



Utrecht University

Master's Thesis

Dissidents and Wanderers: Wim
Beeren's Exhibitions of Eastern
European Art at the Stedelijk
Museum Amsterdam

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Summary

This thesis examines two exhibitions of Eastern European art organized by Wim Beeren during his directorship of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. The first of these, *In the USSR and Beyond* (21st of September 1990 – 4th of November 1990), was the first large-scale exhibition of Soviet art at a museum in the Netherlands and was intended to introduce artists from the USSR to the Stedelijk's Western European audience. It was also remarkably early, having taken place before the Soviet Union itself collapsed just over one year later. The second exhibition, titled *Wanderlieder*, was inspired by Beeren's existing interest in the question of Europe, first demonstrated in his 1986 exhibition *Correspondence Europe*. In light of the importance of these exhibitions, this thesis poses two questions. Namely, what kind of conclusions can be drawn from reconstructing Wim Beeren's *In the USSR and Beyond* and to what extent was the exhibition successful at introducing this topic to an unfamiliar Western public? And how did Wim Beeren approach the question of East and West in *Wanderlieder*, and to what extent was the exhibition an effective answer to the changing Europe of the early 1990s? In addressing these sub-questions, this thesis ultimately answers the overarching research question: what place did *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* occupy in Wim Beeren's later career and what is the importance of these exhibitions within the context of a changing Europe in the early 1990s?

This thesis owes a great deal of influence to the work of Christian Rattemeyer, who used a combination of research and installation photographs to recreate the floorplan of an earlier Beeren exhibition, *On Loose Screws*. Further inspiration was taken from Reesa Greenberg's argument for the importance of reconstructing and remembering historical exhibitions. In light of these influences, this thesis uses photographs and archival research to create walkthroughs of the exhibitions, which allows for a better understanding of how the works were installed. Methodologically speaking, the thesis then proceeds to analyse the exhibition through the Former West framework, and particularly the concepts of 'horizontal art history' and the 'post-communist condition' developed by two leading scholars of Eastern European art history, Piotr Piotrowski and Boris Groys. Using this perspective, this thesis demonstrates that *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* were premature exhibitions made through a predominantly Western lens, and that they would have benefitted from more critical perspectives that would have allowed the Stedelijk to reflect on itself as a Western institution representing the East. However, it is equally important to recognize that the exhibitions were symptomatic of the socio-political climate of the early 1990s and that their significance rests with the specific historical moment they addressed. They remain relevant today, particularly in light of the continuation of the European project. As such, this thesis concludes that it is imperative that they not be forgotten.

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, Wim Beeren (1928 – 2000), then director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, organized two exhibitions of contemporary Eastern European art. *In de USSR en erbuiten (In the USSR and Beyond)* opened on the 21st of September 1990 and presented three generations of 20th century Soviet artists. Just under one and a half years later, *Wanderlieder* would open on the 8th of December 1991 and display murals created by both Western and Eastern European artists.¹ These exhibitions constituted some of the first attempts by a Western European institution to present contemporary Eastern European art following the Cold War.² In spite of the importance of such an attempt, they have received next to no scholarly attention. Furthermore, no floorplans of the exhibitions have been preserved in the Stedelijk archives, as this was not yet systematically done for every exhibition taking place at the museum. In order to fully understand *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*, this thesis uses archival research to reconstruct the lost floorplans. In doing this, it also addresses the lack of critical attention for the exhibitions, as well as for the late career of Wim Beeren.

Wim Beeren's reputation as a major figure in the Dutch art world dates back to his time as head curator of painting and sculpture at the Stedelijk Museum between 1965 and 1971.³ Over the course of these eight years he demonstrated a talent for recognizing emerging international developments in art and bringing them into the Stedelijk before they could be seen in other Dutch museums. This was especially the case for two exhibitions dating back to this time in his career: *Vormen van de kleur (Forms of Colour)* and *Op losse schroeven (On Loose Screws)*. The 1966 *Forms of Colour* focused on new kinds of abstraction and emphasized the changing role of colour in art. The exhibition included work by representatives of hard-edge painting, colour field painting and minimalism, such as Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Indiana and Frank Stella. While these movements had already received significant attention in the USA, Beeren was one of the first curators to display such work in Europe, and certainly

¹ *In the USSR and Beyond* opened on the 21st of September 1990 and closed on the 4th of November 1990. *Wanderlieder* opened on the 8th of December 1991 and was originally scheduled to close on the 9th of February, but was eventually extended until the 1st of March 1992.

² In her essay, 'Geographically Defined Exhibitions: The Balkans, Between Eastern Europe and the New Europe', Raluca Voinea mentions other examples of early exhibitions of Eastern European art in Western Europe, including *Europa, Europa: A Hundred Years of the Avant-Garde in Central and Eastern Europe* (Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle in Bonn, 1994), *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe, 1949 – 1999* (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1999) and *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1999). This reveals that Beeren was remarkably early in bringing Eastern European art to Western Europe.

³ Prior to this Beeren studied at the University of Nijmegen and wrote art-related articles for the publications *Het Vaderland* and *Hollands Weekblad*. He began his museum career at the Haags Gemeentemuseum (today the Kunstmuseum Den Haag), where he held several functions between 1954 and 1965, including assistant of the modern art department, head of the prints department and head curator.

the first to bring it to a Dutch museum.⁴ 1969's *On Loose Screws* would prove even more groundbreaking, so much so that Christian Rattemeyer favourably compared it to Harald Szeemann's celebrated exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*.⁵ The exhibition would mark an intersection of several new developments of the 1960s, such as Arte Povera and conceptual art.⁶ Originally an investigation into the use of new materials, Beeren would eventually expand this initial concept to also address recent artistic experiments with the '...Notions of site-specificity and "situation art", displacement and material transformation, as well as "change as a formative principle" – all informed by process and context, rather than material and objecthood.'⁷ With this revolutionary emphasis on site-specificity, several participating artists created their works on location and made a number of interventions into the architecture of the museum – both inside and outside its walls. Jan Dibbets, for example, excavated the pavement around the four corners of the museum to expose its foundations for *Museum Pedestal with Four Angles of 90°*. Even more remarkable was David Oppenheim's work *Mirror Displacement*, an installation involving the construction of two piles of dirt, one inside the Stedelijk and one in the city of Heerlen.⁸ Such examples of radical experimentation with the notions of space constituted what Teresa Gleadowe has identified as an 'early form of institutional critique'.⁹ *On Loose Screws*, along with Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form*, marked the first exhibitions which demonstrated the fundamental changes occurring within the nature of artistic developments the 1960s.

On Loose Screws had a lasting effect on Beeren. New ideas such as institutional critique and spacial experiments would inspire him to venture outside the walls of the museum.¹⁰ His next major project would see him leaving the Stedelijk to curate the 1971 Sonsbeek sculpture exhibition, a quadrennial open-air show in Arnhem inviting contemporary artists to display their work in the Sonsbeek park.¹¹ Titled *Sonsbeek buiten de perken* (translated into English as *Sonsbeek Beyond Lawn and Order*), it would go on to become the most controversial, but also the most famous edition of the

⁴ Rini Dippel, 'Inleiding: De Amsterdamse jaren in het Stedelijk Museum 1965 – 1971' in *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*, eds. Jan van Adrichem et al. (Rotterdam: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2005), 110 – 111.

⁵ *When Attitudes Become Form* would open at the Kunsthalle in Bern just one week after *On Loose Screws*.

⁶ Participants included artists such as Richard Serra, Joseph Beuys, Jannis Kounellis, Bruce Nauman, Walter De Maria, Robert Morris, Ger van Elk, Dennis Oppenheim, Jan Dibbets and Lawrence Weiner (who, over twenty years later, would also take part in *Wanderlieder*).

⁷ Christian Rattemeyer, "'Op Losse Schroeven" and "When Attitudes Become Form" 1969' in *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, Christian Rattemeyer et al. (London: Afterall, 2010), 24.

⁸ Rattemeyer, "'Op Losse Schroeven" and "When Attitudes Become Form" 1969', 28 – 29.

⁹ Teresa Gleadowe, 'Introduction: Exhibiting the New Art' in *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, Christian Rattemeyer et al. (London: Afterall, 2010), 9.

¹⁰ An interesting parallel can be drawn to Harald Szeemann, whose career was also fundamentally affected by his work on *Attitudes Become Form*. He would leave his position as director of the Kunsthalle Bern following the exhibition and continue to work as an independent curator. However, although both Szeemann and Beeren left their respective institutions, Beeren would ultimately wish to return to working within the museum.

¹¹ Rattemeyer, "'Op Losse Schroeven" and "When Attitudes Become Form" 1969', 60.

show. Under Beeren's leadership the exhibition took on a radically experimental approach. Participating artists included representatives of recent developments in conceptual art, land art and video art.¹² Beeren, expanding on concepts he first encountered during *On Loose Screws*, chose spacial relationships and site-specificity as the central themes of the exhibition. Artists visited the park and were requested to select a location for which they would construct a work of art. Furthermore, for the first time since the inception of the show, artists were also allowed to display their work outside the confines of the park, effectively transforming all of the Netherlands into an exhibition space.¹³ Another ground-breaking change to the existing formula of the exhibition was influenced by Beeren's fascination for the increasing importance of technology as a medium for exchanging information. Inspired by this development, he introduced a dimension of communication to Sonsbeek. Communications centres were constructed in Rotterdam, Leiden, Enschede, Groningen and Maastricht, and were all connected to the park by telephone and telex. They could be used by any guest or artist visiting the centres.¹⁴ Beeren's ambitious plan soon surpassed the traditional meaning of the word 'exhibition' and was instead spoken of as a 'manifestation' or an 'activity', while Beeren himself referred to his project as a 'workshop'.¹⁵

Unfortunately, Beeren's edition of Sonsbeek would suffer from remarkably low visitor numbers. Furthermore, those that did visit the exhibition generally failed to grasp the emphasis placed on social engagement and especially the role of the communication network established between locations. Equally unappealing to the contemporary audience was the travel time required to visit the works spread out throughout the Netherlands. As a result, the broader public was unable to understand Wim Beeren's ambitious vision. It is interesting to note that the decades since 1971 have placed Beeren's Sonsbeek in a much more positive light and it has been retroactively recognized as a revolutionary exhibition ahead of its time. For Beeren, however, it was a source of great disappointment and disillusionment with independent curating. In spite of Beeren's hope of a swift return to museum work, this would prove impossible at the time. As a result, he would instead become a lector of art history at the University of Groningen from 1972 until 1978.¹⁶

Beeren eventually made his return to the museum world in 1978, when he was appointed director of the Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam. He would remain there until 1985. His arrival at Boijmans coincided with a period of lively discussion about the role the museum should assume within the city. Beeren responded to this by creating a new, specialized education department

¹² Participants included, among others, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Donald Judd, Jan Dibbets, Wim T. Schippers, Claes Oldenburg and Sol LeWitt.

¹³ According to Beeren's introduction to the exhibition catalogue, the artists who chose to venture outside of the park included Michael Heizer, Richard Long, Ed Ruscha, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Richard Artschwager, Daniel Buren, Ger Dekkers and Hans Koetsier. External locations ranged from open landscapes in the nature of Limburg to urban centers such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht.

¹⁴ Wim Beeren, 'Sonsbeek 71' in *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*, eds. Jan van Adrichem et al. (Rotterdam: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2005), 188.

¹⁵ Beeren, 'Sonsbeek 71', 190.

¹⁶ Dippel, 'Inleiding: De Amsterdamse jaren in het Stedelijk Museum 1965 – 1971', 115.

that aimed to interpret art for the public to better communicate its 'social function'.¹⁷ Beeren's years at the Boijmans-van Beuningen were marked by an attempt to update the museum's aging art collection. This resulted in a number of internationally significant acquisitions, namely work by Claes Oldenburg, Joseph Beuys, Walter De Maria, Bruce Nauman and Andy Warhol.¹⁸

It was with this formidable background that Beeren was appointed director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1985, a position he would hold until his retirement in January of 1993. At this point in time the museum housed 55,000 artworks and welcomed 500,000 visitors a year.¹⁹ He assumed the directorship with five clearly defined goals: 'I believed that history should receive a place in the aging museum. Furthermore, I wanted to give a very clear presence to what was new. Thirdly, I wanted to restore the connections to cultures that were not in our immediate vicinity. I also thought that contemporary classics should have a place. Finally, I wanted to attempt to create cultural images.'²⁰ These points would clearly shape his tenure as director of the Stedelijk, which was marked by several successful large-scale exhibitions, as well as a number of important acquisitions for the museum collection.²¹

He first demonstrated a clear interest in the question of Europe as early as 1986, when he curated an exhibition titled *Correspondence Europe*. An important precursor to *Wanderlieder*, it included new work by artists from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom.²² According to Beeren, the word 'correspondence' alluded to '...To existing and desired contact with other European countries', showing that Beeren was already optimistic about European cooperation in the 1980s.²³ However, it is interesting to note that the vision of Europe presented in the exhibition was a remarkably Western-oriented one: no Eastern European art was featured. Beeren justified this in the catalogue, stating that it was the direct result of practical difficulties involved in traveling through the Soviet bloc.²⁴ Furthermore, he remarked on his plans for a future exhibition featuring Eastern European

¹⁷ Johan R. ter Molen, 'Inleiding: De Rotterdamse jaren in Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen 1978 – 1985' in *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*, eds. Jan van Adrichem et al. (Rotterdam: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2005), 248.

¹⁸ Ter Molen, 'Inleiding: De Rotterdamse jaren in Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen 1978 – 1985', 249 – 250.

¹⁹ John Jansen van Galen and Huib Schreurs, *Het huis van nu, waar de toekomst is: een kleine historie van het Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1895 – 1995* (Naarden: V+K Publishing, 1995), 209.

²⁰ Wim Beeren, quoted in John Jansen van Galen and Huib Schreurs, *Het huis van nu, waar de toekomst is: een kleine historie van het Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1895 – 1995* (Naarden: V+K Publishing, 1995), 201.

²¹ According to John Jansen van Galen and Huib Schreurs, Beeren successfully acquired 184 paintings, 1500 prints and drawings, and 1000 objects of applied art. These included work by, among others, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Walter De Maria, Frank Stella, Anselm Kiefer, Jeff Koons, Keith Haring, Donald Judd, Sigmar Polke and Barnett Newman.

²² The participants were Jan Vercruysse (Belgium), Thomas Schütte (Germany), Jean-Charles Blais (France), Georges Rousse (France), Remo Salvadori (Italy), Francisco Leiro (Spain), Susana Solano (Spain), Richard Deacon (UK), Jeffrey Dennis (UK) and Julian Opie (UK).

²³ Wim Beeren, 'Forward' in *Correspondence Europe*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1986), 4.

²⁴ Beeren, 'Forward' in *Correspondence Europe*, 4 – 5.

art, clearly recognizing the need for a more complete vision of contemporary European art. Five years later, Beeren would again attempt to accomplish this vision with *Wanderlieder*.

Correspondence Europe would be followed by two more notable exhibitions. *Horn of Plenty* (1989) featured sixteen artists from New York City.²⁵ The show was Beeren's attempt to address the lack of Dutch interest in American art at the time.²⁶ In *Energies* (1990) Beeren invited sixteen influential artists to construct new installations for the museum.²⁷ The resulting exhibition brought together paintings, sculptures, video art, fashion and design, which, in Beeren's words, have the power to '...Bring about changes in our collective ideas.'²⁸ However, Beeren's most remarkable quality as director was his socio-political engagement and interest in incorporating current events in his exhibition programme. He had stressed the social responsibilities of art as early as 1976, in his doctoral thesis titled *In relatie tot de kunst*. In the chapter 'The Functions of Art', Beeren wrote that, ideally, 'an audience would recognize/acknowledge new concepts and norms within art as a stimulus for one's ideas of themselves and society. [...] Art lends itself to identification and brings about catharsis and awareness in collectivities, and as such has a social function.'²⁹ Beeren firmly believed in the role of art in societal progress, a belief which translated itself to his philosophy as director of the Stedelijk. Writing about the role of the museum in the late 80s and early 90s, Beeren stated: 'In a time in which we are seeing and experiencing dramatic political shifts throughout the entire world, it was my conviction that the Stedelijk Museum should not follow a course exclusively along the comfortable highway towards established renown.'³⁰ It is this socially-engaged viewpoint that motivated him to organize not only *In the USSR and Beyond* in 1990 and *Wanderlieder* in 1991, but to also turn towards the question of South America. The 1989 exhibition *U-ABC* took advantage of improved relationships with South American countries, displaying work by artists from Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Chile. When considered along Beeren's other international exhibitions, it demonstrates that his concerns included not only Europe, but also global affairs.

Beeren's intuition for such timely political and socially relevant exhibitions continued into his later career. According to the editors of *Wim Beeren – om de kunst*, 'From 1954 to 1993, Beeren played

²⁵ The sixteen artists featured included Ashley Bickerton, SaintClair Cemin, Anne Doran, Carroll Dunham, Christian Eckart, Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, Robert Gober, Peter Halley, Jon Kessler, Jeff Koons, Jonathan Lasker, Richard Prince, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Haim Steinbach, Christopher Wool, and Robert Yarber.

²⁶ Wim Beeren, 'Introduction' in *Aanwinsten Stedelijk Museum 1985 – 1993*, ed. Wim Beeren (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam), 19.

²⁷ *Energies* featured contributions from Luciano Fabro, Gary Hill, Jenny Holzer, Anselm Kiefer, Rem Koolhaas, Jeff Koons, Walter De Maria, Issey Miyake, Bruce Nauman, Sigmar Polke, Rob Scholte, Cindy Sherman, Ettore Sottsass, Frank Stella, Peter Struycken and Robert Wilson.

²⁸ Rini Dippel, 'Inleiding: De Amsterdamse jaren in het Stedelijk Museum 1985 – 1993' in *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*, eds. Jan van Adrichem et al. (Rotterdam: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2005), 310.

²⁹ Wim Beeren, 'Functies van kunst' in *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*, eds. Jan van Adrichem et al. (Rotterdam: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2005), 240 – 241.

³⁰ Beeren, 'Introduction' in *Aanwinsten Stedelijk Museum 1985 – 1993*, 16.

a leading role in the Dutch museum world comparable to few others... [...] Even after his retirement in 1993, he continued to focus on art and the museum, the essential importance of art in society, and the responsibility of society, its leaders, figures of authority and the cultural elite, towards art.’³¹ Furthermore, he found himself at the helm of a leading European cultural institution as Europe itself was plunged into a decade of dramatic change. In spite of this, the legacy of his later years has not been sufficiently addressed in art historical scholarship, particularly when compared to celebrated Stedelijk directors such as his predecessors Edy de Wilde and Willem Sandberg. This thesis serves as the first step towards greater efforts in researching Wim Beeren’s directorship of the Stedelijk.

This thesis sets out to present archival material in order to reconstruct two Beeren exhibitions which threaten to be forgotten by art history. Its approach owes a great deal of inspiration to a similar attempt made in the 2010 essay “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969 by Christian Rattemeyer. He states that *Op Losse Schroeven*, curated by Wim Beeren during his time as curator at the Stedelijk, [...] Has almost disappeared from history, its reputation largely confined to Dutch-speaking historians and audiences.’³² He goes on to argue that this was in part due to the fact that Beeren had remained in the Netherlands for the entirety of his career. In an effort to document the exhibition, Rattemeyer examines the ‘...Spatial choreography employed by curators to bring works of art into public consciousness.’³³ This thesis closely examines the same processes in order to analyse two overlooked exhibitions and to understand Beeren’s approach in curating Eastern European art under specific historical conditions

In recreating *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*, this thesis marks a contribution to what Reesa Greenberg describes as ‘remembering exhibitions’, a term she coined to define an exhibition documenting a past exhibition. In her essay ‘Archival Remembering Exhibitions’, Greenberg discusses several kinds of ‘remembering exhibitions’. One of these, dubbed ‘the reprise’, is described as a method which ‘re-presents or remembers exhibitions in the form of catalogues or online manifestations with visual and verbal information such as maps, diagrams, installation views, photographs or descriptions of the art on display, video tours, essays, timelines and entries on individual artworks.’³⁴ This thesis, though not accompanied by an online platform, employs similar documentation and research in recreating *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*. The archival research, installation photographs and the floorplans presented here constitute a two-dimensional recreation of *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* and hence serve as such a ‘reprise’.

Greenberg goes on to identify several reasons for why ‘remembering exhibitions’ have recently become an essential area of art history. She argues that they ‘...Attested to the current importance of exhibitions in society and the growing interest in the history of exhibitions, collective exhibition memory, and intersections of past exhibition theory and practice with contemporary concerns. [...] And

³¹ Jan van Adrichem et al., ‘Inleiding en verantwoording’ in *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*, eds. Jan van Adrichem et al. (Rotterdam: NAIo10 Uitgevers, 2005), 8.

³² Rattemeyer, “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969’, 17.

³³ Gleadowe, ‘Introduction: Exhibiting the New Art’, 10.

³⁴ Reesa Greenberg, ‘Archival Remembering Exhibitions’, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 1, no. 2 (June 2012): 159.

finally, they confirmed the understanding that exhibitions can be dynamic cultural moments of active, widespread exchange and debate that are catalysts for changing perceptions and practices.’³⁵ This thesis is a contribution towards the growing interest in historical exhibitions referred to by Greenberg. Furthermore, it analyses the ‘intersection’ of a past exhibition with ‘contemporary concerns’: namely the importance of Beeren’s 1990s exhibitions in light of the persistent aftermath of the Cold War and the continuation of the European project. Lastly, as emphasized by Greenberg, a reconstruction or ‘reprise’ offers a more intimate way of exploring a past exhibition and its artworks, conveying more knowledge than an exclusively textual description.

In the USSR and Beyond and *Wanderlieder* took place as the Cold War was coming to a close and hence offer the opportunity to study a leading Western museum director’s reaction to a turning point in European history. The 1990s were a decade of revolutionary changes, both inside the museum and within Europe as a whole. In Western Europe, an atmosphere of powerful optimism could be felt across borders. The Maastricht treaty, which was signed on the 7th of February 1992, laid down the foundation of the European Union. According to leading European Union scholar Luuk van Middelaar’s book *The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union*, this marked the beginning of a ‘new epoch’.³⁶ The future promised more prosperity, cooperation and lasting peace in a united Europe. The creation of the European Union symbolized an ideological victory over the East. The perspective shared by many was a triumphant one: the Cold War had been won by the West. With the revolutionary wave sweeping the Eastern bloc and the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, communist rule had been abolished in a series of mostly peaceful revolutions.³⁷ These were dominated by a sentiment that historian Tony Judt would later describe as the ‘theme of “returning to Europe. [...] The ‘opposite of communism was not “capitalism” but “Europe”’.³⁸ In other words, Eastern Europe felt it could finally be part of the continent ‘proper’ and regain its lost significance. And with Mikhail’s Gorbachev’s liberalization of the Soviet Union, new diplomatic relationships could continue to be established in the future. It was clear that Europe was entering a period of unprecedented change. Van Middelaar argues that ‘Almost twenty-five years later, Europe has still not fully absorbed the earthquake of 1989; in fact, we have barely begun to assess its significance.’³⁹ This thesis contributes to this assessment by examining these events within the context of the Stedelijk Museum.

This thesis is divided into two chapters, each addressing one of Wim Beeren’s ‘European’ exhibitions. The first chapter reconstructs and interprets the *In the USSR and Beyond* exhibition, which displayed work by contemporary Soviet artists. The second chapter focuses on the *Wanderlieder* exhibition, which invited artists from Western and Eastern Europe to create a large mural on one of the museum walls and hoped to establish a dialogue about a united Europe. In following this structure, this

³⁵ Greenberg, ‘Archival Remembering Exhibitions’, 159 – 160.

³⁶ Luuk van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union*, trans. Liz Waters (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 182.

³⁷ The only exception being the violent Romanian Revolution leading to the deposition and execution of Nicolae Ceausescu.

³⁸ Tony Judt, *Postwar* (London: Vintage, 2005), 630.

³⁹ Van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe*, 181.

thesis examines the research question, 'What place did *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* occupy in Wim Beeren's later career and what is the importance of these exhibitions within the context of a changing Europe in the early 1990s?'

Literature Review

Although no exhibition floor plans have been preserved, a number of useful sources have been stored in the Stedelijk Museum's archives. These include documents such as correspondence between museum staff and artists, transcripts of meetings and press releases. Both exhibitions were accompanied by a catalogue and were also reviewed by critics for major Dutch newspapers such as the *De Volkskrant*, *Trouw*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Het Financieel Dagblad*, *Het Parool* and *De Telegraaf*. A number of journal articles were also published on the occasion of the exhibition openings. For instance, IJsbrand van Veelen analysed *In the USSR and Beyond* in his text 'USSR Artists in Amsterdam', which appeared in the December 1990 issue of the journal *Lapiz*.⁴⁰ *Wanderlieder* also received some international attention, with articles being published in the Polish modern art journal *Obieg*⁴¹ and in *Art in America*.⁴² However, neither exhibition has received any scholarly attention in the many years since their openings.

Likewise, Wim Beeren and his work have received very little attention since his tenure as director of the Stedelijk. However, 2005 saw the posthumous publication of a collection of Beeren's essays on art and museums. Titled *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid*,⁴³ it offers an excellent opportunity to better understand Beeren's career. Unfortunately, an English translation of the texts has yet to appear, limiting the impact the source could have outside of the Netherlands. As mentioned earlier, 2010 also saw the publication of *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969* by Christian Rattemeyer.⁴⁴ A comparison of Wim Beeren and Harald Szeemann's approaches, the book looks at how both curators used pioneering methods in displaying new conceptual art. However, its scope is limited to two 1969 exhibitions. At this time Beeren was still employed at the Stedelijk Museum as a curator and hence *Exhibiting the New Art* does not touch on Beeren's later achievements at the helm of the Stedelijk. This thesis looks instead at Beeren during his time as director of the Stedelijk between 1985 and 1993, working towards documenting a previously neglected part of Beeren's career.

This thesis also touches on the field of the history of Eastern European exhibitions, an area still in need of scholarly attention today. How has contemporary Eastern European art been shown in Western cultural institutions? The only volume dedicated entirely to the exhibition history of Eastern

⁴⁰ IJsbrand van Veelen, 'USSR Artists in Amsterdam', *Lapiz*, no. 73 (December 1990): 67 – 69.

⁴¹ Jerzy Truszkowski, 'Prosiak wszystkich pogodzi, czyli wałęsająca się śpiewka', *Obieg*, 31 -33 (December 1991 – January 1992): 24.

⁴² Janet Koplos, 'Of Walls and Wandering', *Art in America* 80, no. 7 (July 1992): 85.

⁴³ Jan van Adrichem et al. (eds.), *Wim Beeren – om de kunst: opvattingen van een museumman over moderne kunst, kunstenaars, musea en kunstbeleid* (Rotterdam: NAI010 Uitgevers, 2005).

⁴⁴ Christian Rattemeyer et al., *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969* (London: Afterall, 2010).

European art is the 2013 collection of essays titled *Curating 'Eastern Europe' and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition*.⁴⁵ According to the editor of the volume, Mária Orišková, the essays aim 'to monitor how exhibition – as a medium which functions among curators, artists and visitors as well as between different times and places – promotes, mediates, constructs, critically reflects, historicizes and re-formats the histories of the art of former Eastern Europe after 1989'⁴⁶. It successfully lays the groundwork for similar analyses in the future. More recently, *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Ana Janevski and Roxana Marcoci (2018), dedicates a chapter to exhibitions of Eastern European art. In her excellent introduction, Claire Bishop attempts to theorize a timeline of approaches that institutions have taken in curating Eastern European art. She argues that this began with the 'rediscovery' of Eastern Europe in 1989 and is currently exemplified by exhibitions in which Eastern Europe is shown engaging with countries beyond the borders of the European Union.⁴⁷ She is thus far been the only scholar who has attempted to connect individual exhibitions together in order to identify broader curatorial trends. However, although these excellent contributions constitute a solid foundation for further research, it is nevertheless clear that there are many exhibitions that have not yet been studied. This is the gap that this thesis addresses in its focus on the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, marking a contribution to the wider effort of mapping out contemporary Eastern European art as exhibited by Western institutions.

In focusing on the Stedelijk's presentation of *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*, this thesis also contributes to the area of Eastern European art history. Eastern Europe has long been neglected in favour of the current Western-centric art historical canon. Very little had been written about Eastern European art before the 1990s.⁴⁸ Since then however, new research has resulted in several ground-breaking publications. This began with research into the (former) Soviet Union. Margarita Tupitsyn was one of the first scholars to publish research into underground Soviet art, with her work *Margins of Soviet Art* being released as early as 1989.⁴⁹ Another leading authority on Russian art is Boris Groys, whose 1992 volume *The Total Art of Stalinism*⁵⁰ reevaluated the relationship between

⁴⁵ Particularly relevant texts included in *Curating 'Eastern Europe' and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition* are 'The Rewriting of Art History as Art: Mapping the "East"' by Louisa Avgita and 'Les Promesses du Passé: Shaping Art History via the Exhibition' by Kelly Presutti.

⁴⁶ Mária Orišková, 'Introduction' in *Curating 'Eastern Europe' and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition*, ed. Mária Orišková (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2013), 12.

⁴⁷ Claire Bishop, 'Introduction to Exhibiting the "East" since 1989' in *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Ana Janevski and Roxana Marcoci (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 67.

⁴⁸ It is, however, important to mention the existence of some rare exceptions, such as the 1967 volume by Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead, *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union*. Having appeared remarkably early and at a time when research and communication were rendered particularly difficult, the survey sadly leaves out several artists that, in retrospect, would go on to be recognized as instrumental to the underground movement. The most egregious of these omissions was Vladimir Nemukhin. However, the text includes a valuable account of the art world during the Khrushchev Thaw of the 1950s and 1960s and, most importantly, also proves that circumstances sometimes allowed for a certain degree of cultural exchange between East and West.

⁴⁹ Margarita Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1989).

⁵⁰ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

official and unofficial Soviet culture.⁵¹ In 1995 another crucial contribution was made with the publication of Renee and Matthew Baigell's *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika*.⁵² The book compiled conversations with forty-seven Russian and Ukrainian artists and their personal accounts of living and working under communism. This marked an important breakthrough in the availability of primary sources in the English language, an issue which remains a problem in Eastern European art historical scholarship to this day. Of particular importance to this thesis were interviews with artists involved in *In the USSR and Beyond* (Vladimir Nemukhin, Eduard Steinberg, Dmitrii Prigov, Vladimir Ovchinnikov, Komar and Melamid, Afrika, and Ilya Kabakov) and *Wanderlieder* (again, Kabakov).

The efforts towards the internationalization of Eastern European art would continue into the 21st century with the 2002 publication of *Primary Documents: Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*.⁵³ Edited by Laura Hoptman and Tomas Pospiszyl, the volume constitutes a collection of primary sources invaluable to the field. Like *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* in 1995, *Primary Documents* marked the first time a number of essential texts had been made available to Western audiences in English. Similar efforts at incorporating Eastern European art into the art historical canon were initiated by Slovenian artist collective Irwin, which culminated in the 2006 publication of *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*. In their introduction, Irwin correctly identified a lack of an international 'referential system' as an impediment to Eastern European art practice and research, a problem they hoped to address with their project.⁵⁴

The scholar responsible for introducing a transnational perspective into the study of Eastern European art was Piotr Piotrowski, whose 2011 work *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945 – 1989* was the first comparative study of artistic developments in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. Rather than structuring it as a chronological art historical survey, Piotrowski instead chose to focus on specific movements and events in the region, comparing for instance the influence of Surrealism in Hungary versus Czechoslovakia, or the Constructivist tradition in Poland and Romania.⁵⁵ One year later, Piotrowski would also go on to publish the continuation of his work, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, this time covering the period from 1989 until today.

⁵¹ Groys would also go on to author the most important text dealing with underground art in Moscow, titled *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (2010) and conceptualize the idea of the post-communist condition.

⁵² Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika*, eds. Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

⁵³ *Primary Documents: Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, eds. Laura Hoptman and Tomas Pospiszyl (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ Irwin, 'General Introduction' in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, eds. Irwin (London: Afterall, 2006), 11.

⁵⁵ Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945 – 1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

Methodology

Methodologically speaking, this thesis is greatly indebted to the Former West research project initiated by Basis voor Actuele Kunst (BAK) in Utrecht and its accompanying 2017 volume *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* edited by Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh.⁵⁶ At the core of the project was the question, 'If, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, we began speaking of a "former Eastern Europe", why do we not speak of a former West? According to Hlavajova, Former West sought to examine several problems, namely, 'Why hasn't the West simply become former, like in the case of its supposed counterpart, the former East [...]? What has become of the West after 1989? Can we still former it...?'⁵⁷ The end of the Cold War is hence used as a departure point in examining the concept of the West and questioning why it hasn't been held up to the same criteria as the East. Indeed, the revolutions of 1989 and their aftermath continue to be regarded as a typically Eastern European malady and tend to be seen as isolated events. However, in order for their significance to be fully understood, it is of vital importance that they begin to be considered in a global context. This is particularly the case in Western Europe, where the enduring repercussions of the Cold War continue to be overlooked. If, according to Van Middelaar, the West is yet to begin examining the lasting effects the fall of the Berlin Wall had on itself, then Former West offers the ideal conceptual framework in which this can be done.⁵⁸

The Former West framework is further useful in uniting a number of existing art historical concepts developed by Boris Groys and Piotr Piotrowski, who both served as contributors to the project. Leading scholars and experts in the field of Eastern European art history, both Groys and Piotrowski developed conceptual approaches crucial to analysing *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*: 'the post-communist condition' and 'horizontal art history'. In his essay 'The Post-Communist Condition', Groys observes that communism is often seen as 'nothing more than an interruption, interval or delay in the continuous "normal" development of Eastern European countries – a delay which, once it was over, left no traces other than a certain appetite to "make up for lost time"'. Seen from this perspective, communism appears once again as the spectre of communism, the haunting embodiment of nothing that after its disappearance just evaporated into thin air'. In other words, there is a tendency to perceive communism as a single, finite episode in the history of Eastern Europe. This is not at all the case in reality, where communism has left a lasting impact on life on both sides of the Iron Curtain, resulting in a condition which can be broadly described as 'post-communist'. This is further elaborated on by Groys, who writes that this idea 'means giving serious consideration to the historical event that communism was and earnestly inquiring what traces still remain of communism and to what degree the experience of communism still marks our own present reality – but it also means asking why

⁵⁶ *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2016).

⁵⁷ Maria Hlavajova, "Preface in Place of a Postscript", in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2016), 16.

⁵⁸ Van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe*, 181.

communism can at all be regarded as a mere historical intermission.⁵⁹ In this thesis, post-communism helps to analyse the difficulties involved in the East-West dialogue involved in Beeren's exhibitions.

Groys' theory is crucial in analysing how the effects of communism continue to manifest in the East, from the period immediately following its collapse to today.⁶⁰ However, 'post-communism' remains limited by a number of factors. By focusing only on the enduring aftermath of communism, it ignores other important events of the 1990s, most notably the signing of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the subsequent birth of the European Union. In doing this, the concept proves difficult to apply in a broader European context. In this thesis, while useful in analysing the Eastern European art that was shown in *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*, 'post-communism' becomes too limited to fully analyse Wim Beeren's decisions as director of the Stedelijk. It is only by considering Groys' theory within the framework of Former West that it can be applied to the Stedelijk effectively. Carefully scrutinizing the Stedelijk as a Western art institution reacting not only to the events of 1989, but also to the promises of 1992, proves crucial in understanding how the exhibitions were conceptualized and curated.

Piotrowski's essay 'Toward a Horizontal History of the Avant-Garde' conceptualized two distinct models of studying modernism: a 'vertical' art history and a 'horizontal' art history. According to Piotrowski, a 'vertical' history of art '...Implies a certain hierarchy. The heart of modern art is the centre – a city or cities – where the paradigms of the main artistic trends come into being: Berlin, Paris, Vienna, London, New York. [...] Hence, the art of the centre determines a specific paradigm, while the art of the periphery is supposed to adopt the models established in the centres. The centre provides canons, hierarchy of values, and stylistic norms – it is the role of the periphery to adapt the models established in the centres.'⁶¹ In other words, the concept of vertical art history allows Piotrowski to examine the disbalance of power inherent within the Western-centric art historical canon. The purpose of a 'horizontal' art history, on the other hand, is to destabilize this structural imbalance. Piotrowski argues that '...A horizontal art history should begin with the deconstruction of vertical art history, that is, the history of Western art. A critical analysis should reveal the speaking subject who speaks, on whose behalf, and for whom? This is not to cancel Western art history, but to call this type of narrative by its proper name, precisely as a 'Western' narrative. In other words, I aim to separate two concepts which

⁵⁹ Boris Groys, 'The Post-Communist Condition' in *Who If not We Should at Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This? 7 Episodes on (Ex)changing Europe*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004), 164.

⁶⁰ It should however be noted that a linguistic problem of defining the differences between communism and socialism carries over into Groys' theory. Groys himself seems to use the two terms almost interchangeably. For example, he refers to post-communism in 'The Post-Communist Condition' but has also co-authored a book titled *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art under Late Socialism* in 2003. In an essay titled 'The Contemporary Condition: Postmodernity, Post-Socialism, Postcolonialism' he refers to 'post-socialist or post-communist art' [emphasis added]. While the question of the line between socialism and communism remains a contentious issue, this thesis will rely on the term 'post-communist' as is it more commonly accepted within the standards of modern scholarship.

⁶¹ Piotr Piotrowski, 'Toward a Horizontal History of the Avant-Garde' in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. Sascha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 50 – 51.

have usually been merged: the concept of Western modern art and the concept of universal art. Western art history can thus be relativized and placed next to other art historical narratives – in accordance with the horizontal paradigm. The consequence of such a move will be a reversal of the traditional view of the relationship between art history of the margins and that of ‘our’ art history (read: of the West).’⁶²

Hence, by necessitating an examination of the centre from the margins, Piotrowski’s ideas encourage a deconstruction of the hierarchal nature of the Western-centric art historical canon. Unfortunately, although particularly useful to Eastern European studies, Piotrowski’s ideas would not go on to revolutionize the existing narrative of the art world. While certainly useful in rethinking the power structures prevalent in art history, Piotrowski’s concepts of a ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ art history failed to sufficiently impact the current Western-centric canon. A far more radical approach is necessary in order to overturn a status quo that has remained in place for decades. Such an approach is found in *Former West*, which advances Piotrowski’s work, suggesting that the current notion of ‘the West’ should be done away with altogether. This thesis benefits from the more radical method proposed by *Former West*, an approach necessitated by the fact that West-centric hierarchies of the 20th century continue to dominate today’s Europe.

This thesis uses the *Former West* perspective by applying it to the case of Wim Beeren and *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* in the early 1990s. *Former West* helps in examining the effects of 1989 not only on Eastern European artists, but above all in investigating how Beeren’s exhibition programme at the Stedelijk was affected by the changes in Europe at the time. Adapting the *Former West* perspective helps to understand Beeren’s leadership in the immediate post-Cold War era, including why he took the initiative in organizing two exhibitions centred around contemporary Eastern European art. It is only through this framework that his curatorial methods can be understood. Exploring the ways in which the Stedelijk was affected and reacted to the end of the Cold War also helps to further advance the goals of *Former West* itself by ‘Formering’ a Western European art institution. It constitutes the first step to constructing the *Former West* through a history of exhibitions.

⁶² Piotrowski, ‘Toward a Horizontal History of the Avant-Garde’, 54.

In the USSR and Beyond: Contemporary Soviet Art in the Stedelijk

In the USSR and Beyond opened at the Stedelijk Museum on the 21st of September 1990 and could be seen until the 4th of November of the same year. Conceptualized by Wim Beeren, it included the work of twenty-eight contemporary Soviet artists from a period of 1970 onwards and spanned sixteen rooms on the first floor of the museum. Beeren opened his foreword to the exhibition catalogue with a message of gratitude: 'The excellent rapport between colleagues at the USSR Ministry of Culture and the Stedelijk Museum began during the organization of the Malevich exhibition (1987 – 1989). They provided the basis for talks about possible exhibitions on the contemporary Dutch and Soviet art.'⁶³ While decidedly political in nature, the statement was nevertheless true: the Stedelijk's 1990 presentation of contemporary Soviet art could not have been realized without Soviet cooperation.

It is therefore necessary to begin by contextualizing the exhibition within the changes that the Soviet regime had undergone over the course of the preceding decade. When Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin Chernenko as Secretary General of the Communist Party on the 11th of March 1985, it became clear to him that the Soviet empire had become unsustainable. While the 1970s had seen the Soviet economy slow to minimal growth, the 1980s were plagued by a full economic decline, exemplified by a steadily increasing foreign debt and chronic shortages. Major reforms would be necessary if Gorbachev were to ensure the USSR's survival, but any attempt at reform would have proved impossible within the existing ruling structure. To reform the Soviet economy, Gorbachev needed to simultaneously reform the Communist Party itself. It was with this in mind that the policy of 'glasnost' was adapted in 1986, a term that translates to both openness and transparency. At its most basic level, the new policy encouraged the Soviet public to once again engage in discussions of social issues. This however also implied the relaxing of censorship. In hindsight, the consequences of glasnost would reach further than even Gorbachev could have ever foreseen.⁶⁴

By the end of 1980s these consequences had manifested in all aspects of Soviet life, including culture. Preceding decades had seen the presence of state control over art production. And while it is true that the nature and severity of this control changed over the years, it had nevertheless remained a permanent repressive presence in Soviet culture. Under Gorbachev's new policies, however, the face of the art world would be transformed in ways that would have been impossible to predict just a few years earlier. In her book *Margins of Soviet Art*, Tupitsyn recalled the changes she had witnessed in Moscow by 1987, observing that, 'Until recently alternative art was allotted a rather marginal position and an insignificant public life, but now its presence had become much more visible.'⁶⁵ She goes on to describe the results of a decentralized art world, which meant that artists could, to a large extent, exhibit freely. This was accompanied by the opening of artistic clubs, societies, salons and galleries, as well as new possibilities for visitors, some of them foreigners, to see or purchase contemporary Soviet art. Writing about the uneasy mood accompanying these changes, Tupitsyn wrote, 'All this agitation creates an

⁶³ Wim Beeren, 'Foreword' in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 8.

⁶⁴ Judt, *Postwar*, 595 – 599.

⁶⁵ Margarita Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1989), 120 – 121.

atmosphere rather similar to the post-revolutionary period, the difference being that then the Soviet cultural apparatus had not yet been built and now it has still not been dismantled.’⁶⁶ It was in this new climate that Wim Beeren found himself while preparing the Malevich retrospective of 1989, an experience which would inspire him to curate an exhibition of contemporary Soviet art that would open just a year later.

In light of this, *In the USSR and Beyond* was rife with political significance. The Berlin Wall had collapsed less than a year earlier, the Soviet Union was in turmoil, and the face of the continent was being transformed as the Cold War between the West and the East was finally coming to an end. Within this setting, *In the USSR and Beyond* constituted the first large-scale encounter between contemporary Eastern European art and a Western European audience in the Stedelijk, the likes of which could not have taken place before. In light of the significance of such a moment, it is important that Beeren’s exhibition not be forgotten by art history. Inspired by Rattemeyer’s reconstruction of *Beeren’s On Loose Screws* and Greenberg’s argument for the importance of ‘remembering exhibitions’, this chapter aims to reconstruct *In the USSR and Beyond*. In order to do this, it is divided into a number of sections borrowed from Rattemeyer. The first contextualizes the exhibition by focusing on the planning stage. The second uses archival research and installation photographs to make the forgotten floor plan. It is hence also the most descriptive part of this chapter. Lastly, the third section focuses on analyzing the exhibition through the perspective of Former West and Piotrowski’s concept of horizontal art history. In doing this, this chapter addresses a central question. Namely, what kind of conclusions can be drawn from reconstructing Wim Beeren’s *In the USSR and Beyond* and to what extent was the exhibition successful at introducing this topic to a Western public?

Planning the Exhibition

The foundation for *In the USSR and Beyond* was established during the preparations for a Malevich retrospective, which opened at the Stedelijk Museum on the 5th of March and closed on the 28th of May 1989. The Stedelijk already housed an extensive collection of Malevich’s work, an acquisition dating back to 1958. They were bought from Hugo Häring, an architect who came in contact with Malevich when he designed the space for a 1927 exhibition in Berlin. Malevich would be forced to leave Berlin before the end of the exhibition and, unable to take his works with him, he left them in the care of Häring. However, as political repressions in Russia tightened, Malevich was unable to leave the country again and never returned to retrieve the art he had left behind in Berlin. When Häring fled to his native town of Biebarach an der Riß during the Second World War, he took the eighty-four works still in his possession with him. He was first visited by the Stedelijk’s then-director, Willem Sandberg, somewhere between the 28th of April and the 5th of May 1951. Sandberg would go on to visit Häring several times, with the latter eventually agreeing to sell 36 paintings, 15 drawings and 33 studies for the sum of 90,300 Dutch guilders. To Sandberg, the acquisition represented the opportunity to place the museum’s existing collection of De Stijl, and particularly Mondrian, within an international context. It was an excellent strategy: there was a strong comparison to be made, as both Mondrian and Malevich had

⁶⁶ Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art*, 121.

begun creating abstract works around the year 1915.⁶⁷ An emphasis on this historical connection between The Netherlands and Russia aimed to elevate Amsterdam's municipal collection to a global scale.⁶⁸

The Stedelijk's 1958 Malevich acquisition was hence of particular significance to the museum, and Beeren was correct in sensing a timely opportunity for a retrospective exhibition. On the other hand, Beeren also recognized that more works would be needed if an exhibition of such an ambitious size was to succeed. It was necessary to contextualise the Stedelijk's Malevich collection within the greater scope of his earlier and later artistic practice, which was still missing from the museum. Beeren would need to access the museum depots in Moscow and Leningrad, which could only be achieved by establishing friendly relations with the Soviet Ministry of Culture. It was in those depots that Beeren first encountered contemporary Russian art. A work which left a lasting impression on him was a small painting of a horse by Zaven Arshakuni, hidden in the storage of the Russian Museum in Leningrad (fig. 1). Beeren would later be cited as saying that it was this little work that inspired him to begin working on an exhibition of contemporary Soviet art.⁶⁹ Fittingly, Arshakuni's horse later went on to travel to Amsterdam to be displayed as the first painting of *In the USSR and Beyond*.

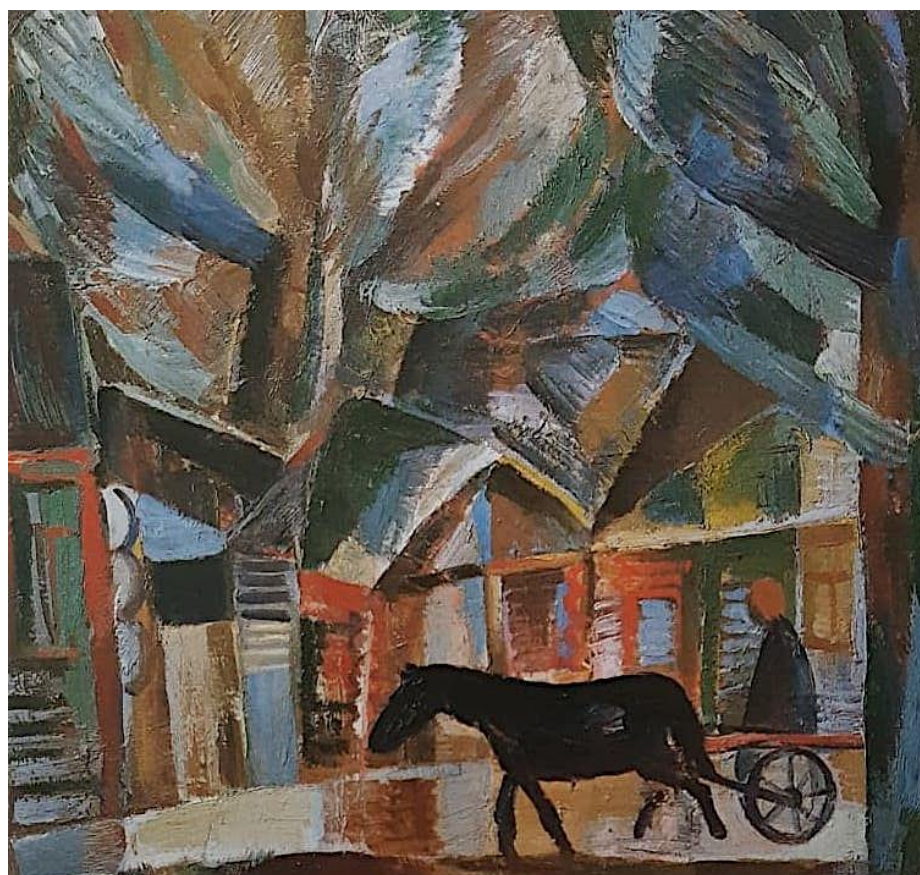


Figure 1: Zaven Arshakuni, *Landscape with a Horse*, 1976.

⁶⁷ Linda Boersma, Joop Joosten and Din Pieters, 'Malevich', *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin* (March 1989): 22.

⁶⁸ Richter Roegholt, 'Malevitsj en het Stedelijk Museum: de odyssee van een collectie', *Spiegel Historiael* 30, no. 5 (May 1995), 176 – 182.

⁶⁹ Janneke Wesseling, 'Verhuld en versluierd: twintig jaar sovjetkunst in Amsterdam', *NRC Handelsblad*, 28th of September, 1990. Delpher.

Kazimir Malevich 1878 - 1935 (figs. 2 and 3) was an enormous success for the Stedelijk. It would eventually be visited by around 240,000 visitors, surpassing all estimates and expectations.⁷⁰ This undoubtedly signalled to both the museum and the Soviet Ministry that further cooperation was worth pursuing, and hence opened the door for future projects. 1989 also saw the expansion of an existing 1967 cultural exchange pact between the Netherlands and the USSR. As reported in Dutch newspapers on the 18th of April, early negotiations initiated by the Soviet delegation were underway. The deliberations took place in The Hague, and it was decided that the pact would be renewed for another three years. Moreover, the previous budget of 140 million guildens would now be increased to an amount between 280 and 300 million.⁷¹ One of the terms of the new pact included a clause about a new exhibition of young Russian artists in the Stedelijk, cementing Beeren's plans.⁷²

Such an exhibition was very much in line with Beeren's existing interest in art from non-Western cultures, as well as his directorial aim to bring such art into the museum. He asked Jan Hein Sassen, curator of painting and sculpture, and Maarten Bertheux, head of the communications department, to join him in organizing the exhibition.⁷³ Sassen and Bertheux travelled to Moscow and Leningrad in order to carry out the necessary research, and to work towards finalizing the list of participating artists. Bertheux's personal account of working on *In the USSR and Beyond* emphasized how little he had known about contemporary Soviet art at the time. In spite of a previous visit to the USSR during preparations for the Malevich retrospective, it was only through conversations with artists that he could find out how challenging it had been to make art outside of official channels: 'We didn't know anything. We were not prepared for what we would encounter. Everything was a new surprise, a new experience.'⁷⁴ Over the course of two weeks (one of which was spent in Moscow and the other in Leningrad), Sassen and Bertheux were able to establish a network of contacts. Meeting Pavel Pepperstein, for instance, led them to be introduced to the work of Ilya Kabakov, who at the time had already left the USSR. Upon their return to Amsterdam, Bertheux and Sassen reported their findings to Beeren, and together the three agreed on a final selection of works for the exhibition.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Leeuwarder Courant*, 29th of May 1989, Delpher.

⁷¹ *NRC Handelsblad*, 'Nieuw Cultureel Verdrag met USSR', 18th of April 1989, Delpher.

⁷² 'Colophon' in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 59.

⁷³ Sassen and Bertheux had both already curated other exhibitions at the Stedelijk. For example, both had already helped organize *Een grote activiteit* (1987 – 1988), while Bertheux had also worked on *Energieën* (1990).

⁷⁴ Maarten Bertheux, conversation with author, 1st of February 2019.

⁷⁵ Bertheux, conversation.



Figure 2: Eustachy Kossakowski, *Kazimir Malevich Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam 1*, 1989.

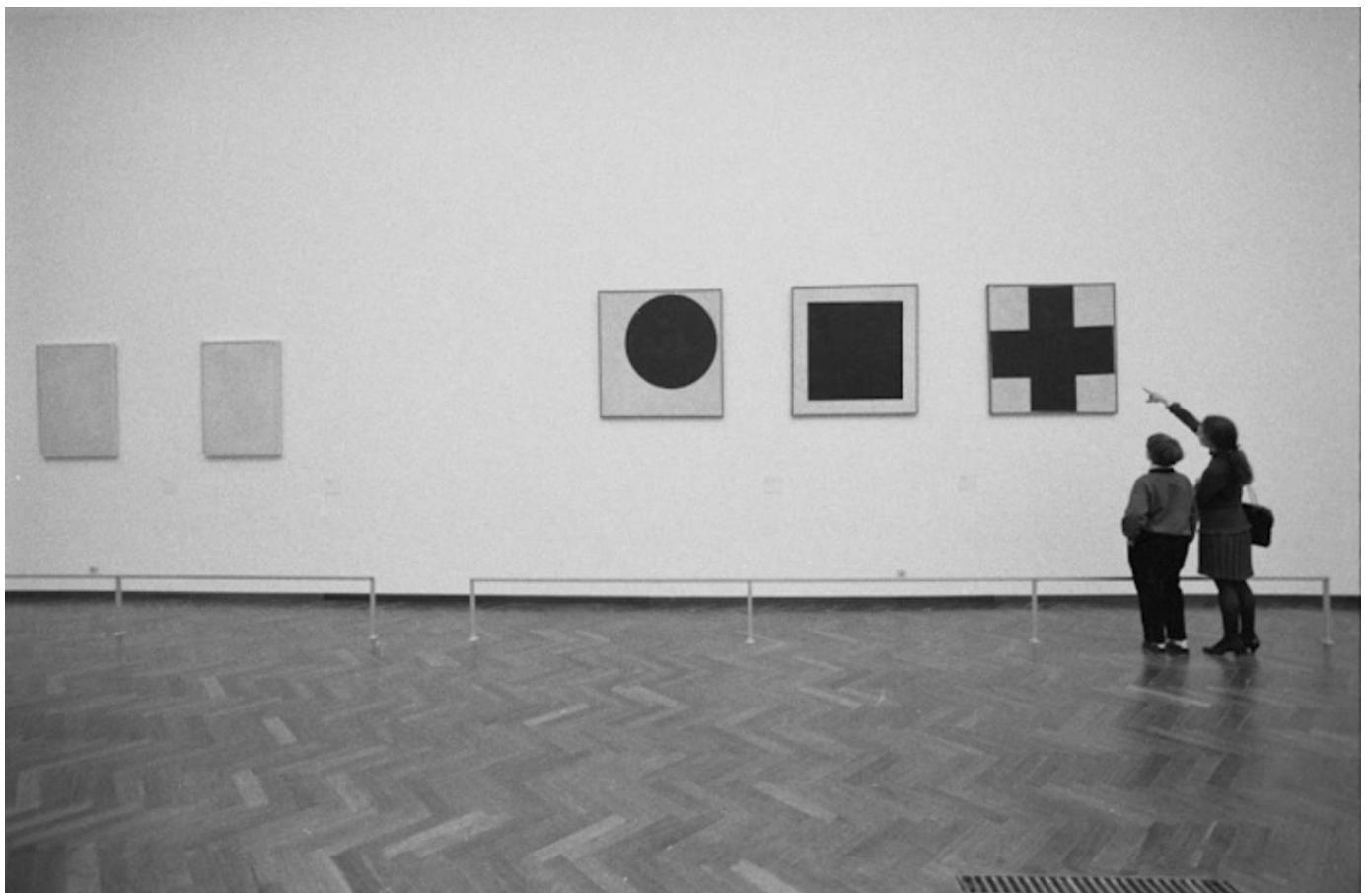


Figure 3: Eustachy Kossakowski, *Kazimir Malevich Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam 2*, 1989.

Their efforts culminated in the signing of the ‘Agreement Between the Ministry of Culture of the USSR and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands)’ of 1990. The aim of the document was to outline a number of understandings about two upcoming exhibitions. These were to consist of an exhibition of Soviet art, which was to take place in the Stedelijk, and an exhibition of Dutch art in a Soviet institution – the latter, however, would never materialize.⁷⁶ The document consisted of three parts, where the first concerned the Soviet exhibition, the second the Dutch exhibition, while the last part addressed general outlines for both. The agreement made clear the shared responsibilities of the Ministry and the museum. The USSR would arrange for the packing and transportation of the works, which would travel by truck to Amsterdam, accompanied by two ministry representatives. Another official representative would be sent to participate in the opening ceremony, and the Ministry would also contribute an article and the necessary slides for the catalogue. The Stedelijk was in turn obliged to provide sufficient security and climate-control for the works, along with arrangements for the packing and unpacking of the truck. It would also be responsible for the publication of the catalogue, of which 50 copies would be provided to the Soviet Ministry. Lastly, the museum was to cover the expenses of the Ministry representatives over the course of their stay in Amsterdam, including hotel, transportation and translation costs, as well as a daily allowance of 60 Dutch guilders.⁷⁷ The agreement was signed by representatives A.V. Andreev and V.L. Rivkind for the Ministry and by Wim Beeren for the Stedelijk.

When asked why such a strict contract had been necessary, Bertheux stated that the Stedelijk had been informed of some of the many problems that artists working with the Ministry of Culture had encountered. It seemed that many works sent abroad to Western exhibitions had never made it back to their authors.⁷⁸ The Stedelijk’s curators hence found it crucial that the Ministry would guarantee that the works would be safely returned to the artists.⁷⁹ Other than the contributions from the Tretjakov Museum in Moscow and the Russian Museum in Leningrad, eleven other international institutions loaned to the exhibition: five from Germany, one from France, three in the United States, as well as two additional Soviet galleries.⁸⁰

The concept text of the exhibition clarified the selection of the art works within the curatorial structure of the exhibition. Though loosely chronological, Beeren did not aim for a representative historical overview of contemporary Russian art. Rather, he selected artists based on ‘a personal perspective.’⁸¹ Though surprisingly vague, the statement can be taken to mean that work was chosen based on its quality, rather than in an effort to fill gaps in a predetermined chronology. Bertheux was

⁷⁶ Bertheux, conversation.

⁷⁷ ‘Agreement Between the Ministry of Culture of the USSR and Stedelijk [sic] Museum’, 1990, *In de USSR en erbuiten* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2768, Amsterdam.

⁷⁸ Bertheux, conversation.

⁷⁹ However, reading the agreement reveals no concrete clause relating to the return of the works to the artists. Only transport ‘back to the USSR’ or ‘Moscow’ is specified. Hence it is debatable if the agreement was indeed motivated by the artists’ interests.

⁸⁰ ‘Lenders to the Exhibition’ in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 50

⁸¹ Maarten Bertheux, ‘Binnen de USSR en erbuiten: 22 september – 4 novemeber’, 1990, *In de USSR en erbuiten* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2767, Amsterdam.

quoted in a newspaper article, where he claimed that the exhibition should instead be seen as an introduction to Soviet art.⁸² Speaking at a press conference, Beeren also put additional emphasis on the selection being his personal choice.⁸³ This was certainly the case to a certain extent, as he had control over the final selection of participating artists. However, it can also be argued that Beeren would have wanted the reputation of being the first museum director to singlehandedly bring contemporary Soviet art to The Netherlands.

The title *In de USSR en Erbuiten* was significant to the concept and structure of the exhibition. This is even more apparent in the English translation, *In the USSR and Beyond*, where the word 'beyond' carries not only the obvious geographical connotations, but also more abstract notions of temporality. It could hence also be interpreted as a look to the future, towards what lay 'beyond' the Soviet regime. According to Beeren, he also hoped to address the growing interest in Soviet art abroad, as well as to open a new dialogue between the Soviet Union and the West. On a more practical level, the title aimed to encompass not only artists working in the Soviet Union, but also those who had since emigrated. This was also related to the curatorial choices that were made. The participating artists were divided into three categories. The first included artists who lived and worked in the Soviet Union, including Steinberg and Nemukhin. The second was made up of artists who, though still based in the Soviet Union, often made their work abroad and travelled extensively. Lastly, the third category dealt with artists who had emigrated from the Soviet Union, including Komar and Melamid, who had left for New York, or Oleg Tselkov, who had permanently relocated to France. These curatorial criteria were further cemented by the exhibition catalogue, which relied on a similar division in presenting its content. Designed by Studio Anthon Beeke, it is made up of a larger folder, which comprises five smaller booklets. Each booklet includes contributions relating to categories such as artists active in the USSR, those active abroad, or the younger generation of artists.

Equally interesting from a curatorial point of view was the inclusion of the smaller exhibition *Naar het object*, or *To the Object*, which had been compiled in its entirety by Russian curators and displayed in Moscow from the 19th of April to the 13th of May earlier that year.⁸⁴ The exhibition was based on a concept by Andrei Erofeev and realized by the architect Yuri Avakumov. A display combining the work of sixty young artists, it aimed to present the role that the 'object' had assumed in Russian art. In the Stedelijk it appeared as a kind of exhibition within an exhibition, located in the large 'erezaal', or 'hall of honour' of the museum. For the purposes of transposing this exhibition to a new setting, Avakumov was asked to create a new design that would fit the architecture of the Stedelijk. This resulted in a large cardboard construction shaped like a ship (figs. 4 and 5). Erofeev himself was responsible for supervising the transport of the artworks from Moscow. An extensive discussion of *To the Object* would risk going beyond the scope of this thesis, which focuses primarily on the efforts of the Western curators. However, as the only part of *In the USSR and Beyond* curated by Russians and not Western staff, it offers an interesting point of comparison between the two different approaches, and hence many opportunities for future research.

⁸² 'Stedelijk Museum brengt overzicht sovjetkunst', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 28th September 1990. Delpher.

⁸³ Wesseling, 'Verhuld en versluierd: twintig jaar sovjetkunst in Amsterdam'.

⁸⁴ 'Colophon' in *In the USSR and Beyond*, 59.



Figure 4: The outer walls of *To the Object*. Visible are the circular cutouts representing the portholes of the 'ship'.



Figure 5: Inside *To the Object*.

1st floor

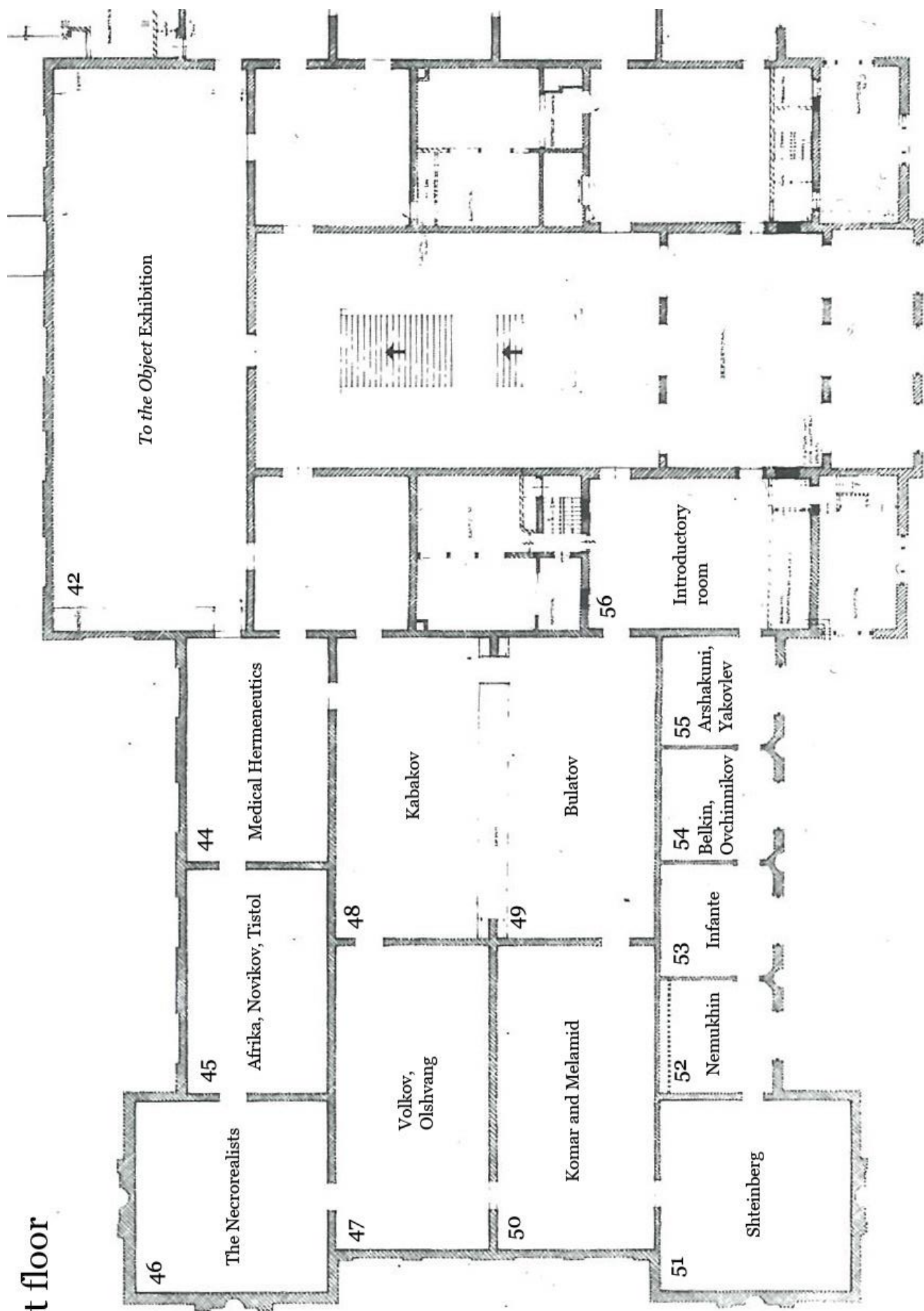


Figure 6: *In the USSR and Beyond* floorplan.

Recreating the Floorplan

In the USSR and Beyond was opened by municipal councillor for Amsterdam, Mrs. M. Baak.⁸⁵ The visitors would begin by exploring *To the Object* in the hall of honour (room 42 on fig. 6) before continuing on to the main part of the exhibition curated by the Stedelijk staff. The exhibition opened with an introductory room (fig. 7). A large table was laid out with an assortment of books about Soviet art, such as a book about Vladimir Nemukhin by Kenda and Jacob Bar-Gera. Alongside them were a number of catalogues. These included *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, published on the occasion of an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and the Tacoma Art Museum,⁸⁶ as well as *UDSSR Heute/URSS Aujourd'hui*, a catalogue of



Figure 7: The introductory room of *In the USSR and Beyond*.

⁸⁵ Lien Heyting, 'De tweede Russische tentoonstelling', *NRC Handelsblad*, 28th September 1990, Delpher.

⁸⁶ The exhibition was housed at the Tacoma Art Museum between the 5th of June 1990 and the 9th of September 1990 and at the ICA between the 1st of November 1990 and the 6th of January 1991. It then went on to travel to the Des Moines Art Centre (16th of February 1991 – 31st of March 1991).

contemporary Soviet art from the Ludwig collection that had been shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne Saint-Etienne and the Neue Galerie – Sammlung Ludwig (known today as the Ludwig Forum) in Aachen.⁸⁷ Beeren's choice of publications was clearly a message to the public. He was demonstrating that underground Russian artists had already made their way to the United States, France and Germany, and that he was now bringing them to the Netherlands. On the wall above the table, four identical exhibition posters were hung, evoking the repetitious nature of Soviet propaganda. A number of informative texts were also displayed. These included a short summary of Soviet art between 1956 and 1990, divided into several distinct periods: '1956 – 1962: Hope and Expectation', '1962 – 1974: Isolation' and '1975 – 1986: Alternative Movement'. Alongside these was a list of selected international exhibitions, which further emphasized that this would be the first time these works could be seen in the Netherlands. Finally, the introductory text of *In the USSR and Beyond* was displayed. The purpose of the room was educational in nature, attempting to inform the audience and contextualize the exhibition within current politics and recent literature.

Following this initial introduction was a row of smaller rooms dedicated to an older generation of artists active since the 1950s and 1960s (rooms 51 through 55). They acted as the departure point for the loosely chronological narrative Beeren had constructed. Boris Groys described this period as embodying 'The paradigmatic figure of the modernist artist-hero suffering for individual artistic truth and struggling against a cold and hypocritical social environment.'⁸⁸ Indeed, the artists presented belonged to those who, immediately following the death of Stalin in 1953, were able to begin producing some of the earliest underground art. In the 1960s they were only referred to as 'experimental' or 'innovative' – they predated the vocabulary which would be used to describe the dissident generation that would follow in their footsteps.⁸⁹ This was a particularly uncertain period for artists. Soviet policy on art in the post-Stalin years was vague and ill-defined, which some artists took as an opportunity to push the boundaries of what was permissible by the state.

Beeren presented this early generation as working within two distinct traditions: expressionism and the historical Russian avant-garde. These two categories had the added benefit of being more recognizable and accessible to Beeren's Western audience. The first rooms of the exhibition were occupied by those working in an expressionist style: Zaven Arshakuni, Vladimir Yakovlev, Vladimir Ovchinnikov and Anatoly Belkin. Arshakuni's two paintings (fig. 8) depicted scenes from everyday life,

⁸⁷ The full title of the exhibition was *UDSSR Heute/URSS Aujourd'hui: Sowjetische Kunst aus der Sammlung Ludwig / Art soviétique de la Collection Ludwig*. It was on show in Saint-Etienne between the 15th of December 1989 and the 26th of February 1990 and in Aachen between the 20th of July and the 9th of September 1990.

⁸⁸ Boris Groys, 'The Other Gaze: Russian Unofficial Art's View of the Soviet World' in *Post Modernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art Under Late Socialism*, eds. Aleš Erjavec and Boris Groys (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 56.

⁸⁹ Yevgeni Barabanov, 'Art in the Delta of Alternative Culture' in *Forbidden Art: The Postwar Russian Avant-Garde*, ed. Garrett White (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1998), 7.



Figure 8: Work by Yakovlev (left) and Arshakuni (right) on display.

namely a rural village (*Landscape with a Horse*) and an interior with two women seated at a table (*Friends*, fig. 9). Although Arshakuni did not stray from the realistic subject matter proscribed by the state – *Landscape with a Horse* can be said to represent a collective farm, or kolkhoz, which was perfectly agreeable with the doctrine of Socialist Realism – he had been influenced by the re-emergence of preceding generations of Russian and French expressionists.⁹⁰ Alongside his work was that of Vladimir Yakovlev, whose sombre gouaches offered a stark contrast to Arshakuni's vivid colours. Yakovlev emphasized existential themes and considered art to be the '...Place of solution for the contradiction between transcendental freedom and its opposite, the world in which man physically

⁹⁰ Jan Hein Sassen, 'In the USSR' in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 2.

lives.’⁹¹ This provocative message can be interpreted as a utopian perspective on art: a liberating alternative to the oppressive reality of the Soviet regime. Works such as *Clown* (fig. 10) and *Religious Curtain* (fig. 11) depicted emotionally-charged portraits. The latter, along with *Russian Tombstone*, also introduced a spiritual element, a recurring tendency in Russian culture. Although neither Arshakuni nor Yakovlev depicted radical subjects, both worked with expressionist techniques inspired by Western artists. Hence their experiments were stylistic rather than thematic in nature.



Figure 9: Zaven Arshakuni, *Friends*, 1979.

⁹¹ Lola Kantor-Kazovsky, 'The Moscow Underground Art Scene in an International Perspective' in *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe*, eds. Jérôme Bazin et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 42.



Figure 10: Vladimir Yakovlev, *Clown*, 1969.



Figure 11: Vladimir Yakovlev, *Religious Curtain*, 1969.

What was the significance of these artists within the greater scope of *In the USSR and Beyond*? Placing them first was undoubtedly a conscious decision on Beeren's part. They exemplified what the audience had already come to expect from Soviet art (membership of the Artists Union and limitations imposed by the government), but also introduced the notion of artists attempting to expand their practice beyond the prescribed guidelines. In this way their work offered a point of subversion of expectations. Whether inspired by the West or by the need to convey a spiritual message, artists like Arshakuni and Yakovlev experimented with an expressionist style while still depicting figurative scenes in order to survive within the Soviet art world. The earliest underground artists did not aim to convey a political message and were by no means revolutionary by Western standards. As such they remain almost entirely unknown. However, using horizontal art history to consider them within the Soviet context, they offer a glimpse at an evolving underground scene and hence remain of great value to the history of Russian art.

Having examined the influence of the expressionist tradition, the exhibition then presented artists influenced by abstraction. It is important to note that abstraction was an idea most openly condemned by the Soviet state and its doctrine of Socialist Realism, and hence suffered the most persecution among the 'bourgeois' styles. However, participating artists such as Francesco Infante, Vladimir Nemukhin and Eduard Steinberg nevertheless actively engaged with the legacy of Malevich. Infante's photographic work used backgrounds grounded in nature against which he placed geometric elements constructed out of man-made materials such as metal and plastic (room 53). This worked to create a juxtaposition of the natural and the synthetic.⁹² The titles he gave these works evoked art historical references. The two series on display were titled *Wanderings of a Square* and *Suprematist Games* (fig. 12) emphasizing his connection to Malevich (to whom Infante even dedicated the latter work). Vladimir Nemukhin studied under Petr Sokolov, who, having trained with Malevich himself, introduced Nemukhin to the Russian avant-garde art of the 1920s (room 52).⁹³ Having experimented with movements such as cubism, Nemukhin eventually began painting still-lives. These were often centred around seemingly random compositions of playing cards, although he claimed he attached no special significance to the cards themselves and was more interested in their form (fig. 13).⁹⁴ He was followed by the final representative of the older generation, Eduard Steinberg, who occupied the corner room (51). He was best known for painting geometrical abstraction he referred to as 'meta-geometry' (fig. 14). Having encountered works from the historical avant-garde in the sixties, Steinberg became influenced by Malevich and began viewing his own work as 'A synthesis of his own feelings and of Malevich's mystical – typically Russian – ideas.'⁹⁵

⁹² Sassen, 'In the USSR', 2.

⁹³ Vladimir Nemukhin, 'Vladimir Nemukhin', interview by Renee Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika*, eds. Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 54.

⁹⁴ Sassen, 'In the USSR', 2.

⁹⁵ Sassen, 'In the USSR', 2.



Figure 12: Francesco Infante’s work on display.

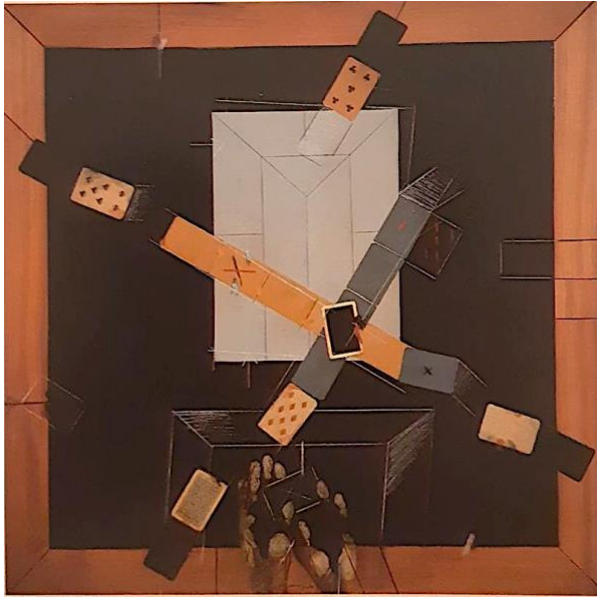


Figure 13: Vladimir Nemukhin, *Black Cardtable no. 1*, 1987 - 1988.

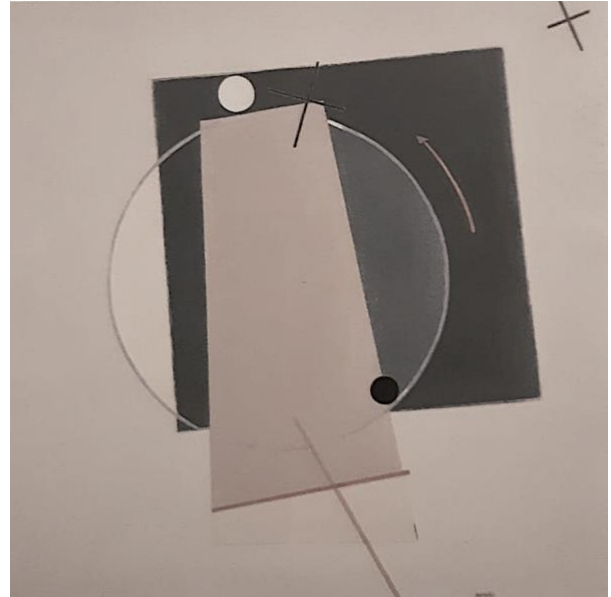


Figure 14: Eduard Steinberg, *Composition*, 1988.

Infante, Steinberg and Nemukhin's work hence constituted an important inclusion in the exhibition, specifically for their connection to the historical Russian avant-garde. Kazimir Malevich enjoys a unique position within art history. His work – along with that of contemporaries Vladimir Tatlin and El Lissitzky – has, over the decades, become firmly integrated into the Western canon.⁹⁶ It is the only movement specific to Eastern Europe that has gained such widespread recognition within the hierarchy of vertical art history. However, the same treatment has not been extended to Malevich's followers, who remain overlooked. The historical Russian avant-garde is seen as the only episode of note to emerge from the region – an entirely isolated and finite chapter, and in that sense an anomaly. It is hence important to emphasize that Beeren dedicated part of his exhibition precisely to such lesser-known artists who drew direct influence from Malevich. In doing this he focused on the periphery, a valuable attempt to fill a considerable gap in the art historical narrative in line with Piotrowski's argument for a horizontal art history. Unfortunately, this had little long-term influence, as the Western canon still continues to overlook these artists thirty years later.

The work of Arshakuni, Yakovlev, Infante, Steinberg and Nemukhin essentially formed an extended introduction to the rest of *In the USSR and Beyond*. Beeren used them to form connections that would be recognizable to a Western audience by situating them in relation to familiar concepts such as expressionism and the historical Russian avant-garde.⁹⁷ In doing this, he also provided historical context for the rest of the exhibition. It was from there that visitors would go on to encounter some of

⁹⁶ Piotrowski, 'Toward a Horizontal History of the Avant-Garde', 50.

⁹⁷ This connection to the historical avant-garde becomes all the more important considering that the highly successful Malevich retrospective had taken place in 1989, just one year before *In the USSR and Beyond*. The two exhibitions essentially allowed Beeren to present a broader narrative of Russian art spanning from Malevich to the present day, although this would have been more effective if both had been included in a larger Russian show.

the most influential names to emerge from Soviet art. These were the artists who had succeeded in gaining significant attention in the West: the artist duo Komar and Melamid, Erik Bulatov and Ilya Kabakov. Beeren had conceived this group as the ‘core’ of the exhibition.⁹⁸ All three have been described as members of a movement known as ‘Moscow conceptualism’, which would become almost synonymous with Russian art of the 1970s and 1980s. According to Groys,⁹⁹ ‘...The goal of Moscow conceptualism was to change the direction of one’s own gaze from future to present, from inner vision to external image. Or: to become external spectator in a world of shared visions. [...] Moscow conceptualism not only made a spectacle of Soviet life, but also saved its memory for a future that became different from that of the Communist vision. It is a memory of shabbiness and austerity of the Soviet everyday life but also of the utopian energy of the Soviet culture. Through the art of Moscow conceptualism a certain period of modern history – namely, the history of realization of the Communist project – finally becomes form.’¹⁰⁰ In other words, Moscow conceptualists like Komar and Melamid, Bulatov and Kabakov were primarily interested in the ‘artistic analysis of Soviet culture’.¹⁰¹

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid had left the USSR as early as 1976¹⁰². Their work, *Nikolai Buchumov* (1973), was a conceptual installation spanning an entire room, an artwork significantly more experimental than any of the older generation (room 50). In it were presented documents relating to a fictional artist Komar and Melamid had created – the titular Buchumov (fig. 15). It included a portrait of the one-eyed artist, as well as an entirely fabricated biography. According to the text, Buchumov trained under Malevich, but was dedicated to realism rather than abstraction. This betrayal of his teacher’s values eventually leads to him being attacked by another pupil, costing him an eye. Buchumov then returns to his native village, where he decides to paint sixty small nature studies of the same landscape – one for each season over the course of fifteen years – a project that becomes his life’s work.¹⁰³ This biography contextualized the rest of the installation. Fifty-nine untitled nature studies were installed in a single row that spanned all four walls of the room (fig. 16). Humorously, each study also depicts Buchumov’s nose as, having lost his left eye, the artist’s nose permanently obscured his field of vision. The sixtieth landscape was reported to be missing and was represented by an empty frame. In the middle of the room was a display cabinet containing artefacts related to Buchumov, such as his eyepatch, his palette, a coat hanger, and an unpublished manuscript about the artist.

Buchumov was not the first artist that Komar and Melamid had created: a previous installation had already introduced the character of Apelles Ziablov. According to Matthew Jesse Jackson, this strategy of inventing artists allowed Komar and Melamid to ‘employ artistic alter egos’ that ‘...Was revolutionary in early 1970s Moscow for it tapped into a long-standing fear of *dvulichie* (double identity,

⁹⁸ Bertheux, conversation.

⁹⁹ Groys himself was responsible for coining the term ‘Moscow conceptualism’ in his introduction to the 1979 issue of the underground Soviet art journal *A-Ya*.

¹⁰⁰ Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 2 – 3.

¹⁰¹ Groys, *History Becomes Form*, 9.

¹⁰² Sassen, ‘In the USSR’, 2.

¹⁰³ Komar and Melamid, ‘Nikolai Buchumov: Autobiography’ in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 9.

two-facedness) in the Soviet Union.’¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, as noted by Groys, ‘Both Ziablov and Buchumov are – like Komar and Melamid themselves – lonely figures and hobby artists living at the margins of society.’¹⁰⁵ Hence, inventing artists is a method through which Komar and Melamid were able to comment on the uncertain position of the artist in the Soviet Union, delivering a poignant commentary on their own position on the periphery.



Figure 15: Komar & Melamid, *Nikolai Buchumov*, 1973.



Figure 18: Komar & Melamid, *60 Framed Landscapes*, 1973.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism, Soviet Avant-Gardes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 123.

¹⁰⁵ Groys, *History Becomes Form*, 9.

Erik Bulatov's large-scale works represent the principles of Sots Art in *In the USSR and Beyond* (room 49). Sots art was one of the most influential practices to emerge from the Soviet underground and borrowed elements from typically Soviet imagery. In *I Live, I See* (fig. 17), the titular words, written in Cyrillic, were shown disappearing into the vanishing point in the centre of the painting. Bulatov borrowed the text from a poem by friend and non-conformist writer Vsevolod Nekrasov. In *Sunset – Sunrise* (fig. 18), a photorealistic seascape is overlooked by the coat of arms of the Soviet Union, which has replaced the sun over the horizon. However, the title and composition emphasized ambiguity, and hence it remained unclear whether the symbol was in fact in the process of rising or setting over the scene. According to Tupitsyn, artists like Bulatov were the '...First to view Socialist realism and Soviet mass media not as mere kitsch or as simply a vehicle for bureaucratic manipulation and state propaganda, but as a rich field of stereotypes and myths which they could transform into a new contemporary language, capable of deconstructing official myths on their own terms.'¹⁰⁶ Although Komar and Melamid were the ones to coin the term in 1972 – as a play on words on American Pop Art – Bulatov had begun exploring similar themes earlier in his career and realized the concept more successfully than other artists of his generation. Unlike Komar and Melamid, Bulatov relied much less on ironic comedy and instead concentrated on repetitions of ideological symbols in order to expose their ambiguity.¹⁰⁷ These symbols were often placed against a backdrop of landscape in which blue skies were a recurrent and prominent element. Bulatov's Sots Art works became particularly successful in the United States, where they resonated most strongly within an art climate that appreciated the similarities it shared with Pop Art. However, they were significantly less valued in Europe, where the public considered them repetitive variations on a single theme.¹⁰⁸

Ilya Kabakov's contribution to *In the USSR and Beyond* was a large-scale installation titled *The Rope of Life and Other Installations* (room 48). The surface of the room was covered with white sheets of paper, while small objects were attached to the titular rope (fig. 19). These related to specific events from the artist's life and were arranged chronologically, in effect transforming the rope into a timeline of memories. These ranged from early childhood in the 1930s to a Swiss exhibition in 1985. Although some memories seemed more mundane than others, the artist emphasized that they were all of equal importance. The outer parts of the rope had been left free of objects. According to Kabakov, this represented events that happened when he was too young to remember, as well as events that will continue to occur after his death.¹⁰⁹ The inclusion of Kabakov's work in *In the USSR and Beyond* was an important one. *The Rope of Life* explores a visual representation of a life spent in the Soviet Union, but also offers a broader meditation on the role of memory in human lives. Today, Ilya Kabakov stands out as the single most internationally recognized artist to emerge from the underground art scene of Moscow conceptualism, and it is precisely this ability to combine commentaries on life in the Soviet periphery with universal human themes that contributed to his success.

¹⁰⁶ Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art*, 61 – 64.

¹⁰⁷ Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Bertheux, conversation.

¹⁰⁹ Ilya Kabakov, 'In the USSR and Beyond' in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 15.



Figure 21: Erik Bulatov, *I Live, I See*, 1982.



Figure 22: Erik Bulatov, *Sunset - Sunrise*, 1989.



Figure 23: Ilya Kabakov, *The Rope of Life* on display.

The central rooms of the exhibition hence displayed some of the most important artists of the Soviet underground art world. Beeren also used them as a preamble to the final part of *In the USSR and Beyond*, which focused on the young talent that had been influenced by their older colleagues. A corner room of the exhibition displayed work of the Necrorealist group from Leningrad (46, fig. 20). The Necrorealists, active since the early 1980s, experimented with particularly dark themes of death and perversity. Their performances, films and paintings challenged the romanticized notion of dying for the communist cause that had been prevalent in the Soviet Union. The group was led by Yevgeny Yufit, who worked with painting and photography, but became best known for his work on film. One of his videos, *Papa, Father Frost is Dead*, was shown in the centre of a room on a screen embedded in a black, square pedestal. Although it was an adaptation of a short story by Alexei Tolstoy titled 'The Vampire Family', it retained very little resemblance to its source material. Like the majority of Yufit's work, it showed

people on the fringes of society, alienated outcasts wondering through abandoned landscapes.¹¹⁰ This can in turn be interpreted as a commentary on the artists themselves, who, still unable to make art freely, remained similarly alienated in 1980s Russia. On a deeper level, it also reminiscent of their status as peripheral artists in Europe. Accompanying the film were paintings by a number of Yufit's colleagues. Most notably, Vladimir Kustov's oil painting *If the Boys from Around the World...* was a close-up of a drowned, bloated corpse (fig. 21). Next to it was hung the work by Sergei Serp, who was strongly influenced by folk art and primitivism. He painted mostly scenes of accidents and death, such as in *Morning in the Forest 2*, which showed a legless man whose neck had been crushed by a fallen tree.¹¹¹ Although such artworks may at first appear to be senseless depictions of violence, it is important to emphasize that they were specific to the time and place in which they were being made. The Necrorealists used them to allude to the decline of the USSR with what Turkina describes as 'anticipation of its imminent death'.¹¹² When seen within their Soviet context, the group was offering a reflection of a culture that was, in itself, dying.



Figure 24: The work of the Necrorealist group on display.

¹¹⁰ Olesya Turkina, 'Necrorealism' in *Necrorealism: Retrospective Exhibition*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Moscow: Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 14.

¹¹¹ Olesya Turkina, 'Serp: A Festival of Necrorealism' in *Necrorealism: Retrospective Exhibition*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Moscow: Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 154.

¹¹² Olesya Turkina, 'Necrorealism', 14.



Figure 27: Vladimir Kustov, *If the Boys from Around the World...*, 1989.

The Necrorealists were subjected to the harshest criticism and as such became the most divisive part of *In the USSR and Beyond*. Writing for the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, Wierd Duk referred to their work as having ‘...Little artistic meaning’¹¹³ while Janneke Wesseling’s review for the *NRC Handelsblad* argued that the artists ‘...Could barely be taken seriously.’¹¹⁴ The corpse from *If the Boys from Around the World...* went on to feature prominently in reviews of the exhibition, its glazed-over eyes staring at readers from newspaper reproductions. According to Stedelijk curator Geurt Imanse, it evoked a strong reaction that ‘The newspaper art critics did not know how to deal with...’¹¹⁵ The Western audience couldn’t understand the Necrorealism and its allusions to the Soviet regime in its death throes. This was at least partially the result of displaying the works in a Western institution such as the Stedelijk: taken out of their Soviet context, the Necrorealists lost their revolutionary quality.

It may have been difficult for Beeren to predict which of the younger artists would go on to enjoy some degree of success. As such, the most important figures that would emerge from this group ended up crowded together in one small room (45). These three artists included Afrika (pseudonym of artist Sergei Bugayev), Timur Novikov and Oleg Tistol. By *In the USSR and Beyond*, Afrika and Novikov had become almost synonymous with the bustling Leningrad art scene of the late 1980s. Inspired by

¹¹³ Wierd Duk, ‘Russische avantgarde in Stedelijk Museum: Glasnost op de Koeznetskibrug’ in *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 28th of September 1990. Delpher.

¹¹⁴ Wesseling, ‘Verhuld en versluierd: twintig jaar sovjetkunst in Amsterdam’.

¹¹⁵ Geurt Imanse, ‘Twenty-One Years of Necros: A Lot of Kustov and a Bit of Yufit’ in *Necrorealism: Retrospective Exhibition*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Moscow: Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 190.

Moscow conceptualism – and the Sots art of Bulatov in particular – they often examined and engaged with Soviet symbols. Unlike their older colleagues however, they adapted a more neutral tone that avoided satirical tendencies. For instance, Afrika's large-scale work *Tractor* depicted a huge reproduction of an S-65 tractor, also known as the 'Stalinets 65', a vehicle particularly popular in Soviet agriculture (fig. 22). The larger photograph is juxtaposed with a small square image Afrika placed in its top left corner: a little drawing of a serene farmhouse executed in a folk-inspired style. Afrika used a similar technique in the second work, *Head*, in which a photo of a classical bust is reproduced on a large piece of fabric (fig. 23). Covering the sculpture's mouth is a small embroidered image of a rooster, once again invoking folk influence. In this way Afrika emphasized colliding worlds: technology and nature, as well as Western and Eastern artistic traditions, themes conspicuously absent from the rest of the exhibition.

Timur Novikov's art consisted primarily of minimalistic, bright collages made from fabrics, a style entirely unique to his work. His choice of using fabrics as opposed to mounted canvas was one motivated by both the influences of folk art and the practical needs of an underground artist. Fabric could be easily exhibited in more unconventional spaces, and it could then be rolled up and moved between locations.¹¹⁶ Novikov's work from the 1980s and 1990s is structured around flat and child-like motifs, and this was also the case in *In the USSR and Beyond*. In *Pyramids*, the line of the horizon is suggested only by the horizontal seam where the two fabrics meet (fig. 24). In *Penguins*, the line between dark ocean and icy landscape is similarly formed by the seam (fig. 25). Penguins were a recurring subject for Novikov, perhaps for the delightful simplicity with which black penguin silhouettes can be depicted against a white background. Novikov stands out as the only contemporary Russian artist to have engaged in such experiments with minimal forms, and his ground-breaking use of fabric as a medium. Today, his influence continues to resonate and he has become almost synonymous with Russia's underground punk scene of the 1980s. Beeren's correct instincts in recognizing his tremendous significance allowed the Stedelijk to go on to acquire Novikov's 1989 *Dirigible over the White House*, an important effort towards broadening the museum's collection of Eastern European art.¹¹⁷

Oleg Tistol was the only artist in *In the USSR and Beyond* to come from Ukraine. Like Afrika, Novikov and many of their contemporaries, Tistol also included recognizable symbols in his works. On the other hand, his work can only be described as uniquely Ukrainian, and it is Tistol's innovative approach in researching and examining the Ukrainian national identity that sets him apart from his Russian contemporaries. His paintings explored a typically Eastern Baroque style and combined it with the bright, kitsch colors of socialist realism, lending his work a uniquely playful quality.¹¹⁸ But it was his choice of subject that revealed the most about Tistol's inquisitive art practice. He often depicted scenes charged with national significance, such as patriotic symbols, historical heroes or significant battles. In

¹¹⁶ Alla Rosenfeld, 'A Great City with a Provincial Fate: Nonconformist Art in Leningrad from Khrushchev's Thaw to Gorbachev's Perestroika' in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, eds. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 132.

¹¹⁷ *Aanwinsten Stedelijk Museum 1985 – 1993*, ed. Wim Beeren (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam), 237.

¹¹⁸ Maarten Bertheux, 'The New Generation' in *In the USSR and Beyond* *In the USSR and Beyond*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1990), 5.



Figure 28: Afrika, *Tractor*, 1990.

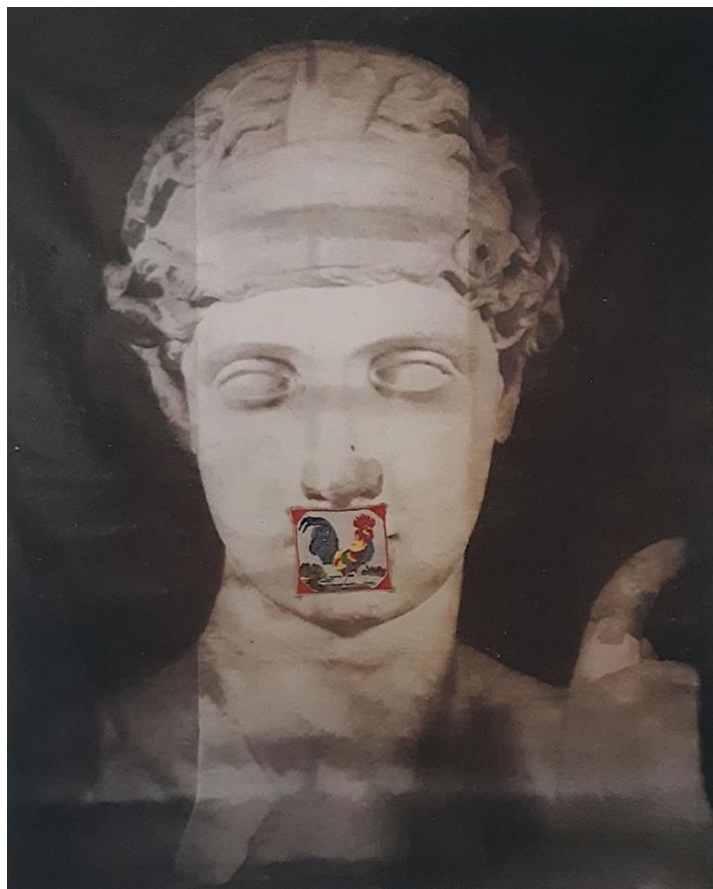


Figure 29: Afrika, *Head*, 1990.



Figure 30: Timur Novikov, *Pyramids*, 1990.



Figure 31: Timur Novikov, *Penguins*, 1989.

other words, he focused on objects, people, places and events that had become an integral part of the Ukrainian national and cultural identity, a notion that preoccupied Tistol throughout his career. Tistol himself referred to this as his fascination with the idea of national ‘stereotypes’. According to Igor Abramovich, Tistol subverted the traditionally negative meaning of a ‘stereotype’ as something repetitive and predictable, to him became ‘... An integral part of culture, an integral part of tradition and artistic language.’¹¹⁹ This method allowed Tistol to explore the Ukrainian identity through its national mythologies. Tistol’s biggest work in the exhibition, the monumental canvas *Reunification* (sometimes also referred to as *The Reunion* and, incorrectly, as *The Ascent* in the Stedelijk’s catalogue of *In the USSR and Beyond*) depicts the Pereyaslav Council of 1654, a period of Ukrainian history remains controversial among historians to this day (fig. 26). The Cossack leader, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, revolted against Polish-Lithuanian rule and sought to become an independent duchy under Russia in order to benefit from the Tsar’s protection. This marked the beginning of Russia’s future dominance over Ukraine and its eventual inclusion into the USSR. Under Soviet rule, the Pereyaslav Council went on to be lauded as a symbol of friendship between the two nations, and, in Paul R. Magocsi’s words, ‘... The ultimate symbol of Ukraine’s “reunification” with Russia, from whom it had been forcibly separated by foreign occupation since the fall of Kievan Rus.’¹²⁰ Tistol hence subverts this Soviet symbol to more accurately reflect what the Pereyaslav Council would mean for Ukrainian independence, making it one of the most overtly political works in *In the USSR and Beyond*. The Stedelijk’s visitors could see Tistol’s exploration of national identity just shortly before the Ukraine would cease to be part of the USSR and regain its lost independence in 1991.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to recreate the entire floorplan of *In the USSR and Beyond* based on archival photographs alone. Some works were not captured on camera at all, while others are photographed too closely to allow for an accurate interpretation of their location. This was the case for work by Oleg Tselkov, Gia Abramishvili, Dimitri Prigov and Vadim Zakharov. It is possible that work by at least one or two of these artists could be found in the square room connected to the displays by Kabakov and the Medical Hermeneutics. However, for the time being, the floorplan does not include their locations.

¹¹⁹ Igor Abramovich, ‘Oleg Tistol: wizualna historia Ukraińskiej tożsamości’ in *Artistic Culture* 15, no. 1 (2019): 6.

¹²⁰ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 230.



Figure 32: Oleg Tistol, *The Reunion*, 1989.

Analysis

This analysis of Wim Beeren's *In the USSR and Beyond* uses primary sources published about the exhibition as a point of departure. These range from archival material to local newspaper reviews that appeared at the time, which is useful for understanding how the exhibition was received and the criticisms that were made in 1990. The second part of the analysis looks at the exhibition through the Former West framework, and especially the concept of horizontal art history introduced by Piotrowski. Taken together, these ideas help to view the exhibition from a more critical perspective with regards to Beeren's Western approach. By doing this, the analysis helps to understand why the exhibition failed to resonate in the long run, but also to emphasize why its importance should be remembered today.

In a January 16th letter on behalf of Wim Beeren, acting director Rini Dippel thanked the lenders for their contributions and briefly discussed the reception of the exhibition, writing: '*In the USSR and Beyond*, which was shown at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from September 21st through November 4th, 1990, was a success. The Dutch press paid ample attention to it in a very positive way, and we received many favourable reactions from abroad.'¹²¹ Indeed, there were a number of positive reviews in the press that praised Beeren's ambitious effort. However, contrary to Dippel's letter, not all of the attention had been enthusiastic, and several articles had in fact been quite critical of the exhibition. These were most often directed at how the artworks were presented out of their Soviet context, at the broader trend of institutional interest in contemporary art from the USSR, as well as larger problems associated with presentations aiming to represent a single region or country.

Several negative reviews were preoccupied with whether or not the art on display could be seen as 'authentically' Soviet, or whether the artists had been compromised by the influence of the Western art market. Critics like Aad Kruijning struggled with this notion, writing: "The "museum" format in which these artists now work speaks volumes: such canvases no longer fit in a Moscow apartment, but they are also not meant for one. Now that even the Soviet Union is officially represented by former dissidents, such as this summer at the Venice Biennale, Soviet art has definitively left the "underground."¹²² Wim Beeren also seemed to be aware of these Western influences and worried about the danger of contemporary Soviet art losing its 'authenticity'. He was quoted in an article by Paul Depondt, who wrote that 'Beeren is justified in saying that "the authenticity is sometimes jeopardised by the fixation on the West." Russian artists are looking for a connection with the Western mainstream, with the European and American avant-garde.'¹²³ In other words, Beeren saw the interaction between Eastern European artists and the Western art market as a precarious path, which risked the loss of an authentic Soviet essence. It is clear that he interpreted the situation from a vertical perspective, with the Western centre exerting a one-way influence on the periphery.

¹²¹ Rini Dippel to the contributing artists of *In the USSR and Beyond*, 16th of January 1991, *In de USSR en erbuiten* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2767, Amsterdam.

¹²² Aad Kruijning, 'Sovjet-kunst heeft de "ondergrondse" definitief verlaten: dubbele presentatie in Stedelijk Museum', *De Telegraaf*, 28th of September 1990. Delpher.

¹²³ Paul Depondt, 'Lenin adviseert: drink Coca-Cola', *De Volkskrant*, 28th September 1990. Delpher.

It is telling to note that this preoccupation and anxiety about authenticity appears to have been an almost exclusively Western concern. The Eastern perspective, at least in the case of Russia, was most aptly summarised by Groys. Rather than focus on how the West may have influenced the East, he instead describes this tendency as characteristically Russian in nature. He states, 'Maybe there is nothing so truly Russian as Russian Westernness. Russian culture has been dreaming of the West for centuries now, wanting to become Western, to outdo the West, to be more Western than the Westerners. Everything that the Russian culture is able to provide in this sense is extremely practical in its nature, arising, as it does, from an intellectual impulse towards the West. In this way, the Russian view of the West, however, does remain something of an original, and very Russian, dream.'¹²⁴ In light of Groys' view, the absorption of Western influence was not at all a detriment to the quality of the Soviet art, but rather a natural result of cultural exchange that horizontal art history emphasizes as progressive.

Groys' comment ties into Bojana Pejić's concept of normalcy. The idea proposes that the East demonstrates aspirations to be 'normal', where the 'norm' refers to the Western idea of 'normal' specifically. The East's goal to become Western will in itself always be perceived as abnormal in the West. This power dynamic also existed in the art world and had come into play as soon as Eastern European artists began exhibiting in the West, wishing to be taken as seriously as the West's native artists, while at the same time being seen as representative of the East and hence fundamentally different.¹²⁵ Writing about the Soviet case specifically, Groys agrees, stating that 'The young Soviet artists have no desire whatsoever to be seen exclusively as representatives of Russia, nor do they want any exotic "value" added to their work. They have come to the West with their own, individual, artistic search and they present their work in exactly the same way as any other Western artist would.'¹²⁶

In light of Groys comments, Piotrowski's horizontal approach helps to further understand this fundamental difference between the Western and the Eastern perspectives. Rather than focusing on the Western perception of the peripheral Eastern art as 'inauthentic', it allows for an examination of the West from the Soviet point of view and to ask what this meant for the exhibition. It appears that *In the USSR and Beyond* seemed more concerned with preserving a timelessly communist and hence exoticized view of the region, than with actually examining the complex nature of the Eastern European art world and the relationship the East shares with the West. This was certainly a missed opportunity for Beeren, who could have delivered a much more nuanced exhibition that did not treat the USSR as entirely isolated, particularly with regards to the younger artists, whose generation was continually looking for international connections.

It is also interesting to note that Beeren's concerns with the authenticity of Russian art did not seem to drastically impact the way in which he chose to display it. The works in *In the USSR and Beyond* were taken out of their original underground context and placed within the pristine white cube of a

¹²⁴ Boris Groys, 'The Russian Artist of the Eighties or a Life Without and Oedipus Complex' in *Exhibit Russia: The New International Decade 1986 – 1996*, eds. Kate Fowle and Ruth Addison (Moscow: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016), 88.

¹²⁵ Bojana Pejić, 'The Dialectics of Normalcy' in *Who If Not We Should at Least Imagine the Future of All of This?*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004), 254.

¹²⁶ Groys, 'The Russian Artist of the Eighties or a Life Without and Oedipus Complex', 88.

Western art institution. Within this setting, they lost their revolutionary quality and failed to resonate with the audience. Hence, if the artworks did not feel original enough, it is perhaps more the fault of the Beeren's unoriginal curatorial style than of the artists themselves. This becomes particularly obvious when Beeren's exhibition is compared to the Soviet-curated display in *To the Object*. The cardboard ship packed full of artworks offers a radically different way for visitors to interact with them and was generally positively received in the press.¹²⁷ The Russian curators responsible for *To the Object* clearly had new, original ideas for curating the work of fellow Soviet artists. This was another missed opportunity for Beeren. While he deserves recognition for displaying *To the Object* in its entirety, he could have taken inspiration from his Russian colleagues with regards to the rest of *In the USSR and Beyond*. A closer collaboration between Beeren and his Soviet contacts could have led to a more experimental presentation better suited to the display of underground art.

A number of reviews of *In the USSR and Beyond* also probed deeper into the larger trend of growing interest in Eastern Europe. Although contemporary Soviet art seemed to be 'discovered' in much of the discourse of 1990, this was also not necessarily the case – a fact that did not go unnoticed by the Dutch press. While *In the USSR and Beyond* was the first large-scale exhibition at a Dutch museum, several reviews went on to note the role that had already been played by galleries and private collectors. Pieter Defesche, writing for the *Limburgs Dagblad*, argued that, 'Soviet art could already be seen in Germany long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, although it was less the result of state initiative than of private entrepreneurship. Chocolate producer Peter Ludwig, famous art collector and patron, already had a collection of Russian art ten years earlier [...]. Other private investors with more direct business interests sold art from the Eastern bloc in galleries in the States, England, Germany and Scandinavia.'¹²⁸ A similar observation could be found in an article by Janneke Wesseling, who writes, 'An important part of the displayed works hasn't come from the workshops in Russia, but from galleries and private collections in Switzerland and the States, and from the Sammlung Ludwig in Aachen.'¹²⁹

It is hence important to understand that the Stedelijk was not alone in its interest in contemporary Soviet and Eastern European art. Smaller Dutch institutions were initiating similar exhibitions at almost exactly the same time, including for instance the Stadsgalerij Heerlen (*Drie Russische kunstenaars*, 26th of August – 21st of October 1990) and the Gemeentemuseum Arnhem (as part of the city-wide culture festival *Passage Oost-Europa*, 28th September – 13th of October 1990). The WFK-Galerie, which specialised in Russian art, had also opened its doors in Amsterdam.¹³⁰ And outside the museum and gallery circuit, even the amusement park Pionypark Slagharen displayed an interest in contemporary Eastern European art, featuring young Soviet artists in their yearly exhibition of recent art academy graduates.¹³¹

¹²⁷ These include Kruijning's review, which is particularly positive about *To the Object*.

¹²⁸ Pieter Defesche, 'Een greep uit de Sovjetkunst', *Limburgs Dagblad*, 22nd of September 1990. Delpher.

¹²⁹ Wesseling, 'Verhuld en versluierd: twintig jaar sovjetkunst in Amsterdam'.

¹³⁰ Klaster, 'Eruptie van opgekropte dynamiek en talent'.

¹³¹ Nicole Hermans, 'De Russen komen: vernieuwd cultureel verdrag tussen Nederland en de Sovjet-Unie werpt vruchten af' in *Beelding* 4, no. 7 (September 1990), 18-20.

While Beeren's *In the USSR and Beyond* was the biggest and most influential of these Eastern European exhibitions in the Netherlands, it must nevertheless be considered one instance among a wider trend of growing Western interest in contemporary Eastern European art. It is possible to examine the reasons behind this trend from the perspective of Former West, which emphasizes that the political climate of post-1989 Europe affected not only the Eastern, but also the Western half of the continent. The Cold War was, above all, a war of ideologies. By the early 1990s it had a clear victor. This of course also meant that the communism of the Soviet Union, and by extension that of Eastern Europe, had suffered a resounding defeat. Hence an exhibition like *In the USSR and Beyond* can be framed as victory exhibition, where the Western triumph over the totalitarian Soviet regime was celebrated. The participating artists, released from oppressive circumstances, could be 'discovered' by the West, a perspective which influenced Beeren's curatorial decisions.

In light of this, there was a tendency present in the heroic representation of the dissident artists and their liberation at the hands of Western liberal values. In fact, Beeren seemed to see a clear divide between artists making a living under the Union of Artists (Arshakuni, Yakovlev, Ovchinnikov and Belkin), and the dissidents he placed at the centre of *In the USSR and Beyond* (Kabakov, Komar and Melamid, and Bulatov). These were also the categories that came to define the structure of the exhibition. In reality, this proved an oversimplification on Beeren's part, as it ignored scores of artists who trod the precarious line between the two worlds. Many Soviet underground artists were nevertheless members of the Union of Artists and moreover practiced their professions within the spheres of 'official' art, for instance as graphic designers or illustrators. This was the case for artists such as Kabakov, who found employment drawing children's books and has therefore always adamantly opposed his status as a real dissident.¹³²

Beeren's Western perspective resulting in the oversimplification of the Soviet art world are symptomatic of any project that aims to represent an entire country, region or culture in one exhibition. Scholars like Raluca Voinea have become increasingly critical of what she describes as 'geographically defined' exhibitions. Voinea poses the crucial question, 'Is the curators' desire to expose artists who are not known and to raise awareness of the creative energies that exist outside the Western scene enough to compensate for the geographical-ideological frames within which they are presented?'¹³³ This can certainly also be asked of *In the USSR and Beyond*. IJsbrand van Veelen touched on this in his article 'USSR Artists in Amsterdam', where he described the problems he noticed in the exhibition: "There is always a danger involved when showing art from a specific country: the *nationality* of the artists is the common factor rather than the content of the work and as soon as this is the case one is inclined to think along the lines of folklore. It reminds one of the old XIXth century Colonial Museums showing the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of some unknown tribe. On the other hand, a *nationalistic* approach is of course always defensible as being an *introduction* to the art from a formerly isolated country. And

¹³² Ilya Kabakov, 'Ilya Kabakov', interview by Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 142.

¹³³ Raluca Voinea, 'Geographically Defined Exhibitions: The Balkans, Between Eastern Europe and the New Europe', *Third Text* 21, no. 2 (March 2007): 146.

in the case of such an introduction it is important not only to show the work of individual artists but also to provide insights into the infrastructure of the art world of the country in question.’¹³⁴

Van Veelen actually addresses one of the key problems of *In the USSR and Beyond*, which is that it wasn’t particularly successful as an introduction to Soviet art. The insights into the infrastructure of the art world were largely overlooked, leading to a lack of the context necessary for a successful presentation. It is also important to point out that, while presented as an introduction to the art of the USSR, *In the USSR and Beyond* was not at all representative of the entire Soviet Union. Oleg Tistol was the only Ukrainian invited to participate, and no artists from any of the other Soviet Socialist Republics were included. This left the SSRs of Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan entirely ignored. In light of this, the exhibition title *In the USSR and Beyond* can almost be considered a misnomer: it actually presented almost exclusively *Russian* art. This was further evidenced by the fact that Beeren’s research team travelled to only Moscow and Leningrad, leading to a kind of tunnel vision with regards to the preparatory research. It is also important to emphasize that this was not for lack of noteworthy artists working in other regions. Estonia had in fact produced one of the most influential Eastern European nonconformist artists, Ülo Sooster, who actually went on to emigrate to Moscow and work closely with Ilya Kabakov. Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia and Georgia also all had active underground art scenes which were omitted from *In the USSR and Beyond*.¹³⁵

Why did the Stedelijk present such a one-dimensional view of the USSR? One possible explanation can once again be found in analysing *In the USSR and Beyond* through the frame of Former West. The West was simply not interested in the smaller Soviet socialist republics, which, while certainly part of the Soviet Union, were also weak and entirely dominated by Russia’s economy and military forces. Only the threatening presence of Cold War-era Russia was sensed in the West. Over the course of the 20th century in the West, Russia had effectively become synonymous with the USSR itself. Hence, the ideological defeat of the USSR meant the ideological defeat of Russia. In light of this, it is logical that Wim Beeren would choose predominantly Russian artists for *In the USSR and Beyond*.

The sudden interest in Eastern Europe in turn gave rise to another question. Would Western attention be a temporary response to the political situation, or could it lead to a permanent rethinking of the art historical canon? The question itself was raised in the concept text of the exhibition, where Bertheux asked, ‘Can this interest be summarized as the West’s attempt to catch up?’¹³⁶ Thirty years later, it is painfully clear that the global interest in Soviet artists did not extend past the early 1990s. As the revolutionary period of 1990s came to an end, so did the initiative of curators in American and Western European museums. The historical Russian avant-garde remains the only Eastern art movement that has been accepted as part of the art historical canon.

¹³⁴ Van Veelen, ‘USSR Artists in Amsterdam’, 67 - 68.

¹³⁵ See chapters ‘Estonian Art Under Communism’ by Olga Berendsen, ‘Nonconformist Art in Latvia’ by Mark Allen Svede, ‘Semi-nonconformist Lithuanian Painting’ by Alfonsas Andriuškevičius, ‘Light in the Darkness: the Spirit of Armenian Nonconformist Art’ by Vartoug Basmadjian and ‘Nonconformist Art of Soviet Georgia: a Synthesis of East and West’ by Elena Kornetchuk in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*.

¹³⁶ Maarten Bertheux, ‘Binnen de USSR en erbuiten: 22 september – 4 novemeber’.

In the USSR and Beyond was an ambitious exhibition resulting from Beeren's unique socio-political engagement, combined with his directorial aim to devote more attention to non-Western cultures. Created at a particularly significant time in European history, it demonstrates how a Western European museum director approached addressing a turning point in the Cold War. However, in spite of the importance of this moment and Beeren's admirable intentions, the exhibition did not succeed at introducing its Western audience to contemporary art from the USSR. Taking the artwork out of its original Soviet context and curating it from a vertical, Western perspective robbed it of its unique revolutionary quality, resulting in it failing to resonate with the audience. Furthermore, *In the USSR and Beyond* would have benefitted from more research into the Soviet art world, which could have led to the inclusion of artists from other Soviet Socialist Republics. The exhibition would also have been improved with the incorporation of more critical perspectives, which could have been realized through greater cooperation with local curators and scholars.¹³⁷ This would have allowed Beeren to reflect on his own position as a Western director curating Eastern European art, paving the way for a more nuanced representation.

A direct result of Beeren's Western perspective, the Soviet art in *In the USSR and Beyond* became rife with contradictions. On one hand it was too Eastern for the West to understand, on the other it was too Western to be authentic. It was, at the same time, both inaccessible to the public and too much of the kind of art the public was already familiar with. More than anything, such contradictions proved indicative of the timing of *In the USSR and Beyond*. As it closed on the 4th of November 1990, the political situation in the Soviet Union was changing drastically. Gorbachev's reforms, at first implemented to ensure the survival of his party, were now threatening the foundations of communist rule.¹³⁸ Just over a year later, on the 26th of December 1991, the USSR officially disbanded and ceased to exist. All the artists that had been represented as distinctly Soviet at the Stedelijk were now simply Russian or Ukrainian. Not entirely devoid of irony, shortly after audiences in the Netherlands were finally introduced to Soviet art, the very essence of the 'Soviet' itself had vanished.

¹³⁷ Examples of Eastern European scholars and curators who were already concerned with questions of Eastern European representation (and particularly the Soviet question) as early as 1990 included Boris Groys and Margarita Tupitsyn.

¹³⁸ Judt, *Postwar*, 595.

Wanderlieder: Wim Beeren's Vision of Europe

While *In the USSR and Beyond* addressed the Soviet Union specifically, Wim Beeren's next exhibition involving contemporary Eastern European art included artists from Romania, Slovenia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, as well as Russia and the Ukraine. Titled *Wanderlieder*, it could be seen at the Stedelijk between the 8th of December 1991 and the 1st of March 1992.¹³⁹ It was Beeren's direct response to the changes that had begun to transform the countries of the Soviet Bloc from 1989 onwards, and would also address the broader question of the future of the entire continent. Having already demonstrated his interest in Europe when he curated *Correspondence Europe* in 1986, *Wanderlieder* would mark Beeren's return to this subject three years later. However, this time he would bring together artists from the West as well as the East, an opportunity that had not been realized earlier due to travel restrictions. *Wanderlieder* aimed to ask whether European countries, now coming into contact with each other in ways that had been impossible just a few years earlier, had anything to offer each other in cultural terms.¹⁴⁰

In order to understand the situation Beeren aimed to address, it is important to begin by contextualizing the exhibition within the Europe of 1991. In Poland, Solidarity negotiated the first semi-democratic elections since 1928, in which they secured almost all available seats. In Hungary, following the 1988 removal of General Secretary János Kádár, the Communist government had largely begun transforming itself from within. In May, the electric fence separating Hungary from Austria was removed, allowing East Germans to pour into the West in overwhelming numbers. One month later Imre Nagy, executed for his leading role in the 1956 revolution, was reburied as a national hero. Similarly, the Bulgarian Communist Party also removed its aging ruler Todor Zhivkov. This resulted in a more liberal leadership, paving the way for reform, a change in ruling ideology, the relinquishing of the Party's monopoly on power and free elections the following year. In Czechoslovakia, a series of peaceful demonstrations began building momentum over the course of November and December, in what would come to be known as the Velvet Revolution. This led to the mass resignation of Party leaders and the subsequent relinquishing of power by the remaining Communists. Meanwhile, in the only violent uprising of 1989, Romanians deposed and executed the tyrannical Nicolae Ceausescu. Finally, in the most symbolically resonant event of the year, the Germans tore down the Berlin Wall and reunited the two halves of their country. However, the dismantling of this physical border marked the reunification of not only Germany, but also of Europe as a whole.¹⁴¹

It is clear that while the path to independence varied among the countries of the Soviet bloc, they nevertheless shared a sense of euphoria that by 1990 was sweeping across the continent. Furthermore, the idea of a unified Europe was itself acquiring a new significance. For decades, Eastern European countries had felt severed from Europe proper. The fall of Communism promised not only a

¹³⁹ The exhibition would originally close on the 9th of February 1992, but was extended until the 1st of March due to popular demand.

¹⁴⁰ Wim Beeren, 'Statement W. Beeren tentoonstelling *Wanderlieder*', 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2911, Amsterdam (hereafter cited as 'Statement W. Beeren tentoonstelling *Wanderlieder*').

¹⁴¹ Judt, *Postwar*, 585-633.

return to their European roots, but also the chance to reassume their place in history. However, this would have implications that reached farther than the borders of the old Soviet Bloc. Rather, the impact would be felt in the West as well. By the spring of 1989, ‘Gradually the realization dawned that behind the Iron Curtain lived more than 100 million people who regarded themselves as “Europeans”.’¹⁴² Meanwhile in the West, the upcoming Maastricht Treaty of 1992 would transform the European Community into the European Union. According to Van Middelaar, this prospect reinforced the idea of a distinct European identity and ‘represented a concrete and attainable set of political goals.’ As a result, ‘The opposite of Communism was not “capitalism” but “Europe”.’¹⁴³

Like *In the USSR and Beyond* before it, *Wanderlieder* was remarkably socially and politically engaged, and was hence representative of Beeren’s interest in integrating current events into the Stedelijk’s exhibition programme. His correct realization that Europe was undergoing a fundamental transformation made it a particularly well-timed initiative. His aim of bringing together artists from the West and the East in the Stedelijk was an ambitious endeavour that should not be forgotten by art history. Its relevance persists to this day, particularly in light of the continuation of the European project. This chapter once again owes its structure to Rattemeyer’s essay “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969’. The first section describes the process behind the conceptualization and the planning of the exhibition, providing context for the rest of the chapter. The second brings together archival research and installation photographs in a reconstruction of the exhibition that can serve as a virtual walkthrough through *Wanderlieder*. The final section offers an analysis through the Former West perspective, and especially Boris Groys’ concept of the post-communist condition. By doing this, this chapter answers a central question. How did Wim Beeren approach the issue of East and West in *Wanderlieder*, and to what extent was the exhibition an effective answer to the changing Europe of the early 1990s?

Planning the Exhibition

When asked about what inspired the exhibition, Beeren spoke of several significant factors. The first was his existing interest in creating links with other countries and regions, particularly through the use of a journalistic approach. He explained this idea in an interview for the *Stedelijk Bulletin*, in which he elaborated on his use of journalism as a curatorial strategy in the exhibition *Correspondence Europe*: ‘Back then I was already in the process of forming connections with other cultures in a rather journalistic method. [...] I saw it primarily as coverage, like something a newspaper reporter might do.’¹⁴⁴ In Beeren’s interpretation, such ‘coverage’ involved conceptualizing a theme or research question that frequently revolved around a location. This was an approach he had used in many of his major projects at the Stedelijk, including the exhibitions *Correspondence Europe*, *Horn of Plenty* and *U-ABC*. This was also certainly the case for *In the USSR and Beyond*, where two curators were dispatched on a

¹⁴² Van Middelaar, *The Passage to Europe*, 187.

¹⁴³ Judt, *Postwar*, 630.

¹⁴⁴ Wim Beeren, ‘Wanderlieder: een gesprek met Wim Beeren’, interview by Maarten Bertheux and Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen, *Stedelijk Museum Bulletin* (December 1991 – January 1992): 106.

research trip to Moscow and Leningrad. The resulting exhibition was essentially a report on what they had found there. Beeren's *Wanderlieder* was a logical continuation of the investigative trend present in his other projects. This time, his journalistic interests inspired him to once again return to the question of Europe.

The second factor driving *Wanderlieder* was the importance Beeren attached to the impending economic changes such as the opening of borders and a monetary union, as well as the broader question of national and European identities. In one of his written statements, he lists the additional impact of specific events such as the reunification of Germany, the end of the Warsaw Pact, the upcoming Maastricht treaty and the process of liberalization in the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, on the 20th of November 1991, Beeren delivered a talk at the Swedish National Committee for Cultural Cooperation in Europe titled 'The Concept of Europe in the Work of Visual Artists'. In his presentation, later published as a text in the *Wanderlieder* catalogue, Beeren argued that the changes in Europe must also be manifesting themselves in culture. This led him to pose a number of key questions, which would also come to form the foundation of *Wanderlieder*. Firstly, does a unique work of art convey the artist's personality and, by extension, his or her identity? If this is indeed the case, is it also possible that the characteristics of a country, or its national identity, could manifest in its art? And, 'If so, how essential are they to the appreciation of a work of art? And will they be influenced by the new political, monetary, economic, managerial, and legal constellation by which still independent European nations decide on radical forms of cooperation?'¹⁴⁶ In other words, Beeren was interested in whether or not European art would undergo noticeable changes as Europe itself was being transformed.

Lastly, Beeren was particularly inspired by the word 'wanderlieder' itself. The chosen title was very appropriate as it encapsulated Beeren's vision and ambition for the exhibition. The word 'wanderlieder' itself refers to German folk songs, traditionally sung by wandering laborers as they travelled through Europe in search of work. These songs have been known to exist since the sixteenth century, and so come laden with a long history. One of their distinctive qualities is the importance of the narrative, as many revolved around a story-telling element.¹⁴⁷ This narrative emphasis would come to play a decisive role in the exhibition's concept: Beeren saw the artists of Europe as the titular wanderers, each with his or her own perspective on current events as well as their own immediate surroundings. But his definition of wanderers also extended to his team of 'journalist' curators, who would go on to travel around Eastern Europe and deliver an exhibition with a strong narrative character.¹⁴⁸

The ambitious nature of the concept also meant that Beeren would have to assume a specific role within the exhibition. He would have to ask each participating artist to create a new work reflecting on Europe as a theme. He elaborated on this, stating that 'I think you can only ask that question [...] if

¹⁴⁵ Beeren, 'Statement W. Beeren tentoonstelling *Wanderlieder*'.

¹⁴⁶ Wim Beeren, 'The Concept of Europe in the Work of Visual Artists in European Countries', in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 21 – 22.

¹⁴⁷ Beeren, 'Wanderlieder: een gesprek met Wim Beeren', 106.

¹⁴⁸ Wim Beeren to Lawrence Weiner, 29th of November 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2916, Amsterdam (hereafter cited as 'Wim Beeren to Lawrence Weiner, 29th of November 1991').

you assume the role of “opdrachtgever”.¹⁴⁹ Here the word ‘opdrachtgever’ most closely translates to the English term ‘client’, or ‘one who commissions’. *Wanderlieder* would hence differ fundamentally from *In the USSR and Beyond*, which did not involve the insistence on a specific theme. This time Beeren would have to approach artists with his initial concept, and they would in turn respond by creating an art that was made specifically for the exhibition. The question of whether this method was a feasible one was brought up during a meeting in September. Beeren’s team of curators expressed concerns and asked whether it was still possible to give artists assignments in 1991, or if the Stedelijk would risk coming across as old-fashioned. However, this seems to have been only a short discussion, as it was argued that the responses received from the artists already contacted had been enthusiastic.¹⁵⁰

When approaching the artists with his concept for *Wanderlieder*, Beeren emphasized the importance of works on a large scale, where each artist could be assigned a museum wall to complete a mural. Why did Beeren choose to focus on murals specifically? This was certainly a curatorial decision motivated by the monumental premise of *Wanderlieder*. According to Beeren, the exhibition dealt with important themes which surpassed each individual artist. He hence felt that the mural best lent itself to tackling such questions. Although Beeren had never commented on this himself, it is interesting to note that the mural is, in itself, an ideologically charged medium. Its history, from socially-engaged Mexican murals of the 1930s to vast Soviet propaganda posters, had always been closely intertwined with politics. This made it all the more appropriate for such a politically engaged exhibition. Beeren’s idea was particularly ambitious. He envisioned, in his own words, a ‘promenade’ of artworks.¹⁵¹ While each artist would use their wall to comment on their individual situation, the visitors strolling through the exhibition would be able to read the entire narrative as it unfolded before them. Perhaps in part due to the scale of Beeren’s ambition, Stedelijk curator Geurt Imanse would go on to call *Wanderlieder* a ‘utopian vision’ that had been fed by the optimistic attitudes in Europe at the time.¹⁵² Considering the problems present in the final exhibition, Imanse’s observation proved entirely correct.

Beeren already had specific artists in mind during the early planning stage of the project. Western artists included Jan Fabre (from Belgium), Robert Combas (France), Gilbert and George (Great Britain), Jörg Immendorf (Germany)¹⁵³ and Lucebert (The Netherlands). Artists chosen to represent the Eastern European perspective were Oleg Tistol and Ilya Kabakov. It is interesting that the majority of the initial suggestions for a universal, European exhibition were nevertheless Western in origin. Even Kabakov, who had been born in the Soviet Union, had been living in the West since 1987

¹⁴⁹ Beeren, ‘Statement W. Beeren tentoonstelling *Wanderlieder*’.

¹⁵⁰ Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen, ‘Notulen vergadering *Wanderlieder*’, 16th September 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2911, Amsterdam (hereafter cited as ‘Notulen vergadering *Wanderlieder*’).

¹⁵¹ Renée Steenberg, ‘Het veranderd Europa op de museummuren’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 5th of December 1991. Delpher.

¹⁵² Geurt Imanse, ‘Time and Again’ in *Who If Not We Should at Least Imagine the Future of All of This?*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2004), 47.

¹⁵³ Immendorff had expressed interest in the concept of the exhibition, but ultimately withdrew from participation. According to Wim Beeren, he felt he had too little time to reflect on the question and could not create a painting that could encapsulate all his experiences of living in the West.

and, like Tistol, had already participated in *In the USSR and Beyond*. This early Western bias is, of course, understandable, as this was also where Beeren's expertise lay. Similarly to the preparations for *In the USSR and Beyond*, *Wanderlieder* proved that very little was known about the Eastern European art world at the time. It was this limited knowledge that prevented the curators from suggesting other names and making further decisions at such an early stage. They would first have to catch-up with several decades of Eastern European artistic developments. Over the following weeks they went on to attempt just that.¹⁵⁴ Wim Beeren's curators would embark on several research trips to a number of European cities in order to create a helpful network of sources to better understand the changing cultural climate.¹⁵⁵ Wim Beeren himself would travel to Romania, while his team of curators would also go on to visit Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Russia and Berlin.¹⁵⁶ The trips proved relatively short, particularly when considering the scale of the research that needed to be done. In spite of this, the curators succeeded in contacting and meeting a large number of artists, often visiting several studios in one day. They also discussed their questions with local art historians and critics. Following their return to Amsterdam, their findings would be discussed with Beeren and a final selection of artists would be agreed upon.¹⁵⁷

It was during these research trips that the list of participating artists could be expanded to include more Eastern European representatives. Beeren travelled to Romania personally, where, guided by Dutch ambassador Coen Stork, he became acquainted with the work of Ion Grigorescu. The artist, now in his forties, had been forced to produce his art underground during Ceausescu's regime.¹⁵⁸ In Poland, Zofia Kulik was visited in her hometown of Łomianki by Geurt Imanse and Ada Stroeve on the 8th of October and her work would be chosen over that of nineteen other Polish artists that the curators had visited during their ten-day trip. Likewise, the Czech Martin Mainer was chosen after Hripsimé Visser and Jan Hein Sassen visited his studio on the 25th of October.¹⁵⁹ Eastern Germany, on the other hand, proved to pose a problem. According to Beeren, the research trip was a failure. '...We thought that there was interesting work to be found there. It didn't go well, that expedition simply didn't produce anything.' He went on to say that it was not his intention to move ahead with second-rate artists, even if it meant foregoing the East German perspective.¹⁶⁰

The organizers were forced to work under strict deadlines. In an official invitation letter addressed to the artists, Beeren wrote that the murals would have to be completed by the 5th of December, three days before the scheduled opening of the exhibition. He also outlined the necessities

¹⁵⁴ Van Nieuwenhuyzen, 'Notulen vergadering *Wanderlieder*'.

¹⁵⁵ Van Nieuwenhuyzen, 'Notulen vergadering *Wanderlieder*'.

¹⁵⁶ More specifically, Hripsimé Visser and Jan Hein Sassen travelled to Czechoslovakia, Ada Stroeve and Geurt Imanse to Poland, Dorine Mignot and, again, Geurt Imanse to Yugoslavia, and Jan Hein Sassen to Russia and Berlin.

¹⁵⁷ Rudie Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'', *Vrij Nederland*, 14th of December 1991.

¹⁵⁸ Wierd Duk, 'Westerse kunstenaars sturen Wim Beeren 't bos in op *Wanderlieder*', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 13th of December 1991. Delpher.

¹⁵⁹ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling''.

¹⁶⁰ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling''.

that would be provided by the museum, which included one wall measuring 10 by 4,5 meters, as well as all materials needed to complete the work.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, other expenses that would be covered would include a return trip to Amsterdam, hotel costs for a maximum of three weeks and a daily allowance.¹⁶² Fundamental changes to the exhibition were occurring even as the deadlines drew nearer. Francesco Clemente was working in New York, Madras and Rome, and proved difficult to track down. When the curators finally succeeded in getting in touch with him in New York, it was already the 8th of November. Lawrence Weiner, on the other hand, only confirmed his participation one and a half weeks before the opening of *Wanderlieder*.¹⁶³



Figure 33: Wim Beeren (left) and his large *Wanderlieder* team, standing in front of Ion Grigorescu's mural *Recommendation for Golan* (Romania and Holland), 1990.

¹⁶¹ For instance, in a letter dated 20th of November 1991, Tistol requested two tubes of each color of oil paint, but especially yellow, dissolver, a big palette, enamel spray, materials for a stencil and tape. (*Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2915, Amsterdam.)

¹⁶² Wim Beeren to Irwin, 13th of November 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2914, Amsterdam.

¹⁶³ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

Museum staff were not the only ones working under stressful conditions, as the artists involved were also faced with the tight deadlines. Rudie Kagie's article for *Vrij Nederland*, published as part of the exhibition catalogue, documented some of their reactions to the task at hand. 'Martin Mainer, a young Czech, was seized by agoraphobia when he laid eyes on "his" enormous wall. Zofia Kulik thought of it as a battle, "And thankfully I enjoy battles." [...] And Ger van Elk: "Such a challenge is nice but shouldn't become the norm."' ¹⁶⁴ In an interesting parallel, the pace of the changes taking place on the exhibition walls became itself reminiscent of the feverish speed at which Europe itself was being transformed.

¹⁶⁴ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

1st floor

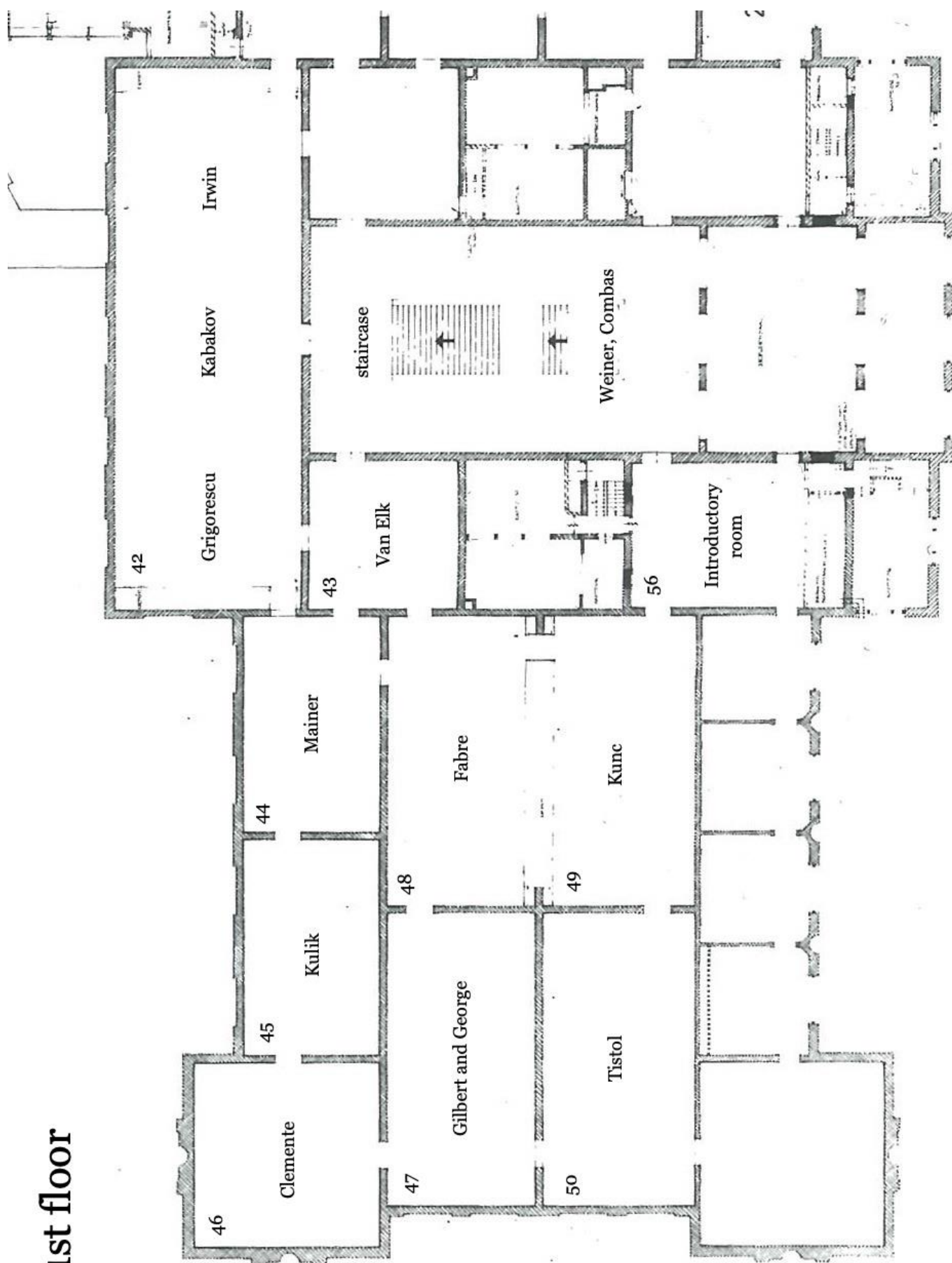


Figure 34: Floorplan of Wanderlied.

Recreating the Floorplan

Originally, *Wanderlieder* could be seen between the 7th of December 1991 until the 9th of February 1992, spanning just two months. However, the exhibition would be extended, eventually closing on the 1st of May. It was located on the upper floor of the left wing of the museum and occupied twelve rooms. Each of the thirteen artists was assigned one room with one wall on which their work was to be installed, with the exception of the two works in the staircase.¹⁶⁵ The visitors would first enter an introductory room which contextualized the rest of the exhibition (room 56 on fig. 28). Wall texts shed additional light on how Beeren understood the question of a changing Europe in relation to art: 'It is not a question about the situation ad hoc but about the experience of human existence within this bewildering constellation which can, with some justification, now be called Europe' (fig. 29)



Figure 35: Introductory room of *Wanderlieder*.

¹⁶⁵ Gilbert and George would be the only exception to this, as their work spanned all walls of the room assigned to them.

From there the visitors would progress into the first room of the exhibition and the work of the Czech Milan Kunc (room 49). He had emigrated to Dusseldorf shortly after the Prague Spring and over time began to see himself as a West German artist. Having experienced both communism and capitalism, commentary on the East and the West continued to resonate in his work, a quality also present in his *Wanderlieder* installation. He had too little time to make a new work for the exhibition and instead presented ten older paintings from the series *Modern Icons* (fig. 30). All were done in the colourful style typical of Kunc, whose use of kitsch imagery conveyed humorously ironic meanings. The works were hung against a pale blue, pink and yellow mural representing a sunrise in an installation titled *European Dawn*.¹⁶⁶ The chosen paintings are exemplary of his own take on the tradition of Sots Art, combining political symbols with iconic consumerist products, ranging from hamburgers to cans of Pepsi. The work that best captured Kunc's political commentary was *Trophäen Sammler* (1990), or *Trophies Collectors*. It depicted the head of a deer, in this case a literal hunting 'trophy'. On the deer's antlers, however, hung an assortment of objects: a car, a washing machine, a factory, a clothes line and an empty can of Coca Cola – but with a hammer and sickle incorporated into its iconic logo. They represented the trophies of the communist age, which, obsessed with quotas, prized its production rates. However, Kunc was also interested in the parallels between capitalism and communism, as according to him 'consumerism – consumption for the sake of consumption itself – is the only true ideology shared by the East and the West.'¹⁶⁷ Other themes addressed in the installation were German reunification (in the



Figure 36: Milan Kunc, *European Dawn*, 1991.

¹⁶⁶ 'Oleg Tistol' in in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 70.

¹⁶⁷ 'Milan Kunc' in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 62.

painting *Lucky Pig*) and the collapse of Soviet ideology (*Tomb of the Unknown Socialism*).¹⁶⁸ Such politically engaged works commented on the post-communist Europe as a whole, and hence matched Beeren's vision for *Wanderlieder*. Kunc in fact went as far as to disagree with the apolitical stance of some of his fellow artists, stating, 'The entire world is confused. Art of the future will change radically. Artists of the two biggest continents, America and Europe, are still concerning themselves with form, while present-day issues force us to take a stance. It's not only about aesthetics, but especially ethics. [...] That is why I find this exhibition such a good idea: it presents the different facets of a political and social phenomenon. Interesting art doesn't only raise questions, it also provides answers.'¹⁶⁹

Oleg Tistol (room 50) had previously appeared in *In the USSR and Beyond*. While there he was featured among Soviet artists, the collapse of the USSR now left him simply Ukrainian, an identity he chose to explore further in *Wanderlieder*. His work, the *Project of the Battle of Poltava* (fig. 31), is a large-scale painting incorporating classical Baroque elements. The titular battle took place on the 8th of July 1709. It marked the decisive defeat of the Swedish king Charles the XII at the hands of the Peter the Great of Russia, resulting in a decline of Sweden's influence in Europe and the beginning of Russia's growing dominance. Having taken place on the territory of modern-day Ukraine, the battle is of particular significance to the country's history. The Cossack hetman Ivan Mazeppa had allied himself with the Swedes in an effort to liberate it from Russia.¹⁷⁰ Under Soviet rule, Mazeppa went on to be seen as a symbol of Ukrainian nationalism.¹⁷¹ Tistol's decision to depict Mazeppa in the year the Soviet Union would collapse was hence loaded with symbolic significance. He also emphasized the legendary status



Figure 37: Oleg Tistol, *Project of the Battle of Poltava*, 1991.

¹⁶⁸ Wim van Sinderen, 'Wanderlieder (ieder zingt zijn eigen lied)', *Het Parool*, 7th of December 1991. Delpher.

¹⁶⁹ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

¹⁷⁰ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 245.

¹⁷¹ Ivan Katchanovski et al., *Historical Dictionary of Ukraine* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 363.

of the figure and the battle, imbuing them with more meaning than they had in real life. As in *In the USSR and Beyond*, Tistol engaged with a 'stereotype', which lived on in cultural memory and no longer reflected reality, similarly to his use of vibrant colour. He opted to render the image in bright yellow and blue, uncoincidentally also the national colours of Ukraine. Additionally, he combined oil paint that he had brought from home with Dutch paint provided by the Stedelijk. He created what he saw as an international mixture, which also evoked the European themes of the exhibition. In fact, he was quoted as saying that he had already regarded these themes as the foundation of his art for many years prior to the show, making him an excellent choice for *Wanderlieder*.¹⁷²

The first of the four large central rooms (47) was reserved for works by English artist duo Gilbert and George. Beeren had come across several of their socially-engaged works during their Moscow exhibition a year earlier considered them ideal participants for *Wanderlieder*.¹⁷³ Together with the curators, the artists made a selection of ten existing photo-based works that they felt were most relevant to the exhibition's theme, all made in the period 1982-1988 (fig. 32).¹⁷⁴ Several of the works had never been shown in Europe before, while four could be seen at the 1989 Anthony d'Offay Gallery exhibition addressing the AIDS crisis.¹⁷⁵ To Beeren's disappointment, Gilbert and George did not travel to Amsterdam to complete their work on-site. Instead, their contributions were made from abroad and with the help of their colleagues. During the construction of the exhibition itself, they were represented by their assistant, Raymond O'Daly, who had travelled from Rome to Amsterdam. Helped by the museum staff, he would install Gilbert and George's works between the 4th and the 6th of December.¹⁷⁶ Gilbert and George had never appeared very interested in the politics of Western and Eastern Europe, and their place in the exhibition hence proved a difficult one to grasp. Even Ger van Elk expressed surprise, stating, 'I am very familiar with the work of Gilbert and George. And I do not have the impression that [...] they are particularly concerned with the problem of changes in Europe.' He does however proceed explain how he eventually came to see Gilbert and George's role in the exhibition: 'That they aren't satisfied with one wall, but claim an entire room for themselves, does fit in with the plan. Gilbert and George are, to a large extent, imperialists within art politics. The bigger, the more dominant, the more present. That is their trademark and that is what their art is about. [...] Their art is about manipulation, dominance, and the urge to possess such a museum. And this attitude is naturally very West European.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

¹⁷³ Beeren, 'Wanderlieder: een gesprek met Wim Beeren', 107-108.

¹⁷⁴ These included *Day and Night* (1982), *Existence* (1984), *Failures* (1984), *You* (1986), *There* (1987), *A.D.* (1987), *Flow* (1988), *Wrong* (1988), *One World* (1988) and *Leafage* (1988).

¹⁷⁵ Rini Dippel, 'Gilbert and George', 22nd of November 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2911, Amsterdam (hereafter cited as 'Gilbert and George').

¹⁷⁶ Dippel, 'Gilbert and George'.

¹⁷⁷ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.



Figure 38: Installation view of work by Gilbert and George at *Wanderlieder*, 1991.

Gilbert and George would not be the only artists who failed to reflect on the European theme. Belgian artist Jan Fabre's installation, *Lucky Strike. Sonst nichts* (fig. 33) (which literally translates to *Lucky Strike. Otherwise nothing* – essentially meaning 'nothing else will do')¹⁷⁸ was a fourteen-meter-long glass pane, which spanned almost an entire wall of the room (48). Together with an assistant, Fabre used his fingers to cover the entire surface in the blue ink used in Bic pens. In the middle of the pane was lodged a Lucky Strike ashtray with the titular slogan, which the artist had found in an East German café. This slogan also functioned as the extent of Fabre's commentary on the future. Speaking about his work in relation to the themes of *Wanderlieder*, Fabre proved very cynical, stating 'No, I don't believe in tremendous changes in Europe. "Luck is the only justice."' ¹⁷⁹ In fact, Beeren would go on to state that Fabre's fervent scepticism and overall disinterest in politics had made cooperating on the exhibition rather difficult.¹⁸⁰

Similar disinterest was noted from Italian artist Francesco Clemente, who occupied the exhibition's corner room (46). Working between New York, Madras and Rome, he was chosen for *Wanderlieder* as a representative of the cosmopolitan spirit the organizers were after. Beeren would even go so far as to describe him as the quintessential 'wanderer'.¹⁸¹ However, this also made him unable to come to Amsterdam to create a work on-site. Hence, similarly to Gilbert and George, he relied on assistants who would install three existing gouaches in the Stedelijk. To Beeren's great disappointment, these neglected to respond to the theme of *Wanderlieder*. Created on hand-made Indian 'Pondicherry' paper and depicting taste, hearing and sight, they were part of Clemente's 1991 series *The Five Senses* (fig. 34). The curators attempted to connect this to instructive themes used in European Renaissance art, emphasizing the Dutch Renaissance in particular.¹⁸² This was a somewhat weak attempt to justify Clemente's place in the exhibition, as even a link to European history failed to comment on current events or the future of the continent. However, this was clearly of secondary significance as Clemente's thematic relevance to the exhibition was his cosmopolitan lifestyle rather than his work.

Having ignored Wim Beeren's request for artworks relating to the theme, Gilbert and George, Fabre, and Clemente constituted the weakest parts of *Wanderlieder*. Their participation in the exhibition proved difficult to justify; all had expressed no interest in the question of Europe, displaying either indifference, or, in Fabre's case, unconcealed scepticism. It became clear that these artists did not feel particularly affected by the events of 1989 or the upcoming formation of the EU. Beeren had chosen Western artists he was already familiar with, having neglected to consider whether their work had ever really engaged with European themes. This was a significant oversight that weakened his concept, leading to an exhibition that failed to realize Beeren's ambitious vision of Europe.

¹⁷⁸ Janet Koplos, 'Of Walls and Wandering', *Art in America* 80, no. 7 (July 1992): 85.

¹⁷⁹ 'Jan Fabre' in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 38.

¹⁸⁰ Steenbergen, 'Het veranderd Europa op de museummuren'.

¹⁸¹ Kagié, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

¹⁸² 'Francesco Clemente' in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 26.



Figure 39: Jan Fabre, *Lucky Strike. Sons nichts.*, 1991.

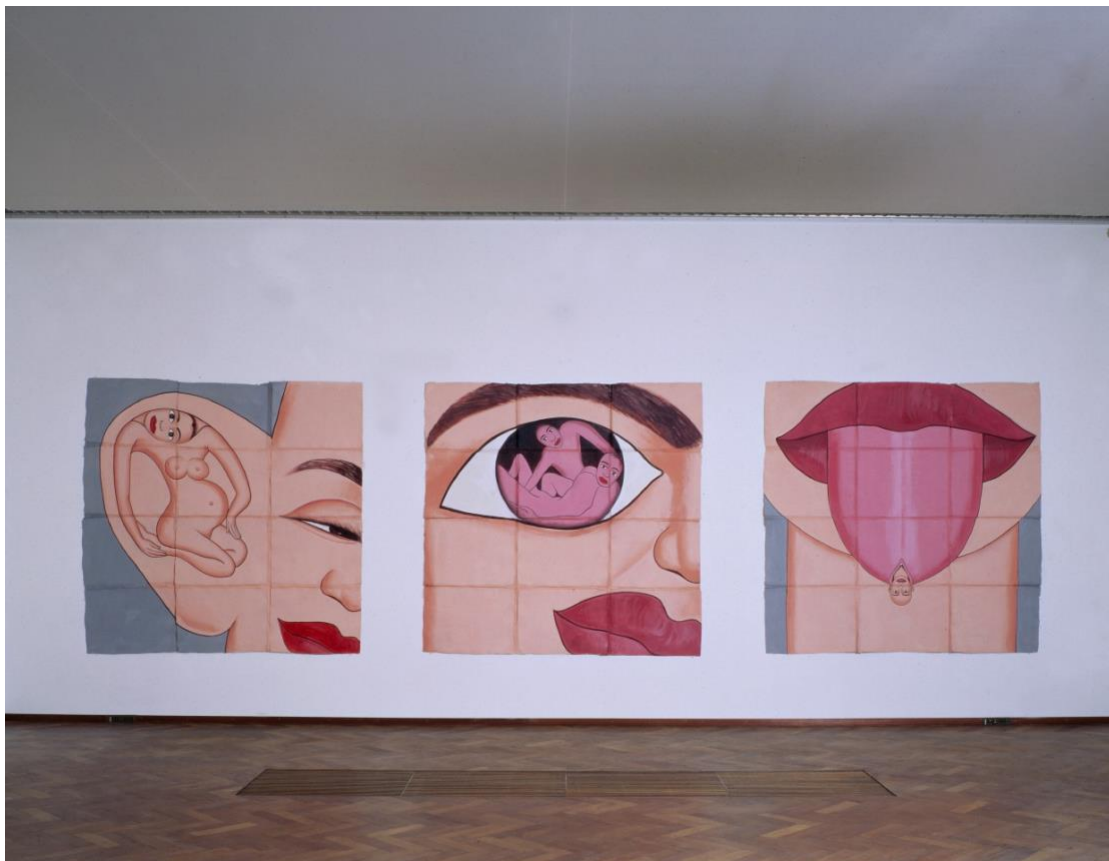


Figure 40: Francesco Clemente, *Hearing, Sight and Taste* from the series *The Five Senses*, 1990.

One of the works offering the most poignant commentary on current events was that of Polish artist Zofia Kulik. Having begun her career as one half of the conceptual performance duo KwieKulik, she embarked on her solo career in 1987 and incorporated photography-based art into work. Her contribution to *Wanderlieder* was one such artwork, titled *Favourite Balance* (room 45).¹⁸³ The work was made up of seventy-eight photo pieces, each measuring around fifty by sixty centimetres, together covering a vast area of three by seven and a half meters (fig. 35). They depicted various images, repeated multiple times to create patterns of symmetry. These ranged from Kulik's colleague Zbigniew Libera, who assumed a number of classical poses, to controversial Polish landmarks: the divisive Palace of Culture and Science, gifted by Stalin to Poland in 1955, and a monument dedicated to the 1939 defenders of the city of Mława. The full effect of the monumental installation could only be seen at a distance, which transformed the photos into a pattern reminiscent of an elaborate Persian carpet. Kulik was particularly interested in how the repetition of a single image can create a new, more complex structure and amplify its power. Furthermore, juxtaposing photos of the human figure with the enormous scale of monuments is also a commentary on the individual versus the collective nature of communism. Although Kulik claimed not to have a concrete message for Europe, this was because she was too preoccupied with developments that had seized Poland. According to Beeren, she was particularly concerned with how the power vacuum left by communism was now gradually being filled by the church.¹⁸⁴ In other words, Kulik was especially interested in how post-communism was manifesting itself in Poland specifically.



Figure 41: Zofia Kulik, *Ulubiona Równowaga*, 1991.

¹⁸³ While the original exhibition plan would have placed it in the adjoining room, now occupied by Mainer, it seems that her work had to have been moved for purely practical reasons –Kulik found too many doorways undesirable for the presentation ('Wanderlieder: bijdrage Zofia Kulik', 29th - 30th of October 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2918, Amsterdam).

¹⁸⁴ Beeren, 'Wanderlieder: een gesprek met Wim Beeren', 106.



Figure 42: Ger van Elk, *From the series 'Pressure Sandwich'*, 1991.

Ger Van Elk was the only Dutch artist participating in *Wanderlieder*. His work occupied the relatively small room which normally houses the Stedelijk's Matisse mural (43). His installation, made as part of the artist's *Pressure Sandwich* series, was made of eight meters of French beechwood and weighed over 1500 kilograms (fig. 36). Squeezed in between the wood were 150 portrait photos of anonymous individuals. The photos, originally black and white, had been printed on linen and painted over in a multitude of colours. This mass of people evoked the landscape of Europe, in which the individual disappears in a crowd. Van Elk had already had the idea for the work before being asked to participate in *Wanderlieder*, but nevertheless agreed to create the installation on-site, in accordance with Beeren's request. On the other hand, he proved very cynical when asked about the concept of *Wanderlieder* as a whole, stating, 'Such a vision of what's going on almost becomes a political cartoon. And political cartoons are, as far as I'm concerned, never art.' He went on to state, 'A recent trend in museum circles is a tendency towards political anthropology. A great deal of sociological art is made, while in an art museum it must be paramount that it is art. [...] In addition, there are more and more themed exhibitions in museums, which say more about the expressive drive of the organizers than about what is going on in art. The artist is asked if he wants to respond to that theme, when actually a piece of art is simply being ordered from him. With this exhibition that is very exceptionally the case.' Although he was very critical of the concept, Van Elk also noted that he was curious to experience working on

such an exhibition and hence decided to participate.¹⁸⁵ However, it does seem that his artistic philosophy was at odds with Beeren's interest in a socially and politically-engaged goals, once again calling Beeren's choice of artists into question.

The large room of honour on the second floor of the museum was sectioned off into three spaces, each reserved for an Eastern European artist (room 42). In the leftmost corner was the work by Ion Grigorescu, a Romanian artist who created unofficial art in his small Bucharest apartment. With the collapse of Ceausescu's regime, the artist, like his country of origin, found himself in a state of transition. He had experienced repression for so long that he was forced to rethink his position and identity entirely. Quoted in the exhibition catalogue, he stated, 'I am forty-seven years old. That is the same age as the party. I now have to go discover what, as an artist, I am going to do with my freedom.'¹⁸⁶ Grigorescu spent almost three weeks working on his mural, a nightmarish depiction of Romanian society titled *Recommendation for Golan (Romania and Holland)* (fig. 37). Ceausescu was a recurring figure in Grigorescu's work, and an image of his palace towered over the composition in the top left corner. Pieces of sheet metal and plywood placed against the foreground depicted prison guards, two naked men and a gruesome birth, which doubled as a commentary on the horrifying state of



Figure 44: Ion Grigorescu, *Recommendation for Golan (Romania and Holland)*, 1990.

¹⁸⁵ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

¹⁸⁶ 'Ion Grigorescu' in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 46.



Figure 45: Ilya Kabakov, *Before Supper*, 1988.

women's rights under Ceausescu's rule. Religious themes were also present in an image of the kiss of Judas and a crucifixion of Christ. Juxtaposed with this were idealized peasants in traditional dress, a tired cliché of socialist realism. Through the use of such loaded imagery, Grigorescu delivered a remarkably introspective artwork that probed deeply into the symbols of Romania's recent past. Similarly to Tselkov and Kulik, he used his work in *Wanderlieder* to renegotiate his new identity under post-communism.¹⁸⁷

In the space to the right was the work *Before Supper* by Ilya Kabakov (fig. 38), who, like Tselkov, had appeared in *In the USSR and Beyond* one year earlier. His installation comprised six untitled oil paintings showing scenes from daily life such as a truck, sailing boats, women around a table and high-rise apartment buildings, all depicted in a socialist realist style. Kabakov attached plates, spoons, forks and knives – all were produced in Russia¹⁸⁸ – to the corners of each painting. The plates however remained empty, evoking anticipation, or perhaps a commentary on the food shortages endemic under

¹⁸⁷ Although the Stedelijk offered each artist the option to work on removable panels which would allow them to later dismantle their work and take it home, Grigorescu turned down this offer and painted directly onto the museum walls. Following the closing of the exhibition, his mural was once again covered with white paint. This was a conscious decision on Grigorescu's part, as he wanted to give the work a temporary character.

¹⁸⁸ Jerzy Truszkowski, 'Prosiak wszystkich pogodzi, czyli wałęsająca się śpiewka', *Obieg*, 31 -33 (December 1991 – January 1992): 24.

Communism. The oil paintings were surrounded by forty-two works on paper, the middle of each page left empty. Around it, decorative borders drawn in the margins show patterns of faces, fruit or flowers. These drawings were in turn arranged in a large rectangle. A table constructed by the museum staff, for which the artist provided instructions, was attached to the museum wall beneath it. This juxtaposition of paintings and drawings against mundane objects like tableware and a piece of furniture allowed Kabakov to explore his interest in where an art work ends, and reality begins.¹⁸⁹ *Before Supper* was originally completed in 1988 for the opera building in Graz, Austria, and marked the first time Kabakov was able to visit Western Europe. Hence, although the work was not created on-site as Beeren requested, it nevertheless held significance to Kabakov's career and transition between East and West.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, it indirectly examined new travel possibilities now opening up to Europeans.

The final space in the large room was occupied by the artist group Irwin, who emphasized their Slovenian, rather than Yugoslavian origin. Although their national identity had always been an important aspect of their work, this was a particularly appropriate time to draw Europe's attention to the question of Slovenia. Just a few months earlier, in June of 1991, it had declared its independence from Yugoslavia, becoming the first of the Yugoslav republics to do so. The title of the work, *Golden Age*, may have been a reference to this tumultuous time in Slovenian history.¹⁹¹ Irwin's finished work differed significantly from the initial plans they had sent to the museum. Their first proposal included a large curved wall on which would be hung paintings and a number of taxidermic animal trophies.¹⁹² However, the concept was scrapped when the museum requested an installation for one wall only.¹⁹³ The final version (fig. 39), centred around a doorway-like structure attached to the museum wall. A light shone from behind two panes of frosted glass in the door, giving the false impression that something could be found there. To the right hung communist nameboards, like the ones that had only recently featured on the headquarters of the Slovenian Communist Party. Above the door are two socialist realist depictions of a farmer and a worker. To the left of the door is a painting of a black cross with which the group alludes to Malevich. This is not the only reference to Malevich in the installation. In a letter to Dorine Mignot, the curators are instructed to open the catalogue of the Stedelijk's 1989 Malevich retrospective to page 141, where they would find a painting with a grey background. This was the precise colour Irwin wished to use for their work.¹⁹⁴ It is interesting that Slovenian artists would reflect on the legacy of Malevich, but Irwin had always been interested in investigating universally powerful images like religious, fascist and suprematist symbols. Within the context of *Wanderlieder*, the Malevich influences comment on the historical Russian avant-garde as shared European heritage.

¹⁸⁹ Kagie, 'Wanderlieder aan de wand: 'Eigenlijk is dit kunst op bestelling'.

¹⁹⁰ 'Ilya Kabakov' in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 54.

¹⁹¹ Walter Barten, 'Wanderlieder inspireert Oost-Europeanen het meest', *Het Financieel Dagblad*, 28th of December 1991. Delpher.

¹⁹² Irwin to Dorine Mignot, 15th of November 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2914, Amsterdam.

¹⁹³ A demand that would not be extended to Gilbert and George.

¹⁹⁴ Irwin to Dorine Mignot, 25th of November 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2914, Amsterdam.

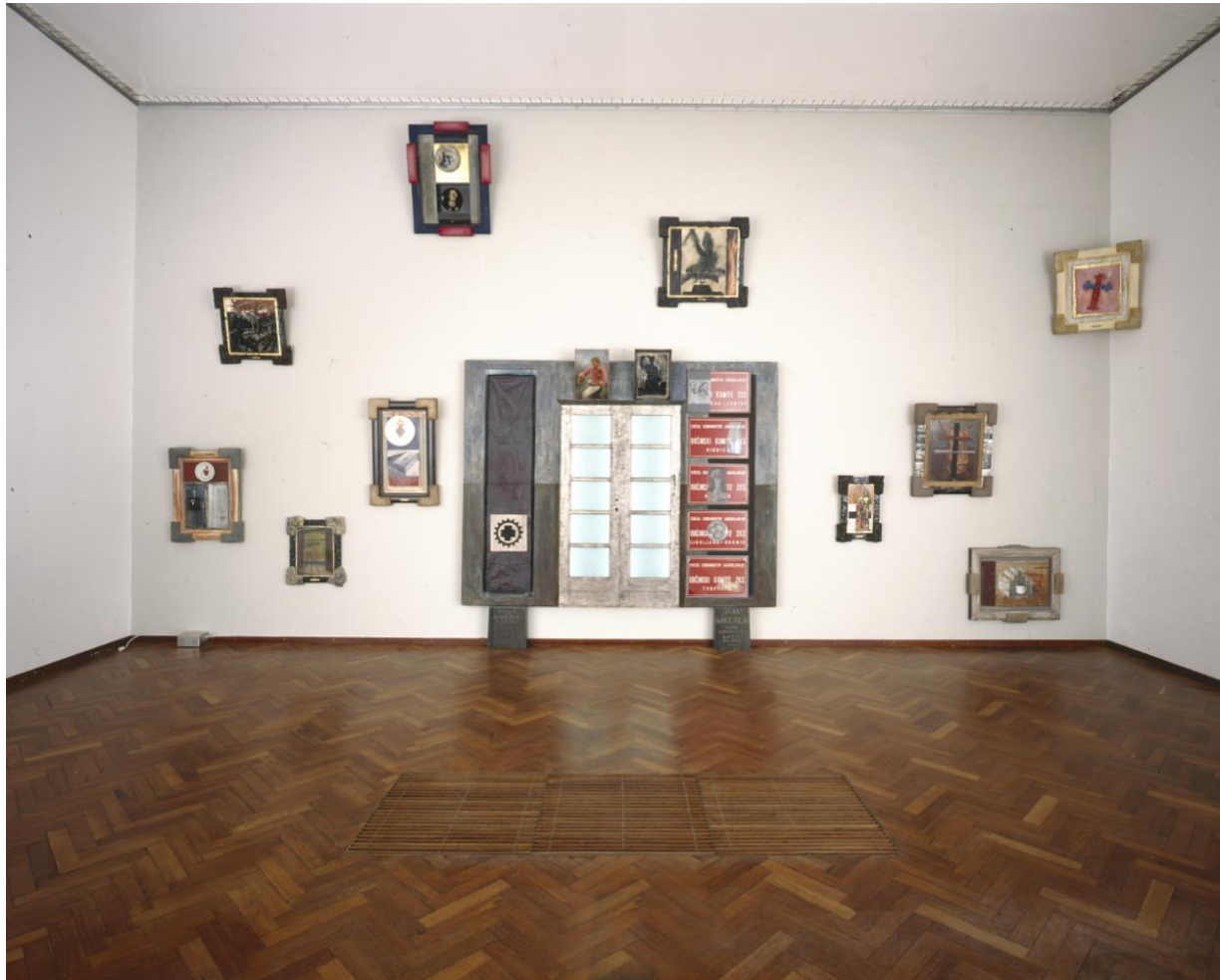


Figure 46: Irwin, *Golden Age*, 1991.

Work was also installed in the central stairway of the museum. *Taken to a Point in Time* had been submitted by American artist Lawrence Weiner, a conceptual artist known for his typographic work already exhibited at the Stedelijk in 1988. In a letter to Weiner about the exhibition, Beeren wrote, 'You, who knows Europe and wander yourself, and who sees the structures and the decline, will undoubtedly react as we hope you will.'¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Weiner seemed to be an excellent example of the kind of titular wonderer that Beeren was searching for. Born in the US, he travelled extensively and installed his work on the sides of buildings in various European cities. The themes present in his work were ones of language, movement, time and space. According to the exhibition catalogue, 'No artist is more at home in *Wanderlieder* than he.'¹⁹⁶ Accepting Beeren's invitation, Weiner introduced his chosen artwork, writing that it was to become '...A series of works relating to the specific idea of moving objects from one place upon the Earth to another.'¹⁹⁷ Unable to travel to Amsterdam himself, Weiner included

¹⁹⁵ Wim Beeren to Lawrence Weiner, 29th of November 1991.

¹⁹⁶ 'Lawrence Weiner' in *Wanderlieder*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1991), 74.

¹⁹⁷ Lawrence Weiner to Wim Beeren, 3rd of December 1991, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2916, Amsterdam.

some specifications for how the work should be installed. The font used had to be Franklin Gothic Extra Condensed in standard process red. Interestingly, the same work had been previously exhibited in Berlin on the occasion of the collapse of the Wall, lending it particular relevance and weight when shown as part of *Wanderlieder*.¹⁹⁸ It is because of this connection that Weiner's work was the most relevant Western European artwork in the exhibition.

By the 1st of February, over 75,000 guests had visited *Wanderlieder*, and Beeren decided to extend it in light of its success.¹⁹⁹ The Stedelijk would go on to acquire several works in connection to the exhibition. The first was Zofia Kulik's *Favourite Balance*, which was officially purchased on the 1st of January 1992. Although Ion Grigorescu's mural had to be painted over, one part of his installation could be preserved, namely the image of the birthing woman that he had painted onto a piece of sheet metal and leaned against the wall. It was acquired by the museum on the 1st of March 1992 and titled *La naissance de la revolution*, or *The Birth of the Revolution*. Lastly, one of the works included in Milan Kunc's display, *Trophäen Sammler*, was bought on the 22nd of May 1992.



Figure 47: *Taken to a Point in Time* by Lawrence Weiner on display in the Stedelijk Museum's central staircase, 1990.

¹⁹⁸ This took place at the gallery Anselm Dreher in Berlin in 1990.

¹⁹⁹ 'Wanderlieder', *NRC Handelsblad*, 1st of February 1992. Delpher.

Analysis

Similarly to the previous chapter, the following analysis of Beeren's *Wanderlieder* exhibition begins with the examination of a number of a number of primary sources. These include reviews that appeared in local newspapers at the time, which help to shed light on how the exhibition was initially received by the press and the criticisms that were noted in 1991 and 1992. The analysis then proceeds to integrate the perspective of Former West and Groys' concept of the post-communist condition. In doing this, it delves deeper into how the events of 1989 affected not only the Eastern bloc, but also Western European countries and institutions, including the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. This method is necessary to examine how *Wanderlieder* performed as Wim Beeren's response to a changing Europe and why it ultimately failed to deliver on such an ambitious concept. At the same time, it helps to understand why it remains a valuable exhibition that should continue to be remembered today.

In a letter to the participating artists dated the 16th of March 1992, Beeren wrote that 100,000 people had come to see the *Wanderlieder*.²⁰⁰ He went on to state, 'All of the tensions and efforts of setting up an exhibition of this kind – in the first place for the artists, and in the second place for the museum – were rewarded by the outcome of the exhibition itself. It was an interesting show with a variety of both content and form, despite or perhaps just because of the commissioned limits. A fan of cultural heritage sprang out of the European soil! The exhibition drew a great deal of attention and was well received in the press.'²⁰¹ Beeren was justified in his optimism. *Wanderlieder* had indeed been well attended, and even more visitors would see it before it closed at the beginning of March. But critical reception was mixed, with criticism levelled at the utopian concept of the exhibition and the attitude of the Western European artists.

Several critics identified problems with the choice of the Western European participants of *Wanderlieder*. This included Dolf Welling, who wrote of the Western artists: 'Most of them thought it was a very tight deadline. A few thought nothing. Those [artists] can only be contacted through their art dealers and it was the dealers that determined their contribution to the exhibition. The result therefore looks different from the grand story that Beeren apparently had in mind.'²⁰² Mariëtte Haveman similarly emphasized this dismissive attitude, writing, 'What the Western artists in this exhibition have in common, in fact the only thing that they have in common, is that they ignored the concept. They sent in work that they still had lying around, or they made something they were already thinking of making anyway; at most, the format was adjusted to fit the requirement of "wall filling."²⁰³ Wim van Sinderen was similarly disappointed by the Western Europeans and even went so far as to single them out as the key reason for why Beeren's vision wasn't realized. According to his article, '*Wanderlieder* could have

²⁰⁰ Wim Beeren to the contributing artists of *Wanderlieder*, 16th of March 1992, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2914, Amsterdam.

²⁰¹ Wim Beeren to Ilya Kabakov, 16th of March 1992, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2914, Amsterdam.

²⁰² Dolf Welling, 'Kunstenaars lopen uit de pas op "Wanderlieder"', *Trouw*, 31 of December 1991. Delpher.

²⁰³ Mariëtte Haveman, 'Het kamerbrede ochtendgloren van het nieuwe Europa', *De Volkskrant*, 10th of January 1992. Delpher.

indeed sounded perfect, if Beeren had not made the mistake of bringing in a few false notes. And I mean in particular the selection of artists from the West.’ He went on to cite Jan Fabre as a particular problem.²⁰⁴ Jan Bart Klaster also found Fabre’s contribution one of the weaker ones, stating that he found the idea behind it ‘meagre’.²⁰⁵ In the eyes of some critics however, Fabre was partially redeemed by the fact that he had been willing to travel and execute his work on-site. Many were hence much more critical of the artists who had sent in existing work instead, including Gilbert and George, Clemente and Weiner. In fact, some critics went as far as to argue that *Wanderlieder* had the potential to be a groundbreaking exhibition, if only it hadn’t been let down by its Western European participants.²⁰⁶ Beeren’s poor choice of Western artists hence proved detrimental to the success of his project, contributing to the lack of the attention *Wanderlieder* has received since 1992.

However, analysing this situation through the Former West framework helps to understand why the Western European artists seemed so disinterested in Beeren’s theme. As argued by the Former West project, a widely held belief at the time of the exhibition was that all political and social changes were confined to the former Eastern bloc. According to Groys, the West was not yet ready to reflect critically on how it was undergoing a post-communist transformation itself. Europe – particularly European reunification and the fate of its Eastern half – was hence of much less significance in the West in 1991. Although the continent was being transformed, this transformation was not always characterized by feelings of coming together. Rather, there was a prevalent sense of the East finally re-joining – and hence catching up to – the West. In light of this, it is logical that most Western artists would not have felt as inspired by Beeren’s European theme. The revolutions of 1989 must have felt far removed from their own English, French, or Belgian concerns. Their dismissive attitude was in fact symptomatic of their privileged status as Western Europeans. This continues to be the case today: the idea of the ‘former East’ is a widely accepted, but a ‘former West’ remains unaddressed. It will remain a barrier to effective cooperation until the West effectively ‘formers’ itself.

The Eastern European artists on the other hand enjoyed quite the opposite reaction from critics. They were generally praised for their enthusiasm and political engagement, and the way in which their work distinguished itself from those by their Western counterparts. Duk, for example, referred to the Eastern European artists as ‘serious’ and ‘committed’ and wrote of a historical awareness that permeated their work.²⁰⁷ The difference between the Western and the Eastern contributions was further emphasized by Geelhoed, who found that the Eastern European artists generally seemed to have ‘more to say’.²⁰⁸ Wim van Sinderen went on to conclude that ‘The show is essentially stolen by the Eastern Europeans, who proved not only engaged, but also extremely energetic and inventive.’²⁰⁹ There was hence a clear agreement that the Eastern artists were the only ones who offered a substantial response to what Beeren had asked of them. Unlike their Western colleagues, *Wanderlieder*’s Eastern European

²⁰⁴ Van Sinderen, ‘Wanderlieder (ieder zingt zijn eigen lied)’.

²⁰⁵ Jan Bart Klaster, ‘Kunst voor arbeiders en andere liefhebbers’, *Het Parool*, 8th of January 1992. Delpher.

²⁰⁶ Duk, ‘Westerse kunstenaars sturen Wim Beeren ‘t bos in op *Wanderlieder*’.

²⁰⁷ Duk, ‘Westerse kunstenaars sturen Wim Beeren ‘t bos in op *Wanderlieder*’.

²⁰⁸ Geelhoed, ‘Een epos voor Europa’.

²⁰⁹ Van Sinderen, ‘Wanderlieder (ieder zingt zijn eigen lied)’.

participants could not afford the luxury of ignoring the changes occurring across Europe. Their countries were being affected in direct, tangible ways, particularly in their transitions from planned economies to the free market. As such, their interest produced art work more relevant to Wim Beeren's ideas. In fact, it is possible that *Wanderlieder* could have benefitted from the inclusion of more socially and politically-engaged Eastern European artists, as opposed to Western Europeans that had little to say on the topic.

As in *In the USSR and Beyond*, it is necessary to consider the question of normalcy as discussed by Pejić. Writing to curator Imanse and comparing her participation in *Wanderlieder* to her earlier experiences in the West, Zofia Kulik wrote, '...I was then still more eastern artist, a kind of "quotation" from East Europe, although not completely. But now in Amsterdam I felt I am at least normal artist, just artist. Schizophrenia is over? [sic]' ²¹⁰ Based on Kulik's comment, it seems that she was very appreciative of the *Wanderlieder* format and perceived a significant improvement in Eastern European representation. She was correct in identifying this as a unique quality of the exhibition. In selecting representatives from both Western and Eastern Europe, and in offering each artist one wall of the museum, Beeren certainly aimed for a democratic concept. Furthermore, having taken a different approach than in *In the USSR and Beyond*, he had chosen a central theme rather than a focus on single country. This was a vast improvement because it successfully avoided the problems of oversimplification present in exhibitions of one region or culture. From the point of view of the Former West, it had the potential to engage the artists in a ground-breaking dialogue about the relationship between the East and the West. However, in light of some of the artists' failure to do so, *Wanderlieder* appears to have been premature.

It is however important to note that not even Eastern European artists exuded Beeren's optimism for Europe. Their work mostly addressed national and historical themes. Grigorescu depicted a pre-1989 Romania still under Ceausescu's rule. Kulik's collage incorporated recurring images of Soviet monuments. Irwin presented artefacts of communist Slovenia and referenced the historical Russian avant-garde. All of their work seemed firmly rooted in the past. Beeren would comment on this, stating that his impression of the 1991 art world in general was that artists were returning to search for their national identities. He found this slightly regressive, stating, '...The idea of Europeanism and Universalism always appealed to me. I now notice a discrepancy between the artistic and the political/economic developments. Even though art used to be far ahead of what is now happening politically and economically!' ²¹¹ Beeren's statement was not a fair judgement of Eastern European artists. When considered from a post-communist perspective, the concern with national questions was of particular importance in the vacuum left by the USSR. No longer part of the Eastern bloc, artists from countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia had to navigate their new identity. This was all the more important in recently independent countries like Slovenia or the Ukraine. Nevertheless, critics were struck by the pessimistic atmosphere of Eastern European self-reflections. In her review of *Wanderlieder*, Wesseling described a conversation she had with Ion Grigorescu: 'When I tell him that

²¹⁰ Zofia Kulik to Geurt Imanse, 3rd of March 1992, *Wanderlieder* archive, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archive VN2923, Amsterdam.

²¹¹ Wim Beeren, 'Wanderlieder: een gesprek met Wim Beeren', 107.

his contribution to the European idea is almost unbearably sombre and without any hopes for the future, Grigorescu answers: “Yes, but turn now to the Slovenian or Polish work in the museum, where are their expectations for the future? There is only the weight of the past. You can’t actually find any prospects for the reunification of Europe anywhere in this exhibition.”²¹² Grigorescu’s answer best reflected the collective trauma of communism that Beeren seemed to be underestimating as a result of his Western perspective. It would have lasting effects on those who had lived under Soviet dominance and continues to reverberate across cultures in the present day. Eastern European artists – Grigorescu, Kulik, Irwin and Tistol among them – would first have to address their own experience of oppression before they could even begin to consider what Europe could mean for them.

Wanderlieder becomes all the more interesting when analysed in retrospect, particularly with regards to Beeren’s utopian vision of the future of Europe. Curator Geurt Imanse would come to reflect on the exhibition in a 2004 article, written in the year that eight former Eastern bloc countries joined the European Union: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. He came to see the dismissive attitude of *Wanderlieder*’s Western artists as an omen of things to come, and elaborated on this: ‘Who could have described my surprise, or rather bewilderment, when at the beginning of this year, with the accession of the ten “new” EU countries only several months away, the Dutch print media began to report on the concerns our government officials had about what the arrival of the “new” EU countries might mean for our economy. I don’t believe that anyone was all that upset about a flood of cheap labour from Malta or Cyprus, two of the “new” EU lands, but primarily about that coming from Central and Eastern Europe. [...] ...I was also pretty well cured of the euphoria about a reunited Europe, in view of the still overwhelmingly conservative (and sometimes downright nationalistic) tinge of the governments that were ultimately running the show in the countries of the former Eastern bloc...’²¹³ In short, having shared Wim Beeren’s hopes for a New Europe, Imanse became embittered by the pervading divide between East and West.

He would not be the only one, as a similar sentiment would come to be shared among many initially optimistic Europeans. Writing about the EU in 2011, Piotrowski argued that ‘The new reality of the European Union offers a much more attractive opportunity for constructing a European identity, one that links the periphery with the centre of European culture, namely the West...’²¹⁴ However, sixteen years following Imanse’s article and nine years following Piotrowski’s, Wim Beeren’s European utopia feels more distant than ever. Britain made its exit from the EU on the 1st of February 2020, while a new wave of right-wing nationalism sweeping the continent appears more empowered than in 2004. The initial optimism – and the disillusionment that followed – was best summarized by Judt, who wrote: ‘Such euro-dreams were harbingers of disappointments to come. But few saw this at the time.’²¹⁵ Hence, although *Wanderlieder* celebrated a united Europe in 1991, it is important to point out that this project still remains to be realized.

²¹² Janneke Wesseling, ‘Wij zijn te oud voor Europa’, *Het NRC Handelsblad*, 13th of December 1991. Delpher.

²¹³ Imanse, ‘Time and Again’, 50 – 51.

²¹⁴ Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945 – 1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 24.

²¹⁵ Judt, *Postwar*, 631.

The premise of *Wanderlieder* reflected a great deal of the optimistic nature of the early 1990s. The future of Europe, as envisioned by Beeren, was one of mutual contact and cultural exchange. What Cold War animosities still remained would soon be resolved and Western and Eastern Europe would come together as one united continent. However, in retrospect, this New Europe would prove to be nothing short of a utopian vision, and this would also ring true of any exhibition revolving around it. Influenced by his belief in socially engaged art, Beeren imagined *Wanderlieder* as an opportunity for international artists to share stories of history and politics. However, the realities of the aftermath of the Cold War prevented his ambitious vision from being realized. Most of the Western artists revealed themselves to be unconcerned with Europe, while the Eastern artists were still processing their shared communist trauma and turned instead to the past. In light of this, *Wanderlieder* proved to be a premature exhibition, taking place too soon after the Cold War to allow for enough reflection on what the future of the European Union could mean.

Conclusion

The exhibitions *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* offer a unique opportunities to examine Wim Beeren's late career as director at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Looking back over thirty years, this thesis focused on the period of time between 1990 and 1992, a turning point in European history that led up to the Maastricht Treaty and the formation of the EU on the 7th of February 1992. This marks an important contribution to documenting Beeren's vision on the events in Europe at the end of the Cold War and the way in which he tried to materialize this vision in his exhibition programme. As this thesis has shown, his unique interest in politics made him particularly attuned to current events, a quality he had already demonstrated in his earlier curatorial career in the 1970s. During his directorship at the Stedelijk, this existing interest led him to curate *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder*. The two exhibitions offered a timely response to the changes seizing Europe and are all the more significant for being the first exhibitions of their kind to be held in the Netherlands. Analysing them through the methodological lens of Former West, and especially the approaches of leading Eastern European scholars Boris Groys and Piotr Piotrowski, helps to determine the extent to which *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* succeeded at fulfilling Beeren's curatorial objectives.

In the USSR and Beyond presented an overview of Soviet art in a loosely chronological structure. The exhibition would have been impossible to realize just a few years earlier and was made feasible only by political changes taking place at the time. Wim Beeren was correct in sensing a well-timed opportunity to reflect on European events and his project would mark the first time that underground Soviet art could be seen in a Dutch museum on such a large scale. Remarkably ambitious in size and scope, the exhibition nevertheless failed to resonate with its audience and was met with mixed reception in the Dutch press. It went on to receive little scholarly attention and was almost entirely forgotten by art history as a result. However, using archival research to recreate *In the USSR and Beyond* allows for a better understanding of the exhibition. As this thesis has shown using installation photographs and the reconstructed floorplan, underground Soviet art – originally created to be shown in small-scale, secret exhibitions held either in apartments or in the countryside – was decontextualized and presented within the pristine white interior of the Stedelijk. In this setting, which failed to emphasize the originality of the work from an Eastern perspective, the artwork's revolutionary quality was unsuccessfully communicated to the Western audience. This became all the more obvious when compared to the Russian-curated *To the Object* 'ship' exhibition, which provided a much more ground-breaking and appropriate display for Soviet art.

Analysing the exhibition through the Former West framework allows this thesis to reach a number of new conclusions. *In the USSR and Beyond* was indeed not without its problems, the majority of which originated with Beeren's Western perspective. The exhibition was framed as his personal discovery of contemporary Soviet art and centred around the liberation of Soviet artists, hence becoming evocative of a victory exhibition celebrating the West's ideological victory over the East. This was, however, a glaring oversimplification of a much more complex reality, preventing *In the USSR and Beyond* from becoming a successful introduction to Soviet art. In retrospect, Beeren's vision would have greatly benefitted from a more self-reflective perspective such as the one suggested by Piotrowski's 'horizontal art history'. Using Soviet art to reflect not only on the USSR, but also on the Stedelijk as a

Western institution displaying such art for the first time, would have lent *In the USSR and Beyond* a more interesting dimension. Beeren effectively missed out on the opportunity to broach a number of more interesting questions, such as ones about the relationship between the West and the East. However, in spite of unfulfilled potential which left *In the USSR and Beyond* with a number of flaws, the exhibition nevertheless remains valuable within the context of its time. It was made possible by specific historical circumstances in the Soviet Union, combined with Wim Beeren's curatorial philosophy and directorial aims for an internationally-oriented, socially-engaged museum. *In the USSR and Beyond* held up a mirror to a particular moment in European history and it is of vital importance that it is not forgotten.

In *Wanderlieder* Beeren chose to broaden his perspective and turn to the entirety of Europe. Inspired directly by the revolutions of 1989, the impending 1992 Treaty of Maastricht and the promises of the European Union, he invited artists from both the West and the East to respond to the changes seizing their individual countries. Beeren envisioned a panorama of large murals that, combined, would form a response to current events and the future of a New Europe. Although the idea was received enthusiastically by the chosen Eastern European artists, few of the invited Westerners shared Beeren's optimism. Gilbert and George, and Francisco Clemente treated the theme with indifference, while Jan Fabre expressed scepticism towards the idea of a united Europe in general. Most Western artists sent in existing work unrelated to the theme, while even those who did create new work failed to deliver the kind of commentary that Beeren was looking for. While Beeren selected artists who led a cosmopolitan lifestyle (Clemente, Weiner) or ones who had previously made socially engaged work (Gilbert and George had organized an AIDS benefit exhibition), he failed to choose artists with a genuine interest in the question of Europe and the fate of the EU. On the other hand, Eastern Europeans were finally offered the opportunity to rejoin history and generally embraced Beeren's enthusiasm. However, they first needed to address individual national issues. This included coming to terms with the trauma of their communist past and the transformations occurring in their individual countries, which in turn necessitated a rethinking of their own identities. Ultimately, these factors contributed to Beeren's utopian vision failing to be realized in the Stedelijk.

Although the disinterest on the part of the Western artists was interpreted as a curatorial flaw by critics, it is more interesting to consider *Wanderlieder* through the Former West lens. This allows for the exhibition to be recognized as symptomatic of the European climate of the early 1990s. While the idea of a transitioning, post-communist Eastern Europe was widely accepted, it was Boris Groys who first applied the idea of a broader 'post-communism' to both the East and the West. In other words, although Western Europeans had never experienced life under communism directly, the entirety of Europe was now effectively post-communist. *Wanderlieder* would have greatly benefitted from engaging with Groys' theory. Perhaps it could have stimulated the Western European artists to respond to the exhibition theme. The idea of post-communism as part of a shared European condition would have helped to counter the vision that emerged in the exhibition: that of a two-speed Europe, an Eastern half, hopeful and enthusiastic, and a disinterested, unaffected Western half, immune to change.

While *Wanderlieder* failed to live up to Beeren's utopian ambition, looking back at it through the Former West framework becomes all the more interesting in retrospect. It is clear that the exhibition was a premature one. The West was not yet ready to reflect on how it had been affected by the aftermath

of 1989, while more time would have to pass before Eastern European artists would be ready to consider their future as part of a united Europe. The issues that arose during the exhibition would also come to reflect broader European struggles. The West maintained its reservations for a New Europe, which would persist well into the 2004 expansion of the EU. As noted by Former West, this is symptomatic of a West that is yet to begin thinking of itself in post-communist terms. Until the West 'formers', successful dialogue between the East and the West will continue to pose difficulties. Ultimately, both the aftermath of 1989 and the European Union did not succeed in delivering on the promise of a unified Europe, much as Beeren did not succeed in realizing the promise of his optimistic concept.

Although not without their curatorial flaws, *In the USSR and Beyond* and *Wanderlieder* remain important moments in the history of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and Wim Beeren's directorship. Although both exhibitions would have benefitted from more critical perspectives, they should be seen as symptomatic of the political and cultural climate in the West at the beginning of the 1990s. As such, their significance rests in the specific historical moments they addressed. Beeren's leadership similarly needs to be rethought and remembered for timely and daring attempts to explore the enormous changes taking place outside the walls of the museum. This effort would greatly benefit from the documentation, recreation and analysis of another overlooked Beeren exhibition, *U-ABC*. Rooted in the same political interests and involvement in current events in South America, it also remains forgotten by art history. The field of Western exhibitions of Eastern European art is similarly rife with more important research opportunities. These would unfortunately venture beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is nevertheless essential to emphasize the myriad of possible questions that arise here. How did other Dutch museums respond to the political, social and cultural changes at the beginning of the 1990s? What other approaches were taken by Western institutions in curating exhibitions of Eastern artists? How did these approaches differ from those chosen by Eastern curators? And finally, how have exhibitions of Eastern European art developed into the 21st century?

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