POSTMODERN PERESTROIKA: UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN ARTISTIC NETWORKS

OF THE 1980s–1990s

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION
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This dissertation examines Ukrainian painting of the perestroika era produced by the last generation of Soviet artists trained in the Socialist Realist method and steeped in the Manichean dualism of official and unofficial cultures. While rejecting the ideological purpose underlying their training, these Ukrainian artists witnessed not only the decomposition of Socialist Realism but also that of Soviet Socialist reality. I explore the historical circumstances during which this new art was born, displayed, and reviewed, particularly the semi-alternative exhibitions scene and the art squats illegally populated by artists in Kyiv and Moscow. Propelled by the paradoxical nature of perestroika, these artists were challenged to create a new quality in art while still invested in the past with its pre-existing art styles and specific expressions of local Ukrainian history–especially during the Baroque epoch. My analysis of major—but understudied—paintings utilizes archival materials, rare catalogues, and my interviews with numerous artists. I show that the hybrid nature of Ukrainian perestroika era painting reveals the porous nature of borders that separated East and West in the 1980s. My text shows how distant and sometimes distorted echoes of Western theoretical concepts, such as Postmodernism, Neo-Expressionism, Transavantgarde and Neo-Baroque, reached and impacted late Soviet art. These terms were freely employed by most sympathetic yet often disoriented

liberal Soviet critics to describe the new phenomena. The artists themselves were not entirely familiar with the trends, yet they readily accepted—and then just as eagerly denounced—such definitions. My dissertation carefully tests and demonstrates the relevance of those theories to Ukrainian perestroika era art. My conclusions are based on a critical reexamination of Soviet era material, including the permutations of late Socialist Realist doctrine and the debates between Moscow Conceptualists and unofficial meta-realist poets.

Beginning with the uproar created by Arsen Savadov and Heorhiy Senchenko's scandalously popular Cleopatra's Sorrow (1987), shown at the 1987 Youth Exhibition in Moscow, and continuing with the relocation to the Furmanny Lane art squat of the Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism group, perestroika era Ukrainian painting appears irrevocably entangled with the culture of Moscow during the collapse of the USSR. I show how Ukrainian artists maintained throughout a productive dialogue with Moscow Conceptualism. Highlighting the constellation of often conflicting concepts and ideas that define and inform this generation's art, my dissertation rejects singular definitions attributed to it. I argue instead that the plurality of cultural impacts and discoveries of local histories require a more nuanced explanation, and my findings indicate that the state of political turmoil of the time is, in fact, reflected in art that subscribed to partial explanations and fragments of multiple discursive systems.

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and, of course, my family who endured all my travails with me and therefore shares all my triumphs.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation synthesizes two concepts – Postmodernism and perestroika – that resist simple definition and are rife with paradox. Both partially coincided in timing, even though they appeared in radically different political, social, and economic situations. In my argument I demonstrate how this seemingly strange convergence is revealed through the art that emerged in relation and in creative dialogue with both phenomena. In my discussion, I highlight aspects of the vast theorization of each of these concepts, and contribute to the expansion and complication of their definitions. Additionally, the focus on little-studied late Soviet Ukrainian art offers a unique insight into hybrid art practices simultaneously affected by Soviet art education, a limited knowledge of Western art trends, and the artists' need to articulate a newly emerging Ukrainian identity.

Both perestroika and Postmodernism were moments of revolutionary change, with the former signaling the collapse of the Soviet Union and the latter the collapse of the modernist paradigm. In the five ensuing chapters I will elucidate the coincidences and interconnectedness between the two systems that became increasingly apparent in the absence of a Cold War context opposing the communist East to the capitalist West. Soviet Ukrainian perestroika art, in both its concrete particularity and its indebtedness to contemporary art trends, will serve as an example of the porous nature of borders between cultures and ideas that have characterized the global art world since the late 1980s.

In each chapter of my text, I chart this history through an analysis of images: of paintings and their critical reception. I begin with the painting that launched the Ukrainian perestroika art trend: *Cleopatra's Sorrows* (1987) (fig. 1) by Arsen Savadov and Heorhiy Senchenko which debuted at Moscow Youth Exhibition only a year after Mikhail Gorbachev had announced at the 27th Communist Party Congress a new course for reforming of all facets of Soviet society. This new approach became widely known as perestroika (literally translated as 'restructuring'), whose ambition was to drastically improve all aspects of life in Soviet Union. Having begun his famous anti-alcohol campaign in 1985, Gorbachev now wanted to dramatically change everything from labor organization to the mass media with his policy of glasnost ('openness' in Russian). The new course toward modernization, reconstruction, containment of the Cold War arms race, and the struggle against the dysfunctionality of the enormous Soviet bureaucratic apparatus caused great upheavals in Soviet society. Despite having such noble goals, however, perestroika did not manage to relieve the country of its economic and social crisis. By 1991, the USSR was destabilized both politically and economically, experiencing acute shortages of everyday supplies. The last years of the Soviet Union were marked by visible signs of decay, not only of Soviet utopian ideals, but of Soviet reality in general. One of the most visible symbols of such decay was the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe in Ukraine (1986), the aftermath of which seriously compromised the promises of glasnost.

Nevertheless, the assurances of perestroika instilled a sense of "great expectations" and optimism into many members of the rapidly changing Soviet society.[1]

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[1] The chapter entitled "Time for Great Expectations," in Vasyl Karpan and Mykola Ryabchuk, *Ukraine: Stepping Stones to Perestroika* (Kiev: Ukraina Society, 1989), 60-112.

The very appearance of the controversial painting *Cleopatra's Sorrows* at an official art exhibition was indicative of the fervor for progress and the thirst for novelty within Soviet society at the time. As evidence of the fundamental shift happening in the Soviet Union, the Communist Party admitted to previous acts of censorship in the arts and publicly renounced them.[2] In the field of culture, perestroika was an unprecedented moment of opportunities for Soviet intellectuals and artists, including those previously restricted to dissident and unofficial art circles, to participate in and influence public discourse. Alternative art places, such as squats in old buildings populated by artists in circumvention of any official authority, were thriving, while official exhibitions showcased art not associated with the Socialist Realism method. As testified by Sergei Prozorov in his authoritative book on the late Soviet and early post-Soviet era: "perestroika was a unique period of the ascent of the Soviet intelligentsia, from scientists to performance artists, to the status of the superior symbolic authority […]."[3]

The Soviet public enthusiastically explored newly available art, literature, and music, with special interest toward Western art and previously forbidden local art that defied old forms and meanings. As the sphere of culture became drastically invigorated, it became clear that old rules and restrictions could no longer be applied. Prozorov, grounding his methodology in theories of Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, identified the moment of perestroika as "a messianic time", as the experience of living through this transitional period was defined by witnessing the "unfolding of the messianic

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[2] "The party and the State have taken into account the past experience; it is senseless to stand in the way of any talented work of art, even if it is poorly compatible with the existing atmosphere." *Kommunist* newspaper quoted in Karpan and Ryabchuk, *Ukraine: Stepping Stones to Perestroika*, 96-97.

[3] Sergei Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 119.

event (the collapse of Soviet socialism)."[4] In such an atmosphere, a sense of optimism, forward thinking, and expectation of revolutionary change permeated late Soviet society.

However, one of the main paradoxes of perestroika was that this revolutionary impulse, in contrast to the utopianism of the October Revolution of 1917, was not primarily directed to the future. When Gorbachev called for a modernization of society, society responded with an avid interest in the horrible events of the past now publicly revealed, such as the Stalinist executions of an entire generation of artists and poets. Analyzing this paradox, Russian theorist Artemiy Magun stated that perestroika was in fact a "conservative revolution" and catered to the interests of the newly forming class of Soviet bourgeoisie who wanted to return to some traditionalist values and principles.[5] The numerous publications and discussion of traumatic historical events reoriented the society toward the past and prevented the promises of perestroika from being fulfilled.

Responding to this scenario, the Ukrainian perestroika artists rushed to explore previously forbidden and crossed out pages of Ukrainian history together with the styles of previously inaccessible modern art. Their art practice, consequently, embodied the paradox of perestroika, simultaneously striving to amend the ruptures of the past and to satisfy the public demand for the new. The resulting art product – large-scale and expressive oil painting mocking the historical painting genre – puzzled official Soviet critics and liberals alike. Such art did not fit into the existing dichotomy of official and unofficial art, but blatantly borrowed from old art styles and revised history. The artworks refused to offer the possibility of final interpretation while their producers

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[4] Prozorov, *Ethics of Postcommunism,* 123.

[5] Artemiy Magun, "Perestroika kak Konservativnaia Revolutsia [Perestroika as a Conservative Revolution]," *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas* 6, no. 47 (2010), accessed September 17, 2015, http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2010/6/ma17.

provided, in lieu of artistic explications, metaphoric and poetic texts that only further complicated analysis.

The term 'Postmodernism' was among the initial interpretive labels applied to Ukrainian perestroika art, along with more specific Western stylistic genres of the 1980s such as Transavantgarde, Neo-expressionism, and Neo-Baroque. The concept of the postmodern had been implemented and theorized in the 1980s by European and American scholars, most notably by Charles Jencks, Jean-François Lyotard, Hal Foster, and Frederic Jameson.[6] It offered a way of understanding the specific conditions reached by Western society under the influence of the capitalist economy and revision of modernist ideals. The abolition of crucial oppositions such as that between high and low culture, as well as a suspicion towards the category of 'The New' often expressed through the practice of citation – these were among the characteristics of the postmodern epoch and its cultural manifestations in the West.

In the Soviet Union, Postmodernism was initially associated with the movement of Moscow Conceptualism, a highly idiosyncratic version of conceptual art owing to its reconsideration of the legacy of the Russian avant-garde. Writing in 1990, theorist Boris Groys in the newspaper *Literaturnaia Gazeta* identified Postmodernism as a reflection upon avant-garde culture that he considered guilty of a totalitarian ambition for privileged access to truth.[7] In this article Groys assigned the postmodern label to all major Moscow Conceptualists of several generations. Many Western scholars followed suit, such as

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[6] Charles Jencks, *What Is Post-modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1986); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: UMI Press, 1984); Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991).

[7] Boris Groys, "O Polze Teorii dlia Iskusstva. [On Usefulness of Theory for Art]," *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 5318, no. 44 (October 31, 1990): 5.

Elizabeth Sussman[8] and later Matthew Jesse Jackson.[9] In Sussman's words: "Soviet Conceptualism, in that it confronts the ending of the utopian dream in the U.S.S.R., and interrogates the absurdities of its aftermath, can be thought of as a form of postmodernism."[10]

Even though Ukrainian perestroika art appears very different in its form and strategies from the art of the Moscow Conceptualist movement, I explore in this dissertation the possibility of viewing their hybrid art practices through the same interpretative lens that has been applied to postmodern art in the West. Mainly, I argue for the productivity of such an approach based on not only the conceptual fluidity of Postmodernism, but also the many points of convergence between the two movements. Among the features Ukrainian perestroika art shared with postmodern art was the blurring of oppositions (such as that between official and unofficial art) and the propensity for citation. Furthermore, postcolonial and gender theoretical concerns, as two paramount facets of the postmodern exploration of identity, provide additional avenues for approaching Ukrainian perestroika art and prove to be crucial indices of the parallelism between the Western theory and late Soviet art material.

Obviously, postmodern theory would not exclusively suffice to explain Ukrainian perestroika art. Rather, it appears suspended between several other cultural discourses exerting their pull on the new works emerging within rapidly changing conditions. The

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[8] Elizabeth Sussman, "The Third Zone: Soviet Postmodern," in *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, ed. David A. Ross (Tacoma, WA: Tacoma Art Museum, 1990).

[9] Moscow Conceptualism is often described in Postmodernist terms in Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism, Soviet Avant-gardes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), for example, Kabakov's "postmodernist's analytical detachment" on p. 37 or "Prigov plunged into the thick of the "mediatized" landscape that defines the postmodern condition" on p. 211.

[10] Sussman, "Third Zone," 63.

urgency of articulating Ukrainian artistic identity became apparent when Savadov and Senchenko in 1987 demonstrated a new and inscrutable Ukrainian style, distinctly different from that of their Russian contemporaries, with *Cleopatra's Sorrows* at the Youth Exhibition in Moscow. At the time when the endurance of the Soviet Empire became uncertain, Ukraine as one of its major republics found itself at the postcolonial crossroads, facing the necessity of formulating an identity separate from the crumbling metropolis (always identified with Moscow). This key moment yet again revealed the repressed trauma of the civilizational choice that Ukraine had been forced to make during its many transitional milestones in history, constantly oscillating between East and West since the Baroque period. Oleg Tistol and Kostiantyn Reunov were the artists who explored this period including the Pereyaslav union of 1654 and its consequences, examining the Russian-Ukrainian relationship in their painting made, appropriately, while living in an art squat on Moscow's Furmanny Lane.

At the same time, these artists continued to register the impact of Socialist Realism, in direct terms of form and subject matter—owing to their academic training as artists–and as a negative standard against which artists rebelled. Accentuated by Cold War rhetoric, Soviet artists' recourse to Western styles and forms was often interpreted as a revolt by nonconformist artists against the stale forms and outdated ideas of the Socialist Realist tradition, and therefore as a sign of their progressive thinking and broad outlook. In chapters one and two I show how, predictably, art deviating from Socialist Realist dogma garnered disparaging criticism from official artists and critics, while gaining approval from their Western-oriented counterparts. Even though many Ukrainian perestroika artists were subjected to harsh criticism from official institutions and critics, a

full consideration of their art and its impact cannot be limited to merely taking sides within this binary. The aim of this dissertation is to complicate the simplistic dichotomy by not only discussing Ukrainian perestroika art's parallelism with Western trends, but also focusing on the locally relevant impact of a decomposing yet persistent Socialist Realism. Directly inheriting the large-scale format of the ubiquitous Soviet monumental painting tradition, young Ukrainians were compelled to react to these locally ingrained and ideologically oriented art forms representative of the visual culture in which they were educated. Their figurative oil paintings imitated narration and the persistence of subjectivity in art through depiction of bizarre heroes involved in undecipherable stories. By charging their work with these allusions, Ukrainian artists subverted while engaging the Socialist Realist method.

The third major influence for Ukrainian perestroika art was Moscow Conceptualism, the dominant nonconformist movement in the capital of the USSR with which Ukrainian art appeared inevitably entangled. In chapter two I shift my discussion from the context of *Cleopatra's Sorrows* at the Moscow Youth Exhibition to the joint participation of the Ukrainian and Russian artists in the *First Soviet-American Art Exhibition* (which subsequently led to the relocation of the Ukrainian group The Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism to Moscow). Ukrainian art was defined through its interaction with and difference from the art of the Soviet metropole. Moscow Conceptualists dissected ideology while also contemplating the nature of their own artistic movement in a self-reflective (and self-archiving) postmodern phase during perestroika. The two art movements shared an ironic attitude towards state symbols, combined with simultaneous recognition of the messaging power of their ubiquitous

presence and accessibility. Like the Moscow Conceptualists, Ukrainian artists explored ideological signs and their appeal to the general public together with the format of collective authorship, although unlike the muscovites, they preferred oil on canvas to performances and installations. Nevertheless, they were routinely cast as a negative double of Moscow Conceptualism in critical reviews.[11] Thus another dichotomy that this dissertation aims to deconstruct in regard to Ukrainian perestroika art is its explanation through a set of qualities opposed to those of Moscow Conceptualism, such as vital versus cerebral, hot versus cold, and plastic versus intellectual, and so on.

Looking at these three discursive contexts of the Ukrainian perestroika art, one cannot help but admit that the idiosyncratic reception of each by Ukrainian artists was due to their fluid and not easily categorizable nature in the context of the late Soviet Union. The application of freely borrowed Western terms such as Postmodernism or Transavantgarde to Ukrainian art as ready-made instruments of analysis, for instance, did not mean that the artists or even critics had a substantial knowledge or understanding of these trends. They had only limited access to art and literature on these subjects. Many Ukrainian artists learned of the terms retrospectively, after their art was already exhibited and pronounced as "postmodern" by critics. Hence their own statements on the subject were rather contradictory: during a very short period of time they both declared themselves Postmodernists and denounced such identification. The Socialist Realist art method, on the other hand, was freely available as the only official method of art in which the Ukrainian artists were formally trained. Still, by the 1980s this method was vividly decomposing together with the Soviet Union, producing hybrid and mutating

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[11] Vladimir Levashov, "Drugoe Litso. Ukrainskiy Fenomen. [The Other Face: Ukrainian Phenomenon.]," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989): 28-29.

forms within a well worn-out ideological framework, with the artistic outcome sometimes bordering on utter absurdity.[12] Moscow Conceptualism was also not readily available to Ukrainian artists in its critical phase of the 1960s and 1970s. By the time the Ukrainians arrived in Moscow, most of the major representatives of the movement's initial cohort had emigrated, leaving a void to be enthusiastically investigated by an even more ironic later generation. Thus, the bulk of the Moscow Conceptualism that made an impact on Ukrainian perestroika artists was either not really available to them for thorough study, or was going through a major process of transformation itself.

Just as Ukraine, not yet a country but still a republic of the disintegrating Soviet Union, found itself at a civilizational crossroads, Ukrainian perestroika artists appeared entangled with powerful and conflicting discourses emerging in contemporary art across a broad international context. Several themes and rubrics run through this dissertation, combining diverse and sometimes incompatible paradigms in Ukrainian perestroika era painting. A preference for metaphorical themes combines with decoration and ornamentality; play with ideological symbols undergirds the practice of citation–all are dimensions of creative innovation that reveal themselves in Ukrainian perestroika art as it simultaneously reflects upon and interacts with Postmodernism, Socialist Realism, and Moscow Conceptualism. Indebted to all those systems of thought, the movement nevertheless expresses its own concrete historic situation and cultural specificity. Among the manifestations of this particularity, this dissertation will examine the belated arrival of perestroika in Ukraine–a condition that lends itself to postcolonial analysis of art.

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[12] "beginning in the Khrushchev Thaw (ca. 1953-62), the Stalinist conception of Socialist realism was challenged, fractured and expanded." Susan E. Reid, "(Socialist) Realism Unbound: The Effects of International Encounters on Soviet Art Practice and Discourse in the Khrushchev Thaw," in *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting, 1920-1970*, ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Matteo Lafranconi (Milan: Skira, 2012), 261. Exhibition catalogue.

Equally important is the Ukrainian artists' exploration of the Ukrainian Baroque epoch and style. Ukrainian artists gradually were becoming more aware and more attentive to the difference of their situation from the center from which they contemplated the history that had led to their condition. Their devotion to the oil on canvas medium was another specific characteristic, as the Ukrainian Socialist Republic and the Kyiv Art Institute (now Kyiv Art Academy) particularly were considered a last citadel of the Socialist Realism method. Since this institution was attended by many artists of this generation, it constituted an immediate background in art education which cannot be altogether ignored.

Although this dissertation is often concerned with probing the applicability of critical concepts through comparative analysis, its primarily goal is not to arrive at a determinative judgment. Instead, my main purpose is historicization of an art movement that is understudied and poorly represented.[13] This dissertation aims to amend the lack of theoretical and historical investigation into late Soviet Ukrainian art. Ukrainian contemporary art is still relatively unknown internationally, and it is rarely included in major publications on global art history[14] let alone in more Western-oriented art histories.[15] Even publications specifically devoted to Eastern Europe that declare the need for a more inclusive art history and re-examine the Soviet past within the East European

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[13] Before the e-book by the Pinchuk Art center in Kyiv issued in 2017, only few scholars addressed the phenomenon of Ukrainian perestroika art and primarily in the context of Russian perestroika art. Tetiana Kochubynska, ed., *Parkomuna. Mistse. Spilnota. Yavyshche [Parkomuna. Place. Community. Phenomenon]* (Kyiv: Pinchuk Art Center, 2017), PDF; Andrei Kovalev, *Between the Utopias: New Russian Art during and after Perestroika (1985-1993)* (Tortola: Craftsman House, 1995); Jean-Pierre Brossard, ed., *Les Ateliers De La Rue Furmann [Workshops Furmanny Lane, Werkstätte Furmannstrasse]* (La Chaux-de-Fonds: Éditions D'En Haut, 1990), Larisa Kaszuk, *Furmanny Zaulek [Furmanny Lane]* (Poland: Fundacja Polskiej Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 1989).

[14] James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (Routledge, 2007); Zoya Kocur, *Global Visual Cultures: An Anthology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[15] See, for example H. W. Janson, *History of Art: The Western Tradition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice-Hall, 2004) or other textbooks.

bloc of countries routinely include Russian but never Ukrainian artists.[16] I will be discussing a number of artworks never published or discussed before, some of which were lost or stolen. Even in Ukraine, information on the period has been limited; until several recent publications (one catalogue by the National Museum of Ukraine and one electronic book by the Pinchuk Art Center) this history had circulated mainly in the form of oral legends spread within Ukrainian art circles.[17] Moreover, because the Pinchuk Art Center publication is devoted to the Paris Commune art squat and the artistic generation associated with it, there is no single comprehensive publication devoted to a wider range of practices, including the Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism group and its Moscow period. My research addresses this lacuna directly: I have conducted thorough interviews in order to give a voice to the artists themselves, allowing them to narrate their own story while supplying the information necessary to fill the gap in the history of this artistic period.

My first chapter introduces the appearance of the distinct trend of the Ukrainian perestroika painting. It is dedicated to Savadov's and Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrows* (1987): its appearance at the official exhibition in Moscow, its reception by the media, and the context of the art squat culture and semi-official exhibitions in Kyiv that engendered the controversial painting. I discuss both negative and positive reactions published in various Soviet media, from the official newspaper *Pravda* [Truth] to the more liberal art magazine *Dekorativnoie Iskusstvo* [Decorative Arts]. Since most sympathetic reviewers characterized this work as Transavantgarde, several sub-chapters

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[16] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion, 2011); IRWIN, ed., *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006).

[17] Oksana Barshynova, ed., *Nova Ukrainska Khvylia [New Ukrainian Wave]* (Kyiv: National Museum of Ukraine, 2009); Kochubynska, ed., *Parkomuna. Mistse. Spilnota. Yavyshche.*

will explore the Transavantgarde and Neo-expressionism as strands of postmodern art. I will approach *Cleopatra's Sorrows* from the perspective of Western theory, comparing the painting with some prominent examples of postmodern art. In reconstructing the immediate context of the painting, I discuss the art squats and semi-official exhibition venues in Kyiv. This process, I argue, signals a massive shift in the Ukrainian perestroika society since the squats harbored the most daring art of the republic's capital. Artists were living and working in alternative art places while the Soviet Union decomposed in the background along with the grand-narrative of the Socialist Realist method. The unlikely coincidences between late Soviet Ukrainian art and its Western counterparts will be discussed while stressing that perestroika artists were not merely copying the Western art but responding organically to the local situation.

The second chapter continues the discussion of the landmark changes in Ukrainian perestroika art indicated by the appearance of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* and its unprecedented popularity in the media. I focus on the theoretical echoes resonating between postmodern thinkers and critics of the Socialist Realism, while looking at the painting as a reaction to both systems. Here I elaborate on the similarities and discrepancies between Ukrainian painting and Western theory of Postmodernism. The metaphor and citation (of the past and of the styles of the past) undermining the homogeneity of the official Soviet style will serve as a bridge uniting these unlikely counterparts. Postmodern theories describing the baroque vision and the metaphoric character of citation will be considered together with Soviet elaborations in the theory of metaphor, particularly its connection to the canon of realism and unofficial concrete poetry. Drawing on these theoretical parallels, I will then analyze more paintings by

Savadov and Senchenko, as well as those by the so-called post-Savadist artists from Kyiv's art squats who were affected by *Cleopatra's Sorrow's* success and message. The subject matter of these paintings exhibited their creators' impulse to tell stories and engage the past while their material constituent demonstrated their desire to create surfaces which would engulf the spectators with bright colors and intricate ornaments. These seemingly contradictory elements will be addressed with the help of Christine Buci-Glucksmann's theory of baroque, and the operation of the fold as theorized by Gilles Deleuze.[18]

In the third chapter I introduce two other main actors of my dissertation, Oleg Tistol and Kostiantyn Reunov, founders of the group The Resolute Edge of the National Post-Eclecticism. This chapter begins with the story of the *First Soviet-American Exhibition* (1988), an unprecedented perestroika traveling show uniting American, Ukrainian, Russian and Baltic artists. This show was instrumental in transporting the Resolute Edge to the Furmanny Lane art squat in Moscow, thus beginning a new chapter in the interaction of Ukrainian perestroika art with the Moscow art scene. I discuss in detail the art that Tistol and Reunov presented at the *First Soviet-American Exhibition* unveiling their main aesthetic and thematic concerns of the time period. Additionally, I make a short detour to the history of the group's origin, when Tistol and Reunov formulated the theoretical and stylistic foundations of their future collective while serving together at the secret Soviet military base Makarov-1. The chapter will then turn to the phenomenon of the Furmanny Lane art squat and will touch upon the prominent representatives of late Moscow Conceptualism that constituted its core group of settlers.

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[18] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*, trans. Dorothy Z. Baker (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014); Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

Discussing their artistic strategies of the time, I draw parallels between the art of the two groups while also describing the contextual difference between the Ukrainian and Russian republics fully comprehended by the artists.

The fourth chapter explores the postcolonial dimension of the postmodern theory on the material of Ukrainian perestroika paintings. Here I focus on the art made by the founding artists of the Resolute Edge group, Tistol and Reunov, after their relocation to Moscow and their first-hand experience of Moscow Conceptualist art and the nonconformist art culture of the capital. Their two main programmatic paintings of the time, Tistol's *Reunification* (1988) (fig. 2) and Reunov's *From the Great Ukrainian People to the Great Russian People* (1989) (fig. 3) directly and provocatively engaged the Russian-Ukrainian relationship, simultaneously in dialogue with some notorious Socialist Realist paintings and with the historic Ukrainian baroque epoch. Given these preoccupations of the group that clearly commingled the idea of the national and eclectic in its title, some aspects of postcolonial theory previously applied only to Ukraine's literature is applied to its visual art. Before direct analysis of their paintings, I summarize the main arguments of postcolonial theory as a facet of Postmodernism and also outline the main arguments supporting and criticizing the applicability of the postcolonial method to the Ukrainian situation and to post-communist art in general. Drawing upon the importance of the concept of baroque for postcolonial studies as well for the Ukrainian perestroika art, this chapter will continue with some of the methodology introduced in the second chapter stemming from intersection of the baroque and Postmodern. Thus after a brief exhibition history of the Resolute Edge's evolution since their relocation to Moscow, I show how this method generates a more insightful reading

of Tistol's and Reunov's paintings and their embodying of the baroque excesses of painterly materiality and oversignification in meaning.

My fifth chapter explores yet another dimension of postmodern theory – feminism – utilizing the material of the Ukrainian perestroika art, this time turning to work by women-artists on Furmanny: Marina Skugareva of The Resolute Edge group and Larisa Zvezdochetova-Rezun from Odessa, connected to the Moscow Conceptualist circles artistically and via marriage to Konstantin Zvezdochetov. Zvezdochetova's imitation of amateurish art and Skugareva's incorporation of embroidery into oil on canvas recalled work of Western feminists due to such shared features as dismantling of the art/crafts dichotomy, exploration of the traditional crafts of female domesticity, and interest in decoration, surfaces, and ornaments as popular and kitsch dimensions of the highly contested concept of beauty. As was typical for their generation, both artists, however, refused to be identified as feminists – a reaction in line with the overarching theme of the conflicting identifications applied to and contested by perestroika artists overwhelmed with the plethora of new terms and concepts. The themes of ornament and the Neo-Baroque, as well as the concept of the metaphor will be examined in the context of feminine creativity within Soviet perestroika art.

All five chapters of my dissertation demonstrate the porous nature of borders and concepts in the burgeoning global art world utilizing the specific situation of Ukrainian perestroika art paradoxically informed by and intertwined with the Western theories of the Postmodernism. Such concepts as Neo-Baroque and the Postmodernism are shown to correlate with the art created in the context of late socialism, perestroika and the impending collapse of the Soviet Union. Aside from Western theoretical definitions,

which were employed as interpretive tools for explaining Ukrainian art both by the critics and the artists themselves, I examine the local traditions of both the Ukrainian baroque and late Socialist Realist art as backgrounds against which new Ukrainian art defined itself. While the policies of perestroika, or restructuring, were unfolding in the Soviet Union at the great speed, a conversation of prominent philosophers – the Russian Mikhail Ryklin and the French Jacques Derrida – took place in Moscow. Derrida enthusiastically stated that "deconstruction is running its course, if you wish it or not, in full force, and what is going on in the Soviet Union now is sui generis deconstruction in action."[19] Keeping these words in mind, in the ensuing pages I adopt multiple theoretical perspectives to explore unexpected critical parallels between the hybrid styles of Postmodernism and perestroika art as distinct yet related responses to the general dissolution of grand-narratives in the late 20th century.

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[19] "Деконструкция делает свое дело, хотите ли вы того или нет, она на полном ходу, то, что происходит сейчас в Советском Союзе, есть своего рода деконструкция в действии." Mikhail Ryklin, *Dekonstruktia i Destruktsia: Besedy s Filosofami [Deconstruction and Destruction: Conversations with Philosophers]* (Moscow: Logos, 2002), 27.

First Chapter: THE SHOCK OF DISCOVERING A NEW FACE: THE APPEARANCE OF *CLEOPATRA'S SORROW*

1.1 Introduction

Ukrainian nonconformist art made a dramatic debut at the 1987 Moscow *Youth Exhibition* with Arsen Savadov and Heorhiy Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow* (1987) (fig. 1). On that occasion, the leading figures of unofficial, alternative art in Ukraine presented their joint work for the first time outside the confines of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. It was a large-scale painting depicting a woman warrior riding a tiger. Their iconography was explicit: the trope of the equestrian posture, which is traditionally reserved for kings, emperors, and, in Soviet times, for generals of the Red Army, was subverted, for here the horse was supplanted by a tiger. Monumental in size and radically incongruous with its surroundings, the animal immediately transported the painting's beholders beyond the realm of realism. The radical departure from the realist style was outlined by the bizarre expressivity of devices that both imitated reality and emphasized the artificiality of the depiction. The red contour around the tiger's silhouette drew the eye to its painterly medium. The semi-ornamental, semi-realistic seashell in the background added to the viewer's confusion over an image that deliberately meddled with the categories of traditional representation.

The allusion to familiar equestrian statues that dotted the city squares of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, demonstrated Savadov and Senchenko's interest in the local color of their native city. The postmodern quotation from Diego Velazquez's painting *Equestrian Portrait of Prince Balthasar Charles* (1634-1635) (fig. 4) alluded—in an ironic

manner—to conventional renderings of strong female characters, mainly muscular peasants and workers, exemplary of Socialist Realism. Unabashedly subverting the genre of history painting and the image of the contemporary hero, this artwork posed an interpretive challenge both within official and unofficial discourses. Stylistically, as a figurative work executed in oil on canvas, *Cleopatra's Sorrows* was drastically different from other works in the style of Socialist Realism, even in its later manifestations, which were far more multifaceted than those produced in the 1930s.[20] Nor did it really fit into the nonconformist canon, which primarily embraced abstraction and, with the advent of Conceptualism, was less preoccupied with the internal problems of painting *per se* than with utilizing the oil on canvas format to convey conceptual commentaries. To be sure, *Cleopatra's Sorrow* perplexed and challenged its viewers, immediately attracting critical attention, at first mostly negative. However, neither official nor unofficial critics could ignore its innovative impulse and shock value.[21]

Contemporary Ukrainian artists were heavily influenced by the success of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* and the relevance of its message. The style championed by Savadov and Senchenko—the subject of this chapter—would also find expression in the works of Oleg Golosiy (Oleh Holosiy), Aleksandr Gnilitsky (Oleksandr Hnylytsky), Valeria Troubina and Vassily Tsagolov (Vasyl Tsaholov), whose collective efforts constituted a newly emerging trend in Ukrainian art in the 1980s and 1990s. Their work shaped a new art historical discourse that not only responded to the reactions, both negative and positive, of Soviet Russian and Ukrainian critics, but also defined a new artistic purpose

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[20] By "late Socialist Realism", I mean the official Soviet style which begins in the 1970s (otherwise known as the 'stagnation period'), and ends with the demise of the Soviet Union.

[21] "perhaps, the most scandalous painting of the exhibition, "Cleopatra's Sorrows" by Arsen Savadov and Georgi Senchenko …" Aleksandr Sidorov, "Ravnenie na…? [Should we take them for a model…?]" *Tvorchestvo*, no. 8 (1987): 16.

that addressed the various permutations of late Socialist Realism in relation to the dominant strains of Transavantgarde and Neo-expressionism in the West that were partially available to Ukrainian artists of the perestroika era. [22]

By the time Savadov and Senchenko's revolutionary and provocative painting was shown in public, Gorbachev's policies of perestroika had agitated Soviet society for nearly a year.[23] While perestroika called for a modernization of all aspects of life, it also provided for a need to revisit the past. In the visual arts, these policies meant that previously forbidden styles and themes gradually re-entered public space and consciousness. Public discussions of past and present art ensued around the celebration of monumentalist neo-Byzantinist Mykhailo Boichuk's legacy and heritage in Kyiv, for instance.[24] As a result, a wider array of styles became more pronounced in public venues, especially apparent in the annual youth exhibitions. These new developments were concurrent with the marked erosion of the tendentious manner of Socialist Realism. Forsaken were the collective spirit and utopian aspirations of that defunct style, now replaced by introspective individualism and socio-historic revisionism.

The need to reconnect with the past was a particular trait that marked and influenced both official and unofficial cultures during the 1960s and 1970s. In the tenets of the unofficial culture, working to reinstate lost connections with previous art

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[22] The term "transavangarde" was coined by Achile Bonito Oliva, an Italian art historian. It is sometimes also referred to as "*transavanguardia.*"

[23] Perestroika (Russian for "restructuring") was a policy implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR, to rejuvenate the Soviet economy, but it also spread into other spheres of life, including culture, and caused a significant lessening of ideological pressure. It was announced at the 27th Communist party congress in February of 1986.

[24] Mykhailo Boichuk was one of the representatives of the Ukrainian avant-garde who was executed together with most of his followers in 1937 during the Stalinist purges of Soviet intelligentsia and thus became part of the so- called "Executed Renaissance" (*Rozstrilyane vidrodzhennya*) generation of Ukrainian poets, artists and writers who were either eliminated or forced to commit suicide by the authorities. The term was coined by Polish publicist Jerzy Giedroyc while he was working on an anthology of Ukrainian literature in 1958. For further information on the phenomenon of Executed Renaissance, see Yury Lavrinenko, *Rozstrilyane Vidrodzhennia: Antolohiia 1917 – 1933* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2004.)

generations, "alternative art in the 1960s to a large extent was restorative in nature" as art critic Andrei Erofeev claimed.[25] The very same claim was echoed by the official art critic, Aleksandr Morozov, head of the art history department at Moscow University, in his assessment of the official art of the 1970s. "The young leaders of the Seventies" he asserted, "are inherently historicist; they do not experience time as one-dimensional."[26] Despite the ideological and stylistic dissensus that opposed official to unofficial cultures, the historicist attitude was apparently one of the points on which their positions coincided. By the 1980s, the citation of previous styles and old artworks was inherent to the official and non-official cultures. And during perestroika, the two previously opposing attitudes were merging and the clear distinction between them was gradually disappearing. Certainly, the ambiguous temporal mode of perestroika, open to the future and—at the same time--obsessively invested in recovering the past, contributed greatly to the blossoming of the paradoxical quality of innovative art entrenched in past themes and styles, as demonstrated in *Cleopatra's Sorrows*. This feature also serves as one of the bridges between late Soviet and Western postmodern contexts.

Among the unofficial art movements of the Soviet Union, the most well-documented and well-researched to date are those based in the capital of the former USSR – Moscow. There, the traditions of unofficial art sustained themselves in a more liberal political environment which, since the 1970s, allowed partial existence in a semi-public space and the rise of several alternative exhibition spaces, such as the Moscow

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[25] Andrei Erofeev, "Metamorphozy "Moskovskogo Avantgarda"," *Iskusstvo*, no. 10 (1988): 45.

[26] Alexander Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh: Zhyvopis Sovetskikh Khudozhnikov 1960kh-1980kh godov [Generations of Young. Paintings by Soviet artists of the 1960s-1980s]*. (Moscow: Sovetski Khudozhnik, 1989), 168. Author's translation.

House of Graphic Artists[27], which opened in the aftermath of the notorious bulldozer incident.[28] Since Khrushchev's Thaw, a period of Soviet history marked by a relative liberation of cultural life after Stalin's death, unofficial art movements emerged in several cultural centers of the former Soviet Union, mainly in Odessa, Kharkiv, Moscow and Leningrad (today St. Petersburg). The artists participating in those movements were initially preoccupied with abstract and expressionist trends previously forbidden by the very same communist party decree of 1934 that asserted Socialist Realism as the only correct style of the Soviet Union. The materiality of their painterly surfaces coincided with the reappearance of religion and spirituality, all three of which were communist taboos of the Soviet era. As a parallel tendency to this revival of multi-stylistic painting, a version of conceptual art titled "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism" (*aposteriori*) by art theoretician Boris Groys developed in Moscow.[29] In the Ukrainian Socialist Republic, however, conceptual art did not constitute a fully-fledged movement. Rather, it was exemplified by individual artists working in Kharkiv (Boris Mikhailov), Kyiv (Fedir Tetianych) and Odessa (Yuri Leiderman, Sergei Anufriev), to name a few. [30] Some Odessa artists joined forces with Moscow conceptualists in the late 1980s.

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[27] Soviet official and unofficial art co-existed in several hybrid alternative spaces that belonged to official structures but showcased unofficial art. See for example Anna Florkovskaia, *Malaia Gruzinskaia, 28: Zhivopisnaia Sektsiia Moskovskogo Obiedinennogo Komiteta Khudozhnikov-grafikov, 1976-1988.* [*Malaia Gruzinskaia, 28: Oil Painting Section of the United Moscow Committee of Graphic Artists*] (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2009).

[28] In 1974, an open-air nonconformist show in Moscow organized by Oskar Rabin and other unofficial artists was attacked by bulldozers; artworks were destroyed; and artists were beaten by KGB agents.

[29] Boris Groys, "Moscow Romantic conceptualism," *A-Ya: Unofficial Russian Art Review*, (1979): 3-11. The third chapter of this dissertation addresses the late Moscow Conceptualism on Furmanny Lane art squat.

[30] Halyna Skliarenko, "Punktyr Conceptualizmu: Do Kartyny Ukrainskoho Mystetstva Druhoii Polovyny XX-ho Storichchiia. [Broken line of Conceptualism. More on a picture of a Ukrainian art of the second half of the 20th century,]" *Suchasne Mystetstvo. Naukovyi Zbirnyk Instytutu Problem Suchasnoho Mystetsva NAM Ukrainy*, (2010): 209-30.

When Savadov and Senchenko presented *Cleopatra's Sorrow* at the *Youth of the Country* exhibition in 1987, Conceptualism in its late phase (The Mukhomor [Toadstool] Group, Konstantin Zvezdochetov, Vadim Zakharov, Yuri Albert) was the most active movement in the Moscow nonconformist circles. It was in productive artistic and theoretic dialogue with the earlier generations of this movement, such as Ilya Kabakov and others working in studios on Stretensky Boulevard, Sots Art and the Collective Action Group.

The Ukrainian presence at the Youth exhibition in Moscow was an unexpected turn of events, chiefly due to two factors. Firstly, it offered something controversial and new, though relayed with the help of the oil paint (the large-format figurative painting medium traditionally associated with the official and outmoded art); secondly, it originated from Ukraine, the province that was known to nourish the most conventional easel painting adhering to the Socialist Realist method. Being a controversial painting, *Cleopatra's Sorrows*, nevertheless, could not be easily assigned under the rubric of unofficial art which at this moment in Moscow associated primarily with the Conceptualism. Initially, the Conceptualist movement in Moscow was devoted to recovering the ideological and existential underpinning of everyday reality. Therefore, its production often implemented artistically in the forms of objects, installations, albums, and texts, seemed to correspond to a global trend in the humanities known as the "linguistic turn." As a result, these artists were less affected by the formalistic debates on the relevance of expressionism or post-Cézannism for the Soviet Realist canon persistent

since the late 1950s.[31] Paintings created within the conceptualist tradition of Moscow served very specific functions and often demonstrated a rather cerebral approach to the old media. The white paintings of Ilya Kabakov, the communist party slogans by Erik Bulatov painted on blue skies, the mixture of linguistic and expressive signs in Andrei Roiter's art[32], and the simulation of painterly techniques by Mukhomors, all employed the media of painting to address various artistic concerns, not all of which were necessarily connected to this media.

Against such a background, Savadov and Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow* appeared scandalous because it was primarily a painting about painting, quoting other paintings and drawing one's attention to its painterly method rather than to metaphysics or ideology. The unexpected source of this new creativity (such as the outdated genre of large-scale paintings), explains the great impact of the painting by Savadov and Senchenko on the Moscow art scene, which was not accustomed to finding novelties outside its own field of vision. This sentiment was well expressed by Moscow art critic Vladimir Levashov: "the appearance of the Ukrainian Wave at the Youth exhibition became the sensational discovery of an unknown culture, in a closely-examined territory."[33] His remarks stemmed from his observations of Savadov and Senchenko's participation in the 1987 Youth Exhibition and more varied Ukrainian works presented at the next Youth exhibition in Moscow in 1988.

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[31] Susan E. Reid, "Toward a New Socialist Realism. The Re-engagement with Western Modernism," In *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts,* ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 217-39.

[32] Roiter's practices were informed by the linguistic and semiotic models of 1970s conceptualism and 1960s soviet expressionism. Roiter was at the core of organizing the Detskiy Sad (kindergarden) group and art space. Yelena Kalinsky, "Quoting gesture: Andrei Roiter in the 1980s," Zimmerli journal no. 5 (Fall 2008): 96-119.

[33] Levashov, "Drugoe Litso."

The shock of discovery of Ukrainian otherness in a familiar space and format was mitigated by Russian critics with the help of a wide array of terms applied to the Ukrainian phenomena, often borrowed from Western art historical discourse, with occasional local references. Stressing the works' simultaneous affinity for the native Ukrainian baroque tradition, as well as the international Neo-expressionist movement current in Europe and the United States in the 1980s, another Moscow critic, Leonid Bazhanov, addressed the novelty of this new and refreshing approach by christening it with the phrase "neo-baroque art of the Transavantgarde type."[34] The article in which these terms were announced was co-authored by Valery Turchin who recently had published an entire brochure dedicated to western Neo-expressionism and Transavantgarde, and was therefore well versed in the topic.[35] Granted, the terms Transavantgarde[36], Neo-expressionism, and neo-baroque[37], borrowed by Russian art critics from current Western art historical discourse and liberally applied to the Ukrainian phenomenon, were far more known to the critics than to the artists who were defined with the help of the new terms. The irony in the use of this Western terminology (born of totally different political and cultural circumstances) applied to an art previously

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[34] Moscow art critic Leonid Bazhanov, in his review of the 1988 all-USSR exhibition, had defined the new art trend as Ukrainian neo-baroque of the trans-avantgarde type, both in publications and in conversation with Ukrainian art critics like Oleksandr Soloviov. Leonid Bazhanov and Valery Turchin, "Ritorika Totalnogo Somnenia. [The Rhetoric of Total Hesitation]," *Tvorchestvo*, no. 2 (1989). Oksana Barshynova, "From an Interview with a Well-known Curator and an Art Critic, Oleksandr Solovyov, One of the Ideologists of the New Ukrainian Art of the Second Half of the 1980s- the Beginning of the 1990s," In *New Ukrainian Wave*. ed. by Oksana Barshynova, (National Museum of Ukraine, 2009), 30-35.

[35] Valery Turchin, "Avantgardistskie Techenia v Sovremennom Iskusstve Zapada. [Avant-garde Movements in Contemporary Western Art]," *Iskusstvo. Podpisnaia Nauchno Populiarnaia Seria*, no. 2 (1988).

[36] Oliva, *The Italian Trans-avantgarde*.

[37] Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: a Sign of the Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), Xavier Rubert de Ventós, *Heresies of modern art.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), Severo Sarduy, "The Baroque and the Neobaroque" in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup. (Duke University Press Books 2009).

unknown, was that Ukrainian artists did not have access to any translations of theoretical texts that would tie them to these Western movements. As the next sections of this chapter will show, the development of any form of Transavantgarde in Ukraine emerged from dynamic local exhibition concerns and vivid theoretical debates devoted to the development of painting, from the period of the decomposition of the Socialist Realist method onwards.

This chapter will first touch upon the idea of Transavantgarde in relation to Western Postmodernism. It will also examine the circumstances that produced *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, including the youth exhibitions, as well as the art squat movement (which was thriving) in perestroika Kyiv. Then, it will address the response to the painting generated by the Soviet media and contributing to its popularity and scandalous status. The remainder of the first chapter will be devoted to the detailed analysis of Savadov and Senchenko's painting against the terms in which it was initially defined, including by comparison with the Western paintings of the same trend. Thus, the chapter launches the discussion on the indeterminacy in definitions and notions surrounding the new Ukrainian perestroika art that supplemented the maelstrom of societal and political changes disturbing the country on the verge of collapse. Disintegrating country and dwindling authority of the Socialist Realism as the official style in art contributed to the appearance of the appearance of the new art together with the influx of Western ideas and terms. Out of these conflicting influences, misinterpretations and a feverish thirst for radical experiments accentuated by perestroika, the new trend of Ukrainian art was born.

1.2 Transavantgarde and Neo-expressionism as visual incarnations of Postmodernism in the 1980s in the West

The term 'Transavantgarde', as coined by Italian critic Achille Bonito Oliva, was applied to Italian artists such as Sandro Chia and Francesco Clemente enjoying unprecedented success on art market and in the museum world since early 1980s.[38] Meanwhile, the concurrent notion of Neo-expressionism was more commonly applied to Americans such as Julian Schnabel, David Salle and Philip Guston, and Germans such as Anselm Kiefer and George Bazelitz. Directly following upon the trends of Minimalism and Conceptual art, these artists' figurative work provocatively turned to the long discarded ideas of artistic individuality and gestural vitality, rejected by the previous generation. The appeal and the amplitude of the new trends were confirmed through major exhibitions that showcased the new tendency in art spreading across the Western world. The 1980 Venice Beinnale, titled *Aperto' 80* and curated by Harald Szeeman and Achille Bonito Oliva, presented Italian Transavantgardists as a unified movement that included the young Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria and Mimmo Paladino. The Venice Biennale was followed by two major international shows that championed the new trend, and which were presented in Berlin and London: "A New Spirit in Painting" (London, Royal Academy of art, 1981) and "Zeitgeist" (Berlin, 1982). Both affirmed the transnational character of the new trend.

The notion of Postmodernism is contested and multifaceted. What is more, the historical distance that separates us from its inception only serves to further obfuscate its

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[38] John Russell, "The New European Painters." *New York Times*, April 24, 1983. Accessed October 15, 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/24/magazine/the-new-european-painters.html?pagewanted=all

definition. [39] Contrary to architecture, in visual arts no authoritative consensus was achieved in regard to the kind of art that would be designated perfect examples of postmodernism, with such disparate phenomena as performative photography by Cindy Sherman and commercial glamour by Jeff Koons routinely assigned to the same rubric. Nevertheless, neo-expressionism and transavantgarde are among the artistic phenomena united under the banner of postmodernism and these were the terms applied analogically to Ukrainian perestroika art. Dismantling the idea of high art along with meta-narratives, postmodernism indulged in mass culture and the production of art that could be effortlessly consumed. Therefore, the bright and figurative canvases of transavantgardists and neo-expressionists enjoyed broad popularity. The autonomy of art held sacrosanct by modernism during the first half of the twentieth century was now deemed unrealizable in the wake of theories and art practices that insisted on the impossibility of a creative product free from ideology, politics, mass culture, and economic and gender issues. The 'ivory tower' concept of a media-specific art was no longer viable. A postmodernist proclivity for citation[40] was supported by its melancholic denial of the category of 'new'. Postmodernism was searching for depth in surfaces while valorizing vision and scopic pleasure over intellectualism[41] and supporting a revolt against visual ascesis— it rejected

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[39] Jencks pronounced the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis in 1972 as the moment when the modern architecture ended and postmodern began. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 9.

[40] In Postmodernism the citation device is often employed in a very specific way. It is not simply used as an indicator of the source of information but serves as a mean to engage a viewer or reader into the ironic and skeptical critique in the form of intertextual play. Citation functions as appropriation in Postmodernism, allowing some already known idea, quote, text or image appear in a new light and decontextualized. The concept of intertextuality was described by Julia Kristeva. See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Samuel, Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993) and Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Minerva, 1994).

[41] Martin E. Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," In *Modernity and Identity*, eds. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 19.

an iconoclasm of the austere Minimalism, and Conceptual art. The trends of Neo-Expressionism and Transvantgarde gave preference to the saturated oil painting developing in the opposite direction of dematerialization of previous decades.[42] The latter trends were already representative of the shift away from the modernist paradigm that had begun in the 1960s in the practices of neo-dada and Pop Art revolting against the Abstract Expressionism. They abandoned the territory of modernist autonomous art and exceeded its boundaries through site-specific art, performances, documentation, texts, photographs and other non-standard forms of art.

By contrast, Neo-expressionism and Transavantgarde restored the most traditional oil-on-canvas technique, together with quintessentially historic art forms, such as the fresco[43] or figurative representation. As a result, many influential Western theorists concluded that postmodernism had a dual character. Between the two separate strands, painterly postmodernism was labeled as conservative or reactionary. Neo-expressionism, and the transavantgarde even more so, were regarded as the most uncritical and market-oriented types of postmodernist art. Hal Foster, for instance, wrote about the "basic opposition" between "a postmodernism of resistance" and a "postmodernism of reaction."[44] Some critics, such as British philosopher Paul Crowther, found the critical/reactionary opposition within Neo-expressionism itself. Crowther distinguished between the critical practice of Neo-Expressionism as "thematising the inadequacy of artistic categories, and, indeed, the inability of art to express the complexities and

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[42] Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 46-52.

[43] "Francesco Clemente's revival of fresco is a particularly blatant denial of history." Craig Owen, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women," *Art in America*, January, 1983, p. 13.

[44] Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), xii.

catastrophes of concrete historical experience."[45] Secondarily, uncritical neo-expressionism, exemplified by transavangardists Sandro Chia, and Francisco Clemente for Crowther was characterized as "painterly excess, and unbridled eclecticism", which through "the overload of paint and imagery connects with its audience fundamentally at the level of private and arbitrary association."[46] Both neo-expressionism and transavantgarde were disparaged for catering to the tastes of market and public by progressive critics, much like Socialist Realist art in the late Soviet Union was treated by nonconformist progressive circles as utterly shallow and reactionary.

The duality of traits, both critical and uncritical, associated with the movements within postmodernism, went beyond the categories established by Crowther. The prefixes "trans" or "neo", for instance, imply a sense of return to the qualities already present in previous art movements. Notwithstanding the modernist need for discovering new qualities in art, any notion of return did not sit well with critics such as Hal Foster, who insisted that "oppositional postmodernism" was intended to "a critique of origins, not a return to them."[47] Yet, as we shall see, Neo-expressionism and Transavantgarde accumulated a number of returns throughout the years of their practice. First among them was new subjectivism[48], the idea of a return to man. This is expressed through energetic brushworks—the indexical traces of the painters, who convey their personal and intimate histories. Secondly, a feature emerging from the first one, is a return to sensuality, again

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[45] Paul Crowther, "Postmodernism in the Visual Arts: A Question of Ends," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 188.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Foster, *Postmodern Culture,* xii.

[48] "The works of the young Italian artists convey not so much private, autobiographical subjectivity, but rather the structural elements that characterize it: mutability, transience, contradiction and emphasis on detail." Achille Bonito Oliva, "Transavanguardia: New Subjectivity," accessed November 2015, http://www.worldofartmagazine.com/Woa6/6woa_OLIVA.htm

via the individual who is seen (or is seeing) through the lens of an intensified emotional experience. Third is a reappearance of a story whose narration effectively initiates the return of the category of time into painting.[49] Two other big returns include the revival of themes of history and a welcoming appropriation of past period and art styles. Finally, universalism and cosmopolitanism are rejected in favor of national identity. All of the above gave new painting the capability of capturing and representing a whole range of myths.[50]

Painting thus turned into a battleground on which past events were reassessed and national traumas were resurrected. Locally ingrained concerns started to gain in prominence as some universally-held values came to be undermined by the failure of existing grand narratives. Postmodern apologist Oliva assessed the return to old art styles as being akin to Marcel Duchamp's earlier ready-made technique,[51] a manifestation of a conceptual plexus within painting styles being repeated, as it were, and taken up in the Transavangarde.[52] Reflecting Oliva's succinct formula of "cultural nomadism and eclecticism," the ready-made styles as a prevailing source for the transavantgarde remained quite diverse, while responding to the accidental character of choices dictated by trajectories of personal development, and not by some rationale at the root of a search for style. Nevertheless, the Italian transavantgarde exhibited some clearly identifiable preferences. These primarily included the Renaissance period and the metaphysical painting of De Chirico, as well as some predilection for the vigorous brushwork and

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[49] "Detail is the anchor of the temporary." Achille Bonito Oliva, "Transavanguardia: New Subjectivity."

[50] "Tendency to treat contemporary reality in mythological terms." Craig Owen, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women," 13.

[51] Achille Bonito Oliva, *Vita di Marcel Duchamp*, (Roma: M. Marani, 1976).

[52] Viktor Miziano, "Beseda s izobretatelem transavantgarda. Interviu V. Miziano s A. Bonito Oliva. [Conversation with the Inventor of the Transavantgarde. Interview of V. Miziano with A. Bonito Oliva]" *Iskusstvo* no.1 (1992): 23.

energetic surfaces of the Abstract Expressionists. Also popular among the neo-expressionists in general were the earlier versions of German Expressionism and French Fauvism, with their sometimes violent, distorted figuration and vivid color palette; some, like Pop Art, also borrowed from the mass media.

Thrust vehemently into a whirling tide of theoretical polemics, neo-expressionism immediately became a subject of inescapable critique by the artists who were previously prone to attack art institutions of all kinds and consumerist culture in general. For example, the British conceptual group 'Art and Language' made a mocking reference to the return of painting. Depicting Lenin in the Abstract Expressionist style, the group parodied both Neo-expressionism and its stylistic affiliations. Invoking Socialist Realism through the painting's subject, they rendered it all through the dripping technique of Jackson Pollock, as though they were deconstructing the Cold War dichotomy of free Western abstract art versus totalitarian Socialist Realism via a single object.

Many art critics and philosophers doubled up on the position and attitude of the 'Art and Language' group. Among the first critics to launch a scathing critique of neo-expressionism was Benjamin Buchloh, who attacked the new trend from the standpoint of left-wing postmodernism.[53] Examining the style from a very broad perspective, Buchloh saw in neo-expressionism the secondary response to the failure of avant-garde's paradigm. Avant-garde artists such as Alexandr Rodchenko and Kazimir Malevich already had returned to figuration in the 1930s after a period of strictly non-objective art. Drawing on the parallels between the interwar European "rappel à l'ordre" and neo-expressionism, Buchloh emphasized the historicizing eclecticism of their style and the

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[53] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (Spring, 1981).

fiction of national identity which motivated it, as an alienation from history and a regression to psychosexual reification. The false naiveté of the new figuration, Buchloh would claim, represented an unwillingness to accept the idea that the means of expression of paint is encoded, and therefore cannot be unmediated. For Buchloh, this type of art represented a shift to right-wing political thinking resulting in what he referred to as "rigid conservatism."[54]

Art historian and critic of a postmodernist persuasion Hal Foster issued his influential verdict on the new art which he called an "expressive fallacy."[55] According to Foster, neo-expressionism was the kind of art that overused the rhetoric of self-expression by indulging in attempts to satisfy the demands of both the "metaphysical tradition and consumerist society."[56] In typical Freudian terms, he described the new figuration as a "parody of the return of the repressed." Foster expressed doubt that the neo-expressionists could really return to history inasmuch as (from the critic's Marxist position) they were alienated from any history of political and/or social concerns. Thus their alleged return to history was, for Foster at least, a "play of false consciousness" representing merely an obsessive or, in his own words, an "anal" fixation on the past. Like Buchloh, Foster reminds his readers that "expressing a self is to replicate a model."[57] He assailed the blindness of the new expressionists for their rhetorical construction of expressionism; to appeal to unconsciousness as a source of artistic creativity was inconceivable for the critic.

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[54] Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," 59.
[55] Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," *Art in America* (January 1983): 80–83, 137.
[56] Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," 82.
[57] Ibid.

Market success was regarded as one of the main trespasses of neo-expressionism; it was not its allegedly fake quality or intellectual shallowness, but rather its betrayal of the late modernist contempt toward the commodification of art that gathered the most bitter and scathing remarks. As the aforementioned Crowther claimed, "Neo-expressionism is to be seen as an exaggerated and empty response to the art market's demand for innovation."[58] Contemporary philosopher Arthur Danto echoed this condemnation, claiming that "neo-expressionism raised, as art, no philosophical question at all, and indeed could raise none that would not be some variant of the one raised in its perfected form by Warhol."[59] For his part, Jean-François Lyotard, who wrote extensively on postmodernism as a concept and historical condition, saw in the transavangarde a "cynical eclecticism"[60]. He interpreted its anti-modernist stance as a method to indulge the capitalist system, demanding only the replacement of aesthetic judgment with profit-making criteria and motivations.

Naturally, it is difficult to overlook the high market potential of the newly resurrected artistic sincerity and the spontaneity of painterly application so cherished by broader Western audiences. Added to that was its appealing compatibility with nationally identifiable styles and topics, also highly marketable. However, artists beholden to the system of late socialist economies and state-controlled or administered art commissions, as was still the case in the Ukrainian Socialist Republic during the perestroika years, could hardly be blamed for catering to the demands of a global art. Incidentally, *Cleopatra Sorrows* was sold the same year (1987) at the FAC fair in Paris, a fact that

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[58] Crowther, "Postmodernism in the visual arts: A question of ends," 182.

[59] Arthur C. Danto, *The State of the Art* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987), 209.

[60] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 40.

significantly added to its legend.[61] However, the accusation that it could have catered to the tastes of potential consumers is utterly incongruous with the backdrop of a non-existent art market and a limited familiarity with global art trends. In fact, the very idea of a gallery-artist relationship was incomprehensible to young Ukrainian artists, who resorted to the use of abandoned buildings as their studios, while continuing to rely on official venues for showcasing their work.

1.3 *Cleopatra* through the Lens of Western Critical Theory

Given the popularity and pervasiveness of Transavantgarde or Neo-expressionist identification for Ukrainian Perestroika art, a closer look at *Cleopatra's Sorrow* is crucial, as the work is closely associated with the launching of the trend. Apart from its complex iconography, what contributed to the painting's scandalous reputation? Which of its formal features made the definition relevant? Which were features crucial in turning its presentation at the Soviet official venue into an audacious endeavor? From the perspective of formalist methodologies in Euro-American art criticism, the Neo-expressionist manner was recognized by the exuberance of its colors, its fluid and contorted forms. Its content involved the potential multiplicity of references, personal and historical. The painting's meaning or value to audiences (including critics) was also defined by its institutional and market success, and by its complex relationships with the

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[61] It was bought by the French Nouveau Réalisme painter Fernandez Arman for 150,000 USD. Denis. Belkevich, "Art-Katok ili Tsiframi po Tvorcheskomu Samoliubiiu. Arsen Savadov. [Art-roller or Numbers Against Art Ego. Arsen Savadov.]" ART Ukraine. (January 15, 2014) Accessed November 2015. http://artukraine.com.ua/a/art-katok-ili-ciframi-po-tvorcheskomu-samolyubiyu-arsen-savadov/#.WTbO7uvyvct.

modernist canon. In this section I will examine those aspects of Savadov and Senchenko's painting that coincided with and diverged from the Neo-expressionist style with which the painting was equated. I will also explore the incommensurability of this Ukrainian artwork with the nonconformist and official visual systems that constituted its most immediate context.

Looming over the horizon, a towering figure of an armor-clad woman astride a tiger, withdrawn and aloof, dominates the barren landscape. Her antique profile is stern and determined as she holds the charging tiger with one hand and an unmarked blue rod with the other. Behind the mounted figure, the perspectival lines coincide at a distant point on the horizon, while a tiny volcano erupts on the right, balanced by the silent mountains on the left. The foreground is occupied by a single rocaille shell and an empty stone plinth with a piece of cloth thrown onto it. A triangular composition of the centrally-placed figure is among the most standard and classical, and evokes numerous precedents. The figures of the woman-warrior and the tiger are proportionally rendered and not distorted for expressive purposes, implying weight and volume through their forms. They are positioned in the landscape endowed with a sense of distance through a diminishing scale that separates the figures from the mountains and skies.

The iconography of a proud noble horseman in the mountain surroundings that this painting evokes, has a long tradition in oil representation, not limited to the declared source that inspired the painting by Savadov and Senchenko, namely the work of Diego Velazquez *Equestrian Portrait of Prince Balthasar Charles* (1635). Presumably derived from the posture of antique bronze statues of Roman Emperors, exemplified by the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (c. 173-76 C.E.), this pictorial scheme was

popularized by Renaissance and Baroque artists, including Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630) (fig. 5) whose depiction of Julius Cesar carries a rod similar to the one held by the prince from the Velazquez portrait. The equestrian position of a rider fully in control of a horse whose two upper legs extend into the air required a physical strength and vigor from the rider and therefore was reserved for the demonstration of the ablest and noblest. With the majority of the subjects depicted in this position being princes and kings, Velazquez perpetuated the tradition in his *Phillip III on Horseback* (1643-35) applying the same posture also favored by his contemporizes Peter Paul Rubens in *The Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand of Austria at the Battle of Nordlingen* (c. 1634) and his distinguished pupil Antony Van Dyck in *Equestrian portrait of Prince Tomaso of Savoy-Carignan (1595–1656),* (1634-1635) (fig. 6). One of the most well-known in the tradition of this temperamental equestrian posture is a much later painting by Jacques-Louis David *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801-1805) (fig. 7), which exaggerated the fierceness of the horse, the harshness of the weather and the calmness of the rider, in accordance with the prerequisites of the Romanticism.[62]

All the classical associations with equestrian portraiture, however, are put to a halt by the bold color scheme of Savadov and Senchenko's painting, even if the substitution of the horse with a tiger is accepted as a matter of fact. Its limited primary color palette and outlined silhouettes recall the aesthetics of comic strips so favored by pop-artists for their clear and bright hues. The coloristic solution of *Cleopatra's Sorrows* work is pronouncedly simplistic; with the exception of the black contours, the ground is a combination of a subdued violet and sand-colored strokes applied onto it. The sky is a

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[62] There are five versions of the portrait.

monchrome of a lemon color, covered in the upper part with a thin layer of erratic brushstrokes of a generic green. Effectively emphasized by greenish hues of the sky, the scarlet red of the tiger outline additionally accentuates the central figure composition. This outline constitutes one of the most noticeable visual oddities of the artwork, which challenges and subverts the coherence of this painting as a representation. The woman warrior grasps the red outline of the tiger, much like she would grasp the horse's harness. Her gesture, in which she touches the means of representation, has the result of destroying the pictorial illusion. By getting hold of the red outline, the depicted figure thus intrudes into a realm of painterly devices actively asserting the materiality of the painting's surface and its colors. [63]

The enigmatic woman engages more with the means of her own representation than with the space in which she is situated, a prehistoric landscape. She seems undisturbed by the erupting volcano in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas, and oblivious to the strange formation in the central background, the hybrid of the sea-shell and the rocaille ornament. The draped cloth on the stone plinth could be a mantle slipped from her naked shoulders, but no gesture or a body movement indicates this connection. Despite the inherent dynamism connoting power, aggression and superiority implied by any equestrian scene, well exemplified by David's portrayal of Napoleon, the tiger's 'rider' here is bizarrely static, devoid of emotions. The scene reveals neither the sorrow promised by the title, nor the intention to attack, as the mounted-noble-horsemen genre would dictate, often focused on depictions of wars and hunts. When compared to

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[63] "The red outline connects the painting to the Christian Orthodox iconography tradition in which the red line signifies the separation between the material and transcendental worlds." Zhmurko, Tetiana. "Dva Slova Pro Shyvopys. [A Couple of Words about Painting]," in *Parkomuna. Mistse. Spilnota. Yavyshche*, 68-101, 79.

Velázquez' painting, the source that launched the interpretative chain that resulted in *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, the baroque image's compositional dynamism of a mountain diagonally contrasted to the diagonal of the horse figure is purposefully obliterated. The arrested movement of the protagonists leaves the viewer befuddled. What is preserved and exaggerated, however, is a sense of incongruence of the aggressive posture and the tender mellowness of the ill-fated child prince, obviously not physically capable of holding such a position while on horseback.[64] If this betrayal of rational action by Velázquez is made for the sake of tradition, Savadov and Senchenko insist that this tradition exists solely for the purpose of enhancing the oil painting, which they intend on perpetuating, albeit in a radically new form. By returning to a figurative pictorial art form, these Ukrainian artists contemplate the possibilities of painting as a genre after the discoveries made by abstract art.[65] This choice also is informed by the decades of suspicion many cast on large-scale oil painting, of the "composed-picture" genre (*zhanrovaia kartina*), corrupted by its association with the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

Savadov and Senchenko's painting oozes the materiality of paint, colors, and the surface of the canvas. Velazquez, a virtuoso of oil painting, is chosen not accidentally, but as an artist capable of enforcing the feeling of material presence of that which is depicted, without concealing his painterly devices. The snow in the mountain peaks in the original painting, delivered by the rapid movements of Velazquez' brush, is as much an illusion created with the help of oil paint applied on the canvas, as is the red outline of

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[64] Domínguez Ortiz, Antonio, Julián Gállego, and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez. *Velázquez* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989). Exhibition catalogue.

[65] The exhibition of the avant-garde abstraction *Paris Moscow* opened in 1981, signaling a partial welcoming of radical avant-garde abstraction, previously rejected and excluded from display. It was the second stage of the major project jointly organized by the Centre Pompidou in Paris (Beaubourg) and the Ministry of Culture of the USSR which began with the exhibition in Pompidou in 1979. Two exhibitions showcased art of French and Russian avant-garde together, examining the mutual influences of the two strands of modernism.

Savadov's tiger. Strangely still, Cleopatra is nevertheless actively calling attention to her fictive status and constructedness through the lines and colors produced by the brush in the hand of the artist. However, the preferred means of representation in this controversial Ukrainian painting does not reduce to intricate color and texture combinations; rather, the artists blatantly declare the painting an illusion created with the help of oil pigments on a flat surface.

When compared to a Neo-expressionist painting, such as Sandro Chia's *The Idleness of Sisyphus* (1981) (fig. 8), both paintings appear to demonstrate, rather than conceal, the materiality of their painterly surfaces. Certainly, a more nuanced approach to the function of visible brushstrokes in both cases is required together with considerations of implications of declaratively pronounced working of the brush in both contexts. Sandro Chia, an Italian artist from the Transavantargist generation,[66] participates in the larger theoretical and formalistic debate devoted to the convention of the Expressionist brushstroke and its relevance and meaning in European and American art of the 1980s.[67] The history of Expressionism into which Chia insinuates himself stretches back to the beginning of the 20th century. For the 1980s generation, it was a movement within modernism that dispensed with conventions and norms. The agitated brushwork as a testament to the prevalence of the individual worldview, and consequently a style, was initially implemented by the artists working after the Impressionists who were determined to preserve an objective feeling of the fleeting moment. With the Expressionist rejection of such possibility, together with their rejection of most representational norms, the dramatic distortions of forms and exaggerations of colors

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[66] Oliva, Achille Bonito. *Trans-avantgarde International.* Milano: Giancarlo Politi, 1982.

[67] See the Special Issue on Expressionism in *Art in America*, January 1983.

were considered as evidence of the "unique intuition" put forward by an artist.[68] Chia's painting claims to share in this history, by including the visual clues directly pointing to classical examples of artistic attempts at conveying a dynamic perception and violent speed, such as the Italian Futurist painting by Umberto Boccioni (1982-1916), *City Rises* (1910).[69]

Following the naïve and wild efforts to assert the immediacy of artistic experiences and emotions by early Expressionists, Abstract Expressionism was the next Western art movement in the 20th century that took in earnest the promise of unmediated creativity. The intense and aggressive movements of Jackson Pollock's brush were interpreted as indexical traces of the real presence of the artist and his unconscious drives on his canvases. Such views were challenged and deconstructed artistically and theoretically within the Neo-Dada (especially Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg) and Pop-Art discourses in the West.[70] By the time that *The Idleness of Sisyphus* was presented in 1981, many voices emerged to insist on the impossibility of conveying unmediated experience with the help of an agitated brush.[71] The resurrection of the claim for immediacy and spontaneity, together with the concomitant assertion of ostentatious singularity of the artistic perception that was associated with the Neo-expressionist trend in painting, caused a wave of indignation among critics like Craig Owens, Benjamin

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[68] Julie Sheldon, "Matisse & the Problem of Expression in Early Twentieth-Century Art," in *Investigating Modern Art*, ed. Liz Dawtrey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 47.

[69] The reference to this painting is the most palpable in Chia's rendering of the Sisyphus figure, with a lattice of narrow brush marks incising the body and accentuating its rapid and violent movement.

[70] The most well-known for the Ukrainian artistic milieu among these Western artists was Andy Warhol through publications in *Decorativnoe Iskusstvo* magazine and Kolpinskiĭ Yuri and Viktor Vanslov, eds. *Modernizm. Analiz i Kritika Osnovnykh Napravlenii [Modernism: Analysis and Critique of the Main Trends.]* Nauchno-issledovatelskiii institut teorii i istorii izobrazitelnykh iskusstv (Akademiia khudozhestv SSSR). 1973. (various editions)

[71] This point of view is unequivocally shared by all correspondents of the *Art in America Expressionism* issue.

Buchloh, and Hal Foster.[72] They demanded that the Expressionist mode of depiction should be recognized as a language, a convention, or a style employed by the artists who could no longer—in contrast to the original Expressionists—sincerely use it as a tool of self-expression.

Paradoxically, sincerity was the point of convergence for attacks on Neo-expressionism by progressive western critics equipped with the most advanced post-structuralist tools of inquiry, in tandem with accusations towards Savadov and Senchenko by the most regressive Soviet critics. The continuity in the rhetoric of accusations by such discrepant parties is quite striking. For Craig Owens, Neo-expressionists were "simulating passions" in their "artificial masterpieces."[73] Carter Ratcliff asserted that only those artists who recognize "raw spontaneity, uninhibited sincerity, violent immediacy" as unattainable were effective as contemporary artists, whereas the "sincere stroke" was doomed from the outset.[74] Half Foster believed the Neo-expressionist works of Anselm Kiefer and Julian Schnabel to be "confected masterpieces" that "trade in simulation of authenticity and originality."[75] Four years on and in the pages of the official Soviet art magazine Savadov and Senchenko's work was discredited in similar terms: it was declared as a threat to sincerity (Kholmogorova's review) or an imitation of sincerity (Sidorov's review). Apparently, faking insincerity was inadmissible both for the critics who championed art that accepts the self as a fiction or employs the expressive strokes

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[72] Craig Owens, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women." Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," Carter Ratcliff, "The short Life of the Sincere Stroke," "Acts of Agression: German Painting Today. Part II." *Art in America* (January 1983).

[73] Owens, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women," 11.

[74] Ratcliff, "The Short Life of the Sincere Stroke," 76.

[75] Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," 137.

ironically as surrogates and the critics who promoted Socialist Realism as the only creative method, spoke of sincerity in exclusively positive terms.

These two respective norms, against which those Western Neo-expressionist and Ukrainian artists were accused of insincerity, already signaled two different trajectories, which their respective analyses would take after an initial convergence. But the issue of brushwork and its correlation to artistic individuality should be addressed first. I will extrapolate it from the same comparison of Chia's *The Idleness of Sisyphus* with Savadov and Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. If the Italian work was considered and criticized for demonstrating its impulsive brushwork as a purveyor of artistic psychological singularity, the analysis of Ukrainian work was, first of all, complicated by the fact that it was produced by an artistic collective and not by a creative individual embodying a unique set of psychological, stylistic, and historical peculiarities. Savadov and Senchenko's reminiscences on the subject are included in their interview (in 2000) with Russian art critic Andrei Kovalev, who asked about their attitude towards collective creativity during the years of *Cleopatra's Sorrow'* success. In the artists' own words, "the artist Savadov-Senchenko" was a reaction against the "myth of individual genius" to which they responded by "blurring the boundaries of the individual 'I' with the simultaneous rejection of the affirmation of subjective values."[76] The artistic language chosen by Savadov and Senchenko to convey this attitude pictorially was the code enhancing the material manifestations of painterly media–but limiting its expressive means. Given their statement, this language was consciously calculated to exclude any

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[76] Andrei Kovalev, "Dinamicheskie Pary. Para Arsen Savadov i Yuri Senchenko. Interviu Andreia Kovaliova. [Dynamic duos. Duo of Arsen Savadov and Yuriy Senchenko. Interview by Andrei Kovalev]." Exhibition dedicated to the Tenth Anniversary of Guelman Gallery, Moscow. http://www.guelman.ru/dva/para14.html (Last accessed, November 2017.)

conventions that might indicate an intense personal emotion, by distorting figures and shapes, or saturating colors. In fact, their application of paint appears rather mechanical, something from which the possibility of personal presence is willfully purged.

The most efficient analogy that Savadov and Senchenko invoke is a Pop-Art silkscreen by Andy Warhol with its reliance on photographic media as a source, and a love for brilliant open colors. In their own statement, cited in *Art in America* in conjunction with Savadov and Senchenko's show in Berman-E.N. Gallery (New York, 1993), artists attest to the importance of Warhol's example in their work: "Europe is a gigantic storehouse of libraries; it is a gigantic accumulation of dust, and now we are trying to create from this dust a Campbell's soup."[77] In Warhol's silkscreen *Siberian Tiger* from the series *Endangered Species* (1983) (fig. 9), one encounters similarly salient outlines of bright colors and the generic depiction of the tiger possibly borrowed from some touristic booklet. Thus, Savadov and Senchenko destabilize the myth of individual genius not only by adopting a collective author figure, but even formally, through their method of paint application: they clearly refer viewers to examples that exhibit a similar attitude.

A juxtaposition of Chia's *The Idleness of Sisyphus* with Savadov and Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow* is effective in demonstrating their very different relationship to the return of subjectivity, which is associated with both the transvantgarde and neo-expressionist generations in the West. The Italian painting directly engages with subjectivism by invoking abstract expressionism both with the handling of paint and with the allusion to existentialist philosophy through its title, which is reminiscent of Albert

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[77] Faye Hirsch, "Savadov and Senchenko at Berman-E.N," *Art in America*, (January 1993): 106.

Camus' philosophical essay "The myth of Sisyphus."[78] The search for the true self was pertinent to Abstract Expressionists, who often relied on existentialism, while reflecting on the expression of their heroic tribulations and tormented individuality. Via the materiality of the oil painting and its connection to the artist's hand, the neo-expressionists invited the presence of the corporeal body to the territory of art after years of de-individualized and body-less conceptualist and minimalist art. Savadov and Senchenko, however, aimed to de-individualize their art production while remaining within the painterly tradition. Rather than investigating inner psychology through painting emotions, their figurative painting moves away from subjectivity, not towards it.

By alluding both to the classical masterpieces of Velazquez and David, which perpetuate the idea of a genius-painter, and to Warhol's ironic gesture, they were effectively de-centering the figure of the artist-creator. In this way, the Ukrainian artists set in motion conflicting and mutually exclusive perspectives. While situated on the periphery of Modernism, the Ukrainian artists' strategies coincide with the perspectives of their Western contemporaries of Neo-expressionist persuasion far more substantially than in the previously mentioned issue of sincerity. Despite a tone of condemnation and accusation of Neo-expressionists, the cross-cutting sentiment in the Expressionist issue of *Art in America* is a melancholic realization of the deadlock in which Western culture found itself in the eighties, when breaking the norm was the norm. Thus, for Owens, this type of art embodies a "response to a situation in which the modernist transgression is a norm that can neither be embraced nor rejected."[79] Ratcliff admits that "modernism needs the entranced, distracted naiveté of Expressionism on the way toward its sophistication,

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[78] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

[79] Owen, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women."

its ironies, its fictions of unmitigated consciousness."[80] Even Foster, while appalled by the Neo-expressionist desire to be seen as original and authentic, asserts the inescapability of the renewal of Expressionist sensibility as a necessary "response to a process of progressive alienation."[81] The deep crisis arising from the re-evaluation of the ideas of Modernism, in particular its radical rejection of conventions, affected the art and art criticism of the 1980s, leading to a reflection on the situation after which all myths had been debunked and all norms subverted—or at least challenged— that is, after the 1960s and 1970s (Minimalism, Conceptualism, Feminism). Thus an affinity between the Neo-Expressionist and Ukrainian postmodern generation was a realization of the deep crisis that followed upon the dissolution of the modernist paradigm of autonomous and individualistic authorship. It was perceived as exhausted in the West, while modernism still was being rediscovered in the late Soviet Union, a period in which artists witnessed firsthand the decomposition of the great Soviet canon of Socialist Realism.

Within the conventions of Socialist Realism, and intertwined with Modernism, Soviet official art also exhibited signs of crisis generated by the simultaneous rigidity and ampleness of the doctrine seeking to illustrate and enforce the betterment of socialist citizens. Past styles, treated in a revisionist manner, began to encroach on the territory of Soviet art, and became an unexpected token for both official and unofficial Soviet artists.[82] A case in point could be seen in the work of Tetiana Yablonska, the matriarch of Ukrainian Socialist Realism and twice recipient of the State Stalin Prizes in art (1950, 1951). In her meticulously handled works, Yablonska experimented with atmospheric

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[80] Ratcliff, "The Short Life of the Sincere Stroke."

[81] "So the return of Expressionism is less than a turn in a Zeitgeist and more than a local reaction. It is a latter response to the same historical process that once enduced German Expressionism – a process of progressive alienation." Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," 83.

[82] Erofeev, "Metamorphozy "Moskovskogo Avantgarda"," 42-46.

impressionist elements, which she introduced into her work from the 1970s onwards (fig. 10), and which the authorities tolerated.[83] Her borrowing from the repertoire of the world historic styles–partially tolerated because of her high status due to past achievements-- was not as blatant as in *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. Nevertheless, Yablonska's stylistic citation was unequivocally historical, even though it was not as misplaced as in the case of Savadov and Senchenko, for it had particular and historically conditioned reasons. When Yablonska quoted Impressionism in her manner of handling paint, or allowed a brighter gamut for rendering some traditional Ukrainian patterns on her canvases, she expressed her affinity with the *shistdesyatnyky* movement in Ukrainian art. These were the poets and artists who since Khrushchev's Thaw, but predominantly in the 1960s, aimed to bridge the gap separating them, through the Stalinist enforcement of Socialist Realist methods, from European Modernism. They also reinstated some traditional Ukrainian forms, themes and patterns in their creative work. Savadov and Senchenko, however, neither belonged to this movement (of their "fathers'" generation), nor shared its political agenda. Their quotation practice is of a much more random character; no ideological concern could be extracted from their choice of imagery or style. Nevertheless, a return to the history and the past, as evidenced in *Cleopatra's Sorrows*, is far more pertinent for Savadov and Senchenko than any other 'returns' associated with Neo-expressionism and Transavantgarde in the West.

The only distinct historical parallel arising from Savadov and Senchenko's painting, which may also shed some light on the reasons of its protagonist's sadness, is the theme of the collapsing empire. Cleopatra, in her antique garments, the last Egyptian

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[83] See for example Tetiana Yablonska, *Kataloh Vystavky Etiudiv [Catalogue of the Exhibition of Sketches]*, (Kyiv, 1981), Exhibition catalogue.

pharaoh before its absorption into the Roman Empire, embodies the entropy of the end of times when former adversaries assume one another's characteristics to the point where no confrontation is possible. *Cleopatra's Sorrow*'s thunderous effect at the official exhibition could be attributed to the fact that she was mourning the imminent collapse of the Soviet Empire through the mere fact of her stunning presence among the official artworks supposedly representing the achievements of Soviet art. Such an outcome seems inescapable if one recalls Boris Groys' interpretation of Socialist Realism as a style-and-a-half.[84] His line of argument stems from the notion of "struggle for artistic heritage", which contributed to the stylistic elasticity of the official Soviet style, additionally informed by the fight against formalism that discouraged one from adhering to a singular formalistic solution. According to Groys, Socialist Realism slowly consumed and recycled more and more styles for "socialist purposes."[85] That process contributed to the assumption within late-Soviet culture that the official style had acquired a certain postmodernist flavor, hence a definition of the style-and-a-half, a style stretched between modernist rigor and postmodernist ironic eclecticism. Thus, Socialist Realism ceased to be a style with a coherent formal structure but turned instead into a method dictated by ideological rather than aesthetic reasons intrinsic to art media. It seemed that the proclivity towards appropriation underscored by Groys's theory was shared both by Western Postmodernism, and, to a certain extent, Socialist Realism. Savadov and Senchenko's work erased boundaries while bidding farewell to the old dichotomy of the

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[84] "Socialist realism was, if you will, a style and a half: its proto-postmodernist strategy of appropriation, continued to serve the modernist ideal of historical exclusiveness, internal purity and autonomy from everything external." Boris Groys, "A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism," in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, eds. Thomas Lahusen and E. A. Dobrenko, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 76-90, here p. 79.
[85] Ibid., 79.

official and unofficial. *Cleopatra's Sorrow* was shrouded in melancholy for her contemporary viewers due to a suspicion that it stands on the brink of the old world, soon to become history. The painting signaled that the new order, which is nigh, would reconcile contradictions such as those that it embodied: those of the unofficial work exhibited in the official venue.

European and American Neo-expressionists do not share with the Ukrainian artists a set of stylistic influences or definitive citations; rather, they share the complexity of engagement with the Modernist tradition. The very umbrella notion of Postmodernism would necessarily achieve different nuances of meaning in the late Soviet conditions. Theoretician Groys, a product of Soviet unofficial life, was among the first to note that Soviet version of Postmodernism was bound to be highly idiosyncratic given the fact that it was introduced to the soil already fertile with stylistic pluralism of Socialist Realist recycling of diverse style for ideological purpose. This specific attribution was formulated by Groys in his polemic with poet Vsevolod Nekrasov in *Literaturnaia Gazeta.*[86] Groys, who was involved in Moscow's conceptualist circles (which artists he assigned to the rubric of postmodernism in the article in question) reminded Nekravov that in the Soviet context avant-garde is inevitably tinted with its associations with totalitarianism.[87] Certainly, this element was absent in Western postmodernism, which did not attribute any direct negative political associations to the Modernist tradition. Consequently, the relation of late Soviet art to the postmodern is rather complicated due to the fact that it was conceived as reacting not only to the modernist norm but also to a semi-postmodersnist official doctrine. If the Western Neo-expressionists were

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[86] Groys, "O polze teorii dlia iskusstva."

[87] Later Boris Groys developed this thought into the book Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (London: Verso Books, 1992).

considering the possibility to critically connect with the tradition of early expressionism after all its norms were dismantled, their Ukrainian counterparts were contemplating the situation in which the technique of appropriation, a tool of the western contemporary art, felt strangely at home within the official doctrine they were supposed to fight against.

Totally oblivious to the critical debates around Postmodernism to which they were compared and even identified, Ukrainian artists were, at the time, consumed by the euphoria of a sudden freedom in art and society in general. Preoccupied more with the current local disputes with official, established, and long-acclaimed Soviet artists over permissible boundaries in late Soviet art, they largely failed to appreciate the "radical" assumptions of Western postmodernist discourse. In contrast to Western Neo-expressionists, there was nothing outrageous in their recourse to history (thematically and stylistically), personality and the technique of large-scale oil painting. Thus, the idea of a "return" operated very differently in perestroika-period Ukraine. Everything the Western postmodern artists were returning to was already present and entrenched in the Soviet official canon. This set the stage for young Ukrainian artists who were prepared to object vehemently to the status quo and intended to dismantle it.

During the 1980s, it bears noting that, Ukrainian artists were not returning to the media rejected by the previous generation as they continued to work in the genre of painting on canvas. As students of the Kyiv Art Institute,[88] they were well versed in the tradition of easel painting, which most among them studied. As capable copyists of accomplished Socialist Realists works of the 1930s-1950s, which in turn were modeled

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[88] This Institute was the most prestigious educational institution in the sphere of art education in the Ukrainian Socialist Republic. It was known as the harbinger of academic easel painting, strictly adhering to the Socialist Realist doctrine at the time. It was founded in 1917 as a Ukrainian Art Academy by the short-lived Ukrainian republic *Tsentralna Rada* (1917-1918). In 1924 when Bolsheviks were in power it was renamed Kyiv Art Institute. Since 1998, it is called 'National Academy of Visual Arts and Architecture.'

on prime examples of the Old Masters and the Russian Itinerants of the 19th century, they saw no purpose in abandoning a genre that they knew thoroughly. Equally important was the emotional experience associated with socialist realist artworks, especially starting from the 1970s with their tendency towards an introspective attention to human feeling, an inwardness that would pervade the official art of Soviet Union.[89] Indeed, there would be no return for artists entrenched in the tradition of depicting Soviet man, together with all of the incumbent official obligations to capture the figure faithfully and fully in the process of transformation into the new socialist being. As for narration, the most common didactic methods sanctioned and approved by the Socialist Realist canon prevailed. The genre of grand historical painting persisted as a continuing legacy in this canon, since there was still a need, for ideological purposes, to depict the story of great communist leaders. Thus history, however constructed or construed, remained a necessary part of official Soviet art.

Nevertheless, those Ukrainian perestroika artists who were labeled Transavantgardists or Neo-impressionists had little notion of the trends they were supposedly representing. More importantly, however, they were not familiar with any critical debates surrounding the notions outlined, developed and critiqued by Western thinkers, be it critics or art historians. Instead, it is important to underscore that during the period of late socialism, Soviet art critics readily adopted many Western terms and ideas to describe the new phenomena witnessed in the new political era, which freed the Soviet Union from the strictures of its cultural isolation policy. In doing so, however they disregarded the difference in contexts and backgrounds between the West and the Soviet

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[89] Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 411-448.

sphere. Ukrainian perestroika art, although bearing some formal similarities with the Transavantgarde and Neo-expressionism, was conditioned by unique circumstances that inflected this artistic practice. This hybrid art appeared as a result of the complex interweaving of sometimes conflicting factors including the decomposition of Socialist Realism and the rediscovery of the local and artistically indigenous styles, not least of which was Ukrainian baroque. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the social and theoretical context in which *Cleopatra's Sorrows* was born.

1.4 Youth exhibitions and art squats – The semi-alternative and underground art scene in Kyiv

Savadov and Senchenko were the first Ukrainian artists to exhibit and cause consternation at the 1987 Moscow Youth Exhibition, with their *Cleopatra's Sorrow* attaining legendary status as a result. Nevertheless, they were not the only Ukrainian artists to explore the margins of the permissible in late Soviet art, or to challenge the dominant position of Socialist Realism. In order to better understand this dynamic, we need to consider the art of the generation from which Savadov and Senchenko emerged. Their painting appeared within the very specific context of local institutions together with that of their contemporaries, artists who will be discussed at the greater detail in the second chapter. This section will be devoted to the context of art squats and semi-official exhibitions that Savadov and Senchenko shared with the artists of their generation and in particular with the group often called Paris Commune, after the name of the art squat in which they lived.

As already mentioned, the main public Soviet spaces which some unofficial art infiltrated during the perestroika times were the Youth exhibitions [molodezhnia vystavka], both local-Republican [respublikanskaia] and all-Soviet [vsesoiuznaia]. The loosening of ideological control over the content of the Youth exhibitions led to the extreme popularity of these shows, which were believed to be the carriers of new progressive tendencies by the general public. As testified in *Pravda*, the most traditionally rigid and most widespread newspaper in the Soviet Union, as well as the official outlet of the communist party, "No cultural event has been covered in newspapers and magazines, on radio and TV, as extensively as youth exhibitions."[90] Beginning with the *16th Youth Exhibition* in Moscow (1986), which opened its doors (or perhaps left them ajar) to Soviet Hyperrealism and even Conceptualism, such shows became the main vehicles for conveying the values of perestroika in the realm of art. Centrally positioned in Moscow, these exhibitions offered much more freedom to artists who came from the provinces which were more restrictive and did not allow for a public exhibition of deviant artwork. This was in itself the incentive to participate outside one's own republic.

Only after painting was validated by the center, did the provincial administrations tolerate the art of those who participated and the local artists who would emulate their work. After the success of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* in Moscow, the *Republican Youth Exhibition* of the same year (1987) demonstrated in Kyiv a noticeable and previously impossible diversity in styles. Savadov presented his individual work *Guillaume Apollinaire's Dream* (1987) together with the works of other artists of Kyiv's group of Savadov's followers such as Oleksandr Hnylytsky and several innovative artists from

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[90] D. Gorbuntsov and V. Lipatov, "V Poiskhakh Lichnosti: Pochemu Tuskneet Palitra Molodykh Khudozhnikov. [Searching for Personality: Why the Palette of the Young Artists is Fading]," *Pravda* (Moscow), April 3, 1987.

Odessa. Another important exhibition of the same year in Kyiv was organized by the journalist Serhiy Sviatchenko at the Gallery of the Polytechnic Institute, which featured a dialogue between artists from Kyiv and Tallinn, Estonia. The pairing of Ukrainian and Baltic artists, whose reputation in the Soviet Union placed them among the most relatively advanced and free from ideological restraints, constituted an important moment of reciprocal exchange and shared ambitions. This horizontal connection between the republics as a way of circumventing the consolidating presence of the center was a clear indicator of the decentering tendencies enacted by perestroika's policies.

The 1988 *Youth Exhibition* in Moscow once again hosted many young Ukrainian artists, strengthening a phenomenon in the making, prompting critics to remark upon its novel organizational structure. Departing from previous models, the show was organized into national pavilions, disrupting the utopian notion of an imagined homogeneity of Soviet peoples. The Ukrainian pavilion gathered the work of over a dozen artists (including individual works by Savadov and Senchenko).

The year 1988 was also marked by an extraordinary event in Ukrainian exhibition history: the *First Soviet-American Exhibition* jointly organized by Soviet and American curators.[91] Altogether, 17 American, Ukrainian, Russian and Baltic artists presented their works in Kyiv in October 1988. Before going on display in the United States, the exhibition travelled to six Ukrainian cities. The objective of this undertaking was politically motivated; it aimed to have an impact on curtailing the Cold War antagonism between the Soviet Union and the United States. A clear outcome of the prevailing perestroika policies, it was intended to foster the mutual cultural interests of former

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[91] This exhibition will be discussed in a greater detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

enemies and inspire a dialogue in the arts between the two superpowers. The site and opening of this momentous display in the provinces, rather than in Moscow, signaled the undercurrent of de-centralization.

Kyiv was soon to be recognized as the site of an alternative art scene brewing in the Soviet Union. Ironically, Ukrainian alternative art developed in places previously reserved only for traditional and officially sanctioned art. The Sedniv House of Creativity in the Chernihiv region, for instance, was transformed into a hotbed of new Ukrainian art in 1988. Two years in a row, this establishment housed and supported the work of nearly 40 young artists. Using standard resources such as those of the House of Creativity (which was financially supported by the official Union of Soviet Artists), they undermined the system from within also exposing its weakness. What persisted was an exchange of ideas facilitated by communal work and shared dwelling in Sedniv, which then culminated in Kyiv through the presentation of large-scale paintings, which dominated the Republican Youth exhibition of 1989.

The very same artists who exhibited in Moscow and in Kyiv came from many regional centers of Ukraine. The majority were students of the Academy of Arts in Kyiv including Savadov, Hnylytsky, Oleg Holosiy, Valeriya Troubina, Vassiliy Tsagolov and Kostiantyn Reunov. However, though Savadov and Senchenko were born in Kyiv, many of the artists who responded to their message were from the provinces, and later populated the art squats. The core artists of the Paris Commune were all from the East of Ukraine: Holosiy was from Dnipropetrovsk, Troubina from Luhansk and Hnylytsky from Kharkiv. Oleg Tistol, originally from the South of Ukraine, graduated from the Kyiv Republican Art School and went on to study at the Lviv Institute of Decorative Arts;

Aleksandr Roitburd was a graduate from the Odessa College of Arts, and Pavlo Makov from the Kharkiv Institute of Design.

By the end of 1989 an emerging group of young Ukrainian artists had found residence in an old communal apartment under reconstruction on Lenin Street in the center of Kyiv. As residents moved out, the artists moved in. Valeria Troubina, Vassiliy Tsaholov and Oleh Holosiy were among the first squatters. With the Savadov and Senchenko studio nearby and art critics Aleksandr Soloviov, Konstantin Akinsha (originally from Kyiv but living in Moscow at the time) and Mikhail Rashkovetskiy (from Odessa) visiting often to discuss art and share their ideas with the artistic enclave, the activities at this site seeded the alternative art movement in Kyiv and all of Ukraine. Soloviov, in particular, influenced the group by analyzing the nascent shift in art and bringing his familiarity with Western art methodology to the picture. In the aftermath of the Moscow Youth exhibitions, they also enjoyed attention from the most progressive Moscow art critics of the time: Vladimir Levashov, Olga Sviblova, Andrei Kovalev and a young curator from Kishinev active in Moscow, Marat Guelman.

Guelman organized a huge exhibition of Ukrainian art in Moscow in February of 1990. It was called *Babylon* and installed in the Youth Center bringing increased attention to the emerging painters. As this event coincided with the blossoming of the first art squat in Kyiv on Lenin Street, it revealed its participants to constitute one coherent movement, exhibiting similar traits of a fully-fledged art group. The catalogues associated with the *Babylon* show declared the artists to be of a generation that would "no longer struggle against the restrictions of Socialist Realism, nor identify themselves with

the "opposition" movement," articulating in such a manner the dream of the generation to be of a principally new quality. [92]

By the time the Lenin street art squat ceased to be available to them (the building was finally closed down for reconstruction, forcing the artists to relocate to another abandoned building on Parizhskaia Kommuna street (now 18A Mikhailovskaia street), their movement was already fully formed, its history and evolution documented by several shows and catalogues. Starting in the fall of 1990, the next phase of the group was associated with the art squat on Parizhskaia Kommuna (Paris Commune) and the name of the street became the common denominator for the entire group, who lived in both squats but were dubbed the "artists of the Paris Commune".[93] Even those such as Savadov and Senchenko, who did not live on Paris Commune Street but shared similar artistic values, fell into the orbit of the same rubric, and their artwork from the period in question was studied from the same perspective.[94]

The history of the development of alternative art structures during the perestroika period parallels the gradual growth of the self-organized system that was only partially interwoven with official circles through exhibition venues and mass media involvement. Remaining distinct from the Soviet system of art unions, it differed from these official institutions by virtue of its very own self-definition and by the type—not to mention the style and ideology—of the organization itself. Initiated solely by artists and not

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[92] *Babylon*, Edited by Marat Guelman (Moscow Youth Center, February, 1990), Exhibition catalogue, 5.

[93] Exhibition in 1991 in the Union of Artists Hall on Vladymyrska street "Artists of the Paris Commune". Vassily Tsagolov's performance *Père Lachaise*.

[94] *Parkomuna. Mistse. Spilnota. Yavyshche [Parkomuna. Place. Community. Phenomenon],* edited by Tetiana Kochubynska (Kyiv: Pinchuk Art Center, 2017). http://pinchukartcentre.org/files/library/pinchukartcentre-parcommune-place-community-phenomenon.pdf

establishments, the art squats were heterotopic spaces[95] of otherness, allowing participants to experience a sense of community neither initiated nor sanctioned from above, nor centrally controlled, like the monolithic Soviet Union of Artists. Furthermore, the art squats facilitated an exchange of ideas and artistic techniques, while helping artists to contemplate their collective identity. For the first time since the avant-garde period of the early 20th century, Ukrainian nonconformism became an organized movement in Kyiv, attracting artists and critics from the entire country. Their artistic efforts carved out a zone of autonomy that signaled an ideological shift in a perestroika-driven society. Soon Kyiv would realize its potential as a future cultural capital.

1.5 The Critical Reception of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* by Soviet Media

The widespread attention focused on the youth exhibitions during the perestroika years was precipitated by the aura of semi-forbidden artworks on display. The atmosphere of ideological decomposition in the Soviet Union spawned hybrid phenomena, which, like the youth exhibitions, combined officially endorsed art with art engendered beyond official structures, as was the case of art produced in the Kyiv art squats. In the absence of any alternative or oppositional media reporting, coverage of such exhibitions, whether favorable or not, continued to be published in the regular Soviet print media, including specialized art magazines or daily and weekly newspapers.

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[95] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27. My dissertation is primarily concerned with the artists who lived in three art squats: on Lenina Street and on Paris Commune Street in Kyiv and on Furmanny Lane in Moscow.

The 17th youth exhibition of 1987, in which *Cleopatra's Sorrow* was on display, garnered an avalanche of immediate responses in everyday press, including such newspapers as *Moskovskaia Pravda* (Moscow Truth), *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* (Young Communists of Moscow), and even *Pravda* (Truth), one of the most widely-read newspapers of the USSR.[96] The opinions and evaluations of journalists resonated later in the expert analysis unfolding on pages of less frequently circulating publications dedicated to art production. Extensive reviews by art critics and historians followed suit in magazines such as *Iskusstvo* (Art), *Dekorativnoie Iskusstvo* (Decorative Art), *Tvorchestvo* (Creativity).[97] All but one (by A. Yakimovich) of the reviews discussed Savadov and Senchenko's now famous painting *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. The extraordinary media success of the artwork was underlined by the large scale of this truly blockbuster exhibition, which included over 2,300 artworks by 1,300 artists from all republics of the Soviet Union. The attention of critics to the scandalous work of the Ukrainian artists did not subside even after major art magazines enunciated their expert opinions on the show. A year later, *Iskusstvo* hosted a feature dedicated to the painting of Ukrainian critic Aleksandr Soloviov.[98] The theoretical and art historical battle ensued in books on young

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[96] L. Nekrasova, "Skvoz prizmu romantizma [Through a lens of romanticism]," *Moskovskaia Pravda,* March 1, 1987. E. Gorchakova, "Davaite sporit. [Let's argue]," *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, April 15, 1987. Gorbuntsov and Lipatov, "V Poiskakh lichnosti."

[97] A. Yakimovich, "O semnadtsatoi vystavke molodykh khudozhnikov Moskvy [On a seventeenth exhibition of the young artists of Moscow]," *Iskusstvo,* no. 4, (1987): 16; Sidorov, "Ravnenie na…?" 16; Olga Kholmogorova, "Deistvo, Mirazh? [Action, mirage?]," *Tvorchestvo*, no.8 (1987): 12; Vladimir Levashov, "Molodost Strany: Zametki s vystavki [Youth of the Country: Notes from the Exhibition]," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 9 (1987): 2, 22.

[98] Aleksandr Soloviov, "Po tu storony ochevidnosti: Predvaritelnye razmyshlenia po povodu odnogo iavlenia [Beyond that side of the obviousness: Preliminary reflections concerning a certain event]," *Iskusstvo*, no. 10 (1988): 35.

artists of the USSR[99], but also in other publications that summed up the emerging art and art criticism of the period.[100]

Even though all of these publications were state-endorsed and subjected to the communist party's censorship, the level of their ideological loyalty varied, something that partially explained the discrepancy in their evaluations of Savadov and Senchenko's work, and of the show in general. The most negative comments came from the most ideologically entrenched *Tvorchestvo* journal, published monthly from 1957 to 1992, and known as a bulwark of conservative art criticism. Both authors of this journal, Olga Kholmogorova and Aleksandr Sidorov lamented the poor quality of the layout and individual works of the show, blaming it all on perestroika. According to Kholmogorova, perestroika in "the spiritual sphere" risked turning into its negative double, due to the "fear of gaining the reputation of a retrograde.[101]

The journal *Iskusstvo* was the oldest (published since 1933) and most authoritative art magazine in USSR, as the official print vehicle of the Ministry of Culture, the Artists' Union, and the Art Academy of the USSR. It was academically inclined but did not completely shun innovative art and methodology. Due to its high standing in the hierarchy among art institutions, the magazine could afford to publish less conventional material such as an explicitly favorable analysis of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* by Soloviov, which included western art terminology. The most liberal of all was the magazine *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* (published from 1957-1993), which enjoyed relative freedom of speech because it did not cover the high genres in art that were

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[99] A.I. Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh: Zhyvopis Sovetskikh Khudozhnikov 1960kh-1980-kh godov [Generations of Young. Painting by Soviet artists of 1960s-1980s]* (Moskva: Sovetski Khudozhnik, 1989).

[100] A.K. Yakimovich, "Problemy sovremennogo iskusstva," *Sovetskoe Iskusstvoznanie*, no. 26 (1990): 22; Leonid Bazhanov and Valerii Turchin, "Ritorika totalnogo somnenia," *Tvorchestvo*, no.2 (1989): 2.

[101] Kholmogorova, "Deistvo, Mirazh," 12.

watched most closely for ideological correctness. Vladimir Levashov's review, therefore, was the most original among those listed above, written in a highly idiosyncratic language and reflective of his interest in contemporary Western philosophy.

Cleopatra's Sorrow earned an unforeseen boost in popularity from the newspaper *Pravda*, the most influential daily media outlet in the country, voicing the official position of the Communist Party since 1912. The painting was discussed in an ominously titled interview, "Deep Roots", conducted by the newspaper's editor of the arts and literature section, Dmitry Gorbuntsov, with Vladimir Kemenov, the most highly ranked art Stalin-era critic.[102] The conversation revolved around the successes of official Soviet artists, who in the opinion of Kemenov were "advancing the realist tradition." The popularity of youth exhibitions was presented in the interview as a threat to these achievements. Nothing revealed the "deeply rooted" crisis more than the youth exhibitions that aimed at "a revision of the Marxist-Leninist aesthetics" under the aegis of perestroika policies. This statement, in accordance with the tradition of Soviet press, was peppered with references to letters from *Pravda's* readers, a schoolteacher, a construction worker, and an artist. They apparently shared with the old-school distinguished art critic a concern regarding the "destiny of realism." *Cleopatra's Sorrow* was presented by Kemenov as exemplifying the decay of tradition along with three other works, and condemned as a "dubious experiment." Stalinist critics spoke with indignation about the "huge vulgar canvas" (*Cleopatra's Sorrow*) which "replaced realist imagery with subjective signs and questionable symbolism."[103] Interestingly, but predictably, as a

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[102] Vladimir Kemenov previously worked in Stalin's prize committee (1949-1953) and as Director of the State Tretyakov Art gallery in Moscow (1938-1940). At the time of the interview, he held the honorable and influential position of Vice President of the USSR Art Academy.

[103] Gorbuntsov, "Glubokie Korni [Deep roots]." *Pravda*, May 18, 1987.

specialist on Velasquez,[104] Kemenov failed to make note of the artists' reference to the Spanish Baroque painter's rather famous *Equestrian Portrait of Prince Balthasar Charles*, which Savadov and Senchenko encoded in their work. With the public largely disillusioned with the Soviet Union, and accustomed to reading Soviet newspapers in between the lines, such accusations were interpreted to the great advantage of the young artists from Kyiv. Reprimanded by the "general" of Soviet criticism[105], Savadov and Senchenko were as a result embraced by the liberally-minded artists and public, with their immediate popularity growing fast.

Numerous reactions to the show that followed the *Pravda's* diatribe compelled other authors to discuss further the subject of the controversial painting. All these reviews revealed that Soviet art critics obviously struggled to effectively analyze artwork for which they were ill-prepared, not having the necessary interpretive tools. As a desperate measure to save face, they responded by borrowing such terms as 'Transavangardia' or 'Neo-expressionism'[106] from codified Western art history, or made futile attempts to invent their own terms, such as "grotesque anti-design," (*groteskny antidizain*)[107] some declared the painting to belong entirely beyond the sphere of art criticism (*vnekhudozhestvennyi*).[108] In more recent publications[109] this terminological indeterminacy is usually narrowed down to the enumeration of Western terms utilized

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[104] Vladimir Kemenov, *Kartiny Velaskesa.* [Velazquez' s Paintings.] (Moscow, 1969).

[105] Konstantin Akinsha in his article poignantly referred to Vladimir Kemenov as to the "last watchdog of the Stalinist art criticism". Konstantin Akinsha, "Soviet Union: Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko." in *Art News* (April 1991): 110.

[106] Bazhanov and Turchin, "Ritorika Totalnogo Somnenia [The Rhetoric of Total Hesitation]."

[107] Levashov, "Molodost Strany: Zametki s vystavki [Youth of the country: Notes from the exhibition]," 22.

[108] Kholmogorova, "Deistvo, Mirazh? [Action, mirage?]," 12.

[109] Barshynova, Oksana. *New Ukrainian Wave,* National Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv, 2009. Exhibition catalogue. Aleksandr Soloviov and Alisa Lozhkina, "Novaia Istoriya Iskusstva. [New Art History]." *Top-10*. http://top10-kiev.livejournal.com/281049.html. Last Accessed March 2016.

while the confusion among the Soviet critics, less or more liberal, is usually omitted from the discussion. However, it is very indicative of Soviet art criticism's lag (in contrast to the new art). Visual artists were more sensitive to the transitional situation of the perestroika era and capable of responding with radically new aesthetics that elicit a passionate reaction from the public. Even more importantly, this discrepancy clarifies the perception of perestroika as a policy of westernization of Soviet society, which, through the elimination of censorship, necessarily leads to the thriving of Western art analogues.[110] This early period of emerging new art was marked by the absence of consensus in its analysis, which involved labeling as Western all newly emancipated art. Nevertheless, all attempts to interpret this art were studied and heeded both in official circles and beyond. In an atmosphere in which information was still a precious and scarce resource, the voices of the more traditionally-inclined critics also complemented the choir, struggling to come to terms with a rapidly changing art scene that was vociferously demanding a new art methodology.

Stumbling over the formal riddles of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, many of the critics speculated on the inspirational origins for the main figures represented, while others promoted the work as marking a nascent shift in Soviet art. Moscow critic Vladimir Levashov, writing a review of the show in *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, avoided any direct condemnation or praise of the notorious artwork. Instead, he saw it as an example of the emerging tendency to curtail a predominant pictorial symbolism that had prevailed since the last decade. The new trend, which in the opinion of Levashov was perfectly

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[110] The widespread belief that the elimination of the communist party intervention in Soviet life will result in the appearance of a "normal" Western-type art became really apparent during such scandalous events as the *Interpol exhibition*. Viktor Miziano, "Interpol, "The Apology of Defeat"," *Moscow Art Magazine* (No. 1, 2005): http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/41/article/799

embodied in the sensibilities of Savadov and Senchenko, produced works that on the surface of things at least, appeared as symbols, though they could not be deciphered as such. Levashov's analysis of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* culminated in his review article of the *Youth of the Country* show. His conclusions, burdened with pessimistic poetics, derived from his analysis of this oil painting, and evolved into a diagnosis of the art produced by an entire new generation. For this critic, *Cleopatra's Sorrow* serves as a platform upon which Levashov projects the lived confusion of his own times and his melancholic experience of it. His worldview drastically diverges from the perspective on perestroika promoted in the official press as a period of inspired optimism. In Levashov's opinion, only works such as *Cleopatra's Sorrow* were able to demonstrate "the reality in which we live" and which "does not suit well for human existence."

Without any extrapolations as to which reality was implied and what was so unbearable about it, the writer invokes a familiar Romantic trope in his discussion of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* of monsters who guide artistic creativity. The term "monsters of illusion" appears in his dense text, resisting interpretation along with such turns of a phrase as: "sign-parasites" [*znaki-parazity*] inhabiting the "parade symbol-painting" [*paradnye kartiny-simvoly*]. These terms are just as enigmatic and undecipherable as is the image of a woman riding a tiger that they were supposed to explain. Levashov's highly idiosyncratic language is reminiscent of Romantic decadent poetry in its ominous tonality and complex metaphors: "When hollowed-out symbols get caught in the space of

an art-trap, their true nature is laid bare: they appear as sign-parasites, monsters of illusion, sucking life and pretending to be real entities."[111]

What Levashov established was the genealogy of Savadov and Senchenko's painting within the history of Soviet official art. In a nutshell, he argues that before, Soviet artists would use objects to convey symbolic meaning[112], but now all that remained were pure symbols stripped of their meaning. What was bizarre in the context of this conversation on Soviet art was that it was conducted in terms that betrayed the writer's familiarity with Western (post)Structuralism. His view of the painting-signifier as devoid of its meaningful connection to a concrete signified appears as an invitation to fill the gap of emptiness with a very personal interpretation—a process that resonates with the then current Western philosophical discourse. Thus Levashov's interpretation of *Cleopatra's Sorrows* inadvertently accommodates the concept of an empty or floating signifier[113]–an idea that would never find its way even to the pages of the Soviet (albeit progressive) magazine, *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*. The signifier deprived of a stable meaning and connection to a fixed object, and capable of assuming a new meaning depending on the context, was first theorized by Claude Lévi-Strauss with its implications radically stretched in the postmodernist period by Jacques Derrida who spoke of the freeplay of signifiers. In 1980s-Moscow, Derrida's work was popular in

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[111] "Когда опустошенные символы попадают в поле искусства-ловушки, их истинная природа обнажается: они предстают знаками-паразитами, монстрами иллюзии, присосавшиеся к живому и выдающими себя за сущее." Levashov, "Molodost Strany: Zametki s vystavki," 22.

[112] In the Severe Style, for instance, in which covert religious symbolism was widespread, a young worker could be rendered in a manner reminiscent of Byzantine icons with a cross of electric power lines towering above her as a Christian symbol.

[113] Concept developed in semiotics and post-structuralist thinking by Daniel Chandler, Jacques Derrida, and Claude Levi-Strauss.

unofficial circles[114], translated and disseminated in *samizdat* (self-published literature)–

and therefore possibly familiar to Levashov. Levashov's elusive text was indicative of the

late Soviet period when texts written by the most progressive critics aimed to

demonstrate their familiarity with Western terminology in a cautious way, as if

employing a secret code available only to the initiated. The covert Western references are

reflective of the predispositions of critics who were often willing to define a local

movement by employing a Western term or idea to demonstrate their ideological

inclination, and not necessarily to deepen an understanding of the subject they were

discussing.

Other critics were more openly antagonistic to the work that denied them the easy

reading of its content, style, and meaning. The impossibility of defining *Cleopatra's*

Sorrow in traditional art historical terms of formal analysis prompted Soviet critic Olga

Kholmogorova to denounce it on the pages of the *Tvorchestvo* magazine as non-artistic

and kitsch. She condemned the organizers of the show for their bad taste–demonstrated

by the inclusion of the painting.[115] According to Kholmogorova, such works were empty

and 'pseudo-serious', while threatening—in vain, according to the Soviet critic—the

"sincere and individualistic atmosphere of the entire show." To support her claims,

Kholmogorova quoted several visitor responses from the comments book, in which only

226 of the 490 were positive. Several dull laudatory opinions cited by the critic pale in

comparison to the negative comments she included. For example, a certain engineer V.A.

Vassiliev claimed that, of the more than 2,000 works displayed, not 10 were worthy in

the exhibition, and proposed that the "dismal rubbish and filth should be gathered into

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[114] Many of the conversations, including the one with Jacques Derrida, were recorded in the late 1980s. Ryklin, *Dekonstruktia i destruktsia: Besedy s filosofami.*
[115] Kholmogorova, "Deistvo, Mirazh? [Action, mirage?]," 12.

one heap and bulldozed."[116] Another visitor declared the paintings he saw to be good only as dirty rugs for scrubbing the floor, and suggested the artists represented become employed as gas pipeline construction workers.[117]

Another critic, Aleksandr Sidorov, who also published his review of the show in *Tvorchestvo*, did not hide his negative feelings toward *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, which he referred to as "perhaps, the most scandalous painting of the exhibition." He implied that only this notoriety had forced him to talk about the painting which he reckoned among those "bellowing" works in the show that "confused self-advertisement with a respect toward the viewer." The best at the exhibition and of the generation of the 1980s, according to Sidorov, were those who looked to the Severe Style of the 1960s with its emphasis on the artist's ethical responsibility towards society. Apparently, Savadov and Senchenko were among the most unethical artists, for their work signified "a bewildered consciousness, the loss of faith in the old ideals."[118] Echoing Kholmogorova's consideration of their work as a threat to sincerity, Sidorov accused Ukrainian artists of faking this very sincerity: "their striving toward barbarian sincerity and primordial naiveté was partially utopian and partially calculated."[119] The products of Savadov and Senchenko's "bewildered consciousness" were "beasts and monstrosities" [*monstry i chudovishcha*], claimed Sidorov, also utilizing the same monster trope as Levashov had done. It seems that the painting scared Soviet critics, including both the liberal Levashov and more traditional Sidorov, who turned their view of the painting, and the need to interpret it into an experience of sublime horror.

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[116] This was a reference to the actual event of the 1974, so-called 'Bulldozer exhibition,' in which the works of nonconformist artists were literally bulldozed by KGB.

[117] Kholmogorova, "Deistvo, Mirazh? [Action, mirage?]," 13.

[118] Ibid., 16.

[119] Sidorov, "Ravnenie na…?," 16.

Aside from blaming it all on the ill consciousness of the artists, Sidorov also ventured into research for the sources of the imagery; his was the first (among the articles mentioned) attempt to unravel the iconographical mysteries of the painting. Somewhat remarkably, he attributed the forms of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* as modeled on Falconet's equestrian monument to Peter the First (fig. 11), shrouded in St. Petersburg's fogs and legends.[120] Commenting on the general atmosphere of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, Sidorov noted that the Ukrainian work was also indebted to the dreamlike pictures of Salvador Dalí, which, in his opinion, suited the contemporary experience of Savadov and Senchenko. Unwittingly, Sidorov grounded the imagery of the notorious painting in sources from both the East and West, overlooking the possibility that the artists of Kyiv might be drawing on a local flavor.

When Kyiv art critic Aleksandr Soloviov entered the debates a year after *Cleopatra's Sorrow* debut with an article provocatively titled "Beyond Obviousness", he was very much aware of the earlier criticism of Savadov and Senchenko.[121] First, he addressed the utter confusion on the part of the majority of the critics in regard to *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. Soloviov's analysis of the now famous yet enigmatic artwork began with an indictment of traditional Soviet criticism and the inadequacy of the existing art historical tools at their disposal to respond productively to the artwork. Soloviov recognized that the inability to deal with the painting on its own terms caused something akin to an aesthetic shock for liberal and traditional viewers and critics alike. What partly led to this state of mind was that the work itself did not fit into any existing conventional

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[120] The famous statue was modeled by French classicist sculptor Étienne Maurice Falconet and erected in St. Petersburg in 1782. It was also known as "Cooper Horseman" after the title of Aleksandr Pushkin's famous poem and was dedicated to the oldest monument in St. Petersburg. It was a highly mythologized symbol in the urban legends of the old capital city of the Russian Empire.

[121] Soloviov, "Po tu storonu ochevidnosti," 35.

categories of known art. Among the categories offered by Soloviov in his negative definition of the painting were optimistic Socialist Realism, rational Hyperrealism, abstract Expressionism, conceptual art, Surrealism, sots-art and even a sensual contemporary Figurativism, everything that in his opinion the painting was not.[122] Soloviov rejected the facile connection to Surrealism, a designation that stemmed primarily from the eerie stillness of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, and, to some degree, the woman figure that recalls Dali's images of Gala dominating the fantastic landscapes.[123] Even in the title of his article, Soloviov aimed to go beyond the surface of the obvious aesthetic associations that would offer some affinity with surrealism, albeit superficial.

Setting misguided interpretations aside, Soloviov sought to clarify the sources of Savadov-Senchenko's painting. He argued adamantly against Sidorov's reference to the equestrian statue of Peter I by countering that Russian visual and cultural myths needn't be part of a Ukrainian painter's primary sphere of consciousness. Pointing out that sources of inspiration for the Ukrainian artists could be completely unrelated to the visual and cultural myths of the Russian center, and belong rather to a wider sphere of European culture, Soloviov asserted that comparing Savadov and Senchenko's painting to Falconet's monument is akin to a comparison to any equestrian image in the world. Additionally, the Ukrainian capital was known for its own unique, signature equestrian statues that could have provided the artists with ample material to emulate.[124] Soloviov's indignation was caused also by the fact that Sidorov never went to the trouble of inquiring of the artists themselves, who "never concealed the source of their

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[122] Soloviov, "Po tu storonu ochevidnosti," 35.

[123] Ibid.

[124] For instance, the monument to the soviet Civil War hero Nikolai Shchors by V.Z. Borodai, M.M. Sukhodolov, M.H. Lysenko (1954) or Monument to Bohdan Khmelnytsky by Mikhail Mikeshin (1888).

interpretation."[125] The painting by Diego Velazquez's *Equestrian Portrait of Prince Balthasar Charles* (1635) served as a point of departure for the artistic duo's experiments, which resulted in *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. This source also poignantly brought the reference back home, to Kyiv's Museum of Western and Oriental Art[126], whose collection boasts another representation of royal Hapsburg's child by Velazquez's—his *Portrait of Infanta Margaret* (before 1659)[127].

Soloviov, who was openly in favor of the controversial art piece by Savadov-Senchenko, did not in the least conceal his erudition concerning current Western artistic trends. Never cowing to the prescribed negative terms with which most Soviet art critics referred to Western contemporary art theory and practice, he invoked in his article Postmodernism as a matter of fact. He admitted that Postmodernism characterized by the "loss of the straightforward stylistic integrity" [*utrata priamolineinoi stilisticheskoi tselostnosti*] had "molded" Savadov artistically. Soloviov commented on this trait of the time as upon the inevitable quality and specificity of the time period. In addition, he supported his argument with the quotation of Achille Bonito Oliva, the main theoretician of the Transavantgarde movement, who described the current cultural situation as a "semantic catastrophe", which unsettled all languages of art. Soloviov interpreted *Cleopatra's Sorrow* as an attempt to come to terms with consequences of this catastrophe by "reconsidering artistic forms and criteria." Soloviov, however, remained cautious in

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[125] Soloviov, "Po tu storony ochevidnosti," 35.

[126] Currently, the museum holds a plaque commemorating the names of the owners of the collection on the premises in which it was founded; the plaque reads: "The Museum of Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko. They donated their collection to the city of Kyiv in 1918." During the Soviet period the museum was renamed 'Museum of Western and Oriental Art,' regaining its original title only during the years of Ukrainian independence.

[127] The attribution of the painting to Velázquez is still contested; while some scholars consider it an oil sketch that matches the artist's own portrait *The Infanta Doña Margarita de Austria* (1660, Prado museum), others consider it a sketch by one of the Velázquez followers, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo.

equating the Ukrainian phenomena directly with Western analogies, and did not feel comfortable adapting the European term to the Ukrainian phenomenon taken at face value. Although he claimed that "some elements of the new expressive language were not alien for Savadov", he did not seek to equate the innovative approach of the Ukrainian artist with the influential trend of European and American neo-Expressionism of the 1980s.

The main point of divergence between Western art and the new Ukrainian phenomenon for Soloviov, was the latter's striving towards the "new poetics of painting." In contrast to their western counterparts, who endowed their work with additional expressivity in style and meaning, Savadov and Senchenko were aiming for the "radical and truly "poetic" inconsistency between form and content. Thus, Soloviov's statement of difference could be summed up in this manner: even if the painting was rendered in the Expressionist manner, it did not connote some emotionally exaggerated or even personal content. One should note that Soloviov's acquaintance with Western Neo-expressionism was limited at that moment. What was crucial, however, is his refusal to conclude his analysis with the discovery of a suitable Western equivalent.

While Soloviov was reluctant to assign a name that would describe the methods or the style of the new Ukrainian art, Russian art critics Leonid Bazhanov and Valerii Turchin, who wrote for *Tvorchestvo*, summarily assigned an invented rubric to all Ukrainian artists: the Neo-Baroque. Only one year after Sidorov's and Kholmogorova's attack on *Cleopatra's Sorrow,* on the pages of the same magazine, Bazhanov and Turchin praised the Ukrainian pavilion at the 1988 Youth Exhibition, which included paintings by Savadov and Senchenko, as some among the most successful in the show. In these critics'

opinion, the Ukrainian neo-baroque works at the exhibition impressed with their "large and decorative scales and rhythms" [*bolshymi dekorativnymi masshtabami i ritmami*] as rather "remarkable."[128] In a conversation with Soloviov,[129] Bazhanov complemented their definition by adding another Western term, defining Ukrainian new trend in art as "the Neo-Baroque of the Transavantgarde type."[130] Levashov followed suit, accepting the moniker and the new definition: in a later article on Ukrainian art, he acceded that Savadov gravitated to the south European Transavantgarde, in which he found his model.[131]

As the reception of their painting demonstrates, the pervasive critical and media response indicated the confusion of the critics and the absence of methodological tools required to deal with such art at their disposal. The situation was rapidly changing: with the advent of perestroika a more favorable acceptance of the new trend may be observed within the time span of a year, in the editorial boards of the same magazines. Altogether, the feverish outpouring of Western terms (Postmodernism, Transavantgarde, Neo-baroque and Neo-expressionism) signaled the need to catch up with Western art history and widespread recognition of the underdeveloped state of art historical methodology in the Soviet Union. Taking these circumstances into consideration, any researcher should be wary of uncritical acceptance of Western definitions as an interpretative goal for Ukrainian art of the period.

The next chapter will be devoted to late Soviet era art criticism that epitomizes the changes within the Socialist Realist method as evident not only in *Cleopatra's Sorrow*

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[128] Bazhanov and Turchin, "Ritorika totalnogo somnenia," 5.

[129] My interview with Soloviov by email. January 27, 2015.

[130] Barshynova, "From the Interview with Oleksandr Solovyov," 30-35.

[131] Levashov, "Molodost Strany," 28.

and responses it garnered but on a larger scale of shifting artistic concerns and devices. Moreover, those debates that reverberated in official and unofficial Soviet art circles in the reception of Savadov and Senchenko's painting will reveal their significant connections to Western Postmodernism. I will argue for a specific version of Ukrainian perestroika-era postmodernism through such locally engendered ideas as the Ukrainian Baroque and the notion of baroque metaphor.

Second chapter: BAROQUE PROCEDURES IN POST-SAVADIST PAINTING

2.1 Introduction

Focusing primarily on *Cleopatra's Sorrow* by Arsen Savadov and Heorhiy Senchenko, a key postmodern painting of the era of Ukrainian perestroika, my first chapter introduced the generation of artists whose output was often defined with the help of hastily borrowed yet not fully integrated Western concepts and ideas. The second chapter will continue along the same trajectory, to demonstrate the parallels between the artistic styles and theoretic interests of Western postmodernists and Ukrainian perestroika artists, and their distinctive yet overlapping concerns. The Ukrainian artists did not merely copy their Western analogues, rather, they transformed specific concepts and theories as they addressed the priorities of their own local concerns. One such concern is the baroque aesthetic so admired by postmodernists and Ukrainian artists alike. This chapter will concentrate on the postmodernist interpretations of the baroque, as both style and theoretical construction, by examining via this perspective other artworks made by Savadov and Senchenko within the thriving atmosphere of alternative art in late 1980s Kyiv. Additionally, I will touch upon artworks that emerged from the reaction to the impact of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* (fig. 1) created by artists designated by contemporary critics as "post-Savadist", such as Oleksandr Hnylytsky, Valeria Troubina, and Oleh Holosiy working in Kyiv's art squats on Lenin and Paris Commune Streets and therefore also known as Paris Commune artists.

This chapter will begin with an in-depth exploration of one of the parallels between Western postmodern discourse and Ukrainian perestroika art already touched upon in the first chapter, namely an interest in the past often expressed through deliberate citation. By analyzing citational practices in Western postmodern discourse and how they developed in both official and unofficial late Soviet art, some important differences will be illuminated. I will summarize the approaches to the citation taken by Western Postmodernism, including its connection to allegory and metaphor. The latter feature was undermining the homogeneity of the official Soviet style since 1960s. Additionally, it will be discussed as influencing discourse of unofficial Soviet art and poetry, including definitions such as "meta-metaphor", likely borrowed from Soviet unofficial concrete poetry and applied to Savadov and Senchenko's art.

Metaphor as an operational device defining the practice of citation serves as an integral connection between Western philosophical discourse of the 1980s and Ukrainian perestroika art. Metaphor becomes one of the ways through which postmodern practices incorporate the baroque into contemporaneity, via baroque optics and simulated narrative structures. Several influential theories exploring the baroque-postmodern connection will be briefly discussed. The metaphoric citation in the painting *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, with its misleading story-like structure and multivalent symbolism, is complemented by other apparently contradictory features attributed to the baroque-postmodern: the ability to create depth in surfaces, as well as a predilection towards ornamentation and decoration. Convoluted, bright, and impenetrable surfaces of artworks resist the possibility of being read and engulf viewers with excessive visuality. This perceptual dynamic constitutes the second major baroque-postmodern feature that will be developed as an interpretive tool in

this dissertation. It acts as a bridge to the succeeding chapter, which dwells more on the crucial connection between the Postmodernism and Baroque in the context of the collapsing Soviet Union and emerging Ukrainian statehood. I establish this connection here through an analysis of the paintings by Savadov and Senchenko and by the so-called "post-Savadists" that followed upon the astonishing success of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*.

2.2 Citations in Postmodernism, Late Socialist Realist and Ukrainian Perestroika-Era Art

The advent of postmodernist theory initiated a paradigm shift in Western European and North American art, as artists moved away from the autonomous and unique art object central to modernism. Hal Foster's introduction to *Anti-Aesthetic*, one of the books that embodied and analyzed this shift at the time, explained how the modernist artifact or *work* became replaced with a "*text* in a postmodernist sense – "already written," allegorical, contingent."[132] The postmodernist artists championed by Foster, instead of looking for the exceptional and singular, readily embraced the allure of replica and the critical potential of repetition to expose the ever-changing context and versatility of a spectator beholding the art object. The strategy of utilizing worn-out aesthetic codes as well as recognizable wholesale concepts and objects became one of the crucial components of the postmodern aesthetic of the European 1980s, marked by suspicion towards the category of the "new" in general. Citation, as one of the main markers of this

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[132] Hal Foster, *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), x. On allegory: Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," Pt 1 *October* no. 12 (1980): 67-86. Pt. 2 *October* no. 13 (1980): 59-80.

curtailing of modernism, became the artistic device habitually associated with what has come to be known as postmodern quotation mark sensitivity.[133]

The practice of citation, however, was not adopted exclusively by Western artists, who were more intimately familiar with theories of poststructuralism that complemented the aesthetics promoting the beauty of the already seen. Its application was imminent even in the art practice perhaps most foreign to Postmodernism: the method of Socialist Realism. Surprisingly, citation had been employed by official Soviet artists and recognized by Soviet art critics since the 1970s. Its use in Socialist Realism, however, carried very different implications from its manifestation in the West. Most noticeably, it signaled the growing rift within Soviet official art methodology between the idea of a singular official style and its multifaceted applications. It also clearly disrupted the homogenous and monolithic picture of Socialist Realist art prevailing since the Stalinist early thirties – optimistic portraits of heroes of labor, workers and peasants, glowing with health and happiness, and always shown participating in some public-spirited and socially-useful activity. Any hint of irony or self-reflectivity implied by the practice of citation was alien to this aesthetic, which was ignited instead by the utopian aspirations of communist ideology and stylistically bound to the nineteenth century critical realism of the Russian Itinerants. Gradually, after the early 1960s, the stylistic coherence of official artistic output had dissipated into a wide range of stylistic choices, when official artists started to quote avant-garde art and diverse folklore sources, Byzantine icons and early

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[133] On intertextuality: Kristeva, *Desire in Language.* On appropriations: Craig Owens, "Representation, Appropriation and Power," *Art in America* 70, no. 5 (1982): 9-21. On pastiche and parody: Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991). On intertextuality and eclecticism: Charles A. Jencks, *Post-modernism the New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1987). Theory of quotation: Michèle Le Doeuff, *Recherches Sur L'imaginaire Philosophique* (Paris: Payot, 1980).

Renaissance masterpieces. All period styles were represented in official canvases and therefore were shown at official venues. The dilution of Socialist Realism's methodological coherence was noticed and analyzed both by Soviet and Post-Soviet critics as well as Western authors.[134] Multiple theories were offered to describe the change in Soviet official art methodology, its adoption of such artistic devices as citation and appropriation, and the consequent appearance of multiple references to other styles and epochs in Soviet canvases. Either borrowed for propagandistic aims, as Groys argued,[135] or simply in response to changes in the art movements of the West,[136] historic styles, themes, and even pictorial fragments frequently appeared in paintings by Soviet artists. By the early seventies, the technique of appropriation, with a diversity of styles and imagery borrowed from various sources, challenged and complicated Socialist Realism as a method.

Thus, the presence of citation in Socialist Realism could not be denied by the 1970s; it had been accepted and even praised by officially sanctioned publications. In his book *Pokolenia Molodykh* [The Generation of the Young],[137] Aleksandr Morozov, an art historian teaching at Moscow State University, enthusiastically supported the new trend of appropriation and citation which he interpreted as a sign of the "intellectualization of

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[134] Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Susan E. Reid, "Destalinisation and the Remodernization of Soviet Art: The Search for Contemporary Realism, 1953-1963" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996). Susan E. Reid, "(Socialist) Realism Unbound: The Effects of International Encounters on Soviet Art Practice and Discourse in the Khrushchev Thaw," in *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting, 1920-1970*, edited by Matthew Cullerne Bown and Matteo Lafranconi (Milan: Skira, 2012), Exhibition catalogue.

[135] Groys, "A Style and a Half," 76-90.

[136] "Official soviet artists in the 1980s were trying to adapt to the international context of Postmodernism." Kirill Svetliakov, *Gosudarstvennaia Tretiakovskaia Galereia na Krymskom Valu. Iskusstvo XX Veka. Putevoditel. [State Tretyakov Gallery on Krymski Val. Art of the 20h century. A Guide.]* (Moscow: Paulsen, 2014), 183.

[137] Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh.*

creativity"[138]—an approach practiced by young Soviet artists since the mid-seventies, according to the critic. He claimed that artists working in this decade engaged the tradition because they experienced an attraction to the museum (*tiaga k "museiu"*) which prompted them to borrow freely from different epochs.[139] For instance, Morozov was openly in favor of the work of the Russian artist from Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Dzovinar Bekarian (b. 1940) who chose to paint a Ukrainian village scene in the style of Pieter Bruegel. The resulting painting, which the Soviet critic found "lustrous and joyous" [*luchezarnyi i veselyi*],[140] presented a panoramic idyllic landscape perpetuating the myth of the never-changing, fertile and rural Ukraine via a rough compilation of several of Breugel's peasant paintings, most noticeably his *The Harvesters* (1565, Metropolitan Museum). Apparently, Morozov saw no conflict in the Soviet artist's appropriation of Dutch Renaissance art to convey the current socialist reality of the mythologized Ukrainian village via a "realist" style since Socialist Realism was no longer a style but a method.

Morozov analyzed numerous paintings from the seventies that for him embodied the trend of refuting "linear historicism," which was associated with modernism in the West, and thus were open to all manners of stylistic influence. Towards the end of the seventies, he believed that the tendency was fully-fledged in Soviet art and could be

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[138] "Обострение лирического начала совершается параллельно с растущей интеллектуализацие творчества. В произведениях «семидесятников» мы нередко сталкиваемся со своего рода исповеданием концепции – определенного представления об идеале или суждения о действительности. [Exacerbation of the lyrical individuality happens simultaneously with the growing intellectualization of creativity. In the artworks of the Seventies generation, we often encounter artists embracing conception as a certain notion of the ideal or as a reasoning about reality]." Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh*, 97.

[139] Ibid., 130.

[140] Ibid., 98.

summed up in his term "the conceptual picture [*kontseptualnaia kartina*]."[141] With this term he wanted to distinguish the Soviet art he advocated for from Western conceptual art, albeit with admitted similarities; and yet his rhetoric strangely echoed that of Hal Foster. The parallels become apparent when Foster describes the postmodern art object as a text, while Morozov asserts that in the Soviet conceptual picture "language prevails over plastic imagery."[142] The major discrepancy, however, for the Soviet critic loyal to the fundamental premises of the Socialist Realist method, lay in the Soviet conceptual picture's preservation of didactic meaning [*poznavatelnyi smysl*].[143] The acknowledgement of the text behind the image and the necessity of reading this text in order to comprehend the art object fully is thus paradoxically manifested in both "Postmodernism of the resistance,"[144] and the Socialist Realist "conceptual picture." While the former is preoccupied with entangling the ideological, economic, social, and psychological narratives that inform the art object, the latter expects its beholders to decipher the ideologically correct didactic message while viewing the eclectically derived image. Although both approaches were highly skeptical about the naïve production and consumption of images, Foster's "Postmodernism of the resistance" engaged in a critique of representation and rejected the possibility of a single meta-narrative,[145] whereas the "conceptual" Socialist Realist picture desperately tried to assert and preserve one (socialist) doctrine.

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[141] Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh*, 149-150.

[142] Ibid., 149.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Foster, in the preface of his book, distinguishes two types of Postmodernism: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction. Hal Foster, *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: New Press, 2002), ix-xvi.

[145] One of the signs of the postmodern condition is the decline of meta-narratives, i.e. the universal systems of thought aiming to describe the entirety of the human experience and history. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Still, as if to tread lightly in a still uncertain era, Morozov, who was characterized by Matthew Bown as "a powerful figure in the liberal camp" and was "particularly detested by conservatives who regarded him as a turncoat,"[146] would only agree to a certain form of quotation and argued that only particular sources operated successfully within this history. For instance, Morozov expressed high regard for such paintings as *In Memory of the Artist A.G. Venetsianov* (1980) (fig. 12) executed by the Ukrainian artist Halyna Borodai—a self-portrait inserted into a painterly replica of Venetsianov's classic work *Reaping: Summer* (circa 1820s, State Tretyakov Gallery). Aleksey Venetsianov (1780-1847) was viewed as a precursor to the Russian Realists known for his idyllic genre scenes of peasants usually shown in quiet, introspective reverie with the attributes of their labor (sickles, threshers, etc.) close by. Borodai inserted an exact copy of Venetsianov's original into the recognizable quiet fields of a Ukrainian landscape at Sedniv[147] thus creating a hybrid of the *plein air* method with an appropriation of the historical landscape by an artist working nearly two centuries earlier in the Tver region (not far from Moscow.) Borodai placed her own towering figure in modern dress and holding a book on Venetsianov's art in the center of her pastiche landscape. By merging the contemporary Ukrainian landscape with the painting by the canonical precursor to the Socialist Realism, the Ukrainian artist was laying bare her ideological and stylistic affiliations. Borodai was not only praised by Morozov for creation of the "idyllic harmony"[148], but was apprenticed by the highly ranked and influential official Ukrainian painter Tetiana Yablonska who supported her student and apparently approved of her

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[146] Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, 463.

[147] Sedniv Artistic Union's House of Creativity was also a place where the young generation also worked during the late eighties.

[148] Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh*, 98.

experiments.[149] Morozov, therefore, did not risk anything by praising the artist who belonged to the official professional organization, was a gifted easel painter, and, most importantly, was able to create a clear and readable narrative.

This kind of citational borrowing favored by Morozov was practiced by other artists in the Soviet sphere, who further developed the "conceptual picture" in the 1980s. Among those mentioned and praised by him is the painting "*Molodost* [Youth]" (1982) (fig. 13) by Kazakh artist Erbolat Tulepbaev (Tolepbai). This "conceptual" Socialist Realist painting includes a direct citation from Rembrandt's *Self-portrait with Saskia in the Parable of the Prodigal Son* (c. 1635, private collection). Here, the two main figures of the Old Master painting are transposed in their exact poses into a dark brown minimalistic interior of an unknown location. Exploiting the tradition of baroque tenebrism, he offsets the murky background with a brightly illuminated exit door, where a little boy appears looking out into the expansive grassy steppes and mountains beyond. What Morozov described as a "transfer of ethnographic Kazakh motifs into the philosophic context of the world culture" is perhaps better appreciated today as a sentimental and displaced appeal to the Old Masters tradition.[150]

The technique of citation so blatantly employed by Tulepbaev is not foreign for Western conceptualism either. However, as critic Benjamin Buchloh claimed for a different context but a similar artistic device (citation), the procedure or operational function of this device was crucial in defining this feature. The approach to citation not only as technique but as procedure, as understood by Buchloh, can reveal some important discrepancies between Western Postmodernism and late Soviet art. In his influential

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[149] Marina Semesiuk, "V Zhertvu Ostalnym Tsevam [Sacrificing for the Rest of the Flowers]," in *MIST* (Kyiv: Institute of Problems of Contemporary Art, 2008), 297-303.

[150] Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh*, 176.

article "Allegorical procedures" Buchloh traced the genealogy of the appropriation mechanism ("confiscation, superimposition, fragmentation") from John Heartfield to Martha Rosler, as theorized by Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes.[151] According to Buchloh, conceptual artists such as Michael Asher "confiscate" artworks and everyday objects in order to expose the function of the artwork as a commodity (Benjamin's allegorical "devaluation" or Barthes's secondary mythologization) and the role of the art institution in the process. The principles embraced by conceptual artists as explained by Buchloh qualify as anti-modernist, since according to his theory it is impossible (in such procedures) for an artwork to remain autonomous and moreover to convey the subjectivity of the artist who created it. The allegorical procedure in conceptual art reveals that the ultimate subject in art is not the artist but the viewer. Thus, one of the main targets of "allegorical deconstruction in conceptual art"[152] in fact is the author position.[153] If we apply this theoretical tool to Tulepbaev's painting, one notes that the on the level of procedure, the appropriation device is operating in a drastically different manner. Instead of questioning or decentering the modernist figure of the author through appropriation, as Western conceptualists have done, the Soviet pastiche by Tulepbaev performs the opposite function by presenting his imaginary encounter with Rembrandt in the Kazakh steppes of the author's childhood. This type of citation, in contrast to the postmodern, confirms the idea of the artist narrating his personal story via his art: that of a young Kazakh boy who has gained access to world civilization and culture with the aid of Communist leadership. Even though viewers are invited to read Tulepbaev's painting

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[151] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum International* no. 21, 1982, 43-56.

[152] Ibid., 33.

[153] Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2011).

as much as Michel Asher's interventions, the citation performs different functions, not disrupting the flow of ideological and imposed narration but reasserting it.

When examining the usage of citation within the Soviet context, the complex and tense nature of the relationship between official and unofficial art in the latter part of the 1970s and through the 1980s becomes apparent. At the same time that the idea of the "conceptual picture" first formulated by Morozov became a standard to describe contemporary developments in official Soviet style, a fully grown movement of Moscow Conceptualism was thriving ignored by official critics. As the most powerful cultural opponent to Socialist Realism during that time, conceptualism was largely excluded from the public field and remained only within the purview of unofficial artists. Although Morozov mentions Western conceptualism, he fails to note the existence of the local Soviet conceptual trend. Meanwhile within the closely-knit circle of Soviet conceptualism, it became customary to employ tenets of Socialist Realism, constant and comprehensible, as a kind of covert underside of conceptualism.[154] Indeed, Russian critic and historian of conceptualism Ekaterina Bobrinskaya noted common features between the antagonistic movements: if conceptualism relied on the textual underpinning of a visual message, Socialist Realism, for its part, was subjugated to ideological language and beholden to an inherent dualism in claiming to represent reality as it is, while also acting to change reality to bring the depicted socialist ideal into actuality.[155] Neither Socialist Realism nor Moscow Conceptualism demanded a purely visual perception, and

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[154] Groys, *Total art of Stalinism.*

[155] Ekaterina Bobrinskaia, "Moskovskaia Kontseptualnaia Shkola. Estetika i Istoria," in *Pole Deiistviia: Moskovskaia Kontseptualnaia Shkola i Ee Kontekst: 70-80-e Gody XX Veka*, ed. Ekaterina Allenova and Alexander Evangeli (Moscow: Fond Kultury "Ekaterina", 2010), 18.

in fact both movements required an intellectual effort from their viewers to complete the artworks through the act of active interpretative viewing.

Oddly enough, Morozov did not apply his favorable accounting of the "conceptual picture" created with the aid of citation devices to the much-discussed painting of Kyiv artists Savadov and Senchenko. Despite Morozov's reputed liberalism (as noted by Matthew Bown) Morozov's assessment of *Cleopatra's Sorrows* (1987) was rather negative. The artwork by the young Ukrainian artists contained, in his words, "nothing more than a grinning mockery of the topic of historical smash-hits."[156] Apparently, paintings quoting other paintings, such as the ones by Borodai and Tulepbaev, possessed certain qualities which allowed Morozov to single them out as prescient; at the same time, he was unable to give the same credit to those very same qualities in Savadov and Senchenko's works, despite their demonstration of the very same "citation" method. Vehemently dismissing the potential value of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* in this regard, Morozov disclosed a distinct bias in his thinking. It might be surmised that what motivated Morozov's assessment was his commitment to canonical aspects of Socialist Realism, most especially its didacticism. Despite the growing erosion of the aesthetic, Morozov apparently still subscribed to its tendentiousness, which was comfortably present in both Borodai's and Tulepbaev's work. Both Socialist Realist works featured the actual immersion of its characters into the fictional worlds given as citations. This experience was presented in the form of a narration whose expected result was the education of a better Soviet citizen.

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[156] Morozov, *Pokolenia Molodykh*, 224.

By contrast, *Cleopatra's Sorrow* did not offer any kind of relatable story, nor did it contain some edificatory meaning. The Ukrainian painting differed from both Western Conceptualism and the late-Socialist Realist "conceptual picture" on the most basic level primarily because it refused to be read. In fact, the oddity of the imagery denied its viewers the comfort and satisfaction of any resolution or stable meaning. One would want to ask, for instance: Why would a riding prince be replaced by a woman-warrior, and why, in an equestrian theme, would the tiger replace the horse? And what brings these unlikely companions to a desert-like environment? Most importantly, how can the story relate to the Soviet experience and be instructive for Soviet spectators? Setting aside these obvious questions and dwelling momentarily on the curious choice of the Velazquez citation, even here, despite the efforts of the author's commentary, we are no closer to solving the painting's riddle. The interpretive ambiguity generated by *Cleopatra's Sorrow* offers an array of potential meanings, without any single one predominating. The very nature of the work invites a confounding plethora of hidden and nascent meanings unfolding uniquely before each new viewer.

Conventionally associated with the promise of delivering a clear and direct message, Socialist Realism was known to be rational and to convey a singular truth via an instructive story. Clearly, critics educated in this tradition could not accept a multitude of possible and correct answers to a single riddle. Searching for wholesome narratives with a singular didactic meaning, Soviet art historians were not predisposed to think beyond scripted meaning and would certainly not be permitted to acknowledge publicly the possibility of "partial explanations."[157] This prerogative was the domain of postmodernist

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[157] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990).

theory and, though contemporary with later Socialist Realism, the Western concept was alien to even the most knowledgeable Soviet critics. Nevertheless, the growing interest of the West towards Soviet nonconformist art and, vice versa, the encroachment of international Postmodernism on Soviet territory points to the ideational permeability of the two systems and the parallelism, albeit oppositional, between their economic and cultural structures. The extreme conditions of isolation and censorship on the one hand, tempered by the mass culture of consumption on the other, made for strange bedfellows between waning Soviet socialism and late European-American capitalism. Thus the globalism of Postmodernism, while thriving on local particularities, was able to find expression and achieve a most unlikely affiliation with Socialist Realism. What one may see in the works of Tulepbaev and Borodai is the mutation of postmodern features, particularly of intertextuality and tolerance, to kitsch—a device usually ascribed to literature where texts are full of citations, allusions, and references not necessarily decipherable, or even relegated to quotation marks in a condition that Roland Barthes would describe as the stereophonic effect.[158] But despite the synchrony of this cultural divide, such attributes would still elude the work of Savadov and Senchenko. No matter how audacious the citations in their case, even the most liberal of Soviet art critics could not understand how a painting like *Cleopatra's Sorrow* might share in the very process demonstrated in the conceptual picture art that he praised.

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[158] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," ed. Josué V. Harari, in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Poststructuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 73-81.

2.3 Metaphors in Socialist Realist Art Criticism

The "conceptual picture" idea developed in response to what has been described as a citational practice in 1970s Soviet art. But this was far from being the only term that critics in Soviet Union used as they attempted to expand the relevance of Socialist Realist methodology to audiences at home and abroad. An array of new terms and explanations was offered by critics who had observed the loss of homogeneous normativity already during Khrushchev's Thaw. The changes were evident in the erosion of the conventional unity of action, time and space and therefore the convenient readability and didacticism of the official artistic method. The realist canon started to widen additionally by allowing a more multifarious stylistic palette and set of influences. As Susan Reid has claimed, both impressionism and expressionism were partially "rehabilitated" as legitimate inspirational sources for Soviet realist artists.[159]

Yet if Soviet art historians were not ready to challenge Socialist Realism's hegemonic role, many were quite capable of questioning its permanent and unalterable nature. One such critic was Aleksandr Kamensky, famous for coining the term Severe Style [*surovyi stil'*] to delineate a specific trend within the Socialist Realism of the 1960s. This new trend had already undermined the stylistic coherence of the official art method of "revolutionary romanticism" and the "generalization of forms." Such Severe Style artists as Pavel Nikonov and Nikolai Andronov utilized expressionistic formal distortions as well as "expressionist but un-beautiful brushstrokes" in the words of Susan Reid.[160]

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[159] Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism," 220.
[160] Ibid., 225.

Apart from formal deviations from the normative influence of 19th- century Russian Realism, these new developments in Socialist Realism challenged the didactic purpose of the Socialist Realist method, as the Severe Style paintings "had no story line" or "psychological narrative".[161]

In 1969 Kamensky wrote of the "metaphoricalness" [metaphorichnost] which distinguished "realism of a conventional, conditional character."[162] The article that inaugurated the Severe Style as a specific trait of Socialist Realism was titled "Realnost Metaphory" [Reality of Metaphor] in magazine *Tvorchestvo*.[163] Even though Socialist Realism was preserving a realist denominator in its title, Kamensky admitted that its claim to reality was diminishing even in certain types of official art after Stalin's death. Both "truth in art" and "sincerity in the depiction of reality" were slogans pertinent for Severe Style. These were promoted by Kamensky and apparently did not contradict other traits also elaborated by the critic, namely, "metaphoricity" and "conditional reality." The Severe Style embodied and made evident the inherent contradictions within the Socialist Realist method. On the one hand, it promised a truthful depiction of reality while on the other it insisted that the art should contribute to a forceful remaking of reality according to the socialist ideal. By the seventies, the Severe Style tendency was openly acknowledged by many Soviet critics who insisted, however, that it still bore a connection to realism and to the overarching rubric of the only official Soviet style.

For example, Viktor Vanslov in 1971 underscored the "turn to symbolism, to allegory, to allusion or as people say these days, to artistic metaphor"[164] which, for him,

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[161] Reid, "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism," 133.
[162] A. A. Kamensky, "Realnost Metaphory [Reality of Metaphor]," *Tvorchestvo*, no. 8 (1969): 13.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Bown, *Socialist Realism Painting*, 450.

was in no way contrary to realist art. The metaphorical tendency within the Socialist Realist canon could indeed manifest itself through a covert symbolism, including forbidden religious allusions. Even color could render symbolic meaning, in the same way as indirect references to other art works and art styles did for these critics. Religious allusions, although explicitly forbidden, however, merged into the most standard thematic of Socialist Realism via the Second World War. Such a tendency could be exemplified by the Ukrainian official artist Mykhailo Antonchyk's painting, *Podvyh Zhinky* [A Heroic Deed of a Woman], (1965, private collection, USA) (fig. 14) depicting three women almost as flat and static as a Byzantine icons, with a sun behind the central figure creating the likeness of a halo. Thus instead of the recognizable World War II painting depicting war heroes in a realistic manner, the viewer is offered an icon-like image, strangely mixing Christian iconography with the communist pantheon of heroes. By resembling an icon, such a painting serves as a metaphor for the martyrdom of the common people during the war.

Still in the 1980s the unlikely combination of realist method and metaphorical citation became a shared discursive feature in Soviet art history criticism. When discussing the 1987 *Youth of the Country* exhibition that featured *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, Olga Kholmogorova pointed to a "trend of an associative-metaphoric art", which in her opinion dominated the show. She termed the prevalence of the associations and metaphors observed in the paintings shown at this exhibition "critical realism."[165] Thus, the Soviet critic was invoking a term relevant to 19th- century Russian realism to describe the new art in the eighties. Not daring to announce stylistic pluralism, she, like other Soviet critics, spoke of the multiple trends within the encompassing colossus of the

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[165] Kholmogorova, "Deistvo, Mirazh," 12.

Socialist Realist norm and preferred to resort to the term "metaphor" in describing the trend.

When writing about the same exhibition, Kyivan art critic Soloviov differentiated between the metaphor he saw in *Cleopatra's Sorrow* and the notion of metaphor already dominating the pages of the Soviet art press. Obviously aware of the use of metaphor in earlier Soviet art criticism, Soloviov did not dispose of the notion entirely but insisted on its new characteristic, which he saw reflected in the work of Savadov and Senchenko. Because of its reliance on the language of association, the painting was, according to Soloviov, metaphoric, but not in the ordinary sense where metaphor unfolds as a story revealing an initially hidden but eventually clear and singular meaning.[166] For this critic, what Savadov and Senchenko performed with their painting was the creation of a "super-metaphor on the level of the painting and its ontology." Soloviov believed *Cleopatra's Sorrow* embodied a "new metaphoricity" which was "characterized by the inexhaustibility of passages and meanings."[167] According to Soloviov, the metaphorical quality of the painting acted as a trigger capable of starting the flow of associations in every viewer, thus denying the possibility that it should ever be interpreted as a reality. The entire scene, eerie and fantastic, excluded the availability of literal meaning or a single interpretation; instead it offered a complex response to the changing world into which two previously antagonistic positions of the capitalist West and the communist East were collapsing.

The definitions offered by Soloviov irritated conventional Soviet art critics who refused to make these connections to the history of the metaphorical quality in Socialist

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[166] Soloviov, "Po tu storonu ochevidnosti," 35.
[167] Ibid.

Realist art criticism. A.K. Iakimovich in the major Soviet art history journal *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie* [Soviet Art History Studies] interpreted Soloviov's ideas and the art he supported as a sign of neophyte enthusiasm and an enduring fascination with Western art theories. Iakimovich refused to see in Soloviov's criticism and in the art he championed anything more than "the rejection of individuality, rationality, morality and culture."[168] What Soloviov's analysis provided, however, was not a rehearsing of the terms and ideas picked up from Western sources, nor was he merely responding to the discussions on the convergence of metaphor and reality beginning to permeate official art discourse. Rather, Soloviov took the debates a step further by also grounding his observations in the explanations given by the artists. Apparently, he derived his ideas of "*novaia metaphorichnost* [new metaphoricity]"[169] or "super-metaphor" as manifested in *Cleopatra's Sorrow* both from his observations and from a statement made by Savadov. Cited in the same article, the artist declared his aim to accomplish with his art the founding of a "new poetics of painting"[170] thus opening the field of interpretation to terms from outside the realm of painting and from literary critique in particular. The necessity of dispensing with the tradition of metaphoricity grounded in Soviet official discourse and asserting a new metaphoricity retained its importance for Savadov through the 1990s. He made his case in an article published in 2000 by analyzing his period of collaboration with Senchenko. Responding to Moscow critic Andrei Kovalev (when referring to the period that gave birth to *Cleopatra's Sorrow*), Savadov stated that the super-metaphor for them was a way to transcend the ordinary metaphor: "to surmount the metaphor on your own is very difficult […] as [difficult] as it is to reject the creative

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[168] Yakomovich, "Problemy sovremennogo iskusstva," 22.
[169] Soloviov, "Po tu storonu ochevidnosti," 36.
[170] Ibid.

mechanisms of modernism."[171] Apparently, the super-metaphor quality was achieved through the negation of the singular artistic ego, which in view of Savadov, was capable of producing only regular-type metaphors.

Traditionally, metaphor is described as a verbal trope responsible for figurative speech. Furthermore, it is theoretically bound to poetry, owing to Aristotle. The ancient Greek philosopher was the first to define it in the western system of thought, supporting his definitions with quotations from Homer. In his *Poetics* Aristotle defined the metaphor as a process of the transfer of meaning "from the genus to species" that results in the appearance of the "strange term".[172] The concept of the metaphor was broadened over time, allowing for such theories as those of Neapolitan philosopher Giambatista Vico (1668-1744), who believed metaphor to be at the origin of human mental capacity. Vico understood metaphor as a process of "linking audio-oral osmosis to visual mimesis"[173] responsible for generating abstract thought.[174] Vico's influential theory, in which visual analogy or the operational function of metaphor precedes verbal semiosis and cognition, establishes a crucial precedent to the theories of baroque perception addressed later in this dissertation. Their main premise is the prevalence of visual signs over verbal analogy and conscious cultivation of experiences defying verbal signification. From the literary trope or a figure of speech to the operation at the very heart of the thinking process, metaphors articulate shifts between visual and conceptual registers, when visual percepts are transformed into mental concepts, according to Vico. Metaphor, first detected in poetic language, therefore, has a strong linkage to iconicity and visual phenomena, due to

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[171] Kovalev, "Dinamicheskie pary."

[172] Samuel R. Levin, "Aristotle's Theory of Metaphor," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1982).

[173] Marcel Danesi, *Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 75.

[174] Marcel Danesi, *Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language*, 53.

the fact that it is indebted to the visual similarity (or analogy, according to Aristotle), which is at the heart of its operation. Being entrenched in the sphere of images and visuality, metaphor is, nevertheless, the opposite of the literal depiction of the seen world as it is always dependent on the imagination allowing the transfer of the meaning. Thus, imagery, detectable at the origin of language capacity, reinforces through the idea of a metaphor the understanding of language's connection to visuality and even more so the proclivity of sign systems, whether visual or verbal, to being a conduit for creative and imaginative acts.

By utilizing the terms "poetics" and 'metaphor", neither intrinsically and specifically connected to the sphere of oil painting, Savadov--followed by the critic Soloviov--was obviously pushing beyond modernist media-specificity. The interrelatedness of cultural spheres is a postmodernist attribute destroying the autonomy of each form of artistic expression. The "poetics of painting" for Savadov therefore is a means of escaping the narrow confines of the painting genre that he aimed to revitalize. Metaphor as a concept explaining the working of poetic speech through adherence to visual analogies gave the Ukrainian artists the base from which they were to re-launch the language of oil painting when a purely visual methodology, such as changing the technique of painting, would not suffice.

In the late Soviet context there were several theories of metaphor available for critics and artists to draw upon. One of those theories, belonging to Russian formalist Roman Jakobson (defining the structuralist mode of thought), presented metaphor as a part of the dichotomy that aimed to describe the plurality of sign systems such as

language or visual art.[175] In a purely modernist gesture of the ultimate reduction of means, Jakobson believed that two semantic operations, metonymy (based on contingency) and metaphor (based on similarity), could describe the infinite variety of processes from language formation and language disorders to literature and visual art. He believed the fundamental distinction of metonymy/metaphor encompassed the entirety of difference inherent within sign systems. These included poetry and prose, with poetry occupying the realm of metaphor, while prose remains metonymic.[176]

Jakobson considered the visual arts a sign system that complied with the same rules as language-based systems; within his theory, for example, a period style in painting could be explained through the overarching polarity of metonymy/metaphor. In such a dualistic system realism would rely on metonymy while metaphor, allowing for imaginative leaps, would better suit Romanticism or Symbolism in both their linguistic and visual expression. In the visual arts, Jakobson examined the distinction through the dichotomy of cubism and surrealism. In cubist art metonymy erases borders between objects, with certain attributes of objects representing the whole, while in surrealism metaphor makes visual similarities and connects things from foreign visual realms.[177] Thus, cubism depending on the contingency (metonymy) between fragment and whole (Picasso's collage creates the guitar with a help of a cut-out from the wood-imitating

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[175] Jakobson, Roman in *Critical Theory since Plato.* ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 1132-1135.

[176] This theory where the poetry/metaphor and prose/metonymy is outlined in R. O. Jakobson, "Zametki o Proze Pasternaka [Notes about Prose of Pasternak]," in *Raboty Po Poetike [Works on Poetics]* (Moscow: Progress, 1987), 324-38. According to Jakobson, the only exception was the synecdochic poetry by Boris Pasternak.

[177] R. O. Jakobson, "Dva Aspekta Iazyka i Dva Tipa Afaticheskikh Narushenii," in *Teoria Metafory*, edited by Nina Davidovna Arutunova (Moscow: Progress, 1990), 110-32.

wall-paper and a piece of note sheet) constitutes "realist" art for Jakobson.[178] Metaphor, consequently, is opposite to realism and depends on visual similarity of discrepant objects, such as a violin and the nude female back, as in the painting by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (photograph *Ingres' Violin* by Man Ray). Based on structuralist systems of thought, an artist who invoked metaphor in discussions of Socialist Realism would counter the movement's ideological claim on reality, turning the main characteristic of the aesthetic into an absurd double. It is apparent that Soviet art historians who saw no problems with a realist style that functioned metaphorically did not share any affinity with formalist theory, which clearly distinguished between the two opposing registers.

Metaphor was also an operative concept within the circle of metarealist Soviet poets, who practiced concurrently with Moscow Conceptualism and were also an unofficial community, since their poetry was not deemed publishable by the authorities. Like conceptualism, metarealism thrived on alternative distribution and unofficial readership, including *samizdat.* The most prominent metarealist poets were Olga Sedakova, Vladimir Aristov, Andrei Parshchikov, and Konstantin Kedrov. Mikhail Epstein, the most important literary critic to endorse and describe the movement since its origins in the seventies, defined the metarealists dialectically through the interconnectedness and discrepancies between the two unofficial communities.[179] In Epstein's view, Moscow Conceptualism aimed to dissect and critique the language of

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[178] Harrison, Charles, Francis Frascina, and Gillian Perry, eds., *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 146.
[179] Epstein christened the movement on June 8, 1983 when he delivered his talk "Theses on Metarealism and Conceptualism" at the Central House of Artists in Moscow.

ideology that "risks identifying itself with reality and proudly abolishing the latter,"[180] For example, the method of Socialist Realism that was grounded in pretending to possess privileged access to truth and reality constituted the ground of their critique. The metarealist poets, however, did not aim to negate reality or ideology by disguising their work as such. Instead, their poetry was a "complication of the very notion of realism, revealing its multidimensionality, irreducible to level of physical and psychological verisimilitude."[181] Evidently, the dialectic of opposition was important for Epstein's argument, which identified two unofficial groups by contrasting them even though both movements investigated and critiqued discrepant languages of realism. The conceptualists and metarealists differed in their relation to images, with the conceptualists employing pictures as vehicles for ideological or metaphysical messages and metarealists, embracing visual imagery in a manner akin to Baroque poets by elevating the image to its "archetypal significance" or the quality of myth.[182] The metaphor in metarealism, consequently, was a method of revealing the hidden dimension of reality as visually generated, or as Epstein puts it, "a poetry of that reality which is hidden within the metaphor."[183]

For Epstein the metaphor with which a metarealist poet works is a "total metaphor" that reveals the real experience of flux, of its changes and metamorphoses.[184] Poet Kedrov postulated that "meta-metaphor" is a metaphor in which every object is a

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[180] Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, trans. Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 36.
[181] Epstein, *After The Future,* 37
[182] Ibid., 38.
[183] Ibid., 40.
[184] Mikhail Epstein, "Theses on Metarealism and Conceptualism," in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, tran. Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, ed. Mikhail Epstein and Aleksandr Genis (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 105-12.

cosmos in itself and not a mere point of comparison.[185] Thus, the meta-metaphor, in contrast to Aristotle's regular metaphor, is not based on the symbolic transfer of meaning, but rather on Vico's theory of visual image becoming mental concept.

Metarealists Vladimir Aristov and Aleksei Parshchikov spoke of the affinity of their ideas with those of the Baroque philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz.[186] The "monad", Leibnitz's enigmatic concept of the smallest particle of reality, self-contained and capable of perception and expression, was of interest to both Soviet underground poets and to such Western poststructuralist philosophers as Gilles Deleuze.[187] For the metarealists, this Baroque idea was instrumental in interpreting the interrelation of metaphor and realism converging in their poetry. Each poetic image is akin to a monad, a world in itself, making the difference between literal and figurative non-essential, with each being real in its metaphoric metamorphosis or "meta-physical reality."[188]

Both the super-metaphor articulated by Savadov and Soloviov as well as the meta-metaphor of the metarealists were formulated against the background of the exhausted, empty dogma of Socialist Realism within the context of the disintegrating Soviet reality. The method of Socialist Realism, already contaminated by metaphors, allegory and other forms of figurative tropes, was decomposing along with the Soviet way of life. When rejuvenating the respective fields of poetry and oil painting, late Soviet poet and painters not only utilized the newly available knowledge of recent Western art trends but also were reconciling this information with their experience of Soviet reality as

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[185] Konstantin Kedrov, *Metakod i Metametafora*, Moskva: Izd-vo Eleny Pakhomovoi, 1999.

[186] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, trans. Paul Schrecker and Anne Martin. Schrecker (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

[187] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[188] Epstein, "Theses on Metarealism and Conceptualism," 105-112.

something figurative, no longer tangible. When writing about the theory of metaphor as evolving from the ideas by the "ironist" Andrei Sinavsky,[189] Alexander Etkind also spoke of the potentiality of life dormant within a metaphor that is confused with reality. "Realized metaphors are monsters," asserts Etkind when contemplating the healing potential of art created by the victims of trauma, including those inflicted upon the citizens of the Soviet Union.[190] People affected by the summation of the impact of the Soviet project on human life during the late Soviet period, are prone to creating such metaphors, which results in an "overflowing of text into life with monstrous results."[191] When looked at from this point of view, *Cleopatra's Sorrow* is a lapidary monster of the metaphor achieving a concrete embodiment.

As my discussion of this history demonstrates, Savadov and Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow* was born into a context ripe with theories of metaphor. While the logic invoked by these artists contradicted certain traditions of formalist criticism (those that did not allow for the intermingling of realism and metaphor), the understanding of metaphor developed in metarealist poetic circles offered some insight into the "new poetics" of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. Here, indeed, each interpretation of the woman warrior is as valid as any other, each one offering an opening into a different world. Thus, the ceremonial portraiture of the infant prince Charles captured in his vulnerability by Velazquez is contrasted to the muscular power of the Soviet athletic body of a peasant woman, the harbinger of the new Soviet world. This contrastive juxtaposition is a realized metaphor, a wildly imaginative and absurdly humorous contradiction that

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[189] Andrei Siniavsky (1925-1997) was a Soviet political prisoner and dissident, writer and publisher.
[190] Aleksandr Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 124.
[191] Ibid., 126.

becomes a concrete embodiment of visual and semantic fantasy—and resists the singular reading required of Socialist Realist art. Citation as such attains a metaphoric character in Savadov and Senchenko's image. In alluding to the history of baroque painting, Ukrainian perestroika-era postmodernists did not aim to develop a coherent story or a singularly decipherable message potentially available with the discovery of the citation source. The gap between the initial and resulting image is as wide as in metaphor's general operation. Hence, the most apparent difference between the citational aesthetics of late-Socialist Realism and Ukrainian artists of Savadov's generation lies in their use of metaphor.

Savadov and other artists of his generation in the perestroika years did not limit their creative efforts to a rhetoric of exegesis (interpretation), but tapped into the potential of painting to produce a new world of experience. This experience, as in Vico's theory of the metaphor, precedes verbal articulation while also conditioning it. Metaphor and reality, intermingling paradoxically both in poststructuralist continental philosophy and in Soviet art criticism of the late Soviet period, offer a new perspective on works of art that appear, in equal measure, withdrawn from, yet tangentially connected to, both systems.

2.4 Metaphor, Baroque and the Postmodernism

Metaphor—a concept broad enough to encompass multiple meanings—figured prominently in the nascent art criticism demarcating the transitional gap between late-Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The use of the concept of metaphor served as a potential bridge from the Soviet sphere to Western philosophical theories that were becoming

highly influential in shaping the dialogue around the late Soviet art scene. While Soviet liberal and traditionalist art critics alike pondered the outcomes of colliding the official and unofficial styles through the citational practices and metaphorical emphasis evident in both canons, Western art criticism linked the philosophical ideas of extended metaphor (to be examined below) with allegory and appropriation. Just as Morozov coined the term "conceptual painting" and Savadov developed a theory of the "super-metaphor", so too critics in Europe and the USA developed similar metaphor-inspired terms to deal with the deep crisis of the modernist paradigm and the advent of Postmodernism. Of particular relevance to my study are Benjamin Buchloch's "allegorical procedures" and Craig Owens' "allegorical impulse."[192] All these interrelated concepts were assuming greater strategic importance since the 1970s, both east and west of the "iron curtain."

Major theories in the West problematized the idea of reality (for instance, the inaccessibility of "the Real" in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis) and questioned sign systems that claimed privileged access to ideas. [193] This rejuvenated interest in statements and way of thinking similar to Nietzche's inquiry into the impossibility of accessing the truth by means other than through metaphor or metonymy,[194] inspiring poststructuralists to complicate the idea of truth by way of introducing the metaphoric presence into the very process of concept creation. In his essay "White Mythology" (1974) Derrida stated

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[192] Buchloh, "Allegorical procedures," 43-56. Owens, "Allegorical Impulse."

[193] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. the Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, London: WW Norton and Company, 1978).

[194] "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms." Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," in *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

that the condition for metaphor "is the condition of truth" whereas the word (logos) is built upon worn-out metaphors turned into abstractions.[195]

Thus, the concept of metaphor appears actualized in both Western and late Soviet philosophical and art historical discourses in the eighties through challenging of the objective and rational idea of reality and realism. Apart from this convergence, stemming from the endowment of the previously devalued metaphor (by Socialist Realism and by the Western tradition from avant-garde to conceptualism) with newfound importance, there was another reason behind the rejuvenated interest towards metaphors and allegories. In postmodern thought focused on privileging neglected concepts and ideas, metaphor and allegory came to the core of critical attention as previously discarded "ornaments" of style. If 'unnecessary' decoration was equated to a crime[196] by key modernist thinkers, metaphors were regarded similarly as a mere ornament of style, utilized to decorate the artistic text but not to enhance its meaning or complicate its content. The implications that metaphors should be regarded as embellishment and therefore superfluous would be contested by such postmodernist writers as Buchloh and Owens placing the stylistic tropes in the center of their theoretic inquiries.

Together with reinstating the importance of metaphor, allegory, and other "ornaments of style,"[197] postmodern theory diverted its attention towards the era of Baroque and its way of thinking, including artificiality, sensationalism, accumulation of

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[195] The well-known passage about the coin whose values are effaced, which results in its becoming of "inestimable value, and their exchange value is extended indefinitely." Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 7-8.

[196] Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime Selected Essays*, ed. Adolf Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998).

[197] Doreen Innes, "Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory as Ornaments of Style," in *Metaphor, Allegory and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*, ed. G. R. Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

meaning in surfaces, excess in decoration, and proclivity for multiple interpretations.[198] The writings of Walter Benjamin in particular were critically reassessed, with his study of Baroque theater[199] coming to the fore of theories devoted to the contemporary condition of culture.[200] The problem of Baroque representation along with representation as such was addressed by Michel Foucault in "The Order of Things."[201] Baroque mathematics and its universal philosophy was a focus of Gilles Deleuze in his "Fold."[202] Both are invoked in the concept of "Baroque vision", the subject of Christine Buci-Glucksmann's "Madness of Vision" and "Baroque Reason."[203] These studies allowed other critics to account for the ahistorical features of contemporary art. Thus a "neo-baroque tendency" became one of the dominant themes for discussing Latin American art and literary criticism of the same period.[204] In his analysis of the Neo-baroque traits of Latin American literature Severo Sarduy spoke of the Baroque pleasure in excess and limitless saturation (reflected in its *horror vacui*), when the language relishes in itself, partially losing the object it ventures to describe. For Sarduy the Baroque with its "painterly

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[198] Erwin Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Michael Kitson, *The Age of Baroque: Architecture, Sculpture, Portraits, Landscapes, Interior Decoration* (London: Hamlyn, 1976); Alois Riegl, *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome*, ed. Andrew Hopkins, trans. Arnold Witte (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

[199] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London, New York: Verso, 1998).

[200] Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Vol. 4, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[201] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[202] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

[203] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* trans. Patrick S. Camiller (London: SAGE, 1994); Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*, trans. Dorothy Z. Baker (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014).

[204] Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: a Sign of the Times*; Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque;* Ventós, *Heresies of Modern Art;* Sarduy, "The Baroque and the Neobaroque."

language" itself was a "metaphor of the impugnation of the logocentric entity," and a metaphor of the "transgressed law."[205]

Walter Bemjamin's ideas on Baroque and allegory are interwoven with both modernism and Postmodernism. Peter Bürger's seminal book "Theory of the Avant-Garde" simultaneously discussed the trend of neo-avantgarde and reevaluated early twentieth century modernism.[206] Benjamin's concept of Baroque proved indispensable for Bürger when he set out to describe the difference between the avant-garde art and the classical norm. Like Wölfflin[207], Bürger sets up a convenient dichotomy of the classic (Renaissance) artwork versus the unconventionality of the avant-garde (Baroque). In summary, for Bürger, the classic work of art represents an organic whole, creating a synthesis of constituent parts; an avant-garde artwork, in contrast, is put together from fragments.[208] The organic integrity of a Renaissance work, competing with nature, will tend to conceal its made-ness, whereas the avant-garde and Baroque artwork presents itself as a constructed artifact insisting on its artificiality.

Benjamin's elaborations of allegory and Baroque are also invoked by Craig Owens' examination of Postmodernism in his influential two-part "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" (1980).[209] Owens sums up the baroque and allegorical attributes that not only permeate Benjamin's oeuvre but also predetermine the configuration of postmodernity. These are the distrust of progress, critique as redemption of the past, and deciphering of code, as well as the attention to the disparate and discontinuous. One example of Owen's understanding of Benjamin's method is his

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[205] Sarduy, "The Baroque and the Neobaroque," 132.
[206] Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde.*
[207] Wolfflin, Heinrich. *Principles of Art History.*
[208] Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* 70.
[209] Craig Owens "Allegorical Impulse."

poetic equation of *inter*pretation and dis*inter*ment.[210] Owens finds that the baroque

melancholy of Benjamin's analysis stems from the fact that he always deals with already

dead matter.

For another proponent of postmodern thought, Michel Foucault, the Baroque

represented an "age in which the poetic dimension of language is defined by metaphor,

simile and allegory."[211] If, by comparison, the artists of the Renaissance believed in

similarities, then, according to Foucault, in the baroque that followed, they accepted only

chimeras of similarities or metaphors instead. Dwelling on dreams, illusions, and

theatricality, baroque visual appearances could only deceive the viewer. The celebration

of artificiality and a kind of posturing within it by relying only on partial and perfunctory

similarity to reality constituted the signs of metaphoric operation. The baroque

fascination with surfaces, a metaphorical way of seeing for Foucault, exemplified a

change of the episteme and a gradual liberation of the language from its mimetic

function. Representation in visual arts since Velazquez became more and more involved

with its own language and finally in the modern episteme became absolved from the

obligation to represent something and ceased to perform the function of a window to the

world.

For his part, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan stated famously in his 1973 Seminar

XX, "I am situated essentially on the side of the baroque."[212] Lacan's theory of the gaze

insisted that direct viewing might not be as effective as looking through an anamorphic

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[210] Craig Owens "Allegorical Impulse," 12, 84.

[211] Foucault, *Order of things,* 51.

[212] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Encore 1972-1973, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1999). More on Lacanian perception of Baroque Nadir Z. Lahiji, "The Baroque Idea. Lacan Contra Deleuze, and Zizek Unwritten Book!" *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 5, no. 2, 1-23, http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/386/393

perspective—essentially what he characterizes as the baroque perspective--that privileged the ellipse over the circle and the distorted vision constructed through Renaissance mathematical single-point perspectivalism. The idea of the "center," established by a unifying vanishing point, a stable, singular point of view is problematized by both baroque and postmodern cultures. Lacan identifies in the Baroque artist a deep suspicion towards the Cartesian model of rational detached spectatorship that equated thinking with disembodied seeing. Instead of the Cartesian subject that discovers his existence through thinking, Lacan insisted on the role of vision in the process of self-realization that begins with a mirror stage. However, this is not a vision from the perceptive center in the brain (Cartesian model), but a process of "seeing outside" when the "perception is not in me."[213] The spectator, involved corporeally in seeing, emerges as a subject from the "function of seeingness (voyure)"[214] through the structure of a gaze which turns a subject into an object of one's own fantasy to which he or she is trying to adapt him/herself.

Christine Buci-Glucksmann's theory of Baroque vision is indebted to the Lacanian theory of the gaze as much as to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[215] Her theory, as argued by Martin Jay, reflects simultaneously the time of Caravaggio and her own contemporaneity: "if one had to single out the scopic regime that has finally come into our time, it would be "madness of vision" that Buci-Glucksmann identifies with baroque."[216] (Baroque's presumable capacity to overflow its historic borders also precipitates Buchloch's comment on Benjamin's writing as analyzing both

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[213] Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 80.
[214] Ibid., 82.
[215] Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*.
[216] Jay Martin, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Modernity and Identity*, ed. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1998): 19.

his own time and the Baroque period.) [217] Inspired by Lacan's "seeingness" as allowing a glimpse of the Real (split within a subject) through an oblique vision, Buci-Glucksmann is fascinated by the dazzling wonder of an embodied baroque vision. Games of appearances, the anamorphic gaze, and ecstasy of vision all signify for Buci-Glucksmann that the baroque eye is anything but a disinterested, rational instrument to examine the world. The look that does not bring you closer to truth but offers instead its infinite variations is the exponent of "anti-Platonic" baroque reason. [218]

The ultimate example of the baroque gaze at work for Buci-Glucksmann is St. Peter from Tintoretto's painting *The Vision of the Cross of St. Peter* (1555, Madonna dell'Orto, Venice) who is "dumbfounded, dazzled by the supernatural apparition." [219] It is the vision that knocks the beholder down, that negates the separation between the spectator and the object he or she apprehends in "the expressive burst of vision, forces and forms." [220] Notably, the vision unfolds not in front of the saint's eyes, but behind and above him; to behold it St. Peter distorts his body in a violent twist. Thus, a baroque proclivity for dynamism and metamorphosis is complemented with a love for the supernatural emerging in a deceptively tangible form. When seeing no longer implies knowing and appearances could be as deceptive as concave mirrors, painting can no longer be a text. Contrary to Hal Foster's interpretation of the postmodern artwork as a text to be read, Buci-Glucksmann's baroque vision is impossible to read; a beholder of such paintings could be only engulfed and absorbed both corporeally and mentally.

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[217] "Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of the Tragic Drama*, was written during the dawn of rising fascism in Germany. Its author was fully aware of the work's allusion to contemporary artistic and political events. George Steiner: Thus a study of the baroque is no mere antiquarian archival hobby: it mirrors, it anticipates and helps grasp the dark present." Buchloh, "Figures of Authority," 41-42.

[218] Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason,* 5.

[219] Ibid., 22.

[220] Ibid., 30.

Another productive way of understanding how the concept of Baroque can be utilized for the interpretation of a contemporary painting is Deleuze's conceptual metaphor, "the fold", derived from his study of baroque mathematics and philosophy. For Deleuze, the Baroque represents not an essence but an infinite process of folding and unfolding, veiling and unveiling, presence and withdrawal: "it does not invent, it endlessly creates folds."[221] Based on his analysis of the philosophy of German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716), Deleuze draws on the model of Leibnitz's windowless monads, which do not intercommunicate as inside and outside phenomena. As much as two separate monads, spirit and matter are folded into each other without ever touching yet still interrelated, not because of their connection to each other but because of their common connection to one Divinity. According to Deleuze, baroque characteristics such as fluidity and elasticity, along with the matter the folding creates, be it architecture or painting, are curvilinear, full of swirling movements and devoid of empty places.[222] Deleuze's exemplary baroque painter is El Greco, and his painting *Entombment of the Count of Orgaz* (1586–1588) with its horizontal division of the earthly and spiritual realms. The painting, with its undulating lines and embodied apparitions illustrates perfectly Deleuze's description of the Baroque as a world of two floors separated by the fold, when both material and supernatural realities are convincingly rendered on the canvas side by side without any means of diffusion of one into each other.

Just as for the French philosopher the operation of the fold appears evident on El Greco's famous painting, the same scheme was familiar to Ukrainian baroque painting,

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[221] Deleuze, "The Fold,*" 227.
[222] Ibid., 230.

carefully studied by artists of the perestroika generation[223]. The history of Ukrainian painting offers prime examples of dual folded worlds. Parallel to Deleuze's El Greco in the Ukrainian context are numerous Baroque icons of the Intercession of the Virgin [Pokrov], showing Mary extending her veil in a protective gesture, covering the rendered figures (fig. 15). One such famous icon from the Cossack era features Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky (fig. 16). Here, the towering figure of the Virgin Mary is adorned with brightly colored flowers, which make her heavenly garment resonate with the traditional skirts of Ukrainian peasant women. The flowers on her gown are echoed in the ornamental wooden elements in the upper corners of the icon. The divine space occupied by the Virgin and the mundane space of ordinary human beings (the realm of the Hetman), intersect bizarrely through the repeated and ornamental elements, yet both spheres are clearly disjointed. The direct adoption of such a pictorial scheme appears in Paris Commune artist Vassily Tsagolov's painting *Love* (fig. 17) (1989). Tsagolov directly borrows the dual model of the world with clear separation between the parallel realms. Additionally, the painting features other baroque traits, including the excessive ornamental decoration and supernatural characters involved in the theatrical opening stage of the depicted event. Despite the naïve painterly style of Tsagolov's painting suggesting a folk icon decorated with artificial flowers, the center image of the artwork is subversive as it depicts an orgy. The contrast between the arrow-equipped cupids and the sexually explicit image is underlined by the painterly manner, more raw and expressionistic in the second case. Both realms are united by Tsagolov through a reference to a single denominator, the English word "LOVE" written in the upper part of the painting.

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[223] My interviews with Oleg Tistol and Marina Skugareva.

The kaleidoscopic array of theories and definitions stemming from the merging of the Baroque and the Postmodernism could be narrowed down to three overarching rubrics: citational pseudo-narration, ornamental materiality, and the operation of the fold to reconcile the first two. These rubrics, simultaneously relevant for late Soviet art and Western Postmodernism, attest to the parallelism in seemingly opposite systems that I addresses in my introduction. However, despite the convergence of themes and ideas, it is obvious that the experience of modernity itself was drastically different in each location (East/West), and thus provides distinctive contexts for historical revision and stylistic choice.

I identify the first feature-rubric of citational and metaphoric pseudo-narration with the constellation of such ideas as the "conceptual painting" (Morozov), appropriation (Owens), and confiscation (Buchloh), as they appear simultaneously in two parallel universes of Postmodernism: Soviet perestroika and Western late capitalism. Those ideas describe the propensity of art in the eighties to tell stories by compiling fragments of already told stories and already seen images. Those stories often mix history and myth to the point of indiscernibility with multiple allusions and direct borrowing from the well-known and obscure sources. Walter Benjamin's writing on the baroque and history informs my reference to this trait; he muses over history as a fragmented and discontinued narrative lending a melancholy and mourning tone to the conversation about past and present.[224] Ruins, the ultimate baroque metaphor actualized via Benjamin overflow the postmodern culture and appear on Ukrainian perestroika-era paintings, for

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[224] The ultimate baroque form for Benjamin was "trauerspiel" or "mourning play" which combined the artificial theatricality with fascination with violence and death. Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*; Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

example in Savadov and Senchenko's series "Gardens Old and New" which will be discussed later in this chapter. Savadov's metaphors strive to come alive and all the heavenly apparitions frequenting the canvases of the Paris Commune's artists could be seen as responding to this trait. As evident from my discussion of paintings by official Soviet artists Tulepbaev and Borodai earlier in this chapter, during the late Soviet period the technique of quotation was a common trait for official discourse as much as for unofficial painting such as *Cleopatra's Sorrows*. The creation of pseudo-narration with the help of citation also often appeared in postmodern Transvantgarde painting. However, only a specific type of appropriation is recognized as acceptable for each of those instances, official and unofficial late Soviet art or Western Postmodernism. In the Western context citation was supposed to be capable of exposing the ideological or economic discourse prevalent in society, for instance as theorized by Buchloh by utilizing allegory as a strategic operation to reveal the fragmentary, discontinued, and ruined as conditions of contemporary civilization. In the late Soviet context, official art employed citation technique to demonstrate that any achievement of world culture could be used for socialist purposes, in order to critically assert and simultaneously forge a better Soviet reality. By contrast, Soviet unofficial art and Ukrainian perestroika-era art in particular, evolving within the most conservative genre of easel oil painting, rejected the demand to be socially critical as this imperative was inherently connected with Socialist Realism's despised dogma. Therefore, their appropriations were pronouncedly ahistorical and resisted any singular interpretation in order to challenge the dominant Socialist Realist norm that was even more strictly imposed in the Ukrainian SSR than in the metropolitan center of Moscow. *Cleopatra's Sorrow* did not expose the ideological flaws of late

communism but signaled the desire of Ukrainian artists to separate painting from ideology, which they replaced with bizarre and metaphoric pseudo-texts. The metaphor they employed operated by over-saturating their paintings with multiple interpretations, thus effectively annulling the role of painting as a text promising a coherent story. Consequently, they replaced the painting-texts with painting-images, without abandoning the figurative painting genre.

The second trait – derived from theories merging the Baroque and Postmodernism – is the excessive and decorative materiality of painterly surfaces of Ukrainian perestroika art. This trait appears in marked contrast to the first because painting that investigates its own media is often deliberately deprived of content. Many artworks indeed, despite their simulation of narration, actively resisted being read and offered the spectacle of painting with material emphases, with convoluted patterns and expressionist brushwork. Here both Foucault and Buci-Glucksmann present a possible explanation: both show how representation may not be burdened with the promise to truthfully render the world, calling attention instead to the artificiality of dazzling and pompous painterly matter. The spectator of such artworks is not a rational reader entangling the puzzle, but a beholder involved in the spectacle corporeally, dissolving themselves in the excess of the materiality, in the bottomless surface on the neo-expressionist canvases teeming with life. Materiality of sign in the visual language is of major importance for painting designated as Transavantgarde. The Western transavantgardists returned to the language of oil painting and the visual pleasures associated with it after a period of Conceptualism and Minimalism actively denying such pleasures. The late Soviet Ukrainian artists at the same time were coming to the rescue of the easel painting which existed only in the form

of didactic Socialist Realism. The only sanctioned official art method in Soviet Union also did not permit its viewer to simply enjoy the painting material but insisted on its function as a mere vehicle for ideological message. Reacting against the Socialist Realist methodology, Ukrainian perestroika artists wanted to restore the possibility of such viewing pleasure within the domain of oil on canvas technique. The ornamental and artificial materiality of their paintings intended to rescue painting with its own means.

The fold, as the operation describing the baroque epoch and way of thinking according to Deleuze, becomes instrumental when the jarring contradiction of the two aforementioned features appears as insurmountable. The non-binary logic of the postmodern as well as the baroque ability to reconcile oppositions allow for contrastive traits to represent the same phenomenon. Thus, the artworks associated with the trend could have narrative structures and depend on historical styles, but at the same time be ultimately unreadable due to their active painterly surfaces presenting ornament and exaggerated brushwork in lieu of stories.

This brief survey of the array of often contradictory interpretations that actualized Western ideas of the metaphor and baroque in conjunction with the postmodern in Ukrainian unofficial art, only begins to suggest their impact in the 1980s. Utilized to explain diverse contemporary phenomena from literature to fashion[225], the "baroque" as an operational concept[226] is similarly instrumental for the Ukrainian art of the late Soviet period. As I argue below, although Ukrainian perestroika-era artists were not integrated into the global discourse of art theory and culture (due largely to their isolated circumstances), their working methods paralleled the processes analyzed and discussed in

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[225] Stephen Calloway, *Baroque: The Culture of Excess* (London: Phaidon, 1994).
[226] Lambert, *Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*.

Western critical theory. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a focused analysis of artworks made in the Kyiv art squats and exhibited in the perestroika era, in an atmosphere that allowed a specific version of late-Soviet postmodernism to blossom.

2.5 Baroque and Ukrainian Soviet Postmodernism

The features of the baroque and postmodern – paradoxically distinguishable in both late Soviet official and unofficial art – should be summed up before I show how they are directly relevant to the Ukrainian perestroika artworks of the Savadov/Senchenko generation. In addition to looking more closely at several paintings made by Savadov and Senchenko individually in the aftermath of the success of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, I will analyze the art produced by the inhabitants of the Paris Commune art squat in Kyiv, sometimes identified as post-Savadists: Oleksandr Hnylytsky, Oleh Holosii, and Valeria Troubina. Even though the artists themselves were often ambiguous when defining their style or theoretical affiliations, Soviet-era analysis of their art mostly tended to be drawn from Western ideas and terms during perestroika and the late Soviet period. As shown earlier, these terms and ideas were defined against the background of late Socialist Realism in its complex interrelationship with the history of modernism. At the same time, the study of metaphor and the Baroque epoch over which it presided resulted in the intermingling of its features with that of contemporary postmodernism. It was a discovery pertinent for Western postmodernism, as noted by Gregg Lambert, who admitted that "generic qualities of the baroque bear more than a passing resemblance to more recent

definitions of postmodernism."[227] Given that Ukrainian perestroika art was defined as "transavantgarde of the neo-baroque type", the baroque denomination begs for a more thorough evaluation. Reviving the metaphor was especially poignant in the case of Ukrainian contemporary painting, seen as an intrinsic baroque quality linked to Ukraine's own historical traditions.

All three traits discussed in the previous section, the pseudo-narration based on appropriated stories, the material excess resisting being read, and the operation of the fold to reconcile the two, characterize Ukrainian canvases produced by Savadov's generation. Arsen Savadov who almost singlehandedly started this new wave in Ukrainian perestroika art described himself in a published conversation with Soloviov as the "prodigal son who recognized his wanderings as his home."[228] Not yet fully aware of "cultural nomadism" as the definitive transavantgardist feature articulated by Achille Bonito Oliva,[229] Savadov's art historical journeys and his generous borrowing of styles and themes embraced a newly discovered postmodernist freedom to choose how and what he wished to deliver visually. For himself, the freedom to make variable selections was his way of revolutionizing painting as a genre. The most obvious connection between Savadov's generation and transavantgardists is on the surface of the canvases, with their open and aggressive colors and distorted figuration actively calling attention to the material constituents of oil painting. The simulated narration on such canvases revealed

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[227] Lambert, *Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, 14.

[228] Aleksandr Soloviov, "Sketch of Mladoukrainskoi Zhyvopisi. (Vzgliad Iz Kieva) [Sketch on the Young Ukrainian Painting (View from Kiev)]," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989): 22.

[229] "Я бы сказал, что трансавангард – это подобие Транссибирской магистрали. Это творческое пересечение территории искусства, которое в своем движении следует двум принципам – культурному номадизму и стилистическому эклектизму. [I would say that transavantgarde is similar to the Trans-Siberian Railway. It is a creative crossing of art territory, which follows two principles while it moves: cultural nomadism and stylistic eclecticism.]" "Beseda s izobretatelen transavantgarda. Interviu V. Miziano s A. Bonito Oliva," 23.

art only disguised as a story—presenting narratives that were, for most viewers, unintelligible.

Savadov was responsible for establishing the fashion for bizarre and ornate titles for paintings, a practice picked up by many artists associated with Kyiv squats, including Troubina, Hnilitsky, and Holosiy. Apart from the perplexing assignation of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, Savadov's paintings from that period carried titles as exotic as *Babylonian Asylum*, *Vital Season*, *Waiting for Venus*, *Maitreya has been born already*, *Bidding Farewell to Aderaim*, and *Touching the Archipelago of Calmness*.[230] Savadov's titles therefore represented a spontaneous array of religious and mythological characters taken from various cultures, and often conveyed a messianic and quasi-religious tone. Hnylytsky's titles were also full of citations and archaic words, as for example *Ausonia— Heaven's Abode* (1989) or *Laodicea's Call* (1988). Holosiy's titles were less dependent on quotations, but tended to be more story-like and notoriously long as in the following example: *Everything Became Clear to Us as We Flew Closer. In Front of the Beautiful and Slim Building There Stood a Proportional, Well-built Monument to Me*. (1991) Commenting on his predilection for extravagant titles, Savadov stated that he intended the titles to counterbalance the equally undecipherable content of his paintings: "two nonsenses directed towards each other."[231] Among the Italian trans-avantgardists who were also known to be inventive with their titles,[232] it was Francesco Clemente who

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[230] Some of which only existed as sketches which are now lost.

[231] Cited in the interview of Kateryna Filiuk with the artist Aleksandr Roitburd: http://artukraine.com.ua/a/iskusstvo-posle-facebooka/#.VTUgi_nF-Ck (Last accessed January 2015).

[232] Italian trans-avangardists were also known for sophisticated and story-like titles. For example, Mimmo Paladino "The Great Cabalist", Sandro Chia "Incident in the café Tintoretto."

spoke of the randomness in choosing titles for his works.[233] Both Ukrainian and Italian artists did not intend their titles to correspond to the content of their artwork or in any way complement and explain them. With titles and content incomprehensible and not reducible to coherent narration, Savadov was trying to accomplish "the radicalization of painting as a genre" by "return[ing it] to its non-verbal phase."[234]

His desire to make painting speak its own language was not connected to Greenbergian modernism of media-specificity as might be argued from the Western perspective, but rather to the artist's objection to the subordination of painting to the kind of didactic and ideological narration that informed the Socialist Realist practice. Savadov's absurd and poetic titles evaded the direct attachment of the readable story to the image. His unreadable explanatory texts as well as titles generated the gap between recognition and randomness in which all the promises of narrative were buried.

Convoluted titles helped Savadov dispense not only with narration, but with the conventional presence of individual authorial subjectivity responsible for conveying the intentionality of an artwork's conceived content. Working with Senchenko as part of an artistic duo, or what Savadov referred to as a "transpersonal practice,"[235] contributed to their goal of going beyond the "individual stylistic practice" and as a result facilitated "the overcoming of the pantheon of modernist values." What the artists claimed to seek was the creation/condition of a "super-metaphor" which would allow them to abandon modernist individualist values and "lay out the pattern deprived of any semantics,

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[233] "I often start from commonplaces, and commonplaces are often readymade titles. I might start from a commonplace, from a ready-made phrase and arrive at another one at the end of the painting." Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords 2: Discourse on the Early 80s* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988): 135.
[234] Soloviov, "Sketch of Mladoukrainskoi Zhyvopisi," 22.
[235] Andrei Kovalev, "Dinamicheskie Pary."

patterns into which you can insert any meanings."[236] Thus, instead of a singular coherent story retrievable only from the correctly deciphered metaphor, the artists triggered a practice of pseudo-narration which allowed multiple stories to unfold simultaneously. The artist's goal was to replace the content of the artwork with a pattern or ornament of meaning.

The extravagant and hyperbolic Baroque titles were complemented by excesses in style and manner in some earlier works by Savadov, most notably in the 1987 painting *Babylonian Asylum* (fig. 18). This painting was singled out by Soloviov for its "expressive brutality of painterly manner."[237] The fluidity of the canvas surface speckled with voluptuous bodies in a Rubeniste style is interrupted by violent insertions of red. The color, similar to the red contour around the tiger in *Cleopatra's Sorrow*, signifies an alternative pictorial space underlying the artificiality of what is depicted. In *Babylonian Asylum* the red artificiality erupts into the violent spectacle of tormented bodies intermingled with crevices of blood-like color fields. Such palpably agitated brushwork harkens back to the European expressionism of the early twentieth century, invoking the style of painters like Oskar Kokoshka and Chaim Soutine. In addition to their dynamic handling of paint, Ukrainian artists also shared with historic Expressionism the convulsive rhyming of composition and disquieting emotional content. One may say that from the perspective of Western criticism such a technique would be considered derivative, similar that which Paul Wood had disparagingly called a "reborn Expressionism" with respect to the 1980s figurative painters of Europe and North

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[236] Andrei Kovalev, "Dinamicheskie Pary."
[237] Soloviev, "Po tu storonu ochevidnosti," 36.

America.[238] However, what distinguishes Savadov's art sharply from the early expressionists was the approach he took when self-consciously using these methods as markers of a certain style and psychological state. Savadov always maintains an observer's distance; there is nothing naïve or involuntary about his vigorous painting manner. It certainly does not serve to disclose a highly subjective authentic truth as in Abstract Expressionism. His expressionist painterly manner rather instigates a conceptual questioning of itself and of the claim of such style to be a vehicle of individual expression. The application of the expressionist technique by Savadov is intentionally deceptive, as the swirling whirlpools of color, instead of indicating rapid movement, are transformed into petrified shells. The contrast of the technique (expressive chaotic movement) and its effect (still, stone-like shells) offers the example of the "super-metaphor" at work: the shimmer of meaning emerging from visual rather than linguistic semantic games. Metaphor, as an iconic sign embedded in visual resemblance, taken to the meta-level of "super-metaphor" allows the artist to be in control by confusing the spectator's sensory expectations rooted in the cultural knowledge of the style and the conventions concerning the message it is supposed to convey, and emotions it is supposed to activate.

Another much more serene painting from this period is Savadov's *Vital Season* (1987) ((fig. 19)—a work imbued with stillness, reminding one of the eerie immobility of *Cleopatra's Sorrow*. Compared to *Babylonian Asylum*, both paintings are less explicitly connected to the influence of Italian and German neo-expressionist gesture, if only due to their limited color palette, less vigorous brushwork, and the arrested movements of the

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[238] Perry Gillian and Paul Wood, *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press in Association with the Open University, 2004), 27.

characters. As in *Cleopatra's Sorrow* a woman is again juxtaposed with an exotic animal; this time a two-headed lion fully absorbed in the action of self-devouring. This duplicated yet singular character could be interpreted to have a strictly decorative meaning, being a prototype for an ornament, a visual language encoded in this painting. Similar in manner to the simulated classical scheme of figures situated in the landscape, *Vital Season* tricks its spectators with the implicit promise of a comprehensible story, one which the artist will purposefully fail to provide. While any semblance of narrative is absent from the painting showing sculpturally-conceived figures both draped and naked, the idea of history is nonetheless invoked through pseudo-classicizing elements (simulations of antique sculpture painted in grisaille) and compositional arrangements modeled on historical genre painting.

The series of paintings authored jointly by Savadov and Senchenko and unified under the title *Gardens Old and New* (1986-87) (figs. 20-22) was a group of paintings reminiscent of the aesthetics of *Vital Season*s and *Cleopatra's Sorrow*.[239] The paintings in the series created the same historical ambience enhanced by classical elements of architecture, staircases, vases, statues, and fragments of columns. One of the works from this series, with the title *Gardens Old and New* inscribed in English in lower right corner, (fig. 20) shows a crude combination of red and green colors applied in a manner resembling an old hand-colored photo or a Warhol silkscreened print. The observer is invited to enter the staircases occupying the painting's immediate background. Apart from the potted orange trees carried by the two boys flanking the stairs, there is no other presence of a garden in the painting--only countless meandering staircases, bifurcating, coalescing, and all the while distracting and misleading the viewer. This visual

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[239] Three of these paintings are in the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum's collection.

presentation calls to mind a literary association drawn from a collection of short stories called "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges. This prominent short story (written in 1941) is set during World War II but also concerns an imagined Chinese philosopher striving to create the novel, itself a labyrinth of endless passages. This universe included multiple timelines, "a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times" with no preference given to a single one, as "*all* possibilities of time" were embraced.[240] Such fictional passages from Borges' work are often cited as examples of a postmodern intertextual mentality.[241] For his part, Deleuze referred to this work by Borges to describe, again in Leibnitzian terms, the contemporary condition in which divergent and incompatible alternatives co-exist in a chaotic universe: "a webbing of time embracing all possibilities". [242] Like Leibnitz's monads, the bifurcating realities remain connected (via the fold) but do not communicate directly. The history of Savadov and Senchenko's paintings is presented similarly as a fiction among fictions. The supposed narrative is fragmented—a convoluted conglomeration of signs of the past strewn about the canvas like spoils after a battle, a scene of ruin simulating the most telling conventions of historical genre painting.

Savadov and Senchenko declared their aim to achieve the super-metaphorical within painting, sometimes directly allowing some important Baroque metaphors to be embodied on their canvases. Their painting series *Gardens Old and New* employs the melancholic mood that prevails in a baroque garden-labyrinth, signaling decay, ruination, and decomposition. In its intermingling of artifice and nature and in its erasure of the

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[240] Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths* http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/borges-garden.html (Last Accessed in October 2015.)

[241] Lev Manovich, "The Database," in *Theory in Contemporary Art: From 1985 to the Present*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Cornwall: Blackwell, 2005), 413.

[242] Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 62.

boundaries between the two, the garden underlines the duality of a nature that bears the promise of being domesticated while nevertheless remaining utterly untamable, thus requiring and enabling a civilization that makes the fascinated contemplation of sublime and terrible nature possible. The trope of the baroque garden points to a pseudo-organic life of ruined and chaotically dispersed architectural fragments. In one canvas from the series, the bizarre nature of this garden is revealed when a sculptural horse seems to come to life in a barren, unnatural landscape.

The property of "unreadability" is featured prominently in paintings by Savadov and Senchenko as well as in many works by other artists in Kyiv art squats. Employing fictional narrative structures that fail to give singular meaning to their work, their paintings resist a casual reading. There are many such examples, most prominently the painting of Oleh Holosiy. Similar substitutions of a story narrative with an impactful but indecipherable emotional expression may be found as well in the color and brushwork of Valeria Troubina's and Aleksandr Hnylytsky's paintings. No intelligible knowledge was being produced by this type of art, which did not aim to secure a certain theme or iconography. The numerous depictions of heavenly apparitions, angels, and other mysterious creatures engaged in inexplicable activities on the canvases of Ukrainian late-soviet postmodernists instead could be seen as signs of baroque taste and an interest in depicting what is unseen and yet known: what Buci-Gluksmann calls the "chimerical moment of Seeingness which brings forth the Ungazable."[243] The impact of such visual matter is calculated to prevent viewers from reacting to a verbal prompt or narrative thread.

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[243] Buci-Glucksmann, *Madness of Vision*, xxi.

Corresponding to the "unreadability" of oil paintings by Savadov are the texts meant to explain them. Authored by the painter during this period are a range of convoluted, eschatological, mysterious writings that often employ an archaic language invoking biblical or ancient myths. In the short text co-authored with Heorhiy Senchenko titled "Apocrypha,"[244] he spoke of "Ceryneian" roses which "delighted" those who smelled them "and their joy was limitless; they run away assured that they are free, yet something everlastingly escaped them."[245] This enigmatic passage alludes to the Greek myth of the Ceryneian Hind, a great deer considered impossible to catch, a belief disproved by one of the labors of Hercules. By drawing on this story of ever-elusive fantastic beast, the young Ukrainian artists were describing the seemingly insurmountable contradictions of their time as experienced by them. Witnessing firsthand the dissolution of the Socialist Realist canon and sensing the approaching roar of the "semantic catastrophe"[246] unfolding in Western culture, Savadov's generation was compelled to determine its own relation to a tradition that was becoming elusive to them, while also directly imposing itself upon them.

As with most Ukrainian paintings of the Kyiv art-squat period, the history of Savadov and Senchenko's jointly painted canvases appears to be more connected with ancient myths and religious themes than it is with the more recent historical and national dramas of Europe attended to by neo-expressionists during this time. Profound and telling are the words of German painter Anselm Kiefer, who once said: "I am a storyteller with a

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[244] Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko, "Apocrypha," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989): 21.

[245] Ibid. Приняв керинейские розы, возрадовались благоуханию, и радости не было предела, и обратились они в бегство, и утвердились в том, что свободны, но что-то вечно ускользало.

[246] "The trans-avantgarde is aware of the *semantic catastrophe* of the languages of art and related ideologies." Achille Bonito Oliva, *Trans-avantgarde International* (Milano: Giancarlo Politi, 1982), 66.

broken history."[247] Among the postmodern neo-expressionists, Kiefer enjoyed perhaps

the most benevolent treatment from critics, despite being partially responsible for the

rejuvenation of figurative painting and the expressionist style despised by many

progressive critics at the time.[248] His painting *Interior* (1981) (fig. 23), for instance,

presents a view onto the marble gallery of the monumental and no-longer existing

premises of the Reich Chancellery built in 1938-1939 by Hitler's favorite architect Albert

Speers. With such paintings Kiefer attended to German guilt brought about by World

War II in an effort to "repair" the German national identity trauma. The use of figurative

painting in Keifer's case was determined by the dominant official style of the Nazi period

that the artist was addressing. By returning to the figuration of Nazism (as opposed to

abstract rendering that in Hitler's time was deemed as "degenerate"), Keifer was, in

effect, pointing to and outlining the historical circumstances in which modernist

abstraction was forbidden and cast out of German art.[249] If Keifer invited observers to the

site of collective memory, then Italian Francesco Clemente resurrected the presence of

late antique wall frescoes in his work *Perseverance* (1982) (fig. 24) in order to summon a

benevolent spirit of his cultural history. Clemente, also one of the main proponents of the

neo-expressionist revival, depicts a male figure in Roman style carrying a model of the

Pantheon. In fact, the artist is representing himself as the holder of the classical

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[247] *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth,* Edited by Michael Auping (Munich: Preston, 2005), 48. Exhibition catalogue.

[248] This holds true when the infamous definition as the "polit-kitsch" from Benjamin Buchloh is ignored; for Buchloh's argument, see: Buchloh, Benjamin. "A Note on Gerhard Richter's *18 Oktober 1977*" in *Gerhard Richter 18 Oktober 1977* (Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1989): 50. Exhibition catalogue.

[249] Andreas Huysmann, "The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth," *October* 48 (Spring 1989): 25-45.

architectural structure. Seeing himself as a "cultural nomad"[250]—an Italian recently relocated to New York, he carries the ponderous weight of a culture left behind. The artist, who claimed in the interviews that the painting was based on a dream, was using the object representing his culture to protect himself.[251] In both Western European examples, the artists are conscious of the part their history plays in their present and are employing, mending, and attending to this history in their art.

My analysis here shows that, although they had every reason to do so, the Ukrainians Savadov and Senchenko, by contrast, did not involve their own cultural heritage in a visual synecdoche as did Clemente. Nor did the two, in contrast to Kiefer's Nazi references, use direct imagery of the palpably waning Soviet period, which, given the circumstances of perestroika, would have been fairly easily achieved. They seemed, instead, to be preoccupied with history and its visual metaphors in general. In this regard, once again, we see how they do not fully comply with the tenets of European Neo-expressionism, though, on the surface of things, they would appear to fit this new classification of contemporary painting. The fragments of the past depicted on their canvases fail to narrate a definitive story, let alone to attend to a national drama that is rife with tension and would lend itself easily to metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche.

It is important to remember that the generation of Ukrainian art squatters was formed at the tenuous precipice of the total collapse and disintegration of the U.S.S.R. Given those circumstances, namely a shared sense of uncertainty in what the future might

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[250] "the artist who strived "to close the gap between different styles and the distance between past and present." Oliva, *Trans-avantgarde International*, 72.
[251] "The first night I slept in the studio in New York, I had a dream where shit was raining from the sky. This painting came after that dream, with the Pantheon sort of protecting me from this rain of shit." Francesco Clemente's statement from his conversation with Brooks Adams in the 1980s and in an interview published in *Artforum* in March 2003.

bring on the one hand, and, on the other, a desperate attempt to cling to a history and culture that continuously had to face erasure and possible extinction, the renegade artists who collected in abandoned buildings tried to reconcile these two spheres of their identity. With the actual period of perestroika, new information about Ukraine's past history came to the surface. Artists witnessed the rediscovery of the cultural apogee of the 1920s and its tragic demise ending in the execution of the brightest and most creative individuals of Ukraine's modern history.[252] The generation that came into its own during the Soviet era participated in this process of national re-discovery of Ukrainian history and culture, responding to a Janus-like perestroika–a crossroads that still featured many glimpses into the past, despite the officially announced vector of modernization, and their realization of future imminent change awaiting the Soviet Union.

Perestroika's involvement with the past, despite its pronounced goals of modernization and intensification of efforts to achieve the advanced stage of communism, supported a cultural environment in which the conflation of the archaic and the modern appeared natural. Ukrainian artists of the time drew upon history as much as upon historical styles and concrete artworks not necessarily directly connected to the country's past. In this vein were the individual paintings that Savadov and Senchenko produced and presented separately at the 1988 youth exhibition in Moscow (a year after *Cleopatra's Sorrow's* success). Senchenko's *Sacral Landscape of Peter Bruegel* (fig. 25) was concerned with the history of art more than with history as such. It was a magnified oil copy of the small pen drawing by Peter Breugel the Elder titled *The Beekeeper and the Nest Thief* (1565, Berlin Museum) (fig. 26). The original drawing was focused on a group

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[252] Stalinist purges of the entire generation of Ukrainian artists, poets and cultural figures in the 1930s. The term was suggested by Polish publicist Jerzy Giedroyc in his letter to Ukrainian literature researcher Yuriy Lavrinenko.

of bee-keepers robed in working clothing to indicate their craft while collecting honey, whose hard-working endeavors were contrasted to a mischievous thief stealing a nest from a tree. Thus, the image depicted the mundane subject with a moral lesson.[253] The exact but magnified copy of the drawing in Senchenko's rendering in large scale and color – a washed out palette of yellows, red and a touch of a green – achieved an uncanny effect. It underlined the bizarre round face-covers of the beekeepers and almost obscured the thief's mischief by the swirling motions of the paintbrush, thus complicating the readability of the moral lesson with dehumanization of the positive figures and disguising of the negative ones. With Senchenko's translation of the pen drawing into the oil painting, the materiality of the drawing process is revealed in the simulation of the avant-garde's practice of calling attention to the artistic device. Senchenko himself, following the contemporary fashion of writing art commentary in a very convoluted manner, as barely comprehensible texts full of poststructuralist terms[254] explained his painting through a text no less enigmatic than "Apokrypha"[255] with the exception that the allusions to ancient Greek myth were replaced with postmodernist jargon. In the tone of a zealous neophyte, Senchenko claimed to "deconstruct the deconstruction" in his painting by taking the classical problem of deconstruction to a new level via creating "the birth of the permanently enduring moment of transgressive transfer to "the different"".[256] Ukrainian perestroika-era postmodernists simulated both the return of history and the

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[253] Hard-working beekeepers are contrasted to the slacking and morally degraded nest thief who prefers stealing to honest work.

[254] "У новой генерации украинских живописцев много общего с поколением в целом. Одни и те же любимые авторы-постструктуралисты, имена которых чтут, а книг не читают. [The new generation of Ukrainian painters has a lot in common with the [perestroika] generation in general. They share the same favorite poststructuralist authors, whose names they praise and whose books they do not read]." Soloviov, Oleksandr. *Turbulentni Shliuzy.* Instutyt problem suchasnoho mystetstva (Kyiv: Intertekhnolohiia, 2006), 8.

[255] Savadov and Senchenko, "Apocrypha," 21.

[256] Oleksandr Soloviov, "In the Twilight of Postmodernism," I_CAN, February 28, 2003. http://www.c3.hu/ican.artnet.org/ican/text308d.html?id_text=39.

return of personality, as the bee-keepers with absent faces demonstrate in their ultimate depersonalization by the artist. The choice of Breugel's drawing depicting laborious yet faceless people with the tools of their labor prominently displayed betrays Senchenko's involvement in an unfinished argument with Socialist Realism as much as with the ideas of Postmodernism.

In light of their complicated dialogue with Postmodernism as a way of defining their art, the art squatters of Kyiv maintained a taciturn and often contradictory relation to the term. According to critic and art historian Konstantin Akinsha's testimony, Savadov and Senchenko decorated the walls of their Kyiv studio in Kyiv with citations from Robert Venturi, the quintessential postmodernist architect.[257] Savadov described himself as a postmodernist in the 1989 *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* article.[258] Yet, surprisingly, by 1991 both artists were clearly unsatisfied with the term, as reported in *Art News*: "At first, they called us postmodernists which was ridiculous."[259] While writing for the 1993 catalogue to the exhibition of Paris Commune artists in Edinburg, Akinsha also contributed to the confusion of definitions with respect to Postmodernism: "It was not Postmodernism but historicism, with a slight aftertaste of mild irony."[260] In 1993, however, Savadov and Senchenko still resorted to Jorge Luis Borges's postmodern metaphor of culture as a labyrinthine library to describe their work: "Europe is a gigantic storehouse of libraries, it is a gigantic accumulation of dust, and now we are trying to

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[257] Amy Bryzgel, "Cultivating Meaning: Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko's Gardens Old and New," ed. Phillip Dennis Cate and Alla Rosenfeld, *Zimmerli Art Journal*, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 118.
[258] Soloviov, "Sketch of Mladoukrainskoi Zhyvopisi," 22.
[259] Konstantin Akinsha, "Who Are the Artists to Watch? Soviet Union: Arsen Savadov and Georgii Senchenko," *Art News,* April 1991, 110.
[260] *Angels over Ukraine: Contemporary Ukrainian Painting*. (Catholic Apostolic Church, Mansfield Place, Edinburgh, 13th August-5th September 1993.) Exhibition catalogue. Publisher not identified. Unpaginated.

create from this dust a can of Campbell's soup."[261] The ironic stance of the two artists and their deliberate reference to the art strategy of the 1960s clearly put them into the camp of Postmodernism, despite their ambiguous attitude towards this definition. From this quotation, we can see that, in their post-historic approach, Savadov and Senchenko insisted on their participation in the Western art world. Their take on the syncretism of European culture was to apply American irony in relation to consumer society, including the consumers of art, to a late Soviet reality foreign to late capitalism and not familiar with the art market.

When in 1988 Savadov exhibited his *Melancholia* (1988) (fig. 27) at the same Youth Exhibition in Moscow where Senchenko showed his *Sacral Landscape…*, he presented a most unusual perspective on the theme of expulsion from paradise. It featured two running figures resembling Adam and Eve on their way from Eden. Both of the figures were female, however, and were belching flames from their mouths. A third female figure shown from the back calmly sits on the ground while a bright-red tree branch grows from her back. The earth and mountains in the painting recall *Cleopatra's Sorrow* to the extent that it seems likely the figures are situated in the same universe as the mysterious tiger-rider. The painting also bore visual connections to other artworks by Savadov from the period via a red contour around figures and objects creating a self-contained universe uniting his work with that of his close collaborator in a unified whole. Prominent in Savadov's painterly style of the period were also his characteristic black brush strokes in oil, imitating drawing and graphic printing technique. This feature was already present in the work *Vital Season* of previous year, but *Melancholia* took on greater poignancy by its association with Albrecht Dürer's famous print through its title.

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[261] Faye Hirsch, "Savadov and Senchenko at Berman-E.N," 106.

Meandering curves of small black lines created volume in Savadov's painting instead of the traditional toning and shading typical of oil paint. Savadov's curious method resulted in marks that for Soloviev resembled undulating strands, leading the critic to dub this as Savadov's "curly style".[262]

Adopting the "curly style," fellow art-squatters Oleksandr Hnylytsky, and more generally Oleh Holosiy and Valeria Troubina, came to be associated with Savadov's method and soon came to be defined as "post-savadists."[263] Hnylytsky's works, including *Laodikeia's Call* (1988), (fig. 28) *Adam and Eve* (1988), and *Ausonia—Heaven's Abode* (1989) (fig. 29) were all executed utilizing the "curly" black lines. This home-style imitation of conventional volume-creating techniques produced unexpectedly different levels of expression in each of Hnylytskyi's works, from the most austere, two-toned *Laodikeia's Call* (1988), to the more colorful but less representational *Ausonia* (1989), and finally *Adam and Eve* (1989)—the brightest painting of all, and the most figurative in conception.

The least autographic among the aforementioned paintings was *Laodikeia's Call*, which did not explicitly reveal the working of an artist's hand on the canvas. This obfuscation certainly directly contradicted the neo-expressionist manner, which preferred to insist on the presence of an artist through indexical traces of vigorous brushstrokes. Hnylytsky, while applying the Savadov-inspired "curves" blurring the boundary between graphics and oil painting, was hardly aware of this contradiction with the Transavantgarde genre to which he was relegated by critics. The slashing movement of

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[262] Aleksandr Soloviov, "Ot Kharkova Do Venetsii. Beseda O Gnilitskom [From Kharkov to Venice:Conversation about Gnilitsky]," 100 Imen. Sovremennoe Iskusstvo Ukrainy Perioda Nezavisimosti [100 Names. Contemporary Art of Ukraine of the Independence Period], 2009, http://www.100artists.com.ua/arts/759/763/2698.html.

[263] Ibid.

black paint imitating the ink strokes of a crude drawing delineated the winged woman with a classic Greek profile. Painted with hastily applied lines, the figure recalled the antique statue of *Nika of Samothrace* (2nd century BC, Louvre) and was situated on an almost undifferentiated background of cool blue color with tints of grey. The black lines emanating from her mouth seemed to indicate the call promised in the title in a manner reminiscent of comic strips. Above the head of the figure and between her wings, two real feathers and three little wreaths (one painted, two ready-made) were placed. When confronted with the artwork, the Socialist Realist painter Tetiana Yablonska reportedly fainted.[264]

Possibly reacting to the contradiction of the Transavantgarde attribution and the mocking gesture of the authorial presence by Hnylytskyy, Soloviov singled out this painting as an example of "cold Postmodernism." [265] This verdict by Soloviov was meant to sound oxymoronic given the dichotomy often repeated by critics during perestroika: of "hot" Ukrainian transavantgarde and "cold" Russian Moscow Conceptualism. This rhetorically convenient opposition contrasted what was perceived as cool, clean, pure, intellectual, well-measured and structured Moscow Conceptualism to expressionist Ukrainian painting bound to appear messy, physical, and emotional when reflected against such a background.[266] The dichotomy was often illustrated by the metaphoric pair of China and Italy, with stereotypical characteristics of both countries chosen to represent

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[264] Viktoria Burlaka, "Aleksandr Gnilitsky. Rannie raboty. Katastrofa vzgliada. [Aleksandr Gnilitsky. Early works. The catastrophy of the Gaze.]" 21 November, 2014. http://artukraine.com.ua/a/aleksandr-gnilickiy-rannie-raboty-katastrofa-vzglyada/#.V6VLMPnR_cs (Last Accessed November 2017)

[265] Soloviov Oleksandr. "Sketch of mladoukrainskoi zhyvopisi," 22.

[266] Vladimir Levashov, "Drugoie Litso. Ukrainskiy Fenomen. [The Other Face: Ukrainian Phenomenon.]," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989): 28-29. Aleksandr Roitburd and Mikhail Rashkovetsky, "O Dushevnom Iskusstve," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989): 24-25.Viacheslav Kuritsyn, "Yuzhnorusskaia Volna," Slovar Sovremennogo Iskusstva pod Redaktsiei Maksa Fraia. http://azbuka.gif.ru/alfabet/yu/yuzhnorus-volna/.

the differences between the two art movements.[267] China symbolized the cerebral and cold intellectual characteristics of Conceptualism while Italy embodied the vitality, warmth, and plasticity of Ukrainian perestroika postmodernists. Soloviov with his statement questioned the dichotomy by implying that the Hnylytsky painting could be both postmodern and cold, or share the "Italian" and "Chinese" qualities simultaneously. Therefore, the Ukrainian critic implied that *Laodikeia's Call* was connected to both cerebral conceptualism and vital neo-expressionism, thus deconstructing the dichotomy.

The title of the painting was based on the biblical town of Laodikeia,[268] destroyed by God as punishment for its inhabitants' proclivity to earthly weakness and sensual pleasures.[269] Moreover, Hnylytsky's choice of subject resurrects a direct Biblical metaphor taken from Revelations 3:15-15, where the phrase, "I wish that you were cold or hot" tells of the Laodikeians "lukewarm" reception of Jesus Christ. The Biblical reference achieves a new meaning in the context of the opposition between "hot" Ukrainian Postmodernism to "cold" Russian Conceptualism. By reading the metaphor from the Bible literary and via his current context, Hnylytsky problematized the dichotomy of cold and hot devised by Moscow critics. Hnylytsky's own response to the call, however, remains purposefully ambiguous. It is not clear if by depicting the Laodikea, the artist was siding with the earthly pleasures it procured by choosing the corporeal vitalism of the oil painting over the cerebral intellectualism of conceptualism. The limited and somber gamut of his painting rather pointed to his placement midway

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[267] Levashov, "Drugoie Litso", 27.

[268] Another possible reference is the enigmatic "Laodikeia's Epistle" by Fedor Kuritsyn, Russian church clerk from the Ioann the III entourage, who died after 1500. The Epistle is variably interpreted as the appearance of Humanistic and Renaissance ideas in Russia or Jewish influence on theosophical thought in Russia in the 15th and 16th centuries during the consolidation of the Russian state.

[269] Book of Revelation (Rev. 3.14-22).

between the two poles. Thus, Hnylytsky's own ambiguous response to the call, his refusal to be either 'cold or hot' complicates the dichotomy offered by Russian art critics by declaring his opposition to the necessity of taking sides.

Ausonia—Heaven's Abode is yet another painting by Hnylytsky that engaged the dichotomy of hot and cold by pointing to the old Greek poetic name of Italy – Ausonia – and therefore to Ukraine, metaphorically associated with this country in late Soviet art historical discourse. The work depicts an enormous angel wing painted in the "curly" manner now identified with the Ukrainian art-squatters. The rendering of the gigantic wing combines gestural painterly quality with representational function, both consciously brought into collision by their calculated inefficiencies. With no splatters or trickles of paint and no fully defined representation, this large-scale painting, neither abstract nor figurative, appears undersized to hold the entire image of which the wing is only a fragment.

Hnylytsky also wrote a poetic text titled "The Olive Seed", which detailed his understanding of art of his time while playing both with the reference to Italy in the name of the olive tree and with the name of the Italian theoretician Oliva who coined the term *transavantgarde*. This highly idiosyncratic text was a metaphor in itself and did not discuss any such matters directly but emphasizes its own poetic form:

I am vitally weak. No. By no means will I become a frightful villain, for the hymen of the virgin-word will never be mine. I am vitally weak. O, crowds of marvelous Amazons. Well, I will suffer for my rotten postmodern age with borrowed pain. [270]

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[270] "Я слаб витально. Нет. Мне ни за что не стать отъявленным злодеем, мне не достать плевы монашей девы-слова. Я слаб витально. О толпы дивных амазонок. Что ж, чужою болью обстрадаю я свой гнилой постмодернистский век." Aleksandr Hnylytsky, "Semia Olivy. [Oliva's Seed]," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989): 26.

Thus Hnylytsky also contributed to the super-metaphor procedure in Ukrainian perestroika-era art with his art and texts containing metaphors not reducible to single-answer solutions. Meandering paths of references leading to other references in the late-Soviet postmodern fashion were played out by the artist in ways suggested by the title of this programmatic text. This mechanism is similar to the way a metaphor works: When the partial equalization of a sign and its interpretation occurs, what inevitably remains is a poetic residue. The discovery of the multiple meanings in *Laodikea's Call* or *Oliva's Seed* text is determined by the knowledge of a viewer who could either enjoy the encoding of references or the ornate style of language and painting. This residue from the partial interpretation is the aesthetic pleasure and the dizzying feeling of ultimate openness and freedom previously unknown to artists born and raised in Soviet Union.

One of the signs of such freedom was recourse to religious topics forbidden by the Soviet doctrine of official atheism that abounded in the Kyiv art-squat community, through recurring images of angels, other sacral beings, and religious ceremonies that also signaled Neo-Baroque sensitivities. Prone to mystification and the irrational world-view, Oleh Holosiy produced the entire cycle devoted to angels and titled "Pathetic Angeliad", with winged creatures appearing in such works as *Christmas Card* (1988), *Yellow Plot* (1989), *Attis* (1988), and *Adagio* (1990). He created paintings of numerous canonical religious motifs such as *Last Supper* (1988) *Annunciation* (1989), *Ablution* (1989), and many others. An entire 1993 exhibition of the Paris Commune artists in Edinburgh was titled *Angels over Ukraine,* taking into consideration this prevailing motif of Ukrainian perestroika painting from Kyiv art squats.[271] Although the Paris Commune's

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[271] *Angels Over Ukraine* (unpaginated).

angels signaled a drastic divergence from the young artists' education in realist methods, these otherworldly and utterly unreal creatures can hardly be explained by the mere spirit of contradiction experienced by artists brought up in a system that banned religious topics from the public sphere. Still, frequently recurring images of angels, other sacral beings, and religious ceremonies, could be seen as signs of a newly-found freedom during Perestroika. Additionally, those angels heralded the collapse of the Soviet Union and the total overhaul of existence for the artists who conceived them. The Perestroika angels on Ukrainian artists' canvases could also attest to the loss of their connection with a reality that was changing so rapidly it no longer seemed plausible. This disbelief and lack of understanding was succinctly formulated in the title of the book of historian Alexei Yurchak: "Everything was forever until it was no more."[272] Since young students of fine arts trained in tradition of realism did not possess the expressive tools to convey the amorphous new reality, they concentrated on capturing of the opposite of reality – angels and other symbols of the supernatural. The fragmented and partial explanation of the Paris Commune's angels includes the intoxicating feeling of freedom inspired by Perestroika, demanding an exploration of forbidden themes, complemented by the sensation of being out of touch with reality while embracing the flux of history. Perestroika itself, with its Janus-like mode of relation to history—its pronounced goal of modernization contradicting its fervent commitment to the revision of the past—was mirrored on canvases with angels borrowed from art history but intended to create new meaning with a new painterly language. Andrew Brown, the director of the Edinburgh gallery which hosted the exhibition of Ukrainian artists felt compelled to comment on the

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[272] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

difference between the angels of Western tradition and Ukrainian perestroika angels: "However, these are not the emasculated angels of effete Western art. They are the awesome harbingers of change whose power and moral rectitude give hope of a better future."[273]

Valeria Troubina executed an entire cycle of large-scale paintings of cherubs and other religious characters at the Lenina and Paris commune art-squats. *Tigers Devouring Righteous Men* (diptych 1989) or *Congregation* (1989 – another version of the title was *Worship to the Newly-born Fear*)[274] – both (figs. 30-31) clearly feature elements connecting her work to Savadov and Hnylytsky. The limited color palette of the *Tigers* and the simplified forms of its figures as well as the characteristic Savadov-inspired red contour surrounding the protagonists of the *Congregation* testify the cross-pollination of ideas in the circle. At the same time, Troubina's paintings such as *Congregation,* a version of annunciation scene with the angel embracing Mary over some mysterious altar-like structure, bore the most direct connection to religious topics. She did not employ them to comment on extraneous matters such as the contradictions between transavantgarde and conceptualist canons, but predominantly to explore the religious syncretism of the late-Soviet years, a time when people who had limited access to religious information improvised by uniting the bits of knowledge on different religions available to them.

Troubina, who had read about Buddhism in illegal photocopies of self-published books, combined her fragmentary understanding of bodhisattvas with ideas of angels from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus, her series of cherubs, well exemplified by such

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[273] *Angels over Ukraine* (unpaginated).

[274] Troubina in her interview with me (February 2015) asserted of her often-practiced habit of re-naming paintings which is another argument for the random character of titles' choices.

works as the sharp-toothed *Fearsome Cherubs* (1990), or the wailing cherubs in the *Celestial Choir* (1989) (figs. 32, 33), deviate sharply from the traditional images of attractive and benevolent angels of the Raphaelite style. Troubina represents cherubs as potentially dangerous creatures whose presence is required when some sacred truth risks being revealed, or the moral balance must be restored by the punishment of those found guilty of crossing boundaries.[275] The artist's response to the collapsing Soviet order and her exploration of forbidden esoteric literature gave birth to the melancholic and sometimes threatening creatures on her canvases, often painted in lugubrious cool bluish-gray colors with expressionistically nervous brushwork.

Troubina's painting *The Catch* (1990) (fig. 34) depicts three blue figures carrying a gigantic sharp-toothed fish equipped with hands folded in a gesture of prayer. The painting conveys the eerie atmosphere of an enigmatic ritual, yet its lumpish sad figures also have a cartoonish look. The fish, also a Christian symbol, is executed in the erratic, agitated movement of a brush, almost scarring its luminescent white body. The resulting effect is that of raw and palpable deformed matter. While the erratic brush strokes as well as their physicality and their materiality connect the artist's technique to expressionism or *art informel*, the content of the work calls for a story to be told and characters to be identified, in direct contrast to a formless idea.[276] Streams of paint resembling tears, mourning figures resembling angels, as well as a fish interpreted in this context as a symbol of Christ, are examples of simulated narration, the betrayed promise of a story. The meaning in Troubina's work is multivalent, and susceptible to various interpretations, while also reducible only to partial explanation: the spectators might infer

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[275] My skype interview with Valeria Troubina in February 2015.
[276] Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: An User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

a connection to religion through certain symbols and actions, but would never be able to connect the painting to any specific religious narrative.

Among the "post-Savadists" no one attained the legendary status of Oleh Holosiy, a star of the Paris Commune art-squat who tragically died before turning twenty eight years old. He was among those who, following Savadov's call, set out to save the genre of painting by exploiting its own methods. Soloviov had written in Holosiy's first personal catalogue published by Moscow gallery Ridzhina in 1991 that the artist was a rare instance of those capable to "breathe the illusion of new life into the now rotting body of Painting".[277] Like Savadov's earlier statements, here he understands painting in terms accepted by Ukrainian artists and critics familiar with the crisis in late Socialist Realist art. However, resuscitation efforts were restricted to "non-verbal means", as pronounced by Savadov and as demonstrated by Holosiy's paintings, most of which were exuberantly and freely executed with little attention given to the subject matter. Commenting on his artistic credo in his first catalogue of 1991, the artist described his worldview as "living without why and wherefore, in the fervent sincerity of expression."[278] His canvases were painted quickly, impulsively, with wide brushwork and often with a hallucinatory white color shimmering through the thin layers of sweepingly applied paint and undermining the reality of the depicted scenes.

Despite some promise of a story occasionally given by the artist in the narrative title or a plot recognizable from art history, most of his work is a pseudo-narration, an orchestrated simulation of a story. The so-called "nonfinitism" which was a term invented by Paris Commune artists who believed that a painting could be declared

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[277] *Oleg Holosiy. Introduction* (Moscow: Ridzhina Art Gallery, 1991). Exhibition catalogue. Unpaginated.
[278] Ibid.

finished at any given moment was reinforced in Holosiy's work by the suspension of the plot, a conscious effort made by the artist to prevent a story from unfolding. He often represented arrested moments as if caught by the stream of events without any resolution of action available. Holosiy defined his method as "fairy-tale like" and was fond of topics connected to a childhood discourse, namely the world of children's toys, fears, and fantasies. Accidentally mixed citations and references on Holosiy's canvases were akin to a "stream of consciousness" expressed through painting. Like Savadov's and Senchenko's allusion to Velasquez' original in *Cleopartra's Sorrow*, Holosiy's oeuvre is full of references to diverse art historical sources, ranging from *Children Running Away from the Thunderstorm* (1872) by Russian realist painter Konstantin Makovsky to Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819-1823) and Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's *On the Firing Line* (1916). Dwelling on this feature of Holosiy's art, Moscow art critic Ekaterina Degot defined it in medical terms as a version of "altruistic kleptomania" in the course of which the artist "incessantly gives us everything he stole from somewhere himself."[279]

Holosiy endowed numerous creatures on his canvases with wings, even where the subject implied in the title did not call for them, as in the painting *Those Running from Thunder*, in which Holosiy repurposed Konstantin Makovsky's iconic 19th-century Russian realist painting depicting peasant children, or *Attis*, a subject from Greek mythology, a self-castrating god representing the abundance of nature creating itself each year. The poetic and sometimes absurd titles of Holosiy contradicted the subject depicted and evaded any direct attachment of the readable story to the image. Unintelligible

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[279] Ekaterina Degot, "Zhyvopis Non-Stop [Oil Painting Non-stop]," *Zhurnal Stolitsa* 120, no. 10 (1993): 63.

narratives were complemented by his use of vivid and aggressive colors, and distorted figuration actively calling attention to the material constituent of oil painting.

A painting from the series devoted to the fictional personage of Nikolai Berezkin, Holosiy's *Death of Nikolai Berezkin* (1989) (fig. 35) could be seen as a rough citation of *Saturn Devouring His Son* by Goya. Devoid of the romantic dark pathos of the source, Holosiy's giant colossus whose size is underlined by the miniaturized palm trees at his feet is tormenting the silhouetted figure while surrounded by flashes of thunderstorm indicating an event of cosmic importance. At the same time, the painting with its main canary-yellow color supplemented by lush hues of pinks, violets and blues, along with its clumsy multi-armed monster and cartoonish victim, inspired feelings very different from Goya's sublime and terrifying *Saturn*. Holosiy's hybrid version of Saturn and a Boogy Man, as well as the name given to the protagonist – "Nikolai Berezkin", banal and yet endearing in its familiarity – all signified an adult story told to children. Yet the story of Nikolai Berezkin is given only in its fragments: we witness his torments and death, and his violent nightmares in the painting *Realization of Nikolai Berezkin's Nightmares* (1990).

With its incompleteness, the story compels the viewer to combine the disjoined units into some coherent narrative. In 1994, after the tragic death of Holosiy, the Aleinikov brothers (movie directors connected to Moscow unofficial art circles including Moscow Conceptualism) made the film *Love Story of Nikolai Berezkin* based solely on the fictional narrative that they composed by freely combining Holosiy's paintings. Thus, invoking narrative plots with his paintings, Holosiy contemplated the ability or requirement (stemming from official Soviet art doctrine in this case) for a painting to tell

stories, while absolving himself of such burdensome duty. His choice of painting as a medium for the indiscriminate capturing of surfaces or random images directly rejected the Socialist Realist norm requiring painting to convey didactic and ideologically correct narratives. Holosiy's neutral, disinterested authorial position was similar to a camera indiscriminately capturing everything in its view. This distance, be it analytic, ironic, or psychedelic, is a postmodern trait writ large – but unrecognized – as a contrast to the neo-expressionist or transavantgarde resurrection of subjectivism. Such strategic divergences between Ukrainian perestroika-era art and its Western equivalents were hardly noticed by critics using the Western terms hastily and without deep analysis.

2.6 Conclusion

Arriving at a better understanding Savadov and Senchenko's art of the late 1980s in the context of their cohort, the "post-savadists," with the help of borrowed Western terms such as Transavantgarde and Neo-expressionism is a complicated task. What contributes to the difficulty is the absence of consensus regarding the confusing array of terms caused partially by both practitioners and theoreticians. Moreover, Bonito Oliva's book "Transavantgarde" is itself a difficult and convoluted read (even in comparison with a typical postmodern text), replete with turns of phrase that for him hold specific meaning but are purely cryptic for non-initiated readers. Many of these terms, a case in point being "linguistic Darwinism," tend to be more poetic than academic and therefore open to

multiple interpretations.[280] Despite Oliva's use of direct and indirect quotations from numerous philosophers and art historians, he fails to document his sources. As if this weren't frustrating in itself, he plays loose with the rubric of Transavantgarde, including many artists such as George Bazelitz who would never have described themselves as belonging to this camp.

Besides the general traits of neo-expressionist aesthetics appropriated by Ukrainian perestroika painters, which include such features as exaggerated painterly gestures, pseudo-narrative structures, invocations of the past, and meandering quotation practice, there were very specific conditions that marked their work and distinguish it from global Postmodernism as a whole. Of critical importance is their unique relation to the Socialist Realist canon which had always been imposed on them and to which they reacted with an alternate painterly vision. Savadov's generation was compelled to tell their Soviet stories differently, avoiding the didactic imperative of Socialist Realism in which they were trained at the art academy. By contrast, Western postmodern distrust in representation (behind one representation there is always another one, according to Derrida) was based on a critique of capitalist society by many philosophers of the time, for seducing customers with false promises of authenticity.[281] This was a very unlikely set of concerns for the Ukrainian painters. Indeed, every Soviet artist experiencing the evaporation of communist utopianism and sensing a nascent radical shift in society was still trained to paint and sculpt figures of Lenin, laboring workers, and peasants. The inherent distrust and lack of faith in such representations and their intended meanings

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[280] Oliva, *Trans-avantgarde International,* 6.

[281] Jacques Derrida, "Sending: On Representation," in *Current French Philosophy*, trans. Peter Caws (New York: New School for Social Research, 1982), 294-326. Miriam Hobson, "Derrida and Representation: Mimesis, Presentation, and Representation," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 132-51.

paralleled, in some ways, the critique of capitalism, but in no way constituted the same motive for turning to an alternative painterly mode. The influence of Postmodernism was widespread, to be sure, but because of limited access to texts and materials, as well as the absence of any free circulation of information, Ukrainian artists' understanding of Postmodernism in the late Soviet period could only be selective and fragmentary.

Instead, locally ingrained concepts of metaphoricity and super-metaphor employed both by such artists as Savadov and Senchenko and endorsed by the critic Soloviov were shown to generate a productive discussion of Ukrainian perestroika art. Metaphor as a concept based on a visual, pre-verbal resemblance between two ideas would prove to be a useful concept for understanding how Ukrainian perestroika art was conceived and interpreted at its time. Residual pleasure appearing from incommensurability and resemblance when these two ideas are juxtaposed with each other, sustain the metaphoric procedure with the help of which Ukrainian artists described not only their painterly practices but also their perception of the artistic subjectivity. Additionally, metaphor becomes an aid in rejuvenating the painting previously subordinated to an ideological language. Ukrainian perestroika artists accomplished this escape from subordination to the Socialist Realist ideological text via the exuberant bravura of brushstrokes connoting emotions and physicality, and via pseudo-narration that imitated a storytelling structure but failed to provide any story. Artists of perestroika Kyiv art squats, inspired by the ground-breaking *Cleopatra's Sorrow* by Savadov and Senchenko, and reacting to the dissolution of the only official art style of the USSR, produced dazzling, sensual, and unreadable paintings. Bizarre artificiality, a mélange of complex references to both prehistoric times and contemporary

styles, a resistance to interpretation and ultimate indecipherability, and ultimately, the rejection of a centered authorial position were the traits that contributed to the failure of the contemporary art historical discourse to adequately react to the new art. Metaphor, at the same time, was a concept with its own history in Soviet art criticism. It was used to indicate the slight shifts and changes in a once homogenous and monolithic Socialist Realism movement and was picked up by critics as a way of responding to more drastic developments in art already outside the official canon.

Third Chapter: POINTS OF ENCOUNTER: MILITARY SERVICE, THE SOVIET-AMERICAN EXHIBITION AND THE FURMANNY LANE ART SQUAT

3.1 Introduction

In October 1988, an event named *Creating the World of Art Together*, was held at the exhibition hall of the Soviet Union of Artists in Kyiv. Even by the standards of Perestroika itself, the aim of which was to rejuvenate and modernize every aspect of life in Soviet society, the exhibition was strikingly different from what the Soviet public had become accustomed to; it was the *First Soviet-American Exhibition*, a fact significant enough to allow it to appear as the title of the exhibition itself. The exhibition had an unexpected, but very important outcome, which will be the subject of this chapter. This is that it fostered networking between participating artists, the Russians and Ukrainians in particular, and facilitated the move to Moscow for two Ukrainians, Oleg Tistol and Kostiantyn Reunov, along with their cohort. After settling at the Furmanny Lane Art Squat, they designated themselves a "Ukrainian Embassy" in Moscow, and set out to explore Ukrainian artistic traditions and history, resorting to its key and transitional moments, which they perceived to be similar to the one they were witnessing. This chapter will reconstruct the history of horizontal interactions between artists, who, circumventing all established institutions, created the spaces for an exchange of ideas on art and generated the situations in which new styles and art identities would be forged.

This chapter introduces the group of Ukrainian artists known as The Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism, who, while connected to the art squats movement in

Kyiv, were not fully involved in it.[282] At the same time, the artistic trajectory of this group was undeniably defined by the Moscow success of the Arsen Savadov's and Heorhiy Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow,* and by the complexity of the relationship that the entire generation had both with the dwindling canon of the Socialist Realism and with newly discovered and somewhat hastily imported Western art historical notions of Transavantgarde and Neo-expressionism. In this part of the dissertation, I trace the appearance of the Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism group and circumstances of its relocation to Moscow. It must be noted that the focus of this and the next chapter will be on the two founding members of the Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism group[283]—Oleg Tistol and Kostiantyn Reunov. The art of Marina Skugareva, who belonged to but did not fully associate herself with the stylistic and thematic concerns of the group, will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

This chapter will situate the Ukrainian artists in the context of the center of the Moscow unofficial art in which they found themselves upon their arrival on Furmanny. The major representatives, who include the initial settlers on Furmanny Lane, will be examined alongside the concepts and ideas that were crucial for them and for their Ukrainian counterparts. Among those coinciding issues were the prevalence of the large-scale painting format, an examination of the imperial past, collective authorship, a preoccupation with childhood, and the contrast between Renaissance and Baroque qualities and worldviews. The main discrepancy that differentiated Ukrainian from Russian artists was that Ukrainian artists primarily engaged with and challenged official Socialist Realist art, which still dominated the art scene in Kyiv, while Russian artists of

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[282] Oleg Tistol had a studio at the Paris Commune Art squat in Kyiv, but never really worked there. My interview with the artist, 2012.

[283] Later referred in this text as The Resolute Edge.

the Furmanny reacted to the Socialist Realist method and to unofficial art, which was so well developed in Moscow at the time that for some younger artists of the circle it constituted a separate canon.[284] What Groys had termed "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism" had already fostered several generations and sub-groups within the movement, prompting the younger generation to reconsider and analyze not only the norm of the Socialist Realism and the all-permeating ideology that informed it, but also the dogma they attributed to Moscow Conceptualism.

3.2 *The First Soviet-American Exhibition*

The artistic spirit of perestroika in Kyiv was fundamentally shaken by the unprecedented *First Soviet-American Exhibition* of 1988. Described with astonishment by a Soviet journalist as a clear testimony to the fall of the Iron Curtain,[285] this exhibition, with its ambitious program of travelling and promotion, introduced an entirely novel form of interaction between the public and the new art exhibited publicly for the first time in the USSR. Besides these obvious achievements that affirmed the spirit of openness promoted in accordance with perestroika's aims, the exhibit had other far reaching consequences for Ukraine. As it became the bridge connecting several Ukrainian artists to Moscow's alternative art scene, the exhibition was instrumental in shaping the next phase of Ukrainian perestroika art after the triumphal Moscow

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[284] The Medical Hermeneutics Group often referred to the tradition of the Moscow Romantic Conceptualism as a "Canon of Moscow Conceptualism". See, for example P. Peppershtein, S. Anufriev and Y. Leiderman (Inspection Medical Hermeneutics), *Ideotechnique and Recreation* (Moscow: Obscuri Viri, 1994).

[285] I. Kruchik, "Pravo Sebia Vybirat [The Right to Choose Oneself]," *Iskusstvo*, no. 4 (1990): 1-3.

appearance of Savadov and Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sorrow* (fig. 1) in 1987. Since the artists comprising the group The Resolute Edge went to live and work in the capital of the Soviet Union, this phase developed in the immediate background of the tremendous societal shift more perceptible in Moscow.

It was a huge endeavor: the show travelled to seven cities in Ukraine and one in Georgia. The sheer sweep of the *First Soviet - American Exhibition* in 1988 was imposing. After showing in Kyiv, it traveled to six other Ukrainian cities including Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Luhansk (then Voroshylovgrad), Odessa and Simferopol and then on to Tbilisi in Soviet Georgian Republic (now Georgia). Over the time of its tour, the exhibition was seen by nearly 150 thousand visitors. Among them, was the American Ambassador in the USSR, Jack Foust Matlock, who left an enthusiastic commentary in the visitors' book. He wrote: "Art possesses an ability to reconcile nations." A fitting message, Matlock's words were perfectly suited to the general perestroika rhetoric and specifically to the discourse surrounding the exhibition. When the exhibition opened in Kyiv in October 1988, it was held at the official exhibition venue of the Union of Soviet Artists under the aspirational title, "Creating the World of Art Together." The brand logo designed for the show reprinted on numerous plastic bags, t-shirts and stickers, were marketing techniques totally new to the Soviet art world. Moreover, to facilitate organizational efforts, a new company called Soviart was founded in Kyiv[286] by the art historian Viktor Khamatov and by the artist and journalist Serhiy Sviatchenko. American partners were represented by the company Global Concepts which was comprised of the L.C. Smith and Alex Hrytsenko, who also used the

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[286] As of 2017, Soviart is still active in Ukraine as a cultural center and publishing house that perpetuates the legendary status of the first show it organized.

services of the artist John Tuck to help them in selecting the American participating artists of the exhibition.

As a blockbuster event, *The First Soviet-American Exhibition* offered exposure to a wide range of artists who cultivated diverse aesthetic and ideological programs. Among the seventeen artists participating in the exhibition, two were from Russia, seven from Ukraine, four from the Baltics and five from the United States. Most importantly, it showcased artworks by young Ukrainian artists who were challenging the canon of Socialist Realism alongside American art, which demonstrated in public space freedom in styles and themes in a manner unprecedented in the Soviet Union. Needless to say, this complicated the reception of the show and confused Soviet spectators in the process. Semi-abstract sculpture, techniques of ready-made and assemblage awed the beholders as much as the fact of a sheer presence of contemporary American art in a Soviet gallery. The Soviet-American encounter was a striking, impossible situation that united very diverse artistic programs and world views. As seen in the photograph of the group printed in the magazine *Iskusstvo* (no. 4, 1990, p. 1), (fig. 36) which included most of the participants and organizers, the rift that separated the young artists from the different sides of the Iron Curtain was visible even in their manner of self-presentation. Looking at the photograph, it is easy to recognize the Soviet artists apart from the Americans as most of the Soviet artists appear more serious and concentrated while American artists appear smiling and relaxed.

Soviet viewers were understandably perplexed by the unfamiliar treatment of artistic media and subjects not for public purview in the Soviet Union. A case in point was Dana Deyoung Olson's objects from her "Lesbian Cycle", for example, an

assemblage *Chris* (fig. 37) that included the representation of a female figure with her body open and inner organs prominently featured. This image was applied on a mirror-like surface inlayed in the old wooden cupboard and adorned with a draped pink ribbon echoing the color of the intestines and evoking the sensation of a flesh. Predictably, the Soviet public reacted disapprovingly[287] while Soviet art critics, such as Igor Kruchik who reviewed the exhibition in *Iskusstvo*, were ill-equipped theoretically to deal with this type of art and therefore misinterpreted it by describing the object as a "refined pop-art."[288] Other American artworks in the show were not necessarily more comprehensible for the Soviet public but rather corresponded to expectations of Western art. For example, the non-representational sculpture by Louis Zoellar Bickett from Kentucky resembling severed body parts geometrically shaped and wrapped in textile, or the abstract Precisionism-like painting of Texas-based artist Dennis Michael Doran, both matched the image of Western art's rejection of realism. Contradicting this image long established in Soviet propaganda were the realistically-rendered series of paintings by Robert Lee Foster devoted to the experience of black people in the United States, as his black and white painting *Monday Morning* (1987) (fig. 38). Soviet viewers bent on social criticism recognized the familiar stories of racial inequalities painted and widely propagated by Soviet official media as evidence of the biased values of American life.

From the Soviet side, mostly young artists took part with career perspectives only beginning to open up in front of them. However, a participating artist from the Baltic republic of Latvia Ivars Poikans (born 1952) was already a recognized member of the

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[287] Newspaper *Sotsialisticheskiy Donbass*: Is there a need to demonstrate a psychopathology of a human personality and its various perversions? Cited in Kruchik, I. "Pravo sebia vybirat [The right to choose oneself]." *Iskusstvo*, 1990, no. 4, 1.

[288] Ibid., 1.

Latvian nonconformist art movement, and known for his caustic humor in graphics and painting since early 1980s.[289] In the show, he was represented by the acid social commentary in oil on canvas, *Idol on Clay Feet,* (fig. 39) which depicted a monumental figure of a Soviet bureaucrat as a swelling giant shadowing Kremlin and thrusting his short and fat hand to the sky in a pathetic gesture that induced a comic effect. This painting was blatantly anti-Soviet as it utilized the Biblical metaphor from the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who dreamt of a great statue made of gold, silver and brass but standing on weak clay legs and therefore doomed to collapse. The metaphor of the colossus on clay legs was routinely applied to the Russian Empire by Western European thinkers, most notably Denis Diderot in the 18th century, and achieved a new poignancy towards the end of Soviet Union's existence. Russian and Ukrainian artists were not so openly political, even though they were involved in not sanctioned by authorities art squats in Moscow and Kyiv. Aleksandr Zakharov and Dmitry Kantorov were based on Furmanny Lane art squat at the time. Among the seven Ukrainian artists presented, most of them were connected to Paris Commune art squat and four of them – Oleksandr Hnylystky, Kostiantyn Reunov, Aleksandr Roitburd, and Oleg Tistol – happened to be the major artists of the generation who would define the art of their native country for a decade to come.

Even though the topics raised by American artists included subjects that were so outrageous and taboo in Soviet public sphere, such as lesbianism, Soviet critics reacted to their art with understanding. Based on the tenets of Socialist Realist art and entrenched methods of evaluating works of art from the perspective of a critical depiction of reality,

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[289] Alla Rosenfeld and Norton Townshend Dodge, eds. *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 247.

they were eager to analyze this art as a reaction to societal problems in the United States. Nevertheless, in contrast to the provocative works of the Americans, the Soviets continued to be puzzled by the painterly virtuosity of the Russian, and, in particular, Ukrainian artists. The latter presented their oil paintings using traditional art techniques but in a most unorthodox manner, which left the critics bereft of tools to deal with the new visual phenomenon. Thus, American art surprisingly proved to be more accessible to Soviet critics in terms of its methods of direct involvement with a societal problem, especially one that would have been taboo in their own sphere of influence.

Regarding the new painting by their own citizens, however, Soviet art critics stumbled upon the impenetrability of the message presented especially in new art from Ukraine. They ignored the formal or content analysis altogether, and did not recognize particular references to the Baroque aesthetic. They concentrated instead on the psychopathological diagnosis of the artists themselves and, lacking art history tools and terms, resorted to the use of diagnostic medical language.[290] For example, Igor Kruchik, the author of the prestigious *Iskusstvo* journal, interpreted the highly individual styles of Ukrainian artists in symptomatic psychological terms, such as "the collapse of individuality into itself."[291] His verdict resonated with initial reactions to Arsen Savadov's and Heorhiy Senchenko's collaborative painting *Cleopatra's Sorrows* which was described by critic Aleksandr Sidorov as the "bewilderment of consciousness."[292] Instead of actually discussing the art, such criticism concentrated on presenting the Soviet artist deviating from realism as undergoing an inner crisis and therefore possessing a

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[290] During the Soviet Post-Stalinist period, numerous dissidents were forced into compulsory long-term psychiatric treatments. This practice, to a large extent, replaced the earlier system of concentration camps.

[291] Kruchik, "Pravo Sebia Vybirat' [The right to choose oneself]," 1.

[292] Sidorov, "Ravnenie na…?," 16.

confused personality. Such characterizations (which, incidentally, were used to deprecate modern German painters in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich in 1937) constituted the major official interpretive approach to the new phase of Perestroika art in Ukraine. Thus, most literally interpreting the title of the painting, Kruchik explained Kostiantyn Reunov's work *The Fountain in the Garden of Loneliness* (fig. 40) presented in the show in psycho-pathological terms as a symptom of the "aversion of the subject to reality."[293] This interpretation clearly failed to perceive the irony of the intentionally too ornate and too sentimental title, which, if style and message were also properly considered, would reveal the postmodern propensity of the artist to the citation practice and to the debasement of serious and tragic themes in art.

Notwithstanding the diatribes against their art, the young Ukrainian artists were set to offer paintings rich with distorted figuration and excessively packed with expressive forms, dynamic action, multilayered symbols and bizarre narrative titles. The stylistic and content choices of Reunov, as well as those of Oleg Tistol, his closest colleague at the time, required a discussion beyond the psychological pseudo-pathological paradigm offered by the Soviet critics.

Fountain in the Garden of Loneliness by Reunov reveals a figure too large to be contained within the confines of the canvas. It is crudely painted with a visible red line recalling the "post-Savadist" generation's popular technique. Partially flat and partially implying volume, the figure's torso is comprised of the black and white grid, juxtaposed against a uniform flower pattern of the cloak in which the figure is clad. Its body is abruptly cropped, with the face uncannily omitted as the border of the canvas swiftly

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[293] Kruchik, "Pravo Sebia Vybirat, 1.

interrupts the figure's emotion. For the painterly surface, the artist uses oilcloth instead of canvas, not only for purely experimental purposes that aim to enhance the painterly surface: part of the oilcloth remains uncovered by paint with the fabric pattern forming part of the image. Standard oilcloth was a staple feature of the Soviet kitchen. It was practical and decorative, usually covering an old utility table. Rolls of oilcloth were sold in government department stores and bazaar markets. Using oilcloth instead of canvas had chiefly practical purposes, as real art materials were not easily accessible in the perestroika-era, marked by scarcity and the absence of living essentials – the oilcloth was the practical equivalent of the canvas. However, as the history of Reunov's artistic interests, including an ever closer attention to the objects of the Soviet everyday will demonstrate, the choice of the oilcloth, with its mass-produced, repetitive patterns appealing to the taste of a broader population, was not an accidental esthetic choice.

Besides Soviet connotations that everyday popular oilcloth designs induced in the case of Reunov's backdrop, the flowery pattern wrapping the figure bears a striking resemblance to Baroque brocades seen in seventeenth and eighteenth century Ukrainian portraiture (fig. 41). This particular genre of portraiture, known as "parsuna", exemplified by the portraits by Ion Kondzelevych (fig. 42) and other anonymous masters often depicts figures clothed in rich fabrics (fig. 43). In general, Reunov's painting evokes the aesthetics of the Ukrainian baroque floral patterns seen in oil painting and engraving in both religious and secular art of the 17th and 18th centuries by Ivan Shchyrskyi, Leontiy Tarasevych, and other artists. Ukrainian Baroque, a period crucial for the formation of local culture (similar to the Baroque in other Slavic cultures), and in absence of a full-fledged Renaissance movement, possessed and propagated Renaissance traits, such as

secularism and intellectualism, as well as a propensity for natural forms. Throughout the entire 17th century in Ukraine, some Renaissance and Baroque forms coexisted until the end of the century, when the Baroque finally prevailed. Besides the adjustment of Byzantine norms in icon-painting which made the faces of the saints less rigid and more Slavic-looking, namely following the Renaissance requirement to be closer to nature, artists of this century progressively brought pronouncedly Baroque forms to the fore. Among these traits are the abundant decoration, accumulation of massive and impressive forms, a prevalence of the metaphors and mythological thinking and an escape from mere realism. Another important feature of Ukrainian Baroque was the inclusion of folkloric decorative elements with their symbolic meanings into high Baroque painting.[294] Development of an ornamental background in icons was especially prominent in Volhynia (Western Ukraine) school of icon-painting, where the dynamic of the image was enhanced by the pulsating patterned background in which it was situated. The function of ornamental detail in such cases was not reduced to mere decoration, as the meaning of the religious image was often complemented by ornamental patterns, reflected by the symbolic meaning of the plants depicted.[295] This tendency could be well exemplified by the icon of the *Blessed Virgin with the Child* by Ion Kondzelevych, which contains lavish decoration in the background of the painting which is echoed in the pattern of Jesus child's shirt. The repetition of the pattern thus unifies the icon pictorially creating the dynamic effect of the moving surface or the "illusion of the living and moving matter."[296] It also adds new layers to the icon's meaning, as the pattern repeated

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[294] More on the features of Ukrainian Baroque D. V. Stepovyk, *Leontiy Tarasevych i Ukrainske Mystetsvto Baroko [Leontiy Tarasevych and the Ukrainian Baroque Art]* (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 1986), 213-15.

[295] Stepovyk, *Leontiy Tarasevych,* 40-41.

[296] Ibid., 41.

in the heavenly matter and in Christ's clothing reminds viewers that they are beholding the sacred infant who can be wrapped in sky. In his *Fountain in the Garden of Loneliness*, Reunov employs a similar device by making the pattern of the figure's cloak repeat itself in the background and thereby complicating the inside/outside relationship in the scheme of the painting. By following the Baroque visual source in a very pronounced manner, Reunov openly claims his sources, much like Savadov and Senchenko with their reference to Velazquez's painting. However, with his distorted and expressive figures Reunov insists on being perceived as a contemporary painter.

The baroque epoch is invoked in the style and content of Oleg Tistol's *Bohdan Zenovij Khmelnytsky* (fig. 44), also included in the 1988 show and depicting the Ukrainian Hetman, who signed the historical treaty of Ukraine and Russia in 1654. The painting, hosting two monumental yet shadowy horsemen, is replete with patterns and symbols such as the state emblem of the USSR mounted on the column; stenciled numbers and letters in the lower right corner, and fragments of the baroque architecture (a building with a volute, visible behind the horsemen), along with a pronounced mace (the symbol of hetman's power). The canvas is filled with references to the Cossack era of Ukrainian history mixed with Soviet artifacts. Similar to Reunov's work, Tistol's painting paradoxically combines surface flatness with full-bodied contoured volumes. The sharp contrast between the two creates a vertiginous experience of conflicting perceptions. Such initial cursory observations beg for further analysis, opening up subjects never touched upon by Soviet critics in their initial encounter with the new art from Kyiv.

3.3 The Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism Group: Pop Art and the Angel of History

Reunov and Tistol's artistic and life trajectories coincided several times and at key moments during the initial period of their careers in the mid-1980s. Those connections ensured the formation of a common artistic program between the two artists. Both Reunov and Tistol, much like the majority of the Paris Commune generation discussed in the previous chapters, went to the same Soviet Republican Art School for Gifted Children in Kyiv. Their education provided them with the best traditional academic training in easel painting available in Soviet Ukraine at the time. Reunov continued his education at the more traditional Kyiv Fine Arts Institute (now The National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture), which, when formed in the 1920s, offered a curriculum of specialties and a socially-oriented program, modelled on the German Bauhaus. But by the 1980s it was considered rather conservative, though very strong in teaching easel painting.

For his part, Tistol advanced to the Lviv State Institute of Decorative and Applied Arts (now Lviv National Academy of Art), which, unlike Kyiv's program, cultivated an open experimental art atmosphere. First of all, it was situated in the outermost West of the Soviet Union, in Western Ukraine, which was previously part of Austro-Hungarian Empire and had close cultural and historical ties to Poland. Secondly, because the main specialization of the Lviv's Institute was not Painting, but Monumental Decoration, instruction there did not need to precisely to correspond to the ideological demands of the ruling regime. Initially, Monumental Decoration was a special brand of art education in

Soviet Union created with the purpose of teaching students how to decorate public Soviet spaces with statues, frescoes, mosaics, and other types of public art. This art openly obviously served ideological goals of educating the masses in basics and aspects of the communist doctrine. Since from the very beginning the Monumental Decoration departments were connected to propaganda and were politically tuned, these departments were also considered safe because dissent from the communist regime was believed to be lurking in formalist tendencies in painting. While for Socialist Realist painting abstraction of forms and colors was considered dangerous, it was tolerated within the premises of Monumental Decoration. By the time Tistol entered the State Institute of Decorative and Applied Arts, the ideological constituent of the Monumental Decoration was all but gone. Instead, it was replaced with more easily available information about Western art transferred through the Ukrainian-Polish border. Bold experiments with decoration conducted by Tistol while in Lviv helped revolutionize the painting output of the Resolute Edge group when it was formed.

The two artists' paths crossed fortuitously for the second time when both were conscripted to the Soviet Army at different points in time, but were assigned to the same military base in the Kyiv region. Reunov was drafted in the middle of his studies and served in his capacity as a student between 1983 and 1985. Their time at the base coincided from 1984 to 1985. Tistol, however, served in the army after his graduation from 1984 till 1986, returning to civil life simultaneously with Perestroika in the USSR. Confined to the restricted space of the secret military base, they were tasked with using their training and talent in the creation of visual propaganda. Their work adorned the army facilities and grounds, impressing a high ranking and influential Soviet military

official.[297] Normally, military barracks were characteristically dismal environments, covered with faded and moldy ceramic tiles of the long-gone Khrushchev era. The living quarters were lined up in monotonous serial rows of box-like architecture and decorated with communist slogans and images. The fading yet omnipresent ideological references to their military experience greatly affected the expressive techniques of the artistic collective that Reunov and Tistol would later establish.

The development of Tistol's style prompted by a period of military isolation may be observed through the comparison of his two self-portraits: one (fig. 45) was created during his study at the Republican art school in Kyiv in 1978, while the other, painted during his military service, was titled *Makarov-1* (fig. 46) after the name of the military base. The earlier painting demonstrates Tistol's fascination with Cubism and Cézanniste tendencies, which were officially forbidden by Soviet authorities but practiced clandestinely by many generations of nonconformist artists in the Soviet Union. This fascination, which began in adolescence, was quickly supplanted by a very different manner, inflected by his military experience. In the second painting, Tistol fuses his self-representation with the realities of his military life. In this later portrait, the earthly green-brown (Cézanniste) tones were replaced by an unnatural metallic grey background which Tistol animated with bright Pop Art colors that delineated the face and offered some unusual optical effects in the process, with shapes appearing to move along his face. The shapes and colors are applied mechanically, imitating old colored photography or a cheap printing effect, with some color fields flowing over the contours of objects. A metallic grey background color, spilling into the empty sockets of the sitter's eyes, denies any

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[297] Oleg Tistol still keeps in his studio the Soviet military merit certificate he was awarded in praise of his achievements in decorating the military compound.

access to the inner world of the depicted subject, completely equating the inside and the outside. The accentuated attention to the painterly surface prevails over the function of the portraiture. This trait was partially owing to the defiance against the Socialist Realist norm requiring psychological content in a portrait. The effect was intensified by the saturated unnatural colors bringing another characteristic feature of Pop Art to mind. Tistol's concern with the process of dehumanization, by which a person is reduced to an ideological function, was similar to Pop Art's investigation of the process of commodification of a celebrity persona, which annuls his/her individuality and turns each person into an object of consumption. Such parallels were initially probed and studied by the Soviet doppelganger of Pop Art, by Sots Art which deconstructed ideological language permeating Soviet life, akin to a commercial advertisement in the West. Thus, it is important to establish how experiments in the exploration of Pop Art aesthetics by the Resolute Edge group correlated with earlier and concurrent Soviet Russian phenomena steeped in such issues.

The Sots Art movement, which began in Moscow in the 1970s, is close to the origins of Moscow Conceptualism; the artists who defined it cultivated ironic attitude from the outset. They treated the Socialist Realist style of the Stalinist period as part of the Soviet myth being propagated with the help of oil on canvas media akin to the Pop Art aesthetics derived from advertisement culture. In fact, even the group's name was born out of an analogy with Pop Art). Vitaly Komar and Alexandr Melamid, who authored the Sots Art concept and were the first to apply it, also underlined their ironic position towards the idea of artistic individuality; this is demonstrated in their reference

to themselves as the "famous artists of the 1970s of the 20th century".[298] Their practice of quoting, their insistence on the secondary nature of their art, as well as their ironic stance toward collective authorship, allow for a legitimate connection between Sots Art and Postmodernism. At the time of perestroika, not only the founders of Sots Art Komar and Melamid were absent (they emigrated in 1976), but some of their followers emigrated as well. Sots Art's second stage developed without these seminal figures and under the influence of perestroika policies.

An ironic play on socialist and communist symbols which endowed early Sots Art with a certain edginess and the aura of defiant nonconformism with the advent of perestroika became part of mainstream aesthetics. Hence, the later Sots Artists, unified by Evgeniy Barabanov under the rubric of "Post-Sots Art"[299], were forced not only to demystify the communist myth but also to ironically reflect upon the initial demystification undertaken by the first generation of Sots Art. However, even though they coincided generationally and, to a certain extent aesthetically, Tistol and Reunov cannot be observed solely through a Post-Sots Art prism. First, they came from the Ukrainian context, which was not aware of a fully-formed Sots Art movement; second, they missed the beginning of perestroika as a result of their military obligations. The conditions of the military base's seclusion and their assigned task of producing visual propaganda in isolation of a secluded military base, intensified their experience of the absurdity of vacuous ideological symbols. Hence, Tistol and Reunov's exploration of the fading communist visual propaganda was bound to irony, not because they were part of the second generation, but because of the specific situation in which their aesthetics were

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[298] O. V. Kholmogorova, *Sots-Art* (Moscow: Galart, 1994), unpaginated.
[299] Evgeniy Barabanov, "Mezhdu Vremenami [Between Times]," *Tvorchestvo*, no. 8 (1989): 14.

born. It should be stressed, moreover, that this aesthetics was connected both to their investigation of ideological symbols and to their painterly practices. They were also not aware of the Baltic Pop Art practices of the so-called Tallinn School.[300]

Tistol's *Breakfast* (1987) (fig. 47) —a double portrait of himself and his fellow soldier Borisov in their army surroundings—was executed a year after his return from military service. The work demonstrates the paradigmatic features that defined Tistol's art during this period. Here again we see a wide range of contrasts: flatness is combined with volume; letters are integrated into the representational image; unnatural colors and color effects imitate the colored photographic medium's image distortion. *Breakfast* shows the two protagonists sharing food in a room filled with artificial and harsh yellow light. The artists with shaved heads and in military uniforms appear against a mottled, hazy backdrop of wall tiles. The work becomes a highly personal portrait of the state of art at the moment. It depicts the circumstances under which Tistol and Reunov discovered for themselves the usefulness and relevance of the Pop Art aesthetic for describing the Soviet everyday experience. Instead of concentrating on the realistic depiction of the grim reality of the military base utilizing his training in classical art, Tistol dwells on the contradiction of the restrictive atmosphere of the Soviet secret military object and the bright and open Pop Art colors with which he renders the scene. Tistol, equipped not only with contradiction, but with education in Soviet visual propaganda underlines the absurdity of the demand to propagate the communist ideology by decorating the base which only a limited number of military apparatchik will ever see. Western Pop Artists used electric and sharp bright colors to underline the pervasiveness

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[300] Andres Kurg, "Feedback Environment: Rethinking Art and Design Practices in Tallinn During the Early 1970s," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 20, no. 1/2 (January 2011): 26-58.

and unbearable gloss of the advertisement culture. Similar colors on Tistol's painting pointed to the harsh and suffocating atmosphere in the basement which was used as a studio by the artists while in the military service. Tistol used the ruthless color capable of dissolving the borders of his figures making them merge with their environment. Artist deprives his characters of firmness and contours allowing them to partially lose their volume due to the light's shimmering mercifulness which also turns their skin-color grey. Pop Art aesthetics becomes a critical tool, through the help of Tistol's brush when the artist demonstrates how the Soviet ideology permeates everyday life.

Sots Art and the Tallinn School were engaged with certain aspects of Pop Art which they deemed relevant – for Moscow artists it was the underlining of the ideological text visible in everyday Soviet life and Estonians were more connected with the investigation of public spaces and their study of industrial and commercial design. Ukrainian artists in their turn diverted their attention to the Western style initially to contemplate the incongruity of the advertising tools with the reality they set out to decorate for propaganda purposes, and then to enhance their classical painting technique with utterly unnatural colors and color combinations.

When Tistol and Reunov returned to Kyiv after their compulsory military service, they discovered a rapidly transforming society, swept by Gorbachev's promises of democratization, modernization and openness (glasnost). The anticipation of imminent change within one's entire way of life became experientially palpable as numerous restrictions on artists were lifted and many bans as to subject and treatment were withheld. Previously forbidden styles that were once condemned as "formalist" began to populate the public sphere. Within this atmosphere, Tistol did not choose to return to his

early Cubist and Expressionist experiments. Instead, together with Reunov, they set out to formulate a common program with the aim of creating a new and fresh quality in art, which they intended to connect to citation practices and the combination of borrowed styles.[301] When, in 1987, the two artists together launched their collaboration which they, rather ornamentally, but wittily, dubbed "The Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism", their ironic position towards the fashion for long, complex theoretical explications typical of the new postmodern discourse was finally exposed. Their title exposed their ironic attitude towards the category of new, which for them was composed of a mixture of citations and styles. They welcomed it as a liberating practice, not only as Soviet artists who are no longer restricted to the procrustean bed of a single official style, but, also, as artists escaping the modernist paradigm that demanded new statements to be relayed in new languages. The desire to dispense with crucial dichotomies, such as high and low styles of art, or the categories of old and new, was characteristic of the postmodern trend thriving in the Western art of the time. In the art production of the group that followed, artists indiscriminately combined some aspects of the modernist aesthetics (laconic geometry and expressive colors) with Soviet clichés, freely borrowing both from the avant-garde, and from the ideological visual language of agitation that was so familiar and tested since the time of their military training.

Another paradox that entertained them was the combination of ideas of the national and eclectic. By consciously creating a clash between two terms, "national," signifying something monolithic, and "eclecticism," referring to something opposite, namely a medley of styles, the artists succeeded in displaying their ironic and intelligent

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[301] "Essentially, as in every new generation, we want to create something new, and this is visible in the new quality of expressive means conditioned by citationality and eclecticism." *Babylon*, Edited by Marat Guelman, 54. Translation in the original.

attitude towards the nation-building process. By employing the prefix "post," the group contemplated the delayed emergence of Ukraine as a country, which had missed the phase of national romantic modernisms. Ukrainian artists, discovering Western theories of postmodernism in tandem with the previously forbidden pages of their own history and culture, became preoccupied with the task of creating national symbols for a state that had yet to earn its statehood, at a time when the idea of the nation-state was actively challenged and deconstructed.[302] In their large-scale and expressive paintings, the artists playfully invented new Ukrainian symbols through the language of Pop and Sots Art, Western advertisements, and, Soviet propaganda.

Paradoxically, but perhaps predictably, given the mood of this generation, the rejuvenation of cultural life in perestroika Ukraine started with the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinist purges.[303] The pall of Stalinist past crimes had a lingering presence in the shaping of an imagined restructured future under Perestroika. For Perestroika artists, in particular, considerations of local identity in light of the resurfacing dark pages of history became a driving force. The strong desire to overcome the detachment from local artistic history (which became more evident with the discovery of such tragic histories as the Boichuk School,)[304] had distinct anti-colonial overtones in the perestroika cultural climate.[305] As they rediscovered the glorious and tragic past, Ukrainian artists paralleled global postmodernist trends that displayed a predilection for welcoming spent history into the realm of art. That was one of the reasons for the appearance of references to the

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[302] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016 [originally published in 1983]).

[303] Karpan and Ryabchuk, *Ukraine: Stepping Stones to Perestroika*, 102.

[304] Executed during Stalinist purges.

[305] The author proposes a distinction between creative postcolonialism and negative and monological anticolonialism. Marko Pavlyshyn, "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture," *Australian Slavonic & East European Studies (ASEES)* 6, no. 2 (1992): 41-55.

Ukrainian avant-garde as well as to a more distant history--Ukrainian Baroque in particular—on the canvases of the Resolute Edge. The perestroika fervor in digging out the lost pages of history constituted a separate context for the Resolute Edge interest to the past, not identical with Western Postmodernism.

Western artists were dismantling the dichotomies of high and low art, issues of marginality and centrality, while exploring the lost utopias and challenges of the radical reproducibility in the capitalist society. The Ukrainian perestroika artists at the same time found themselves facing another dichotomy of great urgency: the opposition between official and unofficial art, an issue that had been formative for Soviet art since the Khrushchev Thaw of the 1960s. The Resolute Edge aimed to dispense with that standing contradiction by recycling the revolutionary discourse and declaring that their programmatic goal was the "struggle for the beauty of stereotype."[306] Their so-called "struggle" was to be understood in a completely ironic sense. In fact, they envisioned their work not as the product of the imposed necessity to choose (and therefore compromise their vision); rather, by abolishing the need for choices, they could exercise choice freely. The "beauty of stereotype", on the other hand, referred to the search for already existing models of culture. As they undertook their quest, they indiscriminately combined modernist aesthetics with Soviet clichés. They borrowed freely and simultaneously from avant-garde art as well as from the ideological language of visual agitation already familiar to them. Through their own choices, Tistol and Reunov introduced a different kind of attitude towards Soviet visuality that coincided with some aspects of Moscow Sots Art. For these artists, fighting the Soviet system could be done

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[306] *Babylon*, Edited by Marat Guelman, 54.

not only by rejecting its symbols and style but also by appropriating them and assigning new meanings for them. Illuminating the military barracks with bright Pop Art colors, Tistol and Reunov no longer felt compelled to dispense entirely with the past, welcoming in their canvases the shapes and colors that the Soviet authorities either endorsed or opposed.

The new condition that Ukrainian artists witnessed did not require that they battle a deadly adversary per se, but contemplate its decay. In doing so, the Ukrainian artists observed its ideological forms in a fashion similar to Walter Benjamin's vision of *Angelus Novus*, the angel of history capable of seeing only ruins no matter where he looked – into the future or into the past.[307] The angel of history was seen by Walter Benjamin in Paul Klee's monoprint *Angelus Novus*, which was the artwork that the German critic interpreted and even identified with throughout his life. This transparent, ominous creature prophesizing the horrors of World War II was seen by Benjamin as thrust towards future, or paradise, but only capable of seeing the past with its catastrophes and ruination. The sentiment was not altogether alien in the perestroika atmosphere, which heralded the goals of accelerated achievements of a better future while reopening old wounds (Stalinist purges, WWII atrocities, artificial famine, etc). The desire on the part of the new generation of post-Soviet Ukrainian artists to preserve the ruins of both ideology and of their extremely familiar Soviet everyday universe that had not yet undergone complete destruction inspired a highly eclectic style which would be shown for the first time at the *First Soviet-American Art Exhibition.*

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[307] Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938-1940*, trans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392-93.

3.4 The Resolute Edge Relocates to Moscow

Following their isolated yet productive army period, the next formative step in Tistol and Reunov's artistic careers was the Furmanny Lane art-commune—the most prominent fixture of the Perestroika period in Moscow. As co-participants in the *First Soviet-American Art Exhibition*, two Russian artists—Aleksander Zakharov and Dmitri Kantorov—invited the Ukrainians they had met and befriended in Kyiv to join them at the art squat on Furmanny lane.[308] This artistic commune illegally occupied a dilapidated Secession-style building in the center of Moscow then undergoing reconstruction.[309] Zakharov and Kantorov, core members of another Moscow alternative group called Tsentr [Center] and also founded in 1987, settled into the Furmanny art space each occupying one of the emptied rooms and turning them into their studios. The very fact that such an alternative heterotopic space was allowed to exist unperturbed in the very center of Moscow reveals much about the changed dynamics in the relationship between artists and state power during the Perestroika period. Perhaps, owing both to the loosening of ideological pressure and to the classic chaos within an empire shortly before its demise, the appearance of the Furmanny commune was possible.

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[308] My Interview with Oleg Tistol, December 2012: Митя приехал на выставку, мы очень подружились, он оказался очень позитивный такой человек, и он на вечеринке у Гнилицкого где-то дома показывал слайды, картинки, объяснял, что там делается на Фурманном, и пригласил: приезжайте на Фурманный, есть пару комнат, кто хочет. Никто не отреагировал, меня это страшно удивило, я был самый старший из этой компании.[Mitya [Kantorov] came to the exhibition, and we immediately became very close friends. He turned out to be such a positive person. Then there was a party at Hnylytsky's home, where Mitya was showing slides, images, and he explained what was going on at Furmanny and invited everyone willing to relocate as there were rooms available. Nobody responded to this invitation, which really surprised me as I was the eldest among those present.]

[309] Farid Bogdalov was the first to settle in and invite the initial group of artists – Yuri Albert, Vadim Zakharov, brothers Sergei and Vladimir Mironenko, Sven Gundlakh, Kostya Zvezdochetov and Andrei Filippov.

The First Soviet-American Art Exhibition which had opened in Kyiv in the autumn of 1988, was still ongoing and traveling when Tistol and Reunov together with their cohort moved to Furmanny. This speed testified to the urgency of their response to the societal changes and their thirst for new testing grounds of their ideas. In the situation of the erosion of the official art system, the networks of artists replaced the institutional functions of the museum organization and curatorship.[310] Tistol and Reunov experienced the solidarity and support from the Furmanny community, even before their relocation when a complete stranger—painter Andrei Karpov financed the transportation of their works from Kyiv to Moscow.[311] On Furmanny Lane, Tistol and Reunov, joined by Yana Bystrova, Oleksandr Kharchenko and Marina Skugareva occupied the abandoned apartment 31 which became their common studio. There, they found themselves in the center of Moscow's alternative culture seated at the heart of the Soviet capital.

Situated in a dilapidated building in the center of the crumbling Soviet Empire, the Furmanny Lane Art squat was the first publicly accessible art space in the USSR that functioned without any control from the Communist regime, or from any official art organizations.[312] Although short-lived (having been occupied by artists since 1986 and closed by the end of 1989), this unauthorized cultural space embodied the main art

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[310] The All-Soviet Youth exhibitions, starting from the 17th that took place in 1986, became the laboratory of curatorship, which had been virtually non-existent in the Soviet Union. Previously, exhibitions were organized by the committees (comprised of artists) within Unions of Artists that selected the artists and placed the artworks on walls. With perestroika, there was an understanding that the institute of curatorship should be developed in the country. "В качестве эксперимента мы договорились, что выставку будут делать искусствоведы, а не художники. Это была настоящая административная революция. Впервые с 30-х годов. [As an experiment, we agreed that the exhibition would be curated by art historians and not by the artists. It was a real administrative revolution. It happened for the first time since the 1930s.]" In Georgii Kizevalter, *Perelomnye Vos'midesiatye v Neofitsial'nom Iskusstve SSSR: Sbornik Materialov [Watershed Eighties in the Unofficial Art of the USSR: Collection of Materials]* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2014), 212-13.

[311] My interview of December 2012 with Oleg Tistol.

[312] Unofficial art was sometimes showcased in private apartment exhibitions but their public was limited to the circles of acquaintances.

concerns, themes and styles of the late Soviet period. It also enjoyed unprecedented interest from Western art collectors and curators of the time. American writer and publicist, Andrew Solomon, spent some time living in the Furmanny squat. He wrote a seminal reportage of his experience in a book he called "The Irony Tower", asserting that, "to have witnessed the heyday of Furmanny is an experience I will remember as long as the memory serves. It was like being at the center of the world."[313] Yuri Albert, one of the first seven artists to appear on Furmanny, after Farid Bogdalov, remembered the visits by major European art curators whose importance was not fully grasped by Soviet artists more anxious to talk about art than to present their professional portfolios and career aspirations.[314] The interest towards Soviet art was a perestroika phenomenon, enhanced by the first Sotheby's Soviet art auction which was part of the emerging fashion for everything Soviet blossoming in Western Europe and the US by the end of the 1980s.[315] The Orientalizing and Othering of the Soviet experience made the discovery even more enticing for numerous western visitors.[316]

The art squat on Furmanny lane was at the epicenter of a West-Soviet encounter where both parties had the opportunity to discover each other. As stated by Solomon: "In the winter of 1988-89, tourists from the west who wanted to buy art had come to Moscow

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[313] Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 230.

[314] A visit from such a curator would be considered by many European artists as the opportunity of a lifetime. My interview with Yuri Albert, January 2014.

[315] "Не будет преувеличением сказать, что до Горбачева и перестройки не существовало в Америке сколько-нибудь последовательного интереса к современному советскому искусству. [It would be no overestimation to say that before Gorbachov and perestroika, there was no consistent interest toward Soviet art in America.]" Jamey Gambrell, "Nekotoraia Polza ot Politiki [Some Usefulness from Politics]," *Ogoniok* no. 47, November 1991. Jamey Gambrell, "Notes on Underground," *Art in America* 76, no. 11 (November 1988): 126-37, 193.

[316] The Russian Empire orientalized its newly conquered subjects during the course of its entire history while Soviet Union was orientalized in the postmodern period. The best example of 'othering' of the Soviet lifestyle during perestroika for the sake of the Western audience's entertainment was the occasion of the Sotheby's auction that was theatrically staged and exploited all known stereotypes about Russia and the Soviet Union to enhance the sales. See more in Solomon, *Irony Tower,* 20, 31.

knowing one word, 'Furmanny.'"[317] The legendary status of the Furmanny as Moscow's main artistic and intellectual center also attracted native professionals. For example, the then rising star of Moscow curatorship, Olga Sviblova filmed an entire movie about Furmanny, rather prophetically titled "In Search for a Happy End." Sviblova's film prominently covered the Ukrainian inhabitants of the art squat.[318]

After settling at the Furmanny Lane Art Squat, Tistol and his colleagues appointed themselves as Ukrainian Embassy representatives in Moscow, even though Ukraine was not yet an independent country but a republic of Soviet Union. While on Furmanny, they encountered the most progressive art of the capital, exploring many themes and concerns that were relevant for the Ukrainian group. They also encountered dissent to their own artistic and theoretic interests. The remainder of this chapter will introduce the main representatives of the Furmany Lane art squat. The aesthetic dominating in this art squat was rooted in the unofficial Soviet culture primarily in the tradition of Moscow Conceptualism. The artists who colonized the squat belonged to the second generation described above, and at this point, they were preoccupied with the analysis and archiving of the movement. Such artists as Vadim Zakharov and Yuri Albert investigated the metaphysical dimension of Moscow Conceptualism, and its most ironic and humorous branch, Sots Art, was developed by Konstantin Zvezdochetov at this time period. The remainder of this chapter will examine the relevance of such themes for the new settlers on Furmanny.

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[317] Solomon, *Irony Tower,* 230.

[318] She narrated the text for the movie that opened with the statement that she believes that historic time was realized most condensed in certain spaces, with Furmanny in mind.

3.5 Moscow Conceptualists and Ukrainian Artists on Furmanny Lane

Ukrainian artists on Furmanny came in direct contact with something which was inconceivable for them back in the Ukrainian Socialist Republic, namely, the fully-formed alternative art movement with its canon, history, descriptive texts and archives. This stood in stark contrast to Ukrainian nonconformism of the sixties and seventies, which was associated with dissident movements and existed predominantly on the margins of the official discourse, in the liminal space of the officially impermissible—and therefore more dispersed and blurred and definitely less documented. Although the Moscow artistic underground never really was welcomed by the communist regime, by the beginning of the eighties loose associations among artists were robust enough to foster a new generation. This generation, many of whose members were among the first settlers on the Furmanny Lane art squat, joined the tradition that was united by the commonly developed textual and aesthetic discourse. Its main representatives, such as Ilya Kabakov, were working on their alternative styles and ideas since late 1950s. Yuri Albert, Vadim Zakharov, Andrei Filippov and Sergei Mironenko, Konstantin Zvezdochetov, the initial Furmanny group which settled there after Farid Bogdalov, were all united by their awareness of Moscow Conceptualism, their relation to this tradition, and, by the necessity to respond to it. They, as well as the Russian-Ukrainian group Inspection Medical Hermeneutics, which was born on Furmanny in December of 1987, defined their artistic practice not only in relation to Soviet reality, but also to the strong unofficial movement within which they recognized themselves as artists.

The Ukrainian artists' ideological (and actual) fathers, however, were the generation of the highly skilled easel painters of the Socialist Realist method, who practiced certain forbidden styles individually, secretly, and in their own studios.[319] Therefore, Ukrainians from Kyiv were discovering not only the new types of art but a different type of approach to art tradition. The youngest generation of Moscow Conceptualism was united by common themes and styles some of which were conditioned by their concern to describe their place in relation to their direct predecessors. Among such themes explored in their artistic practice were their self-referential impulse and gestures; an articulated meta-position; the Soviet discourse of childhood production as one of the languages of their art; the languages of mass culture, ideology, and the current historical context. Many of these themes would resonate in the new Ukrainian painting produced by the artists discovering the tradition of the Moscow Conceptualism simultaneously with the response to it. Arrival on Furmanny by the Ukrainian artists thus coincided with the postmodern moment of the re-evaluation of the canon which corresponded to their concerns even though the tradition they revisited was drastically different.

Even geographically, Furmanny was situated nearby the Stretensky boulevard art studios in which the first generation of Moscow conceptualists such as Ilya Kabakov, Oleg Vassiliev and Erik Bulatov worked. However, the early 1980s witnessed a mass exodus of this generation to the West. By the time of the Furmanny boom, all Stretensky boulevard artists had already left.[320] The second generation of Moscow conceptualists, former members of the group Mukhomory (Toadstool)—Sven Gundlakh, the Mironenko

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[319] Fathers of Arsen Savadov and Kostiantyn Reunov were official Soviet Ukrainian artists.

[320] Artists the core of the Moscow Conceptualist group who immigrated to the West included: Nikita Alekseev, Vitaly Komar, and Alexandr Melamid.

brothers, and Konstantin Zvezdochetov, as well as Yuri Albert, Vadim Zakharov and Andrei Filippov—are considered the core group of the Furmanny lane squat. They moved in following Farid Bogdalov who initiated the settlement of artists in this semi-abandoned, partly undergoing reconstruction building in May 1986. This group of artists is considered responsible for the late conceptualist orientation of art produced in Furmanny. It was a highly idiosyncratic phenomenon grounded both in the unofficial Moscow intellectual culture and its very original interpretations of post-structuralist theory, the philosophy of G.W.F Hegel and Martin Heidegger, as well as religious texts of diverse origins.[321]

Since Moscow Conceptualism largely developed in an atmosphere of isolation and without access to the broader public, art criticism and the international art community; the tautological function of art formulated in the famous dictum of Joseph Kosuth "art is the definition of art" was also highly relevant to this underground Soviet movement.[322] Embodying viewers, critics, and art producers at the same time, artists who belonged to this unofficial circle explored the self-referential nature of art by creating texts, objects, and installations that described the art practice as it was interpreted within the group. The textual outcome of this practice, metaphorical, witty, and hermetic for strangers, was later summarized and organized as a dictionary.[323]

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[321] The originality of Moscow conceptualism and its difference from the global Conceptual Art trend have been articulated in a corpus of important literature on the subject. Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form – Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010). Alla Rosenfeld, ed., *Moscow Conceptualism in Context* (New York, Munich: Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, Prestel, 2011).

[322] Joseph Kosuth, "Art and Philosophy," in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1996-1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

[323] Andrei Monastyrsky, *Slovar Terminov Moscovskoi Kontseptualnoi Shkoly. [Dictionary of the Terms of the Moscow Conceptual School]* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1999).

Even more so, after the earlier generation left, the Furmanny cohort felt the need to define and document the artistic situation in Moscow unofficial circles. [324] Apart from capturing the collective lingua franca, younger artists gathered the archives (MANI folders) of their movement.[325] These artists were also preoccupied with establishing the hierarchies and influences (formulating in this way the Moscow Conceptualism Canon),[326] thus writing their own history, all the while conscious that Soviet society shoved them aside as outcasts. Their internal piety towards older members only underlined the ignorance with which they were treated by official art organizations. These older artists, comprising the core of Moscow conceptualist group, left, leaving a gaping emptiness in their stead. As a result, the younger conceptualists on Furmanny described their activity as a conversation around an empty center alluding both to the absence of founding fathers of Moscow Conceptualism and to a specific compendium of intellectual interests inherent to the entire circle.[327]

Of the initial group of seven Russian artists who settled on Furmanny, Yuri Albert was insistent on defining his art as post-conceptual, in reference not only to its characteristics but to the fact that it was occurring after Moscow Conceptualism was

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[324] "Настало время, а это начало восьмидесятых, когда появилось желание оглянуться вокруг и понять, кто стоит рядом с тобой. Посмотреть с птичьего полета и одновременно поэксперементировать с этим кругом – как исследователь по отношению к какому-то пока еще неизвестному предмету.[The time had come, and I am talking about the early 1980s here, when the desire to look around and to understand who was standing next to you appeared. [I wanted] to see from a bird's eye view and also to experiment with the circle in the role of a researcher dealing with an unknown subject.]" My skype interview with Zakharov, April 2013.

[325] Moscow Archive of New Art, initiated by Nikolai Panitkov, member of the Collective Action Group and consolidated since 1988.

[326] Also defined as an Empty Canon or an Orthodox Hut See*: Monastyrsky, *Slovar Terminov Moscovskoi Kontseptualnoi Shkoly.*

[327] Sven Gundlakh in his letter to Andrew Solomon described their group as "centripetal, a matter of sitting around the void." The idea of void is also an internal reference, given the importance of the idea of the void for Ilya Kabakov, Collective Actions Group and for Moscow Conceptualism in general. Solomon, *Irony Tower*, 140.

crystalized as a movement.[328] His Furmanny-era art was self-referential, replete with hidden and overt citations to the issues raised by other artists of his circle, while often imitating the form of art commentary. As such, it rejected categorically the avant-garde ambition to merge art with life.[329] Instead, Albert questioned this ambition by aiming to remain strictly within a domain of art, its languages, definitions and influences. This conceptual rejection, executed with the mild irony and trademark humor of the artist, is devoid of any pathos. In its place is a confirmation of the inexorable compulsion of art to stay confined within the boundaries of its own history, canons and norms, while constantly affirming a connection to other works of art. This essential feature of art as belonging to its own field was established not necessarily in accordance with media-specificity (as Clement Greenberg would insist), but by an explicit verbal insistence on textual notation. Albert replaces the avant-garde's formalist "laying bare of the device" with narration of the process of his creative efforts.[330] In painstaking detail, he tells not only of how he arrived at his own pictorial ideas, but also how other artists' achievements impacted his thoughts, even the names of the artists who influence him. The work entitled *If Only I Could Make An Artwork That Wowed Everyone* (1986) (fig. 48) follows the method typical of Albert's paintings from the Furmanny era.

The availability of the studio space on Furmanny, as well as the perestroika spirit which instilled in artists the hope that their artworks would be seen by a broader public, enabled Albert to produce several large-scale canvases that existed only as notations

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[328] My in-person interview with Yuri Albert, Moscow, December, 2012.

[329] "revolutionizing of the praxis of life … total return of art to the praxis of life," in Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* Vol. 4, 91.

[330] "Obnazhenie prioma" was theorized by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his study *Art as Technique* of 1917.

before.[331] Emulating the definitive forms of art production, namely canvas with signs inscribed on it with the help of paint, Albert created many canvases, which, like the conceptual paintings of the sixties by the iconic John Baldessari, contained only monotonous background colors and letters applied on top. In Albert's case, however, the bright white background of canvases, aside from serving as a commentary on the traditional languages of art, could also qualify as a reference that perpetuated the trajectory of his art as art commentary. In particular, he commented on the art of major artists of the tradition with which Albert associated himself. The color white symbolized active emptiness in the paintings of Ilya Kabakov[332], the core artist of the earlier Moscow Conceptualism group. However, in the younger artist's paintings, white was devoid of any existentialist or metaphysical connotations, existing rather as a neutral backdrop for a statement. Consequently, Albert's paintings could be seen as commenting upon and also creatively reconsidering the global and local traditions of conceptual art.

Albert created an inverted experience for his viewers; rather than offering an artwork in which the artistic influences become apparent through careful observation, he chooses to list the actual influences upon it, thus presenting the viewer with an invitation to create the work in his/her own mind's eye. Using this device of notation painting, Albert reflects on the ontology of art and the technological possibilities offered by

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[331] "Когда появился в 86 году этот Фурманный, формат сразу изменился, если вы посмотрите по коллекции, то все работы больше метра – они сделаны в 86 году. [When the Furmanny appeared in 1986, the format changed immediately. If you look at the collections, you will see that all the artworks bigger than a meter –were made in 1986.]" My in-person interview with Yuri Albert, Moscow, December, 2012. My interviews with other artists (conducted between 2012 and 2016); and other sources such as: Kizevalter, *Perelomnye vos'midesiatye v neofitsialnom iskusstve SSSR.* For further information on the relevance of notations for conceptual art practice, see: Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968).

[332] Ilya Kabakov, "On the Subject of "the Void"," in *Die Totale Aufklarung: Moskauer Konzeptkunst, 1960-1990 [Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow, 1960-1990]* Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Fundacion Juan March, eds. Boris Groys, Max Hollein, and Manuel Fontain Del Junco (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2008).

languages such as braille or stenography, traditionally viewed as incompatible with visual perception or the realm of art. In a work from the series entitled "For Blind People," Albert substitutes the external form with the message that the specific form is supposed to deliver and titles his work: *In My Works There Is Nothing To See But My Love For Art* (1989) (fig. 49). While researching the distribution practices of post-conceptual art to unprepared audiences, Albert simultaneously played with the incomprehensibility of certain types of art for general audiences. The idea of art's tautological function as explored by Joseph Kosuth, who famously stated that "art is the definition of art"[333] was perhaps the most intriguing for Albert when he first discovered the existence of the Western Conceptualism.[334] Accordingly, Albert's meta-art position was consciously created to describe function, essence, technique and historical context of his own art production.

Given the earlier discussion of on importance of the concept of metaphor for the perestroika generation of artists in the second chapter, it is important to note here that Albert's meta-art methodology comes closest to what Savadov's circle found intriguing for Ukrainian contemporary painting. Albert himself admitted as much: "I am interested in art's capacity to be a metaphor for itself."[335] Indeed, the notion of metaphor complicates the conceptualist idea of art and its definition as it was interpreted by Soviet Perestroika artists. By allowing a poetic dimension into the field of logic and objectivism, which became a hallmark of Western conceptualism, Albert investigated the Romantic characteristic of the Moscow Conceptualism, that metaphorical residue that did not fit

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[333] Kosuth, "Art and Philosophy."

[334] My in person interview with Yuri Albert, December 2012.

[335] Yuri Albert, *Vystavka [Exhibition]* (Moscow: Fond Podderzhki Vizualnykh Iskusstv Eleny Berëzkinoi "Era," 2007), 39.

into the image of the strictly logical and calculated conceptualism.[336] Exploring the history of local conceptualism which was, for example, in the case of Ilya Kabakov highly embedded into the artist's private history, his childhood experiences and emotions, Albert was also gearing his art towards a more human dimension despite its logical and abstracted form. For Kosuth, conceptual art was about direct understanding. Meanwhile, the metaphor denies a singular interpretation and confirms the multivalency of meanings. Despite the formal discrepancies with Ukrainian art working in neo-expressionist figurative painting associated with unbridled emotions, the aims of the two movements appear to coincide on several crucial points, with metaphor as one of them. The Furmanny became the art laboratory that made coincidences more apparent.

The meta-art position assumed by the Ukrainian painters of Savadov's generation was inherent to the artistic method of yet another Russian Furmanny artist, Vadim Zahkharov, who since the early 1980s conceived of projects that would define, provoke, and describe the very character of Moscow conceptualism. In this vein, his works *I Made Enemies* (1982) or *Action Elephants* (1982) were produced with the help of a method that Zakharov described as "sounding."[337] Furmanny offered Zakharov the opportunity to

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[336] The idea of "romantic" nature of Moscow Conceptualism was explored by many authors since initial article of 1979 when Groys gave the characteristic to the *A-Ya* journal. See for example, Sarah Wilson, "Moscow Romantic Exceptionalism: The Suspension of Disbelief," *E-flux,* Journal No. 29, November 2011, Last Accessed October 2017, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68104/moscow-romantic-exceptionalism-the-suspension-of-disbelief/.

[337] Vadim Zakharov: "Под зондированием именно и понималась деятельность, которая исследует нечто с помощью неких "аппаратов". Этим нечто был неофициальный круг художников, и мне была интересна реакция на некоторые мои "исследовательские выпады". Например, та же работа "Я приобрел врагов" или "Слоники", которые буквально являлись иллюстрациями подобного метода работы. Я анкетировал художников в 1982 году, задавая им провокационные вопросы." By "sounding" I meant exactly that type of activity which investigates something with the help of certain "devices." This something was a circle of unofficial artists, and I was interested in their reaction to my "investigative thrusts." For instance, my work *I Made Enemies* or *Elephants* were the illustrations of such a work method. In 1982, I interacted with artists by asking them provocative questions. My interview with the artist. 22.07.2013.

change the format of his artworks, and replace his photography, works on paper, and performances, with large-scale oil paintings. Apart from such works as *Two Canons* (1987), (fig. 51) which used ready-made everyday objects (industrially produced decorative tiles and linoleum), Zakharov also created paintings utilizing the techniques that made the brushwork visible together with the presence of the artist's hand, in contrast to the conceptualist format, as seen in his painting *Baroque* (1986) (fig. 50). According to the artist, his experiments with painting media on Furmanny, which were and are still unique to his artistic output, were primarily the continuation of his conceptual investigation into the intrinsic problems of art development and the inception of ideas in medium when their execution happens in another. He utilized his early performances, which he reimagined as sculptures. Then the artist rendered them in painted forms with the intention of capturing the transition of the realist into abstract painting. In short, he aimed to study the inner logic of art when an idea travels between different media: "To conclude, I can say that it was important for me to model the entire process of art development from realistic to abstract forms in the traditional art technique.[338] The paintings within this project, which in our conversation Zakharov dubbed as "a self-developing system", lasted from 1985 to 1992, when all connected in the closed circle of inner references pertinent to Zakharov's own oeuvre; they would become fully apparent only when the project would be exhibited in its entirety (this has yet to happen).

Similar to Albert's artworks, which were executed in traditional techniques but did not engage with the traditional formalistic issues, Zakharov's paintings were not

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[338] Vadim Zakharov: "Если сделать вывод, то можно сказать - мне было важно смоделировать в традиционной технике процесс развития искусства от реалистических форм до абстрактных." My interview with the artist via email, January, 2017.

primarily affected by the modernist traits and postmodernist sensitivity adopted covertly by late Socialist Realism. His painting *Baroque* (1986) made on Furmanny consisted of a band of eight meters of canvas comprising four panels. Two among those panels were rendered abstractly, and two showed representational images, ornamentation and text. All four panels used only black and white colors. The resulting effect resembled blown-up black and white film strips marked, as if through aging, with multiple white scratches. The retro effect was useful in emphasizing something worn out, decrepit or wasted, making Zakahrov's work visually closer to the aesthetic of Moscow Conceptualism, albeit in a different format. The painting imitated the documentation of conceptualist performances often executed in poor quality black and white photographs, which for instance abounded in MANI archives. Hence the brushwork and scratches on the canvas' surface were not an exercise in late Modernism, with its exploration of two-dimensionality in painting with the help of formalist means. Zakharov was obviously more interested in commenting on Moscow Conceptualism, than on the Western masters of modernism (chiefly Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse) revered by many Soviet nonconformist and official artists of the seventies and eighties.[339]

Zakharov and other artists representative of Moscow Conceptualism's younger generation occupied a radically different position in relation to Socialist Realism than did Ukrainian artists. For the latter, the Soviet official monolithic artistic method was a living embodiment of the generation of their fathers.[340] It was an artistic method they experienced firsthand and consequently possessed an impetus to interact with, predictably by disputing and dissecting it. In Moscow, Zakharov associated himself with the

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[339] Florkovskaia, *Malaia Gruzinskaia, 28*.

[340] Konstantin Reunov's father and Arsen Savadov's father were accepted and influential official painters.

intellectual, logocentric artistic cohort that was no longer devoted solely to pure painterly problems.

Painting for Zakharov, similarly to Albert, was never a field that situated intrinsic painterly problems at the center of his artistic concerns. He employed it as a sign referring to the fine art category (oil on canvas as a quintessential artistic technique), that allowed continuing a conceptualist conversation of art about art. Painting became one among the artistic methods that Zakharov utilized to narrow this conversation even further, by imagining the ultimate reduction of themes and motifs as the oeuvre of a single artist, himself. Zakharov's painting *Baroque* offers a unique perspective on his reductionist method, as it is hermetic to the point that it tries to stay not only in the confines of the Moscow Conceptualism tradition, but within the boundaries of one artist's creative production. Zakharov posits himself as this artist experiencing a "baroque" moment, hence the technique and format of the artwork, but both the aesthetics and the themes return the viewer back to young Zakharov's performances. The two figure-statues depicted in this work recall Zakharov's performances of an earlier period, his action *Eye Patch* (1983) in which the artist covered one of his eyes with a bandage, and his performance *Little Elephants* (1982) during which the artist posed with souvenir figurines of elephants and with placards explaining how the elephants affected his life. In the painting, both elements, the eye patch and the elephants, are fused with the self-portrait of the artist additionally converged with a representation of angels, typical of classical art. The resulting representation with exaggerated unnatural features comments on a baroque sensitivity together with the artistic career of Zakharov and is accompanied by the slogan, humorous and poetic, imitating a lamentation to God that paradoxically asks

not to notice the artist who identifies himself as a "dwarf who dies from his own little hands." Unlike Ukrainian perestroika artists who resorted to baroque forms and ideas because they were seeking in these traditional elements of Ukrainian culture the answer of what is was to be a Ukrainian artist, Zakharov employed the idea of the baroque as something entirely foreign for the tradition to which he belonged. Where Zakharov tested the boundaries of his artistic canon, Savadov was tracing its origins.

In yet another work of the Furmanny period, *Eight Titles* (1988) (fig. 52), Zakharov placed tiny photographs of his earlier paintings and performances covered by glass screens on the big panels overlaid impasto with grey monotonous tempera. An inconspicuous grey industrial tile was placed next to each photograph, echoing its shape but usually pointing in a different direction. By creating a closed-loop hermetic system focused on one person insistently narrating his own private history and mythology, Zakharov commented more universally on the circumstances of an artist deprived of institutional support but also striving to replace with his own persona all the accessorial positions in the art world, be it curator or art historian. The device of having one artwork contain reference to other artworks could also be understood as an ironic commentary on the art historical method of tracing the evolution of an artist's style over the span of an entire career. Thus, with his artwork Zakharov seems to comment on early Zakharov. While exploring the limits of his artistic practice with unusual techniques and themes, Zakharov also continued dwelling on the subject of investigation, pertinent to the entire movement of Moscow Conceptualism. More specifically, he focused on the issue of characters with which representatives of earlier generations, such as Ilya Kabakov, would undermine the traditional figure of the artist. At the same time, while characters in

Kabakov's albums were akin to literary heroes, conceived to imagine a different type of art, Zakharov wanted to take this practice further and, by embodying different imaginary artists, created additional figures in unofficial Moscow art circles. Consequently, by working in tandem and collectively, the artist strove for a "widening of the territory of art and creativity."[341]

As a young artist, Zakharov was also eager to categorize the disparate languages of art. In his other Furmanny work *Two Canons* (1988), he combined two contrasting types of industrially produced tiles and linoleum, one monochrome and another patterned, to open up the variety of divergent associations relating to dualistic thinking, inherent to Moscow Conceptualism. Tiles, a recurring fixture medium of Zakharov's project on Furmanny, were considered by the artist to be a "new canon of the perestroika era."[342] Metonymically, the contrastive pair of monochrome-colored tiles and ornamental linoleum addresses the dichotomy of Khrushchev's functionalism and Brezhnev's voluptuousness, and other oppositional dualities such as avant-garde and kitsch,[343] ornament and crime,[344] intellectual conceptualism and decorative neo-expressionism, or finally Renaissance and Baroque.[345] The artist's statement in regard to this pair ironically asserts the exaggerated importance of this coincidental dichotomy: "In this idiotic industrial design I discovered schemes of the Universal Design of Our Life."[346]

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[341] The artist was part of SZ group, jointly with Viktor Skersis, as an archivist he was Pastor Zond, since 2010 he is part of the group OBAMAinBERLIN. My interview via email with Vadim Zakharov, January 2017.

[342] My interview via email with Vadim Zakharov, January 2017.

[343] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* Vol. 6, No.5 (1939): 34-49.

[344] Loos, *Ornament and Crime*.

[345] Heinrich Wolfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover Publication, 1950).

[346] "Там, в этом изображении идиотского промышленного дизайна, я обнаружил схемы Универсального устройства нашей жизни. Присмотритесь, там круги, орнаменты, как мандалы, несут "глубинный смысл вселенной". А сочетание перестроечного канона с универсальным давало

Zakharov's proclivity for contrast betrays the same schema of thinking that was utilized by Russian art critics when contrasting the "sensual" Ukrainian neo-expressionist painting to "cerebral" Moscow Conceptualism.

In the same year that the Kyivan group The Resolute Edge came into being, a group within Moscow Conceptualism, also preoccupied with its definition and therefore experimenting with gestures of self-reference, was born at Furmanny in December of 1987. The collective that called itself the Inspection Medical Hermeneutic Group (or "Medhermeneutics" in the shortened form) enlisted both Russian and Ukrainian artists. Affiliated with Moscow Conceptualism, the group was comprised of the Muscovite Pavel Pepperstein and two artists from the southern Ukrainian city Odessa, Sergei Anufriev and Yuri Leiderman. Beginning in the 1970s, Odessa was an active site of artistic experiment. By the 1980s it had created its own brand of Conceptualism affected by Odessa's humorous and subversive popular culture, with burlesque and absurdist humor, verbal games and puns, but also inherent cosmopolitanism and a proclivity for myth-making. Inspection Medical Hermeneutics appeared as a merger between Odessan and Moscow conceptualism, infusing the Moscow movement with its special humor, verbalisms and southern nonchalance.

The Medhermeneutic artists claimed to establish their group with a palliative mission, which explains the medical overtones in the name of the collaboration. The group was concerned with the creative potential of art historical discourse which might

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ощущение описания ВСЕГО, найденного в банальном, случайном, не художественном. Но не придавайте этому большого значения. [There, in that image of an idiotic industrial design, I discovered schemes of the Universal Design of Our Life. If you take a closer look, you will see circles, ornaments, and mandalas conveying the "profound sense of the universe." And the combination of the perestroika canon with a universal canon gave the feeling of the description of EVERYTHING found in the banal, the coincidental, and the non-artistic. But do not place too much importance on this]." My interview via email with Vadim Zakharov, January 2017.

heal society from its ideological illnesses. Any ideology was regarded by its members as a sickness from which one could be rehabilitated with the aid of "illustration methodologies" or "ideotechnique."[347] The initial artistic medium of the group was texts and conversations. These highly hermetic, largely impenetrable, yet bizarrely humorous texts produced by the group were connected to colloquies on childhood, medicine, conceptualism, religious experience, psychoanalysis and schizo-analysis. The trio of artists strongly believed, albeit ironically, in the restorative potential of their texts, and treated them as a form of a therapeutic "talking cure". Since the artists rejected any stable identity, their approach oscillated constantly between the positions of "patient" and "doctor." Medical Hermeneutics did not deny that their own symptoms were studied among others, consciously connecting a preoccupation with ideological sickness to idiocy through the similarity of words (ideotechnique and idiotechnique), while not excluding the reversibility of the doctor-patient position in their endeavors.

Mixed with curiosity and fascination, the infantile fear of medicine and its ominous medical instruments translates into their installation *Commodity Panel with Slight Distortion* (1988-1989) (fig. 53). Here glass objects of dubious medical functions mostly incomprehensible to outsiders to the Soviet experience recall cupping glasses borrowed from traditional Chinese medicine, which had become widespread in the Soviet Union as a treatment for the common cold. A testimonial to the ubiquity of ancient Chinese philosophy in Moscow Conceptualist circles, such medical devices also hint at the practice of Soviet medicine as being some sort of contemporary shamanism.

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[347] Peppershtein, Anufriev and Leiderman, *Ideotechnique and Recreation,* 207.

The three members of the Inspection Medical Hermeneutic Group formulated a notion of collective authorship ("individual psychedelic space"), while offering their own commentary to offset any potential interpretations by art historians. Their articulations were produced during the course of their "inspections". These moments of artistic observation contained numerous coincidental and personal references mixed in with allusions to ideas promoted by the Moscow Conceptualist circle. To these they added citations from western philosophers and local thinkers such as Andrei Monastyrsky (the founder of the Collective Actions Group). The novel *Kashirskoe Shosse* [Kashirsky Highway] by Andrei Monastyrsky, which MH considered to have a direct impact on their artistic practices, speaks about immersion into different layers of the collective unconsciousness, using diving as a metaphor of this process.[348] Monastyrsky's notion of "Schizo-China"[349]—an allusion to the seminal work by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari[350]—appealed to the circle of Moscow Conceptualists as a way of addressing the "schizophrenic" (in the Deleuzian sense) nature of Soviet life, epitomized by a reference to China.

Medical Hermeneutic's contribution to Moscow Conceptualism's continuous self-designating practice was the tern NOMA, which referred to the movement and to the nonsensical exercise of inventing tradition. [351] The link between self- reflective art practices and the paradoxical idea of the creation of tradition was central to the art of The

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[348] "Effect of the diving in the bathyscaphe: the ray of projector's light catches some sea monster who is significantly stronger than you, bigger in size, and lives in a different environment, but you, only because of your thick armor can survive in his domain." Andrei Monastyrsky, "Kashirsky Highway," in *Esteticheskie Issledovania [Aesthetic Research]* (Moscow: Herman Titov, 2009), 368.

[349] Peppershtein, Anufriev and Leiderman, *Ideotechnique and Recreation.* My interview with Yuri Leiderman, Berlin, July 2012.

[350] The concept of Schizo-Analysis was introduced in: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert J. Hurley (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).

[351] Monastyrsky, *Slovar terminov Moscovskoi Kontseptualnoi Shkoly.*

Resolute Edge, as will be discussed further in the next chapter. Resolute Edge employs a strategy of 'tradition-inventing' similar to Moscow Conceptualists experiencing a vacuum in lieu of the perceptive general public and professional art criticism, together with a detachment from the new developments of Western contemporary art. Certainly, the main discrepancy is the presence of the formulated and delineated unofficial tradition for Medical Hermeneutics, and the necessity to invent from scratch for the Resolute Edge.

These conceptualist practices led Pavel Pepperstein, the son of a first-generation Conceptualist Pavel Pivovarov, to deliver a speech at Moscow State University at a symposium titled "New Languages of Art" in January 1988, explaining the genesis of the name NOMA and defining its relation to the Moscow Conceptualism Canon.[352] Originating in a series of vocal (frequent usage of terms such as "autonomous", "nomadic", and "nomination") and situational coincidences which Pepperstein called "the phantom-like etiology of a term"[353] the use of the term NOMA served as a demonstration of the Medhermeneutics' use of "ideotechnique" to "illustrate" their intellectual interests. The method of accidental vocal connections invoked, for instance, the surname of the famous Russian philosopher Natalia Avtonomova, a specialist on the French post-structuralist Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan,[354] thus "illustrating" some intellectual interests of the group. Given their preoccupation with religious and social history, using the ancient term *nome* —the name designating administrative units

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[352] Pavel Pepperstein's talk "Ideologization of Unknown"was delivered at the seminar "New Languages in Art" at Moscow State University in January 1988.

[353] Pavel Peppershtein, "Rapport Noma. [Report Noma.]" in Ilya Kabakov, *Noma, Ili, Moskovskii Kontseptualny Krug: Installatsiia [NOMA or Moscow Conceptualist Circle. Installation.]* (Cantz: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1993), 11. Exhibition Catalogue.

[354] She has already published on French theory since late 1970s; see: Natalia Avtonomova, *Filosofskie problemy strukturnogo analiza v gumanitarnyh naukakh* (Moskva, Nauka, 1978). In addition, she translated into Russian such formative works as Michel Foucault's 1977 essay "The order of things."

in old Egypt—the Medhermeneutics group explored the myth of the ancient Egyptian god Osiris, whose body was dismembered and dispersed throughout Egypt, where each *nome* became the home of a different part of the god's body. The Conceptualist designation NOMA, therefore, represented the collective body of Moscow Conceptualism, whose artists were symbolically regarded as one body, even though they may have been working in a wide variety of scattered sites. Pepperstein called this structure the "inner network of language actualizations", where combined images and letters were meant to be both read and contemplated.[355]

A good example of this inner working of the concept of "language actualizations" is an *Untitled* series of collages (fig. 54) comprised of fifty-one items by Medical Hermeneutics (1980s-1990, Dodge Collection, Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum). The series shows an assortment of combined images "illustrating" the canon of Moscow Conceptualism as a whole, while focusing on the MH's own art practice, the ideotechnique method in particular.[356] The series constitutes a homogeneous group of works of art in that each individual component contains both a type-written page juxtaposed with a collaged image of the same size. The dense writings featured in the collages are governed by a kind of specific philosophical poetics characteristic of the Moscow Conceptualist circles. None of the texts is represented in full among the series of collages, while many pages with numerous typos and crossed-out sections appear as drafts. Consequently, the viewers/readers were made to believe that the textual pages from the collages are segments of texts whose coherence and completeness exists beyond

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[355] The impact of Medical Hermeneutics' reflection on the earlier generations of conceptualism in Moscow can be traced to the subsequent use of NOMA by those artists of the earlier generation, such as Kabakov's eponymous installation. See Peppershtein, "Rapport Noma", 9.

[356] The method was based on the deconstruction of the Dadaist principle of chance by finding meaningful connections in randomly chosen images and texts.

the series. Most of the images were collaged from the Soviet children's books of the 1960s and 1970s, illustrated by Vladimir Konashevich, Mai Miturich-Khlebnikov, and Yuri Vasnetsov. The choice of the children's book pictures comments on the fact that many Moscow Conceptualists of the earlier generation, including Ilya Kabakov and Viktor Pivovarov, Pepperstein's father, held official jobs illustrating children's books.

The collage series contains many pictorial cues referencing, albeit metaphorically, how the Medhermeneutics viewed the canon of Moscow Conceptualism and their place in it. For example, the rather suggestive phrase "Orthodox Hut"—one of the nicknames that Medical Hermeneutics assigned to Moscow Conceptualism, along with "Empty Canon", "NOMA", and others—is illustrated by numerous small fairy-tale houses featured throughout the series, both in the texts and in the images. In one of the collages, the figure of a diver appears absurdly among the branches of a tree. According to the private mythology shared by the Medhermeneutics members, the diver is a secret spy who was sent to investigate the bottom of the collective consciousness, but is forgotten by the authority who had originally sent him underwater. Deprived of the constant flow of oxygen, the diver is puzzled by the reasons for his abandonment.[357] Medhermeneutics believed in the therapeutic effect of collecting the diver's hallucinations, which arise as he suffocates, forsaken at the bottom of the sea. This metaphoric character was possibly inspired by the metaphor of diving borrowed from Monastyrsky's novel *Kasshyrskoe Shosse* mentioned earlier above. Additionally, the Soviet book *Modernizm*

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[357] The absence of the constant flow of oxygen is an allusion to the lessening of the ideological impact by the Soviet official discourse. Instead of communicating the values of the communist regime and the promises of the brighter future, the official language starts to exhume some absurdity, thus covering the inherent skepticism in relation of its own ideas.

[Modernism],[358] which was published in the USSR to criticize and disapprove of Western art and was used as a source of information on new artistic trends for unofficial Soviet artists, contained the photograph of a diver in the chapter dedicated to Conceptual Art.[359]

Each iconographic image devised by the group—be it the "Diver" or the "Orthodox Hut"—would be reinforced by a running sequence of metaphoric narrative/definitions. Their terminology was devised not to facilitate our immediate understanding of the notion (i.e., to explain the meaning of the images), but was intended instead to suspend any final crystallization of any given meaning. This approach was in keeping with a deeply-entrenched suspicion of final and finite definitions shared by conceptualists with post-structuralists. The contradiction between the epistemological process of signification (assigning of a sign with a referent) and the nature of metaphor (implying a poetic dimension of signification) in respect to Medical Hermeneutics was underlined by Viktor Tupitsyn when interviewing members of the group.[360] "Inspectors" Pepperstein and Leiderman insisted on "metaphoricity" as the act of "inspecting" which, they maintained, coincides with the working of a metaphor. By being "something different from what it is in itself", the metaphor allows them to "stretch meaning as such."[361]

Another Furmanny artist who embraced the Soviet discourse of childhood production was Konstantin Zvezdochetov, associated with such Russian collectives as Mukhomor [Toadstool] (1978-1982) and Chempiony Mira [Champions of the World]

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[358] Yuri Kolpinskii and Viktor Vanslov, eds., *Modernizm: Analiz i Kritika Osnovnykh Napravlenii.*

[359] Ibid., 270. The chapter included a photo documenting a performance by conceptual artist David Oppenheim, who planted a corn seed at the bottom of the ocean wearing a scuba-diving suit.

[360] Victor Tupitsyn, "The Medical Hermeneutics: The Inspection of Inspectors," in *Margins of Soviet Art Socialist Realism to the Present*, by Margarita Tupitsyn (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1989), 169.

[361] Ibid.

(active on Furmanny in 1986-1988). The latter group which Zvezdochetov founded in 1986 was the first group to appear on Furmanny. He promoted slightly different prerequisites than his compatriots, although similarly to them, he was developing in the orbit of Moscow Conceptualism. In contrast to Zakharov, Albert, and Medical Hermeneutics, however, Zvezdochetov gravitated less towards the ideas of existential emptiness covered by the languages of ideology, expressed in the cerebral style of Ilya Kabakov or Collective Action group (founded by Andrei Monastyrsky in 1976), than toward other facets operating within the movement, Sots Art in particular. As a conceptual artform initiated by Aleksandr Melamid and Vitaliy Komar, Sots Art imitated Soviet mythology and ideology and treated it with irony. A later branch of Sots Art retained its initial irony towards ideology but formally deviated from it by adding a dose of folk art plasticity, in particular in works by Aleksandr Kosolapov and Leonid Sokov. By the time of Furmanny, however, Sots Art had achieved a mainstream position,[362] reinforced by the success of Sotheby's auction in 1988.[363]

In absorbing the lessons of all types of Sots Art and Moscow Conceptualism in general, Zvezdochetov was fascinated with the bright colors of nineteenth century Russian prints, the *lubki* (broadsheets), and applied their aesthetic to his fantastical versions of Soviet children's stories on the heroes of the October Revolution and World War II. Zvezdochetov saw parallels between folk art and the mass production of Soviet

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[362] "С точки зрения сегодняшнего дня соц арт безнадежно неинтересен хотя бы потому, что стал массовой культурой, поп-шлягером. [From the contemporary point of view, Sots Art is hopelessly uninteresting, if only because it became mass culture: a smash-hit.]" Sven Gundlakh, "Sots-art: Iskusstvo pri sotsializme ili sotsialistichskoe iskusstvo? [Sots Art: Art during Socialism or Socialist Art?]" *Iskusstvo*, no. 10 (1988): 53.

[363] Sotheby's history in Russia began as early as 1988 with a groundbreaking sale of Avant-Garde and Soviet Art that gathered more than £2 million (USD $3,074,600). http://www.sothebys.com/en/inside/locations-worldwide/moscow/overview.html (Last accessed on November 10, 2015, no longer accessible)

ideological art as a similar kind of consumerism championed and reviled by Pop Art. He emphasized the naïve traits of the folk art aesthetic to comment on Soviet everyday life, as if initiating the emergence of Soviet folk art. Zvezdochev and Champions of the World group represented a special type of Sots Art, sufficiently transformed by the end of the 1980s for scholars to be able to speak of a special perestroika variety of this trend, which Vladimir Levashov christened Sotsartism[364] and Andrei Erofeev (like Evgeniy Barabanov)[365] christened Post-Sots Art.[366] Borrowing Levashov's explanation, one may say that Sotsartism was exemplified by Zvezdohetov's emphatic dilettantism and his reliance on a more diverse cultural material. In contrast to Komar and Melamid, immersed in the high style of classic Stalinist socialist realism of 1934-1953, Zvezdochetov did not exclude the left art of the 1920s, the avant-garde, or the entire aesthetic field of the Soviet period. He wove this background into the sphere of his longstanding interest in children's literature and satirical periodicals (the magazine *Crocodile* [Krokodil] in particular) along with the even more eclectic and historicist tendencies of late socialist realism.

Zvezdochetov was not satisfied with the magisterial aesthetics and attitude of Moscow Conceptualism which he considered too intellectual, too hermetic, too exclusive and too negative in relation to the surrounding reality.[367] As one of the artists of the Champions of the World, which occupied several studios next to The Resolute Edge's workshop #31, Zvezdochetov found collective art production liberating and efficient.

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[364] Vladimir Levashov, "Ot sots arta k sotsartizmu. Predvaritelnye razmyshlenia. [From Sots Art to Sotsartizm: Preliminary Reflections.]" *Iskusstvo*, no. 10 (1988): 50-52.

[365] Barabanov, *Mezhdu vremenami* [Between times], 14.

[366] Andrei Erofeev, "Post-sots-art: Iskusstvo trofeev i suvenirov. [Post-sots-art: Art of Trophies and Souvenirs.]" Accessed December 2017. http://exil-archiv.de/ru/Russe/www.aerofeev.ru/content/view/13/111/index.html.

[367] Andrei Kovalev, "Frustrirovanny Kibalchish," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, August 2, 1998, 13.

Together with their individual ambitions, the Champions of the World dispensed with any intimation of failure as heralded by the very word "champion" in the Moscow group's title. Moreover, by associating the group's title with sports through a champion denomination in their title and enhancing the creative process through the element of game,[368] these artists followed Zvezdochetov's own trajectory towards playful dilettantism and the naïveté of childhood. Individual works of his 1986 output, namely *Drunken Bench* (fig. 55) and *Love and Blood* (fig. 56), repeat Soviet clichés hardened with time, but present them as buoyant, colorful, childishly humorous, and profusely dependent on folk style ornaments. The subjects of these paintings—in one case, drunken men collapsing on a public park bench[369], in another the disarray of historical figures depicted in moments of passion and dedicated revolutionary struggle—reflect the imagination of a young and innocent pioneer.[370]

Russian painters Andrei Filippov and Sergei Mironenko, who were among the first settlers on Furmanny, were preoccupied with the languages of mass culture, ideology, and with current historical context. Moscow Conceptualism exerted a pull on the artists; Filippov in particular was affected by the Collective Actions group and its founder Andrei Monastyrsky. Dwelling on this influence, Filippov worked in the genre of metaphysical performance, investigating the idea of empire. Unbeknownst to him at the time was the imminent collapse of the Soviet empire, which he predicted through association with Rome, the most notorious fallen empire in history. Prophetically,

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[368] Konstantin Zvezdochetov (assumed) Franstuzskaia Makaka [French Macaque] (signed), "Chempiony mira ili gibel poslednei barrikady kontrkultury. [Champions of the Wolrd or the Fall of the Last Barricade of Counterculture.]" *Iskusstvo*, no. 10 (1988): 64.

[369] The problem of mass-scale alcoholism was one of the issues that Mikhail Gorbachev envisioned as a central issue for perestroika to address and to improve. "Drunken bench" [po pianoi lavochke] was a popular saying that explained the influence (usually negative) of inebriation on life events.

[370] Mandatory organization for all middle school students in the Soviet Union.

alluding to the famous soviet slogan "*Miru-Mir*" (Peace to the world), Filippov presented

the slogan "Rome to Rome" in multiple variations in his works since the early 1980s. The

slogan "Rimu Rim" [Rome to Rome] functioned as a verbal pun and palindrome of the

Soviet pronouncement which inherently conflated the idea of empire and its inevitable

demise with the Soviet experience.[371] Moreover, to express the mutability of ideologies,

the artist on Furmanny invented a new heraldic symbol of power: the two-headed eagle,

the symbol of imperial Russia, blended with the Soviet hammer and sickle. This slogan

and its new symbol, as a contemporary coat-of-arms, adorned the provocative installation

he called *The Last Supper* (1989) (fig. 57). The installation combined Filippov's interest

in the language of esoteric experience inherited from the Collective Actions, along with

the irony of Sots Art's use of symbols.

In a similar vein, although detached from the metaphysical, hermetic references to

Moscow Conceptualism, Sergei Mironenko explored the languages of power and its

semiotics during the Furmanny period. His most famous project at the time was the

performative enactment of a presidential campaign inspired and conducted in parallel to

the current historical process of Mikhail Gorbachev's election as the first president of the

USSR, and its last leader. Appropriating the rhetorical and pompous language of the

presidential campaign together with inventive and widely-publicized perestroika slogans

such as "socialism with a human face," Mironenko translated them into the language of

art, inventing such slogans as the "avant-garde with a human face", hinting at the

impenetrability of certain avant-garde messages to a general audience. The effect was

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[371] Filippov reflected upon the convergence of the religious and geopolitical meanings of historic events, such as the fall of the Roman Empire, the split of the Empire into Western and Eastern (Byzantium), and the idea of Moscow being the Third Rome, which was a part of the imperial Russian mythology that started with the consolidation of power in the Moskovy principality from the 15th century onward.

absurdly funny and reminiscent of Medical Hermeneutic's humor, as Mironenko was ironically deconstructing the political discourse in a procedure similar to the one applied by Medhermeneutics, through the dense language of post-structuralism. Inserting himself into the electoral process, Mironenko created multiple posters expressing widespread sentiments that originated in mass culture, e.g., "Mother-fuckers! What have they done to our country!"[372] In combining the discourses of art, politics, and mass culture, such slogans expressed an alternative view of the epoch.

During October and November of 1988, at the Moscow Palace of Youth, an exhibition titled *Eidos (ideia plasticheskaia i sotsial'naia)* [Eidos (social and plastic idea)] was opened to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Komsomol. At the exhibition, Mironenko presented objects associated with politics as artistic artifacts: a speaking podium with a glass of water accompanied with a poster of his own face, and a red banner bearing the slogan cited above (fig. 58). The artwork can be interpreted on two levels: as part of the ironies cultivated by Moscow Conceptualism, or as part of the absurd political culture perceived by Soviet citizens at large. The environment Mironenko created with the help of a politician's attributes harkens back to the idea of total installation by Ilya Kabakov, who aimed at creating a comprehensive, perceptible, and intelligible reality, as well as a lived experience with his installations.[373] The red banner utilized by Mironenko reminds one of Komar and Melamid's works of the early 1980s, such as *Ideal Slogan* (1984), which imitated communist banners but replaced the text they bore (for example, "Party is the Bulwark of Communism!") with white rectangles in lieu of letters, to comments on the shallowness of some of the political statements that

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[372] Сволочи, во что страну превратили! Translated in Solomon, *Irony Tower*, 57.
[373] Ilya Kabakov, *On the Total Installation* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995).

were ubiquitous during the stagnation era. Fearing the consequences of an expected visit from a real candidate for the presidency, Gorbachev himself, to the exhibition, the officials who organized the show insisted on removing the installation from the *Eidos*, ignoring all of perestroika's promises of openness and democratization.

For the Resolute Edge artists, the exhibition *Eidos* opened up the first opportunity to showcase their work together with Moscow artists from Furmanny. While working on the installation, Tistol took note of the works of art by Albert, Filippov and Mironenko that really fascinated him.[374] Nevertheless, even the enthusiasm of the artists newly-arrived to the capital from the provinces, eager to show their art, did not prevent them from withholding their works without the slightest hesitation in response to censorship. The removal of Mironenko's installation propelled the Furmanny artists to take down their works from the exhibition walls. Within hours, the walls of the Youth Palace were emptied by the participating Furmanny artists, including Ukrainians.[375] Empty places were covered with works by artists willing to cooperate with the authorities. The collective spirit of the Furmanny studios, however, was forged by the consolidated response to the authorities willing to censor art. The reaction of the artistic community that followed the censorship of the exhibition presented an entirely new type of relationship between the artists and the authorities; it also attested to the cohesion and solidarity within the community, including the newly arrived Ukrainian artists.

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[374] "Выставка была великолепная, и там были выставлены все: Альберт, Мироненки, Филипов, весь Фурманный там был, и мы попали в самую великолепную компанию. [The exhibition was splendid, and everyone was included: Albert, the Mironenko brothers, and Filippov, all Furmanny was there. We were invited to participate in something truly splendid.]" My interview with Oleg Tistol, 2012

[375] "Мы споймали грузовик на улице с Митей и Костей, погрузили свои работы и увезли, там остались работы художников, которые не знали. [We stopped a truck on a street with Mitya [Kantorov] and Kostia [Reunov], loaded our works there and left the exhibition. There remained only works by artists [from Furmanny] who did not know [what happened]. " My interview with Oleg Tistol.

This act of protest would have been unfathomable for the earlier generation and for the artists arriving from Ukraine.[376] Coming from Kyiv, which did not know any similar examples of self-organized and effectively functioning alternative structures such as Furmanny young artists quickly and enthusiastically responded to the call to take the paintings down, earning a sense of belonging to the new community as a result. Another result of the participation in the exhibition for the Ukrainians was that during the first couple of days of the exhibition in its initial version, their works were noticed by the curator Olga Sviblova before being taken down. Sviblova later worked on multiple projects with The Resolute Edge.

3.6 Conclusion

Despite the centripetal forces at play at Furmanny, which united artists in their description and revision of the Moscow Conceptualism (often in self-referential or self-archival forms), The Resolute Edge artists brought their own distinctive agenda, and, in contrast to the Odessa artists, resisted the pull of the Moscow nonconformist tradition. A full merger never took place, even though issues such as metaphor as an interpretive poetic dimension were pertinent both for the Kyiv and Moscow current artistic contexts, while the utilization of political symbols and signs was practiced both by the sotsartists and The Resolute Edge group.

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[376] The realities of the artistic non-conformism were much grimmer in the republics than in the center, where not only were their works destroyed, but also, as in Ukraine, where poets and artists were physically eliminated by the KGB (e.g. poets Vasyl Stus and Vasyl Symonenko, and artist Alla Horska). See Myroslava Mudrak, "Lost in the Widening Cracks and Now Resurfaced: Dissidence in Ukrainian Painting," in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Noncomformist Art from the Soviet Union* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 136.

One of the major points of convergence for both Ukrainian and Russian artists of the perestroika period was the practice of collective authorship. The entire Furmanny art squat seemed to be overcome by the spur of the collective creativity uniting artists in numerous artistic groups, while attracting those already united. The idea of the dismissal of the individual artistic ego appealed as productive to numerous artists both before appearing on Furmanny and while in the artistic squat. The duo of Savadov and Senchenko believed that the quality of "super-metaphor" in art could only be achieved with the help of abolishing the individual artistic ambition. This strategy prevailed in the late Soviet context in artistic communities, notwithstanding a history of inculcated collectivism. The pre-determined "victory" of the Champion of the World group or the "individual psychedelic space" shared by the inspectors of the Medical Hermeneutics, were the solutions—albeit differently expressed—to the problem of individual creativity. The Resolute Edge of National Post-eclecticism, with their "beauty of the stereotypes" contributed with yet another facet of meaning of collectivity. If compared to the Medical Hermeneutics group, whose art was intended largely for consumption by a limited circle of artists-friends, the Resolute Edge artists were aiming at a much larger audience. They also ensured that issues of self-determination, which were not among the chief concerns of Russian artists, became central to their art.

In contrast to the organic conflation of Odessa artists with the Moscow conceptualist canon, artists from Kyiv in perestroika Moscow underlined their differentiation from the center from the outset.[377] They emphasized their national identity upon arrival (as "ambassadors" of the republic of the Soviet Union which was not yet a

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[377] Oleg Petrenko and Liudmila Skripkina (The Peppers), Martynchiky, Yuri Leiderman and Sergei Anufriev (Medical Hermeneutics).

country. Thus, the distinction was constructed not so much aesthetically, socially, or professionally, but through a political marker. How this marker was conceived and implemented will be outlined in the next chapter. The perestroika atmosphere of Furmanny offered a peculiar foil for the Ukrainian artists arriving in the metropolitan center of the crumbling empire to discover and assert their difference. Simultaneously, their allegorical large-scale paintings, ornamental, sensual, gestural, yet very complex in their historical references, Soviet citations and imaginary national symbols challenged the sharp distinction between Kyiv painterly vitality and Moscow cool intellectuality.

Fourth Chapter: THE RESOLUTE EDGE OF NATIONAL POST-ECLECTICISM ON FURMANNY: THE BAROQUE FACTOR OF DIFFERENCE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at the work by the Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism art group produced at the Furmanny Lane art squat in Moscow using multiple perspectives already employed in previous parts of this dissertation, while also concentrating on the new moment of the Ukrainian artists' direct encounter with the most advanced art of the capital of the Soviet Union. As I have argued in my previous chapter, even though the Resolute Edge in Moscow had an opportunity to explore their affinity with the ideas of Moscow Conceptualism on Furmanny Lane art squat, the distance between the two movements in dialogue was conspicuous. Still, as I demonstrated in the same chapter, the similarities and differences went beyond the obvious discrepancies in media and forms of expression. In my discussion of the Resolute Edge's art in this chapter I will further elucidate the particularities of the group's art strategies and their response to the perestroika challenges.

The Resolute Edge emerged from the same context as Arsen Savadov and the 'post-Savadists' (also known as Paris Commune artists), sharing with them the excellent academic training in easel painting and similar methods of adapting their classical painting skills to an evolving painterly practice. During their Furmanny period, Oleg Tistol and Kostiantyn Reunov as well as their Ukrainian colleagues painted large-scale figurative oils with saturated colors and form distortions that ironically subverted the

historical painting genre and resembled the canvases of Western transavantgardists or neo-expressionists. Such a marked return to the motifs associated with traditional art, namely the subject and his or her psychological state and emotions, were relevant both for Western Neo-expressionists and for the entire Ukrainian perestroika art generation, the Resolute Edge included. Additionally, the metaphoric signifier, iconic in its nature and functioning in Savadov's immediate circles as the non-verbal condition for Ukrainian painting, was also exerting a huge impact on the Resolute Edge's poly-stylistic expression and the multivalent sources of their painted "stories."

Furthermore, the Resolute Edge's decisive move to the Furmanny art squat underlined their affinity with some traits of Moscow Conceptualism, the art trend discussed in the previous chapter. Among the features shared with the Russian movement was the discovery of synchronicity between Soviet propaganda and the Western language of commercial advertising. This was observed by Tistol and Reunov during their military service, apart from any direct contact with the late Sots Art or Post-Sots Art sub-genres of Moscow Conceptualism. The movements converged though their attention to the idea of emptiness highly relevant both for the superabundant Ukrainian canvases overflowing with symbols and patterns and for the Moscow Conceptualists' exploration of Western metaphysics and Eastern religions utilizing minimal expressive means. In respect to the parallels between these schools, it is important to note the different positions of Moscow and Kyiv in the production of ideological meaning. This chapter will examine the discrepancy between the response of artists from the center where this meaning was produced, and the reaction of artists from the periphery where the meaning was intended to be consumed.

While outlining these important differences and similarities between the Resolute Edge, the Paris Commune artists, and the late phase of Moscow Conceptualism, this chapter will also explore the particular trait of this collective that found its expression in the "National" part of the group's title. Albeit ironic, this word nevertheless reflected the urgent need perceived by Ukrainian artists of articulating a Ukrainian artistic identity at the moment when the endurance of the Soviet Union was becoming questionable and while the prospects of an independent Ukrainian state were becoming more feasible. While in Moscow, situated in the center of the crumbling Soviet Empire, Ukrainian artists were compelled to insist on their difference from the metropolis in an artistic manner recalling the postcolonial modus of the "empire writing back" to its center famously articulated by Salman Rushdie.[378]

Even though scholars cannot agree on the earnest applicability of the postcolonial approach to the complex story of Russian-Ukrainian relations[379] there are many points of convergence that make it crucial to utilize this methodology to the material of this dissertation. First of all, major Furmanny paintings by the Resolute Edge that I will discuss in this chapter directly engaged the complex Russian-Ukrainian history[380] through their subjects, events, and titles that often mixed historical facts with the ideological clichés that Soviet power utilized in its official historical narrative, such as

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[378] Salman Rushdie, "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance," *The Times*, July 3, 1982, 8; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[379] In light of recent Russian-Ukrainian conflict an entire section in *Slavic Review* (Winter 2015) was dedicated to the discussion of the effectiveness of the postcolonial analysis in regard to the history of these two nations' interaction.

[380] For more on the history of Russo-Ukrainian relationship see Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Serhii Plokhy, *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2014); Timothy Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2008).

the concept of brotherhood between East Slavic nations. The artists at Furmanny clearly attempted to deconstruct the national stereotype of 'Ukrainian-ness' that was the product of the Russian, and, later, Soviet Empires. Against the background of the collapsing Soviet Empire, Ukrainian artists faced problems pertinent to postcolonial subjects, namely, the requirement to formulate their identity, and the lack of a symbolic location from which this formulation could be articulated.

Keeping in mind the importance of the baroque trope for postcolonial theory,[381] this chapter will examine how Ukrainian artists engaged with the Ukrainian Baroque period. Moreover, this approach will be contrasted to late Moscow Conceptualism, which clearly did not address such issues. Ukraine's historical Baroque period has had a special significance in the country's history because it coincided with a blossoming of the local literature, architecture, and science along with Cossack warfare. Scholars such as Jose lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, and Alejo Carpentier have admitted the significance of the baroque concept for the study of Latin American art and literature, praising the New World Baroque "for its capacity to absorb, refine and detonate a dialectic of colonial and postcolonial drives."[382] Gilles Deleuze's conceptual metaphor of the fold is often successfully applied to analysis of post-colonial artworks, as it indicates their capability to retain pre-colonial mentality together with the imposed western perspective separate yet integrated in a unique art object.[383]

No scholarly attempt had been made to theorize the importance of the historical Baroque epoch to contemporary Ukrainian art, even though their interconnectedness was

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[381] Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup. *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[382] Leo Cabanese Grant "The Fold of Difference: Performing Baroque and Neo-baroque Mexican identities," in Zamora, Kaup, *Baroque New Worlds,* 468.

[383] Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque.*

recognized by Ukrainian art critics and curators via such major exhibitions as "Myth: Ukrainian Baroque" held at the Ukrainian national Museum in 2012.[384] Postcolonial theory, nevertheless, had not been applied so far to the subject of Ukrainian art, in contrast to Ukrainian literature[385]. Examining the relevance of postcolonial theory to Ukrainian art of the perestroika period involves a constellation of concepts – baroque, metaphor, ornamentation, visual excess, corporeal perception – that are related to both the art and theory in question. In addition, since this dissertation examines an idiosyncratic version of late Soviet postmodernism, a theory considered a "subset of postmodern" [386] merits close attention. Furthermore, the very content and format of the Resolute Edge's art, which aimed to function as a legitimizing discourse for a not yet born Ukrainian state, provides particularly fertile ground for a postcolonial methodology. The affinity of works produced by the Resolute Edge at Furmanny with art and literature clearly identified as postcolonial through an engagement with national stereotypes and other examples of essentializing narrative will be explored in this chapter.

At the height of the Furmanny squat's activities in Moscow, it was widely recognized that Ukrainian painters contributed to its success. This position emerged as critics attempted to come to terms with the collective enterprise. More often than not, when presenting Furmanny as a new artistic phenomenon in Russia, Ukrainian artists

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[384] Oksana Barshynova and Halyna Skliarenko, *Mif "Ukraiinske Baroko" [Myth "Ukrainian Baroque."*] (Kyiv: Natsionalny Khudozhniy Muzei Ukraiiny, 2012); Valentyn Raievsky, ed., *Intervaly: Kosmizm v Ukraïnskomu Mystettsvi XX Stolittia. [Intervals: Cosmism in 20th Century Ukrainian Art]* (Kyiv: Fond "Nove Tvorche Obiednannia," 2000).

[385] Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); George G. Grabowicz, "Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 674-690; Pavlyshyn, "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture," 41-55.

[386] Mark Crinson, "'Fragments of Collapsing Space': Postcolonial Theory and Contemporary Art," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945.*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publ., 2010), 454.

would be inserted into its historical context. Polish art critic Larisa Kaszuk's essay in the catalogue "Furmanny Lane" (1989) for an exhibition at the Petr Novitsky Gallery in 1989 in Warsaw [387] lists both Ukrainians and Russians as co-habitants of Furmanny. A catalogue dedicated to Furmanny workshops, printed in France in 1990, included articles by Kaszuk and several French scholars discussing both Russian and Ukrainian artists, with separate illustrated entries on Oleg Tistol and Marina Skugareva.[388] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Olga Sviblova's film «В поисках счастливого конца» [In Search of a Happy End] (1991) gave a significant amount of screen time to Ukrainian artists, featuring close-ups of their canvases and an interview with them shortly after her own introduction to the Furmanny phenomenon and a brief introduction to the art of Vladimir Mironenko[389]. Not incidentally, Kostiantyn Reunov began his conversation with Sviblova outlining the differences between the cultural situations in Moscow and in Kyiv, arguing that in Kyiv "the artistic underground was impossible."

Since then, however, no effort has been made to consider the theoretical or conceptual implications of this encounter as critics reconstruct the history of Furmanny. Andrey Kovalev's book on perestroika art simply views both Ukrainian and Russian artists through the same perspective and under the banner of "Russian art."[390] Andrew Solomon who lived at Furmanny and wrote a book about his experience never mentioned a single Ukrainian artist apart Larisa Zvezdochetova, who was then married to the

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[387] Larisa Kaszuk, *Furmanny Zaulek. Furmanny Lane. Фурманный переулок* (Warsaw: Dom Slowa Polskiego, 1989).

[388] Jean-Pierre Brossard, ed. *Les Ateliers De La Rue Furmann. Workshops Furmanny Lane. Werkstätte Furmannstrasse (*La Chaux-de-Fonds: Éditions D'En Haut, 1990), 99 (Skugareva entry), and 103 (Tistol entry). The Resolute Edge group is discussed in Kaszuk, *Furmanny Zaulek,* 152.

[389] «В поисках счастливого конца» [In Search of a Happy End], Directed by Olga Sviblova, Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qgq6ejXiVug. (last accessed July 2017, The Resolute Edge's artists appear on 7.55 minute of the movie)

[390] Andrei Kovalev, *Between the Utopias: New Russian Art during and after Perestroika (1985-1993)* (Tortola: Craftsman House, 1995).

Russian artist Konstantin Zvezdochetov.[391] Ukrainian perestroika art, in general, suffers from a serious lack of attention from critics both outside and inside Ukraine.[392] It is for that reason that the art of The Resolute Edge merits more attention by comparison with the tendencies of late conceptual Russian art discussed in the previous chapter. To this end, a closer look at the workings of postcolonial theory serves to elucidate a more nuanced divergence between the groups of artists who might otherwise be simplistically lumped together as part of a more general history of Perestroika and its cultural effects. The aim of this chapter is to argue for the validity of postcolonial methodology in providing a more critically nuanced analysis that sheds light on the differences between Russian and Ukrainian art of the Perestroika period.

4.2 Center-Periphery Encounter: Postcolonial or Not?

After settling at the Furmanny Lane Art Squat, The Resolute Edge artists satirically appointed themselves representatives of a Ukrainian Embassy in Moscow, simultaneously underlining and creatively amending the fact of absence of the Ukrainian statehood. From the very beginning they insisted on their difference from the metropolis and set out to explore Ukrainian artistic traditions and history, resorting to its key and transitional moments, which they perceived to be similar to the one they were witnessing. Continually oscillating between East and West since its historical Baroque period,

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[391] Solomon, *Irony Tower.*

[392] Few Ukrainian sources on the time period: Oksana Barshynova, *New Ukrainian Wave* (National Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv, 2009), Exhibition catalogue. Aleksandr Soloviov and Alisa Lozhkina, "Novaia Istoriya Iskusstva. [New Art History]"; *Parkomuna. Mistse. Spilnota. Yavyshche [Parkomuna. Place. Community. Phenomenon],* ed. by Tetiana Kochubynska.

Ukraine is faced with a suspended civilizational choice that surfaces during transitional moments in the country's history and manifests itself in art created during those periods. In a playful postmodern fashion, the paintings by Tistol and Reunov on which this chapter focuses accumulated a number of references and citations, with a large portion dedicated to Ukrainian Baroque motifs. Paradoxically inventing tradition, including the symbols of a not yet established country, The Resolute Edge combined lavish baroque brocades, Cossacks with maces, and voluptuous Baroque bodies with Soviet industrial and graphic design as well as pieces of visual propaganda for this purpose. Their two programmatic canvases of the Furmanny period were dedicated to Russian-Ukrainian relations. *The Reunification* (1988) (fig. 2) by Tistol was devoted to countering the Soviet historical narrative regarding the Pereyaslav Treaty signed between Russia and Ukraine in 1654 and celebrated in the Soviet Union as a fortuitous reconciliation of the "brotherly nations." *From the Great Ukrainian People to the Great Russian People* (1989) (fig. 3)by Reunov subverted Stalin's infamous toast to the Russian people made after World War II, diminishing the impact of other nationalities in victory over Nazi Germany. Thus, by conflating the Baroque and Perestroika, Ukrainian artists were elaborating their distinctive style by repurposing and combining fragments of both epochs in their multilayered large-scale paintings.

One of the major initial discoveries, as testified by Reunov's aforementioned opening remark in Sviblova's film, was the depth of underground culture in Moscow compared to Kyiv's situation. Even though The Resolute Edge's artists were familiar with the art squats' culture because of their connection to Kyiv's Paris Commune artists, what they encountered at Furmanny in Moscow was on a totally different scale. The

fully-fledged unofficial culture in its self-archiving and self-describing stage – a postmodern moment of redefining a tradition – stood in harsh contrast to the unorganized and feeble sprouts of artistic nonconformism primarily practiced on a clandestine basis in private studios up until Perestroika that they witnessed in Ukraine.

Even perestroika and the associated lessening of ideological pressure came belatedly to Ukraine. Volodymyr Sherbytsyky, the Communist Party Secretary of the Ukrainian SSR, who oversaw the imprisonment and death of many representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia (including poet Vasyl Stus and artist Alla Horska)[393] remained in power from 1971 to 1989, for the duration of the Perestroika period. Because the inconsistencies of policies implemented in the USSR devolved into much stricter applications in the peripheries,[394] it would take some time before Ukrainians could enjoy the liberating aspects of the new political era. As poignantly put by Ukrainian poet and dissident Ivan Drach: "When they clip nails in Moscow, they clip fingers in Ukraine."[395]

There are many blatant cases of such drastically deviant interpretations of government policies and they began long before Perestroika could even take root, dating back to the period of Stalin's purges. A case in point from the 1930s points to this

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[393] Vasyl Stus (1938-1985) was one of the most distinguished poets of his generation. He was imprisoned twice for "anti-Soviet activity" and died while in prison after being tortured. Alla Horska (1928-1970) was an artist who worked in the public arts genre decorating public spaces with frescoes, mosaics, and stained glass; some of her works were destroyed by the authorities. She was also involved in the dissident movement and was brutally killed under unclear circumstances (it is believed that her death was instigated or ordered by the KGB). Both Stus and Horska belong to the generation of *shistdesiatnyky*, who were politically active artists and writers, many of whom suffered persecution from the authorities. Poets and writers as well as painters and graphic artists played a significant role in the full flowering of an entrenched nonconformist movement in Ukraine in the 1960s. For more on the movement, see Olga Balashova and Lizaveta German, eds. *Iskusstvo Ukrainskikh Shestidesiatnikov [Art of the Ukrainian 1960s generation]* (Kiev: Osnovy, 2015).

[394] The Baltic Republics were an exception; they enjoyed much more freedom of choices in art forms and had more access to recent literature.

[395] Bohdan Krawchenko, "Glasnost and Perestroika in the USSR" in *Echoes of Glasnost in Soviet Ukraine*, ed. Romana M. Bahry (North York, Ont. Canada: Captus Press Publications, 1990), 11.

difference. When the avant-garde was beginning to feel the crush of government restrictions, a retrospective exhibition of Kazimir Malevich's work at Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery took place, surprisingly without any consequences for the organizers. When the same exhibition was shown in Kyiv a couple of months later, it resulted in imprisonment of the gallery director, who was accused of "bourgeois nationalism."[396] Jumping forward to the post-Stalinist period when Moscow and St. Petersburg rather liberally fostered several fully-fledged nonconformist movements, (e.g., the Lianozovo School, Moscow Conceptualism, and Sots Art), Ukrainian unofficial art of the same period had a more dismal presence. With the destruction of art and outright prohibition against exhibiting and publishing, as well as the physical elimination of artists by the KGB, Ukrainian artists went underground.[397] In contrast to Moscow's international community where foreign diplomats and journalists were regular visitors at unofficial shows, the absence of foreign embassies and a stultified press in Ukraine prevented any outside contact and fervently guarded against the taint of "national bourgeois" inclinations. The influence of the international community in supporting unofficial art in Moscow is well-known through such cases as the 1974 "Bulldozer" exhibition[398] and its aftermath, the appearance of an uncensored unofficial exhibition in Izmailovsky Park. The only known case of an unsanctioned open-air exhibition in Ukraine during Soviet

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[396] "The Tretyakov Gallery held a retrospective exhibition of Malevich's work in 1928, but when the same exhibition opened at the Kiev Art Gallery its director went to prison for exhibiting this "bourgeois art." Allison Hilton, "Holiday on the Kolkhoz: Socialist Realism's Dialogue with Impressionism" in *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts*, eds. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 200.

[397] Mudrak, "Lost in the Widening Cracks and Now Resurfaced," 136; For more on the art of the 1960s in Ukraine, see Olga Balashova and Lizaveta German, eds. *Iskusstvo Ukrainskikh Shestidesiatnikov*.

[398] "Bulldozer show" – open air nonconformist exhibition in Moscow on 15 September, 1974. Was run down by bulldozers, with artists beaten by KGB and their artworks destroyed. The event was much-publicized in foreign mass-media. Because of the international scandal, Soviet authorities were forced to allow the uncensored open-air exhibition in Izmailovskii Park two weeks after. See more: Viktor Agadamov-Tupitsyn, *Buldozernaia Vystavka* (Moskva: Ad Marginem Press, 2014).

rule was the so-called Fence exhibition in Odessa, when two artists (Valentyn Khrushch and Stanislav Sychev) placed their artworks on the fence in the center of the city for a couple of hours in 1967 and as a consequence were banned from exhibiting in Odessa until Perestroika.[399] The pressure of censorship was much higher and artists were more carefully monitored in the republics outside Russia. The realization of this difference when The Resolute Edge's artists appeared on Furmanny played a significant role in their choice of themes for their paintings. One way to consider incongruities in exerting state control over dissenting artists in Russia and Ukraine is to apply some aspects of postcolonial methodology in art analysis of to reflect the differences between the position of artists from the periphery and those from the capital of the Soviet Union. Can the distinctions in the societal fabric of the artist-power relationships in Russia and Ukraine be explained through a binary of imperial versus colonial culture?

This question was answered positively by numerous scholars of Ukrainian studies in fields ranging from history to literature, who effectively applied postcolonial methodology while discussing the position of Ukraine within the confines of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Such Western scholars of Ukrainian disciplines, namely Marko Pavlyshyn[400] and George Grabowicz[401] were among the first to write on the state of Ukrainian culture immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union using a

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[399] In the summer of 1967, following many failed attempts to have their work included in official exhibitions, Valentin Khrushch and Stanislav Sychev decided to stage an exhibition themselves—on the fence surrounding Odessa's famous Opera Theater (which was then undergoing renovation). Now known as the "Fence Exhibition," this was the first nonconformist art event held in a public space in the Soviet Union. Khrushch and Sychev were prohibited from taking part in any official exhibitions until the collapse of the Soviet Union in1991. As a result, both artists became active organizers of, and participants in, Odessa's many apartment exhibitions.

[400] Pavlyshyn, "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture," 41-55.

[401] Grabowicz, George: "The problem is of course generic and constitutes a paradigmatic post-colonial issue." Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 46.

postcolonial approach and vocabulary. In later scholarship, especially in Ukrainian literature studies, the postcolonial method became generally accepted as suitable for Ukrainian material. It appears as a consensus shared by Western and Ukrainian scholars such as Maria Rewakowicz[402], Tamara Hundorova[403], and Vitaly Chernetsky among others. Most relevant for the present study is Chernetsky's book *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, devoted to Russian and Ukrainian post-soviet literature. Giving a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the interrelationship of postmodern and postcolonial ideas within a context of Ukrainian literature studies, Chernetsky echoes the positions enunciated earlier by Pavlyshyn and Grabowicz. A literary scholar educated in the Soviet Union and the United States, he applies postcolonial method to the study of literature that arose from the ruins of the Russian/Soviet Empire.[404]

Chernetsky examines the writings of Yuri Andrukhovych, a Ukrainian author who was living in Moscow approximately at the same time that the Resolute Edge collective settled in the Furmanny art squat.[405] His phantasmagoric novel *Moskoviad* about a Ukrainian poet and writer wandering in Moscow and witnessing the metastasis of the late Soviet regime while having lavish dreams about a fictional Ukrainian kingdom was analyzed by Chernetsky through a postcolonialist lens, which offers us a way to think about the painters of The Resolute Edge. Chernetsky saw a harsh indictment of Soviet

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[402] Maria G. Rewakowicz, *Ukraine's Quest for Identity: Embracing Cultural Hybridity in Literary Imagination*, *1991-2011* (S.l.: Lexington Books, 2017).

[403] Tetiana Hundorova, *Tranzytna kultura: symptomy postkolonialnoï travmy* [Culture in transit: Symptoms of postcolonial trauma] (Kyïv: Hrani-T, 2013).

[404] Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures.*

[405] "the paradigmatic postcolonial narrative in contemporary Ukrainian literature: *Moscoviada*…" Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures,* 222. Yuri Andrukhovych, *The Moscoviad,* trans. Vitaly Chernetsky (New York: Spuyten Duyvil, 2008).

colonialism in Andrukhovych's novel which, in his opinion, offered "the ontological perspective of a displaced postcolonial intellectual in the former empire center."[406]

Postcolonial theory was primarily developed in the wake of the dissolution of colonial empires and was devoted to historicizing the colonial experience and its effect on formerly colonized subjects. Among its conceptual vocabulary are the notions of empire, nation, subaltern, mimicry, hybridity, othering, and orientalism, as well as the dichotomies of center/periphery and colonizer/colonized. Among the authors and thinkers who analyzed the impact of imperialism on cultural identity and its lingering presence in the form of neo-colonialism were Gayatri Spivak,[407] Franz Fanon[408], Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha[409]. Even though these theorists did not devote much space to visual arts, their methodology was picked up by several art history scholars and critics such as Kobena Mercer[410], Okwui Enwezor[411], and Linda Nochlin[412] who employed it to discuss various art epochs, from French realism to contemporary performance and video-art.

When American scholar Michael M. Naydan stated that the Ukrainian-Russian relationship represented the "Saidean case of unequal relationship between unequal interlocutors"[413] he was referring to the ground-breaking theory of orientalism developed

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[406] Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures,* 222.

[407] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues,* ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[408] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam. Markmann (London: Paladin, 1970).

[409] Homi K Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

[410] Kobena Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008).

[411] *All the World's Futures* was the title of the 56th Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor.

[412] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-century Art and Society*, ed. Linda Nochlin (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

[413] M. Michael Naydan, "Ukrainian Prose of the 1990s as it Reflects Contemporary Social Structures." *Ukrainian Quarterly 51*, no. 1 (1995): 45.

in the late 1970s by Edward Said.[414] Building upon Michel Foucault's thesis on the link

between knowledge and power, Said's concept of Orientalism referred to the production

of imperial prejudices and stereotypes towards colonial subjects. The colonized subject

was often presented as perpetually backward and disjointed from modernity, stubborn in

his neglect and idleness while over-indulging his primitive and uncivilized instincts. Such

subject could be exemplified by the group of elders mesmerized by the exotic

performance of a naked child while in a room inlaid with old crumbling tiles on the

orientalist painting *The Snake Charmer* (1879) by Jean-Leon Gerome (1824-1924).[415]

Despite lacking postcolonial theories' customary ingredient of race, the Russian-

Ukrainian interrelation in the view of Chernetsky and other historians and theorists often

evolved as an encounter of a modern and central nation with its archaic and rural

"younger brother". When analyzing the state of Ukrainian culture in the immediate post-

Soviet condition, Ukrainian historian Mykola Ryabchuk admitted that "Ukrainian culture

is challenged primarily by the Russian one – the culture of the former metropole which

has largely preserved a superior position in Ukraine."[416]

Further complicating Said's position, cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha added the

concepts of "hybridity", "mimicry", "dissemiNation" and "in-betweenness"[417] to describe

the complexity of relationship of the colonizer and the colonized which cannot be

reduced solely to the subjugation of the latter. Bhabha's work has imbued postcolonial

studies with a critical attitude aimed at both describing and repairing the effects of

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[414] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[415] More on the analysis of the painting in Linda Nochlin,"The Imaginary Orient."

[416] Ryabchuk, Mykola. *In Bed With an Elephant: Cultural Wars and Rival Identities in Contemporary Ukraine* (Green college, Oxford, Reuters Foundation Paper No: 159, 2001), 3.

[417] Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994).

colonization, while empowering formerly colonized subjects by outlining their cultural influence on a colonizer. The opposing pair of hybrid and stereotype was creatively reconsidered by Bhabha in postcolonial terms which implied the same rejection of the essentializing concept of identity as postmodernism in general. These ideas will prove highly relevant when talking about the Resolute Edge collective's creative strategies, as one of their main mottos in the perestroika era was "Struggle for the beauty of stereotype!", at a time when Bhabha's work had not yet been written.

In a nutshell, Bhabha's concept of stereotype explains why an idea about the difference of the Other is fixed and rigid but at the same time needs to be repeated in order for a stereotype to be asserted. The theorist relied on psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's register of the Imaginary, relating to his famous theory of "mirror stage" that describes how an infant realizes his identity as separate from the previously experienced yet imaginary wholeness with mother's body and world in general. The coherence between the infant's self and the world is broken as he enters into a realm of Symbolic order and language. As in a language, the stereotype responds to a desire to restore this pre-verbal fantasy of wholeness, or Imaginary, and therefore its essentializing powers can be subverted by recognizing its purely imaginary nature. Metaphor and metonymy play a very important part in Bhabha's theory of the colonized identity as manifested through stereotyping and hybridity. The other is represented through a "metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by the same token as metonym, a sign of absence and loss."[418] Stereotype as an imaginary construct must be cemented through repetition produced by the power discourse of the colonizer. What happens when the stereotype is

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[418] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 51.

appropriated by the colonized is precisely the process of hybridization – a repetition of the discriminatory metaphoric images of colonized identity that shifts the process of domination from the colonial power to a colonized subject. Thus, hybridity creates the space or "the location" where the colonized is no longer "the Other" but also does not become associated with the dominating discourse.

Still, there are researchers who insist that the specificity of the Ukrainian situation does not allow for a facile implementation of the postcolonial analysis. The events in Ukraine of 2013-2014, known as Euromaidan revolution prompted even more vivid discussion and consideration of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Historian Ilya Gerasimov in his article written immediately after the violent events in Kyiv defined the mass public protest of Ukrainians against the tightening of contacts with Russia as a unique case of "postcolonial revolution."[419] The winter 2015 edition of the *Slavic Review* followed suit and published a series of articles demonstrating a wide range of interpretations of the events in which Ukrainian citizens were willing to resort to extreme measures in order to prevent the signing of a treaty with Russia instead of the European Union. Some scholars, including Timothy Snyder, Ilya Gerasimov, and Marina Mogilner, who maintained that Ukrainian postcolonial subjectivity was formulated through Euromaidan, nevertheless remained within postcolonial theoretical framework.[420] At the same time Maria Todorova saw the application of postcolonial methodology to the Ukrainian situation as a "careless

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[419] Ilya Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum," *Ab Imperio* 15, no. 3 (2014): 22-44.

[420] Timothy Snyder, "Integration and Disintegration: Europe, Ukraine and the World," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 695-707; Ilya Gerasimov and Marina Mogilner, "Integration and Disintegration: Europe, Ukraine and the World," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 715-22.

attitude to concepts"[421] which in her opinion may only lead to the "congruent overtones between nationalism and postcolonialism."[422] Ukrainian historians in the compendium Andrii Portnov and Yaroslav Hrytsak both argue for a more nuanced approach based on the particularity of Ukrainian history: its unique hybridity, diversity, fluidity of borders and multi-ethnicity. Hrytsak in his article with the slogan-like title "Postcolonial is not Enough" admitted that Ukraine has had a variety of colonial experiences while maintaining that its transition out of the Soviet Union cannot be explained only as postcolonial liberation, with its classic return to and rehabilitation of the pre-colonial identity. Moreover, according to Hrytsak, the status of Ukraine as belonging to the imperial core contests its consideration as a classic case of a colonized nation.[423]

Even though this dissertation does not aim to resolve the issue of a debated correspondence between postcolonial theory and the condition of Ukraine deprived of statehood throughout modern history, I still believe it is fruitful to observe the convergences and incongruities as powerful examples of the complexity of the Ukrainian situation. In addition, in this chapter I will highlight cultural material that coincides with examples of other "properly colonized" nations dealing with their colonial experience, while finding some postcolonial analyses more suitable than others. However, before moving on to these concrete manifestations in the Resolute Edge's art production, I will consider some of the reservations that point to the uniqueness of the Ukrainian condition.

One of the most debatable issues that comes up in the discussion is the question of definitions, namely whether the Russian Empire and especially the Soviet Union could be

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[421] Maria Todorova, "On Public Intellectuals and their Conceptual Frameworks," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 712.

[422] Ibid., 713.

[423] Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Postcolonial is Not Enough," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 732-737.

considered as true empires. Some would be dubious of defining the Soviet Union as an empire (in the classical sense) in the way that the British Empire figured for Said, Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. Notwithstanding the classic application of the term, scholars such as Chernetsky, Roman Szporluk,[424] and Aleksandr Etkind[425] took the stand that the Soviet Union represented a natural continuation of the ambitions and policies of the Russian Empire. In Etkind's words: "A late development among great European empires, the Russian Empire survived and outdid most of them, after its collapse having been transfigured into its new Soviet reincarnation."[426] At the same time, Hrytsak would maintain that both the Russian and Soviet empires were too specific in character to be examined through existing classic models of empire.[427] A prominent American historian Terry Martin, in his book entitled *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001) likewise insisted on a different and distinct reading of the Soviet Union with respect to the old empires.[428] In his book Martin focuses on the policy of "indigenization" [*korenizatsia*] in the USSR during the 1920s as a contradiction to traditional imperial policy. Instead of subjugating nations under the aegis of a dominant imperial nation initiated by the central authorities, *korenizatsia* promoted the cultivation of national consciousness by encouraging a return to indigenous cultural roots of minor nations.[429] These policies were conducted immediately prior to the Stalinist purges and in Martin's opinion were enacted at the

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[424] Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*, 343.

[425] Alexander Etkind, "Orientalism Reversed: Russian Literature in the Times Of Empires," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 03 (2007). Aleksandr Etkind *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

[426] Etkind, "Orientalism Reversed," 617.

[427] Volodymr Kravchenko, *Ukraiina, Imperia, Rosiia: Vybrani Statti z Modernoi Istorii ta Istoriohrafii [Ukraine, Empire, Russia: Selected Articles on Modern History and Historiography]* (Kyïv: Krytyka, 2011), 430.

[428] "I am not aligning myself with those who now argue that the Soviet Union, as a result of its shared characteristics with other empires, can be classified in objective social science terms as and "empire." Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939 (*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 19.

[429] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire.*

expense of the Russian nation which, temporarily, had lost its dominant cultural status during the process of Sovietization. The "national question" was also rendered most contradictory during the Stalinist period. In his famous formulation of Socialist Realism Josef Stalin himself instructed that art be "national in form and socialist in content."[430]

Another major specificity of the Russian and Soviet empires according to scholars was their self-colonizing practices, articulated by Soviet intellectuals Boris Groys[431] and Etkind.[432] An inherent difference between Russia's colonization and the experiences of other empires lay for some scholars in the fact that instead of conquering some distant exotic lands, Russia fought to expand its territory. This was especially relevant for Ukraine, an immediate neighbor that shares with Russia not only borders but also a foundational historic origin in Kievan Rus and a rather closely related East Slavic language. Nevertheless, for the literary scholar Chernetsky this argument does not suffice. In *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, he asks: "did the seizure of adjacent lands make the entire enterprise less colonial?" implying that failure to notice this aspect only makes apparent the "internalization of the Russian colonialist ideology" by Russian thinkers.[433]

Apart from Peter the Great's westernization efforts, the main example of self-colonization in the Russian Empire was its treatment of Russian peasants in contrast to the empires of old. Russians of the lower classes or peasants, for example, were not less

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[430] "In May 1924 Stalin gave a speech entitled 'On the Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East', in which he talked of proletarian culture as being socialist in content but adopting various forms and means of expression with different peoples. .. in 1930, at Sixteenth Party Congress, … he said, 'What is culture during the dictatorship of proletariat? It is a culture socialist in its content and national in form'." Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting,* 84.

[431] "The reform of Peter I constitutes a sui generis act of self-colonization by the Russian people." Boris Groys, "Imena goroda" in *Utopia i obmen.* (Moscow: Znak, 1993), 358.

[432] Etkind, *Internal Colonization*.

[433] Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist cultures,* 42.

exoticized and othered by the élites than subjects of other nations of the empire. Indeed, the reforms of Peter the Great and his forceful westernization of the Russian population are often used to demonstrate the self-colonizing practices employed in Russian Empire, yet what remains questionable is whether the realities of colonizing Ukrainian peasants alongside Russians really neutralized the overall colonization of Ukraine. The fact that Ukrainians were subjected to additional Othering because they "spoke the wrong language"[434] or because their culture was deemed subservient changes the picture. Chernetsky used the example of Nikolai Gogol's early novels casting Ukrainians "as something exotic and to be mocked – which was destined for consumption by the imperial center."[435] From imperial to Soviet times Ukrainians were commonly viewed as apostate Russians and stigmatized as backward, of peasant origin, and ill-educated, as testified by Szporluk's research on the perception of Ukrainians in the Soviet Union before its collapse.[436]

The history of denying the Ukrainian culture and language the opportunity to develop into a modern vehicle of communication is long, with multiple instances since Ukraine was incorporated into the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union despite substantial military efforts at resistance. Among them are specific culture-denying imperial dictates such as the notorious Valuev Circular of 1863 and the Ems Ukaz of

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[434] Vissarion Belinskii in his review of Taras Shevchenko's poem "The Haidamaks" suggested the poet should use other language. V. G. Belinskii, "Retsenzia Na Poemu T. Shevchenko "Haidamaky" [Review of T.Shevchenko's Poem Haidamaky]," in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii [Complete Works]* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955), 172-74; More on the subject of Belinskii views on the Ukrainian question see Andrea Rutherford, "Vissarion Belinskii and the Ukrainian National Question," *Russian Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 500-15.

[435] Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures,* 192.

[436] "Younger brother" or "country cousin" pattern defined the Russian-Ukrainian relationship." Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine and the Breakup of the Soviet Union,* 96; "When Ukrainians move upward, by becoming technicians, scientists, or the like, they become (at least linguistically) Russified and mobile in the entire USSR." Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine and the Breakup of the Soviet Union,* 73.

1876. The former banned the printing of any books, songs, and music in the Ukrainian language anywhere within the Russian Empire; the latter—the Ems Ukaz—also banned the import of books in Ukrainian printed abroad. The Valuev Circular is best known for its infamous declaration that, "the Ukrainian language has not been, is not, and cannot ever be." Numerous high officials and intellectuals in Russian Empire saw the development of Ukrainian culture as a threat to the integrity of the empire. For instance, a specialist in Eastern cultures and coincidentally a chief censor in Russian Empire Vasilii Grigoriev (1816-1881) rationalized a ban he imposed on Ukrainian language, which he defined as a "little-Russian dialect," as a necessary measure to prevent separation of Ukraine from the Russian empire: "To allow for the creation of an autonomous folk literature in the Ukrainian dialect would be to promote the separation of Ukraine from the rest of Russia."[437] During the Stalinist purges, entire generations of Ukrainian intellectuals were eliminated, accused of "national bourgeois" sympathies, which in *lingua sovietucus* meant the cultivation of traditional Ukrainian culture and language in modernist terms.[438]

By the same token, there are many testimonies to the privileged circumstances achieved by certain representatives of the Ukrainian minority that further complicates the issue. Many Ukrainian-born persons could attain very high positions in the Russian and Soviet Empires. These were individuals who demonstrated a degree of Russophilia that served their purposes. Among these was the seventeenth century author, Theophan

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[437] Etkind, *Internal Colonization,* 168.

[438] "Executed Renaissance" (Rozstrilyane vidrodzhennya) generation of Ukrainian poet, artists and writers who were either eliminated or forced into suicides by authorities. The term was coined by Polish publicist Jerzy Giedroyc while working on anthology on Ukrainian literature in 1958. Lavrinenko, *Rozstrilyane Vidrodzhennia.*

Prokopovych,[439] who coined the concept *russki mir* [Russian world] and created a foundational myth regarding the genesis of the Russian Empire by connecting the rise of Muscovy to the ancient principality of Kievan Rus. There was also the modern historian of Ukrainian origin Nikolai [Mykola] Kostomarov whose thesis was that Ukrainians and Russians were two branches of the same nation. Another Russophile was the Ukrainian-born father of the Russian literature, Nikolai [Mykola] Gogol.[440] In order to do well in the Russian/Soviet Empire, a Ukrainian effectively had to become Russian.[441] In fact, Chernetsky and Szporliuk along with Yale historian Timothy Snyder (*The Reconstruction of Nations*) all underscore that, for any Ukrainian to successfully find professional or intellectual fulfillment under the conditions of empire meant the complete abandonment of Ukrainian identity. As explicitly formulated by Snyder: "to advance from the peasantry into society was to speak and to become Polish or Russian."[442] Given the absence of the racial component and the proximity of Slavic languages, any Ukrainian with means and talents could efficiently assimilate into the dominant nationality showing no traces of his or her previous identity. Thus, the confusion regarding the actual condition of Ukrainians under Russian dominion affected by the abundance of Ukrainians among imperial and Soviet elites, including the Politburo, impeded any clear resolution on the issue of colonization, despite many examples of obvious oppression. Generations of Ukrainian intellectuals, actors, and artists traditionally moved to the Russian

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[439] Theophan Prokopovych (Kyiv, 1681 – St. Petersburg, 1736) served at the court of Peter the Great; "Broadly conceived, Ukrainian culture was a bulwark of the Russian empire, providing many of its legitimizing myths, its folksongs and folktales, and indeed its educated civil servants." Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations,* 120.

[440] Edyta M. Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[441] More on influence of Ukrainian-born individuals on cultural identity of early 19th century Russia in David Saunders, *The Ukrainian Impact on Russian Culture, 1750-1850* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1985).

[442] Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations,* 41.

metropolitan center in advancement of their career and became known as Russian or Soviet artists. Against such a background, the strategy of the Resolute Edge's insistence on their "Ukraine-ness" while in Moscow was a rather radical departure from previous instances of Ukrainians assimilated by the culture of the capital.

A specific understanding of Russian imperial strategies in regard to Ukraine made several scholars including Ryabchuk draw a parallel with Scotland, whose condition in the British Empire was also conceptualized by Michael Hechter through the idea of "internal colonization."[443] Admitting all the particularities of the Ukrainian situation, Ryabchuk claimed that similarly to Scottish culture in British Empire, Ukrainian culture in Soviet Union "clearly represented the inferior, peripheral parts of the imperial culture."[444] Ryabchuk listed the features of attitude of British towards Scottish as relevant for Ukrainians: disparaging of the peripheral culture by privileged group, denigration of the culture with the goal of prevention of separation and the assimilation of the local elites, and their anglicisation.[445] Such a mechanism of domination in regard to Ukrainians was pertinent in both the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, whether they could be defined as empires or not. These mechanisms became the impetus for Ukrainians in Moscow to consider their interrelations with Russian culture not only as with a culture of another republic within a not so stable Soviet Union, but with a culture whose superiority and privileged access to modernism was a given condition.

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[443] Michael Hetcher, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, 1536-1966 (London: Routledge, 1975).

[444] Ryabchuk, *In Bed With an Elephant,* 3.

[445] Ibid., 36.

4.3 Postcolonialism, Nationalism and Art History

Despite the vivid and fruitful discussion of the imperial heritage in regard to the Ukrainian situation in literature and history studies, there is a paucity of authoritative art historical scholarship on postcolonial theory related to the Ukrainian art scene in the Soviet Union during the period of its collapse and disintegration. The most influential opinions on postcolonial theory in the field of art history of the late- and post-communist period were voiced by the Russian theoretician Boris Groys and by the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski. In the catalogue to the trail-blazing exhibition *2000+ The Art of Eastern Europe* (2001) Groys firmly declared the impossibility of discussing the art of the post-communist countries in postcolonial terms: "To speak of the post-communist cultural identity in the same register as post-colonial identity sounds so implausible."[446] In his typical paradoxical style, Groys maintained that, "although the post-communist subject takes the same route from enclosure to openness as his post-colonial counterpart, he moves along this path in quite the opposite direction – against the flow of time."[447] Groys interprets communism as the ultimate project of modernity,[448] which creates its own globalism and makes its subjects "surrender their pre-modern identities."[449] Groys's ultimate claim is that returning to a pre-modern identity under post-communist conditions diminishes any progressive and/or emancipatory power of such opening to a new standpoint. This is in contrast to postcolonial subjects who, by discovering their past,

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[446] Boris Groys, "Back from the Future," in *2000 Arteast Collection the Art of Eastern Europe; a Selection of Works for the International and National Collections of Moderna Galerija Ljubljana; Orangerie Congress-Innsbruck, 14 – 21 November 2001*, ed. Mika Briški (Wien: Folio-Verl., 2001), 11.
[447] Groys, "Back from the Future," 11.
[448] Groys, *Total Art of Stalinism*.
[449] Groys, "Back from the Future," 11.

contribute to cultural diversity and heterogeneity—a cherished postmodern perspective. Consequently, bringing back pre-modern identities (a task which apparently converges with Groys's understanding of postcolonialist incentives) would only result in "re-exoticizing, re-orientalizing and re-antiquitizing"[450] of post-communist subjects already modernized by Soviet power.

Significantly, Groys in the same text explains the prevalence of artistic groups in Eastern European post-communist production, including the Savadov and Senchenko tandem, by arguing for the specifically communist experience of a "shared collective activity." According to Groys, "collective experiences" impact the way Eastern European artists organize themselves even after the collapse of communist regimes: "In Eastern Europe artistic projects are thus still viewed as potentially collective operations that other artists are also welcome to join – as a means of distinguishing themselves from those who withhold their support."[451] Hence, for Groys, the communist experience (of collective activity) defines modes of artistic self-organization even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and also eliminates the possibility for former Soviet countries to engage the identity issues in their art production in any progressive way.

A decade later, Piotrowski published "Art and Democracy in the Post-Communist Europe" (2012), essentially agreeing with Groys's position.[452] As a case in point, while describing conditions in Yugoslavia, and in Serbia specifically, Piotrowski resorts to Groys's argument confirming that decolonization would be a step back in this context, as it would be for Eastern European art in general. Piotrowski sees the juxtaposition of post-communism and postcolonialism as troublesome from both the theoretical as well as

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[450] Groys, "Back from the Future," 11

[451] Ibid., 13.

[452] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 187.

historical perspectives.[453] Quite ironically he stated that "the postcolonial analytic perspective is very attractive for post-communist intellectuals, who enthusiastically consume intellectual novelties produced by American universities."[454] For Piotrowski, the main problem with postcolonialism in the post-communist condition stems from the differences between major historical and civilizational differences of colonized individuals and those who lived under communism. Aligned with Groys, Piotrowski believes that a return to a pre-modern identity in post-communist societies will only result in backwardness. The biggest danger in exploring pre-communist cultural roots in this move "against the flow of time" is decolonization and nationalism, which Piotrowski understood as an aggressive and radical insistence of the dominance of one culture over another.

Piotrowski relied on the model of Homi K. Bhabha's DissemiNation[455] to further elucidate his ideas about the incompatibility of post-communism and postcolonial theory. According to Bhabha, when formerly colonized subjects struggle to separate from the colonizer, and from the identity this colonizer imposed on them, they also strive to break the essentializing stereotype imposed on them. Therefore, the formerly colonized subject in the process of decolonization as it was understood by Bhabha insisted simultaneously on the uniqueness of his or her national identity and on its multifacetedness. Bhabha's

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[453] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-communist Europe*, 46.

[454] Ibid., 186. As a Ukrainian working for her PhD in the American university, and thus carrying a syndrome described by Piotrowski, I wanted to ask him (the opportunity permanently lost since his passing in May of 2015) a postcolonial question in regard to his own writings. Why did he prefer to polonize the spelling of the names of Ukrainian artists he mentioned in his book? He allowed Russian artists to exist on the pages of his book represented by the rules of Russian transliteration, but translated the names of Ukrainian artists into their Polish equivalents. The tendency which exists for both Russian and for Polish writers to translate Ukrainian names into similar names of Russian or Polish origin could constitute an opportunity for postcolonial analysis of Piotrowski's own text.

[455] DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation. Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* Chapter 8.

DissemiNation principle provides for numerous counter-narratives, aimed at upsetting the rigid colonial stereotype, with hybridity persisting as one such counter-narrative.[456] Notwithstanding these new possibilities in his analysis of Eastern European art, Piotrowski refused to see a counter-narrative to the Serbian national myth based on its pre-modern folklore identity. In the context of Yugoslavia's collapse such perspectives were associated with the most backward nationalist thinking (especially during the war years). In case of Serbia which had a dominant position in post-national Yugoslavia, any return for a national trope would result for Piotrowski in cementing of the essentialized image instead of undoing a colonial stereotype

Piotrowski exemplifies the divergence of post-communist art from postcolonialist principles by giving instances of Eastern or Central European art that utilized national symbols or mixed them with totalitarian or Nazi symbolism. Serbian artist's Raša Todosijević installation *Gott liebt Serben* (*God loves Serbs* from German) deals with the decorative attractiveness of ideologies for a naïve population by conflation of Serbian nationalism and German Nazism. Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi during his performances *Romania* (1993 and 2003) first tattooed his shoulder with the name of his country, and then removed the tattoo in response to the dangers of nationalism, according to Piotrowski. Michal Moravćik, an artist from Slovakia, in his work *Internal Affairs* (2003) placed cut-out citations from the writings of Noam Chomsky on the furniture, including "Which nationalism is better?"; in Piotrowski's opinion this was the artist's negative response to the nationalism which drew the separation between Czech Republic and Slovakia. All these examples for Piotrowski prove that postcolonial approaches do

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[456] Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual - disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 149.

not apply to art of countries exiting the context of communism, and thus he regards all national symbols as signs of oppression, not liberation as a postcolonial subject would.[457] Instead, the Polish art historian proposes to view all these and other similar (by artist Vlad Nanca, Grzegorz Klaman and Martin Zet) examples via the paradigm of the neo-avantgarde of the 1960s and 70s, as they "cannot be reconciled with the discourse of the postcolonial condition."[458]

Although Piotrowski insists on the clear distinction between neo-avantgarde-informed post-communist art and Bhabha's postcolonial dissemiNation, he does not give any examples of either postcolonial art or neo-avantgarde to support his argument. It is imperative, however, to understand the dichotomy Piotrowski maintains between the two styles. The Resolute Edge group, being a post-communist art collective engaged with national symbols, shared similar traits with artists presented by Piotrowski as incompatible with a postcolonial approach. So what is the alternative that Piotrowski offers while so carefully examining Bhabha's ideas together with the art of Eastern European artists? In his "Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe" of 2012 the Polish art historian only states that these artworks should be viewed as neo-avantgarde and as a critique of nationalism and totalitarianism without resorting to any other methodology. At the same time in his earlier publication, the *Arteast* catalogue, Piotrowski declares a need for a specific "framing" of Central Europe[459] relying on Derrida's concept of parergon,[460] which could be simplistically defined as a conceptual framework that contextualizes the object of a study. Piotrowski in 2001 found the

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[457]Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 190.

[458] Ibid.

[459] Piotr Piotrowski, "'Framing' of Central Europe," in *2000+ Arteast Collection*, ed. Mika Briški (Ljubljana, Slovenia: Moderna Galerija, 2000), 15.

[460] Jacques Derrida, *Truth in Painting* (S.l.: Univ of Chicago Press, 2017).

majority of post-communist art untranslatable into the universal terms of Western art history, although this art aimed to be understood as such: "one of the crucial elements determining our East European context and "framing" is the very effort to revalorize our culture in universal terms."[461] According to this "frame" the artists copying the neo-avantgarde strategies as discussed by Piotrowski are acting so because they are "handicapped by history" and produce "local mythologies to compensate for the traumatic historical experience."[462] How different then is his framing from Bhabha's postcolonial dissemiNation, which is also based on combination of the creatively conceived elements of local culture with the universal language that allows for a new nation to emerge as modern? In Bhabha's own words: "it is only through the process of dissemiNation - of meaning, time, peoples, cultural boundaries and historical traditions – that the radical alterity of the national culture will create new forms of living and writing."[463]

The threat of art serving nationalist sentiments and the fear of backwardness in the quest for a pre-modern identity put nations trying to find their own voice in the sea of late-Soviet homogeneity in a precarious position. Moreover, in the case of Ukraine, a nation without a state for most of the modern period, the chances of being an equal interlocutor within the all-European geopolitical conversation would be a virtual impossibility. As historian Norman Davies points out: "Ukrainians have rarely been allowed to control their destiny."[464] Only during the late Soviet period, for the first time since the Russian Empire folded, did Ukraine gain an opening to reflect upon national

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[461] Piotrowski, "'Framing' of Central Europe," 19.

[462] Ibid., 20.

[463] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 166.

[464] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 47.

identity. While having been denied the Modernist route to formulating national identity around romantic tradition, Ukraine had a window of opportunity during the perestroika period to formulate it in postmodern terms instead.

Acknowledging that brings us to a better understanding of the implications and paradoxes inherent in the name "The Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism." In combining national identifiers with an eclectic mix of artistic styles, the two concepts were wedded by irony into a rational artistic process of nation-building. In using the prefix "post," the group contemplated the delayed emergence of Ukraine as a modern country, which had missed out on the phase of national romantic modernisms. The Resolute Edge operated on the claim of a non-existent state, thereby providing a distinctively different platform for the idea of nation. Hand-in-hand with postmodernism came their discovery of forbidden pages of their own history and culture; they became preoccupied with the task of creating national symbols for a virtual state—one that had yet to gain its official statehood. In the marketing spirit of Pop and the propagandizing ethos of Sots art, they used flamboyant large-scale paintings as a kind of pageantry to showcase their invented heraldry.

Addressing the idea of what constitutes a nation remained central to the activities of The Resolute Edge during perestroika era. That nations are inventions of the modern epoch is a truism of the social sciences asserted often and agreed upon, for example, by such historians as Eric Hobsbawm who claimed that "the real "nation" can only be recognized a posteriori."[465] However, the theoretical implications of the nation's appearance inevitably bound with national sentiments were laid out almost

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[465] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9.

simultaneously by two authors in 1983, by Ernest Gellner[466] and by Benedict Anderson.[467] These two groundbreaking researchers changed the way the process of assigning nationhood is understood. Both insisted that nationalism as a movement preceded the crystallization of nations. In Gellner's oft-cited words: "it is nationalism which engenders nations, not the other way around."[468] A British scholar of Czech origin with Jewish roots, Gellner is regarded as the author of some of the most brilliant imaginings of Eastern European nationalism. Utilizing the example of the fictional country of Ruritania as the main protagonist,[469] Gellner creates a poetic and humorous narrative on the origin of nationalism which begins with the collection of sad peasant songs by "village schoolmasters" and culminates with migration of workers during the industrialization which forces them to realize their difference from other nations together with their own specificity, previously transparent before in uniform cultural circumstances. Gellner's articulation of nationalism defined it as an objective need for homogenization experienced by highly developed and specialized industrial societies: "nationalism is indeed an effect of industrial social organization."[470] Stressing the utmost importance of culture in this process, he opted to complement Max Weber's famous definition of the state as an entity with a monopoly for violence with the observation that education was a no less crucial monopoly. According to Gellner, nationalism could be a

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[466] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism (*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[467] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of the Nationalism,* New Edition (London, New York: Verso, 2006).

[468] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* 55.

[469] Fictional country which appeared in novels. Anthony Hope, *The Prisoner of Zenda: Being the History of Three Months in the Life of an English Gentleman* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Library, 1998).

[470] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* 40.

very creative endeavor, capable of "inventing cultures"[471] due to the "culturally creative, fanciful, positively inventive aspect of nationalist ardour."[472]

Alongside Gellner's narrative, Anderson's famous view of nations as products of industrialization and modernity provides for a more expanded understanding of nationhood. In his writings, Anderson emphasizes modern nations transitioning from sacred languages and dynastic realms to printing press capitalism and vernacular languages. Among the key aspects of the Russian Empire's aspiration for modernity were its policies of Czarist Russification, argued Anderson.[473] Thus, for the emergence of Russian imperial nationalism, a suppression of minor languages and cultures, such as Ukrainian, was a necessary factor. The course of Ukrainian nationalism's appearance was explained by Anderson very succinctly, fitting perfectly into his own model. It started with a transformation of the language of the 'yokels' into the language of literature, first by publication of the poem *Aeneid* by Ivan Kotliarevsky in 1798, then by the foundation of the university in Kharkiv in 1804, and lastly by the 1830s work of Taras Shevchenko, whose poems signaled the appearance of the Ukrainian literary consciousness and was soon followed by the formation of the first Ukrainian nationalist organization in 1846.[474] Anderson, indebted to the ideas of Walter Benjamin, such as mechanical reproduction's impact on culture under capitalism, assigned much importance to the organized efforts of intellectuals spreading the culture via modern methods of reproduction and circulation, thus allowing communities to imagine themselves through these cultural products. Whether culture or education for Gellner, or more widely the power of imagination for

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[471] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* 49.
[472] Ibid., 56.
[473] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 88.
[474] Ibid., 74.

Anderson, both authors contributed significantly to our awareness that nation-building has always been a creative process.

Does this mean that those nations deprived of statehood in the modern period (i.e., Ukraine and countries of Central and Eastern Europe) were simply not creative enough in their endeavors? Rather, it appears that they rarely functioned as the authors of their own history or makers of their own image. It is a well-known fact that Ukraine played a marginal role in the Russo-centered base of knowledge production.[475] Since Ukrainian culture was considered provincial and its intellectuals were assimilated into Russian culture, its history was created by the official Russian historiography. And because failed statehood prevented Ukraine from writing its own history; the entire concept of a "Ukrainian history" was suspect from the start, as Mark von Hagen points out in his critically acclaimed article "Does Ukraine have a history?"[476] Ukraine, together with other countries of the region not possessing national states at the definitive time, Von Hagen reminds us, was "denied full historiographical legitimacy."[477] It would seem, therefore, that the Ukrainian artists of The Resolute Edge were fighting for a lost cause. Undeterred, they embraced the concept of a failed state as a condition of their creative process, intensifying the ironies of the present as they increasingly became liminally self-conscious of a denied past.

In fact, The Resolute Edge's attempt at creating the national idea of Ukraine out of its ancient myths and the symbolic ideological detritus of the collapsing Soviet Union has none of the naiveté and zeal of Gellner's "village schoolmasters" in search for eternal roots of a nation in need of awakening. Their sophisticated and ironic games with state

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[475] Grabowicz, "Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts," 674-690.
[476] Mark von Hagen, "Does Ukraine Have a History?" *Slavic Review*, 54, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 658-673.
[477] Ibid., 660.

symbols correlated much more with contemporary theories of nation formation such as those of Gellner and Anderson. Both theorists described this process as the effect of conscious efforts to describe a not yet fully formed nation with the mechanisms of art and culture education. DissemiNation can also serve as a model unknowingly utilized by the Resolute Edge's artists for breaking the homogeneity of Ukraine's national stereotype conceived by the Soviet authorities as an anesthetized version of archaic folk identity. Through their appropriation of the symbols of power losing their validity together with fragments of the old stereotype, young Ukrainian artists were inventing a new hybrid Ukrainian identity.

4.4 Postcolonialism and Baroque

The connection to Baroque as a style, a worldview, and an actual historical epoch captured the imagination and carried great weight for Ukrainian art and literature of the late Soviet period. Thus, despite the disputed applicability of postcolonial theory to the Ukrainian art of the time, the historical circumstances of Ukrainian artists discovering and articulating their difference at the metropolitan center of the crumbling empire as well as their reacting to their condition via the favorite postcolonial trope of Baroque make the convergence tangible. Ukraine's historical Baroque period carried special significance in the country's history, for it coincided with a blossoming of culture and inimitable achievements in the fields of literature, architecture, and science. The epoch is also associated with the bravado and independence of the Cossacks, who to this day

symbolize Ukrainian national identity. Intellectual historian Chernetsky wrote that 17th century Ukraine was "the most baroque-oriented culture" in all of Slavdom.[478]

Not surprisingly, also grounded in the late Soviet Moscow period, Andrukhovych's novel *Moskoviad* and his cycle of poems "Letters to Ukraine" both contain direct references to the Baroque epoch—be it real or imaginary—while exploiting its characteristic penchant for allegory, ruins, and excess. One of the poems from the cycle bears the highly conspicuous title «Україна – країна бароко» [Ukraine is the Country of Baroque] and contains a verse that reads "Це підпільне бароко влаштовує опір і цвіте шалено навіть в уламках" – "this underground baroque is fighting back by blooming madly even in ruins."[479] This poem not only generalizes the experience of Baroque as universal for Ukrainian culture but also suggests that through the baroque this culture resists oblivion and neglect. Very succinctly, Andrukhovych summarized the Baroque features of the Ukrainian culture in his verse, as the culture of lavishly decorated ruins.

Not unlike the neo-baroque sensitivities of Latin American postcolonial literature and art often exemplified by the style of magic realism, Andrukhovych's *Moskoviad* begins with a lavish description of the main character's dream in which he recounts a fantasy meeting with imaginary Ukrainian King Olelko the Second which takes place in a splendid Baroque-style palace.[480] The luxurious ambient setting of the dream meeting

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[478] "…among Slavic cultures, Ukraine is possibly the most Baroque-oriented…" Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, 188.

[479] "Ukraine's is a baroque domain […] The land's florid soul keeps blooming, madly, even in ruins. (Original: Це підпільне бароко влаштовує опір / і цвіте шалено навіть в уламках)." Yuri Andrukhovych, "From "Letters to Ukraine"," trans. Nina Shevchuk-Murray, *Prairie Schooner* 82, no. 3 (2008): 167-68.

[480] "The night from Friday to Saturday I dreamt I was having supper with the King of Ukraine, Olelko the Second (Dovhoruky-Rurikid). The two of us sitting at a pleasantly set table in a Baroque loggia made of light blue stone…" Andrukhovych, *Moscoviad,* 10.

comes as a stark contrast to the true lifestyle of the character of the novel—a destitute Ukrainian student living in a dormitory in Moscow far from home. The story comes alive as an alternative version of Ukrainian history and its actual situation towards the end of the Soviet Union. As to Andrukhovych's treatment of the subject, we find that the author's conversations about a lost, if ever-existing, Ukrainian Empire are conducted by means of a postcolonial trope— through the dreamlike metaphoric language contrasting the life of the destitute student with the luxurious palace of the imagined king. By comparison with Latin American postcolonial literature and its active use of the neo-baroque quality, *Moskoviad* also expresses what Severo Sarduy called the "nostalgia for the Lost Paradise."[481] The Baroque trope in Andrukhovych's novel, as in the visual arts, represents a longing for the greatness of the past, an impossible reinvention of an irreproducible chapter in the history of Ukraine. Thus, the engagement with the baroque in this instance is not solely about style; rather, it is a means of asserting and ascribing to the period's grandeur, luxury and power a reflection about a specific trait of national culture.

In her essay "The Fantastical Line of Baroque" written in 1996 and published in 2000 catalogue "Intervals" Kyiv art historian Halyna Skliarenko stated that "the phenomenon of Ukrainian baroque is increasingly losing its historic specificity"[482] while turning into "a national style of existence, the everlasting baroque epoch."[483] Skliarenko also underlined that the Ukrainian artists of the perestroika generation, whom she defines as "the artists of the "new wave"", were particularly susceptible to the baroque message,

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[481] "The Baroque is secretly animated by nostalgia for the Lost Paradise." Sarduy, "The Baroque and the Neobaroque," 271.

[482] Raievsky*, Intervaly*, 182. Translation in the original.

[483] Ibid., 187.

revealing this epoch through their artworks as "a problem of national culture."[484] The anomalous continuity and major influence of the baroque epoch in matters of national consciousness is recognized by Skliarenko among many other Ukrainian scholars, some of whom were discussed in the previous chapter when analyzing baroque aspects of Tistol's and Reunov's paintings at *The First Soviet-American Exhibition*. While Ukrainian Baroque assumed some Renaissance features, in the absence of a fully-fledged Renaissance movement it also spilled over into Enlightenment and even Romanticism periods due to the fact that the blossoming of Ukrainian culture and its brief statehood that coincided with the baroque moment were followed by centuries of existence as a colony. [485]

In 2012 Skliarenko was a co-organizer, together with art historian Oksana Barshynova from the National Museum of Ukraine, of the major exhibition "Myth: Ukrainian Baroque" which juxtaposed the examples of contemporary Ukrainian art, including works by postmodern perestroika artists, with historic artworks of the Ukrainian Baroque, such as printed 16-17th century "visual poetry" and "parsuna" portraiture. Skliarenko maintains that "the myth about the Ukrainian baroque" was an inevitable product of the brief moment of Ukrainian independence in the 17th century and a solace during centuries when Ukraine lost its statehood and its people were turned into serfs.[486] Thus, even though Skliarenko did not mention postcolonial theory and did not

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[484] Raievsky, *Intervaly*, 185.

[485] More on the Ukrainian Baroque in arts: Dmytro Chyzhevsky, *Ukrainskyi Literaturny Barok: Narysy [Ukrainian Literature Baroque: Outline]* (Kharkiv: Akta, 2003); A. Makarov, *Svitlo Ukrainskoho Baroko [The Light of the Ukrainian Baroque]* (Kyiv: Mystetsvo, 1994); Stepovyk, *Leontiy Tarasevych i Ukrainske Mystetsvto Barokko*; A.V. Lipatov, A.I. Rogov and L.A. Sofronova, eds., *Baroko v Slovianskikh Kulturakh [Baroque in Slavic Cultures]* (Moskva: Nauka, 1982).

[486] Barshynova and Skliarenko, *Mif "Ukraiinske Baroko,"* 12.

resort to its vocabulary, this Ukrainian art historian throughout her career expressed attitudes that recall such theories and analyzed Ukrainian post-Soviet art through analogy with the historic baroque style. Keeping in mind this example together with Chernetsky's approach to literature, the remaining portion of this chapter will be devoted to analysis of the Resolute Edge's paintings from the Furmanny period dealing with baroque history and sensitivity.

4.5 The Resolute Edge's Moscow Exhibition History and the Initial Responses to their Art

Discussed in chapter three was the Resolute Edge's participation in the exhibition *Eidos* in the late fall of the 1988 that resulted in Ukrainian artists withdrawing their artworks to protest against censorship in solidarity with their Furmanny colleagues. Following this show, the next several years in Moscow were marked by a spiraling number of exhibitions and artistic collaborations for Tistol, Reunov, and their cohort. Formally, only in 1989 were they directly associated with the Furmanny Lane art squat, which was closed down by authorities at the end of that year. However, the Resolute Edge's artists managed to keep their artworks locked in one of the Furmanny apartments until their relocation to the Trekhprudny Lane art squat in the beginning of 1991.[487] They were able to show their art to visiting curators and artists (one of them then during that

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[487] Art squat populated by the Ukrainian and Rostov-on-Don artists, with Kostiantyn Reunov and Avdei Ter-Oganian being the two directors of the establishment that is considered responsible for the birth of Russian actionist art. See more: Olga Golovanova, *Tovarishchestvo "Iskusstvo Ili Smert"[Union "Art or Death"]* (Moscow: Moskovskii Muzei Sovremennogo Iskusstva, 2009); Miroslav Nemirov, *A.S. Ter-Oganjan: Zhizn, Sudba i Kontemporari Art; Spravochnik-putevoditel [A.S. Ter-Oganyan: Life, Fate and the Contemporary Art]* (Moscow: GIF, 1999).

year was Donald Judd) for months after the squat's closure.[488] Still, for several years following their initial appearance on Furmanny they were greatly affected by that encounter which prompted their artistic program to assume a definite form. Certainly, its seeds were planted during the military service of Tistol and Reunov and in response to rapid changes brought about by perestroika. Nevertheless, the unique position of the Resolute Edge's artists became apparent precisely on Furmanny where their critical distance from both late Moscow conceptualism and Kyiv post-Savadist painting fully revealed itself.

The crystallization of the Resolute Edge's artistic program was happening simultaneously with their participation in major domestic and international exhibitions while producing a steady flow of large-scale paintings in Moscow, Kyiv, and in between those cities. After attending the exhibition *Eidos*, curator Olga Sviblova noticed and admired new Ukrainian art, despite its short appearance in the show. Immediately after, she met Reunov and Tistol on Furmanny and took an active role in arranging art shows for the Resolute Edge's artists. In addition, jointly with them she conceived and collaborated on the project "In Search of a Happy End." This not only gave the title to the aforementioned film by Sviblova, but resulted in several performances and exhibitions by the group.[489] Already in 1989, she helped organize the large show *The Resolute Edge of National Post-eclecticism* [Volevaia Gran Natsionalnogo Posteklectizma] in the Kashirskaia Street Exhibition Hall in Moscow. Given the exhibition's scale and the

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[488] My interview with Oleg Tistol via telephone in December 2015.

[489] The performance *In Search of a Happy End* was conducted in Moscow on the eve of January 12, 1990, with three artists of the Resolute Edge, Tistol, Reunov and Aleksandr Kharchenko "keeping silence in different Slavic languages" so that their silence would be transformed into gold according to the old proverb "silence is gold." For more on the performance, see Olga Sviblova, "V Poiskakh Schastlivogo Kontsa [In Search for a Happy End.]," *Rodnik* 41, no. 5 (1990): 42-43.

paintings showcased, it could be considered as the project that launched the presentation

of the Resolute Edge's artistic program to wide audiences of Russian and international art

critics in Moscow. Tistol's painting *Reunification* [*Vozziednannia* in Ukrainian] (1988),

(fig. 2) a work of paramount importance for the Resolute Edge and one most clearly

embodying their program, as well as the artworks from his "Ukrainian Money" cycle

were presented there along with Reunov's *From the Great Ukrainian People to the Great*

Russian People (1989), *Read Sea* (1988), and *Chicken-Kiev* (1989). Lavish baroque

paintings with flowing paints, gigantic figures that were often sensual and corporeal,

stenciled ornaments, bright coloration, and diverse symbols – these artworks immediately

elicited negative responses from such representatives of Moscow Conceptualism as

Dmitry Prigov (1940-2007) who pronounced at the opening that they should be

considered "Baroque salon art" and hence had no place in Moscow's progressive

gallery.[490] Such statements made clear that Savadov and Senchenko's *Cleopartra's*

Sorrow had not fully prepared the Moscow artistic milieu for the reception of Ukrainian

postmodern perestroika painting, so radically different from that of Moscow

Conceptualism. Neither they were ready to discover the specificity of Tistol and

Reunov's position in relation to the other Ukrainian artists representative of the

perestroika postmodern painting wave.

　　Writing in the same 1989 edition of the magazine *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo* that

discussed Savadov, Senchenko, and the artists of the Paris Commune, the Kyiv-born art

critic Konstantin Akinsha touched upon the divergence of The Resolute Edge's artistic

strategies from other exponents of Ukrainian art of the perestroika period. In his article

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[490] My telephone interview with Oleg Tistol in December of 2015.

"Poetics of *Surzhyk*[491] or a Chicken-Kiev" Akinsha contrasted the "metaphysical calmness" of the painting by Savadov and Senchenko to the "swirling 'post-eclecticism'" [burlenie 'posteklektitsizma'] of the Resolute Edge's artists.[492] Even though these two art groups belonged to the postmodern wave of painting, according to Akinsha, Savadov and Senchenko, who launched this trend in late Soviet Ukraine, were "transcendental cosmopolitans" while Tistol and Reunov reveled not only in "actualized grotesque but in their Ukrainianness."[493] Despite the common medium of pseudo-historic large-scale expressive oils full of pastiches, the fondness for the national stereotypes by The Resolute Edge's artists constituted their peculiarity.

Akinsha testified that some Furmanny artists (he did not specify who) defined Tistol and Reunov as Nats Artists (from 'natsionalny', meaning national) after the analogy with Sots Art. Like Sots artists, they utilized symbols – in their case the symbols pertaining to their national culture – but "poeticized them,"[494] unlike Sots artists who ironically mocked symbols of Soviet power. Akinsha explained this proclivity for poetics as stemming from their connection to Ukrainian painterliness [zhyvopisnost]. Certainly, Akinsha applied the term "poetics" to describe the difference in approaches to symbols by the Resolute Edge's artists and by Moscow Sots artists, invoking the discussion of Savadov's and Senchenko's art as building 'super-metaphor' poetics in painting.[495] Thus the art critic recognized the proximity of the theories behind the two strands of Ukrainian postmodern perestroika that were connected but did not fully coincide, while also

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[491] *Surzhyk* is a mixture of the Russian and Ukrainian languages; it is the most widely spread in the regions of Ukraine that have common borders with Russia.

[492] Konstantin Akinsha, "Poetika surzkika ili Kotleta Po-Kievski [Poetics of Surzhyk or a Chicken-Kiev]," *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* 385, no. 12 (1989), 27.

[493] Ibid.

[494] Akinsha, "Poetika surzkika," 27.

[495] I discuss this term in my Chapter Two.

attesting to the convergences between The Resolute Edge and Sots Art. These convergences were outwardly overlooked by such artists as Prigov who was not willing to look beyond the saturated painterly surfaces by the Ukrainian artists.

1989 was a year also marked by several international exhibitions for Tistol, Reunov and their collective. The Resolute Edge's artists participated in the festival "New Beginnings" organized in Glasgow, within the exhibition *Three Generations of the post-Stalinist Avant-Garde*. Another international show was the already mentioned exhibition at the Piotr Novitsky Gallery in Warsaw, the catalogue to which still serves as a major source of information on Furmanny artists.[496] All five artists of the Resolute Edge were represented in the Piotr Novitsky gallery's catalogue along with their photo-portraits, short bios and their artworks' reproductions. Tistol's and Reunov's artworks in the catalogue demonstrate the range of their painterly exercises. Their art production bridged two opposite stylistic poles evidenced in this show and evolving over time. One was very laconic pictorially, even somewhat austere for Ukrainian perestroika painting, although still ripe with symbols, while the other was overloaded with both symbols and painterly materiality. Tistol's *Together Forever* [*Naviky Razom* in Ukrainian] was an oblong horizontal painting with two stripes of uniform bright colors creating a backdrop adorned by architectural elements in several places. Reunov's *All Will Pass Like Blooming Apples' White Smoke* [Как с белых яблонь дым in Russian] was a diptych covered with violent splashes of paint and hosting several naked figures in expressive postures painted with rapid and sensuous brushstrokes. Both titles, in accordance to the Resolute Edge's interest in stereotypes, were well-known and easily recognizable verbal clichés. Tistol's *Together*

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[496] Kaszuk, *Furmanny Zaulek.*

Forever was a turn of phrase invoking the Pereyaslav Agreement, a treaty signed in 1654 between Ukraine and Russia, and widely celebrated in the USSR as a fortuitous union between two fraternal nations that previously had been disconnected. It was to this historical moment that Tistol returned numerous times during perestroika. Meanwhile, Reunov's *All Will Pass Like Blooming Apples' White Smoke* was a famous verse by the Russian lyric poet Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925) from his poem about vanishing youth, with this particular fragment of the poem often used proverbially in Russian to speak about something fleeting, about to disappear into thin air.[497]

In 1990, their exhibition activity became even more intense; the Resolute Edge artists no longer permanently stayed on Furmanny, but moved constantly between Kyiv, Moscow and other various locations for their shows. Among the two large exhibitions in Moscow, the first, *The Horizon Line*, featured only Tistol and Reunov's work in Belyaevo Exhibition Hall. The second was the first major art promotion endeavor by future prominent Russian galerist Marat Guelman: his ambitious project *Babylon*, which opened in Moscow Youth Center in February of 1990. This exhibition's bilingual Russian-English catalogue promised its readers that seventeen artists participating in the exhibition, including Tistol and Reunov, would "illuminate the essential problems of the modern artistic process in the USSR today."[498] One of the most recognizable features of this radically innovative late Soviet art for the curators of the show Marat Guelman and

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[497] "Не жалею, не зову, не плачу, Все пройдет, как с белых яблонь дым, Увяданья золотом охваченный, Я не буду больше молодым." Sergei Aleksandrovich Esenin, *Slovesnykh Rek Kipenie i Shorokh* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1965), 268.
[498] Guelman, *Babylon*, 5.

Tayana Chistov was that it no longer had to struggle against socialist realism and therefore was "liberated" to create a new quality in art.[499]

The *Babylon* exhibition catalogue included the text written by Reunov and Tistol to explain the artistic program of the Resolute Edge. It insisted on the need to "struggle for the beauty of stereotype" that artists wanted to consciously create by clashing and mixing already existing stereotypes of beauty.[500] This program was accompanied in the catalogue by their three paintings: Reunov's *Red Sea* (1988) (fig. 64), Tistol's *Condottiere* (1988) (fig. 59) and his *New Ukrainian Chervonets* (Ten-ruble banknote) (1988). In the selection of paintings, Tistol's artworks had a more pronounced national component, as his equestrian *Condottiere* held the mace (a symbol of power for Ukrainian Cossacks) and *New Ukrainian Chervonets* was part of the project "New Ukrainian Money" on which Tistol had worked since 1984. Reunov's painting literally represented the name of the sea – yet another embodied metaphor of the Ukrainian perestroika postmodern – with the bright red horizon separating the canvas in two halves, both dominated by a figure too big to be confined within the borders of the painting and therefore with half of its skull cropped. With its scheme of a large-scale figure dominating the landscape, this painting was characteristic of Reunov's work of the period. It became widely known as a part of Marat Guelman's collection and was frequently exhibited after entering his collection.[501] All three artworks brandished painterly virtuosity in layers of luscious patterns, splashes, and dripping of oils in bright

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[499] Guelman, *Babylon*, 5.
[500] Ibid., 54.
[501] Olga Lopukhova, ed., *Iskusstvo Protiv Geografii [Art Against Geography]* (Sankt-Peterburg: Gosudarstvenny Russkii Muzei, 2000).

colors with which the figures of people and horses, immaterial and corporeal at once, were brimming.

The Resolute Edge's rather impressive international exhibition itinerary in 1990 included the National Gallery in Bratislava, National Gallery of Iceland in Reykjavik, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and Kaj Forsblom gallery in Helsinki. The latter exhibition, which opened in May-June of 1990 in Helsinki, was accompanied by the catalogue essay *In search of a Happy End* by Sviblova.[502] Some of the ideas in this essay echoed those of the *Babylon*'s curators, namely that it was the art that had finally transcended the opposition between the official and unofficial that had defined cultural dynamics in the Soviet Union for so long. According to Sviblova, The Resolute Edge's artists "belong to the first generation of young Soviet artists whose artistic consciousness is not characterized by opposition to anything official."[503] Even before the opposition was made irrelevant by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, perestroika art actively entertained the possibility of the former enemies losing the need to struggle. The situation when unofficial art was driven by the need to be anything but like the art promoted by authorities, was considered very unproductive by art critics and artists alike at the verge of the Soviet Union's collapse. The Resolute Edge's large-scale figurative and narrative painting represented a very convenient example of the rejuvenated genre that had been forbidden territory for unofficial artists before perestroika.

However, the way their art was considered still revealed the Hegelian dialectics of a thought process that needed struggling oppositions for progress and therefore was not entirely postmodern in the strict sense. One of the oppositions that defined the perception

[502] Olga Sviblova, "In Search of a Happy End," in *Young Artists from Kiev. Jana Bystrova, Konstantin Reunov, Oleg Tistol, Paintings*. (Galerie Kaj Folsblom, 30.05-27.06.1990) Exhibition catalogue.
[503] Ibid.

and analysis of Ukrainian perestroika art in general was its contrast to Moscow Conceptualism. This dichotomy of the vital, sensual, and visual excesses of Ukrainian art and the intellectual, textual, and dry qualities attributed to Moscow Conceptualism clearly was connected to a structuralist mode of thinking. Post-Savadist painting, discussed in chapter two, often consciously contravened this dualism.[504] The Resolute Edge's artists disrupted the dichotomy even further by working with texts and symbols as persistently as with oil painting's overflowing surfaces. In addition, they challenged the binary by bringing the national component to the equation, allowing it to unfold as both a stylistic reference and a story behind the picture.

Keeping in mind the danger of postcolonial nationalisms voiced by postmodern theorists Jameson and Lyotard in relation to nations overcoming the colonial past by creation and perpetuation of mythic historic narratives, I would like to utilize the optics of postmodernism when analyzing the Resolute Edge's efforts at creation of a national stereotype of Ukrainian-ness.[505] However, as I will argue below their aim was not to create a legitimizing mythic discourse to oppose to the Enlightenment-style universality employed by colonizers to justify their actions, but to destroy the frozen stereotype of Ukrainian-ness based in an anesthetized version of its folk culture. The postmodern underpinning of their artistic strategy was revealed via the constituents of the stereotypes they created not only from the fragmented particles of Ukraine's distant past but also out of the ideological and pop culture debris quickly accumulating on the ruins of a not yet fully disintegrated Soviet Union. They did not strive to construct a solid national identity

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[504] The play with the dichotomy is evident in the painting by Oleksandr Hnylytsky *Laodikeia's Call* discussed in detail in chapter two.

[505] Thomas During, "Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today" in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 457.

excavated from mythic history but attempted to reveal instead its heterogeneous nature–
the direct opposite of a stereotype. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to concrete
examples of their artworks that were devoted to such goals.

4.6 Baroque Excesses: Uncontrolled Proliferation of Painterly Matter in Resolute Edge's Paintings

I would like to begin tracing the development of the artistic methods used by the
Resolute Edge's artists in Moscow by looking at the new edition in the series of self-
portraits by Oleg Tistol. This painting of 1988 was made promptly after their relocation
to Furmanny and was included in their 1989 programmatic exhibition in Gallery "Na
Kashirke."[506] Tistol's *Self-Portrait* of 1988 (fig. 59) appears to have been derived
immediately from the double portrait *Breakfast* (1987) (fig. 47) of himself and Borisov,
his fellow in military service, placed in Soviet military settings and dressed in army
uniform. The portrait also makes reference, albeit less obviously, to still another earlier
self-portrait. Here, as in his first military self-portrait *Makarov 1* (1985) (fig. 46), Tistol
incorporates the magnified hallmark Ben-Day dots of Pop Art, and paints them in red, to
the left of the head of the figure. Tistol depicts himself in the same three-quarters
perspective, looking directly at the viewer as in the painting *Breakfast* while also utilizing
the same palette of strikingly bright yellows contrasted by red and blue accents. His
military headdress, adorned as in *Breakfast* with bright red highlights, and a blue

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[506] Галерея «На Каширке» Объединения "Выставочные залы Москвы" Galereia na Kashirke [Gallery
on Kashirka] of the Union "Exhibition Halls of Moscow" was opened in February of 1986 on Ak.
Milionshchikova Street and became well-known because of the contemporary art exhibitions which were
held there. More information is on https://www.nakashirke.com/

shoulder strap together with the sitter's uncomfortably straight posture indicate that we are looking at a soldier. This is where the similarities with his earlier works end while the traits of the new aesthetics come to the fore.

The perceptive focus of the *Self-Portrait* of 1988 is the face rendered with sharp angles, almost in a cubist manner, and very intently returning the viewer's gaze. The half-length body was locked against a background of two stripes of colors, with the head additionally accentuated by being set on the glaring yellow foil while the torso is situated on much calmer grey. All the extra details of the military surroundings are gone; there are no tables or wall tiles as in *Breakfast*. In contrast to the almost realistically painted face with the rather recognizable features of Tistol, the body was the place on canvas where the excess of the painterly media (combination of multiple types of oil application: impasto, dripping, stencil technique) overpowered the form of the figure. The seemingly infinite variations of oil marking on the canvas created a pulsating multilayered painterly surface engulfing its viewers with a plentitude of intricate details and colors. The expressive torso was being pictorially dissolved in the bright mash of gestural brushwork, stenciled flowery patterns, and dripping paint. Out of the lavish painterly matter a wrist appeared in the lower right corner. In the opposite lower corner a Ukrainian letter *I* was stenciled in bright red against the taupe-grey background. The face, the wrist, and the letter were organized into a well-balanced triangular composition as if the artist were trying to tame the overflowing oil colors and patterns with some sense of order. Such defiance of painterly matter, excessive and hardly controllable, became one of the major fixtures of style for the Resolute Edge's painting on Furmanny.

This painting, being centered on the subject and connoting the expressive painting genre, evokes the Ukrainian perestroika postmodern of Savadov circles, which were often associated with the Western trans-avantgarde due to their dripping oils, bright palette, and return to subjectivity. Nevertheless, The Resolute Edge artists' relocation to Moscow made their distance from their Ukrainian peers more tangible, as they were consciously taking those features to their extremes. The contrast of the painterly surface's ornamental materiality with the plasticity of the figure's face on Tistol's *Self-Portrait* leaves the spectator dumbfounded by the dazzling change of perspectives. Thus the viewer is made aware of the act of active looking that he is forced into by the painterly surface he observes. The overpowering vision, enhanced perception appears detached from the subject/object dichotomy of seeing. This trait of the material excess of painterly surfaces in combination with recognizable human form was common for both Tistol and Reunov during their Moscow period. It was when the painterliness prevailed on their canvases and human form was being violently and sensually distorted, rendering the canvases of their Ukrainian counterparts calm and clear in comparison. Not only the eerie *Cleopatra's Sorrow* by Savadov and Senchenko, but even the lugubrious and deformed creatures by Troubina appear less subjected to painterly excesses than the majority of the Resolute Edge's canvases from the Furmanny period.

Similarly, yet another of Tistol's artworks, the *Condottiere* (1988) (fig. 60), painted at Furmanny and exploring the soldier theme, exhibits a mixture of mimetic and anti-mimetic features. One recognizes all the proportions in distances and ultimately discerns a figure on a horse riding right into the space of the viewer. The canvas is dotted by several realistic fragments such as the mace in the hand of the rider, the horse's ears

and the horseman's face. However, as the spectator's eye absorbs the vortex of bright colors and multiple pictorial planes, a closer look into the surface details reveals a figure dissolving into pure ornament and patterns of paint. Even the mace appears liquefied, about to lose its immutable materiality. On the one hand a spectator concentrates on the seductive painterly surface absorbing her attention with its ornaments, colors, and splashes. On the other, all those pictorial fragments are parts of figures and objects whose perception requires the viewer to mentally cancel the excessive materiality which initially occludes her vision and therefore prevents the fragments from forming a whole. Such paintings stimulate the decentering perception over the course of which viewers are deprived of a stable center of focus and have to become fragmented themselves to be capable of such perception.

Numerous other canvases by Tistol painted in Moscow at Furmanny apartment #31 or during visits to his Ukrainian studio in Baryshivka, a village right outside of Kyiv, employed similar techniques. Such paintings as *New Ukrainian Chervonest* (Ten-ruble banknote) (1988), *Exercise with Maces* (1989) (fig. 61), and *Theirs* (1989) (fig. 62) revel in complex patterns, luscious colors, and numerous methods of paint application. Every painting contains several figures, each of which is a universe of vibrating painterly matter constructing its subjects as corporeal yet strangely abstract.

Theirs is capturing the dialog between Kostiantyn Reunov and his father Valentyn Reunov (1939-2007), a well-known Ukrainian artist of the sixties generation. While the younger Reunov is given in a faint profile, his father dominates the space holding a similitude of a bishop's scepter, a power symbol, in this case referencing the papal power of Roman Catholic Church. Assigning such a high role to the elder Reunov on the canvas

revealed the power dynamic existing within the Ukrainian artistic scene. Trained in Socialist Realism as a method and in academic easel painting as a technique, Valentyn Reunov was a long-time member of the Soviet Artistic Union, but like many of his generation, practiced Cézanne-inspired versions of late modernism clandestinely despite his official position. Neither willing to share the covert late modernist practice in the solitude of their studios nor eager to take his official position, Tistol and Reunov were looking for an alternative in terms of institutions of affiliation and in their artistic practice. Tistol challenges the authority of their fathers' generation by the method with which he renders the elder Reunov's figure. Despite the symbol of power in his hand, Reunov is not a solid figure but a part of the painterly background, containing fragments of tiled grid, rapid oil smudges, and flowing bright colors. Borderless and almost immaterial, Valentyn Reunov holds on to the scepter while being consumed by the layers of pulsating and revolting painterly matter.

Work by Reunov, Tistol's closest colleague at the time, evolved in a similar direction, with even more enhanced sensuality in depiction of his paintings' characters. His *Red Sea* (1988), *A Girl with an Ermine* (1989) (fig. 65), and *A Beautiful Catastrophe* (1988) (fig. 63) were built upon the repeating scheme of a lonely naked body – most probably female – spread out towards a viewer and occupying a big portion of a large-scale canvas. Sensual overtones were reflected in the manner of painting, shimmering and visceral with discernable brushwork of brown to nude colors emphasized by juxtaposition with dripping paints and large areas of unmodulated color tones. Most of his figures were too big for the canvas boundaries to contain, so the artist had to crop their heads. The grandiose but vulnerable giants whose emotions Reunov was protecting by obscuring

their faces were made to appear enormous and imposing due to such compositional approach. A shot from Sviblova's film on Furmanny offers a perspective on the impact these canvases might have made on their viewers when Reunov is standing next to his painting *Beautiful Catastrophe*. His own body is at least twice as small as the mammoth body of his character. All three paintings shared in common not only massive figures but also the method of combining locally painted smooth monochrome spaces and zones where the painterly matter was swelling out with layers of multicolored flickering brushwork. These painterly fragments were brimming with a slush of colors and textures, such as in the chest of the figure in the *Red Sea* or the torso of *A Girl with Ermine*.

This excess of painterly matter overflowing the entirety of the canvas surface persists in Reunov's impressive work *In Search of a Happy End* (1989) (fig. 66). A monumental rider on a charging horse is painted with pulsating brushwork of luscious colors, with some movements of the brush effectively simulating traditional easel painting, such as in the horse's realistically rendered face and knee. The overall impression, however, cancels any expectations of a naturalistic picture that such type of paint application might have promised. Reunov, still in his final year of arts studies, demonstrated the bravado of his painterly virtuosity, using the techniques he was taught in Kyiv Art Academy in order to subvert the realist intentions that such teaching insisted on. His raw, agitated and palpable brushwork is so saturated that it overcomes its subject, the painterly matter effectively competing with the figure that it was supposed to sculpt.

One way to consider such eruptions of painterly media on Tistol's and Reunov's canvases that destabilized perception with a cornucopia of techniques and colors, is through a postcolonial approach to the baroque trope. Severo Sarduy, the Latin American

writer and theorist insisted on the connection between the postcolonial experience and the baroque proliferation of meaning in representation and signification. Together with substitution, condensation, and parody, proliferation is one of the four mechanisms of artificialization that is the most important feature of the postcolonial baroque, the "apotheosis of artifice" according to the theorist.[507] Baroque's prodigious nature multiplies means of expression and metaphors that infinitely prolong the distance between signifier and signified. In place of one signifier baroque produces long chains of signifiers that progress metonymically.[508] For Sarduy, the baroque artwork is characterized by "unlimited saturation, asphyxiating proliferation, horror vacui," all of which results in a partial loss of the object.[509] Sarduy explains this ultimate expenditure of baroque by its striving to fulfill the insatiable lack, which the proliferation circumscribes. Grounding his system in psychoanalytic epistemology, Sarduy relies on the Lacanian economy of the central lack in the order of desire. The visual excess is used to cover the loss, and in Sarduy's interpretation this empty center is the "repressed origin" or the initial condition of the colonized subjects before colonization, permanently non-available.

Tistol's own explanation of the representational havoc that he created with conflicting planes and modes of depiction, however, does not involve directly any political or historical reasons that we might immediately associate with reaction to a postcolonial condition. In fact, he attests: "my play with flatness and volume in the paintings of perestroika period was dictated by the ultimate intolerance that I felt towards

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[507] Sarduy, "Baroque and the Neobaroque," 272.

[508] Ibid., 273.

[509] Ibid., 287.

realistic representation inflicted on me by the Soviet educational system which favored the Russian Itinerants above all other types of art. As a result, in my early works I really wanted to stress that what my viewer was observing was foremost a painting, not an illusion of reality."[510] This statement, nevertheless, fits perfectly into the system of aesthetic preferences of postcolonial authors and artists, according to Sarduy. The Latin American theorist situated the quality of artifice as the main feature to define postcolonial creative production.[511]

While in the metropolitan center, the Resolute Edge's artists were made acutely aware of the lack in place of their cultural identity. As they were challenged to articulate their artistic specificity as Ukrainian artists in the wake of the Soviet Union's ruination, no clear definition was available to them. They realized that the recognizable elements of Ukrainian-ness in the capital were either the frozen folk stereotypes or the Soviet clichés about the "younger brother" from warm and fertile lands. Even Sviblova, who supported the artists during their Moscow years, could not avoid in her analysis such generalizations as crediting The Resolute Edge's unique attributes to the warm Ukrainian climate: "Ukrainians were aided by the sense of humor, southern vitality, and certainly the distinctive tactility and sensuality which are natural for the Ukrainian culture as a whole."[512] Thereby, she subjected the artists she championed to the same stereotyping they were fighting against with their art by repurposing and mocking such stereotypes.

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[510] My interview with Oleg Tistol by phone, November 2015.

[511] The four types of artifice utilized by Latin American artists according to Sarduy are substitution, proliferation, condensation and parody. Sarduy, "Baroque and the Neobaroque."

[512] "Украинцев опять выручили чувство юмора, южная витальность и, конечно, особая тактильность и чувственность, характерные для украинской культуры вообще." Sviblova "V poiskakh schastlivogo kontsa," 40.

Before proceeding to discussion of the symbols and stereotypes populating the Resolute Edge's canvases, I would like to conclude the conversation about Tistol's and Reunov's painterly excesses by considering some aspects of French philosopher Buci-Glucksmann's theory of baroque vision in respect to their paintings' formal qualities.[513] The overabundant painterly surfaces that concealed the partial loss of their subjects and amplified the material painterly constituent connect the Resolute Edge not only to the postcolonial condition but to a postmodern sensibility attributed to artists generally. As discussed in conjunction with the post-Savadov generation in chapter two, this theory is similar to Sarduy's in identifying artifice as one of the central characteristics of baroque that is "the art of truth, the art of artifice."[514] Furthermore, the French theorist underlines the baroque propensity for perpetuating oxymoronic qualities, such as reality and its opposite. She interprets the baroque form as one which is "alternatively empty or excessive yet promises infinite variation."[515] This form is anti-Platonic for her because, unlike Renaissance art that aims to create a perfect copy of the ideal, baroque frantically accumulates appearances and effects, metaphors and hyperbole. Still, devotedly it imitates imitation as such: "making the signifier in its pure state proliferate in the vertigo of lost, sacrificed, and sacrificial meaning, the baroque constructs a *mimesis of nothingness*."[516] Baroque overproduces to compensate for the void that animates this infinite saturation.

Looking at the canvases of Tistol and Reunov with the help of Buci-Glucksmann's theory of baroque-embodied spectatorship, one can admit that their

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[513] The title of Buci-Glucksmann's book is a reference to Merleau-Ponty's statement "Madness in vision." Buci-Glucksmann, *Madness of Vision.*

[514] Buci-Glucksmann, *Madness of Vision,* 9.

[515] Ibid., 5

[516] Ibid., 14.

surplus of painterly materiality definitely confused its viewers. The excesses in painterly matter could provoke swooning and dizziness in attentive spectator experiencing the rapid change of perspectives and therefore resulted in corporeal perception, the immersion into the painterly matter of the viewers' minds and bodies. The tension between the empty spaces and expressive bursts of painterly matter on their canvases was the formal means to achieve the effect of baroque spectacle. For Buci-Glucksmann, the intricate and decorative geometry of Borromini's Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza walls was determined by the move towards the "sublime void" of the opening in the ceiling of the church.[517] Similarly, the combination of the emptiness and plenitude on the Resolute Edge's canvases aimed at intensifying the perceptive experience of their viewers. The multitude of forms, condensed in the zones of painterly saturation, contained stenciled ornaments and symbols, fragments of realistic painting, violent abstract movements of the brushes, and flowing paints. The emptiness appeared as a necessary double of the limitless proliferation, when all the forms dissolved into nothingness, pure effect.

Prompt to note the emptiness behind the formal excessiveness of Ukrainian perestroika canvases was the Russian critic Sergei Kuskov who stated that the baroque forms of Ukrainian canvases were "just the emanations of cultural codes and the enclosures of Emptiness."[518] It was not accidental that the critic capitalized "Emptiness", as it was the concept of paramount importance in Moscow conceptualist circles. For him the emptiness he detected on Ukrainian canvases signaled their move towards

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[517] Buci-Glucksmann, *Madness of Vision,* 11.

[518] "Картина киевлян, заключал Кусков, - «экран обманов», а ее барочные формы – всего лишь эманации культурных кодов и оболочки Пустоты. [Painting by artists from Kyiv – concluded Kuskov – is a "screen of lies" and its baroque forms are just the emanations of cultural codes and the enclosures of Emptiness.]" Oleksandr Soloviov, *Turbulentni shliuzy: Zbirnyk Stattei* (Kyiv: Instytut Problem Sychasnoho mystetstva, Intertekhnolohiia, 2006), 16.

conceptualization.[519] He resorted to habitual methodology that came from the philosophical and religious influences defining artistic practices in unofficial Moscow art for several decades prior. Moscow conceptualism had investigated emptiness since its very inception: Ilya Kabakov's series of white paintings of 1969 contained no details and were concerned with the existential experience of being immersed into being as a whole. Such investigations by Kabakov and by the founder of The Collective Action group, Andrei Monastyrsky, were simultaneously connected to avant-garde abstraction – Kazimir Malevich with his Black Square as a zero of form is an obvious influence – but also to Martin Heidegger's ideas on metaphysics[520] and to the Zen Buddhist concept of Sunyata.[521] Attesting to the importance of the emptiness concept for Moscow Conceptualism were works such as Monastyrsky's text "Ten Appearances" and the performances by Collective Action, as well as Kabakov's text on void[522] explaining his major art form total installation. [523] Consequently, when Yuri Albert or Vadim Zakharov were employing black or white canvases nearly devoid of objects, they were received through the prism of that tradition as much as the elaborations on the Empty Canon by the Medical Hermeneutics group. It was as impossible for a younger generation of Moscow conceptualists to avoid the pull of a tradition of which they were an integral part

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[519] Soloviov, *Turbulentni shliuzy,* 16.

[520] In his famous essay "What is Metaphysics?" (based on his lecture delivered in 1929) Heidegger posits the definition of nothing as the basic condition of human existence which "makes possible the openedness of beings as such. Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," paragraph #35 cited from webpage http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/heidegger5a.htm (accessed November 2017).

[521] A. Monastyrsky, *Trips to the Countryside. [Poezdki za gorod]* Preface to the 5th volume. Cited from the webpage: http://conceptualism.letov.ru/KD-preface-5.html *The dogma of Sunyata as an empty sacral center has always been important for me. Such aesthetic categories as "an empty action", "a band of indistinguishability", "invisibility", on which I was relying in the inner discourse of the group, were described exactly the Sunyata, an empty sacral center as the totalitarian space although negatively conceived* (Last accessed November 2017).

[522] Kabakov, "On the Subject of 'the Void'".

[523] Kabakov, *On the Total Installation.*

as it was natural for Kuskov to apply a familiar discourse to analysis of artworks which did not share this tradition.

However, a careful observation would require a separation between two types of emptiness that Russian and Ukrainian artists were reacting to and creating. Albert was asserting the immanence of the white surface by rejecting Moscow Conceptualism's earlier transcendental paradigm of infinite and omnipresent white emptiness. At the same time, Tistol's and Reunov's immediate context was their fight against the academic tradition and the absurdity of the Socialist Realist method, complemented by their need to articulate their position as Ukrainian artists. Instead of Moscow conceptualists' concern with existential emptiness as Heidegger's necessary condition for the unconcealement of the world as a whole or the perpetual quest of Zen Buddhism to attain the emptiness of the here and now, emptiness for the Ukrainian artists lay on the other side of their Baroque inclinations. Baroque's lavish exorbitance agglomerates around some fundamental emptiness and endlessly proliferates meanings and objects to cover this void. In Deleuzian terms, however, the baroque constitutes a fold, the nexus of infinite veiling and unveiling. The process reveals that in place of the void there is just a crevice between two folds. The endless process of folding creates the "meandering matter" of Baroque art according to Deleuze.[524] In such case, there is no metaphysical outside in baroque, and "transcendence" is lurking in the oversaturated surfaces. Similarly, the texture of the Resolute Edge's painting is Baroque as it shuns the void yet revolves around some inaccessible registers of being, a reticence in regard to their identity's articulation. This irresolvable lack, however, did not generate an existential crisis but

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[524] "In Tintoretto, the lower level shows bodies tormented by their own weight, their souls stumbling, bending and falling into the meanders of matter; […]" Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 30.

instead prompted the accumulation of serious and ironic, overabundant and never final responses to the question of what it meant to be Ukrainian artists at the time of perestroika in Moscow.

4.7 Baroque Excesses: Oversignification and Overproduction of Meaning in Resolute Edge's Paintings

There was more in the paintings of the Resolute Edge than just their exuberant baroque surfaces that pointed into the direction of the postcolonial. The uncontrollable production of signifiers, infinitely magnifying the distance from the signifieds by accumulation of excess of meaning in depicted objects and figures, provided for another convergence with postcolonial theory. Each symbol on The Resolute Edge's painting intended to have several interpretations, none of which was final. One of the prominent examples was the Ukrainian letter I applied in red color in the lower left corner, and quite distinct against the grey-taupe background on Tistol's *Self-Portrait* of 1988 (fig. 59), discussed in the previous sub-chapter. In Cyrillic, the difference of spelling of Tistol's surname lies in this one letter: the Ukrainian "I" instead of Russian "И," both of which are used to represent the same sound. Usage of the Ukrainian "Тістол" in contrast to Russian "Тистол" while in the Soviet capital was the conscious insistence on a departure from the homogeneity of a Soviet identity formulated in the Russian language and in terms of Russian culture in general. Apart from this subtle alphabetic insurgence, the Resolute Edge's art contained other numerous visual and verbal signs and symbols that engaged Ukrainian identification and included simultaneously historical and trite objects

and ideas. Among them were the maces, referring to the Cossack epoch, the trident, recalling the times of ancient Kyivan Rus, and Chicken-Kiev, a ubiquitous dish in any Soviet restaurant and often one of the few things associated with Ukraine outside of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic.

The interpretation of the single letter inserted into the painterly field, nevertheless, is far from being exhausted with its identification as the letter which defines the difference between spelling Tistol's surname in Russian or Ukrainian. Apart from the obvious art historical associations with the word-image dynamic, bringing to mind cubist collages, this orthographic difference also referred to Tistol's key project "Ukrainian Money." As early as 1984 onward, the artist worked on imagining everyday objects, as well as his friends, as symbols of potential Ukrainian statehood. By imitating a serial number, the letter "I" transformed the painting into a banknote. Numerous paintings from the period by Tistol were conceived to represent a currency of a not yet established Ukrainian state. Even though the serial number did not strictly follow the format of the actual banknote as in Tistol's painting *New Ukrainian Chervonets*, which included Ukrainian letters "Aï" and the number 8351464, nevertheless his *Self-Portrait* was part of the project. This identification added another layer of meaning to the painting, blurring the boundary between the function of the portrait and of symbolic representation by allowing the letter I to be either a serial number or a signature.

Before perestroika and long before Ukrainian independence, Tistol had undertaken his "Ukrainian Money" project as a nod to founders of the Ukrainian Art Academy in the early 20th century. It was another transitional moment in Ukrainian history when the prospects of state independence were feasible but did not come to

fruition. The leaders of the newly declared, albeit short-lived, Ukrainian People's Republic (1918-1920) engaged artists of the avant-garde working in the Art Academy to design modern symbols for the new republic, including a new banknote. Most notably, Ukrainian artist Hryhoriy Narbut (1886-1920), who participated in Russian movement Mir Iskusstva [World of Art] before returning to work in Kyiv, was bestowed with a task of creating the banknote, coat of arms, and stamps of the Ukrainian People's Republic. When Tistol thought about such historical parallels and the necessity to create a local currency in 1984, no one yet entertained the possibility of imminent statehood. Yet Tistol, almost prophetically, envisioned himself as the designer of national symbols with that very expectation.

Instead of delving into the past for pictorial sources suitable for representing a state that was yet to be born, Tistol decided to draw on subjects and objects from his immediate reality. On his very first banknote (1984) (fig. 67) Tistol depicted his soon-to-be wife, artist Marina Skugareva (they married in 1985). The laconic profile portrait right in the center of the horizontal black and white image was drawn with flowing lines and contained empty spaces; for example, the entire torso of the figure was the negative white space. In contrast, the background of the lithograph surrounding the figure was highly decorative, adorned with stripes and symmetric floral ornaments. To the left and right of the portrait, Tistol drew two irregular-shaped frames, with the frame on the right containing a simple striped pattern and the one on the left holding Tistol's full name, his address in Lviv (he was a student of Lviv Art Institute then), and his biographical information in Ukrainian. To associate the lithograph with a banknote, Tistol placed

above the left frame the serial number "хЛ 622944," the alpha numeric code stripe imitating official currency.

By turning the portraits of himself and his wife into state symbols, Tistol radically reconsidered the format of state symbolism. While on Furmanny, he created many oil paintings that he endowed with supplementary meaning by adding combinations of alphanumeric symbols, thereby turning his works into gigantic and lavish banknotes. To represent symbolically the future Ukrainian state, Tistol also utilized depictions of mountains, only some of which were directly connected to Ukraine, such as in his painting *Hoverla* (1989) (fig. 68) that commemorated the biggest mountain peak on Ukrainian territory, situated on Carpathian ridge in the western part of the country. Instead of the actual likeness of the mountain Hoverla, however, Tistol depicted a very generic mountain summit, a geometrically perfect triangle akin to the Japanese Mount Fuji, one of the most well-known and poeticized mountain images in the world. Tistol contrasted his Hoverla-Fuji to the dense pictorial field of black erratic markings in the lower portion of the canvas, filled with zigzag patterns slightly echoing the shape of the mountain. Another mountain-symbol of Ukraine appeared on the painting-banknote of 1987 titled *Vesuvius* (fig. 69). To represent Ukraine symbolically, the artist used a generic mountain image and paradoxically appropriated the title of the well-known and culturally-charged Italian volcano with no apparent connection to Ukraine. Both paintings were accompanied by alphanumeric codes, notably containing the Cyrillic letters which differentiated the Ukrainian alphabet from Russian: Їy 177117 on *Hoverla* and Єл 6835100 on *Vesuvius,* with the letters "Ї" and "Є" being unique to Ukrainian orthography.

To illustrate the superabundance of meaning that Tistol was achieving with his pictorial symbols, I would like to look at his 1989 painting *Kazbek* (fig. 70) – the beginning of one of his most iconic mountain series – sharing a similar format with *Hoverla* and *Vesuvius* yet containing no serial number or letters. The artist divided the canvas into two parts, with the upper creating a vibrant light background for the mountain peak while the lower was filled with more saturated colors, stenciled ornaments, and grid-like shapes imitating the tiled wall. The mountain itself was Tistol's rendering in oil of the famous image from a Soviet pack of Kazbek-brand cigarettes.[525] By employing this recognizable symbol featured on a popular Soviet product, Tistol also allowed a series of historical associations as well as uncertainties to unwrap. First of all, these cigarettes were allegedly titled in the 1930s by the Soviet leader Stalin, originally from the Caucasus himself. Second of all, it is not known who was the author of the original Kazbek design or which mountain was depicted. According to one version, the illustrations of Eugene Lanceray (1875—1946) to the novel *Haji Murat* by Leo Tolstoy were modified for the cigarettes' logo. The main character of the novel was an Avar participant of the Caucasian War who betrayed his compatriots by siding with Russia and then was betrayed by Russian Imperial forces in turn.[526] Thus the Kazbek logo celebrated the victorious and romanticized Russian colonization of the Caucasus as well as the notorious Soviet leader. By appropriating and redesigning this logo with its chain of negative associations, Tistol demonstrated how multilayered any stereotype can be and

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[525] The mountain is a prominent Caucasian peak that is located in a region, formerly in Georgia, that was annexed in 2008 and is now part of the Russian Federation.

[526] The Caucasian War was a gradual conquest of the North Caucuses by the Russian Empire through a military invasion and annexation of territories during 1817-1864.

how its appeal can be still untainted by any negativity to which it might be historically attached.

It was precisely this density of historical and ideological allusions that Tistol engaged by reworking the popular logo in exuberant oil painting that separated his practice from that of Pop Art. Even though Tistol used the popular logo, a highly recognizable image of the consumer object, his painting is hardly a comment on capitalist society or a playful transfer of the replicated image into the sphere of high art. Like American Pop artists, Tistol relied on the recognizability of the popular logo, but used this image of power and beauty imprinted in public knowledge by decades of circulation to a different end. Tistol's copy is not identical to its original, which he highly revised by means of oil painting. In accordance with the Resolute Edge's program, the Ukrainian artist is "beautifying the stereotype," not just repeating it. The added dimension of beauty, yet another baroque surplus of Tistol's art, is achieved through an operation not unlike the metaphor that transfers meaning between similar objects or ideas with the residual substance of poetic beauty as a result of the process. Metaphor distinguishes The Resolute Edge's art from Pop Art's appropriations. The beauty of the mountain and of the laconic logo representing it appears side by side with the atrocities of Stalinist purges or Russian colonization that this logo evokes, not cancelling them but attempting to free the popular image from such associations. Repurposing popular objects in the "Kazbek" mountain series and in the "Ukrainian Money" project, Tistol utilizes the condensed symbols of beauty while further enhancing them. The metaphoric dimension of Kazbek series was noted by Ukrainian art critic Kateryna Stukalova who claimed that "the

mountain is generalized to an extreme, but contrary to the sterility of the representation, it is poetic, as is expected from a metaphor."[527]

The Resolute Edge artists were titled Nats Artists by analogy with Pop Art as testified by the Kyiv-born critic Konstantin Akinsha.[528] He had written about the Ukrainian artists during their Furmanny period and was compelled to comment upon their difference from the late Sots Art thriving in perestroika years. Sots artists used Soviet symbols as much as Tistol and Reunov did. For example, as discussed earlier, Andrei Filippov blatantly underscored the mutability of imperial ideology by devising a likeness of the Russian Empire's coat-of-arms out of the ubiquitous Soviet hammer and sickle. Tistol's symbol-creating artistry and his engagement with symbols of power, however, stood in radical opposition to Filippov's ideologically-tinged art. While Filippov employed recognizable symbols thereby evoking an ironic response, Tistol's use of symbols was not intended to be openly provocative. In his own self-rendering, or by using his wife as a subject, Tistol deliberately rejected any psychological reading of the portraits—an approach favored by Soviet critics—and proposed to see their likenesses not subjectively but as pure symbols. The young artist returning from army service only to find his country swept by changes de-personalizes his own image to turn it into a symbol that would identify a country that has not yet come into being. Evidently, Tistol assigned the status of the sign to the previously symbolically neutral subject. When he appropriated symbols ripe with layers of interpretation, such as the Kazbek logo, he

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[527] "Гора как гора предельно обобщена, но вопреки стерильности изображения, она поэтична, как и положено метафоре." Kateryna Stukalova, "Oleg Tistol – Mif Ob Ukrainskom Baroko [Oleg Tistol - Myth about the Ukrainian Baroque]," in *Intervaly: Kosmizm v Ukraïnskomu Mystettsvi XX Stolittia [Intervals: Cosmism in 20th Century Ukrainian Art]*, ed. Valentyn Raievsky, (Kyiv: Fond "Nove Tvorche Obiednannia," 2000), 225.

[528] Akinsha, "Poetika Surzhyka ili Kotleta Po-Kievski," 26-27.

aimed at rewriting them, replacing them with a metaphor of beauty. It was the opposite operation to the one which was undertaken by late Sots Artists such as Filippov and Zvezdochetov, who researched the symbolic remains of the not yet collapsed Soviet Union. They used the Soviet symbols of power to mock them and deprive of their ideological allure. Meanwhile, The Resolute Edge's artists wanted to enchant their audience with symbols they invented and borrowed to use as a currency of beauty.

Through the inclusion of the single stenciled letter "I" into the pictorial field, Tistol's *Self-Portrait* became immediately a banknote of the not yet established Ukrainian state. Nevertheless, the artist encouraged yet another layer of associations to evolve from observation of the procedure. One of the semantic possibilities was to connote the emblematic poetry of Ukrainian monastic poets in the 17th century, who combined words and images in ecclesiastical verse. The blending of alphanumeric symbols with pictorial images marks yet another pathway toward the baroque epoch that the Resolute Edge's artists had intense interest in, reading all the literature available on the subject.[529] Ukrainian baroque poetry had a strangely modern appeal for perestroika artists, who realized that some of the 17th century poetic compendiums by Ivan Velychkovsky appeared rather futuristic in his bold combinations of text and image on pages where the visible and the legible formed a seamless whole.

As noted by famous researcher of Ukrainian baroque Dmytro Chyzhevsky, the unity of the image and the text was paramount as both held the clues to understanding of

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[529] In my interviews with Marina Skugareva (by email, in April 2016) and with Oleg Tistol (by phone, in November 2015), they mention their research of the Ukrainian Baroque during perestroika times using all available sources.

the commonly generated meaning.[530] Velychkovsky's pages from his poems "Zehar z poluzeharkom" and "Mleko" (figs. 70-71) were highly decorative as their hermetic texts were merging with ornaments and images that sometimes enveloped and sometimes overpowered them. Highly elitist poetry, not comprehensible for general population, was popular in educated monastic circles of Poland and Ukraine. As in case of Velychkovsky, his poetry was ornamental visually, adorned with excessive baroque decoration, but also bountiful with verbal ornaments. Striving to embellish the poetic texts with abundant metaphors, comparisons, and allusions to antiquity often overshadowed the meaning of such verses. For example, the visual poem "Anna" (fig. 71) from "Mleko" [Milk] by Velychkovsky included a flower, each petal of which was filled with a word that both symbolized some spiritual quality of Mother Mary and contained the letters "anna", thereby insisting on the mystical importance of the word's concrete form and sound informing and reinforcing its meaning. In the 1970s in Ukraine several books were printed on Baroque emblematic poetry explaining such phenomena and available for Ukrainian perestroika artists to draw upon. Not only was poetry by Velychnovsky published, but also a contemporary treatise on baroque poetry by Mytrophan Dovhalevsky who exemplified his theory with Velychkovsky's poetry.[531] Velychkovsky often aimed to create *mnohoprymenitelni virshi* [*poems for multiple use* in old Ukrainian] – poetry that could have a different meaning depending on the occasion when it was read. Velychkovsky himself titled such poems in the antique fashion – *proteus* – referring to a

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[530] "Малюнок завше і подає той «символ», ту «емблему», якої захований таємничий сенс (моральний, релігійний, поетичний), має бути розкритий в супровідному тексті." [The drawing always presents the symbol or the emblem, which harbor the hidden, secretive meaning (moral, religious, poetic) that will be revealed in the accompanying text.]" Chyzhevsky, *Ukraiinskyi Literaturnyi Barok,* 197.

[531] Ivan Velychkovsky, *Tvory [Written Works],* (Kyiv: Pamiatky Davnioi Ukrainskoi Literatury. Naukova Dumka, 1972), http://izbornyk.org.ua/velych/vel06.htm ; Mytrofan Dovhalevsky, *Poetyka (Sad Poetychny) [Poetics (Poetic Garden)]* (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1973).

Greek sea god capable of taking any shape.[532] The definition seems rather fitting to many of the resolute Edge's paintings, oil painting analogues to the *proteus* 17th century baroque verse.

Similarly to Tistol, Reunov tirelessly amassed symbols and references in his sensual paintings by alluding to famous Renaissance artwork as in the case of *A Girl with Ermine* (1989) or to a popular Soviet dish associated with Ukraine as in the painting *Chicken-Kiev* (1989) (fig. 72). *Chicken-Kiev* encompasses the two major preoccupations of the artist (stereotypes and accentuated emotional states) as it features the monumental figures surrounded by fragments of classical architecture and distorted as if undergoing through some dramatic and pathetic emotional states. This pathos is diminished by the ironic title of the artwork referring to a mundane and popular Ukrainian food. Besides, chicken-Kiev was one of the few references that any foreigner arriving on Furmanny lane squat could associate with Ukraine, thus belonging to the symbolic realm and therefore a field of investigation for The Resolute Edge artists.

Commenting on the fact that in the epoch of cultural globalization Ukraine could offer only a table course as a recognizable symbol of the entire culture, Reunov chooses not to disprove the fact but makes it explicit instead. While historians were exploring the reasons behind the vacuum existing in place of an articulation of Ukrainian identity, the artists of The Resolute Edge were hijacking the mass-cultural symbols in order to fill the gap with what was available.[533] The pervasiveness and universality of the Chicken-Kiev symbol were proven a couple of years later, when *New York Times* columnist William

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[532] Velychkovsky, *Tvory*.

[533] "For many years, they [Ukrainians] were usually presented to the outside world as 'Russians' or 'Soviets' whenever they were to be praised, and as 'Ukrainians' only when they did evil." Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, 48.

Safire used it to label a notorious speech by George H. W. Bush. The American president at the time made his speech in Kyiv during the last months of the Soviet Union's existence in 1991 warning Ukrainians against a "suicidal nationalism"[534] and advocating for Ukraine to remain in the Soviet Union.[535] When writing about The Resolute Edge group in 1989, art critic Konstantin Akinsha borrowed the title of Reunov's painting to dub his article.[536] He considered the term suitable to serve as a key metaphor that unlocked their work by implying mass consumption and referring to an emblem that any viewer would recognize as indisputably Ukrainian. Certainly, the incommensurability of the Chicken-Kiev term with the context of high art and epic emotions generated the humorous effect that the painting produced and also spoke about the self-irony of artists actively separating themselves from the solemnity and pathos of Socialist Realism.

Additionally, *Chicken-Kiev* demonstrated that allusions to Baroque by the Resolute Edge artists were not only made by the inclusion of the verbal signs into the painterly field but by the style of painting itself. Comparison of *Chicken-Kiev* to Ukrainian baroque portraiture such as to *The Portrait of Kyiv Metropolitan Samuel Myslavsky* (1798) by Abbot Arseniy (fig. 73) reveals apparent parallelism. Both artists fill the borders of their figures with patterns, almost exclusively utilizing their subjects to demonstrate their ability to convey complex ornaments in oil, be it baroque brocade or expressionistic brushwork. The baroque ornaments are clearly distinguished against the more monotonous backgrounds on paintings by Reunov and Abbot Arseniy, with outlines

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[534] Serhii Plokhy, *The Last Empire: the Final Days of the Soviet Union* (New York: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2014), 65.

[535] Americans will not support those who seek in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred. Excerpts From Bush's Ukraine Speech: Working 'for the Good of Both of Us' Reuters Published: August 2, 1991: http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/02/world/after-summit-excerpts-bush-s-ukraine-speech-working-for-good-both-us.html?pagewanted=all After the Summit; (Accessed in December 2015)

[536] Akinsha, "Poetika Surzhyka," 26-27.

vividly demarcating and accentuating the vivid zones of baroque ornamentation. Additionally, the painting *Chicken-Kiev* cites some details frequenting baroque paintings, such as the staff against which both characters from each painting lean. Whether deliberately or unintentionally, but likely due to avid reading and viewing of books about Ukrainian baroque art, Reunov's painting evoked these features of the historical style.

Ukrainian baroque and avant-garde, Stalin's interference into Soviet design, verbal clichés, and cultural and natural monuments – the cascading quantity of references and allusions defined the painting practice of the Resolute Edge. The agglomeration of meanings within each symbol was among the main goals for the artists who stretched the distance between the signified and the signifier by adding layers of signification and were willing if necessary to turn themselves into symbols to keep the production flowing.

4.8 Programmatic Furmanny paintings by Tistol and Reunov

Two paintings by Reunov and Tistol that are considered their most important from the Furmanny period are dedicated to the history and reality of Russian-Ukrainian relationships. These two paintings, Tistol's *Reunification* (1988) (fig. 2) and Reunov's *From the Great Ukrainian People to Great Russian People* (1989) (fig. 3) embody the Baroque excesses discussed in the two previous sub-chapters on top of engaging with Soviet stereotypes, products of mass circulation, historical clichés, and several well-known Socialist Realist paintings. They signified, in addition, the contemplation by the artists of the reality of Russo-Ukrainian relationship dynamic while on the Furmanny Lane art squat in Moscow.

A work that constitutes a kind of pictorial manifesto of The Resolute Edge group, *Reunification* by Tistol invokes not only the baroque vision but the Baroque as a concrete epoch in Ukrainian history. It offers a politically charged title, referencing the Soviet historiographic interpretation of the historic Treaty of Pereyaslav. The Treaty (or Council) of 1654 was the dubious legacy of Ukrainian Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnystky, who signed a political and military alliance against the Polish Commonwealth with the representatives of Muscovy and Russian Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich. The Pereyaslav Union was a very important part of the Russian Imperial myth and the Soviet idea that the brotherly Slavic nations aimed at unification throughout the history. The term 'reunification' implied that previously unified fraternal nations had become disjointed in the historical process, and were now finally able to merge together again. Numerous Socialist Realist paintings and monuments were promoting this official laudatory interpretation. Tistol, instead, concentrated on exposing the ambiguity of this evaluation of the Pereyaslav Treaty while contemplating the current Ukrainian situation as a direct outcome of the union.

Monumental in size, *Reunification* offers a phantasmagoric rendering of the event, depicting two embracing figures, shadowed by their non-identical embracing doubles, all four of them engulfed by multi-layered complex painterly matter erasing the borders between figures and surroundings. The canvas surface is vibrating with riotous and chaotic painterly matter erupting in several zones of particular condensation. The middle ground is filled to the brim with erratic movements of the brush, dripping flows, sprays of paint, and Tistol's customary tile-like grids and circles, but also with depictions of maces, apples, spikelets, crosses, fragments of limbs, and a horse's rear end, all vertiginously

mixed. (fig. 2a) The bright and multi-colored palette complements the representational havoc, with blue-green and dirty pink dominating the canvas while bright yellows, reds, and blues add to the confusion. Here and there some more realistically rendered elements appear, such as naked male legs, sculptured with paint to resemble antique statue fragments. The maces, however soft and melting, are also full of volume and three-dimensionality, as are the two lamps flanking the figures in the lower ground. The lamp in the lower left corner with its acidic electrical light was additionally calling attention to the signature of the artist and the year of the painting's completion applied with yellow color on two stripes made with dark and dripping oil: "О. Тістол" spelled in Ukrainian and "1988 р." Immediately above the signature the artist included the serial number "Їх 6835105" with Ukrainian letters "Yikh" to indicate the painting as part of his project "Ukrainian Money."

Besides identifying the painting as part of his crucial project that also engaged the Soviet historiographical cliché through its title, Tistol additionally sets the chain of signification in motion by its art historical reference. *Reunification* is formally and structurally indebted to Rembrandt's baroque masterpiece *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1662, Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg) (fig. 74). The embracing gesture of the two protagonists as well as the rapid smudges of red paint indicating the cloak covering the father's figure point to the famous Dutch painting from the Soviet museum's collection. Therefore, the subject of Khmelnytsky's hapless decision was cast by the artist in the light of the Biblical parable, while shifting some accents. Remaining true to the prototype, Tistol nonetheless challenges the theme of fraternal reunion by ironically questioning the official interpretation of the Treaty as the event during which the

Ukrainian younger brother finds shelter and solace in the loving embrace of his elder, and more powerful Russian sibling. Despite being full of bright colors and expressive figuration, Tistol's work is melancholic when it comes to the vexing proposition posed by it: who, in fact, is the prodigal one? Implicit in this metaphor of two reuniting brothers is the irksome rewriting of the historical origins of Kyivan Rus and the original Slavic territories of the tenth and eleventh centuries, along with the much later founding of Muscovy. Who, one wants to ask, is the older? And who, therefore, is the real prodigal child? As we can observe in the painting, the two central figures are equal in size and both hold symbols of power—one similar to the Ukrainian Hetmans' mace, the other looking like a Russian Tsar's scepter. There is no clear hierarchy, in contrast to Rembrandt's work where the figure of the father is towering over the kneeling son. Like the iconic objects in a Dali painting, the scepter appears to be liquefying, a meltdown that suggests a potent draining of power exactly at the moment of the brotherly embrace.

It is not accidental that while living and working in Moscow Tistol decided to make a painting about the historic Treaty that Russia and Ukraine signed in 1654 and which initiated the incorporation and subsequent assimilation of Ukraine into the Russian Empire. The Agreement or Council in Pereyaslav (*Rada* in Ukrainian) is one of the most debatable and defining moments of the Russian-Ukrainian relationship. It was signed during the tumultuous period of the Cossack War led by Khmelnystky since 1648 against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in attempt to ameliorate the condition of the Ukrainian population within its territory by gaining for it equal rights with Polish and Lithuanian ethnic groups. During the course of the uprising Khmelnystky was searching for a military ally and at different points of the conflict considered joining forces with

Muscovy, with the Crimean Khanate (part of Ottoman Empire), or even with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth if it would be willing to reconsider its position on the role of the Ukrainian population. In 1654, Khmelnytsky decided to side with Tsardom of Muscovy, an ambitious and rapidly growing eastern neighbor with whom Ukrainians shared the Orthodox branch of Christian faith. Religion as one of the possible reasons influencing Khmelnytsky's choice on Tistol's *Reunification* is intimated by the inclusion of numerous crosses in the painting. Some crosses are stenciled and continue the "administrative aesthetic" of the banknote and the post marks; others have obvious Christian connotations.

The Treaty, no written document of which was preserved, had major consequences for all the parties involved, but for the Ukrainian side especially, with simultaneously negative and positive outcomes preventing a unilateral evaluation. Generally speaking, it led to the long war between Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russian Tsardom, to a change of power dynamics in the region, and to Ukraine eventually becoming part of the Russian Empire. The imperial domination that ensued meant the abolition of Ukrainian Cossack autonomy and some democratic elements inherited from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth such as elections along with religious and cultural freedom, culminating in the eventual ban on Ukrainian language and culture under Russian dominion with the Valuev (1863) and Ems (1876) decrees. On the other hand, Khmelnytsky's diplomatic efforts contributed to the nation-building process of Ukraine, which appeared as an autonomous political entity during the agreement. In general, Khmelnystky's liberation movement consolidated Ukrainians as he became a center around which the elements of Ukrainian identity were gathered.

In Russian historiography there was a long tradition of a highly positive evaluation of the Pereyaslav Agreement which became an integral part of the Pan-Russian Imperial myth generated since the appearance of Russian Empire during the reign of Peter the Great (1721-1725). The term Reunification (*Vozziednannia* in Ukrainian) that Tistol used as a title for his painting was first implemented by Panteleimon Kulish, Ukrainian-born and Russophone historian of 19th century, as part of the historical narrative about the fraternal yet separated nations of Russians and Ukrainians destined and yearning for a united fate. The interpretation of the event, therefore, was highly positive during the Russian Empire and was considered as the apex of the entire Khmelnytsky Uprising. Nevertheless, from the perspective of perestroika period in which Tistol evaluated the union, the Treaty's outcome appeared much more ambiguous. As Ukraine yet again found itself on the crossroads of civilizational choice, vexed with the necessity to select its allies and its way of future development, Tistol felt compelled to contemplate the decision made by Khmelnystky in 1654. It was clear to the artist as it is clear to many Ukrainian historians of the independence period that the Treaty—an agreement between unequal powers—came into being not by a truce but by necessity and coercion, with different aims in mind: one side was seeking protection; the other saw the opportunity to further enlarge its territory.[537] Casting further doubt on the unilateral and laudatory interpretation of the event by the historians of Russian Empire is the fact that during the Treaty in Pereyaslav an interpreter was enlisted to enable

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[537] Serhii Plokhy, "The Ghosts of Pereyaslav: Russo-Ukrainian Historical Debates in the Post-Soviet Era," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 53, No. 3 (May, 2001): 489-505.

communication between the parties, as the two presumed fraternal nations could not understand each other's languages.[538]

The four figures of Tistol's *Reunification* canvas are not the emanations of Hetman Khmelnystky, but an allegorical depiction of two fraternal nations in a brotherly embrace. The thumbnail view of a Soviet cliché is treated as a literal rendition of the propagandistic interpretation of the Pereyaslav Treaty, an image that became ubiquitous in Soviet times. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Soviets would continue to exploit the "union" of Russia and Ukraine for the purposes of homogenizing the population under (Russian) Communist ideology, adopting the imperial notion of a brotherhood of Slavic nations, with Russia in a hegemonic stance. The Soviets also called the process "reunification" and popularized the idea by renaming boulevards and erecting gargantuan monuments such as Arch of Friendship on the bank of Dnipro River in Kyiv commemorating the Pereyaslav Treaty.

In 1954, the lavish celebration in the USSR of the 300th anniversary of the event was intended to reassert the union of two brotherly nations destined to have a mutually glorious future.[539] At this time, the official line of the Pereyaslav Treaty's interpretation by the Communist Party was formulated in a special "Theses"[540] proclaiming the agreement to be the result of "the struggle of the Ukrainian society as a whole against the Polish oppressors," with aim "for reunification with fraternal Russia."[541] Even prior to

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[538] "When the Commonwealth and the Cossacks negotiated, they did not need translators. The Cossack officers and Polish nobility shared three languages: Latin, Polish and a vernacular Ruthenian (Ukrainian). When the Cossacks negotiated with Moscovy, they needed translators. Khmelnytsky had letters in Moscovy dialect translated into Latin so that he could read them." Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations*, 116.

[539] This celebration also induced Nikita Khrushchev to make the Crimean Peninsula Ukrainian territory.

[540] "Theses on the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the Reunion of the Ukraine with Russia (1645-1954)" in John Basarab, *Pereiaslav 1654: A historiographical Study* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta: 1982), 270-288.

[541] Plokhy, "The Ghosts of Pereyaslav," 492.

the formulation of the official attitude to the event, numerous works of art celebrated the Treaty in strict accordance of the Communist party's view of history. One may consider such classic Socialist Realist painting by Ukrainian artist Mykhailo Khmelko with the revealing title *Forever with Russia* (1951) (fig. 75) as a visual equivalent of the "Theses." Khmelko was an official artist and two-time laureate of the Stalin prize (in 1948 and 1950). With characteristic pathos and narrative didacticism typical of Socialist Realism, Khmelko depicts an exulting crowd cheering the representatives of the two sides. The Ukrainian Hetman Khmelnytsky is shown facing the people while the Tsar's representatives, one of whom was presumably the boyar Vasiliy Vasilyevich Buturlin, are standing right behind him. Given the ecstatic atmosphere recreated in the painting, with cheering crowds and hats flying in the air, it would appear that the Ukrainian Cossacks are in unanimous support of their Hetman's decision. Moreover, the presence in the foreground of recognizable folk characters such as the blind bandura player and his guide boy brazenly suggests acquiescence on the part of the Ukrainian population as a whole.[542] In reality, the truce was reached under far more ambiguous circumstances.[543] Thus Tistol's *Reunification* was reacting against the obligatory party-prescribed interpretation which Khmelko's painting, familiar to Tistol, embodied. Simultaneously, Tistol was rebelling against the type of painting Khmelko's work represented.

To reflect the ambiguity of Pereyaslav Treaty, Tistol applied the same method he had employed several times before to the character of Khmelnytsky – the doubling of his figure. Viewers are presented with two embraces, similarly to the duplicated figure of the

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[542] The personage of many Ukrainian folksongs, a traveling musician playing bandura, Ukrainian folk instrument, often blind and accompanied by a guide boy.

[543] Several Cossack leaders declined the Union immediately after Tsar's representative asked the Ukrainian side to kneel in respect of the Tsar. It was formally denounced less than 5 years after by Hetman Ivan Vyhovsky in 'Manifesto to Foreign Rulers.'

Ukrainian Hetman on his earlier painting *Zynovij Bohdan Khmelnystky* (fig. 44) exhibited at the *First Soviet American Exhibition* of 1988 and on the lithograph of the same title made in the same year (fig. 76). Meanwhile on the black and white lithograph there are two identical figures repeated twice in a nod to Pop Art. The *Zynovij Bohdan Khmelnystky* oil offers two slightly different versions of the historic figure as if inviting the viewers to make a choice and select a better Khmelnytsky out of the two. The precedent of "doubleness" is set here to emphasize the ambiguity of the notorious Pereyaslav event. Echoing this duality, Tistol deliberately paints two separate equestrian figures, a Janus-like symbol both benevolent and malicious but still representing only one key historical personage. *Zynovij Bohdan Khmelnystky* is also a banknote from the "Ukrainian Money project" as the alphanumeric mark "ПН 216507" in the lower right corner indicates. Behind the doubled figure of the Hetman one witnesses, albeit fragmentarily, the Soviet coat-of-arms on the one hand, and on the other, the Ilyinska church in Subotiv — a gem of the Ukrainian architectural baroque built in 1653 by order of Khmelnytsky, one year prior to the Pereyaslav meeting. Thus, Tistol shows Khmelnystky as a figure both responsible for the blossoming of Ukrainian baroque culture and more dubiously for the Soviet period and the subjugations of Ukrainian freedoms associated with it.[544]

In his painting *Reunification*, the artist calls for a more complex understanding of what had happened at Pereyaslav in 1654. As Tistol contemplated the current conditions in Ukraine under Perestroika, which continued to be affected by the Pereyaslav Treaty, he utilized both the historical event of the agreement's signing and perpetuation of the

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[544] Both Bohdan Khmelnystky and Ilnytska Church of Subotiv are featured on the current five hryvnia (Ukrainian currency) banknote. In contrast to Tistol's painting, the real banknote is celebratory, and the complexity of Khmelnytsky's choice and its outcome are left out of the picture.

Soviet cliché of brotherly reunion to address the layers of mythology surrounding the controversial episode. The four embracing figures, the embodied metaphor of national brotherhood, are also quotations engaging foreign cultures and times, as they represent imaginary and real characters of Greek and Roman antiquity. Not deprived of deliberate irony on the part of Tistol, the faces of his figures on Reunification demonstrate his skill at copying classical models in the strict manner of academic training. The two main figures representing the Ukrainian and Russian leaders bear some resemblance to the Roman Emperors Caracalla and Galba. The shadowy protagonists bear the recognizable traits of Emperor Nero and the Greek god Apollo (figs. 77-80).

Seen from behind and occupying the position of the prodigal son from Rembrandt's painting, the Galba figure is most probably meant to be Khmelnytsky himself shown with a splash of dripping paint on the Hetman's head suggestive of the Cossack hairlock. For Tistol, the conflation of the Ukrainian historical figure with a particular Roman Emperor is associated with a linguistic pun connected with the artist's own private history. When Tistol was a student in Lviv Art Institute, he learnt that halba" (from German "halb" or half) was a common local word for a pint of beer.[545] Yet, such everyday parlance blended with references to victorious Roman conquests is used to underscore both the links between Ukrainian culture and Western civilization and the incommensurability of the Ukrainian historic experience with imperial triumphs. In combination with other pictorial elements, the antique drama of Ukrainian history brings humor into the otherwise phantasmagoric scene.[546] Here Roman Emperors are placed in a

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[545] Under Austro-Hungarian rule, many German words crept into the language of Western Ukrainians.
[546] Ukrainian literature is grounded in burlesque tradition as the first book printed in contemporary Ukrainian language was *The Aeneid* by Ivan Kotliarevsky (1798) which was a burlesque re-telling of the antique epic.

pictorial space covered with squares reminiscent of the interiors of all Soviet administration buildings plastered with uniform tile surfaces—another reminder of the drab present-day material reality of Soviet life.

The conflation of the image of the Ukrainian Cossack and ancient Greek heroes was not a new invention for Ukrainian art. Heorhiy Narbut (1886-1920), who had headed up the graphics division of the newly formed Ukrainian Academy in 1917, was known for blending the iconic Cossack with characters of classical drama. His prolific output of Ukrainian banknotes, stamps, and coats-of-arms for the Ukrainian Peoples Republic would often brandish such images. It was appropriate, therefore, that he was the illustrator of the Ukrainian vernacular version of the *Aeneid*, a modern-day travesty of the classical text written by Ivan Kotliarevsky in 1798. [547] Before his untimely death Narbut was only able to finish one gouache drawing from the planned series (fig. 81), but with it he created an important precedent for Tistol to draw upon. It was the conflation of Ukrainian national attire with antique garments and elements of baroque brocades and folklore patterns, as well as the rhythmic linearity and saturated colors of medieval manuscripts, which generated the drawing's paradoxically modern effect.

Kotliarevky's book was destined to change the fate of the Ukrainian language in the modern period and according to Benedict Anderson was one of the factors that engendered Ukrainian nationalism as such.[548] Kotliarevsky's poem combined features of a national heroic epic with a gritty burlesque. In the ironic retelling of Virgil's dramatic opus, Kotaliarevsky replaced the antique heroes with Ukrainian Cossacks in a panoramic presentation of everyday life in Ukraine of the end of the 18th century. This was the

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[547] Platon Bilestky, *Soviet Ukrainian Art: Painting, Sculpture, Graphic Arts* (Kiev: Mystetstvo, 1979), 20.
[548] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 74.

heyday of Romantic nationalist movements, and Kotliarevsky's rendition of the mythical

hero Aeneas, a founder of the Roman Empire, was deliberately intended to indict the

failure of the Ukrainian Cossacks to secure national statehood. This sentiment resonated

not only with Narbut in the brief period of Ukraine's sovereignty before the Bolshevik

takeover, but yet once again with the work of Tistol who had anticipated a new chance at

nationhood with the impending collapse of the Soviet Union. Humor and irony constitute

a necessary component in the way that these artists handled the past. In Tistol's case, the

position of postcolonialism set him on the path of "negotiating (often parodically) the

once tyrannical weight of colonial history in conjunction with the revalued local past."[549]

Tistol proves himself an adept at constructing a mosaic of symbols capable of

representing his present Ukrainian identity by creating a bizarre medley of pictorial

allusions in his paintings. His profound knowledge of Ukrainian history, his affinity for

the Baroque, and his intimate familiarity with Soviet stereotypes come together in

Reunification. As he shows his personages with their feet sinking into pink snow (the

Treaty took place on January, 18, 1654), we also see apples strewn on the snow—a

reference to the title of the most popular song in the Soviet Union in 1988, "Apples on

the Snow", sung by pop singer Mikhail Muromov. Tistol recalls how pesky it was to have

to listen to the catchy song, since it was played all the time and everywhere when he was

working on the painting.[550] From the standpoint of postmodernist proclivities, however,

the literal inclusion of the song in his canvas demonstrates the artist's versatility in

dismantling the borders between high and low culture. Tistol enterprisingly adapted to

the Perestroika period, which allowed Ukrainian artists to incorporate cheery Soviet pop

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[549] Linda Hutcheon, "'Circling the Downspout of Empire": Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism," *Ariel* 20, no. 4 (1989): 152.

[550] My in person interview with Oleg Tistol, 2013, Kyiv.

songs and melancholic ruminations over lost historical opportunities in a single work of art.

Thus, Tistol's *Reunification* offers a goldmine of symbols that operate on multiple levels. For instance, the mace constitutes an important element in Tistol's paintings, reappearing often in his works of the late 1980s. We can see it in *Condottiere* (1988), mentioned above, and most explicitly in *The Exercise with Maces* (1989). Besides a straightforward reference to Ukraine's unrealized statehood, the mace as an attribute of power is echoed visually in the painting *Reunification* by lamp shapes appropriated from the Kyiv subway system, clearly recognizable by their characteristic Stalinist classicism (fig. 2b). The two realistically painted lamps in the foreground of the painting are flanking the spectator's imaginary entrance to the canvas underscoring the temporality in which the viewer exists, i.e., the Soviet world which itself is on the verge of becoming history. As if standing on a moving subway escalator in Arsenalna—Kyiv's deepest Kyiv subway station—the iconic lamp enters into the viewer's space, privileging them with a dynamic point of perception, along with implied movement.

Reunov was not as explicitly preoccupied with power symbols and lost historical opportunities for Ukraine as Tistol. Most of his work from the Furmanny period was sensual, almost haptic oil painting employed to convey exaggerated emotions using dazzling baroque perspectives and ornaments. Nevertheless, some of his paintings from the period engaged Russo-Ukrainian relationship by mixing diverse symbols and ideas in a bizarre fashion. Reunov came from a family of artists and film directors; thus, his defiance of norms erupted within the painterly tradition into which he was born. One of his first gestures of defying this tradition was rejection of the modernist reverence for the

canvas, partially dictated by the scarcity of materials during perestroika times. He used an ordinary kitchen oilcloth instead of canvas, often preserving and incorporating the original pattern into the resulting painting-collages. Reunov's work *On the Slopes of the Dnipro [River]* (1988) (fig. 82) renders a touristic fixture of Kyiv, the picturesque slopes of the main river covered with greenery and dotted with old churches. Concentrating on The Resolute Edge's programmatic fascination with stereotypes, he presents the popular tourist attraction propagated in the form of a national kitsch abundant in Soviet tourist brochures and calendars. The composite landscape populating the slopes on Reunov's work includes the giant and incomplete logo of the city spelled in Ukrainian, fragments of old architectural structures – mostly churches, and a likeness of a distinctly Soviet addition to the landscape: the famous Arch of Peoples' Friendship (fig. 83a). As the most distinguished monument dedicated to the reunification of Russian and Ukrainian people, it occupies a prominent position on the slopes of Dnipro. The idea of reunification is thus presented as incorporated into Kyiv's most replicated landscape and as such appears as one of the symbols of Kyiv itself. The decorative pattern of the kitchen oilcloth, the quintessence of domestic kitsch, is employed as a neutral background, effectively becoming a sky or a river. Baroque ornamental excess as a neutral surface, therefore, is a constituent of the national Ukrainian stereotype investigated by the artist.

The most well-known work by Reunov from the Furmanny period is also the one which directly concerns Russian-Ukrainian relations: *From the Great Ukrainian People to the Great Russian People* (1989) (fig. 3). In this painting, the artist engages both the classical art tradition and Socialist Realist themes while letting the chain of pictorial signifiers proliferate through a multitude of possible interpretations. On the most obvious

level, given the context and a preference of the artists of The Resolute Edge for the already seen and easily recognizable, Reunov cites the same Rembrandt painting *The Prodigal Son* from the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg as Tistol did in his *Reunification.* Exploring the allegory of the prodigal son's return, Reunov, however, depicts only one heel and the back of the son, while the father is absent over the horizon or, more precisely, replaced by the famous Pshenychnaya (literally meaning 'made from wheat') vodka label (fig. 84).

This well-known Soviet symbol could unfold in two versions of interpretation: the drunkard can be seen as worshiping the hard liquor in times of Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign or the viewer can be reminded of the famous metaphor of Ukraine as "a breadbasket of Europe". Thus, Reunov unequivocally presents the Russian People as a prodigal son thirsty for the gifts that abundant Ukraine can offer. The mythological image of Ukraine as a cornucopia of goods was also perpetuated by Reunov through references to its most famous products, including the Chicken-Kiev cutlet. The image of rural Ukraine filled with eternally blossoming orchards and miraculously fertile lands was occasionally used by Soviet and Nazi powers, both relying on Ukrainian lands to satiate their power ambitions. Trotsky particularly, in his 1918 appeal to communist agitators working in Ukraine, presented this country as a purveyor of goods necessary for the Soviet Union to thrive, famously claiming that Russia will fail without Ukrainian natural resources and wealth.[551]

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[551] "Also remember that, this way or another, we have to return Ukraine to Russia. Without Ukraine's coal, iron, ire, wheat, salt, and Black sea, Russia will not exist, it will suffocate, and together with it, we will, too." From Lev Trotsky "Instructions to Agitators-Communists to be Working in Ukraine, (Speech of People's Commissar comrade Trotsky in Front of Students)," 1918, https://zn.ua/SOCIETY/desyat_zapovedey__ot_lva_trotskogo.html.

The title of the work also has other important reverberations connected with communist history as it references the toast "To the great Russian people" which Stalin gave in Kremlin at the end of the World War II, thus assigning the above nation the leading role in the victory over Nazi Germany while diminishing the contribution of other USSR nations such as Ukrainians [552] Stalin is credited with the idea that the Soviet nationalism should be built upon elements of Russian identity mixed with communism.[553] Stalin's famous toast was the subject of the painting (fig. 83) by the already mentioned Ukrainian Socialist Realist painter Mykhailo Khmelko who received a Stalin prize for this work. Even though this Socialist Realist painting had not been on view since policies of destalinization were endorsed by Khrushchev, it was well known within Ukrainian artistic circles as it was widely reproduced together with other paintings by Khmelko, who occupied the head position of the Union of Artists of Ukrainian Socialist Republic. Therefore, Reunov dealt both with the history of the toast and its implications for Ukrainians as with the fact that a Ukrainian artist could succeed within the tenets of Socialist Realism only by being overly conscientious in practicing the official art methods and by most diligently following, almost to the point of over-doing it, the ideological line of the Communist Party and its leaders.

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[552] The toast was proclaimed by Stalin in Kremlin on May 24, 1945. In his speech, Stalin asserted the Russians to be the greatest nation among all the peoples of the Soviet Union. In addition, he called them the ruling nation of the Soviet Union. http://gazeta.zn.ua/SOCIETY/samyy_grandioznyy_tost.html

[553] "Stalin decided that the new Soviet civilization was to have Russian as its common language, and that Russian culture […] was to enjoy a superior status within a larger body of Soviet culture." Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), xxi.

4.9 Conclusion

To situate the core artists of the Resolute Edge group, Tistol and Reunov, in the context of postmodern perestroika, one needs to consider their interrelationship with their immediate artistic milieu, both in Kyiv and in Moscow. Hence, this chapter explored the distances and proximities between the Resolute Edge's art and that of the artists of Furmanny Art Squat, as well as other Ukrainian artists of Savadov's generation. Additionally, I utilized some aspects of postcolonial analysis as part of the postmodernist method for the discussion of the paintings of Tistol and Reunov that exhibited strong Baroque affinities on the level of pictoriality as well as themes from Ukrainian history pertaining to this period. Before that, some aspects of postcolonial theory and its applicability to Ukrainian art were considered in the first part of the chapter given that the postcolonial theory had not been utilized as a method of Ukrainian art historical research, remaining within the realm of literature.

Along with Reunov, Tistol's longtime friend from their army days, two founders of the Resolute Edge's group embarked on the idea of the "beauty of the stereotype"—a slogan used as a response to the challenge of inventing their nation through symbols during the postmodern period. By embracing stereotypes as pebbles polished by history and ideology, these Ukrainian artists did not simply follow the taste of postmodernity that cherished replicas over originals, but also challenged the trajectory which forced the earlier generation of artists to concentrate primarily on dismantling the official discourse. All in all, they aimed at disproving the idea that their national art was exhausted and therefore left no choice but to be replaced with Soviet branding. Accepting that the

"beauty of the stereotype" allowed The Resolute Edge group to articulate their cultural site brings us back to Homi Bhabha's argument on DissemiNation as a tactic for a postcolonial nation to deal with the stereotype with which it was associated during the colonial period. It was obvious to Bhabha that because simple rejection of the stereotype would not work, a counter-narrative creatively digesting and reformulating the old stereotypes was necessary for the appearance of the new modern and de-colonized identity.

Polish art historian Piotrowski outlined the concept of DissemiNation to argue that post-communist art could not be considered through a postcolonial perspective. While it is difficult to deny the effectiveness of Piotrowski's conclusion in regard to the Serbian case upon the dispersal of Yugoslavia, or, for that matter, to Russia after the Soviet Union's collapse, the Ukrainian case and the art of The Resolute Edge in particular resonate rather powerfully with Bhabha's argument. Given the importance of displacement for the postcolonial experience as articulated by Bhabha, it is critical that The Resolute Edge's artists created their most poignant counter-narratives while in Moscow. The main point of convergence is their aim to artistically destabilize the homogenous image of "Ukrainianness" by utilizing the distance (their placement in the metropolitan center) from which they observed their culture while appropriating the old stereotypes and inventing the new ones.

Certainly, it takes some audacity to introduce a Soviet historical ideologeme, the over-abundant and widely circulating cliché of reunification of Ukraine with Russia, as a new Ukrainian national symbol meriting inclusion on a banknote. In his programmatic painting *Reunification* Tistol reclaims the stereotype instead of fighting to erase it and

repossesses it while outlining its ambiguity, placing it together with the old burlesque invention of Cossacks as heroes of Ukrainian antiquity or Roman emperors, important only inasmuch as their names resemble the name for a beer pint in Lviv. Rejecting the essentialist identity imposed on Ukrainians and presenting this nation as something fluid, something that could be constructed, Tistol demonstrated the willingness to go both beyond the frozen and archaic stereotype of the colonized nation and also beyond the perpetual trauma this position implied for the dissident 1960s generation that preceded his. The artist "narrates" Ukraine by complicating its image through the "irredeemable plurality" of symbols that could represent it.[554] Therefore, the counter-narrative about his country unfolding in the opposite direction from the perpetually solid image produced in the center has little relation to the militant nationalism that for Piotrowski was the only real alternative for a post-communist nation attempting to utilize postcolonial methods and attitudes. It is rather akin to the procedure of dissemiNation or postcolonial self-contemplation of the nation that separates it from the colonizer by destroying the solid stereotype formerly used to describe them, appropriating and repurposing it through the modern language of art.

Both Tistol and Reunov exhibited in their art such qualities that allowed to speak of their affinity with a larger trend of the Ukrainian perestroika generation, such as the multiplicity of personal allusions and references to historical events, exuberant and often distorted figuration, large-scale format, and oil on canvas technique, together with bizarre and verbose titles. However, their painting also had qualities separating them from this general trend. In particular, the array of techniques and methods of application was wider

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[554] Bhabha, *Location of Culture.*

for Tistol and Reunov who, apart from traditional oil on canvas easel painting, also employed stencils, assemblages, and included letters and numbers within the painterly field. Content-wise and in terms of the ambience of works, certain elements of mysticism, eeriness, and metaphysical overtones, pertinent for the Savadov's circle, were absent from Tistol and Reunov's oeuvre of the period. In addition, their archeological fixation on the Baroque period in Ukrainian history combined with their interest in preservation of Soviet symbols and signs made them stand apart from the other Ukrainian perestroika artists, including those participating in the 1988 *First Soviet-American Exhibition* show. Their announcement of a separate artistic program and subsequent relocation to Moscow only made these differences more apparent.

The Resolute Edge's preoccupation with national questions, which according to Akinsha gained the Ukrainians from this collective the title of nats-artists on Furmanny Lane, unfolded with the backdrop of the collapsing Soviet Union.[555] Instead of rejecting the Soviet past, however, The Resolute Edge's artists ventured into the de-essentalization of the Ukrainian image and into the deconstruction of myths and ideologemes concerning the history and culture of the Soviet republic aspiring to be an independent country. These concerns were the subject of the current chapter, which aimed at unraveling the connection of Ukrainian artistic production in Moscow with both the neo-expressionist painting in Kyiv and the late conceptual tradition in the Russian capital. While outlining such crucial points of intersection as the exploration of the metaphoric function of art and studying the impact of ideology and imperial ambitions on Soviet everyday life, this chapter also paid utmost attention to the divergences in styles and themes that defined the

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[555] Akinsha, "Poetika Surzhyka," 27.

art of The Resolute Edge on Furmanny. A focus on Baroque themes, form, and perception singled out the Ukrainian artistic endeavors while giving important insight into the stylistic and choices they made on Furmanny. A postcolonial approach, befitting the proliferation of signifiers and elliptical perception invoked by The Resolute Edge's art, was applied to some of the major works produced on Furmanny in 1988-1989 around the time of the Ukrainians' relocation to Moscow in the aftermath of the *First Soviet American Exhibition*. Having outlined the difficulties arising from articulation of the peculiarity of the Ukrainian colonial and postcolonial experience, this chapter calls for a more complex picture of both hybrid artistic practices and for the idea of a postcolonial realization stemming not from the desire to dispense with any signs of the colonial past, but from the need to creatively dissect and therapeutically address this experience.

Fifth Chapter: ORNAMENT AND KITSCH: INTERSECTIONS OF THE 'COOL' AND 'HOT' FEMININITY ON FURMANNY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with postcolonial theory, the frequent companion of postmodernism, with respect to late Soviet unofficial art; the current chapter will be dedicated to the art of female artists. The connection between feminism and postmodernism is still being debated in the West, with the two strains of critical approaches being closely intertwined and interdependent, though not necessarily recognized as inseparable phenomena.[556] The late Soviet art situation is even more complicated, having developed in response to the fragmented and uneven influx of such theories from the Western world along with the breaking down of habitual art methods and drastic changes in the life conditions and art practices of women artists that accompanied the Soviet Union's collapse.

This chapter will focus on the two Ukrainian women artists working in the Furmanny Lane Art squat: Larisa Rezun-Zvezdochetova,[557] Odessa-born and associated with late Moscow Conceptualism, and Marina Skugareva, Kyiv-born and a member of the Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism group. Despite the discrepancies of their

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[556] The debate began with article by Craig Owens's printed in Hal Foster compendium in 1983. Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 2002). The article elicited numerous responses from feminist critics. Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 621-34; Elspeth Probyn, *Bodies and Anti-bodies: Feminism and the Postmodern* (Montreal: Concordia University, 1987); Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 5, no. 2-3 (1988): 373-94.

[557] Later will be referred as Zvezdochetova.

affiliations, both appeared preoccupied with issues traditionally associated with feminist concerns by Western art theory: namely, dismantling of the art/crafts dichotomy, exploration of the traditional crafts of female domesticity, interest in decoration, surfaces, and ornaments, and both popular and kitsch dimensions of the highly contested concept of beauty.[558] One of the crucial convergences between their art and Western feminism of the 1970s was that both developed alongside strong currents of conceptual art. Surprisingly, one of the shared attitudes declared by both artists (who while at Furmanny did not work in direct contact with each other) was their constant rejection of the feminist label in regard to their artistic production.[559]

The aim of this chapter is to identify and interpret the responses of both artists to their respective circles within their contemporary historic moment, while exploring the role that their gender played in their art and self-presentation. The themes of the Neo-Baroque, ornament, and metaphor, pervasive in this dissertation, will be examined in the context of feminine creativity within perestroika art. While focusing on the great variety of techniques applied by women artists in the center of the most advanced late Soviet art, including Zvezdochetova's imitation of popular art and tastes and Skugareva's canvas embroidery, this chapter does not strive to re-claim the feminist agency somehow "overlooked" by the artists themselves but rather to examine the larger implications of what it meant to be a woman artist in the unofficial art culture during the last decade of the Soviet era. Together with lost pages of local history, late Soviet Ukrainian women artists absorbed the newly available Western styles and art theories at high speed,

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[558] See, for example, Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996).

[559] My interviews with the artists, Marina Skugareva by email in April 2016 and Larisa Zvezdochetova via skype in March 2016.

including feminism. Nevertheless, their strong reaction against being labeled as such despite their many points of convergence with Western feminism requires a thorough analysis.

5.2 Feminism and 'The Woman Question' in the Late Soviet Union

It merits special notice that despite some affinities in style and worldview that the artists discussed here share with both Western feminism and postcolonial subjectivity, I do not intend to claim that Skugareva and Zvezdochetova with their art fought against the "double colonization" by imperialism and patriarchy.[560] The artists themselves were fare from articulating their agenda in such terms being affected by the changes that perestroika brought to the USSR. Among such changes was the strong interest in the newly emerging national identities and gender issues that began to be publicly discussed. Zvezdochetova and Skugareva, while lacking a strong and self-conscious feminist agenda, nevertheless exemplified a postmodern perception that was augmented by their experiences as female artists.

Partially, the artists' rejection of any willful association with feminist ideas might be explained by the view that the gender equality had been formally enacted from above

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[560] The concept of double colonization is indebted to theory of Gayatri Spivak and was first articulated in anthology: Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Petersen, eds. *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Postcolonial Women's Writing* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo, 1986); It was additionally elaborated in Ketu H. Katrak, "Decolonizing Culture: Toward a Theory for Postcolonial Women's Texts," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006).

in the Soviet Union since the October Revolution in a "forced emancipation" that in reality omitted the actual concerns and feelings of Soviet women.[561] It is also natural to assume that women artists working in unofficial artistic circles had major suspicion of anything offered for celebration from above as a great achievement of the Soviet regime. Writing on the subject in the *Global Feminisms* catalogue, Charlotta Kotik mentioned that in general in Eastern Europe women artists were not willing to consider themselves as feminists and attributed the rejection of feminism by female artists in Communist countries to the state's "hypocrisy about women's issues," the unwillingness of women to support the state ideology of the nominal equality, and indisposition toward any political art which was considered a prerogative of the state and therefore corrupt.[562]

At the same time, since Lenin's declaration of his aim of freeing the Soviet woman from 'kitchen slavery', Soviet Union indeed achieved an astonishing level of women's involvement in Soviet economy. By a peculiar coincidence, Norton Dodge, an avid collector of Soviet nonconformist art, began his interest to the region by studying the impact of women on Soviet economy and industry, concluding that the Soviet Union superseded Western economies in this respect in the 1960s[563]. However, such conclusions were questioned already in the early 1970s, as in an article by Alice Schuster, which, through analysis of employment data demonstrated that the engagement of women in the economy was limited to lower and less qualified types of professions.[564] Together with women's "double tasks," namely, their obligations to raise children and perform

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[561] It was postulated in numerous Lenin's Decrees and became a part of the Soviet Constitution.

[562] Charlotta Kotík, "Eastern Europe and Post-Totalitarian Art," in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London: Merrell, 2007), 153.

[563] Norton T. Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966).

[564] Alice Schuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality," *The Russian Review* 30, No. 3 (July 1971): 260-267.

housewives' duties on top of having full-time jobs, the low percentage of women involved in higher positions (in 1959 only 7 per cent of Soviet professors were women) led to the author's assertion that women in the USSR did not overcome their subordinate position despite the ideological declarations and high numbers of women involved in industry as workers ("beasts of burden" in Schuster's phrasing).[565] The trend was only made more apparent by its notable exceptions, such as minister of culture Yekaterina Furtseva (in office 1960-1974)—the only postwar female minister.[566]

Among the art critics drawing attention to the issue of feminism in the late Soviet period was Margarita Tupitsyna, who had immigrated to the US but kept in constant contact with the nonconformist art scene in Russia and applied newly found feminist theories and attitudes to her analysis of unofficial Soviet art.[567] In the series of interviews she conducted with artists in the 1980s, Tupitsyna repeatedly asked women artists about their views upon feminism and gender equality. By her own testimony, none of her respondents admitted to any interest to the topic or its impact upon their art. While discussing the possible reasons to this neglect with her husband Viktor Tupitsyn, also a prominent art scholar, a common belief in the connection of feminism to psychoanalysis was cited. Despite no elaboration has been offered by the authors as to the nature of this connection, the placement of feminism into the inherently private realm of psychopathology that they believe affected the judgment of women artists is rather

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[565] Schuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union," 266.

[566] The first female minister of the USSR was Polina Zhemchuzhyna who was the head of the Ministry of Fishing Industry in 1939.

[567] "Так, например, любая попытка затеять разговор о том, что русские женщины-художницы вправе рассматривать свое творчество как ДРУГОЕ, почти всегда вызывает, причем со стороны самих художниц, нескрываемый скепсис или безразличие. [Thus any attempt to start a conversation about the right of Russian women-artists to see their art as OTHER art, almost always results in undisguised skepticism or indifference.]" Conversation with critic Margarita Tupitsyna in Viktor Tupistyn, *"Drugoe" iskusstva [The "Other" of the Art]* (Moscow: AdMarginem, 1997), 268-285.

conspicuous. The fact that the educated part of women's population, to which women-artists undoubtedly belonged, shunned feminism due to its association with psychological diseases, only highlights that gender emancipation, albeit declared officially as a state political doctrine, was far from being fully realized.

Although the gender equality in the SSSR was celebrated officially, with the holiday of the 8th of March (International Women's Day) devoted to it, by the time of unofficial art movements and Tupitsyna's interviews, it had turned into a strange equivalent of the American Mother's Day holiday. Instead of equal rights of the sexes, the 8th of March holiday in Soviet Union celebrated the essential feminine qualities of Soviet women, for instance their roles as mothers and centers of households. As a result, such official feminism was rejected by the unofficial artists together with other displays of official ideology. The Western type of feminism was not as accepted and did not enjoy a similar amount of interest as Postmodernism within nonconformist circles. The lack of interest is quite jarring when one keeps in mind the widespread cases of wives of nonconformist artists of the first generation, often artists themselves, who abandoned their art practices in order to enable their husbands' artistic careers.[568] Even though during the late 1970s and 1980s such cases were less frequent, with many artistic couples working in tandems[569] and without women sacrificing their career aspirations entirely, household chores were still the prerogative of the female realm.[570] Additionally these

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[568] Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Peeling Potatoes, Painting Pictures: Women Artists in Post-Soviet Russia, Estonia and Latvia: The First Decade* (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University Press, 2001).

[569] The Peppers (Persty) group consisted of Liudmila Skripkina and Oleg Petrenko, Martynchiki group, of Martynchik Svetlana and Igor Stepin, Totart (Natalia Abalakova and Anatolii Zhygalov), Valerii and Rimma Gerloviny.

[570] Valentine M. Moghadam, *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Larissa Lissyutkina, "Soviet Women at the Crossroads of Perestroika," in *Gender Politics and Post-communism: Reflections from the Eastern Europe and the*

chores became increasingly difficult due to perestroika's poor economic conditions, with shortage of goods in the stores and the increasing amount of time necessary to find products during times of deficit.

Soviet nonconformism did not have such a strong undercurrent of feminism if compared to what was happening in the West in the 1960-70s, both in art criticism and art practice. Under the guidance of the influential art critics Linda Nochlinof USA and Griselda Pollock of Great Britain in the West, many shows were staged and books printed to celebrate feminine creativity and to question the reasons of the female exclusion from the great canon of high art. Judy Chicago ventured to demonstrate the effectiveness of art exhibiting essential feminist qualities; Mary Kelly, equipped with conceptual art devices, made evident the social underpinnings of gender construction; and Miriam Schapiro rehabilitated the traditional crafts associated with anonymous feminine domestic labor. This new art demanded a new vocabulary. For instance, the grandiose installation of Judy Chicago' *The Dinner Party* (1979) became the quintessential example of the "central core imagery," namely, art that reflected the specificity of the female anatomy allegedly marking the art produced by women artists. Quite evocative in this respect is the famous enumeration by Lucy Lippard of specifically female qualities in art from an article of 1973 published in the *Womanspace* Journal: "A uniform density, and overall texture, often sensuously tactile and often repetitive to the point of obsession; the prepondrence (sic) of circular forms and central focus… layers or strata; an indefinite looseness or flexibility of handling; a new fondness for the pink and pastels and the ephemeral clod-

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Former Soviet Union, eds. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 274-86; Anastasia Posadskaya, *Women in Russia: A New Era in Russian Feminism,* trans. Kate Clark (London: Verso, 1994); Tatyana Mamonova, *Women's Glasnost vs. Naglost: Stopping Russian Backlash* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1994).

colors that used to be taboo."[571] Feminist art at this stage was contemplating the specificity of female expression while reclaiming features associated with major Western art movements. Repetitiveness, for example, or a so-called "serial attitude," has been reflected upon and employed by conceptualism since the 1960s.[572] Looseness of brushwork was associated with the hallmark movement of Abstract Expressionism and became an important feature of Neo-expressionist figurative art less a decade later.

The ceramic vulvas of *The Dinner Party*—each object representing some historically prominent woman—embodied a female analogy to the phallocentric core of Western culture[573]. Despite an essentialist feminism that has since been critiqued rather harshly for unnecessary reduction of the female experience to female anatomy,[574] some features of this installation are relevant to mention in the context of this chapter. These are: the ornamental repeating arrangement of ceramic sculptures, the reference to an artwork with iconic status (Da Vinci's *Last Supper*), a nod to the kitschy mass market porcelain associated with domesticity and popular tastes, and the disruption of the arts/crafts dichotomy. The later feature was more explicitly engaged by Miriam Schapiro as a member of the Pattern and Decoration movement. By the experiments with materials and techniques associated with feminine utilitarian labor such as textiles and needlework

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[571] Quoted in Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 358.

[572] Mel Bochner, "Serial Attitude," *Artforum*, 6 no. 4 (December 1967): 28–33.

[573] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman,* trans. Betsy Wang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[574] For reconsideration of *The Dinner Party* see Amelia Jones, ed*., Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles, CA: Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1996); For the critique of essentialist feminism see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), (first edition 1990); For alternative views on feminist art as part of conceptual art tradition see Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," in *Art after Conceptual Art*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (London: MIT Press, 2006), 67-86.

she created collages that she called "femmages" in order to underline the involvement of techniques previously not connected to the sphere of "high art" and female creativity.

The dialogue with the old masters and the reversal of the pejorative attitude toward decoration were the common qualities explored by both male and female artists in the West and in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the implications of those traits were different in both contexts. The decorative tendency in the West was seen as defiance against the 'Greenbergian' high modernist norm and citation was a common trait of the postmodern suspicion towards the idea of new. The references to or quotations of canonical works of art unexpectedly brought together western feminists and Ukrainian nonconformists. The *Dinner Party*'s reference to the last supper theme enabled Judy Chicago not only to use the citation technique to challenge the category of the new but to claim a part of the world's art heritage for female artists. Similarly, Ukrainian artists, by quoting the works of Da Vinci and Rembrandt, aimed to bridge the gap that separated them from the world's and their own culture's heritage due to Soviet isolation and Ukraine's provincial status. The decorative excess that in the West symbolized the feminist resistance against the machismo of reductive high modernism was for Ukrainian perestroika art a way to invoke references to the historically and culturally significant Baroque epoch. Thus, despite important formal similarities, it is imperative to look beyond surfaces and resist the temptation to use comparative methodology solely based on appearances. At the same time, the study of perestroika's female artists against the backdrop of western feminist theory may complicate and enrich the larger picture of the global 1980s.

How does the concept of the decorative manifest itself artistically? Defined negatively, the decorative embodies everything that high modernist reductionist norm rejects, in particular, the excess in colors and forms, the employment of patterns not dictated by functional or structural necessity, and the surplus materiality of paint or other artistic means. Stylistically, such a type of art could qualify as baroque-inspired, for its dynamic drama and the desire to dumbfound the observer by directly affecting his or her senses and stimulating the embodied perception. Considered socially, the idea of decorative connotes a meaningless and tasteless desire to ornament and to beautify, inherent in the kitsch aesthetics prevailing in popular art forms and home adornment. Simultaneously, it may refer to folk art traditionally implying bright local colors and repetitive patterns. For instance, ornament, as one of the modes of decorative expression, is partly defined by being functionally dispensable. Certainly, the purpose of the ornament cannot be exhausted by decorative aims, just as the ornament cannot solely represent the decorative realm that includes other means of expression not connected with functionality. Skugareva and Zvezdochetova both ventured into the exploration of the expressive and transgressive potential of the decorative element that could serve diverse means given its outlined connotations in art. Zvezdochetova, inspired by the popular creativity of the emerging Soviet folklore, reflected upon the desire by art neophytes to overfill naïve art objects with excessive decorative means. Skugareva was professionally trained in decorative arts and applied the methods reserved for crafts into the realm of high art. The gender of both artists certainly added an extra layer of meaning when the art methods they utilized were designated as purely decorative.

The dichotomy between decorative and modernist reverberates in the context of this dissertation when compared to another contrasted pair, namely, the intellectual and stylistically austere Moscow Conceptualism and the Ukrainian perestroika expressive and sensual painting. However instrumental the dichotomy appeared when the new Ukrainian art required a clear art historical response, the decorative sphere was never as alien to the Moscow Conceptualists as it was to their Western counterparts. One of the particularities of Soviet art education to which Moscow Conceptualism also responded was the practical realization of the Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda implemented in the departments of the Monumental Arts (*monumentalnoe iskusstvo*).[575] In contrast with the pure art idea, monumental art was supposed to be reflective of its historical and ideological contexts and to perform the role of propaganda. Soviet art encyclopedia defined such art as not only being monumental in the sense of commemoration or grandiose in scale, but primarily as by being "directly connected with the common social climate and atmosphere that prevailed in public life."[576] Many nonconformists were involved in this industry which, broadly conceived, demonstrated the supplementary role of art. Whether made for practical (decoration of public spaces, book illustration) or ideological (production of slogans or monuments promoting Soviet power) purposes, monumental art often provided more formal freedom and more opportunities for potential employment. Therefore, illustrating books or making mosaics for kindergartens became safe havens for many Soviet artists, including the Moscow Conceptualists of the earlier

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[575] Lenin presented his Plan for Monumental Propaganda in the spring of 1918. It was formulated in a decree "On Momuments of the Republic" and signed by himself, Anatoly Lunacharsky and Joseph Stalin in April 12, 1918.

[576] Vadim Mikhailovich Polevoi, ed., *Populiarnaia Khudozhestvennaia Entsiklopediia: Arkhitektura, Zhivopis, Skulptura, Grafika, Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo [Popular Soviet Art Encyclopedia: Architecture, Painting, Drawing, Decorative Arts]* (Moskva: "Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia," 1986).

generation. By involvement in the decorative-monumental arts, many of them achieved access to art materials and studios, and were able to finance their alternative and clandestine unofficial experiments in the arts.

Both women artists discussed here were involved in the industry of monumental-decorative arts. Zvezdochetova was employed in the House of People's Creativity, an institution created with the purpose of discovering amateur art talents. Such institutions were established with the ideological underpinning of supporting the workers creativity, an issue pertinent for the Soviet regime since its early days.[577] Her official duty was discovering and classifying decorative art and crafts made by untrained artists, mostly workers. On her part, Skugareva received her art education in monumental art departments where training in decorative art often meant the possibility to be more daring and inventive formally. Compared to the Western artists, for the majority of whom the step towards the decorative indicated a trajectory away from modernist aesthetics, in the Soviet context it often implied the opposite, with Monumental-Decorative art departments enjoying more freedom in comparison with students of painting departments usually restricted to the confines of the Socialist realism method and ideologically correct content. Therefore, the transgressive element of the decorative arts belonged for them to the sphere of the uninformed public taste and advanced formal experiments rather than postmodernism's struggle with the dominating position of modernist aesthetics in the West.

The most prominent war in the 20th century against decorative embellishment was waged in architecture, with a legacy of such programmatic statements as "ornament is a

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[577] More on art and work merging during the early years of Soviet Union see Maria Gough, *Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

crime"[578]. Ornament was presented as an element possessing not a defining but rather an underlining function, thus occupying a secondary place in the hierarchy of importance. Therefore, it was considered as something that could be easily removed with no harm to the overall purpose of the artistic object. Even Ernst Gombrich in his monumental study "The Sense of Order" described three main functions and goals that ornament can fulfill, namely: to fill, to link, and to frame.[579]

Oleg Grabar, building upon Gombrich's findings and primarily on his own research into Islamic ornaments, developed his own original theory of the ornament based on the ability of the ornament to provide visual pleasure (terpnopoietic quality) and to help viewers feel beauty (calliphoric quality). The ornament for Grabar thus performs an intermediary function akin to daemon of Socrates, which hovers between "lover and the beloved, the man or god" and helps observer to enjoy art objects by more directly engaging with them.[580] Even more important for this dissertation was one of Grabar's observations via which he arrived at the abovementioned conclusion, namely the ability of ornament to transfer the meaning from object to its signifier via the abstracting property of the ornament.[581] Thus, in Grabar's theory the decoration or ornament is akin to a metaphor "for something or other, or as the mystical expression of the truth."[582] One of the methods to involve spectators into the art realm was to give them a space in which their imagination can create the object based on the abstract element of the ornament. This operation is similar to the way a metaphor works when poetic meaning evolves from

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[578] Loos, *Ornament and Crime*.
[579] Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).
[580] Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 45.
[581] Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament*, 26.
[582] Ibid., 21.

the distance between the object and its indirect or metaphoric representation. According to Grabar, when our mind discerns a bird in the leaf motif of a carved wood architectural element, it thrives on the same poetic residue as when we transfer meanings in language from the literal depiction to the metaphoric.

Secondary or even unnecessary in function within the traditional set of art hierarchies, often associated with meaningless embellishment and domestic untrained labor, ornament, nevertheless, will serve as one of the theoretical tools in this chapter exploring late 80s feminine Soviet art. Kitsch and popular taste, the suspect category of beauty, and anonymous domestic craft—issues so popular among Western feminists—will be posed against the artistic production of women protesting their designation as feminists but definitively invested in those issues. Not only the visual, pre-textual pleasure induced by ornament and explored by Zvezdochetova and Skugareva, but certain qualities that ornament can express, such as its cultural and historical location, will be probed against their art. Historical conceptions of ornament, such as that outlined by A. Riegl as a means of conveying national identity and one of the legitimate embodiments of the *Kunstwollen* (will to art) allows to consider the ornament as a succinct formula of the forms and colors that generations of a given culture find pleasure in contemplating.[583]

Further study of the ornament was prompted by the postmodernist rehabilitation of decorative excesses in line with its intention to reconsider the modernist reductionism and also its interest towards previously neglected and denigrated areas of research. In the Western painting of the 1980s the predilection for brightly colored surfaces with

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[583] Alois Riegl and David Castriota, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament.* Princeton (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); The literature that follows his writing has been enriched by Iverson's discussion of his legacy: Margaret Iverson, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, MA:MIT Press, 1993).

pulsating forms was a distinctive feature of the time. Concurrently, such features were practiced and explored by Ukrainian perestroika artists, including women. The particular point of convergence between the feminine and the decorative in the art of later Soviet women artists is the focus of this chapter. Despite their divergent affiliations, Skugareva and Zvezdochetova coincided in this point as much as they coincided in time and space at the Furmanny Lane art squat in Moscow, which happened to be the crucial moment in both artists' careers.

5.3 Zvezdochetova on Furmanny: Transformations of "Kostya's Wife"

The Furmanny years turned out to be critical for the career development and artistic self-identification of Zvezdochetova, the Odessa-born artist and at the time Konstantin Zvezdochetov's wife. Reflecting upon his experiences in the art squat in the summer of 1989, writer Andrew Solomon in his book "Irony Tower" confessed that Larisa Zvezdochetova became the "biggest artistic surprise" of the period for him. With astonishment he followed the transformation from merely "Kostya's wife" to an autonomous and serious artist. "No one else in Moscow worked so constantly and so productively in the summer of 1989 as Larisa Zvezdochetova," Solomon recalled.[584]

In order to understand the nature of the astonishment, one may address the story told by another western beholder of the Furmanny phenomenon, David Ross, who as director of the Institute of Contemporary art in Boston, was one of the organizers of the

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[584] Solomon, *Irony Tower*.

exhibition on late Soviet conceptualism "Between Spring and Summer."[585] In this capacity he visited Furmanny several times, picking up artworks and meeting artists. In a footnote to his introductory article to the exhibition catalogue he expressed an anxiety resulting from the failed attempts to discover feminist art in Soviet Union and the happiness he felt when he finally was introduced to Larisa Zvezdochetova[586]. The discovery was even more shocking given the fact that while he had been looking for women artists, one of them was right there "helping Zvezdochetov move work in and out of the tiny room."[587] Only during the next visit did he realize that the woman who had been introduced as the wife of Konstantin Zvezdochetov was an artist herself. When the first seven artists of Furmanny are listed, Larisa Zvezdochetova is rarely mentioned as one of them. Nevertheless, she was there from the very beginning. However, she admits herself that her being Zvezdochetov's wife mattered more at these early stages than being an artist: "Vadim Zakharov shared a studio with five men (sic), and since I was Kostia's wife, I was able to join them."[588]

Zvezdochetova's marital association apparently took precedence despite the fact that she had been a member of the Moscow artistic milieu since September 1983. It was then that Zvezdochetova exhibited for the first time within Moscow Apt Art movement as part of the Odessa cohort.[589] Her works appeared at the *Beyond the Fence* open-air

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[585] David A. Ross, *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (Tacoma, WA: Tacoma Art Museum, 1990).
[586] Ross, *Between Spring and Summer,* 30.
[587] Ibid.
[588] Baigell, *Peeling Potatoes,* 87.
[589] The moniker "AptArt" refers to the nonconformist practice of displaying art in private apartments that began when the conceptual artist Nikita Alekseev started showing his and others' works in his Moscow flat in the early 1980s. Nonconformist artists came up with the foreign-sounding term, a merging of the English words "apartment" and "art," as an ironic reference to their semi-forbidden status and to accusations of their having sold out to the West. For many Odessa artists, AptArt exhibitions represented the first opportunity for them to present their work within the Moscow nonconformist community.

exhibition for one day at the Mironenko brothers' dacha in Tarasovka outside Moscow. During that exhibition, Zvezdochetova decorated two trees: one, which she refers to as the *Apocalypse Tree* (fig. 85), covered with about 100 angels cut-out from paper, and the other, not titled by the artist, with apples encrusted with plastic doll eyes.[590] The angels, each holding a miniature placard announcing the end of the avant-garde, appeared also to indicate the direction Zvezdochetova's art was to take. Her entrance to the Moscow conceptualist circles was facilitated by the second generation nonconformist artist Sergei Anufriev, who traveled between his native Odessa and Moscow, bringing art magazines and other materials back and forth. Zvezdochetova recalls the articles from A-Ya magazine that constantly mentioned the historical avant-garde in connection with the Soviet nonconformism. Anufriev's impressions and enthusiasm, together with the materials he brought with him from Moscow, prompted Larisa who was a graduate from the Odessa Pedagogical Institute with specialization in teaching art, to search for her own "current in art."[591]

The apples with doll's eyes were literal realizations of a dry and scientific medical metaphor *glaznoe yabloko,* eye-ball in Russian, which Zvezdochetova laid bare following the trend within the late Moscow conceptualism of visualizing language and language puns. Revealing the strangeness in ordinary phrases, a device also favored by Russian formalists and eloquently described as *ostranenie* by formalist theoretician Viktor Shklovsky, was employed by Moscow conceptualists to expose the absurdity of Soviet ideological language permeating Soviet reality and denoting nothing but itself. If with *The Apples of One's Eyes* Zvezdochetova explored the Moscow Conceptualism aesthetics

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[590] My interview with Larisa Zvezdochetova in March 2016.
[591] Ibid.

and sensitivities, *The End of the Avant-Garde* (fig. 86) was more of a statement about her future artistic program. First of all, she wanted to declare that she felt the rift separating her from the elder conceptualist generation often referred to as Soviet second avant-gardists. The change in attitudes was coming from the feeling that the Soviet power was no longer a source of existential fear but of farce. Thus, outsider and newcomer Zvezdochetova experienced and expressed a nascent shift later theorized as Post-Sots Art within late Moscow Conceptualism. Aesthetically, she was also making a new declaration with her angels, figures symbolizing everything so despised by the early avant-gardists like Malevich, namely classicism and academism in art, as well as low 19th century pop-culture with cupids and cheap ornaments. Apart from pointing to a direction aesthetically alien to both early and second Soviet avant-gardes, Zvezdochetova also brought forth her own aesthetic agenda, namely, her interest in folklore styles and patterns. She was interested in discovering the creative potential of such traditional art forms as Ukrainian *vytynanky*[592] and contemporary ones such as paper snow-flakes, popular among school kids in Soviet schools.[593]

Zvezdochetova discovered this outlet of creativity when upon her graduation she began to work in Odessa House of Peoples' Creativity, the Soviet establishment implemented by authorities to promote amateur art and the creativity of the masses.[594] As the official of this institution, Zvezdochetova traveled all around Odessa region searching for undiscovered talents. Once, she had to attend to the application of a sanatorium for

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[592] *Vytynanky* is the traditional Ukrainian form of paper decoration made using the cut-out method. Most popular were the geometric and animal-floral patterns of *plique*-a-*jour* ornaments. Besides Ukraine, it was well-spread in Belarus, Poland and Lithuania.

[593] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 262.

[594] "Art belongs to the masses" – famous Soviet slogan originating from the letter of Lenin to a revolutionary Klara Tsetkin.

the status of Peoples' Museum, a privileged category in the hierarchy of Soviet museums. In the sanatorium, she met a woman doctor who ran the hospital's museum. The doctor believed in healing power of art and exposed her patients to aesthetic therapy. She demonstrated the results of her patients' creativity while discussing how the artistic work helped them to improve their medical conditions, thus turning their art into symptoms of their diagnosis and healing. She even made blind patients to make figurines out of clay and proudly demonstrated the results of their labor in her museum next to portraits of Lenin made of different types of wheat and partially consumed by insects.[595] The biggest aesthetic shock for Zvezdochetova, however, came from the room filled with embroidered reproductions of famous artworks executed in garishly bright colored threads. The aesthetic therapist was an avid embroiderer herself and made numerous copies of Tretyakov Gallery masterpieces based on the patterns provided by popular Soviet magazines, such as *Rabotnitsa*. Even though the doctor was a real enthusiast of her art and her healing method, she lacked formal training in art and her embroideries were not only of unnaturally bright colors that did not match the colors on masterpieces they meant to recreate, but also were full of inaccuracies in forms and shapes, with body parts wrongly placed or in wrong sizes. Educated in a vigorous system of academic art and easel painting, Zvezdochetova could not and did not approve of such creativity, thus declining the museum the status its founders were seeking. The aesthetic therapist did not accept the failure and launched a grandiose scandal involving Soviet Minister of Culture Petr Nilovich Demichev (in office 1974-1986) to whom she addressed an outpouring of complaints regarding Zvezdochetova.

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[595] My interview with the artist in person, Odessa, March 2013.

Retrospectively, Zvezdochetova admitted the immense influence of this aesthetic therapist on her future art when contemplating the scandal through the prism of Moscow Conceptualism. She realized the difference between her skeptical and educated distance from the therapist's genuine amateur creativity based on a sincere desire to educate masses to whom the original masterpieces of Tretyakov Gallery were unavailable. Only the double ironic distance provided by Moscow Conceptualism perspective allowed Zvezdochetova to accept the aesthetically disastrous results of this sincere desire. "Thus, I realized only later, that she was this humanist enlightener and I fought against her," comments Zvezdochetova tongue-in-cheek.[596] Equally distanced from the realm of bad taste and kitschy art of uneducated artists and from her position of "authority" as an official appointed to evaluate such art, Larisa was able to suspend her aesthetic judgment and consider aesthetic junk worth preserving only when she became part of the unofficial art circles, first in Odessa and then in Moscow.

Apart from the incentive to disrupt the artistic hierarchies, Zvezdochetova's growing interest in the naïve and awkward amateur creativity led her to consider the fact that most of this art was a result of women's work, traditionally reserved for the domestic space. "Zvezdochetova wishes to confront the high avant-garde culture predicated on originality with everyday culture of mass-produced feminine arts and crafts, communal-apartment decoration" states Svetlana Boym.[597] The artist herself underlined in her interview the particular importance of the fact that most of the ephemeral objects that she creatively appropriated were the products of feminine anonymous labor. Meanwhile,

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[596] My interview with the artist in person, Odessa, March 2013.
[597] Boym, *Common Places,* 260.

musing over this experience, she identified herself as a person of feminist persuasion but not a feminist per se.

Such considerations and observations prompted many Western researchers to examine Zvezdochetova's work through a feminist perspective. Besides the already mentioned David Ross, literature specialist Helena Goscilo included a chapter on Zvezdochetova authored by Svetlana Boym in in her edited compendium *Contemporary Russian Women's Culture*.[598] Margarita Tupitsyn also interpreted her art along this vein and saw her artwork of the Furmanny period *A Committee of Worried Citizens* as a "commentary on the phallocentric nature of Soviet society."[599] The artwork (fig. 87) consists of four rows of identical and faceless men uniformly dressed in suits and hats surrounded by the red frame which Zvezdochetova decorated with sparkling stars and inscribed the title on. Even though it is difficult to ignore the repeating phallic shapes representing the citizens' faces deprived of individuality, it is obvious that Zvezdochetova does not see a threat in the figures, which she renders with humor that dispossesses them of any real power. Russian and Ukrainian critics alike, at the same time, refused to examine her art as feminist. Moscow critic and gallerist Elena Selina in her introductory catalogue to the exhibition "Contemporary Russian Painting 1992-2002" insisted on the necessity to resist the pull of feminist definitions in regard to the art of Zvezdochetova: "Handmade" techniques traditionally connected with women's crafts, often provoke critics to look at Zvezdochetova's work in a feminist context. This seems

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[598] Svetlana Boym, "The Poetics of Banality," in *Fruits of Her Plume: Essays on Contemporary Russian Woman's Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo (Armok, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).
[599] Ross, *Between Spring and Summer*, 45.

too incorrect […]"[600]Art critic from Odessa, Mikhail Rashkovetsky backs up this opinion: "It is European culture that has birthed a feminism completely inappropriate to the artist."[601]

Zvezdochetova herself in my interview with her, while admitting to being a feminist herself, refuses her art to be regarded as feminist, which for her would mean assigning it to some "ghetto for the weak." Instead she wants to compete with men as their equal and not by being included into some exhibitions "staged out of pity."[602] However, she embraced, or rather appropriated as her own, the label "feminine art," which she accepted when some of the Furmanny male artists, mocking the attempts of Western critics to search for feminist art in the Soviet Union, approached Zvezdochetova jokingly questioning whether the art she made was "feminine". She accepted the challenge and bore the title with the pride.

It was never her original intention to make feminist art, and feminist theory or activism never was a source of creative impulse for the artist, even though the materials and techniques she employed recalled the efforts and preoccupations of the so called essentialist feminists of the 1970s akin to Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. Zvezdochetova's works of Furmanny period such as *Chukchi Legend (1988)*, *White Rhinoceros (1988-1989)* and *Bunny-Mushroom-Eater (1989)* were executed with a

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[600] *Larisa Zvezdochetova. Boutonniere,* edited by Mikhail Rashkovetsky (Odessa: Gallery KhudPromo, 2012), 15. Exhibition catalogue.

[601] "Именно в европейской культуре возник феминизм, совершенно не свойственный художнице." Mikhail Rashkovetsky, "Vsepobezhdaiushchaia In' Larisy Zvezdochetovoi [Triumphant Yin of Larisa Zvezdochetova]," *Art Ukraine*, March 07, 2012. Last Accessed December 2017. http://artukraine.com.ua/a/vsepobezhdayuschaaya-in-larisy-zvezdochetovoy/#.Vwf_pOIrJD9.

[602] "С одной стороны, это защита, а с другой – это презрение, унижение, то есть тебе намекают на то, что ты неполноценный, что ты свободно не можешь конкурировать, тебя нужно поместить в какую-то резервацию и защищать.[On the one hand, it is a protection; on the other it is a disparaging contempt, humiliation, as if you are getting a hint that you are disadvantaged to a certain degree, that you cannot compete as equal and therefore you have to be placed into a reserved area to be protected.]" My interview with Larisa Zvezdochetova by skype in March 2016.

special technique that she invented in this art squat, imitating folk art but using contemporary mass market building construction materials. Initially, the artist's point of departure was embroidery, and she wanted to simulate the relief of the protruding threads on white smooth canvas. The most obvious this approach is in the work *Bunny-Mushroom-Eater (*whose original of 1989 is now lost, existing now only in a 1998 copy) (fig. 88), where with the help of the construction paste used to glue ceramic tiles together Zvezdochetova creates the crude lines imitating the amateur blown-up embroidery pattern, with all its imperfections amplified and made monumental by the scale of the work. According to the testimony of Yuri Albert, Zvezdochetova's discovery of the tile paste's creative potential became really popular on Furmanny and was one of the fashions quickly picked up by other artists in the art squat.[603]

The artist's ingenuity in discovering the art material was revealing of the socio-economic conditions of perestroika period which was a time of scarcity and deficit in regard to both artistic materials and everyday goods. Zvezdochetova's inventiveness with utilizing what was available for the art material corresponded to her daily routine of searching for any type of groceries seldom available in the stores.[604] Tile paste appeared perfect not only in imitating the embroidery but other crafts, such as cloisonné enamel in *Chukchi Legend* (fig. 90) where paste created barriers for the colors to fill, with the result resembling enamel yet in a crude but playful way. While *Chukchi Legend* was relying on its visual similarity with the traditional technique, Chicago's *The Dinner Party* was also

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[603] "Кто-то первый придумал, по-моему Лариса, использовать пасту для наклейки плиток, она давала такой рельеф. Лариса это нашла, а потом человек 10 делали разные вещи из этой пасты. [Somebody was the first to figure it out, probably it was Larisa, to use the tile paste, it created a special relief. Larisa discovered it and then ten people were doing different things with this paste.]" My in-person interview with Yuri Albert, Moscow, December, 2012.

[604] "The shortage of goods and services turned everyday life into torture." Lissyutkina, "Soviet Women at the Crossroads of Perestroika," 276.

paying homage to such crafts as needlework and china painting associated with domestic routine by painstakingly executing each of the plates and napkins in a historically specific manner. Zvezdochetova's approach, however, although exploring resemblance to the crafts she imitated, never exhibited any reverence to the chosen craft, which the artist appropriated ironically.

Simultaneous with Zvezdochetova, the irony and absurd humor making evident the bizarre intersection of childhood discourse with state Soviet ideology was pertinent to the art of Medical Hermeneutics also active on Furmanny. This group, already discussed in chapter three, grounded their practice in post-structuralism and Freudian psychoanalysis. The Medical Hermeneutics aimed to alleviate societal pathologies induced by ideology and used the childhood world as a point when the childhood trauma's roots lay and from which the therapy should start. Children's fantasies, toys, pictures, and fairy-tales heroes being regarded as symptom of illness and discussed in a therapeutic manner in accordance with the practice of a 'talking cure' also underlined that the Medhermeneutics were the youngest among the conceptualist generation. Moreover, the group's decision to employ children's book illustrations as a humorous foil for its dense writings comments on the fact that many Moscow Conceptualists of the earlier generation, including IlyaKabakov and Viktor Pivovarov, Peppershtein's father, held official jobs as children's book illustrators. Thus Zvezdochetova's utilization of children toys appeared in a tradition actively exploring the childhood discourse, ironically and theoretically.

Zvezdochetova's *Chukchi Legend* is similarly indebted to the Soviet ideology rooted in everyday life as a form of a modern folklore and to the Soviet industry of

childhood.[605] The representation of the mammoth tusk in the center of the artwork imitates the traditional ivory carving of Chukchi people and jokingly narrates the Darwinian theory of the evolution imagined from the perspective of this northern tribal people. However, the twist of the story is coming from the fact that Zvezdochetova presents her artwork as an artifact from some Lenin museum which was a necessary fixture in most Soviet towns. Normally, such museum would have an exhibition of gifts from different peoples to Lenin. In Moscow's Lenin museum Zvezdochetova, attuned to amateur art since her time with the House of People's Creativity, noticed a carved tusk by Chukchi that narrated a fictional story of Lenin's visit to their tribe in order to share the story of socialism with them sitting by their fire. Observing how history influenced by ideology can easily turn into a myth, Zvezdochetova wanted in her own work to touch upon events of an epic scale, from volcano eruptions and dinosaurs to the monkey mounted on skis and Chukchi dog sled riding fast into the bright communist future. At the same time, the comic style of the story-telling evoked the Soviet children's universe as much as the figures of the penguins depicted below the tusk and by their design referencing Soviet children's ice-cream cafés. Thus, Zvezdochetova consciously conflated the world of childhood with the ideological indoctrination that assumed the forms of fairy-tales in the Soviet Union.

Despite Zvezdochetova's and the Medhermeneutics' shared devotion to deconstructing the Soviet discourse of childhood, their premises were largely disparate. While Leiderman, Anufriev, and Pepperstein collectively represented the *enfant terrible* figures of Moscow Conceptualism by evaluating, defining, and reconsidering the

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[605] Exhibited at the 1992 exhibition *Sots-Art* curated by Andrei Erofeev in Moscow's Lenin's Museum.

generation of their symbolic (and real, in Pepperstein-Pivovarov's case) fathers, Zvezdochetova faced and fought the struggle against her confinement into the women-children world. In her interview in *Peeling Potatoes, Making Pictures* book the artist expressed her indignation at the fact that her artistic success made her husband envious and also led to his demands of her to have a child and dedicate herself to their marital life.[606] She described the same occurrence of how she was overlooked by curators searching for feminist art, which surprised David Ross so much in the same interview: "My husband showed his paintings. I was running around, preparing food, making tea, acting like a hostess. He did not introduce me and nobody asked my name. I was like a piece of furniture."[607] Meanwhile her husband included elements of her work in his own artworks, failing to give his wife any credit for them. For example, his work *Hair* of 1986 from Furmanny period included the silhouetted angel figure, the same that Zvezdochetova had created for her 1983 *End of the Avant-Garde* installation (figs. 85-86) as well as two figures cut by Zvezdochetova out of paper in the technique of *vytynanka*: the dragon and the horse.[608]

As the experience of Zvezdochetova in respect to one of the touchstones of feminist concerns, namely, the "double burden," testifies, the economic revival was not the only unfulfilled promise of perestroika. Perestroika raised women's interests as one of the important issues of the public agenda, with the question of gender equality more openly discussed. Raisa Gorbacheva became the first prominently visible first lady of the USSR. At the same time, the liberalization of economy and politics led to the percentage drop both in female employment and political representation, with economic

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[606] Baigell, *Peeling potatoes*, 87.
[607] Ibid., 86.
[608] My interview via skype with Larisa Zvezdochetova in March 2016.

restructuring resulting in more women than men losing jobs.[609] Likewise, the democratization of elections meant that the old quotas were eliminated and fewer women were chosen.[610] As Anastasia Posadskaya, a head of the Moscow Center of Gender Studies wrote rather pessimistically, "So far, perestroika and economic reform constitute a masculine project. Women are invisible in the sphere of decision-making; they play the role of objects rather than active agents of current changes."[611] The paradox of perestroika's "negative dialectics" revealed itself through feminist issues as much as through its already discussed complex relationship with the past. Seemingly thrust into a better future, perestroika was very much past-oriented, with not only its discovery of a previously forbidden history, but also with its return to 'traditional values'. Thus, while gender questions were unprecedentedly frankly exposed and discussed, women experienced the heaviest losses in their economic and social status as a result of perestroika policies. Although allowed to "publicly formulate their own agenda" women were suffering from the consequences of the elimination of old protective Soviet quotas and from the loss of the social security conditioned by the new, quasi-capitalist economy.[612]

Domestic duties became a much more challenging task in the reality of the perestroika transitional economy with shortages of food and general scarcity, as shortages

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[609] "The recently introduced official registration of the unemployed revealed that women with higher and secondary technical education form the majority of those losing jobs." Anastasia Posadskaia, "Changes in Gender Discourses and Policies in the Former Soviet Union," in *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies*, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 153.

[610] "The first quasi-competitive elections, held in 1989, […] resulted in a sharp fall in the proportion of the female deputies – from 33 to 16 per cent at the All-Union level." Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, "Gender and restructuring: The impact of Perestroika and its Aftermath on Soviet Women," in *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies*, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 154.

[611] Posadskaia, "Changes in Gender Discourses," 177.

[612] Ibid., 178.

and long waiting lines in stores turned into a prominent feature of everyday life. The growing pressure of 'double burden' for women looms large when one reads the description of Zvezdochetova's routine activities on Furmanny by Andrew Solomon. "Larisa would cook for whoever happened to turn up. Sometimes, there were six people for dinner, but more often there were ten or twelve, sometimes forty. […] When you asked Larisa where it had come from, how she was able to find the ingredients, she would just shrug and say, "I found them"; for everyone else, this feat could have been a full-time career. […] She spent the day shopping for food and talking to friends, the evening cooking, then serving half of artists in Moscow, and then cleaning up. In the small hours after everyone left, she painted."[613] This large excerpt from Solomon's book could be contrasted with Solomon's description of Konstantin Zvezdochetov's prevailing occupations on Furmanny at the same time: "Kostya was always awake as well, talking, rambling, smoking, drinking, complaining about his health, looking out at the streets.[614]" The illustration of inequality with respect of house chores is rather jarring based on the account of an eye-witness who was closely observing the most progressive part of late Soviet society.

Performing the family duties expected from her gender without questioning them, as most of the Soviet women at the time, Zvezdochetova never commented artistically on her experience of the 'double burden' at Furmanny apart from her installation in the *Iskonstvo* exhibition which happened in April of 1990 in Stockholm. It was the third part of the collaborative series of exhibitions *Iskunstvo* initiated by German artist and curator Lisa Schmitz, which featured Furmanny artists together with Western artists and whose

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[613] Solomon, *The Irony Tower,* 234.
[614] Ibid.

two first installments were already held in Berlin and Moscow. The Stockholm show opened shortly after the Furmanny Lane art squat was closed down by authorities in the end of 1989 and was renamed *Iskonstvo* to reflect the Swedish spelling of the word *art*; it included Soviet, German and Swedish artists. It was the show for which Zvezdochetova created the installation *Borscht and Space* (fig. 91) drawing the attention to and exaggerating her function as a cook in a metaphoric summary of her Furmanny years as well as a gesture of defiance.[615] She created the framing altar, adorned by artificial flowers, recalling the Ukrainian folk fashion under which it was customary to decorate the icons with flowers or towels with flowers embroidered on them. Besides flowers of the gaudiest unnatural colors, Zvezdochetova added the cheap plastic imitations of chicken carcasses to the frame, inside of which she placed the actual burning electrical stove with a pot. The artist dissolved the gouache colors in water, each color representing some ingredient of borscht, with white standing for cabbage, orange for carrots, maroon for sweet beets, and so on, added a kilogram of garlic, and put the concoction to boil. She dedicated the installation to the gallerist from Cologne Thomas Krings-Ernst in whose gallery she stayed while working on the show *Medhermeneutics and Others* in 1989 and who often complained about the smell which her cooking produced in his gallery space. The smell which the installation *Borscht and Space* started to exude soon at the *Iskonstvo* opening surpassed all the effects that its disturbingly garish colors generated. In the words of Solomon, who attended the opening, it was an "odor I will remember to my

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[615] In my interview with the artist via skype in March 2016 Larisa commented ironically that she is afraid that she could remain in art history not as an artist but as a cook.

dying day."[616] At a certain point the artist was begged to switch the pot off to stop the unbearable smell and complied, satisfied with bringing her message across. [617]

Nevertheless, feminist interventions did not constitute a main concern for Zvezdochetova during the Furmanny years, as her interests were invested mainly in the preservation of the fragile remnants of the Soviet everyday culture that was quickly becoming history. Those ephemeral objects which the country was so eager to dispose of attracted Zvezdochetova, who still defines herself as an "archeologist of the Soviet trash"[618]—a qualification relevant to her since the late eighties.[619] The plush table cloths and deer decorated carpets, candy covers *fantiki* or *znachki* pin-buttons, embroidery and toys—all those omnipresent elements of home décor which are everywhere until they suddenly disappear when some big historical shift prevents people even from noticing this vanishing. Nothing made this transition more tangible for the artist than her first travels to the West when upon her return she would suddenly discover herself engulfed with drastically new everyday objects. When Zvezdochetova realized how quickly the Soviet cult of sports with all its paraphernalia was replaced with horoscopes, celebrity cults, and UFO investigations, she decided that Soviet kitsch was so unique and evocative of the vanishing epoch that it was really worth preserving.

While contemplating the efforts of Tistol and Reunov aimed at the creation of the national stereotype out of the ideological and material rubbish of the Soviet Union, she felt she was sympathetic with their plight but she could not share their passion and also

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[616] Solomon, *The Irony Tower,* 275.

[617] My interview with the artist via skype in March 2016.

[618] Ibid.

[619] "The artist Larisa Rezun-Zvezdochetova is an affectionate collector and archeologist of Soviet trash." Boym, *Common Places,* 260.

their optimism at the possibility to digest the traumatic past so painlessly. She saw her own function as a therapeutic cleansing or ritual purification which was necessary for full comprehension of the passing Soviet epoch and for the transfer into the next one. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that the trash the artist chose to investigate was connected to domesticity and feminine labor.

The material that Zvezdochetova set out to excavate during the perestroika had its origin in the communal apartments of Stalin's period which were paradoxically filled not with the objects of the revolutionary *byt* but with the products of the bourgeois applied arts [620] These products were mass-marketed and mass-consumed by the majorities of strata of Soviet society precisely since Stalinist times, when it became clear that constructivist battles for the radical transformation of everyday culture were lost. The victorious aesthetics which came to reign in Soviet households was implemented in objects that were cheaply made but appealing to the tastes of an average consumer, imitated numerous old styles including those condemned as bourgeois, and were intended for home consumption. In short, Soviet everyday culture could be described as being of a kitsch nature, if one, for example may refer to the traits of kitsch as defined by Matei Calinescu: mediocrity, eclecticism and hominess.[621]

Soviet kitsch started to mutate during perestroika, exhibiting some hybrid features which were destroying its crystalized normativity, with some global forms of kitsch

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[620] Russian term for designation of the everyday life, was much theorized in connection with the avant-garde art practices, for example by Vladimir Tatlin. Christina Kiaer, "Looking at Tatlin's Stove," in *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture*, eds. Valerie A. Kivelson and Joan Neuberger (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 148-152; L. Trotskii, *Voprosy byta* (Moscow: Krasnaia nov', 1923), translated as Lev D. Trockij, *Problems of Everyday Life: And Other Writings on Culture and Science* (New York, NY: Monad Press, 1977).

[621] Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 249.

encroaching on Soviet territory. In her *Egyptian Carpet* (1989) (fig. 92) Zvezdochetova complements the style of cheap Egyptian souvenirs by adorning the kitschy images of sphinx with ornamentally repeated figures of rabbits and swans executed in *vytynanka* technique and combined with red Soviet emblematic stars. However, the medium to convey this absurd combination is of an everyday, banal nature–it is a textile rug, a necessary fixture in every Soviet household, covering walls, floors, and furniture in every Soviet home. Thus, the artist relays the disjointed and pathological nature of late Soviet everyday culture with a wit and humor akin to the Medhermeneutics, who also applied the out of place Egyptian metaphor (NOMA) to describe the Moscow Conceptualist circle. Nevertheless, her aesthetic interest is not in the ideological delirium enunciated by the decomposing Soviet collective body, but in the aesthetic rubbish which this condition produces.

Ukrainian literature critic Tamara Hundorova, in her book on transitional post-Soviet Ukrainian culture, underlined the particular usefulness of kitsch as a research tool due to its quality of being a "communicative channel capable to materialize desires, advertise emotions and roles" and also to "take part in creation of political and cultural myths by helping turn abstract slogans into glamour emblems."[622] Apart from being a useful instrument in studying the collective desires of a transitioning society, kitsch is predominantly a symptom of the modern condition. For Calinescu, it is one of the five faces of modernity[623]; for Clement Greenberg, it is one of two components, the struggle between which sets the entire system of modern thought and aesthetic into motion.[624]

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[622] Tamara I. Hundorova, *Tranzytna Kultura: Symptomy Postkolonialnoii Travmy [Culture in Transit: Symptoms of the Postcolonial Trauma]* (Kyiv: Hrani-T, 2013), 467-477.
[623] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity,* 225.
[624] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 34-49.

Kitsch and avant-garde are insufficient without each other, all features of avant-garde–its novelty, originality, autonomy and radicalism–shining so brightly precisely in comparison with its dull shadow's fake vicariousness, banality, repetitiveness, conformity, and low taste. Yet, kitsch is the ultimate companion of the modern culture or, according to Svetlana Boym, "a sort of modern parasite, a virus of art and modernization to which there is no single antidote or counterconcept."[625]

Despite all its usefulness as a contrastive partner for avant-garde and as a symptom of a culture in flux, kitsch is elusive ontologically, as it is not easy to grasp its essence when not given relationally. Adorno, who was one of the most ardent opponents of kitsch, which he relayed as a "parody of catharsis" in the 20th century, once remarked that "kitsch escapes, implike, from even a historical identification."[626] The philosopher declined to see kitsch through a set of binary oppositions, as for him kitsch was "a poison admixed to all art."[627] Perhaps, this mutating adaptability of kitsch, as well as its capacity of meta-representation, when it reveals itself with irony as a by-product of such operation, explains its unrelenting attractiveness beginning with Baudelaire and skyrocketing with the advent of Postmodernism.[628]

Incidentally, the relevance of kitsch for this generation of Soviet postmodern artists was supported by Konstantin Zvezdochotov, who was looking for a metaphor suitable to describe his closest milieu, in particular the Mukhomor (Toadstool) group. Resorting to the help of Nikolai Gogol's famous characters customarily used as

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[625] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 15.

[626] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 239.

[627] Ibid.

[628] "Baudelaire wrote in Fusees about the intoxicating effect of bad taste derived from "the aristocratic pleasure of displeasing." Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity,* 254.

personifications of certain archetypes, Zvezdochetov declared that "Thus, the kabakovian artist Pliushkin, was replaced not with a westerner Nozdrev, but our partisan-type artist Chichikov, capable of putting into circulation all kinds of chimeras."[629] Vladimir Nabokov in his book devoted to Gogol interpreted Chichikov as the ultimate kitsch-man, embodying the untranslatable Russian quality of *poshlost,* probably the closest Russian equivalent to kitsch concept that originated in Germany.[630] Apart from local iconic characters such as Chichikov, Zvezdochetov's generation was obviously inspired by Pop Art, which explored the ironic property of kitsch or camp, its reflective dimension, and its acknowledged attraction to 'bad taste' objects.[631] Obviously, the partisan or transgressive qualities of kitsch that preoccupied the late conceptual generation of Soviet artists likewise concerned Larisa Zvezdochetova, who came in contact with them during the time of the Apt Art movement to which Zvezdechetov's statement pertains.

In her *Carpet with Badges* (1989) (fig. 93) Zvezdochetova simultaneously diagnosed the condition of a culture sublimating its desires into its favorite kitschy objects and explored the transgressive qualities of kitsch aesthetics. Manifestly artificial material with cheap electric shine and gaudy floral pattern is repeated thrice to exaggerate these features and also to underline the omnipresence of such artifacts and their everyday normality. It is certainly a kitsch representing itself, savoring its own bad taste by showing off the cheap and ubiquitous commodity of the "culture industry" repeated over and over. In contrast to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, the kitsch Zvezdochetova

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[629] Konstantin Zvezdochetov, "Poligon Apt-Art," in *Pole Deiistviia: Moskovskaia Kontseptualnaia Shkola i Ee Kontekst: 70-80-e Gody XX Veka*, eds. Ekaterina Allenova and Alexander Evangeli (Moscow: Fond Kultury "Ekaterina," 2010), 202. Originally, the essay by Konstantin Zvezdochetov "Poligon Apt-Art" was printed in *KhZh*, (1996), no. 15, 8-11.

[630] Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1961).

[631] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966).

exploits is not so explicitly gendered even though her plush gaudy carpet definitely connotes domesticity. As a token of ironic honor, Zvezdochetova decorated the carpets with sport badges to lay bare the discrepancy of the Soviet cult of sport, another powerful constituent of the totalitarian kitsch, with the reality of plush flowers connoting the domestic un-heroic space more likely to provide a background to a growing rate of alcoholism than to sports achievements.[632] The artist did not choose for her materials such obvious symbols of communism like the medals on communist leader Leonid Brezhnev's chest, as favored by the preceding Sots Art. Instead, she drew attention to small, unpretentious objects not instantly recognizable as instruments of Soviet ideology but however the products of the same government-endorsed system that produced the visibly failing cult of sports together with the kitschy plush carpets.

The artist discovered the aesthetically transgressive appeal of the popular sport images while doing researching the topic of crafts in the Stalinist period. In a magazine of the epoch she found the drafts for the fret-cutting depicting the figures of sportsmen which according to the artists were far from conventional athletic beauty, "twisting and wriggling as if they were insane."[633] In the 1990s she made a series titled *Possessed* (fig. 95) in which she, with the help of the cloisonné enamel imitation, recreated the exact fret-cutting figures, magnifying their absurdity in her triptych. During Furmanny period Zvezdochetova employed the serial mode more than once, including her *Untitled* series of 1989 (fig. 94), also combining cheap carpets with stylized images of sportsmen, as well as a series *Life and Death of a Deer and a Hunter*, 1990 (fig. 96), narrating the phantasmagorical hunting story in a manner simulating the *belle epoch*. The later series

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[632] By 1989, it was obvious that Gorbachev was losing his battle with alcoholism and that his anti-alcohol campaign had failed.

[633] My in-person he interview with Larisa Zvezdochetova, Odessa, March 2013.

surprisingly recalls Kara Walker's paper-cut silhouetted friezes, which also exploited the popular silhouetted technique associated with family and genteel lifestyle as a contrastive foil for telling a different and, in her case, violent story.

It is natural to suppose that coming from the artistic milieu of the artists actively invested in the conceptual art practices, Zvezdochetova might have been attuned to the 'serial attitude', summed up by the Mel Bochner in the article of the same title.[634] The monotonous repetitiveness of Donald Judd's and Sol LeWitt's structures was known and appreciated among the late Moscow conceptualists.[635] However, Zvezdochetova, besides exploring the conceptual art technical devices, also remains loyal to her material–mass produced kitschy objects conveying the dull repetitiveness together with triteness and banality.[636] While kitsch is being fulfilled through repetition and copying, Zvezdochetova diligently collects and works with the multiple copies of the same object. By creating a unique singular artwork out of them she simultaneously reverses the reproducibility of the mass-produced objects while also accentuating it. Consequently, the aura she is looking for and aiming to emulate is not of the authentic work of art but of its opposite: the commonplace.[637] Therefore, kitsch for Zvezdochetova is not only a tool of feminist defiance as in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party,* which exaggerated the public image of feminine taste and returned it violently to this very public by attacking its patriarchal norm of beauty. Kitsch is Zvezdochetova's object of research and also a method of analyzing her time. Since it implies repetitiveness of the already seen images or already

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[634] Bochner, "Serial Attitude."

[635] My interview with Yuri Albert, in Moscow, December 2012, in person.

[636] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity,* 226.

[637] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol. 3 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 101-133.

told stories, the artist welcomes the serial attitude into her art utilizing the repeated objects. Therefore, she applies the serial mode both by exploring the conceptual art techniques and by being true to her medium and object of study–kitsch.

The conceptual expectation of the serial work to be "fundamentally parsimonious"[638] in its order and systematic progression was partially fulfilled in Zvezdochetova's series that achieved the effect of ornament with the help of multiple variations of the same grazing deer and mountain peak from the most popular bucolic nature scene. These two motifs were variously repeated in her *Untitled* series 1989 (fig. 94) in multiple stages of wear. The same factory-produced plush deer in manifold varieties with slight discoloration or loss of fluff adorns the carpets unifying the series. Degrees of deterioration, as indicators of time and also of its prolonged home usage, serve as a factor of differentiation within the series. This trite deer, recognizable by every Soviet citizen and originating in popular 19th century hunting scenes, turns into a pattern when repeated over and over again in arbitrary combinations.[639] The entire series seen together with all its pompous and intended unoriginality fabricates the effect of the ornament created from similar yet different repeating modules. The ornamental quality of the serial approach is a factor ignored by conceptualists and minimalists but cherished by Zvezdochetova, who often pondered the nature of ornament and decoration as necessary attributes of what is traditionally perceived as beautiful. She defines ornament as a "lost language" and believes that it still bears the traces of the now lost symbolic, magic and everyday meaning even if a traditional design appears as a pure decoration to an

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[638] Bochner, "Serial Attitude," 28.

[639] "Drama na okhote (A Hunting Accident)" was a very popular novel by Anton Chekhov also developing the idea of the hunting story. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, *The Shooting Party*, trans. Ronald Wilks (London: Folio Society, 2006).

uninformed observer. "We look at carpets or *pysanky* (Ukrainian decorated Easter egg –

my comment) and we think about crafts and decoration, but there is much more to it, not

available to us anymore."[640] Thus, Grabar's calliphoric quality[641] or the ability to feel the

beauty via the ornament is relevant for Zvezdochetova as some suppressed replacement

for the utilitarian or sacral meaning of the folk decoration. She conveys the popular idea

of beauty by utilizing the kitsch as a vehicle, as a worn-out empty sign which is given in

its modus operandi–a serial repetition of clichés. The result is the ornament of banality in

place of some permanently unavailable idea, an approach diametrically opposite to the

one taken by conceptualists.

The ornamental quality supersedes the supposed narration in the series *Life and

Death of a Deer and a Hunter* (1990) (fig. 96) which were conceived on Furmanny but

executed shortly after Zvezdochetova's relocation from the art squat. Similarly to her

Untitled series of 1989 it is rooted in a hunting scene involving deer and hinting at a trite

story about some hunting incident which is overgrowing with mythological details while

constantly retold. With their bedazzling excessive elements, both series induce its

viewers into a condition of a perceptive trance. Kaleidoscopes of chaotically arranged

fragments, of bright colors, plush, lace, glitter, false pearls, and ornamentally arranged

flowers from the arsenal of popular ideas of beauty are screaming at the observer,

petrifying him or her into a perceptive stupor. Two types of kitsch, the Soviet and the

newly discovered Western (recognizable by the lace fabric and silhouetted figures) are

dissected, studied, and compared in these two series by Zvezdochetova. Ornamental

repetition of the fragments, excessive in their decorativity, calls for a baroque embodied

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[640] My interview with the artist via skype, March 2016.

[641] "Ornament is, to coin a word, exclusively *calliphoric*; it carries beauty with it." Grabar, *Mediation of Ornament,* 26.

perception that is required from a spectator absorbed by the overflowing patterns of "beauty".

Baroque sensitivity and visuality for Zvezdochetova, preoccupied with study of patterns of late Soviet everyday culture, also marks her distance from Moscow Conceptualism, the cultural milieu that prompted her to become an artist. However, her being both a woman and an outsider generated the creative tension that defined her artistic production while in close contact with the Moscow Conceptualist community at Furmanny art squat. Her work *Schizo-China*, 1990, (fig. 97) for example, employed the important self-denominator for the group, in particular for the Collective Actions and Andrei Monastyrsky as well as for the Medical Hermeneutics.[642] While the latter, creatively reinterpreting the call of Joseph Kosuth for art to become the definition of art,[643] were obsessively multiplying the highly original titles they invented for the Moscow Conceptualism, Zvezdochetova was adorning one of such titles with gaudy tinsel and fake flowers, yearning not to replace the object with its description (or art with the idea of art) but to let it dissolve in its decoration.

In the context of Moscow Conceptualism, the Schizo-China title indicated the nonsensical endeavor of inventing the tradition which was implemented by Moscow Conceptualistm. They stage the procedure by imagining and describing their work as a canon and by borrowing from Eastern philosophies and religions different traits that matched their interests, including, for example, Taoism (mystic revelation in everyday objects), Confucianism (bureaucracy, documentation, norms), and Buddhism (search for

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[642] More on the notion of Schizo-China and its relevance for the Moscow Conceptualism in the entry on Vadim Zakharov's website dedicated to Moscow Conceptualism http://www.conceptualism-moscow.org/page?id=451 Monastyrsky, *Slovar Terminov Moscovskoi Kontseptualnoi Shkoly.*

[643] Kosuth, "Art and Philosophy."

emptiness). Instead of venturing into the complex etymology of the neologism and its multiple meanings, Zvezdochetova creates a vignette of lace, flowers, plastic beads, and toy lizards. The center of composition is occupied by a large flower with a black hole in the middle, a negative space around which the entire image revolves. The formal reading of the *Schizo-China* with its focus on circular movement and a black hole as an organizing principle, could be seen as a call for a "central core" feminist articulation, if Zvezdochetova had been in any way familiar with this methodology. From the Moscow Conceptualist perspective, however, we are looking at the juxtaposition of two types of emptiness, one lurking behind the attempts to describe and define the phenomenon with the help of any material sign (word, art medium) and the other behind the attempts to decorate and beautify it. From the perspective of the artist herself, however, we see the original artistic language devised to undermine the norm of the high modernist idea of beauty as much as the stylistic austerity of Moscow Conceptualism.

5.4 Marina Skugareva: The Collapse of Spectatorship in Confrontation with the Feminine Space

The irresistible pull of unrestricted creativity reigning at the Furmanny Lane art squat prompted Marina Skugareva to make her first mature oils there while reconsidering her previous career choices. Before, from 1977 to 1981 she studied textile art in Dagestan Art College in Makhachkala, in North Caucasus, the region famous for its tradition of carpet weaving and ornaments originating in the centuries-long local culture infused with

Persian and other Near Eastern influences. From 1982 to 1988 she advanced her learning of art textiles in the Lviv State Institute of Decorative and Applied Arts (now Lviv National Academy of Arts), in Western Ukraine where she met Oleg Tistol. When, utilizing her expertise in textile, she had made a tapestry portrait of the Ukrainian artist Anatol Stepanenko (based on the sketch by Tistol) and exhibited it at the show *Kyiv-Tallinn* in 1987, her close circle envisioned for her a role as an innovative tapestry-maker. At the Furmanny Lane art squat, however, she followed another calling. Despite the long period of training in textiles, Skugareva was not artless in the realm of oil painting, as her initial specialization in arts began in Kyiv Republican Art School for gifted children, where the majority of artists discussed in this dissertation received their early lessons in easel painting and drawing. The next year, 1988, brought a maelstrom of changes to her life, as it was the year when she graduated, married Tistol, relocated to Moscow, and settled on Furmanny, subsequently making her first big oil *Kyiv Nightly* in December.

From this work ensued an entire series of paintings utilizing and developing the same scheme of large figures dominating even larger canvases. Skugareva adorned her paintings with intensified colors and patterns but also with embroidered elements, often emblem-like, but sometimes figurative and sometimes abstract. The remaining part of this chapter will be dedicated to analysis of *Kyiv Nightly* along with other works of Skugareva's Moscow period, including *Harvest Holiday*, 1989, also made on Furmanny. I will also discuss her artworks made in other locations in Moscow and during her visits to perestroika Ukraine. The closest attention will be paid to the entire painterly scheme and also to the artist's chosen method of decorating her canvases with embroidered fragments, thus enhancing and reconsidering the canonical nude theme.

Skugareva's *Kyiv Nightly* (fig. 98) presents a large and distorted feminine figure with her torso violently folded in half as if the painting's subject was undergoing some emotionally or physically painful experience. The emotions are mainly conveyed corporeally as the face of the figure is obscured by her hair and by her placement in a not fully frontal position. Some amorphous object containing the convulsive and pulsating colorful brushwork is hurled on the floor to directly meet the trajectory of the figure's gaze. The subject's naked body, rendered with the help of a flowing nervous line, is partially flat and almost devoid of any shading or other volume-building technique. At the same time, this body, set against a background of two colors, one of which she shares, is not completely fleshless, as the figure tangibly occupies a space and possesses palpable expressive clots of colors within her body. In several places, such as under the figure's right knee, are a meandering lattice of color strokes not organized by value or tone to imply depth or shadow but rather to evoke a tactile sense of the brush touching the flesh of the body.

Contrary to the paintings made by her closest circle of artists from the Resolute Edge of the National Post-Eclecticism group, like by Tistol and Reunov, Skugareva's figure is not over-flowing with a baroque cornucopia of details and colors. When contrasted to the works of Tistol, also containing monumental figures placed against the background of the two colored stripes, Skugareva's figure is less material though not necessarily less real. Where Tistol calls attention to the flat surface of his figures with intricate lace of color and patterns, Skugareva achieves the impression of corporeality with the ultimate reduction of means, including the agglomerations of emptiness within the figure she depicts. The artist alternates the rapidly applied patches of multicolored

mash with empty spaces where figure and ground become one in a literal sense. In several places, apart from the contour delineated with a bold brush movement, the artist leaves the body indiscernible from the space in which it is situated. The figure becomes transparent enough to show the flows of red, variously diluted color, partially revealing the naked structure of the primed canvas. As a result, Skugareva does not mesmerize her viewers by the baroque over-abundance of expressive means but creates the emotionally dense and dramatic atmosphere with her elegant line and contrasts of saturation and negation of matter.

The upper right corner of the canvas is occupied by a floral coat of arms embroidered by a satin-stitch of yellow and pink shades placed directly above the painterly messy object on the bottom thus contrasting the clear lines of the embroidery with chaotic confusion of paint declining to signify a coherent object. The coat of arms, however, also resists being deciphered as Skugareva does not provide it with discernable elements like a particular flower or animal signifying the traits of a noble family. Thus, the emblem, although located in the place traditionally reserved for a family emblem in a Ukrainian baroque portraiture of the *parsuna* type, appears as a decorative shell from which all the meaningful elements have been extracted while only the adorning function remains. Was it decorating the canvas as a buttonhole of a traditional evening dress or the medal on a general's chest, or was it an emblem celebrating decoration as such?

In order to answer this question, it may be helpful to look at *Kyiv Nightly* as one work within a series it launched, which combined monumental figures with embroidered fragments. The repetition of this compositional order and decorative scheme was encouraged by the success of this first of Skugareva's Furmanny paintings. Soon after it

was made, the work was immediately noticed by a curator from Poland, chosen for the exhibition in Piotr Novitsky gallery in Warsaw,[644] and afterwards reprinted in many catalogues devoted to Furmanny.[645]

The painting *Harvest Holiday* (1989) (fig. 99) was subsequently made by Skugareva in Moscow while still at the Furmanny art squat. Structurally, it is very similar to *Kyiv Nightly* as it depicts a large nude female figure against the background of the monolithic yet slightly washed-out color fields with runbacks. In *Harvest Holiday*, the two versions of yellow, one ochre and the other lemon, are separated by the blue ribbon of the horizon line and create the provisional ground and sky. The female body, half-transparent and partially filled with a lattice of paint applied with brush, stencil, and spray, is tilted forward with her face obscured and hands stretched to pick up a colorful object from the ground. This painting, like Skugareva's first one, includes several embroidered elements: a decorative emblem at the lower right and the bright non-objective patch of silk patterns in the hands of the figure. Thus juxtaposed, these two colorful accents balance the composition, creating a triangle with the figure's bottom on top and the two bright elements on its base. They also remind the viewer of an important local reference that embroidery holds for the Ukrainian artist trained in textile design. The reference is enhanced semantically by the title, as if the observer is looking at the gathering of a harvest. However, both the fruit of the harvesting labor and the decorative coat of arms are placed in the same color field and are executed in the same satin-stitched colors. The visual parallel between the object and the symbol is a reminder of traditional Ukrainian embroidered towels usually decorated with lavish floral or geometric patterns

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[644] Kaszuk, *Furmanny Zaulek.*
[645] Brossard, *Les Ateliers De La Rue Furmann.*

stitched with bright-colored threads. The transformation of the vegetation and patterns into symbols endowed with sacral meaning problematizes the difference between the representation of the symbol and the representation of an actual object.

The transition between the two mediums for Skugareva was more innate than calculated according to her testimonial, but her relationship with embroidery, nevertheless, possessed more familial and endearing overtones. Both embroidery and oil panting were familiar and well-studied methods for her, but the artist described her usage of embroidery in oil painting as an act of "calling for mother's help when you are lost."[646] She spoke of her resorting to embroidery technique which apparently had some maternal meaning for the artist: "When I was not able to demonstrate something with one method, I always had this additional sign, some other way of expression, a second voice, a salvation code."[647]

Commenting on the intrusions of decorative embroidery into the painterly bodies and color planes of Skugareva's canvases from a non-feminist perspective, one might point to the correlation of the decorative mode of expression and the artist's intuitive understanding of local culture. From the artist's point of view, the predilection for excessive and utilitarian decoration was a feature strongly connected to Ukrainian culture. She discovered this trait while traveling and comparing the everyday material practices of the new cultures she encountered to those she was accustomed in Ukraine. "The epitome of the Ukrainian uncontainable striving to attain the beauty and utility at once," attests the artist, "is the Easter Holiday, when every homeowner would not only repair and organize her household, whitewashing the house and cultivating the garden,

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[646] My interview with Marina Skugareva by email, April 2016.
[647] Ibid.

but also would decorate the freshly white walls with the exquisite flowers and patterns."[648] The strong connection of the need to decorate was, therefore, in her case not only dictated by the desire to envelop her figures in the protective maternal space associated with embroidery as a technique but with her acceptance of the decorative as a feature she recognized as her own, communicating and demonstrating her identity. While her figures can be lost in the play of the thickness and dissolution of the paint, mash of brushstrokes and a transparency of the sitters making the ground visible, the embroidered patterns serve as anchors rooting her paintings, by pointing to the that the artist draws upon.

Besides the references to traditional Ukrainian baroque portraiture and Ukrainian folkembroidery technique, there are some ideological allusions in both of Skugareva's two first works made on Furmanny. Although her work was neither explicitly political nor directly touched upon historical controversies, being in the close orbit of the Resolute Edge group certainly made the artist more attuned to such issues. The title of her first painting coincides with the name of Kyiv's municipal newspaper *Vechyrni Kyiv*, or "Kyiv Nightly" in Ukrainian. The Ukrainian artist living in Moscow, the place embodying career aspirations for all Soviet artists of the time, relays an unexpected longing for local news from Kyiv which apparently can invoke very strong emotional response, judging from the expressively distorted figuration in the painting. During perestroika, printed media enjoyed unprecedented popularity and was the main vehicle of news that had become much less censored since Gorbachev's announcement of the new policies. By capturing this habitual everyday element as her title, Skugareva

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[648] My interview with Marina Skugareva by email, April 2016.

unintentionally orchestrates the contrastive clash of the private and public realms. Additionally, the combination of the two colors of the background is an exact copy of the flag of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, turned upside down either in a mocking gesture or to underline its accidental status as a vanishing symbol for a country on the brink of its independence and in need of new symbols.

In her *Harvest Holiday* the Soviet connotations persist through a topic incessantly popular throughout Socialist Realist history. Kolkhoz[649] holidays were among the most canonical official themes for depiction since the Stalinist period, celebrating rural affluence in times of famine as in Arkadiy Plastov's infamous *Celebration in Kolkhoz* (1938) or by bringing the harvest holiday into Kremlin as in the 1938-39 work of Leonid Tanklevskiy and Boris Ioganson (fig. 100). The topic retained its steady popularity into the later periods even as artists abandoned the official pathos and allowed some stylistic informality to convey a hint of Impressionism as in *Harvest Holiday*, 1960, (fig. 101) by a Ukrainian Socialist Realist painter Tetiana Holembievska. Obviously, Skugareva's *Harvest Holiday* is far from being canonical in any way, as it contains a nude and prostrate solitary figure abstract enough to conceal any obligatory enthusiasm expected from the Soviet depictions of labor. At the same time, it unquestionably comments on the Soviet cliché, albeit in a subtler way than the core artists of the Resolute Edge group would. Skugareva admits that Soviet artifacts and visual models such as kolkhoz holidays were "the neutral background of life" for her that was simply given and did not pose enough of a challenge for her to confront or bend for artistic purposes.[650] Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore this imponderable appropriation of the recognizably Soviet

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[649] Soviet collective farm, abbreviation from *kollektivnoe khoziaistvo* [collective household].
[650] My interview with Marina Skugareva by email, April 2016.

commonplace and her dissolution of this trite motif within the painterly matter. The Soviet norm loosens, being lost in the weightless watercolor-like painterly fields contrasted to the embroidered and painted bursts of saturated color.

The ideology almost goes undetected while interwoven into a fabric of Skugareva's dense painterly matter. The artist insists on separating herself from the program of the Resolute Edge, for which ideology and its visual representations were among the primary interests. In her interview she underscored that she cannot be considered as a full member of the collective even though she was obviously affected by the stylistic and thematic choices made and discussed by Tistol and Reunov. She, nevertheless, admits to the othering that she, along with her fellow Ukrainian artists were subjected to on Furmanny, "Nobody there considered us as their own, they even said "khokhols[651] have arrived!" Some said it with affection and others without it."[652] Simply the fact of immersion into the international atmosphere of USSR's capital meant being forced to note and to contemplate the hostilities and friendships based on different statuses and stereotypes ascribed to the Soviet nations, still operating when the country that had produced them was on the brink of extinction.

Immediately before her relocation to Moscow, Marina remembers the meeting which took place after the *First Soviet-American Exhibition* in Kostiantyn Reunov's studio on Perspektivnaya Street in Kyiv. It was then when she heard the term Transavantgarde for the first time. "Then," she said, "the Moscow art historian Natalia Tamruchi ardently explained to Moscow art historian Andrei Kovalev that "those fellows simply flew into the Transavantgarde." It was the first time I heard this word, and it

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[651] Pejorative term for Ukrainians in the Soviet Union; it was often coated by humorous associations.
[652] My interview with Marina Skugareva by email, April 2016.

sounded so celebratory, we all felt that something nice and important had just happened."[653] According to the artist, the main conclusion that she drew from the discussion of Transavantgarde was that citational practices were now not only permitted but even encouraged. The freedom in selection of motifs and styles, echoing the talks about liberation and openness in perestroika-ignited society, led to the overflowing and spontaneous combination of several aesthetic systems inspired by multiple sources welcomed by Skugareva. Chinese ink and wash painting's diffusion of color appeared on her canvases together with Persian decorative motifs and saturated hues of Ukrainian folk embroidery, accompanied by pictorial elements and compositional structures borrowed from Ukrainian baroque portraiture. Notwithstanding her persistent distancing from the ideological tenets of the Resolute Edge's program, she certainly shared with them a penchant for appropriation and multiplication of citations.

Based on the material offered by the first two artworks made by Skugareva on Furmanny, it is clear that they involve a particular set of influences that are also relevant in the context of this chapter's discussion of feminine creativity. The constellation of concerns could be condensed to the triad of such pertinent issues: painting calling attention to its surface, inclusion of explicitly decorative elements, and female nudity. Below, I will examine briefly each of the three traits in correlation with Skugareva's intentions and views, questioning whether they could be qualified as her conscious expression of a feminist agenda.

Firstly, the painting which through expressive brushwork bravura insists on its active and aggressive materiality is germane within the discussion of feminism because

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[653] My interview with Marina Skugareva by email, April 2016.

such type of painting is associated first of all with a patriarchal idea of male genius penetrating canvas and in this way articulating the subjectivity of a male creator. Therefore, the gesture of either appropriating such type of painting or rejecting it altogether by women artists with pronounced feminist agendas in Western art discourse possesses radical or emancipatory overtones. The paradigmatic case study in the realm of expressive painting is the story of Lee Krasner, overshadowed by a dominating husband with an extraordinary successful career in painting. Pollock's style of painting was critically acclaimed as a self-expressive practice. Skugareva, in turn, not only applied agitated painterly facture on her canvases but also was the wife of one of the most recognized and highly praised painters of her generation, the charismatic Oleg Tistol, also working in the expressionist manner during the discussed period.

Skugareva, whose life material happily lacks the tragic circumstances comparable to those of Krasner, nevertheless, matured artistically next to a husband whose dramatic career she had witnessed taking off first-hand, and grew accustomed to constant questions by a media expecting her to explain what it was like to be his wife.[654] Judging from my conversations with Skugareva, she does not want to be perceived as artistically indebted to her husband for her achievements or stylistic choices. She adamantly insists that "my husband did not make my career"[655] pointing out decisively that they rarely exhibited together.[656] At the same time, her free, sometimes weightless and sometimes fleshy painting manner was never intended as a radical gesture of appropriation of the

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[654] Marina Skugareva, "Ia Dumaiu Est i Nebesny Kiev [I Think There Is Also a Heavenly Kiev]," interview by Lera Polianskova, *Art Ukraine*, November 28, 2011. http://artukraine.com.ua/a/marina-skugareva-----ya-dumayu-est-i-nebesnyy-kiev/#.VzperfnR_cs Last Accessed November 2017.

[655] My in-person interview with Marina Skugareva in Kyiv, May 2008.

[656] Since our 2008 interview Marina Skugareva exhibited with Oleg Tistol, along with other numerous painters, in a big group show *Ours* in the Yermilov Art Center in Kharkiv in 2014, *Made in Ukr*, gallery Tsekh, 2006, *Paintings*, Gallery Karas, 2000 (the only show together with Tistol).

expressive style. Lacking the historical distance and a figure of influence akin to Pollock, Skugareva's usage of the expressive style could hardly qualify as a feminist statement of appropriation of a painterly technique that was deemed exclusively male.

The second issue, of decorative intrusion into the pure modernist canvas, is associated with the feminist recourse to anonymous domestic labor, with similarly radical intentions, in order to question the male-dominated art history which neglected female creative efforts. The embroidery and textile in which the artist was trained were consciously chosen by Skugareva as a means to decorate her canvases by enhancing her creative vocabulary with an additional medium. The question, however, remains open whether this gesture of adding an extra ornate layer could be interpreted as a unequivocally feminist encroachment into the territory of high art.

It has been noted by Linda Nochlin that the "Introduction of sewing and embroidery into the sacrosanct realm of high art painting has a special, often transgressive, meaning for contemporary women-artists."[657] The most prominent classical example is earlier mentioned Miriam Schapiro who in her "femmages" combined the canvases with lace handkerchiefs and other products of anonymous female labor. A more recent example, also among reviewed by Nochlin, is Ghada Amer, a Cairo-born New-York based artist who, similarly to Skugareva, adds thread to her canvases inspired by her local tradition of stitching. However, Amer's embroidery with loose threads entangled to the point of abstraction carries encoded pornographic imagery. Thus, by choosing the medium of embroidery, conventionally associated with chastity and

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[657] Linda Nochlin, "Women Artists Then and Now: Painting, Sculpture, and the Image of the Self," in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London: Merrell, 2007), 52.

innocence, the artist is violently disrupting the norm of the stereotypical perception of embroidery.[658]

Skugareva, nevertheless, who also engages her local decorative tradition, is hardly looking for a disruptive effect when adorning her canvases with silk stitches. Even when compared to Zvezdochetova's ironic imitation of the embroidery medium in her subversive amplifications of kitschy amateur creativity, Skugareva's work persists as a homage to a medium she defines as "maternal." She did not study it as a symptom of transitional culture, nor did she apply it to question the expectations associated with a traditional medium and behavior norms that it implied. Skugareva's primary and declared concern with embroidery is decoration and freedom to choose and combine her expressive means. The concept of the decorative, then, requires a deeper examination for a more complex understanding of Skugareva's early experiments as organically incorporating the embroidered decoration into oil painting instead of deliberately and radically blending the "low" feminine crafts with a "high" masculine genre.

The third feature, the depiction of nudity, has been one of the cornerstones of feminist debates in the West since the iconic article by Linda Nochlin of 1971. When answering the provocative question of "Why There Have Been No Great Women Artists" the prominent art historian drew attention to the persisting lack of access to nude models experienced throughout the years by women trying to achieve excellence in arts.[659] The allegorical historical genre, occupying the highest place in the painting hierarchy, required training in realistic rendering of the nude body, often denied to women based on

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[658] Linda Nochlin, "Women Artists Then and Now," 52.

[659] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," in *Women, Art, and Power: And Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 145-78.

the false pretense of protecting their morality. Skugareva, however, did not lack such training, nor had to fight to get access to nude models. Despite the prudish view of sex inculcated by the communist regime, life drawing of nude models was not forbidden by the Soviet school system. Beginning from her studies in Dagestan, painting from the nude was part of her curriculum and considered necessary even though her main specialization was in textiles. During her stay in Makhachkala she additionally painted numerous nude portraits of her fellow student and friend Lena Sabitova on wall-paper, the cheapest art material available for the young artists. While already back in Ukraine and preparing for the entrance exams to the art institute, she also took private art lessons in Kyiv with the artist Hennadiy Titov, who in his studio orchestrated collective drawing sessions of live semi-nude models to help aspiring students pass the entrance exams. Thus, before her Furmanny experiments in oil painting, Skugareva, a product of monumental and decorative (*monumentalno-dekorativnoe*) art education, was simultaneously well-versed in academic tradition of nude painting and was ready to formally challenge it.

Before proceeding to discussion of Skugareva's painting from Moscow period in light of the three above traits actualized by the feminist discourse and also directly or tangentially relevant for the Ukrainian artist, some intermediary conclusion has to be made. In all three cases, despite her engagement of the themes traditionally associated with feminist art in the West, one cannot be definitive about the implications of such stylistic and thematic choices for her oeuvre. There is much more intuition than calculation in the choices made by the artist when by serendipity Skugareva's work becomes congruent with Western feminism. She was not fully informed about feminist theory and practice and also never considered herself as a feminist. In fact, since

Ukrainian art critic Kateryna Stukalova in 2001 published an essay on Skugareva using feminist denomination and vocabulary to define her creative output, the artist denied the association in her subsequent interviews, including our conversations, rather definitively.[660] Additionally, her life material does not provide the stories comparable to the daily struggle on Furmanny Lane squat experienced by Larisa Zvezdochetova, overcome with a classical 'double burden' situation. On the contrary, when Skugareva recalls her Furmanny time, she mentions the lightness of being and prepared chicken bought in a café next to Kursky railway station instead of incessant cooking and cleaning.

Keeping these reservations in mind, I would like to analyze her three oils of nude female figures, which included embroidery and expressive painting and were similar compositionally. All three paintings *From Behind*, 1989, *Moscow News*, 1990, and *Honey-Bunny*, 1990, (figs. 102-104), with centrally-placed and monumental but vulnerable figures turning their backs toward viewers, were made during her Moscow period over the course of Skugareva's visits to Kyiv. Yana Bystrova, then Kostiantyn Reunov's wife, posed for these paintings, which evoked a strong sense of intimacy from its beholders, hinting at the close friendship between the two female artists. The sense of intimacy was conveyed through the proximity of the depicted bodies enhanced by the sensuality of the paint application in the bright clots of the brushwork mash resembling wounds or suggesting the touch of the brush to the skin. However, full access to the depicted naked body was not granted to an observer, as the model did not offer herself for contemplation and her position excluded any possibility of exchanging gazes with her. All three paintings included embroidered elements. In *Moscow News* it was an emblem

[660] Kateryna Stukalova, "Marina Skugareva," in *XX Artists of Ukraine 2000 (End of the Century)*, ed. Evgeniy Karas (Kyiv: Atelier Karas Gallery, 2001). Exhibition catalogue.

with a floral pattern in the upper right corner and in *From Behind* the place of the emblem was occupied by a rapid swirl of paint complemented with a geometrically clear stitched pattern of blue-green hues placed directly below it. In *Honey-Bunny,* which also included a piece of a rabbit fur hinting at the tail of the animal, the partially finished embroidery echoed the visual vacancy of the least embodied figure of the three, rendered with only a few brush strokes and lines.

Emotional intensity and a sensual painterly style together with the denial of contact with the emotions of a sitter or absence of any explicit ideological content makes the task of interpreting these works rather difficult. *Moscow News* (fig. 103) is the title of another popular newspaper which diametrically corresponds to the situation of *Kyiv Nighty'*s creation, since the artist while in Kyiv is immersed into the news from Moscow. Apart from revealing the nomadism of the Moscow period when the entire group of artists was constantly moving between the two cities, these paintings do not offer that much information for a critic to dwell on. Even though all paintings were modeled on the same figure, none of them could qualify as a portrait of the person who posed, being not only abstract in their decorativity but also not really communicative with their viewers. Moreover, according to the testimony of the artist, she portrayed rather her own emotions encapsulated in a situation than those of the person who posed for her.[661] Only lavish surfaces with intricate brushwork and mosaic of colors complemented by embroidered patterns engage the observer. An emotionally thrilling or excruciating story is hinted upon but its full content is hidden from the viewer by inaccessible female backs so proximate in their corporeality yet so distant by their positions.

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[661] My interview with Marina Skugareva by email, April 2016.

The major discrepancy between Skugareva and the core members of the Resolute Edge group, evident from contemplating the three above works, lies in the absence of pre-programmed content. Although they coincided in major themes and modes of expression, such as the presence of a solitary and monumental figure, expressive brushwork, and excessive citation practice, any ideological content in Skugareva's work was secondary. In fact sometimes it appears applied post-factum to her works after discussion within the group. For example, the blue and red of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic flag connection to the color scheme of *Kyiv Nightly* has appeared in such way: after the fact when the paint was coated on, all artists discussing together the first work by Skugareva settled on the meaning retroactively. In contrast, Tistol and Reunov, while certainly letting the flow of references and styles skyrocket and spill over bursting on their canvases ripe with over-signification, always encoded consciously numerous links to historical events and personas which they often discussed and considered part of their program of creating the new Ukrainian art.

Furthermore, one may address the concept whose ambiguity already lies in its enunciation strained between the ideas of a "nude body" and a "naked body", in particular, of a female unclothed body, in this case rendered by a female artist.[662] Even though Skugareva objected to her qualifications as a feminist, nevertheless, some aspects of the critical analysis applied by such theoreticians as Amelia Jones and Griselda Pollock might be useful, not to prove the artist wrong, but rather to point out some historical and social conditions that enable a certain attitude towards the female body. For example, it bears examining how the naked body, the epitome of classical painting,

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[662] More on the difference of the 'naked body' from the 'nude body' in Lynda Nead, *Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 12-16.

appears to function as an empty sign capable of conveying any allegorical or historical meaning, in Pollock's words, "woman as Other, sex, lack, metaphor, sign, etc."[663] This assumption can complicate the woman artist's task of appropriating the thus objectified self. Certainly, the question of nudity cannot be exhausted only by the previous discussion of access to nude models and the ability to realistically convey the nude human form, which Skugareva certainly possessed. As a female artist very often recreating a female nakedness on her canvases, she certainly could not avoid to be entangled into a subject-object interrelation with her sitters, most of whom were her close friends. The tension arises between an authorial position of the artist traditionally responsible for the objectification of the female body, the most common representation of the classical ideal, and the unavoidable identification with a sitter by the female artist whose position as a result oscillates between a passive object and an active image-maker.

Amelia Jones asserted that the "body for women in patriarchy is objectified into a "picture" through male desire.[664] In her analysis of the feminist performances of Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke, Jones pointed out that these women artists wanted to appropriate the representation of the female body and insist on their possession of their own physical selves emancipated from the "fetishistic and scopophilic male gaze."[665] The same means were served by Lynda Benglis's and Wilke's photographic self-portraits assuming the features of earlier actions of self-performance but in a static form. For an advertisement of Ronald Feldman Gallery, Hanhan Wilke posed and was captured by

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[663] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 2006), 26.

[664] Amelia Jones, "Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art," in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York, NY: IconEditions, 1994), 30.

[665] Ibid.

Claus Oldenburg as turned away from his camera, her gaze confronting her viewers with her naked bottom covered only with a transparent layer of black hosiery (fig. 105). Adhering to Sue-Ellen Case's Lacanian analysis of bottom depictions, Jones affirmed "the ass" of Wilke as a "site of desire that refuses the phallic economy of heterosexual patriarchy" therefore unbalancing the traditional economy of the male gaze consuming female bodies.[666]

The posture of Wilke, absorbed in her work, partially disrupts the voyeuristic pleasure of an observer forced to ponder not only her beauty but also her professional activity unfolding in the space away from the observer. Skugareva placed her sitter in a position somewhat similar to the Wilke, who offered her sexuality as a gesture of defiance, of denying the unrestricted access to the definitive traits of her subjectivity. They both un-gender the viewer's gazes, disrupting and denying the unencumbered sexual pleasure normally gained from looking. Again and again Skugareva is hinting at some emotionally traumatic experience but forcefully protects her sitters (and close friends) from an outsider's gaze. The intimacy of the emotional exchange is covered delicately, as the artist is over-cautious in not revealing too much. Her paintings are not explicitly sexual, as the nudity she depicts does not elicit erotic response but rather creates a space of trust and openness that exists between the sitter and the artist but into which the viewer is not invited.

Even Skugareva's reference to the embroidery, the application of which she compared to "calling for mother's help," speaks to her reliance on the specifically feminine space. Such space in Pollock's terms is articulated as the "Realm of the

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[666] Jones, "Postfeminism," 33.

Mother." To this realm belongs not only the art that "stays closer to practices of everyday life,"[667] exemplified by embroidery and other crafts deemed domesticated and feminine, but also which concerns the "retrospective fantasies about wholeness, unity, and undifferentiating" associated with the space of the Mother.[668] The Symbolic order is the order of the Father imposing structure, hierarchies, and a splitting of the Self from the Other. At the same time, the pre-Oedipal stage of inseparability of yourself from the body/voice/gaze of your mother should in Pollock's understanding provide a model for feminine *inscriptions* in the canon, for which she advocates in her book. The feminine *inscription* does not suppose a struggle and open fight with a phallocentric order but "working from the predicament of femininity."[669] In terms of a canon formation it meant not discovering and canonizing the female artists but questioning the formation of the canon itself from the feminine point of view. Skugareva, while not advocating for women's rights or insisting on the feminine nature of her art has, nevertheless, chosen to defend her female sitters from the viewers' gazes. The artist achieves this effect by encapsulating them into the protective space of her paintings and granting her viewers no access to the delicate, sensual, and painful private stories that her sitters shared with her. It is certainly not an assertive gesture of insisting on the exclusivity of the feminine sphere, but the artist is rather adamant in preserving the space of trust and vulnerability intact.

Quite telling in this respect is the resolutely different position which Skugareva reserves for her male sitters, her husband Oleg Tistol, in particular. Despite her portraits of him of 1991 and 1992 being executed in a similar manner of flowing sensual paint

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[667] Pollock, *Differencing the Canon,* 25.
[668] Ibid., 29.
[669] Ibid*.,* 33.

complemented with decorative patterns, created with the help of stencils and embroidery, the relationship of the figure with the observer is radically altered by the artist. Instead of being presented as facing away, covered from inquisitive gazes by his back, as in the three already mentioned works and *Der Fogel*, 1990, (fig. 106) modeled on another close friend Anya Shchetinina, the naked male figure is offered for contemplation without any reservation. In her *Portrait of Oleg Tistol*, 1991, (fig. 107) Skugareva does not hide the emotions involved, with embroidered flowers popping out of Tistol's chest or an embroidered Holy Spirit likeness hovering behind his back. At the same time she does not feel compelled to protect the emotions of her strong-willed and self-assured husband. Nor is she afraid to reveal his not so masculine part, endowing his depictions with a dense emotional atmosphere. Nevertheless, even while being quite open about her own feelings toward her sitter, Skugareva does not involve these portraits pictorially into her series of women's portraiture. The latter differs drastically by placement of her female subjects in the protective "space of the Mother" where the utmost compassion and support reigns. When additionally compared to the female nude practiced in the circle, for example the frontal and comfortably mellow naked figure in Reunov's *Girl with Ermine*, 1989, (fig. 65), Skugareva's series are unique for her characteristically feminine optics.

Viewers confronted with the delicate lines and varied color gradations on Skugareva's canvases observe the figures thrust outside and away from their gazes. They are left to guess the reasons and nature of the dramas unfolding in front of them but not for them. The *Honey-Bunny*, 1990, (fig. 104) painting, for example, points to an inkling of heartbreak through the title and the content of the work. The title "Zaichyk" (bunny in

Ukrainian) presents an endearing name customarily given in Ukraine by men to their beloved women, implying a sense of great intimacy between them but also strong paternalistic overtones. The position of the bunny, so fragile and in need of constant protection is equated with the patriarchal control and dependent position of women in Ukrainian society. On Skugareva's canvas, the body of a "bunny" is almost dematerialized showing the canvas through a kaleidoscope of decorative patterns, with only the head of a figure and a piece of fur (tail) creating the third dimension for this almost flat and transparent figure. The right thigh of the figure, however, holds three lashes of red color resembling cuts with dripping blood. Those familiar with Ukrainian folk music might remember numerous songs about a poor bunny caught by his leg in a trap by a landowner, for instance "Zaichyku, ne skachy po horodchyku" ("bunny, do not jump in the garden"), which includes a forewarning to a bunny to avoid a vindictive gardener whose traps will damage his leg, handicapping him for life. The mixture of visual and textual metaphors on canvas by Skugareva narrates a story in which a folklore bunny transmutes into a close friend and vice versa in a turn that is sad, personal, and universal at the same time. Without being involved into the personal details, the viewers of the painting find themselves as caring and defensive of a fragile figure hurt by an unknown trap.

5.5 Conclusion

The consideration of the feminine optics in Skugareva's early painting practice is entangled with the question of ornament, with femininity and decoration coinciding in themes of domestic crafts and neglected female creativity. However, as both examples of Zvezdochetova's and Skugareva's art demonstrate, the concept of the decorative resists being narrowed down to the feminist struggle towards dismantling the arts/crafts hierarchy. In so far as Zvezdochetova is concerned with the ironic re-examination of the traumatic Soviet past, and Skugareva applies the embroidered patterns to reflect on her local tradition or the discrepancy in representation of the object and the symbol, their efforts are not exclusively defined by the their experiences as women artists.

Purposeless decoration and ornament were among the arch-enemies of the high modernist aesthetics, advocating for pure forms and for the ultimate reduction of artistic means. An artist belonging to the canon had to be theoretically absolved from the guilt if noted in any sentiments towards "meaningless" decoration. For example, Henri Matisse who not once enunciated his love for arabesque was eloquently rescued by Yve-Alan Bois who with the help of Jacques Derrida's concepts of differánce and arche-writing interpreted Matisse's "expression by drawing" as a form of modulation with quantity of color.[670] The art critic compared the fundamental inseparability between color and drawing by Matisse to the primordial undifferentiation between speech and writing described by Derrida. Even though Matisse is a great master of the "decorative"

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[670] Yve-Alain Bois, "Matisse and "Arche-drawing,"" in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 3.

according to Bois, his patterns are not used to accentuate the flatness or the two-dimensionality of the canvas but they "reinforce the modulation produced by the interrelationships of proportions between surfaces."[671] Thus, ornament could be tolerated when it serves a purpose recognized and proved as non-decorative which in Matisse's case was a distribution of space with the help of the different quantities of color.

As is turns out, ornament is accepted to the pantheon of modernism only in its transcended form. The abstraction of Wassily Kandinsky is a "transfigured ornament" according to David Morgan's study examining the influence of German theories of ornament on Kandinsky's understanding of abstract art.[672] Kandinsky, according to Morgan, distanced himself from ornament while pursuing "inner necessity" as the only guiding principle of his art, but was also indebted to such scholars of ornament as Karl Philip Moritz, who pointed out that ornament was based on the idea of isolation as well as Immanuel Kant's ideas of "free beauty" and "beauty in itself." Both scholars saw ornament as something complete, imitating only itself, not dependent on external forms of nature and nevertheless capable of invoking the feeling of aesthetic pleasure form its beholders. Defined so widely, ornament comes too dangerously close to a sacrosanct realm of high abstractionism if considered though the perspective of modernism.

No system of thought has exposed the inconsistency of binary thinking as adamantly and consistently as Postmodernism. Within its premises, the applicability of contrasting dichotomies as a primary epistemological tool was systematically questioned. Postmodernism as such was defined by Lyotard and other theorists as a type of

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[671]Yve-Alain Bois, "Matisse and "Arche-drawing,"" 35.
[672] David Morgan, "The Idea of Abstraction in German Theories of the Ornament from Kant to Kandinsky," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50, no. 3 (1992): 231.

knowledge which excluded thinking in oppositions, for instance.[673] Derrida's idea of *differánce* was also grounded in rejection of polarities and insistence on the possibility to conceive difference without resorting to negation of the opposite idea. When this mode of thinking is applied to the question of ornament, postmodern thought appears as one that tries to conceive a probability for the ornament to be both decorative and a critical tool for examination of the present condition.

As this chapter has aimed to demonstrate, such an approach taken by late Soviet women artists was equally distanced from the postmodern deconstruction of gender and from the postmodern rehabilitation of the ornament actualized in the Western critical discourse of the time. The feminist question, the decorative impulse, and the rejection of essentialism, were intertwined in a complex pattern in which the idea of the Soviet was dissected through studying and imitating of its obscene kitschy twin, and a local particularity was defined though seemingly insignificant decorative details. Without being immersed in the theoretical debates about the collapse of the meta-narratives or the critique of the Enlightenment, Soviet women artists during perestroika nevertheless became congenial to the process, albeit in a fragmentary fashion and without proper access to the full context of these debates.

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[673] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition.*

CONCLUSION

During a roundtable discussion devoted to the state of Soviet art criticism in the late 1980s, several prominent artists and art historians gathered to voice their opinions and concerns.[674] Conversation between Viktor Miziano, Georgii Kizevalter, Evgeniy Barabanov and Vladimir Mironenko[675] ended with the participants unanimously admitting the presence of a crisis in the arts.[676] According to the commentators, the alarming situation stemmed primarily from the rapid influx of information fundamentally changing the status quo in art history and methodology. Multiple perspectives had appeared simultaneously after the policies of perestroika opened borders and lessened the ideological pressure of the Communist Party. Artists and art historians were astounded at the wide vista of newly available material on the historical Russian avant-garde, Stalinist art, and nonconformist Soviet art of the last three decades. Additionally they found themselves exposed to Western theories of poststructuralism and, last but not least, to the uncharted realities of the art market. The sheer amount of newly available material was intimidating at the same time that some highly coveted information remained inaccessible, such as crucial poststructuralist texts that had yet to be translated. Fragments and echoes of diverse artistic and theoretical discourses, sometimes creatively misunderstood and misinterpreted, were irreducibly entangled, making it challenging to even speak about the rapidly changing art world.

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[674] "Beseda v Kontse 80kh. Razgovor vedut E. Barabanov, G. Kizelvater, V. Miziano I V. Mironenko.[Conversation during the Late 80s.Discussion between E. Barabanov, G. Kizelvater, V. Miziano and V. Mironenko]," *Iskusstvo*, no. 6 (1990): 25-27.

[675] Vladimir Mironenko was one of the original settlers on Furmanny Lane art squat, discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

[676] "Мы с вами единодушно констатировали кризисность нашей ситуации. [Unanimously we have to admit that the crisis characterizes our situation.]" "Beseda v kontse 80kh," 27.

In my dissertation, I have addressed precisely this polyphony of conflicting ideas, styles, and worldviews rapidly pouring into the art field during the perestroika years. Recognizing from the very beginning the impossibility of confining my objects of inquiry under the rubric of a single category, I did not aim to arrive at some final definition in my analysis. Instead I examined selected paintings of the Ukrainian perestroika generation through the constellation of various theoretical models existing synchronically in the late Soviet cultural sphere.

I concentrated on the hybrid art practices of the Ukrainian perestroika painters who were educated in the academic classicism of the Socialist Realist method, but challenged their training with deformed shapes, unnatural colors, and multivalent meanings within large-scale canvases strangely resembling Western transavangardist or neo-expressionist painting. Using the painting *Cleopatra's Sorrows* (1987) (fig. 1) by Savadov and Senchenko, the first widely known example of the new trend, I explored the confusion of contemporary art critics when faced with the new phenomenon. Words like "postmodern", "transavantgarde", and "neo-expressionism" were used by Soviet critics to conceal their bewilderment and their lack of adequate vocabulary to describe art which could not be fully incorporated either into official or unofficial Soviet discourse; nor was it a mere copy of Western art. Apart from the responses of progressive Soviet critics, I have also analyzed numerous reactions from mainstream Soviet media, which were often aggressively hostile towards *Cleopatra's Sorrow* and thus contributed to its provocative success. I further discussed Neo-expressionism and Transavantgarde as two postmodern visual art currents of the 1980s, and compared some of these styles' exemplary paintings to the work of Savadov and Senchenko. Furthermore, in my second chapter I analyzed

Cleopatra's Sorrow in the context of an entire generation of young Ukrainian artists witnessing the erosion of the Socialist Realism method against the backdrop of a decomposing Soviet Union, while making fragmentary and incomplete discoveries of the Western art and theory.

My first and second chapters were devoted to the unexpected parallels of themes and visual expressions between perestroika and postmodern art, using the examples of Savadov and the Paris Commune generation.[677] The initial moment of convergence from which my analysis began was both trends' abolition of dichotomies, apart from their disparate contexts. Ukrainian perestroika artists belonged to the first generation that was not invested in the dynamic between the adversarial cultures of official and unofficial Soviet art, each limited to the themes and styles not utilized by the other. The dogma of the Socialist Realism proved doubly restrictive by also dictating the norm of unofficial art, bound to be formulated as its negative. Postmodern art, on the other hand, was engaged in dismantling the numerous oppositional dichotomies of the West, one of most crucial being the distinction between high and low culture. Postmodern artists saw the modernist norm as no less constricting than Socialist Realism, and proceeded to disrupt it through inclusion of kitsch and popular culture aesthetics. Thus, these two arts of the 1980s coincided in their transcending of the struggles that had engaged their respective predecessors.

The concept that bridged these two distant contexts was the idea of metaphor, pertinent both for Ukrainian perestroika art and for postmodern theory. Savadov and Senchenko announced that their painting *Cleopatra's Sorrow* was indebted to a

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[677] Titled after the street of the Paris Commune on which the art squat where they lived was situated.

procedure of 'super-metaphor' that allowed them to overcome the gravity of individual creativity.[678] Metaphor had been part of the official discourse on Socialist Realism since the denomination of the Severe Style as a trend within this official art method.[679] At the same time, it was developed by the group of unofficial 'meta-realist' poets, who aimed to reveal the concrete reality of metaphor with their verses.[680] Thus the Ukrainian perestroika artists engaged with the locally ingrained problem of metaphor, seeking to which advance it to a new level through their art. Metaphor as a pre-verbal and visual resemblance between two ideas was the process of releasing aesthetic pleasure from the play of incongruity and resemblance, and therefore contributed to the poetic effect of the text. Savadov and Senchenko aimed at something similar with their panting, intentionally not fully decipherable and subject to only partial explanation in contrast to programmatically comprehensible ideological messaging of Socialist Realist.

At the same time, for Postmodernism metaphor was a signal of rejuvenated interest in stylistic embellishments, connecting the contemporary theory with the Baroque epoch. For many postmodern thinkers it became clear that such qualities as artificiality, sensationalism, enhanced drama and sensual texture of painterly surfaces, and interpretative variety were features the historic Baroque shared with the 1980s[681]. By drawing on the literature on Neo-Baroque as well as on theoretical constructs developed by Ukrainian postmodern painters, I identified two main features through which I analyzed the paintings of the Ukrainian perestroika in their intersections with both Western theory and Soviet art. The first of these was the materiality of painterly surfaces,

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[678] Kovalev, "Dynamicheskie Pary."

[679] Kamensky, "Realnost Metaphory."

[680] Epstein, *After the Future*.

[681] Deleuze, *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*; Foucault, *Order of Things*; Lambert, *Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*.

accentuated with the help of the gestural brushwork combined with other types of oil marking, and connoting an exaggerated emotional state. The enhanced materiality provoked the baroque vision and embodied spectatorship as per the theories of French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann.[682] The second trait – pseudo-narration, or the seemingly story-telling structure of the painting concealing the absence or indecipherability of an actual story– appears to contradict the first. Painting immersed in the exploration of its own medium is usually not compelled to tell stories. However, the stories hinted at by Ukrainian perestroika paintings are invocations of the already told stories due to their practice of meandering citation. Similarly, the exuberant bravura of brushwork often only imitated an enhanced emotional state rather than pretending to provide access to some real emotion of the artist.

Cleopatra's Sorrows was ostentatiously artificial, calling the attention to its painterly surface with bizarre color combinations, mixture of realist and cartoon-like painterly techniques, and visible brushwork. At the same time, a vigilant woman warrior riding a tiger in a prehistoric landscape intrigued its viewers with the promise of a story but failed to provide any, being instead a highly reworked quotation of Diego Velazquez's painting *Equestrian Portrait of Prince Balthasar Charles* (1634-1635) (fig. 4). Intentionally confusing, such artwork was a puzzle for art historians, provoking conflicting and partial interpretations that actively resisted a solution. The approach I have taken in this dissertation was to analyze such artworks through these conflicting traits, revealing their inherent and deliberate contradictions. For the baroque process of

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[682] Buci-Glucksmann, *Madness of Vision.*

reconciling the opposition, I employed the Deleuzian fold.[683] I also addressed the perestroika's Janus-like nature of simultaneously being oriented towards the past and the future in connection to the artworks I discussed.

The success of *Cleopatra's Sorrow* began with its exhibition in Moscow. It was only after the painting appeared at the All-union show *Youth of the Country* (1987) and was discussed by central Soviet media that Savadov and Senchenko's artwork attained its legendary status. The next three chapters of my dissertation were devoted to the Ukrainian artists whose early career became even more intertwined with Moscow, namely to Oleg Tistol, Kostiantyn Reunov, and other artists associated with their group The Resolute Edge of National Post-Eclecticism. They not only exhibited in Moscow but lived there in the famous Furmanny Lane art squat and worked with Moscow curators such as Olga Sviblova, who helped organize their first international exhibitions. In my third chapter I described the unprecedented *First Soviet-American Exhibition* (1988) which prompted the Ukrainian artists' move to Moscow. In this chapter I also made a detour into the early formulation of the Resolute Edge's program in the Soviet military base where Tistol and Reunov served, and discussed the late Moscow Conceptualism that the Ukrainian artists encountered on Furmanny upon their arrival. My fourth chapter investigated the development of the Resolute Edge's program while in Moscow and their crucial painting of the period exploring the complex history of Russo-Ukrainian relations. In my last chapter I analyzed two Ukrainian women artists active on Furmanny: Marina Skugareva of the Resolute Edge group and Larisa Zvezdochetova, connected to the Moscow Conceptualists. In these chapters I continued to highlight the contradictory traits

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[683] Deleuze, *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque.*

of expressive brushwork and narrative structures in discussing the paintings by the Ukrainian perestroika artists also utilizing such operational concepts of this dissertation as metaphor, Baroque and decorativity. Additionally, I employed postcolonial and feminist lenses to complement my analysis, simultaneously questioning and supporting their applicability to the chosen art material.

Employing the comparative method and discussing the divergences and convergences of the Ukrainian paintings with artworks from their immediate contexts, I intended to foster a more nuanced understanding of the art of the late Soviet period. In particular, I focused on deconstructing of the dichotomy between the supposedly cold and intellectual Moscow Conceptualism and the hot and plastic Ukrainian postmodern perestroika painting. This dichotomy was the main interpretative tool through which Ukrainian painting was thus deprived of an intellectual constituent. The themes that occupied Ukrainian artists during perestroika and their time in the Soviet capital nevertheless resonate with the art produced there, while revealing important differences. Tistol in his painting *Reunification* (1988) (fig. 2) engaged the Soviet historical cliché of 'reunification' like the Russian artist Filippov, who explored the ideologeme of "Moscow as Third Rome" in his installation *Last Supper* (1989) (fig. 57). With both works contemplating the symbols of power and quoting canonical works of art (*Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt van Rijn and the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, respectively) the two share a number of features. If the analogy is extended into the ideological realm, Filippov's installation is a closed unity of the eminent symbol of power presented as a decorative pattern, while Tistol's painting is an open form engendering the symbols of a

not-yet-existing state out of everyday objects and historical references.[684] Filippov's work could be read as a demonstration of the aesthetic appeal of power symbols through comparison with the Renaissance masterpiece. Tistol's painting is not a warning about the threat of fascination with power symbols, but instead a comment on the vacuum that exists in place of those symbols from the perspective of an absent Ukrainian statehood. *Reunification* does not offer to fight the appeal of totalitarian ideology, as it is not confrontational. Instead, it aims to neutralize Soviet symbols by appropriating them and replacing them with self-generated symbols based on actual history in reconciliation with a traumatic, albeit inescapable, past and identity.

The absurdist humor of the Resolute Edge's paintings, heightened by the incongruent layering of historical associations with private stories, had its analogues in Furmanny's art production. Discussed in my third chapter, the Inspection Medical Hermeneutics group's texts, collages, and images were also strangely amusing due to their juxtaposition between the private obsessions and primitive language of the fairy-tale with a scientific poststructuralist lexicon. Yet the strategy of the two groups in dealing with symbols (whether national or ideological) differed greatly. The Inspectors from the Medical Hermeneutics group interpreted any symbols of power as symptoms of ideological illness from which they intended to heal society through an art conceived as a commentary on itself. On the other hand, Tistol and his group were products of a nascent and expected future country which did not yet have its bona fide symbols. Yet Tistol and his cohorts were especially sensitive to the facts of history, particularly that Ukraine had

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[684] By the terms "open form" and "closed unity," I refer here to the theory of Heinrich Wölfflin, who utilized the pair of Renaissance-Baroque as the two ultimate contrastive qualities in art that are constantly replacing each other as history progresses. Wölfflin's ideas were popular in Moscow conceptualist circles and might have influenced Russian critics in their comparison of Ukrainian painters to Moscow Conceptualists. See: Wolfflin, *Principles of Art History.*

been subjected to foreign rule for the last three hundred years. When Medical Hermeneutics observed the collapsing colossus of the USSR, they associated themselves with the metropolitan center, expecting to conduct their investigations into the nature of signifiers deprived of their connection to their signifieds.[685] Power symbols were treated as empty signs, the vacuous leftovers of the Soviet Union's symbolic collapse. Medical Hermeneutics appropriated these with the intention of attaining a therapeutic effect. Tistol and The Resolute Edge, on the other hand, held the position of the provincial artist-intellectual destined to work in the metropolitan center, where his nationality was denied any meaningful existence beyond stereotypes.

The painters of The Resolute Edge while in Moscow experienced an utter lack of the symbolic "location" from which they would be able to formulate their identity. Hence the task of creating such a location became paramount. They could not associate themselves with the center, yet they were disturbed by the rehearsed forms of flippant and comical depictions of Ukrainian identity produced disparagingly for imperial consumption.[686] In response to such essentializing stereotypes, Tistol and Reunov wanted to create an array of symbols which would achieve the opposite: a representation of modern Ukrainian identity that was not steeped in kitsch. Given the elements they collected to represent this identity, including fragments of pop culture or references to quotidian Soviet life, Resolute Edge's attitude towards national symbols was no less

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[685] "Soviet citizens suddenly found themselves in the sea of empty signifiers." Boris Groys, "Medical Hermeneutics: After the Big Tsimtsum," in *History Becomes Form - Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT PRESS, 2013), 164.

[686] "Рушники с орнаментом да гоголевские казаки, уплетающие галушки и вареники с вишней. Этим и ограничивается для многих представление о национальной культуре республики размером с Францию. [Embroidered towels with ornaments and Gogol's Cossacks devouring halushky and cherry dumplings. Here comes a limit to the knowledge by many of the national culture of the republic sized as France.]" Sviblova, "V poiskakh Schastlivogo Kontsa," 37.

ironic than that of Medical Hermeneutics, complementing their conscious efforts at identity construction.

After discussion of the contested applicability of postcolonial theory to Ukrainian cultural material, and painting in particular, in my fourth chapter I concluded that some postcolonial concepts could be very effectively utilized in analysis of the paintings made by the Resolute Edge group, the first such application of postcolonial theories to the material of Ukrainian perestroika painting. For example such concepts as the 'in-between' (introduced to postcolonial theory by Bhabha in his seminal "Locations of Culture") appear to have important resonance with the specificity of the Ukrainian late Soviet condition.[687] Elaborating on a Lacanian reading of the Baroque anamorphic seeing (his famous analysis of Holbein's *Ambassadors*),[688] Bhabha enunciates the Baroque figure of ellipsis to describe the procedure of in-between "where the shadow of the other falls upon itself."[689] The in-between condition forces a postcolonial subject to embody several positions simultaneously, namely those of the colonizer and the colonized. According to Bhabha, the colonized subject initially aims for indiscernibility from the colonizer, hence the stance of mimicry, but the merger could never be complete given cultural and/or racial difference. In the postcolonial condition, however, the formerly colonized subjects realize that they can neither fully return to pre-colonized identity nor effectively assume the identity of a colonizer. The difference between the postcolonial and the anti-colonial perspectives stems from the acceptance that not only is return

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[687] Given that the Ukrainian territory belongs to the imperial core which, in the opinion of such researchers as Hrytsak, means that Ukraine could not be described in postcolonial terms and that the Russian imperial myth originates there as well, also taking into consideration the two cultures' proximity and the tendency of the internal colonization by Russian Empire. See Hrytsak, "Postcolonial is not Enough."

[688] Lacan and Miller, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.*

[689] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 85.

impossible, but also that there is no need to dispense with the new facets of identity that emerged in the process of interrelation with the colonizer. "All cultural specificity is belated," claims Bhabha.[690] When Tistol prefers retaining the symbols of Soviet dominion merged with traditional Ukrainian patterns and heroes, he uncovers and accepts his cultural in-between-ness, the impossibility of erasing some parts of his identity. In his interview, the artist insists that his utilization of Soviet materiality never had any existential overtones or intention to condemn Soviet rule. "Since we were surrounded by these symbols and fragments of Soviet material reality, such as the tiles of the Khrushchev epoch – which in the mind of any Soviet citizen have clear Kafkaesque overtones, since all the administrative buildings were covered in them – my aim was to help us reconcile with such symbols, since we had to live surrounded by them," he commented.[691]

In my fifth chapter I analyzed artworks by the two Furmanny female artists from Ukraine: one Marina Skugareva, associated with the Resolute Edge group, and the other Larisa Zvezdochetova, connected to Moscow Conceptualism, effectively complicating the theoretical opposition between their respective movements. Despite not identifying as feminists, the two artists, however, engaged the same themes and styles of domestic crafts that had been reclaimed by Western feminists for the realm of high art. I explored yet another unexpected intersection between the theories and art practices of the West and of the late Soviet Union, underlining the specificity of the situation when gender equality was a part of the latter's despised official doctrine yet still not implemented in reality. The paradoxes of perestroika–its dreams of a better future coinciding with intense

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[690] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 83.
[691] My interview with Oleg Tistol by phone in November 2015.

immersion in the past–were also revealed through the feminist question. It appeared that the return to the past meant not only the rediscovery of forbidden art styles and forms but also interest in 'traditional values', including the role of women in society. Nevertheless, with my last chapter I argued for a more nuanced contextual understanding of art practices which might appear similar to Western concepts and ideas but do not fully coincide with them. Both art practices by Zvezdochetova and Skugareva on the surface level resembled those of some Western feminist artists, such as Zvezdochetova's collages of kitschy domestic objects and Skugareva's inclusion of embroidered elements into painterly canvases. Even though Ukrainian perestroika women artists shared some of the concerns of Western feminists, it is still would be incorrect to assign this label too. For example, Zvezdochetova's interest towards kitsch was not primarily dictated by its association with the feminine world but her realization of the rapid societal shift brought by perestroika and quickly destroying Soviet everyday material reality. In the case of Skugareva, her explorations of the embroidered ornaments did not happen only due her radical venturing onto the territory of high art with the decorative technique. Rather, she also employed this technique because she realized that the embroidery had become a critical device for examining the national forms of creativity during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in this chapter I resorted to some Western art historical methodology, such as Grizelda Pollock's 'Realm of the Mother,'[692] instrumental in explaining the difference between female and male nude portraiture by Skugareva.

In my dissertation I aimed to channel the interconnected paradigms of Western postmodernist critique and the nascent art criticism of the late Soviet Union undergoing a

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[692] Pollock, *Differencing the Canon,* 25.

moment of monumental change. I utilized the example of Ukrainian perestroika art to demonstrate how the perception and production of this art was affected by the network model of horizontal interactions between discrepant forms of art and distant systems of thought. The artists were reacting to the rapid changes in society by organizing alternative exhibition spaces and by probing multiple art forms against the newly discovered theories and histories. Various, often conflicting, terms and ideas shaped the art discourse shared by artists and art historians formulating their response to the decomposing Socialist Realist method and to the poststructuralist philosophy available to them in fragments and paraphrases. Their art was a product of creating misinterpretations and of filling in gaps in their knowledge, but also it was a result of the exhilarating feeling of openness and freedom previously unknown to artists born and raised in the Soviet Union.

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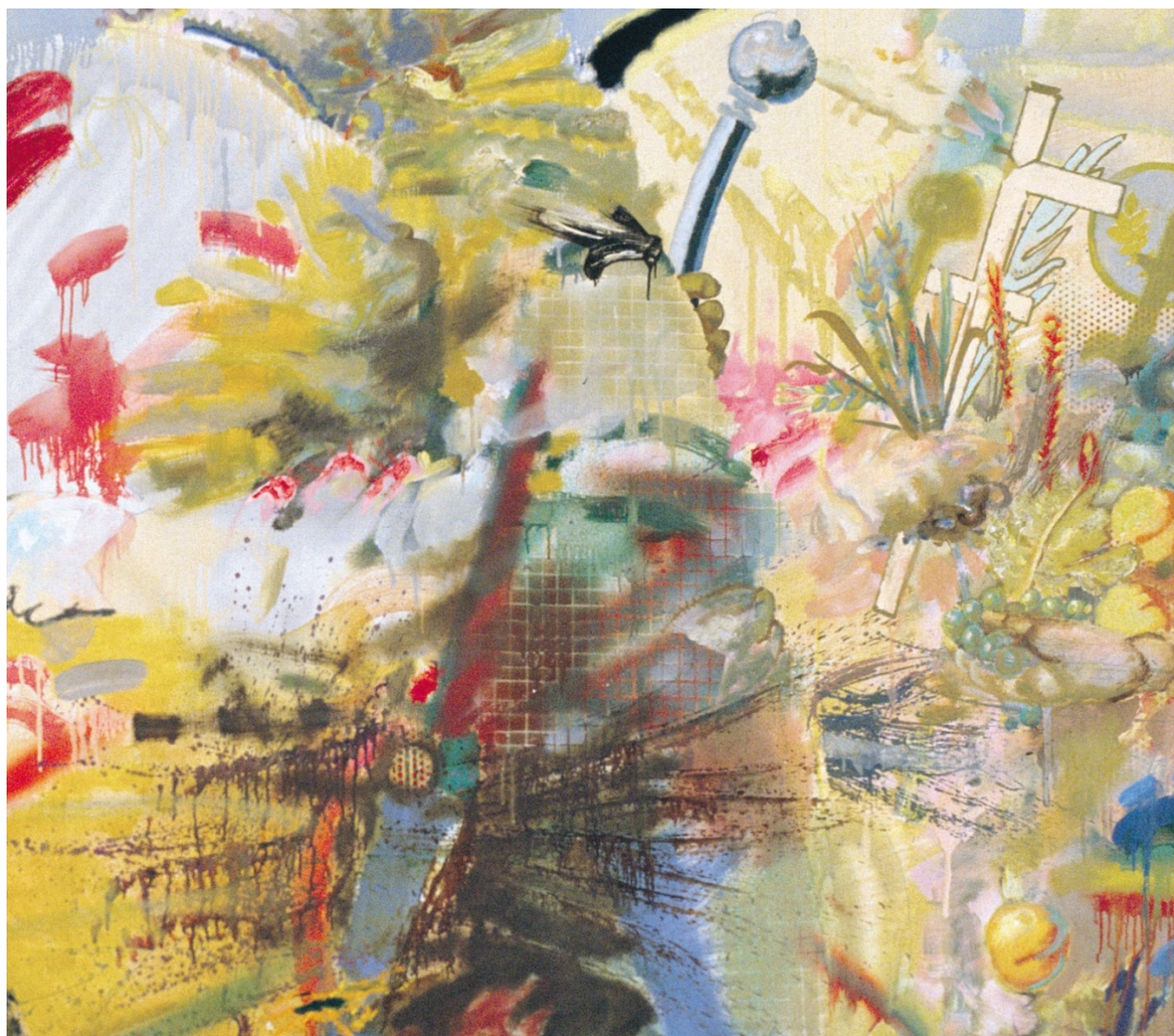
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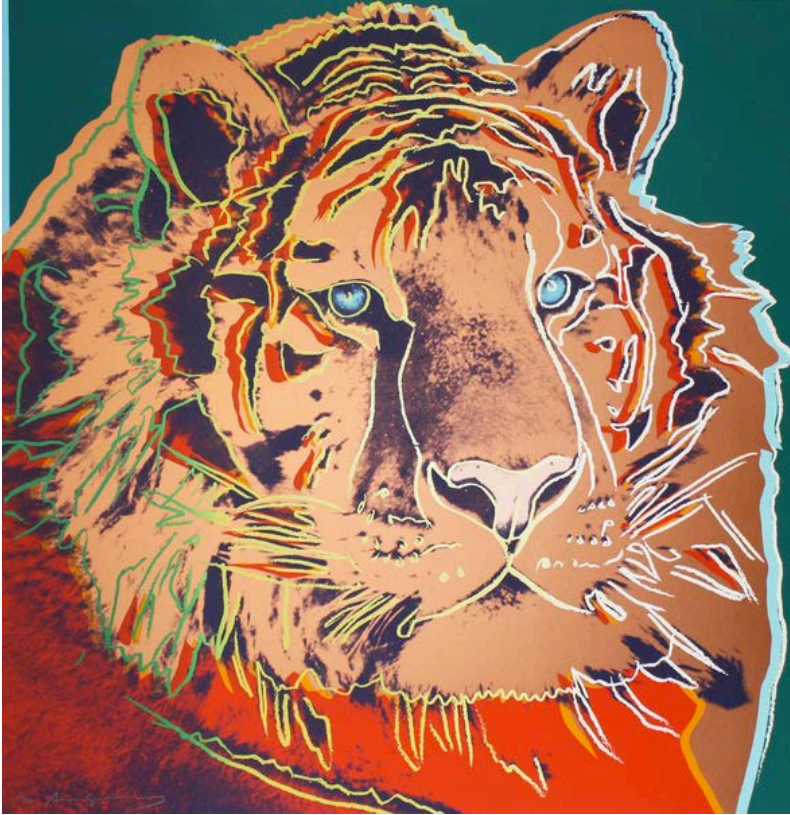
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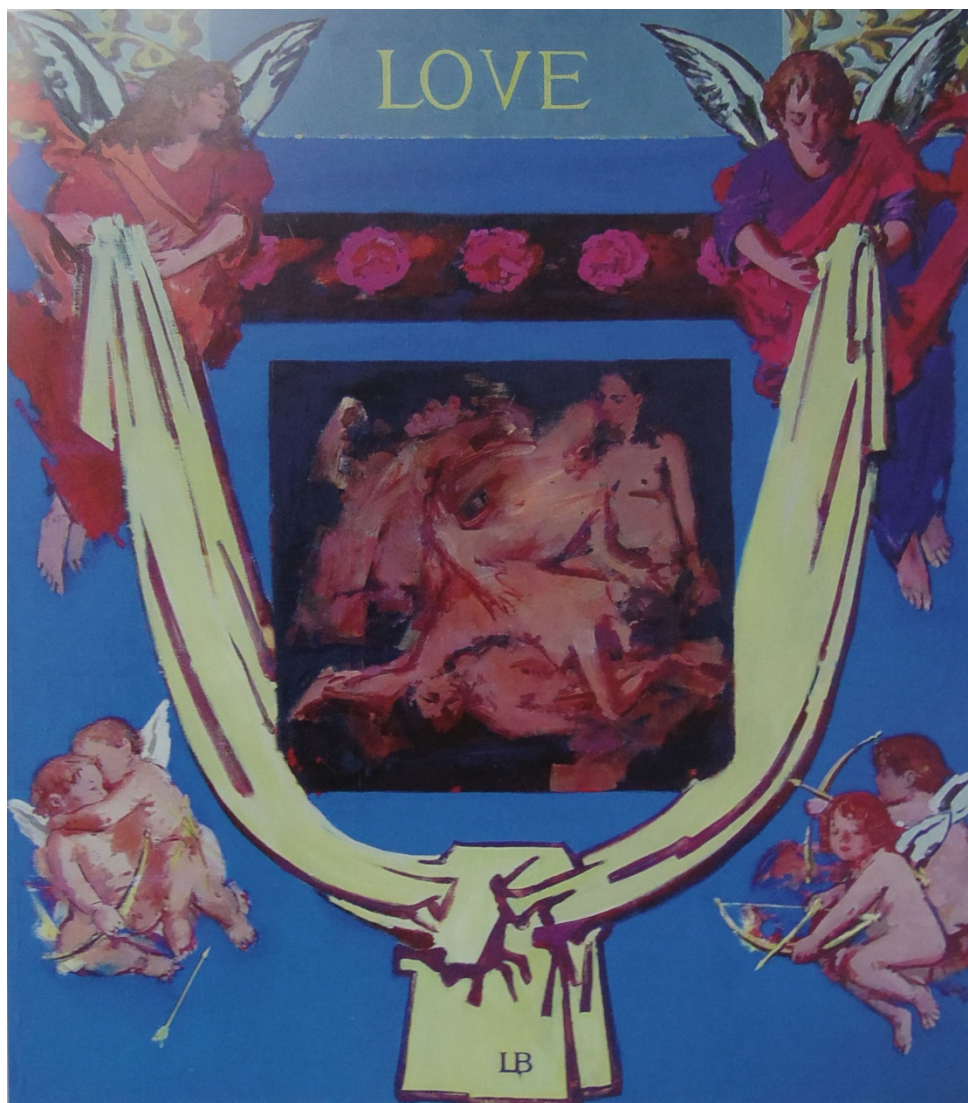
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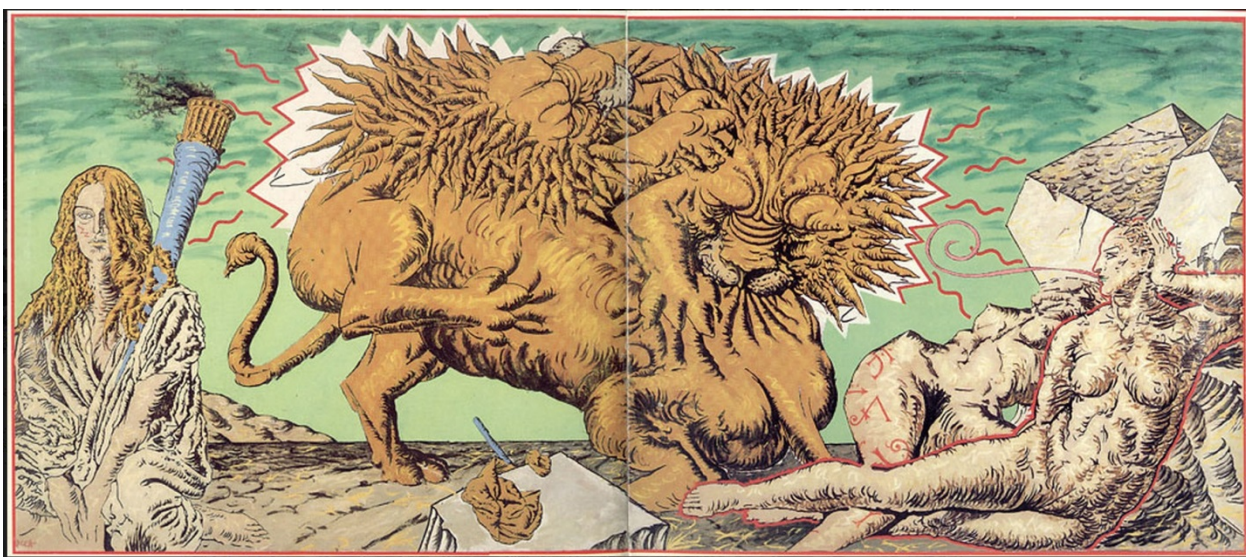
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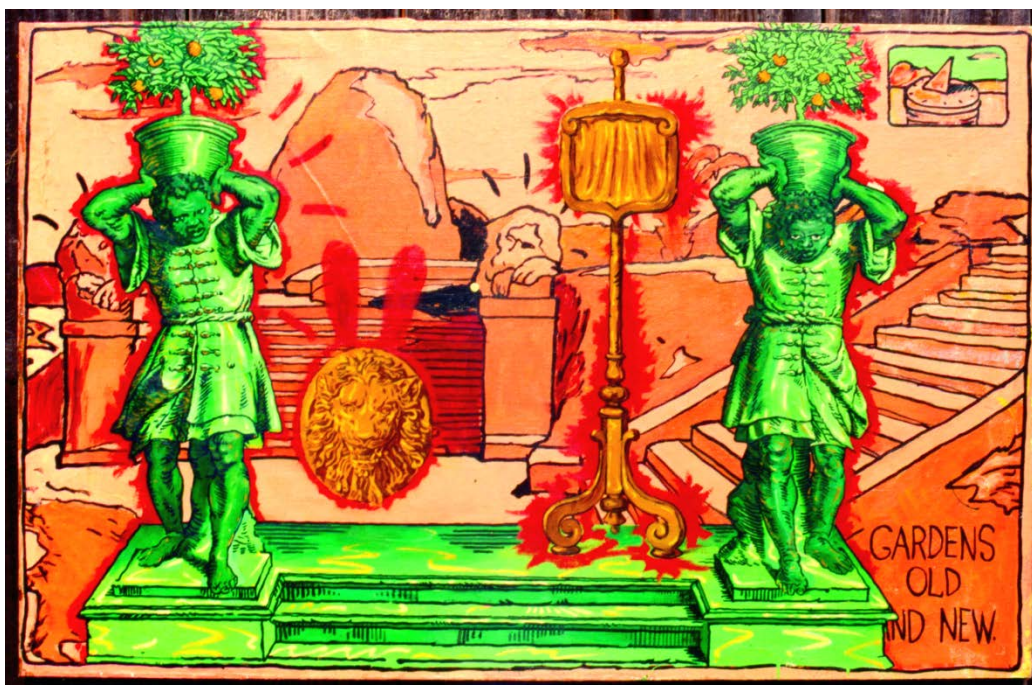
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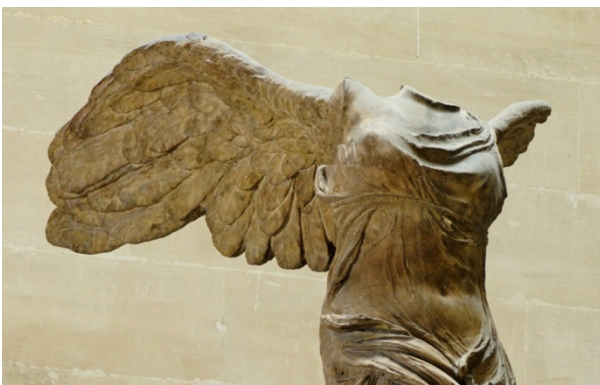
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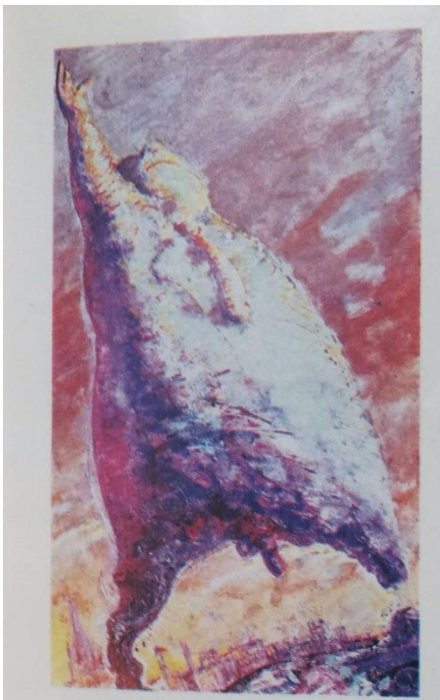
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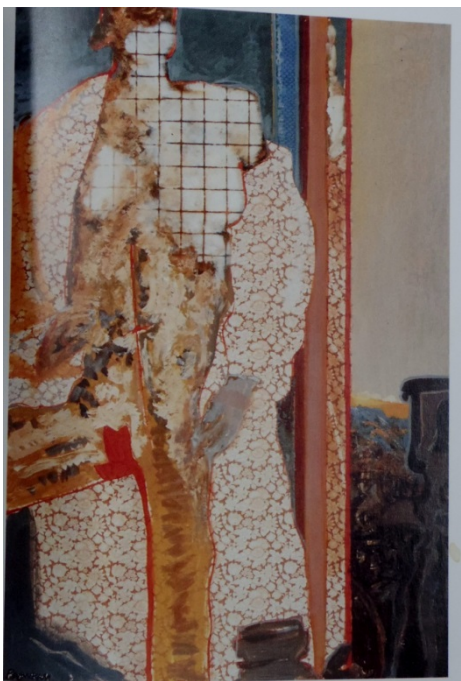
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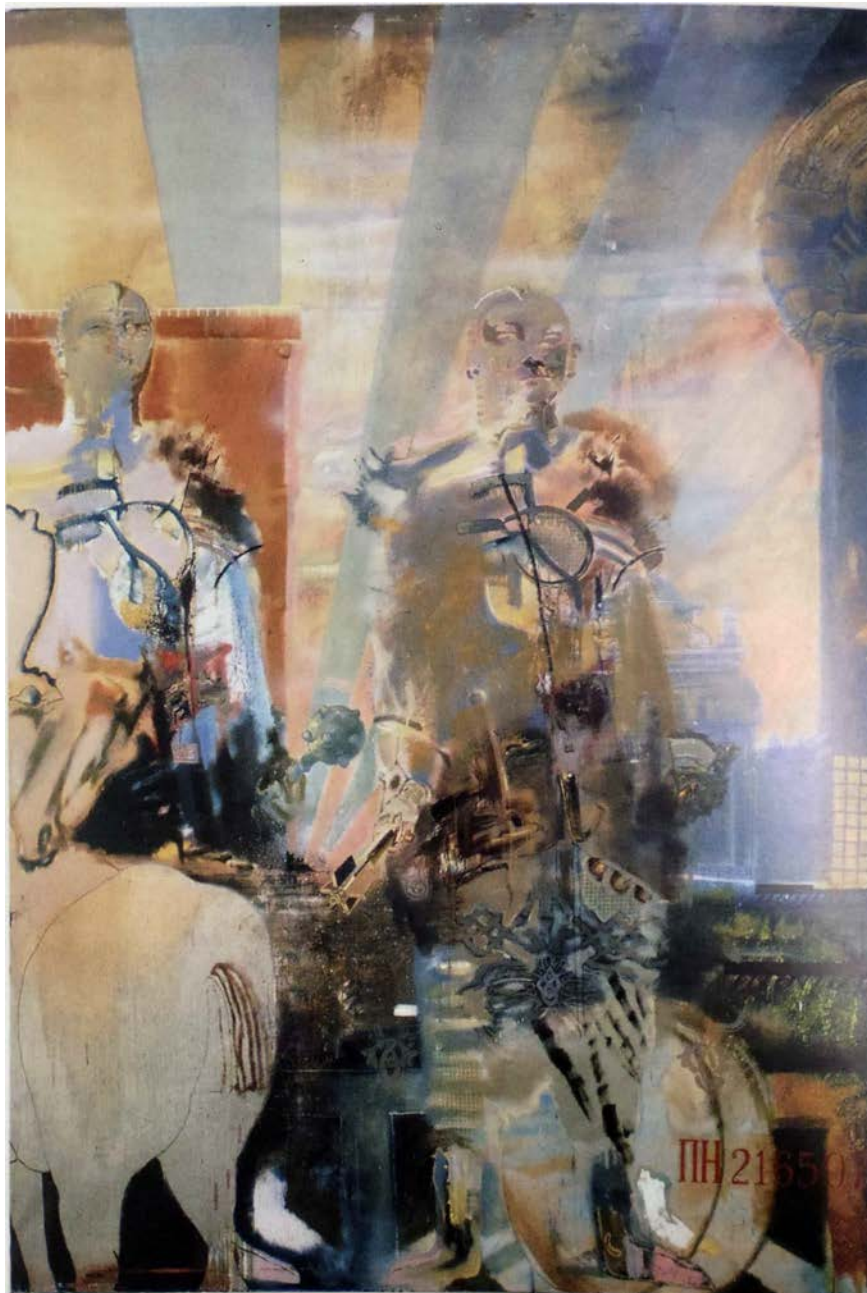
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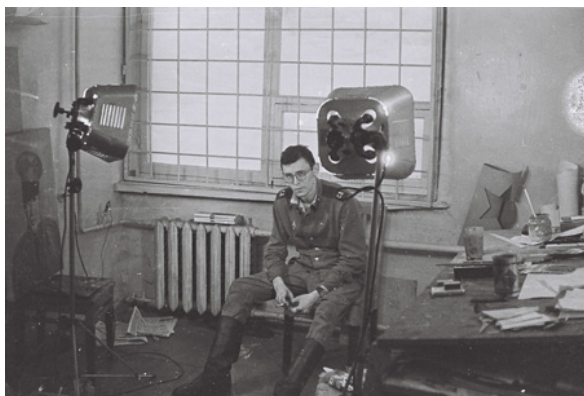
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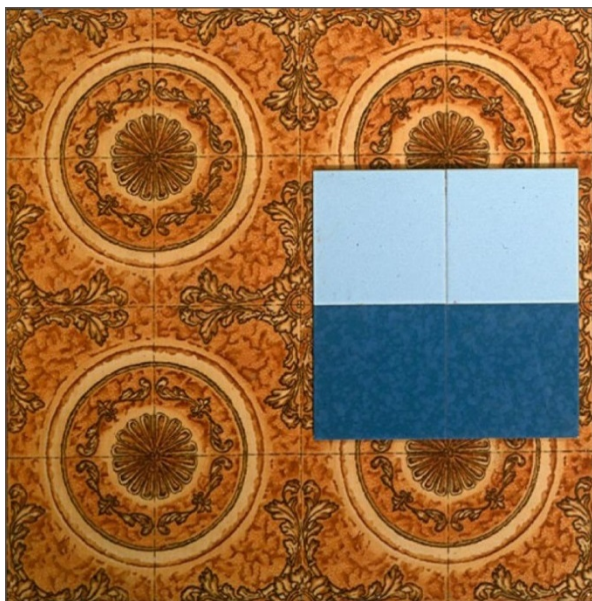
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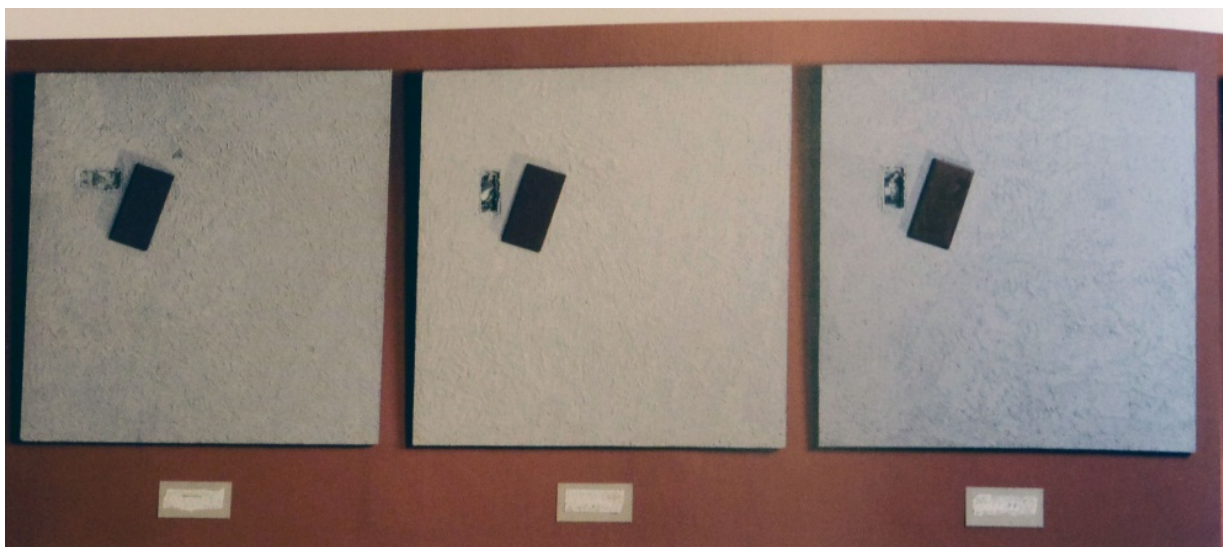
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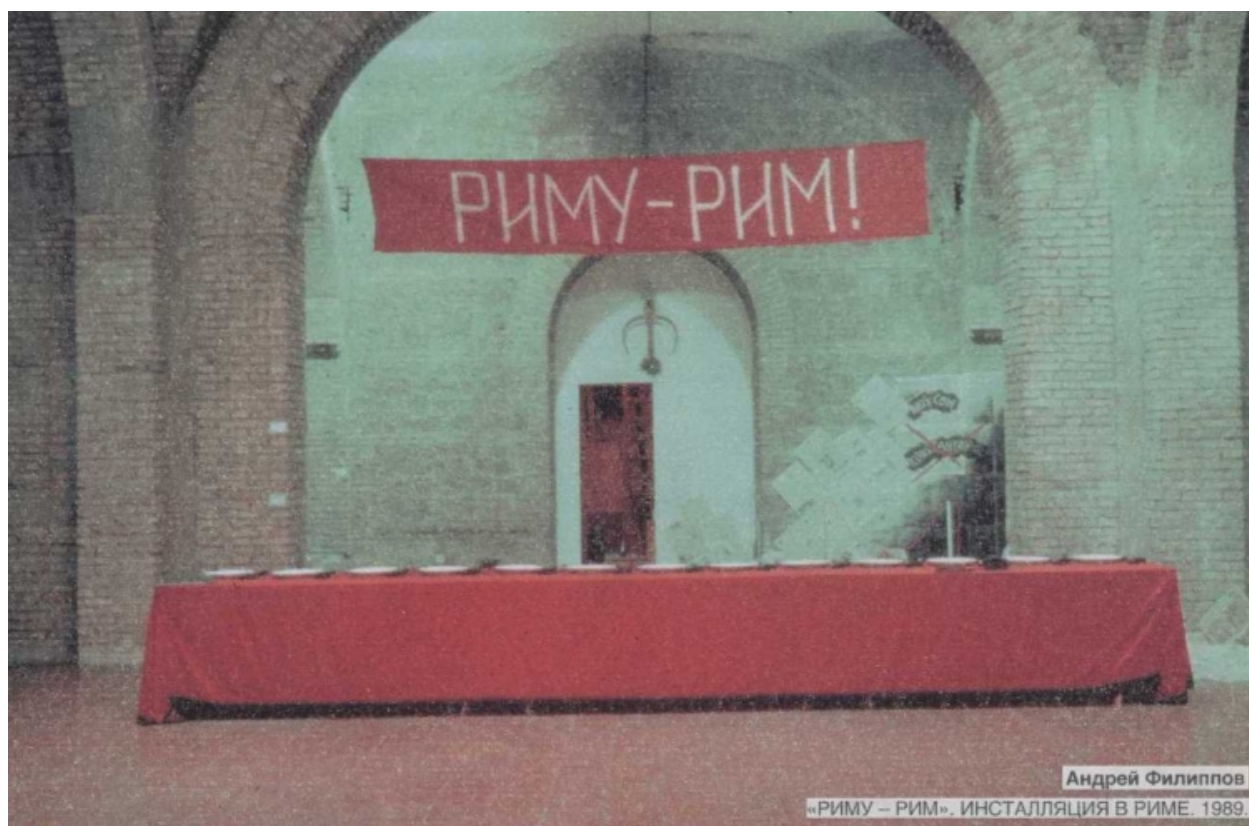
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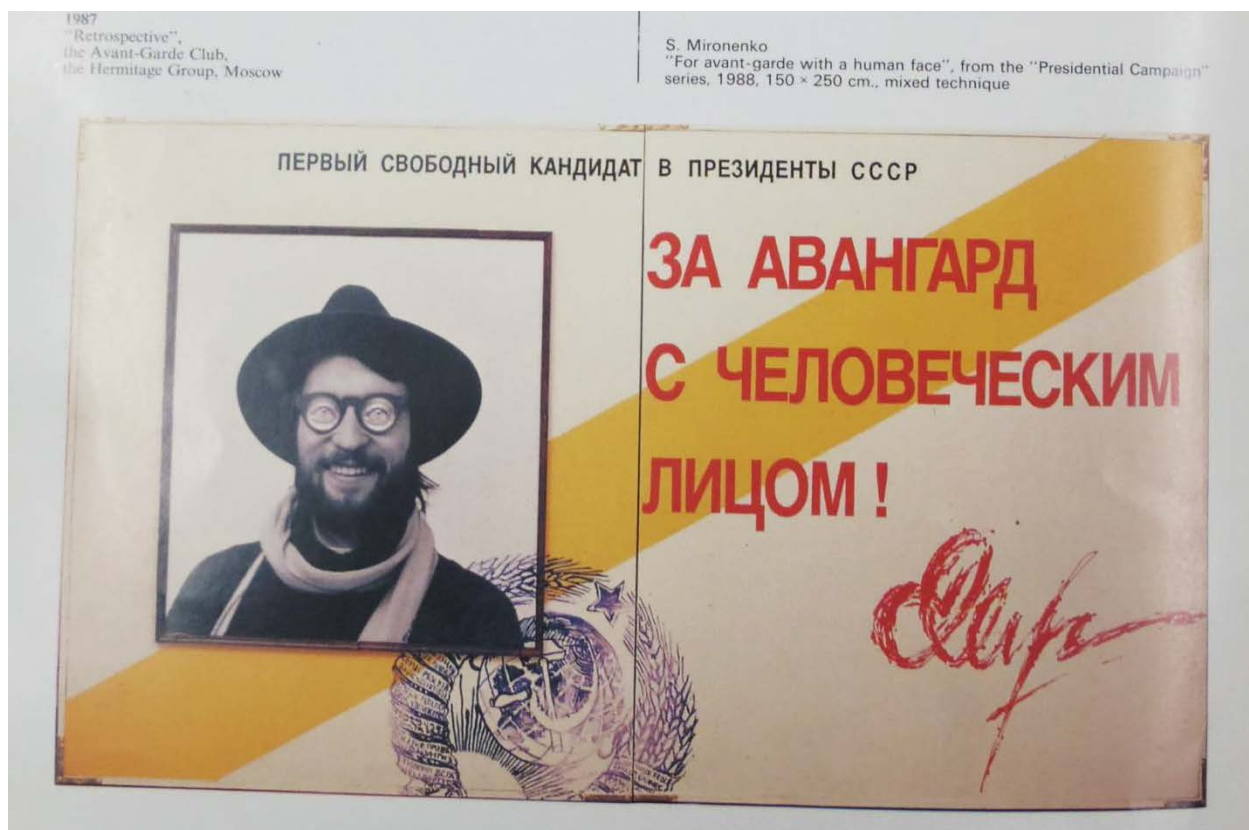
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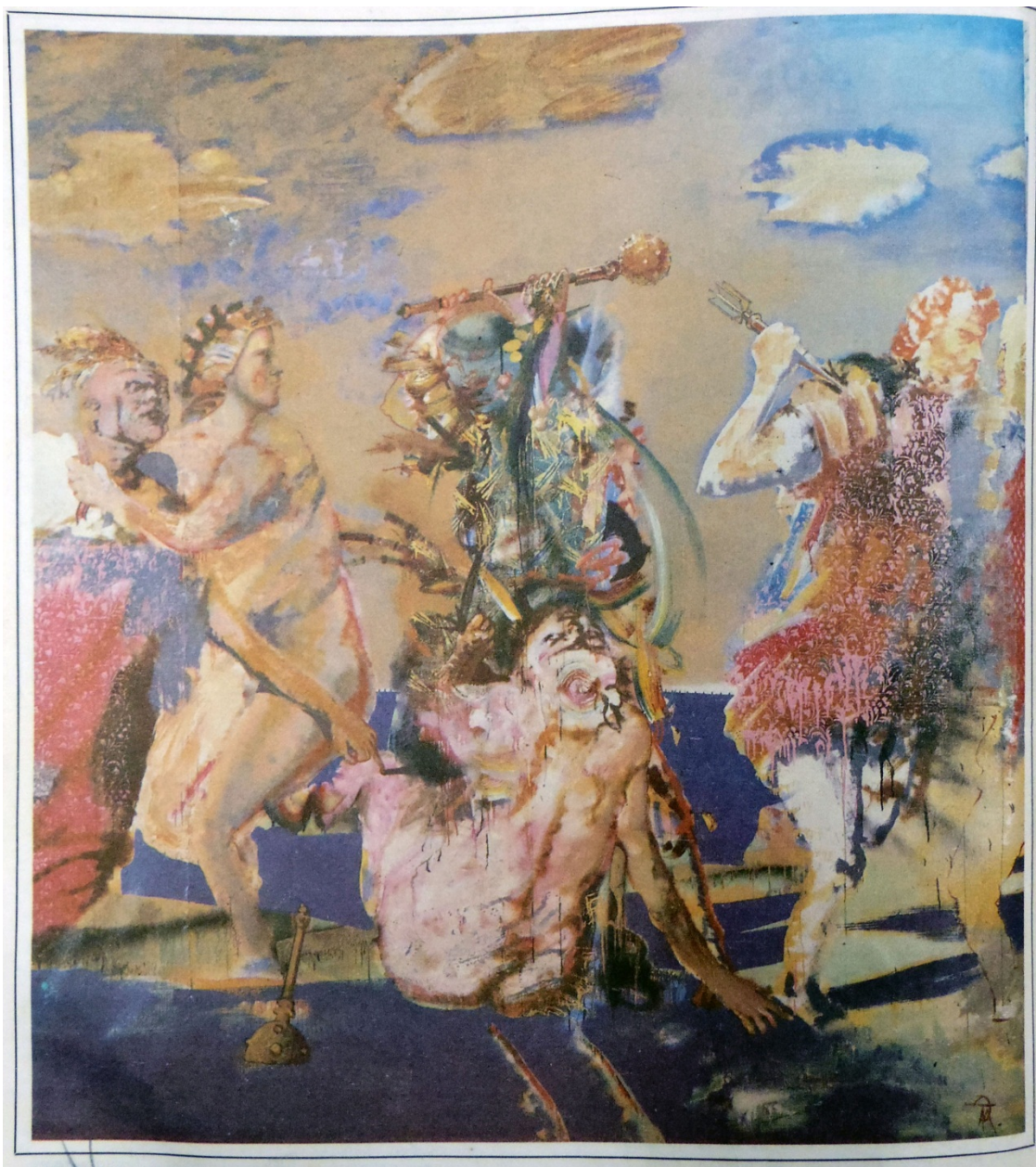
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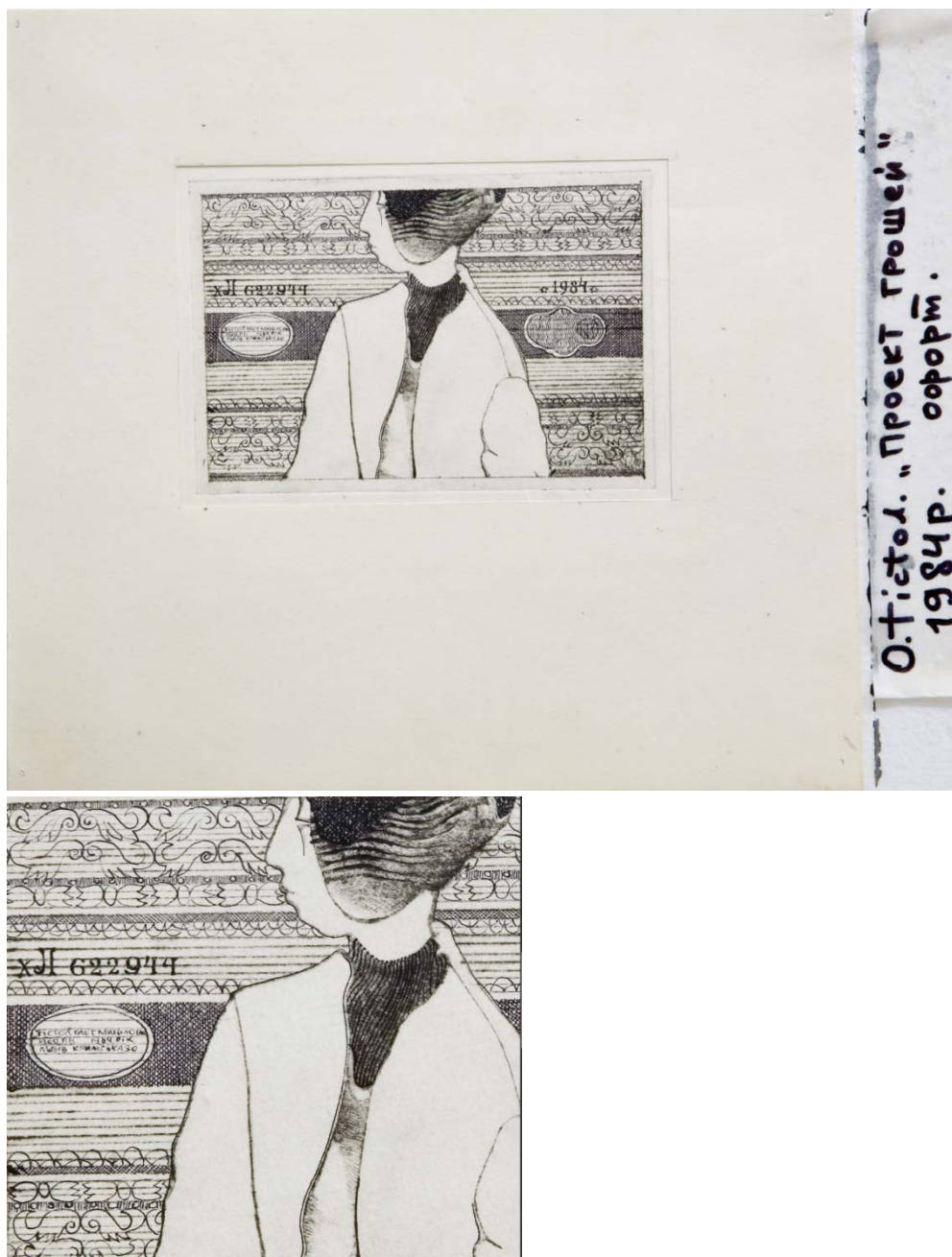
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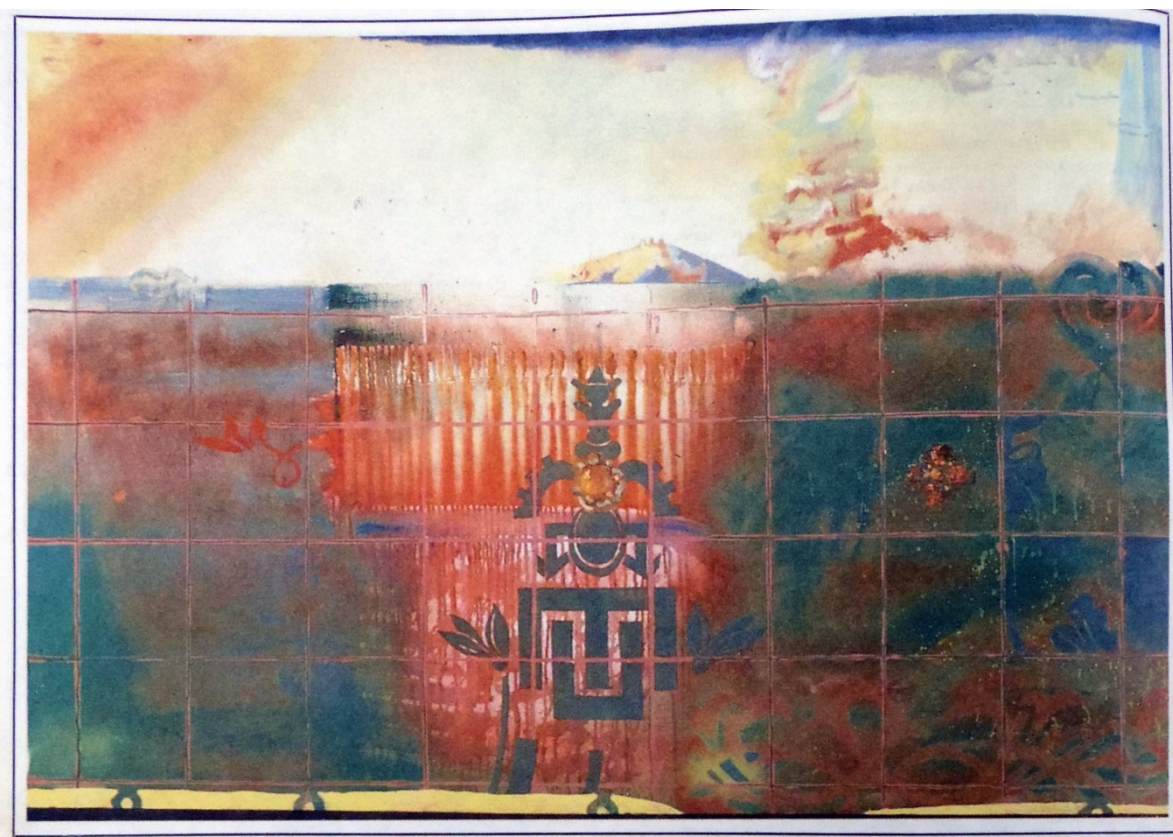
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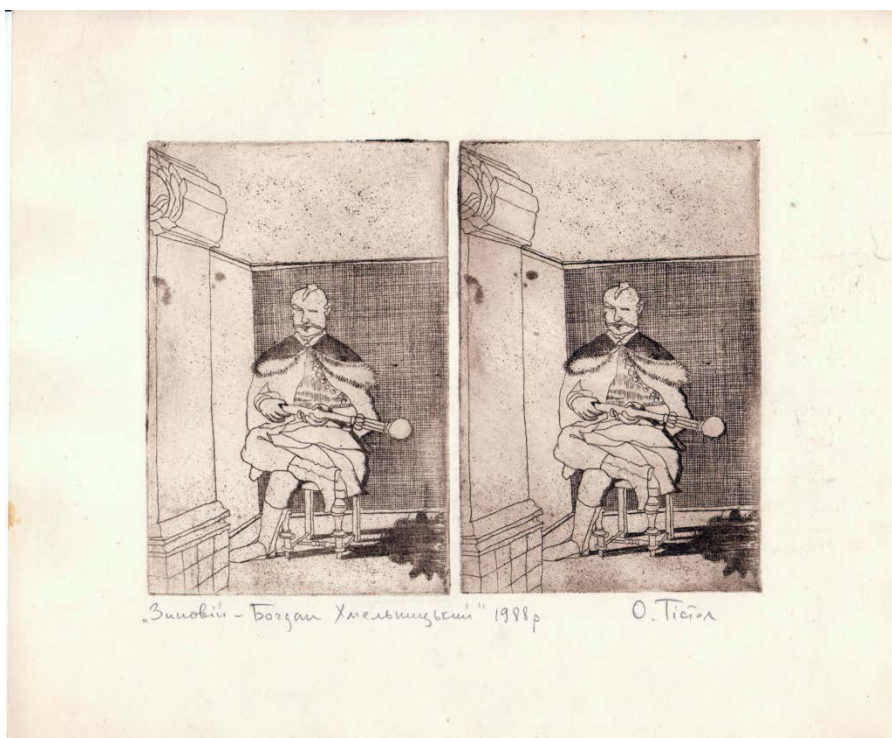
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Galba

Caracalla

Nero

Apollo

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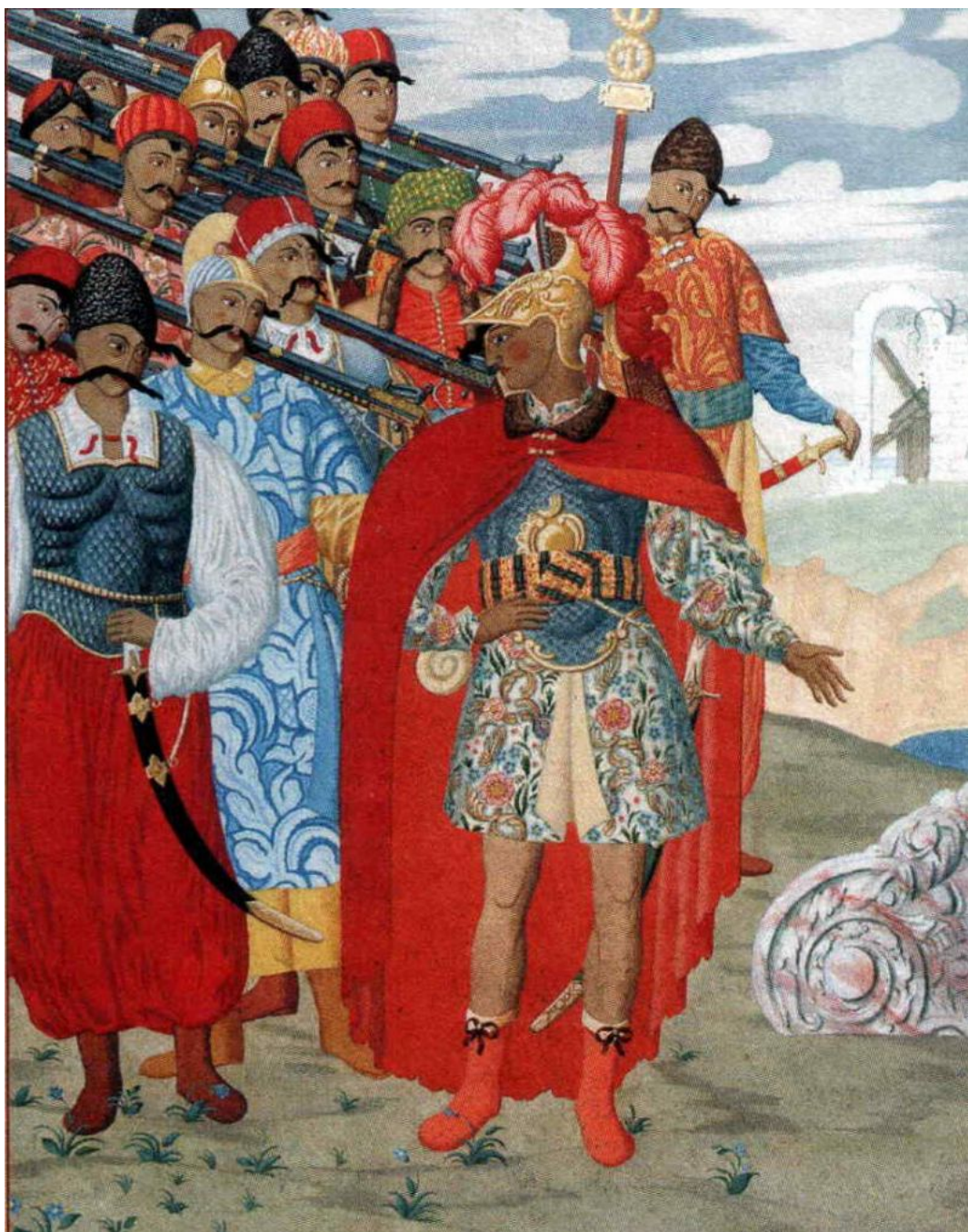
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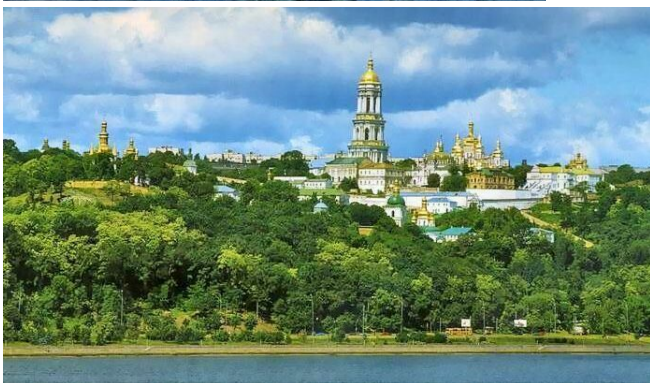
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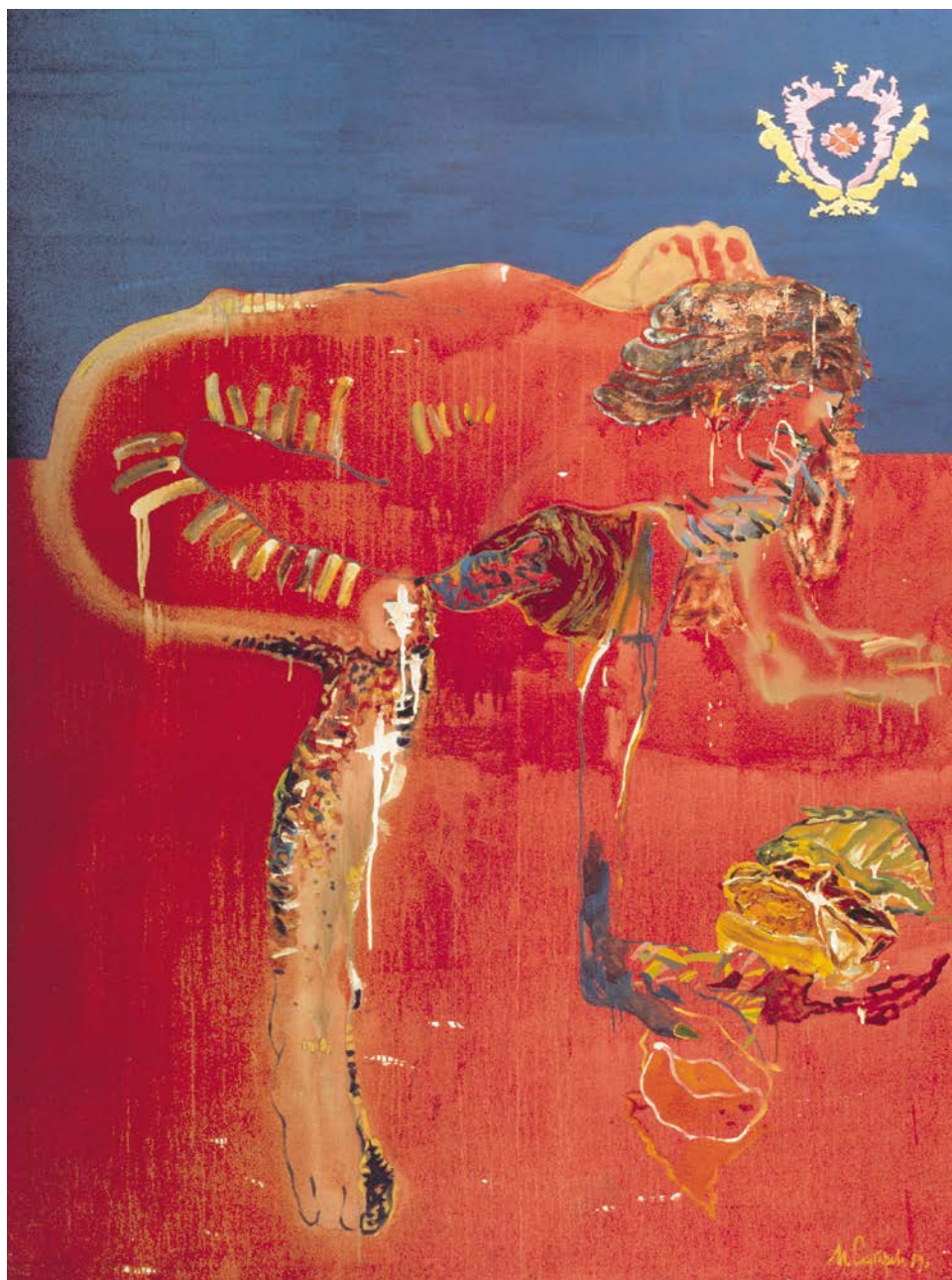Fig. 97. Larisa Zvezdochetova, *Schizo-China*. 1990, Mixed media, 120 x 100 cm.

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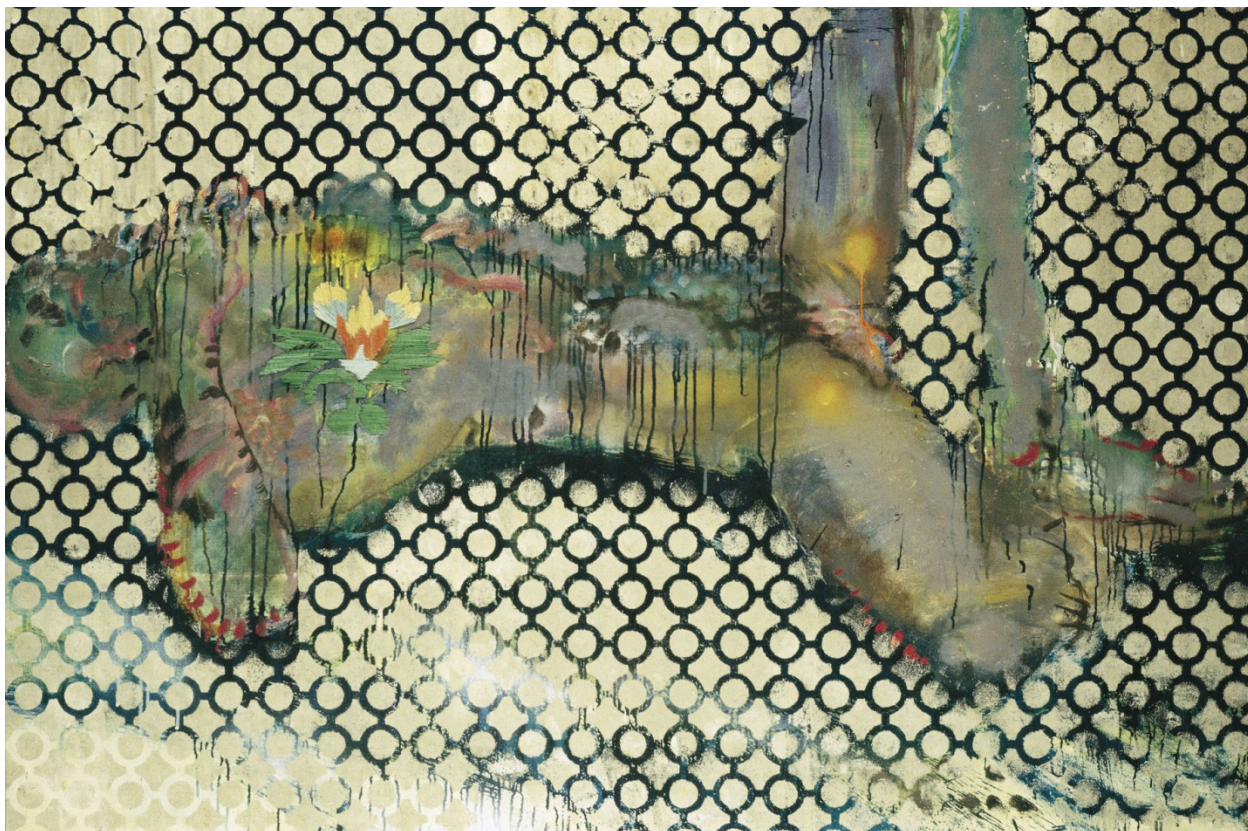
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