

Revisiting the Region

A Debate on Art History in Eastern Europe

Against the Backdrop of a War: An Editorial Note

When we first prepared our contribution for the anniversary issue of *kunsttexte.de*, we were following carefully the political developments in Eastern Europe, and we were aware of the ongoing domestic and foreign political tensions. We were familiar with the initiatives of the governing authorities (not only) in Poland, Hungary and Russia, with their far-reaching impact on visual culture and the spatial configurations of power that we are concerned with in the fields of image and memory history – we will deal with these topics in one of our forthcoming issues. However, the fact that by the time the anniversary issue would be published, Europe was going to be embroiled in a brutal war that would cover Ukraine with destruction and suffering was something beyond our imagination.

Our endeavor to provide immediate assistance to our colleagues in Ukraine regarding safeguarding of cultural assets (UA Art Aid Contact Centre) made us painfully aware of the fact that our otherwise dense networks to East-Central Europe were only loosely linked to Ukraine. Furthermore, together with Mateusz Kapustka, Beate Störckuhl, and Aleksandra Lipińska, we contributed to the *Ukraine Forum* organized at short notice within the framework of the *36th Congress of the German Art Historians* in Stuttgart in late March 2022 with a short reflection on *Blind spots of art history? The example of Ukraine*. An initial swift review of the art historical literature already revealed a striking lack of interest and, consequently, of knowledge about the art and the visual culture in Ukraine. This observation is true first of all for German-language research and, with specific exceptions, for the research landscape of European countries outside Ukraine in general. Our section *Ostblick* is to be included in this criticism.

We believe that this is more than just a mere matter of emphasising subjective interests. On the contrary,

according to our thesis, there are a series of structural and discursive factors that determine the subject of art history, which are genuinely Western in origin and similarly determinant in Russian art historiography. These factors, in turn – Adam Labuda has highlighted this in the first issue of *Ostblick* with regard to the terminology and the field of art history of East Central Europe – cannot be detached from social contexts, political interests, and ideological preconditions (*Ostmitteleuropa – Schicksalsgemeinschaft, Forschungsfeld, Kunstregion*. In: *kunsttexte.de/ostblick*, 2010/1). These factors predispose subjective choice of research objects or, as in Ukraine's case, the lack of such a choice or even the idea of a choice.

Our brief survey for the *Ukraine Forum* allowed us to make a first basic observation: a multi-layered visual culture has emerged in the interlocking, overlapping, and conflict of highly diverse cultures, ethnic groups, denominations, and political power structures on the territory of present-day Ukraine in the various historical periods. With its distinct, specific spatial and visual manifestations, those cultures cannot be easily comprehended and described using classifications, notions and concepts of art-historical knowledge projected onto the region from the outside. Since these notions and concepts hold a hegemonic position in art history, myopia or even blindness towards these forms and their functions inevitably emerges. In a forthcoming issue (2023) we will submit this preliminary observation to a more thorough examination.

The problem is not confined to Ukraine, which has acutely brought it into the spotlight; on the contrary, it is of general epistemological and concrete political relevance. Thus, the question arises to what extent a process has been actually initiated in recent years that has led to an 'integration' of the art of Eastern Europe into

more comprehensive European art history. Furthermore, we have to ask how and whether concepts and knowledge systems of art history have been and are being subjected to a critical revision. As we founded *Ostblick* in 2010, we considered this an essential aspect of research, a mission for a journal dedicated to the history of the art of Eastern Europe. And in fact, since then, numerous studies have done outstanding work in this regard.

The various problems arising from these two questions were the subject of a round table discussion that we held in October 2021, and which is our contribution to the anniversary issue of *kunsttexte.de*. Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine as well as with regard to our field of research, we would like to highlight two aspects here that have been debated in our roundtable conversation, but now emerge even more succinctly.

The first concerns the concept of art: *Umění*, the journal of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, recently took the concept of 'horizontal art history', that has been proposed by Piotr Piotrowski in 2008 in the same journal (*On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History*, in: *Umění*, 2008/5), as a starting point for a re-envisioning of theoretical and methodological reflections on disciplinary approaches and their limits to the art of Eastern Europe. In his article *Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe* (*Umění*, 2021/2), which served as a reference for responses and reflections of other authors, Matthew Rampley subjects Piotrowski's concept to an in-depth critique and provides it with a necessary differentiation. He thus systematizes the analysis of modern art and its observations, which have already been practiced in many individual studies in this sense. Undoubtedly, Piotrowski's approach sparked a series of studies that have not only enriched, but refocused research on the art history of Eastern Europe. However, neither the concept of 'horizontal art history' nor Rampley's critique seem to dissociate themselves from the dominance of the genuinely Western concept of art. In particular, the path via so-called modern art might end in a circular argument. With modern art, both the 'horizontal art history' and the critique of its focus on a historical object in which precisely this concept of art, with the colonizing

practice of the West, became effective as a constituent factor of an increasingly globalizing art production, distribution, and consumption, including art historiography that became institutionally established in the second half of the nineteenth century. Both Piotrowski and Rampley even narrow the perception as they do not distance themselves from the paradigm of modernism and thus adopt a selective gaze already at the field of 'Western' art.

Our second point relates the conceptualisation of our subject: The idea of a 'horizontal art history' is closely related to the simultaneous endeavour to engage with a global understanding of art history – a process that entails a critical revision of concepts and orders of the discipline. This revision drew and continues to draw significant impulses from postcolonial studies. And during this process, although it is far from self-evident, a gradual overcoming of the differentiation between 'Western' and 'Eastern' art can be observed. However, in its place, a new binary order seems to emerge with the global North and South, which in turn risks creating new blind spots. By contrast, it seems worthwhile to follow up on investigations such as those presented in *Circulations in the Global History of Art* edited by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (London 2016) and those undertaken within the academic network *Connected Central European Worlds, 1500-1700* (hosted by the University of Kent). These projects focus on regions as starting points and examine the interplay between local forms and functions of art or visual culture and supra-regional, possibly global networks in a reciprocal consideration of micro and macro dimensions. In light of our thesis, which we formulated at the beginning in relation to art in Ukraine, we believe this approach is very worthy of consideration. It offers an open structure, which not least allows us to relate even conflicting systems to each other. But above all, it enables to recount not one but several 'art' histories, and thus a broader and differentiated understanding of historical processes.

In the future, we would like to devote more space to this approach within our journal *Ostblick*. In this respect, the journal's focus on the art of Eastern Europe will not simply be expanded but will be conceptually positioned

in a broader, global context, thus necessarily transcending disciplinary boundaries. With this in mind, we had planned an issue for the current year dealing with concepts of global heritage and what can and should be preserved through the protection of art, especially in times of armed conflict. Sadly, some of these aspects have been caught up by reality.

Berlin, April 2022

Katja Bernhardt
Robert Born
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Revisiting the Region. A Debate on Art History in Eastern Europe

It was twelve years ago that we, Antje Kempe, Robert Born, and Katja Bernhardt, together with our colleague Andreas Puth, founded the section *Ostblick* of *kunsttexte.de*. For the first issue, we invited Adam S. Labuda, Ada Raev, and Beate Störckuhl to reflect on the current state of art-historical scholarship in Eastern Europe, especially with regard to the German-language research landscape at that time. When the first issue of *Ostblick* appeared, all three colleagues were well known within the scholarly community. Much has happened since then. First of all, it seems, that Eastern Europeanists have been drawn closer together, largely due to the proliferation of digital media and new academic networks, resulting in decreasing hierarchies across generations and communities worldwide. So, for the anniversary issue of *kunsttexte.de*, we wanted to pick up the thread we laid with the launch of *Ostblick* in 2012, but to carry it forward in a different mode.

We have thus opted for a conversational format and invited colleagues who approach research on the art history of Eastern Europe from different perspectives, both in terms of their research interests but also their origins and connections to different national research contexts and communities. The very fact that our contribution to the anniversary edition of *kunsttexte.de* – not least as a consequence of this decision – will appear in English can be read as indicative of shifts within the global research landscape. The extent to which this is also associated with an actual change in research perspectives was one point of our discussion. With this in mind, we met with Mathilde Arnoux, Anna Baumgartner, and Tomasz Grusiecki for two hours on a Friday afternoon in October 2021. We bridged virtually and mentally the distance between countries and even continents in the already familiar form of a zoom meeting.

Anna Baumgartner joined us from Munich. She is completing her doctoral dissertation at the *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*, in which she is exploring Polish Orientalisms and the migration of Polish artists to Munich in the nineteenth century. Another focus of her work are protest cultures in Eastern Europe since the 1970s. Anna introduced a dual perspective to our conversation, as she is connected

through her studies (*Freie Universität Berlin* and *Uniwersytet Warszawski*) and professional experience in both Polish and German art history.

Tomasz Grusiecki, our second participant, is embedded in the Anglophone research context (PhD from *McGill University*), which, in addition to art-historical scholarship on Eastern Europe conducted in the region itself and in German-speaking countries, has played a significant role in developing new questions and methods in the study of Eastern Europe. Tom joined the conversation from Boise (Idaho), where he teaches Early Modern Art History at *Boise State University* as an assistant professor. At the time of our conversation, he was completing his book *Transcultural things and the specter of orientalism in Poland-Lithuania*, in which he examines not only the relations between East-Central Europe and Eastern Europe but also their transcultural interconnections with the Ottoman Empire

Our third guest was Mathilde Arnoux from Paris. She deals with questions that emerge from artistic encounters between different geo-cultural spaces. In this respect, they are part of a transregional art history, which, however, takes a different approach from area studies. She is head of research at the *Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte* (German Center for Art History, Paris) and has been Principal Investigator of the research project *OwnReality. To Each His Own Reality. The Notion of the Real and Reality in the Visual Arts in France, FRG, GDR and Poland, 1960-1989*. (<https://dfk-paris.org/de/ownreality>) Her focus on the various forms of artistic relations in the region was of importance to our conversations. Additionally, we were interested in whether and how the art history of Eastern Europe is anchored and conceptualized in France.

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Ostblick: When we trace back the development of art history as an academic discipline and look at its more recent trajectory, it seems that the main initiatives of art-historical research conceptualizing Eastern Europe were and are still rooted in German-speaking scholarship. Hence, we ask ourselves whether there is a specific discourse behind this phenomenon that should be critically examined? Or is this observation deceptive?

And if so, what alternative approaches have been and are being proposed and practiced, or could conceivably emerge?

Tomasz Grusiecki: As a scholar of early modern Poland-Lithuania trained in the UK and Canada, I do recognize the major role of Germanophone art-historical tradition in shaping the discourse on Central and Eastern European art (my preferred term to describe the region), but I also think it would be a mistake to overstate it. It is undeniable that German-speaking scholars had a great impact on art history in the region, but local contexts also played a part.

Take Polish art history as an example. Cracow and Lviv – some of the oldest art history departments in the world established in 1882 and 1892, respectively – were founded by Marian Sokołowski (1839–1911) and Jan Bołoz Antoniewicz (1858–1922); the former was educated in Vienna by none other than Rudolf Eitelberger (1817–1885), considered as the founder of the Vienna School of Art History, and the latter was trained in Munich. Neither, however, was involved in the circle of Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941), active in Vienna and Graz, who – although controversial today owing to his subsequent embrace of National Socialism – was a major proponent of treating Europe merely as a province of a much larger transregional artistic realm centered on Asia, in which Central and Eastern Europe emerged as an important player. In this respect, it is surprising that Tadeusz Mańkowski (1878–1956), a scholar of Polish material culture sharing many of Strzygowski's interests, including Armenian, Ottoman, and Persian art, never cited him in his work. This omission cannot be simply explained as the result of his legal (rather than art-historical) training in Lviv because Eitelberger's Vienna School model of careful archival study was in fact a key component of Mańkowski's research method. Yet, even though he was fluent in German (having served as a judicial clerk in Innsbruck for a year), Mańkowski's international public consisted mostly of an Anglophone readership. It is through connections to influential West Asian art experts like Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969), founder of the Asia Institute in New York, that Mańkowski was able to promote his vision of Old Poland as a place culturally closer to Iran

and Turkey than to the traditional centers of European art and culture like Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. This image of Old Poland as a quasi-Oriental realm also appeared in the work of the Cracow art historian Zdzisław Żygulski Jr. (1921–2015), who, too, relied on Anglophone readership for his international outreach. Although trained by Vojeslav Molè (1886–1973), who was Strzygowski's disciple, Żygulski did not see himself as a follower of the controversial Austrian scholar, thus calling to question Vienna's long-term impact on Polish art history.

Certainly, the only two Polish art historians who achieved a degree of stardom in international academia, Jan Białostocki (1921–1988) and Piotr Piotrowski (1952–2015), did not look for inspiration to Germany. Białostocki, best remembered for his iconological studies, did not pick up iconology at Hamburg, but rather through his involvement in the *Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art* (CIHA). This focus perhaps explains his Western-centric idea of Eastern Europe, which he saw as an extension of Italy and Germany, comprising only Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia, and excluding Russia and the Balkans altogether, which were supposedly part of a different civilization (see his *Art of Renaissance in Eastern Europe*. London, 1976). Piotrowski's notion of Eastern Europe as a discursive formation owed much to his ability to tap into poststructuralist and postcolonial ideas, particularly the theories of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and Edward Said (1935–2003), both of whom enjoyed a near-celebrity status among the leftists and the liberals in Anglo-American academia at the turn of the previous century. And so, while German and Austrian notions of Central and Eastern Europe, including those emerging from the fin de siècle Vienna and a much older tradition of *Ostforschung*, and – more recently – *Ostmitteleuropaforschung*, have been of paramount importance historically, they are now outweighed by the region's own voices and the ideas formulated within the bounds of the Anglo-American academic industry that is becoming increasingly dominant in this conversation. Thus, even though Germany remains one of the best places to study Eastern European art, given its proximity to the region, its well-funded academic infrastructure, and its long tradition of engagement with this part of the world, I would caution against overemphasizing the role of

German scholarship in conceptualizing Central and Eastern Europe.

Robert Born: France, another art-historical heavyweight, is missing from this context. I would like to tie in here, then, and ask Mathilde a question. I am starting from a region I am more familiar with, namely Romania. There, France in particular, showed a great interest in increasing its influence after the First World War. There were some state sponsored initiatives, such as lectures and trips in which Henri Focillon (1881–1943) assumed a leading role (cf. Michela Passini: *France and the Evolution of Art History in the Central and Eastern Europe: Three Cases of Cultural Transfer*. In: *History of Art History in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*, ed. by Jerzy Malinowski. Toruń, 2012, Vol. 2). From your point of view, is there a particular interest of French art history regarding Eastern Europe?

Mathilde Arnoux: This is rather complicated because there is no Eastern European art history in France. Therefore, the question of your interview dealing with the issue of conceptualizing Eastern Europe from the standpoint of national historiography would not be asked in the same way from within the French academic horizon. There are few specialists in the history of Eastern European art in France. They are often attached to history departments or departments of languages and cultures, and rarely to art history departments. They are part of departments of Slavic Studies or those devoted to Central, Eastern, Caucasian, Balkan or East-Central Europe. Within these departments, there are tensions because scholars want to maintain the diversity of different specializations (to keep the funding) and not be reduced to a global conception of the region of Eastern Europe. The grouping of researchers specialized in a specific language and culture (Polish, Hungarian, Czech, etc.) under the purview of a wider region (Central or Eastern Europe) has often corresponded with the disappearing positions. A department's name reveals a highly political question of academic orientation. Regarding the question of a possible French art history dealing with Central and Eastern Europe in the years between the two world wars, there is, of course, Focillon, but also Léonce Bénédicté (1859–1925), director of the *Musée du Luxembourg* in

Paris, dedicated to contemporary art. I don't know if we can speak of an art history for those years or rather of some sort of art diplomacy. The *Musée du Jeu de Paume* regularly organized exhibitions on foreign countries in France, such as, for example, the Romanian show of 1925. These highly diplomatic exhibitions, financed by the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, highlighted France's relations with the guest country. They also provided an opportunity to buy some of the artworks, to constitute a section of foreign artists within the collection of contemporary art of the *Musée du Luxembourg*, and in doing so, to emphasize the cosmopolitan identity of Paris. Bénédite had a crucial role in the formation of this narrative. I don't believe there was a particular interest in the writing of an Eastern European art history.

Robert Borr: How do you see the role of exiled Eastern European art historians in the interwar period? There was the large group of specialists who had fled Russia after the October Revolution, such as Kyiv-born André Grabar (1896–1990), who migrated via Bulgaria to Paris, and then from there to the United States. Another example is the Moscow-born Lithuanian Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1903–1988), who studied with Focillon in Paris and later taught in Lithuania and in the United States (New York, Yale). His books on medieval art were very popular and, interestingly enough, were translated into various Eastern European languages before 1989. Has there been an influence of these exiled art historians on the French academic world that can possibly be traced to the present? Or was it only an episode in the interwar period or the Cold War?

Mathilde Arnoux: There was also Louis Grodecki (1910–1982), for example, at the Sorbonne. My research has not been focused on this topic and therefore I am not able to trace the influence of the art historians from Eastern Europe on the French academic world, but it would be very interesting to examine their academic careers.

Tomasz Grusiecki: Oleg Grabar (1929–2011), André's son, is another case of an internationally entangled scholar, born to a Ukrainian émigré family in France,

who eventually became Harvard's inaugural Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture.

But, I want to pick up on a point made by Mathilde about scholars' fear of being trapped within the bounds of area studies, rather than art history proper, if they dare to define themselves as Eastern Europeanists. It doesn't help, of course, that the idea of Eastern Europe still reeks of Cold War binaries, despite Larry Wolff's widely publicized, if controversial, claim in *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA, 1994) that the concept could be traced back to the eighteenth-century. Other potential framings of the region are no less controversial. Central Europe goes back to Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1915) and offers an imperialist vision for the area as a realm allegedly predestined for Germanic domination. Yet despite its shortcomings, the idea of Central Europe was attractive enough for the Moravian philosopher – turned first president of Czechoslovakia – Tomáš Masaryk (1850–1937) and the Polish historian Oskar Halecki (1891–1973) who resuscitated it after World War I. Masaryk wholeheartedly believed that the history of the region is connected to Western Europe via Austria and Germany. Halecki's view was different, and his preferred term was East-Central Europe, which in his opinion better rendered the region's status as an in-between place, at a crossroads between East and West. Drawing on these ideas in the 1980s, writers like Milan Kundera, Vaclav Havel (1936–2011), Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004), and György Konrád (1933–2019) argued that Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, were culturally not in Eastern Europe but rather in Central Europe, and therefore had the right to leave the Soviet Bloc and join the Western world, where – as the argument goes – they always belonged.

The question remains whether it is productive to fight one binary with another – the idea of Central Europe simply moves the notional boundary of East versus West to the easternmost corners of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, while keeping its divisive logic intact. I'd argue that it's best to embrace the indeterminacy of the region rather than attempting to demarcate its precise location on the map. I see no problem in highlighting the transcultural dimension of this part of

Europe; after all, there is nothing contradictory in belonging into multiple cultural worlds. For this reason, I think that the least contentious term that embraces the widest possible geographical expanse of the region is Central and Eastern Europe since it is an open-ended phrase that connects rather than divides. Proposing to rethink artistic and cultural geographies could in fact be our contribution as art historians of the region, because to study Central and Eastern Europe always means asking questions about what Europe is and where it is; how many Europes there are; how unique and distinctive the continent is vis-à-vis other artistic and cultural traditions; what does it mean to be European; and how such an identity-position has changed over the years? We do need to make our field more relatable and relevant to a wider art-historical readership, and expanding beyond the purview of area studies could offer us the opportunity to broaden our appeal among historians of other regions.

Robert Born: Larry Wolff's studies on the mental maps of Eastern Europe as a whole and its constituent regions (especially Galicia) point to their (Western) Eurocentric origins in the Enlightenment, and the longevity of Wolff's ideas is an interesting example of a growing Anglophone heft in the study of the region. Inventing Eastern Europe enjoyed a positive reception, especially in the English-speaking academic world. However, in East-Central Europe, it was criticized already shortly after its publication. And yet the criticism voiced by researchers like Csaba Dupcsik was hardly taken up outside the region. This also applies to the contributions by specialists in Russian history, such as Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, who argued that the clichés (such as barbarism) that Larry Wolff has identified as Western perceptions of Eastern Europe had similarly been used in letters by German travellers with reference to France, one of Western Europe's alleged centers.

Anna Baumgartner: I would like to join the discussion at this point and refer to Tom's earlier contribution on the beginnings of art historiography, mainly in Poland. I found the connection to cultural references to Persia or the Ottoman Empire, which Tadeusz Mańkowski, among others, has highlighted in his research an

important aspect. This once again shows the location of the space of Eastern Europe and its art historical references as an in-between place. This in-betweenness leads to conceptual difficulties when it comes to a positioning within the now globally oriented art history, which at the same time wants to question Western hegemony. In this regard, I like Tom's suggestion to speak of Central and Eastern Europe because it points to this fluidity of the category.

Let me point out once more to Larry Wolff's study from 1994, which has been frequently referenced since its publication and is still an important point of reference despite the critical objections Robert has pointed out. Together with Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (New York 1997) and other subsequent works that combine researching stereotypes with an awareness of the hegemonical construction of space, it marked a shift towards postcolonial approaches within Eastern European studies. Considering the potential for art history in these postcolonial approaches it's crucial to me that they allow, to some extent at least, to overcome the legacy of the *Ostforschung* already mentioned and to name the power relations in the Western European gaze on the space of Eastern Europe and its art production.

The latter is indeed something that runs as a common thread through the initiatives of art historical research conceptualizing Eastern Europe. Related to the postcolonial perspective and concepts originating from the cultural studies, which are occurring in recent publications, I would speak less of Germanophone scholarship and tradition in actual art historical research conceptualizing Eastern Europe.

I am thinking here about the various initiatives of art historical research in which Piotr Piotrowski was involved in the ten years before his death and which, in turn, still influences current discussions today. Let me just mention the conference at *Galeria Labirynt* (Lublin, Poland) *East European Art Seen from Global Perspectives. Past and Present*, held in 2014, where Tom was also present, resulted in the volume *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present* edited by Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (London/New York, 2018). Beáta Hock is affiliated with the *Leibniz Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europas* (Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe,

GWZO) in Leipzig, thus in Germany. Nevertheless, we are dealing with international research collectives, both from the researched countries of Eastern Europe and from outside. So, it is in a way already a decentralized academic culture. Nevertheless, I currently see the most important conceptual approaches as being concentrated outside Germany. I think of the *Courtauld Institute* in London as an important driving force nowadays. Equally interesting is the *European Research Council* (ERC) project *Continuity/Rupture. Art and Architecture in Central Europe 1918–1939* led by Matthew Rampley, previously situated at the *University of Birmingham*, now at *Masarykova Univerzita*, Brno. Let me also mention the used language: English is now the lingua franca; it is no longer German, as it was in the beginnings of our discipline.

The research context I'm referring to has shifted dramatically over the last ten years. I would have likely assessed the situation differently in the early 2000s. I am thinking here of the research on art historiographies in Central Eastern Europe around Adam Labuda at *Humboldt Universität zu Berlin* (*Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*, ed. by cf. Robert Born, Alena Janáková and Adam S. Labuda. Berlin, 2004), where scholars from outside and within Eastern Europe came together, focusing on Poland respectively on a bilateral exchange, the *Arbeitsgruppe deutscher und polnischer Kunsthistoriker und Denkmalpfleger* (Working Group of German and Polish art historians and monument conservators) should be mentioned. Regarding the institutional framework: Tom – you spoke of Germany as one of the best places for the study of Central and Eastern European art history. In my experience, the institutional infrastructure necessary for this is currently not optimal.

Katja Bernhardt: I would like to address the issue more broadly – hopefully not too generally. Tom, you drew attention to the Polish art historians like Mańkowski, whose training was not directly rooted in Germanophone scholarship. But the problem remains: Where did get their concepts of knowledge from and thus their general idea of art history? Wasn't that a notion rooted in a concept of art that was mainly based on German scholarship? The second comment touches on the binary of West and East that you mentioned. At different

stages of history, different conceptions of Eastern Europe were developed that attempted to define/describe the region's place in Europe, and the world. The question is to what extent they were rather a reflection of Western hegemony, i.e., responding to an idea of what Western Europe could be. And I agree with you, Anna, that many recent initiatives to explore Eastern European art history did not come from Germany. But again, to what extent do they challenge the concept of art and the basic structure of our understanding of art and knowledge system, which is rooted and institutionalized in the Western world of ideas? So, the general question is: do we still have to deal with this heritage, i.e., a concept of art shaped in the eighteenth-century in the 'West' and still largely determines contemporary art historiography?

Tomasz Grusiecki: By no means did I want to suggest that there were no links between Germanophone and Polish art-historical traditions. We only have to think about Sokołowski's Viennese or Antoniewicz's Munich connections. These imperial entanglements in the region are unquestionable, and they continued even after the Habsburg and the Hohenzollern empires collapsed in the wake of World War I. Zygmunt Batowski (1876–1944), who established the Art History department at the University of Warsaw in 1917, was trained in Lviv by Antoniewicz; Szczesny Dethloff (1878–1961), who founded the Art History department in Poznań in 1919, studied in Vienna under the supervision of Max Dvořák (1874–1921), having previously spent time at Munich and Berlin. But the German-Polish links began to fade following World War II, partly because of the imposition of Marxism-Leninism onto university curricula, and partly because of the embrace of nationalism in the newly ethnically homogenous Polish Communist state. Even after the de-Stalinization of 1956, German and Polish paths continued to diverge. And so, while art history in West Germany kept innovating itself, oscillating between different models of *Kunstgeschichte* and *Kunstwissenschaft*, scholars in Poland were still largely beholden to the traditions of Eitelberger's First Vienna School and Gustav Friedrich Waagen's Berlin School of Art History, studying local works in their original context, paying strong attention to primary source documentation, and focusing on establishing a chronology of

artists' oeuvre by setting their work against that of their Western European contemporaries. This began to change after 1989, but by then the predominance of German tradition had long been challenged by Anglo-American methods and theories, particularly in the field of modern and contemporary art.

With regard to Katja's other question: yes, Western hegemony over academia is undeniable, but this does not mean that Eastern European scholars cannot influence art-historical discourse from within as they attempt to recenter their focus to better position themselves within the international scholarly landscape and the current publishing paradigm. This could be seen as "giving in" to an external model, but as a pragmatist, I cannot help but notice that the most likely alternative to speaking the hegemonic language is not changing the rules of the game, but invisibility. We cannot afford further marginalization from mainstream art-historical discussions, as this would only decrease the number of art historians of Central and Eastern Europe in North America and Western Europe, which is already alarmingly low. We need to think of practical ways of making the region more attractive and appealing, and if *Realpolitik* is the only actionable solution, so be it.

Katja Bernhardt: But this discourse remains the basis of art history teaching. Even initiatives that aim to incorporate the art history of Eastern Europe into a broader discussion remain stuck in this discourse – not only in terms of the general concept of art but also with regard to established narratives. An example of this is the increasing interest in topics such as the Avant-Garde and the Neo-Avant-Garde that we have witnessed more recently. Highlighting these particular facets of art history offers the prospect of attracting the attention of Western audiences and provides an opportunity to relate Eastern European art into the master narrative of art history – a master narrative previously shaped by Western European art history. I completely agree with you that it is necessary to find a way of practice, but at the same time, that practice is a determinant of the discourse.

Mathilde Arnoux Regarding the practical ways that Tom addresses and the discourses that Katja questions, I am wondering if they are not, in fact, the most pressing

issue that must be the reflection on a possible shift in the general concept of art and established narratives. Discourses are changing with subjects of inquiry and the ways they are questioned. It may be pertinent to ask: what effect does the art from the East-Central European region have on the established concept of art and narratives (for example, could an engagement with the Avant-garde or Neo-Avant-Garde in East-Central and Eastern European art be a way of questioning the way Western art history has been shaped?), and, more generally, on definitions of space and time at stake in the research of other disciplines concerned by this specific area? Isn't there an specificity in dealing with art that requires us to address these connections between discourses and the object of research that makes art history especially interesting in social and human sciences? Although this may seem obvious, it nevertheless poses a major challenge because of the risk of repeating the dichotomies that these questions seek to address and because it is not only historiography that is at stake, but also methodologies, institutional practices and discussion forms. The fundamental and radical transformations of art historical narratives that the consideration of Eastern European art practices necessitate have prompted some very different and inspiring observations by Piotr Piotrowski and Igor Zabel (1958–2005), among others.

Anna Baumgartner: In our discussion and in current attempts to conceptualize Eastern Europe in art-historical research, I also see the need to ask which field we are currently positioning ourselves. Do we rather see ourselves within Eastern European studies, thus within area studies? Or within art history? Or are the boundaries already so fluent and the perspective of art historical research already so enlarged that Eastern European art history can be situated within both disciplines and define a specific art historical perspective?

Regarding area studies – do we draw too heavily on concepts from historical or cultural studies that have been discussed there already dozens of times, discovering them with a delay? When we approach the methodological framework of area studies and discuss the concept of Eastern Europe, is our main object of research – the analysis of artifacts – marginalized in the discussion of spatial categories? Or is this just the first

step? And again, concerning art history as a discipline: Is this conceptualization of what Eastern Europe is within art historical research the starting point of gaining more visibility within the canon (I am using 'canon' although I am aware of the power constellation underlying it)?

Antje Kempe: The supposition of a national art history still dominates the discourse on East-Central Europe. On the one hand, we can read in contributions such as James Elkins' *Is art history global?* (New York, 2007) that nationally framed, sometimes even nationalistic art histories still persist in various countries. In this context, he mentions the Czech Republic, among others. On the other hand, we are still confronted with the fact that scholars from Eastern Europe and East Central Europe are invited to Germany, France, the UK, the US, and elsewhere as guest speakers and visiting professors, but almost only to talk about the art of their region. Consequently, we can ask whether, in this context, we are dealing with self-perpetuating or self-sustaining discourse of alterity in the Western narrative? At the same time, scholars from the region see themselves as Westerners and consequently as part of broader Western-oriented art history. Particularly with a view on concepts of global art history, this raises the question of the identity of the speaking subject within discourses. This observation could be a good segue to our second question.

Ostblick: Is there a need to distinguish between an art history about Eastern and Central Europe or from Eastern and Central Europe?

Tomasz Grusiecki: From my perspective, which is that of an Early Modernist trained and employed in North America, there is a distinction in a sense that scholars in places like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic do not need a field that would encompass the entire region as they are well served by the academic infrastructures of their respective countries. While they can simply focus on Polish, Hungarian, or Czech art, this approach would not fly in North America, where there are so few of us. And so, for us, having a field is a matter of survival; we need it to champion each other, to advocate for our research and the need for funding, and to

rally support for our efforts. From a strategic point of view, it makes sense to have a field that groups together North American and Western European scholars of Poland-Lithuania, the Habsburg lands, the Danubian Principalities, the Balkans, Crimea, and Muscovy, even though in the region itself such alliances may be seen as exotic, perhaps with the exception of scholarship on post-World War II art.

Piotrowski, to cite an important scholar from the region, in fact emphasized that Central and Eastern European scholars often know more about various Western European and North American artistic traditions than about those of the neighboring countries. It is, then, incumbent on us, scholars of Central and Eastern Europe both inside and outside the region, to identify sustainable patterns of support and collaboration to build an impetus for convincing other art historians that our scholarship matters beyond the narrow constricts of area studies.

Anna Baumgartner: As far as the national narrative is concerned, I see, with regard to my field of research – nineteenth-century painting – the persistence of the idea of national art, as it was developed in the nineteenth-century, still very strongly represented. This idea also continues or at least continued to shape the orientation of (national) art museums until recently. This is a topic Piotr Piotrowski deals with in his *Muzeum Krytyczne* [Critical Museum] (Poznań, 2011).

Tom, you talked about the importance of working together more, which I think is fundamental, but with regard to Poland, we have a policy strongly oriented toward the national, and the influence of cultural policy cannot be ignored. I am aware of the distinction between academic research and the sphere of cultural policy. Nevertheless, the influence of cultural policy with regard to planned projects, staffing policy, funding, cannot be ignored, and this might inhibit the development of new methodological multi-perspective contexts. Yet, I think that delimitation mechanisms also shape research practice. Of course, we deal with dynamic processes and in fact, despite the latter mentioned, more recent exhibitions seem to be moving towards new approaches.

In 2019/20, the *Musée du Louvre-Lens*, in cooperation with the Museum Narodowe w Warszawie

(National Museum in Warsaw) hosted the exhibition *Pologne 1840–1918. Peindre l'âme d'une nation* (on show at the National Museums in Warsaw and Poznań at the end of 2020 and in 2021, titled *Polska. Siła obrazu – Poland. The Power of the Image*). Presented firstly in France the exhibition was designed to show masterworks of Polish art of the nineteenth-century relating to the concept of the Polish nation within painting; it addressed, as well, the internationality of Polish art and the artistic exchanges between Poland and France. Also, it had a focus on different depicted regions that were part of the concept of Poland during the partitions. Among others, the important motif of Ukraine in painting was thematized. I found it crucial that the authors of the exhibition catalogue, beyond art historical references, briefly referred to the theses of the literary scholar Maria Janion in *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* [The Uncanny Slavdom] (Kraków 2006). Janion is, after all, one of Poland's intellectuals who has rendered outstanding contributions to the critical discussion of Polish culture and its national myths in recent decades. In *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna* she reflects, from a post-colonial perspective, on Poland's position and Polish identity between East and West and deconstructs the Polono-centric, imperial gaze on Ukraine. This kind of references could lead to new approaches and to rethinking long established models. Another interesting bilateral project, by the way, which directly addresses the complex history of Polish- Ukrainian entanglements, is the exhibition at the Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury (International Cultural Centre in Cracow, exhibition: *Ukraine. A different angle on neighbourhood*, September 2019 - January 2021). With the texts in the catalogue, it takes a direct postcolonial perspective. I am curious if we are dealing already with a shift from the concept of nation towards region, space and towards a more critical engagement with national myths within the museum practice, at least when it comes to art of the nineteenth-century.

I wanted to drop to another issue that also raises the question of working together. In advance of the discussion Antje, Katja and Robert asked us, if there was a need to distinguish between an art history about Eastern and Central Europe or from Eastern and Central Europe. This question made me think of György Konrád's essay *Antipolitics* (San Diego, 1984), in which

he already spoke of the global network of information flows and intellectual exchanges beyond borders. Regarding this, I think a distinction between art history about and from the region is not always possible. We are dealing with hybrid academic cultures, with migrating concepts, the global circulation of people, things and signs. Often it is migrant biographies that shape science. I am thinking of academics from Eastern Europe being trained within and outside the region and who, for example, also research and teach in Germany, France, England and the US. What about second-generation migration biographies? I take myself as an example here. Although I was born and grew up in Germany, I have a Polish background and, in addition to Berlin, I studied in Warsaw and worked in bilateral projects. This opposes dichotomies.

Nevertheless, there is of course the discussion about the existing power relations and the question of asymmetries in access to research infrastructures, as well as funding. When conducting research from so-called Western Europe or Central Europe, is it a hegemonic position? In this context, it is important to reflect on the perspective from which one argues.

Mathilde Arnoux: This issue of sidelining the research of local art historians, who provided consultation, recommended material and access to archives, seems to me very problematic. It was one of the very important points addressed during the *OwnReality-Project*: to try to show the variety of positions, of historiographical points of view of young researchers working within various academic horizons, from France, Germany and Poland. It was also the purpose of the project's website, which was created at its conclusion, to try to show the different layers: the layer of the sources, of the discourses, of the witnesses. And I think it's very interesting, and precious, not to recreate a division between the perspective about and from a particular field, but to deal in a quite playful way with both. Regarding what Anna emphasized, it seems to be very important to deal with how ideas are rooted in a tradition or a national concept; to make a subject of this topic, to delineate how it concerns the academic relations within a field. This is something that is very clearly apparent at the *Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte* Paris, because of the intermingling of traditions and discourses that this institution has

prompted in fostering a transfer of knowledge between the French- and German-speaking worlds. It was the aim of the *Art History Authorities* seminar I organized with Clément Layet and Lena Bader just after the *Own-Reality-Project* to deal with some aspects of this question. We were considering that the fall of the Berlin Wall had led to the dominance of certain discourses over others, bringing about a leveling effect. The rise of global perspectives, implying a commonality of interests and shared references, reinforced this trend toward uniformization, which was, however, objectively refuted by the growth in inequalities and resurgent nationalisms. We have wished to assess these heritages and question the orders they helped to establish in order to open up new perspectives. A critical examination of the political and historical underpinnings of current categories required, however, a cooperation between researchers from different academic horizons and an awareness of the singular trajectory from which each point of view has been formed. Only by sharing the various historiographical approaches can we apprehend the overlapping and divergent use of concepts, the ideological biases, the formation of institutions, and the interpretation and presentation of art during the Cold War and after 1989. With this aim in mind, we invited several figures renowned for their importance in art history and museums, from different spheres and traditions, to contextualize as precisely as possible the significations, formations and institutional categorizations they consider most characteristic of their field of activity. The purpose was not to resolve all the problems among different art historiographies, but to bring to discussion people from very different traditions as well as political contexts.

Robert Born: I would like to pick up on some of the points mentioned by the earlier speakers and supplement them with my own observations and experiences. First of all, I would like to talk about area studies, which Anna has already mentioned. Until last March, I was active in various positions at the GWZO in Leipzig for a total of 15 years. Looking back, I found it very rewarding to work in interdisciplinary project groups on different topics. At the GWZO, art history was very strongly represented over longer periods and played a leading role in a number of projects that focused on the influence of

the Jagellonian dynasty respectively the role of art in the processes of confessionalization in East-Central Europe as well as the cultural exchange processes between East-Central Europe and the Ottoman Orient. Some of these topics were then also focal points of courses taught by myself and colleagues at the art history institutes in Leipzig, Berlin, and Bochum. Another important platform for exchange and knowledge transfer were the appointments of visiting scholars at the GWZO. In addition to Leipzig, art history is also still present as a discipline at the *Nordost-Institut* in Lüneburg and the *Bundesinstitut für Geschichte und Kultur der Deutschen im östlichen Europa* (Federal Institute for Culture and History of the Germans in Eastern Europe) in Oldenburg, my current workplace. A major blind spot in institutionalized art historical research, both in German-speaking countries and in France, is Southeast Europe. Its rich multi-ethnic and multi-confessional cultural heritage is mainly treated within the framework of Byzantine studies, Ottoman studies, and Turkology.

Finally, a couple of words on the situation of the discipline in this part of the continent, which, significantly, has also been little mentioned in our discussion. From the experience so far with the scientific landscape, the structures at the universities and research institutes, which are often assigned to the respective national academies, appear quite static. In Romania, the art history institutes are integrated into Universities only in the regions. In the capital, art history is located at the *Universitatea Națională de Arte București* (National University of Arts in Bucharest). Another important area is the *Universitatea de Arhitectură și Urbanism „Ion Mincu”* (“Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning) in Bucharest. The proximity to these institutions of practical training often brings about a focus on modern or contemporary art and architecture. The practical relevance, however, is by no means a life insurance for the art history courses taught at these institutions. This is illustrated by the current development (During the review of this roundtable, the Senate of the National University of Arts in Bucharest decided in March 2022 to terminate the MA program Visual and Curatorial Studies. The students and teachers concerned have not been informed about this decision in advance.)

Another important area, especially with respect to the transfer of new methodological impulses and interdisciplinary international exchange, are institutions such as the *Centre for Advanced Study Sofia* (CAS) and the *New Europe College* (NEC) in Bucharest. At the latter institution, two ERC-funded projects have recently been carried out, the thematic focus of which are of major interest to the issues discussed here. The first project *Luxury, Fashion and Social Status in Early Modern South Eastern Europe* (LuxFaSS) investigated the role of non-Muslim elites in Ottoman-dominated Europe in the early modern period and their contribution to the establishment of hybrid material and visual cultures in South Eastern Europe. The second ERC project *Art Historiographies in Central and Eastern Europe. An Inquiry from the Perspective of Entangled Histories* (ArtHistCEE) explored the art historical discourses that emerged between 1850 and 1950 in present-day Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia and their contribution to the nation-building processes in the region.

As for semantics, the notion of East Central Europe might be helpful and also important to keep the discussion of different topics in East Central Europe going on, also the aspect of area studies. And I'm skeptical if the global perspective is the key to solve all our problems. But enough on that for the moment. I am curious about your opinions.

Katja Bernhardt: Perhaps I have too strict opinion, because I think that the conventional concept of art history as we more or less practice it should be named for what it is: it is a concept of the modern Western world. This is then inevitably followed by the question - and this brings me back to something Mathilde has already mentioned: What could be an alternative approach to all the objects we deal with? What understanding of the object would allow a different approach, which could then in turn challenge the concept of art history as it has been adopted for Eastern Europe? Exploring local constellations seems to be fruitful, because they sensitize to the different layers of society, the sometimes ambivalent loyalties and relationships, and thus to different ideas of what 'art' could be, or to the limitations of applying this concept. Probably this local focus is not the solution, but it still offered me the opportunity to

illustrate what I am thinking about. So, I have a question for Mathilde: are you proposing to change the object or rather the perspective on the object?

Mathilde Arnoux: It is not the object, as such, which seems to me questionable, but much more the perspectives on the object, and the way that they very often reiterate the binary oppositions that underpin modernity and its knowledge. Again, could we ask, what effect does the art from the East Central European region have on the established concept of art and narratives? Dialogic approaches, like that of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), the notion of relation conceived by Edouard Glissant (1928–2011) and Patrick Chamoiseau after him, and the thoughts implemented by Raoul Peck's documentary films, for example, foster a transnational effort to think about the object from new perspectives, to decolonize the gaze and the understanding of the object of knowledge. It is not solely a question of method, but much more one of reconsidering the marks and limitations of binary systems and divisions. This is essential for thinking about Europe not as Eurocentric, but as a place composed of so many different voices that call out to be considered and to take part in re-qualifying what makes up Europe.

Antje Kempe: I think Mathilde addresses a crucial point, namely the question of how to look at Europe, how to deal with art in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of globalization. Looking from the outside – both geographically and methodologically – is helpful in reminding us of Europe's heterogeneity. It is very easy to slip into the trap of thinking in broad categories, like West and East in the past and the global North and South today. Instead, we should think much more in terms of regions and their diverse connections and interdependencies, precisely to name the differences. And, perhaps even more importantly, to involve all scholars in these discussions.

Anna Baumgartner: Yes, I think we need more interdisciplinarity but in a dialogical way. At the moment, I see an asymmetry. Art historians tie up with concepts from Eastern European studies, but what about the other way around? To what extent does art (history) play a role in Eastern European studies as regional

studies, which are rather focused on historical and literature studies? I have in mind especially the curriculum and teaching concerning the question what of what students are supposed to learn as basic knowledge on the region.

Tomasz Grusiecki: For all its success in decentering art history, the global turn has been of limited value to Central and Eastern Europe, which – just like Africa, South America, and most of Asia – has been traditionally on the margins of the discipline's grand narratives. For a long time, the area described as Eastern Europe, although often referred to as 'the Soviet Bloc' or simply 'the East', functioned as a reductive binary opposition to 'the West'. Today the issue is different, however, as increasingly Central and Eastern Europe is being elided into a Eurocentric framework simply because geographically the region is located on the European continent. Such arbitrary grouping is problematic because it is debatable whether the historical classification of the region's art as non-Western, or – in the best-case scenario as demi-Western – really implies a privileged status. But precisely by asking these often uncomfortable questions (like is Central and Eastern Europe privileged, or victimized, or Eurocentric, or not), we are inevitably evaluating the validity of the claims made by so-called global art history. If it really is the case that global art history has no place for Central and Eastern Europe, then how truly global it is? Does one region's inclusion really need to amount to another region's exclusion from mainstream art history? If global art history is just about simply shuffling around regions and their art, then we cannot see it as a revisionist strategy of bringing equity into the discipline, but simply an attempt to recreate the canon, even if on slightly different terms. It's no longer about Michelangelo and Rembrandt; now it's about Michelangelo's unfulfilled trip to Constantinople, or Rembrandt's passion for Mughal miniatures.

The question, though, is whether we still need a canon, albeit a modernized one, in the twenty-first century, and my – admittedly very subjective – answer is, no, we do not. A canon is always going to be stifling and limiting as it implies a zero-sum thinking: something needs to be given up to make space for something else. What we need instead is new ways of thinking about

artistic geography, so that any scholar who dares to challenge and confront the discipline's preconceived assumptions has the chance of being noticed by the art-historical establishment. But for this to happen, we must also be willing to radically modernize our field, and this means linking our research to present-day concerns, including climate emergency, migration, populism, nationalism, and the like, to offer new perspectives on the wider discipline of art history. Globalization seems to be ticking all the right boxes today, but it will probably be out of fashion before we realize because the world is now deglobalizing at an alarming rate. And so, here's a chance for us Central and Eastern Europeanists to identify new issues before someone else does.

Anna Baumgartner: I would like to add to this outlook that we need a better research infrastructure and funding. This is the very practical side, but absolutely relevant. Reaching visibility is crucial too. A look at the possibilities of more and more developing forms of science communication could be fruitful. I see the necessity of bundling and providing knowledge of the already existing initiatives. Let me also bring into this discussion the use of social media. There are already existing Facebook groups as e.g. *Decolonizing Eastern Europe* with over 3000 followers. Here scholars from different disciplines, art historians included, exchange information. Instagram and podcasting could be enriching tools in gaining visibility and connecting.

Tomasz Grusiecki: Visibility and institutional backing are two crucial points. Unless we have colleagues at Oxbridge, the Ivies, and the most prestigious North American and European universities and museums fly our banner, we are just tilting at windmills. I sincerely hope that art history departments at *Princeton University*, *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, and *Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität München* remain focused on the region because if new hires are asked to focus on Latin America, Africa, or China (which are, of course, very important areas), there will be even fewer options to train future generations of scholars who may want to focus on Central and Eastern Europe in North America and Western Europe. This underscores still more our professional duty to build critical mass and visibility for the region, so that other art historians take us seriously.

Ostblick: The last remark by Tom provides an excellent conclusion to our discussion. It offers us encouragement for future issues of our e-journal *Ostblick*: to reflect on current approaches, to make research and its particular approaches more widely available by means of translations, and, above all, to establish stable networks between researchers regardless of their institutional anchorage. It is about the plea for internationality that Jan Białostocki and Lajos Vayer (1913–2001) already called for in the 1970s. The perception of arts from/in East Central Europe and Eastern Europe is still dependent on how we institutionalize art history. Therefore, we want to thank our guests for the fruitful and inspiring discussion, which showed the importance of cross-over reflections.

Summary

It was twelve years ago that the section *Ostblick* of *kunsttexte.de* was founded. With our contribution to the issue on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of *kunsttexte.de*, we pick up the thread we laid with our first issue of *Ostblick*. That is, we return to the question of to what extent and from what standpoint can a history of the art of Eastern Europe be understood and related to the broader context of art history. For this we invited Anna Baumgartner (Munich), Mathilde Arnoux (Paris) and Tomasz Grusiecki (Boise) for a roundtable discussion in October 2021 – three colleagues who approach research on the art history of Eastern Europe from different perspectives, in terms of their research interests but also their origins and connections to different research communities. Five months after our roundtable, Russia opened its war against Ukraine. When trying to establish contacts with colleagues in Ukraine in the days and weeks that followed, we were realizing how little the history of art in Ukraine, and likewise Ukrainian art historiography, had been integrated into our research in general and into the publications of *Ostblick* in particular. An observation we reflect on in a foreword, and that once again underlines the need to become aware of and revisit the conceptual presuppositions, epistemological conditionality, and theoretical frameworks of the study of the art of Eastern Europe.

Titel

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