

Socialist Anthropocene in the Visual Arts (London, 16–17 May 24)

UCL, London, May 16–17, 2024

Deadline: Feb 11, 2024

Maja Fowkes

Socialist Anthropocene in the Visual Arts Conference.

Great Transformation of Nature: Extractivism, Terraforming and Monoculturalization in Global Socialisms.

The Socialist Anthropocene charts a distinctive path through the Great Acceleration, taking the economic programme of the Five Year Plans as its starting point, and tracing social, political and environmental modalities in the unfolding of socialist modernity. Socialism is understood here not as a monolithic system, but as always entailing a multiplicity of forms and manifestations encompassing historical and actually-existing socialisms, global as well as eco-socialist streams. The Great Transformation of Nature, the programmatic maxim for the radical remaking of the natural environment that infiltrated mindsets, was implemented on the ground and officially codified in 1948, connotes the ecological impact of the rapid upswing in economic activity of the model of state-planned industrial expansion. This instrumentalizing approach to nature was by turns adopted, adapted and critiqued across the global territories of socialism, giving rise to environmental histories that are contested and entwined, both monstrous and engendering.

This conference sets out to examine how the processes that shaped the socialist path through the Anthropocene are disclosed in the visual arts by investigating the environmental ramifications of extractivism, terraforming and the monoculturalization of agriculture. In what ways do artistic engagements with mineral extraction, mining and heavy industry uncover the praxes of fossil socialism from the productivist ethos of Stakhanovite overfulfilment to the intersecting agendas of colonial extractivism and socialist developmentalism? How have artists exposed the material infrastructures and geoengineering feats of state socialism, articulating an ecological critique of terraforming procedures of dam-building, river re-routing and conquering of so-called Virgin Lands? What approaches to collectivization, monoculturalization and chemicalization of agriculture can be discerned in art practices that deal with the social and environmental legacies of the Great Transformation of Nature? Furthermore, how might the depository of artistic knowledge be activated to reveal the emancipatory potential of eco-socialist epistemologies and nature praxes?

Proposals are sought for 30 minute papers within and beyond the fields of environmental art history, eco-critical art theory and research-driven contemporary art practice that push the boundaries of interdisciplinary debate around nature transformation under socialism. Particularly encouraged are decolonial approaches that call into question Western narratives of the Anthropocene and challenge Moscow-centric interpretations of Soviet environmental history, in order to cast a spot-

light on the complex Anthropocene trajectories of Central Asia, the Baltic States, Eastern Europe, as well as East Asian, African and Latin American socialisms, including international, interregional and transhemispheric perspectives.

Topics might include but are not limited to:

- Critical engagements with mining and mineral extraction; forced labour and frontier socialism; Maoist and other non-Soviet streams of extractivism; post-extractive landscapes
- Material and immaterial infrastructures; politics of pipelines; networks of the hydrosphere; nuclear-technological complexes; eco-technological sublime of socialist modernity; socialist logistics; infrastructural internationalism; failed infrastructures and resilient ruins
- Artistic perspectives on the socialist praxes of geoengineering and terraforming; transcontinental diplomatic trips to sites of transformation; models of climate adaptation; reverse geoengineering
- Visualizing the socialist countryside; the socialist promise of agro-industrial abundance; ecological effects of monocultures; alternative forms of socialist agro-ecology; rural environmentalisms
- Attitudes and practices to the natural world under socialism; eco-socialist critique of toxic modernity; detoxifying the system; indigenous and decolonial ecologies from the socialist South

This conference is organised within the framework of the Socialist Anthropocene in the Visual Arts (SAVA), an interdisciplinary, visual-arts led research project led by Principal Investigator Dr. Maja Fowkes at UCL Institute of Advanced Studies, which was selected for a Consolidator Grant by the European Research Council (ERC) and is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Proposal submissions

Please send a 250 word abstract and a short biography to: ias.pact@ucl.ac.uk

Deadline for submissions: Sunday 11 February 2024.

Support for travel and accommodation costs is available.

For further enquiries please contact: r.fowkes@ucl.ac.uk

IAS Common Ground, Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS), South Wing, UCL, Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT

www.sava.earth

Reference:

CFP: Socialist Anthropocene in the Visual Arts (London, 16-17 May 24). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 12, 2024 (accessed Aug 14, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40918>>.