

SANJA HORVATINČIĆ

Cultural Politics and Memory Policy of Yugoslav Commissions for the 2nd WW Memorials in the 1950's and the Early 1960's

The end of the Second World War brought along the need for public collective commemoration of victims and celebration of victories. However, the genre of monumental public sculpture in the West part of the newly divided world had at that moment already been in crisis thanks to complex reasons, ranging from the interwar avant-garde rejection of the political use of art to post-war creative inability to materialize the horrors of the War in the traditional form of a public monument. On the other hand, the East had been predominantly insistent on Socialist Realism, limiting artists to a narrow scope of motives and formal expressions. The Cold War crisis was thus also partly reflected in the ways in which official commemoration policy differed (and resembled) in the two Blocks.

In such geo-political context, in which Yugoslavia took neutral, unaligned political position ever since 1948 and formed the global Non-Aligned Movement in 1960, the official Yugoslav attitude toward Modernist aesthetics was of considerable political importance as it served as a visible and evident demonstration of political independence as well as compliance with both sides: by using dominant Modernist aesthetics and formal repertoire of contemporary Western art, the Yugoslav people celebrated the defeat of Fascism and the victory of Communist ideas.

This paper focuses on the ways in which the change of the formal aesthetic expression of the officially commissioned financially supported and symbolically authorised commemorative war monuments followed the changes of memory politics in the context of the Cold War cultural strategies. The key period in that respect are the 1950's and the early 60's, the years during which occurred some of the crucial shifts from the Social Realist toward abstract Modernist aesthetics within the frame of the Yugoslav sculpture. By analysing and comparing several cases of Social Realist monuments on the one hand, and abstract Modernist on the other, we are observing the changes of mechanisms and political tools with which Yugoslav structures of power managed the delicate matter of constructing collective memory of the newly formulated Yugoslav identity.

Sanja Horvatinčić, Research Assistant, Institute of Art History, Zagreb, Croatia