

**INSTITUTIONAL MEDIATION AND IDEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE:
THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE ARTISTIC FIELD IN ROMANIA,
1945–1950**

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Abstract

Institutional mediation constituted the foundational mechanism through which ideological discipline became enforceable within the Romanian artistic field in the immediate postwar years. Against dominant interpretive models that frame early socialist cultural transformation either as the rapid imposition of socialist realism or as the direct result of coercive state intervention, the study demonstrates that mechanisms of regulation, professional normalization, and economic governance played a decisive formative role between 1945 and 1950.

Drawing on legal decrees, organizational statutes, and early administrative records, the analysis traces the dismantling of prewar professional associations and their replacement with centralized regulatory structures, culminating in the legal recognition of the Union of Visual Artists (Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici, UAP) in 1950. Particular attention is paid to the adoption of the UAP statute and to the establishment of economic instruments such as the Plastic Fund, which redefined artistic activity as socially accountable labor integrated into state-managed systems of production, evaluation, and material support.

The article shows that during this formative phase ideological discipline operated less through explicit censorship or stylistic prescription than through institutional mechanisms governing professional membership, access to resources, and criteria of legitimacy. By embedding artistic practice within administratively regulated frameworks, the socialist state effectively reshaped the conditions of artistic autonomy before socialist realism was formally codified as an aesthetic orthodoxy. Institutional normalization thus preceded, enabled, and stabilized subsequent processes of aesthetic standardization.

By foregrounding the administrative and economic dimensions of cultural governance, this study reframes early socialist cultural policy in Romania as a gradual process of structural consolidation rather than an abrupt doctrinal rupture. It argues that the consolidation of ideological authority within the visual arts depended fundamentally on the reorganization of professional institutions, offering a model for understanding how artistic fields are transformed under conditions of political and ideological reconfiguration.

***Key words:** institutional mediation; ideological discipline; visual arts; Romania; socialism; cultural policy; Union of Visual Artists*

Introduction

The years between 1945 and 1950 represent a structurally decisive yet comparatively under-theorized phase in the reorganization of the Romanian artistic

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field under the emerging socialist regime. Rather than constituting an immediate stylistic rupture with prewar cultural arrangements, this interval reveals a gradual but profound transformation of institutional frameworks, professional hierarchies, and mechanisms of artistic legitimation. Through successive legislative acts, administrative restructurings, and regulatory interventions, artistic production was progressively integrated into centralized systems of governance. This transformation reshaped not only aesthetic orientations but, more fundamentally, the material and symbolic conditions under which artistic labor was organized, evaluated, and sustained.

Post-1989 Romanian historiography has made significant contributions to understanding the ideological dimensions of communist cultural policy. Magda Cârneci's synthetic account of Romanian visual arts under communism emphasizes the subordination of artistic production to political authority and the instrumentalization of aesthetics within ideological frameworks.² Cristian Vasile's extensive archival research has clarified the legislative and administrative mechanisms through which cultural institutions were progressively subordinated to party control during the consolidation of the communist regime.³ These studies have been indispensable in documenting the coercive and doctrinal dimensions of early socialist cultural governance. However, they tend to privilege either the formal codification of socialist realism or the explicit political supervision of artistic institutions as the primary locus of transformation.

In the broader historiography of East-Central Europe, the restructuring of artistic life after 1945 has been analyzed within the systemic logic of Stalinist consolidation. Piotr Piotrowski has argued that the transformation of artistic fields across the Soviet bloc occurred through geopolitical realignment and institutional centralization prior to the stabilization of stylistic orthodoxy.⁴ His transnational perspective shifts analytical emphasis from aesthetic form to structural reconfiguration. Similarly, Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius conceptualizes socialist realism not merely as a prescriptive aesthetic formula but as a regime of normalization embedded within administrative, pedagogical, and representational systems.⁵ Such approaches foreground the institutional and discursive infrastructures that sustained ideological authority. Yet even within this

² Magda Cârneci, *The Visual Arts in Romania, 1945–1989. With an Addendum, 1990–2010*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2013, pp. 37–52, 65–79.

³ Cristian Vasile, *Literature and the Arts in Communist Romania, 1948–1953*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2010, pp. 41–78, 109–132.

⁴ Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, London, Reaktion Books, 2009, pp. 11–18, 41–59.

⁵ Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, *Socialist Realism and the Remaking of East European Art History*, in "Revisiting Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern Europe", ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, London, Routledge, 2019, pp. 1–6, 14–19.

comparative scholarship, institutions are often treated as instruments of an already consolidated ideological order rather than as arenas in which authority was incrementally constructed.

A significant strand of scholarship on socialist realism in East-Central Europe has framed cultural transformation either as a top-down imposition of aesthetic doctrine or as an extension of overt political repression. While these perspectives remain indispensable for understanding the ideological consolidation of the Stalinist period, they risk obscuring the infrastructural processes through which ideological authority was rendered durable and administratively enforceable. The Romanian case between 1945 and 1950 demonstrates that the decisive transformation of the artistic field occurred at the level of institutional governance prior to the formal stabilization of socialist realism as aesthetic orthodoxy. The reallocation of professional legitimacy and economic mediation reveals institutional consolidation as the primary mechanism of early socialist cultural transformation during the formative postwar years.⁶

This formative interval therefore requires a more granular reconstruction of this transitional phase. While 1948 is conventionally identified as the watershed year of Stalinization—marked by constitutional reform, nationalization, and the reorganization of cultural institutions—the preceding and subsequent years reveal a more complex process of institutional experimentation, bureaucratic consolidation, and economic restructuring. The formal codification of socialist realism in 1950 crystallized transformations already achieved at the level of institutional governance. By the time stylistic prescriptions were explicitly articulated, the structural conditions of artistic production had been fundamentally recalibrated.

Building on this reframing, the article argues that institutional governance restructured the internal logic of the artistic field before socialist realism was formally codified as aesthetic orthodoxy. Ideological discipline was consolidated structurally before it was stabilized stylistically. Membership criteria, professional accreditation, access to commissions, and economic mediation mechanisms progressively tied artistic legitimacy to institutional recognition. Artistic practice was thus reframed as socially accountable labor embedded within state-managed administrative and economic structures.

Methodologically, the study is grounded in the analysis of postwar legal decrees, published statutes, and administrative regulations governing artistic organizations and economic mechanisms in the late 1940s. Rather than offering a stylistic reading of individual artworks, it reconstructs the procedural consolidation of institutional authority through normative documentation. This approach is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the artistic field, which conceptualizes cultural production as structured by relational positions and struggles over

⁶ Piotr Piotrowski, *op. cit.* and Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, New York, HarperCollins, 1990.

symbolic capital,⁷ and by Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, which illuminates how modern institutions produce regulated subjects through administrative techniques and normative evaluation.⁸ Together, these frameworks allow for an examination of how professional autonomy was reconfigured under conditions of political centralization—not simply suppressed, but reorganized within new structures of legitimacy and dependency.

At the core of this investigation lies the institutional transition from the Syndicate of Fine Arts (Sindicatul Artelor Frumoase), reactivated after 1945 as a professional association rooted in interwar organizational models, to the Union of Visual Artists (Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici), formally established in 1950 as a centralized professional body. This transition exemplifies a broader process of bureaucratic normalization through which artistic representation was subordinated to unified regulatory authority. The restructuring of professional organization did not merely reflect ideological consolidation; it actively produced the administrative and economic infrastructure that rendered aesthetic conformity enforceable.

By foregrounding institutional mediation as a formative mechanism of early socialist cultural governance, this study contributes to Eastern European art historiography by proposing a structurally grounded model of artistic field transformation under political regime change. The Romanian case demonstrates that the consolidation of socialist cultural authority preceded and enabled the aesthetic stabilization of socialist realism, revealing institutional governance as the primary site through which ideological authority was structurally consolidated in the early socialist period, prior to and independently from its full aesthetic codification.

Conceptual Framework: Institutional Discipline and the Artistic Field

This article adopts a dual analytical framework in order to examine how professional legitimacy and artistic autonomy were reconfigured in Romania during the late 1940s. The first component derives from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the artistic field; the second from Michel Foucault's account of disciplinary power. Taken together, these perspectives make it possible to analyze both the redistribution of authority within the cultural field and the procedural mechanisms through which normative alignment becomes stabilized.

In Bourdieu's formulation, the artistic field constitutes a relatively autonomous social space structured by positions, struggles, and competing claims to symbolic capital. Autonomy is not an intrinsic property but a relational achievement, contingent upon the balance of forces between the cultural field and

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 29–73.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Vintage Books, 1977, pp. 135–169, 194–228.

the broader field of power.⁹ From this standpoint, transformations in the institutional loci of recognition—such as the bodies empowered to grant membership, visibility, or professional validation—directly affect the internal economy of legitimacy. The analytical value of Bourdieu's model in the present study lies in its capacity to illuminate how shifts in consecratory authority alter the conditions under which artistic value is defined and acknowledged.

Complementing this structural perspective, Foucault's analysis of discipline directs attention to the operational level of power. In *Discipline and Punish*, discipline is conceptualized as a modality of power that functions through normalization, evaluation, and the organization of conduct within institutional frameworks rather than through episodic coercion.¹⁰ Power is productive insofar as it generates categories, procedures, and expectations that shape behavior from within. Applied to the cultural sphere, this approach underscores how statutes, decrees, admission criteria, and administrative routines may function as technologies of regulation that reorder professional life without necessarily invoking explicit prohibition.

The combination of these two frameworks allows the article to distinguish between structural reallocation of symbolic authority (in Bourdieusian terms) and the normalization of professional conduct through regulated procedures (in Foucauldian terms). Rather than presupposing either aesthetic determinism or direct repression as explanatory models, the analysis proceeds by examining how legitimacy, access, and evaluation are reorganized through formalized mechanisms. The conceptual framework thus serves not as an interpretive overlay, but as a methodological tool for identifying how authority circulates and stabilizes within the artistic field under conditions of political transformation.

In the specific case of postwar Romania, this theoretical articulation clarifies how ideological authority was constructed incrementally within institutional frameworks before socialist realism was formally defined as aesthetic orthodoxy. The Romanian transition thus offers an empirical case through which the interaction between structural reallocation of symbolic capital and disciplinary normalization becomes historically demonstrable.

From Professional Association to Instrument of Regulation: The Syndicate of Fine Arts after 1945

Founded in 1921, the Syndicate of Fine Arts (*Sindicatul Artelor Frumoase*, SAF) functioned throughout the interwar period as a professional organization concerned primarily with the defense of artists' material interests and collective representation. Its institutional profile reflected the plural associational framework of prewar Romania, within which professional organizations operated with relative

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–73.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–169.

autonomy and participated in a competitive cultural field structured by diverse aesthetic and ideological orientations.

The reactivation of SAF after 1945 took place within a fundamentally altered political and legal environment. The Law on Professional Syndicates adopted in 1945 and the subsequent constitutional reordering inaugurated by the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic of 13 April 1948 redefined the juridical framework governing professional and cultural associations.¹¹ Under the new constitutional order, associative activity was subordinated to the principles of socialist state organization, progressively aligning professional structures with the political and ideological objectives of the regime.

This transformation did not initially entail the abrupt dissolution of existing associations. Rather, it initiated a gradual process of administrative integration and functional realignment. As demonstrated by the broader reorganization of cultural institutions during the late 1940s, professional associations were increasingly placed under ministerial supervision and incorporated into centralized systems of cultural coordination.¹² Within this evolving regulatory environment, SAF's capacity for autonomous professional representation diminished as access to exhibitions, commissions, and institutional material support became progressively mediated through structures connected to state authority.

The discursive framework of artistic labor likewise shifted during this transitional period. The language of professional solidarity characteristic of the interwar years was increasingly supplemented by formulations emphasizing social responsibility, productive contribution, and ideological reliability—terminology consistent with the broader redefinition of labor within socialist political economy.¹³ While SAF formally persisted during the immediate postwar years, its institutional position was gradually reconfigured from a self-regulating professional association into an intermediary structure operating within an expanding apparatus of administrative oversight.

SAF thus occupies a transitional place in the reorganization of the Romanian artistic field. Its gradual normalization under conditions of increasing state supervision prepared the institutional terrain for the formal establishment of the Union of Visual Artists in 1950, marking the definitive shift from professional pluralism to centralized regulatory governance.

¹¹ The Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic of 13 April 1948, published in the Official Bulletin of the Romanian People's Republic, no. 87 bis, 13 April 1948. Law no. 52 of 24 January 1945 on the Organization of Trade Unions, published in the Official Gazette, no. 21, 26 January 1945.

¹² Cristian Vasile, *op. cit.*, passim.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

The Institutionalization of Artistic Control: The Union of Visual Artists and the Legal Framework of 1950

The decisive phase in the reconfiguration of the Romanian artistic field unfolded between 1949 and 1950, when a series of provisional institutional arrangements were consolidated into a coherent and legally sanctioned framework. This process culminated in the formal establishment of the Union of Visual Artists (Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici, UAP), which replaced earlier professional associations and fundamentally redefined the institutional conditions under which artistic practice could be pursued within the socialist state. Rather than constituting a merely technical or administrative reorganization, the creation of UAP marked a qualitative transformation in the relationship between artists, professional institutions, and political authority, signaling the transition from professional self-regulation to centralized cultural governance.¹⁴

The legal recognition of UAP was formalized through Decree no. 266 of 23 December 1950, which granted the organization official status as the sole representative body of professional visual artists in Romania.¹⁵ By concentrating artistic representation within a single, state-recognized institution, this decree effectively subordinated professional affiliation to criteria defined, monitored, and enforced by public authority. Membership in UAP thus became a decisive condition of professional legitimacy, regulating access to commissions, exhibition opportunities, and material resources. In this context, professional inclusion was transformed from an expression of collective self-organization into a mechanism of institutional regulation embedded within the administrative structures of the socialist state.

The normative foundations of this new institutional order were codified in the Statute of UAP, adopted on 20 October 1950. The statute articulated a redefinition of artistic activity by explicitly assigning it a social and ideological function. Artistic production was framed as a contribution to the educational and cultural objectives of socialist society, aligning creative practice with the broader political project of social transformation and ideological formation.¹⁶ While the statute did not yet impose a fully elaborated aesthetic doctrine comparable to the later, more rigid formulations of socialist realism, it nonetheless established a normative horizon within which artistic legitimacy was evaluated primarily in terms of social utility, ideological alignment, and institutional conformity, rather than through autonomous professional or aesthetic criteria.

¹⁴ Cristian Vasile, *Intellectual and Artistic Life in the First Decade of the Communist Regime*, București, Humanitas Publishing House, 2014, pp. 88–96.

¹⁵ Decree No. 266 on the Recognition of the Union of Visual Artists of the Romanian People's Republic as a Legal Entity of Public Utility. 23 December 1950. Official Bulletin of the Romanian People's Republic.

¹⁶ Union of Visual Artists. Statute of the Union of Visual Artists, adopted on 20 October 1950.

Significantly, the statute also introduced mechanisms of internal regulation that reinforced the disciplinary role of the organization. Provisions concerning membership admission, professional evaluation, and participation in officially sanctioned artistic activities positioned UAP as both a representative and supervisory body. This dual function blurred the distinction between professional self-organization and administrative control, embedding ideological discipline within routine institutional procedures rather than relying on explicit prohibitions, censorship, or direct intervention. Through these mechanisms, compliance with institutional norms became a condition of professional continuity, normalizing ideological alignment as an integral component of artistic life.¹⁷

Taken together, the legal recognition of UAP and the adoption of its statute marked a decisive shift from professional pluralism to centralized regulation. By redefining the criteria of professional legitimacy and embedding artistic practice within state-supervised structures, the 1950 framework established the institutional conditions that enabled the later stabilization of socialist cultural policy.¹⁸

Institutionalized Admission and the Reconfiguration of Professional Legitimacy (1950)

The institutionalization of ideological discipline becomes analytically tangible when examined through the admission procedures established by the Statute of the Union of Visual Artists (Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici, UAP), adopted on 20 October 1950. The Statute, formally recognized following Decree no. 266 of 23 December 1950, defined the Union as the sole professional organization representing visual artists in the Romanian People's Republic.¹⁹

Under Article provisions concerning membership (as stipulated in the 1950 Statute), admission required formal application, evaluation by designated commissions, and approval by governing bodies of the Union.²⁰ While the Statute did not yet codify socialist realism as an obligatory aesthetic doctrine, it explicitly framed artistic activity as socially responsible labor contributing to the cultural and educational objectives of the state.²¹ This formulation established an evaluative horizon in which professional recognition was inseparable from institutional approval.

¹⁷ Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Intellectuals in the Field of Power*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2007, pp. 116–123.

¹⁸ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996., pp. 65–72.

¹⁹ Decree no. 266 of 23 December 1950 on the Recognition of the Union of Visual Artists of the Romanian People's Republic, *Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Populare Române*, Bucharest, 1950.

²⁰ Union of Visual Artists of the Romanian People's Republic, *Statutul Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici*, Bucharest, 1950.

²¹ Ibidem.

The crucial transformation lies not in explicit stylistic prescription but in procedural relocation of consecratory authority. Prior to this reorganization, professional legitimacy had been mediated through plural professional associations, exhibitions organized by diverse groups, and market-based recognition. After 1950, access to official exhibitions, commissions, and institutional acquisitions was structurally mediated through UAP membership.²²

The UAP Annual Report for 1950 further confirms that participation in collective exhibitions and engagement in state-sanctioned cultural initiatives constituted central indicators of professional responsibility.²³ The language of evaluation emphasized discipline, productivity, and contribution to the cultural education of the masses. Although articulated administratively rather than doctrinally, these criteria effectively aligned professional validation with ideological conformity.

This micro-level procedural shift substantiates the broader claim that the foundations of later aesthetic standardization were laid through institutional restructuring. By centralizing the authority to recognize artistic status, the state did not immediately impose stylistic orthodoxy; rather, it reorganized the field's internal mechanisms of legitimacy, thereby rendering future aesthetic codification structurally enforceable.

Economic Mediation and the Institutionalization of Material Discipline: The Plastic Fund (1949)

If the reorganization of the Union of Visual Artists reallocated symbolic authority within the artistic field, Decree no. 343 of 19 August 1949 concerning the establishment of the Plastic Fund (Fondul Plastic) restructured its material infrastructure.²⁴ Published in the *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Populare Române*, no. 54, 20 August 1949,²⁵ the decree regulated contractual procedures, payment mechanisms, and institutional competencies related to artistic commissions and acquisitions. Its language is administrative and contains no explicit stylistic prescriptions; its significance therefore lies not in aesthetic regulation, but in the centralization of economic mediation.

By concentrating financial administration within a state-regulated framework, the Plastic Fund significantly narrowed the viability of independent economic transactions outside officially recognized channels. Access to remunerated artistic work increasingly required participation in institutional structures sanctioned by public authority. Artistic production was not formally monopolized,

²² Ibidem.

²³ Union of Visual Artists of the Romanian People's Republic, Raport anual, 1950, UAP Archives.

²⁴ Romanian People's Republic. Decree No. 343 on the Organization and Functioning of the Plastic Fund of the Painters and Sculptors of the Romanian People's Republic. 19 August 1949.

²⁵ Official Bulletin of the Romanian People's Republic. No. 54 (20 August 1949).

yet the material conditions under which it could be professionally sustained were redefined through regulated financial circuits.

From a Foucauldian perspective, this reorganization exemplifies a modality of disciplinary power operating through infrastructural structuring rather than overt prohibition.²⁶ The decree did not prescribe aesthetic form, nor did it directly suppress alternative practices; instead, it reconfigured the economic environment within which artistic activity became viable. By aligning material subsistence with institutional affiliation, the Plastic Fund gradually transformed economic dependence into a mechanism of professional regulation.

The economic centralization enacted in 1949 thus functioned as a structural precondition for the subsequent stabilization of aesthetic orthodoxy. By embedding artistic labor within administratively controlled financial systems, the socialist state secured a durable mechanism of discipline that preceded and facilitated the later codification of socialist realism.

Normative Discourse and Professional Evaluation: Early Mechanisms of Ideological Alignment

The institutional restructuring of the Romanian artistic field in the immediate postwar period was accompanied by the gradual articulation of normative discourses that redefined the criteria of professional legitimacy. Beyond legal statutes and organizational reforms, ideological discipline was increasingly exercised through evaluative practices embedded in routine administrative documentation. Annual reports, internal regulations, and official correspondence produced by the Union of Visual Artists in 1950 reveal a growing emphasis on professional conduct, collective participation, and thematic orientation as central markers of artistic legitimacy, signaling a shift from autonomous aesthetic judgment toward institutionally mediated evaluation.²⁷

These documents indicate that artistic assessment was progressively reframed in terms that linked professional recognition to demonstrable social and ideological engagement. Participation in officially organized exhibitions, responsiveness to institutional directives, and alignment with subjects deemed socially relevant were consistently presented as core professional obligations. Although articulated in predominantly administrative and ostensibly neutral language, these criteria effectively established a normative framework within which ideological conformity functioned as a prerequisite for professional validation. Evaluation thus became a key site where ideological expectations were translated into practical standards of professional behavior.²⁸

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–169.

²⁷ Union of Visual Artists. Annual Report, 1950, UAP Archives, ff. 3–5.

²⁸ Cristian Vasile, *Intellectual and Artistic Life...*, pp. 97–104.

The UAP Annual Report for 1950 provides a particularly illustrative example of this transformation. The report explicitly identifies participation in collective exhibitions and contributions to the cultural education of the masses as primary indicators of professional responsibility. Rather than invoking explicit aesthetic prescriptions or stylistic mandates, the document frames these expectations in terms of organizational discipline, productivity, and social usefulness. This mode of articulation enabled ideological imperatives to be internalized as professional norms, blurring the distinction between administrative evaluation and ideological alignment. In this context, professional merit was increasingly assessed through indicators of institutional engagement rather than through autonomous criteria of artistic quality.²⁹

Importantly, the emergence of evaluative norms did not operate in isolation but was closely linked to mechanisms regulating access to institutional opportunities. At this stage, ideological discipline functioned less through direct censorship or explicit prohibition than through selective access to exhibitions, commissions, and material resources. Artists whose work conformed to emerging thematic priorities and representational expectations benefited from increased visibility, institutional recognition, and economic support. Conversely, those whose practices diverged from these norms encountered administrative marginalization, manifested through limited participation in official exhibitions, reduced access to commissions, and diminished professional visibility.³⁰

This system of indirect regulation proved particularly effective during the transitional period under examination. By embedding ideological expectations within routine evaluative procedures, institutional authorities were able to foster gradual compliance without resorting to overt repression. The ambiguity inherent in evaluative criteria—framed in terms of productivity, usefulness, and participation—allowed for flexible application while maintaining clear normative boundaries. In this sense, the normalization of evaluative norms functioned as a preparatory phase for the more rigid aesthetic and ideological codification that would characterize cultural policy in the following decade. Professional evaluation thus emerged as a central instrument in the consolidation of ideological authority within the artistic field, operating through procedural normalization rather than explicit aesthetic coercion.³¹

Conclusion

The reconfiguration of the Romanian artistic field between 1945 and 1950 reveals that the consolidation of socialist cultural authority unfolded less as an

²⁹ Union of Visual Artists. Annual Report, 1950, ff. 4–6.

³⁰ Susan Emily Reid, *Socialist Realism in Eastern Europe*, "Oxford Art Journal 19", no. 1, 1996, pp. 44–47.

³¹ Katherine Verdery, *op cit.*, pp. 70–76.

abrupt aesthetic revolution than as a carefully staged institutional realignment. The transition from the Syndicate of Fine Arts to the Union of Visual Artists, the juridical recognition of the latter through Decree No. 266/1950, and the establishment of the Plastic Fund by Decree No. 343/1949 collectively recalibrated the structural grammar of artistic existence. Professional legitimacy, material subsistence, and symbolic visibility were progressively subsumed within a unified administrative framework that rendered artistic production intelligible—and viable—only within regulated circuits of recognition.

This transformation did not initially depend upon the prescriptive enforcement of stylistic orthodoxy. Rather, it redefined the infrastructural conditions under which aesthetic choices could be sustained. Access to commissions, exhibitions, materials, and remuneration became contingent upon institutional affiliation and evaluative approval. In this sense, economic mediation functioned as a subtle yet decisive vector of ideological normalization. The mechanisms of membership validation, juried assessment, and centralized distribution of resources gradually embedded political criteria within the operational logic of professional advancement. Ideological discipline thus emerged not primarily as censorship in the narrow sense, but as structural conditioning: a reorganization of the field's internal hierarchies that rendered conformity materially advantageous and deviation increasingly precarious.

The institutional consolidation of the late 1940s established the durable preconditions for the subsequent codification of socialist realism as aesthetic orthodoxy. Once the structures of recognition, funding, and exhibition were centralized, the transition from infrastructural alignment to doctrinal uniformity required comparatively limited coercive intervention. The artistic field had already been reorganized in such a way that ideological authority could circulate through routine procedures of accreditation and resource allocation. What followed was less an imposition *ex nihilo* than the crystallization of tendencies inscribed within the newly configured administrative order.

The Romanian case therefore underscores the temporal priority of institutional transformation in processes of cultural reorientation under state socialism. Cultural power proved most effective when diffused through bureaucratic rationalization, professional standardization, and economic integration. The redefinition of artistic autonomy occurred not through its formal abolition, but through its relocation within an apparatus that simultaneously guaranteed subsistence and delimited expressive latitude. Autonomy became conditional, negotiated within parameters set by the state yet operationalized through professional bodies that mediated between artists and political authority.

More broadly, this trajectory invites a reconsideration of how cultural fields are restructured in periods of systemic political change. Ideological regimes do not secure hegemony solely through overt repression or explicit stylistic prescription. They consolidate authority by reshaping the institutional ecologies that sustain

creative practice—by redefining legitimacy, redistributing resources, and reorganizing professional hierarchies. In Romania's early socialist years, the transformation of the artistic field illustrates how administrative consolidation can precede, prepare, and ultimately normalize aesthetic orthodoxy. The durability of socialist realism was thus grounded not only in doctrinal affirmation, but in the infrastructural reengineering of the conditions that made artistic production socially and economically possible.

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