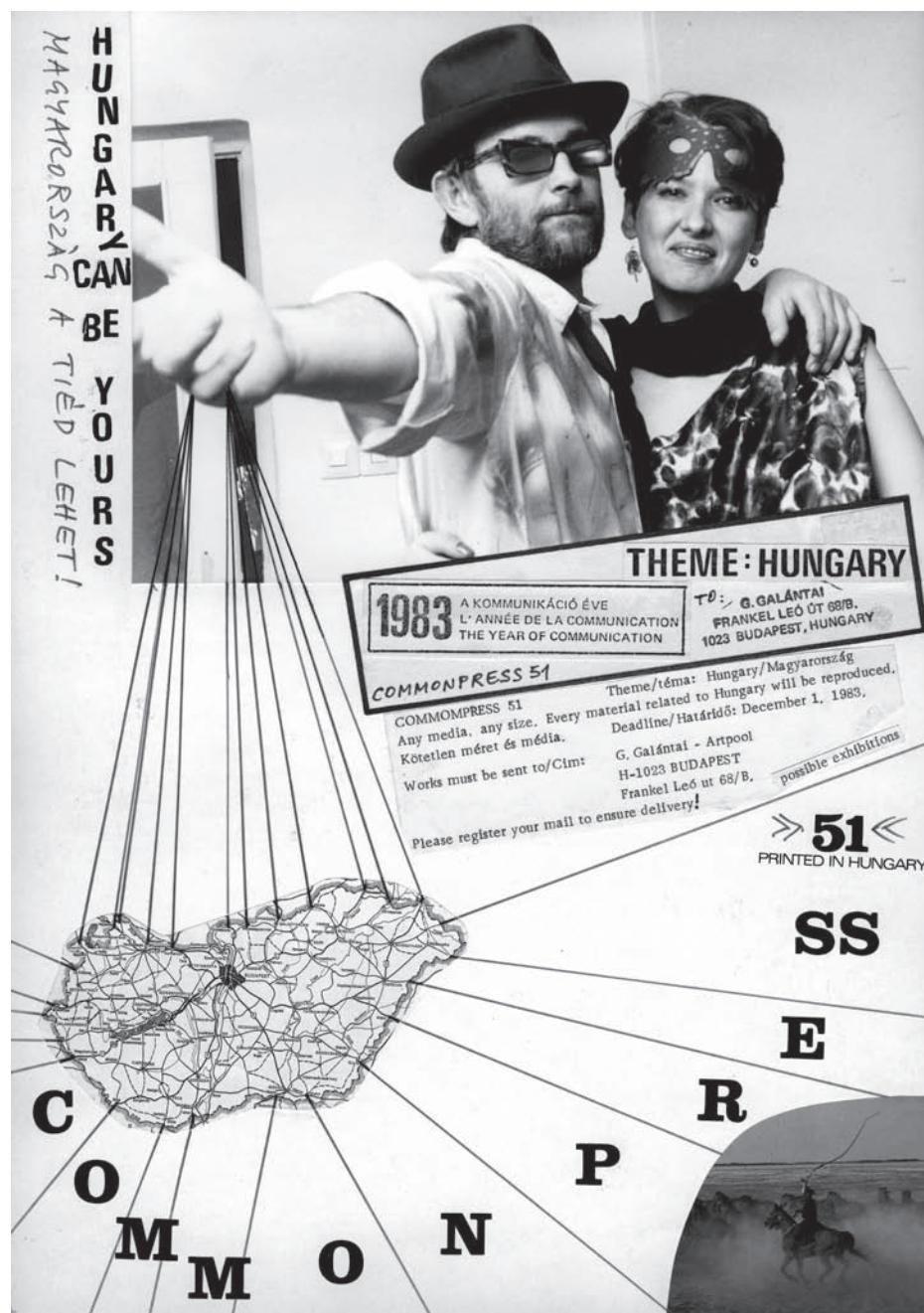


agents
provocateurs

Doing culture under state-socialism: Events, actors and interconnections

International workshop
Leipzig, 20 June, 2013

The Cold War was a period in which international relations were defined by conflicting worldviews and when both high and popular culture were heavily drawn into the sphere of superpower competition. Despite popular imaginations about isolated cultural landscapes behind the Iron Curtain, the cross-border flow of intellectual trends, cultural practices and actors never ceased. The involvement of Eastern dissidents in East-West cultural exchanges has been frequently addressed by a growing body of scholarship, yet, we still know relatively little about how official cultural liaisons and co-operations had been sought, established and regulated within and across political blocs. Workshop participants will present and discuss various instances of transnational cultural interaction during Cold War times.



Call for Commonpress 51 / Hungary Can Be Yours, 1983
The photo of the Galántai couple used in the collage by György Galántai was made by István Jávör – courtesy Artpool Art Research Center

Organisation:

Dr. Beata Hock
(Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum
Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas/
Projektgruppe Ostmitteleuropa
Transnational)

In cooperation with Franciska Zólyom
(Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig)

The one-day program is the closing event of the research-based exhibition project "Agents and Provocateurs" (www.agentsandprovocateurs.net), developed between 2008–2013 with the generous support of Erste Stiftung.

For more information please contact beata.hock@uni-leipzig.de

Programme

Venue: GWZO Seminar room
Specks Hof (Entrance A), 4th floor, Reichsstrasse 4, 04109 Leipzig

9.15 – 9.30 Words of Welcome from Frank Hadler (GWZO, Leipzig)

9.30 – 9.45 Introduction by Beata Hock (GWZO, Leipzig):
Inscribing socialist Eastern Europe into a socialist world through art

9.30 – 11.30 SESSION 1

Chair: Anna Gorski (GWZO, Leipzig)

Maria-Kriistina Soomre (Estonian Ministry of Culture / Estonian Academy of Arts). Art Versus Politics at the Venice Biennale

Abstract: The 1977 "Biennale del Dissenso" was a cultural festival devoted to the unofficial culture and scholarship of Eastern European countries. This was an important exception in the Biennale's usual agenda foregrounding politics and national representation. La Biennale at the time was presided by Carlo Ripa di Meana, a politician of socialist background who considered it vital that this cultural institution also become a platform for suppressed artistic positions and realities. While the official Soviet participations at the Venice Biennial throughout the 1970s were all but avant-garde, the Italian curators in 1977 gathered Soviet underground art mainly from Western collections for the exhibition "New Art from the Soviet Union". Their aim was at the same time to keep the presentation itself aesthetical and politically neutral, which led the Italian art press to regard the art presented cowardly and unprofessional. My case study will reflect over the interlocking elements of art, power, politics, individual histories, geographies, and space that exerted influence on, and swayed, this early attempt of establishing cultural dialogue and translation in the Cold War era.

Victoria Harms (University of Pittsburgh). Central Europe on the Hudson: Why Hungarian dissidents mattered to New York intellectuals

Abstract: Since the late 1970s, more and more non-conformist intellectuals from Budapest held temporary fellowships at various institutes in New York City. Their writings – banned at home – were translated and published; scholarly talks and the influential New York Review of Books voiced and amplified their concerns. Within a few years, a sizeable formal and informal network emerged. This talk explores what inspired East Coast intellectuals to accommodate Hungarian dissidents and the kinds of views and concerns the two parties shared. Drawing on interviews and archival research, the paper demonstrates how the rise of Hungary's so-called Democratic Opposition coincided with a distinct sense of New York's intellectual and cultural decline. Transcending the Iron Curtain, cosmopolitan Central European thinkers promised intellectual rejuvenation, a shared Weltanschauung, and an opportunity to regain anti-communism and the Holocaust from America's neo-conservatives.

Jeannine Harder (Universität Leipzig). Seen from two sides: 1950s Polish film posters and their reception in "Western" countries

Abstract: Poster design and especially film posters from the People's Republic of Poland, the so-called "Polish School of Posters", occupied a prominent place within international graphic design from the 1950s on. Understanding this development as an "histoire croisée", the talk combines two viewpoints – the Polish outstanding and the receiving environment in non-socialist countries. The analysis reveals how processes and dynamics on national and transnational levels contributed to the outstanding position of Polish film posters in advertising art and to their functionalization in (foreign) cultural policies during the East-West conflict.

COMMENTS: Michael Esch (GWZO, Leipzig)

11.30 – 12.00 Coffee break

12.00 – 13.45 SESSION 2

Chair: Franciska Zólyom (Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig)

Heidi Stecker (Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig). "Freundschaftsantiqua"/"Antiqua of Friendship"

Abstract: Rarely tapped materials stored in the archives of the Leipzig Academy of Visual Arts constitute the starting point of this talk. These include the master theses, creative output and personal files of international students who came to study in Leipzig from the so-called "friendly" socialist states of Europe, Africa, and Asia in the 1960s–70s. In this environment of international partnership, dynamic cultural exchanges took place – Mongolian fairy tales mixed with stories by Pushkin, and the life of African residents was mediated, whereas the experiences of non-GDR citizens were a missing theme in public discourses. Upon Mao Tse Tung's demand, a Chinese student invented the font "Freundschaftsantiqua" to render Chinese texts in Latin typeface in a conscious effort to transcend borders created by different cultural heritages. But could the "Antiqua of Friendship" be really put to use outside this unique multicultural laboratory?

Verena Wasmuth (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin). Czech glass art at exhibitions abroad – Ambassador for socialist cultural policy and generator of foreign currency

Abstract: Glass has traditionally played a central role in Czechoslovak exhibitions abroad. Following a resounding success at the 1958 Brussels EXPO, artists went on surprising unprepared international audiences with their original and ambitious works, counteracting common imaginations about dreary cultural production in Eastern Bloc countries. As utility glass objects played an important role in the planned economy system, these glass art works simultaneously functioned as a valuable marketing device for industrial products. While the creative efforts of glass artists were instrumentalised on grounds of their ambassadorial impact and actual market value, their art also became emancipated from repressive cultural-political guidelines due to the products' admitted international success. The presentation will underscore how the Czechoslovak state and its official cultural diplomacy both enabled and channeled these processes.

Chris Byrne (College of Art & Design, University of Dundee). Rupture: Artists' statements on the communist past of Bulgaria

Abstract: The talk will examine the creative statements of three significant Bulgarian artists and their positions towards the specific historical and social milieux surrounding the Bulgarian variant of socialism. The artists are Christo Javacheff, Nedko Solakov, and Ergin Çavuşoğlu. The overall aim is to reveal the fractured identities produced by Bulgarian Communism as reflected in key works by each artist. Christo reacted to Socialist Realism, and also to the commodification of art under capitalism whilst in exile. Solakov is preoccupied with the divided self: a product of the artist's own story as a one time informant for state security. Çavuşoğlu deals with the process of de-Ottomanisation during the last phase of Communist rule.

COMMENTS: Joes Segal (University of Utrecht)

Venue: Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig Black Box
Karl-Tauchnitz-Straße 9, 04107 Leipzig

18.30 – 19.00 Film screening Peter Watkins:
The Forgotten Faces (1961), 18 min.

19.00 – 20.00 Film screening and discussion with Joanna Warsza
(independent curator, Berlin, Warsaw): excerpts from
Massimo Furlan: Boniek! (2007) and Maciej Mielecki:
Battle of Berlin 1945 (2012)

Watkins' short film is a faux-documentary of the failed Hungarian revolution of 1956. Shot in Canterbury and performed by non-professional actors it is the first of many 'collective experiences' brought about by his films.

In Boniek!, Swiss performance artist Furlan re-enacted one of the most spectacular games in the history of the Polish national football team, — the Poland-Belgium face-off (3–0) at the 1982 World Cup in Spain.

For the Berlin Biennial in 2012 the defeat of the capital of the Third Reich in April and May 1945 and Berlin's final surrender was re-encanted in Berlin and Warsaw. Mielecki and members of re-enactment groups from various European countries embodied the Red Army, Polish 1st Army, and German forces.



Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum
Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas
an der Universität Leipzig

Galerie für
Zeitgenössische
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