

Understanding 1989 in East-Central European Art

Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, Sarajevo, Bucharest, Jan 1, 2023–Sep 30, 2024
Application deadline: Nov 30, 2022

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Understanding 1989 in East-Central European Art. War vs. Revolution.

The project led by the Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and supported by the Getty Foundation as part of its Connecting Art Histories initiative, consists of a series of four one-week seminars - in Sarajevo, in Bucharest, a virtual one via Zoom, and in Poznań.

Team: Magdalena Radomska & Edit András (project leads), Caterina Preda, Boris Buden

Description:

The aim of the project is to create a platform for exchange of different narratives on the art produced as a result of the chain of events that unfolded in 1989 and in the following years (the fall of the socialist system in Europe, the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the transition to democracy and capitalism/market economy. Usually, the study of these phenomena is restricted to national contexts, languages, and geographical borders. The approaching 35th anniversary of 1989 and the 30th commemoration of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia offers an opportunity to overcome these limitations in favour of a comparative narrative that focuses on both similarities and differences of the process of political, economic, and social transition in Eastern Europe, and East-Central European art. Thus, the project aims to create an international space for debate between established and emerging scholars and researchers, in order to overcome the limitations of knowledge circulation, language differences, and varied research opportunities. So far, there has been no such narrative that cuts across national divisions and creates a platform to discuss post-communist and transitional experiences of these countries and their meaning in the present.

Understanding 1989 is crucial for understanding the contemporary situation in the region and more broadly - in Europe. Conservative governments in East-Central Europe have appropriated both events and narratives of 1989 for the sake of their own nationalistic, symbolic capital and in order to legitimise their own indispensability. At the same time, contemporary artists in this part of Europe investigate the political, economic and social changes, and the role of 1989 and its initial revolutionary potential, as well as confront the question of what went wrong.

The ideological appropriation of 1989 as national liberation and restoration of national sovereignty has led to the proliferation of ethnic conflicts in the former communist East and finally to the return of the spectre of war to the political scene of modern Europe.

The project Understanding 1989 in East- Central European Art. War vs. Revolution aims at approaching these tendencies in the contemporary art of the region as a peculiar re-appropriation of 1989, which - when understood as a revolution - creates the possibility to transgress national divisions and lay bare the common historical experience of this part of Europe. It is in this context that the notion of revolution, which has been totally ostracised by the discourse of the post-communist transition, as a political instrument of the totalitarian rule, deserves renewed attention, especially after the world financial crisis of 2008 that overlapped with the 20th anniversary of the fall of communism in Europe. The growing awareness of inequalities and the need to seek other solutions to the problems than those offered by conservative nationalism, provoked the visible reaction to reevaluate the communist and Marxist ideological background, as well as the criticism of capitalism in this part of Europe. This approach attempts to trace back the political and cultural process that marginalised topics related to class division, poverty, and other aspects of social and economic injustice.

Structure: The structure behind the four seminars is conceived to interconnect the two notions of 1989 as war, and as revolution with two initial seminars in Sarajevo (war) and Bucharest (revolution) that will focus on their seemingly obvious connotations. They will offer contemporary interpretations to both notions. The Zoom seminar will focus on those transformations that occurred without war and without revolution (Hungary and Poland) or via non-violent revolution ("Velvet Revolution" in Czechoslovakia, the "Singing Revolution" in Baltics, "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, the "Twitter Revolution in Moldova", etc.)

The last seminar in Poznan will be focusing on the consequences of the failed revolutions and the recent war between Russian and Ukraine) as well as a revolution perceived as labour that transforms both class and economic divisions of the post- communist societies (Poznań). Hence, the essential role of the Latin American context for its similarity, with recent artworks created in post-communist Europe. The notion of the revolution generally adopted for 1989 will get a new frame, which makes it possible to break through the national isolationism of individual countries in the region and to reach its shared historical and cultural past connected with left-wing ideas and historical background.

Who are we looking for: We have 15 places for applicants. The target of the seminar is both Ph.D. students and emerging scholars (in exceptional cases Master's students) from East-Central Europe (in exceptional cases from other parts of the world), with a deep interest in the art of the region and the intention to continue research on the subjects discussed during the seminars and/or if the subject of their research is of particular relevance for the project. We will honour the diversity of the professional backgrounds of the group, and we will give priority to those who can prove their engagement to the subject. Once selected, the applicants are expected to take part actively in the whole series of seminars and read the literature on which the discussions will be based. Travel, accommodation, and meals will be arranged and covered by the organisers.

How to apply:

Please submit

1. A bio
2. A list of conferences and academic papers, publications, projects, etc.
3. A letter of intent (describing why you wish to participate, what your professional insight on the

topic is, in which way your previous activity is relevant to the seminar, how you think you could benefit from the seminar, and how it could be part of your future work)

4. One letter of reference from a scholar acquainted with your work

Please send these documents to the email address: piotrpiotrowskicenter@amu.edu.pl with the title "1989" by 30 November 2022.

We will respond to your applications by 20 December 2022.

Reference:

STIP: Understanding 1989 in East-Central European Art. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 5, 2022 (accessed Jul 13, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/37859>>.