Art History and Socialism(s) 1940s–1960s (Tallinn, 28–29 Oct 16))

Tallinn, Oct 28–29, 2016
Deadline: Feb 25, 2016

Kristina Jõekalda

Art History and Socialism(s) after World War II: The 1940s until the 1960s

Location: Institute of Art History, Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn
Hosting institution: Estonian Academy of Arts

Although the Soviet and Eastern European socialist regimes of the latter 20th century seem to lie in the distant past now, research on them still has many uncovered areas. This applies not least to the role of "socialist" art historians, their activities and functions in universities, exhibitions and the mass media, and especially their academic text production. Deriving from a complicated socio-cultural set of relations, the common denominator for which was "socialism", these art historical "acts" shaped the general comprehensions of art, culture and history in the society at large. With the overall historiographical turn in the humanities, scholars from the Baltic to the Balkan region have begun to re-address the various histories of artworks, architecture, artistic styles and whole epochs that these practices constructed. Conferences on this recent art historical past have been held and scholarly publications issued, including in English, today's lingua franca, but the vast majority of research remains only in native languages, thus circulating mainly at the local level.

Our call for papers originates from the conviction that researchers of socialist art history need a common platform, to introduce and compare art historical practices across the former Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Europe. Paraphrasing the late Piotr Piotrowski, the time is ripe for the project of a "horizontal" reading of socialist art history. As with different "socialisms", "socialist art history" as an umbrella term covers a variety of ways of writing the history of art and architecture. Moscow's influence varied greatly depending on the decade, region and particular situation. In addition to ideological pressure and terror, other factors – of which neighbours might not have been or still might not be aware – affected the art historical ideas and practices of different Soviet republics and the satellite states in Eastern and Central Europe. The making of art history and its visual displays by means of exhibitions (as well as contemporary artistic practices) also depended on the international art history discourse, even though the range and accessibility of literature etc. varied from country to country.

The conference addresses these topics primarily via the historiographical and theoretical levels:
- Moscow's role in developing the theoretical grounds of the Marxist-Leninist art history discourse (one centre?, unity of theoretical approaches?)

- implementing this discourse in the Soviet Union, in its new member republics and in the new “socialist countries” (national socialist schools of art history?)
- interpreting art historical concepts and periodisation; shifts occurring over time; comparison with the Western art history discourse(s);
- the complicated relationship with Modernism during the Stalinist era; its later inclusion in the Marxist-Leninist discourse of art history.

Please submit your title and abstract of approx. 400 words in RTF, DOC or DOCX format. The proposal should include your affiliation, a brief biography (approx. 150 words) and contact details. The deadline is 25 February 2016, and the submission should be addressed to Kristina Jõekalda, kristina.joekalda@artun.ee.

Participants will be notified in April 2016. We will probably be able to reimburse the accommodation and travel costs for speakers. Participation in the conference is free of charge. The conference language is English.

ORGANISATION
The post-World War II socialism and related art historical discourse had many faces: too many for a single conference. Therefore we have launched a series of conferences, the first of which will be held in Tallinn in October 2016, focussing on the decades immediately following the war. In 2017 and 2018 follow-up conferences will be held in Leipzig and Berlin.

The 2016 two-day conference will be hosted by the Institute of Art History at the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn, in cooperation with the Centre for the History and Culture of East Central Europe (Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas – GWZO) in Leipzig, and the Chair of Art History of Eastern and East Central Europe at Humboldt University of Berlin.

Advisory board and organisation:
Prof. Krista Kodres, PhD, Estonian Academy of Arts
Marina Dmitrieva, PhD, GWZO Leipzig
Prof. Michaela Marek, PhD, Humboldt University of Berlin
Antje Kempe, M.A., Humboldt University of Berlin
Kristina Jõekalda, M.A., Estonian Academy of Arts

Reference:
CFP: Art History and Socialism(s) 1940s–1960s (Tallinn, 28-29 Oct 16)). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 11, 2016 (accessed Nov 12, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/11931>.