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Inversions in Slovenia 1941–1954

Our case study explores a number of contradictions in terms. Modernism is usually equated with progress, liberty, and freedom. In fascist Italy, however, modernism was put to use in the framework of a totalitarian dictatorship. Thus, contrary to the allied Third Reich that sent key national socialist naturalistic and neoclassical sculptures to Agram/Zagreb in 1942 (“*Deutsche Plastik der Gegenwart*”), Italy chose contemporaneous paintings by modernist – and partly futurist – artists like Giorgio Morandi, Massimo Campigli, Gino Severini, and Cipriano Efisio Oppo, and donated them to the *National Gallery* in Ljubljana, then the capital of an Italian Province. These works remained at the museum also during the German Occupation from 1943 to 1945, regardless of the fact that they would have been labelled *degenerate* in a German museum.

The modernist Italian works survived the Yugoslav or socialist times *in situ*, although their (Western) origin and *bourgeois* style would have demanded their removal; in fact, they are on display in the museum until today, in yet another (European) state. We wonder which narrative adequately explains these twists and turns of art originally intended to function as ambassadors of high culture, originally meant to educate the periphery?

Moreover, looking at Europe’s entangled diversities, the presentation seeks to question simplistic relations of art and politics. In particular, since straightforward equations do not work, we want to ask which concepts are more appropriate? Does the notion of *dissonant heritage*, for instance, help to understand the biography of this group of objects? Are modernist Italian paintings *contested* objects, and how does this status evolve or change over time? Which narrative(s) and which object(s) are needed to tell a transnational history of European post-war art?

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