

Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonizations (Paris/online, Feb–Jun 27)

Paris

Deadline: Aug 15, 2026

Collectif Horizons Rouges

Seminar: "Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonizations: Circulations, (Re)Interpretations, and Resistances of Visual Models in the Context of the Cold War", 2nd Edition.

During the Cold War many countries turned to socialism as an alternative to colonial domination. Recent work in global history, particularly following the work of Odd Arne Westad, has helped move beyond a strictly bipolar reading of the period. This research reasserts the significant role of newly independent states in the political, cultural, and ideological reconfigurations of the second half of the twentieth century. Some of these countries, such as Algeria, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, established socialist regimes that maintained sometimes complex relationships with the USSR. These nations became part of what Matthias Middell termed a "red globalization," characterized by multiple educational, military, economic, and cultural exchanges and circulations within a heterogeneous socialist world.

In this context, visual cultures offer a unique vantage point for examining the processes of political legitimation and identity construction in postcolonial socialist societies. Studying the production, circulation, and reception of these images allows us to grasp the logic behind the appropriation and reinvention of aesthetic, cultural, and ideological models. It also illuminates the dynamics of exchange between the "brother countries" of the Global South and the socialist bloc. These processes, which sometimes lead to conflicting forms of hybridization, help us better understand how art becomes a space for negotiation, resistance, emancipation, and the reinvention of collective imaginaries.

Held from February to June 2026, the first edition of the "Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonizations" seminar, supported by the InVisu laboratory and the INHA, convened over 80 participants at each session. It significantly contributed to structuring a nascent field of research in France, at the intersection of art history, visual studies, cultural history, global history, and postcolonial studies.

Building on these discussions, this call for papers seeks to broaden the dialogue to include new topics, objects, and methodologies. For the second edition of the seminar, scheduled from February to June 2027, we aim to foster intergenerational and interdisciplinary exchange, encouraging contributions from doctoral candidates, early-career researchers, artists, curators, conservators, and heritage and museum professionals.

The following themes, while not exhaustive, may be addressed:

1. Circulations, Transfers, and Transnational Networks

- The movement of images, artists, mediators, and knowledge among socialist and capitalist countries, and countries on the path of decolonization;
- Networks for training, production, dissemination, and reception;
- Cultural, educational, and artistic collaborations;
- Individual and collective movements and career paths.

2. Materialities, Techniques, and Infrastructures of Visual Production

- Material conditions influencing the creation and dissemination of images;
- The circulation of materials, technological transfers, and local adaptations;
- Industries, brands, equipment, and infrastructure;
- Processes of adapting, repurposing, and reinventing imported technologies.

3. Temporalities, Imaginaries, and Social Projects

- Socialist visions of the future, decolonial modernities, and depictions of progress;
- Visual constructions of history, memory, and national identity, including through the lens of museum history in socialist and decolonial contexts;
- Utopias, emancipatory initiatives, and collective imaginaries;
- Representations of the environment and the Anthropocene;
- Depictions of gender, sexualities, family, and social relationships within socialist and postcolonial projects.

4. Theories, Knowledge, and Critical Practices

- Manifestos, theoretical essays, and art criticism;
- Intellectual contributions at the intersection of socialist, anticolonial, and decolonial thought (e.g., Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Tricontinental, among others);
- The circulation of concepts, aesthetic categories, and critical frameworks;
- Cultural institutions and their role in knowledge production;
- Artistic practices outside nation-state cultural institutions and art at the periphery of official art production;

Proposals may engage with a wide range of media and supports, including photography, architecture, cinema, graphic and plastic arts, textile art, mosaic, cultural journals, material objects, digital visual cultures, performance, and art festivals.

The seminar also encourages interdisciplinary and methodologically innovative approaches, such as the history of emotions and affects, the study of egodocuments, reflections on fragmentary or absent archives, research-creation projects, and work devoted to unrealized, interrupted, censored, or abandoned projects.

The second edition of the seminar will be held remotely on Zoom from February to June 2027. Selected participants will be notified in mid-September 2026.

To apply, please send the following materials in English or French by August 15, 2026 to:

socialistvisualcultures@gmail.com:

- Title of the proposal
- Abstract (maximum 300 words), specifying the preferred language of presentation (French or English)
- Sources and archives
- 1-2 images (optional)
- Biographical note

For any questions, please contact: socialistvisualcultures@gmail.com

Reference:

CFP: Socialist Visual Cultures and Decolonizations (Paris/online, Feb-Jun 27). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 17, 2026 (accessed Jun 17, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52740>>.