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Contemporary Art Museums in Central Europe

Between International Discourse
and Nation (Re)building Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

The paper investigates the collection-building strategies in the contemporary art museums of Central Europe.¹ As its methodology, the study takes into consideration the collection-building principles and the way they are related to other activities of the institutions. It focuses on the role of the collection as an ensemble of musealized objects. The paper also intends to raise questions on how such institutions contribute, through their collections, to the participation of the given country in international discourse on contemporaneity. As a consequence of this collection-based observation conception, contemporary art centers and museums without collections are excluded from the observations. The observation focuses on the factors of national and international narratives intersecting each other in the process of modern and contemporary art museum-based national cultural policies.²

What are the borders of Central Europe? Where does Eastern Europe start? Where does Western Europe end? In the present study, the definition of Central Europe is based on a museo-geopolitical approach, and includes all the countries with a shared process of museum development since the 1920s: the formation of national history, art and ethnographical collections, either based on existing private collections or on the institutionalization of museum departments in the above fields. The formation of museums with an artistic character was closely related to national movements in the nineteenth

¹ The research in Poland has been financed by the Visegrad Fund (2012) and in the Czech Republic by the Centre français de recherche en sciences sociales, Prague (2013). Hereby I thank the help of Wojciech Przybylski, Philippe Rusin, Katarzyna Jagodzińska and Barnabás Bencsik.

² Peter ARONSSON and Gabriella ELGENIUS. "Making National Museums in Europe. A Comparative Approach." In *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010*. Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28–30 April 2011, Edited by Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011 (EuNaMus Report No 1.): 13–14, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/064/ecp064.pdf>.

century, and occurred in imperial contexts in the territories of the Habsburg Empire (later Austria-Hungary), Prussia (later Germany) and Russia. The desire for a national encyclopedic museum tied in with a national approach to the history of local, regional and national events.³

The timeframe of the paper concerns the aftermath of the dramatic political changes that shook the entire region, the fall of communism in 1989. The accelerated re-adaptation of social, economic and cultural conditions to the Western model, coupled with the insertion of the nation-based political entities of the region into new global realities, has fostered, alongside many other things, the globalization of the art scene and the art market. The consequences of political change, the spread of liberal capitalism and democracy, the paradigm shift in human rights, in social, religious and racial discourse and tolerance were (and are still) close related to contemporary culture. In post-1989 Central Europe, political, economic, social and cultural practices could finally be reintegrated into society. In the process, open discourse about contemporaneity forged sustained efforts towards globally relevant thought and action. From a broader perspective, the penetration and *institutionalization* of contemporary art and culture in the Central European region post-1989, as an easy entry, advanced the appearance of critical, reflexive contemporary culture in all societies where subversive practices and avant-garde approaches had been banned: the opening of contemporary art museums in the Muslim world or in communist China, the creation of a successful and internationally leading Biennial in Istanbul, and high priced works from contemporary Asian artists are all indicators of the implementation of contemporary thinking in non-Western cultures.⁴

The creation of new nation states in Central Europe after the First World War created a boom in national museums and art galleries, especially in the new capital cities of regional and/or national status. As in post-revolutionary Paris at the beginning of the long

³ One of the exceptions was the concept of Ferenc Pulszky (1814–1897) on the transformation of the collections of the Hungarian National Museum into a universal encyclopedic museum.

⁴ On the critics of the non-Western art market see: Hans BELTING. “Contemporary Art as Global Art. A Critical Estimate.” In *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, edited by Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009: 1–27. On-line version: <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/media/file/476716148442.pdf>

nineteenth century, newly created art museums in the post-war period played a crucial role among the foremost representational tools of the new national narratives. The foundation of national museums and art galleries in capitals from Kaunas to Ljubljana, the reorganization of regional museums (*Landesmuseums*), or the transformation of regional collections into national ones, all took place to meet the need of the new national politics to establish some prestige. The foundation of museums based on patriotic, civic or middle-class initiatives was an important characteristic of the region: nations living under Russian, Prussian or Austrian rule, deprived of national administrations until the end of the First World War, with dominant German-speaking intelligentsias in the national lands in the nineteenth century, followed Western nation-building strategies and faced strikingly similar problems.⁵ From the beginning of the 1920s, the internationalization of art and modern art museums coincided with the formation of nation states in Central Europe, and therefore with the desire to create national cultural and artistic canons. The result of the shift in status of an object from a non-specified to a specified meaning – during the process of musealization – means that museum objects “leave the functional everyday environment of use and are placed in a special environment where they serve an entirely different purpose.”⁶

CONTEMPORANEITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

In spite of vast museological research in the field of museums, their role and function, their exhibitions, their social activities and, in more general terms, the role of contemporary art museums in contemporary culture, the primary purpose of all museums, the acquisition and preservation of artworks, is lacking from the discourse. To acquire artworks and build up the collection is one of the foremost aims of any museum; the acquisition of artworks is at the core of the process of musealization. This has held true

⁵ Ernst GELLNER. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983 and Anthony D. SMITH. *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁶ John CARMAN. “Promotion to Heritage. How Museum Objects Are Made.” In *Encouraging Collections Mobility*, edited by Susanna Pettersson, Monika Hagedorn-Saupe, Teijamari Jyrkkiö and Astrid Weij. Helsinki: Finnish National Gallery, 2010: 74.

from the dawn of modern theoretical discourse on museums, as expressed by Louis Réau:⁷ “We understand that museums are made for collections and that they must be built as it were from inside to outside, shaping the container according to the content”, right up until the latest definition of the ICOM: “Museums have a duty to acquire, preserve and promote their collections as a contribution to the safeguarding of the natural, cultural and scientific heritage.”⁸ The national aspect of museums has been a topical theme in recent contemporary museological research.⁹ Although none of this research has been devoted exclusively to the phenomena of contemporary art museums, all the studies concerned constitute a starting point and an invaluable context for Central European research. The present study intends to provide an extension of existing research towards museums dealing with the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in one specific geographical region. The topic of museums, galleries and centers of contemporary art in Central Europe (1989–2009) was recently the subject of a PhD thesis.¹⁰

Musealization is indeed a process by which a museum turns an object into an item of cultural heritage, transforming the status of the object into a museum object. It is a form of patrimonialization when an object of any nature becomes part of the heritage. The musealized artwork becomes the bearer of a meaning with identifiable values. These identifiable values are, in terms of modern and contemporary art, stretched between the national and international contexts. Davallon emphasizes that museums are not based on

⁷ Louis RÉAU. “L’organisation des musées.” *Revue de synthèse historique* 17 (1908): 146–170 and 273–291.

⁸ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006, article 2.

⁹ National museums in Europe, their history, context and dimensions, have recently been researched within the project “European national museums. Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen” conducted by a team led by prof. Peter Aronsson from Linköping University in Sweden (studies: *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010* published in 2011, *Crossing Borders. Connecting European Identities in Museums and Online* published in 2012, *Museum Policies in Europe 1990–2010. Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia* published in 2012, *Great Narratives of the Past Traditions and Revisions in National Museums* published in 2012, *Voices from the Museum. Survey Research in Europe’s National Museums* published in 2012). All published by Linköping University Electronic Press: <http://www.ep.liu.se/index.en.asp> National museums have recently been studied also in a number of books edited and written by key museologists, e.g. S.J. KNELL et al. (eds). *National Museums. New Studies from around the World*. London: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁰ Katarzyna JAGODZIŃSKA. *Muzea centra i galerie sztuki współczesnej w Europie Środkowej (1989–2009)* [Museums, galleries and centres of contemporary art in Central Europe (1989–2009)], Cracow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2012.

collections, but instead, collections are communicational means of presenting objects.¹¹ If we accept the concept of Waidacher, the object is a signal in itself. An object in a collection acquires one or more meanings through the process of musealization, and these meanings are expanded and enriched in the exhibition: “the object has a meaning from the moment it enters the museum and forms part of the heritage.”¹² If we accept Davallon’s view, musealization is a specific form of patrimonialization carried out by the museum. Thus, through this process, the museum bestows additional values upon objects. Such values, in the case of the newly formed national institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century, were fundamental in the process of nation building. Any artwork musealized in one of the newly created art museums in Central and Eastern Europe after 1920 – exclusively founded by national governments – were thus patrimonialized in national narratives. This was nothing new – since the reorganization of the Louvre in the 1780s, collections and individual artworks have been subject to political appropriation in modern museums. This formed an antagonistic relationship with the international character of modernism, as one of the crucial phenomena of modern art is its *international* character. Modernist artworks surpassed the nineteenth-century classification of national schools and national canons; they reflected formal artistic problems and philosophical issues, based on the shared experience of people anywhere.

The region of Central Europe (including, in this discourse, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and, to a certain extent, Serbia) is a fluid geo-political concept and a politically unstable territory with constantly shifting borders within the given timespan; but also, as mentioned earlier, 1) a group of countries where Western civilization and Western values have already been nationalized in the process of museum-making from the nineteenth century onwards; 2) the appearance of modern canons, avant-garde collections of the interwar period, or contemporary collections of the post-WWII socio-political context (either in autonomous institutions or as divisions of

¹¹ Jean DAVALLON. “Heritage, Preservation, Research, Object, Collection, Musealization.” In *Synthesis of the ICOFOM Symposium. Musology: Back to Basics*. 2009, július 1–3. Liege: Free University of Liege, 2009 (ICOFOM Study Series, no 38): 13.

http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/icofom/pdf/ISS%2038%20Suppl-Engl.pdf

¹² *Ibid.*: 14.

other art museums) has served as a set of objectified references in intellectual discourse. The implementation of contemporaneity from the 1960s onwards has traced very different strategies in contemporary museums and public collections in Central Europe. Since 1989, as a sign of the globalized art market, all major contemporary art museums in the region have adopted similar strategies to the Western model: internationally well-known artists and experts, extensive networking and a presence at international events, a regional focus on acquisition policy, and extra-institutional scope in the archival profile.

Museums are only one factor – albeit a major one – in the contemporary art scene. The role of private galleries, non-profit spaces, graduate schools, and individual practices has been fundamental in the development of the art scene in Central Europe. The present study focuses exclusively on museums as places where the canon is decided upon jointly by the private and the public spheres. Even though the separation of for-profit and non-profit sectors within the international contemporary art world seems inadequate,¹³ contemporary art museums in Central Europe are still part of the public, non-profit sector of the art scene. The non-profit sector, represented mainly by artist-run places and a few non-profit galleries, is more likely to be headed by artists, independent curators and collectors. The corporate sector is active in issuing grants and awards, in influencing prices and, as a recent phenomenon, in collection building.

The revolution in museum architecture, the inclusion of the museum in the semiotic interpretation, and the reinterpretation of artworks, was initiated by the Pompidou Centre, inaugurated in 1977. The Pompidou Centre in Paris, as an autonomous construction, or the Tate Modern in London, as a conceptually adequate solution, reflect the aesthetic, semiotic, urban and museological needs of contemporary art. Even if in terms of museum architecture, the building of the Pompidou Centre has opened the way to the “post-museum”,¹⁴ the spatial shift in museum architecture and urbanism is still lacking in this region. Central Europe and its museums seem to have stepped back from this process, only

¹³ Derrick CHONG. “Stakeholder relationship in the market for contemporary art.” In *Understanding International Art Markets And Management*, edited by Iain Robertson. London: Routledge, 2005: 95.

¹⁴ Douglas DAVIS (foreword by Jack Lang). *The Museum Transformed. Design and Culture in the Post-Pompidou Age*. New York: Abbatville Press, 1990.

one new innovative construction and one brownfield extension can be included in the Pompidou-Tate paradigm: Franić's MSU in Zagreb and the ms2 in Łódź. With the sole exception of the new building of the MSU Zagreb, the work of the young Croatian architect Igor Franić, the dynamic of new museum architecture lags far behind the local boom in founding museums that the region is experiencing nowadays. It is more than mere coincidence that the first ranked contemporary museum architecture happened to be implemented in those cities: the Museum Sztuki Łódź and the Municipal Gallery in Zagreb were the very first places of avant-garde practice in the region, in the 1930s and the 1950s, respectively. The transformative power of contemporary thinking had an influence on the architectural competition and on the innovative approach to new museum constructions.¹⁵

THE FIRST COLLECTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE REGION'S MUSEUMS

Contemporary art, as a complex phenomenon, lies beyond the notion of the “art of our times”. Contemporary, in an art history sense, is used as to distinguish modern art from the 1960s onwards. The paradigmatic change in the consideration of modern art (similarly to colonial or aboriginal art) as a complex but historical practice is due to the emergence of new artistic practices in the early 1960s, followed by new curatorial positions, articulated from the 1970s. In terms of political and social concepts, contemporary art is a way of communicating and a series of divergent practices, and has a complex field of interpretation. It correlates to the reshaping of the art world, from the theoretical to the institutional. The change in name from the Museum of Modern Art to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston is symbolic of this reshaping. Contemporary Art, beyond the stylistic, thematic, compositional and technical inquiries of modern art, is a reflection of one's actual political, social and cultural circumstances. This originally included multiple ways of interpretation and rejected the necessity of communicational transmission via a

¹⁵ Katarzyna JAGODZIŃSKA. “A Museum Open to the Street.” *Riha Journal* 0024 (2011) <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2011/2011-apr-jun/jagodzinska-a-museum-open-to-the-street-en>

third party. Its most recent definitions, its history and its political, social and institutional context are the subject of a book by Terry Smith, who identifies three major currents within contemporary art.¹⁶ In Central Europe the creation of contemporary art museums concerned private founders (Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Museum Kampa, Prague), national ministerial or administrative bodies (*Signs of the Times* initiative, Poland), or local authorities (MSU, Zagreb). In spite of the contribution made to new museums by private or corporate founders, they inevitably depended on national support, as was the case with the Ludwig Museum in Budapest (1989), or the failure of the Guggenheim-Hermitage in Vilnius (2009).

The Muzeum Sztuki Łódź played a pioneering role in the implementation of modernism and the avant-garde in Central European Museums. Apart from its regional leading position, it was among the very first truly modern museums in the world. In the 1920s–1930s, a group of radical artists from the “a.r.” group began to collect works from the most important living artists. This initiative was widely recognized as being of primary importance, and many outstanding artists, (Fernand Léger, Max Ernst, Hans Arp and Kurt Schwitters) donated works to the collection. Through the donation of works of Cubist, Futurist, Constructivist, Purist, Neoplasticist and Surrealist art, the museum became a leading laboratory of new artistic trends and ideas. The consistently and constantly growing collection includes modern and contemporary artworks. The founding act by the artists and poets involved (Władysław Strzemiński, Katarzyna Kobro, Henryk Stażewski, Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski of the “a.r.” group) had an extraordinary influence, as this was the first ever museum initiated by artists themselves. Their activity in the international avant-garde movement meant that they were able to create an outstanding international collection of modern art. The museum’s original collection, the *International Modern Art Collection* of the “a.r.” group, was first exhibited in the Kazimierz Bartoszewicz Museum of History and Art. The institution was renamed the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź in 1950, when it became a state institution. Despite the change in name and

¹⁶ Terry SMITH: *What Is Contemporary Art?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009: 6–9.

ownership, the museum has remained a special place for modern and avant-garde artists, and it continuously receives donations of works and even entire collections from artists and collectors. Among the most significant contributors were Joseph Beuys, who donated an important part of his Archives to the museum in 1981, as a part of his action entitled *Polentransport 1981*; and in the same year, “Solidarity” gave, as permanent deposits, works created by the participants of “Construction in Process.”

Even though the foundation of new contemporary art museums did not cease during the communist regimes, they were mostly concentrated in one specific country in the region, to the national capitals of the former Yugoslavia (Zagreb 1953, Belgrade 1963). The boom in new museums of art, science and memory since the 1970s in the West, especially in the USA, began to spread in Central and East European countries after the new millennium. This affected both post-soviet and post-communist countries, and therefore the region as a whole, with a certain disparity in time and space.

The earliest contemporary art museums and centers were established in Hungary and Poland (Ludwig Museum in 1989, Ujazdowski Center in 1990). In the post-1989 period, the musealization of contemporary art, as an effective way of integrating national cultural, social and political discourses into an international context, began with the foundation of the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art in Budapest. The Ludwig Museum has, for the entire duration of its existence, been jointly hosted by other cultural institutions. Between 1992 and 2005, the site of the former Museum of the Labor Movement, the red-marble-paved “D” wing of the exhibition and cultural complex in Buda Royal Castle, served as a temporary museum venue. This location was greatly influenced by the fact that the Ludwig Museum was founded initially as a department of the Hungarian National Gallery. In 2005, the Ludwig Museum moved to the Western wing of the Palace of Arts, a cultural complex on the south bank of central Budapest that also hosts the National Concert Hall and a theater, at a considerable distance from the National Gallery in the Buda Castle, meaning that there was still no addition to the architectural landscape of contemporary art museums in this region.

The contribution of individual artists and groups within Hungary served as a reference point in the debate on the foundation of museums. The use of the national collection of Hungarian contemporary art of the Hungarian National Gallery by Peter and

Irene Ludwig represented a new direction in the strategy of the Ludwigs. When they decided to donate a part of their own important collection of contemporary art, the couple consciously relied on the already existing collection of the National Gallery to create a collection of international significance, the first of its kind in a Soviet-Bloc country. The donation contained works by important members of the contemporary art scenes of the West (Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Malcolm Morley and Jörg Immendorff) and the East (Werner Tübke, Eduard Steinberg). The future museum was intentionally founded as a branch the Hungarian National Gallery, with the aim of including the National Gallery's collection of Hungarian contemporary art into the Ludwig Museum.

In the Czech Republic, the Museum Kampa is a privately founded contemporary art museum in Prague. Its opening in 2003 was part of the upsurge in contemporary art centers that has taken place since the beginning of the new millennium. The Jan and Meda Mládek Foundation maintains the collection of Central European Modern art, with a special focus on artworks by František Kupka and Otto Gutfreund, leading figures of Czech modernism. Together with the Jiří and Běla Kolář and Jindřich Chaloupecký collections, the museum now plays an important role in the research and exhibition of Czech modernism in Central and Eastern European (CEE) art history. The leading artists of Czech modernism, František Kupka, Otto Gutfreund and Jiří Kolář, are included in an extensive collection of CEE modern art. Kupka is widely recognized as one of the founders of non-figurative art; Gutfreund is hailed as the father of Cubist sculpture.¹⁷ The regional context of modernism is provided through works by Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian and Yugoslavian artists from the 1960s and 1970s. The collection was conceived to illustrate that, despite the political isolation of the communist times, there was continuity with the modernist traditions and – to a certain extent – dialogue with contemporary trends in terms of artistic thought, quality and diversity. The lion's share of the collection is composed of works by Czech and Slovak artists (paintings, sculptures, objects, drawings and prints) representing the generation emerging in the 1950s–1960s. The collection includes such important

¹⁷ Jiri SETLIK. "Otto Gutfreund at Museum Kampa." In *The Museum Kampa Collection*. Prague: Museum Kampa and Nadace Jana a Medy Mládkových, 2009: 73.

regional artists as Magdalena Abakanowicz and Edward Dwurnik from Poland, Ákos Birkás and György Jovánovics from Hungary, and Ivan Kožarić and Mića Popović from the former Yugoslavia.

The boom in contemporary art museums began after the new millennium, once the first phase of political, economic and social transition had ended in the region and most of the countries had acceded to the European Union. The consequence of repositioning museums within society, the emergence of the mediatized museum and the post-museum, was a major consequence of what Antun Bauer has described as the “second museum revolution”.¹⁸ At the beginning of the new millennium, extensive museum constructions began in many countries: this period was characterized by the foundation of new museums and the construction of new museum sites. This new phenomenon was marked in some countries by national memorial places, museums of technology and innovation, while the transformation of former industrial zones into cultural and educational centers has become quite widespread. Apart from memorial centers and history museums, a series of contemporary art galleries and arts centers was created in the new millennium.

Poland’s cultural modernization took on a role of equal weight to the process of economic, infrastructural and social cohesion. The most extensive museum-building program took place in Poland, where the first museum initiative after European Union (EU) accession, *Signs of the Times*, had the ambitious plan of establishing 16 new contemporary art museums and centers across the country (2003–2004). The constant furor surrounding the planned building of MoMA Warsaw, the reshaped architecture of the former Schindler factory for MOCAK in Kraków, or the planned but not yet started museum district in Wrocław, do not seem fully adequate venues for a new critical approach, described as a spatial revolution. By the new millennium, museum architecture had a wealth of experience in the spatial needs and conditions for the provocative, decontextualized approach required by contemporary artistic practices, essential for its communication. The contemporary art museums in the region, as architectural entities, do not create the necessary contact zone between different social groups, and therefore, with

¹⁸ On the concept of Museum revolutions, see: Peter VAN MENSCH. *Towards a Methodology of Museology*. Diss. University of Zagreb, 1992: 5.

occasional exceptions, regional museum architecture does not accomplish the primary mission of contemporary art museums.

At the same time as the Polish program of accelerated museum foundation and constructions, Hungary and the Czech Republic strengthened their existing positions with the (re)construction of buildings to house contemporary art museums. In Hungary the construction of the Palace of Arts (2001–2005), a multifunctional cultural center, raised ideas about founding a Museum of Modern Hungarian Art; while in Prague, the Museum Kampa opened its gates to the public (2003) as the first and so far only non-state founded museum of modern and contemporary art in the capital. The museum was set up by a collaboration between the city and its managing foundation – the building was provided by the city of Prague, while the collection was donated to the Czech capital, and the museum itself is run by a foundation. This process continued in the course of the first decade of the new century. Building on the national museum systems formed during the interwar period, modern and contemporary art institutions are now beginning to cover the region.¹⁹

International visibility and activity seem to be in close correlation with collection-building policies. Given the relatively late foundation of contemporary art museums in the region, and their limited financial sources, important American and European artists from the 1960s–1980s are represented only in the collection of the Ludwig Museum, thanks to donations and a long-term loan. Turning the scope of Central European collection-building to face the context of its own region seemed to provide an adequate answer in terms of both art history and finance. The first of this genre, Arteast 2000+, served as the model for the Ludwig Museum between 2008 and 2013, and for MoMA Warsaw. Moreover, it fostered the creation of the first joint archival project between several Central European

¹⁹ Poland (Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; Contemporary Museum, Wrocław; Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow) Czech Republic (Kampa Museum, Prague), Slovenia (Muzej Sodobne Umetnosti, MSU+MSUN, Ljubljana), Croatia, (Muzej Suvremene Umjetnosti, MSU, Zagreb), Hungary (Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest), Romania (Muzeul National de Arta Contemporana NMAC, Bucharest), and Estonia (Kunstmuseum – KUMU, Tallinn).

contemporary art museums, the “Digitizing Ideas” project, which focuses on performance conservation.²⁰

This boom in Central European countries around 2003–2004 coincided with the worldwide emergence of the theoretical reshaping of museums in the light of technological advances, and with the concomitant acceleration in the construction of museums. In this pre-crisis atmosphere, museums appeared not as places of intellectual discussion but as profit-oriented investments. The Deutsche Guggenheim Museum in Berlin, for example, or the joint venture of the Guggenheim and Hermitage in Vilnius, faced problems of sustainability and financing. The closure of the first and the failure of the latter project testify to a new post-crisis museum model: the necessity of financial sustainability, a forward-looking approach to the social mission of the museum, and an innovative collection-building strategy. The statement of the art historian, Hans Belting, on the role of contemporary art museums is fully applicable to post-communist societies: instead of presenting the history of art, they should promote reflection on our contemporary reality, and on social and political issues.²¹

²⁰ The website *Digitizing Ideas: Archives of Conceptual and Neo-Avantgarde Art Practices* (URL <http://www digitizing-ideas.hr>) contains segments of museum-owned and private collections, archives, and libraries from four European museums: Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Modern Gallery in Ljubljana, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and Museum of Contemporary Visual Arts from Vojvodina (Novi Sad), as well as various other archives and private collections participating in the project. Philip AUSLANDER. “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.” *PAJ. A Journal of Performance and Art* 84 (2006): 1–10. Amelia JONES. “Presence in Absentia. Experiencing Performance as Documentation.” *Art Journal* 4 (1997): 11–18. Piotr PIOTROWSKI. *Avangarda u sjeni Jalte* [Avant-garde in the shadow of Jalta]. Zagreb: Institute for Art History, 2011.

²¹ H. BELTING, “Contemporary Art as Global Art,” *op. cit.*: 48.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT AS A COLLECTION-BUILDING STRATEGY

The former Yugoslavia was the first country in the region to establish a new contemporary art museum after the Second World War: the City Gallery of Contemporary Art, founded in 1954, the first post-war example of a municipality-based contemporary art institution in the region. This marked the beginning of a new paradigm, when national narratives were replaced by an international scope in the acquisition and exhibition policies of almost all CEE countries. The museum narratives were fundamentally determined by the cultural policy of the multi-ethnic state, and by Titoism, the third-way politics which incorporated cultural achievements from East and West. New cultural spaces in some of the capitals (Zagreb, Belgrade and Ljubljana) were often jointly created by the city and the state, serving both avant-garde collection-building and the shaping of a common Yugoslav identity.

The first state-founded art museum with a modern and contemporary profile was founded in Belgrade in 1958, called the Museum of Modern Art. In the first institution of Serbia and Yugoslavia, works from the international contemporary art scene were needed to contextualize the Yugoslav artists. MoMA in New York was considered a model in terms of operational and acquisition policy procedures.²² The museum building was designed by Ivan Antić, one of the most important post-war architects in the country. The construction took place from 1960 to 1965. The choice of the location (in the vicinity of the institutions of state administration and the communist party in new Belgrade) and its name (*umatnosti*, meaning contemporary) reflected the social role of the institution in Tito's Yugoslavia. The task of the contemporary institution in the new part of the capital reflected its role as a generator of social development (in this case, driving growth and progress). The collection was subject to society-building considerations: Yugoslav international art was contextualized through works by exponents of major contemporary

²² Zoran ERIC's presentation "What is happening to the principal museum institutions in the region of former Yugoslavia" at *The Next Step International Conference of Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art*, Ljubljana, 2009: http://videolectures.net/nextstep09_debate_musyugo/

Western artistic movements, such as Andy Warhol, Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies, Max Ernst, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein and David Hockney.

Among the region's contemporary art institutions, the Contemporary Art Museum in Zagreb (MSU) has a prominent place. The MSU differs from the museums in the other former Yugoslav republics in many ways. Many important cultural institutions were created in the city after the Second World War, including, in 1954, the Gallery of Contemporary Art, which was just one municipally founded establishment in the Croatian capital. The role of the gallery was to research, document, promote and interpret contemporary art. In its first location, at a former palace in the center, a total of 123 pieces of art were held. The institution was an active member of the Croatian art scene in Zagreb, hosting the Contemporary Art Gallery, the Photographic Film and Television Center, the Croatian Benko Collection, a library with documentation and a number of smaller classes, as well as naive art pieces. The separation of the Croatian Naive Art Museum and then of Jozo Kljaković collection caused long-lasting gaps in the collection.

The museum's acquisition and exhibition policies have evolved in tandem since the museum's foundation, making it the leading institution for Croatian and international art trends. The institution played an active part in the art scene, and therefore in the formation of artistic trends, in the 1960s–1980s: the exhibitions of “New Tendencies” (1961), conceptualist works in the 1970s, and a substantial part of the works of 1980s post-modern artistic trends. The creation of the collection, based on the integration of Croatian and Yugoslav artists, stimulated dialogue between East and West and contributed to the canonization of Eastern artists into international art discourse. This had a long-lasting effect on the reception of artists from the region. Merely ten years after its formation, in 1964 the institution was accepted at the Venice Biennale, the most significant biennial of that time. The exhibition theme selected by the Croatians, “Arte d'oggi nei Musei” “The Art of Today's Museums” – co-presented alongside 17 of the world's largest museums – affirmed the institution's policy. Since then it has continued to participate in the art historiography of the region at international level. The level of recognition is impressive, as two years after the Biennale, in 1966, it was included among the fifteen best museums in Europe, the USA and Japan.

In the case of the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, the regional context was crucial in the creation of its art collection, Arteast 2000+. Its essential aim was to re-establish the relationship between the regional art scene and the international art world. The focus of collection-building, despite decades of isolation, was on artworks reflecting “Western” art dealing with the same issues faced by “Eastern” contemporary artists. The concept was formulated by Zdenka Badovinac, director of the institute since 1992. The first exhibition of Arteast 2000+ was entitled “The Art of Eastern Europe in Dialogue with the West”. This collection is at the core of the contemporary art museum called +MSUM, which, together with its counterpart, the MSU+, composes the double structure of the Moderna Galerija. One national collection of Arteast 2000+ specializes in contemporary art, with the regional focus, appearing in the 1990s, on young artists and on the former Yugoslav art scene. Creating a collection of Eastern and Western works of art in dialogue with each other represented a new trend in the region. The new policy of the Ludwig Museum in Budapest also consciously sought to establish a parallel collection presenting the great generation of the 1960s–1980s alongside the most important representatives of the younger generation.

The Moderna Galerija was the first institution to focus its collection-building strategy on the Central and Eastern European Region. Its consideration of the region as a unique art scene, where – due to the shared communist past – official art and the reception of international trends were often separated from each other, has ensured that this collection serves as a model. Priorities in exhibition and acquisition policies changed when the museum opened up to regional trends. The presentation of the international art scene and the – internationally mostly unknown, but still important – CEE artists took the lead, first in acquisition policy, and then in exhibitions. The national framework was left far behind, and other leading contemporary art museums followed the “Ljubljana paradigm”, such as the Ludwig Museum, Budapest or MoMA Warsaw.

Apart from its internationally oriented collection-building policy, the Slovenian capital’s cultural urban planning policy also seems to have contributed to the institutionalization of contemporaneity into Slovene national culture. In Ljubljana, the physical proximity of some museums to the ministry of culture reflects the high extent to

which the state administration is involved in the implementation of contemporary art and in the appreciation of art creation. Three museums and a ministry make up a cultural district, placed in a former barrack of the Austro-Hungarian Army. This “museum district” (+MSUM, the Slovene Museum of Ethnography and an exhibition complex of the National Museum) is situated close to Metelkova City, a self-declared autonomous social center, a free place for artistic creation, art education, music, art galleries, bars, artists’ studios, designer spaces, and the offices of cultural organizations. The alternative aspect of Metelkova refers to the 1980s, when “high and low was broken down and a platform for social rights” emerged.²³ A reference to this period of modern Slovene history and the contemporary glass addition to the former barrack building hosting +MSUM are signs of the importance accorded to the recent Slovene past. The social activity of the 1980s is referenced continuously in the contemporary artistic creation in Metelkova, and also in the neighboring building of +MSUM, which, as has been seen, has organized some significant exhibitions and built up an important collection of Central and Eastern European art.

The Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest was founded as a department of the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest by foreign collectionneurs. Thanks to them, the first contemporary art museum opened its gates behind the Iron Curtain in the year of great political change, 1989. The Ludwig couple, Peter and Irene Ludwig, established a foundation in Hungary four years after the first exhibition of the Ludwig Collection in the Múcsarnok (Hall of Arts) in 1983. The idea of a privately funded contemporary art museum was completely new in the former Eastern bloc. The museum’s legal basis was ensured by the donation of 70 high-value international artworks (among others, Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg) and in 1991, 95 other artworks were placed in deposit. This was not only Hungary’s first contemporary art museum, but also the first art museum of international standing to be founded during the cold-war period in the CEE region. The new museum’s first permanent home was opened

²³ Katie TIKAMURA. “Where Soldiers Slept, a Cultural Enclave Rises.” *The New York Times*, 3 (February 2008) <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/03/travel/03next.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>

in 1991 in Building “A” of the Royal Palace, organized by the Hungarian National Gallery. The Museum of Contemporary Art, as an institution, was founded in 1996.²⁴

The museum’s acquisition policy, following the model of the Artest 2000+ collection, was focused from 2008 to 2013 on works of the great generation of the 1960s–1970s and on the youngest generation of artists. The territorial interest behind the acquisition is therefore narrower than the original Ludwig donation, as its main focus is the CEE region, with a special interest in Hungarian, ex-Yugoslav, Polish, Romanian and Czech artists. The Archives of the Ludwig Museum contain a continually growing collection of printed and online documents pertaining to the activity of the museum. As an extra-institutional profile, the archive also incorporated in 2010 the documentation (artist files) of C3, the first independent Hungarian neo-avantgarde research Centre. The museum founded the Archives of Tibor Hajas in 2009 to collect, digitize and promote all information related to the life and art of this important Hungarian conceptual and performance artist.

Apart from the acquisition and exhibition activity of the museum, ACAX (Agency for Contemporary Art) was integrated into the administrative body of the institution as a new department in 2010. ACAX’s mission is to strengthen and support the international presence of contemporary Hungarian artists. Its activities focus on the national and international contemporary art scenes, helping communication among the players of the art world. The main responsibilities of ACAX are the artist-in-residency programs, the Check-In Budapest curatorial visitor programs, and the contemporary art of international agencies, in collaboration with exhibitions, public events, conferences and projects, as well as their technical and financial support, not to mention Hungarian participation in preparing for and providing the conditions for international biennials and other major exhibitions.

The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw is one of the youngest contemporary art museums of Europe, founded in 2005 and situated in the center of the Polish capital, in

²⁴ Krisztina SZIPÓCS. “A budapesti Ludwig Múzeum – Kortárs Művészeti Múzeum története.” [History of the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest] In *A gyűjtemény* [The Collection]. Budapest: Ludwig Múzeum and Kortárs Művészeti Múzeum, 2010: 10–47.

what used to be the building of the Emilia department store. Its mission is to collect, make available and promote important works of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, and to highlight the art links to important historical events, social phenomena, and scientific developments. The museum is managed by Joanna Mytkowska, an internationally recognized art historian. The museum is the best-known new contemporary art museum in Poland, and compared with other contemporary art institutions, its activities also extend to the promotion of Polish contemporary culture worldwide. In spite of this, Polish participation in the oldest and most prestigious international art event, the Venice Biennale, is still organized by Zachęta.

As part of its promotion mission, the museum conducts regular public programs. The initial focus of MoMA Warsaw acquired artworks from the CEE region with a special emphasis on avant-garde, socio-political art. Today the museum's scope has broadened and the collection now focuses mainly on wider developing regions.²⁵

The museum's curators initiated new approaches to the art of Central and Eastern Europe, such as "Accomplices. The photographer and the artist around 1970" (2012)²⁶ and "Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism" (2010).²⁷ Apart from its innovative exhibition policy, MoMA Warsaw pays attention to the heritage of collective memory in the field of contemporary culture, by archiving projects. The museum not only hosts public archives, such as those of Alina Szapocznikow and Eustachy Kossakowski, but is also an active member of the CEE region's first contemporary museum network aiming at creating a common online platform for the preservation and research of the region's archives of conceptual and neo-avantgarde art practices, titled "Digitizing Ideas".²⁸

The institution is jointly managed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the City of Warsaw. Apart from the financial questions, the site for the new building

²⁵ List of the artworks in the collection of MoMA Warsaw: <http://artmuseum.pl/kolekcja.php?l=1>

²⁶ Catalogue available at:

http://artmuseum.pl/wydarzenie.php?id=Accomplices_The_photographer_and_the_artist_around_1970

²⁷ Catalogue available at: <http://artmuseum.pl/wydarzenie.php?id=Modernologies>

²⁸ *Digitizing Ideas. Archives of Conceptual and Neo-Avantgarde Art Practices*: <http://www digitizing-ideas.hr/>

also faces as-yet-unresolved legal issues. The status of the land in central Warsaw earmarked for the construction of the new museum building is still uncertain, as descendants of the former owners claim their rights as landowners. The new building was designed by the Swiss architect Christian Kerez, winner of the international competition. The problematic situation concluded with Kerez being dismissed.²⁹ Thus the Polish capital still suffers from a lack of new modern premises for presenting one of its most valuable contemporary art collections. Social dialogue in the first decade of the new millennium focused on museum issues – the symbolic location of the museum, the need for iconic architecture – which had not been discussed since the construction of the last museum building in Poland in the 1930s.³⁰

The international visibility of artists is stated in the missions of two contemporary art museums in Poland. The program of the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle (CCA) focuses on exhibiting a wide range of contemporary art which is part of the international art discourse, so they can react to current cultural and civilizational events and issues. The center presents artworks by Polish and foreign artists, and since its formation at the beginning of the 1990s it has hosted exhibitions of the biggest names in the Polish and international art scenes. Among others, they have included: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Marina Abramović, Mirosław Bałka, Christian Boltanski, John Cage, Tomasz Ciecierski, Zbigniew Dłubak, Tadeusz Kantor, Joseph Kosuth, Zofia Kulik, Annie Leibovitz, Zbigniew Libera, Henry Moore, Roman Opałka, Dennis Oppenheim, Pablo Picasso, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, and Artur Żmijewski.³¹ Their professional cooperation with such prominent artists has transformed the center into an exhibition place which is known and recognized the world over. This recognition has been of utmost benefit to the promotion of Polish artists worldwide. Apart from its exhibition strategy, the CCA also operates an international artist-in-residence program. As the question of archives

²⁹ *Warsaw Fires Architect of Planned Art Museum*. Associated Press, May 18, 2012. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/05/18/warsaw-fires-architect-planned-art-museum/>

³⁰ Katarzyna JAGODZIŃSKA. "Museum Icons for Central Europe." *Bulletin Moravské galerie v Brně* 66 (2010): 26–28.

³¹ Kolekcija 04, 2001–2005. CSW Zamek Ujazdowski, Warszawa, 2005.

lies at the center of contemporary culture, the CCA also actively maintains its own archives. The Centre for Academic Information and Documentation, the largest national database of its kind (including photography and video archives), provides paper-based information on contemporary artists, and has built up an online database on art galleries in Poland.³²

A successful acquisition policy is often supported by extensive archival activity, which includes not only the artists and groups represented in the collection, but far beyond, covering the activities of contemporary artists throughout the country. Apart from the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw, the oldest and most prestigious contemporary art institution of Poland, also monitors the art scene and regularly updates its collection. At the time of its foundation, Warsaw was part of the Russian partition zone. The institution was based on a civic initiative; its aim was to promote the fine arts in Polish society and to strengthen the cultural sovereignty of Polish lands. Once its collection was moved to the storage of the National Museum in Warsaw, Zachęta operated as an exhibition center under the name of the Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions. In spite of the fact that a communist administrative body headed the institution, Zachęta was one of a few internationally recognized exhibition spaces for contemporary art in Poland. After 1989, the institution gained the necessary level of independence and could continue its original activity with a new statute: the promotion of contemporary art in Poland and abroad.³³ Now, the name Zachęta has become an internationally recognized brand for excellence and groundbreaking initiatives in contemporary art discourse. The institution focuses on the activity of the most important Polish contemporary artists (such as Allan Sekula, Zbigniew Libera and Katarzyna Kozyra) and representatives of the youngest generation of artists (The Summer of Youth, Young People in Contemporary Art), on top of which there is also active participation in the international contemporary art discourse (Gender Check – together with MUMOK, Vienna, Bodily Choreography). Zachęta, despite being called a National Gallery, is more than an

³² Contemporary Art Galleries in Poland: http://www.info.galerie.art.pl/index_e.html

³³ Statute of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art: <http://www.zacheta.art.pl/en/page/view/60/about-the-gallery-statute>

exhibition space – with its collection of approximately 3500 artworks, and an extensive archive containing portfolios of almost 32,000 artists and several thousand items of data on the history of art in Poland, the institution is a leading documentation and research center for contemporary art.³⁴

PLAYGROUNDS OF POLITICS – CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS AND NATIONAL DISCOURSES

Poland has played a key role in strengthening the regional presence of contemporary art since the beginning of the new millennium. This is mainly due to the initiative launched in 2004 called *Signs of the Times* (Znaki Czasu). Its aim was to create collections of contemporary art (in a museum or arts center) in all sixteen provinces (województwo) of the country. The ambitious and properly funded plan eventually led to the creation of a total of five institutions, in Kraków, Wrocław, Toruń, Łódź and Białystok. The very first contemporary art center in Poland was the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, founded in 1990 (due to its constantly growing collection the center now has a certain museum profile). The foundation of a museum as an institution often takes place at a different time to the construction of a permanent building to house it. The program was initially supposed to bring collections to all 16 administrative regions, but the final tally was 15 collections in 14 regions (in Silesia in Rzeszów and Warsaw). In three cities did the collections lead to new institutions: in Toruń, Kraków (although the museum here did not eventually house this collection) and Wrocław.

In the case of the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, the collection has been housed in new premises – called ms² – since 2008, with the new building providing the collection with a proper home. The new premises allowed the curators to rethink the display of the collection and to present it according to a new museological concept. Instead of chronological order, the collection is presented on a rotational basis. The role of the groups

³⁴ Since 2012, Zachęta National Gallery of Art is publishing its bilingual annual report online. *Annual Report* 2012: <http://www.zacheta.art.pl/en/page/view/174/about-the-gallery-annual-report>

is to establish a link between the origins of the museum, the activity of the “a.r.” group, and major issues of contemporary culture. The exhibition in 2012 exemplified how the experience of everyday visitors can touch upon the main issues of international intellectual discourse through the thematic groups of “body, trauma, prosthesis”, “construction, utopia, politicization”, “eye, image, reality” and “object, fetish, phantasm”. The old seat of the museum, renamed ms¹, functions as a laboratory and a place for experience with contemporary art: it holds temporary exhibitions and performances, and provides a location for workshops and film screenings. For the relocation and the new display in the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, curators followed the spatial and thematic reorganization of London’s Tate Modern, where the gaps in the continuity of the collection were solved by thematic rather than strictly chronologic displays.

In Hungary, the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, the only internationally recognized contemporary art museum in the country, moved to its new premises, the Palace of Arts, in 2005. In Bucharest, the National Museum of Contemporary Art (Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană, MNAC) was created in 2002 and moved to its new location, one of the wings of the Palace of the People, in 2005, together with the Romanian Parliament, and many other administrative and governmental bodies and cultural institutions. In the Czech Republic, the newly established Museum Kampa, with its collection of CEE modern art, opened its gates in the fully renovated Sova Mills, just a few minutes’ walk along the River Vltava from Prague’s famous Charles Bridge.

Even though Hungary has an important advantage due to the collection maintained by the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, contemporary art seems to be more widely sustained by secondary agents in Poland and Slovenia. An understanding of contemporaneity is therefore more deeply implanted in political thinking in those countries. The core of the Ludwig Museum’s unique and highly appreciated collection contains important works from Western art movements from the 1960s–1970s, which are no longer available, or affordable, on the international art market. The Ludwig Museum performs all the important aspects of contemporary culture, not only through its exhibition and acquisition policy, but also with the activity of ACAX, which researches, promotes and supports Hungarian contemporary art abroad. In many other cases, this kind of activity is carried out by independent institutions and/or governmental bodies.

Since 2010 the museum landscape in Budapest has changed radically into an administratively centralized, politically motivated reorganization of major museums. The reintegration of the Hungarian National Gallery into the Museum of Fine Arts was theoretically based on the joint exhibition of modernity and contemporaneity, following the arguments of the director. In the political discourse of László Baán, “re-unification would be an important argument for the riches of Hungarian art. This is the European model – to show work in an international context – not the separation. That was a Soviet model as a result of which, in 1957, the communist government decided to establish the Hungarian National Gallery by removing the Hungarian works from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts.”³⁵

The illegitimacy of the Hungarian National Gallery became part of the public discourse around the fiftieth anniversary of the institute (2007). Arguments consisting essentially of political-communicational rhetoric became media issues in the public sphere, while the latest results on the history of the museum were largely ignored. The publication of Katalin Sinkó’s history of the museum in 2009 analyzed the complex social-political-cultural context behind the history of the national and art museum phenomenon since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The reintegration of the museum was therefore included among the rhetoric and practices of the new Hungarian cultural policy of overturning decisions made by the communists, implemented since 2010. In fact, the exhibition and publishing policy of the Hungarian National Gallery had a great impact on the integration of Hungarian art into the broader international context. Apart from joint ventures with similar regional institutions, the National Gallery successfully promoted Hungarian art and artists through retrospective and joint exhibitions.³⁶ The Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart (*MODERNizmusok*, 2004), the Neue Galerie Linz (*Ungarn – Avantgarde im 20. Jahrhundert*, 1998), the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon (*Budapest 1869–1914 Modernité*

³⁵ Richard UNWIN. “Budapest Director’s Double Vision for National Museum.” *Museums* 226 (July–August 2011), and on-line: *The Art Newspaper* (3 August 2011) <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Budapest-directors-double-vision-for-national-museum/24249>

³⁶ RÓKA Enikő. “Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum – múlt, jelen, jövő.” [Hungarian National Gallery – Past, Present, Future], presentation held at Eötvös Lóránd University on the 25th January 2012: http://magyarmuzeumok.hu/tema/459_magyar_nemzeti_galeria_%E2%80%93_mult_jelen_es_jovo

hongroise, 1995; *Fauves hongrois*, 2009), the Palazzo Pitti in Florence (*Alla ricerca de colore e della luce*, 2002), and the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome (*La scuola Romana*, 1998) all dedicated important exhibitions to modernism and its social-political-cultural context in Hungary.³⁷ It is clear, that political discourse – by refusing to consider or appreciate the historical facts – embedded the museum reintegration process into a new nationalist cultural discourse.

The reintegration of the collections necessitated the enlargement of the museum site – just as the growing collection of Hungarian art at the Museum of Fine Arts in the 1950s had been one of the reasons behind its separation and the founding of the Hungarian National Gallery. The enlargement of the museum site seems to have culminated in plans for a grand, almost megalomaniac new museum district in the Hungarian capital, called Liget Budapest, which is to encompass all but one of the national museums of art (The New National Gallery, The Museum of Photography, The Museum of Architecture, The Museum of Ethnography and the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art). The project, which has been widely criticized by urban planners, art historians and museum professionals alike, seems to transform the museum conclusively from a laboratory of ideas and scientific research into one of the branches of a branded cultural industry, serving mainly a representational function. The recently rebaptised Liget Budapest project is, on the one hand, an adoption of the Branding Cities through Art concept, and, in political terms, the embodiment of a neo-historicizing nationalist (art) historical perspective.³⁸ As a consequence of this process, the exhibition policy of the Ludwig Museum Budapest has changed since 2013 in the direction of off-stream exhibitions and the promotion of internationally known artists of Hungarian origin (Simon Hantaï, Judit

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See H. BELTING, “Contemporary Art as Global Art,” *op. cit.* For the new national discourse in monuments and museums in the CEE region, see: *Herito* 3 (2011). This nation-rebuilding strategy is getting enrooted in the West. Tomaso MONTANARI. “La cultura di Matteo Renzi.” *Il fatto quotidiano.it*, 1 March 2012: <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/03/01/cultura-matteo-renzi/194859/>

Reigl) – in both cases private collectors have made important contributions to the exhibitions.³⁹

The foundation and history of the Museum of Contemporaneity in Wrocław perfectly reflects the huge paradigm shift the inhabitants of the region have been through. Wrocław and its lands (commonly referred to as the Regained Territories) were granted back to Poland after the Second World War, and the identity of its inhabitants reflects their multiple origins: many were transferred to the German-speaking Silesian city of Breslau (as Wrocław was then known) from Eastern Polish territories annexed by the Soviet Union in the same post-WWII period. Some important cultural and educational institutes were transferred to Wrocław, such as Lviv University, some important museum collections, and the enigmatic Raławice Panorama, a cycloramic painting dating back to 1893–1894, which symbolizes the heroic struggle for an independent Poland. Despite its weak economic postwar situation, Wrocław quickly became a new and important cultural and intellectual center of Poland.⁴⁰ As the director of the Museum, Dorota Monkiewicz, underlined, the question of when the process of intellectualization (this notion refers not only to the concentration of institutions but also to the cultural behavior of artists and cultural professionals) “begins in Wrocław is a fundamental issue for the local culture and the identity of modern inhabitants of the city.”⁴¹ The museums of the city refer to the rich (both in their diversity and in their semantics): while the National Museum has a rich collection of Silesian art, the city museum refers to the city’s history through a German narrative. The new contemporary space could be interpreted firstly as a continuity of the rich Lviv (Lemberg) pre-war avant-garde traditions that were removed to Wrocław. The second layer refers to the new intellectual and artistic circles forming since the 1970s.

The Contemporary Museum was established by Wrocław City Council in 2011. The program and mission of the Museum were defined by Piotr Krajewski and Dorota Monkiewicz. The Museum commenced its activity in September 2011 in temporary

³⁹ Due to the lack of official press release and new acquisition exhibitions, the acquisition policy of the new director, Júlia Fabényi, cannot be analyzed in this study.

⁴⁰ Dorota MONKIEWICZ. “Es beginnt in Breslau.” *Museum Współczesne* (2011.09.02): 1–2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 1.

premises, an air-raid shelter in Strzegomski Square, while the institution's final location has had to be postponed from 2016 (the year when Wrocław will be the European Capital of Culture) to 2020. The new building will be situated in the center of the city, in the vicinity of other important national cultural centers such as the Museum of Architecture, the Raławice Panorama, the National Museum of Wrocław and the Academy of Fine Arts. The planned architecture of the museum also refers to the long-standing, progressive international traditions of the city. The institution is currently located in a former air-raid shelter (built in 1942), a surviving reminder of "Festung Breslau", renovated and transformed for museum purposes in 2007 by Wrocław-based architects (VROA and ch+).⁴² The site for the new museum is intended to become a hub for museum institutions in Juliusz Slowacki Park.⁴³ This area will probably be more than a "hub", however. Due to the high concentration of museum institutions, and the common intellectual reference to the city as a place of high international importance, this area might well become the "Museum Quarter of Wrocław".

The institution is much more than a contemporary art museum, as it is a museum of *contemporaneity*, so it refers to a wider range of the human activities of our times, with little emphasis on the critical aspect of contemporary art phenomena. In 2012, the institution's show entitled "Only a Game?" focused on football artefacts borrowed from the National Football Museum in Manchester, England.⁴⁴ The exhibition was organized by UEFA as an accompanying event for the UEFA European Football Championship Euro 2012. The exhibition was intended to illustrate "the answer to the question about the meaning of football for cultures of different countries".⁴⁵

One of the most widely discussed critical aspects of the football phenomenon, the question of masculinity, is a new approach in gender studies. Its scientific relevance was raised mainly in open discussions organized in conjunction with the exhibition. The first

⁴² Krzysztof MYCIELSKI, Ewa P. POREBSKA and Jakub CERTOWICZ. "Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław." *Architektura Murator* 1, no. 208 (2012): 36–51.

⁴³ A presentation of the project is available on the website of the architect studio JDS (Julien De Smedt): Wrocław Museum of Contemporaneity <http://jdsa.eu/wro/>

⁴⁴ Information on "Only a Game" Exhibition: <http://muzeumwspolczesne.pl/mww/kalendarium/wystawa/%E2%80%9Eonly-a-game/?lang=en>

⁴⁵ Description of the exhibition. Detail from the flyer of the exhibition, 2012.

exhibition to deal with gender issues was “Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe” at MUMOK Vienna in 2009–2010. This topic is now on the schedules for forthcoming years of some important contemporary art museums in the CEE region, such as the Lentos Museum, Linz and the Ludwig Museum, Budapest.

The Center of Contemporary Art (CoCA) in Toruń is an initiative of the Signs of the Times program⁴⁶ from 2006, the same year construction work began on the building. The importance of the new building, opened in 2008, is the fact that it is the first newly built exhibition space dedicated to contemporary art in Poland since 1939.⁴⁷ In spite of the ambitious plan of introducing the spirit of contemporary art in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian province via international curatorial programs and co-operations, the center is now a venue for regional artists. The first director, Michal Korolko, is currently Vice-Marshal of the province, while Piotr Całbecki, his deputy at the Museum, is its Marshal. The organizational and institutional background was set up by Stefan Mucha, current Dean of the Regional Firm of Solicitors in Toruń. In June 2008, Joanna Zielińska, program curator, formed an exhibition and research program which followed international contemporary art discourse (More is More, Don't forget me! Souvenirs from Poland, The past is a foreign country).⁴⁸ During her activity, CoCA hosted some 30 international exhibitions and other contemporary art projects. In 2010 the Municipality of Toruń named Paweł Łubowski as director, now in charge of the institution. The contemporary character of the institution can be questioned not only because of its management but also because of its recent exhibition policy. CoCA organized an exhibition to mark the centenary of the foundation of the Association of Polish Artists, which was devoted to the regional section (Toruń District) of the ZPAP, and accompanied by a catalogue. Since 2012 the new artistic director, Dobrila

⁴⁶ *Znaki Czasu* means Signs of the Times in Polish. The name of the institution refers to the foundation of new contemporary art spaces, an initiative of the Polish Ministry of Culture in 2004.

⁴⁷ History of the Center of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu* in Torun: <http://csw.torun.pl/centre/history>

⁴⁸ The exhibition list is available on-line: <http://csw.torun.pl/exhibitions/archive>

Denegri, has launched a number of initiatives aimed at repositioning CoCA on the international contemporary art scene.⁴⁹

An example of the misunderstanding of regionality is the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków (MOC AK). After decades of debate on the future of a new institution in the Małopolska Region, MOC AK opened its gates to the general public in 2011.⁵⁰ The long-winded discussion on the institution became reality in 2004 when the Municipality of Kraków acquired the buildings of the former Schindler Factory. The revitalization of brownfield belts for cultural purposes already had a decades-long global history when it was implemented for this historically important site of the city. The construction of MOC AK was part of a larger plan of urban regeneration. The institution was founded on resources provided by the Municipality of Kraków (President: Jacek Majchrowski) and the Ministry of Culture (Minister: Waldemar Dąbrowski). The architecture competition, launched in 2007, was won by Claudio Nardi and Leonardo Maria Proli, who conserved the industrial aspect of the former factory building whilst transforming it into a contemporary exhibition place. It is also the first Polish contemporary art museum housed in its own, specially designed exhibition space. Indeed, as a converted museum building for contemporary art, the new concrete structure, at many points, faithfully follows the old brick-and-mortar factory building.⁵¹ For many people, transforming the Zabłocie district, especially converting the Schindler factory building into a museum of contemporary art, went against the memorial character of the place.

Potocka's concept of art "becoming more similar to life than to itself" was a major influence on the strategy of MOC AK, which clearly defines museum education as the main goal of the institution. The logic of collecting, the setting of artworks and, especially, the explanatory texts are all intended to help develop the knowledge of a public less familiar

⁴⁹ "China Blue Interviews Dobrila Denegri, New Artistic Director of CoCA." *The Engine Institute, Inc.* Posted on May 4, 2011. <http://theengineinstitute.org/china-blue-interviews-dobrila-denegri-artistic-director-coca>

⁵⁰ The opening of the MOC AK building took place in fact already on the 16th November 2010 as part of the municipal electorate campaign. The opening of the building was in 2010, the opening of the first exhibitions in 2011.

⁵¹ K. JAGODZIŃSKA. *A Museum Open to the Street, op. cit.*: 40.

with the world of contemporary art.⁵² This strong educational motivation can be also traced in the exhibition policy: “The ambition of the exhibition is to encompass the diversity through which art operates at present.”⁵³ Under this approach, curatorial intentions of interpreting artworks in multiple contexts are limited to the greater intention “to use that part of the work that fits the more general ‘text’ that the exhibition is intended to be.”⁵⁴

MOCAK, a museum focusing on local artistic traditions and on the achievements of Kraków and Małopolska, not only possesses its own collection (a part of it formerly belonging to its first director, Mrs. Potocka) and a library, but, as a new standard for contemporary art museums, it also pays special attention to archiving, including the archive of the photography and installation artist, Mikołaj Smoczyński. As part of its scientific mission, MOCAK now maintains the artist's paintings and his photographic archive, which were donated to the institution as a gift from his family. Mieczysław Porębski donated his library to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków years before the building was erected. The library, with its workshop-like interior, was designed by professor Jerzy Porębski. This sense of the regional and the local is also manifested in the series of film projections which are devoted to the history and identity of Zabłocie (the historically charged and recently dramatically changing district of the city in which the museum building is located).

⁵² Maria Anna POTOCKA. *In Praise of Diversity. The MOCAK Collection*. Krakow: MOCAK, 2011: 13.

⁵³ *Ibid.*: 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 14.

CONCLUSION

The international context created in a museum collection is what makes the acquisition, exhibition and interpretation of contemporary artworks reliable and communicable. An acquisition policy with a regional and international context – of artworks with intersecting meanings and cross-references – enables a contemporary art museum to fulfill its mission. A contemporary art museum can thus be turned into a democratic laboratory of ideas, a community space which occupies its place within mental and urban structures and, at the same time, allows its participatory audience proper scope for a continuous questioning and rethinking of identities, political positions and social circumstances. An internationally oriented contemporary art collection within a museum creates the context and the interpretational field that allows an understanding of debates and discourses. An international context of artworks provides the critical background for the act of interpretation. Critical thinking and interpretation, as part of the broader social mission of contemporary art museums, may contribute to a reassessment of the diverging national narratives of the modern nation states of Central Europe, created without exception in the nineteenth-century spirit of democracy and nationalism.

The acts of acquiring, exhibiting and interpreting contemporary art from Central Europe constitute the primary role of international collection-based contemporary art museums. The critical approach to the collection-building activity is a phenomenon that is shared by major contemporary art museums, similarly to the exhibition profile and the interpretation of contemporary art. In the international contemporary art scene, museums act as places of communication, interpretation and canon building. Among the contemporary art museums of Central Europe, some make contributions to the acquisition and interpretation of art from Central Europe in an internationally relevant manner.

Within the broadly defined borders of the region, four major institutions can be considered as fulfilling the crucial requirements of a contemporary art museum: a regional focus in the collection-building activity; extra-institutional scope in the archival profile; internationally well-known artists and experts involved in the functioning of the museum; and an institutional presence at major international events in the field of contemporary art.

The Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, as a unique example of what we would today call an artist-run museum, has redefined its mission partly through urban issues, namely, the opening of ms², the reanimation of a former industrial building. Among the newest institutions, MoMA Warsaw and the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art in Budapest appear as important factors in the international art world, with their leading positions in promoting artists from the region. The MSUM in Ljubljana, along with the promotion of the Artest 2000+ collection, offers a competing vision of contemporary art from the region. Their acquisition and exhibition policies make all four of them important laboratories of contemporary ideas and questions, while the extra-institutional archival scope of the latter three is exemplary. Beyond their continuous efforts to incorporate contemporary ideas into national cultural policies, these four museums also have the highest level of international integration in the region.

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***Contemporary Art Museums in Central Europe
Between International Discourse and Nation (Re)building Strategies***

by Miklós Székely

ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the collection-building strategies in the contemporary art museums of Central Europe. As its methodology, the study takes into consideration the collection-building principles and the way they are related to other activities of the institutions. It focuses on the role of the collection as an ensemble of musealized objects. The paper also intends to raise questions on how such institutions contribute, through their collections, to the participation of the given country in international discourse on contemporaneity. As a consequence of this collection-based observation conception, contemporary art centers and museums without collections are excluded from the observations. The observation focuses on the factors of national and international narratives intersecting each other in the process of modern and contemporary art museum-based national cultural policies.

KEY WORDS

Central Europe, contemporary art, museum, museum studies, political change, cultural policy, museum collection, acquisition policy, documentation, archives

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