Modernism's Future Pasts: Abstraction and Identity in 'East-Central Europe'

University of Tübingen & Across East-Central Europe, Oct 1, 2025–Feb 3, 2026
Deadline: Mar 14, 2025

Katia Denysova

! New Deadline: Friday 14 March 2025 at 11.59 pm CET !

Call for Participants | Modernism's Future Pasts: Abstraction and Identity in 'East-Central Europe', 1910–1930s | Getty Connecting Art Histories Project 2025–27.

The Kunsthistorisches Institut at the University of Tübingen, with support from the Getty's Connecting Art Histories initiative, is launching a new research project 'Modernism's Future Pasts: Abstraction and Identity in "East-Central Europe", 1910–1930s'. Early and mid-career researchers and curators are encouraged to apply to participate in the project over 2025–27.

Led by Prof. Megan R. Luke and Dr Katia Denysova, the project aims to re-contextualize modernist art and its historiography by examining and critically reassessing the entrenched polarity between the perceived nationalism of folk practices and the universalism of the historical avant-garde in East-Central Europe. The engagement with the history of ethnography in this region holds enormous potential for how the discipline at large contends with tensions between anticipation and anachronism in the study of culture more broadly. By focusing on the emergence of abstract art and design, the project seeks to explore the link between non-representational visual practices and folk and decorative art traditions in the region of study.

The project will surface a network of 12–15 early and mid-career researchers and curators of early twentieth-century art and visual culture in the European countries of the former Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union. This group will build on extant research in a series of travelling seminars to take place across four locations: Prague/Brno, Łódź/Poznań, Kyiv/Lviv (hybrid format, potentially to be hosted in Estonia), and a winter school at the University of Tübingen. In each seminar, participants will work together to take art historical methodologies beyond the national historiographies that continue to restrict the broader reception of scholarship generated in the region, reinvesting in the study of transnational exchanges and relationships among historical agents active in East-Central Europe between the 1910s, when the first abstract artworks started to appear across the European continent, and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, with the subsequent ideological and aesthetic conformism of Soviet communism that overshadowed this region.

The project strives to generate an increased international appreciation of the heterogeneity of the region's modernist artistic practices and institutional structures while fostering a greater mutual understanding of academic cultures within the region and beyond. The network will work to bridge

the existing divide between the two sub-regions that have structured the study of abstract art and design in this cultural space: the former republics of the USSR and its satellite states. Furthermore, the scholarship generated in the context of this project will aim to move beyond the discourses and theoretical frameworks imported from Western Europe and North America towards developing context-bound terminologies and methods.

In each of the four locations, the network will gather for a week-long session of reading discussions, research presentations and engagement with relevant institutions. Collection visits will concentrate on the artworks, artists, and groups active during the period under consideration to engender new perspectives on their practices and the historical context. The topics of each session will draw on the strengths of art production in the host city/country while also stimulating comparative analysis vis-à-vis other geographies in the region. We expect the participants to engage actively in meetings and discussions and give 1-2 research papers or presentations during the project, with all travel and accommodation expenses covered. Applicants based overseas/beyond the region of study should contact project leaders about funding limits.

We seek applications from PhD candidates at an advanced stage of their programme, postdoctoral researchers, early career scholars and curators from the countries of East-Central Europe, as well as from those who study the region's art history and visual culture from further afield.

All expenses associated with their travel within the project will be covered.

To apply, please submit a single pdf document with:
1. Your full name, email address, professional title/position, institutional affiliation, country of citizenship, and city and country of residence.
2. A statement of intent (max. two pages) indicating what you would bring to the project, the nature of your current work and involvement with the early twentieth-century East-Central European art history/visual culture, and how your research would benefit from your participation in the programme.
3. A short CV (max. three pages) with a selection of your most relevant publications and research or curatorial projects.
4. For PhD candidates only: a brief letter of support from your doctoral supervisor confirming that you are expected to submit your thesis by the summer of 2027.

The project team comprising Professor Megan R. Luke (University of Tübingen), Andrij Bojarov (independent researcher, artist and curator), Daniel Muzyczuk (Interim Director, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź), Professor Matthew Rampley (Masaryk University, Brno), Professor Michael White (University of York), and Dr Katia Denysova (University of Tübingen) will select the participants.

Please submit your application to Megan Luke (megan.luke@uni-tuebingen.de) and Katia Denysova (kateryna.denysova@uni-tuebingen.de) by 11.59 pm CET on Monday, March 14. We are happy to answer your enquiries about the project or application process and will notify applicants of the outcome by mid-April.

This project is made possible with support from Getty through its Connecting Art Histories initiative.

Reference:
CFP: Modernism’s Future Pasts: Abstraction and Identity in ‘East-Central Europe’. In: ArtHist.net, Feb 6, 2025 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/43865>.