

Artists on the Move (online, 7–9 Mar 24)

online, Mar 7–09, 2024

Deadline: Nov 1, 2023

Mira Kozhanova, Frankfurt am Main

Artists on the Move: Transnational and Transcultural Perspectives on Migration from the (former) Russian Empire, 1880–1939.

Location: Online (co-sponsored by Yale-NUS College and the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program of the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University)

The twentieth century was marked by several significant migratory flows from the Russian Empire and its successor states, which resulted in many artists living and working abroad. These diverse artistic relocations were already present at the turn of the century and increased drastically after the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, as well as the Civil War of 1917–1922. These migratory flows were fundamentally impacted by socio-political factors and largely comprised of artists who opposed either the Tsarist or the Soviet regimes on the basis of their ideological, national, or religious views. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has emphasized the ever-present political dimension that shapes migration processes, either as a reason for relocation, in the choice of destination/transit country, and in the activities and/or activism at the new place of residence. Furthermore, it has added a new urgency to the already existing need to reconsider the concept of "Russian emigration," as much as the problematic terms: "Russian artist" or "Russian avant-garde."

First and foremost, the conference aims to illuminate the national, ethnocultural and religious diversity of the migrant artists in order to deconstruct the homogenizing perception of this phenomenon as solely Russian or Russian-speaking. Second, it proposes a shift away from a Russo-centric point of view—inherent in the term "emigration"—towards a conceptualization that is not intrinsic to any nation, as reflected by the terms "migration" or, still more neutrally, "transnational mobility." Third, the conference proposes to extend the conventional time span by including migratory flows from the late nineteenth century, before the "first emigration wave," in order to pay special attention to possible dynamic changes in migrant communities after the 1905 Revolution and the October Revolution of 1917. The period under consideration ends with the year 1939 before another wave of migration from the Soviet Union was triggered by the Second World War.

To date, research on migrant artists from Imperial/Soviet Russia has been dominated by literary studies. Maintaining that there were significant differences in the migration experiences of different individuals based on their respective artistic mediums, this conference seeks to predominantly focus on the visual arts. At the same time, it aims to broaden the geographical scope of migra-

tion routes from the territories of the former Russian empire beyond Western Europe and the USA. Research that explores other important cities of arrival or transit, such as Istanbul, Cairo, Tunis, Shanghai, Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, or Bombay is especially welcome. By bringing together diverse case studies and comparative approaches, the conference seeks to explore how different environments have shaped artistic ideas, production, networking, and institutionalization. Key questions include the reciprocal interactions between new environments, migrant artists, dynamic urban spaces, and the articulation of modernist aesthetics. How did migrant artists come into contact with local cultures and creative traditions? How did the respective topographies affect artistic networking or communication? In turn, how have migrant artists shaped cultural life and urban spaces in their new place of residence? To what extent did their migration experiences in “transit countries” impact their activities as well as general artistic developments in subsequent destination cities?

The aim of the conference is to rethink, redefine, differentiate, and ultimately better understand the complex migration phenomenon labeled “Russian emigration.” By decentering research perspectives and actively adopting a decolonial framework, the conference aims to challenge both the Russo-centric narratives that still dominate art historiography on the subject and the Eurocentric concept of “modernism” more broadly. We invite contributions that address innovative questions of content and methodology, and explore various forms of mobility, production, activities, and networks of artists from the former Russian empire and its successor states. We welcome proposals from researchers at any career stage.

To submit a proposal for a 20-minute presentation, please send an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short biography of up to 100 words in a single PDF document to the conference organizers Mira Kozhanova (mira.kozhanova@uni-bamberg.de) and Maria Taroutina (maria-taroutina@yale-nus.edu.sg) by November 1, 2023. Selected applicants will be notified by December 1, 2023. The working language of the conference will be English. For inquiries, please feel free to contact Mira Kozhanova.

Reference:

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