

The Political Confrontation of the Arts in Europe from the Great Depression to the Second World War

Otto Karl Werckmeister

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.

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