

## [Exhibition Histories and the Roles of Documentation: Writing Ukrainian Art History from Scratch](#)

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This event will bring together current research on writing Ukrainian art history of the 20th century from scratch, since an art historical canon has not yet been produced for this period. Focusing on the Soviet and post-soviet eras, art historians **Lizaveta German**, **Olga Balashova** and **Svitlana Biedarieva** will present their ongoing research and reflect on how museums, exhibitions and artists have conceptualized these periods in art history writing until now. How has the National Art Museum of Ukraine—which is currently closed due to war—written and presented 20th-century Ukrainian art history? What can we learn from histories of exhibitions? What could parallels with other former post-Soviet countries, such as the Baltic States, contribute to revisiting this period? How is Ukraine to rewrite its art history after the war? Artist and researcher **Andrij Bojarov** will act as a respondent and **Margaret Tali** will moderate.

This hybrid event on Monday, **January, 30th, 5:00-7:00 pm EET** (Tallinn time) will be hosted by the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture in the Estonian Academy of Arts, room A501 and it will be screened live on its facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/events/728475915536329>

### **(Not) permanent exhibition at the National Art Museum of Ukraine**

Olga Balashova

At the time of the gallery's closure, the exhibition on the second floor of the National Art Museum in Kyiv was dedicated to 20th-century Ukrainian art. In the absence of a written history of art, we were always referring to this second floor for an up-to-date understanding of this history. Despite this influential role, however, the second-floor exhibition responded to the influence of external contexts, with the core museum team changing it three times during the past 20 years. The first non-Soviet exhibition had a strong national idea behind it, with a central narrative built around the Ukrainian Academy of Art, created in 1917 in the Ukrainian People's Republic, and artists who were looking for peculiarities of the "Ukrainian style." In the second exhibition, created after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the narration was more open for international interpretation, with a central focus on the avant-garde. The most recent change took place in 2020, just months before Covid-19 hit, with the

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narration dedicated to the idea of Modernism. The exhibition contained not only positive storytelling but also critical views of historical events and related art movements. After the war, the second-floor exhibition should change again. So far, it is difficult to say in which direction it will unfold, but it needs to include expertise from previous exhibitions and to consider the new post-war context.

### **We learn what we exhibit what we learn: Looking at art history from the perspective of exhibitions**

Lizaveta German

Offering another perspective on how a particular art historical narrative can be (re)written, this presentation will focus on exhibition history as a method and elaborate on cases from two periods in Ukraine: the 1960s and the 1990s. Based on long-term research on both periods, Lizaveta will discuss how one can navigate through gaps in knowledge and lack of physical material, as well as how (and if) apocrypha can stimulate an alternative view of art history.

From this perspective, the former period—namely, the unofficial art of the so-called Ukrainian Sixtiers generation—can be roughly described as a period known through works which could never have been exhibited under the political circumstances of their time. Nor could they have been acquired for museum collections or entered the private art market, which generally didn't exist in the USSR. As a result, monographic collections of the works of a number of the generation's key artists have been well preserved in family estates and can be accessed for research. Yet, they have never been *seen* as subjects of a shared public discourse and have never been *viewed* as particles of the same space of artistic thought and vision by an external audience. While a good number of artworks from the 1990s—the period inaugurating the recent history of state independence—have long been scattered across anonymous public collections inside and outside Ukraine, others have physically disappeared due to their ephemeral nature or have remained beyond public and scholarly physical reach. Yet, there are somewhat chaotic but curious private documentary archives that cover the first curatorial endeavors to exhibit 1990s art in various non-institutional contexts. Today, this period can be interpreted through the way the art was presented rather than through the actual works.

### **Documenting Russia's war on Ukraine in art, 2014-2022**

Svitlana Biedarieva

The tensions related to the political changes and the war in Ukraine have provided an important background for a shift towards documentary practices in Ukrainian art after 2014, including film, video work, reportage, artist's diaries and photography. The presentation will focus on the processes of documentation and creation of artistic archives following the beginning of the war through the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia from 2014. The presentation explores the changes in documentation practices with the recent escalation of violence and the simultaneous transformation of artists' perspectives on war atrocities, historical memory, trauma and decoloniality. The presentation draws on the interdisciplinary approaches of the film researcher Erika Balsom, the curator Okwui Enwezor and the artist Hito Steyerl to analyze the transformative role of documentary art as a form that emerges in a state of war-related violence and mirrors the effects of the political and economic crisis. It is based on research conducted for the book *Contemporary Ukrainian and*

*Baltic Art: Political and Social Perspectives, 1991-2021*, edited by Biedarieva (ibidem Press, 2021). This recently published text is the first comparative volume to focus on the reflections of postcolonial transformation, contested history and resistance in Ukraine and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), examining how these topics have been documented and interpreted in the art of these countries.

**Olga Balashova** is an art historian, curator and critic and the head of the Museum of Contemporary Art NGO in Kyiv.

**Lizaveta German** is a curator and art historian as well as a co-founder of The Naked Room, Kyiv, and co-curator of the Ukrainian Pavilion, 59th Venice Biennial.

**Svitlana Biedarieva** is an art historian with a focus on contemporary Ukrainian art, decoloniality and Russia's war on Ukraine, and is the editor of *Contemporary Ukrainian and Baltic Art: Political and Social Perspectives, 1991-2021* (2021) and *At the Front Line: Ukrainian Art, 2013-2019* (2020).

**Andrij Bojarov** is a Ukrainian Estonian visual artist, independent curator and researcher who has, from the early 2000s, focused on exploring neglected histories of avant-garde art in the central European context, expanding and blending artistic and curatorial work with research practices.

**Margaret Tali** is an art historian and co-initiator of the project *Communicating Difficult Pasts*, which has brought together scholars and artists to revisit together the narratives of 20th-century history in the Baltic region.

Lizaveta German and Olga Balashova are currently visiting researchers at the Estonian Academy of Arts with the support of the Estonian Research Council.

Contact Info:

Margaret Tali, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Institute of Art History and Visual Culture, Estonian Academy of Arts

URL:

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