

‘Amateur’ Photo Clubs During the 1950s–1980s (Vilnius, 24 Apr 26)

Radvila Palace Museum of Art, Vilnius

Deadline: Sep 15, 2025

Oleksandra Osadcha

Symposium “‘Amateur’ Photo Clubs in the USSR and the Satellite Countries During the 1950s-1980s”, Radvila Palace Museum of Art of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art (Vilnius), April 24, 2026.

In conjunction with the exhibition “Ukrainian Dreamers: The Kharkiv School of Photography”, the Radvila Palace Museum of Art of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art (Vilnius) and the Museum of the Kharkiv School of Photography (Kharkiv) organise a one-day symposium “Amateur” Photo Clubs in the USSR and the Satellite Countries during the 1950s-1980s.

Organizing team:

- Olena Chervonik, PhD, Museum of the Kharkiv School of Photography
- Gintarė Krasuckaitė, Chief Researcher, Curator of the Photography Collection, the Lithuanian National Museum of Art
- Oleksandra Osadcha, PhD, Museum of the Kharkiv School of Photography

Organisations of photographic enthusiasts appeared almost simultaneously with the invention of the medium. The phenomenon of the Soviet “amateur” photo club, however, stands apart from a Western network of self-organized photographic societies. Soviet photo clubs had a twofold mission: to keep the Soviet population collectively occupied under the state’s gaze, even during their leisure time, and to function as sites of “aesthetic education” to install Soviet ideology through the prescription of propagandistically correct aesthetic codes. Their presumed control was, however, ambiguous, allowing photographers to practice highly idiosyncratic, personal expressions, which often deviated from a prescribed Soviet visuality. This liminal space of freedom was secured by the “amateur” label attached to the photo clubs. They were meant to promote a strictly “non-professional” hobbyist attitude to photography, whose professional dimension existed in the Soviet Union solely as part of a journalistic trade. Officially permitted to practice some semblance of creative photography, photo club members could thus engage in intense artistic explorations of the medium and thus introduce distinctly non-Soviet, and therefore non-modernist photographic modalities, essentially paving the way for contemporary art.

The symposium aims to explore various aspects of amateur photo club functioning in the 1950s-1980s in the Soviet Union and the satellite countries that developed similar state-controlled organizations.

Interested in various aspects of power relations, material affordances, information dissemination

as well as aesthetic manifestations, we suggest the following topics, including but not limiting to:

- ideological underpinnings of photo club activity, economic and material conditions
- social networking and exchanges between the photo clubs
- social status of photo amateur photographers – between craftsmanship and artistic aspirations
- role of state periodicals on photography in shaping approaches towards the medium
- relations between amateur photographers and photography-related publications
- darkroom practices as both technical process and site of informal experimentation

Transportation and accommodation will be covered by the organisers.

Submission:

Please submit a single pdf document with your short bio and your abstract (2 pages max) to info@moksop.org.

Deadlines for abstract submission: September 15, 2025

The notification of acceptance: November 1, 2025

The project is supported by the European Union under the House of Europe programme and the Ukrainian Institute.

Reference:

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