Intellectual Art History in Cold War Eastern Europe (Wien, 24 Oct 24–31 Jan 25)

Academy of Fine Arts, Institute for Art and Culture Studies, Schillerplatz 3, 1010 Vienna, Austria, Oct 24, 2024–Jan 31, 2025
Deadline: Aug 5, 2024

Katalin Cseh-Varga

Intellectual Art History in Cold War Eastern Europe – Seminar Series Winter Term 2024/25. Organizer: Katalin Cseh-Varga.

While a transregional and transcultural approach has perhaps been the most influential current academic turn in East, Central and Southeast European art in and beyond the state socialist period, little attention has been paid to the circulation of ideas and their absorption during the Cold War. Numerous recent publications underline that socialist people's democracies were not isolated in the era of bloc polarity. For instance, they developed their own official cultural diplomacy programs based on socialist internationalism and decolonial solidarity (see, e.g., Gabriel/Kácsor 2023; Stanek 2020; Videkanić 2019; Piškur 2019). Artists with little or no state support often invented their own mail communication channels that crossed the Iron Curtain in all directions - from east to west, and from north to south (see, e.g., Fehér 2024; Kemp-Welch 2019; Nae 2016). The complex structure of art production of which international exchange was a part has already made its way into the scholarly consciousness of all the academics engaged in area studies investigations into art and culture. There are still some conditions that have not yet been strongly integrated into the transregional and transcultural Eastern European art historiography, though. We do not know much about how contemporary non-realist artists and art theorists engaged with and absorbed the dominant intellectual currents that washed over Europe during the Cold War. Figures such as art historian and critic Éva Körner embraced and modified structuralism and semiotics, movements that went hand-in-hand with a growing cult of the ready-made, Wittgenstein's influence and minimal art in the Hungarian art scene during the 1960s and 1970s, while Czech performance artist, scholar, and translator Karel Miler became a proponent of Jan Patočka's phenomenology and Zen Buddhism.

It turns out that we know relatively little about the intellectual background of art production in socialist states such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, although it may have generated the factors that influenced what type of art was regarded as innovative, modern, or rather subversive. By looking into the role of mediators, trends in philosophy, and the journey of ideas from source to agent and medium, we can gain a comprehensive view not only of the region's art scenes, but of the working mechanisms of the respective political regimes and how they presented themselves within and outside the Eastern Bloc. There is an organic and dialectical relationship between mediators and philosophical currents, including their carriers. Important figures in art theory and criticism and artists themselves in socialist people's democracies absorbed, trans-

lated, and networked philosophies. The journeys of these travelling ideas resulted in discussions, publications, events, and of course, in works of art.

Against the background outlined above, this call invites the participation of advanced MA students, doctoral students, and postdoctoral researchers interested in these topics to take part in a series of three seminars on October 24-25 and November 21-22, 2024, and January 30-31, 2025. Each one-and-a-half-day seminar will be devoted to one theme and will be accompanied by one expert from the respective field. The first seminar will track down the philosophies and intellectual currents which acted as formative factors in artists' and art networkers' thought and creative practice. The second seminar will focus on mediators and key cultural players to uncover which personalities turned the tables and created opportunities for their peers, and how they shaped the canon of Eastern European art. The third and final seminar will build on the insights of the first two and will investigate and test historiographic methods for building an intellectual art history for understanding the region's art.

The seminars will consist of expert talks, discussions, round tables, project pitches, and interactive small group work. Three weeks prior to the first seminar, participants are expected to submit a short thesis/concept paper that will serve as the foundation for group discussions and pitches, and which will be revised and expanded over the course of the workshop series.

The confirmed keynote speakers are:
•First seminar: Anna Markowska, University of Wrocław
•Second seminar: Juliane Debeusscher, Autonomous University of Madrid
•Third seminar: Simone Wille, University of Innsbruck

Send your applications, including a motivation letter and project description (1-2 pages) and a short biography (up to 300 words), to k.cseh-varga@akbild.ac.at by no later than August 5, 2024. Notifications of acceptance will be emailed to the attendees by August 31, 2024.

Future participants are strongly encouraged to apply for the entire seminar series as the workshops' contents are interrelated and build on one another. Nevertheless, the organiser will also consider applications for one or two of the three seminars. Please indicate any limited availability in your motivation letter.

The seminar series Intellectual Art History in Cold War Eastern Europe is the concluding event of the research project Behind the Artwork. Thinking Art Against Cold War's Bloc Polarity (Hertha Firnberg project T-1074, funded by the FWF. Austrian Science Fund, 2019-2025).

Reference:

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