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The Janus Face of Polish Cultural Diplomacy in Paris during the Khrushchev Thaw

Piotr Bolesław Majewski

Faculty of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, 20-031 Lublin, Poland; piotr.majewski@mail.umcs.pl

Abstract: The Khrushchev Thaw allowed Poland a slightly larger margin of freedom in its cultural exchange with Western Europe than it had since the end of the Second World War. In this newly relaxed political climate, two models of Polish cultural diplomacy emerged in the West. The first constituted the official foreign policy of Poland's communist authorities, while the other remained unofficial, relying on a network of contacts with Poland's government-in-exile. An examination of contemporary Polish art exhibited in Paris during the 1950s and 1960s reveals this dichotomy. The first type of cultural patronage was coordinated in Paris by communist representatives of the Polish Embassy. The second emerged in Paris within Polish political émigré circles. Its key proponents were the Literary Institute (Instytut Literacki), including the intellectual and artistic milieu of the monthly journal *Kultura* ("Polish-based Culture") and the Lambert Gallery (Galeria Lambert). State foreign policy, funded by the state budget and anchored in agreements between Poland and France on cultural cooperation determined the former, while the latter constituted an oppositional stance against the Eastern Bloc, deriving its strength from the resolve of Polish political émigré circles, their extensive network of sympathetic foreign contacts, and an understanding of the mechanics of the art market. The communist model sought to build a friendly image of Polish culture despite the apparent ideological rift between Eastern and Western Europe. The émigré approach stemmed from a refusal to accept the political division of Europe and involved searching the world of art for evidence of forces in Poland that opposed the political status quo. Finally, the patronage model adopted by communist authorities followed the state-imposed policy of favoring figurative art over Polish abstract art, whereas the model championed by émigré circles pursued the opposite strategy. It showcased unrestrained, spontaneous, and mostly abstract art. It evidenced an affinity for international trends in the art of the time, including abstract expressionism and, in particular, Parisian Art Informel. How can these two strands of cultural diplomacy co-exist? Which resonated more with international audiences?

Keywords: East-Central Europe; 20th-century cultural diplomacy; artistic networking; traveling art exhibitions; Polish artists in Paris; art and Khrushchev Thaw; modern art; abstract painting; soft power

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Poland's cultural diplomacy during the Cold War played an exceptionally important role in the artistic scene of Paris. This importance stemmed from the perception of Paris as the artistic capital of the world, the strong cultural ties developed between France and Poland in the interwar period, and the deep-rooted presence of Polish émigrés in Paris during the times of the partitions. In other words, Paris's significant role in Poland's cultural relations with Western European countries during its membership in the Eastern Bloc was inherited from earlier periods. The recognition of Paris as a source of modernist styles also held great significance, consistently influencing the artistic practice of Polish artists. They not only closely monitored the Parisian art scene but also actively sought to participate in international exhibitions, and did not hesitate to incorporate stylistic influences from the French capital into their work. It is important to note that this was not merely a one-sided

relationship. The opposite direction of influence—from Poland to France—should not be overlooked. However, it is difficult to speak of any symmetry in this regard. Nevertheless, Polish artists did, to some extent, contribute to shaping the French artistic scene, or at least certain aspects of it. In the context of the historical event mentioned in this article—the thaw of cultural relations between France and Poland as a result of political détente—one must, for instance, remember the French graphic artists who, in the early 1960s, expanded and shaped their "design awareness" during their studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw under the guidance of Henryk Tomaszewski. Subsequently, they transferred the philosophy of poster design learned in Poland to the French context, with it becoming a significant component of the artistic program of the Grapus group. Incidentally, this example aligns well with the concept of horizontal art history proposed by Piotr Piotrowski, which, in opposition to the hierarchical "center–periphery" relationship, considers the power and significance of centers other than those conventionally perceived as the "center" from the perspective of established historical–artistic analysis (Piotrowski 2008).

Artistic relations between Poland and the broader West took a different form during the heightened activity of the neo-avant-garde. As demonstrated by Klara Kemp-Welch, using the example of the international artistic group NET formed in Poznań in the early 1970s, a network of unofficial connections developed throughout the Eastern Bloc and beyond, escaping the control of the authorities (Kemp-Welch 2018, pp. 97–123). However, the tension between official and unofficial initiatives was not superficial, but rather deeply rooted in the mechanisms of the communist system. Using the same example of the NET group, Jarosław Jakimczyk demonstrated that the unofficial actions of Polish artists on the international stage came at a cost—they provoked the authorities to increase their vigilance, surveillance, and even repression of creators using specialized units of the Polish People's Republic's secret services (Jakimczyk 2015, pp. 164–241). These initiatives were perceived as illegal and even hostile to the state system. This example illustrates that the dualism of what was official and unofficial during the Iron Curtain era was not a theoretical construct, but rather based on real antagonism.

The focus of this article is on the Thaw period, when the dynamics of these multifaceted processes were gaining momentum. During this time, the foundations of new models of cooperation between Poland and the West were established. Furthermore, an unofficial cultural diplomacy developed within the circle of Polish political emigration, which, as evident from the aforementioned example, had no place in the country. For the reasons mentioned in the Introduction, Paris was, at that time, the arena in which these processes became exceptionally vivid.

Naturally, Poland's cultural diplomacy policy was deeply entwined with the fundamental conflict of interests in the global power structure resulting from the Cold War political divisions following World War II. Furthermore, the duality of Polish cultural diplomacy, observed here with the example of artistic Paris, had its origins in this polarization and, to some degree, reflected the conflict of two rival political systems. Needless to say, Poland and France were to a significant extent passively subordinated to the rivalry of the Soviet Union and the United States. It is worth noting that the Cold War conflict between the two superpowers extended beyond hard economic policies and military rivalry; it also played out in the realm of cultural diplomacy and the "battle of ideologies", which may reinforce the belief in the paramount importance of the Cold War clash between the Soviet Union and the United States on the global stage (Hillings 2005). Manifestations of stereotyping during the Cold War era, portraying the art of that time as a reflection of the rivalry between two superpowers, also found their place in art history studies[1]. However, an examination of the case study of Polish–French cultural rapprochement during the period of the political thaw confirms the view of Simo Mikkonen, Jari Parkkinen, and Giles Scott-Smith (Mikkonen et al. 2019, p. 1), which recognizes the important role of individual countries and their policies in shaping the dynamics of the Cold War and the stages of its escalation. In the realm of the official cultural policy with the West, Poland had a vested interest in good relations with France, as it allowed for the improvement of the communist

country's image after years of hostility and isolation during the Stalinist period. Moreover, maintaining previously existing cultural ties and recalling the history of mutual artistic connections provided a solid foundation for cooperation in other areas. On the other hand, France sought to establish good relations with Poland to pursue its main foreign policy objectives, which, as argued by Natalie Adamson, involved the expansion of French art, seen as a tool to strengthen France's position in the international arena and add nuance to the globally spreading influence of American culture (Adamson 2009, p. 74).

While American art was perceived in Poland primarily from a distance and its reception was subject to restrictions (Hopkins et al. 2021, p. 521), French art, even during the Stalinist period, was an important point of reference[2]. During the Cold War, American culture was judged harshly, most often in terms of a fallen bourgeois culture, and after the Thaw it was primarily described through the lens of its European presence. This distance is clearly reflected in the selection of texts by Polish authors on American art collected in an anthology devoted to the reception of American art in the literature of Southern and Eastern Europe during the Cold War[3]. On the other hand, French culture after the Thaw was a model against which, after the rejection of socialist realism, Polish artists sought to establish their own identity. This occurred despite the visibly fading modernism of Parisian origins and despite the Neo-avant-garde breakthrough already looming on the horizon, heralded by artistic movements initiated in the United States.

Direct possibilities for reactivating old cultural connections and ties between Poland and France were reopened after Stalin's death. During the Stalinist era, as observed by Anita J. Prażmowska, the Soviet Union almost had total control over the camp of communist countries in East-Central Europe, but after Stalin's death in 1953, it gradually weakened. As a result of the open criticism of the Stalinist period during Nikita Khrushchev's time, it took on a reformed and relaxed form, commonly referred to as the Thaw (Prażmowska 2014, p. 45). These political processes enabled efforts to fulfill the aforementioned cultural diplomacy goals of the Polish government in France. In this context, the fundamental question was as follows: to what extent could the message of cultural liberalization in Poland resonate in the official initiatives of Polish state patronage abroad? In other words, where was the boundary of tolerance in the context of the reformed but still regime-controlled Soviet influence?

At the same time, in addition to the official and Moscow-directed cultural diplomacy in France, primarily conducted through the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) in Paris, one must recognize the discourses and practices of cultural diplomacy among unofficial (but no less significant) actors, engaging in their own independent goals within the Parisian cultural scene, separate from the official position of the Polish government, primarily enacted through the use of "soft power rhetoric"[4].

The most influential force of this movement was the circle of the Literary Institute (Instytut Literacki) and the journal *Kultura*, operating in the suburbs of Paris in Maisons-Laffitte since 1947. The villa located there became the central hub for anti-communist Polish emigration, under the leadership of Jerzy Gierdoyć, who was swiftly recognized by Polish and Soviet intelligence as a dangerous dissident and an enemy of the Eastern European balance of power controlled by Soviet Russia. The center's mission was to fight for the overthrow of communist rule and a free Poland through a range of soft power tools, mainly by promoting free speech in the pages of the monthly journal *Kultura* and in other publications issued by the Literary Institute, which were deemed illegal and harmful by the authorities in the country but were effectively smuggled into Polish territory through various means. *Kultura* attracted a vibrant and influential community of Polish intellectuals and writers who were living in exile for political reasons. It is worth noting that within this circle was Czesław Miłosz, a future Nobel Prize winner, who in 1953 published *Zniewolony umysł (The Captive Mind)* at the Literary Institute. This work was a prominent pamphlet that was critical of the communist regime behind the Iron Curtain[5]. Józef Czapski, a painter and writer, was a regular contributor to *Kultura*. He was the author of *Na nieludzkiej ziemi (The Inhuman Land)*, a description of Soviet concentration camps, first published in France

in 1949. He also wrote numerous essays on literature and art, highly regarded both in exile and in Poland. Above all, he was a painter and an influential commentator on the Parisian art scene[6]. It was the circle of *Kultura* that turned out to be an alternative source of cultural diplomacy not just in literature but also in the field of art. In addition to the aforementioned artistic criticism featured in *Kultura* (by figures such as Czapski, Konstanty A. Jeleński and, in the 1960s, Andriej Nakov), between 1956 and 1964, the journal awarded a prestigious annual prize for artistic achievements to Polish creators in exile (or temporarily residing in the West). From mid-1959, a highly important element of the soft power of this community was the activities of the Lambert Gallery, which was opened on Île Saint-Louis, in the heart of Paris (Supruniuk 1998). Operating from then until the 1990s, which marked the period of political transformation in the Eastern Bloc, the gallery rapidly established itself within the influential circle and was recognized by Parisian critics as a venue for presenting modern art from Poland.

As a result, by the end of the 1950s, the Polish cultural policy in the capital of France assumed a bipolar, dual-centered form. It was generated by the cooperation of artistic communities and exhibition institutions supported by the Polish Embassy in Paris; however, within its scope, there was also activity from the most important center of Polish political émigrés, located in Maisons-Laffitte near Paris. In other words, with regard to Polish cultural diplomacy in Paris, we are dealing here not with one but two distinct forms: the official one, overseen by the communist government in the country and controlled by Moscow, and the unofficial one, supported and funded, to the extent possible, by the Polish government-in-exile stationed in London. The latter was directly stimulated by the Polish center of political and cultural emigration in Paris[7].

In practical terms (and in terms of influence), these actions are best assessed by looking at the exhibitions of Polish art that flowed into the French capital during the wave of the Thaw's cultural liberalization[8]. During the period of intensified pressure from the Stalinist system in Poland (1949–1955) due to political animosities, exhibition exchanges between Poland and France almost completely disappeared. Consequently, during that time, only Polish artists living and working in the West exhibited in the capital of France, while in Poland, only the aforementioned exhibition of French realism, co-organized by the French Communist Party, was shown. Meanwhile, new trends in Western art came to the fore: abstract expressionism, Informel art, and lyrical abstraction. This rapid "leap forward" from the perspective of a country cut off from the West, where contact with Western partners was not allowed and abstract art was considered forbidden, created a sense of inaccessibility and backwardness. As emphasized by Józef Czapski, the painful fact of the absence of Polish art on the Parisian art scene before the Thaw, during the heyday of non-geometric abstract painting in the West, stemmed from political and cultural isolationism (Czapski 1956, p. 27). This was the main reason for the non-existence of Polish art in international circulation at that time.

Compared to the several years of stagnation during the Stalinist era, the Thaw created a significant shift in the situation, leading to a rapid revival of artistic exchange between Poland and France. The opening of a new chapter in the exhibition of Polish art in Paris was initiated in 1957 with two official historical exhibitions: one focused on ethnography and the other on the avant-garde. The former entitled *Traditions et Arts Populaires Polonaise du XVIe au XXe siècle* (Cassou 1957b), showcasing Polish folk art, was inaugurated at the National Museum of Modern Art (Musée national d'art moderne-MNAM) in Paris in December 1957, in the presence of the Ambassador of the Polish People's Republic in France, Stanisław Gajewski. The French delegation included the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Education, and both governments lent their patronage to the exhibition. Promoting folk culture both at home and abroad has been a priority of state policy since the beginning of communist rule in Poland. At the same time, the Director of the Paris Museum, Jean Cassou, was no stranger to focusing on Polish folklore. It should be mentioned that one of the first Polish art exhibitions in Paris after the end of World War II centered on folk art and, just like the 1957 exhibition, it was displayed at the MNAM shortly before cultural relations

between Poland and France were frozen in 1949. Undoubtedly, Cassou's high regard for Polish ethnographic tradition contributed to the preparation of another exhibition on this subject at the MNAM in Paris in 1957, which was even larger and more detailed than the 1949 exhibition (Cassou 1949, 1957b).

As a side note, it is worth noting that Jean Cassou was one of the first to speak in Paris about the changes in Polish art during the Thaw. From his position as the Head of the National Museum of Modern Art and as a critic who visited Poland in early 1956, Cassou recognized the groundbreaking nature of the changes occurring in Poland before the first exhibitions reached the French capital (Cassou 1956). While in Poland, he discovered with some surprise that, despite the aforementioned isolation, Polish artists were well-informed about the issues of contemporary art. He found that he could engage in discussions with them about the same matters that concerned Parisian artists and that they exhibited a significant openness to what was occurring in the West. Observing and contributing to the "explosion" of Polish art exhibitions along the Seine, starting from its earliest manifestations in 1957, Cassou provided an ongoing commentary on the proposals of Polish artists. He also justified their distinctiveness and originality. At the same time, he systematically supported exhibition endeavors, remained open to discussions and the exchange of ideas with Polish artists and critics, and provided assistance in initiating and facilitating artistic connections. Moreover, he devoted a lot of attention to formulating theoretical reflections that accompanied exhibitions.

Jean Cassou is an example of an influential figure in French, and especially Parisian, artistic life, who greatly appreciated Polish artists. It is worth emphasizing that he supported efforts to promote Polish artists, regardless of whether they were backed by official state patronage or private initiatives. Cassou's neutral stance towards the Polish "dual patronage" in Paris was not isolated, but rather typical of most French partners collaborating with Polish artists and exhibition organizers.

Alongside the ethnographic exhibition from Poland in the capital of France, another point of reference emerged for the assessment of Polish art. This was due to the exhibition *The precursors of abstract art in Poland* (*Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne*) (Luba 2016). The exhibition received official patronage from the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Paris, and the honorary committee included figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Tristan Tzara. Julian Przyboś, the initiator and curator of the exhibition, initially sought its display with Cassou at the National Museum of Modern Art (MNAM). However, in December 1957, the exhibition was ultimately opened at the Denise René Gallery in Paris, which at that time was the most prestigious venue for discussions and presentations of geometric abstraction art along the Seine. Nonetheless, Cassou was involved in this exhibition: he delivered a lecture during the exhibition's opening and also wrote the introduction to the catalog. In his introduction, he attempted to indicate the historical conditions for the formation of Polish constructivism, marked by its precursors' desires to gain the right to independent experimentation, laying out the paths of transformations, consequences and continuation, and consequently defined their participation in the international avant-garde movement (Cassou 1957a, pp. 7–10). This exhibition, for the first time, retrospectively showed the activity of this artistic formation in Poland and paved the way for the intensive promotion of constructivism. In the official exhibition of Polish modern art abroad, this task was performed by Ryszard Stanisławski, the Director of the Museum of Art in Łódź, first at the exhibition *Peinture moderne polonaise. Sources et recherches* at the Galliera Museum in Paris in 1969 (Cieslewicz 1969), and then during subsequent exhibitions in Europe and the United States. Finally, these years of effort culminated in the exhibition *Présences Polonaises* at the Center Pompidou in 1983 (Czartoryska and Ouvrard 1983). The consistent and long-standing consolidation of the position of constructivists in the history of universal art, initiated in Paris in 1957, should be considered as one of the greatest achievements of official cultural diplomacy during the Polish People's Republic era.

In comparison to historical exhibitions, modern art posed a more serious challenge for state patronage; as a result of the Thaw in Poland, it developed intensively and, in essence,

congruently with the trends in Western European art. Contemporary Polish abstract painting in particular, akin to the French Informel and American abstract expressionism, although initially tolerated by the authorities, soon faced restrictions in official exhibitions both in the country and abroad. Moscow was displeased with the rapid reception of abstract painting characterized by *Informel* in Poland. It was too closely associated with abstract expressionism, which was interpreted as a soft power weapon of American international policy in the Cold War era. In any case, this diagnosis, as demonstrated by Serge Guilbaut (1983), was accurate. It was in the substance of their stance toward abstract painting that the most blatant disparity between official and unofficial Polish patronage in Paris emerged.

When observing the first exhibitions of Polish modern art in the French capital after the Thaw, one can still discern a rivalry between the two centers of patronage. One pioneering presentation of young Polish art on the Seine was the exhibition of Alina Ślesińska's sculpture at the Simone Badinier Gallery in January 1958. The sculptor was strongly supported by the Parisian *Kultura* journal. Shortly after the exhibition opened, Ślesińska received news about the *Kultura* award, and in the explanation for the decision that was published in the journal, it was written that "our aim was to support the individual initiative of a young and talented Polish artist whose exhibition took place outside the official circle of cultural exchanges" (Kultura Art Award 1958). Giedroić then recommended the exhibition's author move in artistic circles in London, where the sculptor embarked on an extended stay. In early 1959, an exhibition of the latest abstract paintings by Tadeusz Kantor took place at the Le Gendre Gallery in Paris. While this exhibition was organized through the artist's private connections with Western European collectors, it also received support from the Polish Embassy in the French capital.

The example of Tadeusz Kantor's abstract painting exhibition is extremely interesting. The exhibition garnered significant attention from French art critics, with the majority of opinions being favorable towards the Polish painter. The most characteristic excerpts from the reviews dedicated to this exhibition were reprinted in national journals to emphasize Kantor's success in Paris[9]. Indeed, many voices highlighted the distinctiveness and even originality of his canvases, but also their resemblance to the paintings that could be seen in Paris at that time. In response to the question "What does contemporary painting look like in Poland?", Jean Grenier, in "Siècle", replied: "Almost the same as in Paris." The critic argued that Kantor's painting was extremely relevant and contemporary. He saw in Kantor's works a reflection of the atmosphere of conflict, typical, as he wrote, of the state of society at that time. Denys Chevalier in "Aujourd'hui" emphasized that Kantor painted in an exceptionally moving and thoughtful manner. He characterized his style as precise, concise, and preserving the traditions of expressionism while avoiding verbosity and pathos. A reviewer in "L'Information" stated it plainly: "Kantor's paintings are a revelation. Here is undoubtedly a painter who expresses the seriousness, grandeur, and terror of our reality with exceptional force." The universalism of Kantor's message was also emphasized by a commentator of "La Nouvelle revue francaise", who identified in the canvases of the Krakow painter an individual expression of a collective drama. Michel Ragon was familiar with Kantor's paintings from the international exhibition of non-figurative art in Charleroi in 1958[10]. He described Kantor's painting of "powerful eloquence" as "morphological". He observed references to molecular structures in it, while also noting certain similarities to the work of artists like Gianni Bertini and Kurt Sonderborg, representatives of Informel art from Italy and Denmark. Ragon, who was one of the most influential critics of the mainstream at that time, followed Kantor's Paris exhibition and did not hesitate to call its author "a painter we will have to reckon with from now on."

The discussion of art criticism previously mentioned greatly contributed to the promotion of contemporary Polish art. Kantor's painting, although perceived as imitative by some, was perceived by most as a sign of a radical shift in Polish art towards abstraction. Kantor exclusively exhibited works painted in the Tachisme style, and some of them were explicitly titled *Informel*.

The exhibition of abstract paintings by Tadeusz Dominik in June 1959 initiated the activities of a key exhibition center associated with the political opposition in exile, the already mentioned Lambert Gallery (Supruniuk 1998). Kazimierz Romanowicz, the Head of the gallery, actively pursued press coverage, collaborated with Parisian critics, organized high-profile and well-attended vernissages, and published exhibition brochures that were distributed in large print runs worldwide. The initial phase of the gallery's activity, which coincided with the Thaw in the Eastern Bloc, opened up specific avenues for artistic exchange with the country, and at the time of its reopening to Western culture in Poland, the gallery became the primary outpost in Paris for Polish modern art; no other Parisian institution could compete with it in this regard. The main trend of Polish art exhibitions focused on young domestic art. Among the artists exhibiting in the gallery in the first years after the Thaw were Jan Lebenstein, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Teresa Pągowska, Wojciech Fangor, Roman Artymowski, and Wanda Paklikowska-Winnicka. However, it is important to underline that the gallery did not confine itself exclusively to showcasing Polish art. Supported by Konstanty Jeleński and Józef Czapski, the gallery presented exhibitions of artists from many Western countries, as well as from other countries behind the Iron Curtain, as well as from Asian, South American, and African regions. The gallery's profile, greatly shaped by Jeleński, deliberately encompassed the presentation of art from regions perceived as peripheral, less known, and unconventional. This was precisely how the gallery aimed to stand out in the highly competitive art market in Paris, and it successfully achieved this goal.

Jan Lebenstein's exhibition at the Lambert Gallery was particularly important because it was coupled with the Polish artist's success during the first edition of the Biennale de Paris, which took place in the fall of 1959. The Polish painter, exhibiting as part of the official Polish exposition, won the Grand Prix and received a creative residency scholarship in Paris. This success contributed to the international fame of young Polish art and also served as a broader promotion of the Lambert Gallery. The gallery skillfully leveraged Lebenstein's success and, in December of the same year, exhibited his gouaches as the Biennale laureate, thus effectively attracting the attention of critics and the wider public.

The exhibition of Polish painting at the Biennale de Paris, where alongside Lebenstein, artists like Stefan Gierowski, Bronisław Kierzkowski, Teresa Pągowska, Jan Tarasin, and Rajmund Ziemski exhibited, was perceived as a stylistically coherent manifestation of abstract art. It was recognized for sharing common characteristics with international art while also incorporating elements of Eastern European distinctiveness and "exoticism" (Boudaille et al. 1960). Following this success, in 1960, Konstanty Jeleński observed with satisfaction the subsequent editions of the "Polish season by the Seine" in the pages of the Parisian *Kultura* journal (Jeleński 1960). Covering both official and unofficial exhibitions, he emphasized the unprecedented nature of the influx of Polish art in Paris after World War II.

However, just when Jan Lebenstein achieved spectacular success at the Biennale de Paris and the Parisian critics acknowledged the Polish version of modern art, there was a shift in the official patronage's stance towards abstract painting from Poland. This change was prompted by political pressure to significantly reduce the showing of abstract painting at contemporary art exhibitions. Initially, this directive affected the art scene at home and subsequently influenced exhibition policies abroad, including in Paris. In line with its ideological principles, the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic made efforts to increase the exhibition of figurative painting (Jarosz and Pasztor 2008, p. 197).

This led to a paradoxical situation. The participation of a broader group of young Polish artists at the Biennale de Paris and Lebenstein's success created a period of heightened interest in Polish modern art in Paris. Painters practicing abstract art were particularly eager to be seen on the Seine. This fact immediately raised concerns at the Polish Embassy in Paris, leading to efforts to sideline abstraction in exhibitions, as it was perceived as a risky deviation from official cultural policies. In collaboration with national institutions, the Embassy supported exhibitions of figurative art or at least those in which abstract painting was balanced with figurative forms. The exhibition *12 modern Polish painters (Douze peintres*

polonais modernes), presented at the beginning of 1961 at the National Museum of Modern Art (MNAM), juxtaposed several modern painters with post-impressionist colorism (Cassou 1961). On the other hand, the official exhibitions of Polish art in Paris in the autumn of 1961, including the exhibition prepared for the second edition of the Biennale de Paris and the accompanying exhibition of Polish paintings at the Charpentier Gallery, were clearly dominated by figurative art (Stanisławski 1961; Zanoziński 1961, pp. 11–13).

In the early 1960s, the dual nature of the cultural policy in the field of art was already fully visible in Paris. The Polish Embassy effectively restricted the showing of abstract art at official art exhibitions. This move contradicted the expectations of the Parisian public but remained in line with the ideological directives coming from the homeland. In this regard, official patronage took a step back and contributed to a deceleration of "the Polish wave"[11]. On the other hand, the Lambert Gallery, serving as a stronghold of soft power for the Polish political émigré circles, since its inception consistently contributed to the growth and systematization of modern Polish art exhibitions in Paris. This was possible because the gallery operated unofficially, outside the purview of state institutions, allowing it to maintain its independence. Consequently, the Lambert Gallery became a reliable gauge of the actual, non-ideologically manipulated situation in Polish art, both in the initial years after the Thaw and in subsequent decades leading up to the fall of communism in Poland and across Eastern Europe.

Anita Prażmowska (2014) suggests that the developments in Poland may have been stimulated by a case of Yugoslav insubordination towards Soviet control. Yugoslavia had chosen its own path toward transformation, and its determination to pursue this vision may have inspired some communists from satellite countries to devise a "national road to socialism". Our understanding of the outcomes stemming from the "dual patronage" phenomenon described here can be enhanced by examining Poland's mutual relations with the Soviet Union and Western countries within the domain of soft power. The initially liberal tone of Poland's official cultural policy in France during the Thaw can be seen as an expression of Polish communists' desire to maintain a degree of independence from Soviet control. However, when pressure from the Soviet Union emerged, Polish communists had to seek a compromise in the form of actions that limited the excessive freedom of Polish creators who supported the Western European model and were reluctant to embrace the Soviet model of socialist realism generated in Soviet Russia. Within the circle of political opposition in exile, on the contrary, the most highly valued form of modern Polish art was that untainted by the ideology of socialist realism. It was regarded as a manifestation of the desire for freedom and a representation of Polish culture's affiliation with the West. As evident, Poland's cultural diplomacy during the Cold War evolved not only with a dual approach but also in various directions. On the one hand, there existed an official form that was highly dependent on the Soviet Union and subject to political censorship. On the other, the cultural diplomacy of Polish political émigrés, believing in the eventual defeat of communism in Eastern Europe, challenged the authority of the Soviet Union and emphasized that Polish artists were following their own paths in interpreting the universal values of the Western world. Thus, unofficial cultural diplomacy in Paris, as part of the Polish state structures in exile, created a foothold for assuming state initiatives after the fall of communism and the political transformation in Poland. Its strength lay in neither infrastructure nor its ability to finance large cultural and exhibition projects, something only the state patronage with significant financial means could afford. On the contrary, Polish emigration diplomacy operated with very limited financial resources and in simple housing conditions. However, its position stemmed from meticulously crafted soft power tools: the power of words and images, literary and exhibition activities, consistently developed political thought, and criticism of the status quo behind the Iron Curtain. It was a weapon that effectively undermined the one-dimensional and Moscow-directed narrative in the official cultural diplomacy of the Polish People's Republic.

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Notes

1 The book by Christine Lindey (1990) provides a good example by which the author contrasts two narratives, the Western one (represented primarily by the United States) and the Eastern one (developed behind the Iron Curtain), limited only to the Soviet Union, but at the same time, takes into account both the trends of official socialist realism and unofficial art of the former USSR.

2 Evidence of this can be seen in the organization of an exhibition in Warsaw in 1952 showing the trend of socially engaged French contemporary painting, intended to legitimize socialist realism in Poland. For information on this subject, see Zychowicz (2016).

3 Among the Polish-language texts from the discussed period, selected and edited by Filip Lipiński, in the anthology *Hot Art, Cold War–Southern and Eastern European Writing on American Art 1945–1990* (Hopkins et al. 2021), there were compositions such as Stefan Morawski's pamphlet, *Dwie twarze kultury burżuazyjnej w USA (Two faces of bourgeois culture in the* USA) (1953), two reports from the Venice Biennale (by Mieczysław Porębski from 1956 and Wojciech Skrodzki from 1964), and a text by Tadeusz Kantor entitled *Abstrakcja umarła, niech żyje abstrakcja–o sztuce informelu (Abstraction is dead, long live abstraction—on Informel* Art) (1957).

4 The concept of "soft power rhetoric" is expanded by Craig Hayden, but more in the context of communication studies than art (or culture) studies. See (Hayden 2012); cultural contexts of "soft power" are discussed (Chitty 2017).

5 For information about the publishing achievements of the Maisons-Laffitte community, see: Kostrzewa (1990).

6 Eric Karpeles has aroused international interest in the figure of Józef Czapski in recent years, publishing two extensive monographs on Czapski's life and artistic activities (Karpeles 2018; Karpeles et al. 2019).

7 It is also worth noting the periodic and partial financing of the center's activities from American sources, which clearly demonstrates its position in the political landscape of the Cold War. For information on this subject, see Jones (2018).

8 The phenomenon of Polish modern art exhibitions flowing into Paris during the Thaw and later is discussed in detail in the book *La Vague polonaise* (Majewski 2020).

9 The quotations and opinions from French art critics cited here are from articles published in 1959 in the Polish art journals "Życie Literackie" and "Przegląd Artystyczny", which compile all the favorable reviews about Kantor's exhibition. See (Krytyka zachodnia o Kantorze 1959), (Wystawa Tadeusza Kantora w Paryżu 1959).

10 This refers to the international exhibition of non-figurative art *L'art du XXIe siècle. Rendez-vous de l'avant-garde internationale,* presented at the Palais des Expositions de Charleroi as part of the World Exhibition in Brussels in 1958 (Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles).

11 The term "La Vague Polonaise" (The Polish Wave) was introduced by Michel Ragon, who observed the intense presence of Polish modern art in Paris during the late 1950s and early 1960s. He compared it to the Spanish Informel and contemporary Japanese art, which were also closely observed and commented on by French art critics (Ragon 1961, p. 8).

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