'Amateur' Photo Clubs During the 1950s-1980s (Vilnius, 24-25 Apr 26)

Radvila Palace Museum of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania, Apr 24–25, 2026

Olena Chervonik, University of Oxford

"'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).

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 two-day symposium "Amateur" Photo Clubs in the USSR and the Satellite Countries during the 1950s-1980s.

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.

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.

Symposium program

April 24th, Friday

9:30 – 10:30 – Presentation 1
Hennadiy Kazakevych (Ukraine), "Adapting Technologies: Camera Production and Amateur Photography in the Ukrainian SSR"

10:30 – 11:00 – Presentation 2
Anastasiya Kholyavka (Ukraine), “Artels of Photographers in Postwar Lviv: Amateurs within the Professional Network”

11:15 – 11:45 – Presentation 3
Uschi Klein (Hungary), “Closer to Humanity rather than the “New Man”: the Marosvásárhely Photo Club during the Communist Regime in Romania”

11:45 – 12:15 – Presentation 4
Jiří Pátek (Czechia), “Amateur Photography in the Former Czechoslovakia”
14:00 – 14:30 – Presentation 5
Mihailo Vasiljević (Serbia), “A Critical History of Organized Amateur Photographic Practice as a Framework of Institutionalization of Photography in Serbia after 1946”

14:30 – 15:00 – Presentation 6
Tomas Pabedinskas (Lithuania), “The Significance of Kaunas Photo Club for the Development of Lithuanian Photography: Institutional and Creative Aspects”

15:15 – 15:45 – Presentation 7
Mikołaj Chmieliński (Poland), “Exercises in “Opening One’s Eyes Wide”. Photography Events for Youth Organized by the Warsaw’s 6x6 Club in the 1970s.”

15:45 – 16:15 – Presentation 8
Baiba Tetere (Latvia), “Liepāja People’s Photo Studio FOTAST: The Analog Photography Archive as a Resource”

17:30 – 18:30 – Keynote lecture: Jessica M. Werneke (Assistant Professor, University of Iowa), “The Intersections Between Amateurism and Authority: Unique Developments in Eastern European and Soviet Photography”

April 25th, Saturday

9:00 – 9:30 – Presentation 1
Sandra Križić Roban (Croatia), “The Third Way: The Position of Women in Photo Clubs in Postwar Yugoslavia”

9:30 – 10:30 – Presentation 2
Kamila Dworniczak (Poland), “Photography as a Space for Relationships and Emancipation. Dialogue between Zofia Rydet and Krystyna Łyczywek”

10:30 – 11:00 – Presentation 3
Indrek Grigor (Estonia), “The Queue. An Episode in Tartu’s Photographic History”

11:15 – 11:45 – Presentation 4
Timea-Andrada Toth (Romania), “Resistance through the Female Lens – The Case of Hedy Löffler and her Work during the Communist Regime in Romania”

11:45 – 12:15 – Presentation 5
Kateryna Volochniuk (Ukraine), “About Official Censorship and Private Image-making Practices in

the late Soviet Era”
14:00 – 14:30 – Presentation 6
Tetiana Pavlova (Ukraine), “Vremya Group: a Scenario of a Great Leap and an Eternal Return to the Club's Lost Orbit”

14:30 – 15:00 – Presentation 7
Valeria Pitenina (Ukraine), “Ukrainian photography in Polish magazines in the 1970s”

15:15 – 15:45 – Presentation 8
Halyna Hleba (Ukraine), “Marlen Matus and the “Dnipro” Photo Club: Amateur Photography in the Structure of a Closed Soviet City”

15:45 – 16:15 – Presentation 9
Kateryna Filyuk (Ukraine), “Dark Matter” of Late Soviet Photography: The Viewpoint Creative Photographic Association”

16:15 – 16:45 – Presentaion 10
Anna Smyrnova (Ukraine), “The Semafor Amateur Photo Club and the Artistic Experiments of Vil’ Furgalo in Lviv, 1950s–1985”

For further inquiries and contact: info@moksop.org

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

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