

## Call for Papers

International Symposium

# “People don’t like to look at this...” The Cinema of Kira Muratova

**Dates:** 7–9 May 2020

**Venue:**

FernUniversität in Hagen  
Regionalzentrum Berlin  
Kurfürstendamm 21  
10719 Berlin, Germany

**Confirmed keynote speakers:**

Mikhail Iampolski (New York University)  
Eugénie Zvonkine (Université Paris VIII)

Kira Muratova (1934-2018) always had a particular if not marginal status on the international cinematographic map. The many reasons for this include her unique film style and unprecedented freedom of expression, the years of artistic persecution during the Soviet period culminating in the dismissal from the Odessa film studio, and her deliberate nonconformist self-positioning as *enfant terrible* throughout her entire artistic career. Yet, in the early 2000s, Mikhail Iampolski named three directors under the aegis of whom late Soviet and post-Soviet cinema developed: Alexander Sokurov, Alexei German sr., and Kira Muratova. At the same time, Iampolski noted Muratova’s “foreignness to the familiar landscape” of the national film tradition (2008: 5). The elitist “sophistication” (*kulturnost*), “symbolism”, and even more so, “ideology”, which is often associated with (post)Soviet auteur cinema, is entirely alien to her. Muratova’s idiosyncratic style puzzles not only viewers, but also researchers and critics. As Eugénie Zvonkine’s rightly observes, “this heterogeneous oeuvre resists analysis and does not immediately reveal a profound aesthetic coherence” (2012: 15).

Muratova produced 21 short and full-length films over about 60 years, starting with her first features made together with Oleksandr Muratov in the late 1950s-early 1960s, right up to her last film *The Eternal Return* (2012). Her first solo films with the mirroring titles – *Brief Encounters* (1967) and *The Long Farewell* (1971) – have become irrefutable classics of Soviet cinema, despite the fact that after their release, both films were severely criticised and withheld from distribution. Soviet censors accused Muratova of “gloominess”, “lengthiness”, “mannerism”, “pretentiousness”, “formalism”, “trivial subject matter”, in other words, of “non-socialist, petit

bourgeois realism” (cit. Bozhovich 1988: 12 and Zvonkine 2012: 49-53, 80). *Getting to Know the Big Wide World* (1979) is considered a milestone in the formation of Muratova’s distinct ornamental film style. The eccentric world of her cinema increasingly became filled with “decorativity”, verbal and montage repetitions, doublings of figures, divertissements and tricks, grotesquerie, particular attention to corporeality, and the affected intonations and mannerisms of non-professional actors. Muratova’s heterodoxy was manifest in each of her works as she fell foul of the Soviet censor. A fruitful period began during perestroika: Muratova made *A Change of Fate* (1987) and her “Soviet Apocalypse” (Taubman 2005: 45) – *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989). After the collapse of the USSR, Muratova finally found a long-awaited freedom of expression as well as recognition in her homeland and abroad. In that period, she made – in her words – “superficial” films, such as *The Sentimental Policeman* (1992) and *Pastimes* (1994), followed by the pessimistic murderer triptych *Three Stories* (1997), which provoked vexed audience reactions. From the early 2000s to the end of her life, Muratova made six full-length films – each of them challenging the audience’s assumptions about her peculiar style. While fully acknowledged in the elite cinematic and academic circles, Kira Muratova’s extravagant film oeuvre remains controversial, cryptic, and little known to a broader audience, in particular, at international level.

Muratova masterfully experimented with the potential of the cinematic image and constantly challenged traditional forms of film narration by focusing on the bizarre, insignificant, marginal, tabooed, and those otherwise excluded from the (post-)Soviet regime of representation. Muratova’s cinema returns to some basal mode of excessive “spectacle”, or pageantry (Oleg Aronson 2005), which does not fully belong in either theatre or cinema and in which narrative and performance, fiction and documentary fancifully coexist. This spectacle is closely related to early cinema and avant-garde experiments – to the “cinema of attractions” (Tom Gunning). The only time when the authorial voice interfered in the flux of images was in the well-known heart-breaking documentary footage of a dog pound (*Asthenic Syndrome*): “*People don’t like to look at this. People don’t like to think about this. This is not supposed to have a relation to discussions of good and evil.*” This overtly critical statement, by the same token, succinctly “comments” on the principle of cinematic visibility and offers a meaningful and, of course, self-ironic metaphor for Muratova’s oeuvre.

We invite applications for the first international Symposium dedicated to Kira Muratova’s films. The conference aims at a conceptualisation and systematisation of Muratova’s multifaceted heritage, as well as of methods and approaches to interpreting her film work. Papers can both address general topics related to Muratova’s cinema and focus on the analysis of particular films. The range of topics may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Muratova’s films through the lens of critical theory, gender, postcolonial, post-human studies, etc.;

- Muratova's films and film theories;
- Muratova's cinema in the history and context of world cinema: thematic and stylistic continuity, periodisation, influences, traditions of silent cinema, new waves, etc.;
- politics & aesthetics;
- genre specifics;
- interdisciplinary, intertextual, comparative studies (literature, fine arts, music, circus, etc.);
- artistic interactions and tandems (Alexandr Muratov, Nataliia Riazantseva, Rustam Khamdamov, Evgenii Golubenko, Renata Litvinova, Oleg Karavaichuk, Gennadii Koriuk, Nina Ruslanova, the comic troupe "Maski", etc.);
- unfinished film projects (*Watch Your Dreams Carefully*, *Princess Mary*) and shorts;
- reception of Muratova's cinema.

The organisers especially welcome papers that demonstrate a thorough theoretical background and an original methodology and encourage applications from researchers at an early stage of their career, including graduate students.

The conference is organised by the **University of Hagen, Germany**. Working languages: **English, Russian, and German**. A publication of conference proceedings is planned.

Please send your **submissions** including the **title**, an **abstract** in English, German or Russian (300-500 words), your short **biography**, **affiliation** if applicable, **email**, and the most important **publications** to the organisers **Irina Gradinari** (Fernuniversität Hagen) and **Irina Schulzki** (LMU München). E-mail: [muratova.conference2020@gmail.com](mailto:muratova.conference2020@gmail.com).

Deadline for submissions: **1 September, 2019**.

Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us.  
For news and updates, visit <https://muratova2020.wordpress.com>

7 December 2018.