VIII Forum for Doctoral Candidates in East European Art History

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Report by: Marie Egger, PhD Candidate, Freie Universität Berlin

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The center of Europe has moved eastward since Russia began its war of aggression on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This thesis is nowadays often formulated on the occasion of the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine. It was quoted by Mateusz Kapustka recently in the auditorium of the University Library of Humboldt-University Berlin in his opening remarks for the VIII International Forum for Doctoral Candidates in East European Art History. This underlined already at the beginning of the event that East European Art History is especially well equipped to observe and analyze such shifts in power dynamics within the European realm. In addition, Kapustka recalled a lecture by Adam Labuda on the historiography of the "art region of East Central Europe," which had already been published in 2010. There, the Polish art historian pleaded for a contemporary geography of art that should approach the transnational space of East Central Europe and its historical developments with the greatest possible openness.[1] In this sense, Kapustka called for art historical contributions that are capable of shaping and diversifying the future - a wish that the conference then succeeded to fulfill to the best of its ability.

After an interruption in 2022, the focus of the annual colloquium on the Art History of Eastern Europe was this time, due to the situation, on Ukraine. The poster for the event carried a photograph of Ukrainian artist Ada Rybachuk (1931-2020). Balancing on a scaffold of steel and concrete, she is constructing the body of a female figure out of metal wire. The photo shows Rybachuk working on the "Wall of Memory," a 214-meter-long concrete relief. She realized it on the grounds of the Baikowe Cemetery in Kiev between 1968 and 1981 together with Volodymyr Melychenko. It depicts numerous mythological motifs that were intended to enable cross-community mourning and remembrance. Because of these very motifs, however, the relief was deemed artistically insufficient by Soviet decision-makers in 1982 and concealed with concrete. It had been uncovered again between 2018 and 2021 – a process that was interrupted by the 2022 war.

These art historical contexts of the poster motif formed a motto in Berlin that the organizers Mateusz Kapustka and Elisaveta Dvorakk (Visiting Professor and Research Associate of the Chair of the History of Art of Eastern Europe at the Institute of Art and Visual History) were able to make fruitful for the entire event. Visually, the motif also put current discourses on preservation, destruction, and restoration of cultural assets up for debate. With current events in mind, Rybachuk could also have been one of the numerous helpers who, since February 2022, have been wrapping Ukrainian sculptures and monuments with wood and sandbags to protect them from bomb attacks.[2]

The third panel of the event was composed exclusively of Ukrainian colleagues and explicitly referred to this: In his contribution Semen Shyrochin (Kiev) called attention to the continuing destruction of Ukrainian cultural assets in the course of the war. This leads to the growing absence of art historical research objects in this region. Using Ukrainian industrial cities as examples, he also thematized the controversial debates on Ukraine's Soviet cultural heritage. These considerations were followed by Lubava Illyenko's (Augsburg) presentation on monumental mosaics. She problematized the complexity of Ukraine's approach to its own Soviet heritage from a postcolonial perspective. Illyenko emphasized the urgent need to reconsider the evaluation criteria for Soviet cultural heritage in Ukraine in order to adequately address historiographical paradigm shifts. Her convincing remarks on the demolition of Lenin monuments since the 1990s, on the iconoclasms in the course of the decommunization since 2014, on the destruction of mosaics by the war and on the dismantling of Pushkin statues since 2022, emphatically illustrated the difficult developments the Ukrainian monument landscape is exposed to. The third contribution of the panel by Yevheniia Moliar (Rome) also referred to these shifts in the interpretation of Ukrainian cultural heritage. She criticized the truncated interpretation of Soviet art as "Russian". Moliar substantiated her assessment of a Ukrainian need to break away from such interpretations by presenting several case studies of contemporary artworks dealing with the issue.

Beyond such topical debates, the theme of absence returned through the colloquium like a red thread. Kateryna Filyuk (Palermo) started by discussing the lack of written sources in Ukrainian art history, using the example of the archive of the photojournalist Iryna Pap. Filyuk researched a stock of circa 140 commissioned projects of highly staged documentary photographs that Pap realized as a correspondent for the daily newspaper "Izvestia" with regard to how he contributed to the construction of the so called "homo sovieticus". In doing so, she faced the challenge of having to rely mainly on contemporary witnesses and oral history. Ukraine has no photo museums or collections and access to the newspaper's archive in Moscow is currently closed to her. "Izvestia" was one of the two all-Soviet newspapers until 1989/90, along with "Pravda", and today calls itself "the national newspaper of Russia". Filyuk's study is also concerned with the memory conflicts between Russia and the former Soviet republics. These have recently been profoundly analyzed by Georgiy Kasianov [3] and also the subject of Algimantas Grigas's (Kaunas) study of Lithuanian architectural criticism in the second half of the 20th century.

Katarina Jović (Belgrade) confronted the scattered research materials of her research field by broadening her perspective to include the visual culture. For her art-geographical study of 19th-century salon culture in the Bay of Kotor in present-day Montenegro she takes into account the furnishings of (reconstructed) interiors, portraits of saloniers and salonnières, photographs of gatherings and performative appearances, as well as biographical documents. Based on this, Jović traced how the salons on the Balkan Peninsula functioned and how various media were activated or produced in them.

A subject of particularly lively discussion was Krisztina Vargas's (Budapest) research project, posing the question of why there is no national Roma Museum in Hungary. She further asked, in what form and under what conditions such a museum could be conceived and realized. Varga's project is of immense scale and her presentation could have benefitted from a more precise differentiation between cultural-political, historical and museological arguments. The art theorist also left open which objects such a museum could collect and present. On the other hand, her presenta-

tion showed great sensitivity for the social situation of the Roma, who are marginalized not only in Hungary. It motivated many follow-up questions and led to a joint reflection on minority museums and their form.

This wide-ranging discussion was characteristic for the entire lively and successful conference: Doctoral students served as chairs of each presentation, introducing speakers and moderating discussions with knowledge and interest. Thus, the colloquium offered a community-building opportunity for exchange, in which younger colleagues could learn from more advanced ones. And the former traditionally presented their projects briefly in a concluding "lightning round", already raising anticipation for next year's discussion.

Notes:

[1] See Adam S. Labuda, Ostmitteleuropa - Schicksalsgemeinschaft, Forschungsfeld, Kunstregion, in: kunsttexte.de/ostblick, No. 1, 2010 (12 pages), www.kunsttexte.de/ostblick.

[2] For example, aid transports organized by the Berlin Academy of Arts for the protection of Ukrainian cultural assets (https://www.adk.de/de/news/index.htm?we_objectID=63846). At the 36th German Congress for Art History in 2022, an "Ukraine Forum" was spontaneously organiced in order to enable exchange with Ukrainian colleagues as stated in the corresponding statement of the German Association for Art History (https://kunstgeschichte.org/meldungen/bedrohte-kunstschaetze-in-der-ukraine/).

[3] See Kasianov, Georgiy: Memory Crash. Politics of History in and around Ukraine, 1908s-2010s, Budapest 2022.

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