



# The Concept Of "Socialist Realism" As A Universal Method

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## OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 28 March 2025

ACCEPTED 24 April 2025

PUBLISHED 26 May 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue05 2025

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**Abstract:** This article explores the concept of socialist realism as a universal method of artistic representation, officially established in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. It examines the ideological foundations, aesthetic principles, and implications of its proclaimed universality across various art forms. The article also discusses the limitations and transformations of the method, particularly in the context of its post-Soviet reevaluation.

**Keywords:** Socialist realism, method, ideology, literature, art, aesthetics, universality.

**Introduction:** Socialist realism was declared the official method of Soviet literature and art at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. More than just an aesthetic approach, it was conceived as a comprehensive ideological framework designed to guide artistic creation in accordance with the goals of the Communist Party. Its central premise was the truthful and historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development.

By positioning itself as a universal method, socialist realism was intended to be applicable across all artistic disciplines, from literature and cinema to architecture and music. This claim to universality made it a powerful tool of cultural policy, but also sparked enduring debates about its artistic and philosophical legitimacy.

## Theoretical Foundations

Socialist realism was rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology and drew upon dialectical and historical materialism. According to this worldview, art was not autonomous but functioned as a means of shaping social consciousness and reinforcing class struggle.

## Key tenets of the method included:

- **Ideological commitment** – Art must serve the goals of socialism and the Communist Party.

- **People-centeredness (narodnost')** – Art should be accessible and relatable to the working masses.
- **Typification** – The portrayal of typical characters in typical circumstances.
- **Revolutionary optimism** – The vision of a better future through socialist construction.

These principles aimed to direct artistic output toward the construction of a new Soviet reality, presenting idealized images of workers, collective farms, and party heroes.

#### Universality in Practice

The notion of socialist realism as a universal method implied its mandatory adoption across all artistic media. This led to the standardization of themes, characters, and narratives: the rise of the "positive hero," the triumph of labor, and the collective over the individual.

In literature, this took the form of the production novel and historical fiction with didactic undertones. In visual arts, realistic portrayals of heroic figures and monumental scenes became dominant. In architecture, socialist realism meant grandiose, symmetrical designs that reflected Soviet power and unity.

While this universal framework allowed for centralized control and a coherent cultural narrative, it also imposed creative constraints and stifled experimentation. Avant-garde and nonconformist tendencies were condemned as formalist or bourgeois, leading to repression and censorship.

#### Criticism and Transformation

Despite its initial dominance, the universality of socialist realism was increasingly challenged, especially during the Khrushchev Thaw and subsequent decades. Writers and artists began to explore more personal, psychological, and critical themes that deviated from official narratives.

In the post-Soviet period, socialist realism has been reassessed not only as a cultural artifact of totalitarianism but also as a complex system of values, aesthetics, and practices. Scholars like Evgeny Dobrenko and Katerina Clark have emphasized its ritualistic nature and role in constructing Soviet identity.

Some elements of the method — particularly its focus on social relevance and optimistic messaging — continue to influence contemporary media in post-socialist countries, though divorced from their original ideological function.

#### CONCLUSION

Socialist realism, as a universal method, was less a product of artistic evolution than a tool of ideological enforcement. Its proclaimed universality masked a system of aesthetic control that prioritized political loyalty over creative freedom. However, the cultural products of this method remain an essential part of twentieth-century art history. Understanding its theoretical foundations and practical implications allows for a deeper exploration of how art can both reflect and shape sociopolitical realities.

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