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Keywords: *avant-garde art, art history, cold war, America, national identity.*

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I. Introduction

Showcased in Moscow's Sokolniki Park in the summer of 1959 was a sophisticated network of steel bars, resembling the typical jungle gym in a children's playground, inlaid with multiple colorful panels that represented a kaleidoscope of American culture: there were items "in the cultural, industrial, home and leisure-time groups,"[1] toys, televisions, radios, to name a few, as well as aesthetic creations that conveyed the spiritual wealth of American culture. Visitors of this massive installation art were "immediately engulfed in a barrage of sights and sound"[2] upon entering, as a newspaper described the space as "a riot of color" that spectators could only "clamber through." [3]This comment suited the work's purpose that "the display of these thousands of items related to daily living in the United States" would "reflect the immense variety and the great freedom of economic system" and the importance of American consumerism."[4]

This artistic installation, *Jungle Gym*, was designed by modernist architect George Nelson, influenced by avant-garde art, who went on a cultural voyage to the USSR in 1959 as part of the American National Exhibition in Moscow. It was coordinated by the famous American propaganda agency, the United States Information Agency (USIA), to thaw the relationship between the two superpowers and boost America's social prosperity and the subsequent high living standard in front of the Soviet people. As part of this trip, Vice President Richard Nixon also boasted about American living standards in the historic "kitchen debate" with the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev. The exhibition could be considered an example of successful American overseas cultural propaganda as it demonstrated the booming economy and thriving consumerist society of America, enhancing its international reputation and constructing a potent and prospering national image.

However, it wasn't the first time that America employed the soft power of propaganda to achieve political goals. During WWI, President Wilson and his government conducted a series of propaganda campaigns aimed at arousing patriotism on a national scale and persuading more people to join the army. During WWII, the scale of American propaganda was expanded, and its strategies were updated. President Roosevelt created the Office of World Information (OWI) in 1942 which used multiple propaganda technologies, such as movies and radio, to communicate with the American public and inform them of progress on battlefields overseas. Thus, as the United States entered the Cold War, propaganda—"the design, production, and dissemination of these words and images—was central to the forty-year battle fought between East and West after the Second World War."[5] During a period when both sides possessed destructive nuclear weapons, propaganda became a sharp weapon for undermining the opponent's image and improving one's great international reputation, thereby strengthening one's international influence. For instance, Joseph Stalin once contemptuously conversed with Enlai Zhou on the

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[1] Charlotte Hecht, "The Aesthetics of Propaganda: Modern Design at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow," May 5, 2016, https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=americanstudieshp.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Tony Shaw, Review of *The Politics of Cold War Culture*, by Steve Nicholson, et al., *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 3 (2001): 59–76. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2ou 6925135.

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topic that "America's primary weapons . . . are stockings, cigarettes, and other merchandise."[6] This statement not only revealed that America was successful in displaying its economic prosperity but also stated the stereotype of America as a consumerism-driven society. Thus, another prominent function of cultural propaganda: forming a country's national identity.

Before further exploration, it should be noted that national identity in this essay is defined as "a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by (the maintenance of) distinctive traditions, culture, linguistic or political features", according to Oxford English Dictionary.[7] This definition clearly stated that although national identity was defined by certain aspects characteristic of that nation, the attribution of such aspects didn't have to be just originated from people who belonged to that nation. In other words, the formation of national identity could also be influenced by external perspectives. Of course, a nation's "self-determination" of its identity couldn't be rejected, but in the cohesively connected human society, the formation of identity was a continuous conversation between the subject of identity and its

In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community... yet in the minds of each [member living in that community] lives the image of their communion."[8] As Arvid Brodersen has shown, national identity is important in forming foreign impressions as well. This included 1) America's ascendancy as a world power; 2) America's grand size and wealth; 3) American emphasis on science and technology; and 4) America's great cultural tolerance.[9] This American national identity, despite inheriting the cultural heritage built up during the Cold War, was not the exact national identity constructed through avant-garde art at that time due to the fact that national identity shifted with changes in historical context.

During the Cold War, for example, the cultural propaganda of American avant-garde art impacted the formation of American national identity at that time. In general, art was used to influence and reinforce national identity due to its interactions with historical circumstances.[10] Specifically, avant-garde art served as a suitable tool for cultural propaganda in the political rivalry because it has been associated with politics for centuries. The tradition of avant-garde, conveying social and political messages, was rooted in Henri de Saint-Simon, the great French utopian socialist and father of the term "avant-garde" art. In his *Opinions littraires, philosophiques et industrielles*, Saint-Simon gave artists a leading role in shaping a better community by placing them "at the head of an elite administrative trinity consisting of artists, scientists, and industrialists-artists."[11] Consequently, the secular, social, and political tradition of avant-garde art proved this artistic genre a suitable weapon in this cultural-political rivalry.

Previous scholars have also addressed these topics, such as Walter. L. Hixon. In his book *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961*, Hixon focused on the American government's effort in addressing anti-communism and democracy through various propagandistic means. He also acknowledged the importance of cultural diplomacy in American foreign policies.[12] However, Hixon mainly examined the roles of innovative technologies, such as wireless radios and televisions, in American cultural exportations. Christin J. Mamiya, on the other hand, examined the role of avant-garde art in shaping the American national identity through the case of Robert Rauschenberg. She argues that art conveyed certain messages in certain historical circumstances. Mamiya also researched how domestic American responses shaped the avant-garde construction of national identities but neglected the effects of foreign responses. This paper builds on prior scholarship and, in an attempt to enrich aspects of this topic that previous scholars didn't acknowledge, examines the construction of national identity through cultural propaganda of American avant-garde art and how it was influenced by both domestic and foreign reactions. The paper will use a specific case study of Robert Rauschenberg, the same as Mamiya, with an original analysis of its artistic elements to better illustrate the foreign impact on American national identity.

To elaborate on specific nationalistic elements of American avant-garde art, this paper uses Robert Rauschenberg's artworks in overseas cultural exchange exhibitions as a case study. Rauschenberg's achievements in pop art, a subset of the avant-garde, and their projected influence gained him the reputation

[6] Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945 - 1961* (New York: Ny St. Martin's Griffin, 1998).

[7] "National Identity, N. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary," *Oed.com*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093//OED//4775273353.

[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 15–16. Cited in Christin J. Mamiya, "We the People: The Art of Robert Rauschenberg and the Construction of American National Identity," *American Art* 7, no. 3 (July 1993): 41–63, https://doi.org/10.1086/424194.

[9] Arvid Brodersen, "Themes in the Interpretation of America by Prominent Visitors from Abroad," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 295, no. 1 (September 1, 1954): 21–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/000271625429500104.

[10] Christin J. Mamiya, "We the People: The Art of Robert Rauschenberg and the Construction of American National Identity," *American Art* 7, no. 3 (July 1993): 41–63, https://doi.org/10.1086/424194.

[11] Donald D. Egbert, "The Idea of 'Avant-Garde' in Art and Politics," *The American Historical Review* 73, no. 2 (December 1967): 342, https://doi.org/10.2307/1866164.

[12] Hixon.

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of "Citizen Artist,"[13] representative of American artists who "felt a great sense of responsibility to the life of his time, who was deeply involved in it in all sorts of different ways."[14]

In short, American avant-garde art constructed the American national identity during the Cold War through overseas propaganda due to its imagery integration with contemporary historical circumstances such as rivalry with the Soviet Union and avant-garde's own suitability with promoting preferable American values. Many characteristic traits and celebrated themes of avant-garde art fulfilled America's demand to create a national identity of freedom, economic prosperity, and cultural tolerance during the Cold War. Specifically, the American administration designed multiple overseas cultural exchange programs that promoted the spread of the ideal American national identity among foreign countries. However, by combining with foreigners' responses towards these propagandistic campaigns, the American national identity became malleable under different historical circumstances as well as diverse perspectives.

II. Need for a National Identity in the Cold War

The American national identity was constructed partially through the cultural propaganda diplomacy issued by the American government. Shaped as a potent and ideal representative of democracy, freedom, and anti-oppression, the American national identity is not erected independently, but out of an international interactive narration—the decades-long frigid relationship with the USSR presented in cultural, economic, political, scientific, and military aspects, for example. In other words, America was redefining, refining, and renegotiating its national identity and value in accordance simultaneously with the national image created by its opponent.[15] In the Cold War, Americans thrived to differentiate itself entirely from Soviets who were ideologically and socially opposite to American supported values. America's selection of avant-garde art as a cultural weapon was in accordance with this principle. Therefore, understanding the Soviet national identity in its artistic genre was important in understanding that of America because the American national identity was aiming to oppose that of the Soviets.

The Soviet national identity was reflected through its ideologies and future goals. Boris Groys described what "leaders of the October Revolution" and subsequent Soviet leaders promised:

> The unordered, chaotic life of past ages was to be replaced by a life that was harmonious and organized according to a unitary artistic plan.[16]

The fulfillment of this general abstract guideline of replacing chaos with stability consequently replaced diversity with homogeneity. It required the economic, social, and political subordination under a single authority or a highly centralized party consisting of only a few social elites. At the launch in April 1921, Gosplan, the centralized institution responsible for mapping out the five-year economic plans was comprised of only thirty-four officers,[17] a number in stark contrast to the approximately twenty million Soviet inhabitants upon whom the economic plan was imposed. Apart from this, the USSR political system, regardless of its shifting between reigns of different premiers, preserved the same political heritage from the High Stalinism era characterized by "secrecy, arbitrariness, coercion, insularity, inefficiency, mendacity, corruption, careerism, status consciousness, and lack of initiative from below."[18] Scholar T. H. Rugby concluded the previous traits as "all institutions had gradually dissolved in the acid of despotism."[19]

The extraordinary coverage of highly centralized governmental power with limited diversity in politics and economy resulted in an overall homogeneity in Soviet social and cultural life. Harsh restriction and oppression were consequently imposed by authoritative organizations on various communities that distinguished from the homogeneous social and cultural trends. Avant-garde art became a target for several reasons. To begin with, avant-garde art contradicted the government-promoted and socially accepted artistic genre: socialist realism. Socialist realism was characterized by its demonstration of an ideal socialist society under the regime of the USSR by advancing "principles such as typicality, optimism, 'revolutionary romanticism,' 'reality in its revolutionary development.'"[20] These traits were perceived in a famous Soviet painting *The Dawn of Our Fatherland*. This work was composed in celebration of Joseph Stalin's seventy-first birthday and his enormous contribution to the Soviet Union. In the artwork, Stalin's straight figure is centered, dressed in a pristine white uniform that signifies his modesty; his

[13] Mamiya, 41.
[14] Walter Hopps, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1980), 297-98.
[15] Mamiya, 42.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Edward Hallett Carr and Robert W Davies, *A History of Soviet Russia. 11, Foundations of a Planned Economy 1926-1929; Vol. 2* (London U.A.: Macmillan, 1978), 377.
[18] Erik P. Hoffmann, "The Evolution of the Soviet Political System," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 35, no. 3 (1984): 10, https://doi.org/10.2307/1174113.
[19] Yoram Gorlizki, "Ordinary Stalinism: The Council of Ministers and the Soviet Neopatrimonial State, 1946–1953," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 4 (December 2002): 699, https://doi.org/10.1086/376210.
[20] Stephen C. Feinstein and John E. Bowlt, "Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934," *Russian Review* 36, no. 2 (April 1977): 238, https://doi.org/10.2307/128925.

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hands crosses in the front, an iconic gesture that conveyed the steadieness and authority as the supreme leader of the country. He gazes determinedly forward, towards a glowing yellow hue, the dawn sunlight, that alludes to the ideal future made possible by industrial and social modernization on a massive scale. The tidy landscape with trackers, antenna towers, and industrial factories operating robustly indicates the Soviet's imagined bright future. This artwork combined the artistic expressions of portrait and landscape, two traditional art forms, to emphasize the grandeur of Stalin and the promising society he established. Overall, socialist realism celebrated idealistic yet realistic images of the society under the ideological leadership of Marxism, serving as a major artistic means of cultural propaganda targeted at both domestic inhabitants and international communities.

Therefore, it was unsurprising that the avant-garde art, with its abstract and rough brushstrokes, often fragmented forms, unconventional composition materials and techniques, and imprecise and non-definitive messages which were often related to anarchism or complete objection to all politics, was affirmatively unwelcomed by political-administrative of the USSR. In 1932, Stalin's government issued the 1932 Decree of the Bolshevik Central Committee "On the Restructuring of Literary-Artistic Organizations," which gave the government full control of arts in the USSR. This operation stimulated the later implementation of an official objection policy of avant-garde art. Soviet officials already developed a hostility towards avant-garde art because it deviated from the party's socialist construction in an uncontrollable way. In 1934, Stalin implemented a policy that formally unified artistic means of expression into a single genre—Socialist Realism, broadly defined as "socialist in content and realist in form"—which called for the consequential prohibitions and exaltation of four types of art genres: political art, religious art, erotic art, and "formalistic" art including avant-garde art.[21] Indignant artists who didn't comply with the new policy were forced out of their prestigious positions in the centralized administration of culture.[22]

The aesthetic style of Socialist Realism, which celebrated restriction from the Soviet government in forms and content, determined its destiny to become an opposite rivalry of avant-garde art, which was one of the reasons why the American government chose avant-garde art to compete against the USSR in the field of culture. Constructing a tolerance for pluralism to the incomprehensible and persecuted avant-garde art, contrary to that of the Soviet Union was an effective option in separating capitalistic America from any socialist ideologies. This also reinforced the USSR government as a cruel totalism government that sought to eliminate cultural diversity and, consequently democracy and freedom. This image, therefore, would undermine the Soviet's international support, especially from artists whose creeds and pursued artistic expressions were subjected to mistreatment. The response of the Soviets substantiated the hypothesized motive of America supporting avant-garde art (presented above): a reviewer from the Catholic weekly *America* noted in 1963 that "the Oct. 19 issue of Izvestia, the Moscow daily, charged that our American modern artists are undermining Communist principles. The United States, it was alleged, was using a current exchange show for 'ideological subversion.' All those abstract prints are ... political dynamite."[23]

Apart from representing the opposite of the Soviet Union, support for avant-garde art by the American government was prompted because of several other reasons. To begin with, avant-garde arts were one of the few localized American art forms, something that America needed localized cultures to refute the Soviet's accusation of a cultural desert. Truthfully, avant-garde art didn't originate in America. Instead, its origin could be traced back to the French military term "vanguard" which referred to "those on the front-line, closest to conflict" in the Middle Ages. Later, it was transformed by Henri de Saint-Simon, the great French utopian socialist who inspired modern communism invented by Karl Marx, to refer to artists who "serve(d) as [the people's] garde," using the power of artistic creations as "the most immediate and fastest way to social, political, and economic reform."[24] The earliest artists associated with avant-garde art were Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet, and later the Impressionists, all of them processing a clear European origin. However, with the ending of World War II, Europe had lost its dominating status in global politics and economy. Countries like Britain and France abdicating their titles of superpowers as Europe set into decline as its population decreased sharply, its cities wrecked by bombs and gunpowder, its once-flourished economy dimmed by heavy military expenditure and stagnation in industrial and agricultural development due to war. As a result, the center of art shifted from Paris to New York. Hence, along with some newly risen talented American artists such as Jackson Pollock and Milton Ernest "Robert" Rauschenberg, avant-garde art gradually fit into the context of American society and assumed some of its distinct characteristics. Nonetheless, avant-garde art wasn't the only artistic

[21] Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T Dodge, *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience, 1956-1986: The Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection, the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey* (New York: Thames and Hudson In Association With The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1995), 36–41.
[22] GroïsBoris, 3.

[23] "Art and Subversion," *Newsweek* 64 (6 July 1964): 620. Cited in Mamiya.
[24] National Galleries of Scotland, "Avant-Garde," www.nationalgalleries.org, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/glossary-terms/avant-garde.

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genre that existed in America, which raises the question: why chose avant-garde art to represent the national identity and values of America during the Cold War?

III. Avant-Garde Art as a Cultural Weapon Against the USSR

Visual art forms were considered particularly effective at imparting sophisticated philosophical and political ideas, especially during the early age with limited literacy rate,[25] but avant-garde arts in particular, were more accessible both physically and mentally to normal audiences lacking professional artistic knowledge to comprehend and appreciate. To start with, avant-garde arts were relatively more physically accessible to the general crowd for their usage of materials easily obtained from everyday life. Despite preserving some traditional drawing materials such as oil paints and acrylic paints, a large proportion of avant-garde artists used resources from a variety of novel sources in comparison to oil paintings, sculptures, and watercolors that previous artists used: massively manufactured objects, cuttings from popular magazines and newspapers, consumer goods, or technologies such as photography. Duchamp's Fountain, a representative of avant-garde art challenged the established idea of "art" being the artwork itself. He contended that the artwork was only a medium of conveying; instead, the artist's thoughts were "art." The work itself, a standard Bedfordshire model urinal from the J. L. Mott Iron Works, 118 Fifth Avenue, was an "everyday object raised to the dignity of a work of art by the artist's act of choice."[26] Therefore, materials used for avant-garde artworks resulted in readily availability and fast reproduction of avant-garde artworks, traits ideal for cultural propaganda as their convenience in producing multiple copies in a short amount of time.

Apart from this, avant-garde art, especially performance art, sought to provoke, enlighten, or impart messages through the dynamic artistic creations. It was characterized by "live-ness, physical movement and impermanence", an alternative to the "static permanence of painting and sculpture."[27] Unlike traditional artworks isolated in glass exhibition stands and enshrined permanently in a museum, performance arts encouraged constant interactions between the author and the artworks, as well as the audience and the artworks, because interactions and movements themselves complete the artwork. Take Yoko Ono, an American Japanese female avant-garde artist, for example. Yoko's iconic performance art *Cut Piece*, was achieved through the audience coming up one by one and stripping her naked by cutting away pieces of clothes on her body. The fleetingness of some avant-garde arts was suitable for supporting cultural propaganda, which required works commenting on recent events to be accomplished in a short amount of time. From 1960-1971, Yoko produced 125 artworks, including objects, paper works, installations, and performances.[28] In contrast, Andrew Nowell Wyeth, who practices Italian neorealism in conventional watercolor and tempera paintings, produces only 135 pieces ranging from the 1930s to the 2000s.[29] The dynamics of avant-garde artworks also resulted in the fact that it made quick cross-parochial transportation feasible, thus satisfying the prerequisite of American government-sponsored international cross-countries tour of artworks during the Cold War.

However, being physically accessible to the audience was insufficient during cultural propaganda if without some appeals to thoughts and ideas. Named for advancing into innovative political, economic, and cultural fields, avant-garde arts typically engaged with provocative or controversial social themes. San Francisco's Rincon Post Office Annex murals vividly exemplify how avant-garde art drew great public attention and generated heated social debates.

As one of the most expensive and controversial projects ($26,000) of Anton Refregier sponsored by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts, this collection of twenty-seven murals depicting the history of San Francisco located in the L-shape lobby of the Rincon Annex Post Office sparked national debates regarding the inclusion of disputable historical events in California, which the artist himself viewed as a "meaningful, significant, . . . powerful plastic statement based on the history and lives of the people."[30] The murals intended to cover significant but also highly controversial events from early native American art to the Golden Gate International Exhibition,[31] including anti-Chinese Sand Lot riots, the trade unionist Tom Mooney's trial (based on fabricated evidence), and the 1934 San Francisco waterfront strike, etc., so, predictably, some citizens were displeasured to see all past mistakes and blemishes exposed, claiming that the murals "placed disproportionate emphasis on violence, racial hatred, and class struggle."[32] In particular, the

[25] Mamiya, 42.
[26] Tim Martin, *Essential Surrealists* (Bath: Dempsey Parr, 1999), 42.
[27] Tate, "Performance Art – Art Term | Tate," Tate, 2017, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/performance-art.
[28] Phaidon, "Yoko Ono's Cut Piece Explained," Phaidon, accessed November 22, 2023, https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2015/may/18/yoko-ono-s-cut-piece-explained/.
[29] WikiArt, "Andrew Wyeth - 135 Artworks - Painting," www.wikiart.org, accessed November 22, 2023, https://www.wikiart.org/en/andrew-wyeth/all-works#.
[30] Anton Refregier, *Government Sponsorship of the Arts* (New York, 1961), 7. Quoted in Gladys M. Kunkel, "The Mural Painting of Anton Refregier in the Rincon Annex of the San Francisco Post Office, San Francisco, California" (master's thesis, Arizona State University, 1969), 27.
[31] Peter Jenkins, *Along the Edge of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 68–89.
[32] Ibid.

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panel of the 1934 West Coast waterfront strike, a turmoil causing a total casualty of nine and over 100,0[33] injured[34], was severely criticized and protested by the Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) because when one of the mourners in that panel was spotted wearing a VFM hat, which had to be erased later. Contractionary, various groups such as the San Francisco Museum and the San Francisco Art Association claimed that these murals were "historically accurate as well as esthetically sound and politically safe."[35] Debates stimulated by these avant-garde murals also suggested a diversity in interpreting the artworks, echoing the freedom of citizens' thought, one of American national identities, as the underlying logic. Thus, it seemed plausible and reasonable for the American government to choose promoting avant-garde art as their cultural propaganda in constructing the American national identity during the Cold War.[36]

IV. National Identity in Avant-Garde Art

Even though the American government wished to model its international image as a peace-loving guardian fighting for the freedom and democracy of the general crowd so as to counteract the Soviet's condemnation of it being an aggressive capitalist practicing global hegemonism, the progress of shaping this American identity via avant-garde art didn't fully follow on its previously established trajectory of creating an ideal national identity of freedom, prosperity, and cultural tolerance. International responses also influenced the construction of American national identity, shaping it into a dominant image. This deviation could be explained by an extension of scholar Christin J. Mamiya's view of interactions between art and national identity:

The ability of art to reinforce national identity is derived from the interaction of the images with specific historical circumstances that imbue them with ideological resonance.[37]

In Mamiya's subsequent analysis, she focuses on the dynamic construction of American national identity through arts under the historical circumstances of domestic America. In other words, the author didn't acknowledge that foreign response to American artistic propaganda also played a role in shaping the American national identity, failing to enrich it from a more comprehensive perspective. Similarly, when the American government was eager to impose its carefully selected and designed cultural propaganda such as exhibitions and exchange programs, it didn't fully consider whether international reactions towards American cultural propaganda would create its desired effects. As a result, the American national identity during the Cold War was characterized by freedom, democracy, and cultural tolerance but also dominating and destructive to exotic arts. Overall, the American national identity was produced out of a bidirectional and constantly shifting process; it was shaped both by domestic governmental efforts out of strategic demand and foreign feedback upon receiving the export of American avant-garde arts.

Among the hundreds of avant-garde artists, Robert Rauschenberg is a good representation of the impact they had on constructing the American national identity through cultural propaganda. Born on October 22, 1925, Robert Rauschenberg was an American avant-garde artist famous for his contributions to the pop art movement, not only because of his skillful practice of collage but also for the widespread acknowledgment of his usage of pop art in shaping the American national identity. Walter Hopps, curator, responsible for paintings and sculptures produced in the twentieth century, at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington persuaded the allocation to Rauschenberg of an entire budget of the Bicentennial of the National Collection. Hopps stated that "[Rauschenberg] seemed to me the great example of the 'Citizen Artist,' in the eighteenth-century sense that our Founding Fathers so revered, someone who felt a great sense of responsibility to the life of his time, who was deeply involved in it in all sorts of different ways" with a conclusion that Rauschenberg was "the most deeply and quintessentially American artist."[38] This comment was evidence of the fact that Robert Rauschenberg's participation in building the American national identity using artistic expressions was acknowledged, approved, and promoted by authoritative art institutions and later on the American government, causing his works to be a famous representation of the American national identity and thus making him an avant-garde artist great for examining interactions between art and the American national identity. However, it should be noted that Rauschenberg's artworks engaged in a bidirectional conversation with the American national identity. The latter, in a sense, actively transformed itself in partial accordance with messages implied in artistic pieces created by Rauschenberg.

In addition to being socially approved to represent American values, Rauschenberg remained an ideal research subject because his artistic expression, collage, was closely aligned with the society at the time:

[33] Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?* (Univ. of California Press, 1988), 68–89.
[34] Jane de Hart Mathews, "Art and Politics in Cold War America," *The American Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (October 1976): 762-787, https://doi.org/10.2307/1864779.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Mamiya, 45.
[38] Walter Hopps, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1980), 297-98.

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he often extracted his imagery or merely the physical material for his artworks either through newspapers or magazines, thereby ensuring an immediacy and a tight connection with social issues and situations at that time. Additionally, his artistic creations remained avant-garde but not radically so, with no overt indication or covert implication of anarchism or communism worshipped by some other avant-garde artists but disapproved by the general American crowd, as evident in the case of Rincon Post Office Annex murals.

Finally, from a peripheral and pragmatic perspective, Rauschenberg's pursuit of an artistic career in the 1950s coincided with the Cold War, a time when a well-defined potent American national identity was needed.[39] Furthermore, Rauschenberg was involved in numerous projects during the Cold War that were either organized by the American government or allowed him to represent America as a nation. Consequently, Rauschenberg's artworks could be considered as "promoting 'American' qualities."[40] Renowned examples of these artworks include the 1964 Venice Biennale and the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI). Thus, the following sections will include an analysis of how Rauschenberg and responses to his works constructed American national identity under the historical background of American cultural propaganda during the Cold War.

a) The 1964 Venice Biennale

The Venice Biennale is an international cultural exhibition that held annually ever since 1895, presenting outstanding pieces from the fields of art, architecture, contemporary music, theatre, and contemporary dance. As one of the most significant periodic exhibitions of visual arts, the Venice Biennale is divided into various pavilions, with each artwork categorized in nationality to its according pavilion.

The XXXII Venice Biennale in 1964 upheld a unique significance because it "provided a dramatic chapter in the ongoing negotiation of American national identity, and Rauschenberg's art figured prominently in this process."[41] This was because the United States pavilion in 1964, originally sponsored by private institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, Art Institute of Chicago, and Baltimore Museum of Art, was instead sponsored by the US Information Agency under the supervision of the US government. Alan Solomon, then a curator at the Jewish Museum in New York, was selected by the USIA to fill the position of commissioner of the United States Pavilion.[42] This transition to governmental sponsorship, along with the fact that the arena was divided between different nationalities, not individual participants, accentuated the nationalistic keystone of the American Pavilion of the Venice Biennale. Indeed, Lois Bingham, the chief of the Fine Art section of the USIA Exhibition Division, openly declared the primary criteria for selecting the commissioner was someone who could curate "a cohesive show which said something for America."[43]

The result fulfilled the USIA's expectations. Solomon selected Rauschenberg as a highlighted artist in the exhibition for his integration of images that emphasized the potent position of America in global politics and economy, consequently building a powerful national image.

Rauschenberg excelled at using the technique of collage to visualize the abstract philosophies of the American national identity. In his pieces of art submitted to the Venice Biennale, Rauschenberg inclined to use repetitive images, a pop art element that echoed identical products from mass productions in American current mainstream culture of consumerism, to allude to political, social, economic, and military aspects of America, such as eagles and gestures made by American presidents during their speeches, to emphasize the grand and powerful image of America in the global community. Two prominent examples of which would be *Kite* and *Buffalo*.

Kite, an oil painting on canvas created by Rauschenberg in 1963, capitalized on an allusion to an American eagle to impose a powerful image of America, conveying a sense of stability and authority. Despite its nature of a conventional oil painting, Rauschenberg nevertheless put cuttings of photographs on it: at the central bottom of the work is a record of a chaotic and dynamic marching troop, with each soldier squeezing together in disorder, an environment further discombobulated by tousy flying flags raised above their heads. Above the disorganized crowd is a gilder; its elevated relative position, along with the tumult underneath it, suggests military mayhem, perhaps a commotion during WWII given its creation time. Then, on the central top of the painting perches an eagle, stable and revering, the famous nationalistic symbol of freedom, swiftness, and superiority.[44] Between the clipart of the eagle and military chaos is a vast amount of white paint that traversed the entire canvas, completely segregating the upper and lower part, which emphasizes America's order and superiority by separating it with the chaos downward. Similar images of eagle representing American appeared in others Rauschenberg's pieces of art, such as *Tracer,* where an eagle perched on top of a prosperous street, with cars

[39] Mamiya, 43.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

[43] Lois Bingham, quoted in Laurie J. Monahan, "Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cam- bridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 382.
[44] W. E. Woolfenden, "An American Eagle," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit* 26, no. 3 (1947): 64–64, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41500720.

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roaring past. In this painting, there is no distinct large boundary between the eagle and the collage of the street, hinting at a tight relationship between the two images. Therefore, *Tracer* expresses the flourishing American society, which further fortified the unified symbolism of national identity behind the image of eagle and the propagandistic purpose of Rauschenberg's paintings in the Venice Biennale.

Furthermore, in some of Rauschenberg's other works he emphasized America's booming economy and the flourishment of consumerism culture through repetitions of large-scale manufactured merchandise. In his work *Coca-Cola Plan*, three coca cola bottles, perhaps the most distinguished visualization of consumerism culture, were lined up in a row in the middle platform of a three-floor wooden case. A pair of wings were installed on wooden boards on either side of the bottles, implying the intention of journeying: international trade of Coca-Cola. Below the Coca-Cola bottles sits a wooden sphere with horizontal equidistant parallel curves, like those of latitude lines, reminding a model of earth. All these combined together to convey a sense of Coca-Cola "flying" to other regions on earth, forming a visual of large companies like Coca-Cola who "through their extensive advertising campaigns and calculated marketing strategies, were among those most responsible for the prominence of American business abroad."[45] Thus, this overtly demonstrated the spread of American consumerism culture while covertly providing a specification that America was also disseminating its culture around the world.

Finally, Rauschenberg used repeated gestures of the American president, which imposed a strong image of American political status in the world. In his work *Buffalo II*, using Kennedy's hand gesture twice, both pointing forcefully, Rauschenberg enhanced Kennedy's powerful and authoritative image, almost to the stage of mythologizing.[46]

Indeed, this fulfilled the effect of portraying the political aspect of America and reinforcing its national image through repetition. In 1964, Rauschenberg became the first American to win the Golden Lion award at the Venice Biennale. For Americans, this proved that, through the success of American cultural propaganda, American art finally overcame European avant-garde art and "reached its well-deserved place as leader of the pack."[47] However, this dominant hand gesture of Kennedy, along with other repeated American symbols that were imposed upon the audience, may create some controversy. For Europeans, especially the French, the award demonstrated "the 'last frontier' of American expressionism—for it seemed that the economic and military dominance of the United States finally had been supplemented by cultural dominance."[48] Thus, through Rauschenberg's artworks in the Venice Binnacle, America established the national identity of not only prosperity, consumerism, and cultural accomplishments, but also economic, political, and social superiority

b) Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI)

If Rauschenberg's artworks at the Venice Biennale themselves served as potent weapons for shaping the American national identity under the grand historical circumstance of Cold War cultural propaganda, the implementation of the project Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI) itself strengthened the American cultural propaganda and its dominating national identity while also participated in the formation of a new type of national characteristics due to its different historical background.

The ROCI was designed by Rauschenberg in 1984 when the Cold War was coming to an end and America and the USSR were attempting to form a more peaceful relationship under the effort of the western-inclined Soviet leader Gorbachev. Feeling that "a one-to-one contact through art contains potent peaceful powers, and is the most non-elitist way to share exotic and common information, seducing us into creative mutual understandings for the benefit of all,"[49] Rauschenberg proposed a plan to visit what he called "sensitive areas", or developing and communist countries like China, Japan, the USSR, Venezuela, Chile, Cuba, and Mexico.[50] There, they could "meet artists and artisans 'to learn their aesthetic traditions and to talk to students,'"[51]

Insisting on distancing himself from governmental sponsorship, Rauschenberg refused any federal funding for this extensive project and insisted on self-financial support. However, given the following reasons, the ROCI was still counted as a representative program for American national identity. For one thing, Rauschenberg, as an individual, was celebrated as a representative of America and everything embodied due to his previous frequent engagements in American foreign cultural propaganda policy. Starting in 1961, Rauschenberg's artworks were constantly included in American exhibitions to foreign countries: For example, his works traveled abroad in governmental-sponsored "Vanguard American Painting" which toured Vienna, Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Bel-grade from June 1961 to May 1962.[52] For another thing, the federal government endowed ROCI with official national recognition after the

[45] Mamiya, 46.
[46] Ibid.
[47] *The New Frontier Goes to Venice*, p. ii. NEEDS FULL CITATION
[48] Ibid.
[49] Robert Rauschenberg, *Tobago Statement* (Yakush: Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Exchange, 1984), 154.
[50] Mamiya, 57.
[51] Rauschenberg, *Tobago Statement*, 154.
[52] Walter Hopps et al., *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, Cop, 1999), 559.

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conclusion of the program. In 1991, the National Gallery in Washington D.C. upheld a major show about ROCI, consequently enhancing the connection between ROCI to the nation.

To fulfill his commitment to this project, Rauschenberg did his best to integrate local artisans with their characteristic cultural aspects.[53] As scholar Christian J. Mamiya has stated in her work: "In Samarkand Stitches #1 and Guarded Mirror Rivers, for example, Rauschenberg utilized images of traditional textiles from the USSR and Venezuela." From Rauschenberg's perspective, this may be a benign intention, but some argued that this action was "imperialistic in imposing American art on a local public at the expense of indigenous art,"[54] which gave ROCI a touch of arrogance due to "cultural superiority." Indeed, when Rauschenberg arrived in Mexico, Mexican journalist and book artist Felipe Ehrenberg commented, "There was some understandable resentment that a ... museum ... would show and surround with such drums and trumpets a series of propositions already handled by artists in Mexico years back that hadn't been able to reach public forums."[55]

Nonetheless, ROCI did produce some expected effects on forming a new and positive aspect of American national identity by thawing the US-Soviet relationships. This improvement could be explained by changes in the Soviets' attitudes towards avant-garde art. During and after Stalinism until the 1980s,[56] the USSR accepted only socialist realism as its official form of art while eliminating other artistic expressions such as avant-garde art as "the corrupting influence of the West."[57] However, the Western-inclined foreign policy of the USSR in the 1980s called for innovations in previously limited artistic expressions. Soviet people started to accept avant-garde art, particularly pop art, for the fact that it utilized down-to-earth images to convey social messages concerning daily life. ROCI, when it reached the USSR in 1989, was considered to be "emblematic of the radical reforms underway in the USSR"[58] and even "symbolized freedom," according to Soviet artist and critic Leonid Bazhanov.[59]

Thus, ROCI fortified the American national identity established by its foreign policy at the end of the Cold War— "the rhetoric of peace and international cooperation and friendship." The US-Soviet relation was mitigated at the opening of the exhibition when the presence of Jack Matlock, the U.S. ambassador, American ambassador Vasilii Georgievich Zakharov, the Soviet minister of culture, all the first secretaries of artistic actions,[60] proving the maturity of peace between the two nations and adding new aspects to each national identity. For the American national identity—peace-loving yet still culturally arrogant.

V. Conclusion

The American national identity during the Cold War was specified according to contemporary historical background by avant-garde art through American cultural propaganda. It was most prominent and precise during the Cold War because of the urgency to compete against the USSR. In order to undermine the Soviet ideology and values, the United States constructed its own characteristic traits, opposite and superior to those of the Soviets so as to gain international support. More specifically, America wanted to establish the national identity of freedom which was further categorized into political potency, economic prosperity, and cultural tolerance.

In this case, it was unsurprising that Americans selected avant-garde art the opponent of artistic expression of Socialist Realism in the conflict of cultural propaganda, as a visualized reflection of a larger political, economic, and social conflict. Avant-garde art was severely suppressed in the USSR because it didn't conform to the official or conventional requirements of art. It was related to anarchism, and the USSR feared may cause social turmoil. Additionally, it couldn't fulfill the purpose of Soviet cultural propaganda—realistically yet ideally portraying the grandeur of politics and the promising future under communism.

Therefore, Americans chose avant-garde art as a weapon of propaganda, thus a factor that contributed to the definition of national identity during the Cold War since it emphasized that America was more tolerant of diverse and radical cultures. Besides, avant-garde art, the opponent of artistic expression of Socialist Realism in the conflict of cultural propaganda, was a visualized reflection of a larger military, economic, and political conflict. Repetitive famous American images indicated the above aspects in the case study of a particular iconic avant-garde artist, Robert Rauschenberg, whose utilization of collages conveys strong nationalistic motifs. In Rauschenberg's artworks, eagles referred to the American military mighty; Coca-Cola bottles referred to the prosperous consumerism culture in society; the

[53] Mamiya, 57.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Jane Addams Allen, "Rauschenberg's Worldwide Art Exchange" (Washington Times, May 31, 1985).
[56] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Socialist Realism | Art," in Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/art/Socialist-Realism.
[57] Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *USSR* (Munich: Prestel Verla: ROCI: Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Exchange, 1991), 51–52.
[58] Pamela Kachurin, "The ROCI Road to Peace: Robert Rauschenberg, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 27–43, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925157.
[59] Mary Lynn Kotz, "The ROCI Road Show," *Artnews,* Vol. 88, No. 6, 1989.
[60] The U.S.-Soviet General Exchanges Agreement, which went into effect on 1 January 1986, revived programs that had been suspended since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

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hand gestures of Kennedy referred to American political superiority.

Apart from this, the national identity was malleable according to the propagandistic output of this value, the responses of those who received it, and shifts in historical circumstances. For instance, during the start of the Cold War, when the US-Soviet conflicts were revealed and intensified, America desired to create a more powerful and culturally inclusive national image to make the USSR appear weak and culturally intolerant in comparison. Conversely, America adopted a more benign, friendly, and peace-loving national identity during the last decades of the Cold War, when the Soviets began to politically, economically, and socially incline westward. The above were ideal expectations of the results of American avant-garde art through cultural propaganda. In reality, some of America's movements were too forceful that they imposed their values on reluctant foreign countries, thus also earning themselves the national image of superiority, domination, and arrogance.

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