

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

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

Georg Sokolov, Bremen

Coming to the Surface or Going Underground?

Art Practices, Actors, and Lifestyles in the Soviet Union of the 1950s-1970s.

The Research Centre for East European Studies (FSO), Klagenfurter Str. 8, 28359 Bremen | Raum 3790

November 13-14, 2025

Guest registration by November 7, 2025, via the form <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfS6ZhmL0vHbd66Fk434HXS3OBfcLwFYBhN8zql2mgQecMPfA/viewform>

Working language: English

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 Lipovetsky'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.

PROGRAM:

Thursday, November 13

9:30 Registration, coffee/tea

10:00 Welcome (Susanne Schattenberg & Isabel Wünsche) and Introduction (Natasha Fedorenko, Irina Riznychok, Georg Sokolov)

10:30 Panel 1: Reconsidering Art History: Philosophical Frameworks and Alternative Institutions

Chair: Susanne Schattenberg (Uni Bremen, FSO)

10:30 Aleksandr Kochekovskii (Bochum University / Deutsche Sacharow Gesellschaft): Art Criticism as an Underground Institution on Visuality: Sinyavsky and Golomstock from an Anthropologie of Socrealism to a Clandestine Aesthetic Enlightenment

10:50 Nare Sahakyan (Ashot Johannissyan Research Institute in the Humanities, Yerevan, Armenia): The Late Soviet Charm of Kantianism: Wilhelm Matevosyan's Art History

11:10 Discussion

11:40 Coffee Break

12:10 Panel 2: Body on the Margins of Soviet Art

Chair: Irina Riznychok (Constructor University Bremen)

12:10 Georg Sokolov (Constructor University Bremen): Pathosformeln of Aleksandr Arefiev

12:30 Mane Mkrtchyan (Institute of Arts, National Academy of Sciences of Armenia): Nudity and the Margins of Freedom in Armenian Art of the Soviet Era

12:50 – 13:20 Discussion

13:20 Lunch Break

15:00 Archive Tour

16:30 Panel 3: Transcending the Border between Official and Unofficial Cultures

Chair: Natasha Fedorenko (Uni Bremen, FSO)

16:30 Stephanie R. Dvareckas (Rutgers University): The Space Between: Kazakh, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz Art from Late Soviet Period to Independence

16:50 Ala Pihalskaya (Uni Bremen): Photography as a toggle switch: Belarusian official and uncensored publishing of the late 1960s-1970s

17:10 Discussion

17:40 Coffee Break

18:15 Keynote lecture: Ilja Kujuk (LMU Munich) "Culture of Renunciation: Unofficial Poetic Practices in the Late Soviet Union"

19:30 Dinner for invited speakers and organizers

Friday, November 14

9:30 Registration, coffee/tea

10:00 Panel 4: (Inter)subjectivity of the Soviet Underground

Chair: Georg Sokolov (Constructor University Bremen)

10:00 Simone Guidetti (Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg): The Life of Consciousness Unleashed: Alexander Piatigorsky and the Emancipatory Role of 'Conversations'

10:20 Natasha Fedorenko (Uni Bremen, FSO): Between Nostalgia and Soviet Contemporaneity: Temporality of the Underground Subject

10:40 Discussion

11:10 Coffee Break

11:40 Panel 4, part 2

Chair: Manuela Putz (Uni Bremen, FSO)

11:40 Daria Baryshnikova (Independent, Bochum): Unframed Consciousness, Embodied Texts: Pavel Ulitin and the Soviet Literary Underground of the 1960s

12:00 Ieva Kalniņa (Art Academy of Latvia): Spiritual Resilience and Aesthetic Dissent: Zenta Logina and Elīze Atāre's Alternative Artistic Identity During the Soviet Occupation of Latvia

12:20 Discussion

12:50 Lunch Break

14:30 Panel 5. Global (Dis)connections

Chair: Ilja Kujuk

14:30 Hasmik Khechikyan (LMU): (Unofficial) Russian and Armenian Poetry of the Stagnation Period: Between Modernism and Postmodernism

14:50 Stanislav Savitski (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen): Alexei Khvostenko's "The Poem of Epigraphs" and Edward Estlin Cummings

15:10 Discussion

15:40 Coffee Break

16:10 Panel 5, part 2

Chair: Isabel Wünsche (Constructor University Bremen)

16:10 Alexander Jakobidze-Gitman (Universität Witten/Herdecke): Georgian Musical Avant-Garde and its Underground Networks

16:30 Irina Riznychok (Constructor University Bremen): Neo-Avant-garde Practices of the Sverdlovsk Uktuss School in the 1960-1970s

16:50 Discussion

17:20 Coffee Break

17:30 Roundtable & Concluding Discussion

Chair: Georg Sokolov (Constructor University)

Roundtable discussants: Jane A. Sharp (Rutgers University & Zimmerli Art Museum), Susanne Schattenberg (FSO), Klavdia Smola (TU Dresden)

19:00 End of conference

19:30 Dinner for invited speakers and organizers

Reference:

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