

INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS



NATASHA MITKOVA NOEVA

**125 RAKOVSKI GALLERY – INSTITUTIONAL CENTER OF
ARTISTIC LIFE. HISTORY, ORGANIZATION, EXHIBITION
ACTIVITY, CRITICISM**

(1940 – 1972)

ABSTRACT

**OF A DISSERTATION FOR AWARDING OF THE EDUCATIONAL
AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE PHD**

SOFIA

2023

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OF A DISSERTATION FOR AWARDING OF THE EDUCATIONAL
AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE PHD
IN THE SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY
ARTS AND FINE ARTS, PROFESSIONAL FIELD
8.1. THEORY OF THE ARTS

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR: PROF. MILENA GEORGIEVA, PHD

REVIEWERS: PROF. GALINA LARDEVA-MINKOVA, PHD

PROF. YOANA SPASOVA-DIKOVA, PHD

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The dissertation was discussed and scheduled for public defense at an extended meeting of “New Bulgarian Art” Research Group held on 02.02.2023.

The dissertation consists of 222 pages of text, including an introduction, 3 chapters and a conclusion; 610 titles bibliography in Cyrillic and 10 titles in Latin, 14 appendices, album part (with documentary and photo material) of 202 illustrations, with numbers indicated in the text.

The public defense will be held on 28.06.2023 at 11:00 a.m. at a meeting of a scientific jury composed of: Prof. Blagovesta Ivanova, DSc, VSU Lyuben Karavelov; Assoc. prof. Boyka Donevska, Phd, National Art Academy; Prof. Galina Lardeva-Minkova, PhD, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts; Prof. Yoana Spasova-Dikova, PhD, Institute of Art Studies – BAS; Assoc. prof. Arch. Stella Tasheva, PhD, Institute of Art Studies – BAS

The materials are available to those who may be interested in the Department of Administrative Services of the Institute of Art Studies at 21-st Krakra Str., Sofia

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Relevance of the research

There is a lack of comprehensive art historical research in the scientific literature that tracks and analyzes the history and development of gallery work and artistic life in Bulgaria from the perspective of the creation and functioning of exhibition spaces. This determines the relevance of the present study, which focuses on the gallery as a specific exhibition space - historical development, theoretical formulations; types of galleries - private, municipal, national; the relationship between the museum and the gallery, socio-cultural functions, models of organization and financing of gallery activities. Inevitably, these also include the catalog, the invitation, and the floor plan as benchmarks of the exhibition documentation, as well as the figures of the administrator, commissioner, and (today) curator as organizers of the exhibitions.

The relevance of the research is also determined by the fact that so far, there has been no targeted study of exhibition spaces and their influence on the developmental processes in new and contemporary Bulgarian art, especially regarding the socialist period. Many facts related to cultural life in Bulgaria, and in particular - to the exhibition spaces where artistic events took place, remain unknown. While Blagovesta Ivanova recently published a special study on the Trapkova Gallery, no such research exists yet for the 125 Rakovski Gallery . These two galleries are emblematic of our artistic life with their merits, one being the first private gallery in Bulgaria, and the other being an institution with over 80 years of history, managed by an association of artists, both of which have become a fundamental factor for the development of Bulgarian art. That is why we believe that reconstructing the activities of the first and only exhibition space with such a long history - the 125 Rakovski Gallery, which, in addition to its professional representation as a union gallery, also defines the relationship between the guild and state administration, would be of considerable importance for future theoretical research on the history of Bulgarian art.

2. Aim, objectives, subject and object, methodology, and scope of the research

Aim of the research

1. To delineate the place and significance of 125 Rakovski Gallery , specifically as one of the main centers of artistic life in Sofia and the country, where significant trends, phenomena, creators, and cultural and artistic environments emerge and manifest in two different periods of art in Bulgaria.

2. To construct a comprehensive understanding of the gallery's functioning throughout its long existence - from the inception of the idea for its creation, its architectural design and realization, its preservation as a cooperative private property over the years despite the regime changes, the influence of the Communist Party and the state, and the subsequent changes that follow.

3. To investigate how and to what extent political ideology (does not) affect the exhibition policies of the Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) and the Union of Artists` Associations in Bulgaria (UAAB) at 125 Rakovski Gallery, and the ideational and stylistic development of the works. To trace the relations between the state and the Artists' Union during the People's Republic of Bulgaria period, which are not unambiguous even during the most severe dictatorship of the communist regime.

Main objectives of the dissertation:

- To search for available information about the 125 Rakovski Gallery as a cultural institution, associated with the history of the UBA, UAAB, and UAB;
- To systematize the collected archival and documentary material in a chronology, analyzing the policies and development strategies reflected in Bulgarian art;
- To distinguish separate periods and emphasize their leading characteristics (such as genre determinacy, stylistic features, or emerging specifics);
- To conduct a study of the legislative framework, institutional documentation, and union decisions, inter-institutional correspondence, and issued directives related to the gallery;
- To conduct interviews with contemporary artists who can recount the history of the gallery.

Subject and object of the research:

The subject of the study is the establishment and functioning of the 125 Rakovski Gallery from its opening in 1940 until 1972, when the Union of Bulgarian Artists acquired its new home with the Shipka 6 gallery. The history of this gallery is significant for our contemporary art - it demonstrates the transformations that the artistic life in Bulgaria has undergone, generated both by internal evolutionary processes and due to external factors within the system.

The research examines the history and necessity of the 125 Rakovski Gallery, its design and construction, the cultural policy and exhibition activities conducted, and through it, the artistic associations of UAAB, UAB and UBA in two different periods with different historical and socio-political contexts. The study traces the expressions of main authors, movements, styles, and influences, seeking manifestations of innovation that reveal and prove the gallery's unique role, which has established itself as a center of cultural and artistic life.

An indisputable fact is the resilience of the 125 Rakovski Gallery as an institution, which, despite historical upheavals, has not changed its original purpose, as stated in its design and opening in the regulatory documents of the Union of Artists` Associations in Bulgaria and the Exhibition Space Fund Committee.

Subject of the dissertation:

The presentation and commentary of the exhibitions organized in the gallery in their possible complete chronology for a period of over eighty years, which would allow outlining the panorama of exhibition life with its specifics in 125 Rakovski Gallery. The various types and genres of fine and applied arts presented in its spaces outline the trends in their development, the summarization of which clearly shows the dynamics and directions of artistic processes.

Significant exhibitions held in other capital galleries are also interpreted and added to this body, which expands the basis for the comparisons made.

In order to better outline the historical and cultural context in the chronological review, all available documents and photographs from archival sources, daily and periodical press, specialized publications, video recordings of exhibition openings, and interviews with artists, etc., have been included, analyzed, and cited.

The text attempts to present and analyze, in a credible historical and artistic narrative, facts and artistic events, discerning the underlying artistic processes, thematic, genre, and stylistic tendencies, critical reflections, and reactions of the public sphere, regardless of some extremely negative contemporary evaluations of the period. The 125 general and group exhibitions organized in the space of the 125 Rakovski Gallery, solo exhibitions of Bulgarian artists, visiting collective and individual foreign exhibitions, are indicative of the broad range of expressions by the artists participating in the associations. However, it is also important to acknowledge that during the period of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the gallery also performed ideological functions through political and propaganda exhibitions and, in line with the state's foreign policy, through visiting foreign exhibitions, mainly from Eastern Bloc countries.

Research methodology.

The scientific work is based on a comprehensive interdisciplinary study that relies on methods and approaches from various scientific disciplines. A document-based analytical approach, comparative analysis, formal-stylistic analysis, and sociological and cultural aspects of the issues under consideration have been employed. The reconstruction of the phenomenon of 125 Rakovski Gallery is based on a detailed study of a wealth of source material – archival sources, periodicals, specialized publications, catalogs, oral history – which allows us to define the work primarily as empirical, with an interest in understanding events, authors, trends, and, more peripherally, individual works. The analysis and interpretation of the collected material led to the identification of characteristics, findings, and conclusions of a historical, artistic, and sociocultural nature.

The main sources of information for the study are chronicles, articles in periodicals, specialized publications, catalog publications, invitations, archival documents, and photographs stored in the archive of the Central State Archive, Ministry of Information and Arts, Committee for Science, Art, and Culture, Ministry of National Education, personal funds of artists at the State Archives Agency, the archive of the Union of Bulgarian Artists – photo archive and archival files of its members, the audio archive of Bulgarian National Radio, the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, personal archives of collectors and private individuals, and others.

If the name 125 Rakovski Gallery is mentioned only fleetingly in a few places in Bulgarian scientific literature and with individual pieces of information within a few sentences, the number of studies on Bulgarian art during the examined period is impressive. We will mention the most important authors for our work. We refer to articles and books by art historians and critics such as Sirak Skitnik, Nikola Mavrodinov, Chavdar Mutafov, Stefan Mitov, and Alexander Balabanov, Andrey Protich, Irina Mihalcheva, Vera Dinova-Ruseva, Dimitar Avramov, Veneta

Ivanova, Nikolay Trufeshev, Maximilian Kirov, Ruzha Marinska, Aksinia Djurova, Ivan Marazov, Bistra Rangelova, Tatyana Dimitrova, Chavdar Popov, Milena Georgieva, Violeta Vasilchina, Dorotea Sokolova, Irina Genova, Nikolay Boshev, Boyka Donevska, Maria Miteva, Katerina Gadzheva, Dimitar Grozdanov, Plamen V. Petrov, Milena Balcheva, and cultural historians such as Natalia Hristova, Evgenia Kalinova, Sofia Vasileva, Yoana Spasova-Dikova, Plamen Doynov, Ivan Elenkov, and others who examine the historical and sociocultural context, exhibition, and artistic life during different periods, illuminating the development of art in Bulgaria and its spiritual, stylistic, thematic, and genre expansion.

Chronological boundaries of the study:

They are determined by the stages in the development of 125 Rakovski Gallery . The study traces the maturation of the idea for its creation back to 1926 (although such ideas spontaneously emerged in the circles of the societies as early as 1919), the difficult path it took, its construction and opening in 1940 with the 13th National Exhibition, the cultural policy, and exhibition activities of the UAAB in Bulgaria from 1940 until the gallery was destroyed by bombings in 1944, and the establishment of the Union of Artists in Bulgaria.

The period 1947-1949 follows, during which efforts were made to restore the gallery, the signing of the Bulgarian-Romanian cultural agreement, and the organization of the Romanian-Bulgarian exhibition at the end of 1947, which resumed artistic activity in the gallery. The 1950s are examined in two parts: a review of foreign exhibitions and those organized by joint, collective, and individual exhibitions.

This approach is also used for the exhibitions in the 1960s. The end of the study is set in 1972 when the new four-story gallery of the Union of Artists in Bulgaria at Shipka 6 Street is opened, and the main exhibition activity of the Union is moved there. Of course, the 125 Rakovski Gallery remains subordinate to the Union, continuing to be one of the authoritative centers of cultural life in the country until present day.

Expected results and practical applicability:

1. Systematization and primary interpretation of the extensive newly discovered and available factual material, and its inclusion in scholarly discourse.
2. Identifying similarities and differences in the functionality of the gallery during different political systems - estate and state status; presence or absence of continuity.
3. Outlining artistic processes and trends in Bulgarian visual art in a socio-cultural context during the period under review.

The practical applicability of the study and its inclusion in scholarly discourse is sought in several directions: 1) as an information base for gallery activities in Bulgaria; 2) to support future art research, including studies in related fields - cultural studies, sociology, cultural anthropology; 3) as a solid foundation for organizing a retrospective to mark the anniversary of the gallery's establishment; 4) for creating a website where the collection of photographs and documentary material related to exhibition openings, artworks, and interiors will be digitized and

published, highlighting the gallery's important role as an institutional center of cultural life in Bulgaria; 5) as a valuable information base (archival documents, photographs, etc.) for researchers of individual artists' works, historians, and theorists with scholarly interests in the art of the People's Republic of Bulgaria period; 6) to stimulate prospective new studies and complementary future research related to the emergence and development of gallery activities in Bulgaria, the role of the curatorial team in state institutions and private galleries, clarifying the management and financing models of cultural institutions, and more.

Introduction

I. The Dynamics of Art Gallery Activities in Sofia from the Liberation to the beginning of 1940s

II. The 125 Rakovski Gallery – center of artistic life. History, creation, organization (1940 – 1947)

1. History, creation, organization

2. Architecture - design, realization, transformations

3. Opening the gallery

4. Changes after 1944. Changing the cultural model. Device, organization and activity

III. The exhibition activity of 125 Rakovski Gallery (1940 – 1972). Reflection of art criticism. Artists, critics, trends, issues

1. Exhibition life in the gallery (1940 – 1941). First exhibitions and criticism

2. Bulgarian-Romanian relations (1945 – 1947). Cultural agreement. Exhibitions

3. Activation of the activity of the 125 Rakovski Gallery (1947 – 1949). Other foreign and Bulgarian exhibitions

4. The foreign exhibitions in the 1950s in the 125 Rakovski Gallery. Selection and discussions

5. General and individual exhibitions in the gallery at Rakovski Street in the 1950s. Reflection of art criticism. Selection and discussions.

6. GAE, individual, foreign exhibitions in the gallery at 125 Rakovski str. in the period 1960 – 1972. Reflection of art criticism on genre and genre trends
7. Exhibitions of applied arts (1964 – 1972) at the 125 Rakovski Gallery. Artists, works, discussions
- 8.125 Rakovski Gallery and other exhibition places in the 1960s. Types of spaces.

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendices

Illustrations (album with documentary and pictorial material)

II. SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION WORK

Introduction: The introduction includes the formulation of the study - relevance, state of research, object, subject, purpose, scope, methodology, and expected results of the dissertation.

Chapter I: Gallery Activities in Sofia from the Liberation to the beginning of 1940

In the first chapter, an introductory one, the gallery activities in Sofia are examined from their inception to the beginning of 1940. Within these parameters, exhaustiveness is unattainable due to the considerable material in the research field, on the one hand, and on the other, although there are episodic articles on some galleries - Trapkovata Gallery by Alexander Bozhinov, Nikolay Boshev, Tatyana Dimitrova; on the State Art Gallery by Janet Miteva; on the National Gallery by Dorothea Sokolova; on the Prizma Gallery by Ruzha Marinska; on the Gallery of the Six by Chavdar Popov, they cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the state of artistic life in Bulgaria at that time. However, these galleries clearly define the demarcation between art collections belonging to state museum institutions and the broader trend towards private art galleries in Bulgaria, which interests us in this chapter. In an attempt to shed light on some of the capital's galleries and exhibition spaces before 1940 (long since non-existent today), attention has been paid to newly discovered data on them in scientific literature, archival funds in the Central State Archive, the Union of Bulgarian Artists, and the press.

In the period immediately following the Liberation, due to the lack of specialized spaces, art works were exhibited in the halls of state institutions - the National Assembly, the ateliers and

the fairy tale hall of the Drawing School, the Royal Manege, the interiors of the Sofia Male High School, and the National Ethnographic Museum after 1906. Researchers consider 1910 as the beginning of private gallery activities in Bulgaria, when the first private gallery of Trapko Vasiliev in Sofia, known as the Permanent Art Gallery on Aksakov Street, was opened, existing until 1948 with its transformations and change of ownership. In Bulgaria, the gallery of Trapko Vasiliev provoked the first in-depth studies on the significance and role of exhibition space. In her book "Trapko Vasiliev and the Permanent Art Gallery," Blagovesta Ivanova examines in detail the life and work of Trapko Vasiliev, as well as the history and activities of the gallery. In this chapter, we add previously unpublished materials that enrich our knowledge of Trapkovata Gallery. The dissertation examines the new exhibition spaces and small private galleries opened during the 1920s and 1930s, whose appearance was dictated not only by the lack of premises, but much more by the exceptional dynamics, diversity, and variety of artistic life, as well as by the newly formed associations of artists, producing numerous joint, collective, and individual exhibitions. The flourishing of artistic life in the capital stimulated the search for new spaces and the opening of private galleries such as "Gallery of the 6" at 2 Targovska Street, "Kremona" in the building of the Civil Servants' Society at 4 Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd, Salon "KOOP" at 126 Rakovski Street, "Preslav" Gallery at Preslav Street, ARS - House of Applied Arts at 12 Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd, and others.

Secondary adapted spaces to state, cultural, and financial institutions, such as the "Bulgaria" concert hall, "Slavyanska Beseda," the Macedonian National Bank, "Kjorting" studio, Alliance Française, "Pro Oriente" at 5 Oborishte St., the Student House (since 1939), the Lyceum Club (Moskovska St. and Malko Tarnovo St.), and Fototsentral (photographer Boris Natov's studio) have been examined. Exhibitions continue to be held in the City Casino, the House of Arts, the Royal Manege, the Military Club, and the Jewish Home. Artists also organize exhibitions in their own studios, but these cannot fully satisfy the need for spaces that meet the necessary conditions for exhibition activities.

More attention has been paid to the State Art Gallery, whose construction began in 1934. New, unpublished materials on the gallery's architecture and design have been presented, as well as opinions from contemporary critics, also previously unpublished. The exhibitions at the State Art Gallery have been chronologically traced based on materials found in daily newspapers and specialized literature. General art exhibitions are held in its spaces: X GAE (1936), XI GAE 1937, XII GAE 1938, XIV GAE 1940, XV GAE 1941, XVI GAE 1942/43; exhibitions of the Society of Contemporary Art, the Society of New Artists (The Third Spring Exhibition of New Artists, 1937), the Seventh Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists (1937), a graphic exhibition by Petar Morozov (1937), a joint exhibition of Jordan Geshev and Kolyu Kanev (1937), and "Our Black Sea" by Alexander Mutafov (1937).

The State Art Gallery also hosts a major Italian graphic exhibition (1938); the visiting German exhibition "Labor and Joy" (1938), a solo exhibition of Nikola Tanev, an exhibition of student drawings (1943). Some landmark exhibitions organized in its spaces are examined, such as the Art and Crafts Exhibition (1938), for which a newly discovered, previously unknown accompanying catalog is presented, showcasing the exhibition and specially arranged and

separate corners in the gallery, and proving the overall interior design of the space as the work of Ivan Penkov - its curator. The reconstruction of the exhibitions organized in the State Gallery contributes to enriching and clarifying the picture of artistic life.

Chapter II: The 125 Rakovski Gallery –Center of Artistic Life. History, Creation, Organization (1940 - 1947).

In the second chapter, the history of the construction, opening, and functioning of the 125 Rakovski Gallery in Sofia during the period 1940 - 1947 is presented, with the stipulation that the lower chronological boundary of this chapter is set at 1940, the year the gallery was opened, and the upper boundary at 1947, when it was almost entirely rebuilt after the bombings of Sofia in 1944. The realization of the idea for its creation, which emerged in 1926, is traced, along with the establishment of the "Exhibition Space" fund with a committee to manage it, and the financial support from institutions for its construction. The architecture of the building and its features are examined in detail, as well as the architectural plans, and changes made to the construction are traced. The importance of the gallery in an architectural sense is emphasized, as it was the first gallery in Bulgaria in 1940 specifically designed to meet the needs of such a specific space. The 125 Rakovski Gallery is among the buildings and spaces where the architectural composition purposefully seeks top natural lighting through skylights as a solution that is appropriate and justified from a functional and architectural-technical standpoint. A shift in the views on the architectural and planning composition of art galleries over the years is observed. In the 1940s, the trend was to design large halls with an area of 400 - 500 square meters (about the area of a basketball court), in which the exhibition was arranged along the walls and on mobile screens, thus achieving exhibition flexibility. Examples during this period include the State Art Gallery and the "Bulgaria" Concert Hall, which was also used as a gallery. Over time, the tendency to construct smaller exhibition spaces (100 - 150 square meters) arranged in enfilade or another consecutive order, with analogies to picture galleries and museums housed in palace buildings, began to prevail. During the period under review, the only gallery of such scale in Bulgaria, created solely for temporary exhibitions, remains 125 Rakovski Gallery .

Attention is paid to the Union of Artists` Associations in Bulgaria, its history, organization, and activities, its transformation into the Union of Artists in Bulgaria, the changes that occurred after 1944 in the model of artistic life, and the turn in artistic reflections in the context of the new socio-political conditions. The fate of the building after the bombings of Sofia in 1944, when it was almost destroyed, the difficulties of its redevelopment in a post-war recovery regime, economic crisis, and a coupon system are traced in detail.

In a large part of the published photographs of interiors or specific works in specialized literature and periodical press, the exhibition venues are not indicated, and comments on them often appear in press chronicles with one or two sentences, making identification difficult. The preserved architectural plan of the gallery, created by architect Milko Bichev in July 1938, is particularly useful for researching and reconstructing events when locating exhibition manifestations. With

its detailed description of individual elements and materials used, it allows us to compare it with newly discovered interior photos and draw the respective conclusions about the gallery's condition during its various periods. The technical description itself turns out to be a key moment in the gallery's significance with the entire mass of exhibition materials discovered.

The restoration of damages in Sofia after the bombings continue for years, but in 1945, the artistic life gradually revives. New galleries are opened: "Bagra" on Lege No. 39, "Forum" at Narodno Sabranie Square, "Prisma" gallery for fine and applied arts, "Rodno Iskustvo" on Slavyanska No. 6, "Lazur" on Aksakov No. 11/13. Exhibitions are organized at the Palace, Ethnographic Museum, Art Academy, Military Museum, the exhibition hall of the Postal Palace, the Philharmonic on Rakovski Street; the Civil Servants' Society on Tsar Osvoboditel Avenue No. 6, "Tsvyat" gallery on Narodno Sabranie Square No. 3, the gallery on Tsar Osvoboditel Avenue, "Albanovska" publishing house on Tsar Osvoboditel Avenue No. 5, BIAD, Rakovski Street No. 108.

In the second chapter, the efforts to restore 125 Rakovski Gallery are discussed. An interesting and previously unknown fact is the intention for the gallery to be transformed into a cinema with 600-700 seats and rented out to the "Bulgarsko Delo" foundation. It is important to clarify that not only was the gallery supported by rents, a percentage of artwork purchases, admission tickets, and other sources, but also the administrative management and appointed personnel were supported. In reality, without an exhibition hall, the Union was left without a home and without means, and the artists had nowhere to display their works. Although many private salons opened in 1945, they could not be compared to the scale and opportunities provided by the union gallery. Whether the decision to turn it into a cinema was dictated by the Union's unwillingness to deal with the upcoming heavy renovation, or the artists were thinking of building a new venue, or they believed it was a temporary solution until they gathered the strength to restore the union gallery, is an interesting question. However, at this stage, only hypotheses can be put forward due to the lack of initial data. The attempt to convert the exhibition hall into a cinema, however, deprived the capital's public of exhibitions for two years, which is also confirmed by the review of the press in the years 1945-1947.

Over the course of seven years, the gallery underwent finishing and repair work by UAAB and SAB under both regimes: the Tsarist regime, to complete the project according to the design, and the Communist regime, to restore the building after the destructive bombings.

The Union of Artists directed its efforts towards renovating the exhibition hall and restoring the gallery for its original purposes, engaging the attention of state institutions such as the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Propaganda, and the Ministry of Information and Arts, with the rationale that propaganda exhibitions were forthcoming. Only the need for the Bulgarian-Romanian exhibition, which fit within the international policy pursued by the government and the Communist Party, accelerated its costly renovation. Consequently, the impetus was external but proved effective for the gallery's restoration. The Union also insisted on active assistance from the Ministry of War (the "Construction" department) for the supply of

building materials. According to documents, the complete refurbishment and renovation of the gallery was completed on May 30, 1947.

On May 25, 1947, in accordance with the cultural agreement signed between Bulgaria and Romania, the exhibition featuring works by Romanian and Bulgarian artists opened with a one-year delay due to the impossibility of completing the renovation on time. After a long hiatus, 125 Rakovski Gallery opened its doors again.

Chapter III: Exhibition activities in 125 Rakovski Gallery (1940 – 1972). Reflection of artistic criticism. Artists, critics, trends, issues.

In the third chapter, we focus on the artistic life and exhibition activities at 125 Rakovski Gallery during the period 1940 – 1972 and the reflection of artistic criticism in an attempt to trace leading trends and issues, the activity of artists and critics, and the reception of artistic phenomena in different periods. We are fully aware of the complexity and the scope of the task in this chapter due to the vast source material and the multifaceted nature of the issues in such a long period of time. For this reason, its volume is the largest. It is divided into eight subchapters, which, besides chronology and types of exhibitions, are arranged in a way that covers all types of art in which processes of small and larger changes occur; where there is more freedom within the aesthetic directives of the respective period or where the regime of totalitarian control weakens and the relevance of the opposition between permission/non-permission comes to the fore. Iconic exhibitions for the gallery, as well as for the period of socialism, have been selected. A typology of the exhibitions has been made in comparison with those presented in the new gallery, opened at 1 Gurko Str.

The information from the collected sources, archival sources, periodicals, and their processing allowed for the compilation of a list of exhibitions at 125 Rakovski Gallery over a period of three decades (see Appendices No. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13). The systematically organized material is used as the basis for the analytical part. Based on the newly found documents, supplemented by statistical data, the present text will outline new areas for research and analysis, applying different perspectives to the accumulated material.

The third chapter consists of eight subchapters.

First Subchapter "Exhibition life in the gallery (1940 – 1941). First exhibitions and criticism" examines and analyzes the reflection of artistic criticism on the nine exhibitions organized in 125 Rakovski Gallery – XIII General Art Exhibition (1940), "Contemporary French Painting" (1940), exhibition of Petar Mladenov (1940); Nikola Tanev (1940); exhibition of the society "Contemporary Art" (1940); exhibition of North Bulgarian artists (1941); exhibition of Atanas Mihov (1941); exhibition of female artists (1941); posthumous exhibition of Pencho Georgiev (1941). Attention is paid to the international contacts of the UAAB and the concluded cultural agreements, highlighting the arrangement of reciprocal exhibitions. Some of them, such as the Bulgarian exhibition opened in Athens in 1940, and the one in Berlin in March 1941, are discussed. The exhibition in Berlin is important also from a political point of view, as it

symbolically places Bulgaria in the orbit of Nazi Germany and in the realm of culture after joining the Tripartite Pact (Germany, Italy, Japan).

Second Subchapter "Bulgarian-Romanian relations (1945 – 1947). Cultural agreement. Exhibitions." focuses on cultural cooperation between Bulgaria and Romania and the exhibitions organized in 1945, 1946, and 1947.

After the end of World War II, Bulgaria becomes part of the Eastern Bloc – a community of socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe with communist governments. Culture and art are used as tools for propaganda work in asserting communist ideology, and creative unions are directly engaged in promoting the "correct" ideological line. The UAB monopolizes all artistic activities. The need for exhibition space in the capital, in addition to its purely cultural function in the new socio-political environment, acquires a political character.

The rapid political reorientation of Bulgaria initially limits the international contacts of the UBA. In March 1945, diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Romania are resumed, and the beginning of cultural cooperation between the two now communist countries is laid. As a result of the development of bilateral relations, in June 1945, Bulgarian artists were invited to participate with their works in the joint national exhibition of Romanian artists. In return the Romanian artists would be invited to exhibit at 125 Rakovski Gallery. In the post-war years, organizing an exhibition from abroad proved to be a difficult task. The allied leadership faces a serious problem. After the air raids in 1944, the gallery was set on fire. Due to the lack of space, the UBA asks the Art Academy to provide a salon for jurying the works for the exhibition of Bulgarian artists in Romania. The Art Council selects a collection of 23 paintings, 9 graphics, and 8 sculptural works, and the UBA sends a letter to the Ministry of Propaganda requesting financial assistance for printing the exhibition catalog and providing a railway wagon on the Sofia – Bucharest route and back.

The delayed renovation of Rakovski 125 forces UBA to inform its Romanian colleagues that the exhibition planned for the fall of 1945 with their participation is postponed. For the same reason, the XIX UBA General Art Exhibition, in which artists, and members of the Artists' Union of Bucharest, also participate, opened on December 23, 1945, in the halls of the Art Academy. The agreed exhibition of Romanian and Bulgarian artists, according to the concluded cultural agreement, opens on May 25, 1947 – the first exhibition at 125 Rakovski Gallery after its forced closure.

The third subchapter "Activation of the 125 Rakovski Gallery performance (1947 – 1949). Other foreign and Bulgarian exhibitions" examines the foreign and Bulgarian exhibitions presented between 1947 and 1949 at the Union 125 Rakovski Gallery. A review of the press and documents in the Central State Archives suggests that from 1947 to the end of the decade, the gallery mainly organized foreign guest exhibitions, documentary and historical exhibitions, and photo exhibitions with purely propaganda purposes. In quantitative terms, group exhibitions, now called collective exhibitions of UBA artists, predominate. Individual exhibitions seem to take a back seat at the moment and are rather redirected to the new acquisition in the city center -

the exhibition hall on Gurko Street 1 in the City Garden (on the site of the City Casino), as well as to several small city galleries: Forum, Tsvyat, Lazur, Philharmony, Student House, Prism, etc.

In 1947, the XX UBA General art exhibition is organized at Rakovski 125. The exhibition of paintings and sculptures by artists whose works were not juried in 1947 due to "their special merits in our fine arts" are of interest. The exhibition catalog includes Alexander Stamenov, Bencho Obreshkov, Vasil Stoilov, Danail Dechev, Eliezer Alsheh, Dechko Uzunov, Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, Kiril Tsonev, Ivan Nenov, Kiril Petrov, Marko Behar, Stoyan Venev, Vaska Emanuilova, Vasil Radoslavov, Ivan Funev, Ivan Lazarov, Marko Markov, Mara Georgieva, Nikolay Shmigrela, and others, marked with the sign O.K. (OR Contest). It is stated that these are artists negotiating with the Chamber of People's Culture.

The "Exhibition of Polish Books" (July 17-26, 1947) is organized by the Polish Embassy and the Bulgarian-Polish Society in Sofia. On September 7, 1947, a photographic exhibition of the Bulgarian Deed Foundation is opened. In June, UBA receives a letter from the Bulgarian Photo Club (BPC) requesting to rent 125 Rakovski Gallery for three weeks for an art photo exhibition with about 150-160 photo panels, presenting the achievements of artistic photography - the first of its kind national photo exhibition, presenting the cultural, economic, and political life in Bulgaria, mostly the activities of the new Fatherland Front government in implementing the adopted two-year economic plan.

The 125 Rakovski Gallery is rented by a number of institutions for organizing exhibitions – in April 1948 by the editorial office of the humorous weekly newspaper "Starshel"; in June by the state tourism company "Balkantourist" for a poster competition exhibition; in April for an exhibition of the 4th Fatherland Front Sofia district; in May by the Assistance Organization in Sofia for a charity exhibition to help the children of Greek refugees by artists from the 5th district. The gallery also hosts the National Radio Exhibition from May 3 to 22, 1949. In late September 1948, the exhibition "September 1923" opened, organized to mark the 25th anniversary of the September Uprising.

It is a common practice during this period for the Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) to entrust groups of artists with organizing, arranging, and documenting exhibitions. This is the case with the Albanian Documentary Photo Exhibition, which opened in January 1949, entrusted to Dimitar Kandimirov in cooperation with Kiril Kazanlakliev, Todor Peev, and Borislav Ivanov. Preslav Karshovski is entrusted with the artistic design of the poster, catalog, and layout of the exhibition "Polish Illustrations and Books," organized in March 1949, according to the one-year cultural exchange and cooperation plan between Bulgaria and Poland.

The state enterprise "Bulgarian Cinematography" rents the gallery for 377,000 BGN from December 10, 1948, to February 10, 1949, for the exhibition "Four Years of the Fatherland Front under the Leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party," entrusted to a collective of artists including Tanyu Pindarev, Petar Gachev, Jose Sancho, Aleksandar Zhendov, Simeon Halachev, Todor Petrov, Pepa Dimitrova, Lyuben Dimitrov, Zlatka Georgieva, Boris Kostev, and a spatial project by Petar Gachev. The plan includes the development of two murals, drawings and photomontages, caricatures, inscriptions, slogans, the construction of a photo laboratory (model),

and the creation of a symbolic sculpture measuring 1 x 2 meters. Meetings, discussions, and debates are also held in the gallery. During the "Polish Illustration and Books" exhibition, on March 15, 1949, a conference is held in the exhibition hall together with caricaturist artists to activate their work and involve them in artistic activities.

In 1948, exhibitions were organized according to the plan for implementing the cultural agreement between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. The exhibition "Contemporary Czechoslovak Graphic Art" is displayed at 125 Rakovski Gallery. The same year, the exhibition "Czechoslovak Sculpture" is open for almost a month, featuring not only easel works but also monumental creations. In addition to organizing exhibitions of foreign artists in Bulgaria, the UBA also arranges exhibitions abroad – participating in the international exhibition of children's and youth books in December 1948 in Vienna, a retrospective exhibition of Bulgarian visual art in Budapest, and an exhibition "Bulgarian Folk Art" in Prague.

An important document characterizing the relationship between state policy and the ideology of the Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) is the new Statute of the Union of Artists in Bulgaria, adopted at the IV General Art Exhibition held on February 27-28, 1949. It clarifies the main objective set by the state administration and the Communist Party for the Union: "To actively assist the people's power in the implementation of socialism in our country using the means of visual arts." The Union, as the main body striving to support the artistic life in the country and beyond, has the task of "working for the progressive development of visual arts by helping Bulgarian artists fight against the ideanness in art and against the decadent bourgeois formalist art in any form it may be (modernism, impressionism, naturalism, etc.), and by strengthening their professional mastery, to create high artistic works on the path of socialist realism (...) to work on raising the ideological-political level of Bulgarian artists in the spirit of socialism and to assist in strengthening the ties of Bulgarian artists with the Slavic and all freedom-loving peoples, led by the Soviet Union, as well as for a broader recognition of these peoples through organizing mutual exhibitions, visits, conferences, etc."

In the Statute of UBA, in the "Rights and Obligations of Union Members," it is indicated that the artist must actively work towards achieving the goals of the union and cannot accept or perform individually or collectively artistic commissions of public character without being assigned by the Union. The UBA also imposes a rule prohibiting the purchase of paintings from private exhibitions. This is evidenced by artist Petar K. Yansen, who organized an exhibition at the "Prisma" gallery in April 1948.

In the fourth subchapter "Foreign exhibitions in the 1950s at Rakovski 125. Selection and discussions," foreign exhibitions held at the 125 Rakovski Gallery are reviewed. The exposition presents facts about the artistic life in the capital during the 1950s and the possible full scope of foreign exhibitions. Program documents of the UBA were searched for data on the nature of the exhibition policy being conducted and the ideological line followed. Emphasis is placed on the exhibition of art from the People's Republic of Romania, the exhibition of Hungarian visual art, individual exhibitions of Renato Guttuso, Käthe Kollwitz, Witold Zacharevich, Kukryniksy, and

others. Some of the reviews of the then criticism are considered, which contain a large dose of official rhetoric, and comments on the artistic qualities of the works are based on ideological orientation and political expediency.

In the text, an attempt is made to outline the picture of the artistic life and the activities of the Union of Artists during the 1950s of the 20th century by tracing the manifestations of realism as a direction in art. The question of the differences in understanding realism as an artistic method is raised. Special attention is paid to the international exchange up to the end of the 1950s in the light of the emerging ideological conditions - with increasingly frequent accusations of formalism and the persistent imposition of socialist realism. Because, if up until 1949, some pluralism in style and genre can still be observed - the Romanian-Bulgarian exhibitions illustrate this well - the exhibitions held at the Union Gallery throughout the following decade are massively in propaganda service of the state. Individual and collective exhibitions are replaced by documentary, photographic, and similar exhibitions. It is true that in addition to the exhibitions organized by the Union of Bulgarian Artists in the country, the cultural centers at foreign embassies also organize exhibitions of foreign artists according to cultural agreements. However small or censored according to the requirements for socialist realism this window to the world may be, it also proves to be significant. But at the same time, the gallery has been turned into an active propaganda instrument serving the authorities, and it also becomes a profitable space in the literal sense. The study also provides space for examining the phenomena that characterize the beginning of the thaw after the April plenum in 1956, the first manifestations of turning to folk art and the national heritage as a whole. By the end of this subheading, specific exhibitions have been reviewed with an emphasis on their reflection and evaluation by criticism.

This approach is also applied in the fifth subheading "General Art Exhibitions, group and individual exhibitions at the Rakovski Street gallery in the 1950s. Reflection of artistic criticism. Selection and discussions." The 1950s are characterized by a particular dynamism in exhibition life. As mentioned above, the Union Gallery has been used by a number of state institutions for propaganda purposes, especially until 1954. After this year, the percentage of organized solo, collective, and group exhibitions increases quantitatively. It should be noted that we cannot claim to be exhaustive in terms of the complete reconstruction of the exhibitions, as those whose location has not been established are excluded from the appendices with lists to the dissertation. The typology of the exhibitions in the 1950s in the gallery and their statistics reveal the following picture:

National and general art exhibitions: National Exhibition for Peace (1950), "60 Years of Bulgarian Revolutionary Socialist and Communist Press" (1951), Bulgaria on the Path to Socialism (1952), Exhibition "September Uprising" (1953); "Art Exhibition for Our Village" (1956), Exhibition of Artworks with Military Themes from the Liberation to the Present (1956); "Industrial Art School" (1956); Union of Artists Exhibition '57, Jubilee Union of Artists Exhibition '59.

Competitive exhibitions: exhibition of projects for the monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia (1951).

Individual: "Watercolor Landscapes by Yordan Geshev" (1953), by Ruska Marinova (1955), Zlatyu Boyadzhiev (1955), Stoyan Venev (1955), Alexander Milenkov (1955), Kiril Mateev (1956), Georgi Pavlov (1957), jubilee exhibition of Elisaveta Konsulova-Vazova (1956/7), second solo exhibition of Boris Kotsev (1957), jubilee exhibition of Georgi Popov (1957), first solo exhibition of Tsocho Stoyanov (1957), posthumous exhibition of Ivan Penkov (1958), exhibition of Ivan Getsov (1958), jubilee exhibition of Danail Dechev (1958), exhibition of Konstantin Shtarkelov (1958), Ivan Tabakov (1958), posthumous exhibition of Valentin Valev (1958), exhibition of Vasil Stoilov (1958), "Veselin Staikov - 25 Years of Creativity" (1958), exhibition of Alexander Zhendov (1958), "Alexander Bozhinov at 80 Years", exhibition of Naiden Petkov (1959) and others.

Group: "Exhibition of Four Artists - Tseno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, Andrey Nikolov, Vladimir Dimitrov - The Master" (1952); Exhibition of works by Revival artists (1954), Exhibition of deceased artists antifascists (1954), Exhibition of Alexander Andreev, Lyuben Doganov, and Nikola Georgiev (1954), Exhibition of artistic textiles (1955); Exhibition of the Kamburova-Velichkovi Artistic Textiles Studio ("Spring Exhibitions") (1955), jubilee exhibition of Vaska Emanuilova and Alexander Stamenov (1956); Exhibition of women artists (1956); Art exhibition of teachers (1956); Collective exhibition of artists-teachers at the art gymnasium (1956); Exhibition of women artists (1957); exhibition of Ivan and Tihomir Radinovi (1957), Exhibition of Sofia artists (1958); Exhibition of battle art (1959); Sofia District Exhibition: far from life" (1959) and others.

Not all times it was possible to display them at Rakovski 125, so UBA often redistributes them in other galleries - at "Gurko" 1 Street and "Ruski" 5 Avenue. In the annual plans of UBA, preserved in its archival fund in the Central State Archives, in the section "Artistic and Creative Activity - Organization", it is recorded that for the holding of sectional, posthumous, individual exhibitions and providing creative assistance in holding district art exhibitions in the country by provincial groups, as well as for organizing exhibitions under cultural conventions and others, a plan is prepared jointly and coordinated with the Committee for Culture and Art. From the calendar plans of UBA, it can be concluded that during the year exhibitions are organized in the following sequence: general - group - collective - individual - foreign. Very often the gallery is divided between two exhibitions with parallel duration - while one is taking place, another is opening in the adjacent hall.

In the early 1950s, Bulgarian art was highly politicized, ideologically charged, and a large portion of the group exhibitions organized were necessarily thematically oriented. One of them was the "National Exhibition for Peace" (1950). Newly discovered facts about the organization of exhibitions in the context of "order-contractor-performer" are published for the first time. After the exhibition "Bulgaria on the Path to Socialism" in November 1952, the name of 125 Rakovski Gallery does not appear in the press for a long period of time. From a letter from the Union to Valko Chervenkov requesting assistance regarding the payment of rent by the National Council of the Fatherland Front as a tenant, it becomes clear that the gallery was rented for the aforementioned exhibition for a period of eight months (August 2, 1952 - April 20, 1953). This once again testifies that it was used to serve the government and hold propaganda exhibitions

during the totalitarian years. In compensation for the rejections of organizing collective and independent exhibitions, the Union of Bulgarian Artists increased the contracting, using the proceeds from propagandistic exhibitions for this purpose. In addition, the Union of Bulgarian Artists points out that due to external exhibitions in the gallery, it cannot be used for independent exhibitions by its members and insists that this be changed. Soon after (on November 13, 1953), an exhibition by Yordan Geshev was opened at 125 Rakovski Gallery, which was indicative of the change in relationships, but also of the genre specificity.

In an attempt to trace, outline and analyze the genre and style tendencies over the decade and the change in the cultural environment, separate exhibitions are examined. Each of them deserves detailed attention and detailed elaboration, but the study only focuses on some of them. Of the individual exhibitions opened at 125 Rakovski Street, those of Stoyan Venev, Georgi (John) Popov, and Alexander Zhendov are examined. They reflect the tendency after 1953 to hold retrospective exhibitions of artists from the 1930s generation with left-wing convictions and contributions to the fight against Hitlerism and "monarchofascism," as well as to leadership positions. The exhibitions of Ivan Penkov and Nayden Petkov are also examined. The exhibitions "Four Artists - Tzeno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, Andrey Nikolov, Vladimir Dimitrov - the Master" (1952), Zlatyu Boyadzhiev's exhibition (1955) and Konstantin Shchurkelov's exhibition (1958) are also symptomatic, rehabilitating great Bulgarian artists who worked before the socialist era and turned into true cultural events.

From the group exhibitions, we note the exhibition of women artists opened in February 1956. For the first time since September 9, 1944, an exhibition of women artists in Bulgaria is held. Over 100 female artists participate in the painting, graphics, and sculpture sections. A jury was appointed for the exhibition to select participants and works. Some of the works had been purchased earlier by various institutions and organizations, while others were created before the exhibition opened.

The so-called "Spring Exhibitions" held in the months of February, March, and April of 1955 in the capital have been reviewed. An exhibition of artistic textiles was organized at the Union Gallery as part of the "Creative Support for Artists" fund, led by Kamburova-Velichkovi, and with the participation of Tilko Tilev, the head of the studio at TF (1955).

The gallery also serves as a venue for short-term events, such as the Fashion Show on April 14, 1955, organized by the UBA and the Models and Casts Home under the Central Council of Labor-Productive Cooperatives. From the announcement by the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency and the accompanying photograph on the front page of the "Evening News" newspaper, we get an idea of part of the interior, which was specially rearranged in a completely "domestic" style for the fashion show - from the arrangement of the salon to the speaker dressed in a dress with Bulgarian embroidery. The large hall has been transformed into a cozy home corner with a beautiful wooden chandelier and manually crafted fabrics hanging from the roof window (to limit the lighting). Ethnographic motifs were used for the high round podium. More than 40 of the displayed models were made from "domestic textiles" created in the artistic studio of TF under the Bulgarian Artists' Union, in collaboration with weavers from the Models and Casts Home, while the remaining 80 models were made from fabrics with national patterns, produced

at the "Runa" textile factory. This is an important initiative as it demonstrates the potential for integrating domestic textiles into production.

Chapter Six, titled "GAE (General Art Exhibition), Individual, Foreign Exhibitions in 125 Rakovski Gallery during the Period 1960-1972. Reflection of Art Criticism on Genre and Stylistic Trends," examines the 1960s and the first years of the 1970s, which represent a turning point in the development of artistic life and visual arts in Bulgaria. The 1960s were marked by a double leap in the number of solo exhibitions compared to the previous decade. The period is characterized by even greater dynamism in artistic processes towards democratization of artistic life, complexity of content and plastic issues, an increase in the number of general and individual exhibitions, synchronous with phenomena in the sociocultural life of Eastern Bloc countries. According to historian Evgeniya Kalinova, the 1960s can be defined as a "decade of contradictions and reforms."

Research on the 1960s period poses serious challenges due to the fact that the gallery's program during this decade included not only exhibitions primarily focused on painting and sculpture, as in the previous decade, but also on applied arts, which entered a new stage of development in this period. At the same time, the organization of general artistic, solo, and foreign exhibitions continued. Within the scope of this study, it is not possible to examine all individual presentations, and some of the authors have already been the subject of analysis in scientific literature. Our focus here is on the general processes and phenomena of the period, with an emphasis on some general, individual, and foreign exhibitions. New facts are presented which complement the overall picture of the fine arts. Individual exhibitions by Georgi Baev, Georgi Kovachev, Marko Behar, Alexander Stamenov, Georgi (John) Popov, and Masha Uzunova have been examined. However, unlike the previous period, where less known foreign exhibitions were analyzed in a separate chapter due to important archival material that helped to outline a more comprehensive picture, they have not been thoroughly analyzed for the 1960s. Quantitative data is presented for the reciprocal exhibitions organized in the country and abroad based on signed cultural agreements, which once again testifies to the activation of artistic life and processes in the arts. Of course, the historical context predetermines the parallel existence of both formal exhibitions with obligatory images and props, and memorable vivid works whose authors, although often including such works in their individual exhibitions, reveal a liberation of creative attitudes in another part of their presentations (especially after 1954).

During the 1960s, and particularly in the early 1970s, in addition to the regular general art exhibitions, there was an increase in the number of exhibitions organized for young artists who had recently graduated. This speaks to strengthen institutional support for the young and stimulate their individual expression. Some of the critical reviews for these exhibitions are also examined, with comments on their objectivity, made based on discovered visual material, compared with evaluations of their qualities and the context of the time.

Upon a thorough examination of specialized literature, daily newspapers, and specialized publications on art and culture, the following important trend is observed: during the 1960s, the Union Gallery was reserved for the opening of general and national exhibitions, as well as exhibitions of artists celebrating anniversaries or jubilees. For foreign exhibitions, the salons on

5 Ruski Boulevard and the cultural institutes of the respective countries in Sofia, as well as the National Palace of Culture, were preferred. A significant portion of solo exhibitions were distributed to other exhibition halls in the capital. For example, while the GAE 1962 exhibition, dedicated to the 8th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party, was ongoing in the Gurko 1 and Rakovski 125 salons from November 2, 1962, to March 10, 1963, a ceramic exhibition by Georgi Bakurdzhiev was opened at the salon on 5 Ruski Boulevard, a textile exhibition by Tsvetana Stancheva was opened at the salon on 11 Levski Street, and a ceramic exhibition by Yova Raevska was opened at the Center for Applied Arts on 117 Rakovski Street, and etc.

In addition to general art and individual exhibitions, which included painting, graphics, sculpture, and applied arts, the Union Gallery also hosted exhibitions of documentary nature, such as the "Scientific-Atheistic Exhibition" (1963). However, exhibitions began to be organized that showed a tendency to separate some types of art from the general exhibitions, such as the Second National Photo Exhibition (1963), the National Exhibition of Sculpture and Graphics (1964), the First (1964) and Third National Cartoon Exhibition (1966), the National Exhibition of Scenography (1964), and the First General Exhibition of Bulgarian Political Posters (1967). The activity of the Union of Bulgarian Artists was also intensified through its various professional divisions - sections, which carried out their programs and organized their presentations before the public, i.e., with the stratification of the guild principle, they, to some extent, as a form of organization, approached the associations of the "bourgeois period." And this strengthens the desire for informal autonomy, as far as they were possible within the structures of the socialist Union of Bulgarian Artists.

During the 1960s until 1972, a creative exchange of artists and representative exhibitions was also carried out with the aim of getting acquainted with the culture and arts of the respective countries, according to cultural agreements with Czechoslovakia, Romania, Budapest, Poland, Cuba, India, and others, as well as individual exhibitions of Stasis Krasauskas, John Hartfield, Anatoly Nikic, and others. The organization of foreign exhibitions in Bulgaria was carried out by the Committee for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and the invitees accordingly sent a program of the accepted exhibitions to the Union of Bulgarian Artists, indicating the preferred places for their exhibition.

In an attempt to trace and explain the functioning of the "GAE model," attention is drawn to some of the General Art Exhibitions during the period. Several researchers, such as Ch. Popov, M. Blazhieva, and R. Marinska, take into consideration to its hierarchy, ideological charge, and thematic determination. Although this model should not be taken as an example of our art during the period, from which to derive the leading tendencies, it could raise the question of the transformations of socialist realism as a method and style, as well as a result of the most official exhibitions of the Union of Bulgarian Artists.

Chapter Seven, "Exhibitions of Applied Arts (1964-1972) at 125 Rakovski Gallery. Artists, Works, Discussions", focuses on the general exhibitions of applied arts organized between 1964 and 1972 at 125 Rakovski Gallery on the works presented and their reception by critics. The significant presence of these exhibitions warrants their separation into a special chapter, as they represent a new trend in Bulgarian art - a trend in which the conventionality of the works is

encouraged and easily accepted by the highest levels of authority. Between 1955 and 1972, seven general exhibitions of applied arts were organized in Sofia (1955, 1958, 1960, 1964, 1967, 1968, 1972) in the galleries at Rakovski 125 and Gurko 1. Four general exhibitions were organized between 1964 and 1972, three of which were held at Rakovski 125.

The text analyzes the main directions in the development of applied arts in Bulgaria and distinguishes them as a sphere of individual creative activity, separate from artistic crafts and the work of the applied artist in industrial production. The relationship with traditions and the adoption of new aesthetics – not only here, but in many other areas of contemporary Bulgarian art - are also mentioned. Tracing the general exhibitions provides the opportunity to outline the developmental process in applied art, compare conservative and innovative pursuits, formulate conclusions about dominant stylistic trends, and identify important features related to forms on the boundary between unique works and limited editions. A historical reconstruction of the general exhibitions of applied arts and the first-time publication of archival documents uncovered during the research represent a scientific novelty.

Chapter Eight, "125 Rakovski Gallery and Other Exhibition Venues in the 1960s. Types of Spaces," also examines other exhibition venues from the 1960s, their spaces, and changes in their intended purpose. The changes in exhibition spaces, which are also becoming commercial spaces, are noted. The purely artistic and aesthetic presentation is thus affected by commercial elements. An example of this is the UBA shop on Ruski Boulevard 6, which is revealed through archival documents and photographic material from the periodical press. Another such example is the Center for Applied Arts at Rakovski 117, also owned by the Union of Artists.

In the 1960s, in addition to the mentioned venues - the 125 Rakovski Gallery, the halls at 1 Gurko Street, the National Art Gallery, the exhibition hall of the Committee for Science, Art, and Culture at 5 Russki Street, the salon of the Central House of the People's Army at the corner of Russki and Rakovski, the Bulgaria Hall, the representative store of the Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) at 6 Russki Street, the galleries at 11 Levski Street and 6 Slavyanska Street, the salons of the Czechoslovak Cultural Center at 100 Rakovski Street, the rectory of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", the Club of Cultural Workers at 108 Rakovski Street, the exhibition hall of the Graphic Section at 62 Gurko Street, the Polish Cultural Center at 12 Russki Street, and others that functioned in the 1950s, exhibitions were also held at the Center for Applied Arts at 117 Rakovski Street, in the editorial office of "Puls" newspaper, in the "Tear and Laughter" theater, in the Cultural Center of the GDR, the Belgian Institute for Information and Documentation as part of Bulgarian-Belgian cultural relations, the Hungarian Cultural Center at 8 Russki Street, the Repin Gallery, and others.

In the 1960s, numerous purely commercial spaces emerged. One example is the new gallery-store of the UBA at 6 Russki Boulevard. From a published article in the pages of Sofia Magazine from 1961 and the statistics of the exhibition life from the periodical press during the period, we can reconstruct, albeit partially, the type of exhibition space of a new type and with a different architectural approach in the utilization of the area - more works of art are presented in a smaller area with lots of light, showcases, and specially arranged, i.e. it is an art gallery but with a commercial purpose.

In conclusion

Some sociocultural consequences of the opening of a new exhibition center of the Union of Bulgarian Artists have been presented briefly. At 6 Shipka Street, in the center of Sofia, on December 12, 1972, the new gallery of the UBA was opened. It became popular as "Shipka" 6 over the years, it became an important and integral part of the spiritual and artistic life of the capital, combining the functions of the largest exhibition complex in Bulgaria and the House of Bulgarian Artists. The shift of focus towards the new acquisition of the UBA and the change in the status of 125 Rakovski Gallery have been noted.

After the opening of "Shipka" 6, the 125 Rakovski Gallery, which has been talked about for decades as a pinnacle achievement of artists and a key exhibition space, remains somewhat overlooked by critics, as the new acquisition of the Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) and the exhibitions organized within it become the object of discussion, thereby taking away its leading role as the union gallery. The Salon at Rakovski 125 continues to be used for individual and collective exhibitions, and sometimes, when the exhibition space at "Shipka" 6 proves insufficient, joint exhibitions are also distributed to Rakovski 125. However, this in no way diminishes its significance, as the gallery continues to be an important cultural center in the capital and the country. It retains its authentic appearance as architecture and exhibition space and is particularly preferred for solo exhibitions as well as smaller group and sectional exhibitions. In the last years of the socialist regime, the gallery became an alternative space with several emblematic exhibitions that give us a hint of the birth of the Bulgarian "neo-avant-garde" - the exhibition "Artist and Theater" (1986), the exhibition "The City?" (1986), "Author's Print" (1987), carried out by the Studio of the Young Artist at the UBA, and others that would have been difficult to realize in the already converted four-story gallery complex of the UBA.

Since 1993, the gallery, now named after "Raiko Alexiev," has implemented projects from the UBA exhibition program, presenting authors from all generations working in various types and genres of arts, contemporary forms, and conceptual art.

The study of the history, organization, and exhibition activity of the 125 Rakovski Gallery as a sustainable institution over the years sheds light on various aspects of the history of the artistic life in Bulgaria. Its spaces host hundreds of joint, national, individual, group, and foreign exhibitions in all types of fine and applied arts, a large part of which are emblematic for Bulgarian culture.

The subjective approach in the selection of events is largely predetermined by objective reasons - on the one hand, the archival material is enormous in volume, and on the other hand, for some of the events and exhibitions, there are no documents at all. The systematized facts related to the artistic life and exhibition policy of the gallery raise several questions: "How was the selection of exhibitions made during the socialist period, who decided it, and who prepared the exhibition calendar for the year?" In other words, the study raises future topics with potential for development and multidisciplinary research, which would enrich the understanding of the way the exhibition program was formed, the specifics of the jurying process, what were the motives

for rejecting works accused of formalism or inconvenient for the authorities, for exhibitions removed by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (CCBCP), and the subsequent fate of the authors.

As the subject of a first independent study on the creation, construction, organization, and activity of 125 Rakovski Gallery, this research aims to demonstrate the function and role of exhibition space in the art life in Bulgaria. The systematization of newly discovered and existing factual material (archives of the Union of Bulgarian Artists) and newly found data (archives, periodicals, conducted interviews, etc.) over a long period of time allowed for the creation of a rich documentary and visual database. The compiled databases and chronological lists of exhibitions, as well as specifically researched exhibitions, allow for the identification and fuller coverage of artistic processes and trends on a statistical basis. It is an undeniable fact that 125 Rakovski Gallery played a huge role in the formation and development of the new and contemporary Bulgarian visual arts.

IV. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION WORK

1. For the first time, through the lens of gallery work in Bulgaria, the issue of the development of Bulgarian art is examined in two different periods, under two different political regimes - the Third Bulgarian Kingdom and the People's Republic of Bulgaria, also concerning the period immediately following the Liberation.
2. For the first time, the history of the gallery of the Union of the Artists' Associations in Bulgaria and the Union of Artists in Bulgaria is being revealed - a period that is the longest in the existence of all our galleries (83 years now). The motives and reasons that led to the construction of the exhibition hall at Rakovski 125 are analyzed, and for the first time, the gallery of the Union of the Artists' Associations in Bulgaria (UAAB) / Union of Bulgarian Artists (UBA) is studied as a stable cultural institution in a long-term period, which was governed by the organized guild of artists and subsequently - by a united artists' union, subordinate to the state. A contribution is made by clarifying its status, changes, and development policies in an extraordinarily variable context across different periods.
3. For the first time, a thorough reconstruction of the prehistory and history of the gallery's creation is made - from the birth of the idea to its material realization, the calendar of exhibition activities based on systematic work with scientific papers, archives, periodicals, and oral history. Various new artistic facts, data, and documents, not previously researched or introduced into scientific discourse, are introduced. An entirely new chronology of the exhibition life is made based on newly discovered documentary material for the gallery, and its main stages are identified.
4. A valuable contribution is the examination of the dynamics of processes, directions, types, and genres through the analysis of exhibitions, identifying their managers, organizers, authors, works, and the course of exhibition life by abundant comparative material. The merits of the gallery in culture during its two main periods are pointed out,

addressing essential issues of guild initiative and state assistance, totalitarian power, and the gallery's development in new conditions, reflected in various types of evidence.

5. A contribution is made examining the exhibition space from the view point of functional specifics, which has not been the subject of special research so far. To draw the overall picture of artistic life during the period, both specialized and secondarily adapted exhibition spaces were covered, considering the opportunities they provide for socialization of the art. A typology of gallery spaces during the two main periods is made, explaining why the 125 Rakovski Gallery constantly played the role of the center of the artistic life until 1972. The relationships with the House of Bulgarian Artists (HBA), the "Gurko" 1 gallery, and others are examined, depending on the needs of the UAAB (Union of Artists` Associations in Bulgaria), Union of the Artists in Bulgaria (UAB), and UBA (Union of Bulgarian Artists) - relationships between the gallery and the society/societies that are closely linked, interdependent, and mutually supportive.
6. A contribution of the dissertation is that it provides new and unexplored data, material, methodology, and perspective for future research in this field – for the reconstruction of history and activities, not only of the 125 Rakovski Gallery but also of other exhibition halls outside of Sofia. Through these efforts, the research of historians and theoreticians on the development of Bulgarian visual art is facilitated and supported, including theorists from related fields such as cultural studies, sociology, and cultural anthropology.
7. A contribution is the systematized factual material with newly discovered data in archives, periodical press, and the archive of the Union of Bulgarian Artists, which allowed the formation of a rich documentary and visual corpus spanning an extended period. This enables the outlining and distinguishing of similarities and differences in the status and functionality of the gallery as an institution across various historical periods and political systems. It also allows for a more comprehensive grasp of the artistic processes and tendencies in Bulgarian visual art, studied within a specific historical and sociocultural context.
8. Additional contributions include the dissertation's appendices, which feature a statistical study of the gallery's activities and oral history records in the form of valuable interviews with contemporary artists.
9. The practical applicability and contribution of the research are further outlined by the inclusion of the developed informational directory on gallery activities in Bulgaria and the exhibition activities of the artists during the periods under consideration in the academic discourse.

V. PUBLICATIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DISSERTATION:

1. Noeva, Natasha. The foreign exhibitions in the gallery at 125 Rakovski Str. in the 1950s. Selection and discussions. – Art Studies Quarterly, IAS BAS, 2022, No. 2, 76 – 84.
2. Noeva, Natasha. The Dynamics of Art Gallery Activities in Sofia from the Liberation to 1938 – In: Art and context, IAS BAS, S., 2021, 93 – 111
3. Noeva, Natasha. Vogue in time. Gallery "Rakovski" 125 - center of artistic life 1940 – 1944. – In: Art readings 2020, Module "New Art", Travels, IAS BAS, S., 2021, 363 - 375.
4. Noeva, Natasha. Tradition and modernity: applied art general exhibitions at 125 Rakovski Gallery (1955-1972) – In: Zbornik radova: First International Conference Smartart – Art and Science Applied. From Inspiration to Interaction. Belgrade, 2020, p. 76 – 87.
5. Noeva, Natasha. 125 Rakovski Gallery – center of international cultural cooperation. – Serdika – Sredets – Sofia. 90 years of the Museum of Sofia. S., ROME-Sofia, 2020, 850 – 860.

Interviews with artists related to the topic of the dissertation:

1. Noeva, Natasha. The sculpture is a fossilized thought of the eternal movement of life. Interview with Prof. Valentin Starchev. – Arts platform. Institute for Arts Research, BAS.
<https://artstudies.bg/platforma/%D1%81%D0%BA%D1%83%D0%BB%D0%BF%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B5-%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%BB-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%87/>
2. Noeva, Natasha. The world of Kalina Taseva (interview). – Arts platform. Institute for Arts Research, BAS.

4. <https://artstudies.bg/platforma/%d1%81%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%82%d1%8a%d1%82-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%bb%d0%b8%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%82%d0%b0%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b2%d0%b0/>
5. Interview with Bisera Prahova (unpublished)

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