

International Conference

Artistic Practices between Aesthetics and Power: Propaganda, Mobilization, and Resistance

June 29, 2026, 9:30 – 10:30

Estonian Literary Museum

Vanemuise 42, Tartu, Estonia

Plenary Lecture

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Between Witnessing and Visual Experimentation. The New East European Cinema of War

This talk focuses on the latest films made by the young generation of female Ukrainian directors, visual artists and activists. It will analyse films made between 2014–2024, both feature and documentary, including Anna Buryachkova's *Forever Forever* (2023), Kateryna Gornostai's *Stop-Earth* (2021), Alina Maksimenko's *Ptitsa* (2022) and *In Limbo* (2024), Tonia Noyabrova's *Do You Love Me?* (2023), Alisa Kovalenko's *Alice in Warland* (2016), *Home Games* (2018), *Will Not Fade away* (2023), Iryna Tsilyk's *The Earth is Blue as an Orange* (2020), Angelika Ustymenko's *Queer Fighters of Ukraine* (2023, in cooperation with Alex King) and Maryna Vroda's *Stepne* (2023), among others. All of these films either direct attention to the ways women or children/teenagers approach the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian War in Donbas or build a connection between present times and Ukrainian history immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They show how the war and political changes challenge the established gender order, redefine social roles and relationships, and motivate people to search for a new identity. I argue that the selected films share certain common features such as a subjective female gaze, mapping the political onto the personal, focus on everyday life, interest in children's and teenagers' personal dilemmas, sexual violence, the

significance of female corporeality and the importance of visual materiality, among others. I analyse how presenting history through the details of private lives deconstructs the traditional narration of male and female heroism in a time of war. Ukrainian female directors build up intimate portrayals of their film characters, very often including the world of animals. They expose individual fears, creating a more complex view of reality and inviting the recipient to examine collective questions and struggles. In the selected movies, women and children are not only victims in need of protection, but are also perceived as creators, active fighters for the future, able to turn their traumas into driving forces in life. This approach to history through intimate details—the personal story or loss, images of the fragmented body, individual fears—situates the language of the new female filmmakers in the context of important literary antecedents about women and war, such as Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War* (1985), with which I engage in the discussion, along with scholarly works on counter-history, haptic cinema and somaesthetics.

Dr. Beata Waligórska-Olejniczak, PhD is a Full Professor in the Institute of East Slavic Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland). She is also deputy director and the head of the Department of Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture (since 2014) and the editor-in-chief of "Studia Rossica Posnaniensia" (since 2018). She was also a member of the Executive Committee of the European Society of Comparative Literature. Her latest book, *Literary Constellations of Andrey Zvyagintsev's Oeuvre*, was published in 2022. She is also the (co)author of four other monographs in Polish, i.e. *Contemporary Russian Cinema in the Light of War Traumas: Literary and Cultural Context* (2020); *New Russian Cinema in the Literary and Film Tradition* (2017); *Sacrum on the Way: Venedict Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki and Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction through the Lens of Montage* (2013); *Theatrical Gesture in A. P. Chekhov's Drama The Seagull and Free Dance as the Aesthetic Context of the Great Theatre Reform* (2009). Her articles have been published in China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and the USA.