

Preface

1 **THE THEME**

Between 1929 and 1939, during the decade of the Great Depression, the arts in Europe were politicized more than ever before. Government oversight, party agitation, and public pressure sought to make them serve domestic policies of social stabilization and foreign policies of antagonistic self-assertion. All of this jeopardized the freedom the arts had gained after the First World War. They were drawn into the struggles between the economic, social, and political systems which came to a head in the Second World War. As a result, they were entangled in a three-way ideological conflict between communism, fascism, and democracy. In a fast-moving course of less than ten years, art policies were enacted, and art ideologies were proclaimed, with doctrinaire assurance. This is what I call a political confrontation of the arts.

2 **COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENTS**

It is during the Cold War that the subject was first approached, albeit in a partisan way. The traditionalist arts of the Soviet Union and the Third Reich were equated under the term totalitarian and rated inferior to modern art oppressed by both regimes. Modern art, by inference, was automatically validated as the art of democracy. However, historically, this was not yet the case. In the decade of the Great Depression, modern art still fought an uphill battle for recognition against traditional art in both totalitarian and democratic states. Its fundamental value, the freedom of expression, was in fact a democratic right without allegiance to political democracy.

3 **PRESENT VANTAGE POINT**

Today, the polarization of Cold War politics has given way to multilateral conflicts of capitalist competition among democratic and authoritarian states. Regardless of these conflicts, modern art has come to dominate the flanking neoliberal culture. It no longer needs to reassert itself against traditional art in the historic sense of the term. Its triumphalist rhetoric has narrowed the history of 20th-century art to that of modern art alone. In this book, I have attempted to reassert the historical record of its conflictive coexistence with traditional art.

4 **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CONCEPTUALIZATION**

The overabundant literature devoted to the material covered in this book has

never been pulled together into a conceptual comparison. Rather, it has followed the growth principle of neoliberal economics, which promotes accumulation of assets, needless replacement, and redundant duplication. As a result, it has grown beyond any bibliographically responsible synthesis by a single scholar. This book is thus no synthesis, only an argument, backed up by text sources and previous scholars' insights. Unlike many authors, I have made up no substantive terms of my own—'copyright concepts'—to get on top of the overwhelming evidence. The terms I use are epistemological or historic. They can be verified in *The Oxford English Dictionary* and shared by any reader.

5 **ILLUSTRATIONS**

Since reproductions of the art works mentioned are overabundantly available in publications or on the internet, I have found it pointless to engage in the negotiations and expenses that would have been required to reassemble them once more between the covers of this book. To do so would have meant sharing in the redundancy of neoliberal overproduction which has made the art-historical literature serve the current show and market culture. I have limited illustrations to four sets of representative but little-known images, two of which I have photographed myself.

6 **STAGES OF WRITING**

My attempts to deal with the subject of this book started in 1984 with an inaugural lecture at Northwestern University,⁽¹⁾ and have since informed much of my teaching there until my retirement in 2001. In a paper for a conference about the impact of Critical Theory on art-historical scholarship held at Frankfurt in 1992, I presented a first book project, later replaced by the present one.⁽²⁾ In 2007, finally, I published a survey of the project in its present shape.⁽³⁾ Although I have often lectured on the subject at conferences and schools, and have discussed it with numerous friends and colleagues, it is only fair to say that I don't have to thank anyone for insights or advice. It is the graduate students active in my seminars who have steadily inspired me with their interventions, discussions, research papers, dissertations, and, finally, books. Occasionally I have used information gathered in their papers. They are Cristina Cuevas-Wolf, Jane Friedman, Keith Holz, Elizabeth Grady, Paul Jaskot, Jennifer Jolly, Karen Kettering, Barbara McCloskey, Diane Miliotes, Sarah Miller, Elizabeth Seaton, James Van Dyke, and, especially, Toby Norris.

1. "The Political Confrontation of the Arts at the Paris World Exposition of 1937," *Arts and Sciences. Magazine of the College of Arts and Sciences*, Northwestern University, Fall 1984, pp. 11–16.

2. "Walter Benjamins Passagenwerk als Modell für eine kunstgeschichtliche Synthese," in: Andreas Berndt, et al., ed.,

Frankfurter Schule und Kunstgeschichte, Berlin, 1992, pp. 165–182.

3. "The Political Confrontation of the Arts. From the Great Depression to the Second World War," *Georges-Bloch-Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Universität Zürich*, 11/12 (2004/2005 [appeared in 2007]), pp. 142–175.