SIMPLY LEFT

a performative laboratory on left-wing positions in art

7–14 November 2026
MEINBLAU Projektraum
Pfefferberg Haus 5, Christinenstrasse 18-19, Berlin

Opening: 6 November, 19:00
Seminars and lecture-performances: 7–8 November, 14:00–19:00
Performative laboratory and video archive: 7–14 November, 14:00–19:00

Chto Delat, Bernhard Draz, Gal Kirn, Suzana Milevska, Ellen Pau, Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić, Matthias Reichelt, Rosemarie Roque (AsiaVisions, Haring Ibon), Su Wei, Ina Wudtke, Biao Xiang, Yao Heng, Želimir Žilnik, Zhao Chuan / Grass Stage, ZIP Group.

Initiated by Su Wei, Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić.

Simply Left

is a pilot study investigating historical and contemporary left-wing positions in art from a multi-scalar perspective. In an evolving landscape where left-wing art, grounded in the demand for basic equality and in the breadth and depth of human existence, is increasingly overshadowed by global confrontations, identity politics, performative activism, and community art absorbed by institutional power, **Simply Left** asks what relevance left-wing art practice may still hold today. How can their histories help us to confront authoritarianism, rethink artistic agency and imagine new forms of transnational solidarity?

As an ongoing project, **Simply Left** begins at Meinblau with a performative laboratory, an installation developed together with the ZIP-Group collective. Conceived as a living research environment, the installation visualises key questions and evolves through public seminars, screenings, archival materials, research findings, and contributions from invited participants. By bringing together positions from China, North Korea, Germany, the former USSR, and the former Yugoslavia, the seminars in particular focus on practices that challenged authoritarian structures and official state narratives from within left-wing political and cultural traditions. By placing these different histories in dialogue, **Simply Left** explores their aesthetic and socio-political achievements, contradictions, and limitations.

Simply Left compares critical forms of expression developed within real-socialist societies with subcultural, oppositional, and formally radical practices that emerged in capitalist contexts. In the performative laboratory, the initiators welcome participants and audience to leave in the laboratory any tangible or intangible traces of left-wing art drawn from their own lives and practices. Throughout the laboratory duration, the initiators warmly invite local left-wing art communities to use the space for public or closed-door meetings and discussions. By doing so, the initiators seek to provide a ground for diverse methodologies for thinking about the future of left-wing positions in art.

Ultimately, **Simply Left asks: beyond dogma and nostalgia, what can it mean to be left-wing in art today?**

Simply Left is supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and Meinblau e.V.

Programme

The Simply Left seminar programme brings together artists, theorists, curators, and researchers to reconsider the histories and possible futures of leftist artistic practice across different political and cultural contexts. The seminars place different geographies and historical experiences alongside one another without reducing them to a single model.

Seminar day 1
7 November (Saturday), 14:00-19:00

14:00
Introduction
Su Wei, Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić, ZIP Group

Presentation of the Simply Left Manifesto and the installation by ZIP Group.

15:00
Bring the Left Down to Earth: *Haustürarbeit* in New York and Berlin
Biao Xiang, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany

The question of how leftist thought might reconnect with concrete social experience, lived relations, and the realities that give shape to political consciousness stands at the centre here. Biao Xiang raises this question as a conceptual point of departure for Simply Left and its effort to rethink leftist practice beyond fixed doctrines and inherited categories.

16:30
What was: Failure. What Is: Inventing.
Left-Wing Praxis in China after 2018 (a performative lecture)
Yao Heng, cultural worker, artist, Beijing, China

With her performative lecture Yao Heng examines youth leftist practices in the post-pandemic era in China. Drawing on experience from a community space in Beijing, she asks how democracy is practiced within these groups, what young people actually need, and what forms of collective action are emerging in response to social change and new conditions of labour. The lecture combines a slide-based talk with stage installations and real-time dialogue with AI.

18:00
Revisiting Institutional Critique in Socialist and Postsocialist Contexts – A Feminist Approach
Suzana Milevska, art theorist and curator, Skopje, North Macedonia

In her presentation, Suzana Milevska will address the "everlasting" dilemma on the left concerning the difference between theory and practice, as discussed by the philosophers of the Praxis school. She will also consider whether internal critique of a system or institution is more effective than external critique. One of the questions, which is still relevant, is how one can criticise co-opted, obsolete and patriarchal institutions while also working or exhibiting in similar institutions that are mostly run, supported and controlled by the (socialist or neoliberal) state.

Seminar day 2
8 November (Sunday), 14:00-19:00

14:00
Art in and about North Korea
Bernhard Draz, artist and curator, Meinblau Projektraum, Berlin, Germany

This illustrated lecture situates North Korean art within the country's history, society and Juche, its socialist state ideology of national self-reliance. It examines artistic education and production, political control and individual expression, and the regime's staging of power as a 'total work of art'. It then explores how North Korean dissident artist Sun Mu and Bernhard Draz engage with and transform the imagery of ideology and propaganda. Through images and short videos, Draz presents a historically informed, critical perspective shaped by his left-liberal position and his experience as an artist, curator and researcher.

15:15
Art as a Place for Criticism and Imagination of Alternative Realities
Matthias Reichelt, writer and curator, Berlin, Germany

In his presentation, Matthias Reichelt examines artistic positions that challenge the cultural mainstream of capitalist societies. He asks how art can serve as a platform for critique, resistance and envisioning of alternative realities. Drawing on his experience as a writer and curator, he emphasizes the critical potential of art created in independent and self-organised environments, which exist outside or on the fringes of commercial markets and established institutions. His talk demonstrates how such practices can challenge established narratives, open up new perspectives and propose alternative ways of living and working together.

16:30
The Partisan Counter-Archive: Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Ecology in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle
Gal Kirn, research fellow, Chair of Philosophy of Culture, European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany

This lecture explores the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle as a site where art, revolutionary politics, and collective memory intersect. Rather than treating the partisan past as a closed or monumental inheritance, Gal Kirn develops the notion of a "counter-archive"—a way of reading historical material against the grain of official archives, nationalist historiography, and post-socialist revisionism. The counter-archive does not simply preserve the past; it reopens it as a field of unresolved political and aesthetic possibilities, asking what remains unfinished, suppressed, or still capable of generating new emancipatory im-

aginaries. In the last part of the lecture, he will detail a few examples of antifascist ecology that created imaginary and companionship with the non-human world.

18:00
The Avant-garde and the "East"
Rena Rädle, artist, Berlin / Belgrade, Germany / Serbia

Rena Rädle discusses the contradictions that arise in artistic practices striving to overcome the separation between autonomous and heteronomous art. In her contribution, she brings the literary practice of Sergei Tretyakov and the Circles of Writing Workers in the GDR into dialogue with Peter Bürger's thesis on the failure of the avant-garde in the "West". Did the avant-garde also fail in the "East"?

Performative Laboratory and Video Archive
7–14 November, 14:00–19:00

The selected works address authoritarian power, political imprisonment, histories of revolution, class struggle, collective organisation, and the possibility of imagining other forms of life, drawing on documentary, experimental video, and political cinema, as well as collective pedagogical practice.

ZIP Group

Their installation at Meinblau Projektraum comprises wooden elements and textiles. The special 'Tower on the Rails' is a mobile structure that stores knowledge and objects, and also serves as a lecture hall. As it moves, it shifts the location of activities. Visitors can add everyday objects to the installation, which gradually take on the status of artefacts as part of a growing archive. Together, these items form a stable yet mobile collection that reflects present-day life and the struggle against capitalism.

Arrogance of Power, 1983, 38 min.
AsiaVisions, Philippines

The film documents political repression under the Marcos regime in the Philippines, focusing on the institutionalization of militarization and human-rights violations. It examines the realities of political persecution under martial law and challenges official claims that denied the existence of political prisoners.

The Politics of Detention, 1984, 29 min.
Haring Ibon / KAPATID, Philippines

Made one year after the assassination of former Philippine senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr., this short documentary focuses on political prisoners in the Philippines: their conditions of detention, everyday realities, and struggles for justice.

Both films will be presented by **Rosemarie Roque**, independent archiving advocate of Philippine political films, Polytechnic University of the Philippines.

Diversion, 1990, 5 min.
Ellen Pau, Hong Kong

Footage from the 1960s television documentary Hong Kong Today combined with archival images of swimming competitions in Victoria Harbour evokes the political and cultural tensions between Left and Right, Mainland and Island.

The Old School of Capitalism, 2009, 120 min.
Želimir Žilnik, Serbia

Blending documentary and fiction, the film emerges from the first wave of workers revolts in Serbia following the transition to capitalism. Inviting workers and activists to act themselves in the film, it produces an increasingly complex and yet unfailingly lively account of this transformation amid the misery induced by both local and global capital.

World Factory, 2006–2017, 80 min.
Zhao Chuan / Grass Stage, China

Through the perspective of those marginalized by dominant narratives of economic and social progress, questions of class, revolutionary history, labour, and the political future are approached in this theatrical work. Grass Stage's practice connects artistic experimentation with collective research and social engagement, asking how histories of revolution continue to inhabit everyday life.

Perestroika Songspiel, 2008, 26 min.
Chto Delat, Musik by Mikhail Krutik, Russia

The video deals with a key episode during perestroika in the Soviet Union. Set on August 21, 1991, following the defeat of the restorationist coup, it captures a moment of unprecedented popular uplift, when democracy seemed to have achieved a final victory. The film analyses the particular configuration of forces at this historical juncture and traces the protagonists' struggle to realize a shared version of future.

The Living Image (Emden 1930), 2016, 1, 25 min.
Ina Wudtke, Germany

Ina Wudtke revisits the radicalized use of the *tableau vivant* within the communist movement in this collaborative work. Once a form of aristocratic and bourgeois entertainment, the living image was adopted by the socialist workers' movement and later transformed by communist agitprop groups into a tool of protest and direct action. A documented example took place in Emden in 1930, when communist activists interrupted a NSDAP meeting with a staged living image. Wudtke's video re-enacts this event.

Simply Left

(A Curatorial Manifesto)

I

Since the latter half of the 20th century, leftist artistic practice has manifested as a broad but fragmented landscape. It has been absorbed into statist processes in countries such as in those of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, China and elsewhere. It has also become part of radical guerrilla movements around the globe. With the rise of globalization, however, it has increasingly receded into a less visible and marginalized stream.
We are not happy with the persistent historical eclipse of leftist artistic practice.

II

Although leftist artistic practice has become intertwined with the current dominant identity politics discourse in the art world – a development that carries progressive significance – it is crucial that we maintain a high level of vigilance against its tendency toward oversimplification and decontextualization.

III

Say no to the nationalist Left.

IV

Simply Left is committed to the reclaiming of the basics of leftist artistic practice: expanding aesthetic boundaries through practice, forging people-to-people mobilization and solidarity, and fundamentally sustaining resistance to inequalities produced and reproduced by structures of violence and domination.

V

Leftist artistic practice must move beyond conventional media and form constraints, encompassing research-based art, identity-oriented practices, community-based art, or emerging technological forms through which anonymous creation and the complexity of life can find expression.

VI

We respect left-wing positions in art emerging from diverse cultural, geographical, and spiritual contexts. We must acknowledge internal differences and political antagonisms within leftist artistic practices over pursuing forced global alliances. Leftist artistic practice should not seek coherence at all cost, it can remain alive through tension, disagreement and transformation.

VII

Left-wing art today should return to exploring the breadth and depth of life, and renew a profound commitment of both mind and body to that life. We therefore call for greater self-mobilization, and for less reliance on mediation and discourse.

VIII

We recognize the necessity to navigate the current polycrisis, as opposed to taking a one-dimensional approach by aligning with any single camp, ideology, or aesthetic formula. We remain critically vigilant toward all established frameworks while subjecting our own positions to continuous self-reflection. Subjectivity does not mean self-empowerment or self-censorship, but rather:
I see myself within
YOU.

Simply Left is supported by
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