

Coming to the Surface or Going Underground? (Bremen, 13-14 Nov 25)

Research Centre for East European Studies (FSO), Bremen, Nov 13–14, 2025

Deadline: Apr 27, 2025

Georg Sokolov, Bremen

"Coming to the Surface or Going Underground? Art Practices, Actors, and Lifestyles in the Soviet Union of the 1950s-1970s", Research Centre for East European Studies (FSO), Bremen, November 13-14, 2025.

Stalin's death and the subsequent "thaw" under Khrushchev fundamentally shook the Soviet Union: previously believed truths, self-images, and ways of life were called into question, as were Soviet institutions and the party itself. The search for new forms of expression led to the emergence of a variety of alternative artistic milieus in numerous locations within the Soviet Union. To use Mark Lipovsky's metaphor, these multiple alternative local communities shaped an "underground archipelago" that produced different norms, values, hierarchies, rituals, lifestyles, and self-conceptualization patterns. Our conference will explore these alternative scenes, particularly examining the various sources of intellectual dissent and artistic divergence, the media used for self-expression, and the artists' channels of communication. We are specifically interested in early unofficial artistic practices developed outside the well-established centers of Moscow and Leningrad.

We invite contributions from different disciplines, including history, art history, literary and cultural studies, history of material culture, sociology, and anthropology and encourage papers that examine Soviet art and culture of the period using an interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, we look for contributions that address the subversive, anti-hierarchical, and anti-imperial transgressions along with the conservative, patriarchal, and essentialist components of the Soviet underground legacy.

We welcome submissions that address, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- What were the sources of intellectual dissent and artistic divergence in Soviet underground circles?
- In what ways did the infrastructure of Soviet underground culture develop, and who were the main actors?
- What alternative identities, lifestyles, and forms of social relations were developed against the wider backdrop of Soviet everyday life of the period?
- How did Soviet underground artists navigate between the historical avant-garde and contemporary art movements? What narratives and conceptual models did they use?
- In what ways did the participants of various artistic milieus consider local and global artistic contexts?

- How and from what positions has the narrative of Soviet underground culture been constructed?

The conference will be conducted in English and held at the Research Centre for East European Studies (FSO) in Bremen on November 13-14, 2025. The event is part of the DFG-funded research project "Between Avant-Garde and Nonconformism: Soviet Artists and Their Alternative Practice Between Thaw and Stagnation," jointly organized by the FSO at the University of Bremen and the Russian Art & Culture Reconsidered Group (RACR) at Constructor University, Bremen.

Please submit your abstract (300 words) along with a short biography (100 words), and full contact details in a single pdf file by April 27, 2025 to the following address: soviet.underground@uni-bremen.de

Notification of acceptance of proposals will be given by the end of May 2025.

Accommodation in Bremen will be provided for the duration of the conference, and some travel subsidies are available for those in need of it. For inquiries or further information, please contact the organizers Nataliia Fedorenko, Irina Riznychok, and Georg Sokolov at the above-mentioned address.

Reference:

CFP: Coming to the Surface or Going Underground? (Bremen, 13-14 Nov 25). In: Arthist.net, Feb 26, 2025 (accessed Dec 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/44064>>.