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Contemporary Polish Art Seen Through the Lens of
French Art Critics Invited to the AICA Congress
in Warsaw and Cracow in 1960¹

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¹ The research leading to these findings has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013/ERC Grant Agreement No. 263560. We would like to thank the Archives de la Critique d'Art in Rennes for granting us access to their archival collections and libraries for the purpose of this research: www.archivesdelacritiquedart.org/ The chapter is translated by Sarah Tooth Michelet.

While the Cold War did not lead to armed conflict in Europe, it was essentially driven by an ideological opposition, a conflict between models of representation. Both superpowers utilised art as an instrument of soft power to propagate their own particular values. Art institutions and the cultural policy-makers of the 1950s tended to oversimplify the artistic context of the period by pitching abstraction in the Capitalist West against figurative representation in the Communist East. However, these forms of expression were not so clearly divided between the two dominant systems. On both sides of the Cold War divide, there was competition between different models of representation, combined with a borrowing and re-appropriation of terminology. At the International Meetings organised by the *Ownreality Research Project* in 2013, Sophie Cras showed how, in 1960, the art critic Pierre Restany gave the name “Nouveau Réalisme” to the movement he championed—a name that had already been adopted by a group of artists supported by the French Communist Party in the late 1940s-early 1950s, whose painting style was deliberately traditional.² She

² Sophie Cras, “Le Nouveau Réalisme: du réalisme socialiste au réalisme capitaliste,” *Own-Reality* (6), 2014, accessible online: www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/ownreality/6/cras-fr (English translation: “Nouveau Réalisme: From Socialist Realism to Capitalist Realism”: www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/ownreality/6/cras-en/view).

explained that by doing this, Restany reinterpreted the original meaning of the movement's name to support his promotion of "true" realism, which directly opposed the realism of the communists. Such re-appropriations are difficult for us to contemplate if we view the Cold War period as limited to direct confrontations. The directions followed were often not as clearly-defined as we imagine them to be. An event such as the International Art Critics' Association (AICA) Congress held in Poland in 1960 is particularly interesting from this perspective, as it allows us to examine what happened to these models of representation that were so critically important to the identities of the opposing systems at an event that brought representatives of the two blocs together.

This is what we aim to explore here, by paying particular attention to how the art critic Pierre Restany, founder of *Nouveau Réalisme*, responded to the event. It is only possible to analyse this if we understand the motivations of the Polish branch of the AICA at the Congress, and the extent to which the different viewpoints of participants were constructed in relation to each other.

What the Polish critics desired to show:

The AICA Congress as a reflection of the period of thaw

The 7th AICA Congress marked the first time since the Association's establishment in 1948/1949 that the event was held in a country east of the Iron Curtain. Affiliated with UNESCO as a non-governmental organisation in 1951, the AICA organises regular international gatherings of art critics from member countries based on a particular theme.³ So, from 6 to 15 September, art critics from around the world attended the congress in Warsaw and Cracow at the invitation of the Polish branch of the AICA led by Juliusz Starzyński.⁴

³ See *Histoires de 50 ans de l'Association internationale des critiques d'art: dédié à Abraham Marie Hammacher (1897-2002)*, Paris: AICA, 2002.

⁴ Stanisław Mossakowski, "Juliusz Starzyński," in *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 1976/11, pp. 5-8; Joanna Sosonowska, "Juliusz Starzyński (1906-1974)," in *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, t.XXXVI, PAN WDN, 2011; Marta Leśniakowska, *Władza Spojrzenia – władza języka. Juliusza Starzyńskiego obraz sztuki i jej historii*, "Modus.Prace z Historii Sztuki," T. XII-XIII (2013), pp. 27-52.

The programme presented by the Polish critics aimed to showcase the liberalisation of cultural life that Poland had enjoyed since the death of Stalin, during the period known as the Thaw (Figure 1.1–2).⁵ This is seen

⁵ See Rennes, Archives de la Critique d'Art, AICA Collection, Warsaw 1960, 7th Congress (Folder 1), programme of the *7th International Congress of Art Critics, VIIe congrès international des critiques d'art, VII międzynarodowy Kongres krytyków sztuki*; and Restany PREST. XS EST 49, a folder containing the typescript "Informations concernant les collections des musées et les expositions ouvertes à Varsovie et à Cracovie du 1 au 15 septembre 1960" (Information concerning museum collections and exhibitions open in Warsaw and Cracow from 1–15 September 1960), Rennes: Archives de la Critique d'Art, Archives of Pierre Restany. This folder contains details about exhibitions of historical and contemporary art provided to critics at the congress. Historical art exhibitions in Warsaw: *Polish Painting from the Mid-18th Century to the Present Day*; *Polish Prints of the 20th Century*; A Retrospective on the Work of Tadeusz Makowski (1882–1932) at the Warsaw National Museum, encouraging visitors to also explore the museum's collections of Medieval art, decorative arts from the 17th to 19th centuries and ancient Egyptian and Greco-Roman art; *The Early Days of the Polish State*, held at the State Archaeological Museum in celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the Polish State; an exhibition of documents presenting the history of the city of Warsaw from the 17th century to the present day at the City of Warsaw's Historical Museum; an exhibition of work by Juliusz Słowacki "honouring the life and work of one of the greatest Romantic poets," held at the Adam Mickiewicz Museum; *The Artist in Industry*, an "exhibition of works by students and graduates from the National Visual Arts Academies in Łódź (fabric and fashion design) and Wrocław (ceramics and glass work) held at the Zachęta Gallery run by the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions; *Folk Inspirations in Polish Industrial Design and Crafts* held in the foyer of the Warsaw National Theatre. Contemporary art exhibitions in Warsaw: the Fine Arts Gallery held an "an exhibition of paintings and prints by artists who took part in individual and group shows held at the gallery," curated by the Warsaw branch of the Union of Polish Visual Artists; *Confrontations 1960* at the Krzywe Koło Gallery; *Poland in Artistic Photography*, held at the Warsaw Institute of Technology, portraying "the life of the nation and its people and revealing the transformations that have taken place. This exhibition has a retrospective character, presenting an artistic review of work by members of the Union of Polish Art Photographers from the fifteen years following the war"; an exhibition hosted by the journal *Współczesność* presenting a selection of paintings by Marek Oberländer; an exhibition-sale of work by Henryk Musiałowicz at the Bristol Hotel; and an exhibition of paintings by Mieczysław Antuszewicz at the Klub Literatów (Writers' Society) – "As part of a series of popularisation activities initiated by the Union of Polish Visual Artists, these small-scale exhibitions are organised in various parts of the city, particularly in company clubs." Exhibitions held in Cracow: *Gallery of Polish Painting 1750–1895* at the National Museum, focusing on developments in Polish painting in the 18th century and its place within European art history, as well as on the work of Jan Matejko, leading Symbolist artists and Realists of the 19th century; the exhibition hall devoted to modern Polish painting at the new National Museum presented Polish paintings from the period of "Impressionism to the present day," with a room dedicated to painters working in the Impressionist style and the reaction to Impressionism, Symbolist painters and key examples from the "Young Poland" movement; the first twenty years of the 20th century, featuring the Realist move-

in their decision to include exhibitions held in galleries that had opened as a result of the Thaw, such as the Krzywe Koło and Krzysztofory Galleries.⁶ It is also reflected in the catalogues signed by Aleksander Wojciechowski, editor of the Warsaw-based art journal *Przegląd Artystyczny*, which documented artistic debates of the period. Certain aspects of their discourse on abstraction and the theme of the congress itself are indicative of the period of liberalisation that was underway in the political arena.⁷

The theme of the AICA Congress

We must therefore consider the theme of the 1960 AICA Congress—whose title was “Modern Art as an International Phenomenon”—within the context of the Thaw and the promotion at that time of a non-uniform image of socialist culture. When Juliusz Starzyński suggested holding the congress in Communist Poland to the Association’s president James Johnson Sweeney during the 1957 AICA Congress in Palermo, with the idea of debating “the international character of modern art and the role of the different domestic environments in the creation of this art,”⁸ it an-

ment dominated by the Colourists, a large collection of works by Olga Boznańska and landscapes from the “Young Poland” movement; sculptures by Xawery Dunikowski; Polish painting from 1912 to the present day, tracing issues “From Formalism to the work of T. Makowski and F. Kowarski, among others,” the Colourists and the most recent painters from Cracow (names are not mentioned); sculptures and paintings from the Szolayski House collection; the Czartoryski collection; national art collections from the Wawel Royal Castle; an exhibition of traditional and contemporary folk art at the Ethnographic Museum; an exhibition of contemporary Polish prints at the Fine Arts Palace organised by the Union of Polish Visual Artists, presenting an overview of work in this field from the two previous years; the Krzysztofory Gallery presented *The Cracow Group*; and the Exhibition Centre presented work by the *MARG* group.

⁶ Witold Jedlicki, *Klub Krzywego Koła*, Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1963; Galeria “Krzywe Koło,” ed. J. Zagrodzki, Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe, 1990; B. Wojciechowska, “Marian Bogusz i Galeria ‘Krzywe Koło,’” in *Marian Bogusz 1920–1980*, Poznań: Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, 1982.

⁷ On the effects of the period of Thaw on the Polish art scene and the gradual process of liberalisation, see *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.*, exh. cat., Poznań: Muzeum Narodowe, Sztuki Współczesnej Gallery, 1996, in particular, the essay by Piotr Piotrowski, “The ‘Thaw,’” pp. 243–259.

⁸ See Juliusz Starzyński, Introduction to the typescript “VII Congrès International des critiques d’art Varsovie-Septembre 1960. L’Art – Les Nations – L’Univers. Enquête internationale, Section Polonaise de l’AICA” (7th International Congress of Art Critics, Warsaw, September

nounced the position he would defend during the exhibition *Art in Socialist Countries* held in Moscow in 1958. This exhibition caused a major stir and was condemned by the Soviet authorities as a “betrayal of socialist ideology and aesthetic values.”⁹ At this exhibition, Starzyński desired to show works that drew inspiration from the sources of modern art, notably from the Colourist School, which used forms that contrasted sharply with Socialist Realist works. Drawing upon Marxist-Leninist terminology, he thus asserted his position in favour of a “national path towards socialism,” of a renationalised socialist Polish art.¹⁰ At the Warsaw Congress in 1960, he brought an international dimension to this debate, as well as increased visibility and credibility by bringing it to the attention of Western critics. Starzyński felt it was important—without calling into question the socialist system—to assert Poland’s freedom to choose not to conform to Moscow’s perception of international art as restricted to a single style.¹¹

The thaw at the core of the exhibitions: the reality of abstraction

Indications of the Thaw are also apparent in the texts that accompanied the exhibitions, such as the *Confrontations* show held at the Krzewy Koło

1960. Art – Nations – Universe. International Survey, Polish Branch of the AICA), p. 1, Rennes: Archives de la Critique d’Art, AICA Collection.

⁹ Katarzyna Murawska Muthesius “Paris from Behind the Iron Curtain,” in Sarah Wilson et al. (eds.), *Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900–1968*, exh. cat., London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002, p. 258.

¹⁰ Starzyński declared: “The art from twelve socialist countries presented at the Moscow exhibition does not, and cannot, convey a uniform image. We must look to history to understand the reasons for this, namely, the varying conditions of social and economic development, which are the result of differences in consciousness and which influence the current artistic situation in each country in specific ways.” [“Dyskusja nad wystawą sztuki krajów socjalistycznych,” *Życie Literackie*, 1959, No. 14], cited in *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.*, exh. cat., Poznań: Muzeum Narodowe, Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej, 1996, in the essay by Piotr Piotrowski, “The ‘Thaw’,” pp. 243–259.

¹¹ Starzyński’s position was made clear at the congress’s second work session led by Giulio Carlo Argan on the theme of “Modern art as the result and expression of the multiple traditions and approaches of different peoples,” at which he stated that “Only those artists who associate themselves with the historical reality of their own people, while at the same time participating in the mainstream movement of their era, will have a lasting presence in the history of art,” illustrating his arguments with examples from Polish art. See Rennes: Archives de la Critique d’Art, AICA Collection, Warsaw 1960, 7th Congress (Folder 1), programme of the *7th International Congress of Art Critics, VIIe congrès international des critiques d’art, VII międzynarodowy Kongres krytyków sztuki*, *Bulletin* No. 3, n. page.

Gallery in Warsaw. The publication released with this exhibition includes a collection of excerpts from the gallery's catalogues from previous exhibitions held in 1960.¹² Polish abstract art is presented as participating in the international art scene: a connection is drawn between Tadeusz Dominik's work and the international travel of the Action Painting artists in New York is documented, and high-quality texts describing works in great detail were made accessible by being translated into French. One striking feature of these descriptions is the frequent use of the word "reality" in reference to abstract practices. This is, however, not the same view of the reality of abstract art as was formulated by Western critics, such as Werner Haftmann, to describe its autonomous, spiritual dimension and give tangible content to non-figurative art; a reality that was seen as distinct from the mimetic, material reality attributed to realism.¹³ Instead, it was an endeavour to identify a subject whose representation was the focus of abstract work by artists such as Marian Bogusz and Tadeusz Dominik and whose treatment justified their abstract approach. To quote from one of these texts: "Five years ago, during the exhibition entitled *Group 55* in which Marian Bogusz took part, we were struck by the notion of space that was explored with such intensity in this artist's paintings. This space was described as an imaginative, "philosophical" space filled

¹² This publication gathers together catalogues of exhibitions by the painters Marian Bogusz, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Tadeusz Dominik, Stefan Gierowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Bronisław Kierzkowski, Adam Marczyński, Jerzy Nowosielski, Jan Tarasin, Jerzy Tchórzewski and Rajmund Ziemiński, and the sculptors Tadeusz Łodziana, Alina Szapocznikow, Alina Ślesińska, and Magdalena Więcek, *Konfrontacje 1960*, exh. cat., Warsaw: Krzywe Koło Gallery, 1960.

¹³ Under the direction of *documenta* founder Arnold Bode, Werner Haftmann was responsible for formulating the art-historical discourse and the ideological position of the first three *documenta* exhibitions in Kassel – *documenta I* (1955), *II* (1959) and *III* (1964) – which helped to communicate his point of view to the general public. Haftmann is also author of a highly successful book, *Painting of the Twentieth Century*, which focuses on Western art practices. This book was republished many times, originally published in German: Werner Haftmann, *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1954. See, in particular, Haftmann's Introduction to the 1955 edition. On the subject of Werner Haftmann, see Harald Kimpel, "Werner Haftmann und der Geist der französischen Kunst," in Martin Schieder and Isabelle Ewig (eds.), *In Die Freiheit geworfen. Positionen zur Deutsch-französischen Kunstgeschichte nach 1945*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006, pp. 129–150. See also Gregor Wedekind, "Abstraktion und Abendland," in Nikola Doll et al. (eds.), *Kunstgeschichte nach 1945. Kontinuität und Neubeginn in Deutschland*, Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2006, pp. 165–181.

with thoughts rather than objects. Yet it was also a real space, which was just as real as the artist's intellect.¹⁴ Space in Bogusz's work was seen as an object of representation (Figure 1.3–1.4), as were the forms and colours of nature in Dominik's paintings (Figure 1.5–1.6). Representation was thus seen to preserve its mimetic connection with a referential physical reality, from which it could never fully break free. The progression of Socialist Realist figurative artists towards abstraction was thus presented in a form that was acceptable to Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Through these texts, Wojciechowski ensured a sense of continuity, and, like Starzyński in Moscow, allowed for the possibility of integrating abstract practices into Marxist-Leninist phraseology. The term "afiguratism"—or "afigurative" art—was employed to clarify the situation. The use of this term, which was borrowed from the French communist art critic Raoul-Jean Moulin's review of the Polish section at the Paris Biennale in 1959, made it possible to avoid using the word "abstraction"—and even implied its opposition to abstraction—and ensured that Polish art practices did not conflict with the mimetic representational requirements of the realist doxa.¹⁵ It was a rhe-

¹⁴ Cat. Marian Bogusz, in *Konfrontacje 1960*, exh. cat., Warsaw: Krzywe Koło Gallery, 1960.

¹⁵ Wojciechowski made reference to "afigurative painting" in an article published in the journal *Przegląd Artystyczny*, in which he reported on the 1st Paris Biennale: "At the Biennale, victory has been claimed by the opposite movement to that of abstraction, a movement defined by some critics as "afiguratism." The Polish section's exhibition, among others, was seen to be associated with this movement. I take this opportunity to quote from a viewpoint that is representative of reactions to our exhibition: "References to the real are constant, revealing an imaginary space in the work of Teresa Pągowska and inventing curious blossoming forms in the work of Tarasin. Yet the artists refuse to express these references in the usual ways; a movement, a climate or a colour interest them more than representing or interpreting reality. In this way, Ziemiński brings forth in front of our eyes streaks of red, yellow and green set against earthy backgrounds that are delicately worked and infinitely evocative. Furthermore, the extreme refinement of materials in the work of Gierowski and Kierowski, and, particularly, the highly structured symbols in the work of Lebensztejn, which are created through an endlessly diversified treatment of thick textures, are far from gratuitous. These paintings express the new reality of these artists' lives with a proud commitment to aesthetic values," writes R. J. Moulin in "Les Lettres Françaises" (No. 793). The term "afiguratism" attracted the attention of art critics for some time during this period. It was mentioned in the same issue of *Przegląd Artystyczny* in a text by Mieczysław Porębski, which describes the Polish paintings presented at the São Paulo Biennial in similar terms (pp. 70–71 of the same issue of the journal, "Biennale in Sao Paulo"), as well as in an essay by Tadeusz Dominik published in the catalogue produced for the Krzywe Koło Gallery.

torical strategy directed against the standardisation of an exclusively Western concept of abstraction.

In this way, the question of the international dimension of art and the Polish critics' views on abstraction were profoundly influenced by the specific socio-political context of the Thaw era. The archives of the AICA contain transcripts of debates held at the congress. They conclusively prove that critics from Western Europe and the United States showed no particular concern for these issues. They did not consider that their own perception of internationalism could be challenged by an alternative model that embodied different values. No mention was made of art scenes east of the Iron Curtain, apart from Poland, and the brief references to realist practices portrayed them as anachronistic.¹⁶ The desire of certain artists to return to traditional sources or national references as a means of breaking free from a totalitarian perception of internationalism was not addressed.

Pierre Restany's point of view

Nonetheless, a close examination of the personal archives of Pierre Restany reveals a more complex situation.¹⁷ Restany was well aware of the implications of the period of Thaw, as well as the intentions of its representatives to support developments in artistic practice while remaining loyal to communism. He fully understood what the terms "international-

¹⁶ Jean Clarence Lambert, "The greatest hope for modern art is that it has rediscovered a sense of the universal," in typescript "VII Congrès International des critiques d'art. Varsovie-Septembre 1960. L'Art - Les Nations - L'Univers. Enquête internationale, Section Polonaise de l'AICA," pp. 46-47, Rennes: Archives de la Critique d'Art, AICA Collection.

¹⁷ See the handwritten document "Notes de voyage. La Pologne et la tentation de l'Occident," signed and dated "October 1960, Cannes"; typescript "La Pologne et la tentation de l'Occident," Nov. 1960; handwritten document "La Pologne en plein tachisme," Paris, 11 November 1960; typescript "La Pologne et la tentation de l'Occident," n.d. [1964], grouped together in the report on the trip to Poland for the AICA Congress in 1960, in the Folder entitled "La Pologne et la tentation de l'Occident," Nov. 1960, see Restany PREST. XS EST 55; texts published in *Cimaise*, January-February 1961, under the headings "Notes de voyage: Pologne-Tchécoslovaquie," pp. 78-90, and "Le VII Congrès de l'AICA," pp. 96-99; and in *Das Kunstwerk*, under the heading "Die Situation der Kunst in Polen," February 1961, Notebook 8/XIV, pp. 16-22. Restany's trip to Poland is described by Henry Meyric Hughes in "Pierre Restany, l'AICA et l'aventure est-européenne," in *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*, Richard Leeman, ed., Paris: INHA, Les Editions des Cendres, 2009, pp. 387-401.

ism” and “figuration” meant to the Polish critics. But rather than giving particular consideration to the topics presented by the Polish critics, he interpreted them according to his own modernist, progressive viewpoint. Polish artists’ return to embracing national traditions was seen as archaic.¹⁸ In Restany’s opinion, art should not be considered as a manifestation of the national psyche. He believed that art practices driven by a search for a Polish identity had no place in any modern tradition. His writings combine historical accounts and discussions of contemporary art, through which he portrays an image of Poland as peripheral and backward, a nation whose identity was defined by sources from a past era.

Poland is presented as an epigone, or inferior imitator, of France and the United States—which Restany saw as the two hegemonic powers in the art world—a view he reiterated in the discussions held during the congress. He considered Poland to be provincial, marginal, and the particularities of the socialist system and the national characteristics he mentions—Catholicism, a young nation, romanticism—in no way alter his interpretation of Polish abstract art in terms of Western models. Poland is viewed exclusively through the prism of what he perceives as the cutting edge of international art, which he limits to the work of French, American, German, Italian and Japanese avant-garde artists in the Dada tradition.¹⁹

¹⁸ Archives de la Critique d’Art, “Le VIIe congrès de l’association internationale des critiques d’art,” PREST-XSEST57/23. In a report on discussions held during the congress, Restany clearly expresses his views on the subject of returning to tradition. He explains that during the three work sessions, which were “led, respectively, by Jacques Lassaigue (France), H. L. C. Jaffé (the Netherlands) and G. C. Argan (Italy), debate arose around the general issue of expressiveness: is modern art an international language in itself (in its spirit and purpose) or does it identify itself as the transcendental sum total of diverse traditions? A trend appears to have emerged from these discussions favouring the search for a renewal of art through a return to the primary elements of national tradition. This is the justification today for so many cases of artistic nationalism and explains why we see such a proliferation of cultural inferiority complexes. Yet tradition has always stifled new art, and it is only by breaking free of the straitjacket of localism that geographically localised art movements have been able to play their historical role to the full. However, it would be futile to expect any avant-garde proclamations from a congress (held by the AICA or any other organisation).” Restany, see Archives de la Critique d’Art, “Le VIIe congrès de l’association internationale des critiques d’art,” PREST-XSEST57/23.

¹⁹ Restany’s responses to questions in a survey sent out by Starzyński prior to the congress, in which he states his opinion regarding the theme of the Congress, provide some clarity on these questions. Only Lyrical Abstraction and the Dada movements are described by Restany as international movements, with geometric abstraction eliminated from consideration as it had

Poland's presumed allegiance to the West therefore did not prevent it from remaining backward, since Polish artists had not realised that Lyrical Abstraction and Tachisme had already been replaced by new practices.

In 1960, Restany believed that he had progressed beyond abstract painting. After seeking to assert his critical view of Art Informel over that of other critics, such as Michel Tapié, Julien Alvard, Charles Estienne and Michel Ragon, he turned his back on abstraction and focused on building the reputation of the group of artists he named Nouveaux Réalistes, for whom he wrote a manifesto in April 1960.²⁰ Restany's disparaging comments about Polish Art Informel cannot only be attributed to the country's "backward" state; they primarily reflect his dissociation from abstraction. Restany was no stranger to the rhetoric of Polish art critics, who drew their references from the Parisian communist press. At the time of the AICA Congress, he was fully aware that the abstraction/figuration polarity no longer carried the same messages. Communist doctrine had evolved with the Thaw, and Restany had no alternative but to dismiss that which communism now tolerated. His position was fuelled by antagonisms resulting from the Cold War, and his views on art and the practices he defended were radically opposed to communism.

When Restany founded Nouveau Réalisme in 1960, the effects of the Thaw were discernible in Eastern Europe, and some Eastern states began to accept abstract art. Yet abstraction had already ceased to embody the values of independence, freedom and subjectivity that the West sought to represent. In founding this movement, Restany was motivated by a strong desire to distance himself not only from abstraction, but also from all that communism had appropriated.

Furthermore, it is important to consider why Restany gave only cursory mention to geometric abstraction and paid little attention to the ironic and

rapidly reached "the peak of its international expansion, [...] having at the same time become ossified and conformist," with its "precarious dominance" overthrown by pictorial lyricism, which came to the fore after 1945. See Rennes: Archives de la Critique d'Art, AICA Collection, Warsaw 1960, 7th Congress (Folder 2), Pierre Restany, "L'art moderne, langage international du lyrisme et de l'irrationnel," in "L'Art - Les Nations - L'Univers. Enquête internationale, Section polonaise de l'AICA, Varsovie, 1960," pp. 14-20, p. 15.

²⁰ See, Richard Leeman (ed.), *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*, Paris: INHA, Les Editions des Cendres, 2009; Richard Leeman, *Le Critique, l'art et l'histoire: De Michel Ragon à Jean Clair*, Rennes: Les Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010.

dark side of Polish art practices, which he would have observed in a performance staged by Miron Białoszewski at his apartment, and at Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre.

Restany's understanding of "international" art—which, as we have seen, was far from complete—did not include geometric abstraction or the sense of post-utopian melancholy, or eccentricity, that were expressed by some Polish artists. These forms of expression embodied values that Restany refused to acknowledge as part of contemporary art. His criticism of the "the pessimism of the immediate past"²¹ and his campaign for an optimistic, constructive and progressive outlook led him to take a dim view of the way in which Warsaw chose to come to terms with its destruction.²² Moreover, the theme of destruction, which was so prevalent in Polish art practices, was not referred to anywhere else in his writings. Restany vir-

²¹ "Working in various ministerial offices placed me in a good position to assess the pulse of the nation and the national structures of production. The end of the 1950s marked the end of the period of reconstruction and the onset of economic growth, the beginning of the great technological adventure into space. [...] In other words, I opted in favour of optimism, [...] in reaction to the pessimism of the immediate past." Restany, 1960: *Les Nouveaux Réalistes*, Paris: MAMVP, 1986, p. 267. Jill Carrick eloquently explains how the *Manifesto of Nouveau Réalisme* and other essays offered a "new" vision of a "new" France, a France of the post-war period that was revitalised and full of optimism and energy, turning away from the defeat, humiliations and tragedies of the war. With Charles de Gaulle proclaimed first president of the 5th Republic in January 1959, and again on his re-election in 1965, the new regime endeavoured to detract from the internal conflicts that had disrupted France during and following the war. This was articulated through the propagation of myths of the promotion of social cohesion and national unity. See Jill Carrick, "Vers un art de l'intégration?," in *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*, Richard Leeman, ed., Paris: INHA, Les Editions des Cendres, 2009, pp. 77–88, p. 82 (English title: "Towards an Art of Integration?," published in the proceedings of the 2006 international symposium "Pierre Restany's Half-Century," INHA).

²² "Since 90 % of the city centre and the main districts had been destroyed, it was the last chance to follow the course of history and officially list the site as a commemorative monument, and to reconstruct a new capital at another location as a symbol of renewal. But nationalist sentimentalism won the day—Warsaw was reconstructed on its original site and the Old City was rebuilt stone by stone based on sketches by Canaletto (produced around 1770). These reconstructed facades bring to mind a theatre set that is artificial and soulless, dehumanised, just like the metaphysical cities of de Chirico. Elsewhere in the New City, the Baroque churches of Visitandines and Sursum Corda offer a strange contrast with the MDM block (a Socialist Realist architectural ensemble), the Muscovite-style Palace of Culture (a gift from the Russians) and the housing developments in the suburbs, which are still new but on the verge of collapse. All of these inconsistencies in town planning, which make Warsaw one of the most depressing cities in the world, reflect the intellectual uncertainties of the nation." Typescript "La Pologne et la tentation de l'Occident," Nov. 1960.

tually ignored Polish geometric abstraction, which, according to him, never took hold in an enduring way. Constructivism was described as a temporary phenomenon that, in Restany's view, could not compete with the deeply-entrenched influence of France on Polish art. While reasserting his state-hegemonic view of the situation, he discredited the legacy of Russian Constructivism, which is perceived as digressions from the main currents. In this way, Restany relegated all revolutionary art practices to the fringes of the international movement. The primary aim of his contribution to art theory was to disengage "avant-garde art" from the role of social confrontation, as shown by Jill Carrick in her essay, "Vers un art de l'intégration?" [Towards an Art of Integration?].²³ The Polish artists who captured Restany's interest were defined as "non-activists" (non-engagés in French)—as opposed to the "intellectual communists"²⁴—who followed in the tradition of the interwar French Colourists. While Restany's evaluation of the Polish art scene was highly influenced by his personal convictions, it can only be fully understood by taking into account the stance of the Polish branch of the AICA.

The 1960 AICA Congress was held at a particularly interesting moment in history, when major shifts in East—West relations were beginning to take effect. It exemplifies the end of the abstraction/figuration dichotomy that had dictated the artistic identities of the opposing blocs. It offers a picture of the Thaw era, while bearing witness to the deterioration of gains made during this period of liberalisation. Although Polish artists' increasingly apparent interest in modern modes of expression had been more willingly accepted since 1956–1957, these practices met once again with disapproval after the *Art of Socialist Countries* exhibition in Moscow in 1958. Even if it was out of the question for the Polish authorities to change their policy on the small degree of independence from the USSR that had been obtained by Poland's leader Gomułka after intense negotiations with Khrushchev in the wake of the insurrection of October 1956, they had no intention of extending this freedom. After Gomułka had reaffirmed his faith in Marxist-Leninist principles at the Polish Party Congress in March

²³ Jill Carrick, *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany (Pierre Restany's Half-Century)*, Richard Leeman (ed.), Paris: INHA, Les Editions des Cendres, 2009 (note 21), pp. 77–88.

²⁴ Typescript entitled "La Pologne et la tentation de l'Occident," Nov. 1960.

1959, the guidelines issued by the Soviet Central Committee one year later explicitly expressed the Polish United Workers' Party's loyal support for realist art. The art journal *Przegląd Artystyczny* changed its editorial board, with its new editor, Helena Krajewska, an ardent supporter of Socialist Realism from its very inception. The same year, Starzyński was removed from his position as director of the Instytut Sztuki Pan, which he resumed in 1968 after the dismissal of Jerzy Toeplitz. In 1960, the Polish government enacted a restriction that no more than 15 percent of artworks in public exhibitions could be abstract. Although this Directive saw limited compliance, it remained in effect until the collapse of the socialist system in Poland. The AICA Congress was thus held at a pivotal moment. It reveals a prism of complex relations between art critics from the East and West as they focused on a common subject (Art Informel) and expressed their own perspectives, demonstrating at times their interdependencies (such as the fact that both Restany and the Polish critics were familiar with Raoul-Jean Moulin), which threatened to aggravate existing antagonisms. Furthermore, by turning our attention to the artistic debates that took place within a divided Europe, we are able to take into consideration the fragile interrelationships, the subtleties of viewpoints and the interactions that were played out on the frontline of the Cold War, which were of a different nature to the relations that existed between the two rival superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. This interpretation of these connections and interdependencies cannot suffice, but it represents a process of vital and fundamental importance for the construction of Europe today.

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PREST.XS EST 49

VII^e CONGRES INTERNATIONAL DES CRITIQUES D'ART
Varsovie-Cracovie, septembre 1960

Programme provisoire

LUNDI 5			Arrivée à Varsovie, inscription, installa
MARDI 6	matin	9 h.	Réunion de la Commission des Admissions
		10 h.	Réunion du Comité de l'AICA
		11 h.	Séance inaugurale du Congrès
		12 h.	Conférence sur l'architecture de Varsovie
	ap.midi	15 h.	Visite de la ville précédée d'une séance des courts métrages sur la restructuri de Varsovie
MERCREDI 7	matin	9 h.	Ière Séance de travail; thème: l'art mo en tant que phénomène international
	ap.midi	15 h.	Visite au Musée National de Varsovie
		18 h.	Cocktail
JEUDI 8	matin	9 h.	Réunion des Commissions de Travail
	ap.midi	15 h.	Assemblée Générale de l'AICA
VENDREDI 9	matin	9 h.	IIème Séance de travail; thème: l'art m ne en tant que résultat et expression d traditions et tendances des différents peuples
	ap.midi	15 h.	Visite des expositions
SAMEDI 10	matin	9 h.	IIIème Séance de travail; thème: l'art derns et les perspectives du developpen de l'art des différents peuples
	ap.midi		libre
DIMANCHE 11	matin	8 h.	Départ pour Cracovie /déjeuner en route.
	ap.midi		visite de la ville
LUNDI 12	matin	10 h.	Visite des expositions
	ap.midi	15 h.	visite de la ville
		18 h.	Cocktail
MARDI 13	matin	9 h.	Visite du chateau Wawel
		10 h.	Conférence au sujet de l'art polonais
		11 h.	Séance de clôture
	ap.midi		libre
MERCREDI 14			Commencement du circuit touristique

Figure 1.1: Programme of the AICA Congress,
PREST.XS EST 49.

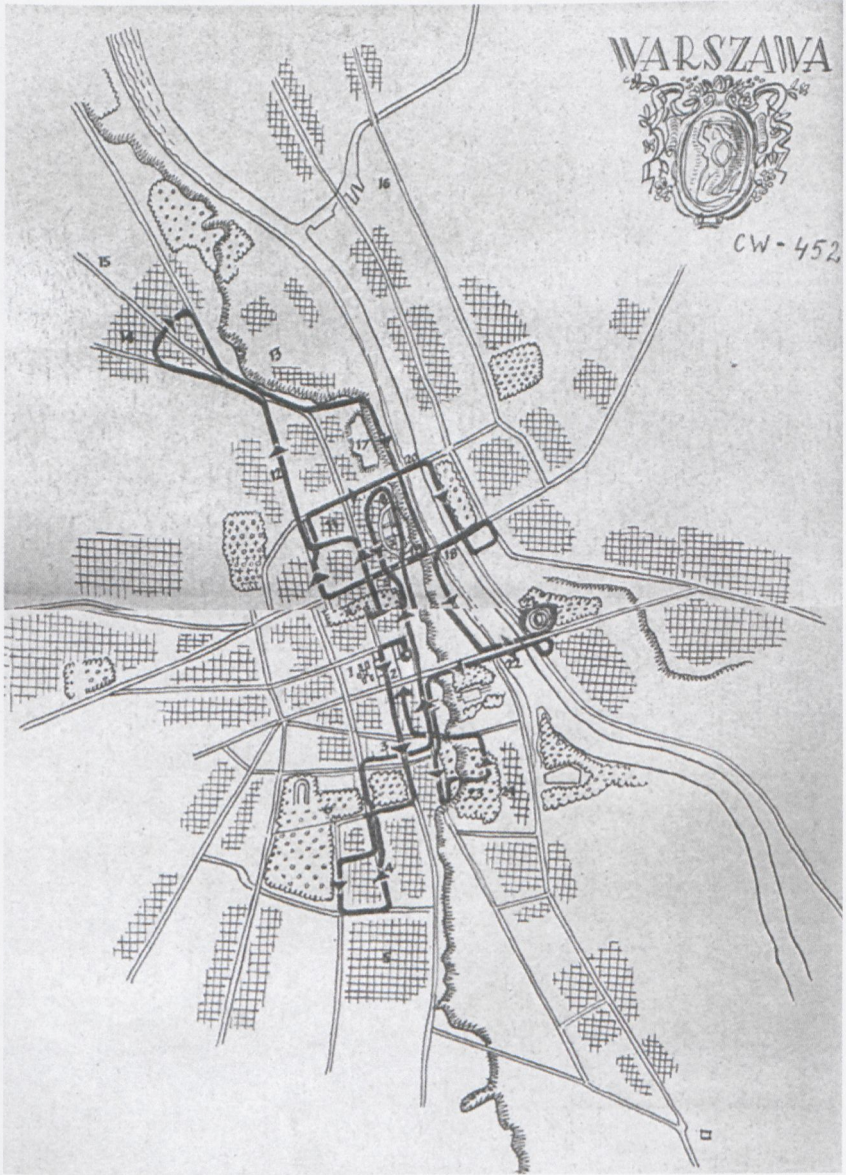


Figure 1.2: Warsaw Map, PREST.XS EST 49.

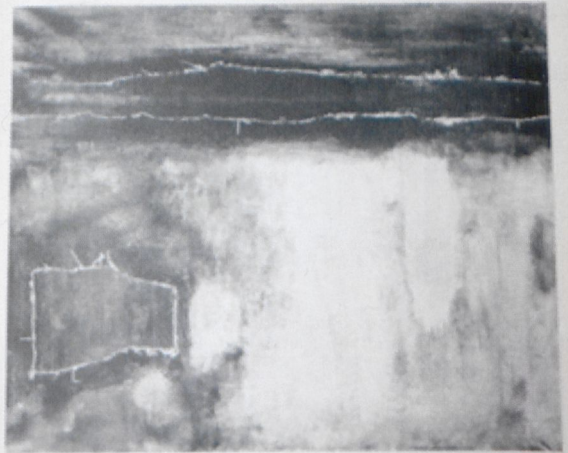


Figure 1.4: Konfrontacje 1960, Restany Library, Rennes, PREST.S EST 211.

tadeusz dominik

gabriel „krzywe kolo”
woreczanin – maj 1960



Wzrost i cięciwa ciała człowieka zmieniają się w miarę życia. Wzrost człowieka trwa do 25 lat, a cięciwa ciała do 30 lat.

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Figure 1.5: Konfrontacje 1960, Restany Library, Rennes, PREST.S EST 211.



Figure 1.6: Konfrontacije 1960, Restany Library, Rennes, PREST.S EST 211.