

Crossing Lines, Entangling Histories (Florence/online, 3-4 Dec 26)

Florence, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut / Online, Dec 3–04, 2026

Deadline: Jul 31, 2026

Natalie Arrowsmith

Crossing Lines, Entangling Histories: Eastern European Art and Aesthetic Theories in Italy, 1945–1991.

Organizers: Matteo Bertelé, Centre for Studies in Russian, Central Asian and Caucasian Art, Ca' Foscari University of Venice; Hana Gründler, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut; Sven Spieker, University of California Santa Barbara.

International Symposium

Centre for Studies in Russian, Central Asian and Caucasian Art (CSAR),

Ca' Foscari University of Venice

December 3-4, 2026

Deadline: 31 July 2026

Conference Theme

The aim of our symposium is twofold: on one hand we seek to investigate how art and aesthetic practices and theories from Eastern Europe were received, framed, contested, and circulated in Italy from 1945 to 1991. On the other, we wish to explore the understudied presence of artists and intellectuals from Eastern Europe in Italy, and to analyze their engagement with and critical transformation of Italian culture.

In the decades following the Second World War, Italy emerged as a crucial site of encounter between Eastern and Western Europe intellectually, economically, and culturally. As a geographic, political, and cultural crossroads, with the largest Communist Party in Western Europe and an influential leftist intelligentsia, Italy played a significant role in mediating, interpreting, and exhibiting artistic production from Eastern Europe during the Cold War and its aftermath. Yet the concrete exchange with artistic and intellectual figures from Eastern Europe as well as the reception of Eastern European, including Soviet, art in Italy—through exhibitions, criticism, collections, translations, and institutional exchanges—remains comparatively underexplored. By focusing on reception rather than production alone, the conference aims to illuminate the asymmetries, negotiations, and ideological filters that shaped Italian understandings of Eastern European art after 1945, while also showing how closely entangled the respective histories and realities were even during the Cold-War period.

Topics of Interest

We welcome papers addressing, but not limited to, the following themes. Interdisciplinary approaches are especially encouraged, including perspectives from art history, visual culture, aesthetics, cultural history, political history and theory, exhibition history museum studies, and media studies.

- Art criticism, art history, and curatorial discourse in Italy concerning Eastern Europe
- Italian exhibitions of Eastern European art (biennials, museums, galleries, cultural institutes)
- Artists and intellectuals visiting Italy and engaging with Italian culture during the Cold-War period
- Italy-based designers, artists, philosophers and their reception of art and aesthetic theory from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe
- Cold-War cultural diplomacy and artistic exchange between Italy and Eastern Bloc countries
- Perceptions, conceptions and misconceptions of the official vs unofficial art from Socialist countries
- The role of publishers, translators, journals, and periodicals in mediating Eastern European artistic and aesthetic practices
- Collectors, dealers, and market reception in Italy
- Gender, exile, and minority perspectives in cross-cultural reception
- Socialist realism, abstraction, neo-avant-gardes, and their Italian interpretations
- Transnational networks of artists, critics, and intellectuals
- Comparative or case-study approaches involving specific countries, artists, intellectuals or movements
- Questions of Orientalism, marginalization, or canon formation in Italian art discourse

Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of 300–400 words, along with a short biographical note (100 words), by July 31 to matteo.bertele@unive.it; ResearchGroup-Gruendler@khi.fi.it; spieker@ucsb.edu

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by the end of August.

The symposium languages will be Italian and English.

Publication

Selected papers may be considered for publication in an edited volume or special journal issue.

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Reference:

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