

# The Lenin Museum

# Yevgeniy Fiks

## Exhibition & Programs

Nov 19	Yevgeniy Fiks
Nov 21	Patricia Ticineto Clough Jasbir Puar
Nov 25	Gwen Shaw
Dec 3	Yevgeniy Fiks Jonathan Flatley Anastasia Kayiatos
Dec 4	Jack Crawford
Dec 8	Yevgeniy Fiks Harry Whyte

The Lenin Museum

The James Gallery  
The Graduate Center, CUNY

365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street  
New York, NY 10016

[centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery](http://centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery)

Free and Open to the Public  
Tue to Thu, 12–7pm  
Fri and Sat, 12–6pm

Nov 20, 2014–Jan 17, 2015

## The Lenin Museum

Vladimir Lenin's government decriminalized homosexuality in Russia shortly after the October Revolution of 1917. The period between 1918 and 1933 in the USSR was characterized by a relative tolerance towards gays. However homosexuality was re-criminalized under Stalin in 1933-1934, as part of a wider right-wing program to return the country to petit bourgeois values including the criminalization of abortion. The re-criminalisation of homosexuality was only overturned in 1993. The public toilets in the basement of the Central V.I. Lenin Museum in Moscow were covertly used for anonymous gay sex between the 1940s and the 1980s.

From 1949 to 1953, The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System\* allegedly included research into the so-called "complex of latent homosexuality" of Soviet leaders (including Lenin), thus adapting earlier research on Nazi society, including Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality*, for Cold War uses. In 1953, the American academic Nathan Leites released a book sponsored by the Rand Corporation and the United States Air Force that was based on his earlier work for The Harvard Project. In *A Study of Bolshevism*, Leites examines Lenin's writings and notes instances of his alleged "repressed homosexual desire"—effectively instrumentalizing 1950s homophobia as a tool for propaganda against the Soviet Union.

In 2011, prominent right-wing Russian TV personality Dmitry Kiselev posed the following questions to his audience during a talk show on homosexuality:

On April 22nd (V.I. Lenin's birthday), flowers will be laid to thousands of Lenin statues all over our country. Has anyone ever looked closely at them and wondered which bouquets are from gays? Have you ever had this thought? Because they must be grateful, because it was precisely [Lenin] who stopped shipping them to Siberia.

Provoking his audience, Kiselev sought to coopt post-Soviet Russian society's anti-Communist sentiment as a homophobic tool.

*The Lenin Museum* reflects upon the historical contradictions and complexities of intersections between Communism, anti-Communism, sexual identity, and ideology. It draws attention to how homosexuality was repressed within the Soviet Union during and after Stalin, following its earlier de-criminalization under Lenin. The project also considers how, during the Cold War, the agents of anti-Communism in the West utilized homophobic sentiments as a weapon in the struggle against the Soviet Union, and how the anti-Communist discourse contributes even today to the creation of (political) homophobia in post-Soviet Russia.

*The Lenin Museum* commemorates the emancipatory promise of the Russian Revolution and mourns the fates of the post-1934 queer Soviet subjects, who were reduced to expressing their sexuality in the toilets of Lenin Museum in Moscow between 1940s–1980s, while drawing conceptual connections to the unstable predicament of the LGBTQI community in present-day Russia.

—Yevgeniy Fiks

## In Plain Sight

Despite their apparent solidity, monuments that mark events of historical significance carry a number of meanings which may vary over time. Depending on the vicissitudes of politics, these monuments can be officially bolstered, denied, or forgotten. To take two examples that have occurred within the past few weeks, we have witnessed the 25-year anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the celebration of the liberation of Belgrade during WWII from the Nazis that was achieved in large part with help from the Soviet Union. The fall of the Berlin Wall heralded a new definition of Russia and Europe that is still being fashioned, re-worked, and hammered out today. The liberation day during WWII, which had not been celebrated officially for approximately ten years, was resurrected as an occasion for a visit to Belgrade from the Russian President, using this particular cooperation in 1944 (and skipping over Tito's significant era of non-alignment), to solidify future partnerships between countries. Similarly homosexuality has been instrumentalized as political ideology. Artist Yevgeniy Fiks' research traces the ways that the Russian Revolution in 1917, Stalin in 1933, the United States government in 1953, and Russia's contemporary right-wing state propaganda have all drawn political connections between homosexuality and communism and motivated political will around homosexuality to very different ends.

The artworks in *The Lenin Museum* consider ways that monuments and their attendant contemporary meanings of liberation are invested with libidinal and affective energy from individuals and communities. This may be interjections in, or additions to, official stories. The beauty of multiple meanings—which every image, object, or occasion carries—is the opportunity to rewrite history, which simply cannot be passed up! Artist Yevgeniy Fiks is particularly interested in writing history with all possible means. In the video and accompanying objects of the artwork *Anatoly*, this act of rewriting can be contemporary post-Soviet LGBTQs asking questions and imagining the life of someone (and many people) who has been written out of history because of his or her sexual identity.

With the sculptural object *Untitled (The Lenin Museum)*, this can be queering a place of historical significance by quotidian use. The oil paintings *Pleshkas of the Revolution* pose the question, "how can paintings pass?" Painted in semi-official Soviet realist style portraying communist landmarks, they tell the additional story of these public places as gay male cruising sites. Although they appear to be acceptable in style and content, a supplemental reference is made to the functions of these sites that are beyond the state's control.

As these communist landmarks were in plain sight and part of public life in Moscow during Stalin's repression and criminalization of homosexuality until 1993, they also portray the multidimensional space of the closet in Soviet society. Visual presence in public space is fundamental to gay male cruising, whereas it is not as central to lesbian culture. Fiks expands this subjective position in the exhibition as lesbian presence and ideas are crucial to the video *Anatoly* as the speakers imagine the character of the man who was Guy Burgess's lover and also elaborate stories of past and future gay communities. Perhaps more than a signature event, memorial, or commemoration, the routine presence of LGBTQ people in public is a way of claiming rights to space and making a place of belonging. Especially today, when homosexuality is again a flashpoint of repression by the current Russian government—as well as elsewhere in the world—that is aggressively slashing all civil liberties, even mundane acts can be radical subterfuge and reason for hope.

—Katherine Carl, November 2014

\* <https://hcl.harvard.edu:8001/collections/hpsss/index.html>

## Exhibition Checklist

1. Resource Room including postcards from the Lenin Museum gift shop, 1972; and excerpts of Yevgeniy Fiks's previous work *Lenin for Your Library?* (Ante Projects: 2007), and his books *Communist Guide to New York City* (common room: 2008) and *Moscow* (Ugly Duckling Presse: 2013).

### 2. *Pleshkas of the Revolution*, 2013

9 framed oil paintings  
Oil on canvas  
40" x 30" each

### 3. *Has anyone ever wondered?*, 2014

Sculptural bust, flowers, monitor and video  
Running time: 1 minute

### 4. *Untitled (Postcards)*, 2014

Artist's postcards of the Lenin Museum facade  
Unlimited edition

### 5. *Untitled (The Lenin Museum)*, 2014

Mixed media  
7' 10" x 5' 8" x 4' 6"

### 6. *Untitled (Guy Burgess's Drawings)*, 2014

Artist reproductions of drawings by Guy Burgess  
Ink on paper  
4" x 3 1/4" each

### 7. *Leaflet*, 2014

8.5" x 11" paper  
Unlimited edition

### 8. *Memorial plaques*, 2013

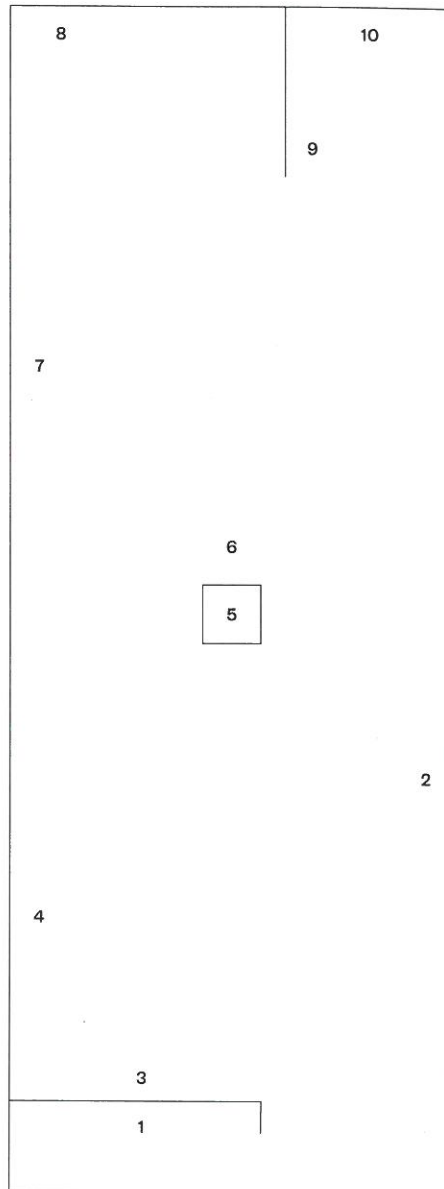
11 memorial marble stones, scraped with nail  
24" x 12" x 1/2" each

### 9. *Lenin's Tomb*, 2014

Three framed prints and vinyl text  
Dimensions variable

### 10. *Anatoly*, 2014

Electrician's tools and subtitled film  
Running time: 47 minutes



## Programs

Wed, Nov 19, 6-8pm  
Exhibition Reception

## The Lenin Museum

This new project by artist Yevgeniy Fiks reflects on the historical contradictions and complexities of intersections between Communism and anti-Communism as well as ideology and sexual identity. The project acknowledges the Lenin Museum as a site for memorialization not only of Lenin but of the fate of free expression of sexual identity in Russia in periods of criminalization between 1933 and 1993, after Lenin's decriminalization in 1917. The show reflects on how Cold War forces of anti-Communism in the West instrumentalized homophobic sentiments as a weapon in the struggle against the Soviet Union, and how the anti-Communist discourse contributes today to the construction of political homophobia in the post-Soviet Russia.

The James Gallery

Cosponsored by CLAGS: Center for LGBTQ Studies.

Fri, Nov 21, 6:30pm  
Conversation

## On Conviviality, Affect and Politics

Patricia Ticineto Clough, Sociology and Women's Studies, Queens College and The Graduate Center, CUNY; Jasbir Puar, Geography and Women's and Gender Studies, Rutgers University.

In a dialogue about theorizing affect and capacity, Jasbir K. Puar and Patricia T. Clough will explore the way they came to think about these concepts, and how their personal relationships, especially their friendship with each other, contributed to their thinking. What is the role of friendship in producing books, book series, special journal issues, and shared work with students? How shall we value this labor? How does academia encourage or thwart the love of work, and the love of friends?

The James Gallery

*Cosponsored by the Center for the Study of Women and Society.*

Tue, Nov 25, 6:30pm  
Gallery Tour

## Presence and Public Space

Gwen Shaw, Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

History, subjectivity, and social recognition rely on issues of visibility and legibility. This visibility often relies on the invisibility of others whose tacit absence gives meaning to larger structures of organization and power. This tour will discuss the ways resistance is possible—and most effective—through the strategic deployment of presence and absence, occupying space and affect.

The James Gallery

*Cosponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Art History.*

Wed, Dec 3, 6:30pm  
Conversation

## Russian Political Bodies from Lenin to Putin

Yevgeniy Fiks, artist; Jonathan Flatley, English, Wayne State University; Anastasia Kayiatos, Critical Theory, Russian, and Women's Studies, Macalester College.

What are the connections between Russian political history and the body? If the body politic designed by Putin today is strictly masculine, patriarchal, and heterosexual, how does this stand in cultural and political contrast with previous eras, when expression of gender and sexual identity was welcomed as part of a revolutionary society? Join a discussion about the intersection of queer and transgender studies, Russian studies, and history, with Anastasia Kayiatos, Jonathan Flatley, and artist Yevgeniy Fiks.

The James Gallery

*Cosponsored by CLAGS: Center for LGBTQ Studies.*

Thu, Dec 4, 4:00pm  
Gallery Tour

## Queer Memory

Jack Crawford, Art History, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

This discussion-based tour of *The Lenin Museum* will interrogate intersections of queer presence and institutional memory. Considering queer to be both an identity category and a critical modality, we will explore the question of how to remember queerly.

The James Gallery

*Cosponsored by the Ph.D. Program in Art History.*



Mon, Dec 8, 6:30pm  
Tour and Performance

## “Can a Homosexual be a Member of the Communist Party?”

Yevgeniy Fiks, artist; Harry Whyte, editor.

Join Yevgeniy Fiks and members of RUSA LGBT for a walk-through of the exhibition *The Lenin Museum*, in which he will explore the exhibition's artworks as well as the stories behind them. This interactive tour will be followed by a performed reading of a letter sent in May 1934 from the then Editor of Moscow's English newspaper, *The Moscow News*, to Joseph Stalin just after the Soviet leader re-criminalized homosexuality. In the letter, Whyte raises the question, “Can a Homosexual be a Member of the Communist Party?” and explores the contradictions of Stalin's decree from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.

The James Gallery

The Amie and Tony James Gallery is located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city brings a range of pertinent discourses into the exhibition space through innovative formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. As a space for artistic and discursive activities, the gallery works with scholars, students, artists and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary practices.

The Lenin Museum at the James Gallery is co-sponsored by CLAGS: The Center for LGBTQ Studies, the Public Science Project and the Center for the Humanities at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

Special thanks to Chris Lowery, Thomas Campbell, Marc Jayson Climaco, Matvey Fiks, Anton Kuryshev.

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# The James Gallery

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