Soviet Materialities (Cambridge, 11-12 Apr 22)

University of Cambridge, Jesus College, Apr 11–12, 2022
Deadline: Nov 15, 2021

Christianna Bonin, Cambridge

Soviet Materialities

The aim of this conference is to explore how a turn towards materiality can enrich our understanding of the Soviet cultural landscape. We invite proposals that consider material and objects, their journeys through time and space, their processes of making and re-making, and how those perspectives might uncover alternative modernisms, defamiliarise Sovietness, and explore the diversity of Soviet experiences and identities.

We expect that this theme will stimulate conversations between scholars working in a variety of different disciplines — including history, literary studies, the history of art and architecture, and anthropology — making this an interdisciplinary and methodologically-focused conference.

While there has been substantial interest in Soviet material culture over the last 20 years, there is, to-date, no coherent handbook on the material turn in Soviet studies. There remains much to be done in terms of analysing how materials powerfully shaped Soviet subjectivities and activities. What theoretical thinking around materials emerged from the ideological context of "actually existing socialism"? How might these theories echo or diverge from Western or capitalist traditions of matter and objecthood? Soviet Materialities conference will serve as the starting point for compiling an edited volume on this topic.

The conference will feature a methodologies masterclass in which senior scholars from the fields of art history, anthropology, and Slavic studies will explore approaches to the study of material culture and the history of materiality, stimulating methodological questions about how scholars of the Soviet past engage with sources, interlocutors, and archival materials.

We invite potential contributors to select objects or matter from the Soviet world, and appropriate "tools" from the methodological toolkit of material culture studies, to open new perspectives on how Sovietness was materialised, and how materials communicate(d) their Sovietness. We welcome paper proposals from researchers at institutions around the world and at any career stage.

Possible paper topics include, but are not limited to:
- Movement across time and space
- Inheritance/heritage (nasledstvo)
- Theories and the language of work (tvorchestvo, trud, rabota)
- Trade networks, gift and commodity exchanges
- Mass production

- Environmental and ecological histories
- Craft, artisanal, and embodied modes of making
- Faktura
- Food
- Kitsch
- “Survivals” from the pre-revolutionary period
- Myth, memory, and commemoration

Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words, and an author bio of max 100 words, to sovietmaterialities@gmail.com by 15 November 2021. Proposals may be submitted in English or Russian. Selected applicants will be notified by 15 December 2021. The working language of the conference will be English.

Soviet Materialities will be hosted over two days, 11–12 April 2022, at the University of Cambridge and supported by a grant from CEELBAS. We will provide one night’s accommodation in Cambridge free of charge for all speakers, and a formal dinner in Jesus College at the end of the conference. A limited number of travel grants are available for graduate students, early career researchers, and those travelling from the CIS.

www.sovietmaterialities.org

Conference Conveners:
Mollie Arbuthnot, Junior Research Fellow, Jesus College, University of Cambridge
Christianna Bonin, Assistant Professor, American University of Sharjah
Gabriella Ferrari, PhD candidate, Princeton University; Associate Specialist in Russian Works of Art, Sotheby’s
Thomas Drew, PhD candidate, The University of Manchester
Tadeusz Wojtych, PhD candidate, University of Cambridge

Reference:
CFP: Soviet Materialities (Cambridge, 11-12 Apr 22). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 23, 2021 (accessed Oct 31, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/34892>.