

## International Conference

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

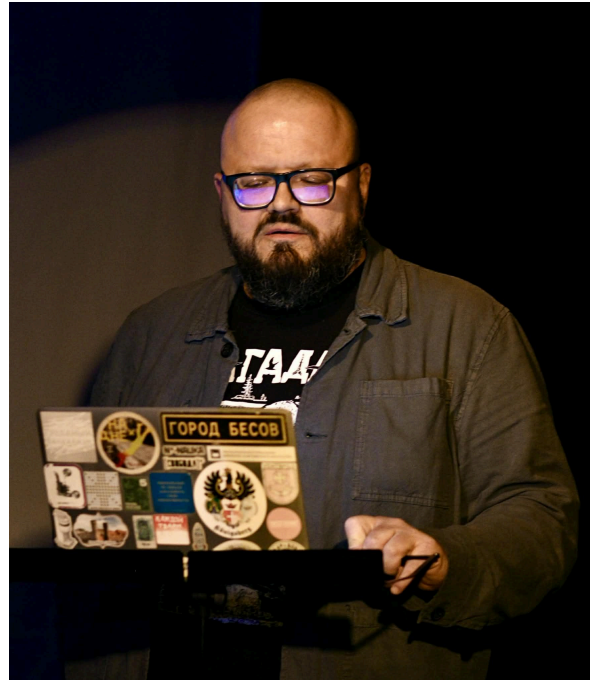
**July 1, 2026, 9:30 – 10:30**

**Estonian Literary Museum**

Vanemuise 42, Tartu, Estonia

Plenary Lecture

**Jan Levchenko** (University of Jyväskylä, Finland; Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Budva, Montenegro)



## Imagery of Visual Resistance: Photos by Dmitry Vyshemirsky and the issue of time and moment

Visual resistance is an effect frequently found in Soviet-era photography. Compared to a forbidden word, a visual image is more ambiguous and therefore liberated. Even early icons of Soviet propaganda, such as Alexander Rodchenko and Arkady Shaikhet, allowed themselves the aesthetic ambiguity that is associated with the very nature of photographic expression. Controlled reality remained reality, which the intermediary photographer did not prevent from manifesting itself. Therefore, the best photographers of the late USSR emerged from modified reportage, that is, a special optics of the moment, dating back to the fundamental principles of Henri Cartier-Bresson. This is true both for the outstanding traditions in the Baltics (Antanas Sutkus in Lithuania or Juris Poišs in Latvia) and for the so-called club or uncensored photography of Leningrad/St. Petersburg (Boris Smelov, Alexander Kitaev). An example of the combination of different schools and reflections on approaches to nature and models is the work of photographer Dmitry Vyshemirsky (Königsberg-Berlin). He is best known for his work on the traumatic memory of the East Prussian region. Its reoccupation by Russia in the form of the USSR in

1945 led to the emergence of a multi-layered ruin, the signs of which are inherent not only in specific buildings, but also in the overall living environment of this formally Russian, but in reality more mixed and complex exclave. Since the end of the 20th century, Vyshemirsky's mission has been to allow this spatial ruin to express its pain and melancholy. Back in the Soviet era, the young photographer created a seemingly purely reportage and existentially acute series entitled 'Beyond the Outskirts,' which will soon be published separately in Germany. The photographer kindly gave the author of this lecture permission to present the archival photos to the wider public and to interpret the dissident narrative that emerges from the combination of these images.

*Dr. **Jan Levchenko**, PhD in semiotics and theory of culture (Tartu University, Estonia, 2004). Studied (2000-2002) and taught (2002-2008) art history at the European University at St. Petersburg. Former professor of cultural studies at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow (2009-2021). Left Russia in 2022 and returned to Estonia. Journalist, critic, and teacher at online liberal arts educational projects such as Smolny Beyond Borders, Berlin, and FLAS Montenegro. His books include *The Other Science. Russian Formalists in Search of Biography* (Moscow, 2012), *The Age of Defamiliarization: Russian Formalism and Humanities* (editor, with prof. Igor Pilshchikov, Moscow, 2016), *The Man with the Diamond Arm. Towards the Centenary of Leonid Gaidai* (ed., Moscow, 2023). Since 2026, Dr. Levchenko has been a senior lecturer in the Department of Russian Language and Culture at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.*

*Photo: Irina Senkina*