Joseph Backstein (online/London, 16 Jan 25)

Online / Pushkin House, London, Jan 16, 2025

Katy Deepwell, KT press

This symposium (online and in person, 2pm-8pm) brings together major practitioners in contemporary art to pay tribute to the critical and curatorial activities of Joseph Backstein (1945–2024), who promoted contemporary art in and from Russia until 2018.
He was especially concerned with fostering a relationship with the international art world post-Perestroika. Four different panels will discuss different phases of his career - in the 1980s, 1990s, the Moscow Biennales, and education projects - and art critic Katy Deepwell, who was married to Backstein for 23 years until his death, will introduce the event.

Backstein's curatorial work spanned over three decades – from participation in dialogues with Andrei Monastyrski and Ilya Kabakov in the 1980s, exhibitions on Moscow Archive of New Art (MANI) and Collective Actions Group, to publications and exhibitions on non-conformist art and Moscow conceptualism.
His innovative curation followed Perestroika at home, expanding to Europe and the USA in the 1990s, but also bringing many international artists to Moscow. In 1992, Joseph Backstein founded the Institute of Contemporary Art in Moscow, which is now an educational programme, the Joseph Backstein Institute of Contemporary Art. He also established and acted as commissioner for Moscow Biennales 1–6 (2004–2016).

Leading curators, scholars, artists and art practitioners will discuss Joseph Backstein's role in different fields, such as curating, art education and art management in Russia and internationally. Sarah Wilson, Emilia Kabakov, Zinovy Zinik, Iara Boubnova, Catherine de Zegher, Jean-Hubert Martin and David Elliott are among those who collaborated with Backstein on seminal international projects and will offer their reflections on his achievements. Former students of Backstein will reflect on the evolution of the contemporary art world in Russia. Alex Melamid will speak about Backstein's work with Sots Art.

Elena Zaytseva, an independent curator, is convenor of the conference.

The event will be broadcasted live to Youtube for those joining online.
The event will be recorded and shared on the Pushkin House YouTube channel after the event.

For more information about Joseph Backstein, please visit his official website: https://josephbackstein.com

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Programme
14.00 - 14.50 (GMT)

Keynote lecture: “Joseph Backstein: Curator of Contemporary Art” by
Professor Katy Deepwell

Panel I
14.50 -15.30
Long Acquaintances
Chair: Elena Zaytseva
Alexander Melamid - online
Zinivy Zinik - in person
Emilia Kabakov - online
15.30 -15.50 Coffee Break

II
15.50 - 16.50
International Curating
Chair: David Elliott - in person
Jean-Hubert Martin - in person
Catherine de Zegher - online
Iara Boubnova - online
16.50 -17.00 - short break

III
17.00 - 18.00
Moscow Art Scene in 1990-2000s in the International Context
Chair: Denis Stolyarov
Sarah Wilson - in person
Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich - online
Marat Guelman - in person
Valentin Dyakonov - in person

18.00 -18.10 Break

IV
18.10 - 19.10
Institute of Contemporary art, the First in Russia
Chair: Denis Maksimov
Katya Sivers - in person
Pavel Otdelnov - in person
Igor Tsukanov - in person
Elena Konushikhina - in person

19.10 Q&A, Comments and Reception

Reference:
CONF: Joseph Backstein (online/London, 16 Jan 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 12, 2025 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/43643>.