

## **Collapse of a Grand Recit? Images from Socialist Realism in a Post-Communist Context**

The fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria witnessed the end of a grand recit, a metanarrative (Lyotard, 1984) that claimed total knowledge of human history, politics and economy. Socialist Realism, as an aesthetic that supposedly embodies this metanarrative, articulated its pretension as the authentic art form that defined relations in the artworld of the country. The collapse of the communist regime should have also been the collapse of Socialist Realism. Similarly the collapse places the arts and artists, previously and inevitably connected to the grand recit through this aesthetic mode, in a new role. Nostalgia combines with an oblivion of the past, just as attempts for rewriting the communist heritage have shaped the debate about Socialist Realism's historical and present role.

In the context of my practice based research, this presentation will seek to explore to what extent did the metanarrative actually end and what the aftereffects in a post-communist situation are. It will focus on the role of Socialist Realist images as displayed in the context of post-communism and on their ability to provoke and maintain nostalgia towards our totalitarian past. In my studio practice I re-see and re-draw fragments of photographs, usually press photographs, of these images. I use the unique historical awareness of photography, "an awareness of its having-been-there" as defined by Barthes to explore the position of these images as forms of mediations between the 'then' and 'now'. These photographs, as produced and distributed during communism relate to its metanarrative and claim to reflect 'an objective reality'. Working with their materiality and colours I seek to explore quite the opposite – that far from objective they form modes of representations that construct an imagined and imaginary past and influence our present.

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