

Russia – Stalin and Afterwards/Soviet Union

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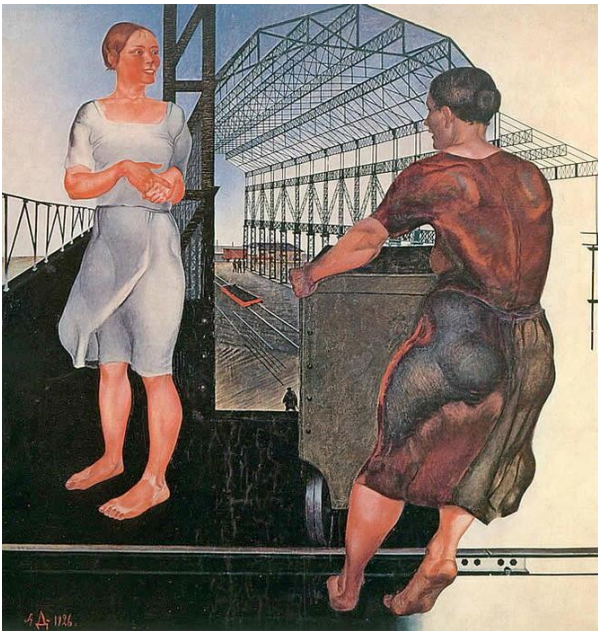
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Proletarian Art

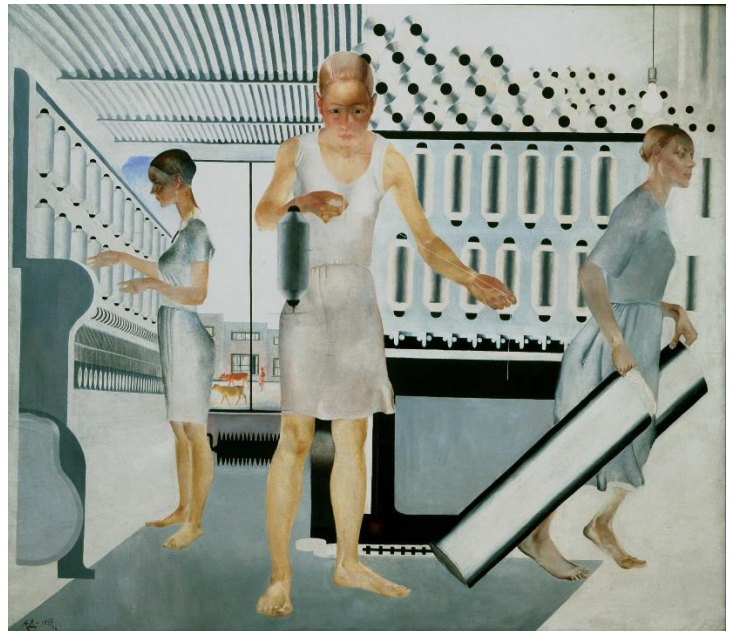
Despite Rodchenko's assertion at the 1921 $5 \times 5 = 25$ exhibition, painting wasn't dead. Further, not all artists were Constructivists. Many who had completed their training in the Petersburg or Moscow Academies before the October 1917 Revolution remained figurative painters. That was less likely for artists who received their education after the Revolution but teachers like Vladimir Favorsky encouraged his students to ignore the rejection of figurative art.

Aleksandr Deineka (1899-1969)

Aleksandr Deineka was most gifted of Favorsky's pupils. Born in Kursk, Deineka studied at Kharkov Art School and then in Moscow Art from 1921-25. In 1924 he formed the Group of Three with Yuri Pimenov and Andrei Goncharov, and one year later helped found the Society of Easel Painters (OST). The members of OST rejected the newer abstraction and also the older Wanderers' style of narrative content. One modern influence on Deineka was the Symbolist Ferdinand Hodler. Deineka's female workers have the same monumentality as Hodler's women in *Holy Hour* (1911) or *Sensations* (1905). Hodler's works were included in the three exhibitions of contemporary German art held in Moscow in 1924, 1925 and 1926.



Aleksandr Deineka, *Construction of New Factories*, 1926

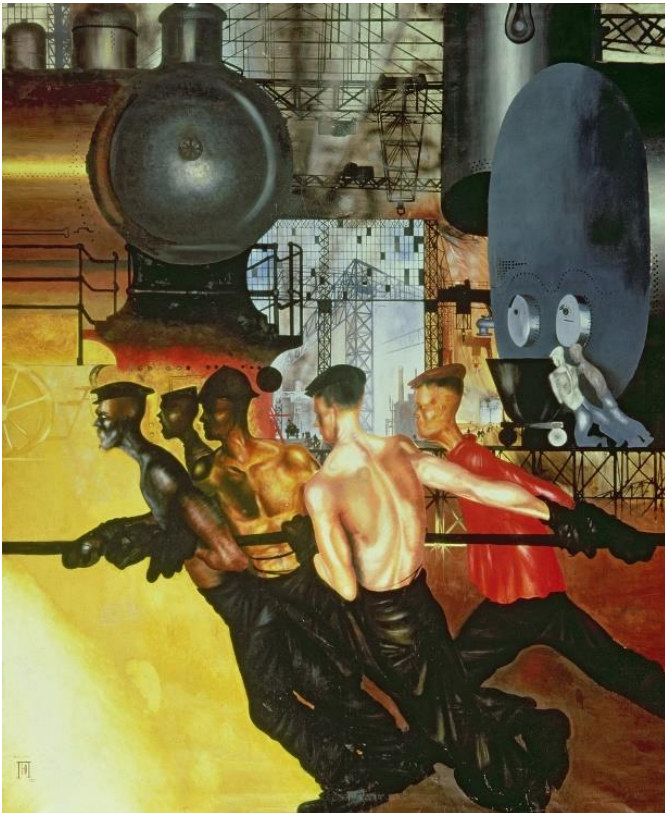


Aleksandr Deineka, *Textile Workers*, 1927

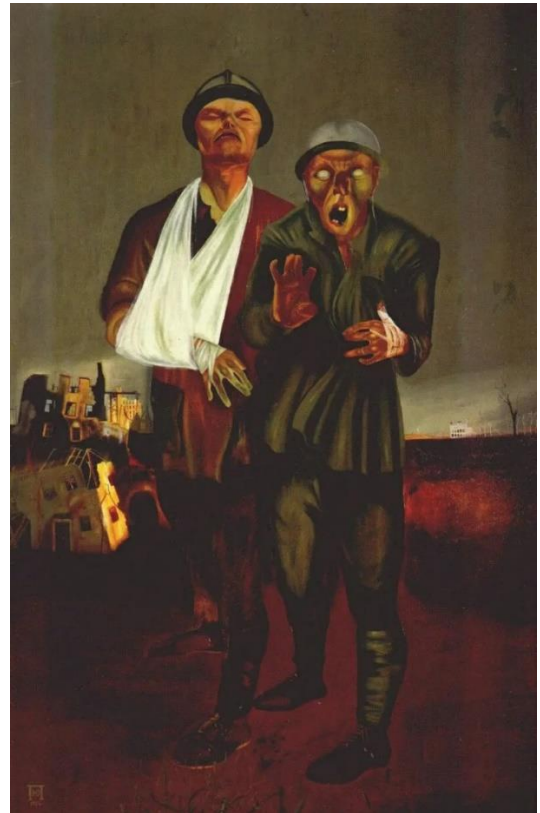
OST held four annual exhibitions in Moscow from 1925 to 1928, featuring works of young artists. Deineka produced his masterpiece, *The Defence of Petrograd*, for the 10th anniversary of the Red Army. The colours reflect the determination and courage of the soldiers (male and female) and the bleak conditions they faced. Those marching out are matched, group for group, by the injured returning above them but the latter are bent with fatigue and injuries and move at a slower pace, depleted by the dead. Whether or not a conscious choice by Deineka in showing that the defence of Petrograd was successful, the regularity of the angles of the rifles recalls the strong verticals of the lances of the victors (contrasting with the higgledy-piggledy array of those of the defeated) in Diego Velazquez's *The Surrender of Breda* (1635).



Aleksandr Deineka, *Defence of Petrograd*, 1927



Yuri Pimenov, *Heavy Industry*, 1927



Yuri Pimenov, *Disabled War Veterans*, 1926

The German art shown in the three shows in Moscow included works by the Expressionists Otto Dix, Max Beckmann and George Grosz. These influenced **Yuri Pimenov (1903-77)**. Pimenov had a psychological breakdown in 1931 and stopped painting. During the early 1930s, Pimenov destroyed many of his important canvases of the previous decade, even those that had been purchased by museums - arranging for the pieces to be replaced by paintings whose style was more 'suitable'.

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (1878-1939)

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin is usually associated with the Symbolists because of his 1912 painting of the *Red Horse*, which came to be regarded as a symbol for the social changes to come. Petrov-Vodkin was deeply committed to the revolution and from 1918 produced works which expressed the importance of ordinary men and women in building up the strength of Communist Russia. His paintings were partly icons; *Petrograd* was known as *The Petrograd Madonna*. A working-class mother embraces her baby protectively – a symbol for the need for people to nurture their new Communist state – while behind her crowds of workers, peasants and soldiers (who were mostly peasants) excitedly talk about the future. Largely because of Petrov-Vodkin's many images of women and their children, family life and maternity became a popular topic for artists as a symbol of the new hope engendered by the revolution.



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, *Bathing of Red Horse*, 1912



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, *Petrograd (The Petrograd Madonna)*, 1918

Like Deineka, Petrov-Vodkin was commissioned to produce a painting for celebrations of the anniversary the Red Army. *Death of a Commissar* shows an episode from the Civil War. The mortally wounded white-faced man is held by a soldier as his colleagues continue to march into battle.



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, *Death of a Commissar*, 1928

AKhRR (Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia)

An important group for older painters was the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, formed in 1922 by members of the Wanderers and painters who spurned modern art. The manifesto of AKhRR was proclaimed at their first exhibition in May 1922 to raise money for starving people: “we will depict the present day: the life of the Red Army, the workers, the peasants, the revolutionaries, and the heroes of labour.” AKhRR’s idea was lauded but their exhibitions were regularly slated because the art was generally of poor quality.

The best AKhRR artist was **Isaac Brodsky (1884-1939)**. He painted many pictures of Lenin addressing crowds. Lenin chose the Smolny Institute as the headquarters of the Bolsheviks; doubtless causing much distress to the ghosts of aristocratic girls educated there and depicted by Dmitry Levitsky in the 18th century [see earlier chapter]. While AKhRR could not boast talented artists, it did have loud voices. By the mid-1920s AKhRR had become the largest artists’ association in the Soviet Union with regional and youth groups throughout the country and its own publishing house, and from 1929 its own magazine, *Art for the Masses*.



Isaak Brodsky, *Lenin in the Smolny Institute*, 1930

Under Stalin the move towards realistic art and opposition to all aspects of the avant-garde grew stronger. Literature (especially) but also art was regarded as a dangerous source of subversion. Artists were sent for 're-training'. Alexander Rodchenko, whose unusual viewpoints in his photographs were denounced as formalism, was sent in 1929 and 1930 to document work on the White Sea/Baltic canal in the dark and bitterly cold conditions of the far north. He professed; *"I was taken aback. I was seized with enthusiasm ... I began to take pictures without any thought of formalism."* This response may have been heart-felt; it was certainly safe. To ensure similar conversions, artists and writers were sent to experience life at collective farms, building sites and factories. In 1932, the Party Central Committee banned all art groups and organisations, and set up one massive state union through which artists could be controlled. Materials and benefits would be given only to those who conformed to the requirement of depicting the socialist struggle.

Socialist Realism

Socialist Realism (SR) was announced as the official style of Soviet art in 1934. The origins can be traced back to 1906 when the Organisation for Proletarian Culture – *Proletkult* - was founded with the idea expressed by Alexander Bogdanov that; *"art is a social product, conditioned by the social environment. It is also a means of organizing labour ... The Proletariat must have its own 'class' art in order to organise its forces in the struggle for socialism."* *Proletkult* wanted to get workers to create their own art. That proved difficult, so workers performing art was explored. Alexei Gastev's *Shockwork Poetry (1918)* was the first book published by *Proletkult*. It contained poems with titles like *'Factory Whistles, Rails and Tower'*. A *Symphony of Labour* was performed in November 1922 by workers and soldiers in Baku using factory sirens, cannons and aircraft engines as instruments. These experiments largely failed and instead *Proletkult* decided that state art should celebrate the achievements of ordinary men and women;

art had to be optimistic, even joyous, and have as its hero the worker. It should be idealistic not just depicting what existed but that which was desirable and attainable.

Stalin's son-in-law Andrei Zhdanov in 1934 at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers defined the duty of writers to depict *"reality in its revolutionary development."* The prescription applied also to the other arts which should exalt the working people and their countries, their struggles and victories. No particular style was adopted but craftsmanship highly prized.

Older Artists

An example of the change these edicts wrought can be seen in the later works of artists covered in the section on Proletarian Art. Yuri Pimenov resumed painting and his best-known work shows the progress being made in Moscow: cars are common, public transport (buses and trams) readily available; new high-rise blocks tower over the Bolshoi Ballet where flags and posters announce that arts are thriving; an entrance to the new Metro can be seen. Pimenov's Impressionistic work shows that some flexibility was permitted in terms of style, as long as the overall sense was one of realism (ignoring the fact that only Party members enjoyed many of the things shown in the painting).



Yuri Pimenov, *New Moscow*, 1937



Aleksandr Deineka, *Defence of Sebastopol*, 1942

Aleksandr Deineka produced *Defence of Sebastopol* which abides by the SR prescription but is much less powerful than his earlier work. Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin abandoned his unusual perspective and produced detailed realism in a scene of a family alarmed during the siege of Petrograd by White Russian forces. The face and figure of the standing girl retain his sense of monumentality, but this is a comparatively weak work.

Both these artists were devoted to the Revolution and the cause of working men and women. But SR doctrine forced them to dilute their art. Stalin's cruel stupidity wasted a generation: *"the plain truth is that both Deineka and Petrov-Vodkin were true proletarian artists (Bird)."*



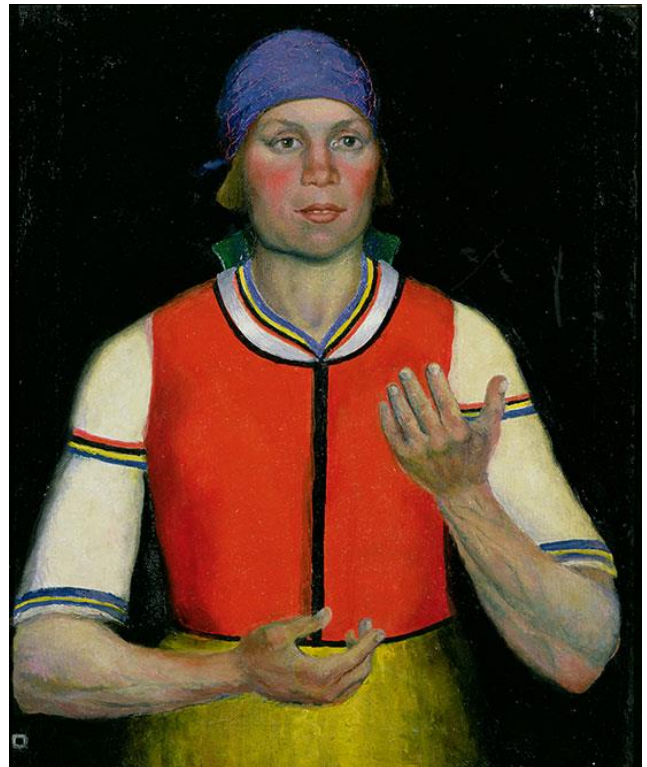
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, *The Alarm*, 1934

Artists cannot be blamed for abandoning their unique vision and talents to serve the requirements of the state. Those who did not conform faced horrendous consequences. Indeed, even those who had previously supported the Communist regime and produced official propaganda art died in prison camps or were executed. Vsevolod Meyerhold, who had welcomed the Revolution, joined the Bolshevik Party and put on many successful plays, was arrested in 1939, tortured repeatedly and shot in 1940. His wife, the actress Zinaida Raikh, was discovered brutally stabbed to death in their Moscow flat. In 1938 the poet Osip Mandelstam died in a transit camp after being arrested and exiled a second time. Mandelstam's response to complaints from his long-persecuted wife is an example of bleak Russian humour; *"Why do you complain? Only in this country is poetry respected – people are killed for it."* The writer Isaac Babel disappeared in a gulag some time in 1941. Gustav Klutsis, pioneer of photo-montage techniques for propaganda and member of the Communist Party, was arrested in January 1938 and shot a month later along with 63 other Latvian artists and intellectuals. Zhdanov kept up a relentless lashing of artists and composers. Even Deineka was not immune. Artist Aleksandr Labas, who himself was accused of formalism in the 1930s and banned from exhibiting (until 1966), commented on the effect of continual criticism from the *"petty and conservative"* people: *"Little by little Deineka too became like them."*

Modern artists (those who had not already fled the country) suffered most under Stalin. Constant abuse and persecution drove them to change their art. **Kazimir Malevich** was arrested and incarcerated for several months in 1930. His paintings of peasants have his Suprematist colour scheme, and memories from childhood; *"All my life the peasantry attracted me strongly ... I thought the peasants lived well, that they had everything, that they didn't need any factories or book learning. They made everything themselves, including paint ... Peasants always seemed to me clean and wonderfully dressed (from Douglas)."*



Kazimir Malevich, *Woman with Rake*, 1930-2



Kazimir Malevich, *Female Worker*, 1933

Temporarily, Malevich was given some leeway. He was allowed to show his work in the 1932 exhibition of *Artists since the Revolution* under the official line that Suprematism was necessary in order to 'purify' painting to allow the coming of Socialist Realism.



The artist in the Kazimir Malevich Room in the 1932 Exhibition *Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic*

Reactions (almost certainly orchestrated) to the 1932 exhibition gave the Party excuses to attack the artists. Afterwards Malevich used realistic faces in portraits, but still managed to get away with signing them with a black square. Twice (in 1933 and 1935) denied travel abroad to receive treatment for cancer, Malevich died on the 15th of May 1935. The Soviet government removed all mention of his name from histories of Russian art, and buried his paintings in museum stock rooms. Only in 1988 could the Russian public see his work.

The work displayed at the 1932 exhibition by **Nadezhda Udaltsova** [see Cubo-Futurism] was publicly denounced for “*formalist tendencies*”. Such was the pressure that she destroyed much of her early work. She then concentrated on painting scenes of rural life in Armenia, in a distinctive style. Artists in the republics of the Soviet Union were permitted various styles in their SR works as long as they were based on tradition. This freedom originated from Stalin’s statements in 1925 and 1930 that “*culture was socialist in nature and national in form.*” Simplified primitive and decorative paintings and murals were claimed to be based on old folk art, and bright impressionist-like works from eastern republics were justified because of the dazzling light and exotic culture.



Nadezhda Udaltsova, *Old Nork, Armenia*, 1933



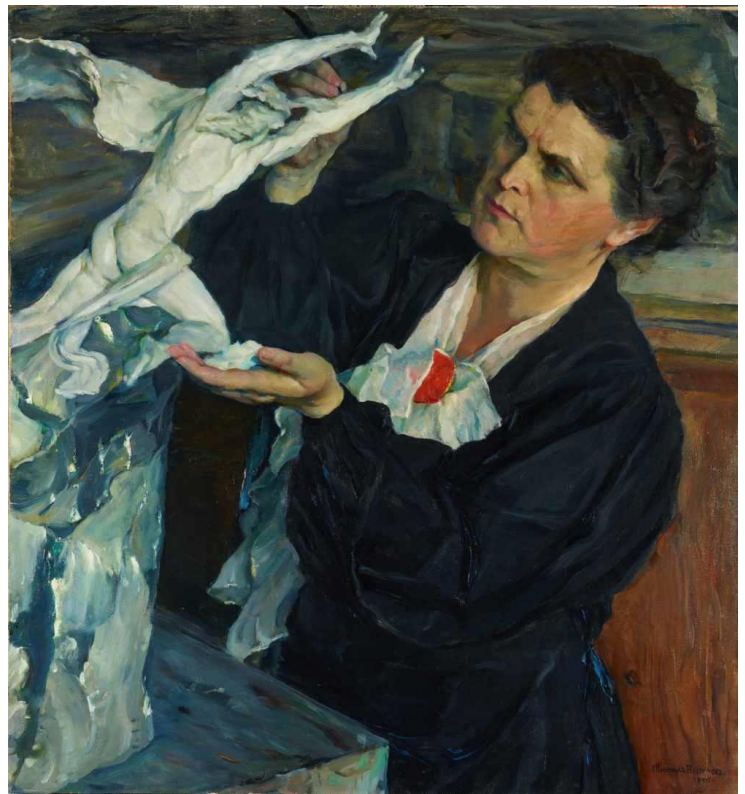
Petr Konchalovsky, *Portrait of Vsevolod Meyerhold*, 1935



Petr Konchalovsky, *Lilacs*, 1951

Portraits and still life were options for older artists struggling to conform. **Petr Konchalovsky (1876-1956)**, a primitivist and a follower of Cezanne, was regularly rebuked for failing to adopt SR, but he managed to maintain his colourful painterly style in his *Portrait of Meyerhold*. Konchalovsky painted many pictures of lilacs. The flowers regularly appear in his works and those of other artists, and must have held some symbolic meaning.

Mikhail Nesterov [see Symbolism in previous chapter] started producing scenes of contemporary life, but these were not acceptable to the authorities. Nesterov switched to painting portraits of Soviet heroes, in a wonderful near-Impressionistic style. Vera Mukhina, the “queen of Soviet sculpture” designed the *Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman* monument for the 1937 Exposition in Paris (see below). Nesterov painted many portraits of leading scientists; Ivan Pavlov - who detested the Soviet regime - being the most famous.

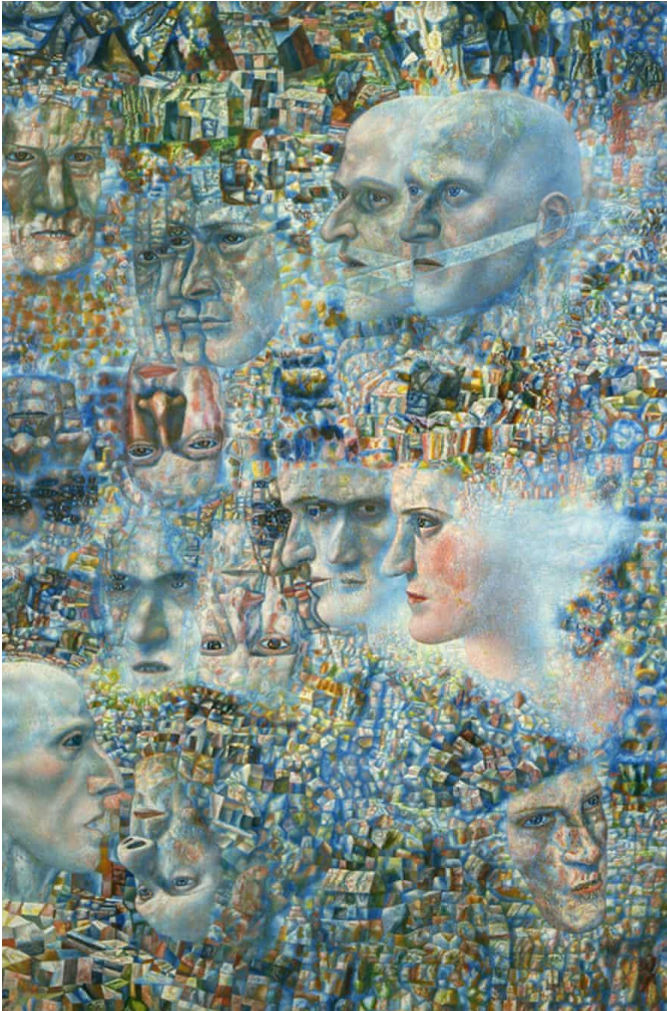


Mikhail Nesterov, *Portrait of Vera Mukhina*, 1940



Mikhail Nesterov, *Portrait of Ivan Pavlov*, 1935

Pavel Filonov (1883 – 1941) also suffered after the 1932 exhibition, being accused of producing art that was incomprehensible. Despite sustained criticism - “no other Russian Avant-Garde leader had to suffer during his lifetime from more frenzied persecutions; nor, after his death, from such global silence (Kovtun)” - Filonov retained his early manner. He felt an artist should devote his energy and skill to every tiny section of the canvas, building up minute details to produce a finished whole. This teeming dense manner, developed in his productive years before the 1917 Revolution, remained in many later works.



Pavel Filonov, *First Symphony*, 1935

Dmitri Shostakovich's *First Symphony* was performed in Leningrad in 1926. Filonov's painting celebrating the music was painted between the first performance of the composer's opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, in 1934 and the airing that caused Stalin to burst into vicious temper in 1936: “leftist confusion instead of music for the people,” *Pravda* reported the day afterwards.



Pavel Filonov, *Faces*, 1940

Filonov was orphaned at an early age and lived with his sister in Petersburg. He was poor and had to forgo art for manual work. Circumstances improved a little from 1912, but in 1932 when he was rejected by the Union of Soviet Artists, poverty became his lot again; every day brought no expectation of work; “On art, I cannot make money” (August 2, 1936). Unsurprising then that his paintings were pessimistic. Sometimes he had to produce work which paid; hence the portraits of Stalin and paintings showing workers. Even in this official art - such as the *Tractor Workshop* - his genius in composition is clear and, in the expression of the workers, his view of the regime. Pavel died of starvation during siege of Leningrad on the 3rd of December 1941. His sister presented 300 works to the Russian Museum after his death, but exhibitions of them were not allowed until 1988.

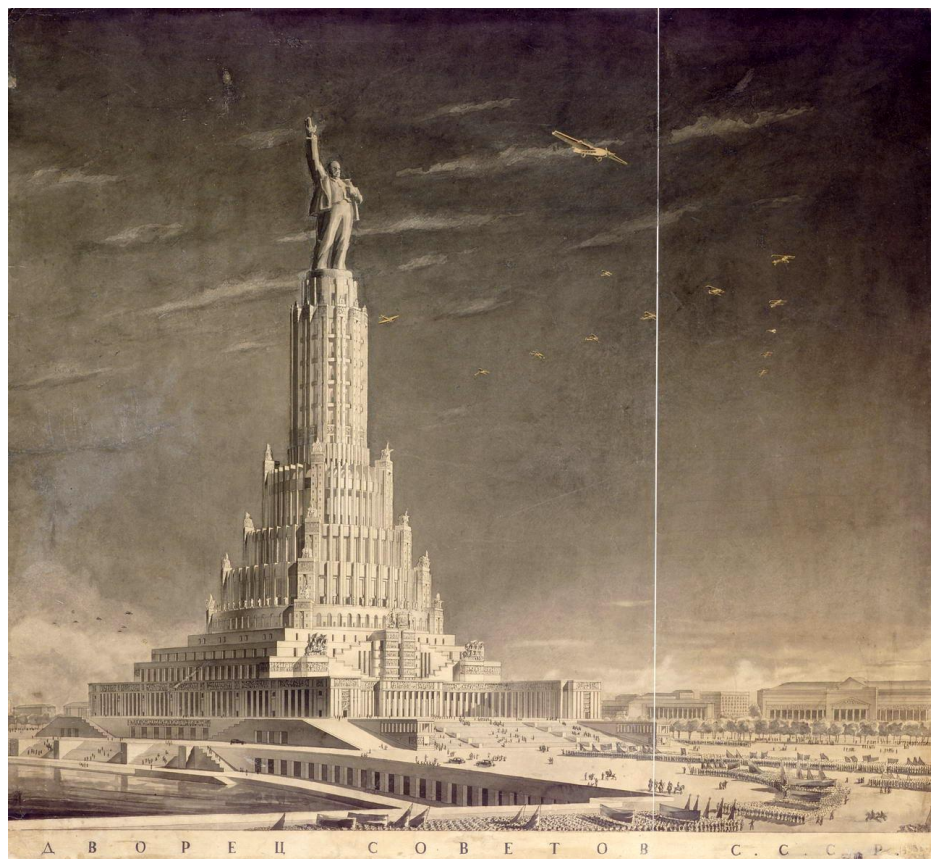


Pavel Filonov, *Tractor Workshop at the Putilov Factory*, 1930 or 1931

Architecture

SR architecture grew out of Lenin's idea of monumental propaganda [see previous chapter]. In 1929 young architects said that the purpose of architecture was "to organise the will of the masses for struggle and labour" – evoking pride and enthusiasm among ordinary people.

The first manifestation of SR architecture came in 1931 when the Party launched an open competition to design the Palace of Soviets. This massive building, which was to stand beside the Kremlin, was to house congresses and assemblies of popular representatives with two main halls for 15,000 and 6,000 people. All manner of designs were dismissed (including one from Corbusier). The presiding committee noted that functional design was not enough, but must incorporate, "an artistic treatment of the form. All the spatial arts must be employed: architecture, which gives proportionality of the parts; painting, which uses colour; sculpture, for richness of light and dark, in combination with lighting technology and the art of the theatrical producer (Catherine Cooke in Bown and Taylor)." Boris Iofan and Vladimir Shchuko won the competition with their final design in 1933 (right).



The 316-metre-high palace was crowned with a huge statue of Lenin. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was demolished to clear a place for the Palace of Soviets. The base of the Palace was built before World War II, but when the Soviet Union was invaded in 1941, concrete, granite, steel and other construction materials earmarked for the Palace were needed for defence and by the military. A similar design was adopted by Boris Iofan for the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition, the statue of *Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman* was produced by Vera Mukhina.

The pavilion directly faced that of Nazi Germany - the two bracketed the Eiffel Tower as seen below - which Albert Speer re-designed after he saw Iofan's scale models in Paris. Speer made sure Germany's pavilion was taller and seemingly more solid, topped with a statue of an eagle.

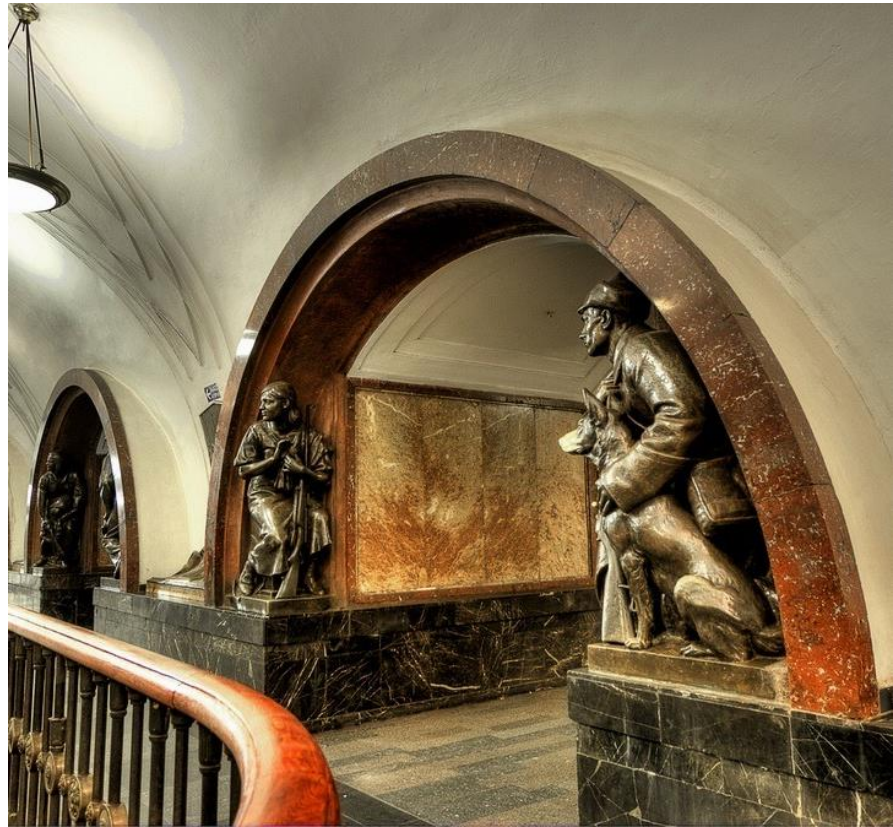
The construction of the Soviet pavilion in Paris in 1936 coincided with news of Stalin's show trials in Moscow, the publication in French of Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, and a condemnation of the Soviet regime by former apologist Andre Gide. So, the message of great progress in the Soviet Union conveyed by the pavilion and its contents was greatly tainted. Around this time, too, came reports from Germany of the first concentration camp built to exterminate Jewish people.



Back in Russia, the Moscow Metro was a grand SR project. The first line opened in 1935, but the first stations were regarded as failures because they were simply functional and did not include sculpture or painting. Stations built from 1938 rectified that mistake. Sculptures by **Matvey Manizer (1891 – 1966)** and Deineka's mosaics were integrated to celebrate revolution and labour.



Matvey Manizer, *Partisans*
(Partizanskaya Metro), 1938

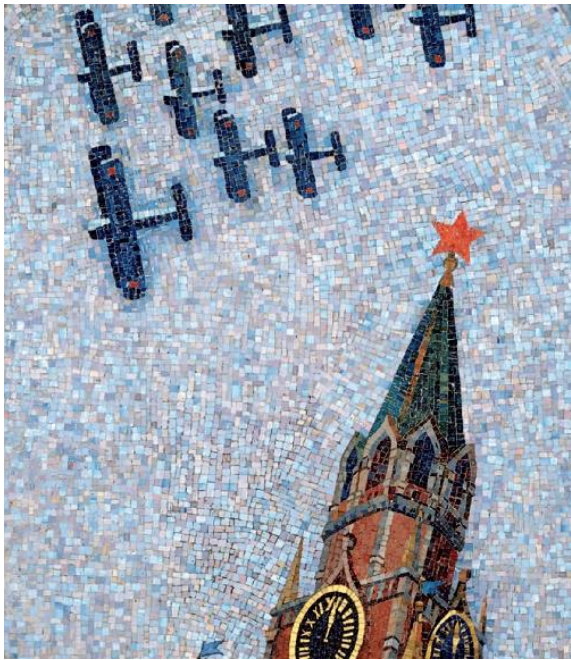


Matvey Manizer, *Female Sharpshooter & Border Guard with Dog*
(Revolution Square Metro), 1938

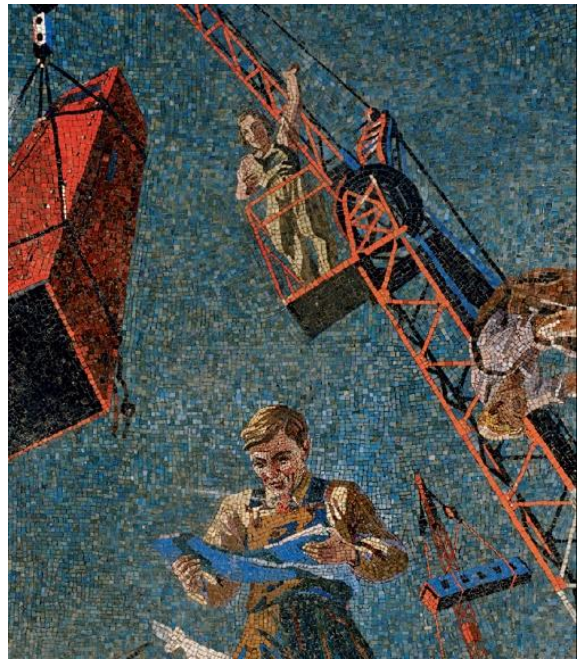
Revolution Square originally had ten pairs of statues by Manizer repeated four times (76 remain). They were figures drawn from the revolution and life afterwards. The seven women included 'traditional' images of mother, student, farm worker and Young Pioneer but also more modern roles; athlete, and as well as a sniper, an aviator.



Aleksandr Deineka produced 34 small ceiling mosaics in the Mayakovskaya Metro, inspired by the poem *Moscow Sky* by Vladimir Mayakovsky. He designed mosaics for other stations on the metro.



Aleksandr Deineka, *Kremlin in the Daytime* (Detail, Mayakovskaya Metro), 1938



Aleksandr Deineka, *Construction Site* (detail, Novokuznetskaya Metro), 1940

Younger Painters

Arkady Plastov (1893-1972)

Older artists struggled to conform, but SR was taken up by the younger generation quite enthusiastically. Arkady Plastov dedicated his work to the glorification of Soviet peasant and farm-worker in whose *“staunchness, spiritual gentleness, diligence and patriotism he saw the true qualities of Russian life. His great paintings were calls to action, icons of socialism (Bird)”*



Arkady Plastov, *Harvesting*, 1945

His lively technique lifts his paintings well above the production-line-like SR scenes turned out by most of his contemporaries. For eight years after his training, he lived in his native village of Prislonikha, working in the fields and, as the most literate person there, was elected to the Poor Peasants' Committee. This was the time peasants were split into classes: kulaks (rich peasants with large holdings who employed other peasants), middle peasants and poor peasants. Policy zig-zagged between supporting the richer peasants so they produced as much grain as possible and forcibly requisitioning stocks from them, until finally kulak families were eliminated through execution or slow death in the work camp or on the street. Plastov eked out a living in the late 1920s by working as a poster painter in Moscow during the winter before returning to his village for summer harvesting. In February 1932 he was given a commission in Moscow to paint large scenes of rural life. *"Just think of it, Nalya [he wrote to his wife in the spring of 1932], painting over a vast area the images of haymaking and animals, peasants — men and women, horses, the glistening noon sky, the swelter and haze of the magic days of summer. That was more than my poor heart could take in. I was hurrying up along a street nearly weeping with joy. Just think, after the hated, measly posters, after those themes bricked up in the deadly cement of conventions and measly techniques, suddenly painting in the full sense of the word ..."* (from Plastova).



Arkady Plastov, *Haymaking*, 1945

The commission received by Plastov in 1932 was an exercise in propaganda for the disastrous collectivisation. Stalin had announced in Pravda on 2nd March 1930 that collectivisation had left him *"dizzy with success"*, but it was a rank lie. Crop production plummeted and animal stocks were ravaged. Peasants destroyed their livestock rather than hand them over to collectives. At the 17th Party Congress in 1934 it was admitted that 26.6 million head of cattle, 43% of all the cattle in the country, had been lost and 64.4 million, 65%, of sheep. In the Ukraine the losses were worse; 48% of cattle, 63% of pigs and 73% of sheep and goats (Conquest, 2018). And these were official figures. All the grain was taken from the Ukraine, the North Caucasus and the Lower Volga to feed Russia (the same had been done in 1918 and 1919 under Lenin's instructions) and supplies into these regions for the starving were prohibited, resulting in a terrible famine which, as 1988 Soviet accounts put it, was organised by Stalin quite consciously and according to plan (Conquest, 1992).

Widespread famine resulted; 10 million people died. Conquest (2018) notes eye-witness reports.

Boris Pasternak: *"In the early 1930s, there was a movement among writers to travel to collective farms and gather material about the new life of the village. I wanted to be with everyone else and likewise made such a trip with the aim of writing a book. What I saw could not be expressed in words. There was such inhuman, unimaginable misery, such terrible disaster, that it began to seem almost abstract, it would not fit within the bounds of consciousness."*

Malcolm Muggeridge wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* of 1 May 1933: *"On a recent visit to the Northern Caucasus and the Ukraine, I saw something of the battle that is going on between the government and the peasants. The battlefield is as desolate as any war and stretches wider; stretches over a large part of Russia. On the one side, millions of starving peasants, their bodies often swollen from lack of food; on the other, soldier members of the GPU carrying out the instructions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They had gone over the country like a swarm of locusts and taken away everything edible; they had shot or exiled thousands of peasants, sometimes whole villages; they had reduced some of the most fertile land in the world to a melancholy desert."*

Brigades were sent out all over the Ukraine and would make formal searches every couple of weeks – even peas, potatoes and beetroots were taken; *"it aroused suspicion not to be in a starving state."* Pasternak wrote at the end of *Doctor Zhivago*, *"Collectivisation was an erroneous and unsuccessful measure and it was impossible to admit the error."* People who referred to famine were arrested for anti-Soviet propaganda and sent to labour camps for a minimum of five years: a doctor was initially sentenced to 10 years and later executed for saying that his sister had died of hunger.

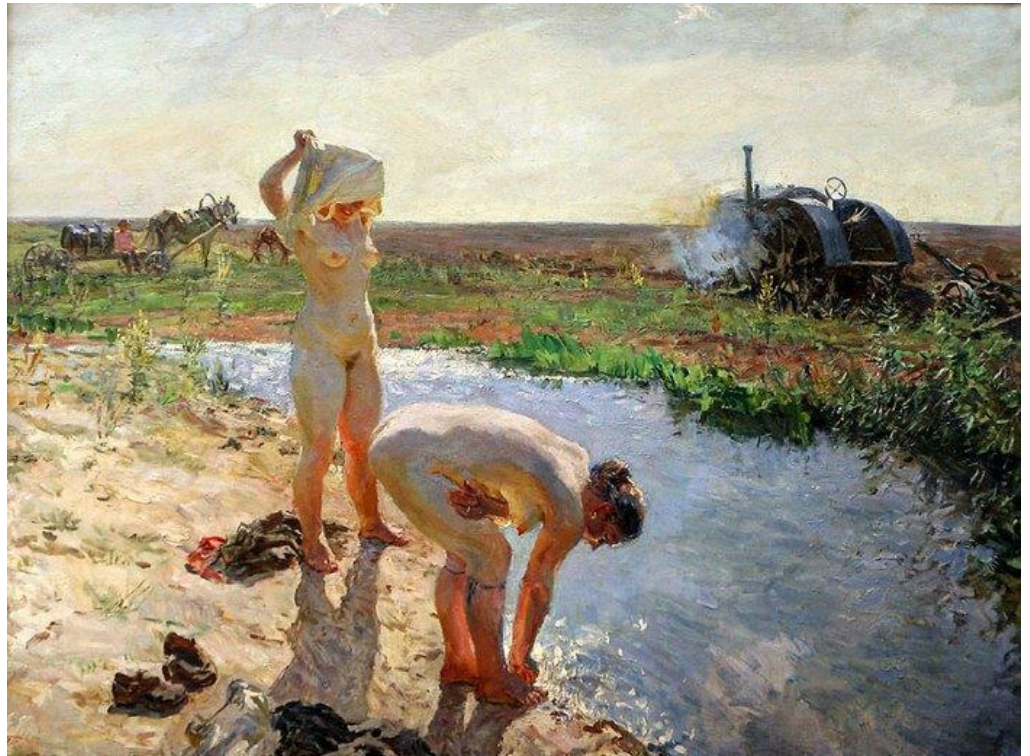
Back to Plastov: the commission allowed him to continue his work. He chronicled rural life and the models for his paintings were always the inhabitants of Prislonikha. He celebrated the renewal of life in the country by depicting ploughing, spring sowing and summer harvest. The vibrant fertility of the lands of Russia and its children are expressed in *Youth, Morning*.



Arkady Plastov, *Youth, Morning*, 1954

Many of the most notable SR paintings depict women working joyfully on collective farms. Mechanisation improved matters. Plastov's *Tractor Drivers* shows two women stripping off to bathe in a brook after a day's work on the farm – their menfolk away at war.

Women ran agriculture. The severe war-time losses suffered by Russia, the millions of men lost in Stalin's Purges and the continuation of the labour camp system after 1945 (Conquest estimates 15% of the entire adult male population were incarcerated after the war) meant women were the vital workforce.



Arkady Plastov, *Tractor Drivers*, 1943



Andrei Mylnikov, *On the Peaceful Fields*, 1950

At the reception held on 24th May 1945 to celebrate victory in the Great Patriotic War, Stalin began his speech with; "I drink in the first place to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding nation of all the nations forming the Soviet Union." This was the basis for Zhdanov to begin a new wave of repression. The Academy of Arts of USSR was created in August 1947 to stamp out any hint of foreign culture, whether from the West or the Republics. Thus, **Tatiana Yablonskaya (1917 - 2005)** was condemned for Impressionism in her *Before the Start* (1947). During the war Tatiana was evacuated from Kiev to a collective farm in the Saratov region where she worked for three years. Resuming her art career, she began teaching. In 1948 her students were sent for 'training' at the collective farm in Letava, praised in *Pravda* for remarkable harvests.



Tatiana Yablonskaya, *Grain*, 1949

In fact, post-war grain yields per acre were lower than they had been in 1913. All the grain from the Ukraine was taken by the state, by force, just as it had been in the 1920s and 1930s. On average a day's work on a collective farm in the late 1940s brought only half a loaf of bread (Hosking). It is no surprise that Yablonskaya's students wrote to her about the "awfully dreary place" at Letava. This is not, however, the impression conveyed by her famous work, *Grain*, completed a year later.

Yablonskaya joined her students and described her experience in Letava: *"the vast scope of work performed by the united, happy workers at the collective farm astonished me. Being there made me clearly realize what a big debt our art still owed to our great people, how little it had done to reveal all the greatness and dignity of the Soviet people, and the vastness of the Socialist reconstruction that our country was going through... I strove to express the joyous communal labour of our beautiful people, the wealth and power of our collective farms, and the triumph of Lenin's and Stalin's ideas in the socialist reconstruction of the village"* (from Polyanskaya). This smacks of propaganda, but artists were under threat, ordered to produce uplifting pictures.

The red truck being loaded bears the slogan, "*Grain is the power and wealth of our state*". Yablonskaya showed the women in traditional, flowing Ukrainian skirts, rather than those actually worn, but she refrained from dressing the main character with a traditional Ukrainian embroidered peasant shirt (in which other women are depicted). Few men are shown; at least that is accurate. The collective farm's chairman's presence is reduced to his satchel with newspaper hanging from the weighing scale.



Tatiana Yablonskaya, *Morning*, 1954

Yablonskaya struggled to match the success of *Grain. Morning*, famous in the USSR because it appears in school textbooks, was favoured by the public and art critics, and acquired by the Tretyakov Gallery. The work shows her ability to capture the mood and effects of warm sunshine in an arresting composition, but she preferred her other paintings to this one.

After the war, SR scenes were supposed to celebrate the new opportunities available to the people.

Aleksandr Laktionov (1910 – 1972) made his mark with *A Letter from the Front* and went on to paint the optimism of the new urban society. His photo-realist style drew criticism from his peers, but was popular with the public and Stalin too, presumably, whose cult blossomed.



Aleksandr Laktionov, *A Letter from the Front*, 1947



Aleksandr Laktionov, *Moving into the New Flat*, 1952

The New Flat depicts an idyll, but masked reality. New apartments were built after the war as part of Stalin's *High Buildings* programme. The Palace of Soviets having been abandoned, Stalin wanted an alternative. The seven buildings were intentionally not referred to as skyscrapers, lest anyone think that the USSR was simply copying New York and Chicago. The former Constructivist architect Yakov Kornfeld who had designed the Builders' Club in the capital of the Urals in 1929 spelled out the difference; the *High Buildings*; "were sharply distinguished from the western high buildings which are called skyscrapers ... born of the ugly system of capitalist land-ownership, speculation and commercial competition ... The Soviet High Buildings are based on principles of socialist humanism ... architecture and contemporary technology to make the life of the individual happier and his city more beautiful (Cooke in Bown and Taylor)." The seven buildings were government offices, apartments and hotels and Moscow State University (photograph below).



The *High Buildings* gave rise to the term “Stalinist Wedding Cake”. Function had given way to appearance. Nikita Khrushchev denounced the buildings in 1954, attacking architects “for skating around the problems of building economics ... indulging themselves with unnecessary ornamentation of facades and all manner of excesses’ ... causing excessive running costs through great heat losses (Cooke).” The buildings produced very little usable floor space. The direction of the future must be “standard designs for housing, schools, hospitals, kindergartens and so on with effective use of new materials ... and of pre-fabricated reinforced concrete components, large-panel and large-block construction systems (Cooke).”

The apartments and hotel of the *High Buildings* were reserved for the elite. Despite Laktionov’s painting the vast majority of people living in Moscow endured chronic over-crowding. Often a family had to make do with only one room. The communal kitchen and bathroom served several families. The acute housing shortage was tackled by Khrushchev who almost doubled the stock from 640 to 1182 million square metres (Hosking). However, construction was not done to a good standard and decay soon began. Nevertheless, SR Architecture was brought to crashing halt.

Stalin’s photograph may have been mandatory for the few moving into new apartments but the consequences of his cult were grave. *A Short History of the USSR* written by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR Institute for History in 1965 commented “The work of many prominent Party officials in science and culture was belittled in order to magnify the status of Stalin. Many men and women dedicated to the Soviet system were classified as ‘enemies of the people’ and fell victim to repression. Books mentioned disapprovingly by Stalin disappeared from the shelves of libraries, and valuable works of some scientists were banned ... the Stalin cult did untold damage to the country’s cultural development”. Zhdanov died in 1948 but not before appointing the old AKhRR leader Aleksandr Gerasimov as President of the Academy of Arts of the USSR. Gerasimov showed “an implacable hostility towards the slightest signs of advanced art and merited the epithets of ‘sinister’ and ‘evil’ which were showered upon him by Western critics and the more courageous of his countrymen (Bird).” However, the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent accession of Khrushchev brought a thaw in literature and the arts.

Severe Style

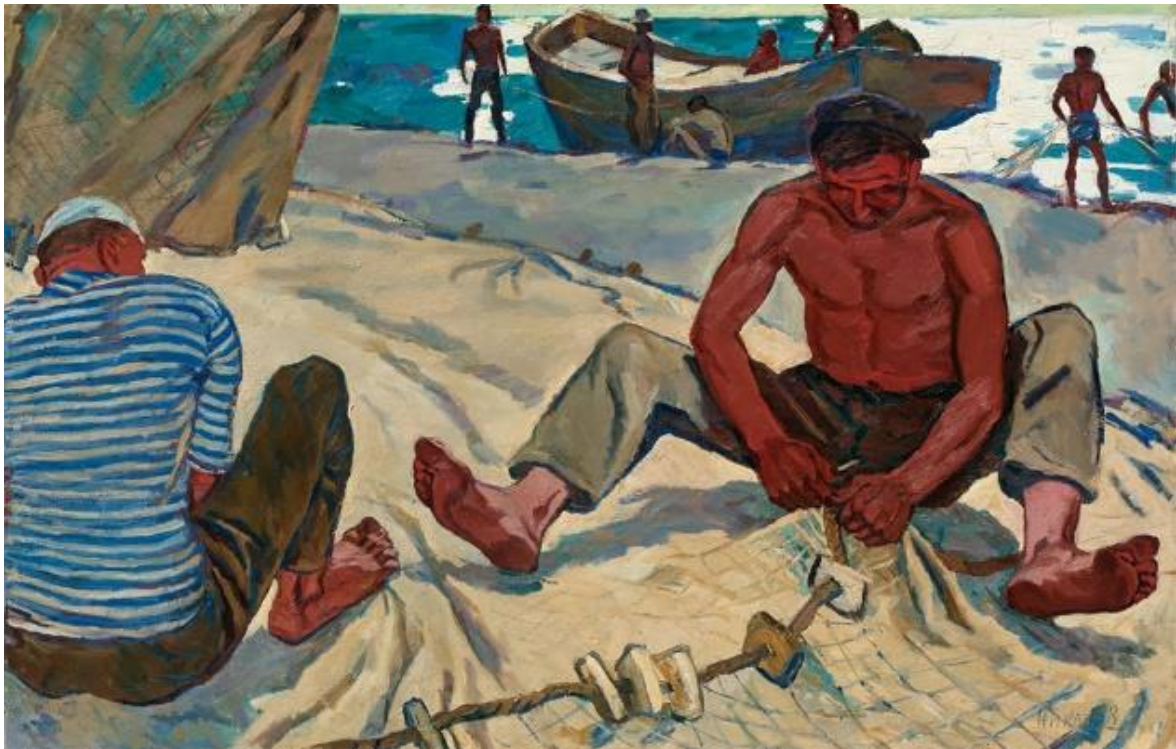
As well as ending SR Architecture, the thaw changed SR painting, bringing in the **Severe Style** (art critic Aleksandr Kamenski’s term). The obligatory optimism was abandoned. **Viktor Ivanov (1924-)**, a prominent exponent, rejected the use of art to glorify the state and its leaders. Instead, art should be more personal. Having completed his art studies, Ivanov decided in 1957 to move to Shelukhovo, the home village of his mother, in the Ryazan region. He painted themes of significance to the village; “Since then, every year, for a few months, I live in the village. All my work is about the Ryazan land, its nature and people. Portraying them I express myself.”

The Family, 1945 shows a young woman and her children now dependent on an older male (her grandfather?) after her husband was killed in the war. A common tragedy, although the painting, one of the first Severe Style examples, was criticised.



Viktor Ivanov, *The Family*, 1945 (1957-64)

Ivanov's paintings of peasants in Ryazan sometimes allude to past times, before mechanisation, and generally portray teams of farm labourers. The communal life of the Russian village is important. **Pavel Nikonov (1930-)**, who graduated in 1957, similarly painted scenes of workers.



Pavel Nikonov, *Fishermen*, 1959

After graduation from the Surikov (Moscow State Art) Institute, Nikonov was sent to Bratsk in Irkutsk and told to produce a painting on one of the Great Construction Projects of Communism. During WWII Soviet industrial plants were moved from the vulnerable west to the safety of Siberia. After the war the region saw development: the Angara gulag was opened in 1947 to furnish labour to build a railway and in 1952 it was announced that a dam and hydroelectric plant would be built at Bratsk. Stalin's idea of a SR painting celebrating this project would have been very different to Nikonov's, which shows the harsh working conditions endured by men and women whose line of march to work recalls Deineka's *Defence of Petrograd*.



Pavel Nikonov, *Our Weekdays*, 1960

Nikolai Andronov (1929-) also graduated from the Surikov Institute and, like Nikonov was sent to paint a Great Project; the Kuybyshev *Hydroelectric Power-Station*, built on the Volga from 1950 to 1957. No good copy is available of this work, but workers are shown realistically, rather than as Stakhanovite heroes. Yet, both Nikonov and Andronov recognise the strength and dignity of people who go about their arduous jobs in difficult conditions for small rewards. The monumental size of Andronov's *Rafters* conveys the commonsense and straightforwardness of those who actually did the work in the Soviet Union.



Nikolai Andronov, *The Rafters (or Ferrymen)*, 1960-1

Andronov was drawn to scenes of villagers saying goodbye to their young men leaving for distant battlefields. *Seeing Them Off* has the feel of an icon. Several Severe Style artists shared this interest in farewells. All considered the distress of the women left behind rather than the heroism of youth. **Evsei Moiseenko (1916-88)** painted a series *Mothers and Sisters* in the 1960s which depicted women watching their men disappear into the distance during the Great Patriotic War. The idea came from the artist's experience of WWII; "I remember my mother when she saw me to the war and how I came home and went away again from the village when I was a soldier. I couldn't forget the women's eyes."



Nikolai Andronov, *Seeing Them Off*, 1965-7



Evsei Moiseenko, *Mothers Sisters*, 1967

Viktor Popkov (1932-1974) was sent to the same construction project as Nikonov around the same time, producing *Builders of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Station* (1960). He turned to more personal paintings in the mid-1960s. *Mezen Widows Cycle* (1966-68) portrays the devastating effect of men lost in war.



Viktor Popkov, *Memories, Widows*, 1966

Popkov remembered an occasion when elderly women visited the old lady with whom he was lodging in Mezen in the far north of Russia. They "sat there for a long time, recollecting the past ... I lay on the bare floor by the wall and looked up at them. I must have dozed off or my concentration lapsed, and when I came to my senses ... I remembered my father, killed at the battlefront when he was just 35, and my mother's unhappiness, and the whole tragic sense of what was taking place before my eyes. How was this possible! Why, for God's sake, were they so alone? Where were their husbands and their children? Where was the happiness which should have belonged to them? Why had fate been so unkind towards them?" (Exhibition Notes, Somerset House 2014).

Gely Korzhev (1925-2012)

Gely Korzhev's art was also shaped by war memories. *Traces of War* from his *Burnt by the Fire of War* cycle spurns the traditional SR war-hero-in-triumphant-action scene and shows an example of the personal cost; the soldier no less a hero than Deineka's defenders. *Mother* conveys the quiet anguish of loss.



Gely Korzhev, *Traces of War*, 1963-4



Gely Korzhev, *Mother*, 1964-7

The Soviet Union endured much more terrible and prolonged hardships, heavier losses, than any other ally in the defeat of Nazi Germany. Peace brought a deep appreciation of simple pleasures. *Lovers* is a classic Severe Style work, seemingly of a serene moment enjoyed during a trip to the sea.



Gely Korzhev, *Lovers*, 1959

But Korzhev's description of the painting provides a glimpse of the nature of artistic creation:

"In 'Lovers', there is an echo of war. It was painful to work on it. First, I imaged a scene: the seashore, two figures, and a motorcycle. This came to me instantly. But who these people were, what their life stories were like - I didn't know. The composition wouldn't come together. Quite by accident, I met an older man who worked as a laboratory assistant in a research institute. He told me about himself and his life. When he was very young, still a boy, he participated in the Civil War and organized collective farms. At the outbreak of World War Two, he joined the volunteer infantry. He was wounded at the front. The man's life, so closely intertwined with the life of Russia, appeared very interesting and significant to me. I realized that such a person was dear and close to me, and he became the hero of my painting. My initial idea became filled with meaning, the content materialized and the painting came alive (from Dyakonitsyna)."

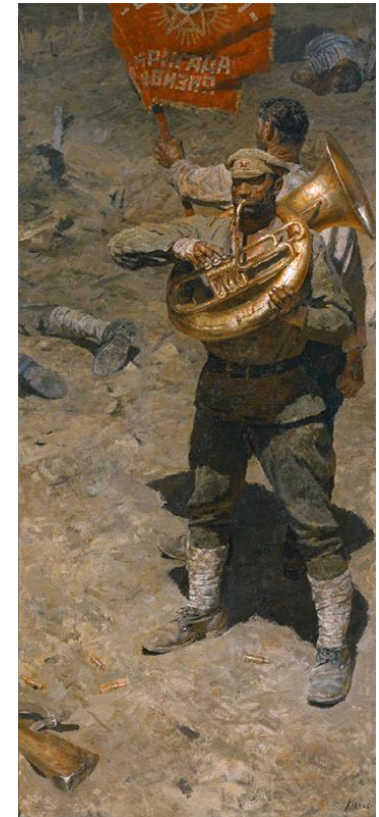
Perhaps meeting this man prompted Korzhev to produce the triptych *Communists*, a celebration of the courage of workers and Red Army soldiers who secured victory in Civil War.



Homer (The Studio)



Raising the Banner



Internationale

Gely Korzhev, *Communists*, 1957-1960



Gely Korzhev, *Before a Long Journey*, 1976

The quiet heroes and heroines of war feature heavily: ordinary people asked to do extraordinary acts. In *Before a Long Journey* self-doubt and apprehension are writ in the young woman's face as she prepares to leave for action. She seems to look to us through the mirror for re-assurance. After all, the long journey may end in death. This is a rare departure painting from Korzhev.

Clouds of 1945 returns to the more usual aftermath. An elderly couple absorbed in their memories – he having lost a leg in the war, her hands rough from labour – rest in warm sunshine in a summer field. They are surrounded by new life; verdant grass, delicate flowers, full leafy foliage and a young girl who stares avidly at the horizon. The hardships of their lives have not separated them and have proved worthwhile - their history preparing the way for the girl's future.



Gely Korzhev, *Clouds of 1945*, 1980-85

Tair Salakhov (1928 - 2021)

Tair Salakhov also portrayed the everyday circumstances of workers. In 1949 oil was discovered beneath the Caspian Sea, prompting the building off the coast from Baku of the settlement of Neft Daşları (Oil Rocks) entirely on artificial islands connected by trestle bridges out onto the open sea. The first trestle bridge path was built in 1952. Extensive development of Neft Daşları began in 1958.



Salakhov was commissioned to spend three months there documenting the Great Project. His *After Watch* shows workers negotiating the path having returned from work by truck over the first trestle bridge, shown in the background. There are shades of Deineka's procession of people, and Salakhov conveys the precariousness of daily work at what was the first offshore oil platform in the world.



Tair Salakhov, *After Watch (The Shift is Over)*, 1957

Salakhov produced many images of the oil industry of the Caspian Sea. *Repairmen* has more monumental figures, perhaps in recognition of their technical expertise as mechanics and engineers. Reflecting the skilled status of the men, their journey to work seems rather safer than the commute of the labourers in *After Watch*. The *Morning* scene suggests that the oil industry dominated the life of communities – the truck bearing new pipes bears down threateningly on a saloon car whose occupants are already alarmed by the rumble of the passing train above them.



Tair Salakhov, *Repairmen*, 1960



Tair Salakhov, *Oil-tank Train, Morning*, 1958

One of Salakhov's most celebrated works, *To You, Humankind!*, was first displayed at the Azerbaijan Republican Exhibition which opened in Baku on 11 April 1961. This was the period of Soviet exploration of space which ruined America's complacent sense of superiority. The Sputnik I mission in 1957 exploded fear in the breasts of the inhabitants of Washington DC just as much those in the Midwest heartland – a fear which grew as the little satellite continued to orbit Earth for two months, traversing the USA 1,440 times. The achievement sparked great joy in the USSR and among its emigres; Natalya Goncharova was inspired late in her life in France to paint again.



Natalya Goncharova, *Space*, 1957-8



Natalya Goncharova, *Arc*, 1958

Sputnik 1 initiated the Space Race to put a man into orbit. America had chosen seven astronauts in April 1959. The Soviet Union began its extensive selection programme two months later. Twenty cosmonauts emerged successfully by the end of the year, and a Cosmonaut Training Centre was opened early in 1960. It was natural, then, that Salakhov would be inspired to paint on the theme. Astonishingly, the day after the Baku exhibition opened Yuri Gagarin successfully orbited Earth aboard Vostok 1; an event that raised Salakhov's picture to iconic status and reduced Americans to gibbering wrecks.



Tair Salakhov, *To You, Humankind!*, 1961

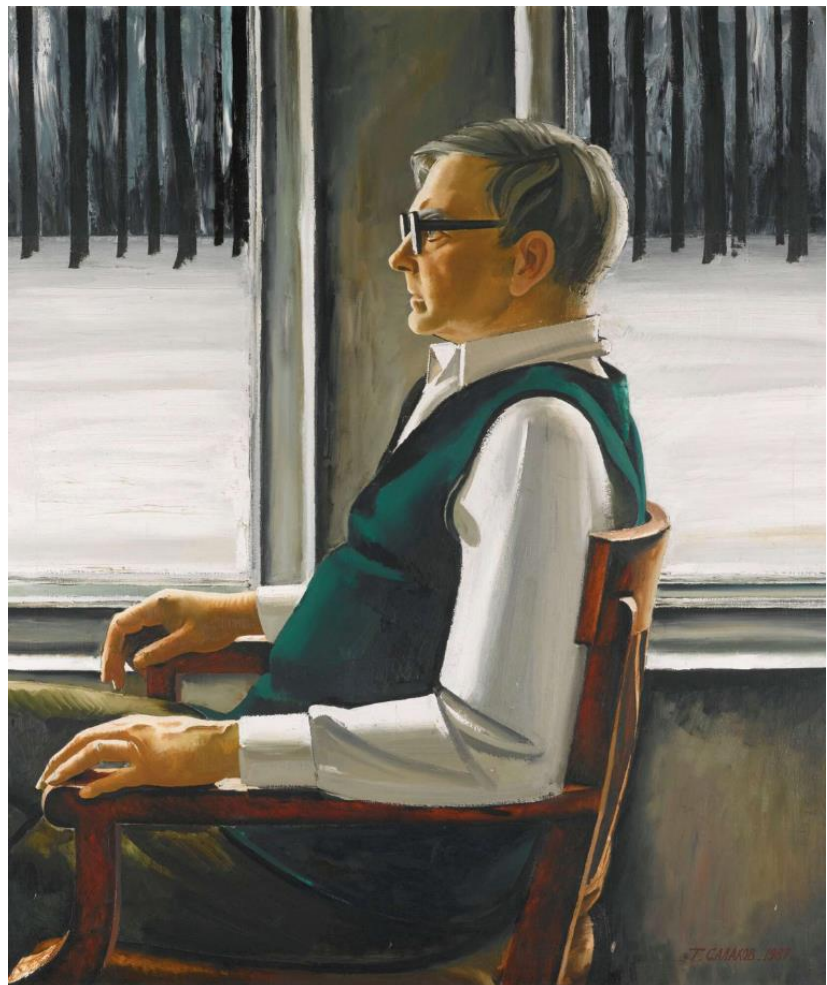
Salakhov became noted for his portraits of composers and writers. Many were commissioned to celebrate winners of the Stalin Prize, yet he did not portray them in the manner which the eponymous leader would have demanded. Indeed, many of the winners had suffered under Stalin. Art critics consider that Salakhov's approach arose from the arrest and execution in 1937 of his father, Teymur, a victim of Stalin's Purges. Composer Gara Garayev wrote the score for the 1958 documentary *A Story About the Oil Workers of the Caspian Sea* about the area which Salakhov had painted. Salakhov wrote of Garayev; *"I must say that I indeed have been fortunate, not only because I had the chance to meet such a talented musical personality but because I got to know him through his music. This is the only way to get deep inside an artist-through music. Everything trivial and insignificant - the things one pays attention to during mundane, everyday meetings - disappears. Only the essence of a man is left."*



Tair Salakhov, *Portrait of Gara Garayev*, 1960

Among Salakhov's subjects were Garayev's teacher Shostakovich. The version painted in the mid-1970s shows the composer seemingly under the same strain as Julian Barnes wrote about him in *The Noise of Time* (2016). The 1987 version still has the sense of a man waiting for the sound of boots and hammering on the door.

Tair Salakhov had a long productive career. He painted landscapes of Azerbaijan, a series set in Spain, as well as still-life. He was instrumental in bringing the works of Western artists to Russia in the 1980s.



Tair Salakhov, *Portrait of Dmitri Shostakovich*, 1987

Dmitry Zhilinsky (1927 - 2015)

Dmitry Zhilinsky was born at an educational commune in St Peterburg. Dmitry's paternal grandparents (his grandma was the younger sister of Valentin Serov) were educated at the commune as well as working on a farm there. In 1929 they were branded *kulaks*. Dmitry's grandfather was executed and his father was sentenced to death. His mother hurried to Moscow and managed to get a reprieve, but this proved temporary; Dmitry's father was executed in 1938. Dmitry Zhilinsky studied from 1946 at the Moscow State Art Institute where he developed a painting method new to Soviet art – precise figures, silhouettes with very little modelling, and patches of eye-catching colour deployed in striking contrasts across the surface (reminiscent of Piero della Francesca's art, though it must be doubted this was an influence). Zhilinsky's style was first seen in *By the Sea*.



Dmitry Zhilinsky, *By the Sea, Family*, 1964 (tempera on hardboard)

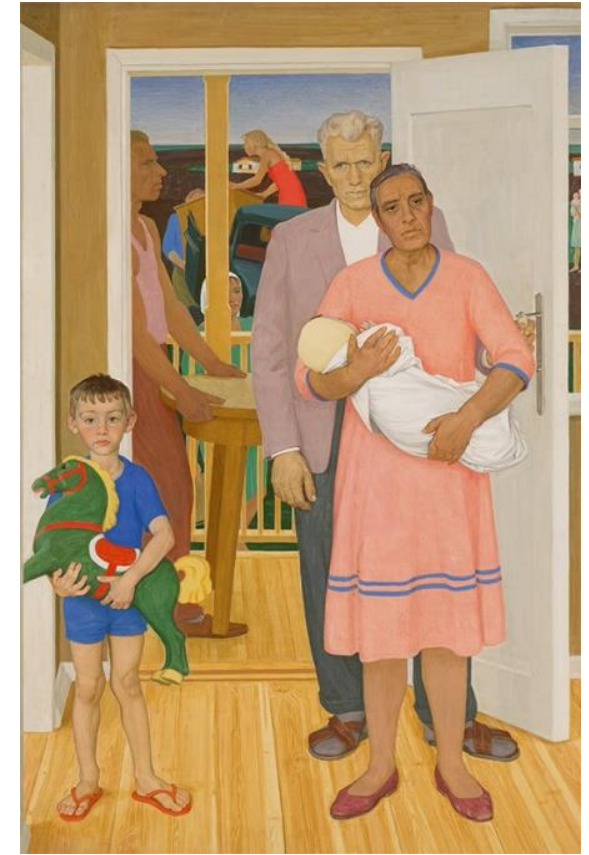
Zhilinsky treasured his relatives and friends; they often feature in his paintings. *By the Sea* shows Zhilinsky displaying a fish to his two children and his wife Nina. Her striking pose holds them in protective safety, her arms mirroring the gesture of Piero's *Madonna of the Misericordia*. Like the other painters, Zhilinsky was sent to a Great Project. At the start of Nikita Khrushchev's reign, Soviet agriculture could not feed the population which suffered regular, often severe, food shortages. Khrushchev initiated the Virgin Lands project to cultivate 13 million hectares of previously untouched land, along the right bank of the Volga, and in Siberia, Kazakhstan and the Caucasus. Zhilinsky visited the Virgin Lands in 1961 and produced a triptych. The original (now lost) did not satisfy the artist, and he painted another version including his own friends rather than the actual workers.



Construction



Celebration



Into the New House

Dmitry Zhilinsky, *New Lands*, 1967

Khrushchev did not want agricultural workers already working on collective farms involved in the Virgin Land project. Instead, he advertised the venture as an opportunity for youngsters; 300,000 volunteers from *Komsomol* (the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League for those aged 14 to 28) travelled to the Virgin Lands in 1954. The project was not a complete success. In search of quick results Khrushchev discouraged proper crop rotation and fertilizers were not available to replace nutrients. Eventually soil erosion followed and, combined with wind-storms, ruined 4 million hectares of land in Kazakhstan. Khrushchev did, however, improve collective farming, encouraged peasants to produce more on their private plots and quadrupled state investment in agriculture.

Zhilinsky said; "I was never an artist of the 'Severe Style'. I just lived at the same time as them." Indeed, he produced many nature and flower paintings, including the ubiquitous lilac (the significance of which to Soviet artists continues elusive). Two flower pieces set against a black background were painted as companions to the work commemorating his father and the many others killed during Stalin's Purges of 1936-9. Around 5 million people were executed (probably more as it is not known how many peasants and workers were murdered). Those victims who were not executed were sent to labour camps to die slowly from work and starvation. According to the authoritative work of Robert Conquest, another 12 million died in these camps.



Dmitry Zhilinsky, *To the Memory of Those Innocent who Died during the Repressions and Atrocities of 1937, 1987*

The central panel is not a memory as Zhilinsky was not at home when his father was arrested;

"I was ten years old, and running back home from school, I saw my father in an open carriage, with two men in military uniform flanking him. I thought it was wonderful - the men in uniform, the open carriage... The only thing that surprised me was that my father was wearing a fur hat and coat on a warm October day. And there was something else - there was an unexpected sadness in the way he waved to me. When I came home, I found my mother and grandmother in tears, my brother frightened and the apartment turned upside down - things thrown about, drawers open, books torn apart. It was the last time that I saw my father" (Lebedeva in Dyakonitsyna)

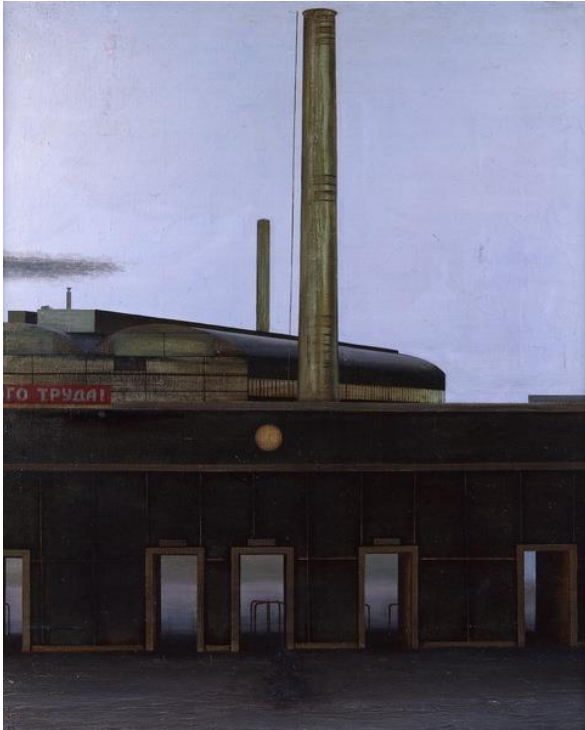
Zhilinsky depicts his father in white in a pose echoing the Crucifixion. The frame, in mourning black, has, at the bottom, a copy of his father's certificate of posthumous rehabilitation. Such certificates were common after the labour camp system collapsed following the execution of Lavrentiy Beria in 1953. They were important in releasing the remaining family from the taint of "enemy of the people", allowing them to reclaim property confiscated by the state and to obtain work and a residence permit.

Leonid Brezhnev's rule from 1964 to 1982 was described by Mikhail Gorbachev as the *Era of Stagnation*. Brezhnev ended Khrushchev's social reforms and revived some Stalinist practices. Industrial growth slowed in the 1970s. Output of consumer goods declined, as the Cold War pushed Brezhnev into giving priority to heavy industry and arms production. Socialist Realism tended to be replaced by actual realism. **Andrei Mylnikov (1919 - 2012)** who had painted notable SR works, such as *In Peaceful Fields (1950)* above, provided an image of the modern Russian soldier departing to serve in Warsaw Pact forces facing the Inner German Border in Europe.



Andrei Mylnikov, *Farewell*, 1975

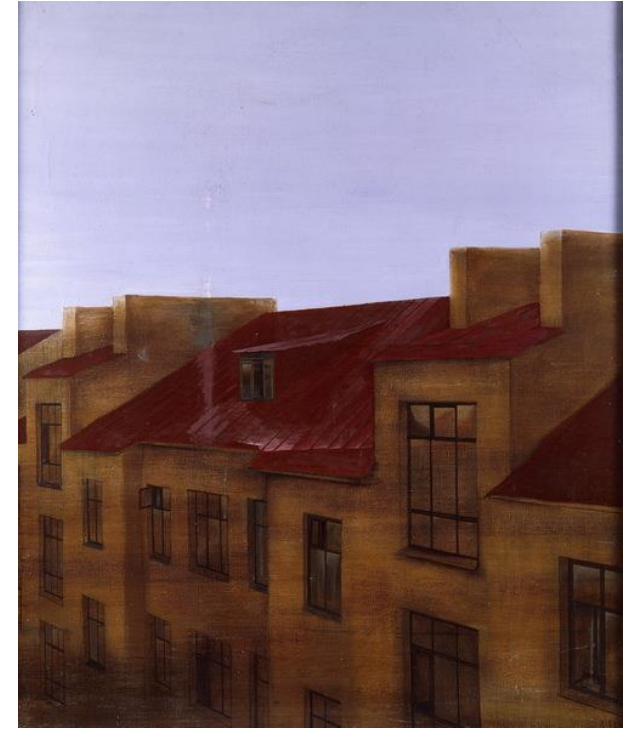
Brezhnev put his trust in Party officials and made few changes, which meant the average age of the Politburo member rose from 55 to 68 under his 18-year leadership. The term 'gerontocracy' was coined. More importantly Brezhnev's rule was deeply conservative, and this continued under Yuri Andropov. Centralised planning failed – unions were defending workers who could not be sacked, but pay was poor. A popular joke reflected this: *a political instructor asks a factory worker, 'What is the basis of the Soviet economic system?'; the worker, "you pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work."* The Era of Stagnation is suggested in the urban landscapes of **Andrey V Volkov (1948 -)**; colourless and bleak scenes of Moscow life with factories of light industry stark and lifeless. *Morning* suggests a dull monotony.



Gatehouse



Trolleybus



Roofs

Andrey V. Volkov, *Morning*, 1978

There is something of Edward Hopper in these scenes. Volkov evokes memories of the US Precisionist Charles Sheeler, whose art shows industrial scenes with very few people. Sheeler was hired by Ford who famously thought his workers were just as replaceable as parts of his cars. While workers might be regarded the same way in the USSR, Volkov presumably was aiming at slightly different aspects of grimness. His colour scheme is beautifully matched to the age.



Andrey V. Volkov, *March in Moscow*, late 1970s

Natalya Nesterova (1944 -) produced unsettling images of city and parks, in which often the people seem less real than their environment. This is true of works from the late 1970s, in which statues appear. *Matsesta*, a sanatorium built in 1924 in Sochi, was favoured by Stalin, and thus became established as the resort for senior party officials. Khrushchev and Brezhnev continued the patronage. Nesterova portrays the man and women as statues or colourless mannequins: they are dead or meaningless compared to the famous building which will endure. Indeed, the sanatorium remains open today; the buildings unchanged.



Natalya Nesterova, *Matsesta*, 1982

Works by American Photo-realists were exhibited in the Pushkin Museum in the 1970s and inspired **Simon Faibisovich (1949-)**. His hyper-realism, painting in oil from photographs, captures reality convincingly. Passengers on buses and trains, people queuing for alcohol or other products and enjoying the sea-side are covered in his many series.



Simon Faibisovich, *Spring is Coming*, 1986 (oil on canvas)



Simon Faibisovich, *Good Spirits*, 1987



Simon Faibisovich, *Shura*, 1987

From the series *Standing in Line for Wine* (oil on canvas)

Looking to the Past

Ilya Glazunov (1930 – 2017)

The preceding sections make clear that from the late 1950s a wider range of styles were permissible in official art. Subject matter expanded too. Strong leaders were celebrated even if their regimes were oppressive. Thus, Ivan the Terrible (a favourite with Stalin) and Peter the Great became national heroes. Depiction of historical figures was resurrected by Ilya Glazunov which was fitting as his father was a historian. His parents died in the siege of Leningrad 1944 and he was evacuated to the countryside, later returning to the city to train at the Repin Institute from 1951 to 1957 (like Nikolai Andronov, Glazunov was sent to the Kuybyshev Hydroelectric Power-Station). Winning an award at an international exhibition of young artists in Prague set him on his way. He was, however, not recognised by the Soviet authorities yet had a glittering career based largely on portraits of famous people around the world, a series which began with dozens in Italy in the 1960s (including one of Gina Lollobrigida).

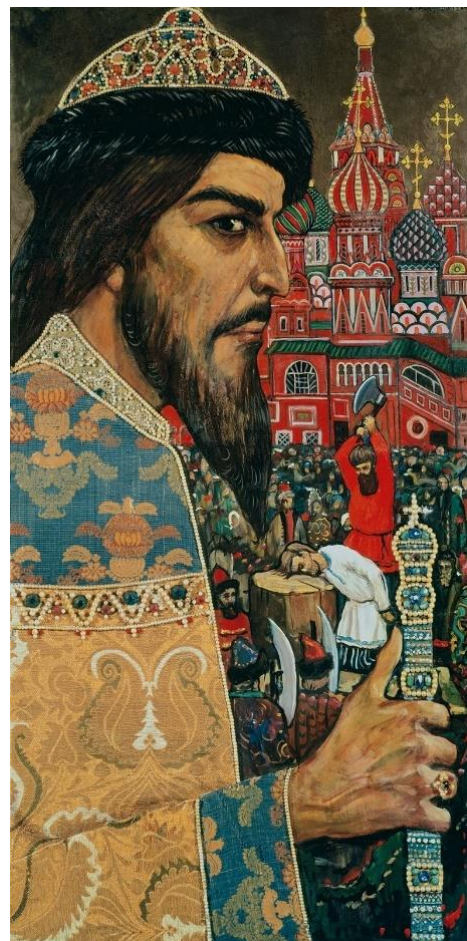
Glazunov's works of historical figures began with *Tsarevich Dmitry*, the youngest surviving son of Ivan the Terrible. Dmitry's elder brother Feodor succeeded Ivan, but Feodor was a child and a sickly one at that, and a regency council ruled in his name. The council was led by Boris Godunov. Dmitry was found dead with his throat cut, thus clearing the way for Boris to claim the throne when Feodor died. Glazunov's work captures the innocence of Dmitry; his portraits of Boris and Ivan, their ruthlessness.



Ilya Glazunov, *Tsarevich Dmitry*, 1967 (mixed media on wood)



Ilya Glazunov, *Boris Godunov*, 1967 (mixed media on wood)



Ilya Glazunov, *Ivan the Terrible*, 1974 (wood, mixed media)

Glazunov promoted literature, painting portraits of Dostoevsky and Lermontov and illustrating the works of poet Alexander Blok. **Anatoli Kulinich (1949-)** draws on a different kind of literature – traditional *lubki*. Kulinich grew up in the northeast Ukrainian countryside, and graduated from the Moscow College of Fine Arts in 1970. He travelled to northern Russia. His images are straightforward views of life and, sometimes, dreams of rural peasant life. His art recalls the works of Marc Chagall while he was still in Russia. There is a trace too of icons – here in the face of *The Laundress*.

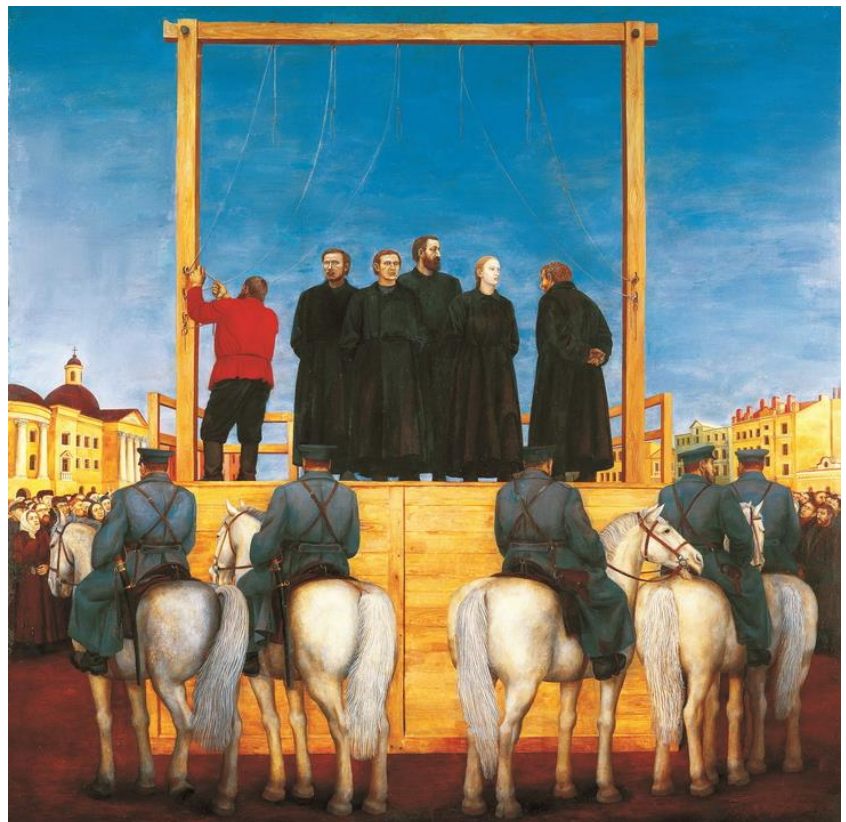


Anatoli Kulinich, *Red Log Cabin*, 1975



Anatoli Kulinich, *The Laundress*, 1985

The heroes of the historical works of **Tatyana Nazarenko (1944 -)** are revolutionaries. *Execution of the Narodniks* shows the execution of five of the six responsible for the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. They were led by Sophie Perovsky, “revolutionary to the bone ... the very image of an avenging angel (*Crankshaw*)”, who insisted on action rather than reform. This was a consequence of the failure of the Narodniks’ *Going to the People* a decade earlier [See 19th Century]. Nazarenko depicts the execution on a bright sunny day with a quiet crowd and relaxed soldiers which seems to mark the event as of little consequence. This is exactly what the *narodniks* were then; activists with no support.



Tatyana Nazarenko, *Execution of the Narodniks*, 1969-72

Nazarenko's grandfather, Nikolai, was arrested in 1935 and shot by firing squad three years later. She graduated from the Surikov Institute in 1968. Paintings of *Partisans have Come* (1975) and the *Decembrists* (1978) followed, and then *Pugachev*, her most famous piece. Alexander Suvorov, one of the greatest military commanders in Russian history rides ahead of Yemelyan Pugachev, leader of the most serious Russian rebellion before the 20th century. Pugachev claimed to be Tsar Peter III, the husband of Catherine (her portrait appears on the right) who was killed by her supporters [see Russian Academy]. Pugachev believed that Peter's edict of 18th February 1762 liberating the nobility from compulsory service to the Tsar was the first step towards the liberation of serfs. He posed as Peter and promised to introduce this reform. Eventually Pugachev was defeated by Suvorov, sent to Moscow in a metal cage and in January 1775 was decapitated then drawn and quartered in public.



Tatyana Nazarenko, *Pugachev*, 1980

Unofficial Art Movement

The Stalinist administration of art remained in place after his death. The Artists' Unions of the USSR (AU) – regional ones or the national umbrella organisation - controlled the lives of artists. After graduation, an artist would engage in “useful” work - posters, graphics or fashion, sometimes the theatre. Before becoming an AU member, an artist had to publicly refute abstract art and formalism of any kind. AU members were entitled to a studio and materials, enjoyed cheap accommodation at one of the Houses of Artists, holidays, rest cures, pensions and medical attention. An AU secured commissions from schools, factories and public organisations for its members, who could also submit paintings for exhibition and sale. There were approximately 10,000 members of AU. Artists who were not members could not exhibit publicly and faced harassment by the authorities and the risk of arrest. Despite this, unofficial art blossomed.

Along with the encouragement of Khrushchev's thaw, impetus was given by exhibitions in Moscow: Picasso in 1956; abstract art in the World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957; the American National Exhibition in 1959 which included works by Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning and Alexander Calder. **Anatoly Zverev (1931-1986)** was already using his bare hands, drips and palette knife to express emotion. He painted many portraits, including that of Vladimir Nemukhin, a member of the Lianozovo Group which was formed in 1958 (covered below).



Anatoly Zverev, *Self Portrait*, 1958



Anatoly Zverev, *Portrait of Vladimir Nemukhin*, 1968



Boris Sveshnikov, *Love in Winter*, early 1950s



Boris Sveshnikov, *Magic Walk*, 1957

Encouragement also came from artists amid the many who were released from labour camps after Stalin's death. **Boris Sveshnikov (1927-1998)** was arrested for terrorism when he bought kerosene at a neighbouring shop for the lamp in his home. He had no link to a terror group: indeed, that was admitted and was the reason he was sentenced to 'only' eight years in a gulag. After two years of unremitting labour Sveshnikov collapsed. He was expected to die and was sent to a camp for invalids where he was given the job as night watchman in a woodworking factory. Secretly, during the night Sveshnikov would paint; "I got my ration of bread and painted what I wanted. Nobody supervised me. Nobody showed any interest in me." He was released in 1954. His expressionist works deal with loss and fragility: "All of my works are dedicated to the grave" (from *Slobodkina-von Bromssen*).

Ulo Sooster (1924-1970) was studying art in his native Estonia, when in 1949 he was arrested and deported along with hundreds of thousands of others from the Baltic States and sentenced to ten years of hard labour. A year after his release in 1956 he moved to Moscow and began a career as an unofficial artist. His *Eye in the Egg* became famous when it was exhibited at the Manege Gallery in December 1962.



Ulo Sooster, *Eye in the Egg*, 1962

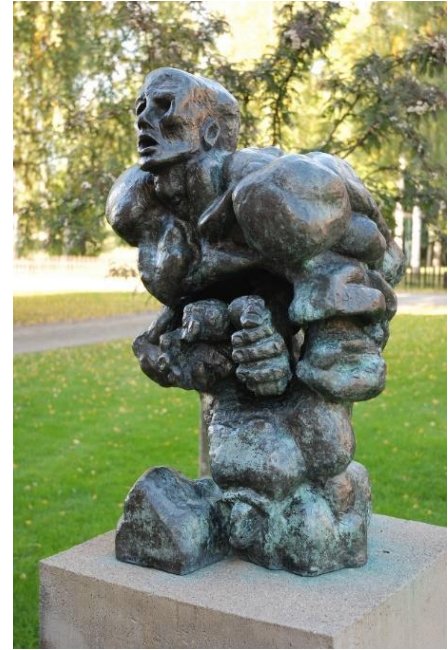
Moscow Manege Exhibition 1962

The Manege Gallery near Red Square mounted an exhibition, *Thirty Years of Moscow Painting*, in 1962. It reflected the more open view of art. Artists whose original works had been banished from public view since the 1930s were included in the exhibition. The Manege Gallery exhibition had been open for a month when Eli Belyutin opened his exhibition of abstract works, *The New Reality*, in his Moscow studio. Belyutin had set up an unofficial academy which thrived in the late 1950s. News of this abstract art exhibition attracted foreign correspondents and drew headlines round the world. As a result, the Ministry of Culture decided to add a Belyutin Room with works from *The New Reality* to the exhibition at Manege.

Khrushchev visited the Manege on the 1 December. Matters went off the rails early, as he criticised Pavel Nikonov's *Geologists*, produced when the artist accompanied an expedition in June-October 1960, as lacking any subject and depicting apathetic figures. Khrushchev's temper exploded when he entered the Belyutin room. Khrushchev got into a shouting match with the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, raging about the distorted faces in the artist's work. *The Prophet*, a re-working of a 1966 bronze, is typical.



Pavel Nikonov, *Geologists*, 1962



Ernst Neizvestny, *The Prophet*, 2009

Niezvestny responded by flying into a rage himself. That calmed down Nikita who closed the encounter with; *“You’re an interesting person, I like these kinds of people, but you have an angel and a devil in you at the same time. If the devil wins, we will destroy you. If the angel wins, we will help you”.*

Evidently the angel won, as Khrushchev’s family asked Niezvestny to design Nikita’s tombstone (which I have visited!) in Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow.



Manege is often cited as marking the end of the Khrushchev Thaw. Life was harsh for unofficial artists. They could be arrested as parasites, as their art was not recognised as official employment. Joseph Brodsky, the famous poet, was arrested and tried for ‘parasitism’ in February 1964, and was sentenced to five years in the frozen north of Arkhangelsk, where he chopped wood, shovelled manure and read English poets. Artists regarded as parasites were often forced to enter the military or to work in a factory or office. This was revealed by the foreign press. Sensitive to international criticism, the government reverted to confining unofficial artists in a mental hospital and discharged them after a few months with a certificate of schizophrenia and a small monthly disability pension. Later, under Leonid Brezhnev, artists were expelled from the country. Brodsky suffered this fate in June 1972 when he was put on a plane bound for Vienna. Nevertheless, unofficial art continued to thrive. The variety of styles suggest Soviet art was ‘catching up’ after Socialist Realism in the same way Russian modernists had after the dominance of the Wanderers.

Oskar Rabin (1928 - 2018)

Underground art was based on groups, sometimes formed of relatives, more commonly, artists who lived close together. They were based in apartments or studios. The Lianozovo Group, established in 1958, included artists who were members of the Moscow Union of Graphic Arts. The group were based in Oskar Rabin's home – a tumbledown camp barracks in a small village just outside Moscow. Their official art was circumscribed – they were not allowed oils nor to exhibit paintings.

Rabin was already in trouble with the authorities when the group was formed because of his *Rubbish Dump No. 8* (1958). "Rabin depicted dreary everyday reality: dilapidated hovels, suburban slums, neglected cemeteries (*Kolodzei in Genzlinger*)" or, as Rabin preferred, "My paintings are the life that surrounds me. It is everything that is happening to my loved ones, my fellow neighbours."

He included items which were detested by Party officials but widely used by ordinary Russians: icons (Communists were atheists) and vodka (alcoholism became widespread but the State's monopoly brought in so much money officials turned a blind eye).



Oskar Rabin, *Bottle and Electric Cords in Town*, 1961

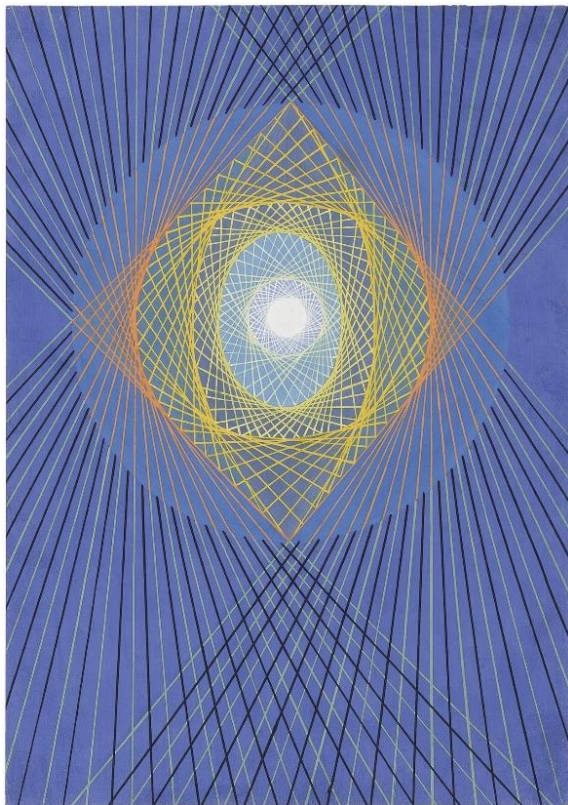


Oscar Rabin, *Houses in Priluki*, 1967

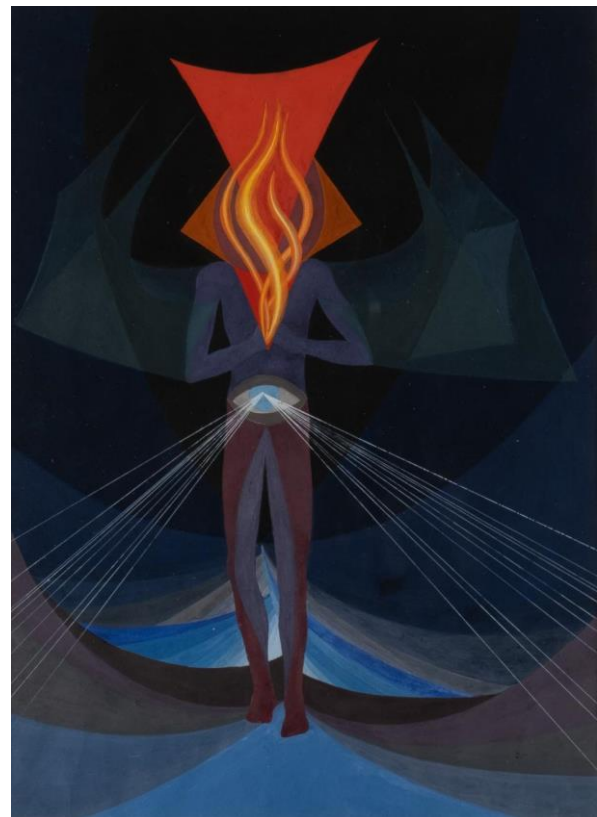
Rabin mixed sand with his paint to provide bulk. As well as labels and postage stamps, scraps of *Pravda* were used. Rabin painted many scenes with a cat, usually curled up comfortably after a meal. The example below includes actual feathers.



Oskar Rabin, *The Icon, Cat and Devoured Chicken*, 1974 (oil, feathers and gesso)



Lev Nussberg, *Electromagnetic Field*, 1962



Lev Nussberg, *Appearance of the Archangel from Space*, 1965

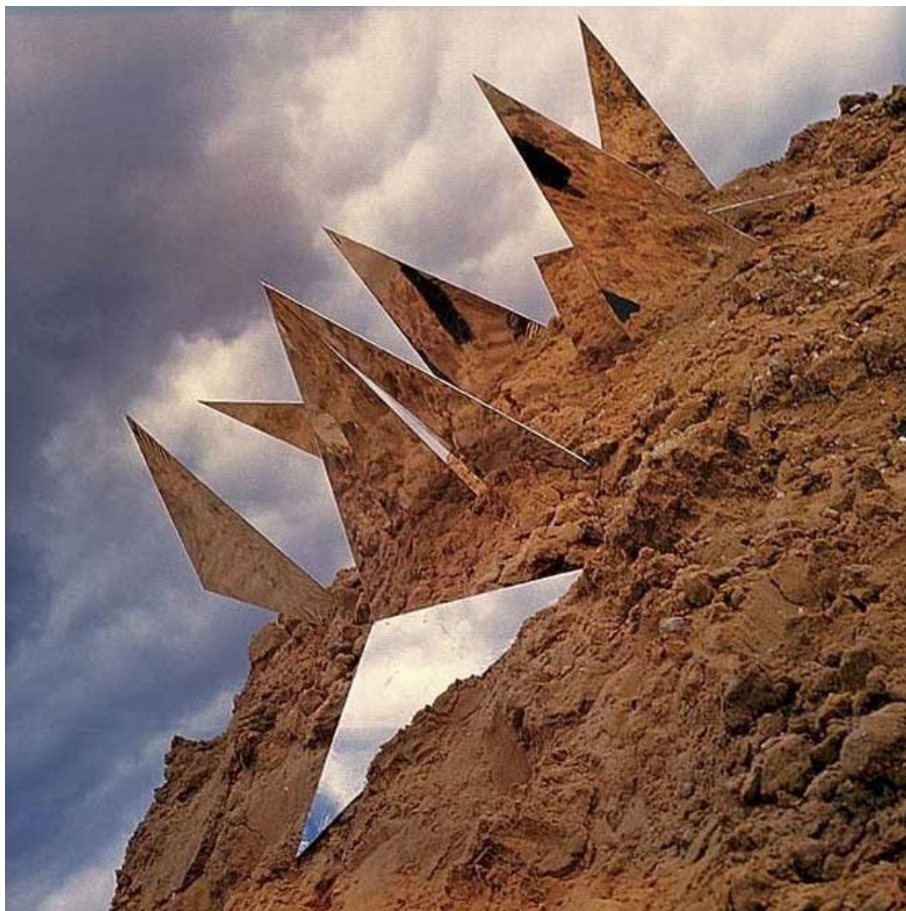
Lev Nussberg (1937-) founded the *Dvizhenie* (Movement) group in 1962. He worked with hard edges and primary colours. This style fitted well with the new clean and bare architecture erected under Khrushchev. Nussberg is known as a kinetic artist.

Francisco Infante-Arana (1943-) was a founder member of the *Dvizhenie* (Movement) group. He had a high regard for Kazimir Malevich. In 1968 Infante-Arana left *Dvizhenie* and a work of that year reflects his interest in Malevich and signposts the direction of his future art. *Suprematist Games* has coloured pieces placed outdoors in the snow.

With his artist wife, Nonna Goriunova and engineer Valerii Osipov, Infante-Arana formed ARGO and began placing kinetic and light installations in public places. From the mid-1970s, ARGO moved to rural settings with a series in which mirrors or mirrored foil stretched over a wooden frame were set against a natural environment. These surfaces are carefully aligned and a photograph taken from a well-chosen angle. *Life of the Triangle* shows how precise everything is orientated, with the mirror reflecting the sky being a powerful counterpoint.



Francisco Infante-Arana, *Suprematist Games series*, 1968



ARGO, *Life of the Triangle*, 1976

These pieces are ephemeral, so they are not really land art which tends to be more permanent. Although the photograph is the residual artwork, Infante-Arana did not regard the camera as an artistic device – it is merely recording a work of art. Some ARGO pieces can invoke a transcendental feeling. The marriage of manufactured shape and nature is close: the spare and tapering spire reaches for the heavens just like the birches. Indeed, the mirrored shape is placed so that the tip of the spire is crowned with foliage. Perhaps there is a sense that religion just as much as the birch is emblematic of Russia. Nature and artifice are united again in *Seat of Deformed Space*. Sunlight glistens on ice and object - powerfully so, as though a star shines from the surface. The wavelike form of the mirrored object reminds that beneath the snow deep waters flow.



ARGO, *Mirror Installations*, 1979



ARGO, *Seat of Deformed Space*, 1979

Like ARGO's spire & birches, Lev Nussberg's *Archangel* hints at the importance still placed on religious or, at least, spiritual matters in the USSR. **Dmitry Plavinsky (1937-)** believed art should create spiritual landscapes. His works can be as dense and crowded as Filonov's, and carry the same sense of a unity being created from the accumulation of myriad details.

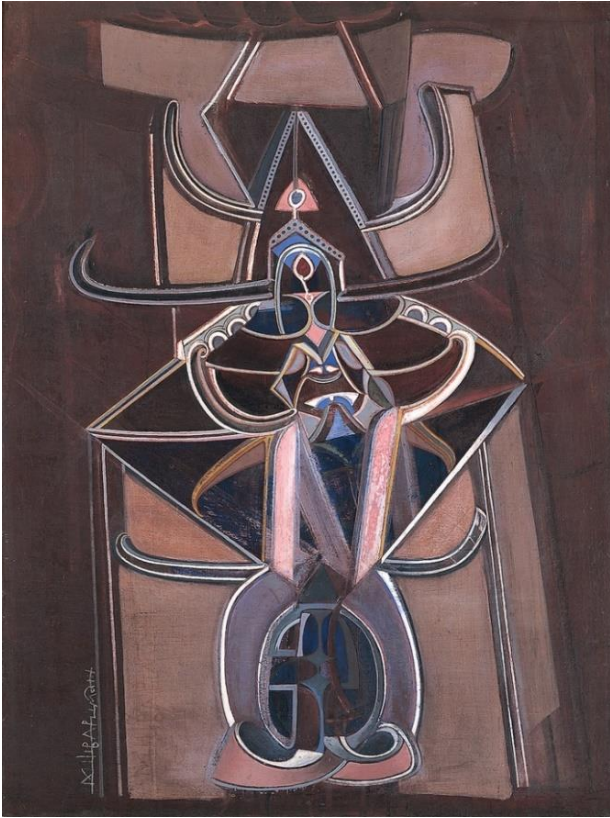


Dmitry Plavinsky, *Voices of Silence*, 1962

Voices mixes man-made objects with the ancient. Plavinsky included fragments of religious images from destroyed or closed churches, as well as the leaf and hand which he associated with the Creator. He sought to find a cosmic unity that encapsulated all belief and religion.

Russians retained their icons, as Rabin's works suggest, despite the Party's attempts to ban religion. Lenin wanted churches destroyed and believers secularised, and this policy remained (apart from the years 1941-53). Countless village churches were destroyed during collectivisation and cathedrals were demolished. In 1961 priests were barred from sitting on parish councils, which over the next few years disbanded over half of the remaining parishes of the Orthodox Church and closed 10,000 more churches (Hosking). Despite this oppression, icons were still produced in peasant communities. Unofficial art revived the medium.

Mikhail Schwartzman (1926-) began working in the icon tradition in 1960. Like the old icon painters, Schwartzman believed the act of painting was sacred, imbuing the work with a spiritual feeling which would spark a response in the viewer. He defined his works, not as icons but as *hieratures* (*Yushkova*), allowing a means of communicating with God. His motif of a face in *Cosmic Herald* recurs – a strange being from the outer reaches of space. Some of Schwartzman's images seem like abstract architectonics.



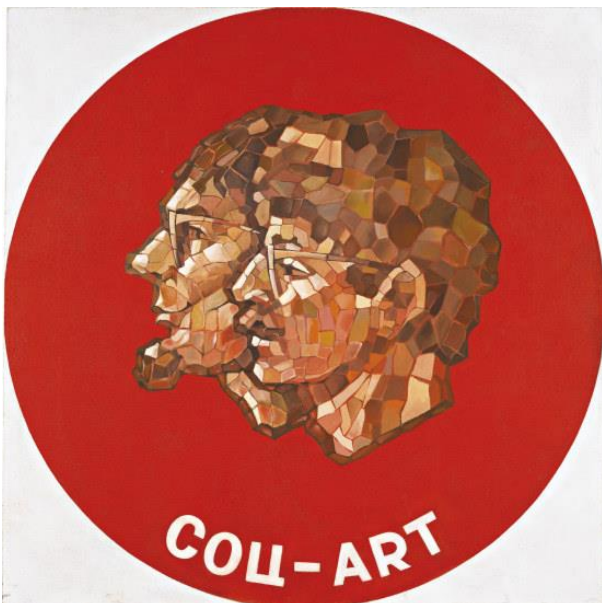
Mikhail Schwartzman, *Incarnation of Space*, 1970



Mikhail Schwartzman, *Past Incarnations*, 1970
(tempera and gesso on wood)

Bulldozer Exhibition 1974

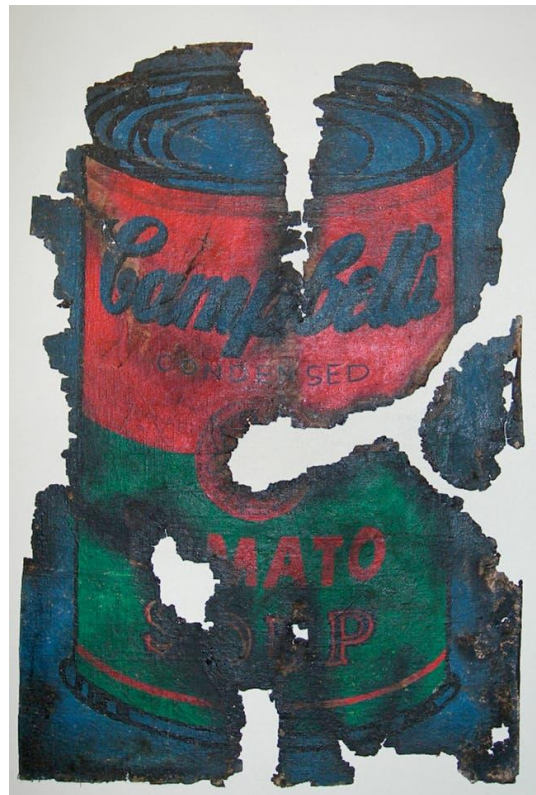
Prohibited from using official studios, Rabin and his friends decided to organise an exhibition on a vacant suburban lot, and wrote to the city council to give them warning: *"They couldn't say we were obstructing traffic or creating an inconvenience. We also chose a Sunday, not a working day."* Twenty artists and their families and friends attended, and Rabin was careful to invite the foreign press. *"The exhibition was prepared as a political act against the oppressive regime, rather than an artistic event. I knew that we'd be in trouble, that we could be arrested, beaten. There could be public trials. The last two days before the event were very scary, we were anxious about our fate. Knowing that virtually anything can happen to you is frightening (Rabin reported by Alberge)."* On the day, the 15th September, it didn't take long for the authorities to intervene. **Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid**, co-artists who took part: *"We hadn't even managed to put up our easels before bulldozers, waste trucks and 'art bureaucrats in plain clothes' suddenly appeared. They began to smash up and confiscate our work. Those who resisted were arrested. One Western journalist even had a tooth knocked out (Tate EY Exhibition Notes)."*



Komar and Melamid's self-portrait was destroyed in the Bulldozer Exhibition. They produced a replica of it in 1984 (above left). Whereas Pop Art drew on images of advertising in the West, they exploited the pervasive political messages in Russia; *"although propaganda images of the Soviet 'mass media' surrounded us always and everywhere, they were never popular among the masses."* Komar and Melamid's self-portrait is based on the dual portrait of Lenin and Stalin.

The heavy-handedness of the Party at Bulldozer drew international news coverage and condemnation. As a consequence, Soviet authorities quickly gave permission for two non-conformist exhibitions. The first, at Izmaylovsky Park in Moscow two weeks after Bulldozer, featured 40 artists who understandably were nervous and did not show their best work. Nevertheless, thousands attended. Komar and Melamid showed examples of from their *Post-Art* series; *"famous works by Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Indiana and other pop artists as they might be after a nuclear war or a political or natural disaster."* An exhibition of their work was put on in New York in 1976, but they were not allowed to leave the Soviet Union to attend. Two years later they emigrated. In the 1980s they began their *Nostalgic Socialist Realism* series.

Oskar Rabin was arrested at Bulldozer. By 1978 the authorities had had enough – he was stripped of his citizenship and was exiled from the Soviet Union. Curiously, Rabin was not allowed to take with him his paintings, offensive though they were to officialdom.



Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Post-art No 1 (Warhol)*, 1973

Moscow Conceptualists

Komar and Melamid are usually cited as starting the Moscow Conceptualist movement, which was critical of Soviet society and regime. This was astonishingly brave, given what had happened to artists who took part in Bulldozer. Erik Bulatov described Conceptualist art as *"a rebellion of man against the everyday reality of life."* The rebellion could take many forms. **Oleg Vassiliev (1931 – 2013)** produced lyrical pictures of fields and forests, a reminder of the beauty and simplicity of nature, away from the abstract theory and mechanical practices of the Party. These works are Impressionistic; *"I try to insert into the depiction of a landscape the impressions captured out of the corner of one's eye while walking through the forest or field to a chosen spot; the memory of the smells, sound, light (Kolodzei)."* Sometimes there is a larger figure set in, or super-imposed on, the landscape which is diffuse at the edges, as though the person depicted is remembering images while they go about the mundane tasks of Soviet life.



Oleg Vassiliev, *In the Field (Abramtsevo)*, 1971



Oleg Vassiliev, *The Materialisation of Gloom*, 1987

Vassiliev often places a central figure between receding walls. *Gloom* is enigmatic – the sense of loss as a friend waves goodbye or the depressing sight of the local apparatchik approaching with false joviality?



Viktor Pivovarov, *Reflections*, 1965-6

Viktor Pivovarov (1937 -)

Pivovarov shows the inner world of the soul and imagination. An early work (above) recalls Rene Magritte. However, his theme is not surrealism, but the escape from the monotony of reality into dreams.



Viktor Pivovarov, *Moscow Party*, 1971



Viktor Pivovarov, *Presentiment*, 1977

Dreams offer things and experiences unavailable in everyday life. *Moscow Party* has an assembly of attractive objects (car, country house, rural scenes, fashionable young woman), plentiful food and drink and a variety of self-images. The dreamer throwing himself outside the frame of his life suggests escapism.

Sometimes the depiction of imagination is more sinister: *Presentiment* might suggest an inescapable inferno.

Pivovarev continued the depiction of how people lived in *Apartment 22* in the middle 1990s; 35 paintings of life in a communal apartment in Moscow in the 1950s. Drawing from his memory of living with his mother as a child in one such apartment block, the scenes are actually transferred to the fictional diary of a musician Pivovarev created. The artist said that the series was not about nostalgia; "I would rather say that "melancholy" is the key word (Tate interview)".



This is Radio Moscow

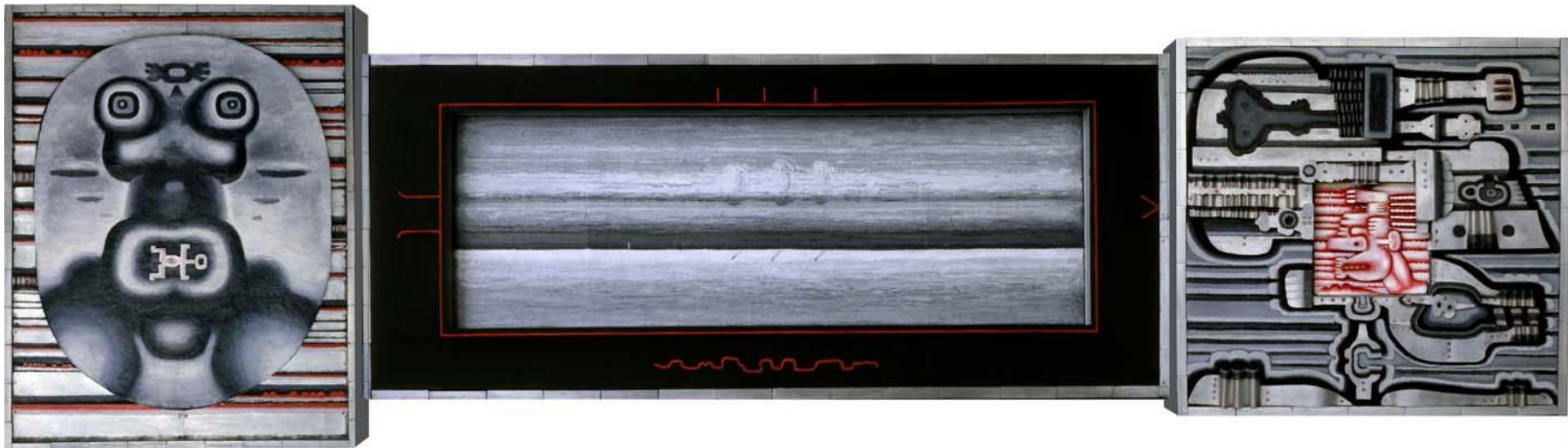


He Hit Me with a Hammer

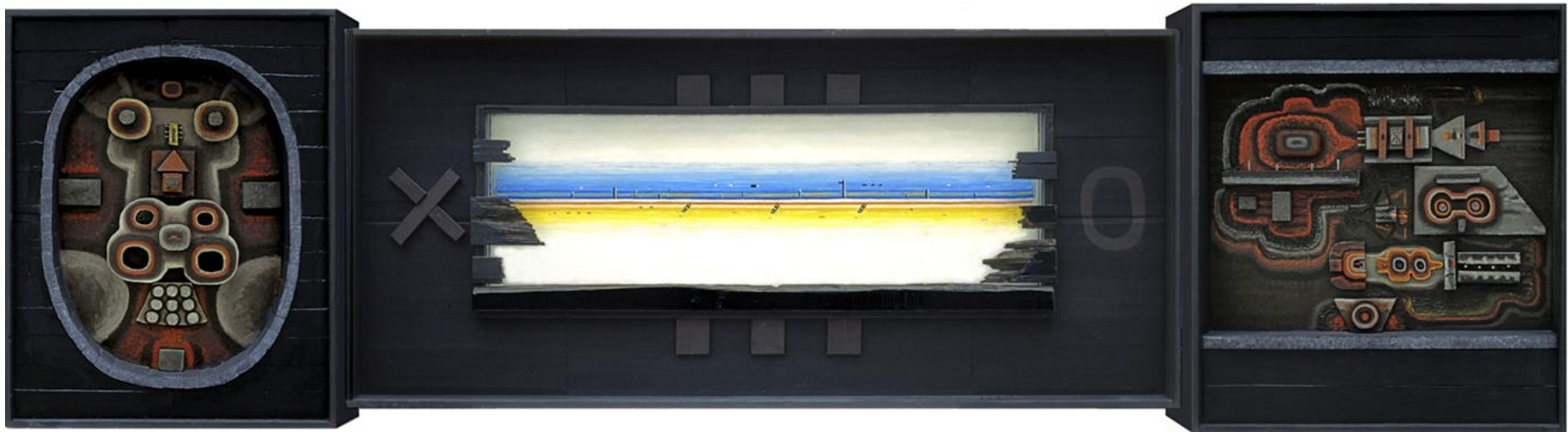
Viktor Pivovarov, *Apartment 22 series*, 1992-6

Vladimir Yankilevsky (1938-2018) produced a wide range of art – some of his works recall Paul Klee. Most famous are his constructed triptychs made from metal, boards and paint. They present feminine (on the left) and masculine (right) images bracketing a representation of the universe.

His feminine images are based on primitive masks; the male is more machine-like. However, the two components are not always rigidly defined; the largely monochrome and hard-edged male has colourful and soft regions; the female includes mechanical parts. In this sense, the *Shostakovich Triptych* could represent the contrasting forms in his music – the hard clashing repetition alongside the softer passages. These constructed triptychs continued in Yankilevsky's art into the 21st century.



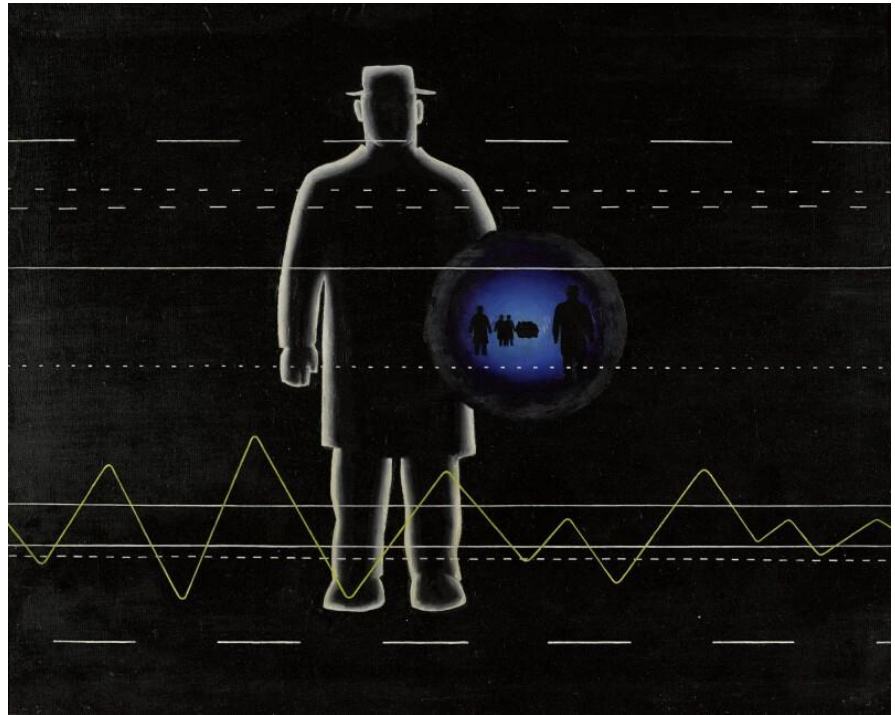
Vladimir Yankilevsky, *Triptych No. 4: A Being in the Universe (Dedicated to Dmitry Shostakovich)*, 1964 (oil on metal and fibreboard)



Vladimir Yankilevsky, *Triptych No. 9 Anatomy of the Soul*, 1970 (oil on wood and fibreboard)

Erik Bulatov (1933 -)

Erik Bulatov formed the Sretensky Boulevard Group in the late 1960s. All the artists mentioned in this section were members of the group – they lived close to each other in Moscow. Bulatov produced images which used the anonymous figures that featured in Soviet advertisements of the time. This *Urban Series* seems to suggest that individuals, devoid of detail, are trivial in comparison to the society they inhabit. Communism as Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist dialectic is much more important (indeed, a life-or-death issue for the millions of 'revisionists' and 'formalists') than Communism as a means of supporting the lives of ordinary men and women.

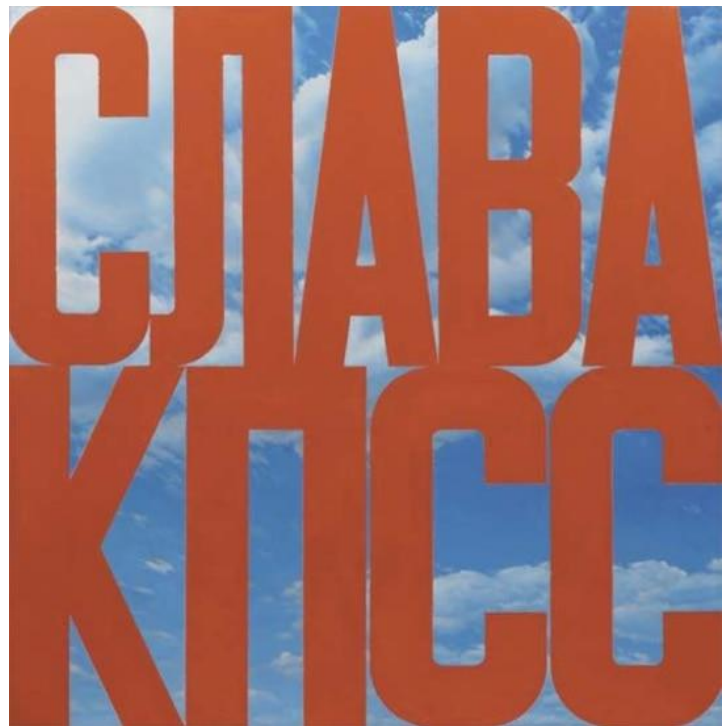


Erik Bulatov, *Street at Night*, 1966

It is for the juxtaposition of ideological words or images against the everyday world that Bulatov is most famous. Slogans and icons to the Party were ubiquitous, celebrating a success which was at odds with the reality of everyday life. "My constant theme is the consciousness of contemporary people, which I have tried to portray not through the terrible or the wonderful, but through the everyday and the mundane ... the space of our lives was completely deformed by ideology, and this was understood by our consciousness as the norm." Ideology created a world separate to the freedom that ought to have been possible.

This idea can be seen in *Glory to the CPSU*, a message bombarded across all media in the USSR. Bulatov explains: "The letters are written not in the sky, but rather on the surface of the picture, while the sky exists in a different space, the space of freedom. The aggressive letters assault us and prevent access to the endless blue sky." Several works were produced in this vein, and they appear pessimistic. But, as Bulatov points out, although the words are dominant and seem to form the bars which block access to freedom, they are in fact

of limited power. They exist only on the picture surface. Mundane natural forces – sunlight, wind, rain – will erode them (quite easily, in fact) and the open heavens will be ours.



Erik Bulatov, *Glory to the CPSU*, 1975

The restriction of the imagination only to goals deemed worthy by the Party is represented in *Red Horizon*. Here the horizon, usually the vista that inspires and drives us spiritually and intellectually, is replaced by the ribbon used on Soviet medals and prizes. It may serve also, of course, as the barrier preventing comrades seeing how other societies are organised and how life might be better: a people hemmed in.



Erik Bulatov, *Red Horizon*, 1971-2

Bulatov depicted the need to conform in Soviet life. Denouncing neighbours was much less frequent under Brezhnev than at the height of Stalin's Purges, but loose talk could still cost lives. In *Danger*, Bulatov overlays a bucolic Socialist Realist image of rest and relaxation with warnings.

Lenin's importance never waned. Stalin might have dominated Soviet history, but Lenin remained the icon of the USSR. In *Krasikova Street*, his image, set against the plain stark background and in an animated pose, seems more real than landscape. Certainly, the dominant force. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Bulatov returned to this image of street dominated by a poster of Lenin in his *Farewell*. This is a much greyer scene; trees barren of growth and only a redoubtable old lady returning with her string bag from yet another queue. Is this what the Revolution and Communist Party worked for? Is Lenin still delighted with himself?



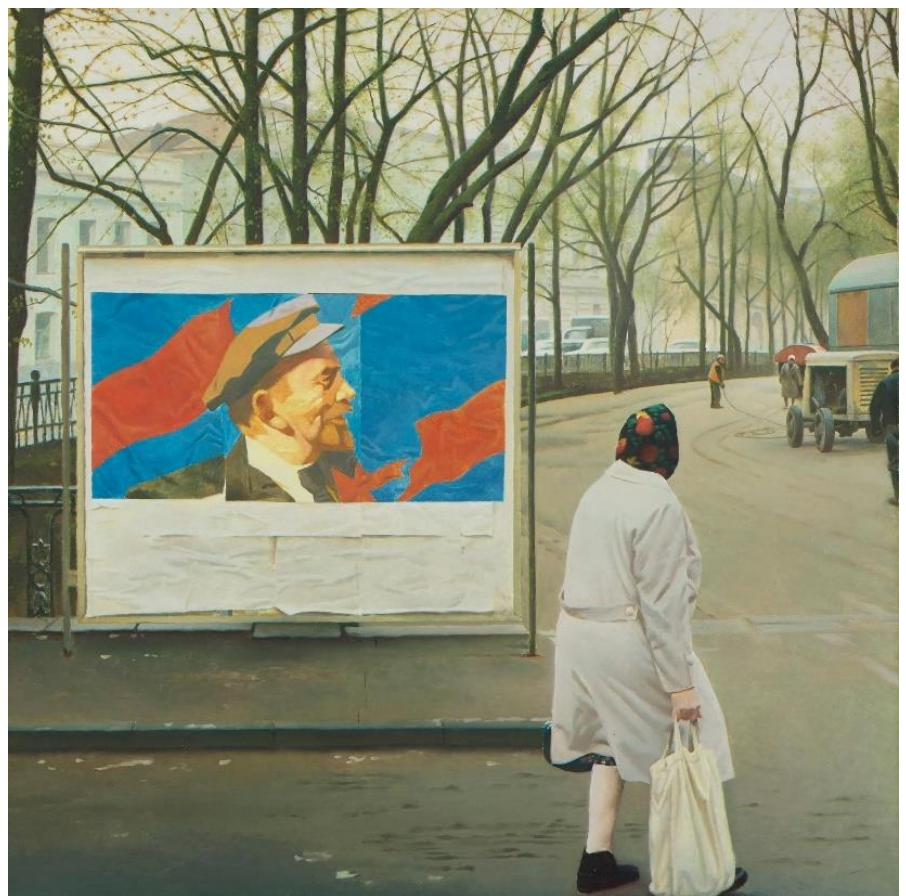
Erik Bulatov, *Danger*, 1975



Erik Bulatov, *Krasikova Street*, 1977

In a book published in 1990, Bulatov lamented;

“I think that the worst thing that Soviet propaganda has done, forgetting the lies and the nonsense, is to have persisted in brainwashing us into believing that the social world we inhabit is the only reality. There is nothing else. Whether you like it or not, you have to adapt yourself. This is the way it is. Possibly there is another structure, beyond the borders, which is hostile to us. For years they inculcated in us the idea that there is no alternative, that the whole world is a prison, that there is no possibility of escape and that it has always been like that. Therefore, art became a necessity for me, as it offered a possible way out.” (Gambrell and Barabanov).



Erik Bulatov, *Farewell Lenin*, 1991

Gorbachev and after

Economic stagnation became worse as Reagan forced up Soviet military expenditure. Then came stalemate in Afghanistan. In 1985 the Politburo recognised the crisis and elected the youthful Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary. Gorbachev's initial openness (*glasnost*) was very restricted. The explosion at the nuclear power station at Chernobyl on 26th April 1986 changed that. The West was appalled that they learned of the incident from Sweden. Soviet citizens were unaware of the dangers or the need to escape them. Even Moscow struggled to discover what the true situation was. From then, *glasnost* was greatly broadened. From the start, Gorbachev encouraged popular scrutiny and public criticism of leaders.

Alexei Sundukov (1952-) Artists answered the call, commenting also on social conditions. Sundukov's picture of passengers on the Moscow Metro might be praising the egalitarian nature of Communist society – young, old, well-off and poor travelling together. The gloom on their faces tells a different story. Sundukov mirrors the approach taken by the Wanderers. And not just the approach: he pays homage to Repin's *Barge Haulers* as he depicts the organised social gathering so common in the USSR.



Alexei Sundukov, *Travelling Passengers*, 1985



Alexei Sundukov, *The Queue*, 1986

Maksim Kantar (1957-) also portrays social situations, but of a darker nature. Bown describes Kantar's subjects as "*straight out of Solzhenitsyn*": haggard men in an endless line apparently outside a gulag, drab communal eating rooms, waiting rooms in hospitals.

Alexei Sundukov didn't really accept Gorbachev's invitation to criticise leaders. Instead, he showed the faceless (unthinking?) Party members applauding every Soviet leader, no matter how repressive. Of course, that was required behaviour, but it recalls the devotion of peasants to Tsars. The leader is beyond reproach; it is his servants (the aristocracy or Party cadres) who make the mistakes.



Maxim Kantar, *Waiting Room*, 1985



Alexei Sundukov, *Prolonged and Undiminishing Applause*, 1987

A brief return to Gely Korzhev. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought the subsequent 'shock therapy' under Boris Yeltsin of privatisation and market liberalisation. The main and lasting effects of which were the creation of a hugely rich oligarchy, the rise of organised crime and the collapse of social services. Korzhev, a firm believer in Communism, was offered a State award in the 1990s but refused it: *"I was born in the Soviet Union and sincerely believed in the ideas and ideals of the time. Today, they are considered a historical mistake. Now Russia has a social system directly opposite to the one under which I, as an artist, was brought up."*

Korzhev produced still lifes: *"I am more of a still-life painter than anything"*. This genre was usually denigrated during the Communist era as bourgeois art, but Korzhev's are very different to the norm. Some of them represent everyday life for ordinary people in the Russian Federation: work in well-worn clothes with carefully looked-after tools, read *Pravda*, rest. His *Still-life with Hammer and Sickle* seeks to restore the ubiquitous symbol to its original real-world components, which are clearly well-used: society founded on the efforts of workers and peasants.



Gely Korzhev, *Social still-life*, 1992

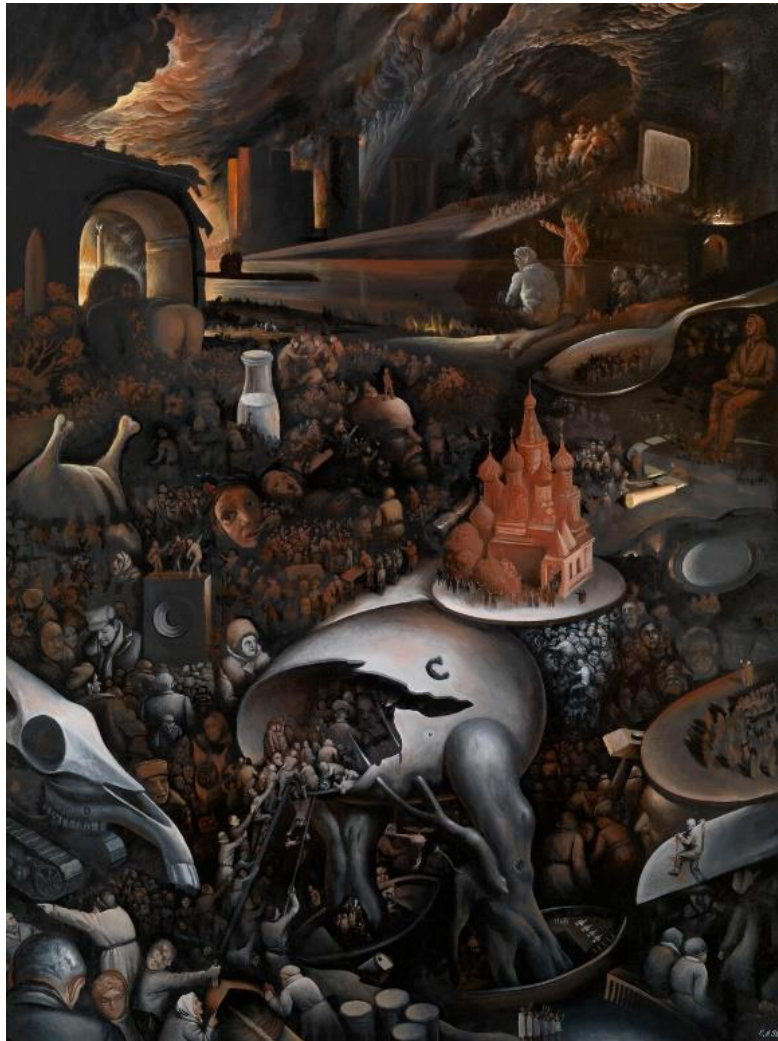


Gely Korzhev, *Still-life with Hammer and Sickle*, 2004

Gorbachev's restructuring (*perestroika*) favoured some privatisation along the lines of Lenin's 1921 NEP, but more importantly brought decentralisation, pluralism and popular representation, and freedom of speech. These forces were much more powerful than expected. Poland, Hungary and East Germany applied Gorbachev's ideas. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was the key event in the disintegration of the USSR: republic after republic called for independence or secession. The proclamation of independence in the Ukraine in August 1991 precipitated the final collapse.

To finish, two depictions of Russia. The first, from Sundukov, shows the dying of the USSR and foreshadows the Yeltsin years. He revises the upper part of the *Hell* panel in Hieronymus Bosch's triptych, *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510).

The sickle is being dismantled – something of a portent of the collapse of the following year - Lenin is being pissed on, tanks and aircraft in the foreground are matched by a nuclear submarine, a loudspeaker continues with propaganda. The spoon may be a symbol of the gangs of organised crime and their drug dealing. It is, as the title suggests, a thoroughly depressing scene, yet perhaps for the Russian women and men on the street during the 'shock therapy' years to come, not at all unrealistic.



Alexei Sundukov, *Nightmare*, 1990

Two years before this, Ilya Glazunov produced a different image of Russia; a compilation of the features of history. Ilya's worldwide portrait business blossomed after the 1960s, and led to him getting many commissions for large-scale works from international organisations (including UNESCO). By the 1980s he had experience in painting monumental works. He remained an unofficial artist, tolerated because of his popularity outside Russia. He was a clever publicist and his success divides critics even today. In 1990 when Ilya reached 60, he said; "as usual, the Soviet government didn't pay any attention to me."

Interestingly, the 20th century has only a small place on the upper right of *Eternal Russia*: Tatlin's *Tower* arches over Lenin, a multiple-stage rocket points to space, and (below) Stalin and Trotsky share a troika. Dominating are people and images of the Russian Orthodox Church. In April 1988 Gorbachev attempted a rapprochement with the Russian Orthodox Church, meeting the Patriarch and senior bishops and telling them, "Believers are Soviet working people and patriots: they have every right to express their convictions in a fitting manner (*Hosking*)". In September 1990, legislation guaranteed freedom of conscience and worship and most restrictions on religious activity were removed. Once more believers could take part in public processions: Glazunov's central mass of people, stretching into the distance, bearing icons, seems to celebrate the persistence and relevance of the Russian church.



Ilya Glazunov, *Eternal Russia*, 1988

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