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Artistic Novelties or Political Tools? Circulating Cold War Art Exhibitions in Finland

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Abstract

The cultural Cold War was a global phenomenon, but how was it fought in Finland, on the periphery of Northern Europe? The essay brings a previously insufficiently known Finnish perspective into the study of cultural Cold War by introducing a research project, *Mission Finland – Cold War cultural diplomacy at the cross roads of East and West, 1945–1991*. The essay discusses study methods of international art exhibitions as soft power and introduces – with concrete Finnish examples – the concept of “state-run exhibition” as a means to comprehend the role of circulating art exhibitions as Cold War cultural diplomacy.

Abstrakti

Kulttuurinen kylmä sota oli globaali ilmiö, mutta miten sitä käytiin Suomessa? Artikkelissa nostetaan esiin aiemmin kansainvälisessä kylmän sodan tutkimuksessa sivuun jäänyt suomalainen näkökulma ja esitellään *Mission Finland – Suomi kulttuurisen kylmän sodan kohteena 1945–1991* tutkimushanke tavoitteineen. Tämän lisäksi tarkastellaan tapoja tutkia kylmän sodan kansainvälisiä, maailmalla kiertäneitä taidenäyttelyitä valtioiden käyttämänä pehmeänä valtana. Käsite ”valtiollispoliittinen näyttely” esitellään eräänä lähtökohtana jäsentää taidenäyttelyiden roolia kulttuuridiplomatian välineenä.

Art historian Maija Koskinen is a postdoctoral researcher working on the project Mission Finland – Cold War cultural diplomacy at the cross roads of East and West, 1945–1991 at the University of Turku, Finland. In the project (2020–2024) Koskinen examines international art exhibitions in Finland during the Cold War.

After the devastating war in Europe nations began to rebuild connections with other nations in a radically changed world. The postwar period was a time of resurgent internationalization. In the Cold War climate, as the two-pole world order grew stronger, interactions between nations through culture became increasingly important. Culture and arts were adopted as an essential part of cultural diplomacy. Through culture nations cemented international relations, promoted country brands, and increased mutual understanding. However, cultural exchange was also given a role as a tool of foreign politics and propaganda.

The Cold War was an ideologically driven battle for people's hearts and minds. This manifested itself especially in the power struggle for world dominance between the superpowers. The United States and the Soviet Union avoided open political or military conflict; instead, they invested heavily in cultural operations in order to influence foreign audiences. As a result, a record-breaking number of cultural products—such as art exhibitions—circulated around the world and across the divided Europe. Yet, while cultural exchange sought to bridge the great divide, it could just as well subvert and corrupt hearts and minds, depending on who was making the assessment.¹ The Americans fought the cultural Cold War through soft power. They introduced a variety of appealing, attractive cultural products and compelling narratives to the world.² Soft power was also used by the Soviet Union even though this Western-based concept does not fit incontrovertibly with its cultural diplomacy which often, as in Finland, had coercive elements.³ However, as the latest Cold War research has argued, the narrative of Europe as solely a divided space by a metal-like mental border, the Iron Curtain, dominated by the bloc-leader superpowers, needs

updating. Under a thin surface of bipolar juxtaposition, there was a wide space of vivid interaction between nations.⁴ The travelling art exhibitions took place in this interactive sphere, where dealings between exhibition organizers were less controlled by the state politics.

Searching for the Hearts and Minds of Finns: The Mission Finland Project

The cultural Cold War was a global phenomenon, but how was it fought in, and through, Finland, on the periphery of Northern Europe? This is the key question of *Mission Finland—Cold War cultural diplomacy at the cross roads of East and West, 1945–1991* project (2020–2024) financed by the Academy of Finland and led by the University of Turku.⁵ *Mission Finland* examines foreign cultural diplomacy in Finland: a variety of cultural and informational activities—cultural events, art exhibitions and distribution of media contents—organized by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and their allies. The project pays attention to domestic and international cultural organizations and individuals who turned the political objectives, defined by foreign governments, into everyday experiences of Finns. The objective of the multidisciplinary project (history, political history, cultural history, art history) is to build a synthesis of the cultural Cold War in Finland and to introduce the “Finnish case” to the field of international cultural Cold War research where there has been a Finland-sized omission.

The main research questions of *Mission Finland* are: what kinds of cultural activities did the Soviet Union, the USA, Great Britain, and their allies conduct in Finland and how did they change during the period 1945–1991? How were foreign cultural

¹ Myroslava Halushka, *Trojan Horses in a Cold War. Art Exhibitions as an Instrument of Cultural Diplomacy, 1945–1985* (MPhil in International Relations, University of Oxford, 2014), 13.

² Joseph S. Nye, the originator of this controversial concept, set out three primary sources of soft power: political values, culture, and foreign policy. Joseph S. Nye, ‘Soft Power’, *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990), 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

³ Maija Koskinen, *Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista. Helsingin Taidehallin näyttelyt 1928–1968* [Artistically Regenerating and Politically Topical – Exhibitions of Kunsthalle Helsinki 1928–1968] (PhD dissertation in art history, University of Helsinki, 2018), 262, 264–266, 273–292.

⁴ Sari Autio-Sarasma and Katalin Miklóssy, Introduction: The Cold War from a New Perspective, *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, eds. Sari Autio-Sarasma & Katalin Miklóssy, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–7.

⁵ University of Turku: Department of History, Culture and Art Studies, European and World History. Research team and collaborators: the PI, Adjunct professor in Russian history, PhD Pia Koivunen; Post-doctoral research fellow, PhD Marek Fields; Professor of contemporary history Lois Clerc and Senior researcher, Doc. Soc. Sci., Adjunct professor Kimmo Elo (University of Turku). Senior researcher, PhD, Adjunct professor Simo Mikkonen (University of Jyväskylä), Dr., Professor of contemporary history Matthieu Gillibert (University of Fribourg, Switzerland). For more information about the project: <https://missionfinland.utu.fi/en/>.

activities received by Finns and Finnish society, and what are the legacies of Cold War cultural diplomacy and propaganda in current information warfare? In the areas of scholarly discussion and methodology *Mission Finland* aims at introducing a new approach for the study of cultural diplomacy by providing a previously unexplored viewpoint: several foreign states' cultural operations in a single country.⁶ The project brings Finland's central position as a cultural battlefield of superpower competition into the international domain. It aims at clarifying the somewhat incoherent conceptual landscape that has been characteristic for studies of state actors' influence on foreign populations through cultural diplomacy. Concepts used in the fields of history, international relations, nation branding and political geography vary from public diplomacy to cultural diplomacy and from soft power to propaganda.⁷ Last but not least, *Mission Finland* aims at widening the discussion on Cold War cultural diplomacy towards the current phenomenon of hybrid warfare. The project seeks to provide research-based tools for deeper understanding of current state-run soft power and information warfare. This will be achieved by producing new information and interpretations about long-term methods used to influence foreign populations, state-run mechanisms behind them and changes they went through over time.

Mission Finland draws on historical qualitative methods and utilizes many international and national archival records, media materials, oral history, interviews and visual materials such as art works, exhibition catalogues and photographs.

⁶ Typically, the cultural Cold War has been studied as cultural operations that one particular country, most often the US or the USSR, has directed at foreign countries, not as a manifold set of cultural operations from many countries in one country. See e.g.: Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way. US Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta 1999); Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, *Russian Art and the West. A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007); Katerina Clark and E. A. Dobrenko, *Soviet Culture and Power. A History in Documents* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁷ See e.g.: Joseph Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency. American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2003), 193–214. About the latest interpretations of cultural diplomacy see Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hect and Mark C. Donfried, "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance, and the promise of Civil Society." in *Searching for Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 13–32.

Mission Finland is not the only ongoing research project dealing with transnational cultural exchange in Northeast Europe during the era. It relates topically to two other Nordic research projects examining postwar international art exchange and exhibitions: *Exhibiting art in a European periphery? International art in Sweden during the Cold War* (2018–2022) by the Södertörn University, Stockholm,⁸ and *Exhibiting across the Iron Curtain. The forgotten trail of Danish artists exhibiting in the context of state socialism, ca. 1955–1985* by the University of Copenhagen (2021–2024).⁹ While *Mission Finland* covers a wide range of foreign cultural activities besides art exhibitions, the focus of the above-mentioned Nordic projects is solely in art exhibitions. However, all three projects can be considered in parallel. All of them widen and diversify the understanding of complex transnational cultural and artistic exchange between Nordic countries and countries inside and outside the Cold War blocs. By examining artistic exchange into and out of Northeast Europe, the projects rewrite exhibition history, art history and Cold War history alike.

The Cold War Art Exhibitions as an Object of Study

It is quite possible to hold an entire conversation on twentieth-century politics without awarding even the briefest of mention to the arts. Yet an informed discussion of the significant art of the twentieth

⁸ The project examines what constituted international in a Swedish art context during the Cold War: how artistic collaborations existed despite the Iron Curtain, and how not only central, but also regional and local Swedish art scenes interacted with art exhibitions from abroad. The project aims at dismantling the seemingly self-evident hierarchy of the Western/Eastern (including the Baltic Sea area) Europe or center/periphery dichotomies by revealing the heterogeneity of international in art in Sweden and presenting a more complex history on the relations, the exchanges and dependencies that supported the presence of international art in Sweden. See, in this volume, Katarina Wadstein MacLeod, Marta Edling, Pella Myrsten, "Exhibiting Art in a European Periphery? International Art in Sweden during the Cold War," *Art@s Bulletin* vol. 11,2 (Fall 2022): pg tba; as well as the website <https://www.sh.se/english/sodertorn-university/research/our-research/research-database/research-projects/exhibiting-art-in-a-european-periphery-international-art-in-sweden-during-the-cold-war>.

⁹ The project examines the active agency of Danish artists and designers in the state socialist countries during the Cold War. By exploring Danish exhibition diplomacy across the Iron Curtain, it highlights exhibitions as zones of transit and international contact, working in official as well as unofficial ways, in the divided Europe. The project sets up a new perspective on the formation of the global contemporary art world. See, in this volume, Kristian Handberg and Yulia Karpova, "Exhibiting Across the Iron Curtain: The Forgotten Trail of Danish Artists Exhibiting in the Context of State Socialism, ca. 1955–1985," *Art@s Bulletin* vol. 11,2 (Fall 2022): pg tba; as well as the website <https://artsandculturalstudies.ku.dk/research/exhibiting-across-the-iron-curtain/>

century necessarily demands an awareness of the international political context of the period, a context that engendered the transformation of art into a veritable social and political force.¹⁰

As the art historian in the *Mission Finland* project, I concentrate on the international art (and some design) exhibitions organized in Finland during the Cold War. I study the exhibitions in the context of cultural diplomacy and focus on exhibitions organized by the superpowers and their allies, but also exhibitions from non-aligned neutral countries. My viewpoint stems from the objectives of *Mission Finland*: art exhibitions as part of the variety of soft power operations through which foreign countries built relations with Finland and/or hoped to influence the hearts and minds of Finns. Art has an ability to seduce the viewer into finding certain ideas appealing through endowing them with an attractive aesthetic.¹¹ In the ideologically driven Cold War this ability was often instrumentalized for political goals, and art exhibitions were used as a platform for ideological communication and propaganda. I explore art exhibitions as political instruments in the battle for cultural orientation of Finland and the Finnish art field. I reveal what kind of state-run political mechanism operated behind them and how the Finnish art field was used as a platform, a mediator and a collaborator in the cultural Cold War. Did exhibitions make a difference—and if they did—did they affect general opinions about the country of origin, or the way visual art was appreciated and conducted in Finland? Or were most of them merely political gestures? I argue that the Finnish art field would not have internationalized as fast and in as many varied ways as it did without the boost given by the cultural rivalry of the Cold War. My objective is to understand this internationalization and art exhibitions as manifestations of the complexity of interstate Cold War competition.

One distinctive feature and an essential part of official intergovernmental cultural diplomacy were bilateral friendship societies. Cultural activities organized by these non-state actors were important in

increasing mutual understanding and peaceful intercommunication. During the Cold War emphasis was placed on the political dimension of friendship societies: considered as apolitical and independent actors, they were used as political tools. If necessary, cultural activities organized by a friendship society offered a coulisse for ideological communication. In Finland friendship societies were often involved in foreign cultural activities. They were especially typical for cultural exchange between Finland, the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, but the US also organized cultural activities and exhibitions using friendship societies as middlemen.¹² This increased the required distance between state actors and the targeted audience and thus increased the possible influence of the exhibition. That said, it is surprising how small a role the friendship societies have been given in the recent research of cultural Cold War.¹³

Another viewpoint that has not been emphasized enough is the circulating nature of the Cold War exhibitions. For instance, most art exhibitions shown in Finland also toured other Scandinavian (and European) countries. From the viewpoint of the main European art centers as well as the United States, Finland—if not all of Scandinavia—was considered peripheral. Yet, from the strategic perspective of the bloc-leader superpowers, Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea were a geopolitical unit. In this context non-aligned Finland, a democratic-capitalist country, but bound to its neighbouring Soviet Union by the Finno-Soviet Treaty of 1948, had a somewhat extraordinary position.¹⁴ I pay attention to the routes of circulating exhibitions in Nordic countries defined by geopolitics and examine what kind of art exchange took place between Finland and other Nordic countries, especially Sweden, Finland's closest neighbor. Was

¹² Koskinen, *Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista* [Artistically Regenerating and Politically Topical], 271–273.

¹³ The friendship societies are often mentioned but otherwise there are only few researchers who have concentrated on the role of the societies, e.g. Jennifer Anderson, *Propaganda and Persuasion: The Cold War and the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2017); Simo Mikkonen, *The Finnish-Soviet Society: From Political to Cultural Connections* (Aleksanteri Cold War Series, Helsinki: Aleksanteri Institute, 2015); Olov Wenell, *Sovjetunionen och svenska vänsällskap 1945–1958. Sällskapen Sverige-Sovjetunionen som medel i sovjetisk strategi* (Doktorsavhandling, Historiska studier: skrifter från Umeå universitet 8, Umeå universitet, 2015).

¹⁴ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *Containing Coexistence: America, Russia, and the "Finnish Solution"* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997). Finland and Sweden were non-aligned, Norway, Denmark and Iceland were in the NATO (1949–), the Baltic countries, Poland and the GDR in the Warsaw Pact (1955–1991).

¹⁰ Halushka, *Trojan Horses in a Cold War*, 11–12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.



Figure 1. MoMA's *Modern American Drawings* exhibition in Kunsthalle Helsinki in 1962. The managing director of the Finnish-American Society, Bengt Broms, in front of Jackson Pollock's ink drawing. The exhibition was organized in collaboration with the United States Information Agency. Photo: Kalle Kultala, Lehtikuva.

the Nordic art exchange used to strengthen cultural and thus political unity of Scandinavia? There was also art exchange between Finland, Soviet Estonia and other Soviet Baltic countries, but it began only later in the 1950s.¹⁵

A Concept of State-Run Exhibition as a Method

In my research I focus on “state-run exhibitions” as defined in my doctoral thesis dealing with the

¹⁵ These viewpoints—the role of the bilateral friendship societies and the circulating nature of the Cold War exhibitions—were not emphasized in the presentations at the international conference “Art exhibitions as intersections in post-war Europe” (Södertörn University, Stockholm 11.-12.5.2022) which introduced the latest research on the role of art institutions in the circulation of art and addressed the exhibitions as a site of international relations and a mirror of society across East and West Europe during the postwar period.

exhibitions of Kunsthalle Helsinki. During the Cold War, as part of cultural diplomacy and country branding, state-run exhibitions pertained to foreign politics and served its objectives – directly or indirectly. Typically, the content of a state-run exhibition was outlined by the organizing state who often financed production costs of the exhibitions and wanted to influence where and when they were displayed. The agents who assembled the state-run exhibitions were often non-state actors of the art field: art museums, galleries and art and artists’ organizations. They collaborated with governmental or semi-governmental agencies in charge of cultural exchange such as the US Information Agency (USIA), the British Council and VOKS—the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries in the USSR. In the receiving country the



Figure 2. A guided tour of the *Soviet Art Exhibition* in 1950 at Kunstshalle Helsinki organized by the Finnish-Soviet Society and VOKS. Photo: People's Archive, Helsinki.

exhibitions were organized in well-known venues in collaboration with the local art field professionals. This was a way to put distance between the organizing state, its political organs and the targeted exhibition audience. The reduction of the role of a state aimed at avoiding an impression of “state propaganda,” and collaboration with the art field professionals strengthened the credibility of an exhibition as “just” an art exhibition.¹⁶

A state-run exhibition, among other cultural products, was often used as a political gesture: a show of good will or a sign of recognition. With an official art exhibition, states could validate an important interstate agreement or celebrate mutual relationships. It was hoped that exhibitions would reinforce positive outlooks in the minds of citizens of the country

in question, and in addition to this its politics and worldview. Through distribution of art and cultural products a state could expect to encourage foreign audiences to perceive it as more than a pure abstraction.¹⁷ Presentation of culture made a foreign state more concrete, familiar and thus more agreeable. The Soviet Cold War exhibitions were all state-run because in the Soviet Union art and cultural production were totally under state control. The case was more complex, versatile and “porous” in exhibitions organized by the people’s democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. The United States also organized hundreds of state-run exhibitions but in the guise of the “free” cultural field and its agents.¹⁸

¹⁷ Halushka, *Trojan Horses in a Cold War*, 71.

¹⁸ See for example: Francis Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999); Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum* no. 10 (1974), 39–41.

¹⁶ Koskinen, *Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista* [Artistically Regenerating and Politically Topical], 208–237, 262–324, 363–367.



Figure 3. Visitors at Ilya Glazunov's (1930–2017) exhibition at Kunsthalle Helsinki in 1974. Glazunov was a popular Soviet portrait painter from late 1950s. Photo: Kari Hakli, Helsinki City Museum, CC BY 4.0.

Naturally, not all the international exhibitions shown in Finland or elsewhere during the era were state-run. The main difference between a state-run art exhibition and an exhibition organized “freely” between art field agents can be defined by determining on whose initiative the exhibition was organized, who determined its content and whose rules were followed when organizing it: the rules of an art field or the rules of state politics? In practice these rules were often intermingled, but there were also international exhibitions during the Cold War that can justifiably be determined as non-state-run. For example, an art exhibition presenting Swedish contemporary art and design in Finland right after the war in 1945 continued the traditional art exchange between art fields of the two countries. It was typical for art exchange between Finland and other Nordic countries that the state financially supported the exhibitions by request of art field agents, and that the state provided an official patronage of the exhibition. In the case of the Swedish exhibition in 1945 the initiative to organize it

came from the Finnish art field professionals, not from the governments of either country.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Finnish government ministers respected the initiative by attending the opening. The exhibition recreated artistic ties between the countries, but it can also be considered to have had political goals: to strengthen Nordic unity in the postwar world.

Many state-run international art exhibitions in Finland introduced prominent modern, contemporary and sometimes even avant-garde art to Finnish audiences. A good example of this is the groundbreaking American art exhibition presenting silk-screen printing as a new technique of graphic art in 1950, as well as other exhibitions presenting American abstract expressionism and pop art in the 1950s and early 1960s.²⁰ This period was “the

¹⁹ The exhibition was organized by the Society of Contemporary Art (Nykytaide – Nutidskont) and Ornamo —The Finnish Designers. It was curated by a Swedish artist Carl Gunne. Koskinen, *Taiteellisesti elvyttävää ja poliittisesti ajankohtaista* [Artistically Regenerating and Politically Topical], 196, 209, 287.

²⁰ The American exhibitions: *American Serigraphy 1950* (a two-year Scandinavian tour), *Twelve Modern American Painters and Sculptors 1954* (circulated in six European countries in 1953–54 including Sweden, Finland and Norway). MoMA's inter-

golden era” of state-run American art exhibitions in Finland: a period when MoMA’s flagship exhibitions often travelled to Northeastern Europe, but what happened when the focus of world politics shifted from Europe to other continents and countries? Was exhibition diplomacy still effective in the neo-leftist and anti-American 1960s, or the 1970s, when Finland was in the throes of Finlandization?²¹ What was the situation in the 1980s—the era of neoliberalism, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the fall of the wall? Did state-run exhibitions follow developments in art or were they trapped in their diplomatic nature? In the Soviet Union socialist realism was the only officially accepted method of art making. Nonetheless, exhibitions of official Soviet art also changed. Social realism as a stylistic orientation became more nuanced, and towards the end of the Cold War constructivist art from the era of the revolution was also exhibited internationally.²²

A Bigger Picture and Case Studies of Cold War Art Exhibitions

My contribution to the international scholarly publication of the *Mission Finland* project is an extensive article on the Cold War exhibitions in Finland. I aim at creating an overall picture of the exhibitions by building an “artistic-political” trajectory of them. I examine where these exhibitions came from, who organized them, what kind of art they exhibited and who were the Finnish collaborators implementing them. I juxtapose contents of the exhibitions to cutting edge visual arts and reflect upon changes in world politics and the political position of Finland. Exhibitions that seemed to be more significant either to the organizing country and its political objectives or to art and the Finnish art field will be highlighted as well as exhibitions from the 1970s and 1980s that have been less explored in the Cold War context.

nationally circulated exhibitions, <https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/icelist.pdf>

²¹ The term refers to the influence of the Soviet Union on Finland’s policies during the Cold War.

²² For example, an exhibition of Alexander Rodchenko at the Helsinki City Art Museum in 1990. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the art institutions of the Federation of Russia began to charge fees for sending art abroad.

The focus of the *Mission Finland* project is the cultural battle between the two superpowers and their allies. I widen this perspective by including Scandinavian participation in exhibiting art in Finland. From the 1960s onwards, many countries from outside Europe joined the field of cultural diplomacy and sent art exhibitions to Finland. I examine why countries from the Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Africa began to send art exhibitions to Finland, and why they wanted visibility in Northern Europe. The article relies on the latest research in the field of Cold War cultural diplomacy,²³ and rests upon a wide archival material in Finnish and foreign archives, newspaper writings, art magazine articles, interviews and (images of art) works themselves.

Besides the overall picture, I deepen the perspective with a few case studies. Through them it is possible to examine some especially interesting exhibitions in more detail: aims and objectives set for them, their contents, circulating routes, organizers, reception and influence.

The first case study, “Cold War on the Home Economics Front—*The American Home* exhibition in 1953 by the Finnish-American Society and the United States Information Agency” has already been published.²⁴ The exhibition consisted of two parts. The first one presented American design assembled by MoMA called *American Design for Home and Decorative Use*.²⁵ The other, *The Home Economics Display*, organized independently by the Finnish-American Society, showcased American consumer

²³ For example: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Louis Clerc, Nikolas Glover and Paul Jordan, *Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries. Representing the Periphery* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Belmonte, *Selling the American Way. US Propaganda and the Cold War*; Boris Groß, *Art Power* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008); Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, *Russian Art and the West. A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007); Marek Fields, *Defending Finnish Democracy. British and American Propaganda and Cultural Diplomacy in Finland, 1944–1962* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Rósa Magnúsdóttir & Óscar J. Martín García (eds.), *Machineries of Persuasion. European Soft Power and Public Diplomacy during the Cold War* (Berlin/München/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019); Giles Scott-Smith, Simo Mikkonen & Jari Parkkinen (eds.), *Entangled East and West. Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction During the Cold War* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018).

²⁴ It was published in a peer-reviewed periodical *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja [Historical Journal]* no. 2, (2022) in its special theme issue of cultural Cold War. The article is in Finnish with an English summary. See also Maija Koskinen, *Utställningen Det amerikanska hemmet i Helsingfors 1953/The American Home exhibition in Helsinki 1953. Scandinavian Design & The US. Människor, möten och idéer, 1890–1980* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2021), 51–56, 156–157.

²⁵ After Helsinki MoMA’s part of the exhibition made a Scandinavian tour and circulated in Belgium and Italy.



Figure 4. *The American Home* exhibition at Kunsthalle Helsinki in 1953. A view from the *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* assembled by MoMA and organized by the United States Information Agency. Photo: Suomi-Amerikka Yhdistysten Liitto SAM.

culture: a fully furnished model home and hundreds of household appliances and consumable products. The fact that the Americans allowed their official exhibition to be used as part of an exhibition that was the initiative of another country was atypical for American cultural diplomacy. That is why I examined the exhibition, its contents and objectives, from the viewpoint of both organizers. I focused on the active agency of the Finnish-American Society as a collaborator of the US in introducing American culture in Finland and its role in building cultural and commercial relations between the countries during the early years of the Cold War. From the American perspective I looked at the exhibition as a tool of soft power cultural diplomacy linked with the foreign policy of the US in relation to the objectives of the country plan for Finland that the US renewed in 1952.

The American Home was a great success. It gained an exceptionally high number of visitors and its media coverage exceeded all expectations. The exhibition was a point of intersection where American anti-communist propaganda in a form of “The American way of life” met the aspirations of Finns towards better living standards and Finland’s political brinkmanship between the East and the West. MoMA’s part of the exhibition offered new ideas, models, materials and production methods for Finnish designers and the selection of household products inspired the domestic appliance industry. At the grass roots level, Finnish post-war everyday life met Western standards of modern living and consumerism. The exhibition also managed to address the gender issue by provoking a vivid discussion about modern home and household work done by women.

In the 1950s the United States was the center from which novelties of consumer goods spread to the world and its peripheries. However, in the case of design, the center-periphery set-up worked the other way. The Americans considered Finnish and Scandinavian design as exemplary. In fact, one of the objectives of MoMA's exhibition was to show the vitality and progress of modern American design to Scandinavian countries.

The American Home demonstrated that cultural diplomacy and circulating exhibitions were not just decorative elements on top of foreign politics. Under favorable circumstances even a small home economics display could be a powerful propaganda tool. Even though the exhibition offered an idealized image of the average American life, it updated, diversified and invigorated the ideas of Finns about the US and the Americans. The route to the hearts and minds of Finns, in this case, went through modern home and consumer products as heralds of a better life offered by modern Western lifestyles. The Soviet Union could hardly compete in the Cold War battle on the home front: Soviet society had little to offer in terms of private consumption.

The other case study 'occupies', at least theoretically, a more neutral ground. The joint article that I write together with Swiss historian Matthieu Gillibert (University of Fribourg) deals with cultural exchange between Finland and Switzerland from a perspective of two militarily non-aligned, "neutral" countries presenting political neutrality from quite different geopolitical positions in the context of the Cold War.

From the Cold War to the Age of Hybrid Warfare—Where did Art Go?

The 'cultural soldiers' of the Cold War compared cultural products and their effect to the most

frightening weapons of the era, the atom bombs and space satellites.²⁶ A lot of resources were put into the cultural Cold War and thousands of art and other exhibitions circulated around the world as soft power tools and propaganda, but also as ways of communicating something that people could share and find common ground in.

It is reasonable to ask where art stands today and what has its position been in international relations in the 2000s? In the era of the explosion of visual imagery online, art and art exhibitions may not be effective tools in information and hybrid warfare. However, they still have a place in the diplomatic tool kit of countries striving for influence through soft power. In the present-day, when art museums have been turned into contemporary cathedrals, some notable art museums have built 'branch museums' in other countries (Guggenheim Bilbao, Hermitage Amsterdam, Ermitage Italia, Louvre Abu Dhabi, etc.).²⁷ Politically the location of these museums is never random. They, together with soft power indexes, i.e. lists of countries with maximum soft power in the world, signify evolution of cultural diplomacy and the importance of soft power in international relations in the global world. Contemporary methods to influence may be different, but human psychology has remained the same. By revealing methods and mechanisms used to influence foreign populations the *Mission Finland* project might also help to understand the role of arts in current information wars. How "innocent" is international art circulating globally today?

²⁶ Halushka, *Trojan Horses in a Cold War*, 51–52.

²⁷ Christine Sylvester, *Art/Museums. International Relations Where We Least Expect It* (New York: Routledge, 2016).