

Kyiv Perennial: Symposium “What Remains of the ‘Friendship between Peoples’?” on June 1



10. Deutsch-Sowjetischer Artistenball im Prater, 1987 © Harald Hauswald/OSTKREUZ

Kyiv Perennial

What Remains of the ‘Friendship between Peoples’?

A symposium of the Prater Galerie

June 1, 2024, 11 am–8 pm

Stadtwerkstatt, Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 11, 10178 Berlin, 1st floor

Access via escalator, barrier-free access via elevator

In English and German with simultaneous translation

Free admission

Registration for members of the media at presse@ngbk.de

Registration for visitors at info@pratergalerie.de by May 30

Kyiv Perennial continues with a symposium of the Prater Galerie on June 1. *What Remains of the ‘Friendship between Peoples?’* focuses on the idea of friendship and brotherhood in (post-)socialist contexts. The symposium will be accompanied by a film program curated by Olexii Kuchanskyi and concludes with a screening by Henrike Naumann and SI_Process.

Since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, many media outlets in Germany have alluded to the past image of friendship between the two nations in contrast to today’s enmity. Hardly a private conversation takes place between those who grew up under socialism – and with the ideology of friendship between nations – without reflecting on the

former solidarity between the 'peoples of the Soviet Union.' Friendship is an important term with a complex history of relations. But what does it mean when applied to entire nations? What characterized these kinds of friendships, which involved emancipatory and conciliatory aspects on the one hand but also hierarchical and even colonial gestures on the other?

After the Second World War, 'friendship between peoples' became a central propaganda tool in socialist countries beyond the Soviet Union. As ideological and dishonest as the term may be, it was also lived out to some extent. Under the slogan of 'friendship between peoples' or 'friendship and brotherhood', real encounters and friendships were fostered, not between peoples, but people. Cultural exchanges took place that were beneficial for both parties. However, this does not appear to have produced a stable friendship between peoples. When the era of socialism came to an end, a seemingly endless series of ethnic and national wars began, which continue today.

What Remains of the 'Friendship between Peoples?' is a symposium that focuses on the idea of friendship and brotherhood in (post-)socialist contexts. It focuses on the term itself and its real-life expression, seen from a historical, decolonial and art-historical perspective. It offers the chance to reflect on how artistic political imaginations, including feminist and queer visions, have expanded the idea of friendship to form new ties and communities, such as notions of sisterhood, communities of care or chosen families.

Speakers: Felix Ackermann, Yevgenia Belorusets, Vika Biran, Olena Chervonik, Taras Gembik, Tereza Hendl, Beáta Hock, Iva Kovač, Kata Krasznahorkai, and Bojana Pejić

Curated and organized by Lena Prents and Antonina Stebur

Program

11–11:15 am

Welcoming address by Lena Prents and Antonina Stebur

11:15 am–12:15 pm

Keynote lecture by Dr. Tereza Hendl: *Not Our Brothers: From Subjugation to Liberation*

The concept of 'friendship between peoples' has played a pivotal role in socialist imaginary. However, its perception differed, depending on membership of dominant or oppressed societies. This keynote lecture will take a closer look at the concept and its implications, through the socio-historical experiences and perspectives of the many different societies directly affected by the ongoing legacy of Russian imperialism. Through the exploration of the myth and lived realities, the question of what friendship does (not) entail becomes increasingly urgent, as do broader concerns of justice and solidarity.

12:15–12:30 pm Break

12:30–14:00 pm

Panel 1, Looking back: *The Socialist Friendship Project – an Imperial Construct or Attempt at Reconciliation?*

After the Second World War, 'Friendship between Peoples' in various Soviet Republics, 'Fraternity and Unity' in Yugoslavia and the German-Soviet Friendship became central tenets of the Eastern Bloc. The first panel of speakers will provide a detailed historical insight into the nascence of these concepts, focusing on the power dynamic and taking the perspectives of different nations into consideration. They will elaborate on the extent to which the notions of "friendship" and "unity" remain relevant today after the collapse of socialism, how they give rise to new forms of solidarity, frustration or nostalgia and how they color the perceptions of military aggression to this day.

Prof. Felix Ackermann: *Post/National/Socialist Rituals of Understanding*

As a post-national-socialist society, the GDR clearly rejected the legacy of Germany's Nazi past. The state's ritualized forms of collective friendship turned the previous occupation of Europe on its head, emphasizing collective friendships between nations rather than individuals. The dominant hierarchy of these official friendships ensured that the Soviet Union was at the top, with the bottom place occupied by the USA and Israel. This past has an impact to this day, especially in the regions of the former GDR.

The various reactions to 24 February 2022 reflect a special bond between many East Germans and Russia that dates back to the GDR era. From a post-Nazi perspective, however, it could also be interpreted as an after-effect reaction to the violence of the Nazi period: one way of dealing with the past is to glorify the former enemy. After 7 October 2023, a similar special relationship with the Palestinian state resurfaced, reflected in the rather tepid expressions of solidarity with Israelis after the Hamas terrorist attack. This can be traced back both to the official friendship with the Palestinian people and to post-national-socialist reservations about Jews and their state.

Dr. Beáta Hock: *Communist Europe's Brotherly Nations Across the Globe*

The bloc-building, bloc-leading, and ruling political role of the "big brother" Soviet Union has been profoundly condemned by many who lived through the decades of Eastern European state-run socialism and many who are subjected to, or witness contemporary Russia's great power ambitions. This talk aims to supplement these interpretive frameworks with further insights, incorporating the perspectives of those non-European peoples whose recent history had almost always been defined by (Western) colonization and imperialism. It utilizes visual arts and an artist documentary to explore these diverse viewpoints.

2–3 pm artistic-lunch performance 'Plates of Unity' by HakkaMoon

3–4:30 pm

Panel 2: *Construction of 'Friendship between Peoples' in Visual Culture and the Arts*

The 'Days of National Culture', the 'World Youth Festivals for young adults and students' and the activities of bilateral friendship societies played an important role in the cultural diplomacy of the real-existing socialist bloc, serving as an extension of the classic propaganda of the countries involved (beyond national borders). The visual arts were particularly favored as a soft power in international and supra-regional cultural exchange. The dissemination of a universally valid socialist artistic approach was intended to counter the expansion of the modern art movement of the western world. However, within this prescribed system, the artists and cultural actors themselves often revealed discrepancies and highlighted intentional misunderstandings on the part of the state, subverting aesthetic and political principles and created a new visual language. When political systems switched and, in some cases, the much-vaunted friendship shifted into animosity, it was they that dealt with the marginalizations and history of violence, offering a more nuanced view of the past.

Dr. Kata Krasznahorkai: *Our Sister, Angela*

During Angela Davis' 1972 trial and her subsequent release, leaders from the Eastern Bloc publicly supported her, referring to her as "one of us," and "our black sister Angela." She was prominently featured in government-run media campaigns. She became a familiar face in East German homes, often appearing in youth and women's magazines as an icon to look up to.

The political appropriation in the socialist camp was stylized as a familial relationship between the white population and the Black woman. Her own goal of gaining allies in the fight against racial discrimination and for equal rights for the Black population in the USA could not have been further removed from the interests of the GDR leadership or of other Soviet-influenced states.

Olena Chervonik: *Photography against the Grain of the Soviet 'Friendship of the Peoples'*

This presentation profiles a case of "Soviet friendship backfiring" with the case history of an artists' community known as the Kharkiv School of Photography, which emerged in the mid-1960s. Kharkiv photographers utilized the officially sanctioned exchanges between amateur photo clubs in the USSR, swapping photographs and periodicals, collaborating on art projects and hosting exhibitions. This exposure to new ideas led to a rejection of Soviet aesthetics. Paradoxically, they saturated the Soviet "friendship" infrastructure with dissident content. This gap between sanctioned infrastructure and the unsanctioned exchange of materials demonstrates a case of resistance to the repressive regime.

Bojana Pejić: *Sexualized Geographies: Forgetting or Remembering Wartime Rape?*

This talk addresses wartime sexual violence against women, which includes rape, mass rape, forced impregnations and gendercide. After WW II, these aspects of warfare have been obscured by decades of cultural and political amnesia. In the early 1990s, however, there was an exceptional awareness of gender-based sexual violence in war, initiated by feminist

scholarship and activism. It was not until the 1990s that these crimes are recognized as such, prosecutable under international criminal law. The issue has also achieved unprecedented visibility in the political and public domains – including in the visual arts. The artworks and temporary public projects discussed here emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Poland and South Korea (and Berlin) as well as in Hungary.

4:30–5 pm Break

5–6.30 pm

What's Next for the 'Friendship between Peoples'?

The idea of “friendship between peoples” has a contradictory nature, with effects we can still observe today, as shown in the previous panel talks. In this panel, we invite you to think about what alternatives to the idea of “friendship” and “peoples” are already being practiced and developed today. What feminist, queer, decolonial lenses offer different options for coexistence? Can approaches be proposed today that respect and recognize the value of difference and give voice to oppressed communities and groups, while at the same time allowing joint dialogue, exchange and action? This panel brings together experts rooted in activist practice who work directly with disadvantaged people while at the same time experiencing marginalisation themselves – due to gender identity, experiences of migration, war and oppression.

The panel members are Yevgenia Belorusetz, Taras Gembik and Iva Kovač, moderated by Vika Biran

Program at nGbK event space

10 am–7 pm Film program "Diaries of the Common", curated by Olexii Kuchanskyi

7–8 pm Screening by Henrike Naumann / SI_Process 'Breathe' with a subsequent conversation between Henrike Naumann and Vasyl Cherepanyn

The symposium of the Prater Galerie “What Remains of the 'Friendship between Peoples'?” takes place in the framework of Kyiv Perennial 2024 and in cooperation with neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK). Kyiv Perennial 2024 is a cooperation between the Visual Culture Research Center, neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst and the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation), together with Between Bridges and the municipal Prater Galerie. The Kulturstiftung des Bundes is funded by the Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media). Prater Galerie is a municipal organisation of the Berlin-Pankow District Council.

Further information on the symposium at pratergalerie.de

Further information on Kyiv Perennial at 2023.kyivbiennial.org

Press images are available for download [here](#).

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