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Creating for the State
An Introduction

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During the second half of the twentieth century, Eastern European countries together with the Soviet Union were ideologically dominated by Marxism-Leninism and experienced the establishment of socialism in all spheres of activity. The role of art during the communist regimes has been studied from an ideological point of view with a domination of Western-perspectives centered on the concept of totalitarianism or totalitarian art[1]. This approach has been amended to include a different national periodization for each of the countries in the region, as well as to identify specific artistic contexts related to the pre-communist experience. In this collection of articles we propose to look at the state art realized in communism from an institutional perspective which focuses most importantly on the creative unions, which were created or reformed by the communist states based on the previous existing trade-unions structures, as well as to other cultural institutions. This institutional perspective can shed light on the state' perspective on the matter, but as well, as several studies in this issue show, on the contradictions of the official policies, on the difficult implementation of the state' projects, and on the dissenting responses by artists in different manners which also change throughout the long period of control by the communist regimes. In line with the studies about the USSR, using the archives of the creative unions allows for a more nuanced outlook on the relationship between the state and artists[2].

While the "state artist"[3] is not specific to the Eastern European and Soviet countries, but can be identified in such diverse political contexts which include France[4], the United States (especially during the New Deal), post-

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1 One of the main references in this sense is this book by Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China*, Collins Harvill, London, 1990.

2 Cécile Pichon-Bonin, *Peinture et politique en URS. S L'itinéraire des membres de la Société des artistes de chevalet (1917-1941)*, Les presses du réel, Paris, 2013; Irène Semenoff-Tian-Chansky, *Le pinceau, la faucille et le marteau. Les peintres et le pouvoir en Union Soviétique de 1953 à 1989*, IMSECO et Institut d'études slaves, Paris, 1993.

3 For a definition for Eastern Europe see Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists under State Socialism*, I.B Tauris Co, Ltd, London, 1988.

4 See for example the recent exhibition "Un art d'État? Commandes publiques aux artistes plasticiens 1945-1965" (31 March-31 July 2017), National Archives of France, Paris.

revolutionary Mexico, Colombia or Peru during the 1920s and 1930s, it is interesting to see what separates the Eastern European and URSS experiences from the rest of instances in which the state calls upon artists to decorate or exalt its power.

A first aspect, which is different, in the case of artists creating for the state in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is the mandatory ideology, which supposedly was required in order to see an artwork accepted and promoted by the state institutions[5]. Nonetheless, a more detailed look, for example at the period of establishment of the state domination over the artistic sphere, shows the hesitations of the states to establish an ideological monopoly and the different superposition of artistic representations and styles even in official orders. A second aspect, which is interesting to stress concerning the Eastern European and Soviet contexts, is related to the length of the state-dominated cultural and artistic institutional models. Whereas in other national contexts the reality of state orders existed, it is rarely as lengthy as the one present in the communist regimes. Furthermore, what is specific to the communist regimes is the disappearance of other possible pathways to artistic financing other than through the state public orders; an independent market from the state was no longer present during the communist regimes, when the state and its different institutions became the exclusive *commanditaires*[6]

This special issue of *Studia Politica* is part of a broader effort of documenting through an institutional perspective based on a comprehensive exploitation of new archival sources the relationship between artists and the state. This research endeavor stems from the research project focused on the case of the Romanian Artists' Union (*Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici*)[7], but takes into account other instances in which this type of relationship can be identified.

Thus, the issue welcomes an array of perspectives on the relationship between the state and the artist during the communist regimes. The collection of articles and reviews interrogate the specificity of creating for the state through a look at diverse artistic contexts (photography, visual arts, literature, amateur

[5] See the volume published after the conference "The State Artist in Romania and Eastern Europe" (5 November 2016, Department of Political Science, University of Bucharest) which includes several studies on specific unions: Caterina Preda (ed.), *The State Artist in Romania and Eastern Europe. The Role of the Creative Unions*, Ed. Universității din București, București, 2017.

[6] At least for the Romanian case an investigation of the functioning of the parallel market, that of private collectors (often members of the nomenklatura) during communism remains to be done.

[7] The research project "From the State Artist to the Artist Dependent on the State: The Union of Visual Artists (of Romania) (1950-2010): The Bucharest Branch" financed by the UEFISCDI (2015-2017) and which developed at the Department of Political Science, University of Bucharest (director Caterina Preda). For more details on the publications and activities, see the page of the project: https://artistuldestatuap.wordpress.com/ (June 15th, 2017).

theater actors), and at different national contexts. While most of the articles are focused on the Romanian case, other articles present the relationship with Balkan neighbors at the beginning of the establishment of the state-dominated model (Cărăbaș, Lopatkina), or the East-German case at the end of the communist regime (Goldstein), thus offering contrasting views on the changing relationship between artists and the state.

In line with the studies of Cécile Pichon-Bonin, the article by Irina Cărăbaș analyzes the period preceding the establishment of the monopoly of the state ideology in Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, and introduces nuances in the widely held view of the abrupt change brought by the post-World War Two transformation. The article by Katarina Lopatkina documents a disappeared painting by Frida Kahlo, which was last seen in Bucharest after being offered by the artist to the USSR and being refused for its artistic style by the new Soviet establishment. Lopatkina's article thus underlines the contradiction between artistic political commitment and institutional twists and turns.

Two articles, by Magda Predescu and Alina Popescu specifically discuss the case of the Romanian Artists' Union (*Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici*). Magda Predescu's article discusses the impact of the Thaw inside the Romanian Artists' Union in the mid-1950s and mid-1960s through the use of a theoretical approach based on the concept of Louis Althusser of "state apparatus" and that of Michel Foucault of the *dispositif*. The study by Alina Popescu analyzes the artistic exchanges the Romanian Artists' Union established with countries in the West and the East in the period that goes from the 1950s to the 1980s, and shows that the institution played an important role besides the other ministries and party institutions that were also active in the establishment of this specific type of relationships.

The study by Maria Orosan Telea is dedicated to the understudied Association of Photographic Artists (AAA) in Romania, established in 1956. The article investigates the AAA through the study of the journal it published, *The Photograph* (*Fotografia*) and through a critical analysis of its contents during the late 1960s and 1970s, in order to check the influence of the "July 1971" theses enounced by Ceaușescu and which are considered as a transformation event in what concerns the cultural sphere. Maria Alina Asavei analyzes in her article the very interesting and understudied case of the amateur comedy rural brigades in a specific county of Romania and shows the limited success of the state imagined strategy of designing a specific form of state humor.

The article by Tom Goldstein analyzes one of the last congresses of the Union of Writers in the GDR and the types of dissent that came about surprising the leaders and the party. The study of Goldstein is an interesting comparing element of the study by Cécile Vaissié, which documented a similar congress,

in 1986 of the union of cinematographers in the USSR[8]. This interesting parallel further supports the comparative approach of the creative unions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during communism, as well as after their transition to democracy.

Two articles, by Ileana Pintilie and Dumitru Lăcătușu are dedicated to two Romanian artists but from dramatically different perspectives. Ileana's Pintilie study of Ion Grigorescu introduces the artist through a look of his dissenting approach of power both during and after communism. Lăcătușu's article about Ion Irimescu analyzes his collaboration with the state institutions, and his ability to survive during four different political regimes through a specific type of pact he made with power.

Finally, the reviews included in this special issue integrate volumes that complement the information provided by the authors of the articles. For example, the review by Kristóf Nagy analyzes a book by Horváth György that investigates the Artistic Fund of Hungary, an institution similar to the *Fondul Plastic* in Romania, which allows for interesting parallels. Cristina Stoenescu's review of the book coordinated by Anca Oroveanu et ali. provides an interesting addenda to this special issue as it deals with art that was created during communism and in the 1990s. Alina Popescu's review of Constantin Pârvulescu's book analyzes the cinematographic landscape of Eastern Europe through a focus on the concept of orphan.

[8] Cécile Vaissié, "L'Union du cinéma d'URSS, moteur, reflet et victime de la perestroika (1986-1991)", in Caterina Preda (ed.), *The State Artist in Romania and Eastern Europe*…cit., pp. 283-309.