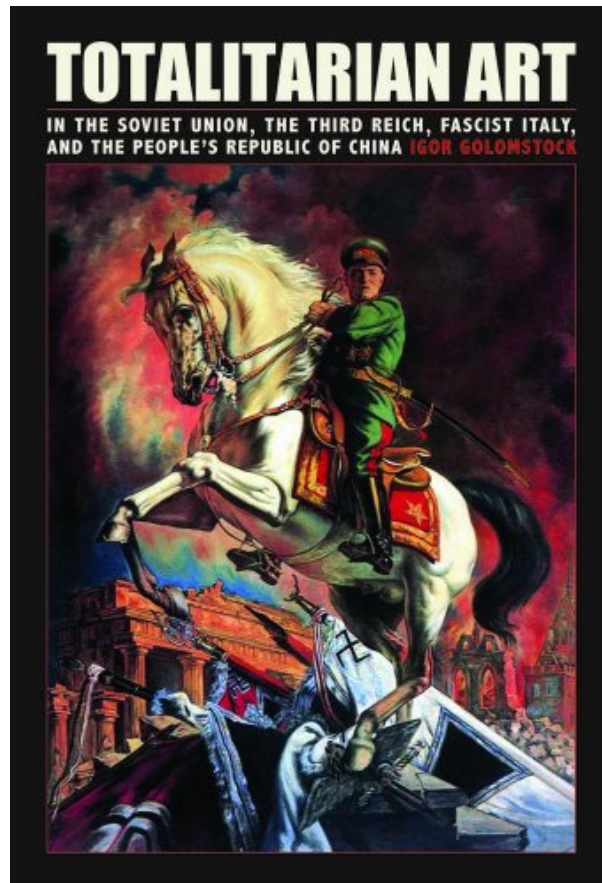


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Review

"Golomstock convincingly demonstrates how the overlapping aesthetic values of these superficially disparate regimes underlined how much they had in common... Fascinating." — Wall Street Journal

"Important and encyclopedic tome...Totalitarian Art is an indispensable work of reference." — Foreign Affairs

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

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About the Author

Igor Golomstock was a member of the Union of Soviet Artists, and worked at the Pushkin Museum. He is a specialist on twentieth-century and Renaissance art, and is the author of numerous books, including Picasso. He has taught at the Universities of St. Andrews, Essex and Oxford. Robert Chandler is the translator of Vasilii Grossman's novel, *Life and Fate*, and the new, definitive edition of Andrei Platonov's *The Foundation Pit*.

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Totalitarian Art achieves nothing less than a thorough and serious comparative study of the official art of Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, Kim Jong-Il's North Korea, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In the Soviet Union, and later in Maoist China, theories of mass artistic appeal were used to promote the Revolution both at home and abroad. In Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy they asserted the putative grandeur of the epoch. All too often, art that served the Revolution or the new millennial society became total realism, and always it became a slave to the state and the cult of personality, and ultimately one more weapon in the arsenal of oppression. Igor Golomstock gives a detailed appraisal of the forms that define totalitarian art and illustrates his text with more than two hundred examples of its paintings, posters, sculpture and architecture, and includes a powerful comparative visual essay which demonstrates the eerie similarity of the official art of these very different regimes.

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The Art of Oppression

By Shellie

Igor Golomstock bravely explores the frightening aesthetic similarities of four of the 20th Centuries most notorious dictatorships, and totalitarian cultures. While his focus is primarily on Nazi Germany under Hitler and The Soviet Union under Stalin, he also briefly covers the art of Fascist Italy and The Peoples Republic of China. This intelligently written book reveals how they used and abused the Western Realist Tradition in the so called fine arts, while also exploiting homegrown artistic achievements that appealed to nationalist pride and xenophobic fears. Each of these regimes employed surprisingly similar thematic content, in epic painting and colossal sculpture. Depictions of happy families and dutiful mothers, contented workers merrily laboring away in fields or factories, and of heroic soldiers on the crucible of the battlefield were particularly favoured. Depictions of the bountiful Fatherland and the industrial might of all four states figured heavily too, especially in The Third Reich and The Soviet Union. And of course looming in importance above all other subject matter was the iconic and idealized portrait of the loving and benevolent, visionary and wise leader himself. The architecture of classical antiquity served as the model for most state buildings (irrespective of political ideology) in the form of monumental stripped or neoclassical architecture that was used to oppressive and soul destroying ends. Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin for example had audaciously bold plans to completely rebuild their respective capital cities - Rome, Berlin and Moscow - on a stupendously massive scale to suit their pompous tastes, though fortunately for later generations of people to live in these three beautiful cities these grand and delusional visions were never fully realized.

Mr Golomstock's revealing book deftly shows how politics can so very easily twist and subvert the arts to chilling ends; thus reducing them to the level of sterile, blatant and at the same time kitsch propaganda. He details how with the aesthetic philosophy of "socialist realism" art was cynically utilized by political leaders and parties as an important tool of state sponsored terrorism to indoctrinate and control the teeming masses, and subject peoples. All four totalitarian states led the populace to believe that they were variously being "liberated" from aristocratic, bourgeoisie, foreign or alternatively jewish cultural dominance; and that the only solution to societies ills was of course provided by them. This insightful and perceptive book illustrates that the far right and the far left have alot more in common than many people at either extreme of this broad political spectrum would ever like to admit! I also think it's a great shame there aren't more colour photographs in Totalitarian Art, for I believe art books really do need them, however with a book such as this it is the message that's unquestionably the most important factor, and not the pretty pictures. So if you're interested in the murky relationship between art, architecture and politics in totalitarian cultures or regimes, then do yourself a big favour and read this perceptive and timely book. And be warned that civil liberties, democratic freedoms and human rights could easily be taken away in your beloved homeland, so don't be an unthinking patriot, and always question your government... always.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A rather impressive book on dictators and their vanity

By DFWQ

I figure dictators are among the most egotist people around, and when vain men have large budgets to play around with, the results can be amusing indeed. TA is well worth a read - the book teems with examples and absorbing takes on how art and culture in countries shifted as dictators took over. I grew up in Dubai, which has a benign ruler but still had the city plastered with youthful posters of the elderly king, and so it was an interesting analysis of something I experienced first-hand.

3 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A political diatribe

By Constant Reader

Golomstock distorts his knowledge of art in the service of his rage against totalitarianism in this peculiar book.

To give one example, the cover illustration, a 1940s or '50s painting by one Boris Iakovlev, a minor Soviet

artist, attempts to depict the larger-than-life heroism of the Soviet military leader Marshal Georgii Zhukov by placing him on a huge white horse as he triumphs over the remains of the Nazi empire. Yes, there is a tradition in bad art of placing famous generals on huge, magnificent horses. but the Iakovlev painting is so silly, so excessively overdone, that the only response to it today, and probably the only response in its time, although expressed more quietly, would be laughter. My point is that this over-the-top cartoon of a painting illuminates nothing except that it's a ridiculous piece of hack work that has received sudden prominence by Golomstock.

I was fascinated by Golomstock's same-page comparisons of Nazi and Soviet tropes in art-- I'll grant him that-- but he fails to recognize the human optimism in the "ordinary people" pictures of wholesome workers and idealistic boys and girls that I found endearing despite their obvious propaganda mission.

Okay, Golomstock does a thorough job of presenting many examples of Soviet-era artists dutifully applying brush to canvas to make Comrade Stalin look tall and benevolent, but this is something that we already knew, and were prepared for, when we began to see similar deifications of Chairman Mao.

I'm not sorry I bought this book, and I'll keep it in the house, but it is not anywhere near as revealing as the recent illustrated book on the architecture of Pyongyang that I'm very glad I bought on Amazon.

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