

From Comrades to Exotic Others (Prague/Brno, 5-7 Nov 26)

Nov 5-07, 2026

Deadline: Apr 1, 2026

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From Comrades to Exotic Others: Global Art in the Exhibitionary Practices of Central and Eastern Europe.

At the inauguration of the Humboldt Forum in 2021, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie posed the following question: Who decided that African art should be labelled ethnological and why is the term "ethnological" used for art from certain parts of the world and not others? Her question invited a deeper examination of the historical context in which ethnographic museums and museums of global art emerged. This involved examination of the criteria used to determine underlying institutional logics and aesthetic hierarchies, as well as the provenance of objects in such museums. The legacy of colonialism has been central to such questioning.

Such debates have been widespread in Western Europe and North America for many years, but they have only recently begun to gain currency in Central and Eastern Europe. It is nothing new to say that this European region and its inhabitants were involved in the colonial system. However, its ambiguous position - there were no overseas Czech / Czechoslovak, Polish or Hungarian colonies - often means that travellers, collectors, and founders of museum collections are usually the beneficiaries of a celebratory discourse. Central and Eastern European publics do not usually view collections of art from outside Europe to be a legacy of colonialism, nor do they consider that the way such collections are displayed can be potentially problematic. Equally, however, it would be simplistic to view collectors and collections of global art in Central and Eastern Europe to be solely the agents or products of colonialism. Although they adopted many racialized colonial tropes, their motivations and practices varied. Thus, as Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò argues, relying on colonialism as an all-encompassing explanatory model can result in misidentifying historical causalities.

The Department of Art History of Masaryk University, Brno, in collaboration with the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Prague, invites contributions that examine the institutional and political frameworks in which global art was collected and displayed in Central and Eastern Europe. We are interested in collections of global art and the individuals behind them - collectors, curators, and founders - as well as their role in shaping public perceptions, popular culture, and museum legacies. We welcome contributions on acquisition processes, their impact on source communities and environments, curatorial and exhibition strategies, visitor engagement, and the evolving politics of representation. We encourage proposals that engage with historical topics as well as contemporary issues.

Of particular interest are the shifting perceptions of the relation between European and global art, and the ideological agendas behind them. We are interested in how museums engaged with artists, collectors, experts and other peoples from territories outside of Europe. What picture emerges of museum practices in Central and Eastern Europe since the 19th century?

Submissions should consist of a 250-word image abstract, together with a brief author biography and details of your institutional affiliations.

Please send submissions to: globalczechs@phil.muni.cz by 1 April 2026.

Reference:

CFP: From Comrades to Exotic Others (Prague/Brno, 5-7 Nov 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 8, 2026 (accessed Jun 19, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51698>>.