The Weaponisation of History (London, 6-7 Jun 25)

The Courtauld, Vernon Square, Penton Rise, London WC1X 9EW, Jun 6–07, 2025
Deadline: Mar 31, 2025

Elena Konyushikhina

The Weaponisation of History: Refracting Soviet Memories in Contemporary Russia and Beyond.

Since the USSR collapsed and independent nations emerged, the Russian state has shaped its national identity by funnelling multiple complex histories into a singular superpower narrative. Repressive law supplemented with a prescriptive visual culture develops a usable past that justifies present political policies and future objectives. As state sponsored cults of memory overspill into cults of war, this “struggle for history” is also a “struggle for mastery” and a national idea that serves the military industrial complex and justifies foreign policy, including the ongoing war in Ukraine.

This conference counterposes memory politics of the Russian state with art and research that confronts the use of history as a state tool of manipulation: grey zones, camouflage, masks, mirror images, sites of refusal, and nostalgia. We seek strategies for fostering independent thought within censorious, politicised realms, and investigate how artistic imagery might support or else create ballast against attempts to reify, coalesce and weaponise complex and diverse Soviet pasts into a singular line.

We invite proposals for papers that explore the complexities of reinterpreting Soviet memory in contemporary Russia, the Eastern European and Central Asian nations that once shaped the Soviet Union. We welcome submissions focusing on visual contemporary arts practices from the early 2009 (the falsification of history law) to 2025. This conference embraces divisions, disagreements, and diverse ways of thinking, seeking to shape a framework for contested and multidirectional histories.

6th June 2025 (Online)

Session 1: The Weaponisation of History: How the State uses Visual Culture to Manipulate the Past
This session explores how the Soviet period is remembered in contemporary Russia, emphasising historical and sociopolitical perspectives. It focuses on how the state uses visual culture to perform history , focusing on the mechanisms of memory construction, erasure, and revisionism. Papers might include investigations into legal or cultural frameworks: mythmaking, sites of memory, embodied affective histories, archival access, or state sponsored exhibitions and media.

7th June 2025 (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London)

Session 2: Alternative Histories: Microhistory and Independent Perspectives
This session looks at the capacity of contemporary visual culture (and particularly contemporary art) engage critically with Soviet histories. Tackling historical amnesia, nostalgia, selective memory, the panel provides insights on how arts challenge dominant historical frameworks to offer alternative perspectives, that might re-stage the past, and rearticulate relationships between memory, ideology, and civil society.

Session 3: Grey Zones: Camouflage and Interconnectedness – Blurred Boundaries
This panel explores cynicism, double-speak, and double-consciousness in contemporary Russia and beyond. It looks for grey zones or in-betweenness, taking a 'both and' approach to conformity and resistance, state and non-state. It explores moral binaries alongside their potential limitations, seeking alternative perspectives to form nuanced, alternative ways of understanding present through the past.

Proposal Submissions:
• A proposal for a 15-minute presentation (250-300 words)
• An academic CV (maximum 2 pages, A4)
• A short biography, including email address

Deadline: 12 pm on 31st March 2025

Email submissions to:
elena.konyushikhina@courtauld.ac.uk and kitty .brandonjames@courtauld.ac.uk

Funding & Accessibility Statement
We welcome participation from doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, independent scholars, and academics from all backgrounds. A maximum of £150 per person will be available to support travel costs. The conference organizers will aim to partially cover travel and accommodation expenses for invited speakers, prioritising those in need of financial assistance and without institutional funding.

Organisers:
Elena Konyushikhina (The Courtauld, London) Kitty Brandon-James (University College, London)

Link to the CFP:
https://courtauld.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CFP_RefractingSovietMemories.pdf

Reference:
CFP: The Weaponisation of History (London, 6-7 Jun 25). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 24, 2025 (accessed Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/44043>.