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**LGBTQ Art and Rights as Democratic Inclusion: Comparative Perspectives on Central and East European Cultures and Societies.**

**The details of the scientific goals of the project**

The aim of this project is to explore contemporary LGBTQ art, visual culture and democratic politics in Central and Eastern Europe. I will examine queer art and visual culture, activism, state policy and societal attitudes towards queer rights and participation through the work of individual artists and human rights organizations, selected art projects, visibility campaigns, performative urban actions and themed exhibitions. The differentiated and volatile status of queer rights in post-communist countries in the twenty-first century, including the dramatic situation in Russia, calls for a comparative approach. A new wave of opposition to equality has arisen over the last years in Europe; it also targets LGBTQ rights. Against this new ultraconservative movement, which is particularly strong in Eastern Europe, queer counterculture has been building resistance. My intention is to study the activist and artistic forms of this democratic movement.

Thus, the anti-discriminatory provisions of the EU will be dealt with to form a background for the LGBTQ successes, struggles and creative expressions in Central and Eastern European countries which joined the EU, juxtaposed and contrasted with those which are not members of the Union. This project covers the period beginning in the 1990s following the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe, but focuses comparatively on the current situation in both parts of the former Eastern Bloc. More than twenty-five years into the change, the region is still struggling for queer rights, with different national ramifications but a shared totalitarian background. Therefore, I will consider

historical aspects of sexual, artistic and social regulations under Communism as a background to the contemporary developments and failures in the human rights of the region. While examining the histories, politics and aesthetics of queer rights and art in selected representative countries, I will discuss the role of art and visual culture as a platform for LGBTQ identities, agency for democracy, civic participation and social justice. Thus, the research deals with the issues of democracy, identity and visibility/visibility, which should be studied due to their impact on politics and equal rights.

### **The current state of the art**

The period of post-communist transition corresponds with an era of rapid and often dramatic developments or drawbacks in LGBTQ issues in Central and Eastern Europe, along with the international trend in visual culture and human rights towards a more open expression of diverse sexual identities and legislation of same-sex unions. I will take into consideration the intersection of these progressive international movements alongside the diverse processes in the region.

To define the state of the art in my field of inquiry I would like to emphasize three academic fields, on which I will draw on in an innovative and interdisciplinary way.

First of all, in my comparative case studies I will use academic publications on democracy, queer/gender/sexuality issues, visual culture and politics in Eastern Europe by such scholars as Piotr Piotrowski, Masha Gessen, Bojana Pejic, Roman Kuhar, Judit Takacs, Robert Kulpa, Joanna Mizielinska, James Brian Baer, Narcisz Fejes, Andrea Balogh, Laurie Essing and Laima Kreivyte.

On the international level, I will explore the social, legal and theoretical elaborations of LGBT rights, as typified in the works of Martha C. Nussbaum, Nico J. Beger, Gert Hekma, Kees Waaldijk and Jeffrey Weeks. Last but not least, I am inspired by studies on queer art in general, by such art historians as James Saslow, Dominique Fernandez, Michael Petry, Allen Ellenzweig, Whitney Davis, Amelia Jones, José Esteban Muñoz, Richard Meyer, Jonathan D. Katz, Jonathan Weinberg, Douglas Crimp, Harmony Hammond and Christopher Reed.

In my project I combine three approaches to open up a space in scholarship that deals with the political representation of LGBT subjects as well as their artistic representation. Among others, in my interpretations I will consider such artists as Yevgeniy Fiks, Karolina Bregula, Anna Daucikova, Anna-Stina Treumund, Julita Wojcik, El Kazovskij, Remigijus Venckus, Michal Pechoucek, Alex Mirutziu, Rokas Darulis, Aleksandra Polisieicz, Liisi Eelmaa & Minna Hint, David Ter-Oganyan, Ugnius Gelguda, Martyna Tokarska & Liliana Piskorska, Georgy Guryanov, Yevgenia Belorusets and Matej Kaminsky.

As I have already researched or exhibited queer art from the region (in Warsaw's National Museum, among others), I will strongly depend on the work I have done hitherto – to be developed during the fellowship. Thus my qualifications and expertise match the objectives of this project. I am a committed researcher, art historian, curator, lecturer, and activist who specializes in the social history of art, LGBT studies and history, contemporary art and curatorial studies. I am experienced in working in numerous national contexts in Europe. I simultaneously practice as a freelance art curator, using my exhibitions as research laboratories and platforms for democracy, social outreach and cultural impact. I have dealt with this subject

throughout my entire academic career, which has resulted in many international publications, conferences and exhibitions.

During this project, which is designed to last 10 months, in the first half I will deal with the deepening of my interdisciplinary and theoretical approach, elaborating on the vast data that I have already collected. I would like to present my findings to other scholars at the IAS, learning from their perspectives coming from other fields. In the second half, I will work on finishing my book on Central and Eastern European democracies, queer art and rights, putting together and interpreting textual and visual sources.

### **The envisaged methodology**

My approach combines the contemporaneity and history of sexuality, civil rights and art, concentrating on the questions of freedom of expression, the state of democracy, the representation of desire and love, censorship and homophobia. Dealing with the intersection of visual culture and the politics of emancipation and/or repression, this project is of an interdisciplinary character, drawing on research in art history, queer studies, cultural studies, European studies, history, political philosophy, sociology and law. Thus it is relevant to a wider intersectional academic context and is connected with current academic, social and media debates in Eastern European politics and culture. The themes of freedom of expression, censorship, LGBTQ and gender rights, individual pleasure, social responsibility and participation, institutional control, discrimination, legal solutions concerning same-sex unions, the diversification of lifestyles, the influence of globalization and pop culture and the rise of religious fundamentalism will be considered.

The objective of this project is to compare and contrast the representations and status of LGBTQ rights, visual culture/art and experiences in different national and cultural contexts in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus artistic representations, political actions and sexual/gender discourses will be interpreted through their social, cultural and national framing as well as their democratic impact or resistance to homophobic oppression. The innovative quality of the proposal on queer rights and expression in Eastern Europe is based on my focus on art and both sides of the region, the EU and beyond, which brings current and topical development in Russia into a broader perspective. Yet the intention is not to propose a comprehensive or encyclopedic overview of queer culture in the entire region, covering all the countries, but to conduct deep contextual interpretations of selected representative case studies, which reflect wider processes. This project will address and thematize the pertinent issues that recur throughout, but will concentrate on a few specific yet topical cases, inscribed into the framework of Eastern European democratic studies.

An interdisciplinary approach will be employed to elucidate the place and function of art in the development of democratic culture and subjectivity and in reflection on their conflicts and opponents. The power of the visual lies in the impact of the image, and its psychological and social effectiveness. That is why I argue that queer art has a particular effect of communication and change in a society trained in a very heteronormative system, with its limitations. LGBTQ rights and expressions are still entangled in culture wars or plain discrimination in many countries in the region; hence methodologically the legal and theoretical study of Martha C. Nussbaum on sexual identity and human rights will have a special global relevance for my approach. On the other hand, equally important is the understanding of art in relation to the struggle with/for democracy in post-communist Europe developed by the art historian Piotr

Piotrowski.

My own contextual and comparative method is located between Nussbaum's and Piotrowski's approaches to social rights and freedom of expression.

Following Nussbaum, my thinking combines law, political philosophy and ethics, to which I add the political interpretation of art and esthetics inspired by Piotrowski. What is at stake is the notion of social justice, equality and amorous diversity -- an important concern in Eastern Europe today. I intend to investigate how the concept of social justice and the pluralization of identities, at the very centre of contemporary politics and a key issue in contemporary art, manifests itself in images. My methodology also includes psychoanalysis. Thus, I am interested in intersubjectivity (social/political) but also in intrasubjectivity (inner life), related to sexuality and affectivity, and explored by psychoanalysts. I plan to develop my novel concept of 'intimate democracy'; I use the methods of the political psychoanalysis of Julia Kristeva, in particular from her seminal series of lectures *Intimate Revolt* (2000).

Despite significant improvement in the EU part of the region, the peculiarity of most Central and Eastern European countries is still their stable conservatism and the political clout of the nationalist or religious right of a strong homophobic character. I argue that against this repressive background, queer culture and activism develop dynamically, representing an alternative push for democracy and sexual/political dissent, and a contribution to civil society. The time of struggle and transformation inspired artistic and activist expression. It is a political utopia, but also an engaged *praxis*, relevant to the vitality of democracy, fighting prejudice and hatred. The new wave of queer art is very visible, and requires academic and curatorial elaboration.

### **The expected scientific outputs and a bibliography**

During the fellowship I plan to complete my book on democracy, queer art and rights in Central and Eastern Europe and to give seminars and conference presentations on the topic. An additional aim is to work on my new exhibition and symposium on queer art and politics from our region. Through these publications, presentations and exhibition, the results of my research will be disseminated to international students, scholars and general audience. My project constitutes an argument for social equality; this call and my research findings will be transmitted to fellow scholars, policy-makers and the wider public.

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