Course Title

Studies in 20th Century Art: Aesthetics of Socialist Realism

Although Socialist Realism has been dismissed as propaganda or kitsch, this interdisciplinary seminar will take it seriously as the aesthetic project of socialism, with its particularly sensory or haptic address to its audiences. Reflecting on Socialist Realism on the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, our premise is that it challenged the assumptions of Western art, including the concept of the avant-garde and the art market itself, offering an alternate model of revolutionary cultural practice and a potentially liberatory politics of gender and race. The seminar will focus on Soviet visual art, cinema and writing during the 1930s under Stalin, and will be co-taught with Prof. Robert Bird, Slavic and Cinema and Media Studies, University of Chicago. The seminar will have a special emphasis on female makers and the representation of women’s experience, because it will draw on the Fall 2017 exhibition Revolution Every Day at the Smart Museum of Art (http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/exhibitions/revolution-every-day/), which is co-curated by the professors; it will also take advantage of the Art Institute’s major fall exhibition Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia! Soviet Art Put to the Test, to which Prof. Kiaer contributed, as well as the film programming related to these shows. The seminar will include students from both universities, meeting alternate weeks at the Northwestern and Chicago campuses (assistance with organizing transportation will be provided). We welcome students with research interests that extend beyond Soviet Russia in the 1930s.

Required Textbooks

No textbooks; all required readings in English.

Assessments

Class participation; short writings related to the Fall 2017 exhibitions; final research paper of 10-15 pp.