

PERESTROIKA IN THE WORKS OF THE "NOVYE KHUDOZHNIKI"



«Ballet of the Three Untearables» O. Kolimeychuk,
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The "Novye Khudozhniki" ("New Artists") group is one of the most advanced groups in Soviet art. In the early 1980s when Russian avant-garde went through a revitalization they sensed the progressive craving of the masses, and created the kind of Russian art that the country's youth was seeking. Therefore it was no surprise that they were the ones to ride the crest of the wave of new artistic trends. The audience paid increasingly less attention to the technique of painting. Inevitably this created a reaction among artists, many of whom started to think: "Is there an abstract spectator who is willing to pay attention to an artist's works just for their aesthetic sake?" The extensive practice of exhibitions and shows among the "Novye Khudozhniki", which grew with perestroika, led to a greater awareness of the viewer. Perestroika, as noted in Communist Party documents, had much in common with the revolutionary processes of 1917: and so did the creative search of the "Budetlyane" ("men of the future" - a word coined for the times of the revolution) and the "Novye Khudozhniki". The continuity is natural and apparent.

Thus, a picture, which nobody needs, becomes a "thing". A modern picture should be understandable, transparent in regard to its form, finished, and it should evoke positive feelings - these were the necessary qualities that came to replace the obsolete requirements. Striving for appreciation has always been natural for artists (and not only artists). Today any mass-oriented art inevitably looks industrial, even when from the "New Artists" group. Given their lack of material and technological resources, they turned to the heritage of LEF (the Left Front of the Arts) and, first and foremost, Mayakovsky.

STENCIL. Severe conditions, including hunger and war in the country, made it impossible for Mayakovsky to execute thousands of images and reproduce them in large quantities. The clarity of the sign in his images leaves everyone convinced that they are folk works. The use of color is extremely limited. Having found their guru, the "Novye" took up the fight enthusiastically. Stencil became the favorite medium of those who yesterday were painting with a mop or a broom. LEF's industrial art had reached a peak, with which the "Novye" were

reluctant to compete. The same processes recur in a different informational environment. Ideological conviction again prevails against impartiality.

THE IDEA OF GOOD. The undefeated good. Russian art in its supreme form is the triumph of the idea of good. Perhaps, it was their youth that makes artists explore and go beyond the traditional theme of "the good and happiness". According to "Novye", depicting happiness is the best way to depict the good (although there exist other ways).

INVOLVEMENT. It is typical of every revolution to destroy their particular "Bastilles". The Bastille of today is the ebony tower, which the "Novye" destroyed, although retaining all its parts in store, aware that they may become handy one day. The "Novye" artists took part in everything. The revolutionary process pours adrenalin into their veins. Concerts, performances, films, exhibitions, almanacs, unions: any event in which they aren't participating is an attraction to them. They are at ease within Perestroika.

REACTION. Reaction is bound to follow. It was the power of LEF that caused the reaction that subsequently smashed it. Is it possible that the current process will go differently? Will it be tragedy that follows farce? Look at the history of art, where the remains of past revolutionaries are to be found everywhere. Will the "Novye" be such a case? The "Novye" are waiting.

INFERNO. The hellish heat, a lingering chance to fall in the fight for the new creates the giants of the will. A work of art becomes a powerful tool.

MAGIC. The large percentage of sorcerers among artists, the "Novye" in particular, is the sign of times.

MAFIA. The "Novye" formed a strong "cultural mafia": they have their own organizations, such as the Club of Friends of Vladimir V. Mayakovsky, the Novye Khudozhniki (New Artists) group, the Novye Kompozitory (New Composers) group, and the "Mzha-la-la Film" studio, the Club of Folk Art Lovers, the "Novost" (News) journal, DP College, the "Novaya Literatura" (New Literature) group etc.; they have subsidiaries, missions and associated organizations in other cities and even other countries. They are open to co-operation (with everybody).

HISTORY. The "Novye" movement began to shape itself in the mid-1970s when the pressure of control over the avant-garde and other non-conformist movements, which did not adhere to the official culture in the USSR, started gradually to relax. By 1977 the first new group of young people, lacking the complexes of an earlier generation which had been incapable of showing its art to the public, appeared with the title "Letopis" (Chronicle). The Letopis artists organized exhibitions everywhere: the usual shows arranged in their flats ran concurrently with exhibitions on beaches, in the streets, on roofs, in parks. The police and KGB always followed them everywhere, which added an element of romanticism to their lives. Beginning from 1979 they started to have official shows in exhibition halls. Fortunately, the persecutions ended almost completely. This produced a new generation of artists, who knew no limitations to their creative work except economic ones.

ASSA. "ASSA to the masses" is "Novye"'s slogan since 1984. Currently "ASSA" prepares its assault on the mass media of the USSR and other countries. And this assault won't cease until "Novye" decides that the idea is outdated.

THE NEW CRITISISM. "All words are synonyms," - Avdotya Smimova had to admit when she came across "Novye"'s techniques of disguise. This technique of secrecy is inseparably interlinked with the versification of the information, parallel meaning shift, and exaggeration.

These and other literary devices are what makes "Novye" invincible. The new art calls for a new criticism. The revolution rid itself of the old legal system.

"NOVYE KOMPOSITORY" (NEW COMPOSERS). The process of perestroika (re-building) requires new methods. One of the most important ones is RE-COM-POSITIONING.

Most common in music, this technique is the most widely used by "Novye"'s orchestra - "Populyarnaya Mechanika" and the "Novye Kompository" group; it is utilized by new artists, film-makers, writers, critics, and theatre professionals. The technique shares origin with RECYCLING.

THE POWER BALANCE. This is how "Novye" position themselves today.

Timur Novikov, 1985