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The Aestheticization of Politics in Socialist Realism

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The Aestheticization of Politics in Socialist Realism



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Introduction

Background: Politics function through both overt and subtle means, which is why it is important to examine the ways in which politics are aestheticized, and powerfully employ emotional and non-rational appeals to harness support.

Methods: I selected exemplary Socialist Realist artists, who, favored by Stalin, were awarded the Stalin Prize, to analyze how they functioned politically

- This research examines: the materials, symbols, and impacts of these selected paintings in the political circumstances in which they were produced, looking at both works that were explicitly political and those that conveyed political ideologies in a much softer, more discreet manner.

Hypothesis

Stalin's regime perpetuated the idea that Avant-Garde art was dangerous and persecuted those artists in favor of Socialist Realist works that furthered the political motives of the Soviet Union and were employed in both overt and subtle forms as instruments of politics. Today, the implications of these insights are profound, especially in light of recent instances of this phenomenon.

Overtly Political Works

Works that are overtly political often glorified Stalin and other political figures



Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin (1938)
Oil on Canvas
Aleksandr Gerasimov



An Unforgettable Meeting (1936-1937)
Oil on Canvas
Vasily Prokofiyevich Yefanov

Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin, 1938, Stalin Prize 1941.

- Highlights why the artist was favored by Stalin, and how he became accomplished.
- An Unforgettable Meeting*, 1936.
- Depicts the leaders of the Party and Government of the All-Union Conference of Women in the Kremlin
 - Earned Yefanov a Stalin prize.

Subtly Political Works

Works that are more subtly political often featured heartwarming, patriotic images.



Arrived on Holiday (1948)
Oil on Canvas
Fyodor Reshetnikov



Low Marks Again (1952)
Oil on Canvas
Fyodor Reshetnikov

Arrived on Holiday, 1948, Stalin Prize 1949.

- Reproduced over 13 million copies which was more than any other card printed in the Soviet Union.
- Low Marks Again*, 1952.
- One of the most popular and widely known works of art in Soviet times.
 - Students wrote essays about it for school and contests.

Related Scholarship and Ideas

- Linking art with politics through aestheticization resulted in the shift away from Avant Garde.
- The Stalin Prize in the Arts was directly connected with wresting power away from dissenting voices in order to promote the Soviet agenda and Stalin's personality cult to the masses through art (Johnson 819).
- It promoted an ideal, state-controlled artistic elite to which other artists aspired (Johnson 820).
- Self-censorship was also a powerful mechanism of control within creative groups (Wallach).

Discussion and Insights Today

- My analysis of the paintings shows how they could be used to promote revolution within oneself as well as within the nation. From these findings an interesting debate emerges: are works that aestheticize politics truly art if they are created solely to further the state's motives? (Stern 456, 458).
- We see very similar instances of the aestheticization of politics in contemporary times. Trump's aestheticization of his radicalism through his tweets and rallies was bolstered by the fact that he entered politics as a businessman and entertainer who knew how to sell his messages (Colassaco).