

SCREENING LIST

ST. KINDELEIN

The Butterfly (Бабочка, 1972), Directed by Andrei Khrzhanowski, Russian SSR, Duration: 10 min

Jabberwocky (1971), Directed by Jan Švankmajer, Czechoslovakia, Duration: 13 min

Hedgehog in the Fog (Ёжик в тумане, 1975), Directed by Yuri Norstein, Russian SSR, Duration: 10 min

The Dinner (Ručak, 1978), Directed by Zlatko Bourek, Yugoslavia, Duration: 8 min

There Will Come Soft Rains (И будет ласковый дождь, 1984), Directed by Nozim To'laxo'jayev, Uzbek SSR, Duration: 10 min

The Encounter (Зачепи, 1984), Directed by Mykhailo Titov, Ukrainian SSR, Duration: 10 min

Tyll the Giant (Suur Tõll, 1980), Directed by Rein Raamat, Estonian SSR, Duration: 14 min

The Butterfly (Бабочка, 1972)
Directed by
Andrei Khrzhanowski
Russian SSR
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Having earned recognition as one of the most important figures in Soviet auteur animation, Andrei Khrzhanovski was often unafraid to explicitly criticise Soviet bureaucracy and censorship in his films; as a result, several of his works were “shelved” for extended periods. *The Butterfly* is a visually striking example of his didactic approach, conveying political and ethical critique through metaphor. The film narrates how a butterfly, initially captured by a boy, grows to an enormous size, ultimately reversing roles and trapping the hunter in the net.

Jabberwocky is a quintessential example of Jan Švankmajer’s early surrealist animation, combining stop-motion, found objects, and grotesque humor to create a nightmarish vision of childhood. Loosely inspired by Lewis Carroll’s poem, the film consists of visual absurdity, presenting childhood as a space of violence, repression, and uncanny transformation.

Hedgehog in the Fog is widely regarded as a landmark of animation not only within Soviet cinema but in the history of animation as an art form. Directed by Yuri Norstein at *Soyuzmultfilm*, the film is based on a short story by Sergei Kozlov and follows a small hedgehog on his way to visit his friend the Bear Cub, carrying a bundle of jam for their nightly ritual of counting stars.

The Dinner stands as one of the most unsettling works of Yugoslav auteur animation – unlike many Zagreb School animators known for clean lines and restrained irony, Zlatko Bourek pursued an aesthetics of excess and deformation. A man is sitting at the table eating. In his troubled mind he sees his childhood, the war, his parents in a Jewish ghetto and all possible forms of aggression, which he has experienced right up to this day.

There Will Come Soft Rains (И будет ласковый дождь, 1984)
Directed by Nozim To'laxo'jayev, Uzbek SSR
Duration: 10 min

The Encounter (Зачепи, 1984)
Directed by Mykhailo Titov
Ukrainian SSR
Duration: 10 min

Tyll the Giant (Suur Tõll, 1980)
Directed by Rein Raamat
Estonian SSR
Duration: 14 min

Total duration: 75 min

Based on Ray Bradbury’s famous short story, *There Will Come Soft Rains* is a haunting examples of Soviet anti-nuclear animation. Set in a fully automated house that continues to perform its daily routines after humanity has been annihilated, the film unfolds without human characters, allowing architecture, machines, and remnants of domestic life to become silent witnesses to catastrophe.

The Encounter is the debut science-fiction animation of Mykhailo Titov, a director who would later often explore mystical and science-fiction motifs aimed at adult audiences. This short film tells the story of an alien tasked with establishing contact with a representative of human civilization to determine whether humanity believes in the possibility of life beyond Earth.

Tyll the Giant is a landmark of Estonian animation and a striking example of how national mythology could be reactivated within the constraints of the Soviet system. Drawing on the Estonian epic figure Suur Tõll, the film presents a monumental, tragic hero locked in eternal struggle against invading forces and destructive powers.

DREAM MACHINE:EASTERN EUROPEAN ANIMATION OF THE SOVIET ERA

SCREENING

AT 6:00 P.M. ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2026

"Give us a Soviet Mickey Mouse!"

Although the "Soviet Mickey Mouse," known to post-Soviet audiences as *Cheburashka* and today being one of the most beloved symbols of modern Russian imperialism, appeared only in the late 1960s, the demand for such a figure had already been articulated by the Communist Party as early as the 1930s. This moment marked a drastic political shift in the Soviet animation industry: a move away from early post-revolutionary experimentation and the stylistic exploration of the avant-garde *multagit-prop* – political propaganda and satirical vignettes aimed at adult audiences, such as Dziga Vertov's *Soviet Toys* (1924) – toward increasing centralisation and younger audiences. This shift culminated in the establishment of the state's first major animation studio, *Soyuzdetfilm* (later renamed *Soyuzmultfilm*), in Moscow. The aim was clear: to emulate the visual language of the ideological opponent, the American *Walt Disney Studios*, while filling it with Party doctrine: fabricating and placing the image of the "New Soviet Citizen" onto the screens of households across the vast empire.

Each successive Party leader, together with the economic and political conditions of their era, exerted a decisive influence on the cultural status quo of the Soviet Union, including the continuously expanding field of animated film. Over time, animation increasingly targeted not only children but also, in part, adult audiences. *Khrushchev's Thaw*¹ with its policies of "decentralisation and balanced ethnic representation," led to the industry's geographic expansion through the establishment of animation studios in other republics, such as Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine. One of the key variables – shifting from place to place and from one leadership period to another – was the degree to which ideological control was enforced. Censorship, to varying extents, was omnipresent. However, the post-war satellite states of the Eastern Bloc – often referred to as the "Soviet West" – enjoyed comparatively greater artistic freedom than the republics held on a tighter leash by the Kremlin.

After *Brezhnev's era of Stagnation*² once again tightened the mechanisms of censorship, many artists turned inward, adopting a tone of humorous pessimism and drawing on collective cul-

tural memory, while gravitating toward an atmosphere of poetic lyricism. Animated narratives increasingly embraced surrealism as a strategy of obfuscation: most stories became blurred, abstracted, or replaced by poetic, non-linear narration. This overtly pessimistic attitude can be read as a reaction to the official optimism of the Soviet society, which lived in the constant hope of a soon-to-arrive bright communist future³. Moreover, silent or near-silent films proved especially effective, since words tend to carry more concrete meaning than images and their exclusion allowed artists to rely on ambiguity as a protective strategy, minimising the risk of censorship.

Undoubtedly, the state-supported animation industry was, in many ways, beneficial to both the technical and creative development of the medium: filmmakers were able to produce high-quality artistic works without the pressure of commercial success. However, state control was often suffocating, extending to nearly every stage of production. Despite these constraints, many talented auteurs from across the Soviet Union and its satellite states developed profound and deeply introspective approaches to reflect on trauma and existential uncertainty. Some of these films went on to receive critical acclaim at Western European film festivals.

DREAM MACHINE presents a curated selection of Soviet-era auteur animation films from across the Soviet Union and its satellite states – including the Ukrainian SSR, Uzbek SSR, Estonian SSR, Russian SSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia – produced during the 1970s and 1980s. The selected works explore notions of childhood, the existential anxieties of the post-World War II and Cold War era, and the experience of societal alienation under totalitarian regimes.

- LESIA HUDZ

NOTES:

¹ *The Khrushchev Thaw* was a period from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s characterized by relative political liberalization, reduced censorship, and renewed cultural and artistic experimentation following Stalin's death.

² *Brezhnev's era of Stagnation* refers to the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s marked by economic slowdown, political conservatism, tightened ideological control, and a general sense of social and cultural inertia within the Soviet Union.

³ Pikkov, Ülo. "On the Topics and Style of Soviet Animated Films." *Baltic Screen Media Review* 4 (2016): p. 30.