*, no. 24, 2015, URL: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/24/pop-art-and-the-socialist-thing-dusan-otasevic-in-the-1960s> (accessed 30.6.2025); *Dušan Otašević: Popmodernizam: retrospektivna izložba 1965–2003* (exhibition catalogue), Branislav Dimitrijević (ed.), Muzej savremene umetnosti, Belgrade, 2003. Side by side with the Belgrade exhibition *Belgrade New Figuration (Beograjska nova figuracija)* from 1966, in Slovenia, we can mention a slightly later exhibition by Kostja Gatnik, Metka Krašovec, Lojze Logar and Franc Novinc at the City Art Gallery in 1970, curated by Aleksander Bassin. It introduced a new generation of artists, which the critics at the time labelled New Figuration or Expressive Figuration, who consciously included elements of Pop Art into their work. We must also mention that it was Bassin who coined the term Expressive Figuration and also became a promoter of this orientation of artistic research. Aleksander Bassin, “Vrenje med mlado generacijo”, *Sinteza*, no. 13–14, 1969–1970, p. 77; Mikuž, 1995 (see no. 2), p. 248; Ana Cebe Podržaj, “Razstava Kostja Gatnik, Metka Krašovec, Lojze Logar, Franc Novinc, Mestna galerija Ljubljana, 1970” (bachelor’s thesis), Univerza v Ljubljani, Ljubljana, 2025. See also: Zdenka Badovinac, “Ekspresivna figuralika mladega ljubljanskega kroga” (bachelor’s thesis), Univerza v Ljubljani, Ljubljana, 1985; Petja Grafenauer, “Slovenija in neuvrščeni pop: Ja i ti i moja coca-cola”, in: Petja Grafenauer (ed.), *Slovenija in neuvrščeni pop* (exhibition catalogue), Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Maribor, 2017, pp. 29–54.

103 Bassin was not alone, on the then Yugoslav scene, in omitting the ambivalent nature of Pop Art towards consumerist culture which it criticises but is also charmed by. The critical responses of the Yugoslav scene to the exhibition were often – but not without exceptions – overtly sympathetic. Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), pp. 123–125. The responses that highlight the socially critical dimension of the movement, but ignore its affirmative inclination to the excesses of the capitalist modes of production, are, mildly speaking, unusual if we consider the context of the then socialist country. Tanja Mastnak writes about the assimilation of the elements of Pop Art into Slovenian painting in *Koncept ponavljanja v moderni likovni umetnosti: Slovenske refleksije*, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, Ljubljana, 1988, pp. 60–64.

Yugoslav socialist doctrine.¹⁰⁴ Despite all that, just like many times previously, the Yugoslav art system turned out to be very susceptible to such influences: the exhibition was realised especially because of the persistence of the already mentioned director of the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art, Miodrag B. Protić.¹⁰⁵

For the third exhibition in this chapter, unlike for the exhibition *American Vanguard Painting* (1961/1962), the context was explicitly provided, but it never made it to Ljubljana. The exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 1979, titled *American Painting of the 1970s* (*Ameriško slikarstvo sedemdesetih let*), was a by-product of a more broadly conceived, ambitious and comprehensive project, originally titled *America Now* or *American Culture: A View of the 1970s*. The exhibition was prepared by the then newly established New Museum in New York under the leadership of its founder Marcia Tucker.¹⁰⁶ It arrived in Yugoslavia in its (more or less) original form and was displayed in Belgrade and in Zagreb as a multi-layered insight into different layers of American cultural production, while the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana only showed a part of it, the contemporary American painting output.¹⁰⁷ Simply looking at the exhibition publications, prepared for the Yugoslav audience in Serbo-Croatian, reveals the different levels of reading this project. In addition to the traditional catalogue of the painting exhibition, the comprehensive exhibition brochure titled *America Now* is more like a colourful pop-cultural magazine than an exhibition publication, as it is a puzzle made of colourful photographs with quotes from both high and popular culture, mixed without any hierarchy. After a brief introductory paragraph by the then president Jimmy Carter, a longer essay positioned American art of the 1970s into a wide network of contemporary social phenomena, institutional structures and *zeitgeist*.¹⁰⁸ The Ljubljana audience was alas deprived of this important part of the context (figs. 48–49).

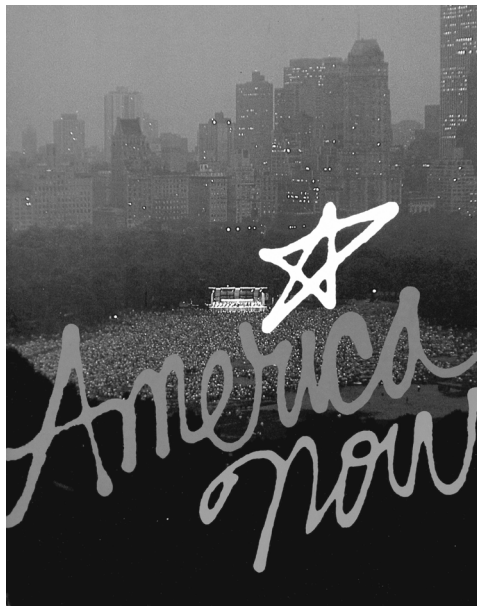
104 Stefana Djokic lists a document from the Archives of Yugoslavia, which has, in its margins, the refusal of the exhibition proposal by the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Considering that all the organisational aspects were taken care of by the organisers, the reason for the refusal was most likely ideological. Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 21.

105 Ibid., pp. 121–122.

106 Mara Gladstone, “Marcia Tucker and the Birth of the New Museum”, *Getty Research Journal*, no. 4, 2012, pp. 187–194.

107 The correspondence between curator Majda Jerman, from the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, and Thomas Craig, from the American Centre in Ljubljana, reveals that, after considering taking the entire exhibition, they only decided to take the painting segment after all. Folder Ameriško slikarstvo 1970tih let, “Pismo Majde Jerman Thomasu L. Craigu, 15.10.1979”, Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

108 Folder Ameriško slikarstvo 1970tih, “America Now, exhibition brochure,” Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.



The exhibition had only a few thorough critical responses in Slovenian media. Among them, two texts stand out: the review written by the art historian Tomaž Brejc in *Teleks* and the response by the visual art critic Franc Zalar in *Dnevnik*. Both agreed on the central shortcoming of the Ljubljana display, namely, the reduction of the broader exhibition project to a simple painting exhibition. It was this limitation that made it difficult to understand the specific painting production presented in the exhibition, and consequently, the justification for the selection.¹⁰⁹

Zalar's piece mostly attempted to place the Ljubljana selection into the missing context and to depict American culture of that time as "creativity without a certain concept, without a tangible style, a conglomerate of the most private thoughts and sensibility."¹¹⁰ But he also warned of a "certain calculation" that was revealed in the list of "semi-private and private galleries that contributed the exhibited works."¹¹¹ Zalar recognised the art in the USA created, in the first instance, as articles for sale, with their originality being only the most attractive of a series of marketing slogans, at a time of general evaluation of visual art's value(s).¹¹² "This is originality, individual visual expression, measurable in dollars – and nothing else."¹¹³ Zalar's reading of the exhibition is in many aspects very astute and, above all, very modern, regardless of it being perhaps motivated by a certain nostalgia for a time of greater visual "originality". His reaction in *Dnevnik* doesn't read like a sharp criticism; it's more like a reading of a certain *zeitgeist* in which "democratic and original" are mere stakes in the economic game.

Brejc's analysis of the exhibition went into a more expert direction. He used the selection on display to identify the shift from analytical and intellectual endeavours of the painting of the previous decade into "regionalism and pioneer mentality" as well as "private mythology, family circle, feminist representation, decorativeness and simplicity."¹¹⁴ In his opinion, the clear negation of the painting *métier*, typical of the majority of the presented selection, is a calculated deviation.¹¹⁵ The calculation that Zalar attributed to commercial interests, in Brejc's opinion, has an art-historical function of denying the seriousness and self-sufficiency of high modernist production. Brejc also provides us with the missing context for reading the exhibition, but

109 Franc Zalar, "Čas pop arta in nove abstrakcije", *Dnevnik*, vol. 28, no. 303, 6.11.1979, p. 5; Tomaž Brejc, "To bi morali videti, slišati, prebrati", *Teleks*, vol. 35, no. 43, 26.10.1979, p. 13.

110 Zalar, 1979 (see no. 109), p. 5.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Brejc, 1979 (see no. 109), p. 13.

115 Ibid.

a more specific, artistic one, formulated by the specific project of the New Museum and its mastermind, Marcia Tucker. This resulted in a slightly biased selection, the representativeness of which Brejc doubted, issuing a short pharmaceutical warning at the end of his piece: "Attention: use with caution!"¹¹⁶

3. Fragments of a Prettier Everyday: American Design Exhibitions

Alongside the exhibitions of painting, and particularly graphic arts, the field in which Ljubljana strove to become an important player, American creative output of the 1960s and the 1970s reached the Slovenian public also through different exhibitions of design. Ranging from posters to books and other everyday objects, these exhibitions were generally smaller and less prominent in the context of the exhibition policies of art institutions. Part of the reason can probably be found in the prevailing art doctrine of the time, which rested on the Kantian notion of "disinterested judgement" and regarded applied arts as inferior to what was considered "high art". Nevertheless, such exhibitions were, after graphics, among the most numerous. Indeed, the few more important Ljubljana exhibition venues featured at least six of them between 1959 and 1970.¹¹⁷

The first in the series was the *Modern American Applied Art* (*Sodobna ameriška uporabna umetnost*), which was shown between 20 March and 2 April 1961 in the small halls of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, and it presented design objects from the art school in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The exhibition was organised in collaboration with the Association of Artists of the Applied Arts from Ljubljana and the Information Service of the US Consulate in Zagreb, a fixture in organising American shows in Ljubljana. The archival materials show that the American side covered all the costs of the exhibition, in return for the free use of the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition halls.¹¹⁸ Judging from the few, but enthusiastic media responses, the exhibition achieved its goal and presented to the Yugoslav public artefacts of American design – together with the lifestyle that goes with them – as objects of desire. Janez Mesesnel's report in *Delo* tells us that the displayed objects looked very modern and were chosen precisely because of their above-standard quality. For this reason, Mesesnel – and probably other visitors to the Museum of Modern Art – couldn't avoid comparing the display with the almost contemporary exhibition of Yugoslav design at the same institution, which, in Mesesnel's opinion,

116 Ibid.

117 In addition to the exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana covered in this chapter, there were other exhibitions of American design at the Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre and (two) at the City Art Gallery. See footnotes 5 and 14.

118 Folder *Sodobna ameriška uporabna umetnost*, "Memorandum of Agreement, 17.3.1961", Dokumentacija-arhiv, arhiv, MG+MSUM.

was showing “all the shortcomings of the pioneering era: both the artist and his work are still searching for their place in society.”¹¹⁹

Between 1 November and 6 November 1967, the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana hosted the *American Books Exhibition (Razstava ameriških knjig)*, organised by the Vuk Karadžić publishing house from Belgrade, as a part of the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries’ programme. They presented over a hundred mostly scientific and technical publications. Although it was not a commercial exhibition, *Delo* invited interested visitors to contact the publisher for potential purchases.¹²⁰

We only have scant archival materials for the next two exhibitions. Regarding the exhibition dedicated to the American poster, all we know is that it was on display at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana from 22 February to 10 March 1968, but the exhibition *American Poster (Ameriški lepak)* in Novo Mesto has a brochure available.¹²¹ Although the brochure does not reveal the organiser, it is clearer about the participants in the exhibition and its scope. The star-studded list of participants¹²² includes four American artists who had their works exhibited at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts.¹²³ That, in combination with the exhibition essay that defined the poster as the application of graphic art in advertising, clearly indicates that the exhibition needs to be read in the context of the wider project of Ljubljana (and consequently Slovenia) as an international centre for graphic arts. The few newspaper reports of the Ljubljana exhibition tell us that the Novo Mesto version was simply a pared-down selection of the already non-extensive selection of posters, shown in Ljubljana.¹²⁴ The reports reveal that these were the posters the artist prepared either as announcements for their own shows or for other

119 Janez Mesesnel, “Ameriška uporabna umetnost”, *Delo*, vol. 3, no. 81, 24.3.1961, p. 6. The subject of comparison is the *DLUUUS Exhibition (the 6th Society Exhibition) (DLUUUS (6. društvena razstava))*, presented at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 1961, and later also at the Maribor Art Gallery and in Slovenj Gradec.

120 J. Sn., “Razstava ameriške knjige v Moderni galeriji”, *Delo*, vol. 9, no. 298, 2.11.1967, p. 2.

121 *Ameriški lepak* (exhibition leaflet), Dolenjski muzej, Novo Mesto, 1969.

122 The leaflet lists: Helen Frankenthaler, Jasper Johns, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, Alfred Jensen, Nassos Daphnis, Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Ellsworth Kelly, Charles Hinman, Bruce Conner, Nicholas Krushenick, Bridget Riley, Theodoros Stamos, Jack Bush and Friedel Dzubas. Ibid.

123 The explanation next to Frankenthaler, Johns, Motherwell and Rauschenberg even exclaims: “all of them exhibited at the world-renowned (!) Biennale of Graphic Arts 1969 in Ljubljana”. Ibid.

124 In the responses by Marjan Tršar and Aleksander Bassin we notice 31 artists presented in Ljubljana (Marijan Tršar, “Ameriški plakat v Moderni galeriji”, *Naši razgledi*, vol. 7, no. 7, 6.4.1968, p. 202; Aleksander Bassin, “Umetnik in plakat”, *Dnevnik*, vol. 18, no. 56, 28.2.1968, p. 7). Based on the invitation, only 16 were presented in Novo Mesto. *Ameriški lepak*, 1969 (see no. 121).

cultural events, and the commentators noticed the shift from typographical to distinctly visual expressiveness.¹²⁵ Along with the enthusiasm about the visual quality and the fluidity of the border between the commercial and artistic graphic prints, the commentary also indicated a wish for similar fluidity of relationship and the high level of execution in our country.¹²⁶

4. Reverse Views: Yugoslavs in the USA

Although the focus of this text is an overview of the touring exhibitions from the USA in Slovenia, it is necessary, for the broadest understanding of this phenomenon, to present, in conclusion, at least a sketch of efforts in the opposite direction. Like in previous chapters, our focus will be limited to the larger, more representative shows, organised on the highest institutional levels, by either the state or the art system, which culminated in the 1960s. The organisation of the touring exhibitions by Yugoslav artists in the USA was motivated both by the systematic efforts of Yugoslav foreign policy, which used cultural diplomacy to strengthen the international reputation and position of the country in its juggling between the antagonistic blocs, as well as by the persistent interest of the local art system.¹²⁷ The local art scene attempted to maintain continuity with pre-war production and preserve contact with the Western art system, from which it continuously sought legitimisation. It thus provided Yugoslavia with a version of high modernism that ideologically legitimised itself with the slogans of modernity, openness and freedom,¹²⁸ which the Yugoslav cultural diplomacy gladly accepted for its presentations abroad.¹²⁹ This “currency” was particularly handy in relations with the USA, which in the decades after the Second World War worked very hard to retain the

125 The exhibition almost certainly travelled outside Slovenia, as the press reports mention the exhibition brochure in Serbo-Croatian. Bassin, 1968 (see no. 124), p. 7.

126 Ibid.

127 Radina Vučetić made interesting comparisons between artistic production that the Yugoslav authorities sent to the USA and the artistic practices intended for exhibitions in the Eastern Bloc. Particularly poignant here are the stances of the artists towards exhibiting in one or the other bloc, as well as the sometimes surprising cultural identification of Yugoslav officials with the countries of the capitalist West. Vučetić, 2012 (see no. 1), pp. 158–159.

128 The exhibitions of the contemporary visual art production at that time were organised parallel with the exhibitions of Yugoslav Medieval art with which Yugoslavia also wanted to present itself as a country with a rich cultural tradition with its own, specific roots. Ivana Bago, “Yugoslav Fanonism in Three (Exhibitionary) Acts: 1950/1972/1989”, *igorzabel.org*, 2021, URL: <https://igorzabel.org/en/news/2021/Ivana-Bago-Fanonism> (accessed 30.6.2025).

129 Nadja Zgonik emphasises that this was not merely about creating symbolic capital, but also about the direct “monetisation of the Yugoslav marketing brand”: this would market its products more successfully abroad precisely under the slogans of progressiveness and modernity. Zgonik, 2021 (see no. 3), p. 34.

binary image of the world split between the free-thinking capitalist West and the oppression of the socialist East.¹³⁰

This does not in any way imply that the interest for exchange between the American and the Yugoslav art systems was not “genuine”; quite the contrary, it remained so until the end of the era that this text covers. From the 1950s onwards, we can observe a certain reciprocity in the exchange, with the first peak occurring in the intensive contact between the biennials in Ljubljana and Cincinnati. Thus, Gustav Von Groschwitz’s unplanned visit to Ljubljana and the deep impression that the first edition of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts left on him brokered the creation of the exhibition *Selections from the First International Exhibition of Prints, Held at the Modern Gallery, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia*, which, in 1956, presented to the Cincinnati audience the international selection of 84 works. The exhibition also marked the beginning of the intense international exchange between Von Groschwitz and Kržišnik, as well as Von Groschwitz’s participation in the international juries of the Ljubljana biennial, and Kržišnik’s reciprocal selection of Yugoslav artists for the Cincinnati biennial. In 1958, the Cincinnati Art Museum, only a few months after the last edition of the Cincinnati biennial closed, prepared the second in the series of Yugoslav shows, a selection of Yugoslav artists from the second edition of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts.¹³¹

A more complex context is reflected in the circumstances of the exhibition *New Painting from Yugoslavia*, which toured several US cities between 1959 and 1962, during a time of particularly tense Yugoslav–American relations and a tense global political climate.¹³²

130 On the genealogy of justifying the post-war Western liberal democracy in opposition to the totalitarianism of the socialist state systems, see Majaca, 2021 (see no. 8), pp. 125–134; on its implementation in cultural exchange, see Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), pp. 137–146.

131 Noonan, 2025 (see no. 17), p. 280.

132 The geopolitical moment of the early 1960s offers insight into the deep embeddedness of the exhibition exchanges in diplomatic manoeuvres. Tito’s surprisingly pro-Soviet speech at the Belgrade conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 caused a significant deterioration in relations with the West. These further deteriorated in the following years, with the Cuban Missile Crisis, so the cultural exchange was a welcome mechanism for smoothing tensions and the return of Yugoslavia into the American orbit of interest. Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), pp. 77–78. This is the context of both the American tour of *New Painting from Yugoslavia* and the Yugoslav tour of *American Vanguard Painting*, in the years 1961–1962, undoubtedly aimed at retaining American political influence in the country. The turbulent period of the early 1960s, the time of the greatest deterioration of the relations, is marked by Yugoslavia’s loss of the status of the Most Favored Nation (MFN). All this resulted in intensive US diplomatic efforts with which president Kennedy once again gained president Tito’s cooperation: this rapprochement can be seen in the cultural field with the awarding of the first Grand Prix of the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts to Robert Rauschenberg in 1963. Stefana Djokic places this in the context of preparing the ground for Tito’s visit to the US in October that year. (Ibid., pp. 39, 86–88).

The exhibition was organised by the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries – it was thus a conscious diplomatic effort on the part of Yugoslavia – in collaboration with the non-governmental, but politically important, American Federation of Arts (AFA).¹³³ The selection of artists, prepared by the curator Zoran Kržišnik, shows the common interest of Yugoslav visual artists and Yugoslavia's diplomacy to present the country in the USA with the most "progressive" art practices, particularly those that explored the different levels of abstraction.¹³⁴ Despite the high expectations and the great symbolic weight of the project, the exhibition encountered many logistical and organisational problems. Particularly disappointing was the lack of more representative exhibition venues, which greatly displeased the respected members of the Yugoslav scene who were very invested in the preparations, especially the curator.¹³⁵ From this fact, as well as from the reaction of the American commentators, we may conclude that the exhibition was far less successful in the context of the legitimisation of the Yugoslav artistic production and more successful in its diplomatic aspects.

For the next representative exhibition, entitled *Yugoslavia: Contemporary Trends, the Younger Generation* from 1966, the initiative came from the USA, courtesy of curator Herman W. Williams from the respected Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC.¹³⁶ The Yugoslav diplomacy enthusiastically welcomed the initiative, and its realisation was supported by the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries as well as the Yugoslav Embassy in Washington, DC. A very telling indicator of the interest of the Yugoslav side was the willingness to give Williams the autonomy in choosing the artists.¹³⁷ The result was an extensive sculpture and painting exhibition that toured in comparably larger and more important venues than the ones that received

133 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69).

134 Janez Bernik, Jovan Bijelić, Stojan Ćelić, Albert Kinert, Milan Konjović, Stane Kregar, Ferdinand Kulmer, Edo Murtić, Šime Perić, Zoran Petrović, Ivan Picelj, Marij Pregelj, Miodrag B. Protić, Gabrijel Stupica, Frano Šimunović, Josip Vaništa. See *New Painting from Yugoslavia* (exhibition catalogue), Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Belgrade, 1961.

135 Stefana Djokic quotes the correspondence from the diplomatic archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, which shows the animosity between the director of the AFA, Moyer, and Kržišnik, and the dissatisfaction of the latter because venerable American venues lacked interest in the exhibition. Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 144.

136 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69); Zgonik, 2021 (see no. 3), p. 35.

137 Four sculptors (Vojin Bakić, Dušan Džamonja, Stevan Luketić and Drago Tršar) and nine painters (Janez Bernik, Stojan Ćelić, Oton Gliha, Branko Miljuš, Edo Murtić, Mića Popović, Zlatko Prica, Mladen Srbinović and Vladimir Veličković) participated in the exhibition. *Yugoslavia Contemporary Trends, the Younger Generation* (exhibition catalogue), Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Belgrade, 1966.

the *New Painting from Yugoslavia* a few years prior.¹³⁸ Despite all that, as Stefana Djokic's analysis shows, this exhibition's real impact was its diplomatic success, with American critics remaining trapped in their own superiority complex when evaluating Yugoslav cultural production (fig. 50).¹³⁹

The end of the 1960s represents the peak of the Yugoslav visual art scene presence in the United States. Between 1967 and 1968, the exhibition *Graphic Art from Yugoslavia* visited eight US cities and venues.¹⁴⁰ This period also saw the establishment and subsequent closure of the Adria Art Gallery in New York, the only experiment of its kind, built around a direct and targeted attempt to place Yugoslav visual art production on foreign markets. Both the graphic arts exhibition and the gallery were the brainchild of Zoran Kržišnik, who, with his energy, vision and outstanding international network, worked for decades on the international activity of the Yugoslav visual art scene.¹⁴¹ The gallery was formally established by the Slovenian commercial company Intertrade as a part of its extensive export activities, with the general support of the Yugoslav authorities. It showed the American audience what the local scene recognised as the most representative practices of Yugoslav modernism. The gallery was shortlived, despite certain successes in promoting and marketing the practices of some Yugoslav artists,¹⁴² and there are several hypotheses about the reasons for its short lifespan (fig. 51).¹⁴³ In the context of the theses in this chapter, it is, considering the specific American ideological agendas in the cultural exchange with Yugoslavia, somewhat difficult to imagine that this "acceptance" would ever materialise. Regardless of the burning ambition of the Yugoslav visual art scene to be accepted as equal in the (Western) art system and its (relative) harmony with the efforts of Yugoslav diplomacy, the Yugoslav modernist production in

138 The Fresno Arts Center (Fresno, California), the Denver Art Museum (Denver, Colorado), the Portland Museum of Art (Portland, Maine), the Addison Gallery of American Art (Andover, Massachusetts) and the Milwaukee Art Center (Milwaukee, Wisconsin). Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 169; Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69).

139 Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), pp. 178–184.

140 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69).

141 For more about the gallery, the context of its establishment and activities, see Dražil, 2020 (see no. 3), pp. 44–52; Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), pp. 228–244; Zgonik, 2021 (see no. 3), pp. 30–43.

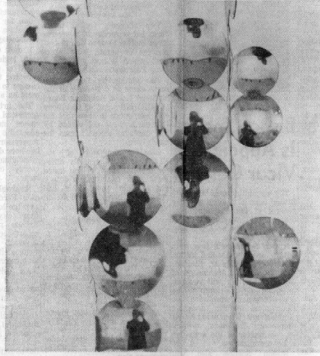
142 It nevertheless seems that the commercial and institutional success of artists such as Janez Bernik, Ivan Picelj or Jagoda Buić in the USA at the time was more a result of their previous engagement and the dynamic of the art scene than the Adria Art Gallery's activities. See, for example, Dražil 2020 (see no. 3), p. 31.

143 Several theses were proposed to explain the failure of the Adria Art Gallery, for example, Zgonik, 2021 (see no. 3), pp. 30–43; Dražil, 2020 (see no. 3), pp. 44–52; Beti Žerovc, "O kombinacijah: Zoran Kržišnik," *Likovne besede*, no. 81–82, 2007, pp. 24–31.

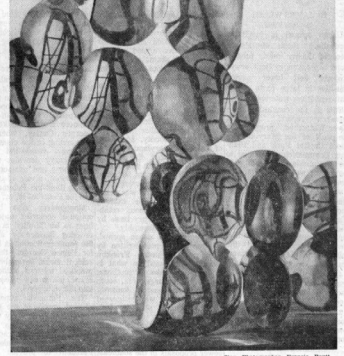
WASHINGTON, D. C., THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 1966



William T. Kennedy, assistant to the director of the Corcoran Gallery, peers through "Metal Sculpture No. 42" by Yugoslavian artist Dusan Drazmjanja.



The photographer sees his reflection through his camera's eye in the brass sculpture called "Radiant Form V" by Vojin Bakic in the exhibit opening tomorrow.



This is another of Bakic's works, this one called "Radiant Form VII," done in copper. The exhibit is the first of its kind since before World War II.

Corcoran Show of Yugoslavian Art to Stress Free Expression

By BENJAMIN FORGEY
Star Staff Writer

The paintings and pieces of sculpture in the Corcoran Gallery exhibit could have been done in New York, Paris or Washington. They were done, however, in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade.

The show of contemporary art from Yugoslavia, selected last summer by Hermann Warner Williams Jr., director of the Corcoran, will open tomorrow night.

This is the first group exhibition of contemporary Yugoslavian artists in this country since before World War II and it should cause a lot of people to rethink some

of the popular clichés about socialist realism, nationalism in art, and artistic freedom in at least one East European Communist country.

"As nearly as I could make out," said Williams, who spent six weeks in the Balkans last year, "the artists have complete freedom to do what they want to do."

"I rather thought that some sort of coercion would be there in a veiled sort of way, but it wasn't," he said. "There may be cliques, some artists may be in and some out, but you get that any place," said Cvjetko Job, press and cultural attaché at the Yugoslav embassy here. "I think the exhibit speaks for itself," Job said, "that and

the fact that an American came to Yugoslavia and chose the work he wanted to show."

"It's fantastic the number of public museums they support," Williams said, "especially considering how weakly strapped they are economically." Almost every city of any size has exhibition galleries financed by the state

and run by a commission of museum professionals, artists, critics and professors. The state also supports artists in a number of smaller ways, from the location and renovation of a studio, for example, to subsidy payments.

The exhibition, Williams says, makes no pretense of being comprehensive—rather

he selected what he thought were the best artists of the younger generation, those who have developed since the war. Consequently, abstraction rules the show. There are only two works that can be remotely considered figurative, Williams said. The works, he said, don't differ materially from what is being done by artists all over the world.

If the art is modern and international, however, tomorrow's night fête at the gallery will have a bit of the old Slavic flair.

It is rumored that instead of the usual grayish champagne punch, the black tie guests will be treated to a few belts of slivovitz, an age-proof drink which is about as old as Yugoslavian as one can get.

A newspaper report from *The Evening Star* about the exhibition *Yugoslavia: Contemporary Trends, the Younger Generation* at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, in 1966.

the final instance was evaluated as either non-genuine or as not of high enough quality.¹⁴⁴

The end of the decade was marked by the extraordinary presence of Yugoslav art in the USA with the exhibition *Yugoslavia: A Report*, conceived at the MoMa in New York by William Lieberman and Riva Castleman in 1969.¹⁴⁵ Smaller in scope but important due to the significance of the venue, the exhibition presented the works of 24 Yugoslav artists. It was supposedly created on the initiative of the Yugoslav government that suggested Lieberman prepare a presentation of Yugoslav graphic artists at the MoMA as early as 1963, when he was responsible for the selection of the American representatives at the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, where he also served as a member of the jury. However, the final selection was done by Castleman, following her extensive study trip through the

144 Stefana Djokic researched this problem thoroughly in relation to several Yugoslav art exhibitions in the USA. She showed that in case after case, the reactions of the American critics, even when they are positive, often end in lamenting the missing "authentic" (read "exotic") dimension of the Yugoslav visual art expression, along with offering the paternalistically affirmative evaluations of its congruency with international (read "Western") modernism, the standards of which they, as a rule, do not fulfil, at least not completely. Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3) pp. 155–166, 178–183.

145 Dražil, forthcoming (see no. 69); Djokic, 2022 (see no. 3), p. 237.

country in 1968.¹⁴⁶ The mentioned exhibition anticipated the end of the intensive period of representative exhibitions and, parallel to the changing geopolitical position of Yugoslavia and the US, announced different dynamics of the exhibition exchanges in the decades that followed.

Conclusion

The extensive corpus of Yugoslav-American exhibition exchanges from the time of the Cold War provides a privileged insight into the antinomies of the Yugoslav state and society, but particularly reveals the paradoxical and often delicate role that the visual art scene in socialist Yugoslavia played in articulating the common societal interest. The cultural exchange between the two countries represented a first-class performance on the diplomatic stage of the Cold War, through which Yugoslavia received, as we attempted to show in this contribution, outstanding artistic creations from the USA, where the centre of the Western art system had moved after the Second World War. The exhibitions that were the subject of our analysis represented clearly articulated artistic statements and deftly incorporated ideological premises. They were intended for consumption by audiences from a number of countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain who needed to be convinced into accepting the thesis of the binary division of the world and of American cultural superiority in this diagram of power.

For that same reason, Yugoslavia, seen as the least antagonistic to the USA – and, as a rule, also friendly – socialist country, received outstanding contemporary artistic creations. These ambitiously conceived and produced exhibitions were presented at reputable institutions and represented what was said to be the most advanced, free and individually oriented visual expression, free of any ideological servility. The Yugoslav art scene followed these exhibitions with great interest and saw them favourably, but it wasn't uncritical. The studied archival materials indicate that, as a rule, the Yugoslav cultural public was able to read the new artistic guidelines from the USA discerningly. At the same time, it expressed reservations about how these were considered in art historical terms, placed within a historical context and presented to the Yugoslav population as a *fait accompli*. Generally speaking, the Yugoslav audience also recognised the incompatibility of their ideological premises with the principles of the socialist society, but they were far less critical when accepting the general ideological values, on which the presentation of American visual art production was based. This particularly applies to the idea of the freedom of

146 Riva Castleman, "Spomini Američanov v Ljubljani", in: Vesna Teržan (ed.), *Mnemozina: Čas ljubljanskega grafičnega bienala*, Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana, 2010, pp. 91, 94, 95.

ADRIA ART GALLERY JE SHODILA

SLOVENSKA GALERIJA SE SEDI NEW YORKA

V sedemnajstem nadstropju nebotičniškega velikana na Madison Avenue v središču New Yorka je že nekaj časa odprta nova galerija Adria Art Gallery, v režiji podjetja za mednarodno trgovino Intertrade Ljubljana in s sodelovanjem ljubljanske Moderne galerije. Težko je po kratkem času, odkar je galerija odprta, govoriti o velikih uspehih. Na vsak način pa pomeni ta galerija prvi jugoslovanski podvig te vrste, veliko privlačnost za vse jugoslovanske slikarje, kiparje in druge upodabljajoče umetnike kot tudi za umetniške oblikovalce. Saj je bila vse doslej naša umetnost, vabljava za ameriškega ljubitelja in kupca, na obširnem ameriškem trgu neznana.

Zoran Križnik, ravnatelj Moderne galerije v Ljubljani, ki po večkrat na leto potuje v Ameriko, je o idejni podobi na novo galerijo dejal: »Proizvajalci kvalitetnih umetniških del se pri nas ne prestano vede, če bodo ali ne bodo upodabljajoči umetniki tudi materialno uspešni, morajo s svojimi stvaritvami najpo predstavi na tuj trg. Amerika je bila za nas doslej povsem neziskoriščen teren. Slovenci in Jugoslovanci smo sodelovali pri številnih razstavah, ki so pa ostale neziskoriščne.«

Nova galerija v največjem ameriškem mestu je namo živ izraz zvož pot našega kulturnega sodelovanja s tujino. V mladih imah zlati vse številne in kvalitetne sodelovanja naših zalobov in ugodnih tujih zalobov. Če smo v preteklih letih pogosto nespretno, tako rekoč naprosto kuka v svet in smo se zadovoljili že s ploščanjem ali vplivnostnimi polvalci, smo sedaj ubrali nova, modernija pota. Tudi kulturna dejavnost ima svoje ekonomsko in galerije na tujem, razen reprezentancijskih nacionalnih galerij, so pravi pravzaprav kulturna podjetja za prodajo umetnin. Po vrsti velikih mednarodnih nagrad, ki so jih slovenski in jugoslovanski umetniki dobili na mednarodnih razstavah, je v svetu močno naraslo zanimanje za umetnost naše male dežele. Žal pa se ne bi na tem velikem trgu enakovredno oh tu-ih umetnikov pojavljati tudi naš Bernik, Jemec ali Škafar?

Ideja se je razvila in začela dobivati svojo pravo podobo. Podjetje Intertrade oziroma njegova organizacija v New Yorku UNITED TRADE REPRESENTATIVES, INC je videlo v novo galerijo velika zafetna sredstva. Pri vsem tem pa je treba poudariti, da pomeni galerijska dejavnost le majhen del poslovanja tega podjetja.

»Zaenkrat so to le dolgoročne investicije« pravijo na Intertradu v Ljubljani. In se skromno pristavijo: »Za sedaj še ni mogoče govoriti o nikakršnem poslovnem uspehu. Za nas in za vsa jugoslovanska podjetja, ki delujejo na ameriškem trgu, ima galerija še poseben pomen. Američanom priča o visoki ravni naše upodabljajoče umetnosti in tako posredno povečuje ugled našega gospodarstva in naše države.«

»Adria Art Gallery je samo ena izmed stotin newyorških galerij. V ne pooredu bližnji naše galerije je vrsta drugih. To je pomembno, saj jo tako strokovnjaki in ljubitelji hitreje opazijo. Slovenskega bruka bo bržkone zmislilo sedemnajsto nadstropje, v katerem leži galerija. V New Yorku pa ni to prav nič posebnega. Številne znane galerije so prav tako kot naša skrite v višinah nebotičniških velikanov. Pomembneje je, da na naše razstave opazijo odziva v newyorških dnevnikih. Še pomembneje je, da dobe vabila val tisti, ki se za našo umetnost zanimajo.

Galerijski prostori so, kot nazorno dokazuje fotografija, lepo opremljeni.

Otvoritev razstave je pokazala pregled najbolj zanimivih jugoslovanskih umetnikov. Sledila je skupna razstava francosko-jugoslovanske tapiserije. Sodelovali so najvidnejši umetniki. Tej so sledile osesne razstave Bernika, Preglja, Slane, Džamonje. Pravkar je razstavljena sobodna jugoslovanska grafika, sledila ji bodo skupinske razstave umetnikov, ki jih veže skupna ideja in skupen cilj.

Ob vsaki razstavi izide lepo nastitnjen in zadosti obširen katalog. Na otvoritvi se zbere tudi do petsto ljudi, med njimi so številni ugledni kolektornarji. Marsikaka otvoritev razstave v značilnih galerijskih muzejih ostaja skromna — vaj kar se številu udeležencev tise. Velik obisk pripisujejo dobremu vremu, ki ga ima umetnost jugoslovanskih narodov.

Naše razstave so bile deležne tudi zelo lepih kritik v dnevnem in strokovnem časopisu. Nova galerija je torej vse prej kot prezirna. Med kupci je bilo doslej največ zanimanja za olja, grafiko in za našo tapiserijo. Nasloj vlada precejšnje zanimanje za našo uporabno umetnost, za drobno keramiko na primer.

Adria Art Gallery torej uremčuje svoj namen: postati prodajni prostor s izbranim programom in hili obsemen informativni likovni center za našo umetnost. Slike naših slikarjev nikakor nimajo nižje cene kot slike umetnikov drugih narodov.

Kratkotrajni obsej galerije na Madison Avenue je rodil že sadove. Velike ameriške galerije vidijo naša dela nekaterih naših umetnikov v svoje reprezentančne razstave. Doslej naših umetnikov niso upoštevali, ker jih niso poglimali in ker jim njihove slike preprosto niso bile dosegljive.

Ta galerija je je še prva stopnja na ameriškem kontinentu. Slovenski organizatorji smujejo naprej. Razmišljajo o podružnični newyorški galeriji v nekaterih drugih ameriških mestih, pa morda o podobnem podjetju v Kanadi in v južni Ameriki.

Upodabljajoča umetnost je v resnici universalna umetnost. Ne omejujejo je ne različni jeziki in ne različne abecede. Naši umetniki, ki so se morali dosejati zadovoljiti z rednimi kupci v drhavi — redki posamezniki z manjšerko sposobnostjo so tudi popelj z lastnimi močmi oevajali tuje kupce — se tako enakovredno izvršajo ob umetnike drugih narodov. Ne nasadnje je to za kvalitetne umetnike vabilivo je v materialnem pogledu. Hiralci in prezgodaj oslabljeni umetniki, ki za življenja komaj zbera denar za platina in barve in naslove sele po smrti, naj bi spadalji v zgodovinske romane iz popreteklosti.

In še enkrat: ljubljanski organizatorji ne morajo že vnaprej napovedati uspeha. Po njihovem mnenju so prvi meseci, prve razstave le litupanje in preskušanje moči. Prva stopnja na razsemen ameriškem kontinentu.

J. K.



GALERIJA V SEDEMNAJSTEM NADSTROPJU: slovenska in jugoslovanska umetnost za ameriško občinstvo

Article on the Adria Art Gallery in *Tedenska tribuna* in 1968.

visual expression, from which one was to draw conclusions on the freedom of the society that advertised such freedom. With that, the ideological effect was achieved. It seems that the entire topic under study revolves around a fundamental misunderstanding around the idea of freedom. The Yugoslav visual art scene, in its idealised perception of the USA as a realm of freedom, was in fact unable to see how the freedom of visual creation was guaranteed by the very system which didn't submit it to the market logic, a system in which art education was widely accessible and basic conditions of work for the artists and their contact with the audience was guaranteed – regardless of what the art market dictated. It seems that the protagonists of the Yugoslav art scene, in following what they perceived as a “developed” art system, overlooked this fundamental incompatibility between the idea of art and cultural production as a public good and its inclusion in the current of capitalist production.