

„Modernity, Socialism and the Visual Arts” – A six-day ship conference

Date: 6-11 October 2013

Venue: conference ship from Berlin via Beeskow, Eisenhüttenstadt, Frankfurt/Oder and Gorzów back to Berlin

Organization: Kunstarchiv Beeskow and Utrecht University in collaboration with Marlene Heidel, Claudia Jansen, Ursula Lücke and Joes Segal

Public debates on Cold-War cultural heritage since the 1990s tend to address the pre-1989 European art world in terms of a clash between Western modernism and Soviet-style socialist realism. However, behind these general concepts one encounters a wide variety of artistic forms and ideas, which more often than not transcend oversimplified politicized distinctions. Especially since the late 1960s, West-European art explored the borders between “art” and “life”, opening itself to various forms of social and political engagement, whereas socialist realism became a highly contested concept in large parts of Eastern Europe, leading many artists away from both realist and socialist assumptions. This rather one-dimensional representations of Cold-War cultural history after the collapse of state socialism provokes a series of fundamental questions. What exactly do we mean by modernism and socialist realism? How do both concepts relate to modernity, and is it possible to speak about socialist modernity? What aspects of Cold War cultural history do we neglect when exclusively focusing on its bipolar character? What concepts would be needed to interpret the pre-1989 European art world in non-exclusive, non-teleological ways? And what could be the role of (material) archives and museums in such a reinterpretation?

These are some of the basic questions that will be addressed at a six-day conference starting at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin and on board an archival ship, travelling from Berlin to Gorzów along a number of sites, archives and institutions related to Cold War culture and art history. Apart from offering a unique opportunity for in-depth discussions, the ship conference symbolizes the crossing of both national, disciplinary and temporal borders; it aims at connecting parallel and divergent European histories, addressing (art) historical, philosophical and interdisciplinary issues both on a conceptual and on a practical level, and relating our interpretation of the past to are present concerns and future ideals.

The conference is made possible by the generous support of: Kulturförderung Landkreis Oder-Spree / Burg Beeskow; Sparkasse Oder-Spree; Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, Potsdam; Raiffeisen-Volksbank Oder-Spree eG; Akademie der Künste, Berlin; Universität Utrecht; and Forum Kunstarchiv Beeskow e.V.

For further information, please see: www.mosocvisualarts.wordpress.com