Repositioning the Postwar Avant-Garde in the East (Dresden/online, 12–13 Jun 25)

Archiv der Avantgarden – Egidio Marzona, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Jun 12–13, 2025
Registration deadline: Jun 2, 2025

Isabel Wünsche

The second symposium of the ‘Decolonizing the Avant-Garde’ project focuses on post-1945 avant-garde and non-conformist artistic practices in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Japan. The view of the avant-garde that emerged during the Cold War is largely West-centric—attempts to decolonize the post-1945 avant-garde accordingly have tended to focus mainly on its relation to the colonizing and colonialist West.
Before and during the Cold War, however, the West was, of course, not the only colonizing and colonialist power. In an attempt to 'former' the West (much like the ‘formering’ the Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when many began to refer to the ‘former Eastern Bloc’), this symposium focuses on avant-garde practitioners across races and ethnicities who worked within Eastern and Central-Eastern Europe—before, behind, and after the Iron Curtain—as well as within Japan.

Two main issues will be explored at this conference:
1) We will chart how avant-garde artists in these regions critically regarded the West, that is the acclaimed center of postwar avant-gardism: What (other) notions or theories of the avant-garde were in circulation here? What decentering practices did avant-garde artists develop? Did the avant-garde in these regions position itself differently than that in the West?
2) We seek to question the mainly Western (art-historical) discourse of decolonization itself: Does that discourse and the power structures it aims to expose do justice, for example, to the complexities of artists holding ties to Soviet colonies outside the West? Did colonial and colonizing practices play a similar or different role in the avant-garde's history here? To what extent should the critical apparatus of decolonization be revised accordingly? To answer these questions, the symposium will also pay attention to Japan and to how its

Program

Thursday, June 12, 2025

10:00 Registration (Blockhaus, Café 451°)

11:00-11:30 Welcome + Opening
Rudolf Fischer and Przemysław Strożek (Archiv der Avantgarden – Egidio Marzona (ADA), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden), Sascha Bru (KU Leuven), Isabel Wünsche (Constructor

University Bremen)

Session 1: Avant-garde Theories and Networks: Eastern Europe and the Global South
Moderated by Kerstin Schankweiler, TU Dresden

11:30-12:00
Przemysław Strożek, ADA, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Theories of the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe and its Reception in the Global South, 1950s-1970s

12:00-12:30
Rado Ištok, National Gallery Prague
The Long Anti-Fascist Struggle in the Work of Czechoslovak Artists

12:30-13:00
Simone Wille, University of Innsbruck
A Czechoslovak-Indian Connection in Filmmaking: Radical and Innocent Puppets

13:00-14:30 Lunch Break

Session 2: Avant-garde Networks: Eastern Europe and the Near East, North and South America
Moderated by Doreen Mende, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

14:30-15:00
Adrienn Kácsor, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar
Baghdad-Budapest: Fragile Cold War Alliances

15:00-15:30
Jasmina Čubrilo and Ana Ereš, University of Belgrade
“Strategic Essentialism” as Positioning Tactic of Conceptual Art in Yugoslavia

15:30-16:00 Exhibition Tour, Przemysław Strożek

16:00-16:30 Coffee Break

16:30-18:00 Roundtable Discussion on Subversive Avant-garde Practices in the Eastern Bloc
with Zuzana Bartošová & Lucia Gregorová-Stach, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava; Sabine Hänsgen, independent scholar, Bochum; Miško Šuvaković, University of Belgrade
Moderated by Sascha Bru

Friday, June 13, 2025

Session 3: Attempts of Decentering Moscow and Decolonialization in the Soviet Union
Moderated by Isabel Wünsche

10:00-10:30
Angela Harutyunyan, Berlin University of the Arts
A Spatial Utopia: The Perestroika Avant-gardes and the Limits of Decolonial Interpretations

10:30-11:00
Irina Riznychok, Constructor University Bremen

Conceptual Art behind the Iron Curtain: Neo-Avant-Garde Practices of the Sverdlovsk Uktus School in the 1960-1970s

11:00-11:30 Coffee Break

11:30-12:00
Ketevan S. Kintsurashvili, Tbilisi, Georgia
Abstract Art as Political Art in Soviet Georgia

12:00-12:30
Shirin Melikova, Azerbaijan National Museum of Art, Baku
Nonconformist Art Practices in Azerbaijan: The Absheron School

12:30-14:00 Lunch Break

Session 4: The Postwar Avant-garde in Central Asia and Decolonialization in the Soviet Union
Moderated by Sascha Bru

14:00-14:30
Harsha Ram, University of California, Berkeley
Decolonizing the Russian Avant-garde: A Kazakh Poet's Eurasian Polemic

14:30-15:00
Mira Kozhanova, University of Bamberg and Daria Kostina, independent researcher, Almaty
Lost in the Margins: Migrant Artists in Kazakhstan, 1940s–1960s

15:00-15:30
Maria Redaelli, Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Broadening the Concept of the Russian Avant-Garde: The Formation of the Avanguardia Orientalis and the Savitsky Museum Collection

15:30-16:00 Coffee Break

Session 5: The Postwar Avant-garde in Asia and Decolonizing Japan
Moderated by Przemysław Strożek

16:00-16:30
Yeon Shim Chung, Hongik University, Seoul
Constructing the "Avant-Garde" in Korean Art and Writings from the late 1950s to the 1980s

16:30-17:00
Midori Yoshimoto, New Jersey City University
Reconsidering Japanese Women Artists and the Avant-Garde

17:00 Concluding Discussion

Registration is free but mandatory. If you would like to attend the symposium in person, please write to Przemysław Strożek (Przemyslaw.Strozek [@] skd.museum) before June 2. Seats are limited, so first come first serve. Online attendance is possible as well. For this please write to the

same email before June 9.

Reference:

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