Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonization (online/Paris, 11 Feb-10 Jun 26)

Institut national d'histoire de l'art Paris / Online, Feb 11–Jun 10, 2026

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Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonization: Circulations, (Re)interpretations, and Resistances of Visual Models in the Context of the Cold War

In the middle of the twentieth century, in the context of the Cold War, various countries began to envision socialism as an alternative to colonial domination. The “new Cold War history” and the scholarship on “global socialism,” which developed in the wake of Odd Arne Westad’s work, have contributed to questioning the bipolar view of the world during this period by restoring agency to countries in the process of decolonization. Far from playing a passive role in the ideological conflict between the two “superpowers,” these countries sought to make their voices heard. Numerous attempts to establish a “third way,” both ideologically and politically, emerged, and several states adopted socialist regimes that maintained sometimes complex relations with the USSR (Algeria, Vietnam, Ethiopia, among others). These nations thus became part of a “Red globalization” (Sanchez-Sibony, 2014) and engaged in a wide range of exchanges—educational, military, economic, and cultural—within a socialist camp that was far from homogeneous, reflecting the persistence of North–South dynamics throughout the Cold War.
Within this dual context of the Cold War and decolonization, the cultural sphere—and particularly the visual arts— occupied a crucial place. Socialism offered powerful visual models associated with ideals of international solidarity, class struggle, and resistance to colonial, racist, and imperialist oppression. For countries in the process of decolonization, the production of images served as a way to defend a worldview opposed to that of the enemy and, at the same time, to promote their emerging national cultures. Situated at the crossroads of multiple cultures and civilizations, the images produced within these postcolonial societies not only reflected this historical turning point but also actively contributed to it. Analyzing the processes of production, circulation, and reception of these images provides a key tool for understanding the formation of postcolonial nation-states. It reveals the logics of appropriation and reinvention of socialist models while highlighting the exchanges between the “brother countries” of the Global South and the Socialist Bloc. These young nations did not simply adopt external models but actively participated in their redefinition, producing hybrid images that were both local and transnational. Such visual productions testify to how postcolonial states constructed their symbolic and visual identities while asserting cultural autonomy within the networks of socialist solidarity.

Seminar program

February 11, 2026, 2 - 4 pm
Session 1: Presentation of the Seminar “Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonization”

invited speakers:
Christina Kiaer (Northwestern University): “Socialist Axes of Exchange in Art History”

Rado Is□tok (National Gallery Prague): “Art in the Age of Solidarity: Czechoslovakia and the Global South in the Cold War”

Vladislav Shapovalov (NABA Milan & HDK-Valand Go□teborg): “Image Diplomacy: Legacy of Cold War Exhibitions in the Post-Cold War Continuum”

On Zoom: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/ viGgOXbcQL6x0qXpehOCkQ

In person: salle Chastel, galerie Colbert, INHA, 2 rue Vivienne ou rue des Petits Champs, 75002 Paris

March 11, 2026, 2 - 4 pm

Session 2: Socialist Internationalism and National Visual Identities in Postcolonial Contexts, moderated by Coline Perron

invited speakers:
Giulia Dickmans (Graduate School of Global Intellectual History, Freie Universita□t Berlin): “Tricontinental Solidarities: Cuban Angolan Cultural Relations Since the Cold War”

Douglas Gabriel (University of Florida) and Adrienn Kácsor (Bauhaus-Universita□t Weimar): “Tough Love: Caricatures of a Socialist Friendship across Hungary and North Korea during the 1950s”

On Zoom: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/ eT0siakJSWaG1xg2uQZYbw

In person: salle Chastel, galerie Colbert, INHA, 2 rue Vivienne ou rue des Petits Champs, 75002 Paris

April 8, 2026, 2 - 4 pm
Session 3: Forms, Constructions, and Performativities of Socialists Exoticisms, moderated by Gae□lle Prodhon

invited speakers:
Perrine Val (Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry): “Cinematographic Relationships Between the GDR and Its Arab and African Partners: The “Others” of the “Other” Germany?”

Daniela Berghahn (University of London): “Post-socialist nostalgia and exoticism in The Road Home and Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress”

Registration link: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/ register/zrwpL-UxT6aVf6P6VRMzmA

In person: salle Chastel, galerie Colbert, INHA, 2 rue Vivienne ou rue des Petits Champs, 75002

Paris

May 13, 2026, 2 - 4 pm
Session 4: Women and the Politics of Emancipation in Socialist and Decolonial Contexts, moderated by Sasha Artamonova

invited speakers:
Christine Varga-Harris (Illinois State University): “Models of Decolonization and Female Emancipation: Women in Africa and South Asia vis-à-vis Soviet Women in the Visual Repertoire of Soviet Woman during the 1950s and 1960s”

Nora Annesley Taylor (School of the Art Institute of Chicago): “Mother, Worker, Hero: Socialist and Post- Socialist Imaginings by Contemporary Vietnamese Women Artists”

On Zoom: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/ QRb1ijsXRbO_Ns_6QKYhSA

In person: salle Brière, galerie Colbert, INHA, 2 rue Vivienne ou rue des Petits Champs, 75002 Paris

June 10, 2026, 2 - 4 pm
Session 5: Subverting Socialist Aesthetics: Oppositions and Appropriations of Socialist Visual Models, moderated by Jade Thau

invited speakers:
Bojana Videkanic (University of Waterloo): “Yugoslav People’s Art”

Maria Mileeva (Courtauld Institute of Art): “Inji Efflatoun’s Socialist Friendship and Revolutionary Aesthetics”

Registration link: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/ register/VamjL_28Qfyp53GgtaDyQA

In person: salle Brière, galerie Colbert, INHA, 2 rue Vivienne ou rue des Petits Champs, 75002 Paris

All times are in Central European Time (Paris, CET)
In-person participation is limited and subject to availability.

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Reference:
CONF: Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonization (online/Paris, 11 Feb-10 Jun 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 2, 2026 (accessed Oct 6, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51639>.