

Transnational Artistic Relations in the Cold War Era (Prague, 25 Nov 26)

Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Nov 25, 2026

Deadline: Apr 30, 2026

Jana FARSKA HAJKOVA

Doctoral Conference at the Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague in cooperation with the Academic Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and Palacký University, Olomouc.

The Cold War was an overriding force that profoundly shaped the conditions under which artists, curators, and cultural institutions could establish and maintain international contacts. While the global landscape was complex, the metaphor of the Iron Curtain embedded itself deeply in the popular imagination and carried tangible consequences for both mobility and communication. Yet, as demonstrated by recent scholarship (e.g., Curley 2019; Franke et al. 2021; Wille 2025), framing the overall situation in strictly bipolar terms is overly reductive; although elaborate webs of connection were limited and certain artistic practices were either, informal diplomacy, and acts of solidarity, they developed channels that blurred rigid distinctions such as East and West or official and unofficial, generating cultural spaces far more nuanced than dominant Cold War narratives imply.

This one-day doctoral conference seeks to explore how transnational artistic relations unfolded in the visual arts between 1945 and 1989. Rather than focusing primarily on restrictions and bureaucratic barriers, we encourage contributions that illuminate the situations in which artists, artworks, exhibitions, or curators did cross the geopolitical and ideological boundaries of the Cold War – sometimes officially, sometimes semi-legally, sometimes unexpectedly – and that examine how these encounters shaped artistic practices and institutional narratives.

We invite papers that examine cases in which artists appeared in “forbidden”, politically sensitive, or ideologically distant spaces, and ask how such moments of contact influenced the content, form, and reception of their work. How did transnational encounters alter artistic languages, curatorial decisions, or exhibition-making practices? In what ways did artists, critics, curators, cultural diplomats, collectors, or informal intermediaries facilitate these crossings, and how were their actions translated into exhibitions, pedagogical initiatives, and other forms of collaboration? Ultimately, the conference aims to illuminate how the lived experience of crossing – or even imagining – the Cold War divide left its imprint not only on individual artworks but also on the art historical narratives that continue to shape our understanding of this period.

Contributions focusing on any geographical context, case study, or methodological approach are welcome, especially those dealing with the Cold War as experienced from Eastern, Central East-

ern and South Eastern Europe and its borderlands. Also, both empirical case studies and more theoretical or comparative papers are encouraged.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

Artistic mobility, residencies, study stays, and informal travel across the Iron Curtain

Exhibitions, biennials, and festivals as sites of East–West or intra-socialist encounters

Institutional and diplomatic frameworks of cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy

“Comradeship” and ideological friendship: artistic relations within the socialist bloc and with countries of the Global South

The role of curators, critics, collectors, cultural attachés, and other “agents” or intermediaries

Mail art, samizdat, and alternative channels of communication

Visual languages of solidarity, resistance, and propaganda

Methodological reflections on writing transnational Cold War art histories today

Given the broad range of potential topics, the conference is aimed primarily at PhD candidates and early-career researchers in art history, visual and cultural studies, history, and related disciplines.

Practical information

Working language: English

Format: 20-minute on-site presentation, online contributions only in exceptional cases

Please send: an abstract of 250–300 words, a short bio (up to 150 words, including institutional affiliation), to mail addresses: jana.farskahajkova01@upol.cz and ljuz.kotocova@avu.cz by 30 April 2026.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 15 June 2026.

The conference is organized by Jana Farská Hájková (Institute of Art History and Palacký University) and Lujza Bederka Kotočová (Academy of Fine Arts in Prague).

References: John J. Curley, *Global Art and the Cold War*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2019. Anselm Franke – Nida Ghouse – Paz Guevara – Antonia Majaca (eds.), *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War*, London: Sternberg Press, 2021. Simone Wille, *Cold War Art Worlds: South Asian Art and Artists in Prague 1947–1989*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2025.

Reference:

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