Promote, Tolerate, Ban: Art and Culture in Cold War Hungary (sous la dir. de Cristina Cuevas-Wolf and Isotta Poggi)

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- ¹ Most Hungarian art and cultural historians would self-evidently refer to the “policy of the three T-s” as the central organising principle of administering culture in state-socialist times. Non-natives, however, may not find this reference easy to decode. But now the volume *Promote, Tolerate, Ban: Art and Culture in Cold War Hungary* initiates an international readership to master this jargon. Although they do not alliterate in English, the verbs of the book’s main title provide a translation of the three Hungarian “T-words”: *támogat*, *tűr*, *tilt*. Announced by minister of culture György Aczél, these three categories governed cultural policy in the Kádár-regime (1956-1988) and, within it, the mechanism of support and acknowledgement on the one hand, or disfavor and censorship on the other. The publication accompanies an exhibition of the same name that was a joint venture of The Wende Museum and The Getty Research Institute; on view in Los Angeles in Summer 2018. Two sets of donations that the institutions acquired unexpectedly and independently from each other formed the backbone of the show. The chance element inherent in the project brought along a number of advantageous consequences. First, the greater part of the acquired collections belongs more to the sphere of visual and material culture than to the fine arts, and even the latter segment of the donated material is abundant in works produced as state-sponsored commissions—all of which represent lesser-discussed areas in post-1989 art history. The curators (Isotta Poggi from The Getty, Cristina Cuevas-Wolf from The Wende) are also editors and authors of the book—and neither of them is a specialist of the field. This turns out to be another beneficial circumstance in that they contemplate the material with fresh eyes and a mindset free of the narrative panels that came to dominate—and constrain—portrayals of socialist art and culture. This is not necessarily the case with the other authors of the volume. In their accounts, The System (or The

Regime) tends to overdetermine most factors of cultural production as well as the artefacts' interpretation while, at the same time, Hungary is regarded as if in a *vacuum*: as if tendencies observed there were not part of a broader, transnational context, not insignificantly impacted by the cultural Cold War. Dávid Fehér's focus on the design and applied arts activities of some major figures of the artistic avant-garde as well as the closing chapter, Géza Perneczky's personal history of transiting between the art scenes of the socialist East and the capitalist West are further highlights of the book. Especially Perneczky's inevitably comparative approach disrupts successfully the often claustrophobic national (or regional) compartmentalisation of an otherwise entangled history.