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The art world's "hidden enemy"

by Julia Friedman

On accusations of ideological impurity and the abrogation of the presumption of innocence in the art world.

While preparing my latest lecture on Russian art of the 1920s and '30s, I was struck by some disturbing parallels between the current American and the historical Soviet cultures of "unmasking the hidden enemy." The comparison was brought on by a group letter, written in the style of an early-twentieth-century Russian Modernist manifesto and headed: "We'll stay silent no more over sexual harassment in the art world." Published in The Guardian on October 29 with over one hundred signatures, the letter called upon all women in the arts (it actually referred to them as "workers of the art world") to denounce their abusers, citing "an urgent need to share our accounts of widespread sexism, unequal and inappropriate treatment, harassment, and sexual misconduct, which we experience regularly, broadly, and acutely." These women identified...

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