

large. Rehabilitation has a long way to go before "every contemporary young reader" can really see what Russian literature was like forty, fifty and sixty years ago. The ghosts may walk again, but they are not allowed to disturb the basic *status quo*, the party line in literature, which insists on confining creative talent to the expression of *partiinost* and socialist realism.

In the fourteen years that have passed since the 20th Congress, the resurrections of purged writers, like other aspects of Soviet literary politics, have fluctuated back and forth along with "conservative" and "liberal" swings of the political pendulum. But the degrees of resurrection seem to have be-

come fairly solidly fixed as outlined here: resurrection with full honors, republication of works and issuance of laudatory monographs; resurrection with "selected" republication and, on the whole, laudatory comment; restoration of the right to be listed in encyclopedias and credited with some positive contributions, but without republication of works and with a good deal of negative comment in histories; restoration of the right to be mentioned in histories but with wholly pejorative comment; and finally, restoration of the right to be mentioned in passing, but not the right to be listed in indexes. The final degree of obliteration, however—total and complete oblivion—seems to exist no longer.

## Art and Artists of the "Underground"

By Arsen Pohribny

A guide was to be waiting for me at the Kaluzhskaia subway exit at 4 p.m. I found myself in a thick crowd of people, and I doubted that he would find me since we had never seen each other. But within minutes I was approached by a man of about thirty, who turned out to be the chief engineer of an electrical appliance factory. I soon discovered that he had two particularly useful qualifications as a guide: he knew the addresses of a whole series of avant-garde painters, *and* he had a car. With the enormous distances that have to be traveled in modern Moscow, the car proved invaluable.

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*Author of numerous books on contemporary art, Mr. Pohribny left his native Czechoslovakia for Italy following the Soviet invasion of his homeland in 1968.*

Our first appointment was with Ilia Kabakov, in his new attic studio. His previous atelier, a journalist told me, had been a damp, cold cellar which could have served as a setting for Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths*; visitors to it were handed large glasses of vodka as they entered, to help them endure the dungeon-like atmosphere. Now the young painter had exchanged his burrow for a pigeon-coop. When we had climbed up to his attic, we saw carpenters transforming the rest of the floor into artists' studios. These workmen, who had come after finishing their regular daily shift in some factory, were relatives of the future occupants of the studios.

Kabakov is one of the most talented young artists in the Soviet Union. His work could stand up to the scrutiny of the most exacting of Western

art critics. The official arbiters of Soviet art have labeled him a "cosmopolitan." Actually, he has used elements of Surrealism, Dadaism and Pop Art to create a special prism through which one sees uniquely Soviet images. Apparitions of the absurd executed with precise craftsmanship, these images have the power to chill the viewer.

Kabakov was waiting for us, surrounded by his paintings. Since work like his cannot be shown publicly, he relished this rare opportunity to communicate with the outside world. I asked some blunt questions. Could such paintings be sold? What did "underground" artists live on? How could he pay for the attic studio? Kabakov's answers were vague and evasive. Obviously, these were matters it was not wise for a non-conformist Soviet artist to discuss with strangers. At this point, my guide intervened to vouch for me, and to explain on Kabakov's behalf:

Well, every now and then, one finds a buyer among friends. And sometimes, though not very often, interested foreigners come along. But transactions with foreigners are supposed to come under the control of the Office on the Exportation of Art Works. Anyone who tries to bypass this office and gets caught finds himself in a fantastic mess. This is precisely what happened a few years ago to Kabakov and his friends when their paintings and drawings were exhibited in Italy. Some Western journalists seized upon the exhibit as an occasion for criticizing official Soviet policy on artistic freedom, and certain Moscow bureaucrats attributed these criticisms to the artists themselves. The attack was strikingly reminiscent of the official strategy preceding the Siniavsky-Daniel trial and seemed to portend another

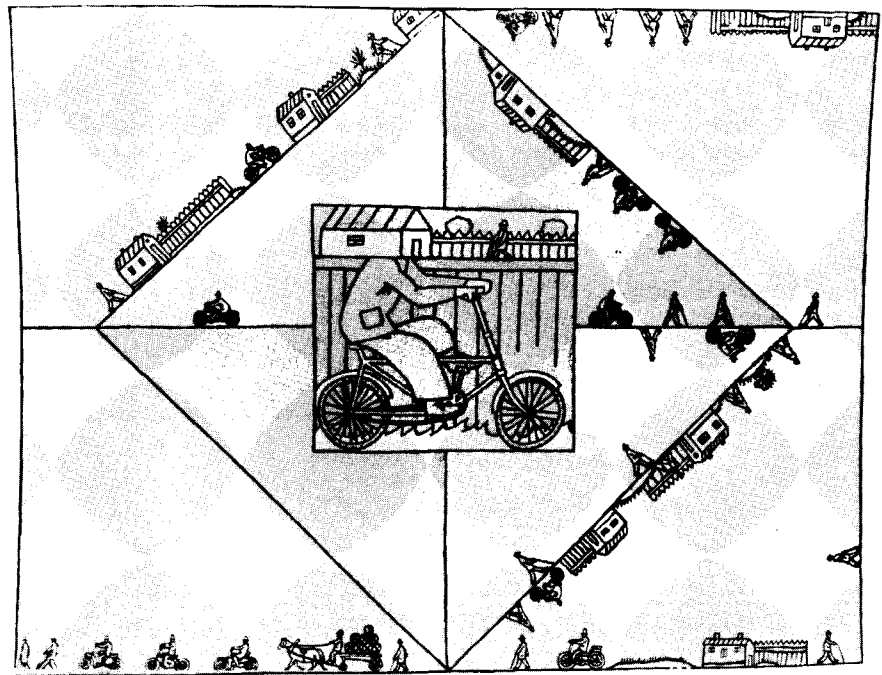
trial of "ideological enemies and calumniators of the Soviet government." Luckily, the texts of the articles in the foreign press were obtained in Moscow before the attack had gone very far, and it could be shown that the quotations cited by the bureaucrats had been taken out of context, and that the charges against the artists had been "fabricated."<sup>1</sup>

After hearing this tale, I was not surprised that Kabakov declined my offer to arrange an exhibit for him in Stockholm; according to my guide, he had already turned down a number of similar offers.

When our visit had lasted about an hour, Kabakov left to transact some business at a publishing house, but he invited us to stay and take as many photographs as we liked. I availed myself of the opportunity to take a close look around this labyrinth of an attic, which covered about 70 square yards. The place was heated, and the walls lined with insulating panels. How much, I asked, had all this cost Kabakov? "Thousands of rubles," replied my guide, "... and his nerves." For labor and materials alone, the painter had paid more than 6,000 rubles—the price of a very good car—which he had earned by illustrating children's books. In addition, hundreds of rubles had dis-

<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to ascertain whether the exhibit referred to was the one held in Rome in 1967 under the title "Fifteen Young Painters of Moscow," or one called "Alternative Attuali," held in Aquila in 1965, in which Kabakov and others also participated.

Ilia Kabakov — "Our Everyday Thoughts," 1966-67 (photo by author).



appeared into the pockets of officials who acted as middlemen in this business. There had been years of deprivation, of begging for commissions, of making sure to get the necessary recommendations. It had been a long and tortuous road from the cellar to this room near the sky.

**F**rom Kabakov's studio it was not far to Taron's. We entered one of those monstrous tenements built in the 1920's. There were the usual dark, winding hallways with their rows of doors, each opening onto a narrow room where an entire family lived, several families sharing a big, dirty common kitchen. I marveled that in this gloomy maze my guide was able to find the right door. The room was only nine feet wide, just big enough to hold a bench, a small cupboard, an easel.

Taron, who had the fine, dark face of a tribal chief from the Caucasus, was born in Chemkent—he didn't know exactly when, maybe 1940.<sup>2</sup> Then the war had come, and he became one of the thousands of lost children whose lives alternated between orphanages and reformatories. His drawings reflected this experience. They were tangles of automatic lines, from which emerged the horrible grimaces of a mask. Bitterness and vengeance seemed to have led this man to art. On the back of one of his drawings, dated April 1966, Taron had written a poem—a litany of curses. Underneath it he had scribbled: "This is written in a madhouse, where a pederast has violated us."

This note explained a great deal, including Taron's outspokenness. He was not afraid because, except for a meager state pension of 30 rubles a month, he had nothing to lose. Like so many of his compatriots who had been put in lunatic asylums, he was an outcast, virtually excluded from the human community. I was later to meet some young artists who had deliberately pretended madness and been officially recognized as insane. By doing so, they became second-class citizens, but they also escaped military service and police persecution. Their sacrifice gives us a measure of the repugnance they must have felt for the conventional patterns of Soviet life.

Towards evening, we crossed the city to visit the apartment where P. Roginsky lived and worked. Unfortunately he was not at home. While

his ten-year-old son Sashka regaled me in the kitchen with a professorial dissertation on abstruse problems of space exploration, his mother and my guide were on the telephone trying to persuade Roginsky to let them show me at least one of his works. He refused—he had made it a strict rule to permit no one to enter his studio in his absence. Although my guide was a close friend of Roginsky, there was always the fear that even *he* might be taken in by an informer.

Why such fear, mistrust, and caution? Does the Soviet government really believe itself threatened by paintings hidden in locked rooms? Yes, the fact is that the authorities place avant-garde works of art in the same category as anti-regime pamphlets and firearms. No deviations can be permitted in a country where the dogma of unity is sacrosanct: "Who is not with us is against us."

**B**efore going to the Soviet Union, I had tried to find out as much as I could about the non-conformist artists. What information I managed to assemble was obtained more by word of mouth than from written sources. According to official Soviet publications, Socialist Realism was forging ahead to ever greater successes, undaunted by the few artistic "hooligans." Western studies on the subject, while more objective, were not much more informative. Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead, in their book *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union*, estimated that there were about 1,000 "unofficial" artists in the USSR, 500 of them living in Moscow.<sup>3</sup> Other sources have specifically mentioned some twenty-odd avant-garde artists of real significance.

There is a real problem of identification here. Who is an "official" artist? Should one include the "left academicians," or the dozens of semi-official artists who do conventional work all week but paint abstract canvases on Sunday? And who can provide a reliable list of the "damned" when even they do not know one another, or want to? The written sources are limited to two or three catalogues and a few articles in Western magazines, where the same names are always repeated. The reason for this paucity of information is that the regime bars the works of the non-conformist artists from public view, thus cutting off the essential interaction between the artists and their environ-

<sup>2</sup> The artist also could not tell me his family name. Taron, I learned, is his given name.

<sup>3</sup> Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967, p. 104.

Valentina Kropivnitskaia—  
"Memories," 1968 (photo  
by author).



ment, reducing their activity virtually to a private hobby, and confining their works within a small, restricted world of family and friends. The only way to see their work and to learn something about their manner of living is to ferret out their studios and apartments like a private detective.

I am not sure that my personal observations in Moscow provide satisfactory answers to the many questions that have been asked about the life, attitudes, and problems of the officially-proscribed artists. In the limited time I had at my disposal, I chose to concentrate on their artistic activity, giving less attention to other aspects of their lives. In this I was influenced by the extraordinary reticence of the artists themselves. When it came to politics or the difficult conditions under which they had to live, they talked only vaguely, in gray and neutral terms. Topics which, if frankly discussed, might expose them to official attack and reprisals were taboo. And because the problems the non-conformist artists face in earning a living are so complex and devious, I came to realize that it was indiscreet, to say the least, to interrogate them on this subject after only two hours' acquaintance. Most of what I learned about the private lives of the artists was told to me by my guide rather than by the artists themselves.

One conclusion I arrived at was that the hardships of the non-conformist artists' daily lives—the inevitable consequence of official disapproval—strongly influence their attitudes, their perception of the world, and their way of expressing it in art.

Thus the painter Lev Kropivnitsky recalled the change of vision he had experienced in exile:

**It is necessary to break free internally . . . to move freely again. . . . My old, realistic landscapes did not give me that freedom. But one day I understood that abstract painting could. In the year 1954, on the sands of Kazakhstan, I made my first experiments. Two years later, returning to Moscow, I knew it—abstract painting, that is my road.**

For others, the conflict between their own high ideals and the material and spiritual poverty of their lives is mirrored in the crazy grimaces and messianic visions of their paintings. V. Yakovlev, for example, takes his revenge by painting devastating portraits of his oppressors. The Easter cycle of A. Smirnov uses Byzantine images to show how people have been degraded to the state of beasts.

Whether because of the inertia of tradition or to compensate for their political impotence, some avant-garde painters have invested the portrait with a magical role. Others—magic symbolists like M. Grobman, Aleksandr Kharitonov, and Valentina Kropivnitskaia—conjure up scenes from fables of the Golden Age and secretly believe that these fairy tales will be transformed into reality. Such works are not merely esthetic exercises. It would be a mistake to view Soviet avant-garde painting in the same light as Western art movements. To do this is to overlook the intimate meaning of these pictures, which were created under the sword of Damocles, under the threat of spying and interrogation, and even of deportation. This sense



of menace is a crucial part of the content of Soviet avant-garde art.

**D**uring my first days in Moscow, I thought that the non-conformist artists' sense of being under constant threat was exaggerated, and I was irritated at what seemed to me their excessive caution. I had read in the Sjeklocha-Mead study, referred to earlier, that painting in "modernist" styles was not prohibited by Soviet law, and that in recent years no Soviet artist had been arrested and imprisoned,<sup>4</sup> although the same book contained reproductions of a number of works whose creators were simply listed as "Anonymous," presumably for their protection.

It was not long, however, before I began to share the artists' awareness of an omnipresent and menacing shadow. Three particular experiences were responsible for this. The first occurred when I took a Soviet artist, whom I shall simply call V., to meet an English writer at the Metropole Hotel. As the three of us were leaving the hotel, we ran into a girl employee of the Academy of Sciences, who some days earlier had helped me with a bibliography. I paused to exchange a few words with her, and when I turned around to rejoin my companions, only the writer was there. V. had disappeared, and he rejoined us only after we had turned the corner. He looked at me with suspicion. "Did that girl invite you here?" he asked. "No, why?" I replied. "She's a stool pigeon," V. explained. "Didn't you know?" I objected that a research worker at the Academy of Sciences did not need to make money that way. "You don't understand a thing about it," V. insisted. "She may have been forced to do it. And if you give in once, they never let you out of their net." Then he told me of a sequence of suspicious incidents at each of which the same girl had been present. I still couldn't quite believe that she was an informer, but who knows?

The second experience took place in the studio of the young Ukrainian painter V. Polevoy. He had just spread out before us some of his small terracotta sculptures and his drawings. Suddenly he jumped up, ran to the door and threw it open. Standing there, huddled up close to the door, was a man with a telephone receiver in his hand. Upon being discovered, he quickly began speaking into

the mouthpiece as if he were carrying on a conversation. But the base of the telephone was ten feet away down the corridor! "He does this to me several times a day," Polevoy explained. "The important thing," he added, "is not to let oneself be disconcerted by it. What they want to do is to frighten us and break our spirit." Again and again I was to hear this use of the word "they," signifying some all-powerful and oppressive external force, some ubiquitous presence that filled one with apprehension.

The third incident happened when I visited a painter whom I will call by the pseudonym of Tchirkovsky. Until 1960, he had been one of the leaders of the young avant-garde, who made his studio their meeting place. Then a popular Western magazine published some photographs of his compositions. He was promptly denounced for organizing a center of alien ideology, ceased to receive any commissions for art work, and found himself under constant surveillance. Most of his friends stopped seeing him.

Tchirkovsky took me to his studio by a roundabout route, talking the while about the new productions of Brecht, but pausing every once in a while to look suspiciously at the other pedestrians. He knew the faces of those assigned to shadow him, but he had reached the point where almost everyone seemed to resemble his watchful "guardians." As we entered his ground-floor apartment, I noticed that the door was sound-proofed. We squeezed along a corridor lined with rows of stacked-up paintings until we came to the room that served as his studio. His first act was to draw the plastic curtains, as people had done during the wartime blackouts to keep from being spotted by the enemy.

Then he turned on the light, revealing a room so crammed with objects of one sort or another that only a narrow path was left open through the middle of the room. Evidence that the place had once been frequented by the spiritual elite covered one of the walls—plaster casts of the hands, and sometimes the faces, of poets such as Yevtushenko, Okudzava, and Akhmadulina, of painters and of scientists, hung suspended on cords like dried fish. Under the dismembered faces and hands hung drills for woodworking. Tchirkovsky loved archaic masks and had made a variety of them. Another wall was covered with shelves full of wonderful small abstract sculptures and other art objects. The shelves and cupboards themselves were painted like Indian wigwams. With the voraciousness of a Brazilian jungle, Tchirkovsky's decorative instinct had taken possession of every corner of the room.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, XIII.

Yet his art remained confined within this one room. Between the shelves and a printing press, dozens upon dozens of paintings stood stacked against one another, so that when Tchirkovsky wanted to show some of them to me, he could do no more than move them slightly apart. So these works, dedicated to the cause of artistic freedom, have instead imprisoned their creator. What a paradox—that the artist's dream of eternal joy and harmony as pictured on these canvases should have found expression in this room, on the edge of the abyss of madness. Suddenly the door bell rings. Tchirkovsky stiffens, clutching at me with his eyes. Someone unexpected wants to come in. We don't move. We wait.

I admit that at that moment I, too, succumbed to this strange paranoia. Later, when I was alone, I asked myself: What caused that sudden wave of anxiety? Telepathy from the persecuted man? Was it a conditioned reflex built up by the earlier experiences related above? Or was it simply that I had come to understand better what it meant to be a Soviet artist on the official blacklist? It was true that no one had been arrested lately for what he painted. But among the avant-garde artists of Moscow there were not a few who had been in labor camps or insane asylums, and many more who had been spied upon, harassed, and interrogated, and who had seen their own persecution extended to their relatives and friends. Living in virtual ostracism from society, all of them were acutely and intimately aware of the regime's permanent suspicion of the intelligentsia, and of the fate that had befallen their literary counterparts, Andrei Siniavsky, Yuli Daniel and others.

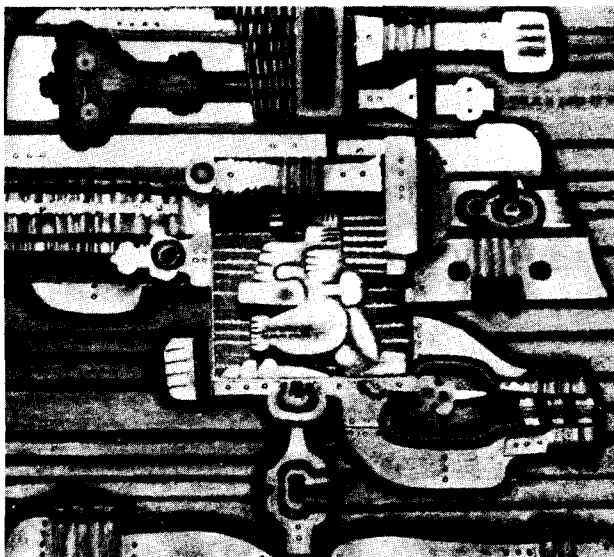
The "policeman of the spirit" has indeed become a central presence in their lives, often more oppressive than material poverty. This shadow walks with them in the street, sits down with them at the dinner table, listens when they talk on the telephone, stands behind the door when they start to draw or model. For these artists it matters little that this presence is not as fierce or compelling as it was in the days of Stalinist terror. The ubiquitous "policeman of the spirit" affects them despite their efforts to resist. Many of them become passive, cautious, silent, hiding their feelings behind the stony mask of the ordinary Soviet citizen. Their speech is full of symbolic, veiled references, since they are always aware of the threat of censorship. Some repress their opinions completely, carry-

ing their "policeman" home with them. In this, they conform to a tradition that goes back many centuries—a tradition of tortured conscience, vague guilt feelings, passivity in the face of authority, and exaggeration of the power of the police. The tragic result is that these victims, intimidated into prudence and demonstrations of loyalty, themselves contribute to the effectiveness of the official system of repression.

But for a sizable proportion of the younger avant-garde artists, dissent has become almost compulsive and goes beyond just the issue of artistic freedom. They refuse to be identified with the oppressors, and they openly sympathize with the injured. If in the Stalin era it was considered a patriotic virtue to denounce one's neighbor, an increasing segment of Soviet youth is now moving toward the opposite extreme. "Only those who have been punished or persecuted are just; the others are more or less guilty, and we must keep our distance from them." This statement was made to me by one of the young painters I met, and it reflected an attitude that I found to be widespread.

A number of dissenting artists, it is true, still believe in the principles of communism, but they distinguish between "progressive" ideology and bureaucratic power. For them, the Revolution remains sacred, the gateway to a better order, but the authoritarian "idiots" have distorted its ideas and taken disastrous detours. What is needed is a return to the original, pristine principles of the party; and in art this means a return to sincerity, truth, and responsibility.

Already during the wave of cultural liberalization that followed Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956, some of the younger artists began projecting these ideas into their work, substituting portraits of brutality for the approved, shining faces of "positive" heroes. I saw the results of this period of sincerity and rebirth at several artists' studios when I visited the Soviet Union in 1959. The painter Dmitri Krasnopevtsev was then living on Kropotkina Road, in a one-story annex to a large tenement. Thin and taciturn, he seemed to be in the grip of some painful experience. His shyness was reflected in his paintings, which contained no human figures. Krasnopevtsev believed only in things and their simplicity. So he painted jugs, broken pieces, bombs, cupboards, mineral crystals—with theatrical highlights and shadows, as if they were actors in some tragedy.



Vladimir Yankilevsky—Right-hand section of a triptych, 1965 (photo by author).

During the day, Krasnopevtsev earned his living by painting huge posters of smiling beauties, to be displayed at the entrances of movie houses. In the evenings, he was silent among his paintings and other prized belongings. He had a fantastic collection of shells, strange corals, and rocks, which he had brought back from the Black Sea. Something of their mystery entered into his paintings, which he saw as associated with no artistic school, but simply as a means of spiritual refuge.

Another artist I visited in 1959 was the sculptor, Ernst Neizvestny, who struck out even more fiercely at the system of bureaucratic repression—and for good reason. From childhood on, he had experienced only the most brutal and degrading aspects of Soviet life. After growing up in semi-exile near the Urals, he was almost killed in the war, spent some time in a Soviet prison camp, and became a recognized artist after the war, only to be expelled from the Academy and forced to work in factories. In the small cellar he inhabited under a new apartment house on Leningrad Chaussée, I saw the horrible Baroque designs of his “War Cycle.” A later series in the same vein, “Robots and Semi-Robots,” earned the widely-publicized displeasure of Khrushchev at the Manège in 1962.

Neizvestny was an outlaw type, a fighter for the things he believed in. But it would be a mistake to idealize him for his intransigence. Life had taught him that the roads to achieving one’s goal could be many. Along with his protest pieces in

that little cellar, where there were more heating pipes than space, I saw heads done in the official mode. Neizvestny could be successful both as a politician and as an artist. Early in his career he found powerful protectors and buyers among the scientific and bureaucratic elite. As the first notable Soviet avant-garde artist, he received important commissions (though this success was spoiled for him by the need to compromise) and was exhibited abroad.<sup>5</sup> Today, despite some setbacks, he has reached the status of a semi-official, widely-respected sculptor, without seriously compromising his modernist tendencies.

A third artist I met during my earlier visit was Yuri Vasilev, who earned his official living as an illustrator and stage designer. But in his private work he was one of the most tempestuous and protean interpreters of the post-Stalin mood. The sculptures, graphics, paintings and assemblages I saw in his bedroom studio on Ulianovskaia Road could have filled a small museum. This dynamic, temperamental man took the official statements on rehabilitation literally. Proceeding methodically through a variety of phases, he “rehabilitated” all the major trends in Western art that had been bypassed in the Soviet Union. By 1957 he had painted his first abstract canvas, “Greenland.” I asked him why he had decided on the uncompromising path of modern art. He replied:

**You know, in 1952, when I came out of the Institute of Surikov, I found myself swamped with commissions. It may have been because I worked so rapidly, and perhaps because the art establishment wanted at the time to show itself the friend of youth. Anyway, I had the opportunity to find out how repulsive, how much like hyenas were these hucksters who dominated Soviet art, who decided the fate of talented artists, often consigning them to poverty. This nauseated me. I have never forgotten how Gerasimov and his ilk liquidated our avant-garde in the 1930’s. In 1954 I decided to go against the current. For me the avant-garde means the Revolution, and all these manipulators have falsified it. But the ideas of the Revolution will win in the end, and our art, which is now silenced, will finally belong to the people.**

For Vasilev, it was not the esthetic but the moral issue which was decisive. And many other Soviet artists, despite their differences, shared his faith in a messianic rebirth of revolutionary purity. Thus the figurative painter Leonid Polistzuk, the “Machinist” Vladimir Yankilevsky, the kinetic

<sup>5</sup> Neizvestny’s works were exhibited in 1964 at the Grosvenor Gallery in London and at the Zentralbuchhandlung in Vienna; in 1966, at the Galerie Lambert in Paris and also in Prague.

artist Lev Nusberg all regarded their painted or constructed visions as forms of utopia, of true socialism, of total liberation.

Something should also be said here about some of the new forms of “collective” art in the Soviet Union. Teamwork in art has actually been practiced since the time of ancient Egypt, but it acquired a new vogue in the USSR with the execution of huge historical canvases in the official style of Socialist Realism. Now, it has been carried over into the realm of avant-garde art, the most interesting examples being the abstract expressionist school of Beliutin,<sup>6</sup> the Prometheus “colored music” collective of Kazany, and finally the kinetic art group known as Dvizhenie (The Movement).

I visited this last group in October 1967 in that rather melancholy and very European city, Leningrad. It had found temporary residence in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, on the bank of the Neva. I entered through the 18th-century House of Engineers where, in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, many decorations, slogans and illuminations were being prepared. Someone had had the idea that Leningrad, as the cradle of the Revolution, ought to put on something extraordinary in honor of the occasion.

<sup>6</sup> On the work of the Beliutin group, see Sjeklocha and Mead, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-88.

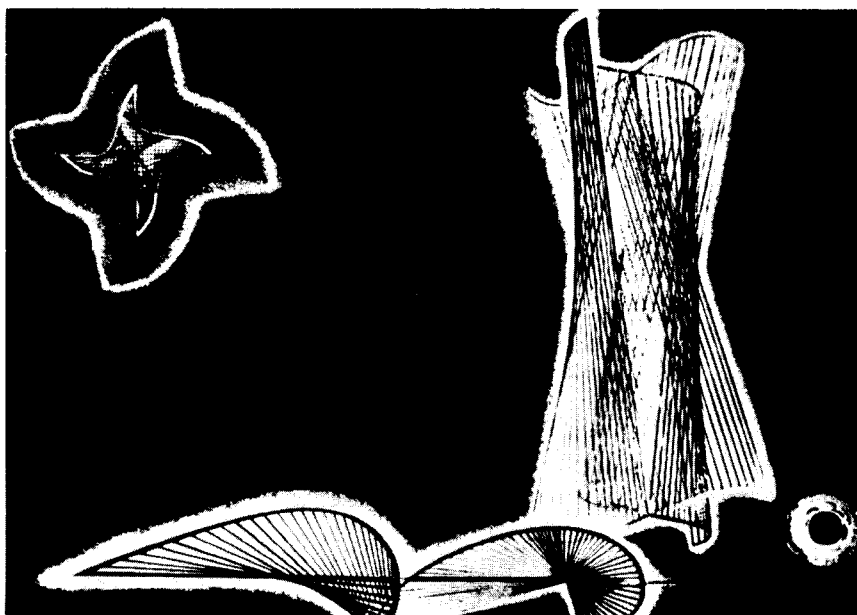
The committee in charge had hit upon the light-and-motion displays of the Dvizhenie group.

No outsider was allowed to enter the long wing of the House of Engineers where the kinetic artists were working night and day. However, my guide produced a card which opened this door, too. The first room contained a podium on which a model of the whole display was laid out. In front of the “Finland Station” construction stood a statue of Lenin on which a film of moving lights and colors was to be projected. We walked along a corridor lined with cubicles full of materials, tools, people sitting on camp-cots, and tables cluttered with drawing paper, pots and pans, small gas cooking stoves, and even toothbrushes. At the end of the corridor, one entered a large hall equipped with radio-electronic gear, projectors, reflectors, and a small stage for kinetic exhibits.

It was nine o'clock in the morning, and already the place was humming with activity. Galina Bitt, the actor Buturlin, N. Kuznetsov, Francisco Infante (the genius of the group), and others were rushing about like so many excited children enthusiastically playing a game directed by an elder brother. The brother in this case was Lev Nusberg, the dynamic general planner, whose work-style revealed the drive of an industrial manager. Nusberg assigned the tasks for the day and then hurried off to an electronics plant to direct the assembly of a great luminous mobile.

That evening we visited with Nusberg. A bit tired, with a pan of slightly-burned macaroni on his knee and sipping the eternal glass of tea, he

The Dvizhenie Group—Lumino-kinetic configuration, 1965 (photo by author).





asked me for news of Le Parc, Colombo, and Schöffer, with all of whom he keeps in touch. Then he went on to describe the work of the Dvizhenie group in these terms:

**Kinetic art organically unites the various traditional art forms, at the same time imparting to them a different character from that with which we are familiar. In kinetism there will be sounds, but no music in the usual sense. You will hear words organized rhythmically, singing, but it will not be literature, nor recitation, nor propaganda. There will be changing colored lights, but the effect will be very different from painting. The spatial structures will have something in common with sculpture and architecture—that is, they will exist in space—but their form will be continually changing. The techniques of film and television will have their place in the ensemble. There will be changes of odor and heat, movements of gases and liquids which will shine with colored light—exploiting radio-electronics, chemistry, programming devices to direct radiations, and finally plastic elements in electromagnetic fields. . . .**

I asked Nusberg how it happened that his non-conformist art group had been allowed to produce the display for the 50th anniversary celebration. "Well," he replied, "I guess it was just by chance or coincidence. Leningrad wanted to trump Moscow by putting on something spectacular and new. So we are preparing this luminescent display centered around the figure of Lenin." I congratulated Nusberg and remarked that it probably meant his group would earn enough money to last for a year at least. "Oh, no, we won't," he replied. "We hardly break even. They give us a place to work and pay us by the hour at workers' wages." "But that's exploitation!" I exclaimed. "Yes," he answered, "all our friends are a bit surprised. But we don't belong to the Artists' Union, so we have no rights. After all, we are glad just to be provided with the materials we need. We couldn't possibly get them otherwise, since they can only be obtained from factories. What is important is that we are doing something. One cannot go on forever just sketching dreams and putting them in the drawer." "But how is it possible for you extreme modernists to be invited to do something official?" I persisted. Nusberg smiled. "They are treating us not as artists but as young electrotechnicians indulging in a hobby. Better that way. Even in Moscow, some of our models were recently shown in an exhibit—in the applied art section, along with embroidered cloths and enameled pots."

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ONE COULD WRITE a book about the bizarre living problems and moral compulsions of the Russian avant-garde. But such a book could equally be

written about the young men in the cellars of Prague and Warsaw—and even about the young Bohemians in Paris and New York. All of them are exponents of new ideas, live in conflict with prevailing conventions, and are rejected by the official guardians of art. The special "privilege" of the Soviet and East European avant-garde is to be the object of the vigilance of the state. Moral considerations play a large part in their activity, but their decisive motivation is simply the compulsion to express themselves with strength and sincerity. The traditional messianic outlook of Russian artists has now taken the form of a fanatical modernism.

While the avant-garde artists of Moscow differ considerably among themselves in technique and style, they share some basic attitudes. Their common opposition to the official conception of art leads them to disavow taboos and dogma in other areas of life. They also share the penalties for these attitudes. Their ability to exhibit their work and communicate their ideas is severely restricted. Denial of membership in the Artists' Union forces them into various secondary occupations<sup>7</sup> which leave them little time and energy to devote to serious art.

Finally, the regime purposely tries to break their spirit by forcing them into poverty and squalor. At the same time, they are offered the chance of living in comfort, and even luxury, *if* they change their opinions and attitudes. But in most cases, the temptation is rejected, and the young artists persevere out of a firm belief in the justice of their position. They refuse to barter away their ideals in exchange for material comforts. They belong to that elite of modern artists who see as their field of investigation the whole of life. They bring to Soviet society, in spite of official barriers, a broad sense of the contemporary and a consciousness of the continuity and variety of world art.

Making my way through Moscow from one dreary cubicle or cellar to another, I had many depressing experiences. Yet, in the end, I came away amazed and uplifted. If the bureaucrats had their way, the studios of the avant-garde would be transformed into places of house-arrest. Instead they have become private enclaves of "internal emigration" where projects are being prepared for a future world of spiritual and artistic freedom.

<sup>7</sup> Avant-garde artists sometimes resort to conventional art as their "secondary occupation." Some of them have become candidates for membership in the Artists' Union on the basis of their conventional, not their authentic, works.

## Reviews in Brief

### *Men of the Past*

DAVID SHUB: *Politicheskie deiateli Rossii, 1850-ykh—1920-ykh gg.* (Russian Political Figures from the 1850's to the 1920's). New York, The New Review, 1969.

IN THIS RICHLY documented collection of essays, David Shub, the noted biographer of Lenin, recalls some of the democratic and humanist elements in Russia's prerevolutionary political heritage, both Marxian and non-Marxian. The first chapter, on precursors of *narodnichestvo* (populism), contains a section on Piotr Lavrov, the versatile colonel of artillery, mathematician, cultural historian, and member of the "*Zemlia i volia*" (Land and Freedom) society, who observed in 1874 that every dictatorship in history "has spent more time, effort, and energy on the struggle for power with its rivals than in using that power to achieve its program." The Lavrov quotation, like many of those from Herzen, Lenin, Gorky, and other authors are not to be found in published Soviet sources.

Mr. Shub also ranges through Russian forerunners of Lenin (Zaichnevsky, Tkachev, Bakunin, Nechaev and Plekhanov), the liberal movement and the First Duma, Russian socialism and the 1914 war, and the "Parvus" affair; he includes commentaries on Lenin and the Bolsheviks by such figures as Plekhanov, Kropotkin and Gorky, as well as perspectives on the Jewish role in the Revolution.

Of particular interest is a chapter devoted to the later years of Vladimir Korolenko, who died in 1921. An early foe of the reactionary and antisemitic Black Hundreds (he attended every session of the trial of Mendel Beilis, accused of "ritual murder," and helped rally support for him), Korolenko in-

curred Lenin's displeasure by condemning Bolshevik forms of oppression after 1917. In 1920, Lenin sent Lunacharsky to Poltava to reason with Korolenko, but this mission merely produced a new indictment of Bolshevism in the form of a series of letters written by Korolenko to the People's Commissar. Shub quotes extensively from the letters, one of which proclaims: "Such things as freedom of conscience, assembly, speech, and the press are, for European proletarians, not mere 'bourgeois prejudices' but necessary tools which mankind has arrived at only through lengthy and not unfruitful struggle and progress. Only you who have never fully known these freedoms nor learned to use them jointly with the people can call them 'bourgeois prejudice.'"

While it is regrettable that this work has not yet been translated into English, its publication in Russian has the virtue of preserving the original versions of many materials not available from Soviet sources. Mr. Shub's style is lucid and concise, and the inclusion of source references in the text helps to compensate for the lack of a bibliography.

James Critchlow

### *Portrait of a Statesman*

ROBERT F. BYRNES: *Pobedonostsev, His Life and Thought*. Bloomfield, Indiana University Press, 1968.

IN 1881, WHEN Alexander III was setting government policy on a new course, his attitude was decisively influenced by Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev. Yet, as the abundant bib-

liography of this book reveals, Western scholars have rarely studied this figure in his own right, and Professor Byrnes demonstrates what a rich seam has been neglected.

Pobedonostsev rose rapidly in his career: first a professor of civil law, then a Senate official, he became tutor to Alexander II's eldest son and heir in 1861, at the age of 34. The Tsarevich died four years later, but by then Pobedonostsev's reputation for intellectual clarity and erudition were well established, and he was retained as tutor to the new heir and future Tsar, Alexander III. By then, too, his philosophy had matured and would undergo only slight revision during the last 40 years of his life.

The author opens with a survey of Pobedonostsev's parents, grandparents, and ten siblings, drawing a parallel between his friendless, impersonal home-life and his later life as the cold and remote *éminence grise*. Paradoxically, in spite—or because—of this upbringing, Pobedonostsev made the family the very keystone of his philosophy, which may be briefly defined as repressive paternalism combined with acid contempt for "progressive" notions.

His personal tragedy was that, although he trained himself to strive for meticulous scholarship, he became intellectually dishonest in his later years, stooping even to plagiarism. A man of contradictions, he believed that society would survive only by dedicating itself to the pursuit of truth and justice, though these goals were hardly in keeping with his pessimistic view of mankind. His intense religious belief focused on human frailty and sinfulness and was perhaps his clearest affinity with Dostoevsky, whom he knew well from 1871 until the novelist's death.

The last ten years of Pobedonostsev's life, from 1896 onward, were marked by steady decline. Although he continued to hold views on policy, they