Socialist Internationalism & the Global Contemporary (Leipzig, 23-25 Nov 17)

Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa (GWZO), Leipzig, Nov 23–25, 2017
Deadline: Apr 30, 2017

Dr. Marina Dmitrieva

Socialist Internationalism and the Global Contemporary —
Transnational Art Historiographies from Eastern and East-Central Europe

International conference organized by Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa (GWZO; Dr. Marina Dmitrieva, Dr. Beata Hock) in cooperation with the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture at the Estonian Academy of Arts (Prof. Dr. Krista Kodres, Kristina Jõekalda) and Chair of Art History of Eastern Europe at the HU Berlin (Prof. Dr. Michaela Marek, Antje Kempe)

Concept and organization: Marina Dmitrieva (GWZO), Beata Hock (GWZO), Antje Kempe (HU Berlin)

Following suit after "Art History and Socialism(s) after World War II. The 1940s until 1960s" (Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, October 2016), the present conference aims to explore selected theoretical underpinnings, methodologies, and legacies of art history writing in socialist period. This time, we wish to explore a possible alternative beginning of the methodology that set a worldwide focus in the study of art: the kind of "universal art history" or Weltkunstgeschichte as an approach to art history that was introduced in the countries of the Socialist Bloc under the aegis of a Socialist internationalism.

It is fairly well-known that being part of the Soviet sphere of influence demanded a great degree of uniformity in terms of the administration of artistic life and the nature of prevalent art critical and historical discourses. It has been considerably less discussed, however, that belonging to the Bloc also involved an enforced allegiance toward “friendly states” across continents, which resulted in a socialist internationalism that has received scant scholarly attention.

We propose to interrogate a tentative link between internationalism as a political and cultural diplomatic principle and the frameworks for art history writing and teaching that were introduced in Socialist times.

Since the 2000s, Global Art History and World Art Studies have been buzzwords promising to renew the discipline of art history in different ways through yet another attempt to dispel the discipline’s persistent Eurocentrism and Western biases, some of which were still bear marks of a colonial-era belief in cultural superiority. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme, renowned propo-

nents of the World Art Studies model would reach back to the early 1990s when identifying the roots of this—meanwhile broadly criticised—approach and methodology in the work of the British scholar John Onians. But what if the genealogy of a global approach in art history could be traced even further back in time, to the partly politically determined model developed and practiced in socialist countries after 1945? Did “universal art history” and “world art history” as practiced in the “Second World” operate with similar concepts? Did they have aspirations and achievements comparable to those of Global Art History and World Art Studies today? Or, was this knowledge production in an internationalist paradigm a mere foil for communist rhetoric? In either case, did Socialist scholars come up with innovative propositions or a more inclusive canon, and if so, how do these relate to theoretical frameworks and methodologies put forth by the more recent focus set on a globally understood art world? Equally importantly, whatever happened to this scholarly output: could its particular aspects be productively re-interpreted today?

The latter question is especially poignant in the context of the system change and political opening after 1989-91: As the Iron Curtain was lifted and de-communizing countries entered the arena of the “global contemporary”, the increase of the cross-border mobility of individuals was accompanied by an influx of scholarly discourses, mostly from Euroatlantic academics. The reception of these intellectual products was twofold: while many local authors have been eager to capture and interpret their own histories with concepts and theories developed elsewhere, more critical voices questioned the applicability or transferability of these frameworks, including post-colonial theory, feminist art history, and global art studies themselves. Nevertheless, the appropriation of those theories and methods inspired a range of new art historical narratives—but have novel theoretical approaches also grown out of a post-Socialist intellectual field? Our inquiry, therefore, targets the complex level of art historiography as connected with cultural politics and diplomacy, the participation of art historians in international initiatives from the end of World War II up to the period after 1989–91.

Presentations are invited to address the following subject fields:

Socialist internationalism:
- Platforms of intercultural scholarly exchange—art historical conferences, joint publications, travelling exhibitions—within the Eastern Bloc and beyond (including Soviet-friendly states in different continents as well as the Western world)
- Educational concepts and contents fostering a “universal art history” and a “world art history”
- Presentations and studies of non-European art in East-Central and Eastern Europe, and the uses of the local vernacular/folk art
- Investigations of the cross-border flow of art historical methods and changing cultural orientations: Interactions with the West; allegiances and misunderstandings between institutions and actors in Eastern Europe and left-wing circles in the West

- The global contemporary:
- The assessment of art historiographical output under socialism and after 1990 (international conferences of art historians; influential articles, books/book series, periodicals)
- An emerging voluntary interest within the East-Central European region in each other’s artistic production and cultural history
- Internet as a resource for writing transnational art histories

Knowledge production and methodologies:
- The adaptation, reworking, critique, or explicit rejection of “international” theories and frameworks: Post-colonial criticism and self-colonisation; feminist perspectives on art history; Global Art Studies; trans-culturality, etc.
- Eastern European art historians and their cutting-edge work in the global paradigm
- Traditional disciplinary methods versus multidisciplinarity

All contributions are expected to operate with a narrative framework larger than a single country. Papers specifically addressing methodological issues of writing a transnational art history of Eastern and East-Central Europe are also welcome.

Please submit your title and abstract of ca. 300 words. The proposal should include your affiliation, a brief biography and contact details. The deadline is 30 April 2017, to be addressed to Marina Dmitrieva marina.dmitrieva@leibniz-gwzo.de

Paper acceptance will be notified in May 2017. Participation in the conference is free of charge. Conference language is English.

Reference:

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