

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Vancouver Art Gallery Presents a Timely Exhibition Revisiting Experimental Art from the Former Eastern Bloc

With themes that resonate in our socio-political climate today,
Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s features
over 200 avant-garde works by more than 100 artists and collectives



December 10, 2024, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is pleased to present *Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s*, a major survey that brings together over 100 artists from six Central Eastern European nations: East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. Spanning visual art, performance, music and material culture, *Multiple Realities* sheds light on the diverse experiences of artists as they navigated varying degrees of control and pressure from state authorities between the 1960s and 1980s. Organized by the Walker Art Center, this staggering exhibition offers a rare opportunity to witness artworks seldom seen in Canada.

“*Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s* is an incredible opportunity for Canadian audiences to experience art from Central and Eastern Europe that is rarely represented in Canadian collections, or shown in Canada,” says **Anthony Kiendl**, CEO & Executive Director of the

Vancouver Art Gallery. “This ambitious exhibition is a sobering reminder of the ways artists throughout history have fought for artistic freedom while navigating censorship, adversity and struggle. We hope that visitors will deepen their understanding of world history through the work of these visionary artists.”

Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s weaves together a complex story of artists questioning how, when and where art could exist, and explores the varied meanings it might hold for society. Despite their geographical proximity, the artists featured in the exhibition encountered different conditions for daily life and artmaking, each confronting various state regulations, limitations and challenges. Embracing conceptual and formal innovation and a spirit of adventurousness, these visionary artists playfully demonstrated their refusal to conform to official systems, creating experimental works infused with wit, humour and irony.

While *Multiple Realities* presents select canonical figures from the region, the exhibition foregrounds lesser-known practitioners, particularly women artists, artist collectives and those exploring embodiment through an LGBTQIA+ lens. There are also many pre-existing connections between Eastern Europe and Vancouver that date back to the 1970s and 80s including early mail art collaborations and residencies with Vancouver's artist-run centre Western Front. Though rooted in the recent past, the exhibition's themes resonate today, exploring the relationship between art and politics and the roles that institutions play in society.

“Although of the not-so-distant past, *Multiple Realities* arrives when imperial aggression in Central Eastern Europe is not a distant memory, but very much a present reality as evidenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine”, says **Pavel Pyš**, Curator of Visual Arts and Collections Strategy at the Walker Art Center. “The exhibition comes at a time of a persistent erosion of democratic processes, a rise in autocratic nationalist discourses, and the stalling or reversal of civil liberties. In the face of increasingly repressive forms of control and surveillance, the work of the artists shown here reminds us of art's powerful capacity, even in its quietest of forms, to challenge and subvert dominant powers. The stories told in *Multiple Realities* are a testament to the vital role of friendship, solidarity, being together, finding community among the disempowered, among friends, and making it your own.”

The exhibition is organized into four thematic sections: **Public and Private Spaces of Control**; **Dimensions of the Self**; **Being Together: Alternative Forms of the Social**; and **Looking to the Future: Science Technology and Utopia**. **Public and Private Spaces of Control** explores the policing of behavior; the expectation to conform to social expectations in the city; and the blurred lines of where surveillance begins and ends. Works in this section address public space, as well as the place of the home—including documentary and covert photography, impromptu improvised performances and sombre memorials. **Dimensions of the Self** looks at how artists reflected on embodiment through their immediate physical surroundings and shared social spaces and through representations of the self. For many artists working in the Eastern Bloc, using one's body as artistic material offered a range of possibilities for both expression and subversion. Key works here include examples by women artists who radically reshaped the representation of women's bodies. Many addressed themes such as the merging of the body with landscape and the body as a site of sickness and trauma, as well as of pleasure, eroticism and sexuality. **Being Together: Alternative Forms of the Social** conveys the many ways artists collaborated and built networks of exchange beyond the prescribed system of making and presenting art as dictated by the state. Modes of collaboration included mail art, which made connections well beyond the Eastern Bloc, globalizing the possibilities of artistic exchange at a time

when borders were seldom crossed. **Looking to the Future: Science, Technology and Utopia** speaks to how the Space Race, the advancement of nuclear energy and new forms of communication sparked major technological advancements, all of which inspired utopian thinking and experimentation. Works in this section chart the rise of Op Art, kinetics and cybernetics and the use of experimental sound and images. Without access to materials and facilities largely controlled by their States, artists were often forced to find creative avenues to continue making art.

Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s opens on Friday, December 13, 2024, and is on view through April 21, 2025. An exclusive opening reception and tour will take place on Thursday, December 12 from 5:30 to 7 PM. RSVP by emailing media@vanartgallery.bc.ca.

Please note that this exhibition contains mature content, and some works feature unexpected sounds and/or flickering visual effects.

Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s is organized by the Walker Art Center with major support provided by **Martha and Bruce Atwater**. Exhibition research was supported by a curatorial fellowship from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. The exhibition is curated by **Pavel Pyš**, Curator of Visual Arts and Collections Strategy, Walker Art Center; with **William Hernández Luege**, Curatorial Assistant, Visual Arts, Walker Art Center. The Vancouver Art Gallery presentation is coordinated by **Diana Freundl**, Senior Curator.

Featured Artists:

Milan Adamčiak, Autoperformationsartisten (Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel, Rainer Görß, and Via Lewandowsky), AWACS (Piotr Grzybowski and Maciej Toporowicz), István Bakos, Lubomír Beneš, A.E. Bizottság, Vladimir Bonačić, Geta Brătescu, Adina Caloenescu, Zdeňka Čechová, Věra Chytilová, Lutz Dammbeck, Jan Dobkowski, Orshi Drozdik, Lubomír Ďurček, Sherban Epuré, Barbara Falender, László Fehér, Stano Filko, Vera Fischer, Henryk Gajewski and Piotr Rypson, AG. Geige, Teresa Gierzyńska, Karpo Godina, Tomislav Gotovac, Ion Grigorescu, Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniszewski, Gino Hahnemann, Heino Hilger, Károly Hopp-Halász, János Istvánfy, Sanja Iveković, Libuše Jarcovjáčková, Željko Jerman, Krzysztof Jung, György Kemény, Eva Kmentová, Milan Knížák / AKTUAL Group, Július Koller, Gyula Konkoly, Jiří Kovanda, György Kovásznai, Jarosław Kozłowski, Krzys, Katalin Ladik, Matei Lăzărescu, Natalia LL, Ana Lupaș, Jolanta Marcolla, Dóra Maurer, Florin Maxa, Simon Menner, Tomislav Mikulić, Karel Miler, Andrzej Mitan, Jan Mičoch, Teresa Murak, Krzysztof Niemczyk, Kolomon Novak, Ewa Partum, Plastic People of the Universe, Krystyna Piotrowska, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Polish Radio Experimental Studio, Karol Radziszewski/Queer Archives Institute, Józef Robakowski and Eugeniusz Rudnik, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Akademia Ruchu, Zbigniew Rybczyński, Jan SágI, Bogusław Schaeffer, Cornelia Schleime, Tomasz Sikorski, Jan Slávik and Ladislav Halada, Gabriele Stötzer, Aleksandar Srnec, Zdenek Sýkora, Alina Szapocznikow, Kálmán Szijártó, Bálint Szombathy, Peter Štembera, Janina Tworek-Pierzgalska, Teresa Tyszkiewicz, Zsuzsi Ujj, Andrzej Urbanowicz, Miha Vipotnik, Jürgen Wittdorf, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Jana Želibská

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, produced by the Walker Art Center, that features newly commissioned essays, a roundtable discussion and thematic timelines that not only reflect on the specificity of the period but consider how the exhibition's artworks and themes will

resonate with today's audiences. The publication is available to purchase [via the Gallery website](#) or in the Gallery Store.

Entrance into this exhibition is included in general admission for the public. Admission is free for Vancouver Art Gallery Members; individuals aged 18 and under; caregivers; and Indigenous Peoples who self identify at the Admissions Desk. Through the generous support of BMO, admission to the Gallery is free from 4 PM to 8 PM on the first Friday of every month, subject to advanced booking. The Gallery will be closed on December 25, 2024, and January 1, 2025.

For more information, visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/visit>

FEATURED EXHIBITION PROGRAM

Curator Talk: Pavel Pyš

Friday, December 13 | 4 PM

Courtroom 302, Vancouver Art Gallery

To coincide with the opening of *Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s*, curator **Pavel Pyš**, Curator of Visual Arts and Collections Strategy at the Walker Art Center, will offer a broad overview of the exhibition, with a particular focus on the relationship between the works on view and the political climate at the time of their creation. This talk is free and open to the public. Register now at www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events.

Media Partners:



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For media requests, email media@vanartgallery.bc.ca

[Download the Exhibition Media Package here](#)

Image: Věra Chytilová, *Excerpt from Sedmikrásky [Daisies]*, 1966, 4K restoration from a 35mm film print, Courtesy Národní filmový archiv/National Film Archiv, Prague, Photo: Courtesy National Film Archiv, Prague, © Czech Film Fund

ABOUT VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931 and located on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations, the Vancouver Art Gallery is Western Canada's largest public art museum. Our mission is to create—through art—paths to share perspectives, build and engage communities and shape our collective future together. This is expressed through exhibitions showcasing outstanding

examples of historical, modern and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world; education programs that encourage dialogue and understanding; and publications that advance scholarship on a wide range of artistic subjects. Our permanent collection, representing the most comprehensive resource for visual culture in British Columbia, has more than 13,200 works. Committed to inclusivity and accessibility, we serve a broad public across the region. Each year, hundreds of thousands of children, youth, students, families, adults and seniors of all backgrounds benefit from our programs.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and the work of the Gallery.

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