

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, New York

3 August – 28 October 2017

In a speech on March 5, 1946, the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill coined the term "iron curtain" to describe the political and ideological barrier between the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and the Western democracies. Communist governments in Soviet bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe were subject to control from Moscow, including the imposition of an official policy toward art, known as Socialist Realism. Abstract art was decried as bourgeois formalism, and many of the artists who practiced it migrated to Western Europe or America. But some chose to stay behind and work against the grain, making art that responded to contemporary trends in international modernism.

Exposed to Abstract Expressionism and its European counterparts through personal travel, or via exhibitions that circulated in Europe and even in Soviet bloc countries in the 1950s and '60s, these artists created bodies of very personal work that was not officially sanctioned. Five of them are represented in the current exhibition: Andre Jemec from Slovenia and Edo Murtić from Croatia, both in the former Yugoslavia; Tadeusz Kantor from Poland; Jan Kotík from Czechoslovakia; and Romul Nuțiu from Romania. Their paintings illustrate each artist's adaptation of an abstract expressionist approach--spontaneous gesture, subjective imagery, and emotional content.

These five artists are by no means the only ones who rebelled against Communist orthodoxy and remained in their home countries, working without official support or recognition to break the stranglehold of Soviet artistic ideology. This exhibition celebrates the achievements of those who had the courage and determination to persevere, and whose work shows that the Iron Curtain was not an impervious barrier to modern art.

Works are on loan from collections in Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, Munich and New York. A fully illustrated catalog, with essays by Charlotta Kotík and Philip Rylands, director emeritus of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, and contributions by prominent Eastern European scholars, is available for \$10 in the Museum Store.

The exhibition and related public programs have been made possible by funds from the Thaw Charitable Trust Endowment, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Suffolk County Office of Cultural Affairs, Dorothy Lichtenstein and the Herman Goldman Foundation.

After closing at the Pollock-Krasner House on October 28, "Abstract Expressionism Behind the Iron Curtain" will travel to the Steinberg Museum of Art at Long Island University's C.W. Post campus from November 10, 2017 – April 7, 2018.