

Moscow



Moscow Exhibitions
and
Performances

Fragments from the video-records of art life

PART 5 & 6

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PART 5

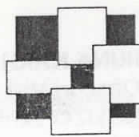
- I. Photobiennale - 96
- II. "Art Moscow" Fair
- III. Moscow Forum of Art Initiatives

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PART 6

- The Theme of Tradition
- I. Novelty as Tradition
 - II. Conceptualism as Academism
 - III. The Conception of Neo-Academism
 - IV. The Crisis of Novelty is the Crisis of Tradition



open society institute
SOROS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS, MOSCOW

MOSCOW'S EXHIBITIONS AND PERFORMANCES
FRAGMENTS FROM THE VIDEO-RECORDS OF ARTIST LIFE

ISSUE 6: THE THEME OF TRADITION

After about twenty or thirty years of its history Russia's unofficial art has by now become a tradition on a par with the official one against which it used to battle. In its turn it is being cursed for it by the new radicals. In this issue of our Video-Chronicle we endeavor to give visual examples both of the calm and stable existence of the 'new tradition' (Moscow and Leningrad underground of the 60s-70s; Moscow conceptualism) and the experience of constructing individual or group art by using tradition as ideology, or an artistic device, or a subject for simultaneous acceptance and rejection.

ISSUE 6. THE THEME OF TRADITION
were prepared by:

ANDREY SILVESTROV
JULIA OVCHINNIKOVA
MARAT KEDROV
ANDREY MURASHOV

VIDEO-EDITOR
CAMERAMAN
EDITING
SOUND

VLADIMIR LEVASHOV

EDITOR, COORDINATOR

I. NOVELTY AS TRADITION

1. **'THE NON-CONFORMISTS.
THE SECOND RUSSIAN AVANTGARDE: 1955-1988'
THE BAR-GHERA COLLECTION**
Tretyakov Gallery
August 1996

An exhibition of 47 unofficial Russian artists of the 60s-70s generation from the German collection of the Bar-Ghera spouses. Though not a major event, the exhibition drew the attention of the professionals and was accompanied with a thick catalogue. It displayed some remarkable works by the leading figures of the unofficial trend and others by artists well-known in their time, but half-forgotten by now.

Curators: Kenda and Jakob Bar-Gera, Joseph Kiblizki, Hans-Peter Riese, Rolf Wedewer

2. **BORIS TURETSKY. GRAPHIC WORKS OF 1959-1962**
Olga Khlebnikova's Gallery
Central House of Artists
September 1996

Boris Turetsky is one of the major figures in the history of Moscow's unofficial modernism. The exhibition presented his graphic works done at the turn of the 1960s when they rated as radically innovative. They are abstract compositions in austere monotone, with a touch of archaic genius. In recent years Turetsky has still been actively working, and though he no longer looks like a revolutionary, he is respected as an exquisite classic.

3. **'THE WAYS OF PAPER'**
Central House of Artists
October 1996

An exhibition by a group of artists, each presenting a large number of works, all specializing in the highly professional graphic field using paper not only for traditional 'flat' graphic art, but also paper reliefs, even three-dimensional sculptures. In the late Soviet years graphic art, particularly book design and applied art, was known as a permitted outlet for experiments. Today, as all over the world, graphic art is a preserve for free esthetic searches, or else post-production, material for compact travelling exhibitions – a realm where contemporary art has not yet come into its own, or has developed a sort of minor tradition.

Artists: V. Apukhtina, E. Izmailov, V. Lukin, V. Opara, V. Orlov, B. Turetsky
Curator: M. Valyaeva

II. CONCEPTUALISM AS ACADEMISM

1. **Andrey Monastyrsky. 'The Branch'**
XL Gallery
November 1996

Andrey Monastyrsky is one of the charismatic figures of the Moscow conceptual school, one of those who invented it. A guru and an anchorite, he never saw his work as anything but a strictly individual pursuit, a deeply personal reflexion. From his old actions as leader of the legendary group Collective Action to his infrequent recent installations Monastyrsky always produced, like a stage director, the possible mental scene as something real and significant. His exhibit at the XL Gallery was quite in his own tradition: a single strange and austere object (a branch (his time) accompanied by a bewildering verbal commentary. In his brief text for the exhibition's catalogue Iosiph Bakstein remarked, " 'The Branch' by Monastyrsky is certainly not 'the Branch of Palestine',* but rather a branch of power possessed by the artist..."

**quotation from Russian poetry (translator)*

2. **YURY ALBERT. 'SELF-PORTRAIT WITH CLOSED EYES'**
Centre of Contemporary Art
November 1996

This is one of the most original conceptualist authors. The exhibition in question was probably his most consistent, logical, and strictly minimalist one. The oblong white canvases were embossed in Braille alphabet with extracts from the letters written to Van Gogh by his brother Theo. That, in turn, was a translation from another cycle by Yury Albert (in which he had copied the said letters by hand) into the medium used by a social minority (i.e. the blind). The labels to the canvases and the invitations to the exhibition were printed in the same script in full keeping with the artist's conception.

3. IRINA NAKHOVA. 'DAD NEEDS A REST'

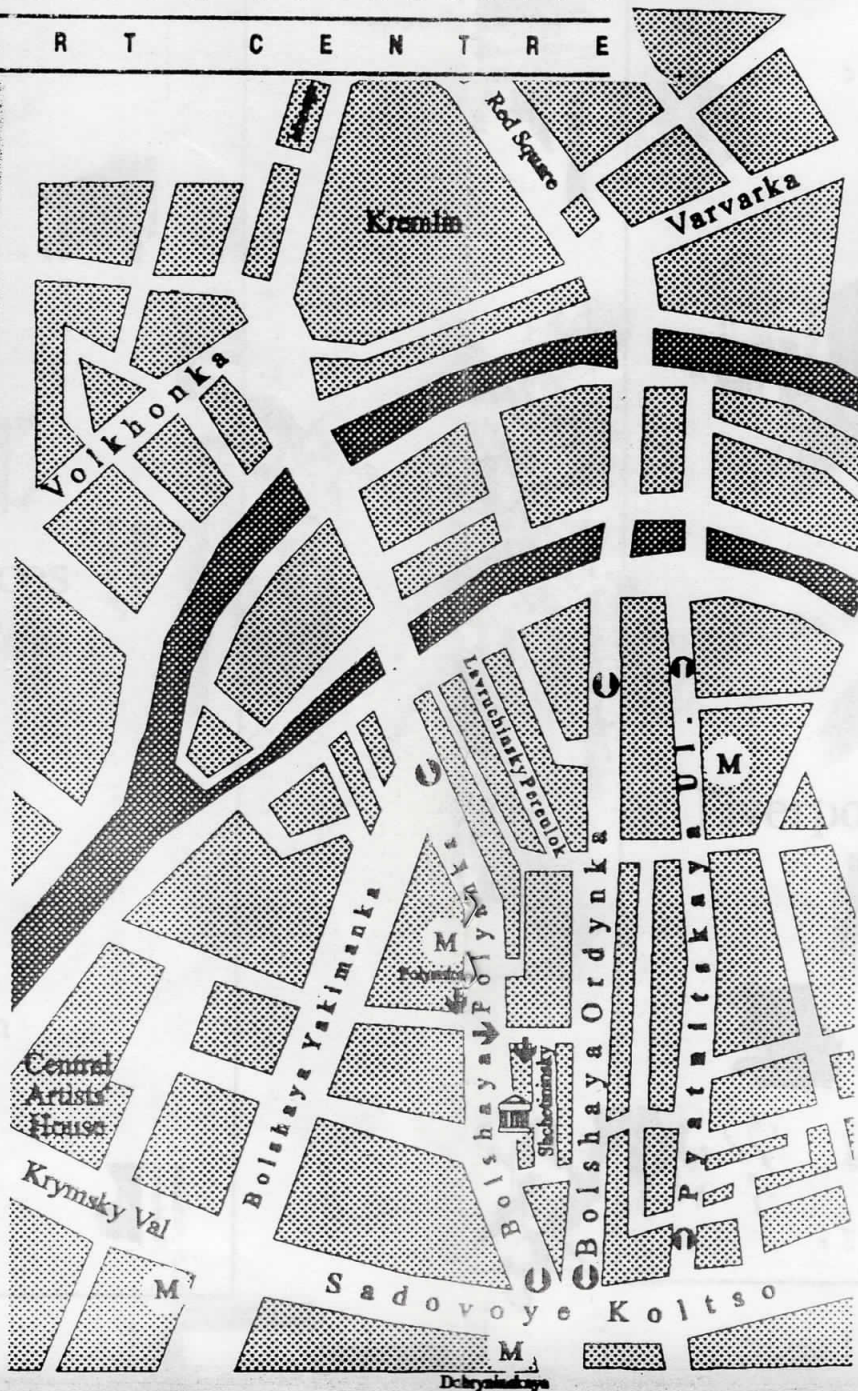
Obscure Viri Gallery
ROSIZO Exhibition Centre
July-August 1996

Irina Nakhova has always kept a niche apart in conceptualism, being interested in the interplay of spatial structures and the visual paradoxes of their combinations. She is still busy with those paradoxes, but now she demonstrates them by combining borrowed and self-produced representations with various objects and, still more important, with sound effects. Nakhova's exhibition at the Obscure Viri Gallery presents an installation based on a certain concrete object – a cushion (with the inscription that serves as the exhibition's title) which has a 'built-in' audio-player. The rest of the display is an associative development of the theme adding new meanings to it.

It is known that sleep 'rhymes' with death. That may have prompted Irina Nakhova to scatter on the floor plaster-cast cushions with representations of severed and disfigured human heads (the associative sequence probably being: sleep-death-crime-mafia-father that can be read in any direction with all possible deviations). The far end wall had a still video-projection of a sleeping man, the back of his head to the spectator. The arm-chair with the cushion was before him, the player was emitting music from Bellini's 'Norma' sung by Montserrat Caballe, the room was in semi-darkness.

The exhibition graphically demonstrated the canonical grammar of creating a work of art and the methods of forming its meanings in the local version of conceptualism.

M O S C O W C O L L E C T I O N
A R T C E N T R E



4. ELENA ELAGHINA. 'THE LABORATORY OF GREAT DOING'

Obscuri Viri Gallery
ROSIZO Exhibition Centre
October-November 1996

This was the first solo show by the veteran of conceptualism. Elaghina displayed nothing new to her style, but rather clarified some of her preferences that had previously remained obscure. Her installation 'imitated' the environment of the biological laboratory-cum-museum of the biologist Olga Lepeshinskaya who in Stalin's times was a follower of the then powerful biology boss Lysenko. In a pseudo-mystical way her activities were shown by the artist as a kind of alchemic experiments. Apart from a large-scale photo portrait of Lepeshinskaya with a real pipe stuck in her lips and puffing out aromatic smoke, the public could observe a glass case with antique (or looking so) tools of all sorts, and a display of many beautiful graphic sheets stylized as old illuminated manuscripts. The artist was present at the opening ceremony wearing a black suit and grotesque souvenir eye-glasses.

III. THE CONCEPTION OF NEO-ACADEMISM

1. 'Foreseeing the Past. The Classical Tendency in Contemporary Radiant Art'

New Academy of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg
State Centre of Contemporary Art, TV Gallery
Centre of Contemporary Art
September 1996

This was the TV Gallery's opening of the 1996/97 season. The action had been initiated by the well-known Petersburg artist Timur Novikov, the inventor, ideologist, and conquistador of the style defined by him as neo-academism. In 1982 Novikov founded the group called New Artists and went in for expressionist painting, later he proceeded to collages made of textiles which became his 'brand style'. Neo-academism was invented by him in 1990 and soon afterwards was given an organisational framework by his setting up a New Academy of Fine Arts squatting in Pushkin St., St. Petersburg. The Academy is Novikov's brain-child surviving only thanks to his strenuous efforts.

The exhibition 'Foreseeing the Past' held at the Moscow Centre of Contemporary Art featured a number of projections and images on TV monitors showing some static works and also films by several Petersburg artists close to the esthetics of the neo-academic canon. The group was strengthened by some artists from other cities (e.g. Sergey Shutov from Moscow) whose work has nothing to do with neo-academism, but serves to show that the trend is not exclusive or confined to St. Petersburg.

Artists: Andrey Ventslova, Yuris Lesnik, Yegor Ostrov, Maxim Polishchuk, Bella Matveyeva, Victoria Ukhalova, Olga Tobreluts, Oleg Maslov, Victor Kuznetsov, Vladislav Mamyshev, Stas Klevak, Frank Muller, Sergey Shutov, Vladimir Zakharov, Denis Nèimond, Vikenty Dav

Curators: Timur Novikov, Yegor Ostrov

2. TIMUR NOVIKOV. 'LUDWIG II AND "THE SWANLAKE"'

XL Gallery
October 1996

The solo show by the Petersburg artist, curator, and leader of the neo-academism trend set up by him – Timur Novikov – followed in Moscow the above-mentioned exhibition 'Foreseeing the Past'. The one in question was built round the two heroes of the gay culture – Ludwig II of Bavaria and Pyotr Tchaikovsky. In line with his 'brand style' of textile collages Novikov exhibited a curtain with the swan motif uniting his two different historical personages into one entity, and a series of graphic works done on wallpaper of classicizing pattern. The static sequence of his exposition was supplemented with video passages from films about the king and the composer (see the annotation above).

3. OLEG OLEAGINUS, VIKTOR FABERFERRARIUS

Aidan Gallery
October 1996

This is still another exhibition in Moscow by members of the Petersburg neo-academism – Oleg Maslov and Victor Kuznetsov who, under latinized pseudonyms, presented a series of pictures in which they portrayed themselves as characters of ancient and classical 'subjects'. The frozen painting of those works was in paradoxical agreement with the parodied subjects and with grotesquely ridiculous lastic qualities of the represented figures.

4. AIDAN SALAKHOVA. 'NEW ACQUISITIONS'
XL Gallery
September 1996

The artist and gallerist Aidan Salakhova staged her exhibition at the XL Gallery right before Timur Novikov on the same venue and his fellow-neo-academists Oleg Maslov and Victor Kuznetsov at her own gallery. As an artist, she has lately been known for monochrome pictures on classical and romantic themes, and as gallerist, she is given to 'beautiful art' and doing some antique trade on the side. This time she displayed quite a bit of conceptual resource: she had covered some of her own pictures ('Leda and the Swan', 'The Judgement of Paris', 'Aphrodite and Hermaphrodite') with a coat of gray paint and then had them X-rayed. As a result, she obtained an exposition including gray oblongs of seemingly minimalist pictures, their X-ray photographs with vague outlines of figures under the upper layer of paint, and the official forms filled up by the X-ray experts. Thus, the classical tradition was demonstrated in its present-day tangibility as antiques involved in legal proceedings and market dealings rather than the process of aesthetic contemplation.

5. VALERY KOSHLyakOV. 'MOSCOW-POLYHYMNIA'
M. Guelman Gallery
September 1996

Valery Koshlyakov has come to be associated with vedutas of Stalin's imperial Moscow and of ancient ruins painted with warm love and, at times, with real grandure. The pathos of antiquity stems from his personal temperament. This time the exhibition at M. Guelman Gallery contained just one painting, all the rest of the visual sequence consisted of photographed walls of various Moscow buildings overlaid with transparencies painted with phantoms of old architecture. The photographs seemed to keep the city's memory of the past, or may be its dreams of what never came to pass, and so could be taken either as an exercise in illustrating anew the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, or as a project of decorating Moscow in the classical style.

IV. THE CRISIS OF NOVELTY IS THE CRISIS OF TRADITION

1. DMITRY GUTOV. 'DILETTANTISM IN ART'
M. Guelman Gallery
October 1996

Dmitry Gutov may be the greatest traditionalist among his colleagues in radical art. His credo can be expressed through two notions: realism and humanist values. Possessing an excellent professional training plus an art historian's education, Gutov stays faithful to the Marxist aesthetics and the authority of Mikhail Livshits.

At M. Guelman's Gallery Gutov presented his realistic easel pictures and graphic sheets with most unpretentious subjects: portrait of his daughter, a landscape, a genre, pencil sketches, etc. Some of them are really good and fresh, but the author deliberately placed them among downright weak efforts, as if admitting publicly his creative impotence. He seems to convey to us that his return to 'orthodoxy' was aesthetically sterile, but he blocked any other path to himself. This may be taken as the artist presenting to the public his personal apocalypse setting off his 'stoic' attitude.

2. VLADIMIR DUBOSARSKY, ALEXANDRE VINOGRADOV. 'RUSSIAN LITERATURE'
M. Guelman Gallery
November 1996

The artistic duet of Dubosarsky and Vinogradov has emerged only lately, but it has enriched Moscow art with quite an original manner. The two of them paint large, 'made to order', pictures on extremely banal subjects treated so as to produce a comic effect. Asserting their conformist professionalism and proclaiming their desire to get orders they, on the other hand, sarcastically project the grotesque personalities of possible clients who might like such art - and that is their caustic comment on today's role of tradition and on their own place in art. Tradition takes the form of utilitarian public need, and they act as cynical and thoughtless producers of goods in demand.

This time at M. Guelman Gallery Dubosarsky and Vinogradov presented a series of their 'chamber' works representing books by Russian classics scattered among Russia's spacious landscapes.

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EURO ART - INFO 26

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