

- Proposal -

# **Collector culture of the Russian Avant-garde**

**Fourth International Khardzhiev conference**

**Thessaloniki, 22-23 October 2021**

**hosted by**

**MOMus Museum of Modern Art - Costakis Collection, Thessaloniki**

**In collaboration with the Khardzhiev Foundation and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam**

Avant-garde collectors like Costakis and Khardzhiev are leading names within a broader collector culture that flourished during the Russian Thaw, the post-Stalin epoch of the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, several collectors collected art that was either not or rarely acquired by museums, thus playing a major role in the preservation of cultural heritage that would otherwise have been largely lost. They purchased and preserved frowned-upon Avant-garde art, often under uncustomary circumstances, as well as art works that were labelled 'formalistic', or were considered undesirable for other reasons, such as art by former emigrants or art with a religious connotation.

Collectors such as Costakis, Chudnovsky, Shuster, Semenov and others collected Avant-garde art as part of broader collections of modernist art, which included works by post-impressionists, symbolists and early cubists. Their collections also played a major role in the rise of so-called unofficial art or nonconformist art -- firstly, because they acquired this nonconformist art, but also because they allowed contemporary artists access to their collections and thus offered access to an Avant-garde culture that was absent in museums. These collectors therefore also played a role in the connection between the Avant-garde and the culture of the non-conformists. The same goes for the unique collection of mainly post-Avant-garde art brought together by museum director and collector Igor Savitsky for the Nukus Museum of Art in Uzbekistan.

In a broader sense, this collector culture is a typical phenomenon of the period of Thaw (and later of Stagnation) with its typical atmosphere of limited liberties, an aspiring civil society, combined with ongoing political repression, and ongoing politicization of aesthetics.

The history of collecting in Soviet times, also mediated and informed the collecting practices of Western-European and American private and public collections. The history of the Russian collections of, for example, the MOMA, the Stedelijk Museum, the Ludwig Museum, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, the CCA collection Montreal, Museum Sztuki Lodz, are immediately connected to the culture of Avant-garde art collecting. Beyond that, collections like those of the Zimmerli Art Museum of Soviet non-conformist art, could also be considered as they originate from the same collecting culture.

The conference will take into consideration any paper considering this theme. The conference does not aim to introduce or present new collections that have not been documented yet. To avoid controversies about disputed collections, we will be hesitant to consider topics concerning recently discovered collections, or collections that have not yet been critically assessed in the field.

### Subjects for consideration

-How did collectors mediate and foster the continuity, legacy and lineage of Russian modernist art forms?

-Can new archival theories broaden or change our perspective on Soviet collections of modernist art?

-How did official and unofficial collecting practices interact in the various historical timeframes in the Soviet Union? In this frame I would add the issue of rehabilitation of the unofficial art when such private collections transition to public. This is of special importance for the way the big museums like the State Russian Museum and the Tretyakov Gallery handled their existing (and slowly but still expanding) collections of Avant-garde art, but also for the unique museum collection of modernist art in Nukus, Uzbekistan.

**Main language will be English with a limited availability for submissions in Russian.**

Every speaker will talk for 20 minutes, followed by a 10-minute discussion.

Abstracts (max 350 words) accompanied by a short biography (max 50 words) should be submitted at [KhardzhievConference@momus.gr](mailto:KhardzhievConference@momus.gr)

Abstract Submission Deadline: **June 1, 2021**

Notification of Acceptance: **July 1, 2021**

Proposals to the open call will be assessed by the following committee:

Angeliki Charistou (MOMus Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki)

Frank van Lamoen (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)

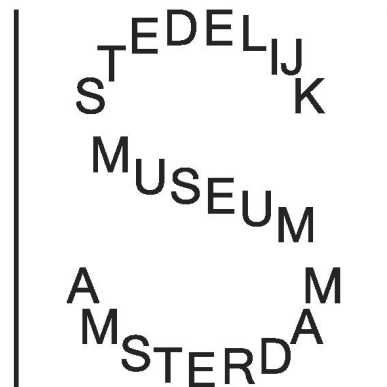
Lyubov Pchelkina (State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow)

Sjeng Scheijen (Khardzhiev Foundation, Amsterdam)

Maria Tsantsanoglou (MOMus Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki)



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METROPOLITAN ORGANISATION OF MUSEUMS OF VISUAL ARTS OF THESSALONIKI

**MUSEUM  
OF MODERN ART –  
COSTAKIS COLLECTION**