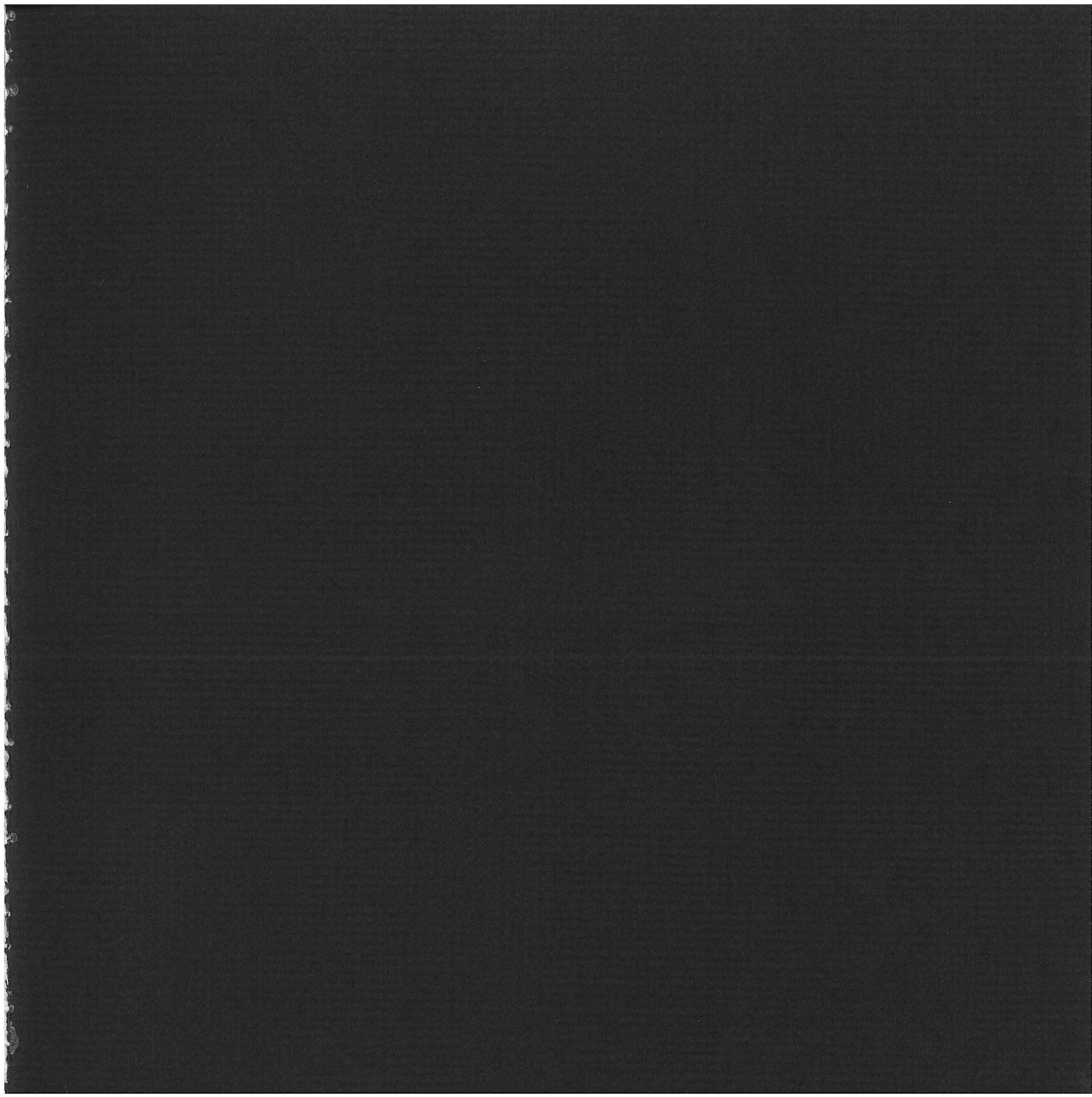


Sots Art





Sots Art

Eric Bulatov

Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid

Alexander Kosolapov

Leonid Lamm

Leonid Sokov

Kazimir Passion Group

Margarita Tupitsyn, *Guest Curator*

THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, NEW YORK

Sots Art

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Foreword

Marcia Tucker
Director

This exhibition of work by Russian emigré artists and one painter still living in Moscow presents and analyzes some essential aspects of the first programmatic art movement to emerge from the U.S.S.R. since the avant-garde modernist revolution of the 1920s.

At the time these works were done, the artists did not see Soviet Socialist Realism, the "official" art style sanctioned by the government, as either a form of *kitsch* or as a means of bureaucratic manipulation on its part, but rather as a rich field of myths and stereotypes which could be turned into a powerful contemporary visual language.

Sots artists therefore used the formal, iconographic aspects of official Socialist Realism to aesthetic rather than specific political or ideological ends. In breaking apart and reusing traditional symbols (such as those of power, gender, nationalism, heroism, or specific cultural myths) and representing them through parody, ironic interplay, and shifting contexts, Sots artists have changed the way we see such images and the effect they have on us and others. (That there are no women in the exhibition ironically underscores the extent to which, in parodying Socialist Realism, the artists have had to identify with the symbols of patriarchal power.)

Through this first museum exhibition of Sots Art, their work can now be seen collectively as an integral aspect of postmodernist art and culture at large. We are also able to trace the changes in attitude and reference that have taken place in the work of those who now live in New York as they are beginning to examine the visual language of the West in similar, subversive ways.

Our thanks to Norton Dodge, a long-time supporter and collector of Russian avant-garde art, for his generous contribution to the catalogue. We are grateful also to the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Institute of Museum Services for their ongoing support of our exhibition program.

We thank Margarita Tupitsyn, our guest curator, for having suggested the exhibition to us and brought it and the catalogue to fruition with the special knowledge of the field that she has as a Russian emigré as well as an art historian. Thanks also to John E. Bowlt for his outstanding essay on the origins of Socialist Realism, which helps to put the present exhibition in a historical context. At the Museum, we are grateful to our Board, staff, volunteers, and interns for their enthusiasm for the project and the hard work which allowed it to happen. Our curatorial interns this year, Rod Goodrow and Barbara Nusbaum, were especially skilled and helpful; Adjunct Curator Brian Wallis worked closely with Ms. Tupitsyn on the final version of the catalogue essay; Marcia Landsman, Publications Coordinator, who produced the catalogue, and Lisa Parr, Curatorial Assistant, saw to the exhibition details with their customary skill, patience, and efficiency. Lynn Gumpert, Senior Curator, was especially helpful in acting as the Museum's liaison with our guest curator.

We are delighted to provide to the public this first in-depth examination of Soviet art since 1970, and thank, above all, the artists who have so generously and courageously added to the challenging and critical aesthetic vocabulary of our own time.

Acknowledgments

Margarita Tupitsyn
Guest Curator

In my attempt to bring contemporary Russian art to a wider audience, I have been fortunate in receiving the warmth and encouragement from a number of individuals. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Norton Dodge for his continuous support over the past five years and his generous contribution to this catalogue. My thanks to Barry Blinderman of Semaphore Gallery who, in 1984, invited me to organize a show entitled "Sots Art: Russian Mock-Heroic Style." I am also grateful to Jodi Daynard and Todd Bludeau for their editorial assistance. At The New Museum, I would like to express my gratitude to Marcia Tucker, Lynn

Gumpert, William Olander, and Brian Wallis for their interest in and realization of this exhibition. My thanks also to John Jacobs and Lisa Parr for organizing the exhibition tour, to Marcia Landsman for attending to the catalogue production, and to Andrea Wollensak for her sensitive design of the catalogue. My sincere gratitude goes to the artists for their years of friendship and for their enthusiasm and participation in this project. And finally, I am grateful to my husband and colleague, Victor Tupitsyn, for being constructive in his deconstructive treatment of the many issues discussed during the organization of this exhibition.

Sots Art: The Russian Deconstructive Force

by Margarita Tupitsyn

It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself.

Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*

There was an air of mystery around Komar and Melamid's exhibition at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in 1982: the lights were dimmed and the large, dramatically lit canvases were not in familiar styles of contemporary art, but seemed to be painted in—of all things—historical and classical styles. Swags of drapery, columnated architecture, and classical muses, were combined with a veritable who's who of the Kremlin—Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev—making the imagery even more strange and distantiated. Moreover, the exhibition was presided over by a larger-than-life bust of Stalin, an authentic Socialist Realist painting, and other trappings of totalitarian imagery. For the American viewer, then, the exhibition marked a displacement or dislocation to a foreign time and setting (not unlike Walter Benjamin's reaction on first seeing the Kremlin in 1926, when he remarked, "All the colors of Moscow...converge at the center of Russian power").

What seemed puzzling about this alien "empire of signs" was suggested by its title—Sots Art—which signalled the fact that the iconography was drawn entirely from the signs of the Soviet cultural and political heritage. For American viewers, unfamiliar with these national icons or their meanings, the exhibition prompted specific, political interpretations. However, this literal reading of the works—especially in the context of heightened U.S.-Soviet antagonism—ran counter to Komar and Melamid's intentions. As they said, "To us, Stalin is a mythical figure. We are not trying to do a political show. This is nostalgia."¹ While it may be true that Stalin is a mythical figure for Americans and Russians alike insofar as he was an omnipotent, paternalistic leader, few people in America can regard his image as a source of nostalgic longing. It is just this type of peculiarly nationalistic response to cultural signs which characterized the particular "otherness" of Komar and Melamid's imagery, which distinguished them as somehow *different* in the context of contemporary art. One was forced to ask then: Why would Komar and Melamid turn to these ideological images in New York, where they had come specifically to escape the particular Soviet use of cultural stereotypes and censorship?

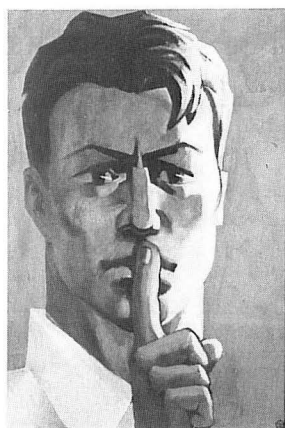
Complicating the answer to this question is the fact that in their 1982 exhibition, Komar and Melamid did not create a new style, but resurrected a movement which they had inaugurated ten years earlier, the movement they called Sots Art. At that time their ideas coincided with those of other artists, such as Alexander Kosolapov, Eric Bulatov, and Leonid Sokov, and Sots

Art became the first avant-garde movement in contemporary Russian art. But the radicality of Sots Art went beyond its uniqueness in the context of strict Soviet restrictions on art production; rather, its critical importance lay in the fact that the Sots artists proposed to view Socialist Realism not as mere kitsch or as simply a vehicle for bureaucratic manipulation and state propaganda, but as a rich field of stereotypes and myths which they could transform into a new, contemporary language, one able to deconstruct official myths on their own terms.

In emigrating to the West, the Sots artists realized that in addition to this rich vocabulary of visual signs, the official style of their nation also carried a psychological weight, inspiring them as emigrés to recreate certain provocative images of their past. As Komar and Melamid observed, "It's only in America that we have really perceived ourselves as national Russian artists, so to speak. Indeed, a 'national' artist does not create himself artificially, he's born like that, it's like a birthmark."² Thus, first in Moscow and later in New York, Sots Art manifested itself as an epic and nationalistic discourse. Ironically, even though these artists were opposed to the usage of national signifiers by the Soviet state, their art remained staunchly pro-Russian, in opposition to the predominant forms of Western culture.

The term "Sots Art" was first coined by Komar and Melamid in Moscow in 1972. According to them, a friend who had come to their studio had seen their paintings based on Soviet mass-cultural imagery and concluded that this work was a Soviet variation of American Pop Art.³ Later Komar and Melamid, intrigued by this comparison, invented a similarly generic term: Sots Art ("Sots" being short for "Socialist"). Also at that time—though independently—an older Moscow artist, Eric Bulatov, began to appropriate the same imagery. Unlike Bulatov, however, who never attempted to exhibit his Sots Art works, Komar and Melamid took a risk. In 1973, when they were invited to have an official show under the auspices of the Youth Section of the Union of Soviet Artists (of which they were members), they brought some of their Sots Art pieces for a preview. Seeing these works, the committee members became hysterical and immediately announced the cancellation of the exhibition. Shortly thereafter it was announced that the artists—"the distorters of Soviet reality"—would be expelled from the Union.⁴

This shocking decision only inspired Komar and Melamid to more radical behavior. They began to organize unofficial performances and apartment shows. During one such apartment exhibition, the police suddenly arrived and arrested all the viewers and Komar himself.⁵ In 1974, Komar and Melamid began to organize a large exhibition which would inaugurate Sots Art as a movement in Moscow. They were joined by Alexander Kosolapov (whose first works in this style



Komar and Melamid
Don't Babble, 1974. Oil on
canvas, 35½ x 24". Courtesy
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,
New York

were made in 1972), Alexander Yulikov, and Komar and Melamid's students, the collaborative performance team of Victor Skersis, Mikhail Roshal, and Gennady Donskoy. Together these artists produced a manifesto, written in a left-wing constructivist mode, and were photographed near the Mausoleum. Later, Bulatov was also invited to participate in the exhibition. Unfortunately, the exhibition never took place as a suitable space could not be found.

In September 1974, Komar and Melamid decided to participate in an open-air exhibition then being organized by a group of unofficial modernist artists. This exhibition later became known as the "Bulldozer" show, for when a number of these artists gathered their works together in a field on the outskirts of Moscow on September 15, government bulldozers overran and damaged the artworks. Komar and Melamid's painting, *Double Self-Portrait* was completely destroyed.⁶ This overreaction on the part of the Soviet bureaucracy aroused a storm of international protest and led to the prompt organization of a second, official open-air exhibition. This second exhibition, held two weeks after the first, was named "Izmailovo," and anyone was eligible to participate. Many nonartists as well as artists of all types produced works especially for this unusual show. After that day, the situation improved somewhat for the older modernists, though younger artists, like the Sots artists, continued to show only in unofficial apartment exhibitions. One of the most popular sites was the studio of the sculptor Leonid Sokov, who joined the Sots Art movement in 1975. Ultimately, the Sots artists were never able to exhibit publicly in Moscow as a group.

Although Sots Art never became a widespread movement, its importance cannot be overestimated. The Sots artists were the first to confront Socialist Realism's structure as a conventional metaphysical system with carefully developed pictorial and verbal icons. Socialist Realism constitutes a "political ideology that, in the name of a Marxist hypothesis, is articulated with the finest examples of...the 'metaphysics of presence.'"⁷ This presence manifests itself by imposing on every Soviet citizen an inescapable sensation of the tangibility and concrete reality of such abstract concepts as Marxist-Leninist truth, bright historic destiny, or even Lenin, Stalin, and Marx, who are, according to official sources, always alive and with you. The Sots artists, for the first time since the official establishment of Socialist Realism in 1934, proposed a deconstruction of that culture's divine claims and utopian assumptions.

This specific project—to dismantle the system of sacred referents of totalitarian art without abandoning its generic features and mythical language—differed sharply from earlier examples of Soviet "unofficial" cultural manifestations. The phenomenon of "unofficial" or "alternative" Soviet culture first

emerged in the late 1950s with the Khrushchev regime's relaxation of the state's ideological control over cultural life. At that time, a rather small group of artists—among them Lydia Masterkova, Oscar Rabin, and Vladimir Nemukhin (those who in 1974 organized the "Bulldozer" show)—first saw a number of American and contemporary art exhibitions and as a result began to experiment with various modernist tendencies.⁸ Considering Socialist Realism as mere kitsch, these "unofficial" modernists of the 1960s defended abstract painting and the remote fantasy of symbolism. Their principal aim was to remove art from the politics of culture; they believed that there could be a "neutral zone" in which art could exist autonomously.

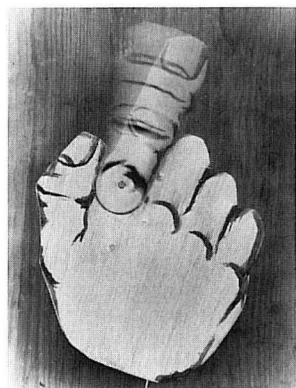
Yet, in official art circles—throughout the 1960s still largely dominated by Stalinist apologists—this unofficial modernism constituted a tangible political opposition, for it weakened the monistic sense of Socialist Realist doctrine. These two cultural forces—Socialist Realism and unofficial modernism—remained in opposition up to the mid-1970s,⁹ at which time the power balance in official institutions began to shift toward a moderate position, and the elite of the cultural establishment began to show signs of tolerance of, and even interest in, modernist styles.¹⁰ In fact, some official artists began to appropriate various elements of the modernist vocabulary into their own art, and to absorb into the official Soviet system the proclivities of their unofficial counterparts.¹¹

At the moment of this uneasy reconciliation between officialdom and modernism, the presence of Sots Art was problematic. First of all, though somewhat unintentionally, the Sots artists created a new form of resistance to the cultural establishment, demonstrating once again that any art functioning beyond the framework of the system becomes potentially radical. Secondly, since the Sots artists appropriated and



Komar and Melamid
Double Self-Portrait, 1973.
Oil on canvas, diameter 36".
Courtesy Ronald Feldman
Fine Arts, New York

Leonid Sokov
Eye Glasses for Every
Soviet Person, 1976.
 Painted wood, 16½ x 15½".
 Collection Norton Dodge,
 Mechanicsville, Maryland



Leonid Sokov
Threatening Finger, 1975.
 Wooden mobile, 13½ x
 7½". Courtesy the artist

repeated verbal and pictorial icons of heroic Socialist Realism, they re-awoke the style, uncovering the "trace, the graft, whose traces [had] been lost."¹² For them, heroic Socialist Realism—at that time becoming an eyesore in both official and unofficial circles—underlay the powerful psychological dimension of the Soviet Union's common history and to simply ignore it (while perhaps desirable) was in the end impossible. Instead, Sots artists countered with the bold gesture of appropriating those very Soviet cultural codes in order to deride, deflate, and aestheticize the codes themselves.

In the context of twentieth-century Russian culture, the reliance on the past in search of a new pictorial language has precedents which link it to a nationalist position. This tradition originated at the time of the early Russian avant-garde, specifically with the anti-Western activists among the Russian Futurists, those who called themselves *budetlyane* and included Velimir Khlebnikov, Benedikt Livshits, Natalia Goncharova, and Mikhail Larionov. These artists and poets criticized Russia's position *vis-à-vis* the West on two levels. On the first level, the dialogue was largely psychological, deriving from the long-standing sense of rivalry between West and East. On the second level, the argument was formulated around cultural issues, specifically the issue of the schism between Eastern and Western culture. This dilemma, with its many manifestations in Russian art and literature, is rooted in events of the late sixteenth century, when Peter the Great forcefully imposed Western notions of progress and intellectual scepticism on the economically backward and fanatically religious Russian people. This prevalence of Western attitudes remained so great that even in the early 1910s, the *budetlyane*—which means "men of the future"—believed that in order to create a truly modern Russian culture they had to develop cultural referents different from those of the West. One way to achieve this was to associate modernity itself with the Russian past; that is, to announce as Goncharova and Larionov did that "Our future is behind us."¹³ To this end, the *budetlyane* chose as their main source of pictorial and conceptual referents the old slavonic myths, folk art forms, and religious imagery. For them these were the true signifiers of "Russianness."

The anti-Western position of the *budetlyane* did not become the mainstream within the Russian avant-garde. After the revolution, the avant-garde artists did not want to perpetuate this schism with Western culture, but rather hoped to create a modernist and progressive internationalism. The *budetlyane's* commitment to the separation of Russian and Western cultural standards regained momentum in the mid-1920s. At that time the principal goal of the Soviet ideologists was to distinguish new proletarian culture from Western modernism. Since they saw the main characteristic of modernism as its conflict with

tradition, they regarded a return to the past, to a specifically Russian cultural heritage, as their strongest opposition to modernist aesthetics. Both Lenin and Trotsky agreed that Socialist culture would need "all the methods and processes evolved in the past, as well as a few supplementary ones, in order to grasp the new life."¹⁴ In his conversation with Klara Tsetkin, Lenin further suggested that the new Soviet culture would not only not compete with Western progress, but would actively repress it. As he said: "We [Bolsheviks] are good revolutionaries, but somehow we feel obliged to prove that we are also 'up to the mark' in modern culture. I, however, make bold to declare myself a barbarian."¹⁵

By the end of the 1920s, the anti-Western or nationalistic orientation of Soviet culture had become even more apparent. In 1928, the prominent party ideologist Nikolai Bukharin announced: "We are creating and will continue to create so great a civilization that before it Capitalist civilization will look as insignificant as 'chopsticks' before the heroic symphonies of Beethoven."¹⁶ Thus, when Socialist Realism was sanctioned as cultural dogma in 1934, it was only natural that its principal definition was spelled out as "national in form, Socialist in content."¹⁷ Armed with this formula, the fabricators of Socialist Realism began to build the collection of readymade myths that over time crystalized into a huge metalinguistic structure constantly reiterating itself in worn clichés (endless representations of labor, great leaders, war, and revolutionary heroes and heroines). Metonymy was the formative device of the Socialist Realist mythos, for as Roland Barthes says "the mythologist is condemned to metalanguage."¹⁸

In their use of Socialist Realism as the new and radical signifier of "Russianness" and in their tendency to identify artistic contemporaneity with a return to traditional forms, the Sots artists continued the nationalist discourse of their predecessors. In the early works of Komar and Melamid, Kosolapov, and Sokov, however, the issue of nationalism assumed previously unprecedented ironic connotations, while in the somewhat special case of Eric Bulatov it held more eloquent meanings, closer to the tradition.

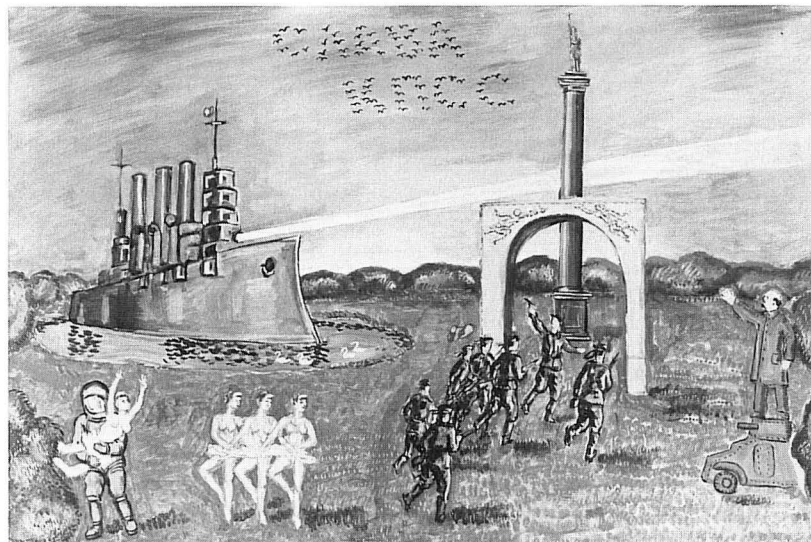
Because Komar and Melamid, Kosolapov, and Sokov aimed at ironic deconstruction of the heroic imagery of official culture, they recreated the linguistic condition of the two discourses that "fight it out within the general unity of a shared code."¹⁹ In the terms of the Russian philologist Mikhail Bakhtin, this is an example of "dialogical speech" or the "two-world condition," manifesting itself in a tense dialogue between an official culture and its unofficial subversion through irony. One subversive technique which Bakhtin identifies with the "two-world condition" is a carnivalesque dispersal of the hegemonic order of a dominant culture which results in the creation of "doublets," that is, comic or abusive myths which are

juxtaposed with serious or official ones.

Komar and Melamid have produced a number of such doublets. In *Double Self-Portrait* (1972), for example, they depict themselves in the manner of stereotypical profile portraits of Lenin and Stalin, and imitate the texture of official mosaics. In *Don't Babble* (1972) they restate another cliché by superimposing the conventional gesture of state secrecy—a finger held up to closed lips—on a widely distributed Soviet poster of a Communist youth. Other parodic doublets by Komar and Melamid deal with political slogans, whose abundance in the Soviet Union can be justified by the Marxists' unfailing belief in the word as "the ideological sign par excellence."²⁰ *Our Goal is Communism* (1972) and *We Were Born to Turn Dreams Into Reality* (1975) are examples of overcirculated collective messages which the two artists painted on red cloth banners and signed. In these works it is precisely the signature—the usurpation of the collective—that signals the deconstructive gesture.

In a similar way, Kosolapov, in his early Sots Art pieces, juxtaposes serious myths against comic ones. In *Soviet Myth* (1974), the artist takes a highly respected cultural icon, Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, and replaces the image of a fairytale prince with that of a cosmonaut (an important hero of the Soviet Socialist community). He also incorporates symbols of Socialist power—Lenin speaking from the top of an armored car and the battleship *Aurora*—into the ballet's idyllic landscape. In so doing, the artist introduces what may be called the concept of "Socialist conversion"—a superimposition of Socialist Realist stereotypes upon any cultural text. By means of this device Kosolapov shows that the confinements of the visual vocabulary of Socialist Realism are so rigid that only a slight shift in imagery leads to radical changes in meaning. In *North* (1974), a similarly subversive gesture is manifested through the superimposition of a couple making love onto the image of Lenin's forehead in profile. The inclusion of a sexual symbol—the major taboo of Soviet ideology in art and life—within the nucleus of Socialist consciousness creates a provocative and unsettling montage.

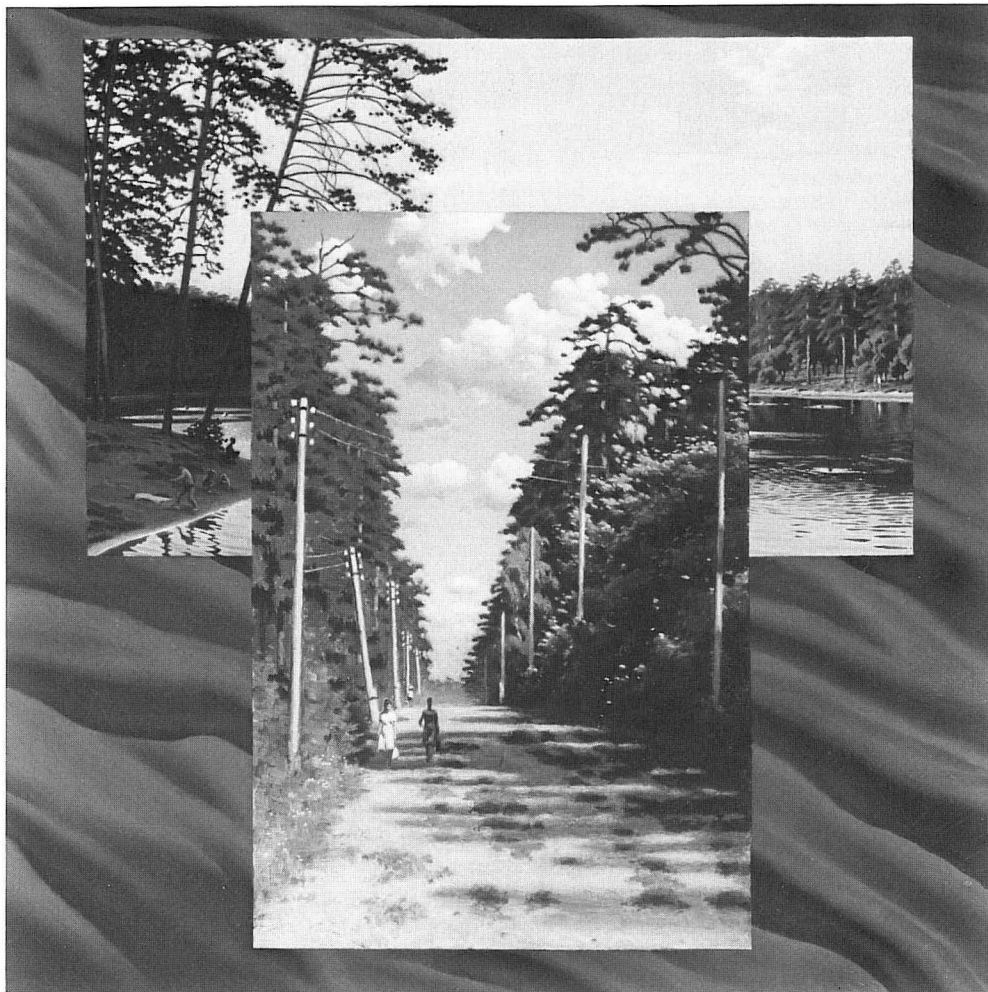
If Komar and Melamid's and Kosolapov's doublets exist in contrast to official painting and propaganda posters, the work of Leonid Sokov, the only sculptor among the practitioners of Sots Art, should be viewed against official sculpture, known for its pseudo-classical coherence and tremendous scale. Sokov's small and clumpish works parody all that is finished and polished, all pomposity. In addition, Sokov's works are mechanized, which allows for an element of playfulness, reducing the appropriated mythical images to the status of "dummies," such as might be used in comic spectacles. These are traditional forms of mass entertainment whose history spans from buffooneries and masquerades of the sixteenth century to post-Revolutionary agit-prop activities. Following in this



tradition of conveying political and social events on a popular level, Sokov practices its coarse simplicity and blunt interpretations. During the 1970s, the artist produced a number of such laughingstocks, including *Threatening Finger* (1975), *Eye Glasses for Every Soviet Person* (1976), and *Carvalan's Heart* (1977). The last, a moving plastic heart filled with red fluid, mocks the event of the spy swap of Luis Carvalan, head of the Chilean Communist Party, for the Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky. *Threatening Finger*, also a mobile, gives a paternal warning (Stalin's finger, Brezhnev's finger, etc.) to any potential opposition.

Eric Bulatov should be considered separately from the other Sots artists not only because he still lives in the Soviet Union, but also because of his different treatment of Socialist content. He proposes not to create comic and abusive doublets of Soviet myths and not to deconstruct stereotypes through deposing juxtapositions, but to expose the ambiguity of an ideological environment through a repetition of its stereotypes and commonplaces. Bulatov comes from an earlier generation than the other Sots artists and during the 1960s he identified with the formalist tradition. In the early 1970s, however, Bulatov's art underwent certain changes of meaning and intention. As he explained, "The constructive aspect of the work is very important to me. But I cannot take it to mean a pure form. For me, the construction of a painting fulfills simultaneously...that of content."²¹ This move from pure formalism to a concern for content drawn from everyday reality is comparable to Kazimir Malevich's dramatic shift in the early 1930s, when he began to populate his canvases with peasants and everyday scenes. Both artists seemed to realize the groundlessness of formalist experiments in a country where one's entire reality is permeated with ideological connotation. Recognizing the positive potential of this

Alexander Kosolapov
Soviet Myth, 1974. Oil on
cardboard, 17 x 24".
Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York



Eric Bulatov
Two Landscapes on the
Red Background,
 1972-1974. Oil on canvas,
 44 x 44". Collection Norton
 Dodge, Mechanicsville,
 Maryland

situation, Bulatov's friend, Ilya Kabakov (the major Soviet conceptualist and now an adherent of Sots Art) has attempted to explain this change. He writes: "We can no longer ignore ideology as a cultural phenomenon. It has become an important lyrical language."²²

Bulatov's own response to this position can be seen as early as *Horizon* (1971-1972). In this vast seascape a group of strollers in the foreground are facing a blank red band which resembles a banner ready to be inscribed with a verbal message. Compositionally, the painting is similar to Malevich's *The Red Cavalry Galloping* (1930), a flat landscape with a long line of red horsemen disappearing into the horizon. In the Malevich painting, the red line signifies the central anxiety of the time, the fading superiority of the avant-garde. In Bulatov's canvas, the red banner suggests ideological limitations and threats whose content is yet to be formulated.

In *Dangerous* (1972-1973), Bulatov begins to graft onto the neutral landscape politicized verbal messages. The resulting representations may be designated as

"ideological faktura"—the superimposition of Soviet ideological stereotypes upon "the colors, the sound of the materials, the assemblages of textures (faktura)."²³ *Dangerous* depicts a mundane picnic scene whose ideological burden, otherwise inconspicuous, is connoted through the word "dangerous" painted in red over the landscape at each of the four edges of the canvas. These are "spreading ripples of verbal responses and resonances [which] form around each and every ideological sign."²⁴ *Dangerous* and other early canvases by Bulatov demonstrate that he aims at promoting a gesture of subtle warning, an index of ideological presence in an otherwise inauspicious environment.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Bulatov began to concentrate on the representational authenticity of official environments. Paintings like *Krasikov Street* (1976), *Glory to CPSU* (1977), or the series of portraits of Leonid Brezhnev produced between 1977 and 1983, most likely would not be seen by censors as subversive. They are precise representations of various streets, buildings, political leaders, and famous slogans; that is, mere depictions of a reality thoroughly penetrated by ideology. But a new signification is brought about simply by virtue of enclosing these politicized bits and pieces of reality within a picture frame; what occurs is an iconization of sorts. Bulatov relies on the frame to pinpoint his reading of authoritative stereotypes in the larger context of metaphysical signification; in this way he also disrupts Socialist Realist claims on atheism. By offering his paintings as new icons, Bulatov suggests that there is only a slight gap between ideological and traditional worship, and that for the majority of Russian people the proscriptions of Orthodox Christianity have been cunningly replaced by the authoritative aura of totalitarian surveillance.

Like other Sots artists, Bulatov has not been able to exhibit his Sots Art works in any official exhibitions. To survive within the Moscow cultural system he has had to lead a sort of double life in art. Through the late 1970s and early 1980s he continued to produce Sots Art pieces for his friends and close colleagues, but along with this "unofficial" production, he also created works whose iconography would pass the standards of censorship. For Bulatov, after the ideological upheavals of the 1960s, the idea of adjustment to official cultural confinements was not a new one.

The younger Sots artists faced more complicated problems. They had an unaccepted subversive and ironic attitude toward heroic Socialist Realism, and they also faced a generational conflict with the modernists of the 1960s whose aesthetic beliefs they subjected to doubt and disrespect. The possibilities that were open to them were either studio or apartment exhibitions or adjustment to the system, which meant changing their style. The Sots artists were too ambitious to accept either of these alternatives.

Instead, a further alternative presented itself: emigration to the West. Many of the Sots artists approached the idea of emigration with ambivalence, for contemporary Western culture was for them a target of both artistic rivalry and a certain hidden admiration. For the Soviet state, the possibility of emigration—generally to Israel—was a particular phenomenon with both political and economic motivations. Largely as an attempt to receive favorable trade considerations from Western nations, particularly the United States, the Soviet Union used emigration symbolically, as an ideological gesture to signify the orderly and civilized process of Soviet internal affairs. Thus, in keeping with the general atmosphere of detente in the early 1970s, the Soviet Union facilitated a lessening of restrictions for obtaining exit visas, especially for many artists and intellectuals. For the artists, emigration was a metaphor for a new potential, a way of breaking with the close-mindedness of Soviet cultural developments. Although artists were technically allowed to take their art works and other possessions, these works had to be passed by a board of censors. Many works did not pass this censor, and some were smuggled out by foreign friends or diplomats.

Once the artists emigrated, the sense of artistic and ethical “norms” preconditioned by the totalitarian confinements of the Soviet ideological structure vanished. Instead, the artists faced the phenomenon of Western artistic pluralism, an overwhelming system of new and alien signifiers. Their initial frustration in confronting a new “language” is common to all emigré artists, but rather than learning this language and assimilating it, the Sots artists (in their search for a “talking cure”) returned to their lost heritage, the method of Socialist Realism. “Our future is behind us,” once again became the slogan of their Russian nationalistic drive. The imitation and repetition of totalitarian images once again became their base for the creation of an avant-garde style. Only this was now a different kind of imitation as it formulated itself beyond the national frame—outside the Bakhtinian concept of the “two-world condition” in which the original and the imitator exist in one social system. In its American incarnation, Sots Art is not an ironic imitation, but a pastiche: the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead “father tongue.”

The Sots artists’ reappropriation of the symbols and stereotypes of Soviet mass culture was a logical step for survival in the midst of Western pluralism. After all, Soviet ideological imagery was the primary material with which these artists could identify psychologically and upon which they could comment provocatively. Yet Komar and Melamid’s assertion that their work in the United States was not political but only nostalgic suggests a willed absence of political or satiric intent in the emigré phase of Sots Art. On the other hand, one could cite the fact that the artists chose to articulate

their response to Western art conditions within Socialist Realism narratives as evidence of a strong psychological conflict within their “political unconscious.”

Their use of nostalgia is in fact very tangible evidence of the Sots artists’ psychological shift. This prevalent iconography of nostalgia can be explained perhaps by frustration arising from their sudden loss of ideological paternity. The cult of the father is central to the structure of totalitarian mythology. For Russians, Stalin constitutes the canonical father figure. His tyranny resulted in the indelible vision of “the Father” as “the nightmare of history from which the sons hope they will awake in the morning.”²⁵ For the Sots artists, migration to the West constituted a type of awakening or break from “the Father,” but it also initiated a longing for the images of childhood; these images then developed into myths and symbols and began to form a surrogate language

In Lacanian terms, the process by which this new language is instituted is analogous to the transition from the Imaginary (the “mirror stage”) to the Symbolic order (linguistic maturation). In relation to the paternal figures of Soviet ideology, this functioning of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders can be seen in a comparison of Komar and Melamid’s early *Double Self-Portrait* (1972) and its later version, *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers* (1982-1983). In the early work Komar and Melamid identify themselves through the iconic images of Lenin and Stalin, the figures of ideological “paternity,” and thus demonstrate the infantile act of simultaneous fascination and rivalry toward these Imaginary fathers. In the later painting the artists represent themselves as boys with adult faces within an ideological entourage of their childhood: dressed in Soviet pioneer’s uniforms with red ties, they stand near Stalin’s bust and blow the trumpets that call for political gatherings. Here a distance is established between the artists and the figure of Stalin, whose designation in the form of a classical bust transcends mere parodying and institutes him as Authority, as “the figure of the Law.”

In a similar vein, Kosolapov reflects his agitation concerning this lost paternity. His photographic series *Mother Russia* (1981), is also based on self-portraiture and features yet another symbol of Soviet authority—the hammer and sickle. But, in structuring the state in a maternal role, it conveys a desire for an allegorical resolution of the Oedipus complex on a collective rather than personal level.

In its emigré phase, then, Sots Art relies not on direct encounters with ideological material and on the creation of comic and abusive doublets (as was the case with Moscow Sots Art), but on distancing, nostalgia, and the desire to allegorize or historicize nationalistic iconography.

In addition to these changes in style and strategy, in New York the Sots artists developed new targets for



Komar and Melamid
Art Belongs to the People
(School of the Arts), 1984.
Color videotape, sound, 30
min. Courtesy The Kitchen,
New York

their deconstructive force. In certain respects, Sots Art serves to dismantle various preconceptions of Western artistic development, specifically those underlying modernism but also those which form the basis of the so-called "postmodernism of resistance." Still, this does not necessarily mean that Sots Art is reactionary. Rather, it is a way of announcing that Socialist Realism has been neglected as an aesthetic system, and that like modernism its language provides a rich field for new explorations and definitions. It is this conviction that leads the Sots artists to their second goal—a multifaceted deconstructive reading of the various myths and histories that constitute Socialist Realism. In accordance with these two polar aims, Sots Art in New York begins to function in a paradoxical way. It operates in the manner of what Derrida has called "elliptical" maneuvering, which "while allowing [the] contradiction to go on, at the same time reconciles it."²⁶

In the performance *Art Belongs to the People* (1984), Komar and Melamid imitated the apologists for Socialist Realism and staged an attack on the modernists. The performance ostensibly centered on an effort to paint—in a Socialist Realist manner—John Hinckley's assassination attempt on President Reagan. First, Reagan's image was outlined by Komar and Melamid on a huge canvas placed at the back of the stage. Then the other fragments of the painting were to be completed by four Russian emigré artists invited to participate in the event. They were announced as people untrained in art and aesthetics. The performance began with these artists and Komar and Melamid casually sitting at a table (placed in front of the "painting-theater"), drinking vodka (the Soviet equivalent of marijuana), and talking about what art should be, according to Socialist Realist doctrine. Komar and Melamid showed slides and discussed the high points and masterworks of Socialist Realism, intermingling images of Sots Art works from the early and late periods. They also lectured on color theory, anatomy, discipline in art, and the patriotism of the artist. Stuffed with this theory and stimulated by innumerable toasts to the collective creation, the neophytes attacked the canvas.

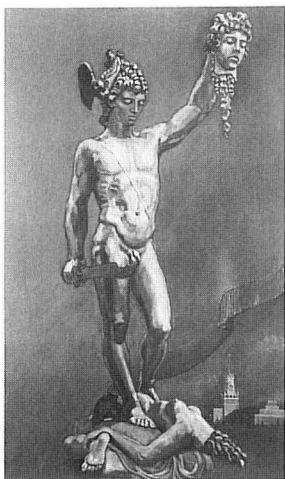
The final product was essentially an automatic painting. Although it was thus suitable for a gallery wall, the result crushed Komar and Melamid's hopes that their disciples' collective consciousness would not be dragged down by bourgeois art. For Komar and Melamid *Art Belongs to the People* was a theatrical realization of the historical debates between realism and modernism which were common in Soviet and Western critical circles in the 1920s and 1930s. In the context of this critical debate, the semi-abstract painting produced during the performance provides an ironic commentary or an inversion of the major stereotypes governing our perception of Socialist Realism.

Kosolapov goes even further in spoofing Socialist Realism and Western pop culture in his poster *Symbols of the Century* (1982). In it the artist presents a montage of Lenin's profile and the Coca-Cola logo. Coke's reassuring slogan "It's the Real Thing" is then attributed to Lenin and the two become interchangeable as mass-cultural products. By creating this radical juxtaposition, the artist implies that although the two systems identified by these symbols are at odds, their principal goal—to convince the population of the authenticity and singleness of their goods—squarely coincides.

This use of Socialist Realist signifiers to undermine Western cultural stereotypes parallels the central aim of Sots artists: imitating, repeating, rewriting, and rephrasing the arsenal of Soviet myths and stereotypical histories. While this aspect of Sots Art constitutes its most important and original contribution, it is difficult for the Western viewer to fully appreciate. Active knowledge of Soviet ideological codes is necessary to comprehend the subtle and cool paradigms that the artists create. One such paradigm central to Sots Art critiques the Socialist Realist claim for the metaphorical union of the national cultural heritage with the culture of classicism. In a number of important paintings Komar and Melamid and Kosolapov conceptualize the emergence of Socialist Realism through the grafting of classical and totalitarian imagery.

In Komar and Melamid's *Stalin and the Muses* (1981-1982), for example, the artists depict the moment in which Stalin welcomes the marriage between tradition and the new proletarian culture. They paint the smiling leader in the company of four muses, who signify their collaboration with the newly established tyrant by handing him a book. In *Origin of Socialist Realism* (1982-1983), the artists create the principal signifier of the style when they identify the origin of Socialist Realism with the process of mythologizing the tyrant. Stalin, sanctified by the presence of the Muse, is selected to pose for the first ideological painting. The fact that these paintings are executed in a highly polished, academic realist style not only coincides with their subject matter, but heightens the sense of subversive irony.

Kosolapov is much more eclectic in his choice of art-historical sources; in his case they range from Egyptian to Baroque imagery. In *Manifesto* (1983), for example, the artist constructs an overall Baroque space populated by a trio of putti, puzzling over the *Communist Manifesto*, which they have discovered amidst classical ruins. Glaring from the overcast sky is the Jovian head of Lenin. Similarly, in *Susanna and the Elders* (1984), the artist depicts an ominous meeting between the biblical heroine and the political gods, Marx and Lenin; and in another painting *Perseus: The Assassination of Trotsky by Stalin* (1983), Kosolapov appropriates the classical myth of Perseus beheading



Alexander Kosolapov
Perseus, 1983. Oil on
canvas, 72 x 46". Courtesy
Semaphore Gallery, New
York

Medusa to rewrite Stalin's plot to kill Trotsky.

Although in both these cases—Komar and Melamid, and Kosolapov—the artists use techniques of montage, the resulting psychological effects are quite different. Komar and Melamid create harmonic relationships between their personages, establishing an organic unity between Soviet political and classical fads. This approach may be identified with Georg Lukács's concept of Socialist Realism as "the organic model of growth."²⁷ For Kosolapov the role of the superimposed element (of Socialist origin) is to disrupt the context in which it is inserted (a context made up of borrowed cultural stereotypes). This is an example of the Brechtian paradigm of montage, one which is designed to reveal "a knowable, but shifting, multifaceted and contradictory outer reality, estranging his audiences from habituated mental assumptions so that they may be able to truly master the social world."²⁸

Before turning to another important target of Sots Art's deconstruction, that of Soviet history myths, I would like to reintroduce Sokov in the context of Sots Art. Because he is a sculptor it is important to mention that, as a medium, sculpture holds an important political function in the Soviet Union. As early as 1918, Lenin issued his "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" which called for the "dismantling of the monuments erected in honor of the tsars and their servants and the development of the projects for the monuments dedicated to the Russian Socialist Revolution."²⁹ Since then the pattern for Socialist Realist sculpture has been to depose adversative monuments and to erect in their place politically suitable ones. As a result, Socialist Realist sculpture has always been in a rather vulnerable position. While paintings representing a disgraced leader could be consigned to storage to await better times, many street monuments were simply destroyed.

Sokov's roughhewn and folkish representations of Soviet leaders convey their vulnerability and hyperbolize the heavy makeup of *narodnost* (Spirit of the People) laid on the face of *partiinost* (Party Spirit). His series, *History of the USSR: Leaders* (1983), consists of wooden representations of the Symbolic fathers, from Stalin to Andropov. Each portrait is only roughly carved and scantily painted, yet each possesses a sharp, caricatural resemblance to its subject. Stalin is recorded in the historic moment of his alliance with Hitler. Their awkward wooden bodies are fixed on metal bars; between them is a tin globe which they rhythmically hammer. Stalin—who united with the Nazi regime in 1939—smiles, unaware of Hitler's plan to break the Russo-German Pact shortly thereafter. Khrushchev, the Rigoletto of Stalin's court and later an ambitious ruler, is shown as a jolly Humpty Dumpty whose bulbous body is adorned with painted corncocks, alluding to his agricultural obsession. Brezhnev holds a wooden book, caricaturing his lack of erudition and inarticulate public speeches. The viewer can activate



this boring characterization by pushing down on Brezhnev's head, causing an oversized penis, hidden by a box built around the body, to leap out. Finally, Andropov's political role is signified by means of mobile ears, an ironic commentary on his career as chief of the KGB.

In another series of wall sculptures, Sokov has cut out flat dark red-and-black figurations of Soviet mythical "shrines"—the Kremlin Wall and Mausoleum, the battleship *Aurora*, the Kalashnikov machine gun. *Kremlin Wall* (1984) reconstructs a familiar scene of Soviet national holidays, when the entire Politburo—here mechanically waving blank cutouts—comes out onto the Mausoleum's tribunal to bestow its greetings to a populace already overpowered by ideological ardor. *The Volley of Aurora* (1984) is a representation of the battleship that fired a memorable, revolutionary salvo at the Winter Palace, originally the residence of the tsar, but at that time the headquarters of the Provisional Government. In the sculpture, smoke and flames shoot out of the guns of the *Aurora*; by superimposing the word "Fuck" over the red flames, Sokov once again approaches a historic phenomenon with Rabelaisian laughter.

After their emigration, the Sots artists experienced a spatial and temporal distancing from the epicenter of Soviet history-making and, as a result, they were now able to put their native history into a broader perspective. In dealing with historical events, Komar and Melamid, Kosolapov, and Sokov themselves assume the role of the creators of history, a role which in the Soviet Union is generally identified with the Communist trinity—Marx, Engels, and Lenin—or with subsequent party leaders. The particular view of history advocated by the Sots artists is not without precedent and is known in literary criticism as the "romance paradigm." This paradigm centers on Hegel's Comic conception of history, which was later adopted by Marx.³⁰ For Hegel and the Romantics, the difference between the Tragic and the Comic visions of

Leonid Sokov
Khrushchev, 1983. Painted
wood, 32 x 20 x 20".
Collection Norton Dodge,
Mechanicsville, Maryland

history lay in the fact that while the former is always accompanied by an unfortunate end, the latter carries the utopian promise of a happy resolution of all social conflicts. For Marx, then, comedy became synonymous with progress, with humankind's move "toward a condition in which society itself will be dissolved and a genuine community, a communistic mode of existence, will be constituted as [its] true historic destiny."³¹

Kosolapov's *Finale of the World History* (1982-1983) serves as a clear example of a subversion of this Communist utopia. It is a triptych executed in the heroic mode of a fresco, and its symbolism satirizes Marx's theorizing. Ballerina and cosmonaut (the artist's prime double metaphor of Socialist perfection) arrive at "true historic destiny," which is represented as a large solar disc; a prehistoric man, signifier of a primeval community, suggests a sarcastic link between Communism and the prehistoric epoch, when social differentiation or antagonism did not exist. And, finally, the representation of a scientist with a microscope serves as a Marxist symbol of an evolution attained through man's "ever greater control over nature and its resources through the development of science and technology."³² Kosolapov's ironic vision of the Golden Age alludes to Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas Solis*—a well-known source for the utopian application of public propaganda—where "the buildings' façades were adorned with frescoes, teaching and educating citizens of the utopian city."³³

In their history-making, Komar and Melamid offer less symbolic and more documentary subject matter. In *Plot Against Beria* (1981-1982) or *Bolsheviks Returning Home After Demonstration* (1981-1982) they place the potentially tragic moments of Soviet history in comic perspective by restaging them in bizarre settings. These humorous contexts are achieved through incongruous elements, such as an absurd mongrel placed in the foreground of a deadly serious meeting following Stalin's death or a tiny dinosaur confronting Party stalwarts.

Sokov's wooden, ladderlike assemblage, *Twentieth Century Leaders* (1985), incorporates the loosely installed statuettes of political personages ranging from the tall and victorious Stalin on top to much smaller representations of Khrushchev, Roosevelt, and others on the bottom. Each figure but Stalin's can be switched around according to the viewer's perception of history. In this work Sokov articulates the instability of Soviet history, in which events are rewritten according to each new ruler.

While Komar and Melamid, Kosolapov, and Sokov assume the concept of historical evolution in the utopian context of an "ascent" with its stress on a comic finale, Leonid Lamm, who joined the Sots Art movement only after emigrating to New York, adheres to a model of historical "descent" characterized by the individual's growing alienation from him- or herself and from others. With this somber attitude to historical phenomena, Lamm adds an explicit political dimension to Sots Art's otherwise elliptical politicality. For Lamm, the culmination of human descent took place during the three years he spent in prison and his work conveys its apocalypses through the iconography of prison stereotypes. Although Lamm comes from the 1960s generation of Soviet modernists, with their strong belief in the separation of art and politics, he suddenly found himself in the highly politicized situation of a Soviet prison. In spite of this Lamm did not stop his art work (like other imprisoned artists before him, notably Jacques-Louis David and Gustave Courbet), but produced two stylistically diverse sets of works. The first one includes handsome washes and pencil sketches representing the quotidian routine of prison inhabitants. The majority are dedicated to the static existence within the cell itself. These are serene drawings, and Lamm's execution of them may be defined as a political apoliticism. That is, although they are conceived in a political environment they do not comment directly on this environment. They function as a denunciation only after trespassing the tangible boundaries of the prison world.

The second set of small works produced during this confinement consists of watercolor compositions with biomorphic and cosmic shapes, in which the artist conveys his yearnings for unbound space and his fantasies of a free and open existence. (Wassily Kandinsky would call this the search for spiritual salvation.) Ironically, it is in these abstract compositions that Lamm makes his strongest political statement. For it is they, not his realist drawings, which pose a potential threat in the minds of the authorities. According to the Communist doctrine, "abstract art [is] the product of an ivory tower, bearing no relation to society,"³⁴ and preoccupation with such aesthetics can only create an ideological barrier between the artist and his fellow prisoners.

The political nature of Lamm's abstractions goes beyond merely the Soviet conception of it and attaches

Alexander Kosolapov
Mother Russia, 1982.
Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York



itself to a broader argument—quite contrary to the Soviet view—regarding the relationship between abstract art and society. As Serge Guilbaut concludes from Meyer Schapiro's 1937 essay "Nature of Abstract Art," "abstract art, like all other art, is socially conditioned" and "the artist's social conditioning and perceptions of the social situation find their way into his artistic work, even if it is abstract."³⁵ Thus, it is the reality penetrating those works, rather than their formal qualities that makes them politically charged.

When Lamm was freed in 1976, he began to transfer these small abstract compositions onto large canvases which formed his primary artistic "baggage" upon arrival in New York City in 1982. What he found in New York was unexpected and frustrating: abstract art was no longer on the frontier of the art world and Schapiro's claims for its social significance were long overshadowed by its service as decoration. Although Lamm's oils were indeed rooted in the social fabric, responding to social conflicts and contradictions (which is to say, his imprisonment), in postmodernist New York they simply resembled the local modernist production, already in surplus. At that time New York was governed by the prevailing attitude that images are portable and can "travel anywhere without translation, although they mean different things in different places."³⁶ In Lamm's case such "portable" images were his recordings of the prison environment which began to mean different things outside his native milieu and seemed to carry an initial potential for him to survive as an artist within entirely new aesthetic values. He began to realize that if his New York colleagues could incorporate other artists' images, then he could quote his own ready-made material. This commitment to be contemporary and to change when faced with a new artistic context turns into a vital strength in Lamm's unmasking of prison stereotypes.

In the series *To Freedom With a Clear Conscience* (1975-1984)—an actual slogan of the prison's educational orientation program—Lamm confronts the viewer with the images that importuned him in his cell. The principal and most dramatic paintings in this series are representations of the cell door from the artist's viewpoint and a portrait of the guard, Nikolai, with his blank stare. Those are signs of the powerful barrier between the interior and the outside world. Like the world outside, the cell has its own rhythm of life, its own hierarchy, and its own oppressive structure. The artist conveys this atmosphere in paintings of a urinal and of a garbage can and in *Butyrka Honor Roll* (1975-1984), which incorporates genuine portraits of his fellow inmates sketched by the artist in prison. He encloses the portraits in found gilded frames, demonstrating his human sympathy for these alienated creatures.

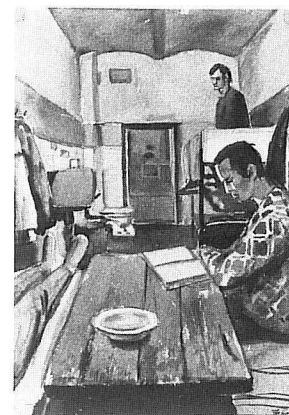
Another large series, entitled *Five* (1985), includes three portraits of court and prison authorities, painted from the original sketches, and a self-portrait. The

series begins, however, with a red, monochromatic canvas. This is followed by the three portraits in which the degree of red in the background varies until it almost disappears. Red is scarcely visible in the self-portrait that protrudes three-dimensionally beyond the picture frame. This symbolic gesture of escape is realized in the final component of the composition, where the artist's diminishing footprints carry right off the canvas onto the wall of the exhibition space.

If *To Freedom With a Clear Conscience* and *Five* are about the yearning for freedom, *Adam and Eve* (1984) is about the relativity of freedom. The artist depicts Adam and Eve, the first tasters of freedom, enclosed in a wooden yoke and captioned with the Soviet sophism "Freedom is Recognized Necessity." This is an allegory for the Communist Garden of Eden where any concept of freedom beyond that which is predefined by the local authorities is a sin.

Lamm persistently imposes on all his works representations of arrows and measurements and mathematical quantities. He explains this formal device as resulting from the Soviet necessity to create standards for everything, thereby quantifying and controlling the surrounding reality. This obsession with measuring is a side effect of Lamm's transformation from familiar (Eastern) into unfamiliar (Western) space. Aware of this feeling of disorientation, Lamm offers simple guidelines to the viewer when he depicts what may be a familiar, but taboo, zone.

The group Kazimir Passion was formed in 1982 by Alexander Drewchin, Alexander Kosolapov, Victor Tupitsyn, and Vladimir Urban. It is named after the artist Kazimir Malevich, whose famous slogan "The Civil War between old and new art continues" the group adopts as its aesthetic credo. Kazimir Passion simulates the pathos of political and cultural events in the combined tradition of fervent Proletkult and tedious Politburo styles. Their first performance, entitled *Communist Congress*, was staged at P.S. 1 on May 2, 1982, to celebrate the International Day of Workers Solidarity. The group sent a telegram to the Kremlin (in the tradition of mail art) inviting members of the Politburo to attend their Congress. Needless to say, the delegation did not appear. Nevertheless, the group was prepared with an elaborate group of props, including a large red backdrop with Lenin's profile (the icon of every Party Congress), two red podiums (one adorned with a hammer and another a sickle), and a replica of the Suprematist coffin Malevich designed for himself. Amidst this intentionally busy pastiche of political and cultural clichés, the artists gave speeches composed by them or compiled out of ready-made truisms drawn from the heritage of Proletkult and the Politburo resolutions. Some of the speeches proclaimed that "In Communism all are artists in life, not dreams" and that "Supply should be equal to demand in art." The active quoting of politicized texts was in accordance with Nietzsche's remark, "I am only a manufacturer of



Leonid Lamm
Call No. 319, 1975.
Watercolor, 14 x 10".
Courtesy the artist

words." Loud patriotic music and prerecorded roars of crowd approval (an echo of genuine revolutionary excitement) followed every speech and act. The performance ended with a sinister, shamanistic dance by a figure dressed as Brezhnev, holding a hammer and sickle in each hand.

This performance was developed further at the Kitchen, where it was intentionally scheduled for the anniversary of the Russian Revolution: November 7, 1982. Although the basic structure of a Communist Congress remained the same, the speeches, music, and revolutionary ardor seemed even more genuine. This convincing recreation of Party support, inspired by a large red banner hanging from the Kitchen's window and bearing Lenin's portrait and the slogan "Long Live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," caused great confusion in the public as to the artists' real political intentions. In addition, two new acts were presented: Lenin's dance with a ballerina and the film *Lenin in New York*. The latter, a montage in the Soviet tradition spanning from Dziga Vertov to Gregory Alexandrov, portrays the arrival of Lenin in New York to complete the World Revolution. Guided by the specter of Communism, the leader visits places of strategic importance, among them Wall Street and Soho. The art galleries in Soho cause Lenin to conclude that "bourgeois culture oppresses the masses." This and other anti-capitalist remarks in the film echo the Soviet ideologists' strong postulates in reference to Western culture. The conventional anti-Western phrases of Soviet ideology are here reiterated and appropriated to reflect the group's own nationalistic discourse and for contrast with the New York art world. The pseudo-classical dance of Lenin—wearing a Constructivist version of the leader's mask—and a classical ballerina comments on a standard Soviet cultural event: the concert of performing stars which takes place after important political "rituals." (Usually by the time such a concert begins, the Party members have consumed so much vodka that even Lenin's live presence on the stage would go unnoticed.) The performance ended with Brezhnev's even more threatening dance interrupted by his frequent death falls on Malevich's coffin.

When the group learned the next day that Brezhnev had actually died, it seemed the ritual had become actual. Art seemed to have the power to affect life, as the Proletkult ideologists had long ago asserted. The group took the responsibility for his death announcing themselves as "artists—creators of history" (another manifestation of the "romance paradigm") and saying "Now we can put on any mask and make a man die." When asked by a *Village Voice* critic, "So who will be next?" Kazimir Passion replied, "We want to put a mask on modernism."

At the birth of the Sots Art movement, the artists recognized the potential of their national cultural heritage to resist the globalization of aesthetics, using

their work toward a dual purpose: a realization of their own nationalistic signifiers and a deconstruction of the discourse of Socialist Realism. These intentions dovetailed with a specific agenda of Soviet cultural policy, by the early 1970s at the highest point of its overproductive cycle. It is not coincidental then that at the very time the Sots artists were planning their first group exhibition in 1974, the government was preparing to replace the forty-year old formula, "national in form, Socialist in content," with a new slogan maintaining that Soviet culture should now be "Socialist in content, but international in form, spirit, and character."³⁷ This important shift was brought about in part by the on-going politics of detente, in accordance with which it was no longer appropriate to operate with Stalinist cultural logos. But more generally the shift marked the shedding of the Soviet Union's nationalist cloak and the acceptance of international and modernist signs of progress. It was this tendency that Sots Art initially opposed with a resurgent nationalism.

But ten years later in New York, the Sots artists repeat this path of the transition from a national to an international discourse. Many of these artists have now begun to supplement their repertoire of Soviet ideological signs with an inventory of commodifiable Western images. Komar and Melamid's exhibition in 1985, for instance, included a veritable lexicon of cultural and political icons from East and West and high and low culture. Similarly, in suggesting the interchangeability of these signs, they also suggest that every sign is ultimately reducible to its economic value and that in the global exchange national concerns have a shrinking significance. Similar tendencies are clear in Sokov's recent sculptures depicting Stalin with Elvis or Stalin with Marilyn Monroe; Kosolapov's poster *Symbols of the Century*, which juxtaposes an image of Lenin with Coca-Cola; and the performance of Kazimir Passion at Danceteria, where they presented Lenin with American tap and break dancers. All this signifies that the Sots artists have evidently adjusted to Western "mythical speech" and that they no longer have a nostalgic longing for the imagery of the past. Now the Sots artists—educated to believe that the artist has a political responsibility to respond to the surrounding environment—clearly feel it necessary to broaden their nationalistic vocabulary of signs and to test their deconstructive strategies on the icons of international culture.

Notes

1. Quoted in Robert Hughes, "Through the Ironic Curtain," *Time* 120, no. 17 (October 25, 1982): 73.
2. In an unpublished interview with Victor Tupitsyn in 1980 (translated by John Bowlit).
3. This friend was the historian Vladimir Paperny, who later emigrated and published the book, *Kultura 'Dva,'* an excellent examination of Socialist Realist architecture.
4. This event is discussed in Hedrick Smith, "Young Soviet Painters Score Socialist Art," *New York Times*, March 19, 1974.
5. In the Soviet Union people outside of their homes can be arrested for lacking proof of identity. Therefore, Komar was arrested and Melamid, at whose apartment the event was held, was not.
6. This painting was later recreated.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 131.
8. Among those exhibits, two of the most important were the International Exhibition at the 1957 World Festival of Youth and Students, and the 1963 Exhibition of American Graphics. The passion for Expressionism, both abstract and figurative, dates from this period. The Picasso exhibit, held in Moscow in December 1956 and organized by Ilya Erenburg, was also of great importance. All these exhibitions explain why the artistic tastes of that period had more in common with French and American art of the 1950s than with the formalist traditions of the Russian avant-garde, then still confined to museum basements.
9. Through the 1960s, these "unofficial" modernists made many attempts to exhibit their art in public spaces. All of them were unsuccessful endeavors lasting only for a few minutes or an hour.
10. After the two open-air shows, the modernists of the 1960s began to be accepted into official cultural organizations, which in turn allowed them to exhibit in public spaces.
11. The collection of post-Socialist Realist art of Peter Ludwig demonstrates how in the 1970s various modernist styles found their reflection in the works of official artists. For further information on these changes, see my article, "The Ludwig Collection, Contemporary Soviet Art," *Vanguard* 14, no. 2 (March 1985): 21-25.
12. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 304.
13. Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, "Rayonists and Futurists: A Manifesto, 1913," in John E. Bowlit, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 88.
14. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1924), p. 236.
15. Quoted in Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art of the 1930s: The Age of Anxiety* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1985), p. 49.
16. Nikolai Bukharin, *Lenin and the Problem of Culture Revolution*, quoted in Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia u Vlasti: Istoriia Sovetskogo Soiuza s 1917 goda do nashikh dnei* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, Ltd., 1982), p. 234.
17. The first version of this formula was "proletarian in content, national in form." In 1932, to avoid connotations to Proletkult already in disgrace, proletarian was replaced with socialist.
18. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 158.
19. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Art* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 84.
20. Valentin Voloshinov, *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 9.
21. Boris Groys, "Interview with Eric Bulatov," *A-Ya* (Paris), no. 1 (1979): 26.
22. Ilya Kabakov, "Culture, Me, It, and the Light of Tabor," *Beseda: A Magazine of Philosophy and Religion* (Paris), no. 2 (1984): 193 [in Russian].
23. Vladimir Markov, "Icon Painting" (1914), quoted in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984): 86.
24. Voloshinov, op. cit., p. 15.
25. Jean-Michel Rabate, "A Clown's Inquest Into Paternity: Fathers, Dead or Alive, in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*," in Robert Con Davis, ed., *The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p. 100.
26. Philippe Sollers, *Numbers*, quoted in Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 356.
27. Curiously, the basic principles of Socialist Realism were shaped partially through the influence of several outstanding Western intellectuals. Some of them—Georg Lukács, for example—were supportive of the Soviet cultural establishment in the 1930s because they saw it as an anti-force to German Nazism. Lukács, as well as other political writers (including Bertolt Brecht), actively discussed their cultural views in Moscow publications such as the journal *Das Wort*.
28. Eugene Lunin, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 121.
29. Igor Grabar, ed., *History of Russian Art*, vol. 11 (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk, 1957), p. 23.
30. At the University, Marx was a student of A. W. Schlegel, one of the principal theoreticians of Romantic irony.
31. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 287.
32. Ibid., p. 286.
33. Significantly, Companella's book was suggested by Lenin to Lunacharsky (in their discussion on April 8, 1918) as a valuable source for the major Soviet project of Monumental Propaganda.
34. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 25.
35. Ibid.
36. Gary Indiana, "Postappropriation," *Village Voice*, April 2, 1985, p. 89.
37. L. I. Brezhnev, *Following the Leninist Course* (Moscow) 4 (1974): 59-60. For any artist in the Soviet Union, "international" amounts to modernism and indeed a strong current of modernist tendencies began to inseminate Socialist content.

The Stalin Style: The First Phase of Socialist Realism

by John E. Bowl

Socialist Realism....requires of the artist a true, historically concrete depiction of reality in its Revolutionary development. In this respect, truth and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological transformation and education of the workers in the spirit of Socialism.¹

This extract from the proceedings of the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers held in Moscow in August 1934 crystallizes the essential meaning of Socialist Realism—the artistic and literary doctrine that characterized Soviet culture of the 1930s through the 1950s.² How and why did Stalin's Russia adopt this particular aesthetic system for the implementation and production of works of art? How is it that such a monolithic program suddenly replaced the artistic plurality of the 1910s and 1920s? What did Socialist Realism signify to the painter and sculptor who embraced the new regime? These are not idle questions. They relate to many aspects of twentieth-century culture as a whole—not only to the culture of totalitarian political structures such as Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany and, to a much lesser extent, Mussolini's Italy, but also to the contemporary predicament of our own artistic evolution, e.g., the growing involvement of government agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts in the subvention and encouragement of painting, literature, music, etc. The aim of this essay is to examine and appraise Socialist Realism in the 1930s, during the first phase of Stalin's rule, and to connect it with artistic precedents of the late nineteenth century onwards.

Before any objective appreciation of Socialist Realism and the fine arts can be undertaken, it is essential to recall that the theory of Socialist Realism, as elaborated in the early 1930s, is not necessarily better or worse than any other aesthetic system, be it American Social Realism, Surrealism, or Action Painting. Stalin's Socialist Realism did not *per se* include penalty and penance as part of its integral composition, and perhaps, ultimately, the connotations of imprisonment and deprivation are as irrelevant to its ideology as is the suffering of the slaves to the beauty of the Egyptian pyramids. (Actually, the pharaonic analogy is tempting since Stalin's Russia of the 1930s and 1940s was also dependent upon hydraulic expansion, symbolized by the building of the White Sea Canal, upon mass forced labor, and upon an imperial hierarchy, although Socialist Realist culture emerged as a distinctive complex of idiosyncratic movements.) The famous artifacts of that era such as Vera Mukhina's statue *Worker and Collective Farm Girl* (1937, Exhibition of Economic Achievements, Moscow) for the Soviet pavilion at the Paris "Exposition Internationale" in 1937 or Alexander Gerasimov's painting *Comrades Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin* (1938, TG)³ belong, unmistakably, to a

style that is already historic and historical. They are part of a fantastic vision that has long since faded and they could have been created only at the rare conjunction of two very powerful forces—the total dominance of a single ideology advocated by a single bureaucratic machine and the unswerving belief in a radiant future. Stalin's oft-quoted dictum of 1935, "Life has improved, Comrades, life has become more joyous,"⁴ however mendacious, was believed by millions and was refracted in the sunshine and blond sportsmen of Alexander Deineka's paintings such as *Lunchbreak in the Donbas* (1935, Art Museum of the Latvian SSR, Riga), in the optimism of the first industrial novels such as Valentin Katev's *Time, Forward!* (1932), and in the hearty major chords of Tikhon Khrennikov's music. As the critic Alexei Fedorov-Davydov wrote: "The victories of Realism in art are being stimulated by the fact that material reality is itself becoming beautiful."⁵

Indeed, a central ingredient of Socialist Realism is its *future* orientation, its concern with the "glimpse of tomorrow,"⁶ as Andrei Zhdanov stated, not with the present tense. That is why it is wrong to consider Socialist Realism as a direct counterpart to American Social Realism which depicted contemporaneity, or even to Nazi Realism which, in spite of a similar ministerial structure (agencies for exhibitions, propaganda, etc.), produced an art that, by and large, was less rhetorical and futurological than that of the Stalin style. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization, but the visionary impulse of Socialist Realism is an important component that can explain or justify some of the curious artistic exaggerations and licenses evident in the painting of the 1930s and 1940s—the superabundance of farm produce (e.g., Sergei Gerasimov's *Collective Farm Harvest Festival* of 1935, TG), the charisma of the leader (e.g., Vasilii Efanov's *An Unforgettable Meeting*, 1937, TG), and even his height (short in stature, Stalin was often depicted as taller than in actuality as in A. Gerasimov's *Comrades Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin* where Voroshilov appears to be shorter than the dictator). This future, wishful orientation of Socialist Realist art was expressed in many other formulaic images that recurred in Soviet paintings, e.g., the factory or installation under construction (not the finished product) as we see in Serafima Riagina's *Higher, Ever Higher* of 1934 (Museum of Russian Art, Kiev), motherhood (not old age) as we see in Taras Gaponenko's *To Mother for Lunch* (1935, TG), and sunrise (rather than sunset) as we see in Fedor Shurpin's *Morning of Our Motherland* (1948, TG).⁷ The title of Katev's novel, *Time, Forward!*, in which the first chapter is "temporarily omitted," is entirely symptomatic of the forward projection of much Socialist Realist literature and art.

What were the principal stylistic requirements of the Socialist Realist platform as delineated in the early



Alexander Gerasimov
Comrades Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin, 1938. Oil on canvas, 118 x 153½". Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

1930s? The term Socialist Realism was invented by a group of writers, led by Maxim Gorky, in 1932, although later on its derivation was attributed exclusively to Stalin.⁸ At all times, Socialist Realism called for an artform that was to be figurative, accessible, and connected explicitly with socio-political reality. In this sense, it paralleled and even repeated some of the tenets and visual resolutions of nineteenth century Critical Realism, specifically of the *peredvizhniki* (members of the Society of Wandering or Travelling Exhibitions founded in 1870). These Realists such as Vasilii Perov, Iliia Repin, and Vasilii Surikov were put forward as models for young Soviet artists to follow. As A. Gerasimov proclaimed:

We want the heroes of our time to look out from our paintings and portraits just as full of life as they do from the works of the great Russian artists Repin and Surikov.⁹

The result was a grand rediscovery and reappraisal of these two artists in particular, culminating in the impressive two-volume monograph on Repin by Igor Grabar in 1937¹⁰ and the renaming of the Moscow Institute of Visual Arts as the Surikov Art Institute the same year. It should be mentioned, however, that this celebration of nineteenth century Realism did not extend by any means to all the *peredvizhniki*, many of whom, contrary to Soviet insinuation, were concerned more with passive nature scenes and sentimental groups than with the "accursed questions" of Russian Society.

The reasons for the renewed popularity, imposed or not, of Repin and Surikov during the 1930s are many, but it is important to remember that even in the heyday of the Russian avant-garde the Realist ideology of Repin and, for that matter, Lev Tolstoi, had never been forgotten. The Society of Wandering Exhibitions held regular exhibitions from 1871 through 1923, Repin died only in 1930, and the experiments of the radical artists such as Pavel Filonov, Kazimir Malevich, Liubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, and Vladimir Tatlin were appreciated only by a small group of wellwishers. The movements that we now tend to emphasize for intellectual and commercial reasons such as Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, and Constructivism were quite alien to the Russian populous. Throughout the 1910s Realism or at least a mild Impressionism dominated the Moscow and St. Petersburg art markets, a fact represented by the continued success of the unpretentious landscapes and portraits produced by members of the Union of Russian Artists such as Grabar, Konstantin Korovin, and Konstantin Yuon.

Perhaps one explanation for this particular emphasis lies in the traditional relevance of Russian culture, its commitment to an extra-aesthetic obligation, whether moral and social as in Tolstoi's novels, or religious as in the icon. Just before October 1917 this inclination manifested itself on many occasions, not least during the civic disturbances of 1905. During that time Russian



artists, including many who were foreign to ideological programs such as Ivan Bilibin and Mstislav Dobujinsky used their decorative and illustrative talents to criticize the Tsarist order and to salute the cause of social justice. During the First World War, too, a number of the avant-garde artists, including Aristarkh Lentulov and Malevich, produced simple, narrative, patriotic posters that celebrated Imperial Russia—just as they were creating their extreme formal reductions. Similarly, just after the October Revolution, hundreds of artists, to the right and left, began to apply their art to utilitarian ends, decorating the cities with agit-prop designs that illustrated and explained the joys of Communism and the ills of Capitalism.

We might also note that, in spite of their diverse individualities, Russian artists tended to support collective structures, be they august institutions such as the Academy of Arts or more intimate clubs such as the Union of Youth.¹¹ It is not surprising to learn, therefore, that the idea of a Russian Ministry of Fine Arts was proposed and discussed *before* the October Revolution—and the arguments presented demonstrated that many artists and critics of the time would have welcomed government involvement in the arts.¹² For better or for worse, their desire was realized in the form of Anatolii Lunacharsky's Commissariat for Enlightenment which assumed broad jurisdiction over most artistic activities from 1918 onwards (exhibitions, commissions, museums, art schools, etc.). In this way, the enormous bureaucratic apparatus essential to the comprehensive imposition of Socialist Realism after 1932 was assembled and put in motion well before the Soviet government was even voicing its strong preference for any one particular artistic style.

Sergei Gerasimov
Collective Farm Harvest
Festival, 1935. Oil on
canvas, 92½ x 145½".
Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow



Serafima Riagina
***Higher, Ever Higher!*, 1934.**
 Oil on canvas, 59 x 38½".
 Museum of Russian Art,
 Kiev

A number of other circumstances are worth recalling in this context of the preludes to the formal establishment of Socialist Realism in 1932. With the October Revolution, many of the intellectuals and artists who had supported the avant-garde emigrated either temporarily or permanently. One result of this was, as Lunacharsky observed in 1925, a "certain lowering in the culture of form."¹³ This lowering of standards was stimulated further by the increasing articulation of the masses in matters of artistic taste, witness to which was the outrage expressed by the Moscow public in 1919 when they discovered that Boris Korolev's Cubo-Futurist statue to the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin was about to be unveiled. The response of the new consumer to works of art during the 1920s and the logical preference for a simple, illusionistic artform "easy on the eye," encouraged the consolidation of Realist forces while discouraging further experimentation by the avant-garde. By 1923-1924 critics were writing that the leftists had been defeated and that it was "obvious that Realism was coming into its own."¹⁴ By 1929 most professional artists and architects had, allegedly, rejected "Formalism"¹⁵—which was enjoying some success "only in the Ukraine."¹⁶

The early 1920s witnessed a number of structural and organizational developments that were highly indicative of this mass orientation towards Realism. Undoubtedly, the most important of these was the founding in 1922 of AKhRR (Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia) in Moscow in the wake of the 47th exhibition of the Society of Wandering Exhibitions. The primary aim of the AKhRR artists such as Alexander Grigorev, Evgenii Katsman, and Pavel Radimov was to present Revolutionary Russia in a realistic manner by depicting the everyday life of the proletariat, the peasantry, the Red Army, etc. They stated in their first declaration of 1922:

Our civic duty before mankind is to set down, artistically and documentarily, the revolutionary impulse of this great moment in history....

We will provide a true picture of events and not abstract concoctions discrediting our Revolution in the face of the international proletariat....

The day of revolution, the moment of revolution, is the day of heroism, the moment of heroism—and now we must reveal our artistic experiences in the monumental forces of the style of heroic realism.¹⁷

In emphasizing this tendentious theme, AKhRR refurbished the traditions of the nineteenth-century Realists and voiced its opposition to those who deviated from their position in no uncertain terms. AKhRR attracted many young artists such as Fedor Bogorodsky, Georgii Riazhsky, and Pavel Sokolov-Skalia who believed in the reportorial mission of painting and sculpture and who, after occasional encounters with experimental movements (e.g.,

Riazhsky's Suprematism and Sokolov-Skalia's Expressionism of ca. 1920),¹⁸ gave their talents to the depiction of the new reality (e.g., Bogorodsky's *Sailors Ambushed*, 1927-1928, TG; Riazhsky's *Woman Delegate*, 1927, TG; and Sokolov-Skalia's *Soviet Tourists*, 1929).¹⁹ Eighty percent of the AKhRR members were of working-class origin, they organized popular thematic exhibitions such as the "Exhibition of Studies, Sketches, Drawings and Graphics from the Life and Customs of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army" (1922) and "Revolution, Life and Labor" (1924), they received direct government subsidy, owned their own printing press, published their own magazine, and produced an immense number of works (e.g., 2000 paintings and sculptures were in the 1926 show in Moscow).²⁰ In addition, AKhRR maintained very close relations with the government and military apparatus: various dignitaries visited their exhibitions (e.g., Mikhail Frunze, Commissar for War, and Marshal Voroshilov) which resulted in a number of imposing official portraits (e.g., Katsman's of Felix Dzerzhinsky, head of the Secret Police, in 1923, TG, and Isaak Brodsky's of Frunze in 1929, Central Museum of the Armed Forces of the USSR, Moscow). AKhRR also fostered an international connection through its German affiliation and, by the late 1920s, moved closely with the Academy of Arts thanks to the prestige of members such as Brodsky and A. Gerasimov (who, in the 1930s, were among Stalin's court painters).

The AKhRR artists were more intent on communicating a message than on artistic innovation and their documentary style was often ingenuous, static, and badly executed. While fulfilling the increasing demand for *siuzhethnost* (subject matter), AKhRR relied heavily on the nineteenth-century methods and was criticized sharply for its conservatism and photographic imitateness. For example, Alfred Kurella, a critic who became a proponent of Socialist Realism in the 1930s, touched off an intense polemic in 1928, contending that AKhRR had not invented a revolutionary form and that even its choice of images simply rephrased traditional ones.²¹ While acknowledging that AKhRR paintings were the most popular of their kind in the Soviet Union, he maintained that, if it were not for the external emblems, the AKhRR pictures could have been painted fifty years before. A case in point was Semen Prokhorov's canvas called *Worker Students in the Ukraine* (1926, TG) in which, so Kurella argued, the ruler carried by one of the young men had only to be replaced by an incense burner and gold crosses put on the textbooks for a village choir to materialize.²² The inference, therefore, was that AKhRR had inherited unquestioningly the anecdotal style of the *peredvizhniki* and that it was simply repeating their technique without improvement or modification. The result was a petit-bourgeois art, a "Pinkerton daubing" that had little to do with Revolutionary Russia.²³

Ironically, this very argument was used by the enemies of the avant-garde during the 1920s and 1930s. Immediately after the Revolution, artists such as El Lissitzky, Malevich, and Rodchenko argued that "Cubism and Futurism were revolutionary movements in art, anticipating the revolution in the economic and political life of 1917."²⁴ They asserted that geometric abstraction, for example, with its reduction to simple, mechanical elements (cf. Suprematism) was close to the proletarian world, that their activity as designers was a logical extension of the factory environment, that only an art devoid of local, folkloric, and ethnic images could be truly international and democratic, and that movement (e.g., Tatlin's Monument to the Third International with its moving parts or Popova's dynamic fashion designs) was the legitimate metaphor for the permanent revolution. These arguments sounded convincing until it was realized that geometric abstraction, kinetic art, and the "International Style" were attracting just as much attention in bourgeois France, Socialist Germany, and Capitalist America—and Soviet critics were quick to point this out.²⁵

Kurella's negative attitude towards the Heroic Realism of AKhRR was shared by many artists and critics of the late 1920s, not least Diego Rivera and, most importantly, by the group known as OST (Society of Easel Artists) led by David Shterenberg (one-time head of the Visual Arts Section of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment).²⁶ The artists of OST (founded in 1924) such as Yurii Pimenov, Alexander Tyshler, Petr Viliams, and, for a while, Deineka supported a figurative style, but believed in the need to experiment with new trends such as Expressionism and even Surrealism within the context of Revolutionary subject matter. They criticized AKhRR for its unfair financial and political privileges and for its rejection of "formal research," something that "threatens to lower the level of our art, to make it stagnate."²⁷ In turn, AKhRR countered this attack, declaring that its members were from the working class, that they had produced "several thousand pictures," and that some of the OST artists had actually transferred their allegiance to AKhRR.²⁸

This polemic between the AKhRR and OST in the late 1920s and early 1930s is symptomatic of the wider debate of those years concerning issues such as the meaning of proletarian art, the Party's position in matters of style, and the need for the presence or absence of artistic plurality. Indeed, until 1932 when all art groups were abolished by law, there were many art and exhibition societies that operated with their own interpretations of "Revolutionary Art"—Existence, Four Arts, Society of Young Artists, New Society of Painters, to mention but a few.²⁹ Still, generally speaking, the impression from their exhibitions was of a "long chain of disappointments":³⁰ after the conventional gesture to Marxism-Leninism in the form of a Lenin portrait, there always followed the usual "nudes, landscapes

with cows," etc.³¹ (One might add, incidentally, that the same impression is elicited by exhibitions of official Soviet art in Moscow and Leningrad today.) Obviously, to ensure the establishment of an authentic Soviet style and of the intricate machinery whereby such a style could be implemented, certain measures had to be taken; to counteract the continuing artistic diversity, certain basic artistic concepts had to be defined rigidly and unambiguously. To a considerable extent, this was achieved through the passing of the decree *On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations* in April 1932 and through the proceedings of the First Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934.

The Party decree *On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations* marked the culmination in a series of official statements that had been curtailing the artist's autonomy since at least 1925, e.g., the decrees *On the Party's Policy in the Field of Creative Literature* (1925) and *On the Production of Poster Pictures* (1931). Before 1932 there had also been attempts to consolidate artistic forces through the creation of umbrella societies such as Vsekokhudozhnik (All-Russian Cooperative of Artists, 1929), FOSKh (Federation of the Association of Soviet Workers in the Spatial Arts, 1930), and RAPKh (Russian Association of Proletarian Artists, 1931), but such organizations had retained a certain independence of the political apparatus and, in any case, had often been infiltrated with Formalism, vulgar materialism, or naive Realism. As the 1932 decree affirmed, they were becoming "too narrow and are hampering the serious development of artistic creativity." It went on:

....these organizations might change from being an instrument for the maximum mobilization of Soviet writers and artists for the tasks of Socialist construction to being an instrument for cultivating elitist withdrawal and loss of contact with the political tasks of contemporaneity....³²

The direct result of the 1932 decree was the dissolution of all groups immediately; and although the proposed single Union of Soviet Artists was not set up formally until 1960 with the First Congress of Artists of the Russian Federation, a special committee was formed to take charge of all art affairs, excluding those of architecture and the cinema, i.e., the Committee for Art Affairs Attached to the Council of USSR Ministries. The drastic restructuring of the Soviet art world that occurred prepared the ground for the conclusive advocacy of Socialist Realism two years later at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers.

This Congress, chaired by Maxim Gorky, played a major role in the history of Soviet culture not only because it constituted an impressive symbol of solidarity (almost 600 delegates from almost fifty Soviet nationalities were present as well as forty-one guests from abroad), but also because it chose Socialist Realism as the only viable artistic medium for



Dmitrii Nalbandian
Stalin in His Kremlin Office,
1945. Tretyakov Gallery,
Moscow

Alexander Laktionov
A Letter from the Front,
 1947. Tretyakov Gallery,
 Moscow



Soviet literature and art. Although the term Socialist Realism was current from 1932 onwards, its meaning had remained imprecise, for, as Lunacharsky wrote, it "is an extensive program; it includes many different methods—those we already possess and those we are still acquiring."³³ The 1934 Congress, particularly in the persons of Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov (Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), attempted to explain the concept of Socialist Realism, advancing principles such as "typicality," "Party spirit," "revolutionary Romanticism," "reality in its revolutionary development," as fundamental to the understanding of the new doctrine. In literature, in fact, Gorky was regarded as the founder of Socialist Realism since many of these qualities could be identified with his work, particularly with his plays and his famous novel *Mother* (1906). Within the framework of the visual arts, there was, however, no precursor of Gorky's stature, although nineteenth-century Russian Realism provided a firm traditional basis, and later Realists such as Abram Arkhipov and Nikolai Kasatkin, some of whom were members of the AKhRR, acted as vital links between the pre- and post-Revolutionary periods. While the emphasis of the Congress was, of course, on literature, its general tenets were applicable to all the Soviet arts, especially to the visual arts. Grabar, never a radical artist, made this clear in his speech: not only did he accept the Party's jurisdiction in matters of art, but also his description of the now "distant past" as "dismal"³⁴ echoed Gorky's condemnation of the period 1907-1917 as the "most disgraceful and shameful decade in the history of the Russian intelligentsia."³⁵ Grabar, already an Honored Art Worker, was the only professional artist who spoke at the Congress. However, some of the literary speakers had been in contact with the more progressive forces of Russian and Soviet art. Viktor Shklovsky and Sergei Tretiakov, for example, once associated with the Constructivist group/journal *Lef*, made substantial contributions to the Congress, although Shklovsky was quick to renounce his former artistic sympathies: "we Constructivists created a construction that proved to be non-constructive."³⁶ The true heroes of the avant-garde—Filonov, Malevich, and Tatlin—were not present.

What became patently clear at the Congress was the degree to which artistic policy in the Soviet Union relied on the political machine, a fact expressed explicitly and implicitly in one of the opening speeches by Zhdanov:

In our hand we hold a sure weapon, thanks to which we can overcome all the difficulties besetting our path. This weapon is the great and invincible doctrine of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin, a doctrine that has been put into practice by our Party and by our soviets.³⁷

Although Stalin himself did not take part in the Congress, the numerous references to his leadership

strewn throughout the speeches, and the formal addresses to Stalin and Voroshilov that concluded the Congress, indicated the power that the government hierarchy already exerted in the field of art and literature. The effect of the Congress on the evolution of Soviet art was decisive. The ratification of Socialist Realism as the only artistic style acceptable to a Socialist society and, hence, as an international style, together with the several subsequent decrees that attempted to abolish "Formalism" in the arts, led directly to its exclusive application in the Soviet Union; and although this led, in turn, to a standardization in form and content, there is no doubt that the portraits of official celebrities, the industrial and collective farm landscapes, the Red Army and Navy scenes were immediately intelligible and achieved a lasting popularity with the masses.

It is important to remember that the kind of art that Socialist Realism produced in the 1930s was intended to be not only "national in form, Socialist in content,"³⁸ but also classless:

....the art of Socialist Realism presupposes the spirit of the people [*narodnost*] both in content and in form. Socialist Realism has no class connection. Plastov and Shurpin may make collective farm scenes, but that does not invest their work with a class exclusivity....the task is to express the spiritual and material cohesion of the whole of contemporary Soviet society under the banner of Lenin and Stalin.³⁹

The rational conclusion—that Socialist Realism could flourish only in a society without class antagonisms—had actually been made several times before, even by Lev Trotsky who, in 1924, dismissed the notion of a proletarian culture as being a contradiction in terms⁴⁰ (which did not stop Nikolai Bukharin from talking about "proletarian literature").⁴¹ In 1919 a group of art workers had announced at a Moscow meeting that

....there is neither Capitalist, nor bourgeois, neither proletarian, nor Socialist art....there is but a single authentic art, the function of which is to unite mankind.⁴²

The critic I. Razumovsky argued further in 1923 that, in the future, art would be devoid of ideology since ideology and art would be the same:

With a different, un-ideological, realistic worldview, law, ethics, art, philosophical methods will cease to be ideologies, but will change into a conscious reflection of the material conditions of life.⁴³

However, the opposing view—that art existed only as an ideological category—also made itself known.⁴⁴

If Socialist Realism was described as a classless art, it still relied heavily on a distinctive internal hierarchy of the arts, and if, for example, new media such as film and photography (multiple and "democratic") had been regarded as revolutionary in the 1920s, their position in the 1930s was usurped once again by the

oil painting in the gilt frame or by the monumental sculpture. As Fedorov-Davydov affirmed in 1951: "the struggle for Socialist Realism in painting has become the struggle for the picture, for the carefully worked out canvas full of content."⁴⁵ In turn, the Academy of Artists was restored to its former glorious position as the arbiter of taste and, like any historical counterpart in Russia, Italy, France, or England, it maintained very close connections with the seats of political and financial power. Indeed, the prestigious academicians of the 1930s such as Brodsky and A. Gerasimov were also Stalin's favorite artists. Moreover, since the practice of Socialist Realism was to be implemented via this traditional pyramid, the apex of this structure was to be the final dispenser of aesthetic judgement—just as Catherine the Great, for example, had been the primary protector of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts many years before. Yet Stalin was hardly interested in the visual arts, is rumored never to have visited an art museum, and his collected works contain no substantive references to painting and sculpture. Consequently, a mythology of Stalin as aesthetic theorist had to be constructed, a task adequately undertaken by the Socialist Realist critics of the 1930s and 1940s such as Fedorov-Davydov, Mikhail Lifshits, and G. A. Nedoshivin. Stalin was even credited with formulating the term Socialist Realism, a "definition of genius."⁴⁶ Fedorov-Davydov made it clear that "Soviet painting is obliged to the brilliant leadership of Stalin for its development."⁴⁷

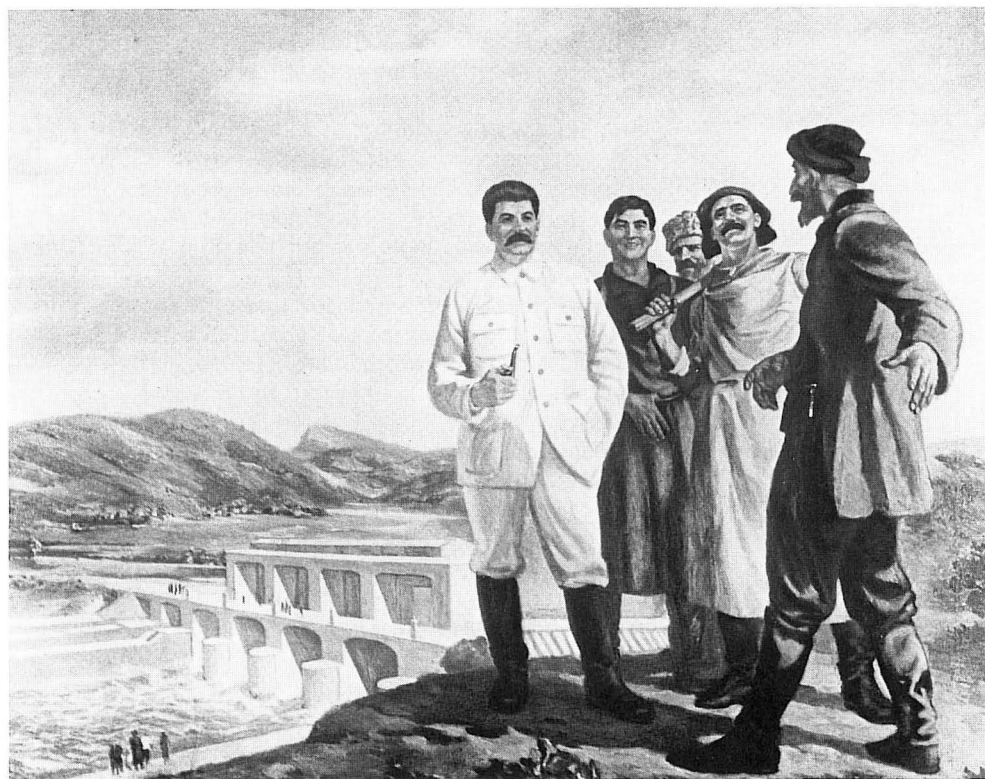
During the 1930s and 1940s the politician's role as art critic and historian was also played by other leaders of the Communist Party. Zhdanov, of course, was responsible for some of the most scathing criticisms of Modernist art and literature. G. M. Malenkov made many pronouncements on these disciplines as did Bukharin. Even Lavrentii Beria took time out from his duties as head of the secret police to co-organize the "Exhibition of Works by Georgian Artists" in Moscow in 1937. The link between Soviet art and politics was forced still further through the feverish search for aesthetic statements made by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. The few comments by these political scientists to the effect that Party leaders should be depicted in the "severe colors of Rembrandt"⁴⁸ or that "art belongs to the people"⁴⁹ served, and still serve, as the basis for Soviet assessments of artistic practice.

The theoretical and practical results of Socialist Realism were propagated through a sophisticated, well-financed structure of exhibitions, publications, and commissions. The thematic exhibition such as "XX Years of the Red Army and Navy" (Moscow, 1938) and "I. V. Stalin in the Visual Arts" (Moscow, 1949), the didactic monographs by critics such as Rafail Kaufman and Vladimir Kemenov,⁵⁰ the production of masterpieces such as Iraklii Toidze's *Stalin at a Hydroelectric Power Station* (1938, TG), Boris Ioganson's *Interrogation of the Communists* (1933, TG),

and Dmitrii Nalbandian's *Stalin in His Kremlin Office* (1945, TG)—here was a gigantic mechanism that disseminated the values of Socialist Realism ruthlessly, persuasively, universally.

The real flaw in Socialist Realism, as in any artistic program, is that its quintessential terms and ideas were and are always open to interpretation. Phrases such as "reality in its revolutionary development"⁵¹ or "working on the image of Stalin is the embodiment of the basic, central theme of Socialist Realism"⁵² are, ultimately, rhetorical approximations, as abstract as words such as "freedom" and "democracy." Consequently, although the subject matter of the Stalin style was predictable, its interpretation was not. Was Stalin to be depicted alone or with a group? Was severity or luxury the material ambience of Socialist society? Would the political heroes of today continue to be so tomorrow? Such questions contributed further to the polemical environment of the 1930s and 1940s, causing the frequent recantations by writers and artists and the modification of works of art in accordance with proposals dictated from above. Just as photomontage was used in Hitler's Germany as a flexible and transformative genre, so titles and images of Soviet paintings were often changed. For example, A.

Iraklii Toidze
Stalin at a Hydroelectric
Power Station, 1938. Oil on
canvas, 93 x 114½".
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



Gerasimov first called his *Comrades Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin, Peace Watch*; in 1940 Ioganson painted his *Leaders of October*, but was criticized for underplaying its "psychological aspects,"⁵³ so in 1948 he repainted it achieving a more acceptable "rhythmical construction."⁵⁴ After Krushchev's exposure of the personality cult in 1956, Stalin himself was overpainted in many paintings, just as his statues were removed from the streets and squares and his writings removed from libraries.

Of course, there was an absent vocabulary as well as a recurrent one in Socialist Realist art. Formalism, which covered practically all the avant-garde movements of Russia and the West, was considered to be alien to Soviet culture, and even trace elements of Impressionism or Expressionism continued to be discerned and censured even when a painting contained all the correct thematic ingredients (e.g., S. Gerasimov's *Collective Farm Harvest Festival*). The total rejection of the experimental trends of just before and after 1917 signified the eradication of an entire generation of artists, of their achievements and discoveries. Consequently, with their removal, Soviet art emerged as the direct continuation of the nineteenth-century Realist tradition. For those few avant-garde artists who survived the 1930s and 1940s, the imposition of Socialist Realism was intolerable not only because of its narrow aesthetic program, but also because of the relentless, bureaucratic methods whereby it was disseminated. All avenues of artistic endeavor—exhibitions, acquisitions, stipends, supplies—were controlled in such a way that the dissenting artist was automatically denied public access and financial support. Even if he or she tried to paint in the correct manner or to move into less exposed and exacting areas such as book design, the stigma of Formalism was never overlooked. Even the Modernist artists who had deviated only slightly from the Realist tradition such as Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin continued to be criticized even if not ostracized for their past sins at least until the late 1950s.

With the advent of the Second World War, Socialist Realism continued to be advocated as the only legitimate mode of expression in Soviet art and literature. True, artists gave their primary attention to patriotic posters, caricatures, and sketches at the front, thereby shifting the emphasis away from the grand oil painting. But the intense exploration of these media was scarcely accompanied by any formal innovation, even though the war posters (e.g., by the Kukryniksy trio)⁵⁵ were trenchant and very effective. In spite of its momentary proximity to the Western allies during the war, the Soviet Union quickly returned to its splendid isolation and, until Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet art was marked by a parochial xenophobia stimulated in no small degree by Zhdanov. The art of the Capitalist West continued to be regarded as "trickery and idiocy"⁵⁶ and those artists who identified themselves

with it were called enemies of the Soviet Union. But perhaps the most perverse element of Soviet culture throughout this period was once again not the system of Socialist Realism itself, but rather the bureaucracy that profited by it, that

small group of people who have no direct relevance to art, who have no competence in matters of art, who have no right to act behind the artist's back or on the artist's behalf, who have no right to be the self-styled regisseurs of an ideology and an economics in the profession of which they know nothing.⁵⁷

Today the portraits of Stalin no longer grace the art exhibition in Moscow, and the perimeter of Socialist Realism has been extended dramatically. Artists are no longer criticized for using Impressionism, and the pressure of the Realist tradition is less overwhelming. Even so, the Soviet artist must still come to terms with an impassive cultural apparatus and heed bureaucratic dictates before artistic ones. Ironically, it is this procedure that hinders rather than inspires the creative development of the tenets of Socialist Realism in contemporary Soviet art.

Notes

1. From the Charter of the Union of Soviet Writers of the USSR in the collection of reports, speeches, and resolutions from the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, Moscow, August 1934—published as *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi sezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1934). Translated in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*, ed. John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking Press, 1976), pp. 292-297. This extract is on page 297.

2. No comprehensive examination of Soviet Socialist Realism, especially as it manifested itself in the 1930s, has yet been published. There are, of course, numerous Soviet publications that deal with the subject, but they tend to be one-sided and are not always accurate. Even so, the following Soviet titles are useful: L. Zinger and M. Orlova, eds., *Istoriia iskusstvo narodov SSSR 7* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1972); O. Sopotsinsky et al., *Stanovlenie sotsialisticheskogo realizma v sovetskom izobrazitel'nom iskusstvo* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1960); V. Vanslov and L. Denisova, eds., *Iz istorii sovetskogo iskusstvo-vedeniia i esteticheskoi mysli 1930-kh godov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977). The following English-language sources are also informative: Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *Art Under a Dictatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Kurt London, *The Seven Soviet Arts* (London: Faber, 1937); C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1973). Igor Golomshtok, presently preparing a monograph on totalitarian art of the 1930s, has published a very useful essay on the apparatus of Socialist Realism in M. Rueschemeyer, I. Golomshtok, and J. Kennedy, eds., *Soviet Emigré Artists* (Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1985), pp. 16-59. As far as Stalin architecture is concerned, mention should be made of a very informative book by Vladimir Paperny, *Kultura "Dva"* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985).

3. TG = State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

4. Stalin said this at the All-Union Convention of Shock-Workers, Moscow 1935. Quoted in G. Nedoshivin, "Stalinskii printsip sotsialisticheskogo realizma v razvitiu sovetskoi zhivopisi," in *Uchenye zapiski*, Issue 2, ed. E. Finberg (Moscow: Akademiia obshchestvennykh

nauk, 1951), p. 185.

5. A. Fedorov-Davydov, "Obraz I. V. Stalina v sovetskoj zhivopisi i risunke," *Uchenye zapiski*, p. 143.

6. From Andrei Zhdanov's speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. In Bowlt, op. cit., p. 294.

7. After Krushchev's condemnation of Stalin in 1956, the artistic celebrations of Stalin, especially the grand oil paintings of the 1930s, disappeared from public view. Many of the key works had been on display in the Tretyakov Gallery, and it is assumed that they are still preserved in the storerooms there. It is not known, however, whether Shurpin's *Morning of Our Motherland* is still there or not.

8. The term Socialist Realism was invented in the spring of 1932 after a series of meetings between Maxim Gorky and other writers. The first printed reference to the term seems to be on 23 May 1932 in a report on the organization of the Union of Soviet Writers by I. Gronskey in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in which he stated that "the basic method of Soviet literature is that of Socialist Realism." The source of this quotation and of other relevant information is Vanslov and Deisova, op. cit., p. 406. Nedoshivin, op. cit., p. 165 wrongly attributes the creation of the term to Stalin.

9. Alexander Gerasimov, *Za sotsialisticheskii realizm* (Moscow: Akademiia khudozhestv, 1952), p. 83.

10. Igor Grabar, *Repin* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo izobrazitelnykh iskusstv, 1937).

11. The Union of Youth was a society of avant-garde artists and critics active with exhibitions and publications in St. Petersburg from 1910 to 1914. Among its members were Pavel Filonov, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Kazimir Malevich, Mikhail Matiushin, Olga Rozanova, and the Burliuk brothers.

12. See Sergei Makovsky, "Ministerstvo iskusstv," in *Apollon* (Petrograd), no. 2-3 (1917): i-xvi.

13. Anatolii Lunacharsky, "Puti iskusstva," in *30 dnei* (Moscow), no. 2 (1925): 6.

14. D. Aranovich, "Desiat let iskusstva," in *Krasnaia nov* (Moscow), no. 11 (1927): 219.

15. K. Alabian et al., "Deklaratsiia Obedineniia proletarskikh arkhitektorov," in *Pechat i revoliutsiia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1929), Book 6, p. 126.

16. R. Pelshe, "Za desiat let," in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (Moscow-Leningrad), no. 5 (1927): 24.

17. From the "Declaration of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia" (1922). Translation in Bowlt, op. cit., pp. 266-267. The best source of information on AKhRR is I. Gronskey and V. Perelman, comps., *AKhRR* (Moscow, 1973).

18. An example of Riazhsky's Suprematism of 1920 is reproduced in A. Rudenstine et al., *Russian Avant-Garde Art. The George Costaki Collection* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1981), p. 445. Sokolov-Skalia's familiarity with German Expressionism can be seen from the reproductions of his early graphic work in V. Lobanov, *P. P. Sokolov-Skalia* (Moscow, 1946).

19. The present whereabouts of Sokolov-Skalia's *Soviet Tourists* is not known. It is reproduced in *Modern Soviet Painters* (Chicago, 1930), no author; unpaginated.

20. AKhRR published a number of books, e.g., N. Shchekotov, *Iskusstvo SSSR. Novaia Rossiia v iskusstve* (Moscow, 1926). The name of the AKhRR magazine was *Iskusstvo v massy* [Art to the Masses] and it was published in Moscow 1929-1930.

21. A. Kurella, "Khudozhestvennaia reaktsiia pod maskoi 'geroicheskogo realizma,'" in *Revoliutsiia i kultura* (Moscow), no. 2 (1928): 42-47.

22. Ibid., p. 44.

23. A. Kurella, "Ot 'iskusstva revoliutsionnoi Rossii' k proletarskomu iskusstvu," in *Revoliutsiia i kultura*, no. 6 (1928): 42.

24. K. Malevich, *O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve* (Vitebsk, 1919), p. 10.

25. See, for example, Ya. Tugendkhold, *Iskusstvo sovremennoi Evropy* (Moscow, 1925).

26. For information on OST see V. Kostin, *OST* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1976).

27. A. Kurella, "Ot 'iskusstva....,'" op. cit., p. 46.

28. E. Yaroslavsky, "Protiv levoi frazy i nedobrosovestnoi kritiki," in *Revoliutsiia i kultura*, no. 3-4 (1928): 38-41.

29. For information on these and other groups of the time see V. Perelman, ed., *Borba za realizm v iskusstve 20-kh godov* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1982), passim. The documentary part of this book is based on I. Matsa et al., comps., *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let* (Moscow-Leningrad: OGIZ, 1933).

30. P. Krasnov, "'Bytie' i....soznanie," in *30 dnei* (Moscow), no. 3 (1925): 86.

31. Ibid.

32. *O perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii* (1932). Translation in Bowlt, op. cit., p. 289.

33. A. Lunacharsky, "Sotsialisticheskii realizm," in A. Lunacharsky, *Sobranie sochinenii v vosmi tomakh* (Moscow) 8 (1963-1967): 501.

34. From Igor Grabar's speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. In Bowlt, op. cit., p. 295.

35. From Maxim Gorky's speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. In I. Luppel et al., *Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi sezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934. Stenograficheskie otchet* (Moscow, 1934), p. 12.

36. From Viktor Shklovsky's speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. In Luppel, op. cit., p. 155.

37. From Andrei Zhdanov's speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934. In Bowlt, op. cit., p. 293.

38. Quoted in A. Gerasimov, op. cit., p. 80.

39. Nedoshivin, op. cit., p. 182.

40. See L. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1924).

41. See V. Friche et al., *Iskusstvo v SSSR i zadachi khudozhnikov* (Moscow: Komakademiia, 1928), pp. 44-45.

42. Pelshe, op. cit., p. 16.

43. Quoted in G. Yakubovsky, "O prirode iskusstva," in *Pechat i revoliutsiia*, 1926, Book I, p. 103.

44. Sopotsinsky, op. cit., p. 155.

45. Fedorov-Davydov, op. cit., p. 141.

46. Nedoshivin, op. cit., p. 165.

47. Fedorov-Davydov, op. cit., p. 161.

48. This phrase is attributed to Marx and Engels by Fedorov-Davydov, op. cit., p. 130.

49. For a discussion of Lenin's statements on, and attitudes towards, the visual arts see V. V. Shleev, *V. I. Lenin i izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo* (Moscow: Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo, 1977).

50. See, for example, R. Kaufman, *Sovetskaia tematicheskaiia kartina* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk, 1951); V. Kemenov, "O zhurnale 'Iskusstvo,'" in *Literaturnyi kritik* (Moscow), no. 8 (1935): 205-210; V. Kemenov, introduction to catalogue of the exhibition "Vasilii Ivanovich Surikov 1848-1916" (Moscow-Leningrad, 1937). A major source of commentary on Socialist Realism in the 1930s onwards is the journals *Iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1933-) and *Tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 1934-).

51. Zhdanov, op. cit., p. 293.

52. Fedorov-Davydov, op. cit., p. 128.

53. Ibid., pp. 148-150. The two versions of loganson's painting are reproduced in Kaufman, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

54. Fedorov-Davydov, op. cit., p. 150.

55. Kukryniksy is the abbreviation of the names of the three artists in the trio, i.e., Mikhail Kupriianov, Porfirii Krylov, and Nikolai Sokolov.

56. A. Gerasimov, op. cit., p. 86.

57. P. Filonov, *Osnova prepodavaniia izobrazitelnykh iskusstv po printsipu chistogo analiza, kak vysshiaia shkola tvorchestva, sistema "Mirovoi rastsvet,"* ca. 1925, unpublished manuscript, p. 18. Private collection.

Works in the Exhibition

Unless otherwise indicated, all works are courtesy the artist. Height precedes width precedes depth.

Eric Bulatov

Dangerous, 1972-1973

Oil on canvas

44 x 44"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Two Landscapes on the Red Background, 1972-1974

Oil on canvas

44 x 44"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Stop! Go!, 1975

Oil on canvas

32 x 98"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

People in the Countryside, 1976

Oil on canvas

56 x 72"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Krasikov Street, 1976

Oil on canvas

60 x 80"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

I Live! I See!, 1980

Color pencil on paper

8½ x 8½"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Watching T.V., 1982-1985

Oil on canvas

96 x 115"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

No Entrance, 1984

Color pencil on paper

9½ x 9½"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Glory to CPSU, 1977

Color pencil on paper

9½ x 9½"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Kazimir Passion

Documentation of past performances, 1982-1984

Untitled video performance

Lenin in New York

Color film, 30 minutes

A replica of Kazimir Malevich's coffin designed by Malevich

30 x 30 x 70"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Alexander Kosolapov

Childhood of Malevich, 1982

Oil on canvas

34 x 44"

Komar and Melamid

Art Belongs to the People, 1974-1984

Oil on canvas

84 x 336"

Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Onward to the Finale of Communism, 1975

Paint on cloth

16 x 77"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

We Were Born to Turn Dreams into Reality, 1975

Paint on cloth

16 x 77"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers, 1982-1983

Oil on canvas

72 x 50"

Collection Martin Sklar, New York

Art Belongs to the People, 1984

Color videotape

Courtesy The Kitchen, New York

Alexander Kosolapov

Lenin and Coca-Cola, 1982

Lithograph and text

22 x 30"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Search of History, 1982

Acrylic on canvas

40 x 50"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

The Finale of the World History, 1982-1983

Oil on canvas

Triptych: 60 x 64"; 60 x 66"; 60 x 62"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

The Manifesto, 1983

Oil on canvas

71 x 66"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Perseus, 1983

Oil on canvas

72 x 46"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Incident During the Manoeuvres, 1984

Oil on canvas

72 x 60"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Stalin and Lenin in Gorki, 1984

Oil on canvas

56 x 46"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Susanna and the Elders, 1984

Oil on canvas

60 x 48"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Leonid Lamm

From "To Freedom with a Clear Conscience" series

1. *The Guard Nikolai*, 1984

Oil on canvas

41 x 41"

2. *The Cell Door at Butyrka Prison*, 1984

Oil on canvas

78 x 58"

3. *Butyrka Honor Roll*, 1975-1984

Oil on canvas and collage

41 x 71 x 53"

4. *Toilet*, 1984

Oil on canvas

19 x 25"

5. *Garbage Can*, 1984

Oil on canvas

27 x 21"

From "Five" series

1. *Red Square*, 1985

Oil on canvas

41 x 41"

2. *Colonel Podrez*, 1975-1985

Oil on canvas and pencil on paper

41 x 51"

3. *Judge Anatoly Brizitsky*, 1985

Oil on canvas and pencil on paper

41 x 51"

4. *Pakhomov, the Prosecutor*, 1975-1985

Oil on canvas and pencil on paper

41 x 51"

5. *Gone, Self-Portrait*, 1975-1985

Oil, pencil, paper on plywood

41 x 51"

Adam and Eve: Freedom is Recognized Necessity, 1984

Oil on canvas and wood and metal

91 x 68 x 11"

Cell No. 319, 1975

Watercolor

10 x 14"

Cell No. 319, 1975

Watercolor

14 x 10"

Assembly Hall, Butyrka Prison, 1976

Watercolor

20 x 20"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Labor Camp near Rostov-on-Don, 1976

Watercolor

15 x 22"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

The Cell Door at Butyrka Prison, 1975

Watercolor

19 x 14"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

The Guard Nikolai, 1975

Watercolor

19 x 14"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Leonid Sokov

Khrushchev, 1983

Painted wood

32 x 20 x 20"

Collection Norton Dodge, Mechanicsville, Maryland

Portrait of Brezhnev, 1983

Painted wood

66 x 18 x 15"

Private Collection; courtesy A & P Gallery, New York

Stalin and Hitler, 1983

Painted wood

44 x 35 x 10"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

The Kalashnikov Machine Gun, 1984

Wood and metal

26 x 90 x 4"

Courtesy A & P Gallery, New York

The Kremlin Wall, 1984

Oil on plywood

93 x 96"

Private Collection; courtesy Zeus/Trabia Gallery, New York

Mausoleum: It's Very Beautiful, 1984

Oil on plywood

46 x 82"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Volley of Aurora, 1984

Oil on plywood

46 x 82"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

Dialogical Speech, 1985

Painted wood

16 x 35"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

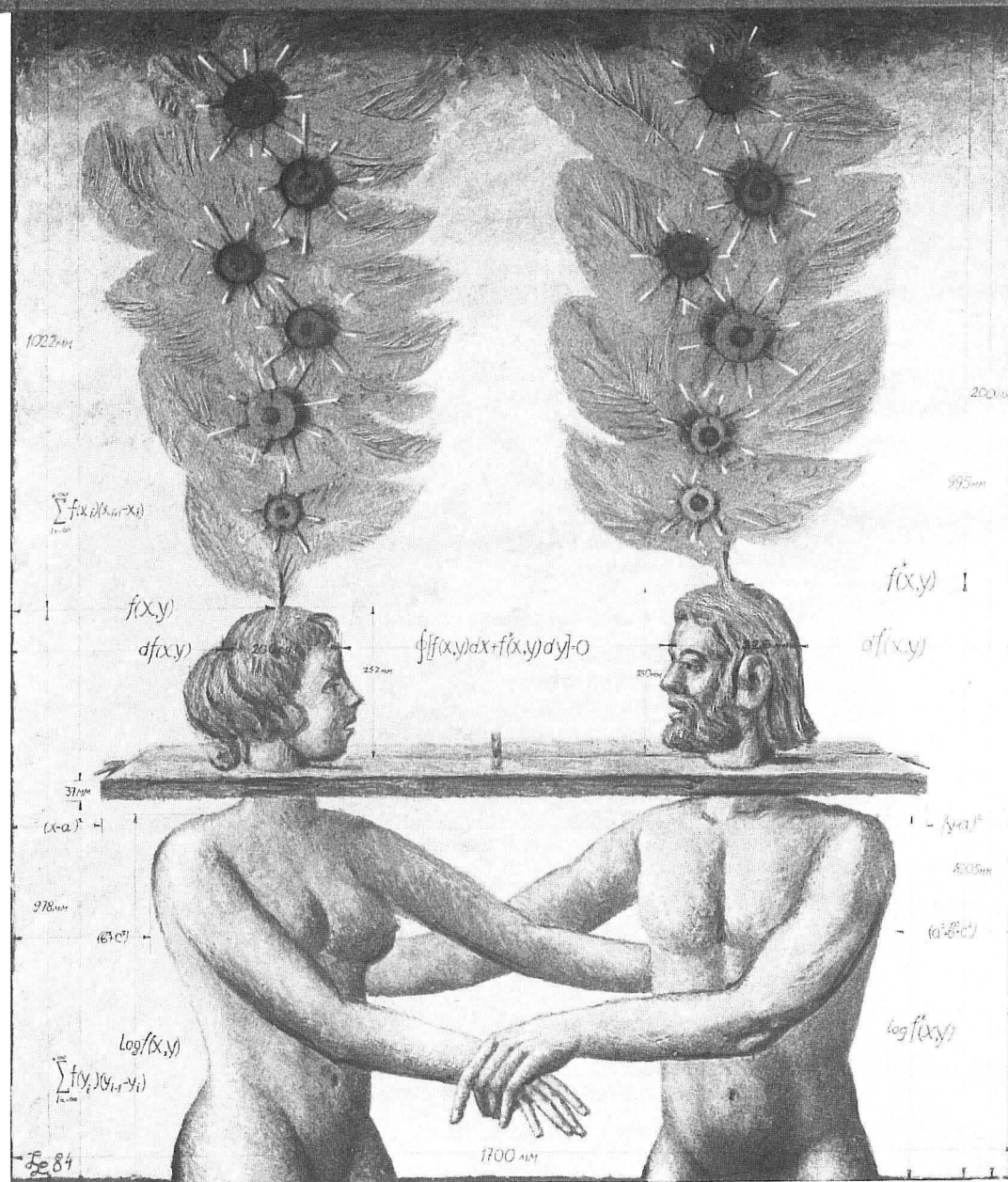
Twentieth Century Leaders, 1985

Painted wood

90 x 21 x 6"

Courtesy Semaphore Gallery, New York

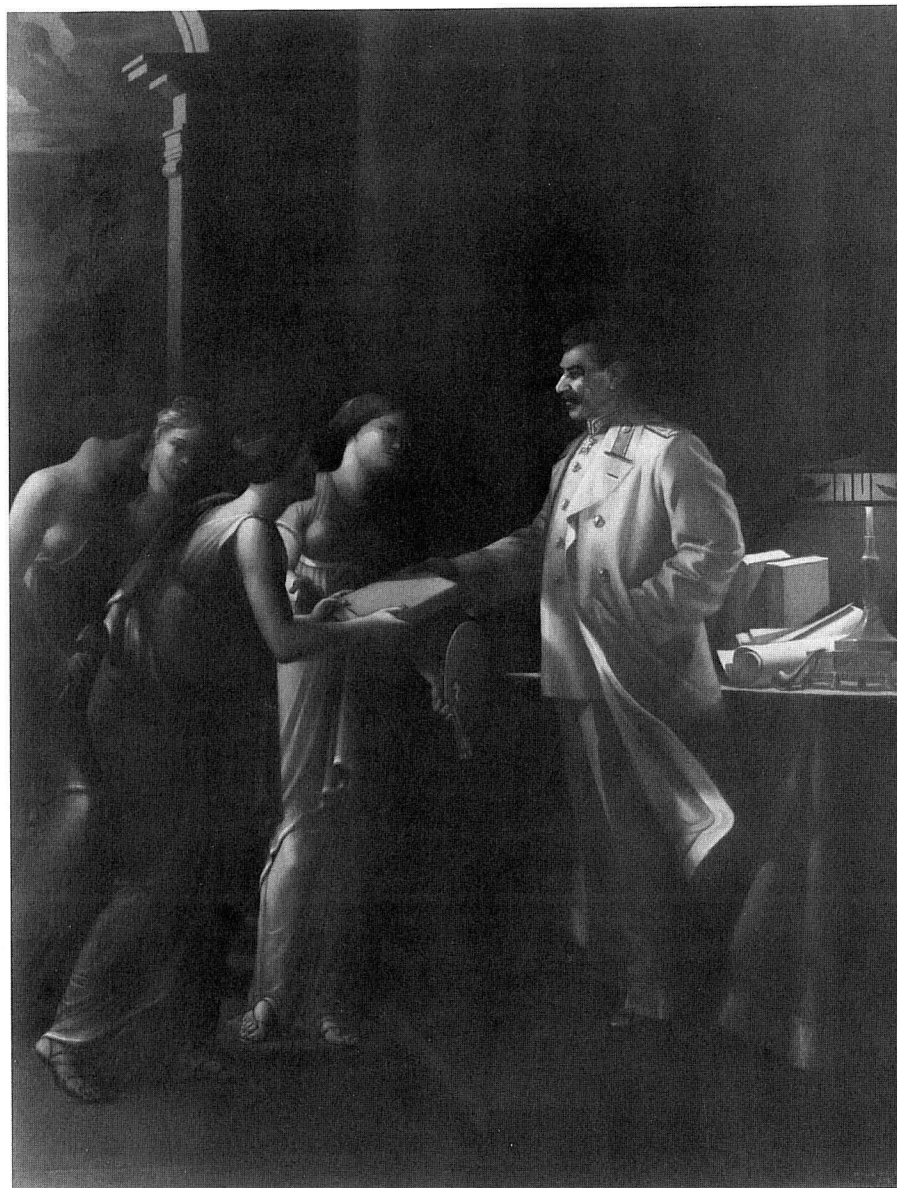
FREEDOM IS RECOGNIZED NECESSITY! /ENGELS/



Leonid Lamm
Adam and Eve: Freedom is
Recognized Necessity,
1984. Oil on canvas and
wood and metal, 91 x 68 x
11". Courtesy the artist



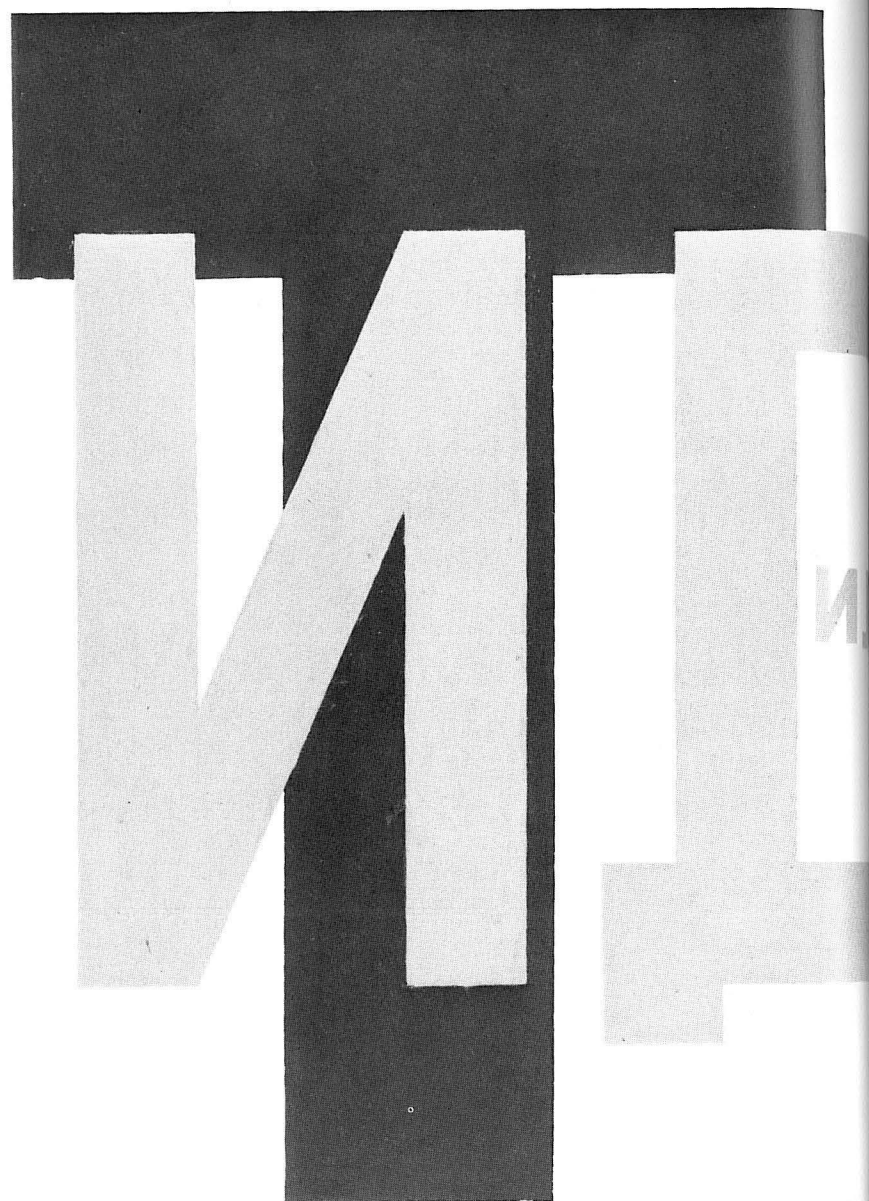
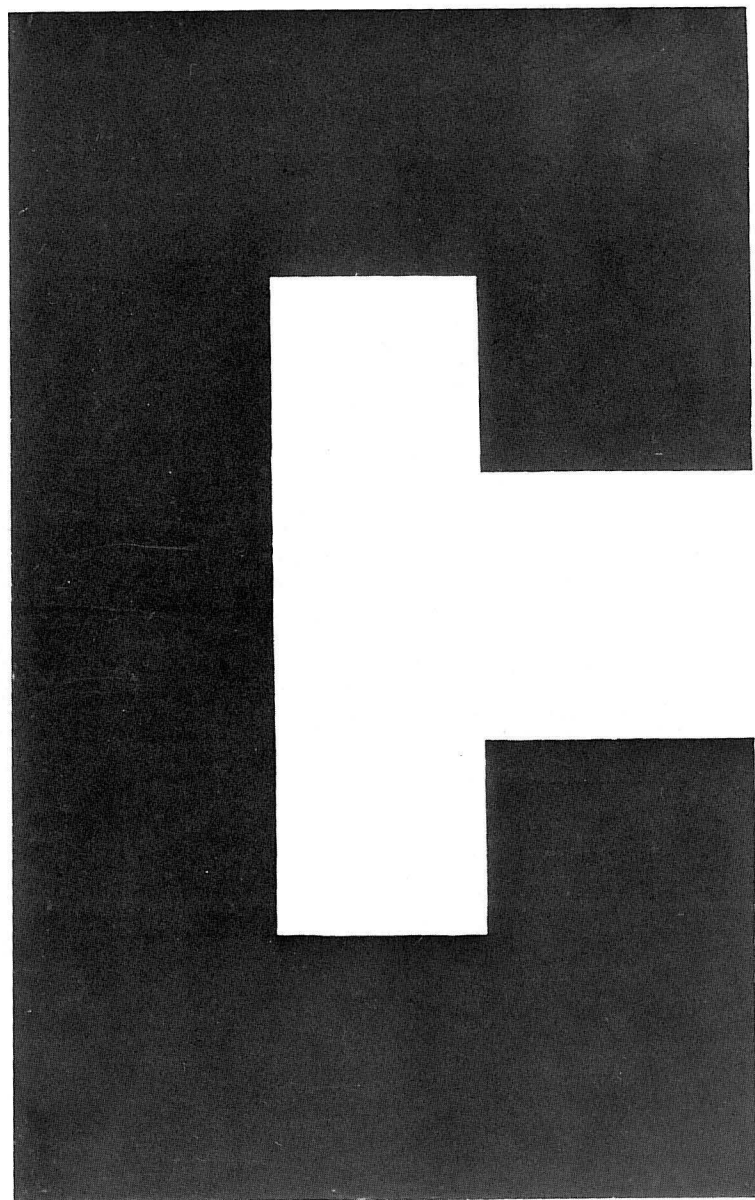
Eric Bulatov
***Krasikov Street*, 1976. Oil**
on canvas, 60 x 80".
Collection Norton Dodge,
Mechanicsville, Maryland

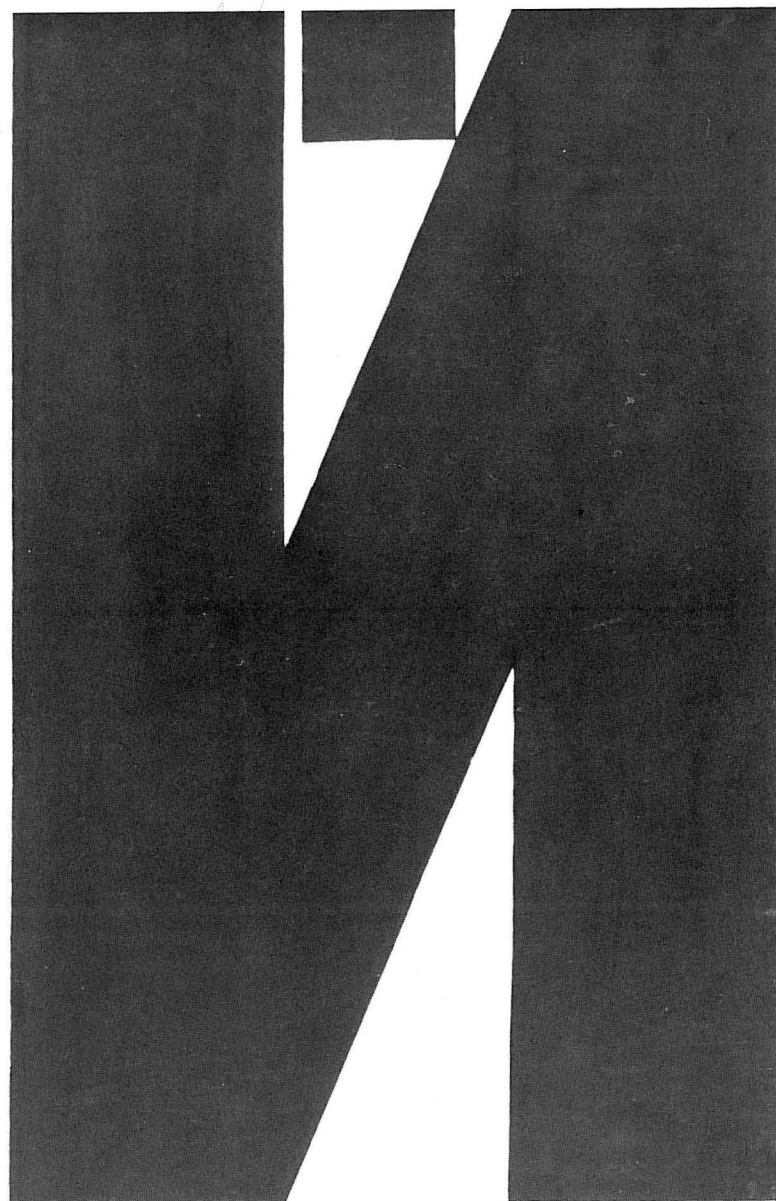
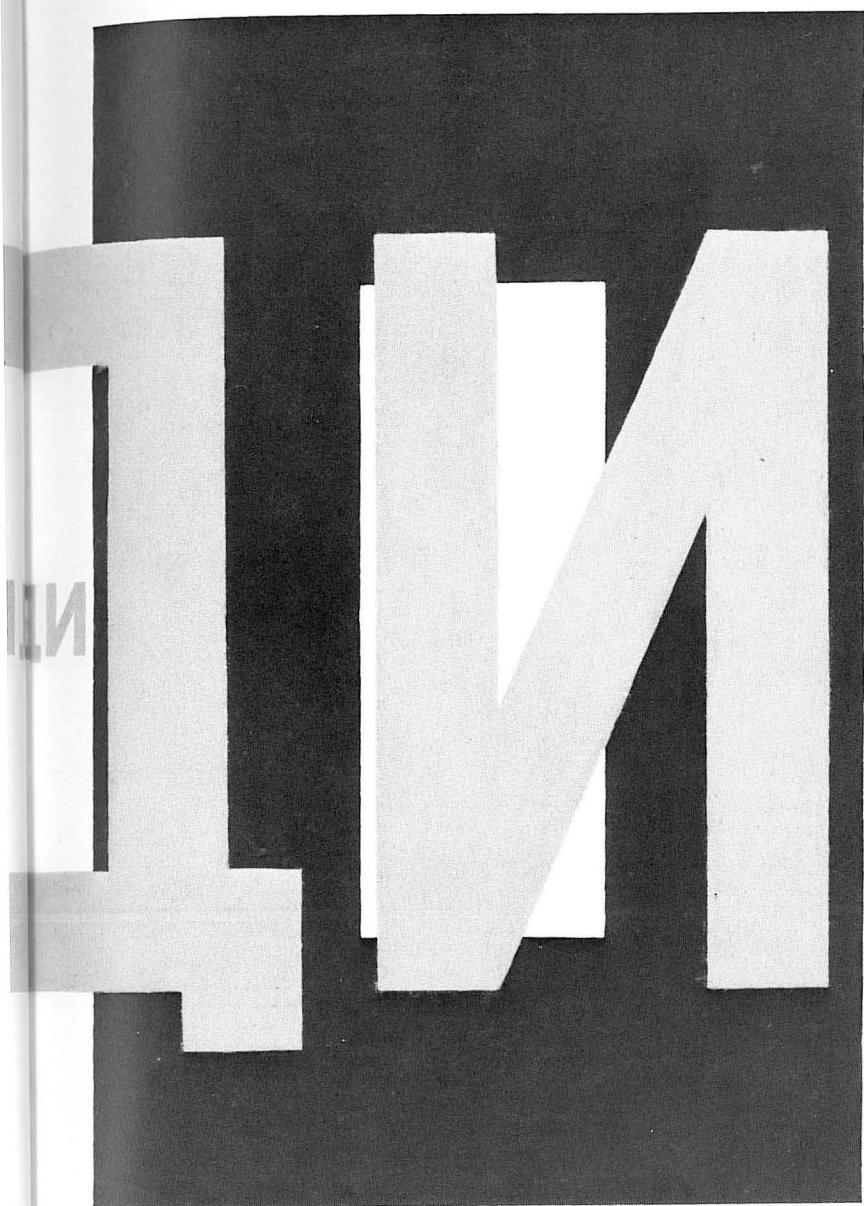


**Komar and Melamid
Stalin and the Muses,
1981-1982. Oil on canvas,
72 x 55". Courtesy Ronald
Feldman Fine Arts, New
York**



Eric Bulatov
***Horizon*, 1971-1972. Oil on**
canvas, 75 x 90". Collection
Norton Dodge,
Mechanicsville, Maryland





Eric Bulatov
Stop! Go!, 1975. Oil on
 canvas, 32 x 98". Collection
 Norton Dodge,
 Mechanicsville, Maryland



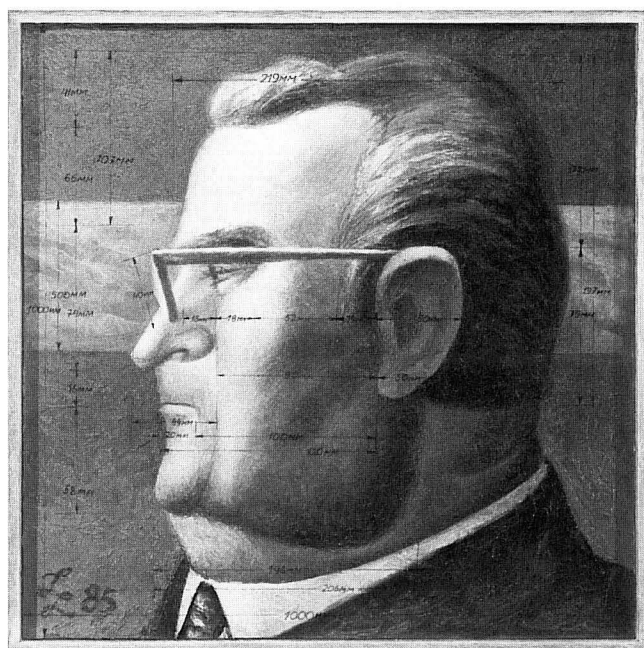
Leonid Lamm
*The Cell Door at Butyrka
 Prison, 1984. Oil on canvas,
 78 x 58". Courtesy the artist*

Leonid Lamm
*The Guard Nikolai, 1984. Oil
 on canvas, 41 x 41".
 Courtesy the artist*





Leonid Lamm
Judge Anatoly Brizitsky,
 1985. Oil on canvas and
 pencil on paper, 41 x 51".
 Courtesy the artist



Leonid Lamm
Pakhomov, the Prosecutor,
 1975-1985. Oil on canvas
 and pencil on paper, 41 x
 51". Courtesy the artist

Leonid Lamm
Colonel Podrez, 1975-1985.
 Oil on canvas, 41 x 51".
 Courtesy the artist

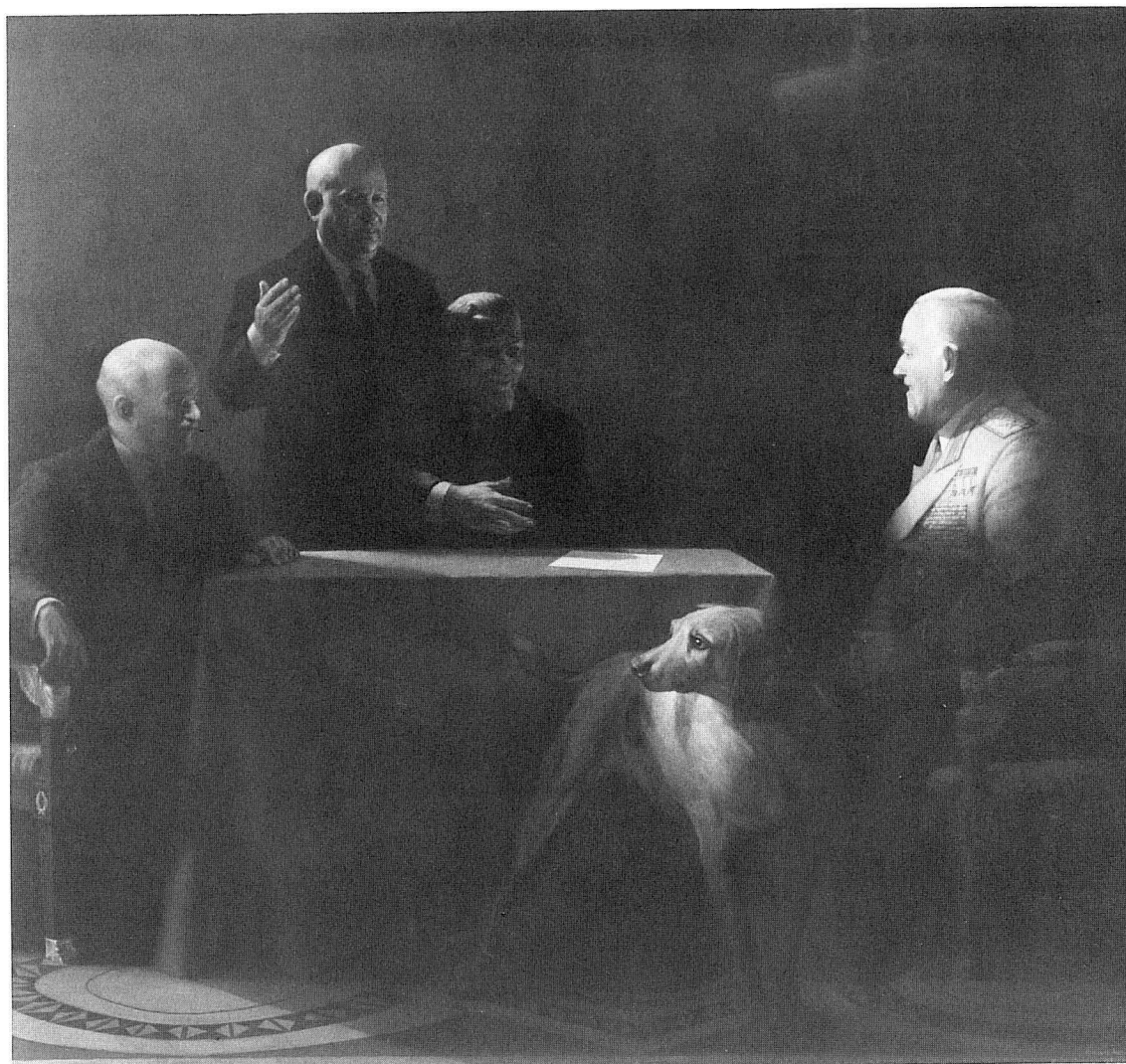




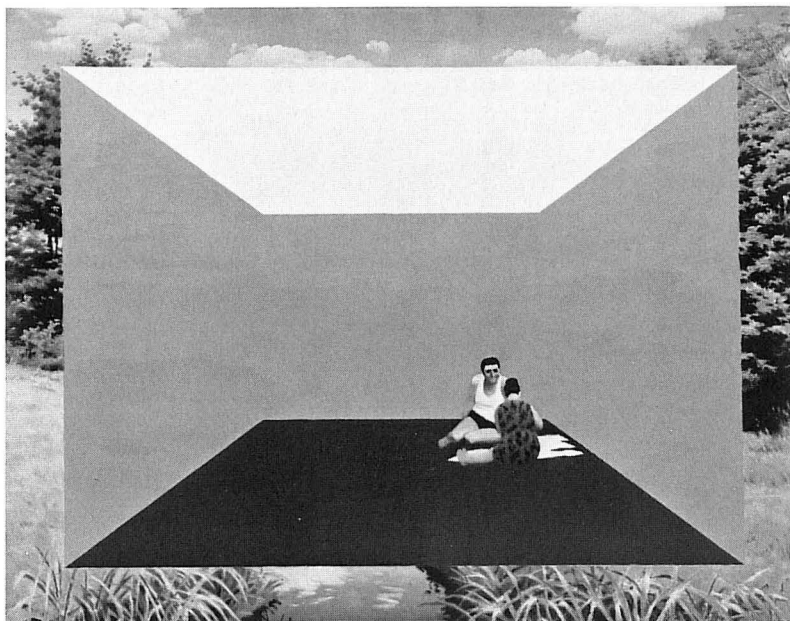
Alexander Kosolapov
Manifesto, 1983. Oil on
canvas, 71 x 66". Courtesy
Semaphore Gallery, New
York



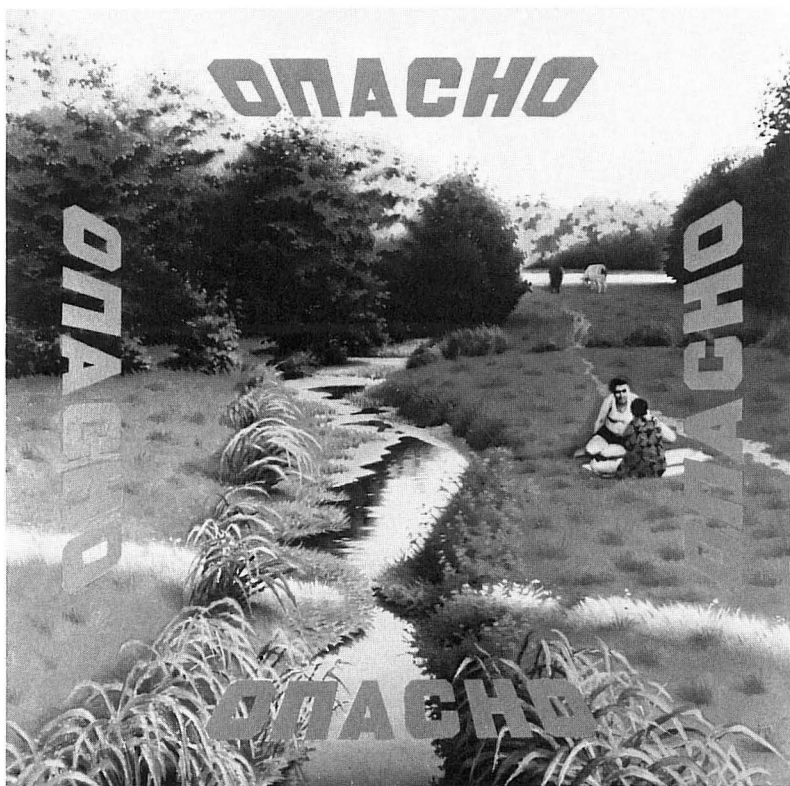
Leonid Sokov
Twentieth Century Leaders,
 1985. Painted wood, 90 x
 21 x 6". Courtesy
 Semaphore Gallery, New
 York



**Komar and Melamid
*Khrushchev's Plot Against
Beria*, 1981-1982. Oil on
canvas, 72 x 76". Courtesy
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,
New York**



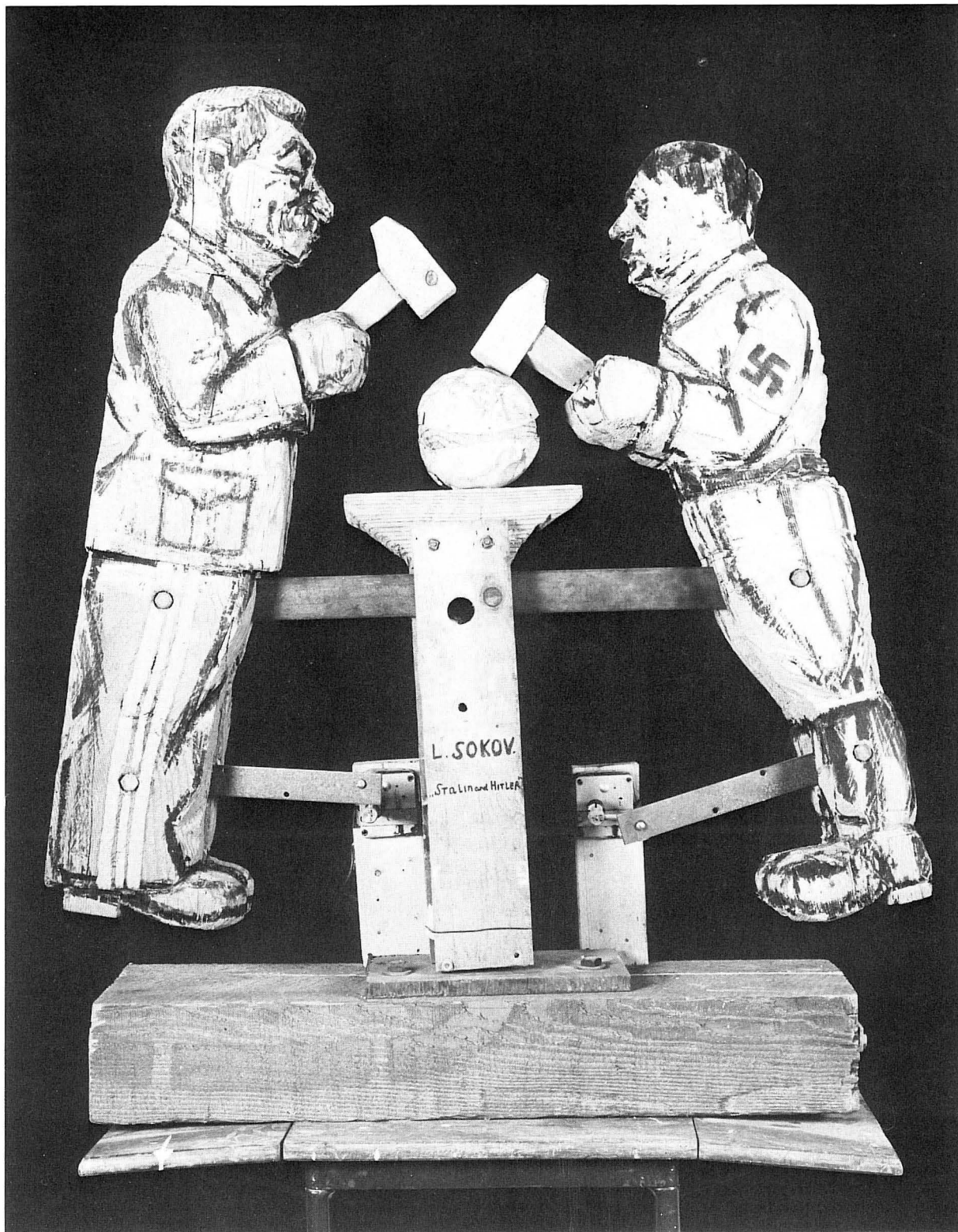
Eric Bulatov
People in the Countryside,
 1976. Oil on canvas, 56 x
 72". Collection Norton
 Dodge, Mechanicsville,
 Maryland



Eric Bulatov
Dangerous, 1972-1973. Oil
 on canvas, 44 x 44".
 Collection Norton Dodge,
 Mechanicsville, Maryland

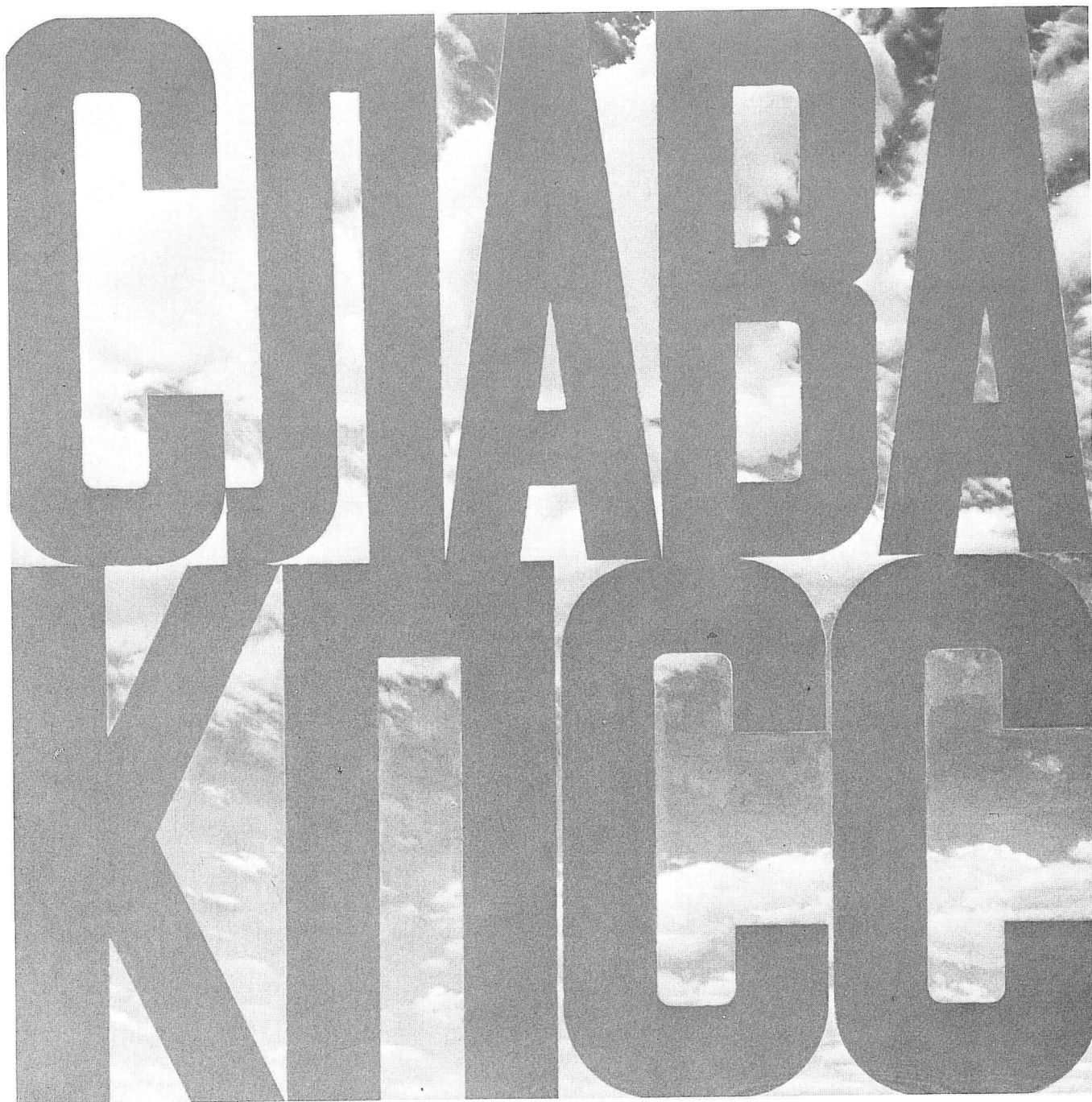
Komar and Melamid
Double Self-Portrait as
Young Pioneers, 1982-1983.
Oil on canvas, 72 x 50".
Collection Martin Sklar,
New York



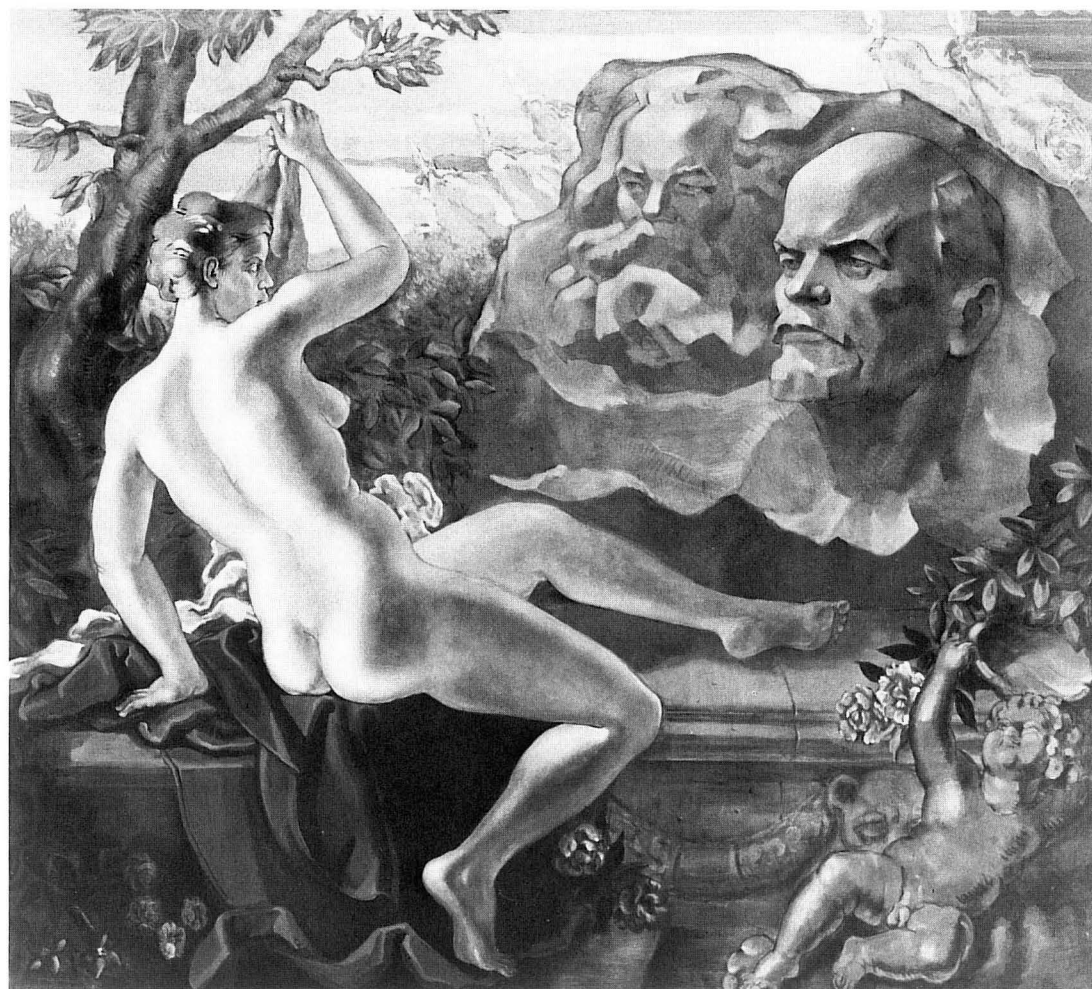


Leonid Sokov
Stalin and Hitler, 1983.
Painted wood, 44 x 35 x
10". Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York

Eric Bulatov
***Glory to CPSU*, 1977. Color**
pencil on paper, 9½ x 9½".
Collection Norton Dodge,
Mechanicsville, Maryland

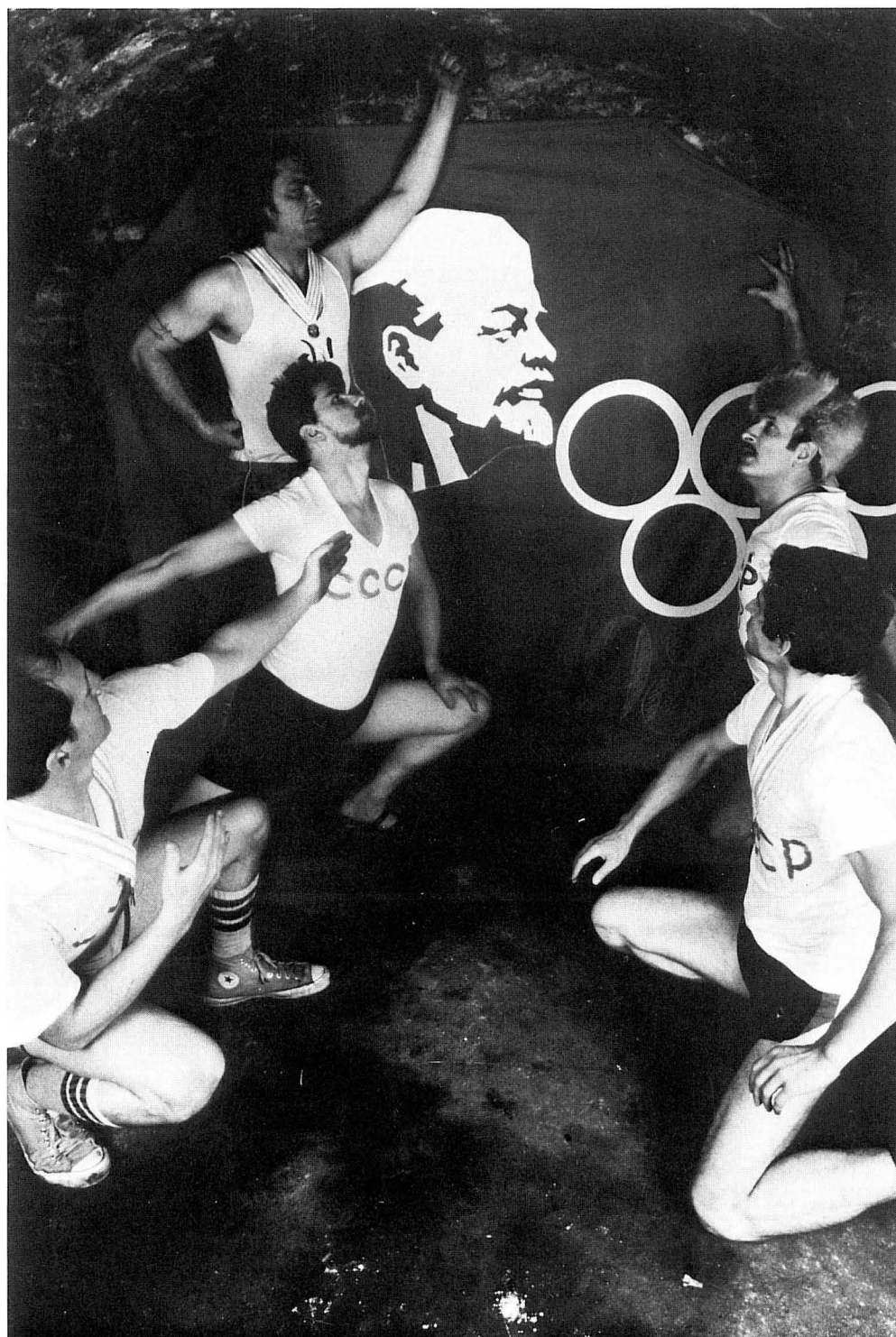


Alexander Kosolapov
Susanna and the Elders,
1984. Oil on canvas, 60 x
48". Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York



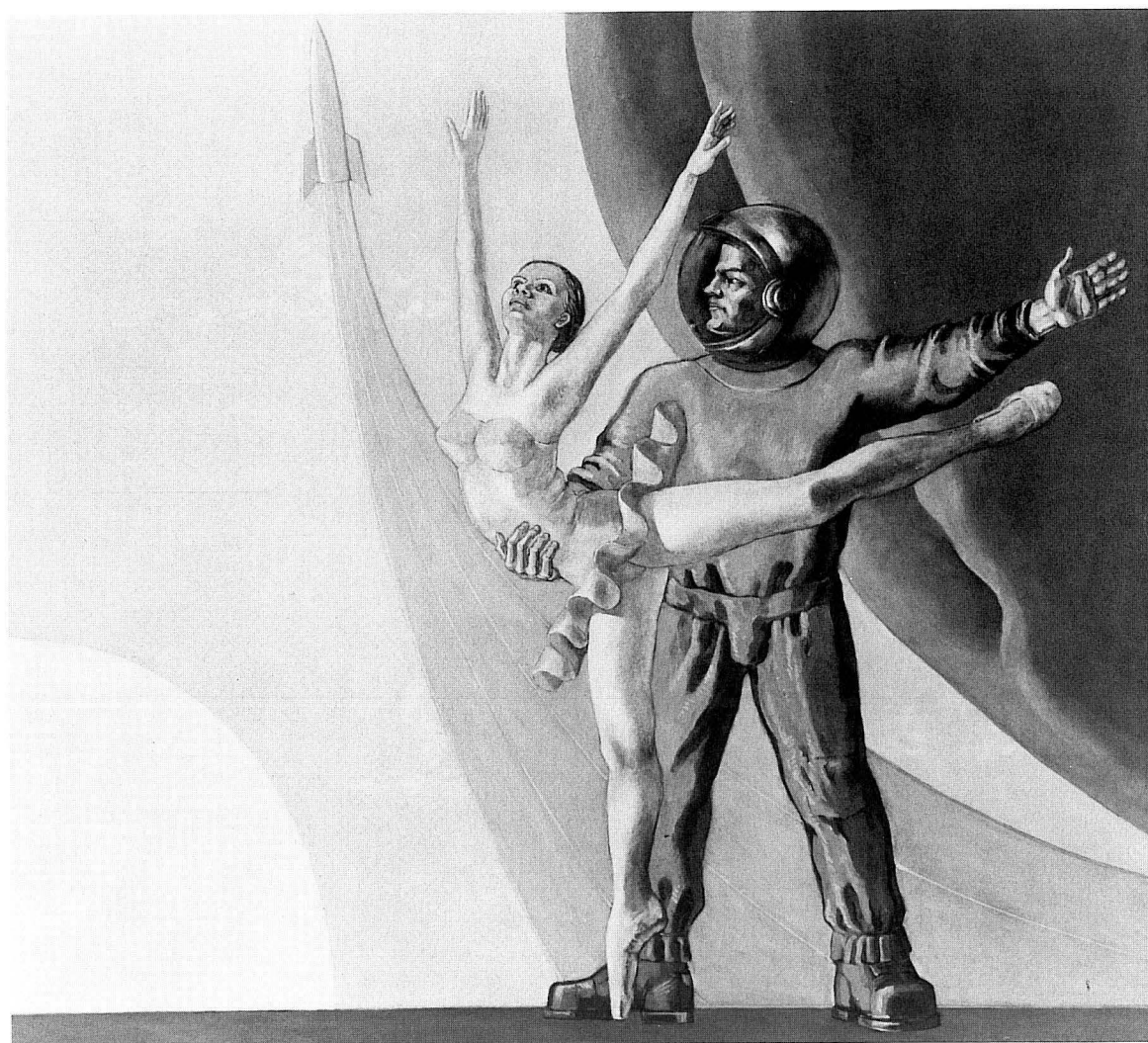


Leonid Lamm
Butyrka Honor Roll,
1975-1984. Oil on canvas
and collage, 41 x 71".
Courtesy the artist

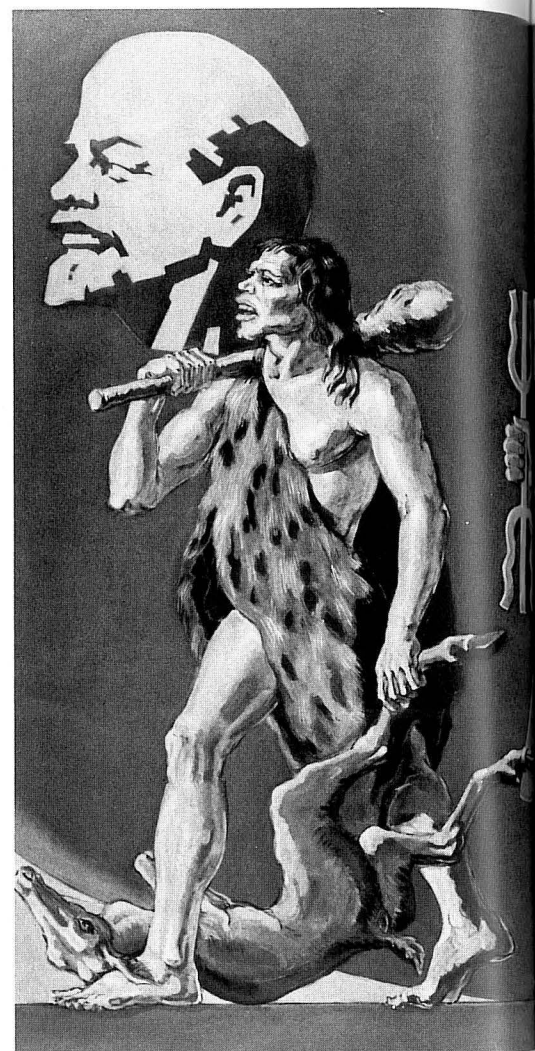


Kazimir Passion
Communist Congress.
Performance at the
Institute for Art and Urban
Resources at P.S. 1, Long
Island City, New York,
1982.

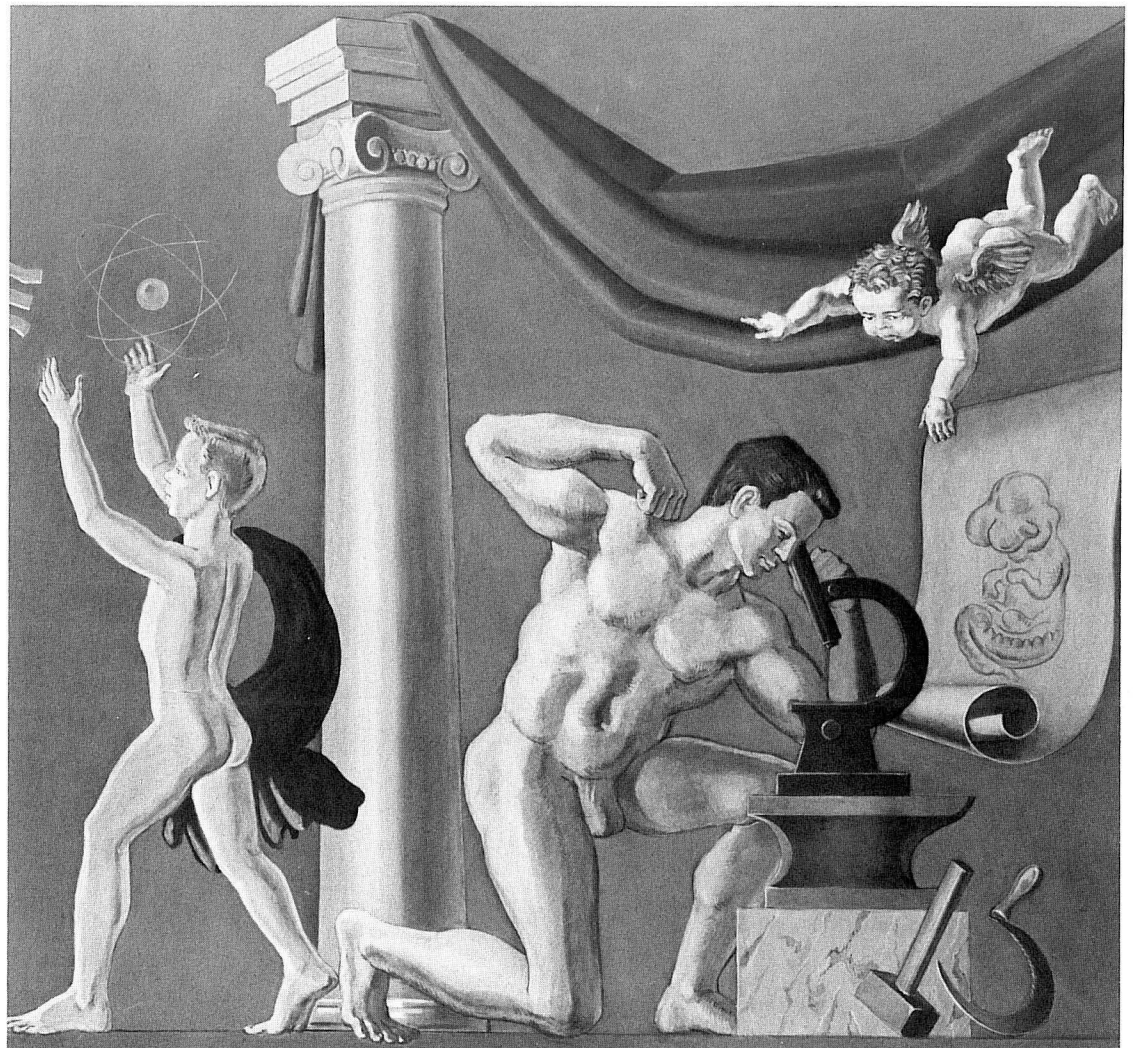
Alexander Kosolapov
The Finale of the World
History, 1982-1983 (detail).
 Oil on canvas, triptych: 60
 x 64". Courtesy Semaphore
 Gallery, New York



Alexander Kosolapov
The Finale of the World
History, 1982-1983 (detail).
 Oil on canvas, triptych: 60
 x 66". Courtesy Semaphore
 Gallery, New York



Alexander Kosolapov
*The Finale of the World
 History, 1982-1983 (detail).*
 Oil on canvas, triptych: 60
 x 62". Courtesy Semaphore
 Gallery, New York





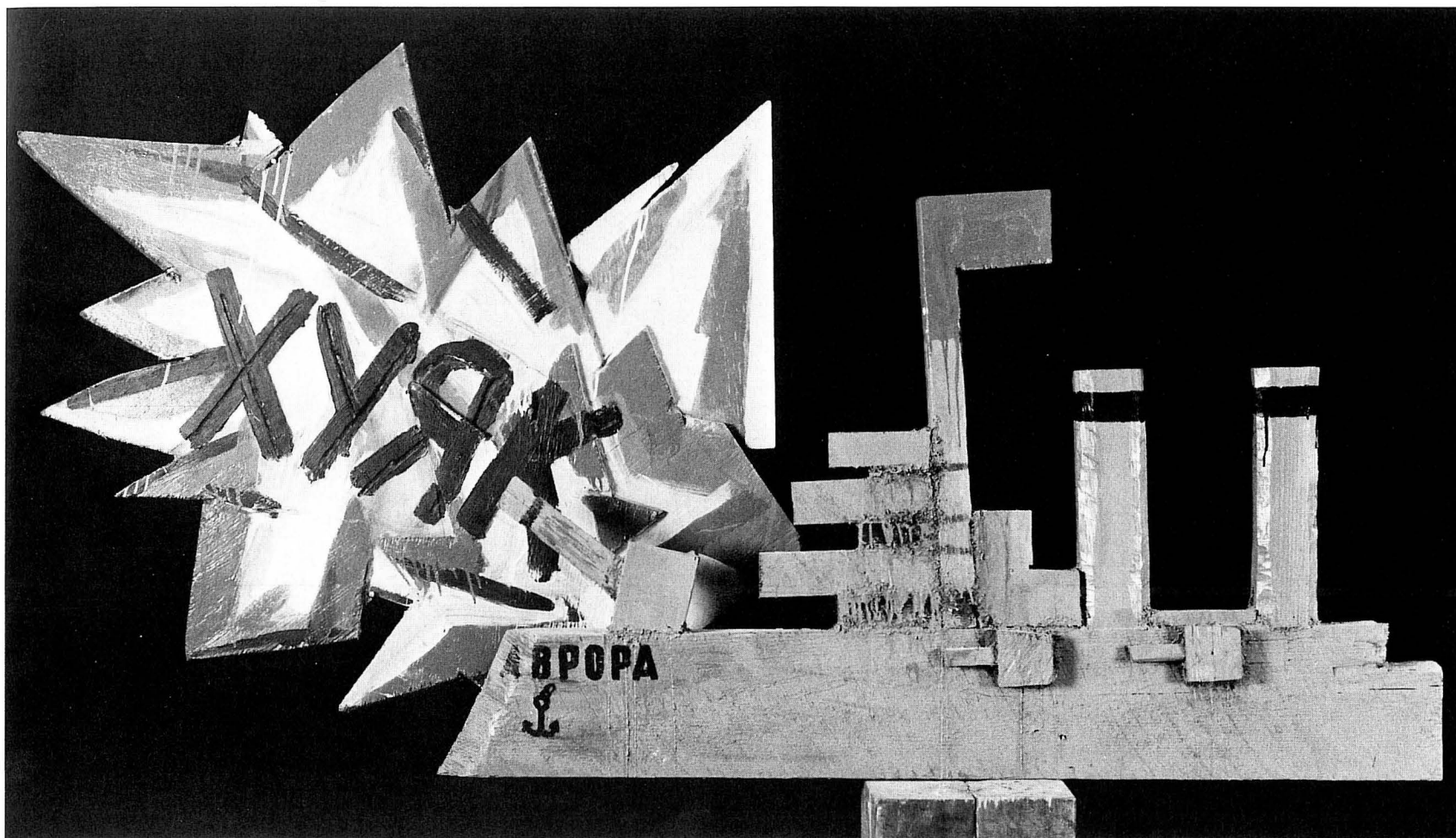
Komar and Melamid
*Nostalgic View of the
Kremlin from Manhattan*,
1981-1982. Oil on canvas,
72 x 87". Courtesy Ronald
Feldman Fine Arts, New
York



Kazimir Passion
Communist Congress.
Performance at the
Institute for Art and Urban
Resources at P.S. 1, Long
Island City, New York,
November 7, 1982.

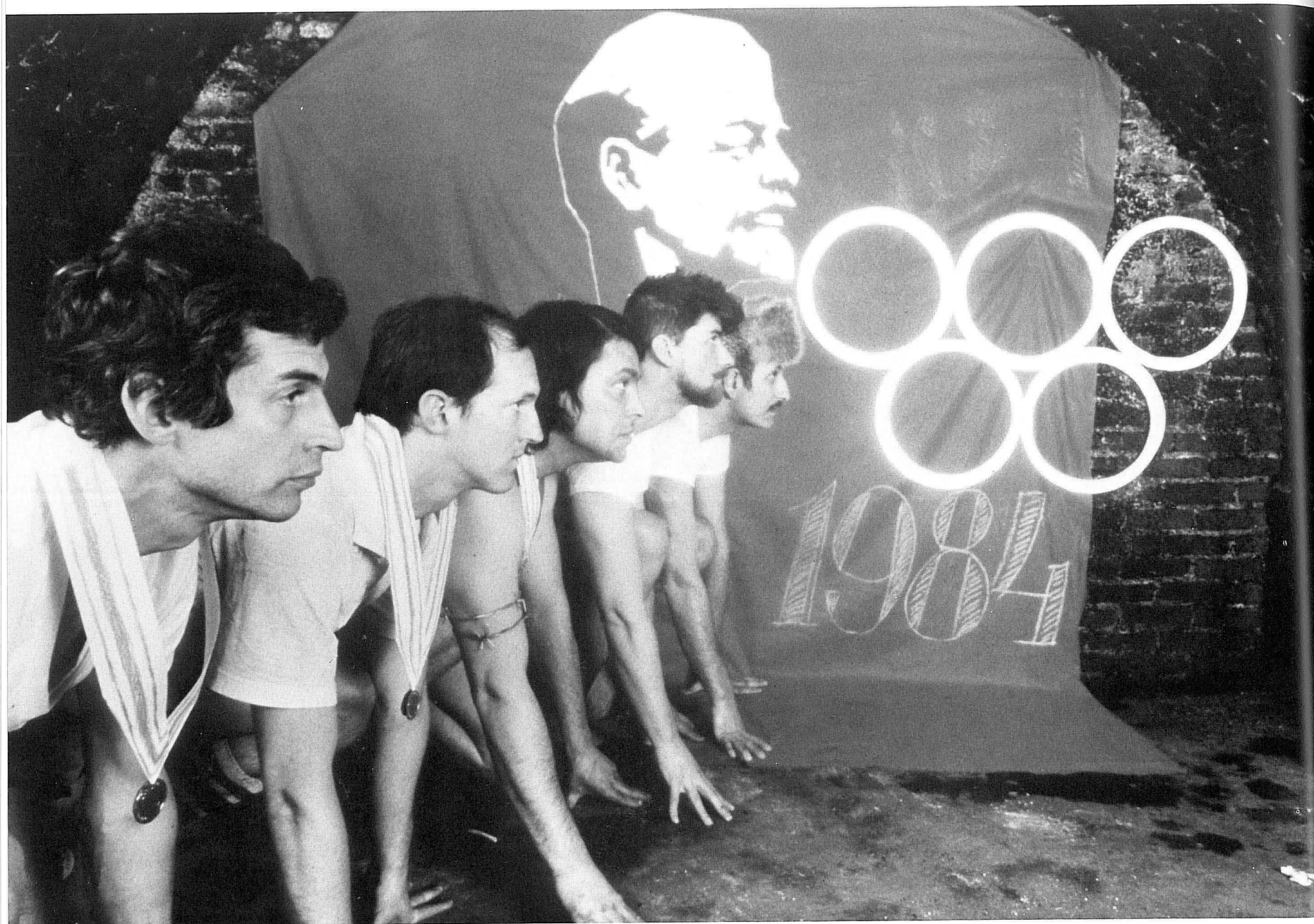


Leonid Sokov
*The Kalashnikov Machine
Gun*, 1984. Wood and
metal, 26 x 90 x 4".
Courtesy A & P Gallery,
New York



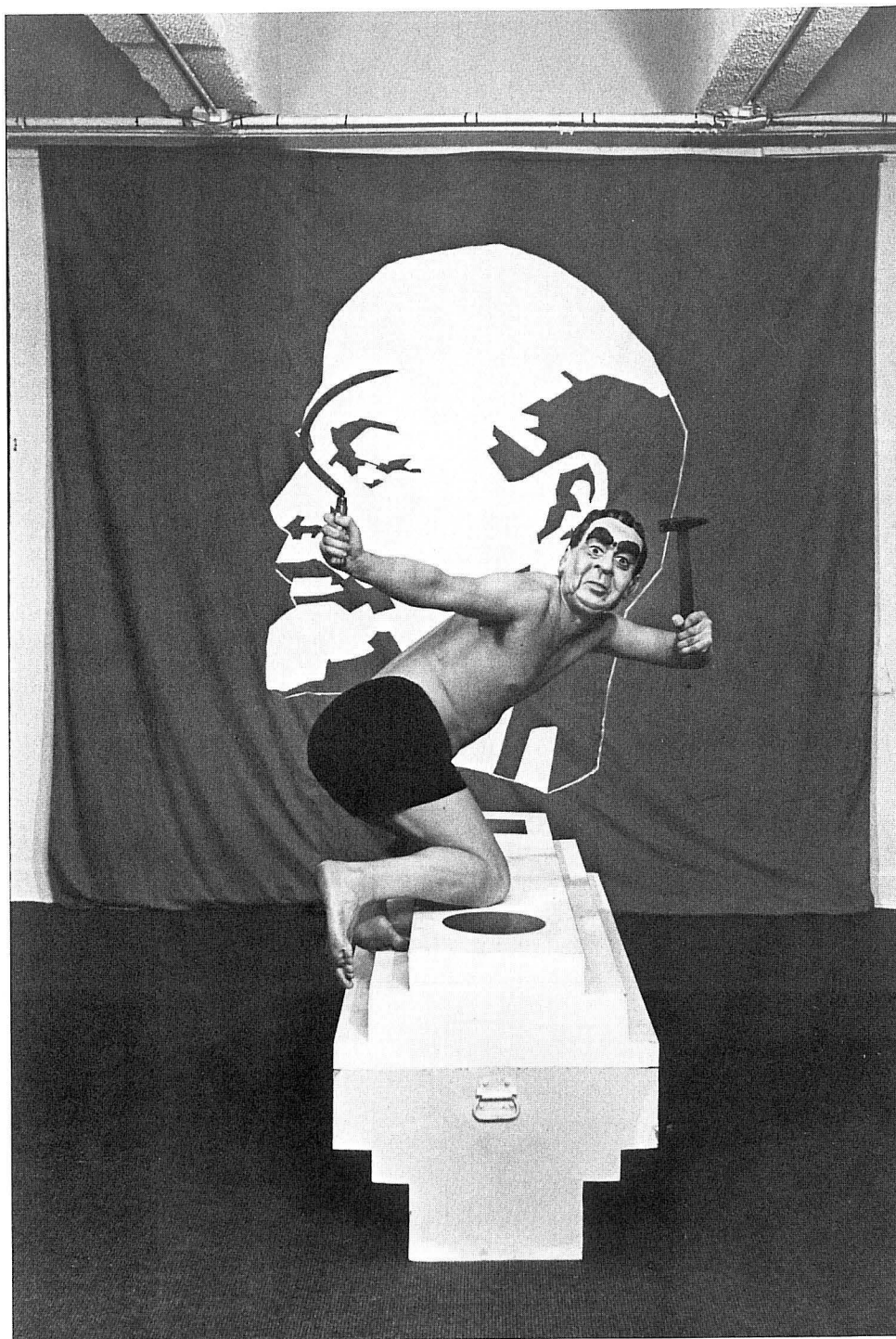
Leonid Sokov
Volley of Aurora, 1984. Oil
on plywood, 46 x 82".
Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York

Kazimir Passion
Communist Congress.
Performance at 8 B.C. Club,
New York, July 1984.





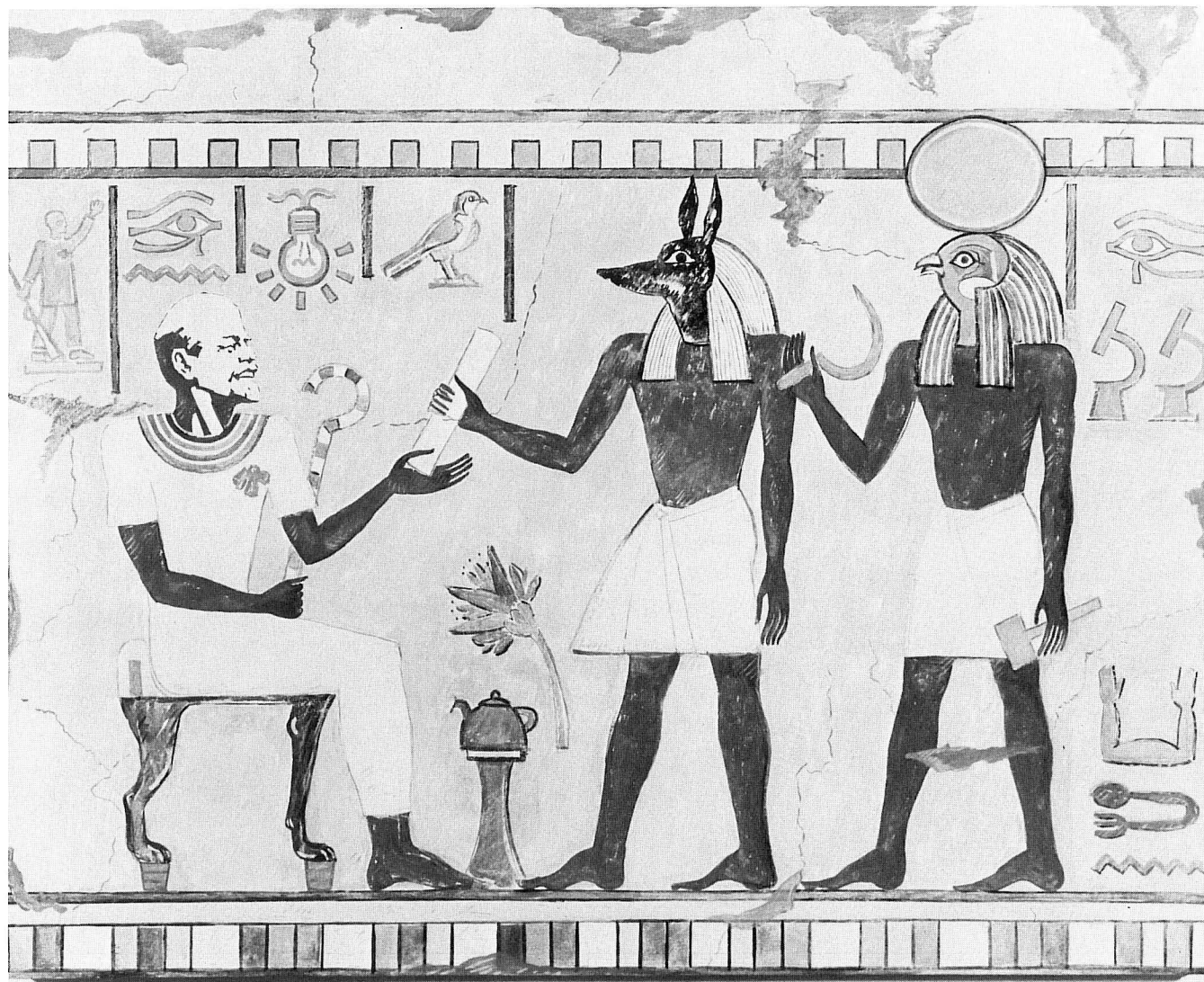
Komar and Melamid
The Origin of Socialist
***Realism*, 1982-1983. Oil on**
canvas, 72 x 48". Courtesy
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,
New York



Kazimir Passion
Communist Congress.
Performance at The
Kitchen, New York,
November 7, 1982.



Leonid Sokov
Dialogical Speech, 1985.
Painted wood, 16 x 35".
Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York



Alexander Kosolapov
Search of History, 1982.
Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 50".
Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York



Alexander Kosolapov
Symbols of the Century,
1982. Lithograph, 22 x 30".
Courtesy Semaphore
Gallery, New York

Eric Bulatov

Born in Sverdlovsk, U.S.S.R. in 1933. Graduated from the Surikov Art Institute, Moscow in 1958. Lives in Moscow.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1984 *Sots Art: Russian Mock-Heroic Style*, Semaphore Gallery, New York [catalogue]
1979 *20 Jahre Unabhängige Kunst aus der Sowjetunion*, Museum Bochum, Bochum, West Germany
1977 *Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England
1973 *Russian Avant-Garde*, Dina Vierny Gallery, Paris, France

Selected Bibliography

- "Eric Bulatov." Interview with Boris Groys. *A-YA*, no. 1 (1979): 26-33.
Tupitsyn, Margarita. "Ilya Kabakov." *Flash Art*, no. 126 (February 1986): 67-69.

Kazimir Passion

Alexander Drewchin, Alexander Kosolapov, Victor Tupitsyn, Vladimir Urban. [Organized in New York in 1982]

Selected Performances

- 1984 *Presidential Elections*, Danceteria Club, New York
Olympics Performance, 8BC Club, New York
Video presentation, Semaphore Gallery, New York
1983 *Lenin in New York*, St. Mark's Movie Theater, New York [film]
1982 *Communist Congress*, Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S. 1, Long Island City, N.Y., and The Kitchen, New York

Selected Bibliography

- Banes, Salley. "In Search of Illumination." *Village Voice*, May 11, 1982.
Goldstein, Richard. "Kazimir Passion Group." *Village Voice*, November 17, 1982.

Komar and Melamid

Vitaly Komar was born in Moscow in 1943. Graduated from the Stroganov Institute for Art and Design, Moscow in 1967. Alexander Melamid was born in Moscow in 1945. Graduated from the Stroganov Institute for Art and Design, Moscow in 1967. Komar and Melamid live in New York City.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1985 Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York (also 1984, 1982, 1976)
Komar and Melamid: Painting History, The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland (traveled)
Komar and Melamid, Swen Parson Gallery, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Ill.
1984 *Komar and Melamid's Version of Russian History*, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa
1983 *Komar and Melamid*, Portland Center for Visual Arts, Ore.

1980 Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Kans.

1978 Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.

1977 Ohio University Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1985 *Correspondences*, LaForet Museum, Tokyo, Japan
Immigrant Artists/American Experience, 1940-1985, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
1984 *Art as Social Conscience*, Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College Center, Anandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.
An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Sots Art, Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio
Sots Art: Russian Mock-Heroic Style, Semaphore Gallery, New York [catalogue]
1983 *History Painting*, Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York
Portraits of the '80s, Protetch-McNeil Gallery, New York
Reallegory, Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Va.
1982 *Counterparts and Affinities*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Illegal America, Franklin Furnace, New York
War Games, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
1981 *Monumental Show*, Brooklyn, N.Y.
1980 *Non-Conformists: Contemporary Commentary from the Soviet Union*, University of Maryland Art Gallery, Baltimore
1978 *Art Couples*, Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S. 1, Long Island City, N.Y.
Artist and Society, 1948-1978, Tel Aviv Museum, Israel
1977 *New Art from the Soviet Union*, The Arts Club of Washington and the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Selected Bibliography

- Bowl, John E. "New Russian Wave." *Art in America* 70, no. 4 (April 1982): 139-140.
Dodge, Norton, and Alison Hilton. *New Art from the Soviet Union: The Known and Unknown*. Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books Ltd., 1977.
Gambrell, Jamey. "Komar and Melamid: From Behind the Ironical Curtain." *Artforum* 20, no. 8 (April 1982): 58-63.
Glueck, Grace. "Art Smuggled Out of Russia Makes Satiric Show Here." *The New York Times*, February 7, 1976.
Hughes, Robert. "Through the Ironical Curtain." *Time*, October 25, 1982, p. 73.
Indiana, Gary. "Komar and Melamid Confidential." *Art in America* 73, no. 5 (June 1985): 94-101.
Kramer, Hilton. "Underground Soviet Art: A Politicized Pop Style." *The New York Times*, September 29, 1974.
Larson, Kay. "Kidding the Kremlin." *New York Magazine*, October 11, 1982, pp. 78-79.
Lerman, Ora. "Soviet Artists Make Open Form as Escape Route in a Closed Society." *Arts* 58, no. 6 (February 1984): 115-119.
Levin, Kim. "Artful Dodges." *Village Voice*, February 7, 1984.

Tupitsyn, Margarita. "Vodka and Modernism." *High Performance* 7, no. 2 (1984): 65-66.

—. "Komar and Melamid: The Red Guardians of Tradition." *High Performance* 8, no. 4 (1985): 41-43, 95.

Alexander Kosolapov

Born in Moscow in 1943. Graduated from the Stroganov Institute of Art and Design, Moscow in 1968. Lives in New York City.

Solo Exhibition

1985 Semaphore Gallery, New York

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1985 *Art Appropriation*, Alternative Museum, New York
Forbidden Dreams, City Without Walls, Newark, N.J.
Some are Better than Others, Semaphore Gallery, New York
Tight as Spring, Kamikaze, New York
- 1984 *Artists Call*, P.S. 122, New York
In My End is My Beginning, Semaphore Gallery, New York
The New Portrait, Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S. 1, Long Island City, N.Y.
Sots Art, Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio
Sots Art: Russian Mock-Heroic Style, Semaphore Gallery, New York [catalogue]
- 1983 *Moscow-Newark: Come Yesterday and You'll Be First*, City Without Walls, Newark, N.J. [catalogue]
Preparing for War, Terminal Show, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 1982 *Communist Congress*, Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S. 1, Long Island City, N.Y., and The Kitchen, New York
Russian Samizdat Show, Franklin Furnace, New York
Visual Politics, Alternative Museum, New York
- 1981 *Russian New Wave*, Contemporary Russian Art Center, New York [catalogue]
- 1979 *20 Jahre Unabhängige Kunst aus der Sowjetunion*, Museum Bochum, Bochum, West Germany
- 1978 *New Art from the Soviet Union*, Pratt Manhattan Center, New York
- 1977 *La Nuova Arte Sovietica una Prospettiva non Ufficiale*, Biennale di Venezia, Italy

Selected Bibliography

Lerman, Ora. "Soviet Artists Make Open Form as Escape Route in a Closed Society." *Arts* 58, no. 6 (February 1984): 115-119.

Tupitsyn, Margarita. "Alexander Kosolapov." *Flash Art*, no. 126 (February 1986): 51.

Leonid Lamm

Born in Moscow in 1928. Graduated from the Architectural Institute in 1947 and the Polygraphic Institute in 1954. Lives in New York City.

Solo Exhibition

1985 *Leonid Lamm: Recollections from the Twilight Zone*, Firebird Gallery, Alexandria, Va. [catalogue]

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1984 *Sots Art*, Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio
- 1983 *International Exhibition*, Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, New York
Moscow-Newark: Come Yesterday and You'll Be First, City Without Walls, Newark, N.J. [catalogue]
Russian Art, Makintosh Gallery, Atlanta, Ga.
- 1980 *Free Art from the Soviet Union*, The Herzliya Museum, Herzliya, Israel
Nonconformists, Goldman Fine Arts Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 1979 *20 Jahre Unabhängige Kunst aus der Sowjetunion*, Museum Bochum, Bochum, West Germany

Leonid Sokov

Born in Kalinin, U.S.S.R. in 1941. Graduated from the Stroganov Institute for Art and Design, Moscow in 1969. Lives in New York City.

Solo Exhibitions

1985 Storefront Gallery, New York (also 1983)

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1986 *The Doll Show: Artists' Dolls and Figurines*, Hillwood Art Gallery, Long Island University, New York
- 1985 *Eastern Europeans in New York*, La Galeria en Bohio, New York
Innocence and Experience, Greenville County Museum of Art, South Carolina
Tight as Spring, Semaphore Gallery, New York
- 1984 *Eastern European Show*, No.Se.No. Gallery, New York
New Portrait, Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S. 1, Long Island City, N.Y.
Sots Art, Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio
Sots Art: Russian Mock-Heroic Style, Semaphore Gallery, New York [catalogue]
- 1983 *Moscow-Newark: Come Yesterday and You'll Be First*, City Without Walls, Newark, N.J. [catalogue]
- 1982 *Russian Samizdat Show*, Franklin Furnace, New York
- 1981 *Russian New Wave*, Contemporary Russian Art Center, New York [catalogue]
- 1979 *20 Jahre Unabhängige Kunst aus der Sowjetunion*, Museum Bochum, Bochum, West Germany
- 1977 *La Nuova Arte Sovietica una Prospettiva non Ufficiale*, Biennale di Venezia, Italy

Selected Bibliography

Tupitsyn, Margarita. "Leonid Sokov." *Flash Art*, no. 123 (Summer 1985): 56.

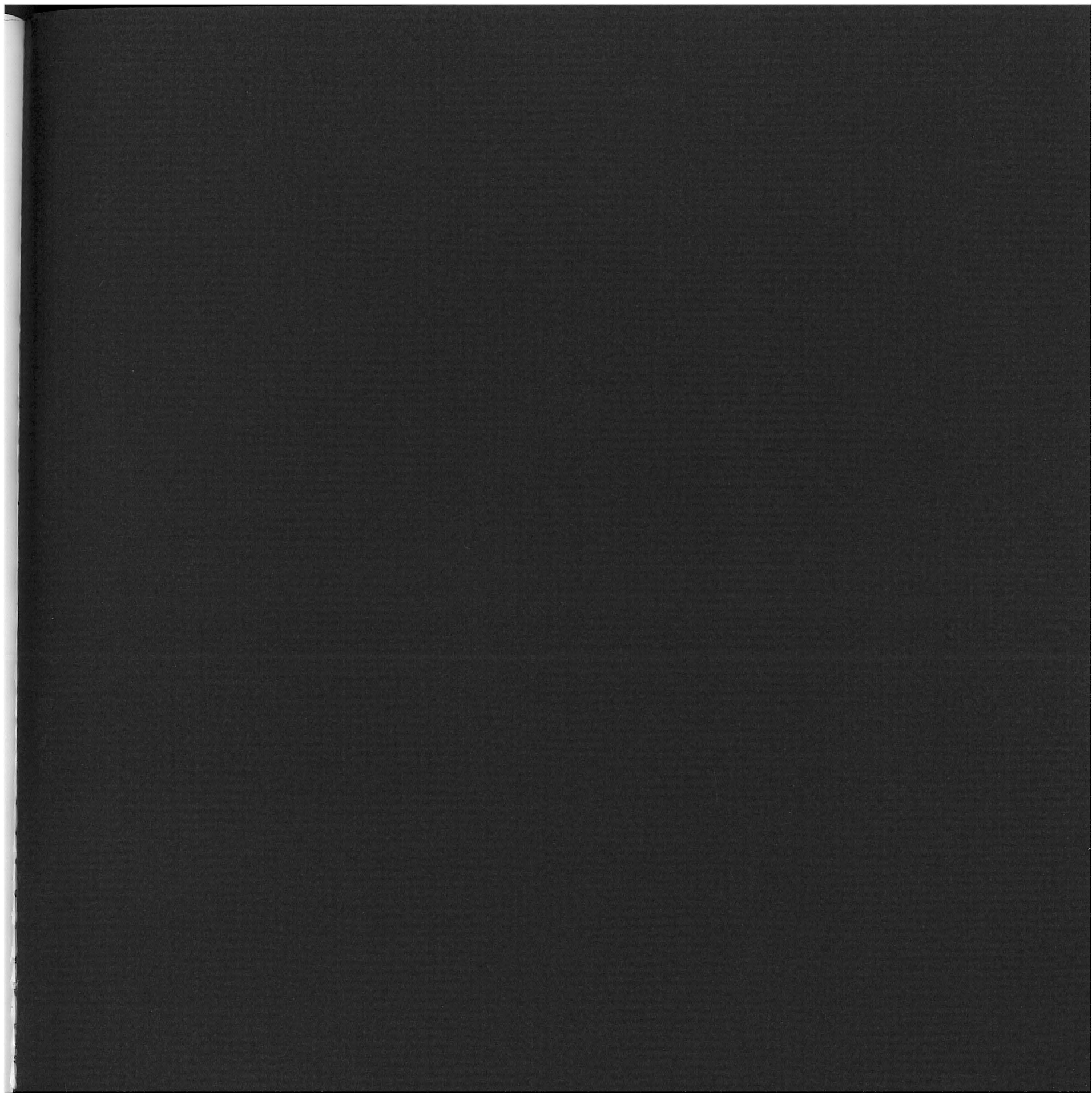
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