

Venice Biennale 1948. The *Mostra degli Impressionisti* at the German Pavilion and its Politics
Francesca Castellani

Abstract

During the 1948 Venice Biennale, the first edition after the end of World War II, the selections for the national pavilions at the Giardini reflected the sclerosis of pre-war structures and the reconfiguration of relationships among post-war victors, defeated nations, and emerging adversaries. This shifting and unstable scenario was epitomised by the *Mostra degli Impressionisti*, organised by Biennale Secretary Rodolfo Pallucchini and staged in the German Pavilion.

This decision takes on deeper resonance when viewed through the lens of the “political topography” of the Giardini’s pavilions. In 1948, defeated Germany, then divided into Allied occupation zones, lacked official representation at the Biennale. Instead, a politically charged exhibition of “the Germans” – featuring artists cleansed of Nazi associations – was displayed in the Italian Pavilion. The choice to occupy the German Pavilion with a “French” exhibition rather than hosting this compensatory display was laden with political and symbolic significance.

The tensions, motivations, and consequences of this decision, along with the pavilion’s eventual “restitution” to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1950 against the backdrop of the Cold War, illuminate the Biennale’s evolving post-war role as a platform for soft power. The broader narrative surrounding the organization of these exhibitions – including the dynamics of loans, hesitations from American collectors, contentious negotiations with the Soviet Union, and the lingering shadow of Nazi-looted art – provides a compelling framework for uncovering hidden historical narratives.

Keywords

Venice Biennale, Impressionism, National Pavilions, History of Exhibitions, Soft Power, Cold War, Rodolfo Pallucchini, Eberhard Hanfstaengl

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Prologue: April 2024

Venice, 60. International Art Exhibition, April 17, 2024. On the closed doors of the Israeli Pavilion in the Giardini, guarded by two soldiers, a sign reads: “The artist and curators of the Israeli Pavilion will open the exhibition when a ceasefire and hostage release agreement is reached”.¹ Scattered on the ground, leaflets protesting against “the genocide pavilion” stain the front walkway red. A little further on, one passes the Russian Pavilion, which remained empty in 2022² in protest against the invasion of Ukraine and now hosts the artists representing Bolivia. Walking lost along the frontier of our searing present, these places urge us to remember. The long course of

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“Art needs an open heart, which is something that doesn’t exist right now, so it’s better to stay closed”, explained the two curators of the pavilion, Mira Lapidot and Tamar Margalit, in their statement on April 16, 2024, <https://www.exibart.com/attualita/biennale-di-venezia-il-padiglione-di-israele-rimarra-chiuso>, last accessed April 2024. In the weeks prior to the opening, thousands of operators from the world of art and culture signed a letter urging the Biennale to exclude the Israeli and Iranian pavilions from the event. The Biennale’s official response, issued on February 28, 2024, reads as follows: “With regard to the participation in the International Art Exhibition of the Countries represented in the Pavilions of the Giardini, the Arsenale and in the city of Venice, La Biennale di Venezia would like to specify that all Countries recognised by the Italian Republic may autonomously request to participate officially. Consequently, the Biennale may not take into consideration any petition or call to exclude the participation of Israel or Iran in the coming 60th International Art Exhibition (20 April–24 November 2024)”, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/la-biennale-di-venezia-national-participations-and-collateral-events>, last accessed April 2024.

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The controversy that led to the closure of the Russian Pavilion in 2022 and to the concomitant installation of Piazza Ucraina by Dana Kosmina and the Ukrainian Pavilion curators in the Giardini’s Spazio Esedra, is well known. For the Biennale’s official statement see <https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/la-biennale-di-venezia-presenta-piazza-ucraina-giardini-della-biennale-spazio-esedra>, last accessed December 2022.

history can help us read today's wounds. This is not the first time the Venice Biennale and its pavilion system have mirrored international politics and its conflicts, reflecting a nationalism that has never really died.³

The case study proposed here, the 1948 *Mostra degli Impressionisti* and its politics, is set against the unstable background of yet another crucial Biennale, the 24th International Art Exhibition, held interstitially between two conflicts – World War II and the Cold War. The *Mostra degli Impressionisti* was mounted in the German Pavilion as a form of “moral reparation”⁴ for the wounds Hitler's dictatorship had inflicted on French and Western culture. The circumstances, tensions, and motivations that led to this, and to the Pavilion's “restitution” to the Federal Republic of Germany in the new climate of 1950 marked by the Cold War, offer a starting point for reflecting on the role of the post-World War II Biennale as a terrain for the exercise of soft power and as an attempt to promote political solidarity in defense of democratic ideals.⁵

Venice, 24th International Art Exhibition, July 1948

Writing the preface to the catalog I thought back, ideally, to the conversations we had had during your visit to Venice in '38 when we had seen the storm coming: ten years later I have been able to produce an exhibition in which the principle of freedom of Western European culture is clearly borne out. Let us hope that this freedom can be maintained and other waves of obscurantist dictatorships do not overwhelm our culture, as we already suffered with Nazism.⁶

So wrote Rodolfo Pallucchini, then Secretary General of the Biennale, to his friend and colleague Hans Tietze, who had immigrated to the United States following Nazi persecutions. Despite the calls for peace and the commitment to amending and democratising Pallucchini had imprinted on the Biennale's mission,⁷ the first postwar Biennale would see the Russian Pavilion closed, as in 2022, and a tense climate of confrontation in-between two conflicts – the “hot” one of the World War II and the

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See Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller, “Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle”, in Clarissa Ricci (ed.), *Starting from Venice* (Milan: et al., 2010) 50-61; Angela Vettese, “The National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale as a Form of Public Space”, in Gediminas Urbonas, Ann Lui, and Lucas Freeman (eds.), *Public Space? Lost and Found* (Cambridge MA: SA+P Press MIT School of Architecture and Planning, 2017), 211-21. For a political and identitarian reading of the architectural language of the various pavilions, see Joel Robinson, “Folkloric Modernism. Venice's Giardini della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture”, *Open Arts Journal*, no. 2 (2013–14): 1-24. For an analysis of the current situation (2015–2020) see Melanie Vietmeier, *Biennial as seismograph: Geopolitical factors, funding strategies and potential international collaboration* (Stuttgart: IFA Edition Culture and Foreign Policy, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.17901/akbp1.04.2022>, last accessed December 2022. For the concept of Biennale as an international “platform” see Clarissa Ricci, *La Biennale di Venezia 1993–2003: l'esposizione come piattaforma* (PhD Diss.: Scuola di Studi Avanzati di Venezia – SSAV, Venice 2014).

4

Rodolfo Pallucchini, Secretary General of the Biennale, used this expression in relation to Oskar Kokoschka's exhibition in the Venice Pavilion in his farewell speech for the 1956 Biennale, quoted in Maria Cristina Bandera, “Pallucchini protagonista della Biennale”, *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, issue dedicated to “Rodolfo Pallucchini e le arti del Novecento”, no. 35 (2011): 77.

5

This research builds on a previous paper by incorporating new archival exploration and focusing on the management of the German Pavilion at the *Mostra* in 1948. See Francesca Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale: storie, politiche, battaglie”, in Claudio Lorenzini (ed.), *Rodolfo Pallucchini: storie, archivi, prospettive critiche* (Udine: Forum, 2019), 281-296.

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Pallucchini to Tietze, July 22, 1948: ARPU (Archivio Rodolfo Pallucchini Udine), S. 3, “Documentazione relativa alla Biennale di Venezia”, box 19, “Documentazione dal 1945 al 1962”, folder 4, “Corrispondenza dagli anni 1948-1949,” subfolder “Tietze Hans”. Pallucchini uses the word “exhibition” to describe the Biennale in its entirety.

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Rodolfo Pallucchini, “Introduzione alla XXIV Biennale”, in *XXIV Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo* (May 1-September 30, 1948), exh. cat., 2nd ed. (Venice: Serenissima, June 1948), XIV–XV: “With this exhibition, the Biennale fulfills its duty to Italian culture and, at the same time, offers an attraction to viewers of every country, [one that is] destined to remain memorable”.

“cold” one with the Soviet Union.⁸ The exhibition engine had started up again in the summer of 1947, a few months after the signing of the Paris Treaties.⁹ In this still relatively fluid phase in the construction of the new European political order, Venice – which was so close to the Free Territory of Trieste and its soon-to-be tragic border – found itself at the epicentre.¹⁰

A not insignificant piece of this mosaic is the *Mostra degli Impressionisti*, which was strongly promoted by Pallucchini with the support of Roberto Longhi, Lionello Venturi, and a committee of impeccable, if not always unanimous, “professors”.¹¹ Although the 1948 Biennale is generally celebrated as an exhibition of reconciliation and cooperation between countries “in a new era of freedom”,¹² this aspect of the discourse only partially reflects the dynamics that were at play. Going beyond the advisory board’s internal disagreements, the entire organisation of the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* was marked by tension, which is far more evident in the documents than in the official publications.¹³ It is no coincidence that the intricate interplay of diplomacy turned out to be even more strategic here than in prior Bien-

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Adrian Duran, *Painting, Politics, and the New Front of Cold War Italy* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2014) analyses the 1948 and 1950 Biennales ideologically through the lens of the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti. See also Nancy Jachec, “Anti-communism at Home. Europeanism Abroad Italian Cultural Policy at the Venice Biennale, 1948–1958”, *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 2 (2005): 93-217; Nancy Jachec, *Politics and Paintings at the Venice Biennale 1948–1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). For the 1948 edition, see also Pascale Budillon Puma, *La Biennale di Venezia dalla guerra alla crisi, 1948-1968* (Bari: Palomar, 1995), 30–32; Stefano Collicelli Cagol and Vittoria Martini, “The Venice Biennale in its turning points: 1948 and the aftermath of 1968”, in Noemi de Haro García, Patricia Mayayo, Jesús Carrillo (eds.), *Making Art History in Europe after 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 84–90. On the “Cultural Cold War” in general it is now classic Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War. The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999); see also Simo Mikkonen and Pekka Suutari (eds.), *Music, Art and Diplomacy. East–West Cultural Interactions and the Cold War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016); Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (eds.), *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War. Exploring the Second World* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Simo Mikkonen, Giles Scott-Smith, and Jari Parkkinen (eds.), *Entangled East and West. Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018). Recent studies have overcome the “monolithic” vision of opposition between blocks in favor of a more permeable reality: Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski (eds.), *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2016); Beàta Hock and Anu Allas (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018).

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Pallucchini was “ordered” to the Biennale by the Directorate of Fine Arts of the Municipality of Venice in the summer of 1947: ARPU, S. 3, box 19, folder 4, subfolder “Nicholson Benedict”.

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The Swiss art historian and collector Hans Hahnloser considers “the closeness of the neighboring Trieste” a deterrent for possible lenders to the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* in Venice. ASAC (Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Porto Marghera, Venice), Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 3, folder 1. For an introduction to Italy’s postwar conditions, see Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell’Italia Repubblicana. L’economia, la politica, la cultura, la società dal dopoguerra agli anni ’90* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997).

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Unlike the organising committees of previous Biennales, the committee for the exhibition on Impressionism was of a high academic caliber, which is why it has been called a “professors” exhibition. In the aftermath of Fascism and the war, the art historians’ alignment on different political and ideological fronts remained latent but concrete and reflected different conceptions of Impressionism and its “modernism”. On the reception of Impressionism in Italy before World War II and its paradoxes, see Laura Moure Cecchini, “Imitators of the Imitators? World Impressionisms at the Venice Biennale, 1895–1948”, in Alexis Clark and Frances Fowle (eds.), *Globalizing Impressionism: Reception, Translation, and Transnationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). The literature has tended to crystallise the conflict between Roberto Longhi and Lionello Venturi, an authentic international expert of the movement who remained lukewarm about the exhibition. Maria Cristina Bandera reconstructs the polemic in “Pallucchini protagonista della Biennale”: 75-92; Maria Cristina Bandera (ed.), *Il carteggio Longhi-Pallucchini. Le prime Biennali del dopoguerra, 1948–1956* (Milan: Charta, 1999); Maria Cristina Bandera, “Pallucchini segretario della Biennale e il suo carteggio con Longhi”, in *Una vita per l’arte veneta*, Quaderni di «Arte Documento», 2001: 128-49; Collicelli Cagol and Martini, *The Venice Biennale in its turning points*, 89-90; Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”. On Pallucchini as a critic of Impressionism, see also Giuliana Tomasella, *Rodolfo Pallucchini. Scritti sull’arte contemporanea* (Venice-Verona: Fondazione Cini-Scripta, 2011), 37-39. On the role of Lionello Venturi in postwar Biennales, Letizia Giardini recently presented “Lionello Venturi and the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia: Postwar Developments”, conference *Lionello Venturi and Postwar Art* (MLAC – Museo Laboratorio Arte Contemporanea, Palazzo del Rettorato, Sapienza University of Rome, November 10, 2023).

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Pallucchini, “Introduzione alla XXIV Biennale”, XI.

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The main archival reservoir is the Biennale’s own archives, ASAC.

nales, helping, for example, to obtain loans from French public museums or to get artworks released from the allied-occupied areas on German soil.¹⁴

A Pavilion Without a Nation

The scenario summoned up by the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* allowed for the shadows of the ongoing historical turmoil to filter through. Even if the decision to mount the exhibition in the German Pavilion was made at a later date, and even if it was partially dictated by pragmatic considerations – given the building’s excellent state of conservation in comparison to other possible venues¹⁵ – it can be seen in a new light when read within the “political topography” of the Giardini’s pavilions, which is anything but abandoned even today.

Defeated Germany lacked an official national representation at the 24th Biennale. In that crucial 1948, Germany – with the Berlin Blockade at its doorstep – did not even exist as a nation, divided as it was into four areas governed by the forces of occupation. This status is reflected in the difficulty the Biennale administration faced in identifying appropriate institutional contacts among the various military authorities and in its attempts to facilitate the shipment of loaned artworks in and out of German territory.¹⁶ The ASAC archives contain a vast and at times frantic exchange of letters and telegrams, dating back to the winter and the spring of 1947-48, addressed to the head of the Italian Delegation in Frankfurt, Lieutenant Colonel Vitale G. Gallina.¹⁷

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For the specific relations between Italy and France during the 1948 Biennale see Caroline Pane, “La Biennale di Venezia del 1948. Rappresentazioni italo-francesi e poste in gioco politiche all’indomani della seconda guerra mondiale”, in Maria Pia Casalena (ed.), *Luoghi d’Europa. Culti, città, economie* (Bologna: Archetipo, 2012), 130-37; Marylène Malbert, *Les relations artistiques internationales à la Biennale de Venise 1948-1968* (PhD Diss.: Université Paris I- Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris 2006); Marylène Malbert, “De l’utilité de l’Ecole de Paris pour relancer la Biennale de Venise en 1948”, *Studiolo*, no. 7 (2009): 213-234. The exhibition’s diplomatic weight within a new strategic framework of alliances can also be felt in the documents’ insistence on the brotherhood between the two countries in the aftermath of the war, while the honorary committee is a small masterpiece of institutional architecture (ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 1, “1948. Mostre storiche. Gli impressionisti francesi”, folder 3). On the theme of diplomacy of the arts within the international exhibition system see Rika Devos and Alexander Ortenberg (eds.), *Architecture of Great Expositions 1937–1959. Messages of Peace, Images of War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

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The initial idea was to hold the exhibition at the Italian Pavilion (now the Central Pavilion), a space Pallucchini criticises. He is the one who proposes the German Pavilion. In a letter to Longhi dated February 17, 1948, Ponti refers to Pallucchini’s motivations: the limited amount of space available in the Italian Pavilion, the artists’ opposition, better conditions in the German Pavilion, and the proximity to the French Pavilion (quoted in Bandera, *Il carteggio Longhi-Pallucchini*, 70).

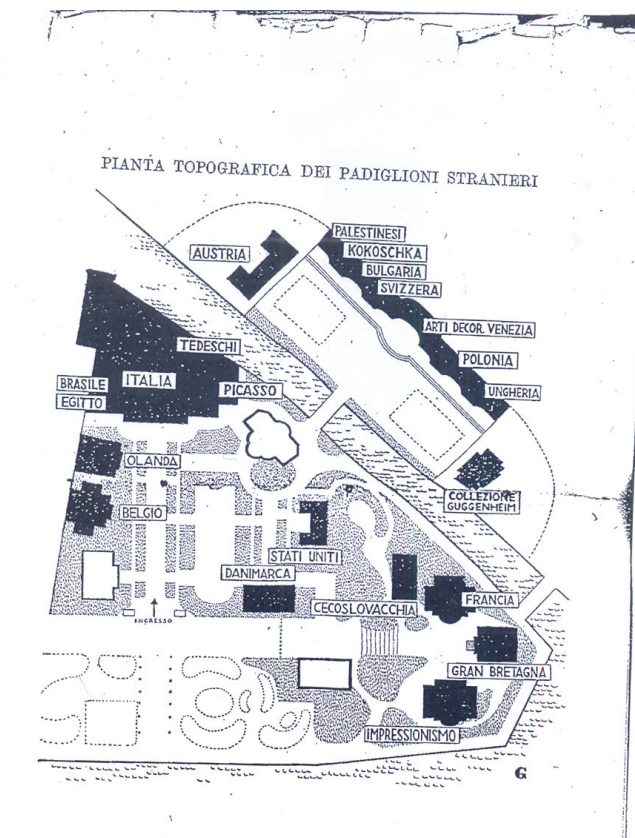
16

From the initial contacts with the Italian Representation, the first lists of loans from the German museums included a good twelve works (Letter of December 10, 1947: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 3, folder 3: “Germania”, loose papers). Negotiations proved to be particularly complicated for three very famous paintings: Gauguin’s *Riders on the Beach* (1902) and *Barbarian Tales* (1902), and Renoir’s *Alfred Sisley with His Wife* (1868), conserved at Museum Folkwang in Essen and at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, both cities then under British control, with particular concern for civil liberties (Letter of February 5, 1948; *ibid*).

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ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 3, folder 3: “Germania”, loose papers. Ultimately, a contest between nations would unblock the situation: the Belgian government provided a train, the United States a airplane.

fig. 1
Topographic map of the 24th
Biennale, from *XXIV Biennale
di Venezia. Catalogo*, 2nd ed.
(Venice: Serenissima, 1948)



Although there was no official participation, the Biennale would host an exhibition of contemporary German artists, titled *Artisti Tedeschi*. Contrary to what one might expect, the exhibition was held in the Italian rather than the German Pavilion.¹⁸ The reasons for this migration from one pavilion to another, which effectively deprived Germany of its institutional space and effaced its name, still need to be more thoroughly questioned.

In a climate in which no choice, no expression, is neutral, fair words bear weight. The use of official terms reflects the desire to create distance from what the Nazi state and its pavilion had previously represented. The title of the exhibition does not refer to Germany, but to the “Tedeschi” – the Germans, a people, rather than a nation.¹⁹ The meaning seems clear. In a scenario that still wavered between inescapable condemnation and the need to open a dialogue for new alliances, it was impossible to forget the horrors of Nazi Germany – the subsequent Nuremberg trials were still underway – but there was a growing distinction between the power of the state and the responsibility of individuals, reaching out to those who were now threatened by the new, terrible form of communist totalitarianism.

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The building had just been renamed Palazzo Centrale (Central Pavilion) but, in the correspondence, it is always referred to as the Italian Pavilion. The *Artisti Tedeschi* exhibition occupies room 51, which is not just any room in that it is immediately preceded by the two rooms showing Picasso, an artist himself at the centre of a controversial case of cultural diplomacy. Given his communist sympathies, France opposed hosting him in its own pavilion, as Pallucchini initially requested. Pane, “La Biennale di Venezia del 1948”, 137; Annie Cohen-Solal, *Un étranger nommé Picasso: Dossier de police n° 74.664* (Paris: Fayard, 2021). For the German participants, see Christoph Becker and Annette Lagler (eds.), *Biennale Venedig: Der Deutsche Beitrag, 1895–1995* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995), and especially for the years under consideration here, see Peter Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962. Wiedergutmachung, Rekonstruktion und Archäologie des Progressiven”, 35–50; eng ed. Elke aus dem Moore and Ursula Zeller (eds.), *Germany’s Contributions to the Venice Biennale 1895–2007* (Cologne: DuMont, 2003); Jan Andreas May and Sabine Meine (eds.), *Der deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung “La Biennale di Venezia” 1912–2012* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2015). On German participants in Biennale first period see also Barbara Cinelli, “Prima e dopo l’espressionismo: presenze della pittura tedesca alle Biennali di Venezia dal 1889 al 1928”, in Maria Grazia Messina and Dominique Jarrassé (eds.), *L’espressionisme: une construction de l’autre* (Paris: Editions Esthétiques du Divers, 2012).

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See the way-finding map in the official catalogue.

What was played out around the German Pavilion was a sort of battle fought with titles, words, and spaces.²⁰ Though this battle was partially submerged, the documents conserved in the ASAC archives provide some interesting background. To sugarcoat the pill of being from their own national pavilion, the Biennale management resorted to some creative storytelling. In a letter dated November 20, 1947, the Special Commissioner Giovanni Ponti wrote to the Ministry of Education of the Bavarian Government, which, as we will see, was the first contact point for the exhibition of German contemporary artists, stating:

Given that not all the nations that have a pavilion at the Biennale will be able to participate in the exhibition on their own premises because of the restoration those buildings require, and furthermore an organization involving the opening of all the pavilions would require [...] a sum of expenses excessive for our current budget, we thought that, with the consent of the participating Nations, we could adopt a suitable, immediate solution by offering hospitality to various countries in the Italian Pavilion itself.²¹

At the time it was made, it was a sincere and undoubtedly flawless offer, and would have stayed as such had events not later taken different turn, with the allied forces – Great Britain, France, United States – aligned in their own pavilion.²² In reality, the excuse of precarious conservation did not apply to the German Pavilion. Pallucchini actually defined it as “the most beautiful and the most modern of the Biennale pavilions”,²³ showing himself all too willing to pay the limited restoration costs when it came to mounting the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* there.²⁴ Moreover, one should not forget that the entire *facies* of the building, renovated by Ernst Haiger in 1937 to respond to the image of “muscular” power and classicism of Hitler’s Germany, bore the painful stigma of Nazi ideology imprinted in its forms.²⁵

This choice to banish the group show *Artisti Tedeschi* from the German Pavilion and to use the space for a quintessentially “French” retrospective seems to carry a clear political and symbolic message.²⁶ Though the early Biennales had favoured a view of Impressionism as a cosmopolitan and essentially transna-

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It is worth remembering that the naming of the pavilions in Venice is anything but secondary. Another example is provided by the German Pavilion, when in 1984, the inscription “Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Federal Republic of Germany” was added to the facade to distinguish it from the German Democratic Republic which had been participating in the Biennale since 1982 (see Michael Diers, “Germania a margine. The German Pavillion in Venice and the Interventions of Art – An Historical Survey”, in Aus dem Moore and Zeller (eds.), *Germany’s Contributions to the Venice Biennale 1895–2007*, 36). Conversely, the inscription was dismantled after the reunification of the two countries.

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ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938–1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”. A similar letter was actually sent to the USSR, a delegation whose inclusion was also controversial at that time. For this, see Matteo Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia (1924–1962)* (Milan: Mimesis, 2020).

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Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Holland, Poland, and Switzerland also exhibited in their national pavilions, while Hungary was hosted in the Romanian Pavilion, and Brazil and Egypt in the Central Pavilion. See Jan Andreas May, *La Biennale di Venezia: Kontinuität und Wandel in der venezianischen Ausstellungspolitik 1895–1948* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009); Chiara Di Stefano, “Beyond Ideologies: United States Exhibition Strategies at the Venice Biennale from 1948 to 1958”, *The Journal of Modern Art History Department Faculty of Philosophy University of Belgrade*, no. 12 (2016): 229–37.

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So, Pallucchini writes to the collector Germain Seligmann to persuade him to lend one of his Degas’s, February 18, 1948: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 3, folder 6.

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See an undated note by Pallucchini relating to the work to be carried out in the German Pavilion: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938–1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

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Annette Lagler, “The German Pavillon”, in Aus dem Moore and Zeller (eds.), *Germany’s Contributions to the Venice Biennale 1895–2007*, 55–61.

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The practice of “political expropriation” of national spaces in the Biennale was not new. In 1942, the French, American, and British pavilions had been taken over by the regime to host exhibitions of Fascist propaganda (Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraph 1).

tional language,²⁷ from 1932 on, when the mood was fully “back to order”, the interpretation moved toward a more identitarian direction. Accordingly, commissioner of the French Pavilion, Louis Hautecoeur, consolidated a celebratory and “classical” interpretation of Impressionism as the foundation of the modern tradition through four programmatic exhibitions devoted to the movement’s “founders”: Monet (1932), Manet (1934), the “Italian” Degas (1936), and Renoir (1938).²⁸ This is not surprising as, in 1933, the relevant entry in the Treccani Encyclopedia – the most authoritative and ambitious cultural enterprise born under Fascism – demonstrated: “Impressionism was and remained an essentially French movement”.²⁹ This statement, made by Palma Bucarelli, future director of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, shows the degree to which Lionello Venturi’s critical positions had penetrated the generation of young scholars destined for the cultural reconstruction of postwar Italy, despite the restrictions imposed by the regime and his exile.³⁰ Lionello Ventu-

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A synthesis in Moure Cecchini, “Imitators of the Imitators?”. On the critical perspective that leads Impressionism back to a fluid international dimension, typical of the early stages of its diffusion at the end of the 19th century, see also Alexis Clark and Frances Fowle (eds.), *Globalizing Impressionism: Reception, Translation, and Transnationalism* (New Haven NJ: Yale University Press, 2020); Emily C. Burns and Alice M. Rudy Price (eds.), *Mapping Impressionist Painting in Transnational Contexts* (New York and London: Routledge, 2021); *Workshopping Future Directions in Impressionism*, conference, September 5-6, 9, 2024 (London: Institute of Advanced Studies, University College). Peter Joch underlines the continuity in the Biennale’s interpretation of Impressionism as “a familiar symbol of international understanding”, in 1948 as well (Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 90); in a similar vein, see Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraph 2. My interpretation diverges in favour of a more careful reframing of French Impressionism in the context of the Biennales since the 1930s. On the *vexata quaestio* of the meager presence of the Impressionists at the early Biennales – a controversy begun, as we know, by Ardengo Soffici in *La Voce* in 1908 – see Maria Mimita Lamberti, “Vittorio Pica e l’impressionismo in Italia”. *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, III, V, no. 3, (1975): 1149-1201; Maria Mimita Lamberti, “Appunti sulle sezioni straniere alle prime Biennali”, *L’uomo nero*, I, no. 2 (2004): 257-63; Leo Lecci, “Monet alle prime Biennali di Venezia: Note sulla fortuna critica dell’artista in Italia”, in Silvia Albornò (ed.), *Claude Monet a Bordighera* (Milan: Leonardo, 1998), 116-19; Leo Lecci, “Occasioni mancate alla Biennale: Presenza e assenza di Monet, Degas e Renoir alle mostre di Venezia dal 1895 al 1901”, in Leo Lecci and Paola Valenti (eds.), *Studi di storia dell’arte in ricordo di Franco Sborgi* (Genova: De Ferrari, 2018), 299-327.

28

Hautecoeur’s declaration in the presentation of the Degas exhibition is also programmatic: “French art, like France itself, is at the same time bold in spirit, but respectful of the traditions of its works” (Louis Hautecoeur, “Padiglione della Francia” in *XX Esposizione biennale internazionale d’arte. Catalogo*, exh. cat. (Venice: Premiate Officine Grafiche Carlo Ferrari, 1936), 258; here quoted from Chiara Di Stefano, “L’allestimento museale nell’epoca della sua riproducibilità virtuale: il caso della mostra di Renoir alla Biennale veneziana del 1938”, in Francesca Castellani, Francesca Gallo, Vania Stuckelj, Francesca Zanella, Stefania Zuliani (eds.), *Esposizioni / Exhibitions*, International conference proceedings (Parma: CSAC, January 27–28, 2017), *Ricerche di s/confine*, Dossier 4 (2018): 375. On the Impressionist paintings exhibited at the Biennales of the 1930s, see the database <https://digitalimpressionismproject.omeka.net/>, last accessed August 2024. On the curatorial approach of the French pavilion under Hautecoeur and before, as an exercise of “soft power” and an affirmation of a cultural identity through the historiographical exhibition construction of a “Mediterranean tradition” and a “new classicism” of modernity, see Margot Degoutte, *La France à Venise. Entre modernités et traditions, participation et représentation françaises à la Biennale de Venise, 1895–1940*, (Diss.: École nationale des Chartes, 2014); Margot Degoutte, “Fare la storia delle esposizioni per fare un’altra storia dell’arte. Elementi di ricerca attraverso l’esempio della Francia alla Biennale di Venezia nella prima metà del XX secolo”, in Castellani, Gallo, Stuckelj, Zanella, Zuliani (eds.), *Esposizioni / Exhibitions*, 280-88; Margot Degoutte, *La France à la Biennale de Venise, 1895–1940. Etude historique et artistique* (PhD Diss.: Université Paris Nanterre, 2019), vols. 1-3. A paradoxically identitarian reading of Impressionism in a local and Venetian sense is offered by Pallucchini himself, who, in the French movement, sees an heir of touch painting and the Venetian “fa presto”, continuing the line of thought of his master Giuseppe Fiocco (Tomasella, *Rodolfo Pallucchini. Scritti sull’arte contemporanea*, 17).

29

See Moure Cecchini, “Imitators of the Imitators?”. The Treccani Encyclopedia’s entry was signed jointly by Giorgio Castelfranco and Palma Bucarelli, who in the introduction to the section “Impressionism outside of France”, felt the need to clarify the French identity of the movement. As Moure Cecchini has noted, since the 1910s, this identification of Impressionism “as a French” movement had been the occasion, over time, of repeated political misfortunes: on the eve of the First World War, for example, or in the last years of the Fascist regime, after 1937, as well as in the Stalinist USSR.

30

As well known, Venturi was forced first to flee to Paris, in 1932, after having refused the oath of allegiance to Fascism which was mandatory for teaching at the university, and later to the United States. On this not so well-known stain on the regime, see Giorgio Boatti, *Preferirei di no. Le storie dei dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 2017).

ri had promoted a modernist view of Impressionism since his teaching days at the University of Turin. His writings from his Parisian and American exile helped to reinforce a political and forward-looking interpretation of the artistic movement as a symbol of the battle for cultural freedom.³¹ This, in any case, is compatible with Pallucchini's vision for the 1948 Biennale, which promised to concentrate on "those great artists who have defended, in sad moments, the freedom of European Western civilisation".³²

To this "political" inclination toward Impressionism as an exercise in "soft power" – which also justifies its anachronism within a contemporary art show – we have to add another, dramatic piece of the historical mosaic that contributes to constructing its moral and psychological background: the systematic criminal looting of Impressionist works of art France suffered during the Nazi occupation. Albeit partially ignored and silenced, it is a searing theme that we will return to shortly.

It seems legitimate to hypothesise the exercise of a retribution of sorts in the pavilions' use of these works. The positions are reversed: the era's victims now occupy the invaders' spaces. Then again, topography is never neutral, especially at the Biennale, which, since 1914, has staged an irrefutable show of cultural power in the Giardini. The main visual axis, which culminates in what was then the Italian Pavilion, is intersected by another axis on the dominant, slightly elevated ground of the Motta, at the vertex of which the trinity of Great Britain, France, and Germany maps old hierarchies and new caesuras in history.³³ The French and German pavilions face one another. From a curatorial perspective, their proximity clearly guarantees a conceptual continuity with the palimpsest of the 1948 exhibition, underscoring the coherence of the "modern tradition" that considers Impressionism a direct precursor to French avant-gardes, from Matisse to Braque, an ideology that, as previously discussed, had been in the works in France for some time.³⁴ Yet in emphasising "the spiritual unity and the legacy of the Impressionists [in] contemporary French work", the words used in the Biennale catalogue³⁵ actually underscored, in contrast, the disaggregation of German identity, deprived of its space and its name.

31

Venturi's interest in Impressionism was consolidated during his exile in Paris, starting from the important essay published in *L'Arte* in 1935 (XXXVIII, II: 118–49) up to the historiographical setup of the *Archives de l'Impressionnisme* (Paris and New York: Durand-Ruel, 1939). See Laura Iamurri, "Lionello Venturi e la storia dell'Impressionismo, 1932–1939", *Studiolo*, Dossier 5 (2007): 74–90; Laura Iamurri, *Lionello Venturi e la modernità dell'impressionismo* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2011). Venturi's modernist positions would find new impetus during and after his stay in the USA, where he emigrated in 1939: see "The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism*, 1 (1941): 34–35; "L'impressionismo e le origini dell'arte astratta moderna", *Quaderni di San Giorgio*, 2 (1956): 77–80.

32

Pallucchini, "Introduzione alla XXIV Biennale", XV. A partially different reading can be found in Joch, "Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962", 90.

33

Although the article refers to another context, interesting insights into a possible "political-cultural topography" can be found in Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47, no. 1 (2012): 13–47; Devos, Ortenberg and Paperny (eds.), *Architecture of Great Expositions 1937–1959*.

34

On the role of Impressionism in constructing a new French "modern classicism", see also Giuliana Tomasella, "'Classicità' dell'Impressionismo nel dibattito critico novecentesco", in Jacopo Bonetto, Maria Stella Busana, Andrea Raffaele Ghiotto (eds.), *I mille volti del passato. Scritti in onore di Francesca Ghedini* (Rome: Quasar, 2016), 341–47.

35

Ponti to Longhi, February 17, 1948. Quoted in Bandera, *Il carteggio Longhi–Pallucchini*, 70.

“Bavarians” or “Germans”?

Sotto voce the archives recount other plots in the interwoven story of the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* and the *Artisti Tedeschi*. At its inception, the latter was only supposed to showcase a selection of “living artists from Munich”³⁶: almost a return to the origins, given that the first German pavilion at the Biennale was the Bavarian Pavilion inaugurated in 1909.³⁷ In 1948, however, Munich had taken on an identity that oscillated between its progressive past (the city of the Secession and Der Blaue Reiter) and the recent but unwieldy shadows of the *Degenerate Art Exhibition* and the worst cultural manifestations of the Nazi regime. It is therefore not without a certain embarrassment that Pallucchini made an eleventh-hour appeal to Colonel Gallina, the Italian representative of the occupying forces, to increase the number of loaned works according to the first idea:

This Presidency would also like the Biennale to be able to show artists from Frankfurt and other German localities, whose works could be grouped together in another room. I thus appeal to your kindness so that you might spark the interest of competent circles.³⁸

The “exhibition of Bavarian artists” (as it is referred to in the majority of documents) did not become the exhibition of *Artisti Tedeschi* until just before the Biennale opened.³⁹ The reason for this initial, surprising, cultural orientation is soon explained and reveals a degree of opportunism. Scrutinising the papers conserved at the ASAC, it appears that the interest in Munich and in the initial idea for a show of contemporary Bavarian painting was to some extent instrumental in organising the retrospective on Impressionism, which Pallucchini clearly had at heart. The Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen (Bavarian State Painting Collections) in Munich owned several important pieces of art including Manet’s *Luncheon in the Studio* (1868) and *Claude Monet Painting in his Studio-Boat* (1874), which is why Pallucchini had initially contacted Eberhard Hanfstaengl, the director of the Munich Museum, who later became the curator of the exhibition of the *Artisti Tedeschi* at the Biennale.⁴⁰ A letter dated November 20, 1947, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, to request their support in obtaining loans clarifies this situation.

36

Eberhard Hanfstaengl to Pallucchini, November 14, 1947 (ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box. 13: “Germania, 1938–1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers).

37

See Christoph Becker, “The Venice Biennale and Germany’s Contributions from 1895 to 1942”, in Aus dem Moore and Zeller (eds.), *Germany’s Contributions to the Venice Biennale 1895-2007*, 70.

38

March 6, 1948: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers. In the end, as evidenced in the list of artists in the catalogue, the shortlist was lengthened notably to include twenty-eight artists from both the north and the south, among whom were important exponents of expressionism, such as Otto Dix, Erich Heckel, and Max Pechstein: *XXIV Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo*, 189-93; Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 35-50. In this context, one should recall the *First General German Art Exhibition* in Dresden in 1946.

39

April 29, 1949. In a letter to the General Secretariat of the Deutscher Künstlerbund, the German artist’s association of Munich, Pallucchini speaks of “a show of contemporary German painting, through the works of those artists that represent the most significant trends of the democratic Germany” (ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers) and seems to delegate their selection entirely to the Association.

40

October 22, 1947: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers). A designation that is in some respects surprising given that Hanfstaengl had been commissioner of the German Pavilion in 1934 and 1936, at the beginning of the Nazi era: a position that was nonetheless confirmed until 1958. On Eberhard Hanfstaengl, see Eberhard Ruhmer (ed.), *Eberhard Hanfstaengl zum 25. Geburtstag* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1961); Becker, “The Venice Biennale and Germany’s Contributions from 1895 to 1942”, 80-83; Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 90-101; Jan Andreas May, “Eberhard Hanfstaengl als deutscher Kommissar auf der Biennale von Venedig 1934 und 1936”, in May and Meine (eds.), *Der deutsche Pavillon*, 85-100.

We mentioned the desire for a representation of Bavarian artists to be present at the next Biennale with some of the most significant recent work. In this regard, we would like to point out to this Hon. Ministry how, in addition to being desired, this participation also appears in some way opportune; if Bavaria contributes to the construction of our Exhibition of French Impressionism with works of great interest; we would reserve a room for the Bavarian artists for such a participation.⁴¹

In concrete terms, five impressionist paintings – including Cézanne’s famous *Self-Portrait*⁴² – in exchange for twenty-five contemporary painters.⁴³ It was a *do ut des* that might seem brutal but is actually standard backstage practice in the international exhibition circuit.⁴⁴

Naturally, these pragmatic aspects appear only sporadically in the official correspondence, which underlines the moral significance of the German (or ex-Bavarian) presence in the first postwar Biennale, an exhibition of “moral reparation”⁴⁵ showing artists who were purged by the Nazis.⁴⁶ These backstage tones are politically interesting and reveal a certain affinity between two countries that are having a hard time juggling between inevitable references to an uncomfortable and somehow shared past. A missive from Pallucchini to Hanfstaengl stated that:

The French Impressionists at the Munich Gallery represent one of the gestures most worthy of being remembered of the freedom of your nineteenth-century artistic cultures. Just as we are only now able to organise an exhibition of French Impressionism, which fascistic [sic] nationalism would not have allowed. In addition to being a grand gesture of solidarity between our two free peoples, bringing the Munich Gallery’s French Impressionists to Venice means reclaiming one of the merits of your artistic culture.⁴⁷

The evident desire to highlight a moment in German history that was particularly open to cultural and international dialogue, namely the early collecting of Impressionist painters in the late 19th century, strongly, albeit with a certain dose of artifice, underscores the distance between the “two free peoples” and the dictatorships they seem to have endured rather than supported. Pallucchini uses the word “people”

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ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

42

Pallucchini to the Consul General Pietro Orlandini, April 28, 1948: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

43

Pallucchini’s loan requests were much more ambitious, but the dates of the Venetian exhibition conflicted with shows in Brussels and Amsterdam, to which the Bavarian Museum had already promised certain works.

44

For the *Mostra degli Impressionisti*, for example, the French wanted to host an exhibition of the Italian primitives in return. See the letter from the Italian Embassy in Paris dated November 20, 1947 and signed by Pietro Quaroni: “Here, however, we would like, in return (which I have the impression will be set forth as a *sine qua non*), an exhibition of at least thirty masterpieces of the Italian primitives to be organised in Paris, as well, in the coming year”. (ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 1, “1948. Mostre storiche. Gli impressionisti francesi”, folder 3, loose papers). The 1948 Biennale marks a more relaxed climate in relations between France and Italy than, for example, the first postwar Film Festival in 1946: Gian Piero Brunetta, *La Mostra Internazionale d’Arte Cinematografica di Venezia 1932–2022* (Venice: Marsilio Editori and Biennale di Venezia, 2022).

45

Pallucchini uses these terms for the Oskar Kokoska exhibition in the 1948 Biennale, in a case of Nazi purge. He does so in his farewell speech from the 1956 Biennale. Bandera, “Pallucchini protagonista della Biennale”, 77.

46

Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 91.

47

A minute undated letter, thought to have been composed at the beginning of November 1947 (ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers). Pallucchini is evidently thinking of the German markets’ and collectors’ precocious openness towards Impressionism.

in the place of “nation”, while Hanfstaengl, who at the time had no nation behind him, tries to walk the shaky tightrope of the Venice–Munich axis: “You suggest a very vital link between our two Countries and especially between our two Cities”.⁴⁸ The two men were operating in a minefield on which Hanfstaengl’s position, in and of itself compromising, necessitated a certain caution. We know that the German scholar had been the commissioner of the German pavilion in 1934 and 1936 at the beginning of the Nazi era: a period for which there was both interest and a need to forget.⁴⁹ Yet despite this awkward past, Hanfstaengl remained the commissioner of the German Pavilion until the 1958 Biennale, contributing greatly to the cultural identity of the new Federal Republic of Germany as a legitimate heir of the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, on a par with other European nations. The “cathartic” expressions used by the curator in the 1948 catalogue move further in this direction: “May this exhibition show that German artists and their significant personalities can also make a contribution to the ongoing reconstruction of the cultural world of old Europe”.⁵⁰

The 1950 “Return Home”

In 1950, there were still conflicts over the use of the German Pavilion. The Italian scholar Pallucchini wanted to repeat the *atout* of 1948 and use the space for an exhibition managed directly by the Biennale. In contrast, its German curator was determined to reclaim control of the pavilion as a space for national representation. Pallucchini, meanwhile, had initially planned to use one room of the pavilion for a Kandinsky retrospective, which he had already agreed upon with the painter’s wife.⁵¹ In Pallucchini’s eyes, this evidently extraterritorial presence was justified by its continuity with *Der Blaue Reiter* exhibition, which, along with the shows of Ernst Barlach, Karl Hofer, Emil Nolde, and Max Beckmann, was the spearhead of the German participation in the 25th International Art Exhibition.⁵² All these exhibitions had been chosen by the Secretary General of the Biennale, as he was the one who had suggested the names to Hanfstaengl even before the latter’s official appointment as head of the pavilion.⁵³ In October 1949, Pallucchini goes as far as to suggest a

48

November 14, 1947: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers. The letter was written in German. Here quoted from the Italian translation of the original text, which was done for Pallucchini and is conserved in the archives.

49

Despite the propaganda dictate of the Nazi regime, studies recognise Hanfstaengl as partially independent from the cultural orientation of Alfred Rosenberg, the notorious ideologist of Nazism, with moderate openings to modernism. See, for example, the presence (albeit exploited) of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Ernst Barlach at the 1934 Biennale. Not surprisingly, in 1937, Hanfstaengl was replaced with Adolf Ziegler, who was very loyal to the Nazi creed. Becker, “The Venice Biennale and Germany’s Contributions from 1895 to 1942”, 80-84.

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Eberhard Hanfstaengl, “Artisti tedeschi”, in *XXIV Biennale di Venezia*, 189. The text is cited directly from Peter Joch’s translation. The scholar underscores Hanfstaengl’s need to claim an alternative German tradition to Nazi art: hence his policy of “cathartic retrospectives” on eminent figures of “Modernism” as a construction of the new Federal Republic of Germany. See Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 89 and 91.

51

Pallucchini mentions Kandinsky in his first informal contact with Hanfstaengl in September.

52

Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 35-50.

53

Pallucchini writes to the German scholar “outside of and before the official roles”: September 24, 1949: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers. The letter clearly underscores Pallucchini’s hand in the choices for the German Pavilion at the 25th Biennale. The new Federal Republic of Germany was actually formed that September of 1949 and had not as yet established a stable central governing structure. The complexity of this situation is reflected – as in 1948 – in the difficulty of identifying suitable institutional interlocutors between Bonn and the Italian delegation in Frankfurt. This is how the situation is described by Edouard Trier, editor in chief of *Il Cicerone* review in Cologne, whom Pallucchini had asked for support: “The difficult principle on the German side lies in the fact that Western Germany does not have a Federal Ministry of Cult [sic], but just professional ministers in the single Regions of the Federation”. January 31, 1950: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

room-by-room layout of the German Pavilion, essentially taking over the curator's role.⁵⁴ Masked as simple "recommendations", the letter expresses a real programme yet, above all, throws a retrospective light on the 1948 exhibition layouts:

First of all I must absolutely reassure you that the German Pavilion is now completely available to your artists. For the past Biennale, inasmuch as it was a sequestered asset and given that the German participation was restricted to a limited number of works whose placement did not require more than one room; considering also that the building was in need of costly restructuring after its lengthy disuse, and, especially, the consequences of war, the idea of mounting the exhibition of French Impressionism in that building was an excellent pretext to be able to make the necessary repairs under the auspices of this institution and therein to bring the pavilion back to a perfect state of efficiency. But now, with cultural exchanges getting better and better and glad that the new Germany, with its best artists, can return to the beautiful venue created in the exhibition grounds, the pavilion – as I confirm – is at your complete disposal. [...] This Kandinsky exhibition has already been planned by the Biennale's Figurative Arts Commission, which would take care of the entire organization, thus all of the expenses would be borne by our Institution; You only need to grant use of the room to host it, accepting the exhibition in your pavilion.⁵⁵

Hanfstaengl's response is polite but firm:

I understand [...] that You intend to mount the Kandinsky exhibition in the German pavilion. Will You allow me, Professor, to express my opinion, that Kandinsky – in his overall production – cannot be well accommodated under the German flag? I think it would be better that Kandinsky, like Picasso in the 1948 Biennale, be hosted in the Italian Pavilion.⁵⁶

"Under the German flag" is not exactly a simple statement. Displaying the flag at the entrance of the pavilion was simply unthinkable in 1948 but had become possible and indeed significant in 1950, after the country's division into the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic.⁵⁷ The official tones, moreover,

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After proposing the distribution of the individual exhibitions in the pavilion, complete with an attached plan, Pallucchini tones down his curatorial meddling. "Of course, this letter of mine, in its details, is nothing but a recommendation, which I take the liberty of making to You, after having also studied the pavilion's plan a little, and which You, with your great competence, will evaluate for arrive at the best final form. But in this way, in my opinion, the pavilion would be very varied and of great interest". Letter to Hanfstaengl, October 20, 1949, ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: "Germania, 1938–1952", folder "Artisti tedeschi", loose papers. At this point, it would be worthwhile looking once again at the analysis of the Pavilion's display as a curatorial choice entirely managed by Hanfstaengl. Joch, "Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962", 93 and 95.

55

October 20, 1949: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: "Germania, 1938–1952", folder "Artisti tedeschi", loose papers.

56

February 22, 1950. ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: "Germania, 1938–1952", folder "Artisti tedeschi", loose papers. Quoted from the Italian translation of the German original conserved in the archives. This letter seems to overturn Peter Joch's hypothesis ("Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962", 93) that Hanfstaengl had intended to exhibit a retrospective of Kandinsky's entire production in the German Pavilion and not just that of the Munich period. A solution that, we know, met with fierce opposition from the painter's widow Nina – who reiterated to Giovanni Ponti that Kandinsky was "in no way German" – and seems ascribable to Pallucchini alone. There was a precedent for the presence of Kandinsky's exhibition in the German pavilion: the 1930 Biennale. Nazism, however, was the inevitable watershed.

57

The question of the flag recurs in the correspondence between the two scholars. Letters of April 18 and April 23, 1950: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: "Germania, 1938–1952", folder "Artisti tedeschi", loose papers. One of the poster sketches for the 25th Biennale, Paola Levi Montalcini's *Tavolozza internazionale*, shows a mosaic of flags, including that of Germany. Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, fig. 16.

had changed radically alongside the international framework. While the German participation of 1948 is now defined as “a friendly gesture”⁵⁸ and “of unofficial nature”,⁵⁹ West Germany is invited to the 25th Biennale as a nation. Once again, the Venetian showcase proves to be an optimal political proscenium.

This would be the occasion with which German artistic culture could fully re-present itself in the international realm. And let me tell you how pleased we are to offer you this opportunity. If, since 1948, we have sincerely wished that German artists were present in Venice, albeit within the modest limits the moment of grave uneasiness allowed, you can well imagine how we look with sincere gratification toward the possibility the 25th Biennale offers the new Germany to present itself in Venice in a manner appropriate to the most genuine tradition of its art, which Nazism had tried to stifle.⁶⁰

The expression “most genuine tradition” is revealing and is certainly not used by chance.⁶¹ The times required a rewriting of the past. Nazism, like Fascism, becomes a painful but brief parenthesis in history, which did not penetrate the essence of the two peoples. This is the historical need expressed in 1950, one that is strikingly anticipated in Pallucchini’s words in the correspondence from three years earlier.⁶² A precise reflection of this change is legible, once again, in the topographical layout of the Giardini and in the Biennale’s communication (the “new” Germany reappears on the official map, with its name). The catalogue reads:

After eight years, Germany has once again taken possession of its pavilion with a group of first-rate exhibitions, as well as a show of contemporary abstract artists. It is a highly appreciated and significant return, due above all to the fact that it re-proposes those masters that Nazi academic fury had tried to ban under the guise of degenerate art, even burning the works.⁶³

It was, as in 1948, another exhibition of “moral reparation” aimed at building the cultural profile of the young nation through recourse to its “modernist tradition” rather than the flagrancy of the present. With a singular symmetry, Expressionism comes to take on the strongly identitarian role claimed by Impressionism for France in the 1930s.⁶⁴ Not by chance, the exhibition finds its way back home, underscor-

58

Eberhard Hanfstaengl, “Germania”, in *XXV Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo* (June 8-October 15, 1950), exh. cat., 2nd ed. (Venice: Alfieri 1950), 308.

59

“This year, we forwarded the official invitation to the government of West Germany through our diplomatic representative in Frankfurt. We sincerely hope that Germany will officially participate in the next Biennale”. Pallucchini to Trier, December 1949: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

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Pallucchini to Hanfstaengl. October 20, 1949: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938-1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

61

In “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 89ff Joch speaks of “rehabilitating recourse of tradition” and of “classical Modernism” to comment on the entire course of German cultural policy after World War II, devoted to redesigning its artistic history of avant-garde movements, such as Expressionism and Surrealism, as the real “founding myth” of the new Federal Republic of Germany. In contrast, the scholar points out how this anachronistic and to some extent “museological” approach paradoxically ends up reducing attention to the artistic movements of the present, which was the Biennale’s original vocation.

62

According to Martini and Cagol, Pallucchini gives the Biennale a real “Museological Turn” with the intensification of the retrospectives: in this sense, the affinity with Hanfstaengl’s politics as curator of the German Pavilion is not surprising (Collicelli Cagol and Martini, “The Venice Biennale in its Turning Points”, 84-90).

63

Pallucchini, “Introduzione alla XXIV Biennale”, XIX.

64

On the foundational presence of Expressionism at the Venice Biennales of the 1950s – after Der Blaue Reiter, in turn, in 1952, Die Brücke – see again, Joch, “Die Ära der Retrospektiven 1948 bis 1962”, 92-97.

ing, this time, the distance between the old Germany and the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany. The Kandinsky exhibition would be mounted in Brenno Del Giudice's building, between Mexico and the Venice Pavilion.⁶⁵

The “underground” Holocaust, the Works of Art

In this climate of unyielding condemnation of Nazi horror, which the 1948 and 1950 exhibitions share, one is struck by the official, apparent silence on the darkest page: the looting of works of art owned by Jewish families and deported, like the people, in sealed boxcars, to satisfy the appetites of an international market more than willing to turn a blind eye.⁶⁶ It is widely known that a substantial part of Impressionist production was part of the enlightened patronage of the great French and German Jewish collectors: they are the real symbol “of the freedom of artistic cultures” to which Pallucchini alludes in his letter to Hanfstaengl of November 1947.⁶⁷ An ideal and material heritage plundered cruelly and methodically and with the complicity of many people apparently above suspicion.⁶⁸

The dispersion of the collections originally owned by Jewish gallery owners and collectors, and sadly still at the centre of controversial battles with museum institutions,⁶⁹ seeps continuously out of the documents on the *Mostra degli Impressionisti*. This dramatic plot – perhaps too recent and too hot to surface in 1948? – is a substantial piece of its organisational fabric.⁷⁰ As I recounted in 2019, the infamy of this page of history transpires in the micro-stories woven into the preparation of the Venice exhibition: from the rejections of loan requests (many of the elite Jewish collectors, often refugees as a result of Nazi persecution, understandably

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Pallucchini to Hanfstaengl: “After what he has told me, let's leave the Kandinsky exhibition in the Italian Pavilion or in another pavilion that may remain available”. Typescript undated after February 1950: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 13: “Germania, 1938–1952”, folder “Artisti tedeschi”, loose papers.

66

See Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”, 289-92. The looting of the art collections in Nazi occupied countries – seizures, roundups, and forced sales at usury rates – was carried out by the ERR - Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce, a notorious Nazi organization led by Alfred Rosenberg. See Rose Valland, *Le Front de l'art: défense des collections françaises, 1939-1945* (Paris: Pion, 1961); augmented edition Thierry Bajou, Catherine Granger, Isabelle Le Masne de Chermont, Anne Liskenne, Emmanuelle Polack, Alain Prévot, Didier Schulmann (eds.) (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux – Grand Palais, 2014); Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa. The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Knopf, 1994). The looted works were grouped together in the so-called “Martyr's Room” at the Jeu de Paume in Paris. The institution has made a database available: <http://www.errproject.org/jeudepaume/>, last accessed July 2024. Another important source on the works looted during Nazism is the *Lost Art Database* created by the German Lost Art Foundation: https://www.lostart.de/Webs/EN/Datenbank/KunstfundMuenchenBestand.html?cms_param=SAMML_ID%3D1312, last accessed July 2024. See also the exhibition *Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art*, curated by Darsie Susan Alexander and Rose Elihu, New York, Jewish Museum of New York, August 20, 2021–January 9, 2022. On the subject of the forced acquisition and deportation of artworks from Jewish family collections in France, Gitta Ho just delivered a presentation. “At the Center of Interest: Competing Access to Jewish Collections and their Transport from Occupied France to Germany, 1940–1944”, conference *Infrastructures of Trading/Transferring Art since 1900* (Budapest, KEMKI – Central European Research Institute for Art History, 27 June 2024).

67

Cf. footnote no. 42.

68

The *Red Flag Names List*, or rather the blacklist of merchants, collectors, and art agents compromised by Nazi looting, compiled by the United States Art Looting Intelligence Unit (ALIU) between 1945 and 1946, was made public in 1999. The documents are available online in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) platform, www.lotart.com. In the sixteen registers, packed with data divided by nationality, one finds the names of illustrious art historians, dealers, collectors, bankers.

69

Among the most high-profile cases, made famous by a film, is Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, which the Belvedere Museum in Vienna finally returned after fifty years and the involvement of the United States Supreme Court.

70

It should be remembered that, at that time, it was very difficult to identify the colluders.

decline such requests from the Biennale)⁷¹ to the numerous attempts by owners, all of which failed, to obtain the restitution of the plundered assets using the exhibition as a channel to get them out of the occupied territories. Not surprisingly, one of the allied authorities' major concerns in loaning works off German soil is the guarantee against their seizure.⁷²

Among the many cases that have emerged from the archival documents,⁷³ arguably the most sensational concerns the *marchand-amateur* Paul Rosenberg, who sought refuge in New York after the occupation of Paris. The well-known gallery owner repeatedly offered to loan the Biennale works from his collection, which had been requisitioned by the Nazis in 1940 and then sold in Switzerland: an impressive series of masterpieces that included, among others, works by Degas, Monet, Renoir, Cézanne, and other Impressionist masters, to mention only the names that interested Pallucchini at that time.⁷⁴ The operation clearly sought to force the paintings off Swiss Federal territory, so that the property might be reclaimed in a more neutral court. "Rosenberg is ready to offer part of his collection taken by the Nazis to Switzerland and still now under dispute [...] If he can have this material, which he says is important, in the summer, you will be able to choose".⁷⁵ This "important material" probably also included Degas' *Madame Camus at the Piano* (1869), one of the pivotal works in Emil Bührle's collection, which was put together primarily from the remains of collections seized from the Jews, together, perhaps, with works by Renoir and other impressionists belonging to Hildebrand Gurlitt, a dealer who colluded with the Nazis.⁷⁶ To obtain the loan, Pallucchini tried to contact the Swiss judicial authorities directly, writing to Plinio Bolla, a judge on the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland, who, on February 5 1948 reported that:

The Federal Supreme Court would not see any difficulty in allowing one or another of the sequestered paintings to leave Bern for the Venice exhibition, provided that the claimant Mr. Rosenberg and the defendant from whom the canvas is claimed have agreed [...] In the meantime, the lawsuit is pending, with the exception of the works

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See Castellani, "Il 'Quarantotto' degli impressionisti in Biennale", 290-291.

72

Letter from Pallucchini to Orlandini April 28, 1948. See footnote no. 42.

73

This is what happened with a canvas by Manet and four drawings by Daumier that had been part of the collections of the painter Max Liebermann and his son-in-law Kurt Riezler, who sought refuge in the United States in 1938. The works had remained blocked in the American occupied area of Germany, and the heir's offer to loan them for the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* evidently envisaged using the Biennale as a safe conduit to get them off European soil and to the United States, where they would eventually arrive without passing through Venice. ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 2, folder 6.

74

In March 1941, the most important pieces of the Rosenberg collection – together with those from the Seligmann, Wildenstein, Rothschild, and other collections plundered by the ERR in Paris in 1940 – were loaded onto a special train headed in the direction of Neuschwanstein. Earmarked for the Führermuseum in Linz, they remained hidden in Ludwig's castle until the Monuments Men arrived. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*; <http://www.errproject.org/jeudepaume/>, ad nomen Rosenberg, last accessed September 2024. Complete list of raped pieces in Cultural Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, Database of Art Objects at the Jeu de Paume, <http://www.errproject.org/jeudepaume/>, ad nomen Rosenberg Paris, last accessed August 2024.

75

Tietze to Pallucchini, November 9, 1947. ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 2, folder 1.

76

Although some scholars had long raised concerns about the dubious provenance of some Bührle's works, the scandal erupted only with the reinstallation of the collection in the new wing of the Kunsthaus Zurich on October 9, 2021. Jakob Tanner, "Zurich's Bührle Scandal in Context", *Passés Futurs*, no. 14 (2023), <https://www.politika.io/fr/article/zurichs-buhrle-scandal-in-context>, last accessed September 2024. On the case of Gurlitt, whose illicit trafficking with the Nazi emerged only after the collection's donation to the Museen Bern in 2014, see: https://www.swissinfo.ch/ita/elenco-di-opere-d-arte_le-verit%C3%A0-nascoste-della-collezione-gurlitt/, last accessed December 2022.

by Matisse, whose return to Rosenberg is no longer contested. But I suppose this painter does not interest you, in the context of implementing this exhibition, I mean...⁷⁷

In the end, not even this loan went through; indeed, the ordeal of the Rosenberg collection is still not over.⁷⁸

The Swiss market turned out to be the privileged channel for criminal Nazi trading. This fact emerged unequivocally after the declassification, in 1999, of the lists compiled by the ALIU⁷⁹ – the United States intelligence agency that, between 1943 and 1946, investigated the looting and illegal trafficking of works of art carried out by the Nazis – and the publication of *Red Flags Names List* of art lovers, experts, and art historians (which would perhaps be better labeled “black”). Many of these names, even illustrious and surprising ones, were involved in the organisation of the *Mostra degli Impressionisti*, and we now know colluded with the Nazis.⁸⁰ A passage in the exhibition circuit through the authoritative and prestigious platform of the Biennale can in fact prove useful not only for those claiming lost ownership, but also for “cleaning up” a suspicious provenance: this is perhaps the case with Degas’s superb pastel *Singer with a Glove* (1878), the iconic image of the Biennale’s exhibition.⁸¹ The web of loans to the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* is unfortunately woven with bitter threads.

The Soviet Pavilion closed

This chain of loans leads us back to the Giardini’s topography. Not far from the German Pavilion, another pavilion, that of the USSR, also remained empty in 1948, despite the repeated appeals of the Presidency of the Biennale.

In assembling the *Mostra degli Impressionisti* Pallucchini had courted the Soviet government at length, but to no avail, to obtain the loan of certain fundamental works from the Shchukin and Morosov collections, including Cézanne’s *Mardi Gras* (1888), Gauguin’s *Te tiare farani* (1891), and Renoir’s large portrait of *Jeanne Samary Standing* (1878), which were then preserved in the State Museum of New Western Art of Moscow. In the words of Lionello Venturi, who had seen these works at the Impressionism retrospective at the Exposition Internationale de Paris

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ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 3, “1948: Gli Impressionisti francesi”, folder 7, “Svizzera”, loose papers). Pallucchini’s relationship with Bolla is cordial and probably predates the Rosenberg case. In December 1945, the Swiss Confederation had issued a decree on looted assets and established a dedicated *Raubgutkammer* (Looted Assets Tribunal) to evaluate restitution claims. See Tanner, “Zurich’s Bührle Scandal in Context”.

78

See Anne Sinclair, *21, Rue La Boétie* (Milan-Geneva: Skira, 2012). The legal battles are led by collector’s grand-daughter, Marianne Rosenberg.

79

The Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland, Second World War (ICE) was set up between 1996 and 2002 to investigate the assets that had arrived in Switzerland during and after the conflict. The results of the research are presented in a series of publications culminating in the *Final Report of 2002*: <https://www.uek.ch/it/index.htm>, last accessed July 2024.

80

From famous merchant-art lovers, such as César Mange De Hauke and André Schoeller, to collectors such as Baron Eduard von der Heydt and even Lionello Venturi’s son-in-law, Albert Skira. Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”, 291-92.

81

The work had been purchased in 1947 by Fritz Heer, a pneumatologist from Zurich. In this case, the buyer was perhaps an unsuspecting guarantor for a providential transit of property: right after the Biennale the pastel work would be sold to the American collector Maurice Wertheim, who, in 1951, left it to Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. The work had belonged to the French collector Camille Groult until 1908 and did not appear to be implicated in Holocaust crimes, but the heirs nevertheless negotiated a rushed sale with De Hauke. Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”, 291.

in 1937, where they had caused quite a stir: “Everyone agrees that if the Russian government lends, the whole world will come to Venice”.⁸²

No stone was left unturned in trying to secure the paintings. Alongside the official diplomatic channels, the Ambassador to Rome Michail Kostylev helped test the waters of professional relationships, consulting, somewhat surprisingly, with the famous medievalist Viktor Lazarev, member of the Soviet Committee for the Arts. Even family relationships were called into play. The archives conserve considerable correspondence from Pallucchini to Lionello Venturi’s son, Franco, who was employed at the Italian Embassy in Moscow.⁸³ “Evidently”, Pallucchini wrote to the Communist painter Antonello Trombadori, “official diplomacy has to be helped with steps of a political and confidential nature”.⁸⁴ Despite the delicate internal political situation – Italy was in the midst of the Constituent Assembly – and affiliation with a moderate faction (Giovanni Ponti was one of the founding fathers of the Christian Democratic Party), the Biennale did not hesitate to knock on the door of the Italian Communist Party and its secretary Palmiro Togliatti.⁸⁵

The exchange of letters also allows us to measure a dramatic difference between intellectual positions. In their early contacts with Soviet institutions, Pallucchini and Ponti try to leverage the image of Impressionism as a symbol of a shared cultural, spiritual, and democratic *koiné*, from the perspective of a reconciliation between the Western European countries, which had until then been the most fruitful diplomatic weapon to obtain loans.⁸⁶ Demonstrating a total lack of awareness of the Stalinist attitude toward the international community, Pallucchini comes to think that

a great Impressionist exhibition [...] would be very appealing to the Moscow government, as it stands as testimony to the visitors who converge here from all over the world of how much interest the USSR has in artistic culture and how important heritage is in the field of art.⁸⁷

A better understanding of the sovereignty that characterised the Soviet cultural climate (and thanks to Franco Venturi too) soon suggested pragmatically exploiting its exact opposite: the *damnatio* of Impressionism, which, at that time in the USSR, was considered a symbol of a “formalist” and “bourgeois” cosmopolitanism completely alien to the identity of the Russian people. The most violent exponent of this view was Aleksandr Gerasimov, the powerful president of the newly resurrected Academy

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Venturi to Pallucchini, November 15, 1947: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Box 1, folder 2. These documents were first published in Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”. Some of these documents are also referred to and discussed by Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia* chap. III, paragraph 2. For the relationships between the Italian Communist intellectuals and the USSR, see also Nicoletta Misler, *La via italiana al realismo. La politica culturale del PCI dal 1944 al 1956* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1973); *Guardando all'URSS. Realismo socialista in Italia dal mito al mercato* (May 30–October 4, 2015), exh. cat. (Milan: Skira, 2015).

83

See Antonello Venturi (ed.), *Franco Venturi e la Russia: con documenti inediti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2006). See also Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraph 2.

84

Quoted in Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”, 287. Trombadori is destined to play an important role as a critical interlocutor in the cultural reorientation affording renewed Soviet participation in the Biennale, starting from 1959: Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraph 4.

85

Togliatti makes it known that he “has brought particular attention to” the loan request and that “in the case that it does not succeed [...] he himself will intervene by other means”. Quoted in Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”, 287.

86

“I would like to point out the Exhibition’s great importance and usefulness for the benefit of culture and as an affirmation of solidarity in the realm of spirit”. Letter to Russian Ambassade, October 28, 1947. Quoted in Castellani, “Il ‘Quarantotto’ degli impressionisti in Biennale”, 287.

87

Letter to Franco Venturi, November 24, 1947: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 1, “1948. Mostre storiche. Gli impressionisti francesi”, folder 7, “Russia. Museo di Mosca”, loose papers.

of Fine Arts.⁸⁸ Condemnation would have meant the public obliteration of the paintings, then relegated to depositories, until the State Museum of the New Western Art closed in 1948.⁸⁹ Franco Venturi showed foresight in evoking his emotional encounters with Impressionist paintings sadly sealed away in warehouses:

One of the most influential people in the field of art in the Soviet Union today, Gerasimov, does not hide his strong disapproval of the French Impressionists from anyone. But it is hoped that the museum will reopen soon and, in any case, the fact that the paintings are not currently on display may favour the request from the Venice Biennale.⁹⁰

Despite the insistence of the official and unofficial letters from Venice on the ease and advantage of moving works that were already packed in crates, and despite numerous efforts and some typically generic assurances in response, the paintings in the Russian museum never arrived in Venice.

In this patient yet unproductive skirmish, the “arm” of Soviet national participation is extensively but uselessly invoked. Here as well, the correspondence conserved at the ASAC and in the Pallucchini archives in Udine bears witness to a story of many overtures, opaque responses, and long silences, a reflection of Stalin’s isolationist policy that is not without unsettling parallels today.⁹¹ A 1952 note from Pallucchini to Mario Novello, executive director of the Biennale Secretariat, well describes the uncomfortable atmosphere and the stakes:

The question of Russia is very important [...] In any case, the arrival of the Russians must not be lost. And so negotiate, taking time and playing: talk about it with Piccini, Bazzoni, and Zorzi. Without other ears!⁹²

“Negotiate, taking time, and playing”: the Biennale now seems determined to use the same language as its interlocutors. In January 1948, in an effort to secure Soviet participation, Pallucchini even offered to pay for the Pavilion’s restoration, some-

88

Impressionist works were judged “anti-popular and formalist, of Western European bourgeois art, devoid of any progressive and educational message for the Soviet public”. Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraph 2.

89

In 1948 the State Museum of the New Western Art was closed, as a symbol of a “servility” to Western culture, and its collections divided between the Hermitage and Pushkin Museum. Maria Mileeva, *Utopia in Retreat: The Closure of the State Museum of the New Western Art in 1948*, in Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori, and Maria Mileeva (eds.), *Utopian Reality* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 203-18.

90

Franco Venturi to Pallucchini, letter from the Italian Embassy, Moscow, December 10, 1947: ASAC, Fondo Storico, Arti Visive, box 1, “1948. Mostre storiche. Gli impressionisti francesi”, folder 7, “Russia. Museo di Mosca”, loose papers.

91

For an effective analysis of Soviet cultural chauvinism in the context of the Biennales, see Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraphs 2 and 3. See also Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art under Stalin* (London: Phaidon Press, 1991).

92

ASAC, Fondo Storico, Scatole Nere, Paesi, box 31, “U.R.S.S. 1947-1962. Uruguay 1951-1964”, folder “XXVI Biennale. U.R.S.S.1952”, loose papers. Pallucchini refers to Count Elio Zorzi, who was head of the Biennale press office for a long time and the first director of the postwar Film Festival, to Giovanni Piccini, chief administrator of the Biennale, and to Romolo Bazzoni, former chief administrator of the Biennale and author of *60 anni della Biennale di Venezia* (Venice: Lombroso, 1962).

thing practically unheard of given that the responsibility for maintaining the building, suspended in limbo between the Biennale and the Soviet government for years, was the subject of a long nerve-wracking game of cultural politics.⁹³ But the Pavilion remained empty. In reality, the USSR had not exhibited at the Biennale since 1934 and would not return until 1956, with the political turn undertaken by Khrushchev. As Matteo Bertelé has written, the entire course of the Soviet pavilion at the Biennale expresses a shrewd strategy of absences and presences on the Western exhibition scene.⁹⁴

93

The Soviet government had claimed ownership of the pavilion in 1928, yet despite repeated requests, the USSR had never taken over the building's maintenance. The tension continued until 1955. The entire correspondence is in ASAC, partially referred by Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*, chap. III, paragraph 1. See also Marylène Malbert, "Le retour de l'URSS à la Biennale de Venise en 1956", *Histoire de l'art*, special issue *Art, pouvoir et politique*, no. 55 (2004): 119-29; Francesca Zanella, "Russi in Biennale. Intorno alla XXVIII edizione (1956)", in *Guardando all'URSS*, 125-42.

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Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia*.

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