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**The Dissertation Committee for Catherine Julie Marie Dossin Certifies that this is
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**Stories of the Western Artworld, 1936-1986:
From the “Fall of Paris” to the “Invasion of New York”**

Committee:

Richard Shiff, Supervisor

Katherine Arens, Co-Supervisor

John R. Clarke

Jeffrey Chipps Smith

Jacqueline Barnitz

Ann Reynolds

**Stories of the Western Artworld, 1936-1986:
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by

Catherine Julie Marie Dossin, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation

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Catherine Julie Marie Dossin, Ph.D.

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As we all know, there are multiple stories of art. But even in the West, each country has its own story, especially when it comes to the visual arts in the second part of the twentieth century. The stories told by the French, the German, the Italian, and the American textbooks and museums differ greatly. Yet, the American story is usually regarded as the standard account: the common Western story against which we mentally contrast the Non-Western stories.

Without aiming at writing the *true* story of contemporary Western art, this dissertation tries to uncover alternative stories, interpret the differences, and explain how one particular view came to prevail as *the* story. Concretely, it examines four contentious issues on which the standard account is particularly challenged by other stories, namely the fracture of the Second World War, the shift of the artworld’s center from Paris to New York, the domination of American art in the 1970s, and finally the European comeback of the 1980s. Analyzing the different national interpretations of these events

and confronting them with empirical data (place, date, participant, etc.), the dissertation uncloaks enduring myths and reductive explanations. It highlights above all the role of dealers, collectors, curators, critics, and government officials in the way art is produced, received, and remembered. It also demonstrates how the shifting historical, economic, and institutional contexts continuously reshaped the story, the canon, and the viewers, so that what art historians have traditionally seen as stylistic shifts and artistic leadership appears rather as the result of forces that extend beyond the artistic creation.

Stories with less international recognition should not be dismissed in favor of an official story that would erode all differences and present us with a single – and thus deficient – perspective. Only through the consideration and analysis of multiple cultural and national perspectives can we understand the complexity of the artworld's dynamics. Ultimately, I propose a comprehensive yet critical art historical approach rooted in cultural history that would offer a solution to writing art history in an age of globalization that purports to eschew previous assumptions of nationalism and creative genius.

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Introduction

On my last visit to the Centre Georges Pompidou in June 2007, I found myself in a room devoted to Figuration Narrative, looking at artworks I knew but had never seen on the museum's walls before. As I continued on into other rooms, it became obvious that the institution's new installation was paying homage to numerous French and European movements of the last forty years, while reducing American art to just a few examples. European artists were emerging from storage at the expense of more famous American artists. Who said nothing interesting had happened in France since the death of Yves Klein?¹

A few days later, I went to the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris to see the new display of its permanent collection. There I was presented with a history of twentieth-century art from which American artists were absent – a presentation that strikingly challenged the common belief in the twentieth century as “The American Century.”

These two installations were not isolated cases of Eurocentrism. They are representative of the situation in museums throughout Western Europe. A year earlier, I was in Germany where I saw another story of twentieth-century art: Wols (Wolfgang Schulze) was a major artist, the equal of Jackson Pollock and Jean Dubuffet; Willi Baumeister, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Fritz Winter, and Hann Trier exemplified post-War abstraction; the kinetic constructions of the Zero-Gruppe artists and the figurative paintings of Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz defined the 1960s as much as European Nouveau Réalisme and American Pop art; Joseph Beuys was the dominant figure of the 1970s; and Anselm Kiefer's work was rooted in 1970s Conceptual art. The museums I visited in Cologne and Düsseldorf did not simply show a few local artists worthy of

¹ As I am writing, the Galeries du Grand Palais are presenting an exhibition of the Figuration Narrative (April 16-July 13, 2008).

interest; they offered a different perspective on the artistic developments of the second half of the twentieth century.

The same would be true in Italy, Spain, Austria, England, or Belgium; each country has its own story of contemporary art.² Even in the United States, the New York story differs from the Chicago story, which differs from the Californian story, the Southwestern story, and so forth.

This observation is not altogether new. In *Stories of Art*, James Elkins draws attention to the differences between the Western story of art, exemplified by Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* and Marilyn Stokstad's *Art History*, and its non-Western versions.³ But within the Western world, there are divergent narratives, as well. Their differences are particularly striking when it comes to contemporary art. To better understand the disparity between the Western stories, we can compare three textbooks devoted to twentieth-century art: Harvard Arnason's *History of Modern Art*,⁴ Karl Ruhrberg's *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*,⁵ and Daniel Soutif's *L'Art du XX^{ème} siècle: de l'art moderne à l'art contemporain*.⁶ The tables of contents of these books clearly show the variations among "national narratives" about the development of contemporary art.

Let me start with the US-based narrative, encapsulated in the following excerpt from its table of contents:

History of Modern Art by Harvard Arnason

Chapter 19: Abstract Expressionism

Chapter 20: Postwar European art

Painting and Sculpture in France

² For the purpose of this study, contemporary art will refer to the art produced after 1945.

³ James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴ Harvard Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, (revised by Marla F. Prather) 4th ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998).

⁵ Daniel Soutif, ed., *L'art du XX^{ème} siècle: de l'art moderne à l'art contemporain, 1939-2002* (Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 2005).

⁶ Karl Ruhrberg and Manfred Schneckenburger, *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Taschen, 2000).

L'Art Informel and Tâchisme in France
 Concrete Art
 Postwar Art in Italy and Spain
 CoBrA
 Painting and Sculpture in England
 Chapter 21: Pop art and Europe's New Realism
 Pop Art in Great Britain
 Neo-Dada and Pop Art in the United States
 Happening and Environments
 Europe's New Realism
 Chapter 22: Sixties Abstraction
 Post-painterly, Color Field Abstraction
 Hard Edge Painting
 Optical Painting (Op Art)
 Motion and Light
 Modernism vs. Minimalism
 Chapter 24: The Pluralist Seventies
 Conceptual Art
 Performance Art and Video
 Process Art
 Earth and Site Works
 Monuments and Public Sculpture
 Figurative Art
 Pattern and Decoration
 New Image Art
 Chapter 25: The Retrospective Eighties
 Neo-Expressionism
 Appropriation
 Graffiti and Cartoon Artists
 Installations
 Abstract Art

The American story opens with American Abstract Expressionism as the major artistic development of the post-War era. The next chapter covers parallel developments in France, Spain, Italy, Benelux, and England in the aftermath of the War. The chapter devoted to "Pop art and Europe's New Realism" begins with British Pop, moves to American Pop art, and ends with Nouveau Réalisme, despite that movement's having chronologically preceded American Pop art. The next two chapters, "Sixties Abstraction" and "The Pluralist Seventies," present a succession of movements that are either specifically American (Color Field Abstraction and Pattern and

Decoration) or that developed internationally but still are rooted in the United States (Conceptual art). There is no single chapter devoted to specifically European movements such as Arte Povera or Supports/Surfaces. Arnason's chapter on the 1980s opens, interestingly, with paintings by Baselitz and Gerhard Richter dating from the 1960s. *History of Modern Art* clearly sets up an apotheosis of American art.

One of Germany's proto-typical account starts on a very different course:

Malerei des 20. Jahrhunderts by Karl Ruhrberg

Chapter 10: Zwischen Aufstand und Einverständnis

Das Unbekannte in der Kunst

Abstrakte Kunst in Deutschland

Gegenstandlose Malerei in anderen Ländern

Wolfgang Schulze – ein deutscher Maler in Paris

Tachismus, Informel, Art Autre

Chapter 11: New York statt Paris

Malerei der Jahrhundertmitte in den USA

Die Reaktion auf den Abstrakten Expressionismus in Europa

Pop Art und Nouveau Réalisme

Der Realismus des Francis Bacon

Aspekte des Neorealismus

Chapter 12: Malerei als Denkspiel

Grenzüberschreitungen der Op Art

Minimalistische und konzeptuelle Malerei

Malerei von Bildhauren und Objektmachern

Chapter 13: Jenseits von Utopia

Malerei an der Jahrtausendwende

Instead of opening with American art, the German story begins with the situation in Paris at the end of the War, focusing on geometric and lyrical abstraction. The title of this first sub-chapter, however, refers to Willi Baumeister's book, *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (1947), thus placing the artistic development of the post-War era under German patronage. The second sub-chapter, "Abstrakte Kunst in Deutschland" is devoted exclusively to German abstraction, while the third sub-chapter considers non-representational painting in "anderen Ländern" (other countries).

Whereas Arnason's does not mention post-War German art, Ruhrberg gives preponderance to their work, granting an extra sub-chapter to Wols.

Another difference between these two national narratives lies in their depictions of the importance of Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and the Zero-Gruppe. The American story associates Fontana with post-War Italian abstraction, Klein with Nouveau Réalisme, and the Zero-Gruppe artists with 1960s American abstraction. The German story, in contrast, groups their works together as a European response to American art, thereby offering a vision of a continent united.

The main characteristic of the German story is its thematic approach, which emphasizes continuity in the history of art over ruptures – projects rather than national voices. Thus the sub-chapter on “Pop Art und Nouveau Réalisme” is subtitled “Fascination with Triviality,” and examines this tendency from Jean Hélion to Christo. Likewise, the sub-chapter on “Aspekte des Neorealismus” presents figurative tendencies from Bernard Buffet and Francis Gruber to Gerhard Richter and Chuck Close, while “Malerei an der Jahrtausendwende” considers the meaning and function of painting from Baselitz (clearly identified as a 1960s artist) to the present. Overall, the author portrays post-War art as being comprised of international movements in which German artists produced art of equal relevance to that of their American and other European counterparts.

Not surprisingly, the French narrative differs from both the German and the American:

L'Art du XX^{ème} Siècle by Daniel Soutif

Chapter 1: Mouvements et figures en Europe

Chapter 2: l'expressionisme abstrait et ses suites

Chapter 3: Fin de la peinture?

Chapter 7: Pop, minimal, conceptuel, peintres et peinture

Chapter 8: Avant-gardes en France dans les années soixante

Chapter 9: De Fluxus à L'Arte povera en passant par la Belgique

Chapter 10 : La conquête de l'espace

Chapter 11 : Mémoires et mythologies

Chapter 12 : Ceci n'est pas une photographie Chapter 13 : Naissance de l'art vidéo Chapter 14 : Sons et images Chapter 15 : Et si des femmes... Chapter 18: Retours de la peinture
--

The French story opens by discussing neither American Abstract Expressionism nor European abstraction. It begins instead with the end of militant Surrealism, the redefinition of abstraction, the late works of Picasso and Matisse, the realism of André Fougeron and Renato Guttuso, and finishes with Marcel Duchamp. Soutif therefore stresses the continuity between pre- and post-War developments, and asserts figuration and realism as distinctively post-War trends, unlike Arnason and Ruhrberg, who present abstraction as *the* post-War style. This focus on continuity and figuration is also present in his second chapter, “l’expressionisme abstrait et ses suites,” which starts with American Regionalism and ends with the return to figuration of Larry Rivers and Robert Rauschenberg.

The French story also diverges in its presentation of Nouveau Réalisme, which appears in the American and German books after American Pop art despite its chronological anteriority. The French book, conversely, examines the movement in a chapter titled “Fin de la peinture?” along with monochrome painting, Yves Klein, and the Affichistes. American Pop art is discussed at length in a subsequent chapter that also considers American Minimalism and Conceptual art.

Just as Ruhrberg challenges the belief that nothing happened in Germany in the 1950s, Soutif and his collaborators dispute the common prejudice against French art in the 1960s with a chapter-long presentation of the artistic creation in France during that period, from Figuration Narrative to BMPT and Supports/Surfaces.

Finally, unlike the American book, which presents the developments of the 1970s as international (or is it rather American?), the French story stresses the national roots of the

movements of that decade, as exemplified in the chapter titled “De Fluxus à Arte povera en passant par la Belgique.”

The differences in the stories told and the illustrations used cannot simply be dismissed as mere patriotism or historical opportunism. Beyond the expected preferential coverage given to their respective national artists, there are major discrepancies in the chronologic and thematic ways in which movements and ideas are presented. In the American story, Nouveau Réalisme follows Pop art, the 1960s and 1970s are dominated by American art, and Baselitz is a 1980s artist. According to the German story, Abstraction dominates Western artistic production until the 1960s, Wols and Bacon are major figures (if not *the* major figures) of post-War art, and Baselitz is a 1960s artist. From the French point of view, abstraction is just one of the post-War movements, the United States just one center of artistic production, and art movements are firmly rooted in their historical and geographical context.⁷

Such discrepancies are not surprising. Isn't reality simply a chaos of elements on which there can be multiple perspectives, as Nietzsche explained? Do not time and place influence the way we perceive reality? The events of the contemporary artworld will always look different seen from Paris, New York, or Berlin.⁸ Consequently the stories that developed in each of these cities differ from one another. While Nouveau Réalisme emerged in France in the 1950s, it only arrived in the United States in the 1960s. Likewise Baselitz, who had been active in Germany since the 1960s, only began exhibiting in New York only in the 1980s. The French, German, and American stories may diverge, but they are all valid to the extent that they reflect multiple

⁷ These empirical observations are corroborated by the systematic comparisons of illustrations used in French and American textbooks undertaken by David W. Galenson, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago. See: David W. Galenson, "The New York School vs. The School of Paris: Who Really Made the Most Important Art after World War II?," *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 9149* (September 2002).

⁸ I use the term “artworld” in reference to Arthur Danto’s essay. See: Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (October, 1964): 571-84.

possible perspectives on the events that took place in the artworld during the second half of the twentieth century. There is no one *true* story because there is not *a* correct way to perceive reality.

Yet, we have to admit that the American perspective is conventionally the one used to tell the story of Western art. When Elkins differentiates the Western story from the non-Western story, he presents the American story as *the* story of the West. Despite the challenges from other nations that I have outlined above, the American story remains dominant. It may not be *the* story, but surely it is the “official” one. The story we all supposedly know and against which we mentally contrast *other* stories as we encounter them.

This story tells how, after the hiatus of the Second World War, the center of the artworld shifted from Paris to New York. France, materially and morally ruined, had supposedly lost her creative power, and the United States had to take charge of the regeneration of modern art. Modernist innovation became henceforth identified as an exclusively American project. For decades, purportedly, nothing interesting came from Europe. In the late 1970s, this situation suddenly changed, when a new generation of European artists emerged. Like hordes of savages, Germans and Italians invaded New York with expressionist paintings. This flood of European art was warmly welcomed by American dealers and collectors who had grown tired of Minimalism and Conceptual art. The artistic influences that had been unilateral since World War II became a field of bilateral influences again, and the artworld exploded into multiple art centers. The pluralist era had started.

This story, however persuasive it is, is just one story among others. It represents only one particular (American) perspective on the events that took place in the West in the second part of the twentieth century. So what about the other stories? What about those who, like me, did not

learn art history through Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* or Stokstad's *Art History*? The (French) story I learned has clearly less international recognition, but is it therefore less valid? And the other stories: the German, the Italian, the Belgian and the British stories, are they also irrelevant? Should we discard the other points of views to only keep the official one? And anyway why is this particular perspective *the* story of the Western artworld? Has it always been? Will it always be?

Reflecting on these questions, Pierre Descargues, whose story is rooted in his Parisian experience, comments distraughtly on the irrelevance of his memories vis-à-vis the official story that resonated so powerfully from the United States:

Puis les historiens d'art sont venus et ils nous ont tiré le tapis sous les pieds. Non, ont-ils écrit, ce que vous avez vécu ne vaut rien. La véritable aventure a eu lieu aux États-Unis. Pas à Paris. Pas à Saint-Germain des Près, dans le périmètre qui allait de la gare du Luxembourg à l'Île St. Louis. Aujourd'hui je me souviens. Nous y avons été. On faisait le trajet à pieds. Pas du tout! insistèrent les historiens funéraires. Rien ne s'est passé à Paris. L'École de Paris n'a aucun intérêt. Ce sont des gens sérieux, les historiens. Et comme ils se copient les uns les autres, à la fin, le nombre impressionne. Fallait-il croire ça ? Que ce que nous avons vécu n'avait pas de sens ? Notre vie ne ressemblait pas à ce que les historiens avaient décidé.⁹

I do not believe that Descargues's experience is meaningless and should be discarded. I firmly believe it is an important part of history and that only by considering multiple nations' stories will we be able to reconstruct the story of the Western artworld in the second half of the twentieth century in all its complexity.

The purpose of the present project, then, is not to identify the *true* story of Western contemporary art. Its purpose is to uncover different stories, interpret their differences, and explain how one particular perspective came to prevail over the others and gained the endorsement of the art community as *the* story. This will allow us to recover the reality of

⁹ Pierre Descargues, "1945 à Paris: la liberté partout?" in Patrick-Gilles Persin, *L'envolée lyrique -Paris 1945- 1956* (Paris: Musée du Luxembourg, 2006), 24.

Western contemporary art – not as a stable truth, but rather as a network of factors that are, directly or indirectly, acknowledged in all of the national narratives of art history.

The goal of this project thus falls partly within the framework of the genealogical method of inquiry defined by Nietzsche in his *Genealogy of Morals*.¹⁰ The genealogy was Nietzsche's response to Plato's idealism, which the modern philosopher saw as the worst error of humanity, for it transformed ideas into real substances. What is good? What is evil? What is beautiful? For Nietzsche, such questions were irrelevant. What did matter were the material and symbolic conditions under which man constructs the value judgments of good and evil. Genealogical inquiry does not consider the nature of good and evil, but the construction and articulation of such categories. Instead of asking "what is the truth?" Nietzsche asked "why should we prefer the true to the false?" His genealogy studies the cultural construction of the content of a priori cognitive categories, as they are used to understand, symbolize, and control the facts of experience. If "history" is a cognitive tool to process and organize the data given by our perception, the historical question is not "what happened?" but "how did the people engaged in this event understand it?" Subsequent reception of Nietzsche's work, up to French Post-structuralism, shows that it constitutes a methodological shift from the event to its reception. Consequently, the historian's task since Nietzsche has been to identify the different ways in which an event was or could have been understood, and to what end that understanding was framed. The supposed objects of history are thus revealed not as facts but as points of view. History becomes stories of experiences and discourses on these events. There is, after all, no such thing as the center of the artworld, be it Paris or New York, beyond people's understanding

¹⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956).

of it and the discourses they create around that signifier. In other words, the center of the artworld exists only in the discursive field of contemporary art.

My project can thus be rephrased as my attempt to sketch the genealogy of the stories of the contemporary Western artworld: an investigation into the ways different participants understood the events (the facts of experience) that took place within the artworld's field during this period through an analysis of their discourses, with the goal of seeing what material factors are being subsumed under these discourses and their compelling national, international, transnational, and regional narratives.

To do such a genealogy requires an amplification of Nietzsche's essentially philological method – what we today call an archeology of the discursive field, a methodology defined by Michel Foucault in *Les Mots et les choses* (1966)¹¹ and *Archéologie du Savoir* (1969).¹² Following Foucault's method of inquiry for each discourse, I ask: Who speaks? In what context? To whom? What are the historical conditions that erase a discourse from memory? Or, conversely, what are the historical conditions that lead a discourse to be forgotten? I also look for breaks in the discursive fabric, i.e. moments when the official discourse changed, thereby revealing paradigmatic shifts, moments when the values and ideas of the artworld shifted. Finally, I look for what Pierre Bourdieu describes as instances of symbolic violence, when one idea is imposed over others to the point that it seems natural and legitimate, and thus a highly constructed narrative becomes naturalized as a proper understanding of facts.¹³ My goal in this procedure is to identify the agents in the artworld who were able to impose their arbitrary understanding of events onto others as *the* legitimate view.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses; une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

¹² Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction : critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

Following Nietzsche and Foucault, this dissertation proceeds as an archeological dig into the artistic fields in order to establish the genealogy of the official story of Western contemporary art. Concretely, it examines four objects of discourse that marked central reference points in the Western artworld's self-conception in that half-century, namely the fracture of the Second World War, the shift of the artworld's center from Paris to New York, the domination of American art in the 1970s, and finally the European comeback of the 1980s. These four events that happened in the second half of the twentieth century have been the object of varying interpretations depending on individual or collective perspectives. By exposing the polyphony of discourses on these events, confronting these national interpretations with facts, and finally identifying the instances of symbolic violence that these points helped to enact, my project recaptures the complexity of what Bourdieu called the field of art, and hopefully enriches our understanding of contemporary art with new perspectives and new questions.

As the visual arts of the second half of the twentieth century are already being relegated to the annals of history, it seems timely to pause a moment to critically examine the stories that have been told and that we continue to tell, for, as Bernard Ceyson noted:

L'histoire de l'art de ce siècle reste, malgré tout, à écrire. Celle que l'on nous a contée, que l'on nous a écrite et que nous écrivons encore (quand il arrive qu'écrire sur l'art c'est, parfois tout de même tenter de faire l'histoire) est une histoire de militants, une histoire de conviction.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bernard Ceyson, "La Tradition Française," in *Jean Bazaine* (Paris: Sirka, 1990), 9.

Chapter 1

“Véhémences Confrontées”: The Fracture of the Second World War

On March 8, 1951, Michel Tapié presented at the Galerie Nina Dausset in Paris an exhibition titled “Véhémences Confrontées,” which featured Camille Bryen, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hartung, Georges Mathieu, Jackson Pollock, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Alfred Russell, and Wols – that is, artists from all over the Western world who had in common a practice of lyrical abstraction. According to Tapié, these artists were engaged in a new adventure – an adventure into the *unknown*. Their art did not break simply from surrounding reality, but from the reality of art. In this venture, each artist was taking a different path. In fact, their art had nothing in common beyond the dramatic rupture it signaled from the past – hence the title, “Véhémences Confrontées.” As Tapié explained in the exhibition catalogue: “La plupart de ces peintres ne se sont jamais rencontrés et vivent dans des pays différents, ceux qui habitent à Paris se connaissent depuis peu, se rencontrent fortuitement et rarement et le dernier de leur souci serait de travailler ensemble.”¹⁵ Such profound differences among artists (despite an apparent stylistic unity) and lack of exchange are, to my mind, symptomatic of the situation of the post-War Western artworld. According to Marilyn Stockstad, the post-War era was characterized by “a persuasive sense of despair, disillusionment, and skepticism.”¹⁶ If everyone in the Western world felt despair and disillusionment, the feelings of the German people should, nonetheless, not be assumed to parallel those of the American or French. Each country

¹⁵ Michel Tapié, *Véhémences confrontées* (Paris: Galerie Nina Dausset, 1951), 281.

¹⁶ Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History Volume 2* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2002), 1034.

experienced the Second World War as destabilizing, but the extent and meaning of this rupture were different for each of them, as can be seen in the stories each country tells about it.

The first difference among the stories told by the Americans, the French, and the Germans, as well as the Italians, lies in the chronology of this fracture. For the Americans, the moment of rupture came in 1945 with the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. This event, as the Gardner explains, was perceived in the United States as apocalyptic:

World War II, with the global devastation it unleashed on all dimensions of life – psychological, political, physical, and economic – set the stage for the second half of the 20th century. The dropping of atomic bombs by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 signaled a turning point not just in the war itself, but in the geopolitical balance and the nature of international conflict.¹⁷

For the French, the end of the old world came with the invasion of France in 1940. For the Germans, the rupture took place in 1933 when Hitler and the Nazis took control of the country. For the Italians, the rupture is less defined since the period between Mussolini's coming to power in 1922 and the invasion of Italy by the Allied forces and the Germans in 1943 marks a long parenthesis in the country's history.

The second difference among these nations' stories concerns also the meaning of the new period initiated by the end of the Second World War. For Americans, it marked the beginning of the Cold War and the end of European supremacy. For the French, it heralded the triumph of modernism – “le développement planétaire d'une modernité esthétique, dont les principes pour l'essentiel, ont été formulés durant l'entre-deux-guerres” – and the realization of the “logique de la modernité, logique à la portée universelle,”¹⁸ of which Mies van der Rohe's architecture and Minimalist sculpture are the symbols. For the Germans, it signified the end of the “klassische

¹⁷ Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner's Art through the Ages Volume 2*, 12th ed. (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 1031.

¹⁸ Françoise Hamon and Philippe Dagen, eds., *Epoque contemporaine XIX^{ème} - XX^{ème} siècles, histoire de l'art* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 452.

Epoche der modern Kunst” and the “Zeit der Utopien und der geschlossenen Systeme,” and the beginning of a “neu gewonnen Freiheit, eines die nationalen Grenzen durchbrechenden, weltumarmenden Kosmopolitismus.”¹⁹ For the Italians, it ushered in modernization.

The Second World War fractured the history of art. This fracture, however, cannot be located in one specific moment or act of cultural significance. Each country has its own understanding of events, with opposing perspectives originating in varying experiences of the War. The following pages will trace the background against which the “Véhémences Confrontées” occurred – the separate experiences of the end of the old and the start of modern art in the dislocations caused by Europe’s second Great War.

1.1. THE DYNAMISM OF THE DARK YEARS: THE VISUAL ARTS DURING THE WAR

Although the rupture of the War is an important element in the history of contemporary art, the War itself is usually not discussed in art historical textbooks. In fact, the texts I have reviewed posit a hiatus in art-making from 1939 to 1945. Most of the stories end with Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), a symbol and a summary of what the War would mean for Europe. Ruhrberg, for instance, does not discuss the War as pertaining directly to art, but instead devotes a chapter to Picasso, “Das Gesicht des Jahrhunderts,” treating him as a transitional figure between the pre- and post-War periods.²⁰ Likewise, for Gardner *Guernica* stands as the only image related to World War II. It is, however, discussed in the section on “Art as Political Statement in the 1930s,” preceding an overview of the Great Depression that is illustrated by Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant Mother* (1935).²¹ Hitler and the War are briefly mentioned in relation to the immigration

¹⁹ Karl Ruhrberg and Manfred Schneckenburger, *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Taschen, 2000), 220-21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 210-18.

²¹ Kleiner and Mamiya, *Gardner's Art through the Ages Volume 2*, 1020-25.

of European artists to the United States.²² To take another example, the Stockstad's *Art History* (vol. 2) features only a textbox on "The Suppression of the Avant-Garde in Germany," in the section devoted to "Bauhaus Art in Germany," which introduces the students to the "Entartete Kunst" exhibition (1937) and Hitler's art policies.²³ None of the textbooks I have mentioned discuss the visual arts during the War, as if nothing happened between 1939 and 1945. Five years of the history of art disappear as the War gets lost between chapters.

If the Second World War fractured the history of twentieth-century art, did it actually halt artistic production between 1939 and 1945? Did galleries stop exhibiting, and critics writing? Is art production during the War period irrelevant? Shouldn't we consider what happened during the War if we want to understand post-War developments? I firmly believe that the events that took place during the War are essential to understanding the artworld in the second part of the twentieth century and therefore need to be examined more closely. But, of course, the experience of the War was different in each country. We will thus consider the War and its consequences consecutively for Germany, Italy, France, and the United States in order to set up the context in which artists, gallerists, and critics did in fact continue their respective labors.²⁴

1.1.1. The grand artistic vision of the Third Reich

After Hitler came to power in 1933, the situation for German artists became precarious: many not only lost their teaching positions, but were also denied the right to exhibit, sell, and even create works. Those of Jewish origin like Felix Nussbaum, who was murdered in Auschwitz in July 1945, were even denied the right to live. Max Beckmann lost his position at

²² Ibid., 1027-28.

²³ Stokstad, *Art History Volume 2*, 1097.

²⁴ In the limited framework of this project, I chose to only present the situation in these four countries of the Western world. Because of these limits I had to leave out other countries even though they were important to the genesis of modern art.

the Stadelschule of Frankfurt and spent the War in exile in Amsterdam, living quasi-underground, fearing arrest and deportation at any time. Paul Klee lost his chair at the Kunstakademie of Düsseldorf in 1933; he then flew to Switzerland, where he was denied citizenship, and spent the rest of his life tormented by fear and anxiety (he died in June 1940). After being dismissed from Dresden, Otto Dix withdrew from the public sphere – choosing *inneres Exil* – and went to Lake Constance, where, despite the interdiction on his work, he painted small landscapes that he could hide in his pockets. In February 1945, he was called back into service, and then imprisoned in France. Käthe Kollwitz lost not only the right to work, but also her studio and its contents in the bombings of Berlin; she died just a week before Hitler. Wols, who had immigrated to France, was interned as enemy alien by the French at the start of the War. Released in 1940, he lived in limbo in the South of France, unable to immigrate to the United States, threatened by the Germans with execution as an army deserter. Hans Hartung, who had long been living outside Germany, enrolled in the French *Légion Étrangère*, and lost his leg in combat.²⁵

However difficult the situation of both Jewish and non-Jewish modern German artists was, we should not conclude that no art was produced in Germany during the Nazi era. On the contrary, the art field was extremely active, as the visual arts played an important role in Hitler's vision. Conceived as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the Third Reich relied on the visual arts not only as means of propaganda, but also has an essential dimension of its cultural, social, and racial ideology, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated.

In September 1933, Joseph Goebbels created a Reichskulturkammer to overlook, inspire, and organize the artistic production of Germany. The first task of Adolf Ziegler, the director of

²⁵ Werner Hofmann, "Dans ma patrie, je suis contraint de me sentir comme un émigré," in Jean-Paul Ameline, ed., *Face à l'histoire, 1933-1996 - L'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/Flammarion, 1996), 88-93.

the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, was to “purge” the visual arts of its socially and racially unwanted elements. However, in the first years of the Third Reich there were no strict guidelines as to what style was or was not acceptable. Hitler, whose artistic sensibility was rather traditional, openly criticized Cubism and modernism in general, but he did not set up any rigorous artistic criteria. Until the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, Germany tried, in fact, to give herself the image of a modern country, and architecture was paramount in the Führer’s mind at that point. In addition, Goebbels enjoyed modern art and did not favor the idea of an official art. But, once the Olympic Games were over, Hitler started to pressure Goebbels to act more actively against modern art, arguing that modern art conflicted with classical values of beauty and with the noble ideals of work and strength that were at the center of the Nazi ideology. In response, the Propaganda Minister ordered the confiscation of 16,000 paintings from German museums, which were then either sold, destroyed, or put into remote storage, as part of the *Reinigung des Kunsttempels*. Goebbels also organized the “Entartete Kunst” exhibition, which featured 650 artworks considered exemplary of degenerate art. The exhibition, a masterpiece of propaganda that played upon common prejudices against modern art, opened on July 19, 1937, in Munich before touring Germany and Austria, after the *Anschluss* in March 1938. More than three million Germans and Austrians visited it, making it the first blockbuster exhibition.²⁶ A day before the opening of “Entartete Kunst,” “Die Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung” opened at the new Haus der Kunst in Munich. This grand show featured acceptable artworks according to Nazi guidelines. Between 1937 and 1944, eight exhibitions of German art would take place. If the

²⁶ Stephanie Barron, *Degenerate Art – the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991).

Nazi government ostracized modern artists, it actively supported those who like, Ziegler or Arno Breker, adopted a more classical or heroic vocabulary.²⁷

After the beginning of the War, the visual arts took on even greater importance in the Third Reich with the plundering of the occupied countries. As Lynn Nicholas explains in *The Rape of Europa*, the scope of German looting was unprecedented.²⁸ Never had art played such an important role in war, in terms of ideology as well as commodity. Art collections of Jewish collectors and dealers were seized. National treasures of occupied countries were taken to Germany for “safe-keeping.” The Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) roamed Europe confiscating degenerate artworks. Hitler, Hermann Goering, and other high Nazi officials collected art frenetically and rapidly acquired extraordinary art collections. Hitler’s ambition was to create in his hometown of Linz a museum that would house the masterpieces of humanity. Goering, more prosaically, enjoyed beautiful objects. By 1945, his collection counted more than 2,000 artworks, including 1,300 paintings that he had bought, selected from confiscated stock, or received as gifts. He actually left a wish-list with art dealers so that people would know exactly what to offer him. The commerce of art had rarely flourished so much. For officials in the Nazi organization, as Jonathan Petropoulos has explained, collecting art was both a way to emulate the Führer and a means to ground their newly acquired elite positions in the symbolic prestige of art.

Thus, contrary to common belief, art did not stop in Germany during the Nazi era; even if the purposes of its new collectors were dubious, the German art field had rarely been so active.

²⁷ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²⁸ Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1995).

1.1.2. The multiplicity and diversity of Fascist official art

Unlike Hitler, Mussolini had no interest in the visual arts and no precise idea of what Fascist aesthetics should be, hence the climate of artistic diversity that characterized Italy under his leadership.²⁹

Initially his artistic policy was orchestrated by his mistress, Margherita Sarfatti, an art critic and friend of artists, whose salon gathered Milanese intellectuals and artists. She was actively involved in the development of *Il Novecento Italiano*. Opposed to the metaphysic anxiety and intellectualism of the *Pittura Metafisica* and *Valori Plastici*, *Il Novecento* claimed a return to the grand tradition of history painting and the solemnity of a simple and clear discourse that did not reject the lessons of modern art. Sarfatti designated this grand and calm embodiment of modernism as *the* Fascist style. She thus convinced Mussolini, at least for some time, to support the movement. In 1923, during the exhibition which officially launched *Il Novecento* in Milan, Mussolini gave a speech, and in 1924 the movement appeared triumphantly at the Venice Biennale. In 1927, when the *Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Belle Arti* was created, the leaders of the group were granted important administrative positions.

Mussolini, however, also supported Futurism – a style very different from *Il Novecento* – whose radical modernist ambitions were congruent with the Fascist ambition to create a new society. Futurism and Fascism shared nationalist feelings and a cult of war, that they both saw as a set of hygiene measures aimed at purifying society. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti adhered to the Fascist party early on and remained an ardent supporter of Mussolini until his death in December 1944. His influence on Mussolini's artistic conception was thus as important as Sarfatti's. In

²⁹ Kate Flint, "Art and the Fascist Regime in Italy," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1980): 49-54. Philip V. Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture in Italy, 1919-1945," in Emily Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1989* (London, Munich: Royal Academy of Art/Prestel Verlag, 1989), 147-54. Fanette Roche-Pézard, "L'art italien pendant le fascisme," in Ameline, ed., *Face à l'histoire, 1933-1996 - L'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique*, 106-09.

1929, the Duce gave Marinetti a post at the Italian Academy of Art, thereby showing no favoritism between the forces of Il Novecento and Futurism, which both could be considered official art movements of the Fascist regime.³⁰

The situation was even more complicated since there were many other movements that also claimed to be Fascist. Among them was Il Selvaggio, a group located in Tuscany, which appeared in 1924. Ardengo Soffici, the theorist of the group, who had been an enthusiastic opponent of international modernism, promoted a national art that would bring back the power of Italian renaissance art. He called for a return to the Latin and Roman Catholic values, which he believed had brought glory to Italy and that he opposed to Germanic and Protestant values. Il Selvaggio thus appealed to the Fascists as a celebration of Italy.³¹

In Milan, there was also a group of artists around Atanasio Soldati and Carlo Belli, who practiced a style of geometric abstraction related to the rationalist architecture of Giuseppe Pagano and Marcello Piacentini that the Duce favored. Modern, precise, and mathematically constructed, this abstraction was encouraged by the Fascists and widely exhibited in the 1930s.

Until 1937, therefore, many styles coexisted in Italy, and, despite their differences, they all claimed to be Fascist and all received the support of Mussolini. The situation changed with Mussolini's alliance with Hitler. The Duce was particularly impressed by the "Entartete Kunst" exhibition, which offered a very clear cultural model. As the first racial laws were passed in Italy, Sarfatti, who was Jewish, fled the country. Deprived of her support, Il Novecento slowly disintegrated, although it was obviously the only style that conformed to the classical ideals recommended by Nazi propaganda. Il Selvaggio, which was openly anti-German, became an embarrassment for the Fascists, and found itself isolated in a pro-German Italy. As for Futurism,

³⁰ Anne Bowler, "Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism," *Theory and Society* 20, no. 6 (1991): 763-94.

³¹ Walter L. Adamson, "The Culture of Italian Fascism and the Fascist Crisis of Modernity: The Case of Il Selvaggio," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 4 (1995): 555-75.

it was clearly a degenerate form of art according to Nazi definitions, but it remained impossible to condemn it publicly because of its close ties with Fascism. The same was true for the geometric abstraction taking place in Milan. For the Fascists, the situation was intricate – the Italians could in no way follow the German cultural model without considerable alterations.

The polemics on art matters were so important, in fact, that they divided the Fascist party. In 1938, Roberto Farinacci created the “Premio Cremona,” an official art competition intended to support a realist style that would glorify Italy, il Duce, and Fascist values. His ambition was to create a “Fascist realism” modeled after the German realism displayed at the “Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung.” Interestingly enough, Marinetti was a jury member of the 1938 competition. In response to the “Premio Cremona,” Giuseppe Bottai created in 1940 the “Primo Bergamo” to present “good” art as opposed to the propaganda art featured at Cremona. These two competing events were both sponsored by the Fascist government, who did not favor either side of the quarrel.

Everyone in Italy agreed on the need for a clearer definition of Fascist culture, but no one agreed on what form it should take. Presented with numerous possible definitions of Fascist art, Mussolini never decided on one. Philip V. Cannistraro reports that in June 1933 Mussolini, pressed to make a clear statement about his ideas on art, declared: “Me? Nothing doing. It’s your job to worry about the artists. I know what I’m talking about. To supervise textile workers, construction crew and metal workers is easier than supervising painters.”³² As a result of this absence of definite guidelines, Italian artists enjoyed a certain freedom throughout the Fascist era, and this conceptual chaos somehow created a situation of unprecedented artistic diversity.

³² Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1989*, 151.

1.1.3. The black market, the Resistance, and tradition in Occupied France

After the invasion of France in June 1940, many artists and intellectuals had to flee. This was particularly true for the Surrealists, who were well-known communists and had, like André Masson, fought during the Spanish Civil War. But the majority stayed. For them, artistic life continued during the four years of the German Occupation and Vichy Government.

In fact, the art field had rarely been as active as during the Occupation. Artists seemed even more productive. At the Salon d'Automne of 1941, there were 2,447 artworks on display – a record number. Sarah Wilson explains this increase of activity in relation to the lack of other distractions, a distressed need to express oneself and communicate with others, and the return to favor of academic styles.³³ This increased activity did not slow down, either, as collectors were also buying more artworks. The Occupation of France actually stimulated the art market. As one of their first measures, the Germans devaluated French currency. This gave them extraordinary buying power, which many German officials used in their art collecting endeavors. In the economic context of Occupied France, art also became one of the rare outlets for anyone who had cash, from collaborators to black marketers. Artworks became regarded as highly desirable objects – safe assets in a very uncertain world. The 1941 to 1942 season was particularly good for the Parisian market. In that season, the Hôtel Drouot sold more than a million objects – a record. Buyers were particularly fond of Pierre Bonnard, Georges Braque, and Henri Matisse, i.e. established French artists.³⁴

The visual arts came also to play an active role in the French Resistance. Jean Moulin who, before the War had been exhibiting his cartoons under a pseudonym, and was thus familiar

³³ Sarah Wilson, “La vie artistique à Paris sous l’occupation,” in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Paris-Paris, 1937-1957 - Création en France* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981), 96-105.

³⁴ Georges Bernier, *L'art et l'argent - Le marché de l'art à la fin du XX^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1990). Gérard Monnier, *L'art et ses institutions de la renaissance à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

with the artworld, realized that an art gallery would be a perfect cover for Resistance activities. In 1942, following his advice Maurice Pons opened in Paris the Galerie de L'esquisse, which was used by the Resistance. In February 1943, Moulin created in Nice the Galerie Romanin (using his artistic pseudonym), which was run by Colette Pons. This cover was perfect since it allowed him to travel, meet people, and transport documents and objects. As Françoise Bertrand-Dorléac explains, the Vichy government, which controlled Nice, saw art as a-social and a-political. They controlled the content of artworks, but could not imagine artists involved in Resistance activities.³⁵ Covertly, the Resistance contributed to the liveliness of the art scene during the Occupation.³⁶

The dynamism of the art scene was reinforced by the relative freedom artists enjoyed. The Germans tolerated in France the kind of art and artists that were condemned as degenerate at home. Hitler did not care about the moral purity of the French, and the Nazi officials who vacationed in Paris actually enjoyed its immorality. Unless the work was obviously anti-German or the artist Jewish or communist, German censorship in France was rather lax. As for the Vichy Government, its art policy was not particularly strict either. Maréchal Pétain himself was in favor of a traditional, sentimental, realist style, but the visual arts were not his priority. French artisans were far more important as they produced useful and beautiful objects that could be sold and demonstrated the French savoir-faire. As a result, there was little official theorization of what art should be and no strong censorship.

Although there was no style imposed on them by the German occupants or the Vichy government, French artists spontaneously adopted a style inspired by Fauvism and Cubism, two

³⁵ Jean-Louis Panicacci, "Jean Moulin artiste, résistant, marchand de tableaux," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 68 (2000): 124-26.

³⁶ On a side note, Moulin's assistant was Daniel Cordier, who would later become a very important art dealer, as we will see.

styles which were widely exhibited in Paris during the Occupation. The Salon d'Automne 1943, for instance, organized an important retrospective of Braque's work. Braque and Matisse, who had remained in France, became the models for the younger generation in these precarious times – the symbol of better times and of a French culture that needed to be preserved. Thus, the works exhibited in the famous “20 jeunes peintres de tradition française,” which opened on May 10, 1941, at the Galerie Braun in Paris, featured the Cubist grid and the Fauvist palette. Young artists were not interested in abstraction or Surrealism. These styles were too international to have a symbolic power in Occupied France, and their main practitioners had fled. The interest of the young artists went rather to Romanesque art as a second source for inspiration. Pierre Francastel had drawn public attention to this French tradition with the publication of his *Humanisme Roman* in 1942, a polemic response to the formalism of German art history. Besides, as Sarah Wilson indicates, the Romanesque rooms were also the only exhibition rooms opened in the Louvre during the War. The works of young French artists, like Jean Bazaine, Maurice Estèves, and Alfred Manessier, thus operated to create a synthesis between French modernity and French tradition, in a soft and spiritual language that could pass censorship and that reflected the uncertainty of the period.³⁷ This was a visual language whose goals were similar to the one Louis Aragon created in his war poems.³⁸

While the Occupation stimulated the Parisian art market, it thus overall led the artists and art historians to cling to threatened French traditions. It is indeed during the War that Bernard Dorival wrote both his volumes on French painting and his three volumes on the *Etapas de la*

³⁷ Sarah Wilson, “Les peintres de tradition française,” in Hulten, ed., *Paris-Paris, 1937-1957 - Création en France*, 106-15. Michèle C. Cone, ““Abstract” Art as a Veil: Tricolor Painting in Vichy France, 1940-44,” *The Art Bulletin*, June 1992, 191-204.

³⁸ See for instance “Plainte pour le grand descort de France” or “Chanson de recreance” in Louis Aragon, *Les Yeux d'Elsa* (Paris: Seghers, 1995).

peinture française contemporaine that were published after the War, in which he called for and defined an art growing out of French tradition.

1.1.4. The creative isolation of the New York art scene

In the United States, artistic life during the Second World War was also very dynamic without being hindered by the political or ideological issues that burdened other countries. Isolated from Europe and preserved from the worst of the War, the New York art scene bloomed.

From an economic point of view, the War finally ended the Great Depression, as the production of the American industry intensified with the War effort. After a decade of economic hardship, the Americans were finally earning money. The personal income of most Americans actually doubled between 1942 and 1944. But, because of the War economy, there were almost no consumer and luxury goods available for purchase. In this context of scarcity, art became an investment of choice for those who needed an outlet for the money they were making; artworks were safe investments in a period of global uncertainties.³⁹ Besides, as Serge Guilbaut has explained, the newly rich could use art collecting as a means to establish their newly acquired social positions.⁴⁰ Finally, many exiled Europeans had brought artworks with them to sell on the American market. As a result, the art market flourished in New York during the War. While the auction house Parke-Bernet had a turnover of \$2.5 million in 1940, in 1943 they sold \$6.15 millions in artworks, and, for the rest of the War years, annual figures would remain as high or

³⁹ A. Deirdre Robson, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag between Critical and Commercial Acceptance," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Routledge, 2000), 288-93.

⁴⁰ Serge Guilbaut, "Création et développement d'une avant-garde : New York 1946-1951," *Histoire et critique des arts*, July 1978, 29-48.

even higher. In New York, the sales of the 57th Street galleries also increased by 300% between 1940 and 1946.⁴¹

The American art field was furthermore enlivened by the arrival of European artists in New York. For American artists, who had long felt so isolated and remote from Paris, the arrival of the Europeans was a revolution. It was as if the art center was coming to them! Many major artists – Picasso, Miro, and Matisse – were still in Europe, but public figures – notably, the Surrealists – had left. The Americans discovered that they could stand shoulder to shoulder with the Europeans, who, seen from close-up, were actually not all that impressive. They were actually rather disappointing, stuck in old formulas, like Marcel Duchamp’s Dada intervention from the “First Papers of Surrealism.” For this exhibition organized by the European artists on October 1942, Duchamp created a labyrinth of strings in the gallery, which prevented the audience from seeing the works. This was funny, but not exactly new.⁴²

The arrival of European artists thus largely resulted in a boost of self-confidence for American artists. What really impressed them, rather than the artworks, was the Surrealists’ public attitude and skills at drawing attention. As Meyer Schapiro noted: “It wasn’t automatism that the Americans learned from the Surrealists, but how to be heroic.”⁴³ Following the example of the Surrealists, American artists would start to engage in polemics, writing manifestos such as the one published on June 1943 by Adolf Gottlieb and Mark Rothko in *The New York Times*, and shaping their public personae in the press, as they did with Nina Leen’s famous photograph “The Irascibles,” which was published in *Life* magazine in 1950. They thus fashioned themselves into the kind of public intellectuals that many European artists were.

⁴¹ Robson, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag between Critical and Commercial Acceptance," 288.

⁴² Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, IX.

While personal exchanges between American and European artists remained extremely limited during the War, Peggy Guggenheim invited a few local artists to exhibit in her Manhattan gallery, Art of the Century, alongside European artists. Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, William Bazotes, and Hans Hoffman – in other words the very artists who would later be called Abstract Expressionists – were featured in several group shows and even given solo shows.⁴⁴ To display young American artists beside famous Europeans in this way not only empowered the newcomers, it also provided symbolic validation to the American public that American art was important. Such confrontations could, in the media, even turn out to be favorable to the Americans, since Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Jean Tanguy, and the other Surrealists belonged to the past. The public was already familiar with their work, which had been presented in 1936 at MoMA in the retrospective exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” The young Americans appeared, in contrast, as interesting innovators. At a time when no novelty was coming from Europe, there was an appetite for new art that the American artists were able to fill.

The wartime absence of communication between Europe and the United States was beneficial to both American artists and critics. *Cahiers des Arts*, to which American artists used to cling for determination of what was important, and other such European art magazines were no longer coming to the United States. During the War, the voices of European critics went unheard. Yet new American collectors needed advice. There was thus a space to be filled – a space that young critics like Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg were eager to occupy. Greenberg began to write art reviews for *The Nation* in 1941. In the absence of authoritative European voices, American critics were able to develop their own arguments and criteria, and to find their own voices and audience. According to Dore Ashton, what made “Greenberg’s criticism

⁴⁴ Peggy Guggenheim, *Confessions of an Art Addict* (Hopewell: The Ecco Press, 1960).

important was [...] his willingness to speak firmly, and often with keen passion.” He was not afraid to say that Pollock was great and to defend his opinion.⁴⁵

The isolation of Paris resulting from the War gave the American dealers, collectors, artists, and critics the opportunity to free themselves from European models and to develop independently. Consequently, the War was a period of intense creativity in the United States.

1.1. 5. Conclusion

The Second World War did not stop the West’s artistic life. On the contrary, it stimulated it. These were prosperous years for the art market, as artworks became extremely desirable objects – as means to validate newly acquired social positions, as safe investments in a context of unpredictable inflation and deflation, as durable and expensive commodities for those who needed discreet outlets for their cash. Yet the importance of art was redefined not only in economic terms; art could also involve political stakes, as Hitler’s Germany and its collecting practices documented. Moreover, art was seen a tool of both propaganda and resistance. Style became in the public mind no longer simply a matter for formal investigation, but also for documentation of the adherence to a certain ideology. Concomitantly the international focus on modernity itself lost relevance, while tradition became the urgent question on all sides of the political spectrum.

From 1939 to 1945, artists most certainly did not stop painting, dealers exhibiting, collectors buying, and critics writing. They continued their trades with renewed intensity, for reasons both noble and suspect. If anything stopped during the War, it was the exchanges between individual countries. Artists, dealers, and critics continued working, but they could not see what their colleagues in other countries were doing. The only exchanges – like the infamous

⁴⁵ Dore Ashton, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 160.

journey of French artists in Germany in fall 1941 – were propaganda projects, and hence do not qualify as the kind of exchanges out of which artistic innovation grows. Finally, this absence of communication and the different situations within each country resulted in independent and singular artistic developments that were not always developments of what went before. While French artists developed a style based on the Cubist grid and the Fauvist palette, American artists took on the techniques of the Surrealists and German expressionists exiled in the United States.

Explanation of the different paths each nation's visual arts took after the War involves, in no small part, recounting local experiences of the War – making these narratives necessary in any account of contemporary art. Without knowledge and understanding of what happened during the War, we cannot understand post-War developments in the artworld; thus, it is clearly necessary to supplement the standard textbook accounts that I summarized in my introduction.

1.2. DIFFERENT PRIORITIES: THE VISUAL ARTS AT THE END OF THE WAR

Not surprisingly, the experience of the War is what would also motivate the ambitions and discussions of post-War visual arts. Since the experience of each country was different, their post-War priorities were also different. This is, however, something that the textbooks rarely take into consideration in their post-War narratives. If they draw a line between the victorious United States and war-ravaged Europe, they do not clearly distinguish among European countries. Yet, the situation of Germany in the aftermath of the War cannot be compared with the situations in France and Italy. To set the terms for understanding post-War artistic developments, we need first to examine the specific position of each country at the end of the War, and how these positions resulted in particular and different priorities in art matters. Let me again address each country separately to characterize the contexts in which new art practices would arise.

1.2.1. Rebuilding and re-educating Germany

In the smoking ruins of post-War Germany, basic living conditions were terrible and seemingly not conducive at all to art practice. The country was divided and occupied. Its ravaged industry could not meet the basic needs of a population exhausted by years of *totaler Krieg*. Millions of Germans were homeless from bombings, and population displacements would continue into the immediate post-War years. In many cases, city-dwellers continued living underground in the bunkers they had used during British and American air raids. The cities above them were almost uninhabitable and construction material was scarce. German museums and art collections offered the same image of desolation even as they began to rebuild, against all odds.

In 1948, Prolog, a group of Germans and Americans, published a report on the condition of German museums. The picture they drew was tragic, as museums were categorized according to rubrics such as “repairable,” “perhaps capable of repair,” and “lost.”⁴⁶ The scale of destruction cast doubt on the feasibility of reconstruction. In 1951, Bernard Myers reported:

When I visited Germany in the summer of 1947, it was an unforgettable experience of desolation with city after city standing in absolute ruin. By 1950, during my second post-war trip, things were just beginning to be cleaned up and although in some areas strenuous efforts were being made to put things to rights physically, there were many places indeed where rebuilding seemed virtually impossible.⁴⁷

Though the museum of Düsseldorf did reopen in 1947, the majority of German museums remained closed until the mid or late 1950s, with the lucky ones still possessing collections that had been moved to safety in mines and catacombs rather than bombed *in situ*. Art schools had also been victims of the air raids and needed rebuilding. The famous Kunstakademie of Düsseldorf, for example, after being bombed in December 1943, had only two rooms left intact.

⁴⁶ Edith Appleton Standen and Otto J. Brendel, "Report on Germany," *College Art Journal*, Spring 1948, 209-15.

⁴⁷ Bernard Myers, "Postwar Art in Germany," *College Art Journal*, Spring 1951, 251.

Art galleries and artists' studios had also been destroyed, and in the general shortage of livable spaces their reconstruction was not a priority. Producing art supplies required a chemical industry that no longer existed, or which was dedicated to reconstruction. In the post-War era, therefore, most exhibitions took place in private homes. In Stuttgart, which had been heavily bombed, Ottomar Domnick, a neurologist and art lover, organized exhibitions in his apartment. In 1948, Rudolf Springer opened a gallery in two rooms of his parents' house in Berlin. In 1949, the Zimmergalerie Frank opened, as its name indicates, in a room in its owner's home in Frankfurt.

The situation of the art collections was as disastrous as the state of Germany's buildings. Many artworks that had not been removed had been destroyed, and those that had been removed were dispersed throughout the country in repositories. As Edith Appleton Standen explained in the *College Art Journal*, the recovery of these artworks from their remote locations was itself a colossal endeavor, but necessary if further damage and losses were to be avoided:

Publically-owned collections are now being laboriously returned from their war-time repositories, painfully re-assembled, and in some part, placed on exhibition. What this operation implies in a country where almost every museum building is badly damaged, where transportation is exceedingly scarce, and where such things as glass, thumb-tacks, plywood, paper, paint, are almost unobtainable, is hardly to be imagined.⁴⁸

Gathered in so-called "collection points," these artworks awaited the Allies' verdict concerning their future. In most cases, the museums which had originally housed them were no longer standing, so they couldn't simply be returned. In addition, some in the international community thought these artworks should be used as war compensation. Others believed that the German people needed to earn back the right to own such treasures.⁴⁹ In any case, the German art collections were threatened on many levels. And fears were justified. In April 1946, for example,

⁴⁸ Standen and Brendel, "Report on Germany," 209.

⁴⁹ Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second*.

the Soviets removed some of the most important artworks located in their zone of occupation, such as the Treasure of Priam and the Pergamon Sculptures, and sent them to Russia, where some of these items remain today. In 1948, the Americans removed 202 masterpieces from German museums and sent them to Washington for “safe-keeping.” This created huge controversy in the United States, and the works were eventually returned in March 1949.⁵⁰ Some Americans proposed to exchange municipally owned artworks for “building materials and other consumer goods,” and were strongly rejected.⁵¹

To this already dark picture should be added the fact that the Nazi government had removed around 16,000 artworks from German museums. Many of the confiscated pieces were lost forever, having been destroyed or sold abroad. German museums, which had often been the first to collect examples of avant-garde movements, had lost major parts of their modern art collections. These, too, needed to be reconstructed. Libraries needed to be rebuilt. As Myers noted in 1951: “The shortage of books and periodicals on art is so serious that museum and university libraries are often less equipped than the average American university teacher’s private library.”⁵²

If reconstruction (*Wiederaufbau*) was the first priority in Germany, re-education (*Umerziehung*) was the second. The Nazi government and the War had not only destroyed artworks and museums, they had also prevented people from creating, discussing, and seeing modern art – or, let’s say, from seeing it in a positive way and speaking of it in terms untainted by Nazi influence.⁵³ In the German post-War artworld, there was thus an urgent desire to recover and to restore the image of those artists the Nazis had defamed as degenerate. The efficiency of

⁵⁰ Standen and Brendel, "Report on Germany," 213.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Myers, "Postwar Art in Germany," 255.

⁵³ Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI -- Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook*, trans. Martin Brady (Somerset, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000).

Nazi propaganda against modern art should not be underestimated – millions of visitors had seen the “Entartete Kunst” exhibition. Something needed to be done.

This is the specific context in which the documenta exhibition in Kassel was created. Once an important economic and cultural center and strategically located in the middle of Germany, Kassel was a ruined city at the periphery of West Germany after the War. Of its dwellings 83% had been destroyed in the 1943 bombings, and 65% of its industry. Its closeness to Soviet borders did not encourage active reconstruction. Dr. Arnold Bode, an art history professor at the University of Kassel, wanted to do something to both help the cultural revival of the city and reconnect Germany with the history of modern art. With some friends, he decided to organize an art exhibition to coincide with the *Bundesgartenschau* that was to take place in Kassel in 1955. Millions of visitors would be coming to this garden show as a sign of German normalization. An art show would be an opportunity to draw people’s attention to both Kassel as *Kunstmetropole* and to modern art. Dr. Bode and his friends planned a retrospective (*Rückschau*) of modern art from Impressionism to 1940, intended to rehabilitate the reputations of artists that had been denigrated by Nazi propaganda. Documenta opened in June 1955, and received 130,000 visitors (the *Bundesgartenschau* attracted 3 million). The show was such a success that the organizers decided to repeat the experience in 1959.⁵⁴

The retrospective approach adopted for the first documenta was representative of the German post-War attitude toward its art heritage. After the Nazi experience and the War, there was a strong desire to look back at the history of modern art, especially at the German contribution, and make sense of it in a way that would help rebuild the nation’s cultural life. This need to understand the history of German modern art motivated the exhibition program of the

⁵⁴ Harald Kimpel, *Documenta: die Uberschau* (Cologne: Dumont, 2002). Harald Kimpel, *Documenta: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: Dumont, 1997).

German pavilion at the Venice Biennale throughout the 1950s. In 1950, for their first official participation at the Venice Biennale since the War, the Germans asked Eberhard Hanfstaengl, who had been the curator of the German pavilion in 1934 and 1936, to serve again. He organized a retrospective of Der Blaue Reiter, which was followed by a presentation of Die Brücke in 1952. Through these two exhibitions, Hanfstaengl distinguished between the Apollonian (Der Blaue Reiter) and the Dionysian (Die Brücke) poles of German expressionism. In 1954, he opposed the abstract and figurative trends of modern art through a retrospective exhibition of Paul Klee and Oskar Schlemmer. In 1956, he examined the Surrealist vein with Max Ernst. These exhibitions were, to my mind, less directed towards the larger artworld and more towards the German people. They responded to the particular cultural needs of Germany at that time. The showcased artists had been victims of the Nazi regime – representatives of the degenerate art despised by the Nazis and hence necessarily acceptable in the post-War era.⁵⁵

1.2.2. Opening Italy to the world

As part of a series of articles on the situation of Europe after the War published in the *College Art Journal* in 1948, Millard Meiss reported from Italy:

Like other art historians who went to Italy last summer for the first time in many years, I returned with mixed feelings: eager to see again its wonderful art, yet anxious at the prospect of confronting wrecked buildings, of looking squarely at blank walls or gaping holes where formerly there had been paintings and sculpture. The sight of these losses and scars proved indeed depressing.⁵⁶

If the destruction in Italy did not have the sheer scope of Germany's devastation, the campaign there had nonetheless been difficult and the human and material casualties heavy. Many cities, including Naples and Milan, were heavily bombed. The monastery of Monte Cassino and the

⁵⁵ Christoph Becker and Annette Lagler, eds., *Biennale Venedig: Der deutsche Beitrag (1895 -1995)* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen/Cantz Verlag, 1995).

⁵⁶ Millard Meiss, "The Condition of Historic Art and Scholarship in Italy," *College Art Journal*, Spring 1948, 194.

Camposanto of Pisa were the most famous buildings to disappear in flames, but they were not the only victims. The Church of San Lorenzo in Rome, the Brera Museum in Milan, and the Uffizi in Florence were badly damaged. In addition, before retreating the Germans purposely destroyed much of the Italian infrastructure to hinder the Allies' progression – for instance, exploding the bridges of Florence. All this demolition, combined with a lack of maintenance during the Fascist years left Italy and its monuments in a pitiful state. At the end of the War, 80% of the Italian infrastructure and 60% of its industry needed repair. However, most Italian people still had roofs over their heads. And if rationing was tight, German scarcity was worse.

In terms of morale the situation was also very different from Germany. If Italy was objectively in the clan of the vanquished, the Italians did not feel defeated in the same way. The German liberation of Mussolini was straightforwardly seen as an invader of Italy, and the Allies' invasion as liberation from Fascism. This view conformed to the message sent by the Allies to the Italians: they were not held responsible for Fascism, but were considered the victims of a dictator. Italy was not occupied and the Italians did not lose their national sovereignty. Consequently, optimism prevailed in Italy. The post-War years thus became a time of hope. The Italian people thought their country could finally break with its past and embrace modernity. They believed a new and better society would emerge from the ruins. In short, they trusted the future to realize the very promises that Fascism had not realized.⁵⁷

In art matters, there was no need to re-educate the Italian people. Unlike in Germany, there had been no consistent propaganda against modern art in Italy and, as already noted, a stylistic plurality predominated. The Italians had been debating and arguing about art questions among themselves throughout the War years; now what they wanted was to engage in

⁵⁷ Nathalie Vernizzi, "Les artistes abstraits italiens face à l'histoire," in Ameline, ed., *Face à l'histoire, 1933-1996 - L'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique*, 275-78. Stuart Woolf, "History and Culture in the Post-war Era, 1944-1968," in Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1989*, 273-79.

discussions with artists and intellectuals beyond the borders of their country. After twenty years of autarchy, during which contact with foreign countries was extremely limited, the main preoccupation of Italians became to open their country to the rest of the world. They wanted to know what the others had been doing all these years. While in post-War Germany historians were engaged in a rethinking of German modern art, in Italy there was relative disinterest in Italian art. Not until the 1960s would Italians rediscover their modern art. In the immediate aftermath of the War they wanted to catch up on international developments.

The Venice Biennale was the perfect opportunity to reconnect with the international art scene and to open Italy to the world. Rudolf Pallucchini, the administrator of the Biennale from 1948 to 1960, was an art historian with a didactic approach. He wished to educate (not re-educate) the public about modern art. The focal point of the 1948 Biennale started that process in historical terms with an exhibition of Impressionism, featuring 98 paintings from the public collection of Cologne, where the museums all remained closed. The exhibition, the first important presentation of Impressionism in Italy, was an immense popular success, reflecting Italians' desire to learn. In the central pavilion, there was also a retrospective of Picasso – his first in Italy – that drew a large crowd. In the Greek pavilion, there was a selection from Peggy Guggenheim's collection, which introduced the public to Surrealism (Dali, Ernst, Tanguy), pre-War abstraction (Kandinsky, Pevsner, Malevich), and, most importantly, to recent American painting (Motherwell, Pollock, Rothko). The Biennale of 1950 continued this project of historical recapitulation with presentations of Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism.⁵⁸

However interesting the Biennale was, it didn't satisfy young Italian artists who wanted to know what was happening *now* in the visual arts. For those, Paris – the center of the artworld – was the requisite destination. There they could count on Alberto Magnelli and Gino Severini to

⁵⁸ Palazzo ducale of Venice, *Venice and the Biennale: Itineraries of Taste* (Milan: Fabbri, 1995).

introduce them to the Parisian art scene. Afro Basaldella, who had lived in Paris in 1931, returned there after the War. Tancredi Parmeggiani went to Paris in 1947. The same year, Piero Dorazio received a scholarship from the French government to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In Paris, he met Braque, Matisse, and Picabia. In 1948, Angelo Savelli received a grant to spend a month in Paris, where he instead stayed for a whole year.

For Italian artists, Paris, however, was not the only destination. The United States, due to its close ties with Italy, was also an option. Peggy Guggenheim, who was then living in Italy, was also influential in bringing Italian artists to take interest in the American art scene. Afro travelled to New York in 1950 where he started a collaboration with the Catherine Viviano Gallery. In 1955, he published *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna*, which was the first study of international modern art published in Italy. In 1957, he taught at Mills College in Oakland, California. Dorazio also traveled to the United States. In 1953, he taught at Harvard, and was able to meet De Kooning, Franz Kline, Greenberg, and the young Robert Rauschenberg, who had been to Italy a year earlier with Cy Twombly. During their stay in Italy, they had met Alberto Buri, whose work fascinated them. Buri was able to obtain a show for Rauschenberg at the Galleria dell' Obelisco in Rome. In thanks Rauschenberg organized a show of Buri's work at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1954. That same year, Savelli immigrated to the United States. Tancredi would never go to the United States, but, through his friendship with Guggenheim, he kept well informed of overseas developments.

These post-War travels to Paris and New York were very important for Italian artists. They were their introduction to modern art – their Grand Tour, even. They also filled in a gap that Robert Motherwell identified in talking with one of these Italians in New York: “I was touched lately when a young Roman painter visiting remarked how much the Italians have to

catch up with: ‘Why, I only saw my first Picasso in 1947,’ he said. I saw mine in Paris a dozen years before. He felt as shy as I had in Rome.’⁵⁹

1.2.3. Preserving the image of *Belle France*

Reporting for the European special issue of the *College Art Journal* in 1948, Sumner Crosby described the situation of France as fortunate considering the circumstances:

Although approximately 12% or over 1,700 classified historical monuments through France were damaged in varying degrees during the war, it must be admitted that, except for certain areas in Normandy and in Alsace and in Lorraine, France in comparison with the other European countries was singularly fortunate.⁶⁰

Paris, Bordeaux, and other major French cities had indeed escaped destruction thanks to the disobedience of German officers, and so were left intact. Once the collections of the museums had been repatriated from their wartime repositories, French museums could reopen. On Crosby’s visit, only the Musée de Cluny remained closed to the public. If the French infrastructure had not been completely destroyed in the fighting, it was nonetheless worn and torn by years of economic exploitation. French industry was in a poor state and had difficulty meeting the basic needs of the population. Living conditions were worse than during the War; the bread ration in 1948, for example, was a third that in 1942. In such a context, bread was the main preoccupation of the French people – a preoccupation to which Jean Hélion alluded through the insertion of baguettes in his post-War paintings.⁶¹

Unlike the Italians, the French were not particularly hopeful. Once the festivities of the Liberation were over, they were faced with the depressing reality of post-War recovery. As

⁵⁹ Ralston Crawford et al., "Symposium: Is French Avant-Garde Overrated?," *Art Digest*, September, 15 1953, 13.

⁶⁰ Sumner McK. Crosby, "Report on Conditions Relating to Research and Study in the History of Art in France," *College Art Journal*, Spring 1948, 203.

⁶¹ Frances Morris, "Introduction," in Frances Morris, ed., *Paris Postwar: Art and Existentialism* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993).

Simone de Beauvoir explained: “The war was over; it remained in our hands like a great, unwanted corpse, and there was no place on earth to bury it.”⁶² The French had first to deal with the uncomfortable issue of the Vichy government and collaboration. In the first days of the Liberation, there was a surge of violence against those accused of cooperation with the Germans. Women’s heads were shaved and the women then forced to parade in public, while notorious collaborators were executed. Jean Fautrier’s *Otages* series began in 1943 as a monument to the Resistance fighters shot by the Germans in the forest of Châtenay-Malabry, near his home, but the location’s meaning changed after the Liberation when the Resistance started to use that same forest to shoot collaborators.⁶³ As a wave of violent retributions shook the country, fear and anxiety took hold of the French people. Most of them had neither been heroes nor traitors; they had simply lived through the War and Occupation, which had involved doing business with the Germans when necessary. Should they be considered collaborators? Were the art dealers who had sold artworks to Germans collaborators? What about the artists who had been invited to Germany? And whose studios the Germans had visited during the War? Did anyone have the choice not to comply with the Germans? Could a dealer refuse to serve Goering? Could Andre Derain dismiss the “invitation” of those who were burning his paintings? Could Picasso refuse German officers access to his studio? General de Gaulle, then at the head of the interim French government, believed that raising such questions would only create more tension in an already divided country. His priority was national reconciliation, a reconciliation that could only be achieved by forgetting the past. For the time being, it was better to pretend that with the exception of a few traitors like Pierre Laval and Robert Brasillach, who had already been executed, the French nation had resisted the German Occupation.

⁶² Ibid., 15.

⁶³ Patrick Le Nouëne, “Jean Fautrier, des Otages aux Partisans, 1945-1957,” in Ameline, ed., *Face à l'histoire, 1933-1996 - L'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique*, 230-43.

In the post-War era, the main objective of France would thus be to forget the War and the humiliation of the German Occupation, and pretend that nothing had changed. France was still a grand nation and Paris the artistic and cultural center of the Western world – at least that is what the French would try to convince themselves and the world of. They would thus energetically promote French culture and ardently reestablish their position as cultural leader. As Crosby noted, the French, eager to see their art and culture promoted abroad, were delighted to oblige visitors (something rather untypical for the French): “The French, it should be added, are also anxious to help foreign students and scholars and will do everything possible to facilitate opportunities to visit monuments or collections or to consult any type of documentary material.”⁶⁴ Outside France, they organized art exhibitions and theater performances. In 1947, for instance, *La dame à la licorne* toured the United States along with other examples of French tapestry, while Jean Marchat’s theater company travelled to Turkey and the Middle East.⁶⁵ The French were particularly active in their German zone, organizing many more exhibitions and lectures than the British and the Americans, as Standen noticed during her stay in Germany: “The French have accomplished the most; they have circulated fine exhibitions and helped and encouraged every type of cultural activity”⁶⁶ Among the French exhibitions organized in Germany was the famous “Moderne französische Malerei,” which took place in October and November 1946 at the Stadtschloss in Berlin and which attracted a huge number of visitors eager to see Impressionist and Post-impressionist paintings after years of censorship. The image of France that this exhibition (and all French exhibitions organized in the post-War era) promoted was the nostalgic image of *Belle France*.⁶⁷ This was the image the French also sent to the Venice

⁶⁴ Crosby, "Report on Conditions Relating to Research and Study in the History of Art in France," 202.

⁶⁵ Bernard Piniau, *L'action artistique dans le monde* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

⁶⁶ Standen and Brendel, "Report on Germany," 211.

⁶⁷ “But what they show the German is ‘la Belle France’ alone.” In *ibid.*

Biennale in the 1950s, where they tried to pay homage to the masters of the first School of Paris in the crowded space of the French pavilion. These presentations were successful in reaffirming the superiority of French culture, and French artists garnered all the major awards.⁶⁸ But these exhibitions and these awards were not representative of the situation of current French culture. They were rather part and parcel of the French attempt to preserve the fading image of *Belle France* in the world – an endeavor whose success would eventually backfire, as we will see.

1.2.4. Asserting an American, original identity

The Americans were not the only ones eager to cross the Atlantic to see what was happening on the other side. The Europeans, and especially the French, also wanted to know more about the United States – a country about which they actually knew little beyond its jazz music and GIs. European interest was great, but it was also mixed with apprehension. The United States emerged from the War hugely powerful and the future of Western Europe seemed to depend on its good will.

When Jean-Paul Sartre arrived in the United States in January 1945, as special correspondent for the newspaper *Combat*, he was thus both excited and worried. He loved Jazz music, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos, but would he like America? More importantly, would he like American views on world politics? For several weeks, Sartre explored the country, comparing its environment and mentality with those of Europe, and sending his conclusions to his anxious French readers. In France, people were so anxious for his reports that *Combat* ran his “Un français à New York” as front-page news in February 1945,

⁶⁸ Association Française d'Action Artistique, *La France à Venise: Le pavillon français de 1948 à 1988* (Rome: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1990).

alongside news of the War, which was still raging east of Paris.⁶⁹ In January 1947, Simone de Beauvoir traveled to the United States for a series of conferences and interviews. Existentialism was in vogue in the United States, and everybody wanted to talk to the prettiest Existentialist. Her diary, *L'Amérique au jour le jour*, offers a precise image of American as it appeared to a European. What emerged from her description is a huge gap between Europe and the United State that cannot be reduced to economic differences:

Et puis on s'aperçoit bientôt que sous les papiers multicolores qui les enrobent, tous les chocolats ont le même goût de cacahuète, tous les *best-sellers* racontent la même histoire. Et pourquoi choisir un dentifrice plutôt qu'un autre ? Il y a dans cette profusion inutile un arrière-goût de mystification. Voici mille possibilités ouvertes : mais c'est la même. Mille choix permis : mais tous équivalents. Ainsi le citoyen américain pourra consommer sa liberté à l'intérieur de la vie qui lui est imposée sans s'apercevoir que cette vie même n'est pas libre.⁷⁰

The experience of the War was so different for Americans and Europeans that they could not relate to one another. Their perspectives (*Gedankenwelten*) were too different. Whereas the War placed politics and engagement at the center of the of the French intellectuals' preoccupations, in the United States it resulted in a disenchantment with politics and Europe.⁷¹

The Americans were indeed disillusioned by the Europeans. They were appalled by the megalomania of the Fascist regimes, the madness of their fratricidal wars, and the barbarity of their genocides. Twice now they had needed to intervene to stop the Europeans' killing frenzy. They were also disappointed in the French for failing to resist the German invasion. The debacle of the French armies had been distressing and the attitudes of the "Frogs" during the Liberation

⁶⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Un Français à New York," *Combat*, February 2 1945.

⁷⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *L'Amérique au jour le jour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 27.

⁷¹ Douglas Tallack, "Culture, Politics and Society in Mid-Century America," in Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, eds., *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1913-1993* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 29-38.

exasperating.⁷² Now, the United States had to feed the Europeans, help them rebuild, and protect them from the Soviet Union. How could the Americans still hold Europe in high regard? How could they not despise them? In this context, the old belief that Europe was rotten and that Western civilization could regenerate itself only in America regained momentum. The United States was a good country with good people, and Americans were proud of the American way of life. As the prestige of European culture evaporated, the interest in American culture increased. After 1945, the number of American Studies programs in American universities increased from 29 to 82. There were also more books devoted to American literature and art, among which perhaps the most visible was Alexander Eliot's influential *Three Hundred Years of American Art* (1957). Likewise, US museums organized shows about the nation's history of art, including "Two Centuries of American Painting" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1954.⁷³

If before the War the label of "American artist" was a stigma associated with provincialism, after the War it became an honor. American critics, whose voices emerged during the War, made the defense of American art their main issue. They repackaged America's purported provincialism as an independent and original identity, radically different from the European identity. In spring 1952, *Partisan Review* organized a symposium in three parts on American culture. Among its contributors there was a strong desire to assert the superiority of America over Europe, and a conviction that a long-overdue cultural affirmation of the United States was underway.⁷⁴ In September 1953, *Art Digest* asked the question: "Is the French Avant-garde overrated?" In his response, Greenberg theorized the difference between *belle peinture*

⁷² For anecdotes on the relationships between the Americans and the French during the Liberation, see for instance Donald Kladstrup and Petie Kladstrup, *Wine and War: The French, the Nazis, and the Battle for France's Greatest Treasure* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002).

⁷³ Sidra Stich, *Made in the U.S.A. - An Americanization in Modern Art*. (Los Angeles; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 8.

⁷⁴ Newton Arvin and ali., "Our Century and Our Culture," *Partisan Review* 19 (1952): 282-326, 420-50, 562-97.

française and rough and tough American painting. French painting was, according to the critic, decorative and dated (he was certainly thinking of Braque, Matisse, and Bonnard who, as we saw, were presented as *the* French painters at that time). American painting, in contrast, was wild and immediate.⁷⁵ This image of the American artist as a savage – an image to which he would return in 1955 in his essay “American Type Painting” – came, as Arthur Danto has noticed, from Philip Rahv’s 1930s article “Paleface and Redskin.”⁷⁶ In this essay, Rahv created a distinction between “paleface” writers who, like Henry James, were “highbrow,” and “redskin” writers who, like Walt Whitman, were “lowbrow.” The palefaces were European in taste, while the redskins were American originals.⁷⁷ Danto suggests that the concept of the American artist as wild actually came from the Surrealists, who were interested in primitivism and liked to see the Americans as rough and primitive. In the same way that they created the myth of the *femme-enfant*, they originated, or at least fostered, the emergence of the myth of the wild American artist. In any case, after the War American artists were packaged as free and spontaneous. Jackson Pollock, born in Wyoming, became the best-known image of the redskin American artist; the antithesis of the paleface European artist.⁷⁸ Willem de Kooning, who was 22 when he arrived in the United States and remained proud of his European origins, was annoyed by such discourses and used to mock the American artists: “They stand all alone in the wilderness, breast bearded.”⁷⁹ Although there was an element of parody in the redskin image (and it’s difficult to

⁷⁵ Crawford et al., "Symposium: Is French Avant-Garde Overrated?," 12-13, 27.

⁷⁶ Arthur C. Danto, “Philosophizing American Art,” in Joachimides and Rosenthal, eds., *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1913-1993*, 21-28.

⁷⁷ Philip Rahv, "Paleface and Redskin," in *Image and Culture, Fourteen Essays on Literary Themes* (Norfolk: New Directions Books, 1949), 1-5.

⁷⁸ Guilbaut, "Création et développement d'une avant-garde : New York 1946-1951," 29-48. Serge Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945-1964* (Cambridge; London: MIT Press, 1990), 30-78.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 125.

think of Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman as primitive and instinctive artists), this American identity won over the public's imagination.

1.2.5, Conclusion

In the post-War era, each country had different priorities based on their War experiences and the hopes they had for the future: in Germany, reconstruction and re-education prevailed; in Italy, catching up and traveling were the main objectives; in France, all efforts went into preserving the remains of French cultural prestige; and in the United States, the goal was to define and assert an original American identity. Recognizing these diverse priorities allows us not only to understand the particulars of each country's cultural politics and artistic discussions, but also to measure the gaps separating the countries. These were not just different countries, they were different worlds – or, to be more exact, different *Gedankenwelten*. The War had really divided the Western world – a division that the Cold War would only intensify.

1.3. POLEMICS AROUND FORM: ART AND POLITICS IN THE WAKE OF THE COLD WAR

As the reality of the Cold War progressively took hold, the separations between the countries of the Western bloc widened. In each country the implications and meanings of the Cold War differed. In France or Italy, communism had an aura of prestige due to its role in the Resistance, and consequently it became an important political force. In France until the late 1960s, the PCF would get up to 29% of the seats at the Assemblée Nationale. In 1969, during the French presidential election, Jacques Duclos, the communist candidate, received 21.5% of the votes. Many French and Italian people subscribed to communist ideals, rejecting American imperialism as the worst of all evils. Others, like Général de Gaulle, wanted Europe to act as a

third force in the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. To counterbalance American influence, de Gaulle formed links with the Soviets and left NATO in 1966.

In the United States, in contrast, communists were not seen as heroes to the Resistance but as enemies. As the image of the Red Menace prevailed, McCarthyism officially deemed members of the communist party traitors. For mainstream Americans, communism was not an option, and they could not understand how it could fool European intellectuals and artists. When Picasso became a member of the PCF in 1944, for example, he received a letter of protest from American artists and intellectuals begging him to reconsider his decision. Picasso was reportedly puzzled by the Americans' irrational fear of communism: in his village, everybody was a communist – the butcher, the baker, the teacher – and they were all charming people.⁸⁰

In Germany, the situation was even more different. There, the division of the world into two opposing ideologies was not an abstract, political fact but a reality that tore families apart. Germans were reminded of the Cold War in their daily lives, and the threat of an imminent third World War loomed. For West Germans, choosing communism was not a political option as it was for the French and the Italians, and they could not afford to reject the protection of the United States.

It is in this particular context that we need to examine the discussions on the visual arts of the 1950s. Only by taking into account the particular situation of each country within the Cold War reality, can we – I believe – understand the events that marked the Western artworld during and after the 1950s.

⁸⁰ The Americans did not appreciate Picasso's becoming a member of the communist party. See: Pierre Cabanne, *Le siècle de Picasso 2* (Paris: Denoël, 1975), 120-21. Françoise Gilot, *Life with Picasso* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 64-5.

1.3.1. The American discourse on individual freedom

In the United States, the priority was to define and assert an original American identity, independent from the European identity. In the wake of the Cold War, however, the issue of American identity became more complex, as communism and anti-communism became part of the discussion. The question of what American art was or was not became intertwined with the question of what communist art was and was not. Artists, museum directors, and public figures across the whole political spectrum provided divergent answers to these questions, and a polemic grew which, in the context of McCarthyism, took on unprecedented proportions.

The polemic started in fall 1946 with “Advancing American Art,” an exhibition organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and scheduled to travel throughout Europe and Latin America. The show consisted of a collection of 117 paintings and watercolors by 45 artists that the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs of the State Department had bought. The show opened quietly at the Met, but, in November 1946, the American Artists Professional League wrote a letter of protest to then Secretary of State James Byrnes condemning the exhibition. According to the League, the show presented works that “were strongly marked with the radicalism of the new trend of European art” and so were “not indigenous to our soil.” For these artists, American art could not be modern because modern art was European.⁸¹ In February 1947, *Look* magazine picked up on the show and published a controversial article titled “Your Money Bought These Paintings,” which consisted of two inflammatory paragraphs and seven illustrations. With this article, the debate took a different turn: the modern style was dreadful, completely opposed to the values of American culture. Modern art was obviously not American art.

⁸¹ American Artists Professional League, "League Protests to the Department of State," *Art Digest*, November 15 1946, 32.

On February 5, 1947, the famous (arguably infamous) radio broadcaster Fulton Lewis Jr. made matters even worse by bashing the show, raging over the \$49,000 taxpayers spent on these impossible paintings, and claiming: “If that be American art, God save us.” As a result of this broadcast, Congressmen started to receive letters of complaint from American citizens who considered the show against the American spirit and urged the US government not to support such corrupt art. The controversy grew so great that Representative John Taber wrote to Secretary of State George Marshall asking him to intervene: “The paintings are a travesty upon art. They were evidently gotten up by people whose object was apparently to, (1) make the United States appear ridiculous in the eyes of foreign countries, and to (2) establish ill will towards the United States.”⁸² At stake here was the definition of American art and, ultimately, the image the United States wanted to send to the world. For Fulton, Taber, the Congressmen, and their constituents, modern art was un-American.

The controversy surrounding “Advancing American Art” reached Congress during the investigations by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) of the Hollywood film industry. This particular context brought a new set of questions: could those artists who gave such a poor image of the United States be communist? Could they be plotting to tarnish the reputation of American art abroad? Representative Fred Busbey wondered about this and asked for more information: “I am particularly anxious to know what information you had regarding the communistic background and communist affiliation of the various artists.”⁸³ The possibility that some of the artists might have been communist prompted the State Department to stop the tour and bring back the show to the United States, where the works were put into storage and eventually sold. But this did not stop the controversy. The investigation undertaken by

⁸² Quoted in Michael L. Krenn, *Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 38.

⁸³ Quoted in *Ibid.*

Congressman Busbey actually revealed that 24 of the artists in the show had been involved in what HUAC called subversive activities. Ben Shahn, to take one example, had contributed a drawing to an auction held to benefit the leftist journal *The New Masses* in March 1942. In an attempt to stop the controversy and avoid such problems in the future, Marshall announced in May 1947 that taxpayers' money would no longer be spent on modern art. But this did not help ease tensions. The scandal was not so much about public funding as it was about the relationships linking modern art, American art, and communism.

Armed with 2,000 letters of supports from American citizens, who deemed modern art communist and therefore un-American, Congressman George Dondero launched an attack against modernism. On August 16, 1949, he delivered his famous speech "Modern Art Shackled to Communism" to Congress:

All these isms are of foreign origin, and truly should have no place in American art. While not all are media of social or political protest, all are instruments and weapons of destruction...

Cubism aims to destroy by designed disorder

Futurism aims to destroy by the machine myth ...

Dadaism aims to destroy by ridicule.

Expressionism aims to destroy by aping the primitive and insane ...

Abstractionism aims to destroy by the creation of brainstorm.

Surrealism aims to destroy by the denial of reasons ...

The artists of the "isms" change their designation as often as readily as the Communist front organization. Picasso, who is also a dadaist, an abstractionist, or a surrealist, as unstable fancy dictates, is the hero of all the crackpots in so-called modern art. [...]

We are now face to face with the intolerable situation, where public schools, colleges and universities, art and technical schools, invaded by a horde of foreign art manglers, are selling to our young men and women a subversive doctrine of "isms," Communist-inspired and Communist-connected, which have one common, boasted goal – the destruction that awaits if this Marxist trail is not abandoned.⁸⁴

In response to Dondero's accusations, Howard Devree wrote "Modernism under Fire," an article published in *The New York Times* in September 1949, in which he pointed out that the official

⁸⁴ George A. Dondero, "Modern Art Shackled to Communism," *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, First Session (16 August 1949).

style of the Soviet Union was Socialist Realism, not modernism. Devree went as far as to compare the Congress's attacks on modern art to Hitler's and Stalin's persecution of modern artists.⁸⁵ Taking up this idea, Alfred Barr, MoMA's advisory director, published a long essay in 1952 in *The New York Times*, which asked: "Is Modern Art Communist?" Barr explained that abstraction had been regarded as decadent in the Soviet Union since the 1920s. Far from being communist, modern art was – according to Barr – anti-communist. Communist art was servile propaganda; modern art was the expression of individual freedom, and the American style par excellence: anti-communist and individualist.⁸⁶ With a very elegant sleight of hand, Barr was able to repackage modern art from seeming communist and un-American to promoting anti-communist and American values. To convince the American people of this, he became committed to presenting the specifically modern trend in American art as *the* American art.

In July 1952, the International Program of Exhibition of MoMA was created with a five-year grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Since the US government had renounced the promotion of modern art exhibitions after the disastrous experience of "Advancing American Art," Nelson Rockefeller thought the MoMA should take on the responsibility of presenting American art in the United States and abroad. This was also an opportunity to disseminate their personal vision of American art. Bypassing Congress and the American people, who officially believed modern art was un-American, the MoMA would present to the world modern American art.⁸⁷ In 1953, MoMA bought the American pavilion in Venice. At the 1954 Biennale, they programmatically presented Ben Shahn and Willem de Kooning, to the great displeasure of the US Government, who did not appreciate having the United States represented by a communist

⁸⁵ Howard Devree, "Modernism under Fire," *The New York Times*, September 11 1949, section 2.

⁸⁶ Alfred Barr, "Is Modern Art Communist?," *The New York Times*, December 14 1952, 22-23, 28-30.

⁸⁷ Helen M. Franc, "The Early Years of the International Program and Council," in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad* (New York: Museum of Modern Art/ Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 108-49.

and an immigrant! But the American pavilion had become a private venture, about which they had little say. From MoMA's perspective, the selection was intended as a strong message to the international community that the United States was a country of artistic freedom and diversity; McCarthyism had not taken hold of the American visual arts. The choice of Ben Shahn was particularly judicious. The artist had just published an essay in *Art News*, "The Artist and the Politician," in which he strongly opposed Dondero, and reassured the world that American art was an expression of individual freedom: "Our idea is Democracy. And I believe that it is the most appealing idea that the world has yet known. But if we, by official acts of suppression, play the hypocrite toward our own belief, strangle our own liberties, then we can hardly hope to win the world's unqualified confidence."⁸⁸ This article, which was republished in the Italian journal *Sele Arte* in December 1953, seduced the Europeans with its honesty and open-mindedness. At the Venice Biennale, Shahn raised a lot of interest and helped transform the image of American art in Europe.⁸⁹

Another event organized by the International Program that contributed to improving the American image was the exhibition "De David à Toulouse-Lautrec," which presented French art from American art collections at the Musée de L'Orangerie in Paris in 1955. This show was an immense success, attracting 188,000 visitors, who gained respect and admiration for the American collectors who had understood Impressionism and Post-impressionism before the French had, and who had put together such outstanding collections.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ben Shahn, "The Artist and the Politicians," *Art News*, September 1953, 67.

⁸⁹ Frances K. Pohl, "An American in Venice: Ben Shahn and United States Foreign Policy at the 1954 Venice Biennale," *Art History*, March 1981, 80-113.

⁹⁰ Franc, "The Early Years of the International Program and Council," 108-49.

Through these international exhibitions, Barr, Rockefeller, and MoMA were thus able to foster an image of American art as the expression of individual freedom – a rich and powerful image which could be read at home as anti-communist, and abroad as modern.

1.3.2. The West German discourse on universal language

In August 1946, the “Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung” opened in Dresden at the Stadthalle Nordplatz. This ambitious exhibition, organized by Will Grohmann and Hans Gründig, showcased 256 artists coming from the four occupation zones of Germany. As the first exhibition of German art since the fall of Hitler, the “Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung” presented a large variety of styles – a confirmation that the era of Nazi censorship had ended. For those who visited the show, the question raised was what form (*Gestalt*) art should take in the new Germany that was to emerge on the ruins of the Third Reich. The discussion was not so much if it was still possible to paint after Auschwitz, but rather what painting should be in the future.⁹¹

There were those who believed in engaged art, who thought that new art should offer strong political and social commentary. In the Western zones, this anti-fascist trend was regarded with suspicion because of its communist undertones, while in the Eastern zone it was its strong critical stance that isolated it. Anti-fascist art was clearly too political to be the new German art. Then there were those who, like Willi Baumeister and Fritz Winter, simply wanted a return to pre-War abstraction. This second possibility was also not convincing. Regarded as an artistic expression of the 1910s, abstraction was rejected as dated and irrelevant, and not a suitable response to the current crisis in the world. In *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (1947), Baumeister

⁹¹ The allusion is to Theodor Adorno's statement that writing poetry after Auschwitz was "barbaric." Wieland Schmied, "1945, ou l'art dans les ruines," in Ameline, ed., *Face à l'histoire, 1933-1996 - L'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique*, 158-64.

presented the abstract artist as a loner misunderstood by society – an image that accurately reflected the situation of abstract artists at that time. Finally, there were those – the majority, in fact – who, like Otto Dix, Franz Radziwill, and Karl Höfer, opted for a moderately modern style which expressed existential and spiritual crises through allegorical representations. In the immediate post-War period, this third trend appeared as the appropriate art form.⁹²

In the late 1940s, the question of what German art should be took on different meaning as a result of the progressive division of Germany into two political entities, and stylistic division took place alongside political. With the implementation of the Zhdanov doctrine in the Soviet zone in 1947, Socialist Realism became the official style of Eastern Germany. The split in German artistic practice became visible at the second “Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung,” which opened in September 1949, just a month before the creation of the two independent German States. Grohmann, who had moved to West Berlin in 1948, was not involved in the curation of the second show, which still featured artists from the Western zones. If the official art of the German Democratic Republic thus had become representational and ideological under Soviet influence, what, then, should the art of the Federal Republic of Germany be? For many, the answer lay in a non-representational, non-ideological style. Abstraction, which had been despised as irrelevant and absurd in the years immediately following the War, was becoming a valid artistic choice for West German artists in the context of the Cold War. The supporters of this non-ideological art, who gathered around the journal *Das Kunstwerk*, launched a campaign for the defense and promotion of abstract art. Leopold Zahn, for instance, published in 1948 an article in which he argued in favor of abstraction, asserting that “Wer sich der abstrakten Kunst

⁹² Jost Hermand, "Modernism Restored: West German Painting in the 1950s," *New German Critique*, Spring - Summer 1984, 23-41.

in spottischer Feindseligkeit und bössartiger Verstocktheit nähert, dem bleibt sie stumm.”⁹³ This campaign was successful, and Baumeister, once a loner, became the leader of West German art. There was, however, some resistance from those who believed that art should not be politically silent, as the polemic between the representational painter Höfer and Grohmann shows.⁹⁴ Höfer publically condemned abstraction as decoration, dangerously disconnected from reality. In his opinion, it was an escape rather than a response to the situation of Germany.⁹⁵ But despite his protests, the non-ideological and universal abstraction promoted by Grohmann became *the* style of the Federal Republic.

In 1954, Werner Haftmann published *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*, which told a story of modern art that reflected the strong West German belief in the universality of art. For Haftmann, modern art was an international dialogue: “Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts ist ein sehr dichtes und fruchtbares Gespräch über alle Ländergrenzen hinweg.”⁹⁶ He believed that in the future national art would be replaced by a universal art: “Ich glaube, daß ein später Mensch, der denselben Versuch unternimmt, nur noch als Welthistoriker über Weltmalerei wird handeln können.”⁹⁷ This claim for the universality of art was not only a response to the strongly determined art of East Germany, it was also a way to enable German artists to continue working in a world where many felt that all German art was taboo.⁹⁸ The paintings of the German artists could indeed only exist in the context of world painting (*Weltmalerei*), where nationality was insignificant; if they were seen as representatives of national traditions, they would by necessity be besmirched by history, even if they were not directly complicit with the Nazi state.

⁹³ Leopold Zahn, “Der abstrakten Malerei gewidmet,” *Das Kunstwerk* 5/6 (1948): 58.

⁹⁴ Hermand, “Modernism Restored: West German Painting in the 1950s,” 23-41.

⁹⁵ Karl Höfer, “Der Mut, unmodern zu sein,” *Berliner Tagespiegel*, February 11 1955.

⁹⁶ Werner Haftmann, *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁹⁸ Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993).

Interestingly, Haftmann's book became, despite being rooted in West German reality, an international success and a standard art history reference for the time.⁹⁹

Haftmann's ideas were also disseminated through documenta, of which he was the chief curator in 1955 and 1959. On July 11, 1959, for the inauguration of the second documenta, Haftmann gave a speech in which he claimed that abstraction was a universal language (*Weltsprache*) that could be understood by everyone and the prototype of a universal culture (*Weltkulture*). "documenta 2," which presented artistic developments since 1945, was consequently almost entirely devoted to international abstraction, allowing German art to appear in the context he recommended. The highlights of "documenta 2" were the four rooms devoted to Wols, Baumeister, Nicolas de Staël, and Pollock – that is, to four major artists who had recently passed away and whose works were exemplary of the *Weltsprache* Haftmann was encouraging.

In response to the communist ideology of East German art, West Germany thus developed an ideology of non-ideological art – a universal language, which ignored its own traditions.

1.3.3. The Italian discourse on engagement

The burning question for Italian artists during the post-War era was that of engagement – the need to respond to the nation's Fascist past. They almost unanimously recognized the necessity of an engaged art able to respond to history and influence its course; but they did not agree on which form this engaged art should take. This thorny question was first raised during

⁹⁹ It was published in the United States in 1965.

the Fascist period among the members of the Corrente group before becoming *the* issue of the Italian artworld.¹⁰⁰

In January 1938, the journal *Corrente* had been created by members of the Fascist Youth, who wished to oppose the chauvinism of official culture by introducing Italians to the works of international writers, such as Martin Heidegger, Franz Kafka, and Ernest Hemingway. The Fascist government was rather lenient towards such projects, considering it best to allow some opposition within the framework of the party in order to ultimately control the spread of dissenting voices. However, under the influence of the art critic Raffaello De Grada, the journal took a more and more critical stance to the point of becoming overtly anti-Fascist, and so it was eventually suppressed in May 1940.

De Grada and his friends Renato Birolli and Algi Sassu, two painters who contributed to the journal, believed that art could be a strong social force with the potential to change the world. Their political opinions were in fact firmer and more united than their ideas about art. De Grada had evolved in the Il Novecento circle, Sassu had exhibited with the Futurists in 1928, and Briolli had started as an academic artist. As a result, the art shows that the Corrente group put together (before and after the suppression of the journal) were rather heterogeneous. Nonetheless, it is still possible to distinguish two trends emphasized in them: a modernist, realist style promoted by De Grada, and an expressionist, abstract style championed by Birolli. In 1943, despite their stylistic differences, the artists of the Corrente group drafted a manifesto, in which they claimed their dedication to revolutionary painting and their rejection of art for art's sake. Picasso's *Guernica* was the model for this revolutionary art: "Picasso in 1937 posed the problem. We look to Picasso as the most authentic example of those who have invented completely in life

¹⁰⁰ Nathalie Vernizzi, "Les artistes abstraits italiens face à l'histoire," in Jean-Paul Ameline, ed., *Face à l'histoire, 1933-1996 - L'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique*, 275-78.

... The images of the painter are a provocation and a flag for thousands of men.”¹⁰¹ Interrupted by the arrest of some members of the group who were involved with the communist resistance, the signing of the manifesto went unfinished.

In the years after the manifesto, the question of which form this revolutionary art should take became more urgent. In Italy, where Futurism and modernism were associated with Fascism, a revolutionary (i.e. anti-Fascist) art could not look to modern art for its inspiration because of these associations. Under the influence of Edouardo Persico, therefore, the artists of the Corrente group turned to Impressionism and Post-impressionism. Persico presented the Impressionist touch as spontaneous and free – a metaphor for the liberation of society. Likewise, the chromatic liberty of the Post-impressionist palette could be seen as the symbol of humanity’s liberation. In the specific context of Italy, Impressionism offered a valid option between modernism and academism. As Bette Talvacchia explains: “Ignoring the option to work in an avant-garde style was therefore a pondered decision; willful, rather than a backward and provincial allegiance to the art of the early modern masters, and the choice had a theoretical basis.”¹⁰²

In March 1946, a group of artists stemming from the Corrente group published the “Manifesto del Realismo,” also called “Manifesto oltre Guernica.” This second manifesto opened with a quotation by Paul Cézanne, thereby establishing the Post-impressionist roots of the project, followed by a version of Picasso’s famous remark: “Painting is not made for decorating apartments. It is an offensive and defensive instrument of war against the enemy.” Again, *Guernica* was presented as the ideal model. Ennio Morolotti, one of the signatories, had

¹⁰¹ Mario De Micheli, “Realism and the Post-war Debate,” in Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1989*, 281.

¹⁰² Bette L Talvacchia, “Politics Considered as a Category of Culture: The Anti-Fascist Corrente Group’,” *Art History*, Fall 1985, 345.

actually seen the work in Paris in 1937, but most of these others only knew it through the reproductions of it that they kept in their studios. The manifesto rejected categorically any art from which a moral dimension would be absent. Art should show the social reality of contemporary life through “realist” art, which did not imply a particular style but rather certain content. Following the manifesto, Birolli created the Nuova Secessione Artistica Italiano, which became in 1947 the Fronte Nuovo dell’Arte. The artists of the Fronte were united by political convictions, not style; Guttuso’s paintings were figurative, for instance, while Giulio Turcato’s work was almost abstract.

With the rise of the Cold War and the hardening of communist ideology on art matters, the unity of the group was threatened. For those who tended toward abstract forms, the situation became difficult. A group of young artists who met regularly in Guttuso’s studio decided to protest against the narrow-mindedness of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). In April 1947, in consequence, Piero Dorazio, Carlo Accardi, Antonio Sanfilippo, and others published the “Forma Manifesto”: “We declare ourselves to be FORMALISTS and MARXISTS, convinced that the terms Marxism and Formalism are not irreconcilable.”¹⁰³ This was also the opinion of Elio Vittorini, the editor of the communist journal *Il Politecnico*, which rejected the idea of an official communist style and supported instead stylistic diversity and individual expression. In 1947, however, the PCI ordered Vittorini to adopt Socialist Realism and stop publishing bourgeois artists and writers. Upon his refusal, the journal was suppressed, and Vittorini was eventually excluded from the party. In January 1948, during the Congress of the PCI, Zhdanovism was adopted as the cultural politics of the party. There would be henceforth a cultural commission within the PCI in charge of verifying the conformity of cultural and artistic

¹⁰³ Mario De Micheli, “Realism and the Post-war Debate,” in Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1989*, 282.

production with the simplicity and straightforwardness prescribed by Zhdanov; this implied the surrender of an independent national communist voice to an increasingly totalitarian world norm.

For radical Italian artists, the situation became increasingly difficult, as the controversy surrounding the “Prima mostra nazionale d’arte contemporanea” exhibition in Bologna in 1948 showed. While most of the artists featured in the show were communists, their works did not follow Socialist Realist style, and therefore drew the severe criticism of Palmiro Togliatti, the head of the PCI. His condemnation fell on both non-representational and representational artists. It was not enough to do figurative painting – one had to follow the guidelines of Zdanovism. For Guttuso, this was a real dilemma. He was a committed communist – even a communist representative in the Italian parliament – and his art reflected his engagement. He rejected abstraction as a dead end that could not save people from chaos. To communicate with viewers, he firmly believed, representational objects were needed. He relied on reality, but not in the literal sense as much as the metaphorical. Guttuso’s realism was humanist, not socialist, and his work would never follow the Zhdanov doctrine. His position within the PCI was thus ambiguous and precarious for as long as the doctrine dictated the cultural politics of the Party.

For non-representational artists, the situation was obviously even more difficult. In 1952, Birolli, Afro, Ennio Morlatti, Giulio Turcato, Emilio Vedova, and other non-representational artists created the Gruppo degli Otto Pittori Italiani. The work of these artists was understood to be “concrete” – a less ambiguous adjective than realist. In the catalogue of the 1952 Venice Biennale, Lionello Venturi explained: “These painters are not, and do not wish to be considered ‘abstract’ painters; nor are they, or do they wish to be considered ‘realistic.’ Instead, they propose to break away from the contradictions inherent to these two terms.”¹⁰⁴ Identified as

¹⁰⁴ Mario De Micheli, “Realism and the Post-war Debate,” in *Ibid.*, 287.

concrete, their work was not disconnected from reality. Non-representational art, in other words, could be engaged.

In 1953, Picasso's *Guernica* toured Europe, stopping in Milan, where it was exhibited in the Palazzo Reale, still in ruins at that time. This powerful event relaunched the debate over the necessity for an engaged art, and the question of what form revolutionary art should take – a question that defied resolution in the pluralistic art scene of Italy.

1.3.4. The French discourse on *Informel*

The battle between abstraction and realism is usually thought to have been the main issue of the French artworld during the post-War period. Indeed, in those years there were many polemics between the champions of abstraction, who considered realism dated and fascist, and the champions of realism, who condemned the escapist attitude of abstract artists. Among the representational artists committed to communism, there were also some vivid discussions between those who followed the guidelines of Zhdanovism, which was adopted by the French Communist Party (PCF) in June 1947, and those who, like Picasso and Léger, kept on working in their long-standing modernist styles. While these modern artists were publically condemned by Moscow, in France they were nonetheless the most famous public communists. They could not simply be expelled from the Party. Besides, they were friends with Maurice Thorez, the head of the PCF, who unlike his Italian colleague Togliatti, was not opposed to modern art.

To make things even more difficult, there was also the group who first exhibited at the “Manifeste de l’homme témoin” in June 1948, and then created the Salon des peintres témoins de leur temps. These young artists – included Jean Buffet, Bernard Lajou, Paul Rebeyrolle, and Michel de Gallard – practiced an expressive Social Realism that offended both standard-bearing

Social Realists and modernists. Such polemics, however important, were nothing new in France. They were the prolongations of those started by Aragon and Léger in 1936, in the context of the Front Populaire and the Spanish Civil War. The *Querelle du Réalisme* was, however, essentially a pre-War debate.¹⁰⁵

The real issue of the post-War period, I would argue, was the crisis of form. The War had shattered all certainties and created profound malaise. As André Malraux noticed in 1947: “The Europe of bombed ghost towns is no more ravaged than the ideas Europe has made for itself of man.”¹⁰⁶ The horrors of Auschwitz and Hiroshima were beyond the limits of understanding. Like Roquentin, the hero of *La Nausée*, people were trapped in an uncanny world they could not comprehend. Nothing was assured, not even their own existences in relation to their surroundings. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy reflects this age of doubt, did not examine the world from the distance of the philosopher, but from inside of experience, or, more precisely, from inside the act of seeing. In a world that could not be understood, he raised the question of what it is to see. For Merleau-Ponty seeing was not just a passive act of perception, it was an active means of grasping and transforming reality. Seeing, as a mode of comprehension, offered an alternative to the rational thinking that had been wrecked by the War. Merleau-Ponty’s model was not only philosophical, it was also based on the visual arts and, in particular, the paintings of Cézanne. “Cette philosophie qui est à faire, c’est celle qui anime le peintre, non pas quand il exprime des opinions sur le monde, mais à l’instant où sa vision se fait geste, quand, dira Cézanne, il ‘pense en peinture’.”¹⁰⁷ To think in painting was to grasp reality through the

¹⁰⁵ Serge Fauchereau, ed., *La querelle du réalisme* (Paris: Editions du Cercle d'Art, 1987). Sarah Wilson, " "La Beauté Révolutionnaire"? Réalisme Socialiste and French Painting 1935-1954," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (Oct., 1980): 61-69. Sarah Wilson, “Débat autour du Réalisme Socialiste: chronologie,” in Hulten, ed., *Paris-Paris, 1937-1957 - Création en France*, 206-12.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Morris, ed., *Paris Postwar: Art and Existentialism*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’oeil et l’esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 60.

body; a way to give form to the *inform*. Taking on this idea, Sartre argued that the artwork was the space in which an individual realizes oneself. While Aragon and the Socialist Realists saw the artwork as supporting a message and form as a vehicle for meaning, Sartre saw the canvas as a space in which awareness was realized (*prise de conscience*). In Existentialist philosophy, moreover, art was seen as engaged not because of its literal or metaphorical message, but because of the moment of awareness it induced. In the act of creating, the artist was made aware of himself; viewers became aware of themselves in the act of seeing. Sartre championed artists like Wols and Giacometti, whose works bore witness to the creative process and supposedly created such moments of awareness in their viewers. Rather than offering finished forms, then, their works and drawings showed forms emerging from *inform* – from that which was unformed. In other words, they captured the moment when vision becomes act, the moment when awareness is realized.

In 1946, Jean Dubuffet published his “Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” in which he describes the work of artists as the creation of form from *inform*. For him, the adventure of art starts with the unformed and takes place at the surface of the painting: “Le point de départ est la surface à animer – toile ou feuille de papier – et la première tache de couleur ou d’encre qu’on y jette: l’effet qui en résulte, l’aventure qui en résulte. C’est cette tache, à mesure qu’on l’enrichit et qu’on l’oriente, qui doit conduire le travail.”¹⁰⁸ As described by Dubuffet, the progressive materialization of the work appears like a process of realizing awareness. The idea of art as locus of self-awareness was also essential to Antonin Artaud, as his famous text on Van Gogh shows: “Il ne s’est pas suicidé dans un coup de folie, dans la transe de n’y pas parvenir, mais au contraire il venait d’y parvenir et de découvrir ce qu’il était et qui il était, lorsque la conscience

¹⁰⁸ Jean Dubuffet, “Notes pour les fins-lettrés,” in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art en théorie, 1900 -1990* (Paris: Hazan, 1997), 653.

générale de la société, pour le punir de s'être arraché à elle, le suicida."¹⁰⁹ Van Gogh is presented as an artist who reached an extreme level of awareness, who could see and comprehend what others could not. Similarly, for Henri Michaux the act of drawing was a means of self-realization. After the death of his wife, he started to draw frenetically in a desperate attempt to find himself again. The faces that emerged from the unformed lines are repeated attempts to comprehend what and who he was.

In a world on the verge of collapse, where recent crimes were beyond comprehension and the atomic bomb could annihilate humanity at any moment, human existence was precarious. The works of these artists were images of this precariousness. For Sartre, Wols was the Existentialist artist par excellence, who saw the world in terms of otherness. His paintings were the paintings Roquentin would have had painted, had he been a painter. As for Giacometti, his works revealed the drama of the human existence that only exists in and for the other's glance:

[C]hacune nous livre cette vérité que l'homme n'est pas d'abord pour être vu par après, mais qu'il est l'être dont l'essence est d'exister pour autrui. En percevant cette femme de plâtre, c'est mon regard refroidi que je rencontre sur elle. De là ce plaisant malaise où me jette sa vue: je me sens contraint, et je ne sais à quoi ni par qui, jusqu'à ce que je découvre que je suis contraint à voir et contraint par moi.¹¹⁰

Francis Ponge, discussing Giacometti's work, adds: "L'homme non seulement n'a plus rien; mais il n'est plus rien ; que ce JE."¹¹¹ Jacques Lacan has described the formation of "JE" as the moment when the *hommelette* becomes *homme*, when seeing becomes thinking, when *inform* becomes form.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Antonin Artaud, "Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société," in *Ibid.*, 663.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "La recherche de l'absolu," in *Ibid.*, 268.

¹¹¹ Francis Ponge, "Réflexions sur les statuettes, figures et peintures d'Alberto Giacometti," in *Ibid.*, 677.

¹¹² Jacques Lacan, "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du je," in *Ibid.*, 670-75.

1.3.5, Conclusion

Even this brief survey confirms that we cannot reduce the story of post-War art to the triumph of individual expression, as is too often done, nor can we present the universal language of abstraction as *the* art of the period. These scholarly images are the products of specific contexts and do not represent the situation of the entire Western world. Similarly, it is misleading to see the post-War artworld as an international field, with shared concerns and goals. It was rather a field divided into multiples sections which did not necessarily communicate with one another. Each country was engrossed in its own preoccupations and lived its own story, which often had little to do with others' stories. Contrary to what Haftmann claimed, then, art did not create conversation across frontiers – at least not in the 1950s. It was comprised, rather, of a set of distinct monologues.

1.4. PARTIAL AND LIMITED: ARTISTIC EXCHANGES IN THE 1950s

Ideologies about art were not the only factors that limited national art stories to acting as monologues. In the post-War period, the international exchanges were limited not only because people were too deeply involved in their own rebuilding, but also simply because exchanges were, technically speaking, difficult, especially between Europe and the United States. Transatlantic crossings were long and expensive, and air transportation still rarely used. In the years following the War, the Parisian dealer René Drouin was able to send artworks to his former partner Leo Castelli in New York only because a pilot friend would take rolled paintings in his luggage.¹¹³ Within Europe, if the distances were shorter, communications were not much easier: post offices were slow; transportation companies not always reliable; and customs did not

¹¹³ Leo Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1969).

understand anything about art as commodity. Italian customs were particularly dreadful, and it was not uncommon to have artworks disappear into storage for months awaiting an office's decision on what to do with them. Beatrice de Monti, the owner of the Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan, would, for example, often have to go rescue works sent to her from the depths of custom offices.¹¹⁴ Beyond the problems of communication and transportation, there were also difficulties related to international payments, which in the 1950s were painstaking and lengthy procedures. In addition, international transactions were often made in dollars, which were not always easy for Europeans to acquire (and expensive if available). In Italy, it was sometimes impossible to get dollars, to the great displeasure of the collector Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, who wanted to buy American art.¹¹⁵

We need to keep such material conditions in mind as we examine cultural exchange in the Western world after the War.

1.4.1. The revival of Franco-German relations

In the post-War period, exchanges between France and Germany resumed rather quickly despite such hindrances, perhaps because they had never really stopped. In a strange way, the Occupation had been a form of exchange. There might have been strong animosity – if not to say hatred – among the French towards the Germans, but, even during the War, the French and the German people knew that this war, like the others, would end one day and they would remain neighbors.¹¹⁶ When the War did end and the French took control of part of West Germany,

¹¹⁴ Beatrice Monti, "Galleria dell'Ariete Records," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 980059).

¹¹⁵ Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, "Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 940004).

¹¹⁶ For examples of such feelings, see Kladstrup and Kladstrup, *Wine and War: The French, the Nazis, and the Battle for France's Greatest Treasure*.

reconciliation was the main issue, not retaliation. The lessons of the First World War and the disastrous occupation of the Ruhr had been learned.

From a cultural point of view, the Germans were – as noted earlier – eager to rediscover the French modern art that had been censored during the Third Reich, and the French, flattered and reassured by this interest, were only too happy to oblige. Despite the terrible economic and political situation in France in the aftermath of the War, French authorities oversaw an involved cultural policy towards Germany, organizing seventeen art exhibitions in their zone between 1945 and 1949. As mentioned above, the exhibition “Moderne französische Malerei” that took place in Berlin in 1946 was a great success. That year, the French also opened an Institut Français in Fridberg, whose library would count 600,000 books in 1949. The French did not just promote their own culture, they also fostered the revival of German culture. They organized, for instance, the exhibition “Deutsche Kunst der Gegenwart” in Baden-Baden, which Edith Appleton Standen described as superior to Dresden’s “Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung.”¹¹⁷ The French also sponsored the publication of Franco-German journals, such as *Lancelot*, which introduced the German people to the cultural and artistic situation in France, and the creation of German art journals, such as *Das Kunstwerk*, which was published in Baden-Baden starting in 1946 and whose editorial staff was strongly Francophile. One of the most symbolic gestures of reconciliation took place in October 1948, when France donated a set of prints by Matisse, Picasso, and Braque to the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe, and, in thanks, was presented with a painting by Baumeister, *Jour heureux* (1947), which was placed in the permanent collection of the Musée National d’Art Moderne.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Standen and Brendel, "Report on Germany."

¹¹⁸ Marie-Amélie zu Salm-Salm, *Échanges artistiques franco-allemands et renaissance de la peinture abstraite dans les pays germaniques après 1945* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

The French were also accommodating to German artists who wished to go to Paris. They gave them authorization to cross the frontiers, which until the creation the Federal Republic in October 1949 remained closed, and even occasionally granted them money (*bourse de mobilité*). As Karl Otto Götz confided to Marie-Amélie zu Salm-Salm, traveling to France was actually easy: “je ne devais me rendre qu’au consulat français et dire : ‘je suis peintre et je fais une expo à Paris.’ On te donnait le papier. C’était tout. Ce ne fut nullement compliqué. Au contraire, ils aidaient beaucoup.”¹¹⁹ For German artists, going to Paris was a priority in the post-War era, as Werner Schnalenbad explained:

Tourner le dos à l’Allemagne, Paris devant mes yeux, voilà ma direction. Bien sur ce détournement de l’Allemagne était dû à l’expérience nazie et à la guerre. [...] on ne voulait rien savoir de l’Allemagne, ni de l’art allemand. Je m’intéressais aux événements, mais je ne m’engageais pas du tout. Intérieurement, je me détournais même de l’expressionnisme allemand, en faveur du cubisme français.¹²⁰

German interest in the School of Paris was even greater since two of its more important artists, Wols and Hartung, were German-born. They were highly respected in France, and their works were admired on the international art scene without ever being labeled German. Such examples were empowering for young German artists, who feared that being both German and creative was impossible after Auschwitz. In 1947, Ottomar Domnick published the first monograph on Hartung in German, thereby increasing the knowledge and popularity of the artist in his home country and helping him to emerge as a paradigm for German international art.

In 1948, the organizers of the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, a new Parisian salon devoted to abstract art, asked Domnick and Baumeister to make a selection of German abstract artists to be exhibited in the international section of the Salon, alongside American, British, and Italian artists. This was to be the first exhibition of German art in France since the War, and the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 103.

invitation marked a renewal of pre-War relationships. The Salon des Réalités Nouvelles was, in fact, the reincarnation of the association Abstraction-Création, of which Baumeister had been a member.¹²¹ Then Galerie Jeanne Boucher, which had exhibited Baumeister before the War, renewed his contact and started to represent the artist in France after 1949. To thank the organizers of the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles for extending an invitation to German artists, Domnick organized in Germany an exhibition of “Französische abstrakte Malerei,” which featured 90 works by Pierre Soulages, Pierre Schneider, Hartung, and others. The show, which travelled to Munich, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, Hannover, Hamburg, and Frankfurt, was a significant event in the promotion of abstract art in Germany.¹²²

With the opening of German borders in the 1950s, travel and exchange intensified, even more so since the newly formed West German government was directing most of its international cultural policy towards France.¹²³ In 1950, Charles Delaunay organized the Premier Salon International du Jazz in Paris, which highlighted the link between jazz music and abstract art. Bernard Schultze and Karl Otto Götz, members of the group Quadriga, which had close ties with the Parisian art scene, attended the event. They were subsequently given solo shows at the Studio Paul Facchetti in Paris.¹²⁴ In 1952, Peter Brüning received a scholarship from UNESCO to study in Paris, where he stayed until 1954. There he befriended Pierre Restany, who afterwards visited him in Düsseldorf. Restany also met Jean-Pierre Wilhelm, a German of Jewish origin who had spent the War hidden in France and was a Francophile. In May 1956, Wilhelm organized an exhibition of “Cinq Abstraites Rhénans” at the Studio Facchetti, featuring artists from the Gruppe

¹²¹ Dominique Viéville, “Vous avez dit géométrique? Le Salon des Réalités Nouvelles 1946-1957” in Hulten, ed., *Paris-Paris, 1937-1957 - Création en France*, 270-85.

¹²² Ottmar Domnick and Greta Domnick, *Die Sammlung Domnick* (Stuttgart; Zurich: Belser, 1982).

¹²³ Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften, *Zur Geschichte der Kulturpolitik in der B.R.D.* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987), 47.

¹²⁴ zu Salm-Salm, *Échanges artistiques franco-allemands et renaissance de la peinture abstraite dans les pays germaniques après 1945*, 151.

53, namely Peter Brüning, Winfried Gaul, Gerhard Hoehme, Albert Fürst, and Friedrich Wertmann. For these German artists, Paris in 1956 was still the center of the artworld – the place to which they looked for inspiration and empowerment. For them Franco-German relationships were vital because in Paris they could discover, as Fürst explained, freedom:

Ich meine, was von Amerika, vor allen Dingen aber von Paris herüberkam, war ja damals für uns überraschend, und es war eigentlich vefuherisch, nicht? Die Möglichkeit, so frei zu sein, wie Picasso es auf seine Weise war. Das war für uns etwas Neues, da wir aus einer Generation stammten, die gehorcht hat Gehorchen: Hitlerjugend, fünf Jahre Soldat, wie unter anderem Hoehme auch.¹²⁵

1.4.2. Americans in Paris

German artists were not the only ones to go to Paris after the War; it was also a favorite destination among recipients of the GI Bill. For young American artists, there were many reasons to go to Paris, but chief amongst them was the situation at home. American art schools were overcrowded with former GIs and it was very difficult to find a place. Jack Youngerman, for instance, decided to study in Paris when all his applications to American schools were rejected. Besides, due to the extremely favorable exchange rate for American dollars, one could live very well in France on the \$75 monthly allowance of the GI Bill. Life was thus easy for the American artists in Paris. They just needed to enroll either in Ossip Zadkine's class at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière or in Léger's studio to receive their GI stipends. After that nobody would check on their attendance or give them grades. As Sam Francis, who enrolled in Léger's studio, explains: "C'était juste pour avoir l'argent du GI Bill. J'y allais une fois par semaine. C'était sympathique. Rien à faire. Juste venir pour toucher de l'argent."¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Marie-Louise Otten, ed., *Auf dem Weg zur Avantgarde: Künstler der Gruppe 53* (Rattigen: Museum der Stadt Rattigen, 2003), 37.

¹²⁶ Henri Michaud, "Sam Francis, Années 50," *Art Press*, Summer 1988, 18.

Another reason to go to Paris was the still glorious aura of the city. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Picasso, Braque, Miro, Chagall, Matisse, Brancusi, and Sonia Delaunay were still around. One could meet these historical figures in the streets of Montparnasse, have lunch next to them, and even casually visit their studios. Going to Paris was a pilgrimage to the shrine of bohemia. For Youngerman, it was incredible to experience an art establishment from another world and time:

For me it was an unbelievable return to the past. I was amazed that they could preserve a sense of atmosphere down to every detail. The way the professor looked – his dress and all the mannerisms- were all very 19th century. And the studio that I was in – people told me it had been Toulouse-Lautrec's and that van Gogh had also been a student there. As though it had been the day before yesterday. [...] that was what I liked the most – that kind of historical fetishism.¹²⁷

However, Americans in Paris had very little contact with young French artists, mainly because of the language barrier. Most Americans came to France without speaking French and not many French spoke English. This made exchanges difficult and friendships almost impossible. Studying with Zadkine or Léger was completely useless if a student couldn't understand what the Master was saying. During Léger's weekly critiques, for instance, translations had to be provided by an Egyptian and a Hawaiian student, who were the only ones who spoke both French and English.¹²⁸ Besides the language barrier, French and American cultures were completely different in those years. If at first the cultural gap was excitingly exotic, in daily life it created tensions, as Youngerman quickly experienced:

They were all somewhat on the defensive about all kinds of things. Not about art because they owned art at that time and according to them we were obviously the philistines with our pockets loaded with dollars – I think most Americans felt that. We all had some French friend. And I still have some who are among the most beautiful people I know

¹²⁷ Jack Youngerman and Colette Roberts, "Jack Youngerman Talks with Colette Roberts," *Archives of American Art Journal* 17, no. 4 (1977): 11.

¹²⁸ Gladys Fabre, "L'atelier de Fernand Léger, période 1937-1955," in Hulten, ed., *Paris-Paris, 1937-1957 - Création en France, 190-95*.

and I love them. But there was in general a kind of nationalist feeling and a sort of scorn for us.¹²⁹

One of the exceptions in this general lack of communication was the collaboration between Franklin Koenig, who had come to Paris to study literature at the Sorbonne and thus spoke French perfectly, and Jean-Pierre Arnaud, who had recently opened a bookshop in Paris. Both were interested in the geometric abstraction that was promoted by the Galerie Denise-René since 1944 and by the journal *Art d'Aujourd'hui*. Starting in spring 1951, they organized exhibitions in the bookshop of works by French and American artists, among them Youngerman and Ellsworth Kelly, who had been in Paris since 1948 and frequented the circle of the geometric abstract artists gathered around Michel Seuphor.¹³⁰ As time went on, the bookshop morphed completely into a gallery, and the brochures published for the exhibitions were subsequently transformed into *Cimaise*, a bilingual art journal, to which Michel Ragon and Dore Ashton contributed. In those years, *Cimaise* was one of the rare bridges between the French and the American artworlds.¹³¹

Georges Duthuit was another point of contact between American artists and the Parisian art scene. A critic and art historian, he spoke English fluently and was in charge, since 1947, of *Transition*, a Parisian journal published in English. Duthuit, who was also Matisse's son-in-law, introduced Jean-Paul Riopelle and Sam Francis to the late work of Matisse. Thanks to him, these late works, which were not well-known at that time, became a strong source of inspiration for the American artistic community in Paris. The other models of these American artists were Bonnard and the late work of Monet, in particular the *Nymphéas* of the Musée de l'Orangerie. Completely

¹²⁹ Youngerman and Roberts, "Jack Youngerman Talks with Colette Roberts," 12.

¹³⁰ Michael Plante, " "Things to Cover Walls": Ellsworth Kelly's Paris Paintings and the Tradition of Mural Decoration," *American Art* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1995): 37-53.

¹³¹ Corine Giriaud, "Cimaise 1952-1963 - Une revue dans une période de transition : du monopole parisien à la suprématie new-yorkaise" (Mémoire de Maitrise, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2001).

disconnected from current Parisian artistic developments, the Americans of Paris took Monet, Matisse, and Bonnard as their models, thereby creating a distinctive style and movement that was between France and America. Arnold Rüdlinger, the director of the Kunsthalle in Bern, described the position of these artists as completely original:

N'étant pas soumis à une agitation frénétique et à la tension nerveuse de leurs confrères de New York, les Américains de Paris paraissent beaucoup plus calmes et plus pondérés. Ils semblent moins tourmentés. Leur nature est plus ferme, plus modulée, plus compréhensive qu'agressive. Leurs tableaux reflètent un accord intérieur végétatif et organique qui n'apparaît pas chez les artistes de New York. L'influence de Paris ? Peut-être. Il y a des cadences de couleurs, chez Shirley Jaffe, qui l'apparentent à Bonnard – A tort ou à raison Sam Francis rappelle à un Européen la dernière période de Monet.¹³²

One must not forget, however, that these American artists' presence in Paris did not necessarily foster exchanges between the two countries. They formed an isolated community, detached from both the French and American art scenes. As such they could only contribute to a better understanding between France and the United States on an individual level.

1.4.3. Some transatlantic initiatives

In the postwar era, transatlantic exchanges remained extremely limited for the reasons noted above. When they happened, they were usually the result of individual initiatives and chance collaborations.

In 1947, for example, Georges Mathieu, who had been teaching English during the War and had worked as a translator for the American armies at the Liberation, started to work for the transatlantic shipping company United States Lines. This new job gave him the opportunity to travel to the United States and to discover the New York art scene. In 1948, he decided to organize an international show of abstract art at the Galerie Montparnasse in Paris:

¹³² Arnold Rüdlinger, "4 Américains de Paris. Exposition au Centre Culturel Américain. Été 1958," quoted in Yves Michaud, Sabine Dauré, and Serge Fauchier, *Des Américains à Paris 1950-1965* (Pyrénées-Orientales: Fondation du château de Jau, 1988).

J'écris donc au début du mois d'aout à différentes galeries de New York pour leur demander d'envoyer par avions des dessins et des gouaches. [...] La liste est établie, elle comprend : Bryen, de Kooning, Gorky, Hartung, Mathieu, Picabia, Pollock, Reinhardt, Rothko, Russell, Sauer, Tobey et Wols. Elle a lieu en novembre, mais assez incomplètement, étant donné alors les difficultés de coopération avec les galeries américaines (Charles Eagan, Julien Levy et Betty Parsons) en vue d'activité strictement non commerciale.¹³³

Despite the semi-failure of the show, Mathieu continued to promote American art in France. Starting in 1953, he started to publish a bilingual magazine, *United States Lines Paris Review*, for which Thomas Hess wrote essays on new American painting.

Michel Tapié was a jazz musician and sculptor who, thanks to his friendship with Mathieu, was also able to go to the United States to become familiar with the American art scene. In Paris, he met the collector Alfonso Ossorio, who owned several works by de Kooning and Pollock. This gave him the idea to repeat Mathieu's "confrontation." This time, though, there would be no begging American dealers to send a handful of small works on paper; he would request large oil paintings by major American artists. The exhibition, titled "Véhémences Confrontées," took place in March 1951 at the Galerie Nina Dausset. It featured – as mentioned earlier – Bryen, Capogrossi, de Kooning, Hartung, Mathieu, Pollock, Riopelle, Russell, and Wols. Since Ossorio did not own any Rothkos or Reinhardts, these artists were not featured in the show. In March 1952, with Ossorio's help, Tapié was able to organize a subsequent solo show of Pollock at the Studio Paul Facchetti. As the guest book of the gallery reveals, the exhibition was well-attended. The edition of *Lettres Françaises* dated March 20, 1952 includes Pierre Descargues's enthusiastic review "Pollock: atomiseur de l'art." Nonetheless, only two paintings sold: one to a Swiss collector whose name was Pollack and one to a Milanese collector.

¹³³ Georges Mathieu, *De la révolte à la renaissance: au-delà du tachisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 61-62.

¹³⁴ During his subsequent visits to New York, Tapié developed a working relationship with Betty Parsons, to whom he recommended Morris Louis and for whom he wrote catalogues.¹³⁵

In France, Tapié and Mathieu were not the only ones becoming concerned with American art. Jean Cassou, the director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne (MNAM) was also interested in bringing American art to France. Since the reopening of the MNAM in 1947, Cassou had tried in vain to launch an exhibition of American art, but the US Information Service never followed up on his repeated requests. As discussed earlier, the State Department was in the middle of the controversy surrounding the "Advancing American Art" exhibition. The last thing they wished to do was to organize a show of modern American art in Paris. Cassou's request was finally answered in 1952 when MoMA's International Program of Exhibition was established. In July 1952, Alfred Barr came to Paris to meet Cassou and discuss the possibility of a show. The French wanted a selection of established artists that would reflect the diversity of American artistic production – something in line with the collection of the MNAM, which was presently not exhibiting the newest artistic trends but rather established masters like Picasso, Matisse, and Bonnard.¹³⁶ The resulting show, selected by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, featured twelve reputable and established artists working in different styles: Ivan Albright, Edward Hopper, Ashile Gorky, Morris Graves, John Kane, John Marin, Jackson Pollock, Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis, Alexander Calder, Theodore Roszak, and David Smith. "12 peintres et sculpteurs américains" opened at the MNAM on April 24, 1953. In its exhibition catalogue, Cassou writes:

Le Musée National d'Art Moderne est heureux d'accueillir cet ensemble d'œuvres de neuf peintres et trois sculpteurs américains représentatifs de quelques unes des tendances

¹³⁴ Alfred Pacquement, "La première exposition de Jackson Pollock à Paris, Studio Paul Fachetti, mars 1962," in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Paris-New York* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 536-41.

¹³⁵ Eric de Chasse, "Paris - New York: Rivalry and Denial," in *Paris: Capital des arts 1900-1968*, ed. Sarah Wilson (London: Royal Academy of Art, 2002), 344-51.

¹³⁶ Gay R. McDonald, "The Launching of American Art in Postwar France: Jean Cassou and the Musée National d'Art Moderne," *American Art*, Spring 1999, 41-61.

essentielles de l'art actuel des États-Unis. Celui-ci est encore peu ou mal connu à Paris, malgré toute la curiosité qui doit légitimement s'y éveiller à l'égard de ce que peut bien être l'expression artistique d'un si vaste et puissant pays. Cette interrogation reçoit ici un commencement de satisfaction.¹³⁷

The show did indeed raise a lot of curiosity among the French and was well attended. According to the US Information Agency, it was visited by 2,500 visitors and was thus the most visited show of non-French art at the MNAM. The show went subsequently to Zurich, Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo, where it was equally well received.¹³⁸

Arnold Rüdlinger, the director of the Kunsthalle in Bern, was also very eager to show American art. In 1947, he thus organized a show of Alexander Calder. Through Calder, Rüdlinger met Sam Francis and his Parisian friends. In 1954, he organized a show titled "Tendances 3," which featured Bryen, Francis, Mathieu, Pollock, Riopelle, Tancredi, Tobey, and Wols. The works were borrowed from Peggy Guggenheim (hence Tancredi), Sam Francis and Tapié, from whom he also borrowed the concept of the show. In the catalogue of the exhibition, Rüdlinger wrote: "Die bildende Kunst ist heute an einem Punkt angelangt, wo in Europa und Amerika eine Sprache gesprochen wird, die sich des selben Vokabulars bedient, und zwar nicht eines angelernten, sondern eines simultan geschaffenen. Ich möchte diese Sprache 'Tachisme' nennen."¹³⁹ Note the reference to the notion of abstraction as a universal language!

In 1955, Rüdlinger became the director of the Kunsthalle in Basel. His ambition was to go to the United States and select works for an ambitious presentation of American art in his new museum. Unfortunately, he did not have the money for such a trip and without Sam Francis's generous intervention, he would have never gone. In March 1957, Rüdlinger at last went to New

¹³⁷ Jean Cassou, "Introduction," in Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *12 Peintres et sculpteurs américains* (Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1953).

¹³⁸ Franc, "The Early Years of the International Program and Council."

¹³⁹ Quoted in Sigrud Ruby, "The Give and Take of American Painting in Postwar Western Europe," in *The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective*, ed. Volker R. Berghahn, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, and Christof Mauch (Washington, D.C.: GHI Conference Papers on the Web, No. 1, 1999), 15.

York. There he discovered that it would be extremely difficult and expensive to put together a show on his own. He thus contacted the International Program at MoMA, which was working on a show of contemporary American art to be sent to Europe in 1958. Rüdlinger was able to slightly alter the original selection and the show started its European tour in Basel in April 1958.¹⁴⁰

Mathieu, Tapié, Cassou, and Rüdlinger were able to stimulate artistic exchanges between Europe and the United States, but their projects did not really create opportunities for exchange between American and European artists. They simply moved artworks from one continent to the other, and displayed them in a framework that reflected more their understanding of American art than what it really was. However important these individual initiatives were, by their very nature they were limited and partial.

1.4.4. Pierre Restany and the international avant-garde

In the mid 1950s, an international network of artists, critics, and dealers started to emerge around Pierre Restany. Restany was not responsible for all the encounters and initiatives of the network, but he was definitely the link connecting its different parts, and the energy powering it.

Born in France, Restany spent most of his childhood in Morocco. After repeatedly failing the entrance exam of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA), he decided to go to Italy to study art history. He studied with Giulio Carlo Argan in Pisa, who introduced him to modern art. In 1952, he went to Ireland, where he stayed eighteen months to do research on Irish illuminations. These international experiences and his mastery of foreign languages gave Restany an exceptional advantage in the post-War artworld.

¹⁴⁰ Eberhard Kornfeld, "Rüdlingers Reise nach New York 1957," in Lukas Gloor, *Die Geschichte der Basler Kunstvereins und der Kunsthalle Basel, 1839-1988* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 1989), 228-29.

Back in Paris, he started to write articles for *Cimaise* and for some Italian magazines. During that time, he met – as mentioned earlier – Jean-Pierre Wilhelm and Peter Brüning, who was a member of the Gruppe 53. For the movement’s second exhibition in Düsseldorf in January 1956, the artists asked Restany to write a text, “Lyrisme et Abstraction,” which Wilhelm translated. Restany in return convinced Paul Facchetti to exhibit these German artists in Paris, hence the “Cinq Abstraites Rhénans” show we mentioned earlier. During his visits to Düsseldorf, Restany met Alfred Schmela, an artist who had studied in Paris in 1949 with André Lhote, and who was considering opening an art gallery. He also met Otto Piene and Heinz Mack, two artists who rejected Tachism, and with whom his friend Yves Klein was already in contact. Restany had met Klein in December 1955, and had become his champion. Thanks to his Italian contacts, Restany was able to organize an exhibition of Klein’s blue monochromes, “Epoca blu,” at the Gallery Apollinaire in Milan, which was directed by Guido Le Noci, in January 1957. During this exhibition, Restany met Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, who was starting to collect art, and whom he would advise in future years.

In May 1957, during his exhibition at Iris Clert, Klein met Werner Ruhrau, a German architect in charge of the opera house of Gelsenkirchen. On May 31, 1957, Schmela opened his art gallery in Düsseldorf with an exhibition of Klein’s monochromes. This show convinced Ruhrau to entrust Klein with the decoration of the opera house; the artist started work on the project in 1958. When he had trouble communicating with his German workers, Klein asked Rotraut Uecker, the former nanny of Arman’s children in Nice and an artist in her own right, for assistance. Through Rotraut, whom he would eventually marry, Klein met her brother Günther Uecker. Uecker thereby met Mack and Piene, with whom he started to collaborate. In July 1958,

Mack and Piene published the first issue of *Zero* magazine, which included a German translation of Klein's text "Meine Stellung im Kampf zwischen Linie und Farbe."¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, at the Venice Biennale of 1958, Restany and Jean Larcade encountered the work of Jasper Johns and were immediately convinced of its importance. Larcade, who was then living in the United States, decided to come back to France to open an art gallery. In January 1959, Larcade gave a solo show to Johns in the Galerie Rive Droite he had recently opened in Paris.

In March 1959, Jean Tinguely, Klein, Uecker, Mack, Piene, Burri, and other European artists interested in light and movement put together a show, "Vision in Motion," at the Hesselhuis in Antwerp. On the road to Antwerp, Klein, Mack, and Piene drafted the idea of the *Ecole de la Sensibilité*. Informed of these developments, Piero Manzoni, an Italian artist interested in the same ideas, drove to Düsseldorf to meet with Mack and Piene. There he was able to participate in "Dynamo 1," an exhibition which opened in Wiesbaden two days before "documenta 2" and was conceived as a reaction to Haftmann's claim that lyrical abstraction was the universal language of contemporary art. Mack and Piene, who were great admirers of Lucio Fontana, asked Manzoni to help them organize an exhibition of the master's work, which eventually happened at Schmela's in January 1960. The previous autumn, Manzoni, Enrico Castellani, and Vincenzo Agnetti had created the journal *Azimut*. In its first issue, they presented Yves Klein and the Zero-Gruppe. In March 1960, Udo Kulterman organized at the Schloß Morsbroich in Leverkusen an international exhibition of monochrome paintings. Featuring works

¹⁴¹ Henry Perier, *Pierre Restany, L'alchimiste de l'art* (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1998). Gilbert Perlein, ed., *Zero International* (Nice: Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, 1998). Karl Ruhrberg, ed., *Alfred Schmela Galerist: Galerist-Wegbereiter der Avantgarde* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1996). Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1994).

by Klein, Fontana, Manzoni, Mack, Piene, Uecker, Rothko, Still, Newman, and many others, this show was an exceptional international event.¹⁴²

In December 1959, another international exhibition took place in Paris: “L’Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme.” Organized by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton at the gallery of Daniel Cordier, the show featured, among others, Tinguely, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. In March 1960, with the complicity of Duchamp, Tinguely was able to realize at the MoMA his *Homage à New York*, a self-destructing machine, which included a money thrower donated by Rauschenberg. In spring 1961, Rauschenberg and Johns were in Paris. Rauschenberg had a solo show at Cordier’s that May, and Johns had one at Larcade’s a month later. During their Parisian stay, both took part in the Parisian art scene with the help of Niki de Saint-Phalle, who, being Franco-American, often facilitated communications between French and American artists. In March 1961, Johns, Rauschenberg, de Saint-Phalle, and Tinguely participated in “Bewogen-Bewegen,” a show organized by Pontus Hulten in Stockholm, which also featured Duchamp and Alexander Calder. In May, Rauschenberg contributed to “Les 41 présentent Iris Clert” with a short telegram he heralded an artwork. On June 20, Tinguely, de Saint-Phalle, Rauschenberg, and Johns performed in “Hommage à Tudor,” a ballet choreographed by Merce Cunningham and orchestrated by John Cage, at the American Cultural Center in Paris. On June 30, for the opening of de Saint-Phalle’s “Tirs à volonté,” everybody was there: Restany, Klein, Rotraut, Rauschenberg, Leo Castelli, and the dealer Lawrence Rubin (her brother-in-law) with Frank Stella. In July, Pierre Restany organized “Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York” at the Galerie Rive Droite. In September, Johns and Rauschenberg were included in the Second Biennale of Paris. In spring 1962, while de Saint-Phalle and Tinguely

¹⁴² Annette Kuhn, *Zero: Eine Avantgarde der Sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Propylaen Verlag, 1991), Perlein, ed., *Zero International*.

were staying in New York, they collaborated with Rauschenberg on “The Construction of Boston,” a performance in which Stella and Henry Geldzahler participated as well.¹⁴³ Finally a group of European and American collaborators was in place, exerting real influence on one another’s perceptions and production.

“The Construction of Boston,” an extravagant event, was, however, the last collective action of this particular international network of artists. With the premature deaths of Klein in 1962 and Manzoni in 1963, the group lost two important actors who had facilitated connections amongst French, German, and Italian artists. Without them and their incredible energy, creative relations became looser and looser, tensions arose, and divisions occurred. But a very important point had been made: artists from these various nations did in fact have reasons to work together, reasons beyond the “international language of abstraction.”

1.5. CONCLUSION

“Véhemences Confrontées” – the title chosen by Tapié for his 1951 exhibition – offers a largely accurate image of the post-War artworld. Etymologically, “confrontation” comes from the demarcation between two properties, and implies a separation, not an exchange, of arguments. Contrary to common belief, the post-War artworld was not a global field in which everyone spoke the universal language of abstraction, nor was it a battlefield from which American artists emerged victorious. It was, rather, a localized and compartmentalized field, in which exchanges between compartments were tenuous. From the vantage point of one compartment it was almost impossible to see what was going on in others, and easy to assume

¹⁴³ Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time*. Pierre Restany, “Chelsea 1960,” in Hulten, ed., *Paris-New York*, 142-57. Alfred Pacquement, “La première exposition de Rauschenberg à Paris, à la galerie Daniel Cordier, mai 1961,” in Hulten, ed., *Paris-New York*, 580-83. Pontus Hulten and Billy Klüver, “L’hommage à New York de Jean Tinguely, MOMA 1960,” in Hulten, ed., *Paris-New York*, 570-79. Pontus Hulten and ali., *Niki de Saint-Phalle* (Nice: Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain, 2002).

that either they were doing the same or nothing. Yet, in each compartment, vehement and distinctive polemics were taking place. To say that Europe lost its creative power during the War or to reduce post-War artistic production to Abstract Expressionism is to be the victim of this compartmentalization on a conceptual level.

From all this, we can identify clear tendencies in art production during the post-War era: national artistic polemics depended almost exclusively on a limited number of national voices, with little international input; those artistic polemics were heavily determined by the politics of World War II and, subsequently, the Cold War, rather than by artistic traditions; the material and financial situations of each country heavily determined the re-establishment of national schools; exiles, emigrants, visitors, and immigrants had only sporadic influence on the re-establishment of national art projects; first contacts between countries were often made in shows that represented the host country's preferences rather than the source culture's strengths or innovations. These fragmented and localized interests, I believe, need to be factored into all accounts of post-War art.

Chapter 2

“A Tale of Two Cities”: The Shift of the Western Artworld’s Center from Paris to New York

“We all know what happened to International School of Paris Painting at some time in between 1939 and 1945; it ceased to exist. We know how it happened; the evidence is plain in literally thousands of pictures by hundreds of very gifted, intelligent artists.”¹⁴⁴ So begins Thomas Hess’s “Tale of Two Cities,” an account of the exhaustion of Paris and the triumph of New York.

Many articles and books have been written on the shift of the artworld’s center from Paris to New York, and it could seem pointless to reopen the discussion once more. However, there remains one aspect of this story that has not yet been questioned – namely, the gaps within the chronology of the shift. For Hess, writing in 1964, the shift happened during the war, “sometime between 1939 and 1945.” But in 1946 Greenberg was still claiming the dominance of Paris: “Paris remains the fountainhead of modern art, and every move made there is decisive for advanced art elsewhere, which is advanced precisely because it can respond to and extend the vibrations of that nerve center and nerve-end of modernity which is Paris.”¹⁴⁵ However, considering new French art again just two years later, Greenberg could not help noticing it had lost its edge: “the conclusion forces itself, much to our own surprise, that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of

¹⁴⁴ Thomas B. Hess, “A Tale of Two Cities,” *Location*, Summer 1964, 37.

¹⁴⁵ Clement Greenberg, “The School of Paris,” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 120.

industrial production and political power.”¹⁴⁶ Greenberg’s argument about the exhaustion of Paris slowly gained influence in the United States, but without convincing everyone, not even every American artist.

When *Art Digest* organized the symposium “Is French Avant-Garde Overrated?” in 1953, not all its participants were convinced that such a shift had actually happened or could happen. Greenberg, of course, reiterated his conviction that Paris was finished: “Do I mean that the new American abstract painting is superior on the whole to the French? I do.”¹⁴⁷ Jack Tworkov, on the other hand, dismissed the question: “In a symposium such as this one, it would be my aim to obtain a better climate for American painting rather than to fan up competition with the French.”¹⁴⁸ Ralston Crawford was perplexed:

“There haven’t been any great artists in Europe since Picasso” has become an American song. Then there is the unsung but often suggested chorus: “That makes us all great.” The logic leading to this chorus has eluded me for a long time. In France, now there are many fine artists working in various styles. During my sejour there in 1951 and 1952 I didn’t happen to see any young artists who seemed to have the substance of Cézanne, Picasso or Gris. I don’t find them in New York either.¹⁴⁹

If the end of Paris was under discussion in certain American circles, the same was not true in Western Europe. Across the continent Paris remained the undisputed center of the artworld. John Franklin Koenig, an American in Paris, found the city’s cultural life amazing in the 1950s: “C’était une époque extraordinaire: le renouveau de la France intellectuelle et artistique après la guerre. C’était fantastique, d’une diversité, d’une richesse incroyable.”¹⁵⁰ For German artists, as we saw in the last chapter, Paris in 1956 was still the place to go for artistic freedom and inspiration. Paris’s privileged position ended for many only in 1964 when Robert

¹⁴⁶ Clement Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism," *Partisan Review* (1948).

¹⁴⁷ Ralston Crawford et al., "Symposium: Is French Avant-Garde Overrated?," *Art Digest*, September, 15 1953, 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Corine Giriaud, "Cimaise 1952-1963 - Une revue dans une période de transition : du monopole parisien à la suprématie new-yorkaise" (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2001), 28.

Rauschenberg received the Grand Prize of Painting at the Venice Biennale. On that occasion, Alan Solomon, the curator of the American pavilion, rejoiced that the superiority of American art, which Greenberg had been claiming since the 1940s, was finally being recognized abroad: "The fact that the art world center has shifted from Paris to New York is acknowledged on every hand."¹⁵¹ The center of the artworld may have actually shifted during the War, but the world took twenty years to acknowledge it

The problem with Hess's tale is that it implies that those who saw Paris as the center of the artworld in the 1950s were wrong, and that the American, German, and Italian artists who came to Paris in the 1950s made the wrong decision. By this logic Pierre Descargues's life was irrelevant. Only those who recognized New York as *the* center were right. A second problem is that it presents the center of the artworld as moving from city to city as if it were the capital of a kingdom whose ruler liked to move his court to new places. The geographic metaphor implied in the term "center of the artworld" is misleading, because it *necessarily* suggests that the artistic activity moved from one city to the other. However, we know that there was in the era much activity not only in Paris and New York, but also in Milan, London, and Chicago.

The terminology has a more pertinent psychological dimension. The center of the artworld is not the place with the largest number of artists and the most activity. The center of the artworld is simply the place that attracts the most attention. What shifted in the middle of the twentieth century was not the center of the supposed art kingdom, but people's center of attention – the *regard*, as we say in French. Additionally, people's center of attention did not shift swiftly from Paris to New York. In fact, it took twenty years and a wide range of reasons to make the world look at New York instead of Paris. Contrary to Hess's claim, the shift did not happen in the paintings, but rather in the viewers of the paintings. Instead of assessing the

¹⁵¹ Jean-Robert Arnaud, "Mise à mort dans Venise la Rouge ?," *Cimaise*, July-October 1964, 104.

possible *truth* or *falsity* of the power relations claimed by both New York and Paris, I propose to examine the shift of the *regard* and the reasons why Western Europeans shifted the focus of their attention from Paris to New York.

2.1. *PARIS SERA TOUJOURS PARIS: THE CONTINUING PREVALENCE OF PARIS IN THE POST-WAR ERA*

Paris was not yet liberated when American dealers were already boarding ships, intent on journeying to France to buy art. With a ridiculously inequitable exchange rate between the dollar and the franc, everything in France was a bargain. Americans could buy Picasso, Matisse, Miro, and other masters of the School of Paris for less than it would cost them to buy young American artists at home. For the French, who lacked for everything, American dollars were a godsend – a second American landing!

American dealers were soon followed by collectors, art lovers, and artists from all over the world, who all wanted to wander through the streets of Montmartre, to visit Brancusi in the Impasse Ronsin, to dine at Montparnasse, and to sit at the terrace of the Café de Flore. In a ruined world, Paris remained a romantic ideal. As Sarah Wilson has explained: “pour l’Amérique comme pour l’Angleterre, Paris était toujours Paris, miraculeusement épargnée par les bombes, villes intacte, berceau de la civilisation où s’épanouissaient les arts et les lettres.”¹⁵²

In 1956, Roger van Gindertael asked some of the artists who had flocked to Paris a simple question: why Paris? Answers varied:

Pourquoi Paris? ‘Mais parce qu’on y est libre dans son travail, dans son expression, libre de s’isoler, libre aussi de retrouver le plus grand nombre et de se confronter quand il le faut...’

Pourquoi Paris? ‘Parce qu’il fallait partir, sortir de soi-même...’

¹⁵² Sarah Wilson, “Duncan Philips et Robert Sainsbury : L’École de Paris en Angleterre et en Amérique,” in Catherine Carrein, Catherine Morlet, and Bernard Ceysson, *L’Ecole de Paris? 1945-1964* (Paris: Musée national d’histoire et d’art du Luxembourg/Adagp, 1998), 39.

Pourquoi Paris, alors que tout est mieux ailleurs? [...] Pourquoi Paris? Peut-être parce qu'on peut y garder l'espoir jusqu'au bout. Partout ailleurs, il faut faire carrière et réussir vite. Paris n'est-il pas le seul lieu du monde où l'on puisse être un râté et vivre heureux, parce qu'ici il n'est jamais vraiment trop tard?¹⁵³

The reasoning behind these answers needs to be looked at in more detail.

2.1.1. Paris at the crossroads of painting

In December 1961, "Kompas - Paris: Carrefour de la Peinture," an ambitious exhibition devoted to the School of Paris, opened at the Stedelijk van Abbe-Museum of Eindhoven. In the exhibition catalogue, its director, Edy de Wilde, asserts: "C'est à Paris, plus qu'ailleurs, centre d'accueil pour les artistes de toutes nationalités, que se rend visible la gamme toute entière de la peinture."¹⁵⁴ Supporting this claim, the exhibition presented the School of Paris at its apogee. Despite Greenberg's comments on the exhaustion of Paris, in the early 1960s the School of Paris remained the indisputable darling of collectors, museum curators, and international juries.

In the post-War period, Parisian artists scooped up all the Grand Prizes at successive Venice Biennales: Georges Braque (painting, 1948), Marc Chagall (printmaking, 1948), Henri Matisse (painting, 1950), Ossip Zadkine (sculpture, 1950), Raoul Dufy (painting, 1952), Jean Arp (sculpture, 1954), and Jacques Villon (painting, 1956). In addition, many prizes went to artists who were closely associated with Paris, such as Alexander Calder (sculpture, 1952), Max Ernst (painting, 1954), and Joan Miro (printmaking, 1954).

In 1958, Antoine Pevsner and André Masson exhibited at the French pavilion. Everybody believed that Pevsner would win. But the Grand Prize for sculpture instead went to Umberto Mastroianni. In fact, that year all the winners of the international awards were Italians, with

¹⁵³ Roger van Gindertael, "Le complexe de l'Ecole de Paris," *Cimaise*, March 1956, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Edy de Wilde and Roger van Gindertael, *Kompas: Paris-Carrefour de la peinture* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbe-museum, 1961), 1.

Oswaldo Licini winning the Grand Prize for painting and Luigi Spacal the Grand Prize for printmaking. This caused a huge scandal and led to a reform of the Biennale's jury system. Pevsner and Masson did not get any prizes, though they were regarded as having deserved them. So, in a way the French pavilion won once again. In 1960, Fautrier and Hartung shared the French pavilion. The jury, unable to decide between these two major artists, awarded two Grand Prizes for painting, but none for sculpture. In 1962, the organizers of the Biennale held a retrospective of the winners of the Grand Prizes since 1948 in the central pavilion. This exhibition asserted the overwhelming prevalence of Parisian artists since the end of the War. That year, the Grand Prize for painting went to Alfred Manessier.¹⁵⁵

In the 1950s, the School of Paris also remained the favorite of collectors. Deirdre Robson, in her study of the market for Abstract Expressionism, found that, despite a growing interest in American art, American collectors remained faithful to European artists, and particularly to those associated with Paris, until the end of the 1950s.¹⁵⁶ Sarah Wilson, who has examined the collecting practices of British and American collectors, drew the same conclusion.¹⁵⁷ The collector Duncan Philips, who was an active supporter of American art and had been calling for its recognition since 1927, nonetheless continued to buy European artists. If he did not like Picasso the communist, he loved Bonnard, and Nicolas de Staël was his great discovery of the 1950s. He built a substantial collection of the artist, and after de Staël's death he organized a retrospective at the Philips Gallery in May 1956.¹⁵⁸ Examining the list of his purchases makes clear that this great promoter of American art nonetheless continued buying the

¹⁵⁵ Association Française d'Action Artistique, *La France à Venise: Le pavillon français de 1948 à 1988* (Rome: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1990).

¹⁵⁶ A. Deirdre Robson, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag between Critical and Commercial Acceptance," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Routledge, 2000), 288-93.

¹⁵⁷ Sarah Wilson, "Duncan Philips et Robert Sainsbury : L'École de Paris en Angleterre et en Amérique," in Carrein, Morlet, and Ceysson, *L'École de Paris? 1945-1964*, 39-55.

¹⁵⁸ Marjorie Phillips, *Duncan Phillips and His Collection* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 242-43.

School of Paris throughout the 1950s. Among his last acquisitions was Mannessier's *Du fond des ténèbres* in 1964.¹⁵⁹

MoMA, too, remained faithful to the School of Paris. In 1958, it presented an exhibition of prints by Braque, Miro, and Giorgio Morandi, which was followed by retrospectives of Georges Seurat, Juan Gris, and Jean Arp. That same year the museum hosted the shows "Ten European Artists (Prints)," a selection from the Philip L. Goodwin's Collection, and "Fifty Selections from the Bareiss Collection," which both featured numerous French artists. In 1958, there was no exhibition of American art at MoMA.¹⁶⁰ The Tate Gallery in London also kept on looking to Paris: as late as 1962, they presented a grand exhibition of the School of Paris.¹⁶¹

The darling of collectors, international juries, and museum directors, the School of Paris was henceforth very important to art dealers for financial reasons. American dealers, in particular, could keep their galleries afloat by selling prints and drawings from the School of Paris in their backrooms. Samuel Kootz an ardent supporter of American art who had been claiming the end of Paris since his exhibition at Macy's in 1941, and who had organized an exhibition of American artists at the Galerie Maeght in Paris in 1947, was only able to keep his gallery going because he had obtained the exclusive right to sell Picasso in the United States (in thanks he gave the artist the infamous Cadillac.) In 1953, Kootz gave contracts to Georges Mathieu and Pierre Soulages, two artists of the second generation of the School of Paris, who, as such, were easier to sell to the American public than unknown American artists.¹⁶² Thus the prestige of the School of Paris passed on to a second generation.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 317-47.

¹⁶⁰ Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 481.

¹⁶¹ François Mathey, *Ecole de Paris* (London: Tate Gallery, 1962).

¹⁶² Samuel Kootz, "Interview Conducted by Dorothy Seckler in New York on April 13, 1964," in *Archives of American Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1964).

It cannot be stressed enough that in the 1950s Paris remained the center of the Western artworld in the minds of virtually all: the place where European and American collectors, dealers, and museum directors would go to find new talent. If one were not in Paris, one did not exist on the art map. As a result, in the late 1950s several American dealers decided to open a gallery in Paris to show American art. Lawrence Rubin, who had been working at the Galerie du Dragon, which specialized in Surrealism, opened his own gallery in 1959. His new Galerie Neufville presented Abstract Expressionism, the Post-painterly Abstraction supported by Greenberg, as well as Frank Stella. In Paris, Rubin was able to introduce these American artists to European dealers in West Germany (most notably to Alfred Schmela) and Italy (Beatrice Monti), which he could not have done had he been in New York, since Europeans did not go there at that time. Schmela, on the other hand, used to go to Paris every six or eight weeks to keep informed of the newest trends.¹⁶³

In 1962, Ileana and Michael Sonnabend decided to open a gallery in Paris. They had initially wanted to go to Italy, but soon realized that Paris remained the art metropolis of Europe. In Italy or West Germany there were many art centers that were competing with one another. Each region lacked *a* single official or unofficial art center. One could go either to Turin, Milan, or Rome. Similarly, if one wanted to go to West Germany, how would one choose between Düsseldorf, Berlin, and Munich? In contrast, Paris, located at the center of Western Europe, was clearly *the* designated center of the Western European artworld. For the Sonnabends, who wanted to introduce American art to Western Europeans, this was the only place to be.¹⁶⁴ This

¹⁶³ Karl Ruhrberg, ed., *Alfred Schmela Galerist: Galerist-Wegbereiter der Avantgarde* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1996). Monika Schmela, "Alfred Schmela," *Kunstforum* 104 (1989).

¹⁶⁴ Michel Bourel, "Les galeries d'Ileana Sonnabend," in *"Collection Sonnabend" - 25 années de choix et d'activités d'Ileana et Michael Sonnabend* (Bordeaux: Capc, Musée d'art contemporain, 1988). Leo Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1969).

was also the conviction of David Anderson, the son of Martha Jackson, who opened a gallery in Paris with a friend. The ambition of the Anderson-Meyer Gallery was to draw European attention to the American artists that Martha Jackson represented in New York, but who were unknown in Europe.¹⁶⁵

The same thinking motivated MoMA's International Program to consistently present its European exhibitions in Paris, whereas other European cities were granted only one or two shows. These exhibitions also always started their European tours in Paris, except in the case of "New American art" in 1958, which opened in Basel for the specific reasons already noted. As Gay McDonald explains: "The American museums considered Paris to be the West's ruling cultural tastemakers and looked to the French capital as a site that would confirm the validity of American art."¹⁶⁶

2.1.2. Europe's late discovery of American art

In the 1950s, as we traced in the last chapter, American art was not well known in Europe. In fact, Europeans knew very little about the United States beyond Hollywood movies and comic books. People were talking about the "cocacolonization" of Europe – referring to invasion of American products – but in reality the influence of American models was small and limited to youth culture. Even in the early 1960s, British models would be more important than American on the continent. Americanization would really only start in the mid 1960s.¹⁶⁷ In the fine arts realm, the influence of the Americans was even smaller since nobody knew exactly

¹⁶⁵ Véronique Wiesinger, "L'art cinétique dans la guerre des marchés : de *L'Hommage à New York* à l'ouverture du Centre Georges Pompidou (1960-1977)," in Jean-Paul Ameline and Véronique Wiesinger, eds., *Denise-René L'intrépide - une galerie dans l'aventure de l'art abstrait 1944-1988* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2001), 129-41.

¹⁶⁶ Gay R. McDonald, "The Launching of American Art in Postwar France: Jean Cassou and the Musée National d'Art Moderne," *American Art*, Spring 1999, 41.

¹⁶⁷ Alexis Schildt, "Americanization," in *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990: A Handbook. Volume 1, 1945-1968*, ed. Detlef Junker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 635-42.

what American artists were doing. Edy de Wilde, one of the strongest promoters of American art in Europe, remembered that: “Over here, in Europe, in the 1950s, we did hear about a ‘New York School,’ but we had never seen anything of it.”¹⁶⁸

In the first part of the 1950s, only three significant shows of modern American art came to Europe: “Amerikanische Malerei: Werden und Gegenwart” in 1951, which went to Berlin, Vienna, and Munich; “Twelve American Painters and Sculptors” in 1955, which traveled from Paris to Zurich, Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo; and “Modern Art in the USA” in 1955, which opened in Paris as “50 ans d’art aux Etats-Unis,” before going to Zurich, Barcelona, Frankfurt, London, The Hague, Vienna, Linz, and Belgrade. However important these three shows appear in retrospect, at the time their repercussions were limited. They went to a few cities, where not many visited them. When “Modern Art in the USA” came to Frankfurt, it received enormous publicity: 15,000 handbills were distributed in public places, and a short film was shown in 1,750 movie theaters. The show attracted 16,000 visitors, which was considered excellent attendance at the time.¹⁶⁹ Yet, considering the massive publicity involved and the strong American presence in this region, this success was far from striking.

Not widely attended, these shows were also not well understood. They were intended to present the entire panorama of American artistic creations, yet they were difficult to comprehend from an outsider’s point of view. What could the visitors of “Twelve American Painters and Sculptors” make of a show that juxtaposed John Marin, Edward Hopper, and David Smith? Likewise, how could the visitors of “Modern Art in the USA,” who had never heard of Pollock, understand the work of the artist from two paintings as disparate as *She-Wolf* (1943) and *Number*

¹⁶⁸ Edy de Wilde, “Memories and Afterthoughts,” in *60’ - 80’ Attitudes - Concepts - Images* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1982), 6.

¹⁶⁹ Helen M. Franc, “The Early Years of the International Program and Council,” in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad* (New York: Museum of Modern Art/ Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 127.

I (1950). From these shows, to be sure, the European public gained a certain understanding of American art, albeit one which was different from the image Americans had of their own art. The best example of this gap is the different reception of Mark Tobey in Western Europe versus the United States.

In Europe, Tobey was regarded (with Pollock) as perhaps the most important American artist, while in the United States, he was not much noticed. This difference could be explained by a different sensibility among Western Europeans and Americans, but it could also be the result of different curatorial efforts. At least that is what the comment of J. Lusinchi, reviewing “50 ans d’art aux Etats-Unis,” suggests: “C’est incontestablement Mark Tobey qui domine l’abstraction dite expressionniste des dernières salles.”¹⁷⁰ While Pollock was represented by two dissimilar paintings, Tobey was represented by a consistent body of works. Besides, Tobey was simultaneously showing at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher, in a solo show that allowed viewers to get a more in-depth understanding of his work. Following this exposure, he was awarded the Painting Award of the city of Venice at the controversial Venice Biennale of 1958. This recognition was particularly important, because he was the only non-Italian artist to be awarded a prize that year. Since many considered the international awards of 1958 invalid, Tobey is sometimes listed only as the winner of the Grand Prize for Painting.¹⁷¹

Another gap between the European and the American images of American art was the concept of a School of the Pacific, which did not really exist in the United States, but was widely discussed in France in the 1950s.¹⁷² From what I can reconstruct, in 1948 Francis Henry Taylor, the director of the Metropolitan, told Michel Tapié about artists in San Francisco and Seattle,

¹⁷⁰ J. Lusinchi, "Cinquantes ans de peinture aux Etats-Unis," *Cimaise*, Mai 1955, 10.

¹⁷¹ Enzo di Martino, *Storia della Biennale die Venezia, 1895-2003* (Venice: Papiro Arte, 2003), 129.

¹⁷² See for instance Julien Alvard, Michel Tapié, and Fitz Simmons, "L'Ecole du Pacifique," *Cimaise*, Juin 1954. Kenneth Sawyer, "L'expressionisme abstrait: la phase Pacifique," *Cimaise*, Juin 1954. Paul Wescher, "Ecole du Pacifique," *Cimaise*, April 1955.

who during the War had developed an original and interesting style. Tapié then told people in France about this group, which included Morris Graves, Tobey, Clifford Still, and Mark Rothko, and whose references to Asian art echoed French interest in Asia. Through Sam Francis, who also came from the West Coast, French curiosity about the American West increased. As a result of these particular circumstances, the French embraced with enthusiasm the idea of a School of the Pacific that had vaguely emerged in California after the War but which had never taken off in the United States.

The Western Europeans' knowledge of American art only improved in 1958 with the two exhibitions organized by the International Program at MoMA: "The New American Painting," which went to Basel, Milan, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, and London; and the retrospective "Jackson Pollock," which traveled to Rome, Basel, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, London, and Paris. Unlike the previous exhibitions, these two shows did not aim at presenting the entire range of American artistic production. They focused on Abstract Expressionism, and hence made a more consistent impression. As Kenneth Rexroth explained to the readers of *Art News*: "This is the first chance most Europeans have had to see this aspect of American painting. Most other shows have taken in the whole range of contemporary and not so contemporary styles, from Grant Wood to Clifford Still, and so have been, to strangers certainly, confusing rather than informative."¹⁷³ The show was indeed received in Europe as the sign that American art had finally found itself. Writing in *Cimaise*, Restany concluded his review of the show by claiming: "il existe désormais outre-Atlantique un climat spirituel capable d'apporter aux essentielles exigences de l'Art quelques solutions originales."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Kenneth Rexroth, "Americans Seen Abroad," *Art News*, Summer 1959, 30.

¹⁷⁴ Pierre Restany, "U.S. Go Home and Come Back Later," *Cimaise*, Winter 1959, 37.

These two exhibitions were very influential, chiefly because many saw them – a sign that interest in American art was growing. Johannes Gachnang remembered:

Baselitz hat sie in Berlin gesehen, Nitsch in Wien, ich selbst in Basel, in Kounellis wird sie in Rom nicht versäumt haben. [...] Das war für meine Generation, die kurz vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg geborenen, die eigentlich erst Berührung mit amerikanischer Kunst, eine eigentliche Schock, zugleich aber auch ein befreiender Schlag, der in verschiedenste Richtungen Türen zu öffnen schein.¹⁷⁵

Even if the shows did not go to Vienna, Gachnang's claim that they were important for a whole generation is confirmed by many individual accounts. Niki de Saint-Phalle, for instance, explained: "C'était vers 1959 [...] une grande et extraordinaire exposition d'art américain se tenait à Paris [...]. Pour la première fois, je voyais des œuvres de Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning et d'autres. J'étais complètement bouleversée. Comparée avec la leur, ma peinture m'a brusquement semblée toute petite."¹⁷⁶

As Rexroth told his readers, responses to "The New American Painting" and "Jackson Pollock" were not all positive; most of them were actually completely negative. But whatever the comments were, at least American art was making headlines in the European press: "Save me from the great string spider webs" (*Reynolds News*, London); "Il Presley della pittura" (*Avanti!*, Rome); "Gigantisme et petitesse de la Nouvelle peinture Américaine" (*Figaro Littéraire*, Paris).¹⁷⁷ They may have not liked it, but at last Europeans knew what this School of New York was about.

Except for the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, which had bought two Pollocks from Peggy Guggenheim in 1950, European museums did not own works from the School of New York before these two shows. After them, things started to change. In 1959, Rüdinger was able

¹⁷⁵ In fact, the show did not go to Vienna. Johannes Gachnang, "From Continent to Continent," in Siegfried Gohr and Rafael Jablonka, *Europa/Amerika - Die Geschichte einer künstlerischen Faszination seit 1940* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 1986), 337.

¹⁷⁶ Pontus Hulten, ed., *Niki de Saint Phalle* (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1992), 154-55.

¹⁷⁷ Rexroth, "Americans Seen Abroad," 30.

to get funds to buy a Rothko, a Newman, a Kline, and a Still for the Basel Kunsthalle. That same year the Tate Gallery bought a Rothko, and in 1960 a Pollock.¹⁷⁸ Slowly, American art was catching Europeans' attention. The march of American repute across Europe was steady, once it started:

Exhibitions of American Art in Europe organized by the International Program at MoMA ¹⁷⁹	
Twelve American Painters and Sculptors	Paris, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Apr 24-June 8, 1953 Zürich, Kunsthaus, July 25-Aug 30 Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlungen der Stadt Düsseldorf, Sep 20-Oct 25 Stockholm, Liljevalchs Konsthall, Nov 25-Dec 23 Helsinki, Taidehalli, Jan 8-24, 1954 Oslo, Kunst-ernes Hus, Feb 18-Mar 7, 1
Modern Art in the USA	Paris, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Mar 30-May 15, 1955 Zürich, Kunsthaus, Jul 16-Aug 28, 1 Barcelona, Palacio de la Virreina & Museo de Arte Moderno, Sep 24-Oct 24 Frankfurt, Haus des Deutschen Kunsthandwerks, Nov 13-Dec 11, London, Tate Gallery, Jan 5-Feb 12, 1956 The Hague, Geementemuseum, Mar 2-Apr 15 Vienna, Secession Galerie, May 5-Jun 2 Linz, Neue Galerie (Photography), May 5-Jun 2 Belgrade, Kalemegdan Pavilion, ULUS Gallery, Fresaka Gallery, Jul 6-Aug 6
The New American Painting	Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Mar 1-30, 1958 Basel, Kunsthalle, Apr 19-May 26 Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Jun 6-Jul 7 Hamburg, Kunsthalle, Jul 19-Aug 21 Berlin, Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Sep 1-Oct 1 London, Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nov 5-Dec 14 Paris, Musée National d'Arte Moderne, Jan 16-Feb 15, 1959
Jackson Pollock	Basel, Kunsthalle, Apr 19-May 19, 1958 Milan, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Jun 1-29 Madrid, Museo Nacional de Arte Contemporáneo, Jul 16-Aug 10 Berlin, Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Sep 1-Oct 1 Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Oct 17-Nov 24 Brussels, Palais des Beaux Arts, Dec 1-29, Paris, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Jan 16-Feb 15, 1959 London, Tate Gallery, Feb 24-Mar 23

¹⁷⁸ Dieter Honish and Jens Christian Jensen, eds., *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis Heute: Kunst der USA in Europäischen Sammlungen* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1976), 152-83.

¹⁷⁹ Based on "Internationally Circulating Exhibitions" at <http://www.moma.org/international/PDF/icelist.pdf>

2.1.3. The fragility of the French position

“The New American Painting” and “Jackson Pollock” drew attention to the School of New York and convinced many to look in that direction. They did not, however, alter power relations within the Western artworld. New York became part of people’s field of vision, but it had not yet replaced Paris.

The worst threat to the hegemony of the School of Paris actually did not come from new American art, but from within France itself. In the 1950s, the School of Paris was an idol with feet of clay, which owed its prestigious position to the attention of American and Western European collectors and museum curators, but not to the French, who provided almost no support to their artists. In France, nobody but a handful of eccentrics collected contemporary art, as Julien Alvard has noted:

Côté mécénat, le tableau est accablant! A l’exception d’une poignée de va-nu-pieds qui ont à peine les moyen de faire vivre un oiseau et coupent les grains de riz en deux pour empêcher leurs copains de crever, on compte sur les doigts d’une seule main les quelques personnes qui s’efforcent d’apporter une aide matérielle aux artistes.¹⁸⁰

According to Daniel Cordier, French collectors were only interested in academic art: “Der wirkliche Geschmack der französischen Sammlungen hat sich nach Bourgeois oder Carolus Duran für Dunoyer de Segonzac, für Brianchon, Buffet, Brayer usw. entschieden, d.h. für eine traditionelle Malerei ohne Lyrik und Wahrheit, aber auch ohne Gefahr.” As a result, the Second School of Paris only survived thanks to the support of American, German, Italian, Belgian, and British collectors: “Durch seine bedeutenden und regelmäßigen Käufe unterhält das Ausland eine Schule, die in der ganzen Welt ihre Liebhaber findet, außer in Paris.”¹⁸¹

Not only were French collectors not supporting contemporary French art, French museums were not buying it either. At the end of the 1940s, the Musée National d’Art Moderne

¹⁸⁰Julien Alvard, “Paris sans école,” *Cimaise*, October-November 1955, 10.

¹⁸¹Daniel Cordier, “Zur Krise des Kunsthandels,” *Das Kunstwerk*, Summer 1964, 49.

became part of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, and thereby lost its budget for buying living artists. From then on the museum could only buy dead artists. To get a Picasso or a Brancusi, Jean Cassou, and Bernard Dorival (the curators of the MNAM) could only count on donations from artists or collectors. And, if they wanted to buy deceased artists, they would have to convince the commission for French patrimony that what they wanted to buy had value as national patrimony. As Dominique Bozo explains: “C’est un point de l’histoire important. Désormais, le Musée ne pourra plus qu’émarger sur les crédits des Musées Nationaux pour les seuls artistes décédés, en entrant en compétition avec les autres départements du Louvre et des Musées Nationaux. La difficulté d’imposer l’art moderne devenait à nouveau inextricable.”¹⁸² If the national museum devoted to contemporary did not support living artists, who would? As for organizing exhibitions of contemporary art at the MNAM, this could only happen within the limits of its tight budget. As Alvard lamented: “Si bien que le Musée d’Art Moderne d’un pays qui par ailleurs glousse avec des tremolos sur sa réputation et en tire d’assez jolis profits, est contraint d’assurer son existence avec un budget qui mènerait à la faillite l’entreprise la plus crottée de France.”¹⁸³

And even if the French museums had had a budget to buy and exhibit contemporary art, they would not necessarily have done it. The majority of the French museum curators had been trained in the Ecole du patrimoine as conservators of historical patrimony, not as advocates for new art. Promoting contemporary art was not their priority. Those who, like Cassou and Dorival, were working with modern art supported artists from their own generation, i.e. the established artists of the first School of Paris. For them, promoting contemporary art meant supporting the

¹⁸² Dominique Bozo, "Introduction," in *La collection du musée national d'art moderne* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1987), 16.

¹⁸³ Alvard, "Paris sans école," 10.

likes of Picasso, Braque, Bonnard, and Giacometti, who were still alive and therefore still contemporary. It did not mean supporting young, emerging artists.

The lack of support for French contemporary art was particularly obvious in the cultural policies France took part in abroad. In the 1950s, French foreign policy aimed chiefly at counteracting the loss of prestige and power resulting not only from the War but also from decolonization. The international political prestige of France, seriously diminished since the debacle of 1940, had been further damaged by the Indochina War (1945-1954), and was clearly not improved by the situation in Algeria. As the French colonial empire fell apart, the French government engaged in cultural policies aimed to salvage the shreds of France's reputation, as well as to preserve the use of the French language throughout the world. French cultural outreach was directed particularly towards Latin America and Eastern Europe, where it was thought they could play the role of mediator in the Cold War – a third power between the United States and the Soviet Union. This scheme left no room for promoting French contemporary art in the United States and Western Europe. At home the visual arts also faced neglect, as the state considered theater, the vehicle of the French language, far more important.

Thus, in 1959, the Association Française d'Action Artistique (AFAA) spent 48% of its budget on theater and 29% on visual arts. In 1964, theater received 52% of the total budget and visual arts only 19%.¹⁸⁴ The budget of AFAA being already modest, the small percentage that fell to the visual arts was miserly. As a result, events organized by France abroad looked stingy. They were done with what was available and in the cheapest way possible. To save on transportation costs, French exhibitions consisted mostly of small works on paper that could be easily rolled and cheaply shipped. Even in their wildest dreams, penny-pinching French curators could not dream of organizing grand exhibitions of large-scale paintings, as the curator of the

¹⁸⁴ Alain Dubosdard, *L'action artistique de la France aux États-Unis, 1945-1969* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2003), 297.

International Program at MoMA did. In 1956, the budget of AFAA in the United States was \$230,000.¹⁸⁵ By the current exchange rate this was a huge sum for France (roughly 8 million francs), but represented almost nothing in terms of spending power in the US. At the Venice Biennale of 1964, while the American pavilion produced a lavish catalogue in which Alan Solomon asserted “Everybody is now aware that the world center of the arts has moved from Paris to New York” (he also flooded the Giardini with the polemical pamphlet mentioned earlier), the French exhibitors did not even have enough money to print a piece of paper with their artists’ names!¹⁸⁶ Such cheap shows and presentations clearly could not foster a particularly impressive image of French contemporary art, and they probably contributed to the overall decline in reputation of French art worldwide.¹⁸⁷

Not only were the visual arts not a priority for the French government in its international cultural politics, French institutions were so used to people praising and longing for French art that they did not see the point of promoting it. They let foreign institutions and dealers take care of it. The problem was that foreign institutions were not interested in showing current French art, especially given its lack of visibility. They preferred organizing exhibitions of Rococo or Versailles such as the “Splendid Century 1600-1715” or “Treasures of Versailles 1631-1789” which toured the United States respectively in 1961 and 1962. Such exhibitions promoted an antiquated image of France in the mind of the American and Western European public. For them, France had become itself a museum piece, the country of Versailles, the French Revolution, the Impressionists, and *Mona Lisa*, who incidentally had been sent by the French government as a

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Arnaud, "Mise à mort dans Venise la Rouge?," Association Française d'Action Artistique, *La France à Venise: Le pavillon français de 1948 À 1988*, 213.

¹⁸⁷ Roland Dumas et al., *Histoire de l'association française d'action artistique* (Paris: AFAA, 1992). Bernard Piniau, *L'action artistique dans le monde* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

special “ambassador” to Washington and New York in 1963. Less and less did France appear in the mind of the public and collectors as the country of contemporary art.¹⁸⁸

2.1.4. Conclusion

When “Kompas – Paris: Carrefour de la Peinture” opened at the Stedelijk van Abbe-Museum of Eindhoven in December 1961, Paris appeared to Europeans and Americans alike as an idol with feet of clay. While the city owed its prestigious position to Americans’ and Western Europeans’ ongoing fascination with it, their affection for *Belle France* which had little to do with the disastrous reality of contemporary France.

The contemporary political situation did not help the reputation of French arts, either. On May 13, 1958, following incidents in Algiers, a riot started in Paris, which almost ended up in a right wing political *Putsch*. The army had to intervene, and the government resigned. On April 21, 1961, another attempt at a political *Putsch* took place. This time French generals residing in Algiers organized it, and it almost succeeded. As an anecdote, Rauschenberg’s first Parisian exhibition took place during the conflict, and was consequently not well attended, particularly since it lacked the promotion of the gallerist Daniel Cordier, the former Resistance fighter and assistant of Jean Moulin, who was completely engrossed in political action.

Engulfed in costly decolonization wars and grappling with political and economical difficulties, France could no longer play a major cultural role in the world, economically or diplomatically. If foreign collectors, dealers, and curators were to withdraw their support for the School of Paris, France could not, and would not, prop it up.

¹⁸⁸ Dubosdard, *L'action artistique de la France aux États-Unis, 1945-1969*. Piniau, *L'action artistique dans le monde*.

2.2. THE GOLD RUSH: THE SPECULATIVE FRENZY OF THE ART MARKET AND ITS DOWNFALL

Not surprisingly, the French position collapsed in 1962, when an economic crisis swept the Western world. The art market, which had been flourishing since the War, was particularly hurt. The School of Paris would not recover from this attack. The prehistory of this moment shows a clear pattern of building toward this national catastrophe.

2.2.1. The boom of the art market in the 1950s

The post-War boom of the art market had started in Paris on May 14, 1952, with the auction of the Cognac Collection, “France’s biggest twentieth-century art auction” according *The New York Times*. The collection comprised 63 paintings and 6 sculptures of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French masters. The auction, which took place at the Galerie Charpentier, attracted 4,000 onlookers. The triumph of the afternoon was Cézanne’s *Apples and Biscuits* (1879), which sold for 33,000,000 francs (\$94,000). Renoir’s *Young Girl with Flower in Her Hat* brought in 22,500,000 francs (\$64,000), and Cézanne’s *Countryside, Trees and House* was auctioned for 20,000,000 (\$57,000). The high bids placed on *Apples and Biscuits* caused great surprise, since they were higher than those received by a Fragonnard, a Boucher, and a Manet that were also being auctioned. The Cognac sale made the artworld shiver with excitement. The final gavel had not yet come down when people were already talking of prices going even higher next time. *The New York Times* informed its readers that:

The sale of Cézanne’s *Apples and Biscuits* was the talk of art articles in New York when word got around that the picture had brought \$94, 281. It was the highest price ever brought at auction for a modern painting, according to available records. [...] There are many pictures by him, it was said, which, if available for sale would bring more than *Apples and Biscuits*.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ The United Press, "Cezanne Painting Brings \$94,281 in Sale of Big French Collection," *New York Times*, May, 15 1952.

The Cognac sale was followed by the auction of Maurice Girardin's collection in December 1953 at the Galerie Charpentier. Girardin, who had died in 1951, was a friend of Georges Rouault and Maurice Gromaire. Over the years, he had accumulated an enormous collection of modern art, of which he donated 500 works to the city of Paris (the founding collection of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris). The rest of his collection, composed of works by Léger, Rouault, Soutine, and Utrillo, among others, was sold during an exciting auction, which brought astonishing and unprecedented prices for these twentieth-century artists. The bearish market of modern art was further confirmed in November 1954 with the successful sale of Mr. Rees Jeffreys's collection of Derains, Matisses, and Soutines, at Sotheby's in London.¹⁹⁰ French art seemed to be *the* cultural commodity of Europe and beyond, and because of these sales the modern collectors' market was being reshaped.

Between 1954 and 1957, the boom of the moderns continued, leading to a surge of speculation and forecasts before each auction. As Georges Bernier noted in his study of the art market, the idea that the odds of an artist could be objectively assessed like the odds of a horse in a race emerged in those years. What the French called the *cote* of the artists became a major subject of discussion for art magazines, especially *Connaissance des arts*.¹⁹¹ Art auctions and price records were also discussed in non-specialized magazines. In December 1955 and January 1956, *Fortune* magazine published a two-part article on "The Great International Art Market," which introduced readers to the "great art boom," as well as to the "Art-Its Ups" and "Art-Its Downs." The authors, Eric Hodgins and Parker Lesley, distinguished between "gilt-edged security" (Flemish Primitives, Italian renaissance artists, and eighteenth-century French painters), "blue-chip stock" (Impressionists, Post-impressionists, Fauvists, and the School of

¹⁹⁰ Georges Bernier, *L'art et l'argent - le marché de l'art à la fin du XX^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1990).

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Paris), and “speculative or growth” investments (contemporary artists who might be famous one day). Adopting a speculative point of view, the authors asserted that contemporary art was the best investment; the one from which you could yield the largest profit.¹⁹²

1957 was a very important year from an art market point of view. On June 14, the collection of Margaret Thompson Biddle was sold at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris. One hundred paintings, mostly by French modern masters, were sold for the record sum of 445,000,000 francs. The auction made the front page of *The New York Times*:

The sale began before a packed, sweltering audience. Brisk bidding had been foreseen in view of the quality of the paintings, but the results exceeded the wildest expectations. The total figure was believed to be one of the largest ever reached in a Paris sale. The bidding on the Gauguin began at 25,000,000 francs. When it reached 100,000 the entire audience rose and burst into applause.¹⁹³

Gauguin’s *Nature morte aux pommes* (1889) sold for the record price of \$225,000. Then, on July 10, 1957, Sotheby’s auctioned off the collection of Wilhelm Weinberg. According to Bernier, the works featured in this collection lacked commercial appeal. Yet, they sold very well, particularly the Post-impressionists. The demand for modern art was so high that even difficult works were selling like hot cakes. Art auctions were becoming spectacular events catching media attention, and art prices a favorite topic of conversation.

The whole thing had the flavor of a sporting event. Before the sale of the Lurcy collection that was to take place at the Parke-Bernet on November 7, 1957, *The New York Times* ran the headline: “Record Auction Prices Forecast for Modern French Collection.” Some claimed that the sale would bring in as much as \$2,000,000. Four thousand people had requested to attend the auction, but the room could only seat half that. As a result, there would be a “closed-circuit-television in two galleries adjoining the main salesroom,” allowing everyone to see modern art

¹⁹² Eric Hodgins and Parker Lesley, "The Great International Art Market I," *Fortune*, December 1955. Eric Hodgins and Parker Lesley, "The Great International Art Market II," *Fortune*, January 1956.

¹⁹³ "Painting by Gauguin Sells for \$255,000," *New York Times*, June, 15 1957.

break new records.¹⁹⁴ *Art Digest* devoted an article to what promised to be a “major event,” featuring the highlights of the collection.¹⁹⁵ As anxiety rose, everybody speculated on who would be the evening’s big winner. The morning after the auction, the results were reported on the front page of *The New York Times*: the sale had brought in a record sum of \$1,708,550. When the rest of the collection (furniture and applied arts) was sold, the \$2 million forecast would be exceeded.¹⁹⁶ Now everybody was convinced that art prices would keep on going up and up.

Art auctions were also becoming fashionable events. While in the past auction houses were mainly patronized by dealers, they started to be invaded by speculators looking for high-yielding investments and socialites in quest of cultural thrills and the latest gossip. The auction of Jacob Goldschmidt’s collection, on October 15, 1958, at Sotheby’s in London was particularly important in that regard. It was an evening sale that, for the first time, required black tie. It also offered the first auction catalogue with color reproductions of the works to be sold. The Goldschmidt sale was an unprecedented success: in less than 21 minutes, seven paintings by Cézanne, van Gogh, Manet, and Renoir brought in \$2,186,800. Cézanne’s *Garçon au gilet rouge* (1888-90) drew \$616,000, dramatically topping the \$225,000 price tag of the Gauguin at the Biddle auction. Following the auction, *The New York Times* devoted a long article to the success story of Cézanne and his *Garçon au gilet rouge*; the same issue featured an analysis of the art market and the promises of fortune it held.¹⁹⁷

Such promises were kept when, five weeks later, the collection of Arnold Kirkeby sold at Parke-Bernet. Before the auction took place, 10,000 people came to see the works that were on

¹⁹⁴ Sandra Knox, "Record Auction Prices Forecast for Modern French Collection," *The New York Times*, November, 3 1957.

¹⁹⁵ "The Lury Collection," *Art Digest*, October 1957, 30-33.

¹⁹⁶ Sandra Knox, "Modern Art Brings Record \$1,708,550," *The New York Times*, November, 8 1957.

¹⁹⁷ Aline B. Saarinen, "A Painting That Tells Modern Art's Story," *The New York Times*, November 2 1958. Aline B. Saarinen, "A Seller's Market," *The New York Times*, November 2 1958.

display at the auction house. Those who could not go to New York were able to survey the collection in the pages of *Art Digest*, which featured color reproductions and descriptions of its major pieces.¹⁹⁸ Seven thousand people requested admission, but only 2,000 got in. The entire collection was auctioned off in 1 hour and 29 minutes for \$1,528,500. Kirkeby's Impressionist paintings, even though they were small and not particularly interesting examples of the movement, received very high bids. The surprise of the auction was Picasso's *La mère et l'enfant* (1903). As *Time* explained to its readers:

Top record-breaker of the evening: \$152,000 for an early and not especially rewarding Picasso that cost just \$45,000 three years ago, was bought by Kirkeby only last year for a whopping \$185,000. His loss on that canvas was more than compensated by record-breaking prices for a golden clutch of modern favorites: Modigliani, Rouault, Bonnard. Vlaminck, Signac, Morisot, Pissarro and Segonzac. The whole thing had the fever of a poker game, with the blue chips in the hands of professional gamblers.¹⁹⁹

The secondary market was not the only one to profit from the "boom of the Canvas."²⁰⁰ Avant-garde galleries were also doing very well selling emerging artists to collectors eager to invest in the new Cézanne. The premature deaths of Nicolas de Staël in 1955 and Jackson Pollock in 1956 had led to spectacular rises in their prices, convincing everyone that contemporary art could indeed be as great a gold mine as *Fortune* magazine had suggested. In such a context, even emerging artists were suddenly affected by the wave of speculation. As *Time* explained, avant-garde art was becoming a profitable activity:

While there is a recession in the U.S. economy, one group of Americans more accustomed to bust than boom is in the midst of a new wave of prosperity. They are Manhattan's abstract expressionist painters, who until three years ago could rarely afford to move out of their coldwater, walk-up studios. Now their shows are selling out, and at record high prices.

Perhaps most in demand is the work of Jackson Pollock, whose paintings reached a top price of \$10,000 before his death two years ago. Major Pollock canvases are now bringing up to \$30,000 each. But the boom is by no means all Pollock. Among the sellout

¹⁹⁸ "The Kirkeby Collection at Auction," *Art Digest*, November 1958, 27-31.

¹⁹⁹ "Under the Boom," *Time Magazine*, Monday, December 1 1958.

²⁰⁰ "Boom on Canvas," *Time Magazine*, Monday, April 7 1958.

shows this year: Mark Rothko (top price \$5,000), Hans Hofmann (top \$7,500), Philip Guston (top \$4,000), and William Baziotes, whose recent show sold out at \$3,500 top even before it opened. Adolph Gottlieb’s show sold eight of ten (top \$4,000), and Sculptor Seymour Lipton’s show sold 16 of 21 with a top price of \$15,000.²⁰¹

In summer 1958, *Art in America* published a special issue on “Trends in Collecting.” In his article on “The New Collector,” B.H. Friedman explained that, because of the high prices and scarcity of Impressionist and French modern paintings, new collectors – like Ben Heller – were buying contemporary American art. It was less expensive, readily available, and yielded more profit than the work of already established artists could.²⁰² In the same issue, John Braun provided an “a b c for collectors of American contemporary art” in which he asserted “collecting our modern art is not for the timid or for the escapist. It requires, and at the same time, it bestows on the collectors in even greater measure, an acceptance of modern life in its values and a belief in his own convictions.”²⁰³ Not only was collecting contemporary (American) art the most interesting investment, evidently, it was also the most fulfilling and rewarding.

A summary of the top prices makes clear what was at stake in these assessments:

May, 14 1952	Cognac Collection	Galerie Charpentier Paris	Cézanne <i>Apples and Biscuits</i>	\$94,000
June, 14 1957	Margaret Thompson Biddle Collection	Galerie Charpentier Paris	Gauguin <i>Nature Morte aux Pommes</i>	\$225,000
October, 15 1958	Jacob Goldschmidt Collection	Sotheby’s London	Cézanne <i>Garçon au gilet rouge</i>	\$616,000

2.2.2. The Kennedy Slide, tax reform, and the Chrysler Affair

If the art market had been in fast expansion in the 1950s, the stock market had also been doing rather well. In 1960, the equity value of the New York stock market was three times higher than before the crash of 1929. Prosperity had come back to the United States and economic

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² B.H. Friedman, "The New Collector," *Art in America*, Summer 1958, 12-19.

²⁰³ John L.H. Braun, "A B C for Collectors of American Contemporary Art," *Art in America*, Summer 1958, 45-48.

forecasters were very optimistic.²⁰⁴ On January 3, 1960, *The New York Times* claimed, for instance: “Stocks Rise – Gain Shown for 1959 – Traders Expect a Good Year in 1960.”²⁰⁵ In Europe, optimism also prevailed. The economy had fully recovered from the War and was now in fast expansion to meet the needs of a growing and eager population. Reporting from the London Stock Exchange, *The New York Times* announced: “Stocks in London End Year in Boom – Market Index Shows Jump of 50 Percent in 1959, A Record Increase – More Gains Expected – Most Experts Says Upward Trend Will Continue But At Slower Pace.”²⁰⁶

In the early 1960s, everybody seemed to believe that there would be no end to the boom in the stock market (as in the art market). Yet, on May 28, 1962, the stock market crashed. In the largest drop since 1929, \$20,800,000,000 vanished on Wall Street.²⁰⁷ The following day, however, 60% of this loss was recovered. The situation was nonetheless extremely tense, as *Time* noted:

Across the land, 15 million investors reluctantly emerged from a dreamland of perpetual capital gains and grimly focused their attention on the citadel of U.S. capitalism at Broad and Wall Streets in lower Manhattan. There, behind its grey stone walls and Corinthian columns, the New York Stock Exchange was shuddering through its worst week since June, 1950. In one hectic week, the paper value of the 1,545 stocks listed on the Big Board plunged by \$30 billion — which is more than the combined gross national product of Australia, Sweden and Ireland. At week’s end mighty IBM had fallen from its October high of 607 to 398.²⁰⁸

On June 12, the market dropped again, and an additional \$7.8 billion in value was “wiped out.”²⁰⁹ The Republicans held President Kennedy and his expensive policies responsible for the stock market failure; hence the rubric “Kennedy Slide” by which this drop became known.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ "Stock Values Soared During 50's," *The New York Times*, January 1 1960, 26.

²⁰⁵ John G. Forrest, "Stocks Rise -- Gain Shown for 1959 -- Traders Expect a Good Year in 1960," *The New York Times*, January 3 1960, F1.

²⁰⁶ "Stocks in London End Year in Boom," *The New York Times*, January 4 1960, 45.

²⁰⁷ Burton Crane, "Stock Prices Dive in Sharpest Loss since 1929 Break," *The New York Times*, May 29 1962, 1.

²⁰⁸ "One Hectic Week," *Time Magazine*, June 1st 1962.

²⁰⁹ Richard Rutter, "Market Tumbles as Volume Rises," *The New York Times*, June 13 1961, 55.

²¹⁰ Felix Jr. Belair, "Eisenhower Calls Spending a Factor in Stock Decline," *The New York Times*, June 2 1962, 1.

The repercussions were serious in the culture industries. To cover their stock market losses, many investors who had been following the advice of *Fortune* magazine and buying contemporary art sold their collections. The market was soon flooded with abstract paintings, many of which did not find buyers. Art prices fell dramatically, and panic took hold of the market as more and more collectors tried to get rid of works. If the stock market eventually recovered from the Kennedy Slide, its effect on the art market was heavier and longer lasting. One year after the crisis began, *Time* magazine investigated the state of the art market and found the situation bleak:

Last year's drop in the stock market and the long New York City newspaper strike both hurt Manhattan's long-booming art galleries, and as dealers began sizing up their season's-end experiences last week, it was obvious that the slump had one particular victim: the abstract painting that after the war made Manhattan the center of the art world. "There has been a cresting of the abstract-art market," says Phillip Bruno of the Staempfli Gallery. "Those painters in the \$5,000 to \$15,000 range have been hit hard. Prices have been too high and a re-evaluation was necessary." The art boom has not collapsed, but it has drastically shifted. [...] Manhattan's galleries are still flooded with second-grade abstraction, but it is no longer considered much of an investment.²¹¹

Art collectors' eagerness to buy contemporary art further cooled when the Bureau of Internal Revenue started to contest some of the appraisals they received for artworks given to museums as tax write-offs. In the past, the Bureau had accepted without question experts' appraisals for these charitable deductions. But, as prices of contemporary art soared and art donations became more frequent, the Bureau started to investigate suspicious cases. In 1962, several cases emerged in which the Bureau contested the high appraisals given to contemporary artworks. As the Bureau was becoming stricter, buying contemporary art became less appealing

²¹¹ "State of the Market," *Time Magazine*, June 21 1963.

to those looking for tax breaks. This also made donation less interesting and prompted no small number of owners to sell rather than give.²¹²

In this already tense context, the Chrysler Affair finished tarnishing the idea of modern art as a safe and easy investment. In fall 1962, when Walter P. Chrysler's collection of modern and contemporary art was exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada, the authenticity of several works raised curators' suspicions. After further investigation it was discovered that roughly seventy works lacked proper documentation and were most probably counterfeits. The Chrysler Affair caused great fuss, even in the popular press. *Time* reported: "Between 60 and 70 of the 187 paintings in the exhibition were under critical indictment as phony—a scandal so big as to strike at the confidence that the art market is founded on."²¹³ For *The New York Times*, the scale of the forgery discredited the whole "world of selling, buying and exhibiting works of art."²¹⁴ The Chrysler Affair was, however, only the first of a series of forgery scandals, of which that surrounding the Meadows Collection would be the worst. In 1967, Algur Meadows realized that 44 of the 57 paintings and watercolors of the School of Paris he had bought from a French dealer were fake.²¹⁵ It was soon discovered that the author of these forged works was Elmyr de Hory, and that the Meadows's works were just a tiny percentage of his production. Profiting from the buying frenzy of the 1950s, de Hory had been selling hundreds of School of Paris paintings and drawing to collectors and museums throughout the world, who were only too eager to buy such paintings and failed to check their provenance.²¹⁶

²¹² "The Baroness' Income Tax," *Time Magazine*, March 3 1963, Milton Bracker, "Tax Deductions on Donated Art to Get Closer Federal Scrutiny," *The New York Times*, January 17 1962, 1.

²¹³ "Scent of Scandal," *Time Magazine*, October 26 1962.

²¹⁴ "The Chrysler Affair," *The New York Times*, October 21, 145.

²¹⁵ Milton Esterow, "Rash of Art Fakes Being Investigated," *The New York Times*, May 11 1967, 1.

²¹⁶ Clifford Irving, *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory the Greatest Forger of Our Time* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969).

Such widely publicized scandals put an end to the buying frenzy of the 1950s and induced people to be more careful when buying art – especially when buying works from the School of Paris.

2.2.3. The collapse of the French market

If the New York art market was hurt by the Kennedy Slide, tax reforms, and forgery scandals, the worst victim of these unfortunate events was undoubtedly the Parisian market. The School of Paris had long been the favorite choice of investors, with its works holding the greatest prestige and value. They were the ones to be forged, and so the first ones to be sold when investors needed to recover from stock market losses. They were often regarded as mere investments and, unlike works from the New York School, there was no national pride in owing them. They were often bought without much care (and documentation), and could be dumped on the market at any moment without scruple. The situation of the Parisian art market in 1963 was thus rather gloomy. Reporting from Paris for *Art Magazine*, Edward Roditi wrote:

The art market has its rumor and panics, like any investment market. In a financially jittery season, it was widely rumored that no major Paris gallery had managed to sell, in a whole year, a single important work by Mathieu. [...] Left Bank or Right Bank, a kind of Orestes complex at the mere sight of a Poliakoff. Wherever one went from Knoedler's to Dina Vierny's, the same works of Poliakoff seemed to stare at one from the walls, veritable Furies that followed one or countless replicas that, like characters in a Pirandello play, remained doomed to search for a purchaser instead of an author.²¹⁷

Many Parisian galleries had to close: first René Drouin in 1962, then Daniel Cordier in 1964, and Lawrence Rubin later that year. To announce the closure of his Parisian gallery, Cordier sent a letter “Pour Prendre Congé” to 4,000 people in the artworld. With this letter, the dealer settled the score with the Parisian artworld: “It would be hypocritical to condemn, in a rather belated outburst of ethics, operations which satisfied everyone involved: painters, collectors and dealers

²¹⁷ Edouard Roditi, "A Market Report," *Arts Magazine*, September 1963, 33.

alike. There were no dupes, no one played a guilty role, everyone got his share.” The Parisian dealers had had their time of glory, selling second-rate paintings for high prices to collectors who only wanted the prestigious stamp of the School of Paris. The party was over!²¹⁸

From the Parisian point of view, the crisis had started when, during an auction at Sotheby’s London, a painting by Joan Miro and one by Nicolas de Staël did not find buyers and so had to be withdrawn from the auction. Then, a rumor started circulating that Robert Lehman, Daniel Bright, and Huntington Hartford – in other words the most important American collectors of contemporary art – were trying to get rid of their abstract works by Parisians– a hasty explanation that overlooked the American financial situation. Around the same time, Parisians learned that MoMA, which had been the champion of abstract art and of the School of Paris in the United States, was presenting an exhibition of American figurative painting, “Recent Painting USA: The Figure.” Finally, the Guggenheim Museum in New York announced that they would auction off fifty paintings by Wassily Kandinsky. This caused quite a stir in the artworld, as it was interpreted as another rejection of abstraction and of the School of Paris.

One must acknowledge that the Miro and the de Staël were mediocre paintings, and note that at that same London auction a drawing by Miro had sold for 150,000 francs, while works by Gauguin and Renoir took in just 100,000 francs a piece. American collectors were less rejecting the School of Paris than reacting to the losses they had suffered in the Kennedy Slide. As for the Guggenheim Museum, it was not “dumping” abstraction. The museum owned 170 paintings by Kandinsky, many of which were minor examples that did not add anything to the collection. The sale that took place in London on June 30, 1964 brought in \$1.5 million for the museum, a sum regarded as very good for such works. By selling minor Kandinskys the museum was simply

²¹⁸ Daniel Cordier, *Letter*, June 1964. A copy of this letter is available in Willi Bongard, "Willi Bongard Papers, 1960-1985," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 880363, 880363*, 880363**), 880363, Box 3, Folder 3.

trying to raise money to buy other artists' works. Because of the particularly anxious context in which these events took place, however, they were interpreted in Paris and elsewhere as evidence of the end of the School of Paris.²¹⁹

All these events combined to convince Western European collectors that buying American art was the safest investment. From the viewpoint of the market, it was even wiser to buy American rather than French art, since the French tax system was unfavorable to the art business. In 1954, a painting sold for \$100,000 would bring the owner, after taxes, \$90,000 in London, \$80,000 in New York, and only \$65,000 in Paris. Besides, in 1957 France introduced the *droit de suite*. This law awarded 5% of the sale of an artwork to the artist or artist's heirs for 65 years, so that the seller would actually get – after taxes and the payment of the percentage – only \$61,750. Intended to protect artists' rights, the law actually discouraged collectors from selling art in France. Finally, French currency was a victim of high inflation at that time. For art collectors, it was consequently more sensible to buy works that would appeal to the American market and thus could be exchanged for trustworthy dollars rather than fluctuating francs.²²⁰

2.2.4. Conclusion

When “Paris: Carrefour de la Peinture” opened in December 1961, Fautrier, Bissière, Estève, Mathieu, Manessier, Poliakoff, and Soulages constituted the pantheon of post-War painting – those whose names were destined to pass into posterity. But by June 1964, everything had changed. Paris no longer seemed to be at the crossroads of painting, its artists no longer at the forefront of international art, and Alan Solomon could assert: “The fact that the art world

²¹⁹ Michel Ragon, *Cinquante ans d'art vivant - chronique vécue de la peinture et de la sculpture, 1950-2000* (Paris: Fayard, 2001).

²²⁰ Bernier, *L'art et l'argent - le marché de l'art à la fin du XX^{ème} siècle*.

center has shifted from Paris to New York is acknowledged on every hand.”²²¹ The same artists who had been so enthusiastically celebrated were dismissed as repetitive by critics, ignored by collectors, and their names eventually removed from the canon. Reflecting on this sudden reversal of fortune, Alfred Manessier sighed: “On a continué à travailler, c’est tout. Que pouvions-nous faire d’autre? Nous suicider de ce brusque oubli?”²²²

The School of Paris’s relegation to the art-historical dustbin was, however, the result neither of the exhaustion of its artists nor of a tortuous plot orchestrated by American dealers and critics. Rather, the School of Paris fell victim to its dependency on and ties to the international market, as well as to its management of these ties. When the economic system that supported it crumpled in 1962, it collapsed like a deck of cards and nobody was interested in saving it. In the new cultural environment of the 1960s, the School of Paris belonged to the past, not the future, yet France continued to champion artists whose careers began before the Second World War, rather than the younger generation.

2.3. “SOMETHING IS HAPPENING...”: POP ART AND THE NEW CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Starting in 1962, as I have shown, most Western European collectors turned their attention away from Paris to look in the direction of New York. However, the financial incentives they found in purchasing Abstract Expressionist works did not necessarily find their correlatives in aesthetic rationales. Abstraction, just as much as the School of Paris, had been discredited in the events of 1962. With the exception of Philippe Dotremont and Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, who started to collect American Abstract Expressionism in the late 1950s to complement their School of Paris collections, Western European collectors were still not

²²¹ Arnaud, "Mise à mort dans Venise la Rouge ?," 104.

²²² Quoted in Jean-Paul Ameline, ed., *Manifeste: une histoire parallèle 1960-1990* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993), 58.

interested in the American abstraction.²²³ In Europe, Abstract Expressionists were newcomers, but their prices, which reflected their reputation in the United States as well as the exchange rates of European currencies with the American dollar, were prohibitive for most Western Europeans. Besides, this style did not seem to bring anything new. As the German collector Hans Beck put it, Abstract Expressionism looked too much like Parisian abstraction, of which they were tired. European collectors were not interested in another (probably derivative) form of European modernism. They wanted something new:

Rothko, Kline, natürlich das ist richtig, aber das war noch eine Kunstrichtung, die sich durchaus im Rahmen der Ecole de Paris und des Tachismus hielt und die auch damals bis zu einem gewissen Grad von der Europäern verstanden wurde, aber eben nicht einen solch radikalen Durchbruch darstellte, wie es dann die Pop Art tat.²²⁴

European Tachism and American Abstract Expressionism belonged to the post-War world; a world that was giving way to a new cultural environment, in which the “pursuit of happiness” was the motto and the mass media the main characteristic.

Here, again, a close look at the historical facts changes the story that has been passed down. The School of Paris was in fact not replaced by the School of New York in the 1950s, either aesthetically or financially. Instead, it was replaced in the hearts and minds of Western Europeans only in the 1960s, and by American Pop art. Hence, it was a whole new art aesthetic that heralded the decisive move away from European art.

²²³ Kunsthalle Basel, *Moderne Malerei seit 1945 aus der Sammlung Dotremont* (Basel: Kunsthalle, 1961). Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, "Interview Conducted by Christopher Knight April, 1985," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1985).

²²⁴ J. Cladders, ed., *Pop Sammlung Beck* (Düsseldorf: Rheinland Verlag, 1970), 25.

2.3.1. The spectacular rise of Pop art

1962 was not only the year of the Kennedy Slide and the crisis of abstraction; it was also the year when American Pop art emerged, to offer a replacement for an older aesthetic in paintings the likes of which had not been seen before.

At the origin of the movement was the friendship between Ivan Karp, Richard Bellamy, and Henry Geldzahler, which developed around the Hansa Gallery, in operation between 1952 and 1959. In 1959, Leo Castelli asked Karp, who was then working for Martha Jackson, to join his gallery. While working for Castelli, Karp met Robert Scull, a businessman, who had started to collect established European abstraction, but was now looking to invest in contemporary American artists (maybe following the advice of *Fortune* magazine!) In 1960, Scull decided he wanted to open an art gallery. He held onto the optimistic notion of contemporary art as a gold mine. Karp recommended his old friend Bellamy to run the gallery.²²⁵ Scull and Bellamy made a deal: Bellamy would open a gallery (the Green Gallery) featuring contemporary artists whom he was free to select, and every year Scull would buy \$18,000 worth of art – to cover the sum necessary to maintain the gallery.²²⁶ By 1961, Karp was at the Castelli Gallery and Bellamy at the Green Gallery; Geldzahler, who had recently finished his PhD in art history, was working as an assistant curator of American painting and sculpture at the Met. The three were ready to conquer the world.

In fall 1961, Allan Kaprow, another friend from the Hansa Gallery, introduced Karp to one of his colleagues, Roy Lichtenstein. Karp told the artist to come to the gallery and bring some works. One day, Lichtenstein brought a new series inspired by comic strips. Karp was

²²⁵ Ivan Karp, "Interview Conducted by Paul Cummings, March 12, 1969," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institution: Archives of American Art, 1969).

²²⁶ Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 179.

puzzled by these works and asked him to leave them so that Castelli could look at them. Castelli was both surprised and fascinated by these paintings, and decided to keep a few to show collectors to gauge their reactions. A few weeks later, a client saw one of these works and told Karp and Castelli that he was doing paintings in the same style – the client was Andy Warhol. Karp and then Castelli went to Warhol's studio. They liked his work and Castelli even bought a piece. Two months later, Karp met James Rosenquist, a billboard painter who was working in a style related to Lichtenstein and Warhol. But still Karp and Castelli hesitated.

As much as Castelli and Karp liked Warhol and Rosenquist, they did not want to represent them. Their works and Lichtenstein's were too similar. Castelli felt that to show all three in his gallery would be counterproductive. It would be better to spread their work across New York galleries. This, he thought, would give momentum to the movement and catch the attention of the press and collectors. Castelli thus encouraged Warhol to go to the Stable Gallery of Eleanor Ward, and Karp placed Rosenquist at the Green Gallery.²²⁷ Meanwhile, Geldzahler had discovered Tom Wesselmann at a happening organized by Claes Oldenburg. He introduced the young painter to Karp, Bellamy, and Alex Katz. Katz was able to get a show for Wesselmann at the Tanager Gallery in December 1961.²²⁸ A campaign for the visibility of a new generation of artists, and a new art, had begun.

The Pop art campaign was launched in February 1962: Lichtenstein had a solo show at Castelli's, and Rosenquist had his at the Green Gallery. In September, Bellamy exhibited Oldenburg and in October Wesselmann. In November, Warhol's show opened at the Stable Gallery. That same month, Sidney Janis, the Abstract Expressionists' dealer, included these new

²²⁷ Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973." Karp, "Interview Conducted by Paul Cummings, March 12, 1969."

²²⁸ Tom Wesselmann, "Interview Conducted by Irving Sandler, January 3 - February 8, 1984," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1984).

artists in a group show titled “The New Realists.” By the end of 1962, in consequence, Pop art was everywhere. Castelli had succeeded in creating the impression that something was happening! The launching of Pop art was a stroke of marketing genius, as Marvin Elkiff later explained to the readers of *Esquire*:

The Green Gallery’s Bellamy admits his own innocence in the face of Castelli’s wisdom. He tells how Castelli wanted to make sure the Green Gallery held its first Rosenquist show at the same time as Castelli held his show of Roy Lichtenstein – best known for his comic-strip paintings – thereby creating a sense of movement to build up the enthusiasm of collectors, museums, and the press. For the same reason, Castelli himself says, he urged Andy Warhol to go to the Stable Gallery, Dine to Janis, rather than his own gallery.²²⁹

Janis’s “The New Realists” had been planned a year earlier, in Paris, when Janis visited Pierre Restany’s “La réalité dépasse la fiction: Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York.” Impressed by the show and looking for fresh talent, Janis had offered Restany an American venue for his exhibition. Following the emergence of the new American trend, the New York show, however, took on a different form. Instead of showing the connections between European Nouveau Réalisme and American Neo-Dadaism, Janis confronted the Parisian artists’ work with that of those who would soon be dubbed Pop artists.

The confrontation was to the European contingent’s disadvantage: next to Wesselmann’s nudes and Lichtenstein’s comic strips, their works looked passé and gloomy. As the French artist Arman recalled: “à la galerie Sidney Janis, il y avait des Warhol de trois mètres, des Lichtenstein de deux mètres, des Wesselmann de quatre mètres. Les Européens, à côté, avaient l’air maigre et poussiéreux.”²³⁰ Not only were the slick and figurative paintings of Lichtenstein and Wesselmann radically different from the Nouveaux Réalistes’ shoddy assemblages, they also belonged to a different historical moment. When Restany visited the show, he said his heart

²²⁹ Marvin Elkiff, “The American Painters as a Blue Chip,” *Esquire*, January 1965, 112.

²³⁰ Otto Hahn, *Arman, mémoires accumulées. Entretien avec Otto Hahn* (Paris: Belfond, 1992), 66.

broke: “Je compris tout en un clin d’œil. Adieu Schwitters, adieu Duchamp, adieu l’appropriation objective. Du style, un grand style de représentation réaliste.”²³¹

The Europeans were not the only ones who felt betrayed – so did the Abstract Expressionists that Janis represented. After years of struggling they had hardly begun to enjoy success when their dealer started replacing them with new artists, the works of whom they regarded as an insult to serious art. As Janis explained: “This was a step that the older artists, particularly Guston, Motherwell, Gottlieb, and Rothko, strongly opposed. They held a protest meeting and decided not to be associated with what they believed to be Johnnys-come-lately, and withdrew from the gallery as a body.”²³²

Castelli, who disagreed with Janis’s mismatched confrontation, did not say anything because he knew that to present the new movement in this prestigious gallery, whatever the context, would establish Pop art in the minds of serious collectors.²³³ And, indeed, the show received a great deal of media attention. The day of the opening, Brian O’Doherty wrote in *The New York Times*:

It’s mad, mad, wonderfully mad. It’s also (at different times) glad, bad and sad, and it may be a fad. But it’s welcome. It is called “New Realists,” and it opens today at 4pm in the Sidney Janis Gallery at 15th East 57th Street. [...] The general tone is zippingly humorous, audaciously brash, making use of the industrial products of conformity in order to non-conform.²³⁴

The non-conformist Pop artists were causing a huge sensation in the New York artworld. Rarely had a new style created such a concentrated media stir. If serious critics opposed its vulgarity,²³⁵ the popular press embraced it with eagerness. In June 1962, *Life* magazine thus devoted a long

²³¹ Pierre Restany, “Chelsea 1960,” in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Paris-New York* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 152.

²³² Laura de Coppet and Allan Jones, *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1984), 39.

²³³ Castelli, “Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973.”

²³⁴ Brian O’Doherty, “Art: Avant-Garde Revolt,” *The New York Times*, October 31 1962, 59.

²³⁵ Max Kozloff, “Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians,” *Art International*, March 1962, 34-36.

article to the new movement. In response to such popular frenzy, Peter Selz, a curator at MoMA, decided to organize a symposium on Pop art, a style he despised for giving up to American consumerism. In fact, Geldzahler was the only participant of the symposium to defend Pop art with enthusiasm.²³⁶ Despite the reservations and critiques raised during that symposium, the simple fact that the new style was the subject of serious discussion at MoMA was extraordinary. For everyone, even those who did not like Pop art, this was the sign that it was important. So felt Thomas Hess, the editor of *Art News*. He let Gene Swenson, a fervent enthusiast for Pop art, write several articles on it, including a series of interviews published in November 1963 and February 1964.

In March 1963, just one year after its official launch, Pop art was featured at the Guggenheim Museum. "Six Painters and the Object," curated by Lawrence Alloway, traveled throughout the United States, increasing the visibility of the movement outside New York. *Time* could write: "Pop art is popping out all over."²³⁷

In less than a year, Pop art had replaced abstraction as the art of choice for American collectors. As one New York dealer confided to the *Time* reporter: "I know several dealers of abstract expressionism, especially second-generation abstractionism, who have had a great deal of trouble. There are even dealers who have urged their abstractionists to switch to pop art."²³⁸

2.3.2. The arrival of Pop art in Europe

Unlike Abstract Expressionism, which had arrived late to Europe, Pop art appeared almost simultaneously in the United States and Europe, where it enjoyed the same kind of instantaneous success.

²³⁶ Peter Selz, "A Symposium on Pop Art," *Arts Magazine*, April 1963, 36-45.

²³⁷ "Pop Pop," *Time Magazine*, August 30 1963.

²³⁸ "State of the Market."

The new style was introduced on the old continent by Ileana Sonnabend who, as detailed earlier, had decided to open a gallery in Paris to represent Leo Castelli's artists in Western Europe. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend, who were then married, were in the process of opening an art gallery in collaboration with René Drouin. The War forced them to flee France, and Drouin carried out the project alone. After the War, Drouin and Castelli resumed their business, bringing European art to New York. Castelli wished he could also bring American art to Europe. Living in New York, he had met very interesting artists he thought Europeans ought to know.

In 1955, Castelli went to Paris and investigated the idea of opening a gallery devoted to American art. In France, everyone was encouraging: they all wished to know more about American art. The only problem was funding such a venture, which would certainly not be an instant commercial success. Back in New York, Castelli talked to Sidney Janis, who was uninterested. Janis knew he could sell his artists successfully in the United States, and thus had no need to conquer the European market. Castelli then submitted a proposal to Alfred Barr, but MoMA was too involved with its International Program to support another project of that kind. Castelli had to put his project on hold for lack of funding. One cannot help but wonder what would have happened if Castelli had opened an American gallery in Paris in 1956. Instead, he opened a gallery in New York in 1957. His interest in the European market, however, did not diminish, as can be seen in his active promotion of Rauschenberg and Johns in Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

When Ileana and her second husband, Michael Sonnabend, decided to open a gallery in Europe, it logically became a joint venture with Castelli. The agreement was that Sonnabend would get exclusive European rights to represent Castelli's artists, while he promised not to sell

directly to European collectors, who weren't coming to the New York at that time anyway. Sending his artists to Sonnabend was a way to expand his clientele into the European market. A shared commission on European sales was more appealing than no sale at all. The Sonnabends opened their Parisian gallery in fall 1962. At the outset of the project, Ileana wanted to represent Castelli's Neo-Dadaists as well as the European Nouveaux Réalistes, but Restany's wife Jeannine (the former assistant of Drouin) had recently opened the Galerie J. to represent the latter. Again, one wonders what would have happened if Sonnabend had handled the European artists. The Sonnabend Gallery thus opened with an almost exclusively American program.²³⁹

Castelli was particularly anxious to exhibit the Pop artists in Europe, because in New York the most enthusiastic reactions to the new style had come from Europeans: Duchamp, Dali, Count Panza, and Jean Leymairie, a French art historian who would replace Dorival at the MNAM in 1968.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, the first collector to buy a Pop painting by Lichtenstein was British.²⁴¹ In March 1963, Sonnabend launched the new style in Paris with "Pop art Américain," featuring Oldenburg, Warhol, Rosenquist, Wesselmann, John Chamberlain, and Lee Bontecou. This first show was followed by solo shows for Lichtenstein in June and Oldenburg in the fall. The year ended with a group show, "Dessin Pop." In 1964, the gallery continued to promote Pop art through a series of solo shows of Warhol, Rosenquist, Segal, etc.

These shows were considered sensational and attracted many visitors and passersby. The gallery was actually located in the same building as the famous restaurant "Relais Bisson," which was patronized by the French artistic and intellectual elite, including André Malraux, then

²³⁹ Bourel, "Les Galeries d'Ileana Sonnabend.", Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

²⁴⁰ Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

²⁴¹ Véronique Wiesinger, "L'art cinétique dans la guerre des marchés : de *l'Hommage à New York* à l'ouverture du Centre Georges Pompidou (1960-1977)," in Ameline and Wiesinger, eds., *Denise-René l'intrépide - Une galerie dans l'aventure de l'art abstrait 1944-1988*, 129-41.

minister of culture. On their way to the restaurant, diners could not help noticing the impudent artworks displayed in this American gallery! The Sonnabends were on a mission to educate the French and Europeans about American art. They were open to everyone interested, and eager to convince those who were at first repulsed by such vulgar artistic expression.

For each exhibition, they commissioned French critics to write the catalogue instead of having an American text translated. This was a way to involve Restany, Alain Jouffroy, Michel Ragon, Otto Hahn, and even André Breton in the new American art, and to have them define it for the French public.²⁴² As Sonnabend recalled, the Europeans were keenly interested in the new American art:

Young European artists always wanted to meet the artists we showed. That's why we tried to bring the artists from New York for the openings. They were a great excitement and those opening were mobbed by all kinds of people – the young and not so young, cultural officials, and the general public. [...] when Andy Warhol came for his opening, he brought a whole retinue with him from New York, and we screened his films in the gallery. Soon after, Langlois showed them at the Cinémathèque. There was a very interesting cultural life in Paris at that moment, great interaction among the arts.²⁴³

The Western Europeans who, in 1963, were still going to Paris to see new art, discovered American Pop art at Sonnabend's and they loved it. Count Panza was particularly interested in Oldenburg and bought several pieces from his show. Pontus Hulten, the director of the Moderna Museet of Stockholm, also became infatuated with the new style. In 1963, he bought a Johns and a Stankiewicz for his museum; in 1964, a Dine, an Oldenburg, a Rosenquist, and a Segal; and in 1965, a Warhol and a Bontecou. He also organized a show, "Amerikansk Pop Kunst," featuring Dine, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, Segal, Warhol, and Wesselmann, which opened in Stockholm in February 1964, and traveled to Holland, Belgium, and West Germany. Edy de Wilde, the new director of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, also became a good client of

²⁴² Bourel, "Les Galeries d'Ileana Sonnabend."

²⁴³ Coppet and Jones, *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works*, 112-13.

Sonnabend. In 1964, he bought a Dine and a Rosenquist. Interestingly, that same year the museum bought its first de Kooning. Pop art entered European museums almost at the same time as Abstract Expressionism, and, due to its lower prices, these institutions purchased more of it.²⁴⁴

In order to reach a larger audience, Sonnabend created partnerships with Italian and German dealers who were interested in showing the new American art. Wasn't it exactly the alternative to Parisian abstraction that Western European collectors were looking for? On a visit to Paris, Alfred Schmela discovered Pop art and was immediately conquered.²⁴⁵ Rudolf Zwirner, a young West German dealer of French and American abstraction, decided to switch to American Pop art. It was less expensive and more relevant to the current age.²⁴⁶ Beatrice Monti, who was already in business relationships with Martha Jackson and Lawrence Rubin, asked Sonnabend to send her works for a Pop art exhibition in Milan in April 1963.²⁴⁷ That month, Sonnabend received the visit of Michelangelo Pistoletto, to whom she gave a contract. In June, Pistoletto came back with Enzo Sperone, a young dealer who worked at the Gallery Galatea in Turin. Sperone convinced Sonnabend to send him the Lichtenstein exhibition. In March 1964, Sperone opened his own Gallery and became Sonnabend's contact in Italy.²⁴⁸

By 1964, Pop art was everywhere in Europe. It was featured in the press, in galleries, and even in museums. Pop art really was "popping out all over."

²⁴⁴ Honish and Jensen, eds., *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis Heute: Kunst der USA in Europäischen Sammlungen*.

²⁴⁵ Schmela, "Alfred Schmela."

²⁴⁶ Rudolf Zwirner, "Rudolf Zwirner," *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989).

²⁴⁷ Beatrice Monti, "Galleria dell'Ariete Records," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 980059).

²⁴⁸ Corinna Criticos, "La Galerie Gian Enzo Sperone: Notes pour un historique," *Ligeria*, June-October 1998.

2.3.3. The meaning of the 1964 Venice Biennale

In June 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg was awarded the Grand Prize for Painting at the Venice Biennale, he was undoubtedly the most famous and best appreciated young American artist in Western Europe, where his work had been widely presented. In 1959, he had been included in the first Biennale de Paris (reserved to artists under 35) and in the “Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme.” His first Parisian solo show at Cordier in spring 1961 was not a great success, but, as noted earlier, it took place during the *Putsch* of the generals, when art was not a public priority.²⁴⁹ When this show opened in Milan at Beatrice Monti’s Galleria dell’Ariete, in contrast, it was very well received. Rauschenberg was also part of important European shows such as “Bewogen-Bewegen” (Stockholm, 1961), “Dylaby” (Amsterdam, 1962), “La réalité dépasse la fiction” (Paris 1962), and “4 Amerikaner” (Stockholm, 1962). When Sonnabend opened her gallery, she did a lot to promote Rauschenberg’s work, giving him solo shows (two in 1963 and two in 1964) and including him in most of her group shows. Because of his ties to Castelli and Sonnabend, Rauschenberg was widely featured in shows devoted to Pop art. As a result, in 1963 and 1964 his works were everywhere, and he was even touring Western Europe in person with Merce Cunningham’s dance company.

Rauschenberg was not just well represented, he was also well appreciated. Handsome, outgoing, and candid, for Europeans he had become *the* American. According to Sonnabend, “Rauschenberg did become a hero to the French artists.”²⁵⁰ In his biography of the artist, Calvin Tomkins tells the anecdote of when André Parinaud interviewed Rauschenberg for a French magazine. At first, Parinaud was hostile, but Rauschenberg quickly seduced him, and the resulting article was rather positive. Titled “Un Misfit de la peinture new-yorkaise se confesse”

²⁴⁹ Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time*, 189.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

in reference to the movie *The Misfits* (1961), it presented Rauschenberg as the Clark Gable of painting.²⁵¹ For Castelli, there was no doubt that Rauschenberg “was understood and appreciated in Europe well before he was here [in the United States].”²⁵²

Consequently, Rauschenberg’s victory at the Venice Biennale did not come as a total surprise. In the context of the crisis of abstraction and the growing wave of realism, the victory of a new realist artist was to be expected. Following the deaths of Yves Klein in 1962 and Piero Manzoni in 1963, Rauschenberg became the leader of the new international trend of realism and was thus the best candidate for the award. The French would not have won that year with or without Rauschenberg’s competing. Jacques Lassaigne, the curator of the French pavilion, had selected Julio González, who had died in 1942, and Roger Bissière, who would die a few months later in December 1964. Bissière had asked to remain out of the competition, because of his old age and having already received the Award for Religious Art at the Venice Biennale. The jury gave, nonetheless, Bissière an honorary award in recognition of his long career. The French also exhibited two young artists, Zoltan Kenny and Jean Ipousteguy, but they were clearly not competing for the grand prizes. Ipousteguy was awarded the David Bright Prize for young artists, a great recognition for this artist at that moment of his career. Objectively, 1964 was an excellent year for the French, in which the diverse selection of their pavilion garnered many accolades.²⁵³

If Rauschenberg was so appreciated in Western Europe, why did his victory at the Venice Biennale cause such a stir in Paris? If the French could not win anyway, why would they be so upset? This case shows once again how little the received story actually conforms to the experienced event in its time. The French were actually not that upset that an American won the most noteworthy prize. He was not even the first American to do so. Calder had won it in 1952,

²⁵¹ André Parinaud, "Un Misfit de la peinture new-yorkaise se confesse," *Arts*, May 10 1961.

²⁵² Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

²⁵³ Association Française d'Action Artistique, *La France à Venise: le pavillon français de 1948 à 1988*.

and Tobey's victory in 1958 had been regarded as the only fair award of the year. The French were certainly offended by Solomon's impudent tracts which were handed out during the official ceremony and claimed the end of Parisian talent, but Venice had long been famous for its petty games and tortuous politics. They were also undoubtedly jealous of the financial means of the American contingent – the French pavilion was as small as the Greek, and its supporters had no money to publish brochures, let alone a tract claiming the longevity of Parisian artistic glory. But these are just anecdotes and incidents that veil the real meaning of the 1964 Venice Biennale, at which the problem, I would argue, was precisely *not* that Rauschenberg won the prize.

As already noted, 1963 had been a very difficult year for the French artworld. In April 1964, when the retrospective exhibition "54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade" opened in London at the Tate Gallery, the French felt completely betrayed.²⁵⁴ As Herta Wescher explained in his review "Pauvre Ecole de Paris," the problem was not the importance given to British artists in that exhibition – it is normal to give one's artists weightier representation. No, the problem was the overwhelming representation of young American artists. In a show supposed to present the artistic production of the past twenty years, to give such prevalence to artists who had emerged only two years prior was conceptually inadmissible for such a project. An additional error of this sort was that abstraction, even American Abstract Expressionism, was relegated to a position of secondary importance: "It is inadmissible that Pollock, who had the deepest influence on the new generation, be presented by no more than a narrow panel which is lost in the ensemble."²⁵⁵ Similarly, the School of Paris was reduced to a few uninteresting pieces by Hartung, Poliakoff, Soulages, and de Staël. Bissière, who would represent France at the Biennale, was absent and with him the entirety of French lyrical abstraction. Fautrier, who had

²⁵⁴ Edward Wright and Robin Fior, *54-64 - Painting and Sculpture of a Decade* (London: The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1964).

²⁵⁵ Herta Wescher, "Pauvre Ecole de Paris," *Cimaise*, Spring 1964, 63.

won the Biennale in 1960, had not been included either. Even British abstraction was mishandled. For Wescher, then, the show was completely biased: “Seen in this way, the arbitrary suppression of so many artists of the Paris School seriously indicts the historical duty incumbent upon such an exhibition.” As for the new trend, only Rauschenberg was interesting to him: “In the presence of Rauschenberg (leading exponent of the New Realism for the past ten years [...]) the younger of the movement have little to say.”²⁵⁶ For the French, in consequence, this show did not reflect the history of the past twenty years, but rather recent taste. As such, it was an act of historical erasure. The London exhibition did not simply reject abstraction and French abstraction in particular, it more importantly marked a sea change in the values of the Western artworld: novelty was becoming more important than historical continuity, even in official circles.

These divergent approaches to contemporary art were particularly obvious in the differences between the French and the American selections at the Venice Biennale. While the French presented artists at the end of their career, the Americans presented artists at the breakthrough moments in theirs. The French did present a few young artists, like Kenny and Ipousteguy, but these artists were little known outside France and their works were eclipsed by the more established artists. For the French, the Biennale was a place of consecration and honors. For the Americans, it was a laboratory for the newest experimentations. Until 1964, the French historical view had been shared by other European countries. But in 1964, there was a shift in curatorial practices, with most of the pavilions adopting the American view and showing emerging artists. In 1964, for instance, when Edouard Tier became the curator of the German pavilion, he stopped the tradition of historical shows and started to present young West German

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 64.

artists.²⁵⁷ So, Rauschenberg's award that year was only part of a larger victory for the American approach to contemporary art. In an unpublished essay, Pierre Restany analyzed the events of Venice with great insight:

Par l'anachronisme de son choix, Jacques Lassaigne est l'artisan indirect de la victoire américaine. L'indignation des journalistes parisiens n'y changera rien. L'école de Paris n'a pas été trahie pas les décisions du jury international, elle a été desservie (de bonne foi, c'est là le pire!) par celui qui avait la charge de la représenter en établissant une sélection officielle. La présence comme invité d'honneur du vieux maître Bissière est pour le moins aberrant à Venise en 1964.²⁵⁸

If Restany had been in charge of the official selection, he would have taken a competitive position and presented the French Nouveaux Réalistes, thereby giving the French pavilion an opportunity to actively participate in the laboratory of contemporary art that Venice was becoming. But to have asked Restany to curate the French pavilion, the French officials would have had to change their patrimonial and historic approach to art, not just a particular school or economic situation.

2.3.4. Conclusion

In examining the political, economic, and cultural contexts of the School of Paris's dismissal, it becomes obvious that it was neither the result of a torturous plot nor of American art's irresistible appeal, but rather of a new historical environment. By studying the facts, especially an undeniable chain of exhibitions and collection activities, it is also clear that the School of Paris was *not* replaced by the School of New York in the 1950s – the prevailing myth of most Western art histories. Facts clearly indicate that French abstraction (and American abstraction to a certain extent) was replaced only in the 1960s, and then by American Pop art.

²⁵⁷ Christoph Becker and Annette Lagler, eds., *Biennale Venedig: Der deutsche Beitrag (1895 -1995)* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen/Cantz Verlag, 1995).

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Henry Perier, *Pierre Restany, l'alchimiste de l'art* (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1998), 242.

This discussion should thus not be reduced to a confrontation between Paris and New York, as is typically done. Collectors and curators from all over Europe played major roles in Paris's fall from grace. They were the ones who initiated the shift by turning their *regards* – their new optic and measuring point – to New York and Pop art. Western Europeans' enthusiasm for American Pop art ought more properly be considered the reason for the shift of the artworld's center from Paris to New York.

2.4. POP BEGEISTERT: THE TRIUMPH OF AMERICAN POP ART IN WEST GERMANY

To better understand the role of Western European dealers and collectors in the rise of Pop art and the eclipse of Paris, I would like to examine more closely the West German craze for the new American style, and to investigate the reasons behind their enthusiasm. The specifics of Germany's role help to explain other facets of the international art scene and art market.

2.4.1. An immediate and irresistible success

West Germans had discovered American Pop art in *Art International's* special issue on "The New Realism, Neo-Dada, Common Object," from January 1963. More than the articles by Restany and Barbara Rose, what caught the attention of West Germans were the reproductions, and especially the color reproductions of Lichtenstein's *Woman Cleaning* and Wesselmann's *Great American Nude 39*. With their flat colors and crisp lines, Pop art paintings were more photogenic than the works of the Nouveaux Réalistes. West Germans found them more exotic and, ultimately, more appealing. Konrad Fisher²⁵⁹ remembered: "Da sah ich zum ersten Mal Pop art, das war für mich ein großes Erlebnis, denn ich fühlte mich angesprochen. Vor allen von den

²⁵⁹ Konrad Fisher used his mother's maiden name, Lueg, as his artist name.

Arbeiten von Roy Lichtenstein und Claes Oldenburg.”²⁶⁰ Fischer could not go to the United States to learn more about these artists – it was too expensive – but he could afford to go Paris. Several friends, including Gerhard Richter, joined him. At Sonnabend’s they sensed an opportunity and introduced themselves as the “German Pop artists.” Fairly predictably, Sonnabend told them she was not interested in German Pop artists, but she did show them works on paper by Lichtenstein, Warhol, and other American Pop artists.

Alfred Schmela, as previously noted, discovered American Pop art at Sonnabend and liked it so much he let some collector friends convince him to join them in New York. For Schmela such an expensive trip seemed worthwhile. His wife Monika Schmela remembered: “Drei Wochen lang setzten wir uns mit der Pop-art auseinander, kauften dann bei Castelli den ersten ‘deutschen’ Lichtenstein und leinden Segal zu einen ersten Ausstellung für December ein.”²⁶¹ The Lichtenstein was sold to a West German collector for DM 10,000 – a very reasonable price, considering that in the early 1960s a Pierre Soulages would sell for DM 100,000 and a Franz Kline for DM 40,000.²⁶² As for the Segal exhibition, Sonnabend agreed to send her show to Schmela in Düsseldorf. In 1963, Rudolf Zwirner also crossed the Atlantic to visit artists’ studios and buy Pop artworks: “1963 führ ich zum ersten Mal in die USA. Ich fand Gefallen an Pop-art. Das war mein großes Erlebnis! Lichtenstein, Segal, Warhol, Jim Dine bewegten mich sehr, und ich kaufte ihre Werke.”²⁶³

In January 1965, Rolf Ricke, a dealer from Kassel, traveled to New York at the request of Dr. Etzold, a collector interested in buying prints by Pop artists, who gave him \$4,000. Ricke arrived in New York without any idea where to find such works, so he simply went to MoMA

²⁶⁰ Konrad Fischer, "Konrad Fischer," *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989).

²⁶¹ Schmela, "Alfred Schmela," 228ff.

²⁶² Zwirner, "Rudolf Zwirner," 238ff.

²⁶³ Ibid.

and talked to Peter Selz (maybe not the best person to inquire about Pop art!) who gave him the address of Tatyana Grossman's Universal Limited Art Editions in Long Island. When Ricke arrived at the print shop, Johns was working on a project, and Rosenquist came by. Ricke not only bought prints for Etzold, he also made a contract with Grossman that gave him exclusive representation rights in West Germany for the ULAE prints. Back in Kassel, Ricke organized a show with the works he had brought back.²⁶⁴

The first West German collector who got seriously interested in Pop art was Wolfgang Hahn, the chief restorer of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne. Hahn was extremely supportive of young artists and already collected Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme when he started to buy Pop art from Zwirner. Another early collector was Siegfried Cremer, the restorer of the Staatgalerie in Stuttgart. Between 1963 and 1965, Cremer built arguably Europe's most impressive Pop art collection. At one point, he owned the paintings *Hopeless* by Lichtenstein (1963) and a *Liz* by Warhol (1964), two iconic images of Pop art.²⁶⁵ Starting in 1965, Hans Beck, a lawyer from Düsseldorf, bought prints from Ricke and quickly built an outstanding collection that earned him his reputation as "der Sammler von Pop Graphik in der BDR."²⁶⁶ Pop art did not only appeal to collectors of advanced and emerging art. It also earned the allegiance of more traditional collectors. In 1965, for example, Dr. Peter Ludwig, an avid collector of medieval and modern art who had a PhD in art history, bought his first Pop painting while in New York.²⁶⁷ In 1966, Karl Ströher, a serious collector of modern art and a general supporter of the arts, traveled to New York, where he visited galleries and artists' studios to learn more about Pop art.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Marianne Stockebrand, ed., *Rolf Ricke* (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 1990), 21.

²⁶⁵ Annelie Lutgens, *Fluxus und Nouveaux Réalistes - Sammlung Cremer* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1995).

²⁶⁶ Cladders, ed., *Pop Sammlung Beck*.

²⁶⁷ Rainer Speck, *Peter Ludwig Sammler* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1986).

²⁶⁸ Christmut Präger, "Museum für Moderne Kunst and Ströher Collection," in Jean-Christophe Ammann and Christmut Präger, *Museum für Moderne Kunst und Sammlung Ströher* (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991), 92-126.

Following the example of these major collectors and established figures in the German artworld, many in Germany started to collect Pop art. Those who could not afford singular pieces bought posters in the small “Pop shops” that opened throughout the country. On October 26, 1966, the Drittes Fernsehen Program der WDR aired a feature documentary on “Pop art in America,” thereby introducing the greater public to the new style. Profiting from this general art fervor, many art galleries opened in Cologne and Düsseldorf in the mid 1960s. Pop art had become a commercial success. In 1967, Zwirner, who had moved to Cologne, initiated Kunstmarkt with Hein Stürke. The idea was to create an event that would bring collectors together in a single space where they could see what German dealers were selling.

For the first Kunstmarkt, Zwirner and Stürke invited eighteen galleries devoted to the promotion of advanced art.²⁶⁹ Rolfe Ricke came with several paintings of American Pop art, over which the other dealers fought. He sold a *Great American Nude* by Wesselmann to Rudolf Springer, the dealer from Berlin, for DM 5,000. Springer then sold it to a collector from Cologne for DM 19,000. According to Ricke, the painting would have already sold in 1969, just two years later, for DM 75,000, so great had the demand for Pop art in West Germany become by that date.²⁷⁰ The American style completely dominated the second Kunstmarkt. For West German dealers, the problem was that they could not get enough works to satisfy the growing demands of their collectors. Many of the Pop artists were now with Castelli, and Sonnabend had exclusive European rights to his artists. West German dealers had to take what she agreed to give them, for which they owed her a commission. Lichtenstein was particularly highly coveted and extremely difficult to get. Prints were easier to find in West Germany, since Ricke had an exclusive

²⁶⁹ Rudolf Zwirner, "Die Entwicklung des Kunsthandels," *Die Welt der Kunst online* (2006), Zwirner, "Rudolf Zwirner."

²⁷⁰ "30 Jahre Kunstmarkt Köln," *Art* 1996, Rolf Ricke, "Rolf Ricke," *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989), Stockebrand, ed., *Rolf Ricke*.

contract with Tatyana Grossman. During “documenta 4” in 1968, Ricke held a parallel exhibition of Pop prints in his gallery. The day of the opening, Sonnabend bought out the entire show. According to Ricke, she was not particularly pleased to see him handling Pop artworks.²⁷¹

In 1968, Franz Dahlem, a dealer from Munich who had moved to Darmstadt because it was the hometown of Ströher, went to New York to find some Pop art: “Dahlen war auf der Suche nach Pop-art. In Deutschland war Pop nicht aufzutreiben.” In New York, he met with Makler Salzman, who told him that the collection of his friend Leon Kraushar, who had just passed away, was for sale. “Er war sprachlos, denn in München hatten sie die größte Mühe, einige Grafiken oder gar Plakate auf zu trieben und nun konnte er über eine ganze und berühmte Sammlung verfügen.” Dahlem was able to convince Ströher to come to New York and buy the Kraushar collection for \$1 million.²⁷² Back in West Germany, Ströher, who did not like everything in the collection, put numerous works on the market. Since everyone wanted to buy Pop art, Ströher had no difficulty in selling his culls, which were prominent works. Demand was so great that those who had bought works from Ströher were able to resell them quickly at high prices. This, in turn, created even more demand for Pop art in West Germany.

In 1968, American Pop art received official consecration through a series of museum exhibitions. In May 1968, the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne exhibited Wolfgang Hahn’s collection, which, as we have seen, included many Pop artworks.²⁷³ In June 1968, the Suermondt-Museum in Aachen organized “Zeitbild – Provokation – Kunst,” an exhibition of Peter Ludwig’s collection, which contained many Pop artworks, as well.²⁷⁴ During the summer of 1968, “documenta 4” in Kassel featured various contemporary art movements such as Op Art,

²⁷¹ Ricke, “Rolf Ricke.”, Stockebrand, ed., *Rolf Ricke*.

²⁷² Franz Dahlem, “Franz Dahlem,” *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989).

²⁷³ *Sammlung Hahn* (Köln: Wallraff-Richartz Museum, 1968).

²⁷⁴ *Zeitbild – Provokation – Kunst* (Aachen: Suermondt-Museum, 1968).

Minimalism, Fluxus, and Happenings, but colorful and oversized Pop works eclipsed them all. Pop art was clearly the favorite of the exhibition's 220,000 visitors, and maybe also of its organizers. In reaction to what they saw as a biased presentation of the contemporary art scene, several artists – among them Cesar, Martial Raysse, Vassilakis Takis, Julio Le Parc, Demarco, and François Morellet – withdrew from the show.²⁷⁵ At the end of the “documenta 4,” Peter Ludwig bought all the Pop works available for purchase and displayed them along with the rest of his collection in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, starting in February 1969. This large and impressive show, titled “Kunst der sechziger Jahre,” was a huge public success. By the end of August 1969, more than 200,000 visitors had seen it. The catalogue was also a huge success; within two years, 20,000 copies sold, and it is presently in its fifth edition.²⁷⁶ Around the same time as Ludwig's show, Karl Ströher toured his collection through Berlin, Düsseldorf, Basel, and Darmstadt.

By 1969, Pop art was everywhere in West Germany. On November 27, 1970, *The New York Times* ran the headline: “American Pop Really Turns on German Art-Lovers.” The article's author, David Shirey, described in awe how Zwirner had just bought a Lichtenstein *Brushstroke* for \$75,000 – that is, for “as much as has ever been paid at an auction for the work of a living American artist.” For Zwirner, if the Americans were surprised at such a high price, they simply did not yet understand how important their own artists were.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Pierre Restany, “Biennales,” in *L'avant-garde au XX^{ème} siècle*, ed. Pierre Cabanne and Pierre Restany (Paris: André Balland, 1969), 118.

²⁷⁶ *Kunst der sechziger Jahre* (Cologne: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 1969).

²⁷⁷ David L. Shirey, “American Pop Really Turns on German Art-Lovers,” *The New York Times*, November 27 1970.

2.4.2. Portraits of two West German collectors

The success of Pop art in West Germany – some would even say the success of Pop art in general – would never have reached such a level without the extraordinary collecting of Dr. Peter Ludwig and Karl Ströher. Who were these two collectors, and what were their motivations?

The first thing to be noted is how different these West German collectors were from their American counterparts. The American Pop collector par excellence was Robert Scull, who was, as noted earlier, behind Bellamy's Green Gallery, where many of Pop artists had debuted. Working with Bellamy, Scull quickly built an impressive collection of Pop art. In 1965, however, Scull withdrew his support from the Green Gallery, and its artists joined Castelli's stable.²⁷⁸ Scull, a self-made man who owned a large taxi business in New York, was reputed to be vulgar and loud. Castelli had trouble dealing with him for this reason. Karp disliked him and resented his way of buying art.²⁷⁹ Scull was indeed using contemporary art as a high-yield investment – something to buy cheap and resell at a greater price. He had previously started to collect French and American abstract artists, but saw their prices as too high. He thus turned to contemporary art and set out to discover the new generation of artists – hence his collaboration with Bellamy. As new money, Scull and his wife Ethel were also using art as a tool for social climbing. They bought artworks to display in their lavish apartment, where they organized extravagant parties. They loved to be surrounded by artists for the cachet it gave them.

The Sculls' flamboyant style did not go unnoticed, and they received plenty of press coverage. In February 1964, for example, *Time* devoted a feature article to Scull and his avant-garde collection.²⁸⁰ In July 1965, *Life* introduced its readers to the homes of a few Pop collectors, among them the Sculls. "You Bought It Now You Live With It" thus displayed color

²⁷⁸ Karp, "Interview Conducted by Paul Cummings, March 12, 1969."

²⁷⁹ Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

²⁸⁰ "At Home with Henry," *Time Magazine*, February 21 1964.

photographs of their unconventional apartment, and quoted Robert Scull: “It’s a ball living with Pop art [...] it’s great to wake up and see it. I don’t mind what people say. But don’t think I don’t like all the attention. I love it.”²⁸¹ In April 1966, *Time* reported on Segal’s casting of Ethel Scull for one of his statues. The main point of the article was not the artist’s technique, but rather the destruction of Ethel’s designer boots in the process.²⁸²

The other famous American collector of Pop art was Leon Kraushar, an unconventional insurance broker who was nicknamed “the Beatle of Wall Street” because of his long hair. He, too, made Castelli uncomfortable because of his straightforward attitude and bargaining style.²⁸³ He collected Pop art because it was fun and contemporary, as he explained to *Life* magazine:

Pop art is the art of today, and tomorrow, and all the future. All that other stuff – it’s old, it’s antique. Renoir? I hate him. Bedroom pictures. It’s all the same. It’s the same with the Abstract Expressionists, all of them. Decoration. There’s no satire; there’s no today, there’s no fun. That other art is for the old ladies, all those people who go to auctions – it’s dead.²⁸⁴

In contrast to the vivid personality and public figure of these American collectors, Ströher and Ludwig were highly educated, serious, and soft-spoken German gentlemen, who came from old families in which collecting was a tradition.

In the 1930s, Karl Ströher ran the family hair-care business and collected art seriously. The War and the communists stopped all this. His factories and properties, located in the Soviet zones, were confiscated, and Ströher had to move to Darmstadt to restart his business, which became the successful Wella brand. He also resumed his collecting activities, focusing mainly on German Expression, Bauhaus, and the School of Paris, i.e. the very styles that had been persecuted by the Nazis. He developed his collection into a comprehensive presentation of

²⁸¹ "Living with Pop: You Bought It Now You Live with It," *Life Magazine*, July 16 1965, 57.

²⁸² "The Casting of Ethel Scull," *Time Magazine*, April 1 1966.

²⁸³ Ammann and Präger, *Museum für Moderne Kunst und Sammlung Ströher*, 108, 13.

²⁸⁴ "Living with Pop: You Bought It Now You Live with It," 57.

European modernism. He also tried to promote the revival of contemporary German art. In 1950, for example, he endowed the Karl-Ströher-Preis to support German artists, and he later established an award for students at the Academy of Arts in Berlin.

In 1966, Ströher went to New York with the Cologne dealer Hans-Jürgen Müller to learn more about Pop art – a style everybody was talking about. During that trip, he bought a Lichtenstein *Brushstroke*. He collected this new style not so much because he liked it, but because he thought it was important: something he ought to include in his overview of modern art. In 1968, he bought the Kraushar collection, noting: “Considering the treasures included in this extensive collection, the likes of which was not yet found in Europe, I could not resist the opportunity to bring it to Germany in its entirety.”²⁸⁵ He kept only the pieces he thought were important and resold the rest. He thereby gave other West Germans the opportunity to own works that, without him, would not have come to West Germany. For Ströher, collecting art, and Pop art in particular, was not a matter of personal interest but of public responsibility. He wanted West Germans and Europeans to have access to this new form of art, thereby reversing completely what the Nazis had tried to do.

For Dr. Ludwig, collecting was also a matter of civic duty. Younger than Ströher but coming from a similar industrial background, Peter Ludwig discovered art at the collecting point of Wiesbaden, where the artworks looted by the Nazis were gathered before being sent back to their home country. After the War, he started to study law, but quickly switched to art history. He wrote his PhD dissertation on “The Image of Man in the Work of Picasso.” His main argument was that art is an expression of the artist’s working with culture: “My thesis tried to show the intellectual legitimacy of his art; to see him not as an individual creating an art which is

²⁸⁵ Sotheby's, *Pop Art from the Collection of the Late Karl Ströher, New York, Tuesday, May 2, 1989* (New York: Sotheby's Inc., 1989).

not understood by society, but to show him as an artist, who, bound by his time and his generation, gave expression to the thinking and feeling of that time and that generation.”²⁸⁶ After completing his PhD, he took over the family business of his wife Irene, who had studied art history with him. He quickly became the major chocolate producer in the world, which allowed them to collect art extensively. They started with Greek and Roman antiquities and medieval objects and manuscripts. Their collecting was extremely researched and systematic – the work of two serious art historians. In 1965, when Ludwig saw Pop art in New York, he thought it was a style as timely as Cubism had been in its time:

Cubism announced the demolition of the world, which became manifest in the Russian October Revolution and in the spiritual upheavals of Europe. Pop art equals Cubism in importance because for the first time in the century, it represents and acknowledges industrial society as an important reality. [...] My admiration for Pop art stems from the fact that it does open up to the realities of this life and does not retreat from them.²⁸⁷

The motivation behind the Ludwigs’ collecting was not personal enjoyment. The works they bought were not displayed in their home but in public museums, and they never resold them. As Dr. Ludwig explained to Pierre Cabanne: “Jamais, ma femme et moi nous n’avons collectionné pour accumuler des richesses. Notre collection a une mission didactique, nous voulons former et informer le public, exposer ce qui ne serait pas montré sans notre engagement.”²⁸⁸

For Ströher and Ludwig, collecting and collecting Pop art was a response to the specific situation of post-War Germany: a desire to promote the most advanced artistic expression in reaction to the Nazis’ prohibition of avant-garde art, combined with the necessity to support contemporary art in a country which did not support its artists. The Germany of Adenauer was indeed not favorable to the visual arts. Intellectuals and artists were regarded as useless in the

²⁸⁶Phyllis Tuchman, "Peter Ludwig: An Obligation to Inform," *Art News*, October 1976, 62.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁸⁸ Pierre Cabanne, *Les grands collectionneurs 2: être collectionneur au XX^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Amateur, 2004), 324.

reconstruction process of Germany, and often suspected to be the Trojan horse of communists.

As a result:

1950 gab es in der BDR etwa 70 000 Künstler der Bereiche Musik, darstellende und bildende Kunst; 1960 war es nur noch etwa 64 000. Die Zahl der freischaffenden Schriftsteller und Publizisten ging zwischen 1950 und 1970 von 3500 auf 3100 zurück. Das war ein deutliches Zeichen der kulturellen Krise und für viele betroffene Kulturschaffende eine Existenzfrage.²⁸⁹

Faced with the political apathy in art matters, individuals from the private sphere had to take charge of support for West German art. As Ströher explained:

It was a disappointment to me that the long ban on modern and in particular abstract art under Hitler did not generate in everybody a need to make up for lost time, a longing to see Expressionism again, a hunger for what artists had done during their prescription between 1933 and 1945 and what they are doing today. [...] this state of affairs left me with no choice when deciding whether I should acquire works already acknowledged by museums and galleries or help young unknown artists.²⁹⁰

Ströher and Ludwig wanted to make contemporary art available to their fellow citizens. To them, Pop art was an important historical development of which West Germans needed to be aware, making education the collectors' primary motivation. Consequently, they sent their collections to museums throughout Europe and published catalogues and brochures.

A secondary result of their efforts was, however, reinforcing the market for Pop art. They introduced it widely and valued it for its place in history without needing to like it. Such non-partisan representation helped the public to see what this new import from America was about.

2.4.3. Cultural and historical explanations for West Germans' craze for Pop art

If a sense of history and civic service was at the origins of Ströher's and Ludwig's collecting, what were the reasons behind the West German people's enthusiasm for Pop art?

²⁸⁹ Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften, *Zur Geschichte der Kulturpolitik in der B.R.D.* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987), 65.

²⁹⁰ Ammann and Präger, *Museum für Moderne Kunst und Sammlung Ströher*, 96, 103.

Why did the new American style appeal so much to them? Why did they fight to buy a Pop print or painting at Kunstmarkt? Why did thousands of them decorate their homes with posters of Lichtenstein or Wesselmann? Such commercial appeal was not simply a result of witnessing exhibitions of high-profile collections.

First of all, it would be a mistake to reduce Pop art's success to economic factors. The collectors in Germany were not only looking for safe investments and currency shelters. If West Germans' had been interested in speculating, they would most likely have turned to American Abstract Expressionism, a more established style, or, if it were already too expensive and rare, to Post-painterly Abstraction, the new style promoted by Clement Greenberg and supported by American institutions. Thanks to Greenberg's active support, artists involved in Post-painterly Abstraction, such as Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski, enjoyed immense success in the 1960s, and so their work made for wise investments. Yet, instead of collecting the academically endorsed new American art, German collectors turned to Pop art, a style vividly attacked by American critics and suspected to be a joke – or at least a fad – by the majority of the American artworld. Greenberg simply ignored Pop art as unworthy of his attention; Harold Rosenberg nicknamed Warhol “a veritable Leonardo of boredom;” and Barbara Rose warned against a vulgarization of art. Without the support of the art establishment, what *Time* nicknamed “The Slice of Cake School” should not have been very appealing to collectors looking for secure investments.²⁹¹ In the mid 1960s, when the West Germans started to buy it, Pop art did not appear as the safest or wisest investment – it was selling well only in Germany. Therefore, their motivations could not have been merely economic; they also had to be aesthetic and cultural.

²⁹¹ "The Slice of Cake School," *Time Magazine*, May 11 1962. The name came from Wayne Thiebaud's painting, *Cakes* (1963), which illustrated the article.

I contend that West Germans turned to Pop art because it really looked “American” to them – like the future – and completely different than any European tradition. Thus, it was a good political statement for Germans to make. Remember that Europeans had not been very interested in Abstract Expressionism because it looked too similar to European Informal art. Pop art, on the other hand, represented a radical break from history. While Pop art was severely criticized as not serious enough when it first appeared in the United States, it was easily accepted in West Germany, most probably because the German people did not expect American art to be serious in the way they expected European art to be. As a counterbalance to their own country’s history, they loved the bright colors, crisp lines, and casual imagery of Lichtenstein’s and Wesselmann’s works because they were exactly what they expected of American art, in no small part recognizable through American marketing aesthetics’ arrival in West Germany via the Marshall plan. One might say that the West German people enjoyed Pop art because, through its colorful, sometimes glamorous subject matter, it embodied the American way of life as it was disseminated through products, magazines, and films. They looked at Pop art in the same way they watched Hollywood movies and listened to rock-and-roll music – as something new and exciting coming from the electrifyingly modern country of America. Not insignificantly, the first American painting Peter Ludwig bought was Tom Wesselmann’s *Landscape n°2* (1964), which contained a Volkswagen beetle. Ludwig explained that he became fascinated by this bright representation of a modern (German) car; he liked it for its unexpected beauty, which brought together technology and science.²⁹²

I also believe that Pop art seduced the German people because, as a celebration of youth and pleasure, it embodied all that they had been deprived of in wartime and during the conformist Adenauer era. After years of suffering, privation, and austerity, the West German

²⁹² Speck, *Peter Ludwig Sammler*, 95.

people were seeking pleasure and entertainment for the first time since the 1930s. They could afford it thanks to the German economic miracle of the 1960s, and they had earned it through hard work and ingenuity, of which the Volkswagen Beetle was the best symbol (despite its origin in the Nazi era). The German people loved the bright environments depicted in Pop artworks, not only because they differed greatly from the environment of post-War Germany, but also because they embodied the West German dream of a future of abundance and pleasure. On a more psychological level, I would argue that Pop art appealed to the German people because its celebration of daily life offered them an escape from the burden of memory into a world of immediate fun; in other words, it allowed them to celebrate their regained lives. Not unlike the success of Baroque art in Germany after the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century, Pop art was symptomatic of a society that wanted to get over the past to enjoy the present. Ludwig once said: "Every communist behind the Iron curtain wants a fridge and auto and a TV. This is his idea of heaven. Medieval art was about God and the Next World. This art is about now, this world. It is about heaven on earth."²⁹³

Finally, Germans were attracted to Pop art because its images of the United States offered them release from their German-ness. In the 1960s, the German identity was a heavy burden to carry in a world that still considered Germany the country of fascism, militarism, and barbarism. Hans-Jürgen Müller remembered that on his first arrival to the United States in the early 1960s, his taxi driver greeted him with a reminder that "you killed five million Jewish people."²⁹⁴ The capture of Adolf Eichman in May 1960 and his trial in Jerusalem, which was broadcasted on international television, revived the dreadful memories everyone had tried to forget. From April to December 1961, survivors of the concentration camps and other witnesses described crimes

²⁹³ Francis Wyndham, "Art in the Ruhr," *The Sunday Times*, August 9 1970, 29.

²⁹⁴ Hans-Jürgen Müller, "Hans-Jürgen Müller," *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989).

that were beyond comprehension. The Eichman trial was followed by the trial of the SS and Kapos of Auschwitz. The “zweiter Auschwitz Prozeß” lasted from December 1963 to August 1965. Twenty-two individuals were tried, among them Rudolf Höss, the director of the camp; 360 witnesses testified, among them 210 survivors. For many young West Germans, who were born after the War, these trials were agonizing. Kasper König, who attended part of the trial in Frankfurt, recalled his bewilderment and distress: “Als ich nach Frankfurt zum Auschwitz-Prozeß habe ich zunächst gar nicht kapiert, worum es ging. Es war wie eine religiöse Selbstkastierung, zumal ich aus einer katholischen Umgebung komme.”²⁹⁵ By rejecting all that was German and embracing the American way of life, as well as the art and culture of America, the West German people hoped to take on a new identity.

Embracing Pop art in the early 1960s could also have been a reaction to the precarious situation of West Germany within Cold War geopolitics. Remember that the Berlin Wall was built in November 1961 and that President Kennedy gave his famous speech “Ich bin ein Berliner” in June 1963, i.e. just before West Germans started to collect American Pop art. By embracing the new American style which was so closely associated with the Kennedy era, the West Germans were also showing their allegiance to the only country which could protect them from the Soviet Union. Willy Brandt, the German Chancellor of the time, thus had his portrait painted by Andy Warhol, *the* American artist.

2.4.4. Conclusion

The German craze for American Pop is sometimes described as a complete misunderstanding of the new style. Appearing in Germany at the time of the student movement and the revival of the Frankfurt School under Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, American

²⁹⁵ Marius Babias, “Ich war dabei, als ...” Ein Gespräch mit Kasper König, *Kunstforum International* 144 (1999).

Pop art is said to have been interpreted as a sardonic critique of consumer society and of the capitalist system. As Andreas Huyssen explained: “I, like many others, believed that Pop art could be the beginning of a far reaching democratization of art and art appreciation. This reaction was as spontaneous as it was false.”²⁹⁶ By the 1970s, the Germans purportedly understood that American Pop artists did *not* actually intend to subvert capitalist society, but rather to celebrate it. They realized that Warhol’s signature remark “Everything is beautiful” should have been taken at the literal level, not as a meta-critique. West Germans consequently withdrew their support for this bourgeois, capitalistic style.

If that new style imported from America could have seduced German intellectuals like Huyssen and Rainer Crone because they saw it as an ally in the struggle against capitalism that realized the predictions of the Frankfurt School, German collectors – as we saw- did not embrace the new art on such philosophical grounds. This interpretation may have motivated students to buy reproductions in 1968, but it wasn’t what had dealers and collectors traveling to New York to buy work between 1963 and 1966.²⁹⁷ The majority of the West Germans, I argue, embraced Pop art because the new American art responded to the specific needs of the new cultural environment of the 1960s.

2.5. CONCLUSION

The mythic shift of the artworld’s center from Paris to New York, once looked at in a more factual light, is not the tale of two cities. It is rather the story of Western Europeans’ shifting the focus of their attention away from Parisian existential abstraction and towards

²⁹⁶ Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop: Reception and Critique of US Pop Art in the Federal Republic of Germany," *New German Critique*, no. 4 (1975): 77.

²⁹⁷ The question of whether Pop art was or was not critical of consumer society remains to these days problematic.

American Pop figuration in response to the new cultural and political environments of the 1960s. Whatever the nature or quality of its art, the France of Charles de Gaulle could not embody the new historical moment as the United States of John F. Kennedy could. There was also a paradigmatic shift in economics that kept US attention at home. These various changes created for the artworld a moment of rupture, as all its values and ideas seemed to change. Peter Ludwig summarized this situation very well: “The American influence is very important in modern art because it is important in modern life.”²⁹⁸

What this second post-War decade shows us about modern art history is threefold: the story of modern art between the 1950s and the 1960s was determined by novelty and value (material or symbolic) rather than by aesthetic values per se; historical context as well as economic circumstances and publicity can prove more influential on aesthetic judgment than anything else; *local* understandings of the artistic situation may determine choices more than larger ideological battles.

²⁹⁸ Wyndham, "Art in the Ruhr," 29.

Chapter 3

“I like America and America Likes Me”: The Domination of American Art

In 1964, René Block opened a gallery in Berlin, which would soon become the meeting point of the international Fluxus movement, and the center of Joseph Beuys's activities. In 1972, Block went to the United States for the first time and, like many Germans before him, came back smitten by New York and its artistic milieu. On his second trip, in 1973, Block decided to open a gallery in New York to show contemporary German art in the United States. This decision, however, would require considerable labor. In the early 1970s, the American public knew very little about contemporary European art, let alone West German art. Informing Americans of the newest European developments was an ambitious and urgent project that Block wanted to take over. It could not be accomplished from Berlin, as the world's attention was then focused on New York and the Americans were not traveling to Europe to discover new talent. Western Europeans also only took notice of what happened in New York. For a European dealer like Block, therefore, the only way to catch the attention of American and Western European collectors and to establish his artists on the international art scene was to open a gallery in the new capital city of the visual arts. What Paris had once been, New York was, and Block would follow Ileana Sonnabend's example.

For the inauguration of Block's New York space in May 1974, Beuys performed *I Like America and America Likes Me*. Wrapped in felt, the Germany artist was transported from the airport to the gallery in an ambulance, never setting foot on American soil. Beuys spent the

following several days locked up in the gallery space with a coyote (symbolizing Native Americans), a triangle (impulse), a flashlight (energy), brown gloves (freedom of movement), and a copy of *The Wall Street Journal* (the US), which was delivered to him daily. In this performance, Beuys wished to make “contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States’ energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man,” because “a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted.”²⁹⁹

Beuys’s performance, I would argue, is key to understanding particular relationships between Western Europe and the United States in the 1970s. In the context of Americans’ indifference to European contemporary art, the title of Beuys’s performance might be considered sarcastic. If West Germans loved American art, it was doubtful that Americans cared for West German art. Were they even familiar with it? Commenting on these issues, Rudolf Zwirner has explained:

Der programmatische Titel der ersten Joseph Beuys Aktion in der Galerie René Block in New York 1974 “I Like America and America Likes Me” bleibt eine prägnante Zweckbehauptung, die sich als falsch erweisen sollte. Auch alle anderen Bemühungen deutscher Händler, wie die von René Block oder Reinhard Onnash, in ihren New Yorker Galerien deutsche Kunst an amerikanische Sammler zu verkaufen, scheiterten kläglich. In den 1960er und 1970er Jahren kauften die Amerikaner, soweit es sich um zeitgenössische Kunst handelte, nur Werke ihrer Künstler.³⁰⁰

But why would Americans buy European art when everyone was claiming that modernist innovation was henceforth an exclusively American project, and that Europeans were just following the lead of American artists? Not surprisingly, Block’s gallery closed in 1977 for lack of business.

In light of American art’s worldwide domination, Beuys’s performance appears rather somewhat incongruous in its attitude: he went to the United States – the dream of many

²⁹⁹ Joseph Beuys, “Coyote, I Like America and America Likes Me,” in *Joseph Beuys in America: Writings by and Interviews with the Artist*, ed. Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 141.

³⁰⁰ Rudolf Zwirner, “Die Entwicklung des Kunsthandels,” *Die Welt der Kunst online* (2006).

Europeans – but refused to set foot on the American soil.³⁰¹ He spent a week in New York, the center of the artworld, but in the confinement of a single gallery space. Furthermore, he inaugurated a German gallery in New York, but, instead of offering the American public the spectacle of something quintessentially German that might have appealed to them in its exoticism, he performed a rather subversive piece on one of the darkest moments in US history. The Native American symbolism he adopted was, in itself, controversial enough, but performed by a German artist it would have seemed particularly inappropriate. The majority of the world still saw Germans as the authors of the worst crime against humanity in history. Guilt and shame were part and parcel of their post-War identity. The hint of moral superiority conveyed in the accusation “You killed five million Jewish people!” that a taxi driver hurled at Hans-Jürgen Müller on his arrival in New York in the 1960s still accurately represented the majority of Americans’ feelings toward Germans at the time of Beuys’s performance. Beuys not only used the extermination of millions of Native Americans as a counterpoint to Germany’s recent crimes, but, more importantly, he reversed the traditional roles of Americans (the good guys) and Germans (the bad guys). Taking a superior moral stance, he took charge of the restoration of the American spirit and claimed to heal its unresolved trauma. And, indeed, who better than a German who had been “re-educated” and come to terms with his responsibility for the Holocaust to help Americans identify their own trauma and move past it?

The shift in power relations triggered by Beuys’s performance is revealing of the complex relationships between Western Europe and the United States in the 1970s. The domination of American art during that period was neither as straightforward nor as absolute as is often assumed. Yes, Western Europeans liked America, but without being fully aware of it Americans also liked Western Europeans, and even, as we will see, depended on it.

³⁰¹ He purportedly refused to do so until the US army left Vietnam.

This chapter will thus attempt to trace a more accurate historical picture behind the myth of “American domination” in terms of Western Europeans’ relationships with American art. In doing so, I hope to move beyond the simplistic myths of triumph and admiration that haunt the history of contemporary art.³⁰²

3.1. BEYOND THE TRIUMPH OF AMERICAN ART: THE SUCCESS OF THE AMERICAN WAY

Les visiteurs des grands musées new yorkais ne pouvaient manquer d’être frappés, depuis le début des années 1970, par l’insistante présence, en piles épaisses dans les librairies du Musée d’art moderne, du Metropolitan, du Guggenheim, et du Whitney, du livre d’Irving Sandler intitulé, sans recherche excessive de la nuance : *The Triumph of American Painting*. Le livre, et surtout le soin apporté à sa diffusion, représentaient des exemples caractéristiques de la stratégie par laquelle, systématiquement, certains milieux américains ont imposé à travers le monde l’image mythique d’une supériorité de l’art américain depuis la guerre.³⁰³

As Jean-Luc Chalumeau noted, a great number of books and articles were published in the 1970s on American art, its emergence, and its triumph. All these studies focused on artists and their ability to create amazing works that filled their viewers with awe. But was America’s triumph just a matter of artistic superiority? I wonder. Without questioning the quality of American art, I think it is necessary to take a closer and more pragmatic look at the mechanisms that fostered the domination of American art.

Howard S. Becker explains in his study *Art Worlds* that artworks “do not exist in isolation, but come in complexly interdependent systems.”³⁰⁴ He adds: “Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that

³⁰² For a discussion on the origins of the term, see: Eric de Chasse, *La violence décorative: Matisse dans l’art Américain* (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 1998), 301.

³⁰³ Jean-Luc Chalumeau, “Le “Triomphe” de l’expressionisme abstrait Américain: Jackson Pollock,” in *Lectures de l’art* (Paris: Editions du Chêne, 1991), 123.

³⁰⁴ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 32.

world, and perhaps others as well, define as art.”³⁰⁵ I will argue in this chapter that America’s triumph not only belongs to its artists, but also to the support-system which made it possible. The greatest champions of American art since the 1950s, I would venture to say, are not the artists as much as the galleries, magazines, critics, and museums which supported them. The ascent of American art also represented the triumph of the American way, and its methods of displaying, discussing, and defending contemporary art.

3.1.1. The American-type dealer

Without disparaging American artists’ merits, the role played by their dealers needs to be considered as the primary factor in their success.

Sidney Janis, as detailed in the previous chapter, was particularly influential in the ascents of both Abstract Expressionism and Pop art. In the 1920s, Janis had become very successful in the shirt industry by creating a new type of shirt: a two-pocket, short-sleeved shirt. This was exactly what American men wanted: something practical and comfortable. Through his wife, Harriet, an art enthusiast, Janis became interested in modern art. Together they started to collect the first School of Paris and involved themselves with the newly created MoMA. In 1944, the Janis couple wrote a study, *Abstract and Surrealist Art*, and, in May 1948, opened a gallery, in which they organized exhibitions that were noted for their quality and originality.³⁰⁶ Without forgetting his business training, Janis applied the same techniques that had made him successful in the clothes industry to art dealing. He would give his customers exactly what they wanted. Castelli once told a very telling anecdote about the savvy dealer:

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 34.

³⁰⁶ Leo Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973," in *Oral History Interview* (Smithsonian Institute: Archives of American Art, 1969).

Janis was very alert and well informed. He found out that Matisse's son-in-law, a Frenchman name Duthuit, was writing a book on the Fauve Movement,³⁰⁷ and we set to work gathering as many of those artists as we could – Derain, Vlaminck, Matisse, Braque, Dufy and others – for a show that would coincide with the publication of the book. [...] The show was a great success. We sold everything rapidly and made a good profit. Paintings bought at \$2,000 went for around \$8,000 – a lot of money in those days.³⁰⁸

As Pierre Matisse and Julien Levy took over the representation of European artists in New York, it became more and more difficult for Janis to find European art to sell. He thus turned to American art. In 1951, Janis put together an exhibition which paired French and American artists. For Castelli, this was a “silly” show: “It proved one thing, however, that there really was no connection except on a very superficial level, between European and American painting.”³⁰⁹ But for Janis, this was an important event which allowed him to legitimize American art using the compare/contrast technique promoted by André Malraux in his *Musée Imaginaire* (1947). For Castelli and those who knew about the artists, comparing Pierre Soulages and Franz Kline was indeed silly, because their works were conceptually very different. But for American collectors, such a visual confrontation was rather convincing: the American artists could be as interesting and important as the French. Janis's exhibition may have been questionable from a historical and methodological point of view, but from a marketing stance it was a stroke of genius.

Starting in 1951, Janis regularly exhibited Abstract Expressionists along with more established European artists. His ambition was certainly not to undermine the Europeans, though. Being their collector and dealer, he had no interest in devaluing them. He was rather trying to raise the reputation of the Americans by associating them with the Europeans' prestige.

³⁰⁷ Georges Duthuit's book was published in 1949

³⁰⁸ Laura de Coppet and Allan Jones, *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1984), 85.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

Collectors who came to the Sidney Janis Gallery to see works from the School of Paris were presented with works by emerging American artists. They found these recent works were tempting: they were cheaper; they were by Americans; and they appeared as the legitimate successors to the prestigious School of Paris – at least if one believed the gallery’s presentation.

Reflecting on Janis’s contribution to the success of Abstract Expressionism, Castelli asserted:

Nobody could have done it. Only Sidney could have done it, and he did it, too. [...] It was only through those incredible circumstances of Sidney’s having handled the great men and handled incredible good material, marvelously-chosen material, and then coming up with the Americans, with beautiful, well-selected shows that convinced the American public, the collecting public, that the American painters were really perhaps not equals of the Europeans, but were worth considering.³¹⁰

In 1961, Janis threw himself into the Pop adventure, taking under his charge the representation of the new artistic trend. Castelli, as mentioned, now let Janis organize one of his “silly” confrontations between Europeans and Americans, because he knew from experience how effective they were.

It is interesting that Janis decided to give a chance to the Pop artists, given that he was an established dealer handling successful artists. He clearly did not need new artists, and, because of the “New Realists” show, he actually lost his Abstract Expressionist artists. In all likelihood, Janis simply felt that the public wanted something different so he tried to provide it. Even in the art business, Janis kept his entrepreneurial spirit: always looking for novelty to keep his clients interested, always trying to follow the newest trends, never lagging behind other dealers. This is what made him, to my mind, an authentically American-type dealer, and a highly successful one.

Castelli is another example of the American-type dealer. His goal was not simply to sell artworks, but to establish the reputation of his artists and thereby create a demand for their work. He always favored long-term benefit over short-term profit, and he knew when to be generous.

³¹⁰ Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

There is the famous anecdote about when he let Thomas Hess borrow Jasper Johns's *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955) without asking any questions. Famously, the work ended up on the cover of *Art News*. Had Castelli refused, Johns's work would not have made the cover of the magazine.³¹¹ Another time, when Leo Steinberg mentioned to Castelli that he wanted to write an article on Johns, Castelli arranged for the essay to be published in the Italian magazine *Metro* and paid Steinberg for his efforts. Castelli was indeed eager to help such a good critic to write and publish an article on his artist as it would assure John's lasting reputation in Italy, a country with which Castelli had close ties having been born in Trieste.³¹² In 1959, he sold Frank Stella's *Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959) to Alfred Barr for \$700 instead of its listed price of \$1,200; Barr thus managed to acquire the work for MoMA without having to secure the authorization of the museum's board. The transaction meant that Castelli had to write off his share of the sale, but he knew he had everything to gain in the long-term in having the work in MoMA's collection.³¹³ Because photographs were expensive, dealers were typically tightfisted when it came to providing reproductions of works to magazines; Castelli, however, generously handed them out to anyone who requested them. In 1962, for instance, when Max Kozloff published "Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians" in *Art International*, Castelli provided most of the illustrations and all the color photographs.³¹⁴ Even if Kozloff's article was not a very positive review of Pop art, the dealer knew that people throughout the world would see the pictures, and this was what mattered.³¹⁵ Finally, in his agreement with Sonnabend, Castelli demonstrated the same type of thinking: by refusing to sell directly to the Europeans, he allowed Sonnabend to

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Alice Marquis gives a different account of these events but her account is apparently not completely exact. See: Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1991), 222.

³¹³ Ibid., 230.

³¹⁴ Max Kozloff, "Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians," *Art International*, March 1962.

³¹⁵ Marquis, *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics*, 222.

create and organize a market for his artists in Europe. In the short-term he lost half of his percentage to his ex-wife; but in the long term he was guaranteed future sales.

Another American-type dealer was Robert Scull. However incongruent it may seem to associate him with Janis and Castelli given his being a collector, his participation in the Green Gallery and the spectacular sale of his collection in 1973, grant him – in my opinion – this title. Like Janis and Castelli, Scull gave the public what it wanted and used the press to establish his artists. As we saw in the previous chapter, he received a great deal of media attention and was repeatedly featured in *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Life*, and *The New York Times*, among other periodicals. After earning his fortune as a taxi mogul, he became a public figure and tastemaker. If at first he had used art to gain social prestige, he quickly became positioned to invest prestige into the art he bought. When he auctioned off his collection in New York on October 18, 1973, everybody came. More than a sale, it was a media event that Scull had carefully planned. He had already sold a few pieces anonymously and was waiting for the right moment. Over the years, he had generously lent works to museums and exhibitions, thereby increasing their reputation and desirability. According to Alice Marquis, 50% of the works had been shown in prestigious museums, and these works counted for 75% of the proceedings of the sale. On the night of the auction, Scull hired a crew to film the whole sale, which cost him \$60,000 – a small price to pay for such publicity.³¹⁶

Janis, Castelli, and Scull are just three examples of this American-style dealer, who listened to the public, applied American marketing strategies to the art business, and, most importantly, knew how to work with the media, which was then becoming a major, if not *the* major, power.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 181.

3.1.2. American art magazines

In 1947, Clement Greenberg published an article on “The Present Prospect of American Painting and Sculpture,” in which he complained about American artists’ engrossment in French art.³¹⁷ Discussing the psychological dependence on Paris of those years, he later told Arthur Danto that American artists were clinging to each and every issue of the *Cahiers d’Art* they could find, as if it were the fountain of life or the Holy Grail.³¹⁸ By 1970, however, the situation had been completely overturned: European artists were now the ones devouring American art magazines, and depending on them for inspiration and motivation.

The role of American magazines in the triumph of American art cannot be exaggerated. Besides the triumph of the American-type dealer, we also need to consider the success of the American-type art magazine – a new type of art periodical that appeared in the mid 1950s.

At their origins, American art magazines, such as *American Art News* (founded in 1902), *Art in America* (1913), and *Arts Digest* (1913), did not focus on current art. They presented the whole spectrum of art history, with perhaps a slight preference for established forms of expression. *Art in America*, for instance, originally focused on Renaissance and Baroque art. In the 1950s, following the general public’s increasing enthusiasm for contemporary art, these periodicals started to devote more of their pages to the contemporary scene. Under the direction of Thomas Hess, *Art News* became the champion of Abstract Expressionism. In 1954, *Art in America* opened its editorial pages to contemporary art with an article on “Americans with a Future.” In 1955, *Arts Digest* was renamed *Arts* to indicate a similar editorial change.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospect of American Painting and Sculpture," *Horizon* 16, no. 93-94 (1947).

³¹⁸ Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, eds., *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1913-1993* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 22.

³¹⁹ John A. Walker, "Periodicals since 1945," in *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, ed. Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot (London: The Art Book Company, 1976).

The refashioned *Art News*, *Art in America*, and *Arts* still specialized in art, but no longer saw their readership as strictly made up of specialists and professionals. Instead, the magazines were gearing their articles towards the growing audience for contemporary art by providing the very information the public wanted – namely, current information that could not be found in books. This included articles on new trends, reviews of exhibitions taking place in major cities, and also advertisements, which functioned cumulatively like an events calendar. Unlike European magazines, which were usually connected to a single gallery or style, American magazines adopted a more journalistic approach, covering the events of the artworld in the same manner that *Time* and *Newsweek* might report on what happened in the “real” world – maybe not objectively but at least comprehensively. Hess covered Pop art despite his disliking it, simply because it was happening – something Christian Zervos would not have done in his *Cahiers d’Art*.

Another characteristic of the American periodicals was their visual quality. While European publications, like *Cimaise* or *Das Kunstwerk*, took after scholarly journals – using heavy, matte paper, dense blocks of texts, and black-and-white reproductions – American periodicals started to model themselves after *Life* and *Vogue* in terms of design. To appeal to the greater public and compete with other lifestyle magazines, they adopted a more dynamic lay-out and used thin, glossy paper and as many color reproductions as possible. This in turn led to the diversification of their advertisements, which included a growing number of lifestyle products. Consequently, the circulation of the magazines increased dramatically. In 1940 *Art in America* had a circulation of 199, but by 1957 it had reached a “satisfactory” level, and by 1970 the circulation was up to 65,000.³²⁰

³²⁰ Jean Lipman, “Early Days at Art in America,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 31, no. 4 (1991).

In 1962, *Library Trends* summarized the recent transformation of the American art periodicals as follows:

Today's trends in art periodicals in the United States must be viewed in the context of general cultural postwar direction. These directions can be characterized as (1) a mere inclusive definition of the sphere of art activity, (2) a new and broader art market, (3) an internationalism of approach, (4) the widespread acceptance and appreciation of contemporary forms, and (5) the emphasis upon visual communication.³²¹

The only point on which I would disagree with the above statement concerns the "internationalism of approach." It might have been an accurate characterization of these magazines in the late 1950s when the author conducted his investigation, but by the 1960s it was not. In that decade, American magazines were reaching an international audience and thus could, in one sense, be considered international, but their content was largely local. In fact, they focused more and more on American art alone.

Browsing through the 1960s issues of *Art News*, it is obvious that their coverage of European art, and French art in particular, diminished over the years. Before 1963, there was a "Report from Paris" almost in each issue. After 1963, such reports became more and more infrequent, French and European art was not even featured on the pages of the newly created *Artforum* (1962). France was the *bête noire* of the editorial team, as its editor, Philip Leider, has explained: "The only sense we had of Europe was that it was a nightmare and nothing French was good. There is a definition of bad art – that it 'tastes French'."³²² *Artforum's* antipathy for French and European art is of importance owing to the influence of the magazine in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Castelli, in those years Leider played the role Greenberg once had:

³²¹ Stanley Lewis, "Periodicals in the Visual Arts," *Library Trends* 10, no. 3 (1962): 330.

³²² Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 131. One could also speculate that their anti-Europeanism was in fact a form of anti-East-Coast attitude.

shaping the way people saw contemporary art.³²³ If he did not like French art, his audience would not have a good opinion of it, either.

Through their appealing and fine presentations of contemporary art, American periodicals were able to impose themselves as *the* references and tastemakers of the 1960s, not only in the United States but also in Western Europe. They had adapted to the new cultural environment and were able to respond to the demands of the new public; European periodicals had managed to do neither. Through their media Americans controlled the creation and distribution of knowledge about contemporary art. They used magazines and books to impose not only their artists but also their story of contemporary art as *the* story of the Western artworld. Americans were not just artistically dominant, their media also ruled supreme in its ability to produce and distribute knowledge about art and its history.

3.1.3. The American support-system

Next I shall argue that American-type dealers and American art periodicals were able to spread a new support-system across the Western artworld – in other words, a new way of promoting and selling contemporary art.

In *Art Worlds*, Becker describes how: “Works of art [...] are not the products of individual makers, ‘artists’ who possess a rare and special gift. They are rather joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic convention to bring works like that into existence.”³²⁴ Art is the fruit of the collaboration of artists and those who surround them:

Painters thus depend on manufacturers for canvas, stretchers, paint, and brushes; on dealers, collectors, and museum curators for exhibition spaces and financial support; on critics and aestheticians for the rationale for what they do; on the state for the patronage or even the advantageous tax laws which persuade collectors to buy works and donate

³²³ Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

³²⁴ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 35.

them to the public; on members of the public to respond to the work emotionally; and on other painters, contemporary and past, who created the tradition which makes the backdrop against which their work makes sense.³²⁵

In the 1960s, cooperation within the Western artworld changed, as people started to use different tactics to produce and market art. Instead of looking at the events of the 1960s only in terms of aesthetic shifts associated with individual artists, I thus propose to see them as the results of a paradigmatic change: not as a shift from Parisian abstraction to American figuration, but as a shift from one pattern of art production and distribution to another, or from an avant-garde support-system to a gallery-oriented system.

Remember that the avant-garde support-system appeared in the nineteenth century, in reaction to the Academic system – its school, its prizes, and its official salons. It emerged when Gustave Courbet set up his own, independent pavilion on the margins of the Universal Exhibition in 1855; it gained currency when Edouard Manet followed Courbet's example and held his own exhibition during the 1867 Exhibition; and it became a model support-system for Edgar Degas when he organized the first exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1874. By carving a space for those artists who could not exist within the academic model, Degas defined a new way to collaborate in the artworld, which was adopted by other groups throughout the Western world. The definition of the avant-garde as encompassing unique vision is closely related to this independent working model: the artists were no longer part of society, but, rather, distinct from it – at the tip of the triangle, to rephrase Kandinsky. Furthermore, artists gathered around specific ideas that expressed their unique visions – hence, the names Impressionism, Divisionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, etc.

More practically speaking, these groups typically had an impresario who oversaw their visibility and promotion, and functioned as a special mediator between the artworks and those

³²⁵ Ibid., 13.

who “needed” to be taught their value: Degas for Impressionism, Marinetti for Futurism, Greenberg for Abstract Expressionism, Rosenberg for Action Painting, and Restany, even, for Nouveau Réalisme. These movements gained specific vocabularies as avant-garde artists and their impresarios wrote manifestos and articles to publicize their ideas, such as the letter Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman sent to *The New York Times* in 1943 or the “Manifeste du Nouveau Réalisme” Restany and a few European artists signed in 1960. The ambition behind such writings was to catch the public’s attention, and to create bridges between artists and society at large without compromising avant-gardism.

This model was replaced by a gallery support-system that allowed for the commodification of art while also crediting the public for having tastes independent of the patronage system and hence beyond the control of a narrow cadre of dealers and collectors. By this new model, artists were no longer seen as grouped around an idea, and more around a gallery. Reflecting on the differences between the situation in France (still dominated by the avant-garde model of isms) and the United States (where the gallery model was already in place) at that time, Arman recalled:

Mais alors qu’en France on se regroupe autour d’une idée, aux États Unis on se réunit par galerie. A la Stable Gallery, c’était l’équipe Indiana, Andy Warhol, et la belle Vénézuélienne Marisol ; à la Green Gallery, il y avait toujours ensemble, Oldenburg, Rosenquist ; Sidney Janis regroupait Jim Dine, George Segal et moi. Chez Castelli, on trouvait, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, puis Warhol après l’éclipse de la Stable.³²⁶

This gallery model was itself not new: it can be traced back to Ambroise Vollard, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, and Paul Guillaume. Yet how it was implemented shows once again that this paradigmatic shift was not so much a question of nationality or aesthetic value but of attitude. What distinguished the gallery system from others was the importance of the dealer’s vision and

³²⁶ Otto Hahn, *Arman, mémoires accumulées. Entretien avec Otto Hahn* (Paris: Belfond, 1992), 66-67.

the tight group of artists he gathered around him to realize it. A dealer would have a certain aesthetic line, but he wasn't bound to a particular movement and didn't necessarily handle all the artists working in a given style. On the contrary, most dealers liked to present a wide range of styles, to avoid competition within the gallery (remember Castelli's concern that Warhol and Rosenquist were too similar to Lichtenstein) and to appeal to the widest possible array of collectors. In their selection of artists, the dealers followed commonsense associations rather than aestheticisms. Janis, for example, exhibited both the first School of Paris and the second, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop art. Castelli, who represented Johns, Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, and Warhol, would later take on the Minimalist and Conceptual artists, and, eventually, Julian Schnabel and David Salle. Castelli was the only factor that brought these mismatched artists together – their gallery was his vision, not theirs. Brokers of quality, dealers presented a brand to collectors rather than an aesthetic or philosophical ideology.

The role of dealers was to champion artists by creating links not only with museums and collectors, but also with art critics and the press, and, ultimately, with society at large (or at least a larger part of society than in earlier eras). In the age of mass media, dealers had to act as public relations agents. Herein lies another difference between the gallery support-system and the avant-garde model. In the latter, artists did not exist outside its system – that they belonged to a system brought the proclaimed end of the avant-garde. Under the gallery support-system, the goal was no longer to catch the public's attention through controversial actions or ideological declarations, but rather to play along with the media. To be successful, artists needed to capture the imagination of the public and create a demand for more information about themselves and their works, because the works themselves were no longer perceived to be of value as objects of contemplation alone. The best examples of this "stardomization" of artists were undoubtedly

Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, whose works somehow disappeared behind the media phenomena of their public personae.

In France, the problem was that artists and gallerists alike were still following the avant-garde model, while the rest of the Western world was adopting the gallery support-system. The best example of the gap between France and the United States is the failure of Yves Klein's exhibition at Castelli's gallery in April 1961. The fact that Castelli decided to only exhibit the blue monochromes of the 1950s and refused to present Klein's newest work – which the French saw as sabotage – is generally regarded as the cause behind the American public's subsequent lack of interest in Klein.³²⁷ But the artist's attitude probably also played a role in the cold reception he received. He presented his ideas as he had done in 1959 at the Sorbonne: in a long and formal philosophical presentation. There was nothing appealing or glamorous in Klein's use of a chalkboard, nothing to capture the American public's imagination.

When Beuys came to New York for the first time in January 1974, he lectured his American audience as Klein had, also using a chalkboard as he explained his "Energy Plan for the Western Man." Beuys, too, failed to connect with his audience. But after the failure of his lecture at the New School, Beuys completely changed his strategy. In Chicago, he dressed like a 1930s gangster and wandered through the back alleys of the city. This time his audience responded with enthusiasm: the persona of the gangster was more enticing than that of the professor. In May, he would come back and perform *I Like America and America Likes Me*. With this performance, he would become a star in the United States.

³²⁷ Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1994), 275.

3.1.4. Conclusion

To go back to Chalumeau's comment on Sandler's *Triumph of American Painting*, it is very telling that the offense did not come from the book itself – a history of Abstract Expressionism³²⁸ – but from its provocative title and the media's zealous promotion of it – that is, from the marketing strategies used to promote this book and American art in general. American domination was, I dare say, less an aesthetic than a media phenomenon – not because American art was not great, but because the American media system was greater.

3.2. PARIS POST-1964: WHY ARE THERE NO MORE GREAT FRENCH ARTISTS?

An assumption related to American art domination is the alleged inferiority of French art after 1964, a concept that has as much currency as the “triumph of American art.” Even Arthur Danto, in discussing twentieth-century American art, had to evoke it: “French painting between the wars and after the Second World War exemplifies so protracted a decline that the final three-quarters of the twentieth century could be written with scarcely mention of France.”³²⁹ Interestingly, the decline of French art is no longer said to have started around 1940. It has been pushed back to 1914. The second School of Paris has already been relegated to the art-historical dustbin. If we believe Danto, the first School may soon experience that same fate. Such a revision would certainly give more credibility to the still mounting notion of the twentieth century as “The American Century.”³³⁰

Yet, for the time being art historians regard the art made in Paris in the first part of the twentieth century as important. They agree that the decadence of Parisian art started with the

³²⁸ Irving Sandler, *Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

³²⁹ Joachimides and Rosenthal, eds., *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1913-1993*, 22.

³³⁰ See “The American Century: Art & Culture 1900-2000,” an exhibition organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1999 in New York City.

Second World War, and that, after 1964, nothing happened in France anymore. In the post-War era, there were still interesting artists like Dubuffet and Klein, but after them there would be no more great French artists.

The question thus arises as to what actually happened to justify this story: Why would Parisian artists suddenly lose their creative edge? Were they victims of a degenerative epidemic? The sudden exhaustion of an entire city does not really seem credible. External factors must have contributed to create the impression that France had become an artistic wasteland. Following Linda Nochlin's method of inquiry, I thus propose to examine why there were no more great French artists after 1964.³³¹

3.2.1. Nouveau Roman, Nouvelle Vague, Nouvelle Critique, etc.

This question is overdue given the great dynamism of French culture in the 1960s in virtually every arena except the visual arts. French literature, cinema, criticism, and philosophy were then going through a complete rethinking of their methods and goals, which makes this period one of the richest in French cultural history.

In the late 1950s, a group of novelists connected to the Editions de Minuit endeavored to systematically deconstruct the traditional novel and create a new form of text. These young writers rejected the conventions of the Balzacian novel (*le roman balzacien*) and the mission of the committed literature (*la littérature engagée*), which had dominated the post-War period, notably through the works of Sartre and Camus. They were also reacting to those books which only aimed at pleasing their readers (*le roman facile*). The new novelists were interested neither in psychological portraiture nor in intrigue. In their works, the fragmentary consciousness of the

³³¹ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *Art News*, January 1971, 67-71.

subject was paramount, with the role of the narrator questioned, as well as his or her motivation to tell a story. Alain Robbe-Grillet has explained:

C'est Dieu seul qui peut prétendre être objectif. Tandis que dans nos livres au contraire, c'est un homme qui voit, qui sent, qui imagine. Un homme situé dans l'espace et le temps, conditionné par ses passions, un homme comme vous et moi. Et le livre ne rapporte rien d'autre que son expérience limitée, incertaine. C'est un homme d'ici, un homme de maintenant, qui est propre narrateur, enfin.³³²

The Nouveaux Romans, as they came to be known, were not stories about heroes launched into adventures. They were writing experiments: acts that aimed at letting language reveal itself. The subject of a book was henceforth the processes of its own creation. As Jean Ricardou summarized: "Le roman n'est plus l'écriture d'une aventure, mais l'aventure d'une écriture."³³³

Another interesting aspect of the Nouveau Roman was its relation to time, space, and memory. The new novelists rejected strict chronology on the grounds that clock time (*le temps des horloges*) was not human time. They wrote according to the time of human memory – hence the chronological shifts and flashbacks of their novels.

The same process of deconstruction was applied to movies by the young cineastes of the Nouvelle Vague, which emerged in the late 1950s around the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. They were reacting against post-War French cinema, which cruelly lacked originality and, as they saw it, was totally dependent on literature. The new film-makers refused to see movies as mere animations of written texts. They wanted to free movies from the boundaries of textual narrative. In the same way as the new novelists deconstructed the novel to find the residual elements of the genre, the new cineastes deconstructed the movie to enlighten viewers of the structures that made a movie. The films of the Nouvelle Vague thus constantly reminded their viewers that they were watching actors playing in a film. It was, to a certain extent, the pinnacle of realism: a realism

³³² Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un Nouveau Roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 149.

³³³ Jean Ricardou, *Problème du Nouveau Roman* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), 111.

that did not try to fool its viewers into believing in a pseudo-fiction, but instead showed them cinematic reality. Such ambition was clearly visible in the techniques used: from natural lighting to actors' directly addressing the camera to *mise en abyme*. Claude-Jean Philippe summarized the innovations of the Nouvelle Vague:

La révolution *d'A bout de souffle* est celle d'un adieu à Bogart et à tout ce qu'il représente, c'est-à-dire un adieu à la fiction cinématographique telle qu'elle s'est présentée pendant quelques soixante ans, à une fiction parfaitement distribuée en multiples genres et reposant sur une espèce de convention entre le public et le cinéaste, le cinéma en général, qui voulait l'illusion d'un récit et d'une durée continue. C'est à cela que, brusquement, mettait fin *A bout de souffle* avec ses fractures, ses sauts délibérés qui ouvraient sur un monde nouveau, qui allait être celui des années soixante.³³⁴

At the same time as French novelists and cineastes deconstructed their respective mediums, French critics started to deconstruct their discipline and its ambitions. This new criticism emerged in the late 1950s but became widely known only in the mid 1960s with the so-called *Querelle de la nouvelle critique*, in which Raymond Picard ridicules the pseudo-scientific methods of Roland Barthes. In 1966, responding to questions about the reasons for the Nouvelle Critique, Serge Doubrovsky explained:

Le grand mérite de Roland Barthes c'est d'avoir, le premier, pris la conscience la plus aigüe de ce problème et d'en avoir esquissé une solution cohérente. Il semble, en effet, qu'avant lui, les critiques, anciens ou nouveaux, aient eu, par des voies opposées, une ambition unique : dire *vrai* ou dire la *vérité* sur Racine. [...] la grande découverte de Barthes, c'est qu'en critique, la *vérité*, comme dieu, n'existe pas.³³⁵

For the truth of the text, Barthes substituted the internal coherence of the critique:

la littérature n'est bien qu'un langage, c'est à dire un système de signes : son être n'est pas dans son message, mais dans ce « système. » Et par là même, le critique n'a pas à reconstituer le message de l'œuvre, mais seulement son système, tout comme le linguiste n'a pas à déchiffrer le sens d'une phrase, mais à établir la structure formelle qui permet à ce sens d'être transmis.³³⁶

³³⁴ Jean-Luc Douin, ed., *La Nouvelle Vague 25 ans après* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1983), 37.

³³⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, *Pourquoi la Nouvelle Critique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966), 81-82.

³³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991), 257.

This interest in structure was shared by other thinkers working in different disciplines, among them Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Foucault in history, and Derrida in Grammatological critique. It was also important to Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and the other members of *Tel Quel*, the journal which dominated the French intellectual life from 1960 to 1982. The idea of structural analysis even applied to art criticism. In 1968, Pierre Daix wrote *Nouvelle critique et art moderne*, in which he called for a new way to approach art: “Une critique de la convergence, c’est-à-dire une critique multiple qui soit structurale non au sens isolationniste de la mise au jour des structures comme on exhume le cadavre d’une tombe, mais au sens actif d’une critique partie prenante à l’art et capable d’en éclairer les relations vivantes. Une nouvelle critique, quoi.”³³⁷

Not only was the French cultural life very rich in the 1960s, it also presented a consistent set of ideas and preoccupations that defined the period from a French point of view. But what about the visual arts in this period?

3.2.2. The French visual arts in the aftermath of 1964

Despite all that had been said – or gone unsaid – about French visual arts after 1964, artists were not actually removed from the dynamism of Parisian cultural life at that time. There were several artistic movements that raised questions similar to those of the Nouveau Roman, the Nouvelle Vague, and the Nouvelle Critique, and as such are worthy of consideration as innovations in an era that supposedly had none.

The first visual arts movement to participate in Parisian artistic life was the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (GRAV), created in 1960 by Horacio Garcia Rossi, François Morellet, Julio Le Parc, Francisco Sobrino, Joël Stein, and Jean-Pierre Yvaral. In a text published on the occasion of the 2nd Biennale de Paris in 1961, “Assez de Mystifications,” these artists explained

³³⁷ Pierre Daix, *Nouvelle Critique et art moderne* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), 198.

that their ambition was “la recherche de l’œuvre non-définitive, mais pourtant précise, exacte et volontaire.”³³⁸ The idea of the work of art as forever unfinished and always open to new interpretations and actualizations had its origins in the thinking of Paul Valery who, in his book *Tel Quel*, writes: “Quand l’ouvrage a paru, son interprétation par l’auteur n’a pas plus de valeur que toute autre par qui que ce soit.”³³⁹ This idea was not only important to the writers and thinkers associated with the journal *Tel Quel* (its title pays clear homage to Valery), but also the visual artists of the GRAV. Their works possessed a structural transformability that required the participation of the viewer, using his or her full sensational capacity. As they didn’t believe in finished masterpieces, the GRAV created what they called artistic proposals (*propositions plastiques*). The valorization of the viewer’s participation went hand in hand with a depreciation of the artist’s role. Members of the GRAV, for example, typically worked collectively on projects they left unsigned.

Starting in 1963, the GRAV created labyrinths, i.e. environments which induced the active and involuntary participation of those who encountered them. On April 19, 1966, they organized *Journée dans la rue*, in which they tried to break the daily routine of Parisians in order to awaken their sensitivities. The project’s prospectus explains: “La ville, la rue est tramée d’un réseau d’habitudes et d’actes chaque jour retrouvés, nous pensons que la somme de ces gestes routiniers peut mener à une passivité totale ou créer un besoin général de réaction.”³⁴⁰ In 1966, Le Parc was awarded the Grand Prize for painting at the Venice Biennale. If this victory contradicted the GRAV’s rejection of authorship and the masterpiece, it also marked the

³³⁸ Yves Aupetitallot, ed., *Stratégie de participation. GRAV - Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel. 1960/1968* (Grenoble: Magasin - Centre National d'Art Contemporain, 1998), 34.

³³⁹ Paul Valery, *Tel Quel I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), 198.

³⁴⁰ Aupetitallot, ed., *Stratégie de participation. GRAV - Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel. 1960/1968*, 172.

international recognition of their ideas and projects. After the tumultuous events of 1968, the group separated, seemingly to indicate that their viewers had freed themselves of inhibition.

A second group active in the 1960s was BMPT, the acronym of Daniel Buren, Oliver Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niel Toroni. Like the GRAV, BMPT was an international group in the great tradition of the School of Paris. The works of these artists were situated at “the zero degree of art” – to borrow Barthes’s expression. In the same way that Barthes raised the question of what literature was, BMPT asked what painting was. To reach its zero degree, their practices were focused on the repetitive and mechanical gesture at the basis of all painting. Buren worked with colored vertical lines; Mosset with black circles on white backgrounds; Parmentier with horizontal grey and white lines; and Toroni with short brushstrokes in staggered rows. On the occasion of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture of 1967, BMPT sent out invitations that read: “Nous vous prions de prendre part à la première d’une série de manifestations qui se proposent, non seulement de présenter le résultat de notre activité, mais surtout de rendre évident le mécanisme dont il procède.”³⁴¹ When visitors arrived at the Salon, BMPT’s room was empty: the day of the opening the artists had taken their canvases off the walls, thereby reaching the zero degree of the exhibition. Likewise, when they exhibited at the Musée des arts décoratifs in June, they organized a happening during which nothing happened.

Supports/Surfaces, the third group, emerged after the events of 1968. Among the artists belonging to the group were Vincent Bioulès, Louis Cane, and Daniel Dezeuze. This was not a fixed group of artists as were the GRAV or BMPT; it was rather a loose pool of artists who exhibited together on an irregular basis. What they shared was a desire to uncover the structures of painting: “Toute œuvre doit mettre en lumière, analyser, questionner de façon critique les

³⁴¹ Daniele Perrier, Peter Ludwig, and Bernard Larmarche-Vadel, *Atelier de France: Art de France depuis 1950* (Koblenz: Ludwig Museum in Deutscheerenhaus, 1992), 45.

propriétés caches, intrinsèques de la peinture.”³⁴² The members of Supports/Surfaces were actually very close to the *Tel Quel* group, and their works clearly did to painting what Barthes had done to literature. Another important aspect of the group was its insistence on the hand of the artist, which had to be visible – an artisanal practice that echoed the approach of the film-makers of the Nouvelle Vague.

The last group I would like to consider gravitated around the Salon de la Jeune Peinture and is called alternately Figuration Narrative or Figuration Critique. The Salon had been created in 1953 by artists who rejected both Social Realism and abstraction, but it remained peripheral until 1963, when Henri Cueco became president of the Association of the Jeune Peinture, which managed the salon. In the 1960s, the Association and the Salon became extremely active, organizing events and promoting painting that was both radical and committed. One of their ambitions was to deconstruct the myths surrounding art, in particular that of the solitary genius – a romantic invention that centuries of workshop practices contradicted. As with the GRAV, many of the artists associated with Jeune Peinture worked collectively: Gilles Aillaud (France), Eduardo Arroyo (Spain), and Antonio Recalcati (Italy) collaborated on a few paintings; the Spaniard Manuel Valdes and Raphael Solbes signed their works as Equipo Cronica starting in 1963; and Cueco created the Coopérative des Malassis with Lucien Fleury, Jean-Claude Latil, Michel Parré, and Gérard Tisserand. The collective works of these artists questioned not only notions of authorship and of the masterpiece, but also the concept of artistic personality.

Another myth these artists countered was that of the avant-garde and the autonomy of art. Committed Marxists, they saw avant-garde artists as mere pawns at the service of bourgeois society, who created superficial disruptions that masked the sclerosis of society and, thus, participated in the preservation of the bourgeois system. In 1965, Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati

³⁴² Ibid., 47.

created their infamous *Vivre et laisser mourir, la fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp*, in which the artists represented themselves executing Duchamp, accused of having served the interests of the bourgeoisie by promoting the falsehood of the artistic freedom. With the events of May 1968, the political dimension in Figuration Narrative would take on even greater importance, hence the name Figuration Critique that is sometimes applied to the group. The *Salle Rouge pour le Vietnam* realized for the 1968 salon in opposition to US bombing of North Vietnam,³⁴³ and the *Ateliers Populaires* of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, which created posters during the events of May 1968, are examples of such political projects.³⁴⁴

The artists of Figuration Narrative were not only interested in politics. As the name of the movement indicates, they were also working with the concept of narrative. In the same way as the *nouveaux romanciers* and the cineastes of the Nouvelle Vague were trying to distance themselves from the conventions of traditional narrative, the painters of Figuration Narrative endeavored to create figurative paintings that would tell a story unhindered by the temporal and spatial limits of textual narrative and linear psychology. In the *Degré zéro de l'écriture*, examining the notion of duration in the novel, Barthes explained that the novel transforms “la durée [en] un temps dirigé et significatif.”³⁴⁵ Jacques Monory’s work can be seen as an attempt to address the problem of duration in relation to narrative, using techniques similar to those used by the Nouvelle Vague and the Nouveau Roman.

³⁴³ Because of the May 1968 events, the salon did not open. *The Salle Rouge* was thus exhibited during the 1969 salon.

³⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Chalumeau, *La Nouvelle Figuration: une histoire de 1953 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions Cercle d'Art, 2003). Gérard Gassiot-Talabot, “De la Figuration narrative à la Figuration critique,” in Jean-Paul Ameline, ed., *Manifeste: une histoire parallèle 1960-1990* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993), 358-63.

³⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, *Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 32.

3.2.3. Media invisibility

The picture I have just sketched of Parisian artistic life in the 1960s and 1970s is very different from the image traditionally associated with French art during this period. Far from being a creative wasteland, France seemed rather fertile ground. So, again, why were there no more great French artists? If there were some artists doing very interesting work, why did none of them gain recognition? I believe that it had nothing to do with the quality of the artists' work or with the timeliness of their aesthetic principles. There could well have been great artists in France in those two decades, yet they failed to be recognized as such because nobody was looking to Paris anymore. Collectors' attentions were completely focused on New York, as they previously had been on Paris, with all that happened elsewhere passing unnoticed.

Visiting the United States in 1964, Michel Ragon interviewed Robert Motherwell and asked him to give his impression on the situation of French art:

R.M. – C'est mon opinion que l'art français est complètement écrasé

M.R. – Sous quoi ?

R.M. – Écrasé intérieurement. C'est une question morale.

After having read the transcript of his interview, Motherwell sent a letter to Ragon trying to rectify his comments:

La vraie réponse [...] est que je ne suis pas bien informé du caractère actuel de l'École de Paris, que les peintres contemporains français que j'admire le plus sont Dubuffet, Soulages, Mathieu et Hoscasson. Je n'ai pas séjourné plus d'une dizaine de jours à Paris pendant ces dernières vingt-cinq ans. Je ne sais pas si les peintres français que l'on expose à New York sont très représentatifs de ce qui se fait à Paris où l'on trouve peut-être des peintres excellents que nous ne voyons pas ici.³⁴⁶

Demonstrating rare lucidity for those years, Motherwell realized that Americans could only have incomplete knowledge of contemporary French art – they knew only what was brought to their doorsteps, which could only offer a partial view of French production. In the following years, as

³⁴⁶ Michel Ragon, *Vingt-cinq ans d'art vivant* (Paris: Casterman, 1969), 309-15.

interest in French art decreased further, knowledge of it became ever more limited. How would Americans have learned about French art? Serious collectors were no longer going to Paris. Art magazines would have been the only way to learn about new art made in France, but, as already noted, French magazines had lost their significance and some, like *Cahiers d'Art*, had disappeared altogether.³⁴⁷ The creation of knowledge about contemporary art was in the hands of American art magazines, which at best were uninterested in French art and at worst hostile to it. They failed to feature French artists, so that, reading them, one would get the impression that nothing was going on in Paris anymore. After Rauschenberg's victory at Venice in 1964, the prerequisite for gaining recognition was to be in New York. French artists, who rarely showed in New York at that time (neither in museums nor in commercial galleries), in practical terms did not exist. They had become invisible.

In 1972, realizing how marginalized French artists were on the international art scene, French President Georges Pompidou decided to organize a grand retrospective of French art. "12 ans d'art contemporain en France" caused huge polemics, as everyone disagreed with one or another aspect of its selection and installation. The Coopérative des Malassis created for the occasion an immense painting measuring 65 meter long and 1.62 meter high, titled *Le Grand Méchoui*. The work was a bluntly harsh critique of the situation in France under President Pompidou. The day of the opening, the Front des Artistes Plasticiens, led by Gérard Fromanger, demonstrated outside the Grand Palais and kept guests from entering the exhibition. When the arrival of the Queen of England's retinue on the Champs Elysées was announced, police were ordered to break up the crowd.³⁴⁸ During the clash that followed, several artists were hurt and five arrested. In response, the Malassis took their painting down and replaced it with enlarged

³⁴⁷ *Cahiers d'Art* ceased publication in 1960

³⁴⁸ This information cannot be verified and the Queen's coming might just be a myth. In any case, this story is typical of the situation in France in those years of intense political activity.

photographs of the police's attack on the artists. Pierre Alechinsky took his works off the walls, Kermarec returned his against the walls, and Daniel Spoerri requested that no one replace the Camembert cheeses he used in his installation for the duration of the show – one can just imagine the smell!

What interests me about this story is that essentially nobody outside of France knows it. If this had happened ten years earlier, it would have become a famous anecdote in the history of art. Even in its time, it was a major anti-government protest of the sort promoted internationally by artists. But since nobody was looking towards Paris anymore in 1972, it went unnoticed. This demonstration was, moreover, not the first such political art scandal. In 1967, the government of Cuba invited artists to an international congress in Havana. Several French artists attended, and, with other participants, they realized a large mural painting known as the *Mural of Havana*. The trip to Cuba and the mural have largely gone unmentioned in art history, not because they weren't noteworthy but because they were not reported on by the American magazines and critics that were *de facto* writing history at this time.³⁴⁹ If the Cuban trip had happened when the French still controlled the authorship of art history, this event would be part of the official corpus of our discipline.

My ambition in focusing on these elisions is not to reclaim French artists of the 1960s and 1970s and add them into the canon of art history. Rather, I want to identify the mechanisms at work in the production of art historical knowledge. There were no great French artists after Yves Klein's death, I would argue, not because French artists suddenly lost their creative power, but because nobody was paying attention to what they were doing on an art scene that was so almost exclusively American. This situation was true not just for French artists in the 1970s, but for all artists not based in the United States at that time. The French situation is just particularly

³⁴⁹ Chalumeau, *La Nouvelle Figuration: Une histoire de 1953 à nos jours*.

striking since Paris was once the center of attention. Geography does not influence quality; it influences recognition.

As such, the low profile of contemporary French artists is not a real problem for art itself and for the history of art. Many international artists had been overlooked internationally in the first half of the twentieth century due to the prevalence of Paris. Perhaps French artists deserved their subsequent invisibility. However, for those interested in the visual arts of the 1980s, I tend to believe that this invisibility has prevented art history from making interesting connections that would characterize the production of that era in more provocative ways. Awareness of Figuration Narrative would, for example, most certainly enrich our discussion of the American appropriation phenomenon of the early 1980s. The story that would be uncovered runs approximately as follows: in the late 1970s, American intellectuals rediscovered the works of French thinkers from the 1960s, and their writings inspired American artists to work on issues of authorship, appropriation, and narrative – the same issues that Parisian artists had been investigating for the past twenty years. I think it would be enlightening to pursue these connections – for example, comparing and contrasting the appropriations of Equipo Cronica, which was so tied to the political situation in Spain under the dictatorship of Franco, to the work of Americans such as Mike Bidlo and Sherrie Levine. Similarly, it would be useful to examine the differences and similarities in the deconstructive approaches of Jacques Monory and David Salle, and in the voyeuristic dimensions of Leonard Cremonini and Eric Fischl. Whatever their potential, such connections will not be drawn if present-day art historians studying the 1980s know little, if anything, about Figuration Narrative.

This is, of course, just one example of historical invisibility. But it is a good example that allows us to measure the extent to which what we call the history of post-War art still remains a

fragmentary story told from a perspective that all too often has followed geopolitical transformation instead of other kinds of networks. Each time geopolitical shifts impact perceptions of international relations, history is rewritten to highlight “new” perspectives on winners and losers. That is why the canon of art history is not fixed and frozen, but keeps evolving and changing.

3.2.4. Conclusion

Why were there no more great French artists after 1964? There were no more great French artists because to be great one needs to be recognized by the international public. In the 1960s, Parisian artists were excluded from dominant international system for establishing and disseminating recognition. Not only were many potentially important French artists in the wrong place and thus practically invisible, but France was also not in position to support its artists on the international art scene. The financial means and the political will were too weak, and the prejudices about what art should be and who controls it were too strong.

The international conclusion in this regard was almost inevitable: general opinion held that French artists’ time had passed and nothing was happening in Paris anymore. Thus, writing in *The New Yorker* in 1973, Harold Rosenberg accused the French magazine *Opus International* of concocting a French avant-garde.³⁵⁰ From the American critic’s point of view the French were pathetically claiming that things were happening in Paris when everybody knew nothing was going on there.

³⁵⁰ Harold Rosenberg, "The Art World," *The New Yorker*, February 23 1973, 91-95.

3.3. A EUROPEAN AFFAIR: THE PROMOTION OF AMERICAN MINIMALISM AND CONCEPTUAL ART IN EUROPE

Another seeming anomaly in the historical record of the prominence of American art is the frequently overlooked role played by Western Europeans in its promotion in the late 1960s and 1970s. This aspect of “American domination” undoubtedly deserves more attention for its scope and possible repercussions.

Remember that, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the promotion of American art in Western Europe had the support of American institutions and dealers: the International Program at MoMA had toured several exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism, and Castelli and Sonnabend had brought Pop art to Paris. As American art became more and more successful, Western European dealers like Gian Enzo Sperone, Alfred Schmela, and Rudolph Zwirner started to take over its promotion and distribution in their respective countries. They quickly tired of Sonnabend’s control of prominent Pop artists, and started traveling to New York to make their own selections. By the late 1960s, European dealers were actually bypassing the American system of promotion, with the impact of creating what could be seen as an alternative American canon. They were showing American artists they had discovered, and sometimes their choices had little to do with what American institutions were promoting at home. American art may have been triumphant, but the question of whose American art it was remained unclear.

Rolf Ricke’s story is a perfect example of this phenomenon. As described in Chapter 2, Ricke went to the United States in 1965 to obtain Pop art prints. During his stay, he also met a few promising emerging artists. He was particularly enthusiastic about Gary Kuehn, and wished to exhibit him in Kassel. The cost of shipping such heavy sculptures was, however, prohibitive. Ricke thus had the idea of inviting Kuehn to come to Kassel to produce works there. This was the beginning of a successful “artists-in-residence” program: Ricke would pay for artists’ plane

tickets, provide studios and materials, and then exhibit the works created during the residencies. It was a wise solution, with the additional advantage of creating links between American and German artists. There could be real exchanges, unlike what had happened with Abstract Expressionism's arrival in Europe. Among the artists who came to Kassel were Lee Lozano, Jo Baer, James Rosenquist, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, and Richard Artschwager.³⁵¹ Ricke's concept was so successful that soon other West German dealers were setting up similar artists' residencies. These dealers were, to a certain extent, creating a parallel American art scene over which they were in control.

In the late 1960s, the promotion of American art in Western Europe became more and more of a European enterprise – the project of a handful of young people who went to the United States and brought back what they considered to be the most interesting of recent American creations. What is too often forgotten, however, is that this American art they brought to their homelands was *not* the American art of American galleries.

It would be impossible to consider everyone who participated in this endeavor, but to gauge what kind of impact this evolving parallel American canon had we can examine the cases of three Western Europeans who played essential roles in the promotion of Minimalism and Conceptual art in Western Europe, and whose stories serve as examples of a much larger phenomenon.

3.3.1. Kasper König

In 1961, Kasper König saw an exhibition of Cy Twombly at Zwirner's gallery in Cologne. It was a revelation. König was eighteen, he had just left school, and he was unsure

³⁵¹ Rolf Ricke, "Rolf Ricke," *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989). Marianne Stockebrand, ed., *Rolf Ricke* (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 1990).

what he wanted to do with his life. Starting in 1963, he interned at Zwirner's gallery, witnessing the arrival of American Pop art in West Germany firsthand, as well as the transformation of Cologne into an art city. Cologne, unlike Düsseldorf, had never been an important art center. This started to change in the early 1960s under the influence of the Studio für elektronische Musik des WDR, which attracted artists interested in experimental music, like John Cage and Nam June Paik. This, in turn, stimulated the visual arts and led to the burgeoning of experimental activities at the studio of the artist Mary Bauermeister.³⁵² Living in Cologne, König witnessed the developments in this new art scene and became particularly interested in the work of Nam June Paik. Around the same time, he created with some friends a publishing company – books being his first passion.

In 1964, he went to London to pursue his training at the gallery of Robert Fraser, which shared with Zwirner a handful of artists, including Konrad Klapheck and Eduardo Paolozzi. At the end of the year, König had the opportunity to transport two Picabia paintings to New York. He expected to stay there only a few weeks, but instead stayed until 1978.³⁵³ Before he left for New York, Hans Haacke, who was from Cologne and had lived in the United States in 1961 and 1962, gave him a few addresses, including Robert Morris's. In October 1964, Morris had exhibited at Schmela's gallery in Düsseldorf. The show had been planned a year earlier, in 1963, when Schmela had visited New York. Morris came with his partner, the dancer Yvonne Rainer. Beuys invited them to perform at the Kunstakademie.³⁵⁴ König attended this performance and was very impressed by Rainer's performance. When he arrived in New York, he was particularly eager to meet her again: "Dieses Konzert habe ich damals mitbekommen. Mein Eindruck von der

³⁵² Wolf Herzogenrath and Gabriele Lueg, eds., *Die 60er Jahre Kölns Weg zur Kunstmetropole: Vom Happening zum Kunstmarkt* (Cologne: Kolinsher Kunstverein, 1986). Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, *Intermedial - Kontrovers- Experimentell: Das Atelier Mary Bauermeister in Köln 1960-62* (Cologne: Emons Verlag, 1993).

³⁵³ Marius Babias, "'Ich war dabei, als ...' Ein Gespräch mit Kasper König," *Kunstforum International* 144 (1999).

³⁵⁴ Monika Schmela, "Alfred Schmela," *Kunstforum* 104 (1989).

Tänzerin Rainer war ungeheuer stark. Als ich Morris besucht, habe ich sie kennengelernt und den Kontakt vertieft.”³⁵⁵ Besides Morris and Rainer, König met Dan Graham, who was then the director of the Daniels Gallery, as well as Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt, and Donald Judd. In the late 1960s, König worked for a spell at Andy Warhol’s factory. Through Graham, he made contact with Nova Scotia College, and, in 1973, became the director of their publishing company, the focus of which was art books.

Immersed in the New York scene, König started organizing shows of American artists in Western Europe. In 1966, he organized a show of Claes Oldenburg in Stockholm at the Moderna Museet, and in 1968 he returned there with an exhibition of Warhol. More importantly, König served as advisor to Konrad Fischer when he opened his gallery in Düsseldorf in 1967, recommending artists he had met in New York. For example, he put Fischer in touch with Carl Andre, whose exhibition inaugurated the Fischer Galerie in October 1967. Ten years earlier, in contrast, Schmela had opened his gallery with a show of Yves Klein. Over the years, König would introduce Fischer to many other American artists, among them Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Ad Reinhardt, Robert Ryman, Brice Marden, and Robert Smithson. Following the example set by Ricke, Fischer would invite these American artists to come to Düsseldorf, provide them with studios, and exhibit what they made during their stays. It is difficult to assess the full extent of König’s role and influence on the program of Fisher’s gallery, but it is safe to say that he made connections that probably wouldn’t have happened without him.³⁵⁶

In 1968, König met Harald Szeemann, who was then touring the United States to select artists for his “When Attitude Becomes Form” exhibition, which was to open at the Kunsthalle of Bern in 1969. It is once again difficult to assess König’s role in it, but we can safely say that he

³⁵⁵ Babias, “Ich war dabei, als ...” Ein Gespräch mit Kasper König.”

³⁵⁶ Konrad Fischer, “Konrad Fischer,” *Kunstforum International* 104 (1989).

did contribute to the show's organization. When Szeemann was offered the chance to curate the 1972 documenta, he asked König to join his curatorial team – a sign that they had been and still were collaborating. König's influence in Western Europe also extended to his brother Walther's famous bookshop, Walther König Buchhandlung, around which the artistic life of Cologne centered for decades. In 1968, the two brothers created a publishing company, the Gebrüder König Verlag.

Kasper König was not only a bridge between the United States and West Germany; he was also a major promoter of Minimalism and Conceptual art, and it is arguable that, without him, many American artists would not have been seen in Western Europe, or at least not so early in their careers. It could actually be argued that some of these artists built their careers on European interest in them. Rudi Fuchs once said: "Americans may not realize this, but several artists of roughly my generation – Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, Lawrence Weiner, James Lee Byars, and others – have told me that their 'reputation' was first established in Europe."³⁵⁷ König alone is not responsible for the rapid success of these artists in Western Europe, but he definitely contributed to their good fortune, and his story adds nuance to what "American domination" involved.

3.3.2. Piero Gilardi

Another European who acted as a bridge between Western Europe and the United States and who played a very important role in the dissemination of Conceptual art in Western Europe is Piero Gilardi. His story exemplifies additional issues of "American domination."

³⁵⁷ Rudolf Herman Fuchs, Adam D Weinberg, and Hayden Herrera, *Views from Abroad - European Perspectives on American Art I* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 24.

Born in Turin in 1943, Gilardi made his artistic debut at the Galleria L'Immagine with *Machine per il futuro*. A friend of Michelangelo Pistoletto, he was one of the first artists to join Gian Enzo Sperone when he opened his own gallery in Turin in 1964. In 1965, Gilardi started to create his first *Tappeti-natura*, which were shown at the Gallery Sperone in 1966. Sperone and Pistoletto facilitated Gilardi's introduction to Illeana Sonnabend, who gave him a show in Paris in January 1967, and secured a series of shows for him in partner galleries. In February, Gilardi's show traveled to the Galerie Aujourd'hui in Brussels; in April it was in Hamburg at the Galerie Neuendorf; in July at the Gallery Zwirner in Cologne; in September at the Fischbach Gallery in New York; and finally it landed at the Gallery Michery in Amsterdam. Thanks to Sonnabend, the international network of galleries that the War had broken up had now been reconnected, in one of the first moves that would help Western European art re-establish its place on the international scene.

On the occasion of his New York exhibition, Gilardi spent two months in the United States. In New York, Gilardi met the artists of the Fischbach gallery, including those who had participated in Lucy Lippard's "Eccentric Abstraction" exhibition in 1966. His conversations with Eva Hesse and Frank Viner convinced him of the necessity to recognize their Post-minimalist experimentations at an international level. And so, from New York he went to California. As noted earlier, Californian art had fascinated many Western Europeans since the end of the War, and going out west was a priority for Gilardi: "But my idea, an idea that I had already had in Europe, was that in America I wanted to see above all those Californian artists who, in the area of 'funk' art, have realized a dimension which is organic, emotive, sensitive, in relationship to a typically American type of conditioning of life."³⁵⁸ While New York and

³⁵⁸ LeGrace G. Benson, Gabriele Muresu, and Piero Gilardi, "An Interview with Piero Gilardi," *Leonardo* 1, no. 4 (October, 1968): 436.

Western European artists were working with primary structures in similar ways, in California artists were taking a different path: their work was more sensual and bore Asian influences. Gilardi's trip out West had happened "by means of friendships," i.e. thanks to an international network of artists that was emerging in parallel to the network of galleries and museums which had helped to establish more Americans on the international scene.

Gilardi published a diary of his travels to New York and California in the newly created Italian magazine *Flash Art*.³⁵⁹ He was acting on his desire not only to inform his Italian colleagues of the new developments in American art, but also to create a bridge between American and Italian artists interested in what he called "entropic sensibility." That is, he was hoping to move from a model of national dominance in art to one of shared international projects. Upon his return from the United States, Gilardi decided to travel through Western Europe to meet other artists working in this entropic vein. He first went to London with the artist Icaro. There, they met Richard Long, Barry Flanagan, George Pasmore, and Mark Boyles. They next traveled to Düsseldorf, where they meet the artists of the Zero-Gruppe, including Joseph Beuys, Alfred Schmela, and Konrad Fischer, who had just opened his gallery. Gilardi published the diary of his experiences in London and Düsseldorf in *Flash Art*, continuing his enterprise of information and connection.³⁶⁰ Finally, in December 1967, Gilardi went to Paris with the art critic Tomaso Trini. There they met Ger van Elk, who drew their attention to two young Dutch artists: Jan Dibbets and Marinus Boezem.

As a result of such extensive travels, in 1968 Gilardi was one of the most informed persons on the recent artistic trends. He was thus able to recommend Long, Boezem, Dibbets, and van Elk to Germano Celant and Marcello Rumma for the "Art Povera e Azioni Povera"

³⁵⁹ Piero Gilardi, "Diario da New York di Piero Gilardi," *Flash Art*, November-December 1967, 1-2.

³⁶⁰ Piero Gilardi, "Da Londra e Dusseldorf," *Flash Art*, February 1968, 1-2.

show they were organizing at Amalfi. Thanks to Gilardi, this show took on an international dimension. It reflected a new sensibility shared by artists throughout the Western world, using a model of *networks* instead of *influence*. The concept of international connections became even greater in Celant's book *Arte Povera* (1969), which discussed Andre, Beuys, Boezem, Flanagan, Haacke, Hess, Nauman, Sonnier, van Elk, and other artists whom Gilardi had met during his travels.³⁶¹

Gilardi also talked to Sperone about the artists he had met abroad. Starting in 1968, Sperone changed the program of his gallery from Pop art to Minimalism and Conceptual art, both American and Western European. This was around the time when he started to work with Konrad Fischer. In March 1968, Sperone exhibited Dan Flavin; in March 1969, Robert Morris; and in fall 1969, Carl Andre. A group show followed that included, among others, Bruce Nauman, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and Douglas Huebler. In fall 1970, he showed the Western European Conceptual artists Long, Dibbets, Hamish Fulton, and Gilbert and George. In 1972, Sperone opened a gallery in New York in order to tighten his international connections. In 1975, Fisher and Westwater joined him in this venture, creating the Fischer-Sperone-Westwater gallery.³⁶²

Considering his extensive knowledge of the Western European and American art scenes, Gilardi was the necessary intermediary for Wim Beeren, the curator of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, and Harald Szeemann, the curator of the Kunsthalle of Bern, who were both planning exhibitions of Conceptual art. For Beeren's "Op Losse Schroeven," which opened in Amsterdam on March 15, 1969, Gilardi did not contribute a work of art per se, but he was

³⁶¹ Richard Flood and Frances Morris, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001).

³⁶² Corinna Criticos, "La Galerie Gian Enzo Sperone: Notes pour un historique," *Ligeria*, June-October 1998, 146-60. Anna Minola et al., *Gian Enzo Sperone - Torino - Roma - New York - 35 Anni di mostre tra Europa e America* (Torino: Hopefulmonster, 2000).

represented by a long essay, "Politics and the avant-garde," which was published in the catalogue and provided a script for this art's reception. Gilardi's art was also absent from Szeemann's "When Attitude becomes Form," which opened on September 28, 1969, but he was acknowledged by Szeemann in the catalogue as one of the curator's advisors before he visited the United States (where, as mentioned earlier, he would meet Kasper König). In fall 1968, Gilardi published an article in *Arts Magazine* on "Primary Energy and the Micromotive Artists," in which he discussed both American and Western European Conceptual artists, thereby informing his American audience about the Western European scene.³⁶³

Gilardi was opposing not only the paradigm of art as national, but also the commercial model, calling for the complete autonomy of artistic practice from the economic system. He wished to replace the gallery system by an international network of artists, and to highlight their similar projects. Following the endorsement of Conceptual art by galleries and museums, he grew more and more discontented with the practice of art patronage in Europe. He was particularly annoyed with the political games played by museum directors, collectors, and dealers. In the 1970s, he consequently stopped his artistic activities to devote his energy to political activism.

As with König, the exact extent of Gilardi's influence is difficult to measure, but he was unquestionably instrumental in the recognition of an international trend in Conceptual art in the late 1960s.

3.3.3. Paul Maenz

A third promoter of American Minimalism and Conceptual art was Paul Maenz, who helped connect Western Europe and America in still other ways than my previous two case

³⁶³ Piero Gilardi, "Primary Energy and the Micromotive Artists," *Arts Magazine*, September-October 1968, 48-51.

studies. In the late 1950s, Maenz studied at the Folkwangschule für Gestaltung in Essen with Marx Burchartz, who introduced him to the concepts of the Bauhaus. Burchartz was also on the jury for the opera house project in Gelsenkirchen. Through him, Maenz had access to the works Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely were creating for that project. In 1964, Maenz started to work for an American advertising agency in Frankfurt, where he met Peter Röhr, a young artist who introduced him to Minimalism and Conceptual art. In 1965, Maenz was transferred to the New York branch of his agency. During his two years in New York, Maenz met numerous artists: he went to Andy Warhol's factory, and met up with Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and Dan Flavin. Starting with his purchase of a modular structure by LeWitt, Maenz started to collect the works of these artists.

In 1967, Maenz and Röhr decided to put together a show of the artists Maenz knew from New York as well as British artists they had discovered through their friend Jan Dibbets – namely Long, Flanagan, and Gilbert and George. The show, titled “Serielle Formationen,” took place at the University of Frankfurt. It included, among others, Warhol, Flavin, Andre, Lewitt, Flanagan, Röhr, Dibbets, Agnes Martin, Konrad Fischer,³⁶⁴ Charlotte Posenenske, and Garry Schumm, who filmed the event. “Serielle Formationen” was the first exhibition of Land and Conceptual art in Western Europe as well as the first exhibition of many of the two movements’ artists on that side of the Atlantic. It was soon followed by “Herzchen” at the Dorothea Loehr Gallery, and “19:45-21:55,” a multimedia event in which Fischer participated.³⁶⁵ In 1968, when Fischer opened his gallery in Düsseldorf, he asked Maenz to work with him. That same year, Peter Röhr died.

³⁶⁴ Fischer exhibited his work as Konrad Lueg.

³⁶⁵ As Lueg.

In 1970, Maenz decided to open his own gallery with the help of Gerd de Vries, an editor and writer whom he had met in Frankfurt. Since Fischer was already representing Minimalist art in Düsseldorf, Maenz and de Vries decided to settle in Cologne and to focus on Conceptual art. Their ambition was to create an alternative space that would function as an artists' cooperative rather than as a commercial gallery. To find artists willing to participate in the project, Maenz asked Hans Haacke, who was then living in New York, and Jan Dibbets, who had studied in London and was always well informed on the newest artistic developments, for suggestions. Other artists also had ideas, as well. Victor Burgin recommended Charles Harrison, and Allan Kaprow put forth Dick Higgins's name. Gary Schum told Maenz to contact Germano Celant, who had just published his study on Arte povera. Celant not only introduced Maenz to the Arte povera artists, but also put him in touch with Sperone.

Maenz's alternative gallery opened in January 1971 with an exhibition of Hans Haacke. Quickly, the Paul Maenz gallery became a major center for Conceptual art, exhibiting Art & Language, Joseph Kosuth, Victor Burgin, Daniel Buren, Giuseppe Penone, and Giulio Paolini, among others. At documenta in 1972, which was curated by Szeemann and König, many of Maenz's artists were featured alongside Fischer's artists. The exhibition consecrated the arrival in Western Europe of this American-born art, featuring artists hand-picked by Western Europeans for Western European tastes. It marked the triumph of what we might call the "parallel" American canon.

In 1972, Maenz opened a gallery in Brussels, because Belgians were his best clients. Generally speaking, they were very interested in Conceptual art, so setting up shop in Brussels was a way for Maenz to be closer to his clients and to attract those who did not go to Cologne. Besides, opening a gallery in Belgium would allow him to represent artists whom Fischer had

exclusive rights to in Germany, including On Kawara. The Brussels space, however, was not a success and only lasted a year.

In 1975, de Vries became an editor at the DuMont publishing house. His professional background and Maenz's training as a graphic designer shortly had them publishing brochures, books, and yearbooks to document their activities. They asked art historians and critics, such as Wolfgang Max Faust, Germano Celant, and Jean-Christophe Ammann, to write for such projects.³⁶⁶ By sponsoring historical and theoretical discourses on his artists, Maenz was not just selling their works, he was also carving a space for them in art history. He was following Castelli's precedent.

As a curator, collector, and dealer, Paul Maenz played a significant role in the success of Conceptual art in Europe.

3.3.4. Conclusion

The promotion of American Minimalism and Conceptual art in Western Europe was the endeavor of a handful of Europeans (mostly centered in and around Germany) who, like König, Gilardi, and Maenz, traveled to the United States and brought back artists they liked to their home countries. The collector Count Panza, for example, discovered American Minimalism and Conceptual art at Fischer's and Zwirner's, not through the American dealers with whom he was in contact. The list of his purchases in the late 1960s and 1970s shows that he bought most of his Minimalist and Conceptual pieces from Fischer, Zwirner, and Sperone – that is, from Western European galleries – who were importing artists directly from the United States without going

³⁶⁶ Hans Dickel, ed., *Die Sammlung Paul Maenz* (Weimar: Neues Museum Weimar, 1998). Paul Maenz, "Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 910066).

through their American colleagues.³⁶⁷ American dominance on the Western European art scene persisted, but these examples show a nearly unacknowledged side result: the American art of note abroad was *not* necessarily the American art being celebrated in New York.

The exhibitions organized in Western Europe to promote Conceptual art – including “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitude becomes Form,” for example – were not connected to any American institution. Beeren and Szeemann did not ask MoMA to send them shows of Conceptual art, as Jean Cassou and Arnold Rüdinger had done in the 1950s. Instead, they organized their own shows, which reflected their own ideas of what an American canon might be. Furthermore, to select American artists for these shows, they first sought advice from other Western Europeans who had been or were in the United States, not from Americans. When they opened their galleries, Fischer and Maenz also asked Western Europeans to recommend American artists: Fischer asked König and Maenz, and Maenz asked Haacke and Dibbets. The Europeans were bypassing the American system of promotion, and using their own, independent transatlantic networks.

Geopolitics did play a role in the new European-American dynamics of the 1960s and 1970s. MoMA, which had been so active in promoting American art in Europe in the late 1950s, had become rather disengaged. Its International Program continued its activities, but instead of promoting recent American art in Western Europe, it organized historical shows, such as “The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection” (1970) or “Dorothea Lange” (1972).³⁶⁸ Generally speaking, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the United States reduced its cultural outreach to Europe because of the cost of its increasing military commitment in Southeast Asia. As Hans Tuch has explained, by the late 1960s, the German Federal government was providing 75% of the funds for the

³⁶⁷ Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, “Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990,” (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 940004).

³⁶⁸ See “Internationally Circulating Exhibitions” at <http://www.moma.org/international/PDF/icelist.pdf>

Fulbright Program in West Germany, though it had originally been financed exclusively by the US Department of State. Furthermore, the Amerika Häuser in Heidelberg, Essen, Nuremberg, and Darmstadt, that the US government had created after the War to promote American culture in Germany, lost their funding and were replaced by German-American cultural institutions sponsored by West Germany.³⁶⁹

By handing off the task of promoting their culture to Western Europeans, weren't the Americans taking a risk? König, Fischer, Gilardi, Maenz, and other foreign promoters of American art were not simply uncomplicated enthusiasts. They were promoting an international conceptual trend, which *de facto* undermined the exclusivity of American superiority.

3.4. A DOUBLE-EDGED LOVE: THE EUROPEANS AND AMERICAN ART

Since the mid 1960s Western Europeans had focused on the American art scene. They loved American art and could not wait to learn more about it. They were eager to bring American artists to Europe, to exhibit and collect their works. If, in the short term, such enthusiasm resulted in the triumph of American art, would it become problematic for the United States over the long term? No one was asking, for example, if and to what extent American artists were becoming dependent on Western European promotion? Would American art remain great if the Europeans were to withdraw their support, and particularly their support for younger artists? Moreover, what kind of power did this give Western Europeans over the American art that purportedly remained superior to their fellow countrymen's efforts? Is it possible that Western Europeans actually influenced the development of American art after the late 1960s? Beyond all the tales of triumph and domination, what was the real position of American art in Western Europe during

³⁶⁹ Hans N. Tuch, "American Cultural Policy toward Germany," in *United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990: A Handbook. Volume 2: 1968-1990*, ed. Detlef Junker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 275.

the early 1970s? To answer these questions we need to look more closely at this evolving canon of “European-American art.”

3.4.1. American art in West Germany

In November 1970, *Artforum* featured a long article titled “American art in Germany: The History of a Phenomenon,” by Phyllis Tuchman. Philip Leider had commissioned this article because he was upset to see many American masterpieces being bought by German collectors and thus leaving the country. When Ströher purchased Leon Kraushar’s collection, and Ludwig acquired all the Pop art on display at “documenta 4,” Americans were initially delighted to see their country’s art being appreciated, and generally took it as a sign of national dominance. They did not realize that German collectors were actually depleting the United States of many signature works of American Pop art and taking away – or at least redirecting – an important part of American culture. Leider wanted to alert the American public to these issues, and to provoke a reaction from American collectors, so that they would start purchasing such works, instead of letting them go.

This was not an easy battle. In the United States, very little was known about German collectors, so Tuchman had to start her investigation from scratch. Before leaving for West Germany, Tuchman met with Leo Castelli and Heiner Friedrich, a German dealer who had settled down in New York. They provided her with recommendations and addresses. Interestingly enough, Tuchman started her investigation in Paris at the Sonnabend Gallery, and from there proceeded to trace the journey of American artworks from New York to Düsseldorf, Aachen, Cologne, and Berlin. During her travels in West Germany, Tuchman saw outstanding collections of American art. She reported back: “the art is so well-chosen that the pleasure of

experiencing art is even more rewarding than in New York.” Though she rejoiced about German enthusiasm for American art, she lamented that American masterpieces were leaving their homeland, so much so that “To see work by contemporary masters, it is not necessary to have access to a private collector’s home; to see the most recent paintings and sculptures, it is not necessary to visit an art gallery or even an artist’s studio. American art – whether we recognize it or not – is now to be seen in museums in Germany.”³⁷⁰ To illustrate Tuchman’s article, Leider collected images of American artworks then in German collections and created a four-page spread of “missing” artworks, which added a sense of urgency to Tuchman’s comments.

Artforum was not the only American magazine intrigued by the German phenomenon. That same month, *The New York Times* ran an article about “German Art-Lovers,” as already mentioned in the previous chapter, in response to a series of auctions of contemporary American art at which West Germans had been the higher bidders. Here, again, the tone of the article is ambiguous; on the one hand, it reveals pleasure and pride in respect to German enthusiasm for American art, but, on the other, it hints at some uneasiness about the disappearance of American artistic patrimony:

As a result of the American artistic success in Germany, “things are in a bad way on the American art scene,” lamented Leo Castelli whose gallery represents Lichtenstein. “Americans never should have let important pieces like the Lichtensteins and Oldenburgs slip out of their hands.” Mr. Zwirner himself was “shocked that the Americans didn’t buy these irreplaceable historical works.”³⁷¹

In Europe, people were also discussing the growing importance of West Germany in the art scene. In August 1970, the *Sunday Times Magazine* of London published a story on the German collectors of the Ruhr region. Its author, Frances Wyndham, explained to her readers:

³⁷⁰ Phyllis Tuchman, “American Art in Germany: The History of a Phenomenon,” *Artforum*, November 1970, 68.

³⁷¹ David L. Shirey, “American Pop Really Turns on German Art-Lovers,” *The New York Times*, November 27 1970, 46.

In this flat forest of factories, one would expect to find a society as heavily materialistic as any in the world. Yet this area has also been the scene, over past few years, of a boom in modern art which had had significant effects in London and New York. [...] The most important collector of modern art in the Rhineland – and therefore one of the most important in the world – is Dr. Peter Ludwig.³⁷²

The West German collectors made headlines even in France: in January 1972, Otto Hahn proclaimed in *L'Express*: "L'avant-garde choisit le mark." He declared that West Germans had supplanted Americans as the chief buyers and supporters of contemporary art.³⁷³

Americans, however, did not intensify their buying of American contemporary art. Even museums remained rather passive on that matter. When Robert Scull made public the fact that he was willing to sell his collection, the city of Munich contacted him. Eventually, the city's involvement in the 1972 Olympic Games superseded buying Scull's collection. Scull was, however, surprised by Americans' lack of interest in keeping such important works in the United States: "I was disappointed, especially because no American museum except the Met got in touch with me when the Munich deal was under discussion. [...] I would have taken payment over ten years, made some gifts – but nobody was interested."³⁷⁴ When the collection was auctioned off in October 1973, the higher bidders were Western European, and the main beneficiaries of the evening certainly German. One of the high points of the auction was when Zwirner bought Jasper Johns's *Beer Cans* (1960) for \$90,000. Scull had paid \$960 for it. As for Dr. Ludwig, he enriched his collection with significant pieces. The warnings of Leider, Castelli, and Tuchman had been made in vain: more and more treasures of the American national patrimony were leaving the country.

³⁷² Francis Wyndham, "Art in the Ruhr," *The Sunday Times*, August 9 1970, 24.

³⁷³ Otto Hahn, "L'avant-garde choisit le Mark," *L'Express*, January 3 1972.

³⁷⁴ Dorothy Seiberling, "Scull's Angels: Going once, going twice," (New York, page 58) is mentioned in Will Bongard's archives without further information. See: Willi Bongard, "Willi Bongard Papers, 1960-1985," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 880363, 880363*, 880363**), 87.4.

One reason why Americans were not buying American art more eagerly was economic. In the 1970s, the American economy, which had already lost momentum due to the ongoing Vietnam War, was badly hurt by the oil crises of 1973 and 1975. In such bleak economic circumstances, nobody was in the mood to collect contemporary art against heated competition from abroad. In fact, many sold their art collections to compensate for their financial losses. As it turned out, Americans grew ever more likely to sell works from their collections as Western Europeans paid increasingly high prices for them. Despite the international oil crisis, the West German economy, in contrast to the American economy, was doing well. The West German currency was particularly strong. In the 1970s, West Germans had great buying power, and they used it not only to purchase established masterpieces by Pop artists but also examples of new artistic trends, which were typically brought to their attention by young European dealers like Fischer and Maenz.

In 1969, Karl Ströher traveled to the United States with Heiner Friedrich to see the work of Walter De Maria and other Land artists. After selling some of the Kraushar collection, he switched the focus of his collection to Minimalism and Conceptual art.³⁷⁵ In the early 1970s, Dr. Friedrich Rentschler created, in collaboration with Paul Maenz, the famous Fer collection, whose focus was also Minimalism and Conceptual art.³⁷⁶ As for Peter Ludwig, he bought examples of all the newest trends in American art, following his comprehensive and didactic approach to collecting.

In the 1970s, West Germans were thus the strongest supporters of American art, and it is possible that if it hadn't been for them American Pop art may not have reached such historical significance. It might have been just a passing fad, as the organizers of the 1962 MoMA

³⁷⁵ Jean-Christophe Ammann and Christmut Präger, *Museum für Moderne Kunst und Sammlung Ströher* (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991).

³⁷⁶ Maenz, "Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991."

symposium had originally predicted. By their consistent purchasing of Pop art throughout the 1970s, the museum exhibitions they organized, and their thorough documentation, Ludwig and other West Germans established the American movement as historically significant. They thereby contributed to the construction of the American canon, adding to it artists that were not originally embraced in the United States.

3.4.2. Conceptual art in Belgium and the Netherlands

The West Germans were not the only ones to be enthusiastic about American art and to collect it eagerly. The importance of the Belgians and the Dutch in valuing Conceptual art should not be overlooked.

As we saw, the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam had been very important in the dissemination of American art in Western Europe. William Sandberg, who was its director from 1945 to 1962, was one of the first Western Europeans to be sincerely interested in contemporary American art, and when he bought two Jackson Pollocks from Peggy Guggenheim in 1950, he became the first Western European museum director to include examples of American contemporary art in his institute's collection. His successor, Edy de Wilde, followed Sandberg's precedent, enriching the Stedelijk's collection with works by Americans such as Andre, Flavin, Nauman, Oldenburg, and Oppenheim.³⁷⁷

As for collectors, Philippe Dotremont of Brussels had been one of the first Western Europeans to take contemporary American art seriously. In the late 1950s, he had started to add examples of American art to his collection with the help of Lawrence Rubin, whose Parisian

³⁷⁷ Dieter Honish and Jens Christian Jensen, eds., *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis Heute: Kunst der USA in Europäischen Sammlungen* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1976).

gallery only survived thanks to the Belgian collector's enthusiasm.³⁷⁸ Dotremont, however, was exceptional, and in general the Dutch and Belgians started to really pay attention to American art only in the late 1960s – that is, after West Germans. When they entered the art market, American Pop art was thus scarce and expensive. As a result, they turned to Minimalist and Conceptual artists, who were just emerging and whose works were cheaper and more readily available in European galleries, especially in West Germany. The interest of the Dutch and Belgians in American Minimalism and Conceptual art should not, however, be considered a merely pragmatic move; it was also grounded in aesthetic preferences. They saw the works of these artists as the continuation of Mondrian's ideas on Neo-plasticism, as well as the extension of Malevich's Suprematism and Russian Constructivism – movements that were well represented in Dutch Museums and in particular at the Stedelijk. For a public familiar with Neo-plasticism, Suprematism, and Constructivism, Conceptual art would not have been as challenging as other nationalities found it.³⁷⁹

As mentioned earlier, Paul Maenz decided to open a branch in Brussels in 1972 because Belgians were his best clients.³⁸⁰ When Konrad Fischer's gallery featured Carl Andre for its inaugural show, the first and only buyers were Martin and Nina Visser from the Netherlands. Andre was so impressed by the Vissers that he told Sol LeWitt about them. This convinced LeWitt to go to Düsseldorf and show at Fischer. And indeed, when he arrived in January 1968, the Vissers bought one of his works even before the opening. Such enthusiasm for Minimalist art was not common and thus worth a trip to Europe.³⁸¹ As early as 1968, Jan Leering of the Stedelijk van Abbe-Museum could organize "3 Blind Mice/de Collecties: Visser, Peeters,

³⁷⁸ Kunsthalle Basel, *Moderne Malerei seit 1945 aus der Sammlung Dotremont* (Basel: Kunsthalle, 1961).

³⁷⁹ Suzanna Heman, Jurrie Poot, and Hripsime Visser, eds., *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium, 1965-1975 - Artists, Collectors, Galleries, Exhibitions, Events* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum/NAi Publishers, 2002).

³⁸⁰ Maenz, "Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991," I,7,1 and I,3,6.

³⁸¹ Fischer, "Konrad Fischer."

Becht,” a show that included works by American Minimalists like Flavin and Andre, drawn from the collections of three major Dutch collectors. Herman Daled of Brussels was also a very important supporter of Minimalist and Conceptual art. He actually built his collection according to four principles, thereby transforming his collection into a conceptual project: he would only buy living artists; he would never buy from the secondary market; he would never resell a piece; and he would only collect emerging artists.³⁸²

Dutch and Belgian collectors were not only buying from West German dealers; they could also find Conceptual art in the Netherlands and in Belgium, which counted among its galleries a few important venues devoted to this art. One of them was the Wide White Space of Anny De Decker and Bernd Lohaus, which opened in Antwerp in 1967. De Decker was an art historian and Lohaus an artist who had studied at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf with Konrad Fischer and Hans Strelow. At first, De Decker and Lohaus did not have a well-formed artistic project for their space; they just wanted to show advanced art. They considered showing American Pop art, but they had essentially come too late to get a share of it. When they visited the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris, De Decker remembered, “They looked down their nose at us and refused. They had their own clients in Belgium and they didn’t want to lend us their artists.”³⁸³ Instead they bought one of Gilardi’s *Tappeti-natura*. With a Flavin bought from Zwirner and a Piero Manzoni they already owned, they opened their space. Martin Visser came, bought the Flavin, and traded the Manzoni for one of his Christos. Alerted, Schmela suggested Wide White Space hold a show of Christo’s work. This show opened in April, 18 1967 and received a lot of attention. Then Marcel Broodthaers, already a rather established artist, decided to join the gallery, adding credibility to their endeavor. In 1968, Wide White Space participated in Prospect,

³⁸² Jan Mot, "Quatre questions à Herman Daled," *Newspaper Galerie Jan Mot*, November-December 2001, 5-6.

³⁸³ Yves Aupetitallot, "Interview with Anny De Decker and Bernd Lohaus," in *Wide White Space: Behind the Museum, 1966-1976* (Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 34.

an art fair created by Fischer and Strelow in reaction to Zwirner's Kunstmarkt, which they rejected for being too commercial. Wide White Space's participation in Prospect increased the gallery's visibility. With Broodthaers and Panamarenko, De Decker and Lohaus became known as "the Belgian group." Without really planning it, the pair had created a vital center of international Conceptual art that benefited American artists as much as it did Europeans.

Art & Project was another important promotional center for Conceptual art. Located in Amsterdam, the gallery had been created by Geert van Beijeren and Adriaan van Ravesteijn in 1968. Art & Project was important not only for its exhibitions, but also for its bulletins – designed and created by artists, they were artworks in themselves. Today, these 156 bulletins represent a major corpus of Conceptual art.

In May 1969, A 379089 opened in Antwerp. A 379089 was an anti-museum and anti-gallery devoted to films and happenings. The idea of such an alternative space was launched by the Belgian film-maker Jef Cornelis at the house of the collector Hubert Peters; its name uses the letter A for alternative, and 379089 because it was Peters's phone number. Isi Frizman, another important collector, would pay the rent; Kasper König would coordinate projects with Cornelis; and artists like Broodthaers, Panamarenko, Carl Andre, La Monte Young, and Jörg Immendorff would contribute. This project was typical of the collaborative atmosphere that dominated this evolving Conceptual art scene. Egidio Marzona has explained: "those were exciting years. We almost felt like conspirators or revolutionaries, and we remained misunderstood. Because if you want to grasp this kind of art, you need to make an effort, you can't just do it intuitively. You have to study it, learn how to handle it in order to find your position."³⁸⁴ Unlike Pop art, which had been a popular success, Conceptual art was not easily accessible and remained reserved to

³⁸⁴ Hans-Michael Herzog, *Die Sammlung Marzona: Arte Povera, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, Land Art* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 1995), 30.

the curious few who had been initiated into its hermetic system. Undoubtedly, the complexity and distinctiveness of Conceptual art played a role in its success among collectors in Western Europe, who were still more convinced by aesthetic philosophies than glamorous interviews.

It is critical to note here that despite the strong American presence in these galleries, these Northern Europeans were not supporting American Conceptual art so much as they were supporting an international Conceptual art movement, in which European artists played a very important role. The dominant position of American art was, as I noted earlier, undermined by the international dimension of the Conceptual art trend that was being promoted in Western Europe, if not in the United States. If American artists dominated, it was under the beneficence of Western Europeans.

3.4.3. A power imbalance

While Western Europeans collected and supported contemporary American art vigorously in the 1960s and 1970s, Americans' considerably reduced their consumption over that period. Talking to Paul Cummings in the early 1970s, Leo Castelli complained extensively about Americans' lack of engagement in contemporary art as opposed to Europeans' dynamic involvement with it. His interview was punctuated with faint praise for Western European curators, dealers, and collectors, which reflected more his disappointment in Americans than his satisfaction with Western Europeans. According to him, MoMA had relinquished its responsibility to promote emerging artists, and collectors of contemporary art were scarce in the United States. This disengagement was not just due to the economic crisis of the early 1970s, in his opinion. It also involved a shift in collecting practices. The craze for contemporary art had faded in America, and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art had come back into

fashion. For Castelli, there were no important collectors of contemporary art among his fellow countrymen apart from the Tremaines and the Sculls, and even they could not compare to Western Europeans like Count Panza and Dr. Ludwig, who were unquestionably the most dedicated collectors of contemporary art around:

Beyond any doubt the most fervent and extraordinary collector I ever came across is Count Panza of Milan. When he gets involved with an artist, he buys en masse. In the fifties, when nobody else wanted it, he bought Rauschenberg's work – six or more at one stroke. Later on, he was one of the few to buy the Minimalists and Conceptualists. The only counterpart to Giuseppe Panza is the German collector Dr. Peter Ludwig. [...] The dedicated collector supports the gallery and the artists with unparalleled commitment in scale and daring. He makes choices way before any general consensus of approval. In this respect, he is as much a champion of uncharted territory as a dealer. None of us could survive without him.³⁸⁵

For Castelli, the difference between Western European and American collectors did not concern their financial means but rather their engagement. Dr. Ludwig, he explained, “has more buying power than Scull and the Tremaines ever had, or at least he uses more money. Maybe they have just as much as he has but they don't wish to use that much at least for painting.” What Castelli could not understand was why Americans were less supportive of new American art than Western Europeans were.

John Weber, who had run the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles and New York in the 1960s, echoed Castelli in his observations on Western Europeans' promotion of new art: “Minimalism took off like a shot in Europe. These guys were really energetic. [...] A support structure developed pretty fast for these artists, faster than in America. It was funny: Carl Andre was already having a retrospective at The Hague in 1969 when there wasn't one work of his in a public collection in New York.”³⁸⁶ Weber opened his own gallery in New York in 1971 to

³⁸⁵ Coppet and Jones, *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works*, 104-05.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

promote Minimalism and Conceptual art, and later commented that “out of every ten collectors I was dealing with at the time, six were Europeans.”³⁸⁷

For Castelli, the situation was becoming difficult. If Americans stopped buying, he could no longer sell through Ileana Sonnabend. He would need to sell directly to Western Europeans:

But again now in this situation, the crisis situation where actually the only people who do buy art, the Italians or the Germans or people in the Middle West [...] Collectors are very scarce now, and little by little I felt obliged to sell to Sperone directly, you know, just to survive. He accounts probably for at least one-third if not one-half of my sales. If I had done that through Ileana [...] So I had started dealing directly with those two or three European dealers, which I had not done before.

Having lost her monopoly over the distribution of American art in Western Europe, Sonnabend returned to New York, where she opened a gallery while gradually closing her Parisian space. It was the end of an era!

In the early 1970s, without their Italian, West German, Belgian, and Dutch clients, the New York galleries devoted to advanced art could not have survived. Their dependence on Western European collectors created a power imbalance in the artworld that must be taken into account in the story of “American dominance.” In January 1978, Willi Bongard published in *Art Aktuel* the results of a questionnaire he had circulated, which asked who the most powerful agents of the artworld were.³⁸⁸ The responses he received were quite revealing, with Peter Ludwig as the most popular answer, followed by MoMA! European dealers and curators clearly dominated the list:

1. Peter Ludwig
2. MoMA
3. Leo Castelli
4. Beaubourg and Pontus Hulten
5. documenta

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 200.

³⁸⁸ An exemplary of Willi Bongard’s *Art Aktuel* of January 1978 is accessible in Bongard, “Willi Bongard Papers, 1960-1985.”

6. Panza di Biumo
7. Alfred Schmela
8. Konrad Fischer
9. Harald Szeemann

Even if Bongard's method was not exactly scientific, it offers a good indicator of people's perception of power relations within the 1970s artworld. From the art professionals' perspective, Americans were no longer in control.

The power imbalance was particularly strong when it came to Conceptual art. While it was a great success in Northern Europe, in the United States there was little interest in this form of art. Apart from a handful of atypical collectors such as Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, whose buying power was very limited, there was essentially no market for Conceptual art in the United States. Castelli, however, took Conceptual artists into his stable at the request of his European clients, who had discovered them in Europe. By his own admission, Castelli was convinced by Count Panza and Sperone to represent the American Conceptual artists. Count Panza explained to him, for example, that Leonardo had done a kind of conceptual drawing in his time. Conceptual art was historically important and thus deserved to be supported, even if it wasn't commercially viable. When Castelli let his European clients, who were also his best customers, convince him that he should represent Conceptual artists, Ivan Karp, Castelli's long-time assistant and an enthusiastic supporter of Hyperrealism, left the gallery; Minimalism and Conceptual art were too far removed from Karp's personal aesthetic agenda.³⁸⁹ Castelli's decision may have gone far in establishing one myth of American dominance, but Conceptual art reached beyond its American origins to include an international array of artists, as we will see in the next chapter.

³⁸⁹ Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

Not only did Western European collectors convince American gallerists of the value of Minimalist and Conceptual artists, they also convinced American institutions. Thus, in summer 1973, after visiting Count Panza's collection in Varese, Lawrence Alloway, who was then a curator at the Whitney Museum in New York, wrote a letter to Panza explaining how his visit had changed his appreciation for Donald Judd's work. After seeing the way Count Panza had installed Judd's pieces, he was finally able to understand and appreciate them.³⁹⁰ Alloway was only one of numerous art cognoscenti who learned to appreciate American Minimalism and Post-minimalism in the Renaissance villa of Count Panza. In October 1976, for example, the members of the Saint Louis Contemporary Art Society came to Varese. Despite their former prejudices against these two art movements, they let Count Panza convert them.

American collectors' general lack of interest in Minimalism and Conceptual art, however, remained problematic for American galleries. Because Conceptual artists were difficult to sell in the United States, Castelli and other dealers could only sell their work to Western European collectors. Taking on American Minimalists and Conceptualists in order to please European clients alienated potential American clients, and consequently reinforced American gallerists' dependence on Western European collectors.

3.4.4. Conclusion

The examination of the collecting practices of Western European collectors such as Peter Ludwig and Count Panza challenges our understanding of power relations within the artworld. These collectors were not simply buying whatever their New York dealers were showing; they directed their dealers to show what they considered to be the best contemporary artists. Through

³⁹⁰ Lawrence Alloway, unpublished letter to Count Panza, dated July 9, 1973 in Panza di Biumo, "Giuseppe Panza Papers, 1956-1990," I, 28, 9.

consistent and massive purchases, they gained control over American galleries and were, in turn, able to impose their aesthetic visions onto the artworld. Their influence was increased by the fact that they gave or sold their collections to preeminent museums in Europe and the United States.³⁹¹ As a result, the combined aesthetic visions of this handful of European collectors have become *the* definition of contemporary art. If French collectors and artists are not represented among those remembered in late twentieth-century art history, their omission is attributable in no small part to France's slowness in adopting a version of the American gallery support-system for its domestic market.

The influence on the contemporary artworld of collectors like Count Panza and Dr. Ludwig cannot be overestimated. Hyperrealism and Pattern and Decoration never reached historical preeminence despite their commercial success, while Minimalism and Conceptual art did – in no small part because, as Castelli explained, Western European collectors like Count Panza “never bought a super realist painting because it didn’t seem to be an interesting movement to him.”³⁹² Western European collectors did more than buy art; they made history. And they did so *using* the Americans, not being used *by* them.

3.5. CONCLUSION

I began this chapter with a discussion of Beuys's performance *I Like America and America Likes Me*, the title of which was not ironic. In fact, it was strikingly accurate: Western Europeans liked American art and American art liked them because they were its chief promoters and supporters in the 1970s. Without them, American Minimalist and Conceptual artists might

³⁹¹ Peter Ludwig gave parts of his collection to a dozen of museums throughout Europe and sold his manuscripts collection to the Getty Museum. In 1984, Count Panza sold 80 works, and gave a few others to the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. These works formed the core of the new museum's collection.

³⁹² Castelli, "Interviews Conducted by Paul Cummings, 1969, 1971 and 1973."

not have gained historical significance and the galleries that exhibited them might not have survived. My examination of the domination of American art reveals a system of codependency between American artists and gallerists and the Western European art scene, which drastically contradicts the discourses on American success that Jean-Luc Chalumeau wrote about.

In many ways, the situation of American art in the late 1970s resembled that of the School of Paris in the late 1950s: it was like an idol with feet of clay, which owed its prestigious position to foreign collectors and dealers, and was not supported by its own collectors and institutions. Visiting the United States in 1976, Willi Bongard was surprised to see that Americans were chiefly interested in realist art. Only the Vogels, who worked in a post office, were interested in Conceptual art. To him, too, this looked like *déjà vu*: “Die amerikanische Kunstzene, wie sie sich mir heute darstellt, erinnert verteufelt an die Pariser Situation gegen Ende der Fünfziger Jahre, als man sich seine Sacher sicher, allzu sicher wähnt (während New York langst in Führung gegangen war).”³⁹³

Resting on Western Europeans’ support, the domination of American art was fragile and could break at any point.

³⁹³ Willi Bongard, "Vom Niedergang einer Kunstmetropole: New York, das Mekka der modernen Kunst der Sechziger Jahre, verliert wieder an Bedeutung," *AZ*, May 10 1976, 6.

Chapter 4

“A New Spirit in Painting”: The European Comeback of the 1980s

The 1980s opened with “A New Spirit in Painting,” an international exhibition of painting organized by Norman Rosenthal, Nicholas Serrota, and Christos Joachimides at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. After years of Minimalist and Conceptual experimentations, the show was received as either a liberating or a reactionary return to painting. In the United States, it was seen as an international follow-up to Barbara Rose’s American exhibition “American Painting, the Eighties” at New York University’s Grey Gallery, about which she claimed, two years earlier, that everywhere in the United States artists were back in their studios, having gone back to their brushes and easels.³⁹⁴ Joachimides discussed similar ideas in the catalogue for “A New Spirit in Painting,” asserting, for instance: “artists are involved in painting again, it has become crucial to them, and the new consciousness of the contemporary significance of the oldest form of their art is in the air, tangibly, wherever art is being made.”³⁹⁵ But unlike Rose’s exhibition, which raised little attention outside New York, the “New Spirit” show caused a sensation, both across Western Europe and the United States. As Peter Doig has recalled, the show was an eye-opening event, for better or worse depending on one’s perspective on figurative painting:

I was in college in the early ‘80s and what affected me most was “A New Spirit in Painting” at the Royal Academy in London. Everyone was in it: Bacon, Warhol, Freud,

³⁹⁴ Barbara Rose, *American Painting, the Eighties: A Critical Interpretation* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Thorner-Sidney Press, 1979).

³⁹⁵ Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, *A New Spirit in Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1981), 15.

and Guston. The Italians were there; also Polke and Richter. It was the first time I'd seen many of these painters. And to see them all at once? It was almost too much. It was exciting, but also incredibly confusing, since anything and everything seemed possible. Then there was a huge reaction against the show. It was a good time to be a young painter and a bad time. You went from having almost nothing to look at in London to having painting in abundance, and a license to explore.³⁹⁶

The most important aspect of the show, besides the resurrection of painting, was the importance given to Western European artists. For Doig and many other visitors, this show was their first exposure to the works of many Western European artists who would later rise in fame. It was also the first time in a long while – at least since “54-64: Painting and Sculpture of a Decade,” which had also taken place in London – that Western Europeans seemed to win out over Americans on the artistic playing field.

After years of artistic meekness, a new creative force seemed to have finally emerged in Western Europe. Edward Lucie-Smith claimed in his study of the 1980s: “It was agreed in many quarters that the creative initiative had indeed returned to Europe.”³⁹⁷ Such a statement echoed and overturned the declarations of Alan Solomon’s infamous 1964 pamphlet, which claimed: “The fact that the art world center has shifted from Paris to New York is acknowledged on every hand.”³⁹⁸ Just as the Venice Biennale of 1964 had marked the end of Paris, “A New Spirit in Painting” was regarded by many as a sign that the American domination of modern art had ended. Western European artists were back at the forefront of the contemporary scene – they could no longer be left out of artistic discourse.

What is interesting in the written accounts of this European comeback is their insistence that it was connected to a return to painting. Western European artists were not, in fact, the only ones going back to their easels in the early 1980s. Besides the painters promoted by Rose in her

³⁹⁶ “Writing the '80s Part 1,” *Artforum*, March 2003, 58.

³⁹⁷ Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art in the Eighties* (London; New York: Phaidon, 1990), 10.

³⁹⁸ Quoted in Jean-Robert Arnaud, “Mise à mort dans Venise la Rouge ?,” *Cimaise*, July-October 1964, 104.

1979 exhibition, in America there were also the “Bad Painting” artists that Marcia Tucker had exhibited at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1979, as well as the rising stars of the Mary Boone Gallery: Julian Schnabel, David Salle, and Eric Fischl. Since the late 1970s, painting had been coming back with a vengeance in the United States. Yet, the return to painting has been perceived and remembered as having started in Italy and West Germany. Tony Godfrey’s account of the emergence of painting in the 1980s is typical of the discourses on these events: “At the end of the seventies and beginning of the eighties a phenomenon known as the New Painting had emerged, firstly in Germany and Italy, then subsequently in the United States, Great Britain and France.”³⁹⁹

The European comeback and the return to painting were so entangled that they became almost interchangeable in the discourses of the period. Western European art was consequently associated with painting, while American art was identified with Conceptualism, even though Conceptual art had been more important in Western Europe than in the United States. Yet, even today, the dominant story of the Western artworld has it that, in the early 1980s, Western European painting attacked the American Conceptual fortress.⁴⁰⁰ But beyond that myth, what do we know about the resurgence of European art and of painting in that era? How can we understand these two phenomena and the connections between them?

In the United States, discussions surrounding 1980s painting dealt almost exclusively with the legitimacy of a return to painting that some welcomed as a necessary normalization of artistic practices, while others rejected it as a commercial backlash against Conceptual art. The purported comeback of the Western European artists was accordingly either portrayed as a creative renaissance or dismissed as a commercial move. The vivid debates about painting

³⁹⁹ Tony Godfrey, *The New Image: Painting in the 1980s* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

⁴⁰⁰ For a discussion of the 1980s critical debates in the United States see, for instance: Alison Pearlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

focused on the ontological nature of the medium and the philosophical implications of using it at the end of the twentieth century, rather than on the particular historical circumstances of its return in the 1980s, and in Western Europe in particular.⁴⁰¹

Contemporary European accounts are no more useful in understanding the new Western European painting. They simply explain it as the expression of a new *Zeitgeist* – something “in the air,” as Joachimides claimed. In 1982, Gerd de Vries and Max Wolfgang Faust published *Hunger nach Bildern*, a study devoted to West German painting. They discussed what they saw as “die Hinwendung einer ganzen Kunstlergeneration zu Malerei” in great detail, but did not offer any convincing reasons why such a trend had started.⁴⁰² It just had. Yet the idea of a spontaneous regeneration of European painting after years of creative apathy does not seem credible, especially considering the workings of the artworld as discussed in the previous chapter. As noted, the problem in the 1970s was not that Western Europe lacked good artists, but rather that they were invisible and thus could not be recognized as great. So the question of the 1980s concerns what happened so that Western European artists could be *regarded* as great again. What happened in the late 1970s to make Western European artists visible again? And if there was a shift in the *regard* – the public’s view of the situation – what consequences did it have for American art? Did New York lose its preeminence?

My ambition for this last chapter is thus twofold: first to move beyond any simplistic marketing or *Zeitgeist* explanations to address the return to painting and the comeback of Western European artists in their historical contexts; and, second, to analyze the consequences of this phenomenon for the artworld.

⁴⁰¹ See: Ibid.

⁴⁰² Wolfgang Max Faust and Gerd de Vries, *Hunger nach Bildern: Deutsche Malerei der Gegenwart* (Cologne: Dumont, 1982), 7.

4.1. IN THE SHADOW: EUROPEAN ART DURING THE AMERICAN DOMINATION

The shift of the *regard* from Paris to New York had plunged Western Europeans even further into the shadows than they had been after the War. Earlier, though Parisian artists had overshadowed them, Europeans could at least rest assured that they had geographic access to the center. Now the center was on the other side of the Atlantic, and Americans were no better than the French at looking at what was going on beyond their own environs. Reflecting on the position of Western European artists after the triumph of American art, Lucio Fontana complained that the Americans were “now worse chauvinists than the French; first it was the French, now it is them. They’re good, yes, but ...”⁴⁰³ The shift of attention to New York did not improve the situation of Western European artists, and the American gallery support-system was, indeed, more constrictive for them than the avant-garde model had been. To exist as an artist one had to go to New York, and to gain any form of recognition one had to be associated with a New York gallery – part of a “family,” as Castelli once explained to Pistoletto:

At the end of 1964 Leo Castelli told me, hurry up and make some more paintings because the others have all been sold or placed with museums and I want to give you a show right away. So I went to work like a madman, I took off for New York, I remember that I had Solomon, who had curated the American pavilion at the 1964 Venice Biennale, when Rauschenberg had won, on one side in the taxi and Leo Castelli on the other. Castelli said, “Listen, you have to come to the United States or there’s nothing more I can do for you. You’re doing very well, but either you join our family or it won’t be possible to go on.” After that I didn’t go back to the United States for fifteen years.⁴⁰⁴

Pistoletto did not accept Castelli’s ultimatum, and it’s difficult to assess what might have happened to his career had he settled in New York. However, having started his career before 1964 and belonging to Gian Enzo Sperone’s “family” allowed him to enjoy a certain visibility regardless of his location.

⁴⁰³ Quoted in Richard Flood and Frances Morris, *Zero to Infinity : Arte Povera, 1962-1972* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001).

⁴⁰⁴ Michelangelo Pistoletto, "Intervista con Germano Celant," in *Pistoletto* (Firenze: Electa, 1984), 31. Translation from Pistoletto’s website: <http://www.pistoletto.it/eng/crono06.htm>

Pistoletto was not the only artist who had to choose between New York and Europe. Sidney Janis made the same offer to Arman, who accepted it, moved to the United States, and became an American citizen. Christo and Jeanne-Claude also decided to settle in the United States. Most of the artists, however, stayed in Europe, because they did not want or were not given the opportunity to move to New York. For those who stayed behind – be they artists, dealers, or critics – it was urgent that they act to finally move out of America's shadow.

4.1.1. The dynamism of the European artworld

Almost immediately after America's supposed triumph, Western Europeans started to organize themselves to overcome their invisibility and lack of power on the international art scene.

For instance, they created art fairs such as the Cologne Kunstmarkt we mentioned earlier that Rudolf Zwirner and Hein Stürke launched in 1967. As the dealer Hans Mayer has explained, the idea of Kunstmarkt was to showcase West German galleries for local and West European collectors:

Es gibt da so eine Bewegung in Köln, wir möchten den Amerikanern und Franzosen und Engländern etwas entgegensetzen. Es gibt hier in Deutschland so viele gute progressive Galerien. Doch weil wir keine Hauptstadt haben, sind die Aktivitäten so verteilt. Jetzt wird eben einmal im Jahr eine Ausstellung gemacht, um den Ausländern mal zu zeigen, daß es in Deutschland eine lebendige junge Kunstzene gibt.⁴⁰⁵

The first Kunstmarkt to take place was an even greater success than expected: Zwirner thought there might be 800 visitors, but instead 15,000 people came to see what young West German dealers had to offer.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ "30 Jahre Kunstmarkt Köln," *Art* 1996, 34.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

The following year, in 1968, Konrad Fischer and Hans Strelow, two dealers in Düsseldorf who had not been invited to Kunstmarkt, organized Prospect, an alternative art fair. While Kunstmarkt featured chiefly American Pop art, Prospect was instead oriented towards Minimalism and Conceptual art. The Cologne fair was a greater financial success, allowing Fischer and Strelow to dismiss it as a commercial venture. The historical rivalry between Cologne and Düsseldorf subsequently created an atmosphere of competition that enlivened the West German artworld. Prospect eventually disappeared, but Kunstmarkt continued to flourish. In 1975, 201 galleries took part in the Cologne fair, and 40,000 visitors came. Following the German model, Swiss dealers organized Art Basel in 1969, which quickly became a major rendezvous point for the Western artworld. Even the French followed suit: moving at last beyond the Salon model, they created the FIAC (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain) in 1976. Although it never became as important as Art Basel or Art Cologne (Kunstmarkt's new name), the FIAC still helped re-energize the French art scene and gave French dealers and artists some international visibility.

At the same time as these art fairs were developing, there was a movement to restructure the Western European art press.⁴⁰⁷ Many Western European magazines, like *Quadrum* (Belgium, 1956-1966) and *Aujourd'hui* (France, published until 1967) had disappeared in the late 1960s, but others were founded around that time, like the Italian magazine *Flash Art* (1967), the French *Opus International* (1967) and *Art Press* (1973), and the West German *Kunstforum International* (1973). These magazines adopted some of the characteristics of the American magazines discussed in the last chapter, and they thrived. As their names occasionally indicate, they had an international readership: they covered international topics, commissioned international writers,

⁴⁰⁷ Sylvie Mokhtari, "Des revues d'avant-garde en Europe et en Amérique du Nord du milieu des années 1960 à la fin des années 1970" (DEA, Université de Renne 2, 1991).

and often included summaries in English in order to reach a larger audience. In 1974, Benjamin Buchloh bought *Interfunktionen*, a West German art periodical that had been created in 1968, and gave it a more international focus. In 1976, *Heute Kunst*, another West German art magazine, which first appeared in 1973, began including both English- and German-language articles. The same year the Jodidio family bought the French magazine *Connaissance des Arts* (1952), and gave it a more journalistic and contemporary twist. In 1978, Giancarlo Politi, the publisher and editor of *Flash Art*, launched *Flash Art International*, an English version of the magazine.⁴⁰⁸

One of the goals of these magazines was to give some international visibility to their respective national art scenes. As the French dealer Daniel Templon has explained, art magazines were then the necessary vectors for promotion of contemporary art:

Pour vendre bien un tableau, il faut que son auteur soit reconnu. Mais pour être reconnu, il faut qu'il soit préalablement connu. C'est là qu'intervient le marchand. C'est dans cette optique que j'ai créé deux magazines. Le premier, *Art Press*, diffuse dès 1972, a été le fruit de ma collaboration avec Catherine Millet.⁴⁰⁹

Templon and other Western Europeans understood, as Americans had before them, that, in a mass-media society, recognition and reputation happened in the press. If Western Europeans were able to give their magazines an international dimension, they would be able to exist internationally. Even if one was not at the geographic center of attention (i.e. in New York), one could put oneself at the media's center of the attention.

In the early 1970s, Western European states also became more active in the promotion of their artists. In France, as mentioned in Chapter 3, President Pompidou organized "12 ans d'art contemporain en France" in order to give some exposure to French artists. Such local

⁴⁰⁸ Benjamin H D Buchloh, "Magazine Mentality and the Market (Europeans Regions)," *Art Monthly*, October 1976. Mokhtari, "Des revues d'avant-garde en Europe et en Amérique du Nord du milieu des années 1960 à la fin des années 1970". "Survey of Contemporary Art," *Studio International*, September-October 1976.

⁴⁰⁹ Eve Mercier, "Daniel Templon, Michael Werner, l'art et la manière," *Le Journal des Arts*, October 1994, 46.

exhibitions, however, could have hardly had any international resonance. Despite its shortcomings, this exhibition still marked an important change in the French government's attitude toward contemporary art. Around that time, the government decided at last to create a museum of modern art and to endow it with a budget for buying art by living artists. Significantly, the direction of this new museum was entrusted to Pontus Hulten, and not to a French *conservateur*, who would have been trained at the Ecole du Patrimoine. Hulten and his team wanted to use the Musée National d'Art Moderne (then known as Beaubourg) to investigate the role of Paris in the evolution of twentieth-century art.⁴¹⁰

Beaubourg's inaugural exhibition should have been the famous "Paris-New York" show, but because this ambitious exhibition was not ready on time, "L'Œuvre de Marcel Duchamp" opened in February 1977, thereby placing the museum under the patronage of this Franco-American figure. "Paris – New York," which followed, was an important exhibition because it meticulously and objectively examined the relationships between the two cities in the twentieth century, beyond all the petty debates of artistic priority that had hindered Franco-American relations since the War. As Robert Bordaz explains in the catalogue: "L'itinéraire Paris-New York a depuis soixante-dix ans, le mérite de révéler, dans l'écheveaux des influences réciproques, la richesse et la complexité de l'échange, faisant passer au second plan l'étroite question des antériorités qui menace trop souvent l'approche comparatiste."⁴¹¹ One of the results of the exhibition was, nonetheless, to attribute a historical dimension to America's supposed artistic dominance. Under Hulten's leadership, Beaubourg became a prominent center for reflection on modern art and, as such, an influential player on the field of contemporary art. As described in the previous chapter, in the ranking of powerful art agents Willi Bongard published

⁴¹⁰ Pontus Hulten, ed., *Paris-New York* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 13.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

in *Art Aktuel* in 1978, Hulten and Beaubourg arrived in fourth place.⁴¹² It seemed that France was finally, I dare say, back in the game.

In West Germany, too, the Federal Government was becoming more active on the cultural front. Arts that had been neglected under Konrad Adenauer were becoming important again, especially under the Social Democrat Chancellor Willy Brandt, who was in power from 1969 to 1974. The country had recovered its economic significance and somehow its political clout; it now needed to restore its cultural prestige – to become again a *Kulturstaat* (a state of culture). To change the public image of their country, West Germans thus started to promote German cultural heritage actively, which had been underplayed since the end of the War, through presentations of the great accomplishments of German writers, musicians, and artists. In 1970, for example, they organized resplendent ceremonies for the two-hundredth anniversary of Beethoven's birth, and in 1971 they celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of Albrecht Dürer's birth with great pomp.⁴¹³ Beyond commemorating Beethoven and Dürer, these celebrations promoted a rediscovered pride in German culture.

It is not possible to list all the projects that aimed at restoring German visibility on the cultural front, but it is worth mentioning the Berliner Künstlerprogram, which started in 1963 with a grant from the Ford Foundation to bring American artists to West Berlin. At the end of that year, the German Federal Government decided to continue the project, importing international artists to work in the divided city. From 1972 to 1978, Karl Ruhrberg directed the Berliner Künstlerprogram, and made it particularly dynamic and visible. For instance, he created

⁴¹² Willi Bongard, "Willi Bongard Papers, 1960-1985," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 880363, 880363*, 880363**).

⁴¹³ Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften, *Zur Geschichte der Kulturpolitik in der B.R.D.* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1987).

a residency in New York at PS1 for artists from Berlin.⁴¹⁴ Between 1963 and 1985, 511 international artists were awarded the Berlin residency, among them Bridget Riley (1971), John Cage (1972), Daniel Buren (1974), and On Kawara (1976).⁴¹⁵

In the 1970s, the Western European artworld was thus very active, even if it remained overshadowed by American domination. Europeans were building a support-system similar to the American one, but also more cohesive. It included international art fairs, an international art press, and international exhibitions, like documenta and the Venice Biennale. All this activity allowed Western Europeans to communicate easily among themselves and to be aware of the newest artistic developments throughout the Western world.

4.1.2. European art and the promoters of American art

Western Europeans were enthusiastic for and supportive of American art. What often goes unmentioned in historical accounts is that they were also supporting Western European artists.

Karl Ströher, an enthusiast for American art, was equally committed to German art, which he had been purchasing since his earliest days as a collector. German Expressionism and post-War German abstraction were major portions of his collection. In the 1950s, he was indeed involved with Willi Baumeister and Ottmar Domnick, and with them he created the Karl-Ströher-Preis to support German contemporary art. In 1967, Heiner Friedrich and Franz Dahlem, having previously talked Ströher into buying the Kraushar collection, introduced him to Joseph Beuys's work, with which he was greatly impressed. In 1969, he bought the entirety of Beuys's

⁴¹⁴ Rainer Höynck, "Bald ein Vierteljahrhundert : Das Berliner Künstlerprogramm," *Das Kunstwerk*, September 1985. Heinz Ohff, "Programm auf Gegenseitigkeit : Das 'Berliner Künstlerprogramm' des DAAD," *Kulturchronik*, May 1983.

⁴¹⁵ For a list of the artists who participated to the program, see: <http://www.berliner-kuenstlerprogramm.de/>

exhibition at Schmela. This was the beginning of the *Beuys Block* to which the collector kept on adding through his constant acquisitions.⁴¹⁶ Beuys occupied a very special position in Ströher's collection, but he was not the only contemporary German artist in it. Included as well were many young, West German Conceptual artists, like Blinky Palermo, Peter Roehr, Charlotte Posenenske, and Hanne Darboven. He also collected European artists, among them Mario Merz, Alighiero Boetti, Christian Boltanski, and Ilya Kabakov. When Ströher exhibited his collections in museums, visitors would see great American works side by side with lesser-known European ones, which seemed, thanks to the association, worthy of consideration. The same techniques that had been used to raise the status of American art vis-à-vis French now served to give prestige to European art vis-à-vis American.

Count Panza was also supporting both American and European art. His collection included many examples of Arte Povera and European Conceptual art, from Beuys and Darboven to Jan Dibbets, Daniel Buren, and Louis Cane. Those who came to Varese to see Count Panza's collection of Minimalism and Conceptual art were thus confronted with both American and European artists. In 1976, the Galleria d'Arte Moderna of Bologna organized an exhibition of his collection, "Europa-America: l'astrazione determinata 1960-1976," which installed American and Western European contemporary abstract works side by side, thereby increasing the prestige of the latter in visitors' minds.⁴¹⁷

Peter Ludwig's collection was also international in scope. He and his wife collected German and European art as eagerly as they did American. Over the years Dr. Ludwig enriched his collection with contemporary art from West Germany, France (his collection now forms the basis of the Ludwig Museum Koblenz), East Germany (now at the Ludwig Galerie Schloss

⁴¹⁶ The *Beuys Block* includes more than 300 works realized between 1949 and 1972. In 1970, Beuys installed it at the Hessischen Landesmuseum in Darmstadt.

⁴¹⁷ Flavio Caroli, *Europa-America: L'astrazione determinata 1960-1976* (Bologna: Galleria d'arte moderna, 1976).

Oberhausen), as well as from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (now on display at the Ludwig Museum Budapest). For Ludwig, American art was just one part of his encyclopedic collection.⁴¹⁸

Likewise, Ileana Sonnabend was not just a dealer of American art, she was also a supporter of Western European artists. While her original ambition had been to represent both Castelli's artists and the Nouveaux Réalistes, she did not work with the latter because Pierre Restany's wife opened the Galerie J to show them. Sonnabend remained, however, interested in Western European artists. She signed a contract with Pistoletto in 1964 and gave Gilardi a show in 1967. Through her collaboration with Western European dealers like Gian Enzo Sperone and Rudolph Zwirner, she was meeting artists to whom she gave shows. Indeed, the exchanges between Sonnabend and her partners were not as unidirectional as one thinks: she sent them Castelli's artists but they also sent her their artists. The Sonnabend Gallery thus regularly exhibited Italian and West German artists. In 1969, it showed Giovanni Anselmo, and, in 1970, Pier Paolo Calzolari. As for German artists, in 1965, Sonnabend exhibited Konrad Klapheck, one of Zwirner's artists, and, in 1973, Bernd and Hilla Becher. Starting in 1967, her gallery also started to represent French artists. By then the goal of giving more visibility to American art had been successfully achieved, and French art was direly in need of representation. Arman was the first French artist Sonnabend showed. She would then add Boltanski and Anne and Patrick Poirier to her stable.⁴¹⁹ So when collectors went to the Sonnabend gallery to see great American art, they also discovered Western European artists. The simple fact that she represented them gave them a certain kind of prestige in the minds of Western European collectors.

⁴¹⁸ For more information on the museums Peter Ludwig created, see: <http://www.ludwigstiftung.de/5.0.html?&L=1>

⁴¹⁹ Michel Bourel, "Les galeries d'Ileana Sonnabend," in *Collection Sonnabend" - 25 années de choix et d'activités d'Ileana et Michael Sonnabend* (Bordeaux: Capc, Musée d'art contemporain, 1988).

The role of these Western European collectors in the European comeback cannot be exaggerated. They were the best clients of American galleries; they were able to impose American artists they liked on their American dealers; why couldn't they impose European artists as well? The desire among West Europeans, and West Germans in particular, to restore their countries' cultural prestige cannot be overlooked. This ambition, I would argue, influenced their collecting practices as much as their keen enthusiasm for American art. In late 1968, Wolfgang Hahn and Dr. Peter Ludwig met in New York for a private discussion. This meeting, it is generally believed, resulted in Ludwig's decision to donate his contemporary art collection to the city of Cologne for the creation of what is now the Ludwig Museum. There are no records of the exact content of this discussion, but it seems it formed the basis for the establishment of Cologne as a major art center, potentially able to replace Paris as the center of the European artworld, and even to compete with New York as the epicenter.⁴²⁰

4.1.3. The discrete presence of European art in the United States

Western European art was not exclusively visible in European galleries and collections; it was also on view in American galleries, even if its presence was discrete and overshadowed by American art.

In 1970, Illeana Sonnabend opened a space in New York, where she intended to promote European artists whom she had discovered in Paris, and who were completely unknown in the United States. With her New York gallery, she intended to repeat what she had done in Europe for American art: "Opening a gallery in New York was really the reverse of my Paris situation,

⁴²⁰ Rainer Speck, *Peter Ludwig Sammler* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1986), 101.

partially because I wanted Europeans to be seen there.”⁴²¹ She was showing artists who, without her, would have never been shown in New York, such as Mario Merz, Gilbert and George, the Bechers, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Piero Manzoni, Jannis Kounellis, and Giulio Paolini. As she had done in Paris, Sonnabend commissioned essays on these artists to contextualize their works for their American audience. In 1972, she also created the Sonnabend Press, the direction of which she gave to Germano Celant. Together they published books on European artists, including the first monographic study of Manzoni published in the United States.

John Weber was also an active promoter of Western European art in the United States. In the mid 1960s, the Dwan Gallery, which he directed in Los Angeles, welcomed the Nouveaux Réalistes after their shaming at Janis’s “New Realists” show. The Europeans spent time in California, living in Virginia Dwan’s house in Malibu,⁴²² and some of them, like Niki de Saint-Phalle, decided to settle there, thereby reinforcing the connection between Western Europe and California. When the Dwan Gallery moved to New York in 1965, Weber brought with him Californian Post-minimalists and the Western Europeans he had represented on the West coast. In 1971, he opened his own gallery, where he energetically promoted European Conceptual artists. He showed, for example, Daniel Buren, Richard Long, and the Arte Povera artists. Weber’s connection with Italy was even stronger since he was then married to Annina Nosei, an Italian art historian, who would open her own gallery in New York in 1979. Weber used to go on vacations to Italy, during which he would also scout for artists to exhibit in New York. These European artists were, however, not particularly well received by their American audience, which seemed utterly uninterested in European art. Weber has commented:

⁴²¹ Laura de Coppet and Allan Jones, *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1984), 114.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 197.

There always has been a certain chauvinistic resistance in America toward contemporary European art. Out of the three or four one-man exhibitions I did of the Italian artist, Mario Merz, I sold one piece, to the Museum of Modern Art. I have never sold one piece by Boetti; I never sold one Anselmo. After seven or eight shows of Daniel Buren, I've never sold one Daniel Buren in America to anybody, institution or private collector.⁴²³

Although these shows were commercial failures, they were nonetheless important because they gave a degree of international visibility to European artists, who otherwise would have been completely unknown. Americans may not have liked Western European art, but at least they knew it existed. This was similar to what had happened to American artists when they first started to exhibit in Western Europe in the late 1950s. Just as American collectors had bought American art from Parisian galleries, Western European collectors would only buy Western European art if it bore a New York gallery's stamp of approval.

Marianne Goodman also played a role in the promotion of Western European art in the United States. In fact, she once described how she got the idea of opening a gallery after discovering the works of Western European artists who were completely unknown in New York:

My first trip to documenta was 1968, and it was a fascinating and impressive exhibition. I saw the work of Joseph Beuys for the first time and immediately tried to arrange to have his films shown in New York. In due course it became very clear to me that there were many very important artists in Europe that were simply not being shown in New York. Opening a gallery might do something to remedy that. When I met Marcel Broodthaers I was shocked to learn that he had never shown in the United States, and I immediately set about trying to make up for this neglect. I started a gallery in 1977; the first exhibition was a beautiful show of a broad range of works by Broodthaers – films, objects, drawings, paintings. It was designed to introduce his work to New York.⁴²⁴

In the following years, Goodman would show Blinky Palermo, Gerhard Richter, Joseph Beuys, and other Western European artists.

In the 1970s, Western Europeans were present on the New York art scene not only through young American gallerists committed to the promotion of European art, but also through

⁴²³ Ibid., 201.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 178.

more established American dealers like Castelli, Janis, and André Emmerich, who each represented a few European artists. Castelli was showing artists whom he had discovered through his European partners, among them Darboven (through Sonnabend/Fischer) and Salvatore Scarpitta (Sonnabend/Sperone). Additionally, his second wife, Antoinette (Toiny) Castelli, who directed Castelli Graphics, was French and enthusiastic about European artists. As for Janis, starting in 1974 he showed Bridget Riley and Pistoletto. Emmerich took Gotthard Graubner into his stable in 1975. Considering the growing presence of Western European artists in New York in the mid 1970s, Willi Bongard contributed an article to *Art Aktuel* titled “Welcome Infusion of European Art in The New York Scene.”⁴²⁵ In this article, he also mentioned the work accomplished by Western European dealers like Sperone, Block, and Friedrich, who had each opened galleries in New York, as described earlier.

In the late 1970s, Western European art was present in the United States; its presence was discrete and for most part went unnoticed, but it was there, waiting to be noticed.

4.1.4. Conclusion

During American art’s era of domination, the Western European art scene was very active, with its tight web of collectors, dealers, and museums directors, all supporting works from either side of the Atlantic. Yet, despite its dynamic support-system, Western European art was still invisible. Bias against European art was palpable, with United States art patrons largely uninterested in work from abroad.

In the 1970s, Julian Schnabel met Ernst Mitzka, a professor from Hamburg, who was friends with Palermo and Sigmar Polke; when Polke came to New York in 1974, Schnabel befriended him. Schnabel then traveled to West Germany for a show in 1978, where he visited

⁴²⁵ *Art Aktuel* (21), 1974. An exemplar is available in Bongard, "Willi Bongard Papers, 1960-1985."

Polke's studio and was impressed by his work. Back in New York, he told people about it, but no one was interested. He later remembered:

There was, it must be said, a whole bulk of paintings we weren't seeing, because of American chauvinism. In 1978, when I returned from my show in Germany, I brought a catalogue of Polke's work to Holly Solomon, thinking Polke's work might extend some of the possibilities presented by artists in her gallery. Holly told me it looked too German.⁴²⁶

If the American situation in the late 1970s resembled that of France in the late 1960s, the Western European situation of the 1970s recalled in many ways the situation of the United States in the 1950s – namely, as a powerful actor that was not yet recognized as such. Western Europeans could collect, represent, and exhibit art, but they could not yet be seen as producing anything interesting. The task of Western Europeans would thus be to reverse the situation, so that European artists could once again be seen as great artists; so that being “German” would no longer be a flaw, but an asset.

4.2. NEW PACKAGING: THE RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EUROPEAN ART

In the same way that Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, and other American thinkers had developed a theory for American art that transformed its provincialism into an independent national identity, Western Europeans re-conceptualized European art so that it could exist on the international art scene outside the shadow of American art, as an original, independent, multiform tradition.

Without claiming to be able to identify all the individual contributions to the repackaging of Western European art, I would like to look at a few theories and ideas which, to my mind, contributed substantially to the comeback of Western European artists.

⁴²⁶ Julian Schnabel, *CVJ: Nicknames of Maitre D's and Other Excerpts from Life* (New York: Random House, 1987), 34.

4.2.1. Johannes Gachnang and the theory of provincialism

One of the main obstacles for Western European art in the 1970s was the dominant belief in one model of art history, one based on the idea of the progression of modern art towards an always greater reduction of its means. This view, exemplified by Alfred Barr's diagrams and Greenberg's writings, had played a very important role in shaping the narrative of American triumph: the American artists were the ones who had continued the modernist international project, while the French had deviated into decoration. Despite its inconsistencies, this myth prevailed, with its criterion for distinguishing "good" art used internationally by both the public and institutions. Artistic developments outside the American modernist canon were considered provincial and retrograde, and dismissed as such.

Among those "provincial" approaches was the work of a group of painters in Berlin in the 1960s. These artists – Georg Baselitz, Eugen Schönbeck, A.R. Penck, and Markus Lupertz – had for models Wols, Jean Dubuffet, Henri Michaux, Antonin Artaud, and other artists who had been working in the *Informel* vein described in the first chapter. These Berlin artists were friends with Johannes Gachnang, a Swiss printmaker and art historian, and Michael Werner, then a trainee at Rudolf Springer's gallery, who, as mentioned, never chose between abstraction and figuration but represented both. Associated with the Springer group was also Christos Joachimides, a Greek art historian who was then studying in Berlin. They all shared a similar *musée imaginaire* filled with works by Artaud, Wols, Dubuffet, and Gaston Chaissac – a selection of "major artists" that was very different from what was becoming the official post-War *musée imaginaire*. As Baselitz recalled:

Finalement les influences les plus fortes sont venues de Paris. C'est là que les artistes traitent les livres, les sons et les toiles de la façon la plus radicale. Ils étaient plus radicaux parce qu'ils s'attaquaient au centre du tableau. A mon sens ce ne furent jamais des manifestations de liberté, comme les présentaient les peintres américains mais des

actes de destruction agressifs et existentiels. Les toiles elles-mêmes restaient de petite-taille, inappropriées pour la grande décoration. Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Jürgen ...⁴²⁷

Interestingly enough, these painters had all been trained in East Germany. Even though they rejected Socialist Realism and their work did not fit within official East German ideology, this training influenced their output. For them, the figure was not as taboo as it was for their Western colleagues, in whom a belief in abstraction as the universal language of art had been deeply instilled. From their original training, they also remained involved in subject matter. While they refused to submit their works to communist ideology, they continued to see content as an important aspect of their paintings. These artists, who grew up during the War, the Allied bombings, and the division of Germany, did not hesitate to discuss political issues in their works. They used art as Michaux, Wols, and Artaud had – as a way to negotiate between personal and historical events. Such an artistic perspective was alien to the practices of the universalist, formalist tradition that was triumphing elsewhere.

The social milieu surrounding this group is significant. Werner and Gachnang tried their hardest to promote the atypical works of their friends. In Berlin, Werner exhibited them first in the short-lived Galerie Werner & Katz, then in the First Orthodox Salon he held for several years in his Berlin apartment, and finally, starting in 1968, in the gallery he opened in Cologne. In 1971, Gachnang started to work at the Goethe Institut of Amsterdam, in which he organized exhibitions of Baselitz, Lüpertz, Penck, and Kiefer, who had recently joined the group. In 1974, he became the director of the Kunsthalle of Bern, and continued to exhibit these artists. More importantly, over the years he elaborated a theory that would legitimize their work vis-à-vis the rest of contemporary art.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ Georg Baselitz and Suzanne Pagé, *Georg Baselitz* (Paris: Musée de la ville de Paris, 1997), 202.

⁴²⁸ Mercier, "Daniel Templon, Michael Werner, l'art et la manière." Michael Werner, "Ich bin Kunsthändler und nicht Galerist," *Art*, May 1999.

Gachnang believed that the modernist tradition that claimed a progressive reduction of form was just one possibility for creating modern art. Though it was widely presented as a universal movement, in reality it should be considered just one path among many. In other words, to use terminology that would appeal to Germans and the Swiss, it was only one *dialect* of modern art; as there were multiple provinces in the artworld, in which artists were speaking other dialects, the differences among them should be respected. Baselitz, Lüpertz, and Penck, for instance, were speaking a dialect that was different but as legitimate as that spoken by Donald Judd or Carl Andre. Instead of dismissing provincial particularities, Gachnang celebrated them as positive and stimulating differences. This theory of provincialism offered an alternative to the myth that underpinned formalism of a universal language of art. The new theory was also a way to reframe European positions within international artistic traditions; by this reading, American art was just *a* province of art, and the language they talked was not *the* authentic expression of modern art.⁴²⁹

In the mid 1970s, Gachnang became the director of the Kunsthalle of Bern. From there he started a conversation with Rudi Fuchs, then the director of the van Abbe-Museum in Eindhoven, on these issues. Over the years, Gachnang try to demonstrate to Fuchs – an ardent promoter of American Minimalism and Conceptual art – that there were other valid approaches to consider. Unwillingly, Fuchs started to look at the works of Baselitz, Lüpertz, Penck, and Kiefer, and slowly learned to appreciate them. He later commented:

Although at first their work was disturbing for its lack of affinity to American art, its quality became increasingly obvious and *irresistible*. It could not be ignored; and that simple fact led to the realization that American art, programmatically pushing toward the limits of its adopted morphology, was just a style, or even just another dialect in the great diversity of artistic expression. Almost overnight, I found myself *defending* European art

⁴²⁹ Michel Compton told Irving Sandler how in 1976 during the selection of the Biennale de Paris, Gachnang defended his theory of provincialism. Irving Sandler, "Irving Sandler Papers," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 2000.M.43), 31, 22.

and artists, “who had to worry a lot before they could make something,” against what we perceived as the haughtiness of American style.⁴³⁰

Gachnang’s theory of provincialism provided a conceptual framework under which the works of Baselitz, Lüpertz, Penck, and Kiefer – as well as those of other artists working in other styles – were considered as pertinent to discourse as mainstream American art. After years of modernist universalist/monist domination, this theory introduced regionalist/pluralist ideas to the artworld.⁴³¹

4.2.2. Achille Bonito Oliva and the European artistic identity

Achille Bonito Oliva also adopted the idea of provincialism. But while Gachnang was just discussing ideas with friends and colleagues, Oliva systematized them, first in *Flash Art*, and then in several books. In 1976, he published *Europe/America: The Different Avant-gardes*, in which he distinguished the characteristics of the American art province from those in Europe:

European culture means a constant referring to cultural models and matrices, in other words, substantially to history and the history of art. Conversely, American culture is concerned with the extension of its own present and, therefore, with a concept of experimentalism in which technology becomes a technical philosophy.⁴³²

According to Oliva, European art was ideological, and Beuys was the best example of the European tradition: “Joseph Beuys sets out, through art, spiritually to reconstitute man’s unity, to give him back energy and the urge to transform his dealings with the world, both political and cultural.”⁴³³ Oliva opposed this image of the European artist to that of Andy Warhol, the American artist, “who systematically catalogues the data of reality” because American art was,

⁴³⁰ Rudolf Herman Fuchs, Adam D Weinberg, and Hayden Herrera, *Views from Abroad - European Perspectives on American Art I* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 25.

⁴³¹ Rudolf Herman Fuchs, *Markus Lüpertz Painting* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1997).

⁴³² Achille Bonito Oliva, *Europe/America: The Different Avant-Gardes* (Milan: Deco Press, 1976), 7.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

by definition, statistical.⁴³⁴ Another difference between the American and the European artists was their relation to nature: “In European art nature does not exist as an uncontaminated space, but as one already handed over to the history of culture.”⁴³⁵ While in the works of Giovanni Anselmo and Jannis Kounellis nature was haunted by history, in those of Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson nature was a field on which the artist acted.

Oliva focused his book on Beuys rather than the Italian Arte Povera artists because in 1976 he was one of the rare Western European artists to be known in the United States. The book, written in English, French, German, and Italian, was intended for the international community, but with Americans particularly in mind. That is also why Oliva wrote about a general European identity, and didn't discuss specifically Italian, German, or French identities. America had defined its identity against Europe's, and so Oliva now needed to redefine the European identity on European terms. Besides, in the 1970s, Italian and German art still had too many other connotations. German art was too closely associated with fascism, while the Renaissance period still dominated the reputation of Italian art. Oliva recognized that Italian and German contemporary art had to be repackaged as European to initiate a new discourse. Yet Oliva's European artistic identity did not replace national identities. On the contrary, it was a flexible, encompassing identity that could accommodate the particularities of individual nationalities' identities. It's worth noting that this conceptualization of European identity has much in common with the ideas surrounding the establishment of the European Community.

In 1982, Oliva published *La Transavanguardia internazionale*, in which he insisted on the importance of artistic dialects in contemporary art: “The current artist has no intention of losing himself behind the homologation of a uniform language, but aims at recovering an identity

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 13.

corresponding to the ‘genius loci’ that inhabits his particular culture.”⁴³⁶ The concept of the “genius loci” was what allowed him to introduce diversity into the European artistic identity, making one of its chief characteristics its interest in local history and culture:

We are witnessing a specialization that is distinguishing American artists as those who work on visual patterns, repetition, ornamentation, abstraction or the recovery of the figure. For European artists, the histories of art and language are fields to draw on with extreme flexibility, without creating obsessive or privileged areas of recovery.⁴³⁷

That is why Italian artists investigated Italian history and language, while European Germans were working on German traditions:

The art of the German transavangarde takes up the idea of a recovery of a national identity mortified by the political reality of the post-war era. [...] In this way, art heals a historical wound and restores unity to the lacerated body of German culture by reactivating such cultural and historical roots as expressionism, which amply represents the possibility of speaking a national and unitarian language.⁴³⁸

Oliva tried to characterize all the other European regional cultures using similar strategies of identification: “Dutch culture is permeated by an optico-perceptual and analytical tradition that underlines even the most pictorial efforts,”⁴³⁹ while “Even the context of Danish art is replete with typically Nordic cultural impulse, geared toward the abstraction of an absolute mood.”⁴⁴⁰ Beyond the obvious flaws of Oliva’s characterizations, they were important as a celebration of regional difference and as a rejection of the universalist myth. Through a dialectic reversal he transformed the provincialism of European art that had been its handicap for decades into a major asset.

Beyond all his theories, Oliva’s main ambition was indeed the promotion of European art. His book thus ends with a rather biased distinction between American and European art:

⁴³⁶ Achille Bonito Oliva, *La Transavanguardia Internazionale* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi, 1982), 52.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

“Through art, the American painter seeks a reason for existence; the European painter instead seeks a higher level for the existence of art.”⁴⁴¹ Rooted in history, culture, and spirituality, European art was packaged as richer and deeper than American art, which was portrayed as focusing on the present time and technology. Even if Oliva’s ideas could be rejected as simplistic stereotypes, they empowered European artists and brought a strong European artistic identity to the forefront of the artworld.

4.2.3. Paul Maenz and the new European painting

Gachnang and Oliva each re-conceptualized contemporary art to show how Western European art movements could exist independent of mainstream American art. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Paul Maenz would add to his stable, well known for its representation of Conceptual artists, a stylistically diverse selection of young Italian and German painters. Maenz’s shift from international Conceptual art to regional figurative painting was regarded at the time as a betrayal of the Conceptual cause – a commercial move from difficult art to pretty paintings. However, the gallery’s archives offer evidence that the promotion of these young painters was costly and not particularly profitable initially. When he started exhibiting Italian painters in 1978, Maenz had difficulty selling their works to a clientele accustomed to seeing Conceptual art in his gallery.⁴⁴² So how can we explain the comeback of European painting without resorting to an explanation that blames commercialism?

I would argue that Maenz did not necessarily change his mind or betray anybody. I think that he and his colleagues were actually pursuing their interest in Conceptual art. Arte Povera

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁴² This can be seen in letters and reports from that period. See: Paul Maenz, "Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991," (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities Special Collections and Visual Resources, 910066).

and the Sperone gallery are the missing elements without which we cannot understand the full story of the transition from Conceptual art to regional painting.

Arte Povera artists saw themselves as Renaissance men, interested not only in art, but also in other fields like history, science, and poetry. They refused to be confined to a single medium or style, and so conceived of themselves as “nomads” – moving from one technique to another – and their works as “vagabondages.” Such convictions should not surprise us coming from Italy, where pluralism had dominated the artistic scene since the Fascist era, as discussed in Chapter 1. The artists of Arte Povera had often started as painters and slowly moved away from the medium. The generation who came after them and often studied under them embraced painting as a medium onto which their predecessors had not left a strong mark, and which thus still offered opportunities to young artists. On a side note, Francesco Clemente’s mentor Alighiero Boetti had had his artistic epiphany in 1957 in front of Wols’s paintings. Boetti was fascinated by the way forms emerged from the materiality of the paint itself in these works. Looking at Clemente’s works, one cannot help noticing a similar emergence of form from formlessness – something Boetti may have passed onto him.⁴⁴³

Between Arte Povera artists and their successors – Clemente, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, and Mimmo Palladino, to name a few – there was no rupture, only consistent development. They thus exhibited together at the Sperone’s gallery (with Clemente’s first show there in 1975),⁴⁴⁴ where Paul Maenz discovered them. In 1978, Maenz decided to organize an “Italian Year,” during which he would exhibit only Italian artists. Maenz asked Celant to write that year’s yearbook, introducing these new artists. Celant was perhaps not particularly enthusiastic about their work, but he did not reject the offer. He would later include them, even, in shows on Italian

⁴⁴³ Flood and Morris, *Zero to Infinity : Arte Povera, 1962-1972*.

⁴⁴⁴ Anna Minola et al., *Gian Enzo Sperone -Torino - Roma - New York - 35 anni di mostre tra Europa e America* (Torino: Hopefulmonster, 2000).

art that he organized in the 1980s – another sign that their works were not perceived as betraying Arte Povera's conceptual approach.⁴⁴⁵

Another important transitional figure between Conceptual art and figurative painting was the Italian artist Salvatore Mangione Salvo. A Conceptual artist, Salvo took ironic photographs of himself dressed in ancient costumes or mimicking figures in Renaissance religious paintings. He first exhibited at Sperone in 1970, and, thanks to Sperone's connections, was later shown by Paul Maenz, Art & Project, and Yvon Lambert, the Parisian dealer. In 1973, Salvo switched from photography to painting. Painting seemed more appropriate to creating ironic historical compositions because the historical dimension of the medium added another level of meaning to the project.⁴⁴⁶ Salvo's use of painting as a conceptual tool was important, since it opened the door for other conceptual painters.

The work of Carlo Maria Mariani also blurred the distinction between Conceptual art and painting. Part of the Anachronism movement championed by Maurizio Calvesi, Mariani appropriated the style of Neo-classical artists – Angelika Kauffmann was his main reference – and used mythology as a form to express modern ideas.⁴⁴⁷ Maenz discovered Mariani's meta-modernist paintings at Sperone, and immediately bought one for his personal collection. He then featured him in his Italian Year in 1978.⁴⁴⁸

In their full context, the paintings of Clemente, Cucchi, Chia, and Palladino – the group of artists known as Arte Cifra – need not be seen as representing a break from Conceptual art; perhaps they offered a continuation of its interests, as Maenz, de Vries, Wolfgang Max Faust,

⁴⁴⁵ Germano Celant, ed., *The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy Today* (Ontario: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1987). Germano Celant, ed., *L'identità Italiana: L'art en Italie depuis 1959* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981).

⁴⁴⁶ See: http://www.teknemedia.net/pagine-gialle/artisti/salvo_salvatore_mangione/documentazione-artista.html and <http://www.depart.it/ita/opere.asp?id=2>

⁴⁴⁷ Carlo Maria Mariani, "To Madame Angelika Kauffmann the Leading Painter of the Century," (Rome: 1976).

⁴⁴⁸ Maenz, "Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991."

and Jean-Christophe Ammann thought to be the case. Faust wrote the catalogue of Arte Cifra's exhibition at Paul Maenz, and Ammann featured the group's paintings at the Kunsthalle in Basel, of which he was then the director.⁴⁴⁹

The cognoscenti's interest in Italian figurative painting led them to take notice of several young German artists who were working in a similar vein while referring to the German "genius loci." Starting in 1977, a group of artists who called themselves Die Berliner Heftigen ("The Strident Berliners") exhibited their violent paintings in the artist-run Berlin space Galerie am Moritzplatz. This group included Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, Bernd Zimmer, and Salomé. In Cologne, the Mülheimer Freiheit group, constituted of Walter Dahn, Hans Peter Adamski, Peter Bömmels, Gerard Kever, Gerhard Naschberger, and Jiri Georg Dokoupil shared a studio on Mülheimer Freiheit Street (hence their name), where they exhibited their works to the public. The third group of artists, which included Georg Herdd, Albert Oehlen, and Werner Buttner, had come from Hamburg to practice in Cologne, attracted by the growing artistic activity of the city. Like the Italian artists of Arte Cifra, these German artists had studied with Conceptual artists and weren't trying to undermine their predecessors so much as they were aiming to find their own voices. They were turning back to the practice of painting to address issues that the previous generation had addressed in other media. Dahn, for instance, had studied with Beuys in Düsseldorf, and Dokoupil had been taught by Hans Haacke in New York.⁴⁵⁰

When Maenz showed the Italian artists in Cologne, these young German artists were very impressed. As Bömmels recalled: "Daß heißt es: wir müssen uns abgrenzen von den Italienern, wir müssen noch härter, noch brutaler, noch witziger sein, immer noch mehr Gas geben. Vor

⁴⁴⁹ "7 Italian artists" was featured in Basel, Essen, and Amsterdam in 1980, and the same year Clemente had a solo-show in Basel.

⁴⁵⁰ Rudiger Thomas, ed., *Klopfschreie: Kunst und Kultur der 80er Jahre in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig/Verlag Faber and Faber, 2002).

allem noch peinlicher sein.”⁴⁵¹ Maenz eventually organized a show with some of these young Germans, “Mülheimer Freiheit und interessante Bilder aus Deutschland.” Ammann wrote the press release, in which he asserted that a rupture had taken place, insisting that these artists belonged to a new generation. Faust wrote the catalogue. When the show opened on November 13, 1980, its attendance was record-breaking, totaling more than 500 visitors and a TV crew.⁴⁵²

Because of the insistence in its promotion on the emergence of a *new* generation, the show was received as a complete break from Conceptual art. The links between the Neue Wilden – the name the young Germans became known by – and their predecessors went unnoticed, and Maenz was accused of having opportunistically betrayed Conceptual art. Yet, not everyone rejected the new painting. Dr. Rentschler, who had established his collection of Minimalist and Conceptual works through the Paul Maenz Gallery, took interest in the dealer’s newcomers. As Dr. Rentschler later explained, it was a natural and logical development: “Dass dann die junge, wilde Malerei der beginnenden achtzigen Jahre mich als äußerst spannende Entwicklung fasziniert und ich mich mit diesen außerordentlich starken Bildern auseinandersetzen wollte, war deshalb kein Bruch der Sammelkonzeption, sondern eine logische Folgerung meines Interesses.”⁴⁵³ In December 1983, the collection of Dr. Rentschler was exhibited at the Museum Folkwang in Essen; “Die Sammlung Fer” presented an international panorama of conceptually oriented art, with works by Joseph Albers, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, Sol LeWitt, Peter Röhr, Dan Flavin, Giulio Paolini, Daniel Buren, Salvo, Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Dokoupil.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁵² Maenz, "Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991."

⁴⁵³ Götz Adriani, ed., *Obsessive Malerei: ein Rueckblick auf die Neuen Wilden* (Karlsruhe: Museum für neue Kunst/Hatje Cantz, 2003), 93.

⁴⁵⁴ Paul Maenz and Christel Sauer, *Die Sammlung Fer - the Fer Collection* (Cologne: Gerd de Vries, 1983).

Even though the evolution of Conceptual art into regionally-based figurative painting was not followed by – or even visible to – the public, its story is important for us because it explains why, beyond the myths of rupture and commercial greed, painting was appearing in the venues of Conceptual art in the early 1980s.

4.2.4. Conclusion

Gachnang's provincialism, Oliva's European identity, and Maenz's new painting are exemplary of the discussions that emerged in Western Europe in the 1970s and made possible the comeback of Western European artists. The re-emergence of painting, like the stylistic diversity and historical references of much art in the early 1980s, was not simply the result of a change in taste or of commercial calculations; rather, it evidences the continuation of projects and discussions that had started in the 1970s but only became public in the early 1980s.

4.3. THE EUROPEAN OFFENSIVE: PUTTING EUROPE BACK ON THE MAP

By the late 1970s, everything seemed in place to permit a comeback for Western European artists: they were supported by a strong European support-system and their differences had been re-contextualized and repackaged in ways that allowed them to appear as contemporary by the standards of mainstream art. But to be recognized as important artists, something was still needed that could assert their existence and publicize the theories that supported them, which involved provincialism and artistic dialects. If it is impossible to reconstruct the exact succession of events that led to the return of European artists to the center of the artworld (is there actually anything like an exact sequence of events?), we can still consider the following aspects their comeback: the growth in visibility of West German artists, the promotion of new artistic

traditions, and the affirmation of aesthetic pluralism. We will also examine the different ways these phenomena could have been understood and misunderstood at the time.

4.3.1. The return of German art

In the early 1970s, there were a few internationally successful West German artists, such as Hans Haacke and Hanne Darboven, but their works were not identified in terms of their nationality. German art was still taboo, and so could the discourse surrounding it involve ideas of formal universality, as Rudi Fuchs explained:

The whole question of a German culture which was rooted in its own history remained, like Pandora's Box, firmly closed; few dared even to rattle the lock for fear of the specters that might be roused. In art, the question of nationhood has been side-stepped, at first by the politically acceptable ideas of emigration and "inner emigration" and later, in the fifties and sixties, by a warm and comforting wave of universal internationalism, orchestrated initially from Paris and later from New York.⁴⁵⁵

Joseph Beuys overturned this situation by creating works that were German not only in origin but also in content. At the Venice Biennale of 1976, Beuys created for the German pavilion *Strassenbahnhaltstelle* ("Tram Stop"), a reconstruction of a seventeenth-century monument from his hometown of Cleves, in front of which he used to wait for the bus. He remade this monument using discarded weapons of war and included the head of the former Cleves resident Anacharsis Cloots, who had participated in the French Revolution, and was beheaded. The work was dark, expressionistic, and made a profound impression on the public. In his review for *Burlington Magazine*, Simon Wilson described what he saw as the most powerful work in the Biennale that year:

In the large, echoing, apsed central space of the fascist-classical German pavilion, its peeling walls left unrestored on the artist's instruction, Beuys has installed *Tram Stop a Monument to the Future*. [...] A complex personal symbolism, relating to the artist's

⁴⁵⁵ Rudolf Herman Fuchs and ali., *Immendorff* (Rotterdam; The Hague: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen; Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1992), 17.

childhood attaches to this work but, approached with no knowledge of this, it functions with direct power as an intense and mysterious expression of Beuys's vision of a tragic and painful human condition, and [...] is instantly recognizable as a great work of imaginative art.⁴⁵⁶

With this installation, Beuys succeeded in making a work that addressed German history without alienating its international public, who appreciated it as a metaphor of the human condition, and did not dismiss it as "too German."

Following his noticed appearances in the United States in 1974 and his success at the 1976 Venice Biennale, Beuys was offered a retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition, which opened in November 1979, was crucial to the comeback of Western European artists, and of West Germans in particular. This was indeed the first exhibition of a contemporary German artist in such a prestigious New York venue, and, as we have noted repeatedly, Americans only noticed what happened in New York in this era. Beuys thus entered American critics' field of vision and became a subject of discussion for them through his retrospective. The journal *October*, for example, organized a panel discussion on Beuys that included Benjamin Buchloh, Annette Michelson, and Rosalind Krauss. Michelson noted that the event reflected how poorly informed Americans were on the situation in West Germany:

Rosalind and I came to a direct experience of the work of Joseph Beuys somewhat late. From what I know of developments in Germany over the last twenty years, I have the feeling that this work, which has had an extraordinary dissemination throughout Europe, must already have encountered a fairly coherent questioning and analysis, conceivably by German Marxists. Is that so? Are we not likely to rehearse many of the questions and reservations that the work has already elicited in German critical literature?⁴⁵⁷

The exhibition was widely discussed in the American art press: Kim Levin reviewed it for *Arts Magazine* in April 1980; Kay Larson in *Art News* in May 1980; and, also in May, Donald Kuspit

⁴⁵⁶ Simon Wilson, "Review of the Venice Biennale," *Burlington Magazine*, October 1976, 724.

⁴⁵⁷ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim," *October*, Spring 1980, 3.

devoted a long article to the artist in *Art in America*.⁴⁵⁸ These reviews featured illustrations of the works, and so increased viewers' recognition of Beuys.

The mainstream press was also curious about the German artist. On October 28, 1979, just before the opening, John Russell published a six-page article in *The New York Times*, in which he presented Beuys as a shaman artist and a "great European force." The author insisted on Beuys's German-ness: "He is to begin with profoundly and unalterably German. He has the pertinacity, the craving for absolutes, the intense poetic fancy and the gift for abstract formulation, which for centuries were fundamental to most of the German achievements which we held in honor."⁴⁵⁹ Russell concluded his article on the most laudatory note: "Alike as an artist, as a performer, as a politician and as an irreducible individual, he has tried all his life long to extend our notion of what it means to be a human being."⁴⁶⁰ Beuys had become the symbol for the resurgence of a German culture free of Nazi associations, the image of German culture that the Federal government there had been actively promoting in recent years.

If the Beuys retrospective allowed Americans to discover the artist's work, hinted that they may have missed important European developments over the past twenty years, for Europeans the show was a sign that times had changed: the American fortress was on the verge of surrendering. Remember that Oliva and others had presented Beuys as *the* European artist; *the* embodiment of European art. Consequently, his show symbolized for Western Europeans not only the emancipation of German art, but also of European art. As Rudi Fuchs has recalled, the exhibition's opening was a symbolic moment:

After the grand opening of Joseph Beuys's show at the Guggenheim Museum in 1979, we all went downtown to a bar on University Place. There a prominent American artist loudly complained that it was not right that Beuys had a show at the Guggenheim before

⁴⁵⁸ Donald Kuspit, "Beuys, Fat, Felt, and Alchemy," *Art in America*, May 1980, 78-99.

⁴⁵⁹ John Russell, "The Shaman as Artist," *The New York Times*, October 28 1979, 95.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

he had one. Then I knew that something had changed and that somehow, we would be equals again.⁴⁶¹

Beuys's exhibition gave German artists back the right to be artists – a right they had been deprived of first by the Nazi government and then by the discovery of Nazi crimes. His example opened up opportunities that had been unavailable since the 1930s. Furthermore, he showed that one could talk about German reality in one's art – could comment on Germany, its history, its past and present traumas. In doing so, Beuys created a space for artists like Baselitz, Lüpertz, Penck, Kiefer, and Immendorff, who were also dealing with German history.

Since the 1960s, Michael Werner had been promoting the works of these artists, trying to catch the attention of collectors and museum directors. In this endeavor, he had benefited from the early support of Wolfgang Hahn and Peter Ludwig, who were dedicated to collecting German artists, but it was difficult to impose German painting in the 1970s, as he explained to a French magazine:

Pour faire reconnaître mes artistes et les faire sortir du ghetto, j'ai progressivement développé une stratégie quasi-militaire. Je dois confesser que j'ai été quelque fois un peu trop agressif dans mon enthousiasme. Je n'ai pas hésité à harceler sans relâche les conservateurs de musées afin qu'ils exposent et acquièrent les travaux de mes protégés. La partie a été longue à gagner. Plus de 10 ans d'efforts incessants.⁴⁶²

Werner finally mastered the game in 1980, when two of his artists, Baselitz and Kiefer, were selected to represent Germany at the Venice Biennale. This gave them public exposure at a moment when the image of German art was shifting, thanks to the legacy of Beuys. Xavier Fourcade and Ileana Sonnabend, who already knew the work of Baselitz, were finally convinced that he was important, as Fourcade explained: "Then in 1980 he showed a sculpture at the Venice Biennale which was placed alone in the big hall of the German pavilion. It was amazing

⁴⁶¹ Fuchs, Weinberg, and Herrera, *Views from Abroad - European Perspectives on American Art I*, 29.

⁴⁶² Mercier, "Daniel Templon, Michael Werner, l'art et la manière."

– so strong – so fresh, so original, that I realized that here was really a first-rate artist, who could make sculpture of the same quality as his immensely impressive paintings.”⁴⁶³

The German-ness of Baselitz’s work, which had long kept him on the margins of the contemporary art scene, now became regarded as its strength and originality. There was, of course, some resistance to such national art. Prejudice against Germans still lingered, and because of the lack of information on these artists and their backgrounds, they were sometimes accused of being reactionary and even proto-fascist. Craig Owens, for instance, argued that Baselitz, Kiefer, Penck, Lüpertz, Immendorff, and Per Kirkeby were:

engaged in recycling the entire German Romantic reserve of folklore, symbolism, myth and cultural heroes (what Walter Benjamin called *Traumkitsch*). This is, of course, the same cultural baggage that was appropriated by National Socialist propaganda as evidence of a German national character, and the rhetoric of redemption that surrounds these painters’ work ultimately boils down to the attempted resurrection and revalorization of cultural traditions discredited by their association with fascism (This is also why their work is sometimes accused of being “proto-fascist.”).⁴⁶⁴

But even if it drew fire, German art at last existed again. Instead of being taboo, it was discussed and exhibited. In 1981, the Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris showed “Art Allemagne Aujourd’hui,” an exhibition of contemporary German art curated by René Block.⁴⁶⁵ Finally, in October 1983, the artworld came to Berlin for a grand exhibition of contemporary art at the Martin-Gropius-Bau. Organized by Joachimides and Rosenthal, “Zeitgeist” was less important for the works it presented than for the prominence it gave to German art. It also brought a huge crowd to the former German capital, which was then at the margins of the Western artworld. With this exhibition, German art was fully re-instituted.

⁴⁶³ Coppet and Jones, *The Art Dealers: The Powers Behind the Scene Tell How the Art World Really Works*, 184.

⁴⁶⁴ Craig Owens, “Bayreuth ’82,” *Art in America*, September 1982, 134.

⁴⁶⁵ Suzanne Pagé, *Art Allemagne Aujourd’hui: Différents aspects de l’art actuel en République Fédérale d’Allemagne* (Paris: ARC Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1981).

4.3.2. A new artistic tradition

In parallel to the resurgence of German art in the early 1980s, there was, as we have seen, the promotion of new artistic traditions. Johannes Gachnang had been advocating these *other* traditions for more than a decade, and their first publicly promoted exhibition came in 1981 with “A New Spirit in Painting,” organized by Rosenthal, Serrota, and Joachimides, who, as mentioned, had been connected to the Gallery Rudolf Springer in Berlin and thus to Baselitz and his cohorts. In the catalogue’s introduction, they explained that: “the three organizers of the exhibition feel strongly that the art of painting, whose recent history and development is far more complex and rich than has generally be acknowledged, is in fact flourishing.”⁴⁶⁶ Rather than presenting new painting, as its title suggested, the show was trying to tell an alternative story of contemporary Western art: to reclaim the tradition of figurative painting that had been excluded from the canon since the War. “A New Spirit in Painting” thus presented three generations of artists:

1. Picasso, Héliou, Freud, Bacon, Balthus, de Kooning, etc.
2. Warhol, Twombly, Merz, Kounellis, Kitaj, Baselitz, Lüpertz, Penck, etc.
3. Kiefer, Schnabel, Chia, Paladino, Clemente, etc.

The title and the comments used to publicize the show were ambiguous and did not indicate the curators’ ambition to rewrite recent Western art history. To attract visitors, the show had to promise something exciting: *new* painting. But, presented as such, “A New Spirit” was disappointing and heavily criticized. Overall, it included few new works by Picasso, Warhol, Baselitz, and Schnabel, even. *Art News* thus asked: “A New Spirit? – Or just a tired Ghost?”⁴⁶⁷ *Burlington Magazine* argued that the show overlooked painting that had occurred in the 1970s,

⁴⁶⁶ Joachimides and Rosenthal, *A New Spirit in Painting*, 11.

⁴⁶⁷ W. Feaver, “A New Spirit? - or Just a Tired Ghost?,” *Art News*, May 1981, 114-18.

such as Pattern and Decoration, Hyperrealism, and “bad painting.”⁴⁶⁸ Stephen Bann, reviewing the show in *Connaissance des arts*, was among the few to understand that the curators’ intention was less to present a new approach to painting than to revive figurative painting in the history of contemporary art. His article, judiciously titled “Repenser la peinture moderne?”, praised the curators for an original approach to contemporary art that went beyond traditional historical and conceptual categories: “It is both refreshing and productive to be able to trace these cultural cross-currents, and individual streams, when the more usual approach of the macro-exhibition is to corral the works in rigid national groupings (Venice), or to project upon them the vastly magnified image of the critical entrepreneur (Kassel).”⁴⁶⁹

Another instance of the promotion of *other* artistic traditions was the publication of *Hunger nach Bildern: Deutsche Malerei der Gegenwart* (1982). Because of its subtitle and its association with Paul Maenz’s gallery, this book has often been regarded as the manifesto of new German painting, but it is rather a re-evaluation of German painting since the war. As described earlier, Maenz, de Vries, and Faust had been drawn to reconsider their positions toward painting through the works of the Italian artists they had discovered at Sperone’s gallery. The young German painters they subsequently noticed in Cologne and Berlin led them to re-evaluate German painting since the War. Faust and de Vries thus went back in time to recover artists who had been overshadowed by the domination of American art. *Hunger nach Bildern* was a new history of German contemporary art written in light of recent developments, as the authors explained: “Durch die massive Wiederentdeckung der Malerei durch die junge Generation erhalten die Maler, die schon seit dem vergangenen Jahrzehnt tätig sind, einen neuen Kontext.”⁴⁷⁰ The book’s table of content clearly indicates that the “new” painting of the 1980s was not the

⁴⁶⁸ Richard Shone, ““A New Spirit in Painting” Review,” *Burlington Magazine*, March 1981, 182-95.

⁴⁶⁹ Stephen Bann, “Repenser la peinture moderne?,” *Connaissance des arts*, October 1981, 97.

⁴⁷⁰ Faust and Vries, *Hunger nach Bildern: Deutsche Malerei der Gegenwart*, 7.

central element of its study. While painters from the 1960s and 1970s were discussed in great detail, new artists were briefly covered at the end of the book:

Faust's and de Vries's *Hunger nach Bildern: Deutsche Malerei Der Gegenwart*

Die Deutsche Malerei nach 1945

Malerei als Malerei (Baselitz, Lüpertz, Richter)

Abstrakte Positionen (Graubner, Palermo, Knobel)

Bilder und Wirklichkeiten (Klapheck, Wunderlich)

Jenseits der Malerei (Penck, Immendorff, Kiefer, Polke)

Die 80er Jahre (Fetting, Dahn, Dokoupil, Kippenberger, etc.)

Giancarlo Politi's *Flash Art* was also aiming to rewrite the history of art. Browsing through 1980s issues of the magazine, one can see how the promotion of new painting went hand in hand with the re-evaluation of past artists who had influenced it. The January 1983 issue, for instance, featured essays on Jean Dubuffet, Filippo De Pisis, and Edvard Munch as well as articles on "New French Painting," "New Painting in Sweden," and "Recent Painting in Australia." Likewise, the May 1983 issue opened with articles on Francis Bacon and CoBrA, and ended with a consideration of Robert Longo's work, a study of Neo-expressionism, and an introduction to "Fresh Painting in Yugoslavia." These articles combined to redefine the history of Western art since the end of the War.

Over the years, Joachimides and Rosenthal continued in their project of rewriting art history. After "A New Spirit in Painting," they organized a series of exhibitions at the Royal Academy of Arts: "German Art in the 20th Century" (1985), "Italian Art in the 20th Century" (1988), "British Art in the 20th Century" (1987), and "American Art in the 20th Century" (1993). These historical exhibitions and the catalogues that accompanied them participated in a more general re-examination of contemporary art. In an interview with Faust, Joachimides analyzed his motivations for doing such exhibitions:

Ich glaube nicht, daß wir in einer Zeit leben, die postmodern ist oder eine Meta-Avantgarde signalisiert. Ich glaube vielmehr, daß ein falscher Begriff von Avant-garde und Moderne in einer fast terroristischen Aesthetik geherrscht hat, und es ist zu untersuchen, ob es richtig war. Ich glaube [...], daß es eine Chimäre und eine böse Interpretation von Kunstgeschichte ist, zu meinen, daß die Innovationen der letzten zwei Jahrzehnte „richtig“ waren, und plötzlich irgendwelches Nichtskönnen und noch Reaktionärereres angeblich die Kunst verunstalten.⁴⁷¹

Joachimides and Rosenthal wanted to defend these other artistic traditions, which the “official” story of contemporary art omitted on the grounds that they were not “right.” Such exclusions, they believed, resulted in a partial, restrictive, and thereby shaky understanding of contemporary art.

Joachimides, Rosenthal, de Vries, Faust, and Politi were among the Western Europeans who tackled the project of adding other stories to the history of Western contemporary art, thereby legitimizing the other traditions from which Western European artists were coming. Even though their intentions were often misunderstood and their stories did not supersede the dominant one, their efforts led to the re-evaluation of some artists who were then added to the official canon, or at least better noted.

4.3.3. The end of the universal language

The last aspect of the European comeback I would like to consider is the artistic diversity of 1980s art production. As we saw, pluralism was part and parcel of Gachnang’s theory of provincialism and Oliva’s definition of European identity.⁴⁷² With the 1982 documenta, curated by Rudi Fuchs with the help of Gachnang and Celant, the ideas that had been discussed by a small group of curators and artists got international exposure. Yet, instead of being critically received as an exhibition that attempted to break the stronghold of a restrictive, monist

⁴⁷¹ Wolfgang Max Faust, "Gespräch mit Christos Joachimides," *Kunstforum International*, December 1982.

⁴⁷² Here it must be noted that this pluralism was very different from the 1970s pluralism, which resulted from the diversification of artistic strategies and the integration of women and other minority artists to the canon.

understanding of modern art, “documenta 7” was generally seen as regressive, misogynist, anti-American, and chaotic.⁴⁷³

The most common grievance against “documenta 7” was that it constituted a return to order – moving back from advanced Conceptual art to regressive figurative painting. It was accused of rejecting the ideas that Szeeman and König had defended at “documenta 5” in 1972 and that Fuchs himself had promoted for years. To accuse Fuchs of betrayal is, I would argue, to misunderstand his agenda. Conceptual art was not absent from “documenta 7.” On the contrary, it was well represented through the Bechers, Art & Language, On Kawara, Gilbert and George, Hans Haacke, and other artists. Besides, the two major elements of the show were the homage paid to Marcel Broodthaers, who had recently died, and Joseph Beuys’s *7,000 Oaks*. Moreover, many of the painters included in “documenta 7,” like Baselitz, Penck, and Lüpertz, had started painting long before the emergence of Conceptual art and so were in no way reacting against it. As a matter of fact, Szeeman had included them in “documenta 5.” Finally, as explained earlier, the new painting had its roots in Conceptual art. So, objectively, the programming of “documenta 7” did not signify an attack on Conceptual art.

The second criticism leveled at Fuchs was that his selection underrepresented American art. He had assembled, as Max Faust put it, “Eine europäische Documenta.”⁴⁷⁴ Reviewing the exhibition in *Artforum*, Donald Kuspit agreed: “The Germans are given clear intellectual supremacy in the catalogue as well as a certain supremacy in the installation.”⁴⁷⁵ However, if one examines the list of artists exhibited, it appears that American art was by no means underrepresented: there were 51 American artists, 35 West Germans, and 20 Italians. Rather than

⁴⁷³ See for example: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Documenta 7: A Dictionary of Received Ideas,” *October*, Autumn, 1982. Owens, “Bayreuth ‘82.”

⁴⁷⁴ Wolfgang Max Faust, “Documenta: Haare in der Suppe,” *Kunstforum International* 53/54 (1982).

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, Donald Kuspit, “The Right Mind,” *Artforum*, September 1982, 64.

undermining American art, “documenta 7” can be seen more usefully as having paid particular attention to Western Europeans. The only underrepresented groups were female artists – both American and Western European, with no more than a dozen exhibited – and, of course, non-Western artists, but that is another story.

The third problem with Fuchs’s documenta was its apparent lack of curatorial concept and its purportedly mismatched presentation. The display of works in the rooms of the Fridericianum seemed, indeed, completely random: Kiefer, Long, and Warhol were shown in the same room, while Judd and Immendorff shared the next one.⁴⁷⁶ But what appeared at the time as indiscriminate juxtapositions were, I believe, the results of conscious and programmatic decision-making. The ambition of Fuchs and Gachnang was less to show the newest creations than to present a new way of thinking about contemporary art – hence the inclusion of artists who had gained prominence the 1960s but were still active at that time. As Rudi Fuchs explained in *Flash Art*, it is impossible to take a historical perspective on contemporary art, for there is no historical distance: “Art is no one long track from A to B, but a complex field of younger and older artists who exchange problems, inspirations, and impulses. It is an illusion to think that contemporary art has a history; there is no history.”⁴⁷⁷ Presenting artists in a linear fashion, as if they came one after the other, makes for inevitable inaccuracies. Why would Andy Warhol be consigned to the 1960s when he was still working in the 1980s? Why should his work always be shown alongside Lichtenstein’s and Rosenquist’s, when he had taken a very different path? Why shouldn’t we see Kiefer, Long, and Warhol in the same room if their works were made in the same years? For Fuchs, then, artists should not be corralled in a specific decade but presented in

⁴⁷⁶ Michel Compton, “Documenta 7 - Review,” *Burlington*, September 1982, Edit deAk, “Stalling Art,” *Artforum*, September 1982.

⁴⁷⁷ Paul Groot, “The Spirit of Documenta 7,” *Flash Art*, Summer 1982, 95.

a way that matches the creative diversity of real life. Instead of telling a linear story, then, the organizers of “documenta 7” aimed at “weaving a tapestry.”⁴⁷⁸

If “documenta 7” was reacting to something, it was most likely the idea of abstraction as a universal language that Werner Haftmann had promoted in 1959 at “documenta 2.” As Fuchs explained it, “documenta 7” was acknowledging the end of “the great common language of classicism. Everyone now speaks the dialect of his own tradition, speaks about himself and about his own history: the artists as well as the various co-organizers of this documenta: Johannes Gachnang from Switzerland, Gerhard Storck from Germany, Germano Celant from Italy and Coosje van Bruggen from America.”⁴⁷⁹ To move away from the universalist myth, one needed to present the maximum diversity. In the show, in consequence, pluralism had become not a movement but rather a tool used to react against years of paralyzing monism. In the catalogue’s introduction, Fuchs describes how the artists “flow together in this exhibition; they meet on the single river; but on this river all the ships carry different sails.”⁴⁸⁰

The confusion that visitors felt at “documenta 7” might thus properly be seen not as the result of a lack of conceptualization, but as a gap between the organizers and the public. Fuchs and Gachnang somehow failed at explaining their ideas to their audience, and in particular to the American public, which was largely unaware of Western European developments. From their perspective, “documenta 7” was promoting painting and thus reacting to “documenta 5,” while its organizers had intended to advocate art historical pluralism in order to take a stance against “documenta 2.”

⁴⁷⁸ Rudolf Herman Fuchs and ali., *Documenta 7* (Kassel: Druck Verlag GmbH, 1981), XV.

⁴⁷⁹ Groot, "The Spirit of Documenta 7," 92.

⁴⁸⁰ Fuchs and ali., *Documenta 7*, XV.

4.3.4. Conclusion

Despite all the misunderstandings that surrounded the different aspects of the European comeback, by the mid 1980s Western European artists had moved from the shadows to the spotlight. In 1986, the Venice Biennale re-instituted the Grand Prizes, which had been eliminated after the events of 1968, under the new name of Golden Lion. That year the international jury awarded the first Golden Lion Sigmar Polke, an artist whose work had been dismissed ten years earlier as “too German.” To be sure, this victory did not have the same impact as Rauschenberg’s in 1964, but it was a very symbolic moment for Western European art in terms of its prestige, and for German art in particular. Polke’s award recognized the many years during which he and his colleagues had existed only at the margins of the artworld.

Western Europeans were back on the map, but how they would be integrated into the canon of Western art and what the consequences of their comeback would be on the artworld remained uncertain.

4.4. UNCERTAIN RESULTS: CONSEQUENCES OF THE EUROPEAN COMEBACK

What happened after the excitement of the European comeback had passed? What were the outcomes of Western European artists’ return to the spotlight? Did it have lasting and significant consequences on Western contemporary art and art history? Or was it just a trend that quickly faded away? To understand the consequences of the European comeback, I propose to examine how these Western European artists were integrated into the canon of Western Art; to what extent the position of Western European in contemporary art then changed; and, finally, if and how that mythic comeback transformed the artworld.

4.4.1. The incorporation of European artists into the canon

To understand how Western European artists who achieved international recognition in the early 1980s were integrated into the Western canon and how their accomplishments were added to the dominant story, we can go back to the textbook examples we considered in the introduction. As we then noted, Harvard Arnason's *History of Modern Art* presents Baselitz, Lüpertz, Penck, Polke, and Kiefer in the chapter devoted to "The Retrospective Eighties," along with younger German and Italian artists such as Fetting and Chia⁴⁸¹ Arnason's presentation is typical of the way Western European artists are presented in American textbooks – namely, by the time, order, and context in which they appeared on the American scene.

In his study *Art of the Postmodern Era*, Irving Sandler also adopted the American point of view to tell this story, as his book's table of content shows:

Art of the Postmodern Era by Irving Sandler ⁴⁸²

Chapter 6: New Image Painting in the United States
Chapter 8: American Neoexpressionism
Chapter 9: Italian Transavanguardia and German Neoexpressionism
Chapter 11: Postmodern Art Theory
Chapter 13: The Art World in the First Half of the 1980s
Chapter 14: East Village Art
Chapter 15: Commodity Art, Neogeo, and the East Village Art Scene

In Sandler's book, Baselitz and Richter are presented in the same chapter as Clemente and Kippenberger because they appeared at the same time on the international art scene, which risks giving the false impression that they all belonged to the same generation. Likewise, Sandler introduces the Italians and West Germans after the American Neo-expressionists. This once again follows the order according to which these artists appeared before their American

⁴⁸¹ Harvard Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, (revised by Marla F. Prather) 4th ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998).

⁴⁸² Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (New York: IconEditions, 1996).

audience, while suggesting that the Western European artists followed their American counterparts' lead – even more so since they are presented under the same label of “Neoexpressionism.” Sandler, who was aware of the ideas developed by Gachnang, Oliva, Fuchs, and Faust – as his archives indicate⁴⁸³ – mentions these thinkers as examples of an “Anti-American Kulturkampf” in his chapter on “Italian Transavanguardia and German Neoexpressionism.” He does not see their ideas as relevant to the critical debates of the time, and omits them from his chapter on “Postmodern Art Theory,” which considers only the American critical debates of the editorial teams of *October*, *Artforum*, and *The New Criterion*. In his chapter on “The Art World in the First Half of the 1980s,” he discusses only the American artworld. The imbalance between the attention Sandler gives to the American and the European situations is further exemplified in the way he squeezes Western European art of that period into a single chapter, while devoting two chapters to the “East Village” – a mere neighborhood of streets in New York.

By drawing attention to the absences and imbalances of Arnason's and Sandler's accounts, my intention is not to criticize the authors but rather to demonstrate how, after the European comeback, the American perspective continued to dominate the narrative of the Western artworld within America. From this perspective, Western European artists had not been playing any significant role for the past forty years, and so when they reappeared in the 1980s, American art historians did not know what to do with them. They thus incorporated them as best as they could into their accounts, limited by their incomplete knowledge. The story they consequently told emerged as particularly unsatisfactory in the dimensions I have noted above. But could it have been otherwise? Could Americans have fully understood the “return” of Western European artists?

⁴⁸³ Sandler, "Irving Sandler Papers."

One anecdote exemplifies the problematic appearance of European artists on the American art scene. In December 1981, William Zimmer reviewed for *Soho News* all the exhibitions of German artists currently taking place in New York. The article, titled “Blitzkrieg bopped,” describes the impression of a sudden German invasion that the American public may have felt at the time. Penck was at Sonnabend, Lüpertz at Marianne Goodman, Baselitz at Fourcade, Solomé at Nosei, and Fetting at Mary Boone.⁴⁸⁴ The problem for Zimmer and his audience, however, was not just the swiftness of the German takeover, but also their overall lack of knowledge about these artists, who until then were almost completely unknown in New York. Even though Zimmer and other American critics were aware that these artists belonged to different generations, they had little background information on them beyond what their galleries were saying. Their galleries, of course, were focusing on the novelty and originality of the artists. For marketing purposes, Baselitz could not be presented as a 1960s artist, and so his work had to be packaged as new no matter what its historical provenance was. The simultaneous arrival of these Western European artists without any distinction between their generations and underlying programmatic concepts made the historical differences between a Baselitz and a Fetting, for example, unclear to Americans. The situation was actually even more complex since the Italian figurative painters had arrived earlier in New York than the Germans thanks to Sperone’s American branch. Italian Transavanguardia was thus perceived as having preceded German Neo-expressionism, which was indeed the case. The problem for art-historical reality was that Lüpertz, Baselitz, and Penck were lumped together in the all-inclusive German Neo-expressionist group, and clearly Chia did not precede Baselitz.

Part of the misunderstanding can also be attributed to the way Western Europeans presented their artists to the international public. As we saw, pluralism was an important

⁴⁸⁴ William Zimmer, “Blitzkrieg Bopped,” *The Soho News*, December 22 1981, 61.

dimension of the European comeback, which motivated the organization of several major shows in the 1980s, including “A New Spirit in Painting,” “documenta 7,” and “Zeitgeist.” Yet, for the international public in general and American viewers in particular, this diversity of artistic dialects could be rather confusing, causing them to take “pluralism” to mean a kind of stylistic randomness rather than the regionalism it was taken for in Europe. Besides, there was scant literature available in English about these artists, and what was available had usually been conceived specifically for its American market (as part of the European offensive); the literature thus focused on the contemporaneity of the works rather than on their position within history. Discussing this issue, Ronal Nasgaard wrote in the catalogue of the 1987 exhibition “The European Iceberg: Creativity in Italy and Germany Today” at the Art Gallery of Ontario:

Certainly, speaking of North America in general, current European art has not yet been seen in any larger meaningful context. When it first appeared it was through the auspices of a number of New York dealers. But as has often been pointed out, they quite naturally concentrated their energy on a small number of artists, with much reiteration and reputation building, leaving North Americans with an imbalanced perspective and largely ignorant of the careers of many other equally significant artists.⁴⁸⁵

As an anecdote, following “documenta 7” and “Zeitgeist,” where he had been intrigued by the new Western European art, Robert Pincus-Witten wrote to Paul Maenz, whom he had met at both exhibitions, to request all possible information on the European art scene of the past few years. He desperately wanted background information on the artists he had recently discovered and about whom he knew nothing.⁴⁸⁶

For all these reasons the American understanding of Western European art was limited and partial. All Western Europeans were regarded somehow as “new” artists and added to the canon as such. Doing otherwise would have required a complete rewriting of the history of art since the War – something nobody was willing or able to do in the United States. Instead, the

⁴⁸⁵ Celant, ed., *The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy Today*, 9.

⁴⁸⁶ Maenz, “Galerie Paul Maenz Köln Records, 1956-1991,” I,10,8.

official story remained the same linear, progression of styles, geniuses, and programs that had organized the presentations of artists and artworks for decades. The 1980s were thus presented as a period of rupture: the beginning of pluralism. Yet, pluralism wasn't considered to be a means of redressing art history – it was perceived more as a style of presentation, and the result of a new *Zeitgeist*.

I would venture to suggest that no profound rewriting of Western art history took place following the European comeback because of the non-Western attack on the canon in the late 1980s. Subaltern studies and post-colonial theories were challenging the Western canon's pretensions of universalism, and bringing exposure to non-Western artistic traditions. Just when Western Europeans finally won their battle against American domination, non-Western historiographic perspectives launched their offensives against the colonizing mentality of the United States and Western Europe. Western Europeans thus lost the opportunity to negotiate a better position for themselves in the canon. James Elkins could write *Stories of Art* (2002) before anybody had managed to deconstruct the story of Western art.

4.4.2. The repositioning of Europe in the contemporary artworld

In January 1982, John Perrault reviewed the events of the past year for *Soho News* and wondered about the new year: “Will the Europeans succeed in once again making world-class art? Will the Italian and German invasions of New York galleries – the French are coming! the French are coming! – really make a dent?”⁴⁸⁷ This was indeed an important question: what would be the long-term effects of the European comeback on contemporary art? Would Western European artists be able to hold onto the artworld's attention so that their works would continue to be seen as great?

⁴⁸⁷ John Perreault, "The Year in Pictures (among Others Things)," *Soho News* 1982, 42.

The Italian invasion, which was really just the invasion of Chia, Cucchi, Clemente, and Palladino, did not last long; by the early 1990s interest in their work had almost vanished. Articles and exhibitions on them became scarcer and scarcer. Chia, for instance, received tremendous attention in the early 1980s, before disappearing from the spotlight of international contemporary art. In 1983, twenty articles and catalogues were devoted to his work, he had ten solo shows, and was featured in twenty-three group exhibitions in galleries and museums throughout the world. In 1992, however, only one catalogue was published on his art, and he appeared in just four solo shows and one group show, which were mostly in commercial galleries.⁴⁸⁸ This decrease of interest can be better assessed using *Kunstkompass* ranking, which, despite some flaws, is a good indicator of media and institutional interest in artist's work. Chia ranked as the ninth most visible artist internationally in 1988, fell to number 21 in 1993, and disappeared from the list altogether after that. In 1988, Cucchi ranked fourth in visibility, but by 1993 had fallen to hundredth place. Palladino, who was listed as number fourteen in 1989, was no longer listed in 1993. Clemente was the only one in the group to remain in the rankings in 1993, and still he dropped from the top ten to forty-eighth place. Having moved to New York and being well connected to the American scene (remember his collaboration with Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat) certainly helped Clemente to remain at the center of attention.

Artists	1983	1988	1989	1992	1993
Baselitz	24	1	1	2	4
Richter	25	3	3	3	2
Polke	62	16	8	5	3
Penck	27	7	9	12	43
Kiefer	78	6	5	6	15
Immendorff	absent	33	32	27	47
Clemente	absent	5	4	8	48
Chia	absent	9	16	21	absent
Cucchi	absent	4	6	13	100
Palladino	absent	11	14	absent	absent

⁴⁸⁸ Information available on Chia's official website at: <http://www.sandrochia.com/>

Fetting	absent	81	95	absent	absent
From Bongard's <i>Kunstkompass</i> , 1983-1993 ⁴⁸⁹					

As for the ranking of German artists, we need to distinguish between the first generation promoted by Werner and the second generation promoted by Maenz. The second generation of painters received some attention in the first part of the 1980s, but it did not last. Rainer Fetting, one of the preeminent figures of that group, was one of the few members of the group to appear in *Kunstkompass* at the end of the 1980s but then disappeared, in a rise and fall similar to that of the Italian artists, though, the Germans never even reached the same level of success as the Italians. This difference could be attributed to a certain extent to the fact that the Italians' dealer, Sperone, had a gallery in New York where he promoted their work. In contrast, Maenz, the dealer for the young Germans, did not have a gallery in New York and thus had to find partner galleries to exhibit his artists – a difficult and less efficient system. The other impediment to the young Germans' visibility was their association with the older generation. If this association was problematic for the older generation because it transformed them somehow into 1980s artists, for the younger artists it set up unfair competition. Baselitz, Polke, Penck, and Lüpertz were mid-career artists with large bodies of work behind them, who had been supported by a committed group of critics, museum directors, and collectors for several years. In the United States, their work had both the attraction of novelty and the prestige of established careers. Besides, their dealer, Werner, had created a business partnership with the equally energetic Mary Boone before opening his own gallery in New York. This gave his artists more consistent visibility in the United States. (Richter's dealer, it should be noted, was Fischer, who had a gallery in New York with Sperone and Westwater.) For all these reasons, when it came to selecting new German artists, the older generation was the compulsory choice.

⁴⁸⁹ Adapted from: Linde Rohr-Bongard, ed., *Kunst=Kapital: Der Capital Kunstkompass von 1970 bis Heute* (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2001).

The first generation of West German artists thus did not disappear. They continued to catch the public's attention throughout the 1980s, and gained even more recognition in the early 1990s. In 1993, Richter ranked in second place in *Kunstkompass*, while Polke was in third and Baselitz fourth. Even today they remain at the center of international attention. In the 2007 *Kunstkompass*, Richter was at number one, Polke number three, Baselitz number seven, Kiefer number twelve, and Immendorff number thirteen.⁴⁹⁰ The success of German artists is not strictly limited to the first generation of painters, however. In the early 1990s, a new generation of German photographers emerged that included Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, and Thomas Ruff, who quickly came to be regarded as major figures of the decade. These "objective" photographers had studied at the Kunstakademie of Düsseldorf under Bernd and Hilla Becher, and were thus connected to the Düsseldorf Conceptual art scene and to the Fischer gallery, where some had shown. The German comeback was not brief in duration; it had lasting effects – unlike the French one.

In fact, to art historical memory, the French invasion Perreault announced never really happened. His article was referring to "Statements New York 82," a presentation of French artists sponsored by the French government that took place in New York in February 1982. The concept of the event was rather unusual and somehow unfortunate. It was not a single-venue exhibition of French art, but a simultaneous presentation of French artists in different galleries all over New York. Otto Hahn, who coordinated the event, had made a selection of artists from which American dealers could choose. Holly Solomon, for instance, exhibited the artists of Figuration Libre: Robert Combas, Rémi Blanchard, Hervé di Rosa, and François Boisrond.⁴⁹¹ The event was a failure and received bad reviews, such as Peter Schjeldahl's "Why New French

⁴⁹⁰ See 2007 *Kunstkompass* at: <http://www.capital.de/guide/kunstkompass/100006893.html?eid=100003842>

⁴⁹¹ Otto Hahn, *Statements New York 82 - Leading Contemporary Artists from France* (Paris: Les Presses Artistiques, 1982).

Art is Lousy” in *The Village Voice*.⁴⁹² The reasons for such a poor reception were threefold: first, a bias against French art was still fashionable; second, the presentation’s governmental sponsorship hinted that it was an overly official selection; third, the lack of engagement on the part of the American dealers involved – who seemed to have simply rented their spaces out to the French government – showed they were not really committed to the artists on display.

The second attempt at a French comeback took place in 1984 at the Musée de la ville de Paris, where Suzanne Pagé organized “S/S Figuration Libre France USA,” an exhibition that tried to connect the French Figuration Libre with American graffiti artists, such as Kenny Scharff and Keith Haring.⁴⁹³ Despite clear affinities between the French and the American artists exhibited, as discussed by Warhol and Ben Vautier in the catalogue, it was not a success. It had no international repercussions, and probably couldn’t have had any. A comeback could not start from Paris, Vautier was not Warhol, and Robert Combas would never be regarded as Haring’s equivalent. The show could only be dismissed as a (pathetic) French attempt to once again co-opt an American movement.

In the late 1990s, the French government commissioned a study of the international art scene to understand the reasons behind the poor reputation of French contemporary art. In the published results of this study, Alain Quernin insists on the growing importance of West Germany in contemporary art over the past twenty years.⁴⁹⁴ He demonstrates this phenomenon through the respective representation of American, German, Italian, and French artists in *Kunstkompass* between 1979 and 1997:

⁴⁹² Peter Schjeldahl, "Why New French Art Is Lousy," *Village Voice* 1982, 37.

⁴⁹³ Suzanne Pagé, ed., *S/S Figuration Libre France USA* (Paris: ARC Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1984).

⁴⁹⁴ Alain Quernin, *L'art contemporain international : entre les institutions e tle marché* (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 2002).

Country	Number of artists in 1979	Number of artists in 1997
United States	50	40
Germany	11	28
Italy	4	5
France	9	6

Looking at the results, the question arises of why German artists were able to hold onto the public's attention while the Italians fell out of it and the French remained invisible despite their government's support? One could simply argue that the works of Richter, Baselitz, Polke, and Kiefer were better and more interesting than the works of other Western Europeans. But, considering all that we have covered since the beginning of this study, such a simplistic answer is not convincing. Without underestimating the West Germans' merit, we still need to look beyond their paintings to account for their collective success.

I am convinced that German artists remained important on the international art scene because West Germans were so powerful and entrepreneurial within the Western artworld. West Germany had very forward-thinking dealers, committed collectors, and dynamic museum directors, who, thanks to the model of the Kunsthalle, were not forced to build permanent collections and could instead promote contemporary artworks. The West German support-system was efficient and flexible, and allowed all involved to play important roles in contemporary art. The recognition of West German artists thus spoke for the triumph of these support networks. In the same way that it became necessary in the late 1950s to recognize American artists because the artworld was dominated by American institutions and collectors, it was necessary in the 1980s to give German artists a position that would reflect the importance of West Germany within the artworld. The networks in each case launched the artists into the canon.

In France, the support-system was neither as efficient nor as flexible. In the early 1980s, following the election of François Mitterand, the new minister of culture, Jack Lang, implemented many significant reforms and pioneered important programs to promote

contemporary art in France.⁴⁹⁵ However, this institutionalized support was heavy-handed, and so could not compensate for the lack of private collectors. The French government started to buy art from French dealers, but it was not the same as private collectors buying international art from international galleries. As Philippe Dagen explained in *La Haine de L'art* (1997), the position of contemporary art in France remained precarious and marginal. French collectors hid their contemporary collections for fear of being misunderstood, so that there were no public models like Peter Ludwig and Karl Ströher in West Germany.⁴⁹⁶ Besides, museum directors continued to be selected exclusively from the pool of academics trained at the Ecole du Patrimoine, which prevented active promoters of living art from engaging in the institutional scene and, to a certain extent, on the international art scene.

Beyond the European comeback, what the 1980s involved was a rebalancing of power within the Western artworld, according to each country's weight and influence. West German artists were successful on the American scene in the early 1980s neither because people wanted painting (there were painters working in the United States at that time) nor because people wanted European art (the French, Scottish, and Scandinavians had not much success). They were successful because their dealers and collectors were powerfully and closely connected to the American scene.

Such a connection leads one to speculate about the consequences of present-day Russian collectors' growing power. Allow me to predict a Russian comeback in the coming years.

⁴⁹⁵ Georges Bernier, *L'art et l'argent - Le marché de l'art à la fin du XX^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1990), Raymonde Moulin, *L'artiste, l'institution et le marché* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992).

⁴⁹⁶ Philippe Dagen, *La haine de l'art* (Paris: Grasset, 1997).

4.4.3. The transformation of the Western artworld

If the European comeback led to a rebalancing of power within the Western artworld, as I am describing it, what were the consequences of this new geopolitical order for New York? Did New York lose its position as *the* center of attention for Western art? These were exactly the questions Hilton Kramer raised in a symposium he organized in 1986, “New York in the Eighties.” Not unlike the symposium organized by *Art Digest* in 1953 that had asked the question “Is French Avant-Garde Overrated?”, “New York in the Eighties” assembled artists, critics, and curators to discuss what they thought of the present position of New York in the artworld. Kramer described the concerns of the symposium:

It has been accepted for several decades now that New York is the artistic capital of the Western World, and that it will remain so in the foreseeable future. In all questions having to do with high culture, whether as a creative enterprise, as an object of critical scrutiny, or as an established institution, New York in the last years of the 1980s continues to occupy a place of unequalled leadership. Yet this position of dominance, while rarely questioned as a general proposition, no longer seems quite what it was even a few years ago.⁴⁹⁷

As Serge Guilbaut noted, the tone of the symposium resembled that of the discussions that animated the Parisian art scene when its hegemony was threatened by New York: the same need to convince oneself that one was still in control when the game was already over.⁴⁹⁸ The game wasn't necessarily entirely over, but the attendees' discussions showed more doubt than confidence in New York's ability to remain the center of the artworld, because, as Kramer explained: “In the visual arts the heralded new talents are today as likely to come from Germany, England and Italy as from New York.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Hilton Kramer and ali., "New York in the Eighties: A Symposium," *The New Criterion* 76 (1986): 4.

⁴⁹⁸ See “Introduction,” in Serge Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945-1964* (Cambridge; London: MIT Press, 1990).

⁴⁹⁹ Kramer and ali., "New York in the Eighties: A Symposium," 4.

Chuck Close pointed out that New York art scene was now (and had long been) a melting pot of international artists, and wondered whether New York's problem as an art center might be that it could not necessarily represent any one national program. Barbara Rose questioned the cultural preeminence of New York in related terms: "New York is a city for the consumers, not the producers, of culture."⁵⁰⁰ Richard Koshalek, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, judiciously commented that:

The very fact that *The New Criterion* has undertaken a national plebiscite on the subject of New York's claim to hegemony in the arts suggest that certain confidences and beliefs which are crucial to such claims may already have begun to waiver. Not that New York's status as a leading force in the art world can be reasonably questioned. But the notion of leadership itself in the context bears greater scrutiny.⁵⁰¹

The most interesting analysis came, to my mind, from Clement Greenberg, who considered that it was less about the decline of New York than the rise of other art centers: "Yes, there are now important centers of artistic production away from New York, not large but important. [...] These new centers of production may be provincial in location, but the art produced is not at all provincial."⁵⁰²

Although there were some common points between the situation of New York in the 1960s and that of Paris in the 1980s, the two are radically different when seen from the point of view I have been presenting here. The developments of both, to be sure, resulted in redistributions of power within the artworld. The earlier case involved a transfer of power from one city to the other, while the later is more accurately described as involving a redistribution of power among different centers. Following the European invasion, New York was not *replaced* by Cologne as the center of the artworld. Rather, the importance of Cologne was recognized. What changed in the 1980s was not the center of the artworld, but its internal organization.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.: 57.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.: 30.

⁵⁰² Ibid.: 18.

Before that decade, the artworld was a centralized network with a main hub (the center of the artworld, be it Paris or New York) and peripheral nodes that radiated from it. In the 1980s, the artworld was a more complex set of networks with several important hubs (New York, Cologne, London, Venice, Kassel, Paris, etc.) There were still multiple peripheries but no longer a single center. What were considered peripheries one day became pluralist centers (in the European sense of the term) the next, as Greenberg noted.

In this new organization, the center of the artworld was no longer a city, but a center of activity at a particular moment – be it through an exhibition series, a gallery, a museum, or a set of visible artists. In a world where communication and travel were becoming easier and cheaper by the day, the public’s attention was no longer bound to one particular point; now it moved from one center to another depending on what events were taking place where at any given time. A new way of collaborating in the artworld emerged that I would like to call, in homage to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a nomadic support-system; it replaced the gallery support-system.

“A new spirit in painting?” Well, not really. If there was a new spirit in the early 1980s, it was less in painting than in the artworld’s geopolitics and the link of that politics with institutional entities of various sorts.

4.5. CONCLUSION

To return to our original questions concerning the European comeback and the return to painting, we have clearly established that these events signified the end of the grand modernist narrative and the beginning of a transnational narrative. Yet, the story of contemporary art was not rewritten. The events that had happened in Western Europe, but had gone unnoticed in the

United States were not added to the existing story. Instead, starting in the late 1970s, Western European artists were simply added to the narrative in ways that maintained an American version of events. This lack of a rewriting to combat the persistence of the American perspective remained problematic for European artists like Baselitz and Lüpertz, whose models were not part of the canon; it was equally damaging to national narratives that it did not acknowledge – for example, it left a gap between artists who were valorized in their homelands and those taken up in New York as national representatives. In all such cases, the dominant American story did not provide any background for what might be called provincial works, which were therefore difficult to understand.

I am convinced that this is the cause of art history's recourse in the 1980s to vague narratives about pluralism, seen as a more or less confused mix of styles – a mix we have difficulty making sense of even today without access to the more informative kinds of context that I have tried to provide. The 1980s were pluralist because the Western European artists who appeared on the international art scene in that decade could not be appropriately incorporated into the American story. 1980s pluralism was, I would argue, a stopgap that emerged to cover up a profound historical and conceptual breach.

As Bernard Ceyson said in the text I quoted from in my introduction, the art history of this century remains to be written, but is this task possible?⁵⁰³ Could the dominant story of Western contemporary art be completely reshaped to accommodate Western Europe's under-recognized narratives, so that Baselitz would no longer be considered a 1980s artist and the works of the Western Europeans in that decade would not seem to have emerged from nowhere? This new history would involve completely reworking the chronology of the canon. And problematically, such a story would just be *my* story: *my* perspective on the events that took

⁵⁰³ Bernard Ceyson, "La Tradition Française," in *Jean Bazaine* (Paris: Sirka, 1990), 9.

place in the second part of the last century. It would never be *the* story of the contemporary artworld. There can only be stories.

Conclusion

To conclude this study, I would like to go back to some of the historiographic problems to which I have alluded throughout, and to propose some ideas for an art historical approach that could accommodate data of the sort I have been assessing here. Such an approach would lay greater claim to being a comprehensive narrative that moves beyond the narrow limits of nationalism to describe the scope of an era.

Analyzing the different stories of the Western artworld, the national/local ones appear, indeed, to be sharply limited. Not one offers an account of the events that took place in the second part of the twentieth century (concerning the fracture of the War or the European comeback, for example) that does justice to the real dynamics of art production and distribution in the era, mainly because the perspectives of the national/local historiographers were too limited and too partial. These individual national accounts are unsatisfactory in and of themselves; they require supplementary information to expand their perspectives: other national/local stories, as well as the stories of the vast fold of artworld participants. It is only through the combination of multiple perspectives that we can recapture the complexity of the field of art. This is why knowing just one national story is problematic, especially when that story does not acknowledge how a national story is a narrative predicated on one particular historiography and ideology.

The kinds of examples I have pursued also suggest why other stories should not be dismissed in favor of an official story that would erode all difference and present us with a single – and thus deficient – perspective. Although the dominant narrative of art history presents Pierre Descargues's life in Paris in the 1950s as irrelevant, I would argue that it actually constitutes a valid story of post-War artistic reality, which can complement other views on that period. The

French story I was taught at the Sorbonne is neither less nor more valid than the stories I learned in the United States and discovered in Germany. They combined, supplemented, and contradicted one another; from these gaps and differences, this project has emerged not just as a necessary corrective to the histories involved, but also as a kind of solution to writing art history in an age of globalization that purports to eschew older assumptions of nationalism and creative genius. Of course, it is impossible to know all the stories involved, but we can seek out a variety of them in order to understand and assess the cumulative narrative that needs to be told.

Such an examination also offers a glimpse into the way certain art centers come into power while others are eclipsed, and how geopolitical shifts influence the official canon of art history by affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of art. The hegemony of one center and the canon that comes along this particular power should, be questioned and examined in its historical and cultural contexts. Linda Nochlin's famous question "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" ought be posed for many other agents, events, and issues in the artworld.⁵⁰⁴ To be sure, even in this optic artists remain important, but not just in terms of their merit. They become considered great when the public values them for reasons that often have little to do with the actual artworks they produce.

World geopolitics shape and reshape the canon and its viewers, and what art historians have traditionally seen as stylistic shifts are often the results of events unrelated to the visual arts – accidents of other sorts, exploited by talented individuals. Discussing the differences in Eastern and Western German art history, for instance, Hans Belting has explained: "Russian art was a subject of serious study for East German art historians, much less for those in West Germany,

⁵⁰⁴ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *Art News*, January 1971.

while Italian art eventually became an exotic subject to study in the East.”⁵⁰⁵ Following Reunification in 1989, German values shifted, and art curricula, models, and tastes began to be decisively reformed, as well. Identifying such differences and understanding why the reception of artworks and art movements evolves over time and varies between countries and regions should be considered important to art historical inquiry. These matters concern the *reception* of art in the Foucauldian sense, as related to epistemes – not as judgments of taste. Telling the stories of such moments in a “national” (in this case, “German”) art history cannot be adequately achieved in narratives framed around simpler notions of *Zeitgeist* and taste. We must look for answers to our questions amongst a complex mesh of factors that include politics, economics, and aestheticism, as well as individual projects.

Establishing the genealogy of the official story of the Western artworld in national narratives that include moments of disjuncture, as I have done, allows us to understand the mechanisms of myth-making inherent in any study of cultural objects. We’ve seen how the facts of an object’s production and consumption are interpreted, and how they can disappear thus. Objective data – such as dates, places, and participants – are often completely transformed in the mythologizing process to the point of becoming unrecognizable. As Bernard Ceyson has said, the history of contemporary art chiefly reflects all the agendas of those who wrote it. It is a “histoire de militants, une histoire de conviction.”⁵⁰⁶ To unpackage the myths of contemporary art as a series of convictions originating in particular times and places and leading to acts and values gives us access to the motivations and perspectives of those militants, and thereby permits us to reconstruct the different *Gedankenwelten* in which art was created and interpreted and which form the complex reality of the artworld.

⁵⁰⁵ Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993), 37.

⁵⁰⁶ Bernard Ceyson, "La Tradition Française," in *Jean Bazaine* (Paris: Sirka, 1990), 9.

In the final account, there will always be stories: multiple stories of art rather than a single, totalizing history. Even as we try to encompass different stories, to keep our own national prejudices at bay, to question our canon, and to dispel the myths, the result will only be a story. This dissertation has been my interpretation – my story – of the events that took place in the artworld during the second half of the twentieth century. No individual historian's ambition can be to tell *the* story of the Western artworld, but it can be to enrich our understanding of contemporary art with new perspectives and by raising new questions for future discussion.

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Vita

Catherine Dossin was born on March 31, 1978 in Deauville, France. She completed her general studies at the Institution Frémont in Lisieux. In June 1996, she passed her Baccalauréat (Majors: Literature, Languages, and History) with High Honors. She then followed the French Hypokhâgne and Khâgne curriculum, specializing in Literature. She went on studying art history at the Université Paris IV Sorbonne, where she obtained a Deug d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art in June 1999 and a Licence d'Histoire de l'Art with Honors in June 2000. She received a Maîtrise d'Histoire de l'Art with Very High Honors in June 2001, with a thesis devoted to Andre Derain and the Return to Classicism, written under the supervision of Dr. Bruno Foucart.

In January 2002, she came to the United States to pursue a doctorate degree at the University of Texas at Austin under the supervision of Dr. Richard Shiff. After completion of all coursework and qualifying exams, she entered candidacy in June 2006. She received several grants and fellowships from the University of Texas and the department of Art History, which enabled her to conduct research in New York, Paris, Cologne and Düsseldorf. In May 2007, she went to the Getty Research Institute thanks to Library Research Grant, and in summer 2008, she spent two month in Giverny in the framework of the Terra Foundation's Summer Residency, where she completed her dissertation.

While pursuing her doctoral studies, Catherine Dossin worked with artists, curating shows, conducting interviews and writing exhibition catalogues. She was also involved in the Itinerant Laboratory For Perceptual Inquiry (an organization established by Katherine E. Bash in 2005), in which she serves as historiographer and President of the Board.

At the University of Texas, Catherine Dossin taught as a teaching assistant and assistant instructor, while furthering her interest in education and pedagogy by attending workshops offered by the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment at UT (DIIA), completing teaching certificates, and participating in several teaching colloquia. In September 2007, she was presented with DIIA's inaugural Graduate Student Instructor Award. During the academic year 2007-2008, she worked for the Instructional Technology Services of the College of Liberal Arts, developing an educational website for Professor George Doig, which presents today's medical terminology in its Greek and Roman cultural and artistic contexts.

In August 2008, she will join the art history faculty at Purdue University in Indiana.

Permanent address: catherinedossin@hotmail.com

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