Soviet-American Art Exchanges during the Thaw: from Bold Openings to Hasty Retreats

East-West artistic connections during the Cold War were a complex range of phenomena including the circulation of works of art, travelling by art professionals, the exchange of practices and the adoption of art currents from the other side of the Iron Curtain. The Cold War has also been said to have influenced the arts and artistic processes in a number of ways. Yet, art has always shunned political borders, wavering between the guidance of individual and governmental patrons, and borderless expression. This chapter discusses an attempt at an extensive exchange of exhibitions between the Soviet Union and the United States around the late 1950s that involved New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Pushkin Art Museum from Moscow and many other leading art institutions. It illustrates the prospects of fine art in expanding the horizons of people, while at the same time it manifests the strict limitations that political players on both sides managed to impose on the arts.

By the 1950s, the Soviet Union had been isolated from the currents of contemporary western art, just as western influences in general had been considered harmful throughout the Stalinist period. Things started to change after Stalin's death. The change did not take place overnight, but it became possible to follow western art currents through magazines, and in occasional discussions with foreigners. However modern western art rarely found its way to the Soviet Union, nor was it easily accessible to broad audiences. Rather than examining what kind of influences flowed from west to east, this chapter takes a look at the formation of artistic connections between the eastern and western artistic worlds in the post-Stalin period. It tries to explain why, when compared to music and dance, east-west connections in the fine arts were few and why many early projects failed despite considerable high-level involvement.

The first part of Nikita Khrushchev's period at the helm of the Soviet Union is often called the Thaw. The years between 1956 and 1962 saw strong destalinization, especially the dismantling of physical terror, but also the liberalization of culture and of the mass media. Apart from inner processes, the Thaw significantly altered the Soviet position in the world scene. Recently there have emerged works evaluating Soviet interaction with the surrounding capitalist world and the implications of these connections.[1] Indeed, if we compare it to the preceding Stalinist era, the Thaw

[1] In most general studies about the Cold War, culture, and the arts in particular, are mostly omitted. Recent decades, however, have produced some noteworthy exceptions in this respect e.g.: W. Hixson, Parting the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961. London: Macmillan Press, 1996; F. Saunders, Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War, London: Granta Books, 1999; D. Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; Y. Richmond, Cultural Exchange and the Cold

period saw a drastic opening to the West, with selected members of the cultural and artistic intelligentsia being allowed access to western countries, to their colleagues in the West and to western artistic currents.

The case here describes the Soviet willingness for cultural exchanges, the limits and implications of such exchanges, and relations between American and Soviet art professionals as related to art exchange projects, describing their manoeuvering space under political pressures. This case is centred on Alfred H. Barr Jr, one of the most influential non-artists in the world of modern art, but also on his organization, the Museum of Modern Art in New York. There has been research concentrating on Barr and his role in the Cold War artistic world.[2] Instead of concentrating on Barr, his work and operations are used as examples of the changes in the Soviet attitude towards the West, about East-West artistic exchanges as well as the formation and functioning of transnational networks during the post-Stalin era. Barr is known mainly as a missionary for modern art and for his work in popularising abstract art. But he also visited the Soviet Union a few times and when it became possible, was in correspondence with several of his Soviet colleagues. He was particularly active in arranging an exchange of art exhibitions between American and Soviet art museums, a highly ambitious project that will be discussed here. But, first there is a need to discuss briefly the framework that made such projects possible in the first place.

East-West cultural exchanges

After the Second World War, foreign policy in the democratically governed countries became increasingly dependent on popular opinion. This substantially increased the electoral relevance of international relations. The Soviet leadership saw a chance to use this feature which it considered to be a central weakness in western democracies. By culturally influencing foreign populations it aimed at having electorates press their respective governments to become more compliant towards Soviet objectives. Although the Soviet Union had for a long time influenced foreign communists, these measures were now directed to the growing middle classes in order to make a real change.

War: Raising the Iron Curtain, University Park: Penn State Press, 2003; V. Rosenberg, Soviet-American Relations, 1953–1960: Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange During the Eisenhower Presidency, Jefferson: McFarland, 2005; J. Gienow-Hecht Culture and the Cold War in Europe. – M. Leffler & O. Westad, The Cambridge History of the Cold War, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 398–419.

[2] S. Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press. 1985; A. G. Marquis, Alfred H. Barr Jr. Missionary for the Modern. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989; M. Krenn, Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005; P. Hills, "Truth, Freedom, Perfection". Alfred Barr's *What Is Modern Painting?* As Cold War Rhetoric. – G. Barnhisel & C. Turner, Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda and the Cold War. Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010.

Although not even Soviet officials genuinely believed that they could turn foreign middle classes into communists, cultural influencing was believed to make the Soviet Union a positive factor in people's minds instead of being a threat.[3] The change in the Soviet approach to foreign influencing started very quickly after Stalin's death (1953).

Under Stalin, the arts had been kept strictly away from foreign influences. Apart from a few major international exhibitions and musical competitions, the Soviet Union did not send artists abroad, nor were works of art exchanged with western governments. In retrospect, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party itself stated that there were practically no cultural relations with the US government before 1955. Only tours of Paul Robeson and Yehudi Menuhin were then mentioned as exceptions.[4] Then, suddenly, Soviet musicians and dancers started to tour in the West. Furthermore, this meant not only individuals, but in some cases whole opera houses, spent months touring the capitalist countries. Although music and dance led cultural exchanges, other kind of exchanges of delegations and people soon followed.

The change was reflected in the Communist bureaucracy. During the Stalin era, the organization for overseas cultural connections was called VOKS. In 1957 this organization was closed and replaced by two different structures. The first and the more visible was the NGO-styled SSOD, Union of Friendship Societies. It consisted of country-oriented sections, like the Soviet-Finland Friendship Society, and also of smaller thematic sections, for example for particular arts. Yet, it was the other organization that was even more important. The State Committee for Overseas Cultural Ties (GKKS) assumed powers not only from VOKS, but also from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture among others. Throughout the Khrushchev era, this committee exercised wide powers over cultural exchanges and artistic connections to foreign countries. It took care of much of the foreign propaganda, but also controlled parts of the foreign travel, closely coordinating with other parts of the government and Party organs.[5] Although the GKKS was not the origin of Soviet foreign expansion, its establishment is illustrative of the importance placed on foreign cultural operations by the Soviet government and by Khrushchev personally. The head of the GKKS, Yuri Zhukov became a man of importance who facilitated plans for cultural exchanges with foreign countries, if often in the background. Zhukov seems to have been a reformer along the oversimplified dichotomy of neo-Stalinists and reformists in the Soviet bureaucracy. This way,

[3] V. M. Zubok, A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, p. 104.
[4] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennii arkhiv noveishei istorii (hereafter RGANI) f. 5, op. 64, d. 126, ll. 20–24. Report of Cultural Exchange with the US, 19.4.1972.
[5] RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 304, ll. 78–84. Zhukov's memorandum to TsK KPSS, 16.7.1959.

formation of the GKKS heralded the temporary victory of reformists over neo-stalinists around 1956 and 1957.

Indeed, under Zhukov, the GKKS assumed a less rigid and more flexible role in cultural affairs than its predecessors the VOKS and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although still working to benefit communist ideals and the Soviet Union abroad, it downplayed the role of outright propaganda and aimed at both more reactive and proactive approaches. The GKKS's actions were less aggressive and went along with Khrushchev's ideas about openly competing with, but also learning from the West. This led to mutual exchanges not only of artists, students, professionals and tourist groups, but also to exchanges of printed matter and cultural artefacts. Arts took a lead in foreign exchanges during Khrushchev's reign. One US contemporary aptly described Soviet cultural diplomacy as a systematic exploitation of cultural materials, symbols, persons and ideas to reach their foreign political objectives.[6] Indeed, as the Soviet Union signed agreements of bilateral cultural exchange in the latter half of the 1950s with most capitalist countries, and with the US in late 1957, these were Soviet initiatives, closely relating to Khrushchev's ideas of peaceful coexistence.[7] Agreements were often left fairly open, without strict definitions about cooperation in order to prevent western counterparts from controlling too tightly actions on their side.[8] After all, the Soviet government often dealt with prominent individuals and private companies in the West instead of with capitalist governments. Alfred Barr and the Museum of Modern Art he represented were precisely the kind of organizations sought for by Soviet officials: professionals who were able to deliver and whose actions were not completely restricted due to political realities.

The story of Barr

Alfred Barr was primarily a protagonist of abstract art. His "What is Modern Painting?", originally written in 1943, is among the most influential works in the popularisation of abstract art. This work was primarily educational, meant to familiarise broad audiences with modern art, even if it had an important political role in the Cold War.[9] Barr had also become known as the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (established in 1929), curating many of its most famous exhibitions. In MoMA he had seemingly little interest towards the Soviet Union until the mid-1950s

[6] F. Barghoorn, Soviet Cultural Offensive. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960, p. 11.
[7] Peaceful coexistence and the Soviet relationship to the United States has been examined by R. Magnusdóttir, Be careful in America, Premier Khrushchev! – Soviet perceptions of peaceful coexistence with the United States, Cahiers du Monde russe, 47 (2006), pp. 109–130.
[8] RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 370, ll. 74–76. Zhukov's memorandum about bilateral agreements between the Soviet Union and Western Europe and the United States, 28.11.1961.
[9] A. G. Marquis, Alfred H. Barr Jr. p. 215.

as it appeared to be a closed and isolated society, out of reach for westerners. He had, however, made a trip to the Soviet Union in 1927-28, spending there almost three highly influential months in the final days of the NEP era. What he found in Moscow and Leningrad, was an abundance of cultural life, with a chance to meet many of the avant-gardists of the era. Barr did not just follow fine arts, but he was especially keen as well on following music, theatre, and film. He had a chance to meet Sergei Eisenstein, who had a profound impact on Barr, who later inaugurated a film library at MoMA in the 1930s.

Barr regarded his 1928 trip as "the most wonderful experience of my life" despite the difficulties he faced there.[10] As soon as it turned out that he had a chance to renew his contacts, he immediately jumped to the occasion, becoming electrified by the prospects of a Soviet opening to the world. During his trip, Barr had tried to see art collections confiscated from Serge Shchukine and Ivan Morosov especially the early 20th Century French and Russian masterpieces remaining hidden from sight in Moscow museums. This was his first thought when he was contacted by a New York lawyer called Marshall McDuffie in late 1954.

McDuffie had been in wartime Ukraine in 1944 as part of an international relief mission apparently befriending Khrushchev. Ten years later, in a situation where travelling between the Soviet Union and the United States was practically impossible, he cabled Khrushchev personally asking for a permit to travel there. Apart from getting an almost-unheard-of-invitation, he also did a three-hour private interview with Khrushchev[11] which was published in *Collier's* magazine. As he was planning another trip in late 1954, he contacted Barr with an unexpected offer. He alleged he had been contacted by a counsellor in the Soviet Embassy in Washington about a possible sale of some modern paintings. This vague remark was considered to refer to the very collections of Ivan Morosov and Serge Shchukine that included some of the finest works by Picasso, Monet, van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, and many others.[12] Barr was enthusiastic about the chance. He recalled that in the 1930s, Andrew Mellon had bought several notable paintings from the cash-strapped Soviet government, and Barr thought this might be a second such chance.[13] Barr checked McDuffie's background, after which he authorized him to negotiate with the Soviets. Officially, MoMA declined to be involved, but it allowed Barr to act on behalf of unnamed American patrons.[14]

[10] A. G. Marquis, Alfred H. Barr Jr., p. 51-57.
[11] The New York Herald Tribune reported the interview in its March 5, 1954 issue, p. 14.
[12] A. G. Marquis, Alfred H Barr Jr. p. 301.
[13] A. G. Marquis, Alfred H. Barr Jr. pp. 300-301.
[14] It is interesting that in Marquis' biography of Barr, McDuffie was said to have received high references, but for example the former Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Stephen Clark, said that there had been "a divergence of opinion in regard to Mr. McDuffie". Clark saw the project as rather risky. Letter of Stephen C. Clark to

McDuffie went on with the negotiations, but nothing came out of it in the end. Khrushchev was said to have "given a flat turn down" for the proposal.[15] Although paintings had been kept in museum basements for decades, the Soviets had no intention whatsoever of selling them. In fact Yuri Zhukov announced a few years later in the New York Herald Tribune, rather theatrically, that the Soviet Union was going to buy back even those paintings that had been sold to the United States in the 1930s. But an important result from the McDuffie affair was that Barr's attention turned to the Soviet Union for several years to come and he spent a considerable amount of his energy in dealings with his Soviet colleagues.

After dropping the idea of buying early modern masterpieces, Barr started to sound out Soviet officials about a chance to loan some of them for exhibitions in MoMA and other US art museums. First he decided to approach McDuffie asking for his views about Khrushchev's attitude towards the lending of paintings. McDuffie seemed positive about the chance, whilst the US ambassador to the USSR, Charles Bohlen, whom Barr also approached, had a completely contrary opinion.[16] These differences might have been related to the fact that the Soviets, and Khrushchev in particular, placed more trust in American individuals than in representatives of the US government. Furthermore, the US government was still highly suspicious about Soviet aims with cultural exchanges in 1955 and was hesitant to accept offers for an official agreement. Instead, William Burden, the well-connected president of MoMA took the matter straight to the Soviet ambassador successfully pushing the matter forward.[17]

Over the Iron Curtain

The first logical step for Barr was finally to see the paintings in person. Soon after approaching the Soviet embassy, MoMA received the VOKS's representative in March 1956. This visitor was

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Alfred H. Barr Jr. on January 13, 1955 (Archives of American Art, fully copied Alfred H Barr files from the Archives of Museum of Modern Art, hereafter: AAA, AHB). William Burden and David Rockefeller had also given negative reports on McDuffie. Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to John Hay Whitney on January 6, 1955. Other people gave McDuffie much more positive reviews. William Burden as MoMA's president declined to involve MoMA in the project, but allowed Barr to pursue the issue with private collectors, which he did. McDuffie was brokering industrial deals with the Soviet Union, but had also asked the Soviet embassy in Washington about the possibility of acquiring modern, non-realist paintings from the Soviet Union. Surprisingly, Embassy Counsellor Konstantin Fedoseev had referred to painting sellings in the 1930s and hinted that this might take place again. Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Nelson Rockefeller on January 3, 1955.

[15] Letter of Alfred H Barr to William Burden on September 26, 1955 (AAA, AHB).

[16] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Marshall McDuffie on July 5, 1955. See also letter of William Burden to Ambassador Charles Bohlen on April 1, 1955. Barr coordinated the writing of Burden's letter as can be seen in a letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to William Burden on March 21, 1955 (AAA, AHB).

[17] Letter of William Burden to the Soviet Ambassador in the Unites States, September 26, 1955 (AAA, AHB).

Grigory Aleksandrov, famous director and actor of many musical comedies in the Soviet Union, like *Volga-Volga*, *Jolly Fellows* and *Circus* from the 1930s, but also vice-president of VOKS and head of its film section.[18] After the visit, the project started to proceed quickly. Barr's contact in the Soviet embassy was its second secretary and cultural attaché, Yuri Gauk. Within months Barr received a notice that the Soviet Ministry of Culture had forwarded an official request to the Soviet administration (referring to the Communist Party) about an official exchange of paintings between the US and the USSR.[19] Then, Barr was invited to travel with his colleague to the Soviet Union to further the project. In Moscow, they were treated as royals. But what is more important, Barr was allowed into museum storerooms where he finally saw paintings by Kandinsky, Malevich and others that had been hidden from the public for almost four decades.[20] Malevich in particular, was an interesting story, as the majority of his paintings were hidden from sight almost throughout the Soviet era. Eight of his paintings were in MoMA, but almost 200 were in the basements of Soviet museums, such as the Russian Museum in Leningrad and the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.[21]

Barr's experiences from the Soviet Union were very encouraging. In his letter from Moscow, Barr was very positive about the project and stated that there was "a better than 50/50 chance of success". Yet, delays were looming: Barr mentioned that the Russians demanded a reciprocal visit to the US.[22] The problem was not so much about hosting Soviet visitors, than about dealing with the US State Department. Still, after Barr's first trip to the Soviet Union for almost three decades, it seemed that he just might be able to pull off a revolutionary exhibition displaying hidden masterpieces from the Soviet collections. The Soviets, in turn, would get an exhibition of 19th century American paintings and the famous "Family of Man" photo exhibition.

Soviet participants

Formal Soviet approval for the exchange came in the summer of 1956 when acting Soviet Minister of Culture G. S. Orvid wrote "…we accept your suggestions concerning the exchange of picture exhibitions and we are ready in the case of a complete agreement to send to the U.S.A. immediately an exhibition of Russian classical painting, and we accept on our part an exhibition of American painting from the 19th Century." French impressionist paintings from the early 20th Century had

[18] Memorandum by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt about conversation with cultural attaché Gauk on August 7, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[19] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Soviet Minister of Culture Nikolay Mikhailov on May 25, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[20] A. G. Marquis, Alfred H Barr Jr. p. 303.
[21] J. Russell, A fuller view of a Soviet artist. – New York Times (Mar 15, 1989), pp. 17-C.17.
[22] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Porter McCray on June 4, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

been the focus of discussions although Orvid had omitted this from his letter.[23] This might have been due to the delicate background of these paintings. It was safer for the administration to talk fuzzily about classical Russian paintings than to refer to art currents of the early 20th century. Furthermore, Barr and MoMA wished to avoid canonised Soviet era paintings. The interesting point here is that impressionism could be mentioned at all in connection with the exchange. After all, impressionism had been equated with formalism only a few years earlier. Impressionism had been considered most alien to Russian art.[24] Yet, now museum professionals and VOKS representatives were openly considering an exchange of impressionist art with the United States in an obvious manifestation of their reformist approach. However, the Soviets carefully selected American realist and less modern works from the lists of American art in the negotiations.

The Soviet reciprocal visit took place in October-November 1956. The main meeting was on November 3 when directors of the Tretyakov Gallery, of the Pushkin Art Museum and Tamara Mamedova[25] from the Soviet Embassy met with MoMA's staff, together with representatives from Yale University Art Gallery, The Boston Museum of Fine Arts and The Art Institute of Chicago. These institutions, plus the San Francisco Museum of Art, and an unspecified museum in the USSR, were supposed to participate in the exchanges. The plan was to have 100-120 probably 19th Century paintings tour for one year in both countries. The choice of paintings was to be done by Americans for Russian paintings, and the Soviets would choose the paintings from the list drawn up by the Americans. The exhibition was to take place on a reciprocal basis so that each country would cover the costs of transport to the target country, and from there on by the receiving country, insurances included. The preliminary agreement was already rather detailed, stating how paintings would be packaged and transported, ranging from travel arrangements of accompanying personnel to the ascertaining of possible damage to paintings. Communication was supposed to go through the embassies.[26]

[23] Memorandum of Policy: Possible Artistic Exchange with U.S.S.R. [July 1956]. This memorandum was sent to the State Department by MoMA (AAA, AHB).

[24] A. Zotov, Impressionizm kak reaktsionnoe napravlenie v burzhuaznom iskusstve. – Iskusstvo 1 (Jan-Feb 1949), C. 86-91; E. Gilburd, Picasso in Thaw Culture. – Cahiers du Monde Russe 1-2, 47 (2006), p. 71.

[25] Tamara Mamedova had been involved with VOKS, and continued to play an important role in the organization while in the Soviet Embassy in Washington. Her husband was Enver Mamedov, a very important person in the Soviet media directed abroad. He edited Soviet radio broadcasts to the Americas and the UK in the 1950s and was the first editor of USSR, a Soviet English-language magazine. Mamedova became the contact at the embassy after her predecessor Gauk was called back home in August 1956. Memo by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt about conversation with Mamedova on September 7, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

[26] Preliminary draft of agreements relating to an exchange of exhibitions of 19th Century paintings from the USSR and the USA, November 5, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

The key person on the Soviet side was Tamara Mamedova, cultural attaché from the Soviet Embassy in the US, who also represented the soon to be terminated VOKS. Whilst the idea of the exchange had come up when Mamedova's predecessor, Yuri Gauk, was the cultural attaché, Barr had been quite suspicious about Gauk's approach. In Barr's opinion, Gauk "was trying to manoeuvre us into a position where we would be showing Soviet Socialist Realism."[27] Things changed when conservative-minded Gauk was replaced by the apparently more liberal Mamedova. Furthermore, instead of merely accepting Barr's suggestion of arts exchange, she was ready to expand it. She asked MoMA for loans from their film library following Grigory Aleksandrov's proposal, but also adding the famous photo exhibition "Family of Man" to the exchange plan. Barr, too, had a specific petition to add for the Soviets: he was arranging a major Picasso 75th Anniversary exhibition at MoMA for 1957 and for this purpose attempted to get some hidden Picassos from Soviet collections on loan.[28] The Soviets did not seem to have anything against loaning and this project proceeded together with the more extensive US-Soviet art exhibition exchange. However an unexpected twist then took place, as merely hours after the meeting concluded, Soviet forces invaded Hungary complicating things for the moment.

The State Department and US involvement

International politics influenced early projects of East-West cultural exchange perhaps more than later when exchanges became more commonplace. But it was not only Soviet actions that were influential. Already before the Hungarian revolution in autumn 1956, the US State Department had been cautious about cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union. It was impossible to avoid the State Department's involvement in projects related to the Soviet Union. Visas for Soviet visitors for example, were hard to come by, and all visitors had to clear detailed scrutiny by the department officials. Furthermore, in 1956, the Secretary of State was John Foster Dulles, hardly an appeaser, but rather known for his hard stance against communism. Accordingly, the State Department seems to have adopted a very cautious attitude towards the Soviet Union, even in cultural issues. Thus, when the Soviets were preparing for the reciprocal visit in the summer of 1956, MoMA and its staff had to provide the Department with details about the Soviet visit, its nature, and the itinerary a number of times.[29] MoMA also provided the State Department with updates and memorandums of all conversations.

[27] Letter of Alfred H Barr Jr to James White on January 11, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[28] Memo by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt about a conversation with Mamedova on November 29, 1956; Memorandum by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt about a conversation with cultural attaché Gauk on August 7, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[29] Memorandum by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt about discussions with the State Department on August 15, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

Although the State Department was perhaps rightfully wary of Soviet objectives until Soviet cultural attaché Gauk was abruptly called home in late summer 1956, his former assistant, Tamara Mamedova did not invoke any more confidence at the Department. MoMA and Barr, however, very quickly developed friendly and confidential ties with Mamedova. Barr was hardly well-informed about power changes within the Soviet administration, but he and MoMA immediately made a difference between Mamedova and Gauk. For the State Department, Mamedova represented the Soviet government and was therefore unreliable. This is illustrated in the Soviet reciprocal visit in October 1956. When Soviet representatives, Aleksander Zamoshkin and Policarp Lebedev[30], directors of the Pushkin Museum of Arts and Tretyakov Gallery respectively, were selected, the State Department did its best to prevent Mamedova from joining their tour around US art museums.[31] The State Department was convinced that Mamedova would act as an ideological filter, without which Soviet visitors would be more susceptible to American messages. This perception represented a rather naïve and uninformed approach: unlike Mamedova, Lebedev had been a highly placed Party apparatchik under Stalin; Mamedova received her prominent position only under Zhukov and Khrushchev. Indeed, in Barr's view, Mamedova was willing to discuss American and Soviet views on art with the aim of understanding US viewpoints. Indeed, Mamedova visited MoMA informally several times to discuss with Barr and his associates about art and cultural exchanges in general.[32] Barr was hardly naïve himself, but contrary to the State Department, he seems to have made a difference between the Party line and Soviet bureaucrats, seeing certain individuals as human beings with personal interests.

Meanwhile, in the exchange project, the State Department had so far been kept in the background, but Hungarian events brought it to the fore. On December 17, its tone had become quite harsh. Malcolm Toon from the State Department's East-West Contacts staff openly discouraged MoMA from exchanging any films, emphasizing that this was something that Soviets very much desired. Furthermore, MoMA should neither exchange the "Family of Man" photograph exhibition, despite the fact that the US Information Agency was already using the exhibition in several places. Barr was personally very peeved with the State Department about their decision not to send "Family of

[30] Alexander Zamoshkin was a member of the Soviet Academy of Arts and the Director of the Pushkin Museum of Arts until 1961. Zamoshkin was himself an artist while Lebedev was a so- called Party apparatchik, having graduated from the Red Professors' Institute in 1934; he was Director of the Tretyakov Gallery 1954-1972. He had been in prominent positions under Stalin, such as Chief of the Committee on Artistic Affairs from 1948, during the campaigns against formalism and cosmopolitanism.

[31] Letter of James White to Malcolm Toon on October 4, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

[32] Memo by James White on conversation with Russians on September 24, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

Man" to the Soviet Union.[33] This is particularly interesting as the exhibition finally became part of the American exhibition in Moscow in 1959, as part of the Soviet-American deal, but outside the project in question. Finally, the State Department even urged MoMA to avoid correspondence with the Soviets. Simultaneously, MoMA felt uncomfortable about having to ask for the State Department's permission, although it considered cooperation with the Department important.

The State Department's tough stance probably went too far for some of its officials. One department official added off-the-record that, as a private institution, MoMA was free to proceed with negotiations even if official and US-paid exchanges were frozen. About loaning Picasso's paintings from the Soviet Union for MoMA's exhibition, the State Department dryly stated that this had nothing to do with official exchanges: it was not Soviet art, nor from a Soviet artist.[34] Yet, the Department's approach seems to have affected both MoMA's willingness to take the project further, and generally the chances of its success. The Director of MoMA, Rene d'Harnoncourt thus expressed the situation in early January 1957 as follows: "Our project is, perforce, 'on ice' for the time being." He referred to the cooling in US-Soviet relations, but also added that if the situation should improve, things ought to be settled so that the project could continue quickly. Suspension was manifested in the fact that two months after the meeting at MoMA in which detailed plans for the exhibition had been drafted, minutes of the meeting were still not sent to the Soviet side as had been agreed.[35] Mamedova had been asking about the minutes and was worried about them, since usually Americans acted highly efficiently.[36] She apparently sensed that something was wrong. Finally, d'Harnoncourt agreed to send the minutes, but in his letter he did not mention anything towards fulfilling the plans, just as the State Department had advised him to do.[37] It seems that for MoMA, the State Department and the government were too important partners to be angered, even if Barr was personally for the exchange with the Soviets. As a compromise, while the exchange of exhibitions was postponed for the moment, Barr went on with securing Picasso loans from the Soviet Union, since the US State Department seemed to have nothing against this line of action.

Guarantees for Soviet art loans

[33] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Rene d'Harnoncourt on December 21, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[34] Letter of James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt on December 17, 1956. Also, Letter of Frederick T. Merrill to James White on December 28, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[35] Letter of Rene d'Harnoncourt to Tamara Mamedova on January 4, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[36] Memo by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt about conversation with Mamedova on November 29, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[37] Letter of Rene d'Harnoncourt to Tamara Mamedova on January 4, 1957; Letter of James White to Malcolm Toon on January 7, 1957 (AAA, AHB).

Picasso loans, however, revealed the big issue that influenced practically all prospective art exchange projects with the Soviet Union that concerned pre-revolutionary art. The Soviet Union sought guarantees that loaned pictures would be returned despite possible legal suits. Before 1954, few modern paintings had visited capitalist Europe. Then one art gallery in Paris, whose manager was a leftist, had managed to exploit the new Soviet attitude towards the West and borrowed Picasso's early works which had not been seen outside Russia since 1917. Irene Shchukine, heir of the former owner of paintings, however, challenged their ownership while in France. Soviet officials decided to act before legal actions sending a diplomatic motorcade to the gallery, grabbing all 37 loaned paintings and rushed them to the Soviet embassy.[38] The art world's "sensation of the season", turned into a scandal that would poison East-West art exchanges for years to come. For Barr, however, the loaning of Picassos to Paris, and a similar example from Milan the same year, was a clear indicator that future exchange were possible.[39]

Quite early on, Barr realized that some kind of guarantees were necessary to get the Soviets on board. Thus, immediately upon his return from the Soviet Union in 1956, he started to acquire information about possible guarantees. For this purpose, Barr visited Georges Salles, Director of Musées de France, who had successfully hosted an exhibition of French paintings with some Matisses from the Soviet Union. Salles had apparently acquired a written assurance from Shchukin and others that they would abstain from lawsuits in connection with the exhibition.[40] Barr decided to turn to the State Department for having possible guarantees and getting their perspective for ownership issues. The State Department's early, although unofficial stand on the issue was that since the Soviet Union was a sovereign state recognized as such by the United States, ownership of Russian property should not be a problem when in the United States.[41]

On the Soviet side, Mamedova was particularly careful concerning guarantees for Picassos. She urged that the issue should not be mentioned in the correspondence and ought to be settled quietly within a small circle of people. She even suggested that this issue should be discussed only by telephone, which was anyway her preferred way of contacting Barr. Her reason was that correspondence was archived by the Soviet officials and was thus seen by many others, not just Mamedova. The correspondence had little mention of how guarantees were discussed, although it becomes quite clear that discussions were continuous, and not necessarily worrying. Mamedova's

[38] H. Devree, Russia's Picassos Shown in Paris. – New York Times, Jun 20, 1954; Suit Closes Paris Show of Soviet-Held Picassos. – New York Times, Jul 7, 1954, p. 34.
[39] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr to William Burden on June 16, 1955 (AAA, AHB).
[40] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Rene d'Harnoncourt on July 30, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[41] Memorandum of James White concerning Soviet-owned paintings on June 27, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

strategy to stay quiet about guarantees seems logical as things got quite complicated as soon as the State Department and the Soviet Foreign Ministry became involved.

Whilst a more extensive exchange project was on ice due to events in Hungary, Barr went full steam ahead with getting Picassos to MoMA. He had already estimated that the insurance costs for ten Soviet Picassos would range from $30.000 to $150.000 each.[42] Barr went to great pains, even having Picasso himself approach the Soviet Minister of Culture Mikhailov by letter.[43] This is particularly interesting since Picasso's stature in the Soviet Union was going through a metamorphosis. Picasso, a member of the French Communist Party, was already well-known in the Soviet Communist Party. VOKS, the organ Mamedova also represented, had planned an extensive Picasso exhibition in Moscow and Leningrad for autumn 1956, at the time MoMA was in talks with Mamedova. However, contrary to the original plans, Picasso had sent his more modern selection. Soviet officials had to choose between humiliating French communists and Picasso by returning some of the works, or by exhibiting the sent paintings. The latter option was eventually chosen, leading to heated discussion and even unrest surrounding the Picasso exhibition.[44]

Interestingly, even if Moscow and Leningrad were in a state of agitation after the epoch-making Picasso exhibition, Barr and Mamedova did not mention the case at all. Against this background, Picasso's petition letter might have not been as authoritative as Barr had hoped. Although Picasso-related unrest was never mentioned in the files, Barr was likely informed since he used his connections in the Soviet Union for obtaining a list of Picassos that had been on display.[45] He was apparently discreet enough not bring up the issue. Picasso's art divided opinions in the Soviet Union sharply, and his place in the Soviet temple of classics was still almost a decade away.[46] Thus, the controversy might have affected negotiations in spring 1957 about loaning Picassos.

The bigger problem was that negotiations with the State Department for official guarantees were stalling. MoMA took the issue all the way to the US Attorney-General's office in an attempt to have them write a document assuring the Soviets about the safety of art exchanges.[47] The State Department, however, could not be persuaded to give any guarantees. Although this was the State

[42] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Monroe Wheeler on April 8, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[43] Letter of Rene d'Harnoncourt to Ambassador Georgi Zaroubin on April 5, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[44] E. Gilburd, Picasso in Thaw Culture, p. 73. On heated discussion and even unrest, see p. 89.
[45] Letter of Sheila Isham to Alfred H. Barr Jr, February 10, 1957; Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Sheila Isham, March 11, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[46] For the details and implications of this event, see for example E. Gilburd, Picasso in Thaw Culture. About heated debate in late 1956, see especially p. 72
[47] Letter of James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt on December 17, 1956 (AAA, AHB). White was special assistant to the director of MoMA.

Department's stand throughout negotiations, the way it was now announced gave the death blow to the endeavor according to MoMA.[48] The Soviets got the feeling that the US government was unwelcoming and, should any problems arise, it would be more likely to help the opposite side. Barr's earlier wondering "whether the State Department is our master or our servant" began to look highly prophetical.[49] Without guarantees, Picassos were not to be sent to MoMA and thus, its anniversary exhibition was held without Soviet loans.

Curiously enough, these paintings found their way to the Soviet pavilion at the Brussels EXPO '58. MoMA's staff was naturally very curious about how Belgians had managed that. Contrary to early rumours, the Belgian authorities had not given any guarantees, nor did they set the expo grounds as free from legal obligations as an international area. Based on the correspondence, the Belgians had approached Shchukine and other heirs obtaining letters promising they would not intervene. The Soviets had also insisted that a certain amount of Soviet art was to be presented together with French paintings, a demand that was met in Brussels.[50] Finally, the Soviet government itself was present at the exhibition instead of giving paintings to a foreign representative. These were important bits of information as MoMA and Barr were still planning a major exchange of exhibitions even if this could not include the Soviet Picassos.

Contents of the Soviet-American art exchange

The meeting at MoMA around the time of the Hungarian uprising in November 1956 had already produced quite detailed plans concerning the Soviet-American art exchange. Lebedev and Zamoshkin had brought lists of works in Soviet collections they would be willing to exchange. Negotiations generally went smoothly, staying matter-of-fact. Both parties were confident that this was going to be only the first such exchange, with several similar projects following in the future.[51] On the American side, it was practically Barr who went through the Soviet catalogues deciding and proposing which paintings would be accepted by Americans as part of the exchange. Others seemed

[48] Letter of James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt on May 31, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[49] Letter of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Rene d'Harnoncourt on July 30, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[50] Letter of Frederick Merrill to James White on August 20, 1958; Letter of Frederick Merrill to James White on September 8, 1958 (AAA, AHB).
[51] Memorandum "Meeting of Soviet and U.S. Art Experts at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Saturday, November 3, 1956 (AAA, AHB).

happy about his choices.[52] After more than three months of silence, planning for the exchange was continued in mid-February 1957.[53]

Mamedova was working particularly hard for the exchange to take place. She constantly travelled to meetings with museum representatives and informed MoMA of her activities over the phone. In his private letter to a colleague at San Francisco, James White from MoMA wrote positively of Mamedova, and that she was working hard for their mutual benefit.[54] During spring 1957 Barr seemed as positive about the exchange as ever. In June and July, Barr exchanged several letters with Soviet ambassador Zaroubin and the Pushkin Museum's director Zamoshkin about guarantees for paintings, trying to assure them that the paintings would find their way back to the Soviet Union even without official US guarantees. In October 1957, the Director of MoMA and Zamoshkin exchanged letters about American paintings that would be sent to the Soviet Union as part of the exchange.

The issue of guarantees as well as the State Department's delay tactics and sour attitude, however, were making the work increasingly difficult. By the summer of 1957, it was admitted in internal discussions at MoMA that prospects for the exchange were starting to look dim.[55] Barr's relationship with Mamedova was increasingly cordial suggesting that problems were elsewhere. Both Barr and Mamedova worked hard to avoid their respective governments from blowing the issue off course. Confidentially, Mamedova quoted Soviet Minister of Culture Mikhailov saying no to exchanges because "he does not wish to get into trouble because he would lose half his head"[56] suggesting the issue was as much about the Soviets saving face as anything else. The last remaining obstacle in the negotiations was the US guarantees. Furthermore, the dead-end was reached at the time when the Soviet and American governments were initiating their negotiations for a US-Soviet agreement on cultural exchanges, the so called Lacy-Zaroubin agreement. This was the agreement that led for example to the famous American exhibition in Moscow's Sokolniki in 1959.

[52] Memorandum "Meeting of Soviet and U.S. Art Experts at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Saturday, November 3, 1956 (AAA, AHB).
[53] Memo of Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Rene d'Harnoncourt on February 18, 1957. Also, Letter of James Platt White Jr. to Daniel Rich on March 4, 1957 (AAA, AHB). Daniel Rich was the Director of the Chicago Art Institute which was supposed to display paintings loaned from the USSR together with MoMA.
[54] Letter of James White to Grace McGann on September 6, 1957. A similar visit e.g. to Chicago had taken place in mid-March 1957, see Letter of James White to Daniel Rich on March 4, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[55] Letter of Rene d'Harnoncourt to Professors Alexander Zamoshkin and Policarp Lebedev on June 7, 1956; Letter of James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt on June 7, 1957 (AAA, AHB).
[56] Memorandum of Alfred H Barr about conversation with Mamedova on July 3, 1957 (AAA, AHB).

Exchange in the area of fine arts was actually brought up in the negotiations for a Soviet-American cultural exchange. Negotiations were primarily general, but one art exchange project was mentioned by name and this was precisely the exchange of 19th Century French, Russian and American art which MoMA had been pushing forward. This time, it was the US State Department that brought the issue up, but without offering anything new in the way of guarantees. This led the Soviet negotiator to state that Soviet art would then stay in the Soviet Union. The issue remained as unsettled as ever.[57] This was also the last occasion for a year-and-a-half when there was any correspondence concerning the issue. It seems Barr got personally fed up as he merely touched upon the issue in the future. When the issue was brought up in February 1959 and MoMA referred to a possible exchange with Moscow's Pushkin museum and the Tretyakov gallery, Mamedova was still the primary contact, who took care of the negotiations with the Soviet counterparts.[58] Yet, Mamedova was recalled from her post by the end of 1959, an event that people in MoMA felt very sorry about.[59]

At this point, it seemed that attempts for the reciprocal exchange of art exhibitions were finally buried. The issue was not taken forward anymore in letters, and Barr's correspondence with the Soviets took a very different course, touching very different issues. It took more than a quarter of a century until another project of a similar magnitude was successfully undertaken. Even then, in 1986, it was not MoMA, but the National Gallery of Art under the patronage of 88-year old industrialist Armand Hammer that fulfilled Barr's dream. Indeed, impressionist and post-impressionist paintings from the Leningrad Hermitage and the Moscow Pushkin Museum were included, with tens of paintings from Matisse, van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne, and Picasso.[60] In 1986, the US government had finally given guarantees that paintings would be returned to the Soviet Union.[61] This apparently gave the Soviet Union enough confidence finally to proceed with the Soviet-American art exhibition exchange.

The Fate of Soviet-American art exchanges

[57] Letter of James White to William Burden on December 12, 1957 (AAA, AHB). In an illustrative memo by James White to Rene d'Harnoncourt on June 7, 1956 concerning negotiations between the State Department and Soviet officials. it was underlined how time and again it had to repeated to Soviets that the US Government could not give guarantees and that the Constitution separated courts from executive power. The Soviets seemed to be using the same exhaustion tactics of not giving an inch, that were familiar from high politics.
[58] Letter of Rene d'Harnoncourt to Tamara Mamedova on February 11, 1959 (AAA, AHB).
[59] Letter of Rene d'Harnoncourt to Perry Rathbone on December 14, 1959 (AAA, AHB).
[60] G. Lee, Soviet, U.S. Museums Plan Exchange of Exhibitions. – Washington Post, Dec 14, 1985, p. A1.
[61] A. G. Marquis, Alfred H Barr Jr. p. 305.

The case of MoMA and Barr's negotiation with the Soviets over five years is illustrative in many ways of the early East-West art exchanges. Different levels of officials on both sides contradicted each other and a few poorly chosen words could obliterate the whole effort. In 1966, when the Boston Museum of Fine Arts apparently attempted to revive the American-Soviet exchange project, Barr was asked to work as a consultant for the project. Barr's estimate then was that the cause of failure had been in Soviet fears for legal action. Although he considered that they managed to assure Soviets informally that legal action would lead nowhere, it was the embarrassment that Soviets so feared.[62] With the State Department unwilling to come along even symbolically, the effort was doomed. Barr seemed to accuse at least as much the US State Department as the Soviet bureaucracy for this.

Personally, Barr's story with the Soviet Union did not end with the failed project, quite the contrary. Instead of aiming at another major project, he built personal ties with his Soviet colleagues and used this to establish sound networks within the Soviet art world. Thus, his second trip to the Soviet Union in 1959 had nothing to do with the American-Soviet art exchange project. This second visit had originally been planned for as early as in summer 1957.[63] It was postponed many times, mostly due to Barr's busy schedule. Mamedova renewed the invitation several times, insisting on Barr making his second trip and assisting this endeavor in several ways. When Barr's visit finally started on June 3, 1959, this was shortly before the American exhibition in Moscow. Despite the American exhibition presenting MoMA's "Family of Man" exhibition, the State Department did not give a cent to Barr's trip. The State Department, apparently, did not consider Barr's trip beneficial, although he was working towards the goals the State Department itself cherished.

Interestingly, new openings in the field of East-West exchanges in art seemed to be on hand in the latter part of the 1950s. In music, individual artists, orchestras, choirs, even opera houses crossed the Iron Curtain, composers' delegations travelled in both directions and also met at international festivals, discussing recent artistic currents and exchanging opinions. In the arts, development seems to have been much slower. Attempts at wide-scale exchanges of exhibitions faced a seemingly impenetrable wall of bureaucracy on both sides. The US government abstained from giving any kind of guarantees to the Soviets. Although it would have been against the US constitution to give legally binding guarantees against lawsuits, the Soviets would have been satisfied with the symbolic guarantees that would have saved the Soviet Union from negative

[62] Letter by Alfred H. Barr Jr. to Perry Rathbone, June 10, 1966 (AAA, AHB).
[63] Letter of Alfred H Barr Jr to James White on July 25, 1957 (AAA, AHB).

publicity in the face of a private lawsuit. This controversy seems to have prevented all attempts at an exchange of exhibitions of pre-revolutionary art.

Curiously enough, a lack of official guarantees was not an obstacle in Europe, although even there the movement of works of art was small when compared to music or dance. Similarity between music and art was apparent, however, in the way the Soviets preferred private individuals as brokers in art exchanges. In Soviet-American music exchanges Sol Hurok, a famous Broadway producer, was the Soviet man-of-choice. He was preferred when Soviet artists were touring the United States, with the State Department kept at arm's length. In other countries, there were often preferred actors, either individuals or private concert organisers that the Soviet liked to use, instead of governments. It seems that Soviets quite readily adapted to the capitalist system in foreign environments when it came to cultural operations. The same seemed to apply to the field of art where Alfred Barr and the private museum he represented, New York's Museum of Modern Art, were precisely what the Soviets were looking for: highly skilled partners that were able to deliver. Yet, a number of factors prevented fruitful cooperation in this particular field.

Another important finding from this case is the role of individuals. Much depended on the activity of individual actors and their motivation. It is also important to notice that, even if mutual projects fell through and the common objective in this sense was lost, many of the connections stayed active. In the case of Barr, the failure to exchange works of art was only the beginning. Instead of abandoning his Soviet contacts who seemed unable to further their common project, Barr decided to deepen his connections and transformed factual ties into transnational networks. While the Soviet government originally chose Barr and MoMA as partners who could further Soviet foreign policy objectives in the United States, Barr's second trip to the Soviet Union and his following correspondence with Soviets had hardly anything to do with the governmental level.

Cultural operations along Khrushchev's idea of peaceful coexistence can thus be seen as concealed attempts to influence foreign populations. But they also made it possible transnational networks to emerge in the post-Stalinist era. Instead of just a few highly placed diplomats, exchanges gave a substantive amount of Soviet intellectuals an access to foreign countries. Furthermore, through the visits of foreigners to the Soviet Union, even those who were not allowed to travel outside the Soviet Union got access to foreign currents, information and sometimes became involved in transnational networks. These ties were about personal and professional motivation on both sides. They were networks between equals, people with similar interests. This was certainly a step towards normal relations between two different countries and cultures, aiming at mutual understanding. The

Cold War narrative has often failed to see the existence of such connections, but even if political realities limited the amount and contents of such networks, it does not mean that they never existed, as Barr's example points out. However, in order to understand the extent and implications of these transnational networks in the field of art, there is definitely a need for further studies. Barr's case was only the beginning, taking place during the early period of the international opening of the Soviet Union that was followed by the expansion of transnational networks.