
The Historical and New Avant-Gardes of Eastern Europe: Bookends of the 20th Century



Avant-Garde: A term originally used to describe the foremost part of an army advancing into battle (also called the vanguard) and now applied to any group, particularly of artists, that considers itself innovative and ahead of the majority; as an adjective, the word is applied to work characteristic of such groups.

Neo-Avant-Garde: A term used to describe the works of certain American and European artists of the 1950s and 1960s who reprised avant-garde devices such as collage and assemblage.

Post-Avant-Garde: A term sometimes employed to distinguish more recent advanced art from the historical avant-garde of the early 20th century.

-A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art

The political and cultural turmoil of the 20th century's first decades is mirrored in that of its last. The historical avant-garde, from its myriad definitions and "isms"—Dadaism, Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism, Constructivism, Surrealism—to its diverse manifestations in art and culture, as well as its legacy in modernism and post-modernism, has yielded limitless interpretations by the artists and architects, writers and poets, dramatists and filmmakers who have created its works. It has also provided equally infinite topics for discussion and debate among the critics and historians who have attempted to interpret and contextualize its concepts and legacies. Within the vastness of this literature, the discussion of East European avant-gardes in particular is a relatively new, but a quickly growing area of interest.

On February 4-6, there will be an International Symposium here at the University of Chicago on "New Histories of Modern Art: The East European Avant-Gardes". In conjunction with this symposium, offered here in this small exhibit is but a brief glimpse into some of the issues being debated, some of the tensions which exist between a Europe still divided into east and west, along with a pastiche of works by East European artists of the early and late 20th century.

The exhibit, located in the Second Floor Reading Room of Regenstein Library, will run through March 2010.

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Illustration: Cover of *ReD: Review of the Union for Modern Culture Devětsil*, an influential group of Czech avant-garde poets, writers, artists, and designers active from 1927-1931.