

EN

# PASSION AND PAINTING RUSSIAN ART SINCE 1970

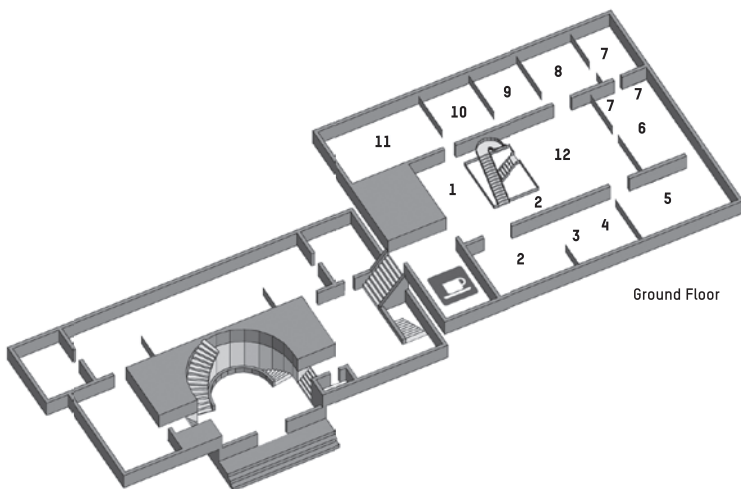
THE COLLECTION ARINA KOWNER

03.12.2011–12.02.2012

KUNST  
MUSEUM  
BERN

EXHIBITION GUIDE

# Exhibition plan



- 1 Introduction
- 2 Referencing the Russian Avant-garde
- 3 Referencing Icons
- 4 Artist in Residence: Aleksandra Koneva
- 5 The «New Artists» Group
- 6 Leningrad Neo-academism
- 7 Artist in Residence: Svetlana Mazoulevskaja
- 8 Sots Art
- 9 «Independence»
- 10 Photography
- 11 Muscovite Conceptualism
- 12 Jewish Tradition

## 1 Introduction

Arina Kowner's collection of Russian contemporary art comprises over 200 works made by 48 artists between 1970 and 2008. The focus of the collection is the period of political transition from 1984 to 1996 in the former East Bloc. It thereby presents an art-historical documentation of the unique political and social changes marking the end and birth of an era. Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and Moscow were the two centers in which artists from all over the Soviet Union came together. The exhibition reflects the different styles and approaches to art as well as the different subjects and imagery typical for both cities.

In the case of the artists who worked in Moscow we are able to perceive a certain degree of openness to the West – due to foreign diplomats – while the proximity to the Kremlin forced many artists to go underground. The Leningrad group was inspired by everyday life or officially acknowledged works of art hanging in the Hermitage Museum. Such art is often difficult to comprehend for a Western audience. To a large extent it is more provocative than art produced in Moscow and addresses subject matter such as state power, Soviet prudery, or religion.

The exhibition *Passion and Painting – Russian Art since 1970* provides the opportunity of seeing works by famous Russian non-conformist artists. They rejected the socialist realism of party doctrine and worked as underground artists, as they likewise called themselves, until 1989. Furthermore, we can now finally view the works of the Leningrad artists, who are still relatively unknown in Switzerland.

Arina Kowner comes from Russia herself and is – or was – acquainted with many of these artists. As Kowner put it herself, «acquiring a work of art is mostly linked to a personal encounter.» Correspondingly she describes her collection as a «great documentation of memories that impacted my life.» In 1988, she purchased her first painting, Igor Vishnyakov's *Feuervogel* (Firebird), in Sergei Borisov's Studio 50 A in Moscow, the legendary meeting point for underground artists from all over the Soviet Union. Arina Kowner's visit to Studio 50 A and her conversations with the artists there triggered her fascination for Russian contemporary art.

But her interest goes beyond this: Her collection contains Russian icons too, as well as a portrait of a royal from pre-revolutionary Russia and Vishniakov lacquer boxes. Additionally, international contemporary art is represented in her collection by a number of renowned artists. In the hanging of her collection at home she combines it with pieces of Russian contemporary art. Thus Robert Mangold's abstract triptych hangs over Viktor Pivovarov's still life with a samovar and silverware on either side. In her living room Russian icons are confronted by Sergei Shutov's painting *99 Namen* (99 Names), alienating the devotional objects and their kitschy aesthetic appeal. The curators of the exhibition were intrigued by the collision of Russian and international art. Therefore they decided to start up a dialogue in the Kunstmuseum Bern between Russian and non-Russian art by also showing a number of the latter works from Arina Kowner's collection.

Enthusiasm for Russian avant-garde art, which developed in the 1910s, has been prevalent in the US and Western Europe since 1960. Its radical formalism that even embraced non-representational art fascinated the West as well as its vision of new constructions of reality. However, the Soviet government was not at all impressed by avant-garde art. Nevertheless, or should we say, exactly for this reason, avant-garde art currents – and above all Kazimir Malevich and his invention of suprematism – were a key source of inspiration for Soviet artists who sought alternatives to state-prescribed socialist realism. According to Malevich, the artist was not to imitate nature but instead create like nature. He continued by saying that art can only keep up with constant progressive developments in the world and in life if it models its individual and independent forms in the same way nature creates.

Already in the late 1960s, **Edik Steinberg's** works articulate themselves by means of a geometric language, recalling Malevich's and El Lissitzky's suprematist pictures. As a Russian Orthodox, Steinberg was especially fascinated by the spiritual dimension of Malevich's works.

**Vladimir Nemukhin**, too, reveals the impact of suprematism in his works, such as in his *Komposition mit Fahne* (Composition with Flag). In fact, his art teacher had been Malevich's assistant. With the playing cards that crop up as figural motifs in otherwise abstract works, Nemukhin points out another source of influence. The cards reference the avant-garde group of artists «The Jacks of Diamonds» who, above all, explored the avenues opened up to art by cubism.

**Igor Makarevich** depicted four figures in his series *Malevich-Makarevich Buratino*. They strongly remind us of the suprematist coloration in Malevich's pictures of farmers and people playing sport. Makarevich fits his faceless figures out with headdresses and pointed noses, thereby alluding to Aleksey N. Tolstoy's *Buratino*, a Soviet version of *Pinocchio*. The series is an ironic commentary on Soviet propaganda that did not even stop at infiltrating characters in children's books.

With its geometrical and technological principle of design using mostly large fields of color and basic geometric forms, constructivism likewise has a great influence on contemporary Soviet Russian art.

**Boris Bich** availed himself of a pictorial language that looked to constructivism and op art for inspiration, oscillating between geometric abstraction and obvious figuration. Thus after a closer inspection of his seemingly abstract composition *И-16 (AK)* we begin to recognize the elements of an airplane.

Since 1975 **Francisco Infante** has been creating what he terms «artefacts,» often integrating materials with reflecting surfaces. Artefacts are geometric objects that Infante embeds in nature, considering the interplay between nature and artefact to be an «art event,» which he records in photographs. His interest is absorbed especially by the relation of technology to nature and humans. His geometrical visual language positions him as a follower of suprematism and constructivism.

**Michail Chernyshev's** art was not only inspired by suprematism and constructivism but by contemporary Western art too. According to Chernyshev, his painting *Geometrie auf Schwarz* (Geometry on Black)

presents his response to Ad Reinhardt's black paintings and to Malevich's *Schwarzem Quadrat* (Black Square).

Following constructivist principles of design to a large extent, **Leonid Borisov's** paintings oscillate between representational and non-representational abstraction. But Borisov's art is likewise related to conceptual art and minimalism. Two of the key representatives of those movements are: **Sol LeWitt** and **Robert Ryman**. The square plays a prominent role in both these artists' work. As far as LeWitt is concerned, the concept is the most important part of the artwork and not the work itself, whereas Ryman attaches great importance to the materiality of his entirely white squares.

**Babakhan Badalov «Babi»** has a special standing within the Lenin-grad art scene because he mixes Western art elements with those stemming from Islamic culture in his abstract paintings. The luminously colored abstract compositions display Babi's playful treatment of imaginative forms and ornaments. The latter betray the oriental and Islamic background of the artist who was born in Azerbaijan. Babi points out the much hoped for liberalization of art after the fall of Communism in his abstract painting *Europäisierung* (Europization) from 1989.

The Muscovite **Georgi (Gosha) Ostretsov** combined in his 1998 painting abstract, geometrical and figural elements into a creation that resembles a head. Further elements remind of us of different objects, such as a tree. Ostretsov's works with their glaring colors and reduced vocabulary of forms make us think of comics or avant-garde collages.

## Referencing Icons

In the years following Stalin's death in 1953, Polish art began to reject socialist realism. In its place artists explored approaches to art that continued on from the abstraction of the Russian avant-garde. **Stanisław Fijałkowski** and **Stefan Gierowski** are prominent representatives of such a style. Gierowski's artistic concern is to explore the qualities of space and search for light by applying the material of paint onto canvas. Whereas Gierowski conclusively gave up realistic painting, Fijałkowski engaged with the interface between abstract form and representation in his work. Since the early 1960s, his painting and prints display his interest in surrealist poetics, metaphorical expression, and geometrical abstraction. In the 1970s he additionally grew fascinated by Cabbala and numerology.

Early in the 20th century, a number of Russian avant-garde artists sought inspiration from Russian Orthodox icons.

A Russian Orthodox icon is a devotional image traditional to Russia since the Middle Ages. The icon is not merely a representation of the Godhead but likewise embodies the divinity on earth, analogous to the incarnation of Christ. It is therefore a holy object and has divine powers. Believers come closer to the divine by viewing icons. The *Mandylion Icon* from Arina Kowner's collection portrays the Archangel Michael holding the cloth with Christ's face, a miraculous icon not made by human hands. From time immemorial certain icons were believed to perform wonders. An example is the *Icon of the Virgin from Kazan*. Allegedly it was through the Virgin Mary's intercession that the Polish troops could be expelled in 1612. Icons do not attempt to represent reality but instead produce counter-images of reality expressing spiritual notions. Icons share specific formal features: schematic forms and figures, two-dimensional representation, frontal depiction of saints without light and shade effects, and the symbolical use of color and gold. The intellectual content and the principles of representation used in icons made them a source of inspiration for Russian avant-garde artists at the beginning of the 20th century, as in the case of Kazimir Malevich.

Still today the icon has not lost its fascination. In a series of works in the 1970s, **Edik Steinberg** used the so-called «Byzantine» or «inverse perspective» and thereby referenced the pictorial concept of Russian Orthodox icons. The artist pointed out the spiritual content of his art as well, which expresses his faith using Christian symbols

(the Cross, circle, triangle).

**Grisha Bruskin** assembled figures in the 1993 gouache to which he added traits from the Jewish religion and tradition, but included demons and angels too. The work belongs to the *Alphabet* series in which Bruskin engaged with the Hebrew alphabet and numerology. The style of representation has no precedents in Jewish art in Russia, but it is strongly reminiscent of Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendars in which believers find a catalogue of the saints for each day of the month – with the figures lined up in longitudinal pictorial fields, one over the other, ordered chronologically. Also the painting *1900 – 2000 (Exodus)* by the Bolivian artist **Norha Beltrán** brings such calendar icons to mind. By doing so she is addressing prevalent 20th-century problems of forced displacement of ethnic and religious minorities and resulting migration.

**Sergei Shutov** developed a kind of Russian pop art in the 1980s. *99 Namen* (99 Names) presents 29 faces of the Virgin between white- and-golden crosses and colored or black forms. By fragmenting the icons and repeating the face 29 times, Shutov ironically depletes the Orthodox image of the Virgin of her cultic semantics.

The St. Petersburg artist **Vladislav Mamyshev «Monroe»** is a travesty artist and parodies icons from politics and show business in his artwork and performances. The *Selbstporträt als Karl Marx* (Self-portrait as Karl Marx) is evocative of a over-elaborately decorated icon with the silver frame and gold crown. But it equally resembles a traditional coffin or funerary portrait with highly realistic, almost photographic representation, artificial flowers, and dried palm leaves. With the

collage *Katze* (Cat) Mamyshev alludes to Stalin as the «big tomcat.» The artist repeatedly depicts himself as Marilyn Monroe, whose name he adopted as a pseudonym. In this way he questions ideals of femininity or masculinity that were established as part of Soviet culture and have survived in Russia to this day.

**Andy Warhol** literally presented Joseph Beuys as an icon of art: The precious diamond dust and the frontal, symmetrical view of the portrait recall the design principles of traditional icons.

**Svetlana Mazoulevskaja** adopted a similar approach in her portrait of the Russian space pioneer Yuri Gagarin. Yuri symbolized the optimism and thirst for discovery in Soviet times and was, consequently, a popular public figure and greatly admired.

## Artist in Residence: Aleksandra Koneva

**Aleksandra Koneva** was born in 1972 in Cimkent, Russia, and studied art education at St. Petersburg University. In 1995 she spent a semester as a visiting student at Kunsthochschule Düsseldorf. Since 1996 she has been working in Berlin as a freelance artist. Koneva always focuses on herself in her work, is always engaged with her own «ego.» As triptychons, her *Retablos* look like retables that can be opened or closed. On each of the middle panels the artist presents herself dressed as the Virgin Mary or a patron saint. The altars are brightly colored and decorated with many everyday items and pop-culture objects. Koneva's art strategy is an ironical confrontation with the religious cult image.

Due to the generous support of the GegenwART Foundation, Aleksandra Koneva was able to produce an altar here in Bern especially for the Russian Art exhibition. Here too she has produced an ideal image of herself as a saint in the triptych retable *Madonna mit den 40 Dolchen* (Madonna with the 40 daggers).

The object *Petersburger Kleid* (Petersburg Dress) reveals mysterious photographs of St. Petersburg, hidden behind small doors. In this artwork the artist explores aspects of her relationship to her Russian origins and where she was born. In the object *Das rote Nadelkissen* (The Red Pincushion) Koneva portrays a nude under a heart-formed pincushion and thereby addresses clichés of femininity with playful undertones.

## The «New Artists» Group

Groups of artists that emerged in Leningrad in the 1980s differed greatly from those of the preceding generation. The most striking thing about them is that they not only were active in the field of the pictorial arts but also in theater, music, and film. In 1982, **Timur Novikov** founded the «New Artists» group, together with around twelve further key members. The group was engaged with the idea of finding new impetus for future art, for an art that was still in the making. They sought audacity in painting as well as new approaches and forms. The art propagated by the «New Artists» was an attack against total state control over art as well as an attack on the hierarchical nature of the fine arts and their claims to elitism. The group played ironically with Soviet cultural images, and this was especially true in the case of Timur Novikov. His piece *UdSSR – Land der Sonne* (USSR – Country of the Sun) comprises a truncated Soviet flag. Arina Kowner had given the artist the flag, which he then augmented with his name, a title, and an ideal image of the sun and a tree. By this he created a parody of Soviet «imagery of contentment» in which the sun symbolizes untroubled life in the ideal Socialist city. The megalomania of the Soviet Union has been reduced to absurdity. The work *Flug in die Unendlichkeit* (Flight to Infinity) illustrates, on blue fabric, an almost invisible small cloud and an airplane. It is a symbol for the ambience of change and the hopes of artists in 1989.

The airplane symbolizes freedom in a seemingly endless sky also in a watercolor by **Oleg Kotelnikov**. This artist was another of the founding members of the «New Artists». His watercolors are both delicate and highly reduced to only a few formal elements. One of the water-

colors here presents different animals in fields of color arranged one over the other; another illustrates people indigenous to the Arctic while working together with reindeer. In their minimalist style of representation, the hieroglyph-like representations are reminiscent of **Joseph Beuys'** lithographies of stags and sleds in Kowner's collection. The highly symbolic skies and infinite expanses characteristic for Novikov's and Kotelnikov's work are flanked by two large-format works by **Alois Lichtsteiner**. This Swiss artist likewise leads our eyes to wander into the far-off distance.

**Vadim Ovchinnikov** cooperated closely with Kotelnikov on numerous book projects. His painting *Das Leben der Pflanzen* (The Life of Plants) presents an oversized toadstool on a yellow-orange background. Toadstools are popular subject matter in the Leningrad art scene and can, among other meanings, be understood as references to the artist group «Toadstool».

This particular species of mushroom crops up in the work of the «New Artist» **Vladislav Gutsevich** too. His painting *Pansionat* (Guest House) depicts a lake landscape with an island in its center where we can see a vacation center. The sun's rays – as a symbol of the omnipresence of state power – overarch the landscape. The seven swans allude to the practice of showing *Swan Lake* on TV or playing the music on the radio whenever one of the party elite died. The naive painting is a parody of the Soviet utopia of socialist fulfillment.

**Inal Savchenkov** as well responds critically to Soviet symbolism with comic-like, somewhat surreal counter-worlds. His painting from 1992 presents a yellow mythical creature with red eyes that rises

over a white figure lying on a sofa. On the flat background the artist wrote: «Sun is life, sun is death, sun – give us warmth and light.» In Soviet mythical language Stalin was the sun, the symbol of power – that can foster life or be deadly.

**Sergei Bugaev «Afrika»** was a member of the «New Artists» too and responded to the soviets' use of imagery. In his artwork *Aphasie* (Aphasia) he alienated the Soviet flag by embroidering two brains on it. This articulates the loss of speech through an impairment of the brain. In philosophy it likewise means to refuse to make judgments. In his Anti-Lissitzky series, Bugaev transformed and travestied El Lissitzky's avant-garde propaganda poster from 1920. The 16 enamel plates showing photographs of important 20th-century Russian historical events stem from the installation *Mir – Made in the XX Century*, and can be understood as a farewell to the Communist era.

The «New Artist» **Andrei Khlobystin** tells the story of paradise anew in his screen *Der Sündenfall* (Original Sin). By doing so he ironically disrupts the narrative by not only allowing a Lincoln biography – as symbolic for democratic values – to fall down but also integrates a radio and amplifier tube as relics from Soviet times.



## Leningrad Neo-academism

Right from the beginning of his career **Timur Novikov** was one of the founders of the «New Artists» group and part of the Leningrad underground scene. However, after the sobering experience of a 1989 sojourn in Europe he turned his back on modernism and aspired to classical academic principles of beauty in his art. In 1993 Novikov founded the New Academy for Fine Arts and thereby marked the birth of Leningrad neo-academism, which was largely oriented toward 19th-century academic art. The break with modernism and his commitment to Orthodox religious views had a great impact on Novikov's art. For textile works he now chose fabrics customarily used in religious ceremonies, on which he places photographs of Russian saints and martyrs in the center field.

The Muscovite sculptor **Aleksej Blagovestnov** realized the sculpture *Anna Karenina* using the classical proportions of the human body. The title is the same as that of the famous novel in which Leo Tolstoy addressed the subject of marriage and morals among the 19th-century Russian nobility. Blagovestnov was very taken by the art of the Renaissance after discovering its beauties during a sojourn in Europe. It became an important source of inspiration for the artist.

A co-founder of *arte povera*, **Giulio Paolini**, likewise integrated elements from classical and ancient Greek and Roman art into his works. For example, he referenced a female figure from a Pompeian fresco.

**Bella Matveeva** is considered one of the leading representatives of Leningrad neo-academism. In her painting *Nachtwache* (Night Watch) she portrays a male nude, a dog, and two dead pheasants together.

She adopted the title from Rembrandt's famous painting. Her painting clearly illustrates the selective and ironical handling of subject matter taken from the classics of art. The artist combines the portrayal of the nude with two dead pheasants – the latter being common motifs in 18th-century still lifes. The paintings *Madame Butterfly* and *Kallipiga* are self-portraits of the artist. The decorative elements and the simplified depiction of the female nude betray that Matveeva not only sought inspiration in 19th-century academism but was additionally influenced by *jugendstil* and art deco.

**Oleg Maslov** was a teacher and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts. He executed the two abstract paintings with geometric forms exhibited here before he radically broke with abstraction. Since 1992 he pursues classical subject matter with a romantic and ironical bent. In the 1992 painting he merged the classical subject of the *Drei Grazien* (Three Graces) with Rembrandt's *Danaë*, but depicted the latter mythological figure from the back. The Graces all wear black patent leather shoes. Thus the classical motif is imbued with a modern aesthetic we attribute to pinups. Maslov's painting has been paired with **Markus Raetz's** diptych *AVE EVA*, which is based on a pinup of Marilyn Monroe. The artist practically turns the pinup into a cult object by transforming it into the first mother of humankind with the title *AVE EVA*.

## Artist in Residence: Svetlana Mazoulevskaja

**Svetlana Mazoulevskaja** was born in 1972 in Saratov where she also later attended art school. In 1995 she moved to Switzerland and continued her studies in art at the Hochschule der Künste Zürich. In her work she especially focuses on the subconscious, tracing long lost memories, bringing repressed experience to light, and exploring the abysses of the human psyche. The generous support of the GegenwART Foundation enabled Mazoulevskaja to realize her installation *Siehe Ursprung* (See Origins) on location in Bern. The installation addresses problems of origins and homeland, as well as their value for and influence on personal development. According to Mazoulevskaja, «if we live outside our country of origin we can clearly see that a large part of our personality remains inarticulate within a foreign culture. The distance to our homeland and immersion in new cultural surroundings makes those collective experiences and memories palpable that were before locked away in our subconscious.» The artist riddles the installation with symbols whose meaning is easily decipherable in Russia, the country of her birth, but in Switzerland cannot be understood without some explanation. For example, we see a depiction of Lenin's Mausoleum, easily recognized by Russians.

## Sots Art

The two Muscovites **Vitali Komar** and **Aleksandr Melamid** invented so-called «sots art» in the 1970s. The movement is closely related in its techniques and imagery to pop art. The artists ironically compared the «overabundance of ideology» in the Soviet Union with the «overabundance of consumer goods» in the West. The diptych *Urban Angels* was commissioned by the Los Angeles Public Library in 1990. A monumental version of it now decorates the façade of the building. Using the same design the two artists made a small number of silk-screen prints – of which each is an original. The German artist **Michael Buthe** in *Hommage an die Sonne* (Homage to the Sun) portrays an angelic being that strives towards the heavens.

**Aleksandra Dementieva** has a strong affinity to sots art. In her painting in from the series *Metrostation «Park Kultury»* she creates a burlesque of socialist realist aesthetics. Her pioneers are exact copies from a relief in the underground station «Park Kultury.» In the underground station numerous wall reliefs depict everyday Soviet heroes. The young pioneers played a key role as future heroes in Soviet propaganda both as laborers and as soldiers defending their country.

**Konstantin Latyshev** freely adapted the techniques and subject matter typical for pop art in his work. In his early painting *Grauenhafter Mord des Generals* (Ghastly Murder of the General) we already can discern traces of its impact. Latyshev combines the aesthetics typical for printmaking (visible in his portraits of women) with a very expressive painterly technique (visible in the clothing and headdress).

The artists from Moscow exhibiting in this room are remarkable for their autonomy, which makes it practically impossible to classify them according to specific art movements. With hasty brushstrokes **Anatoli Zverev** creates a horse and rider on paper. Also in his numerous portraits the artist succeeds, with just a few swift but precise brushstrokes of wash, to create a portrait with individual traits.

In his series called *Nacht* (Night) **Boris Kocheishvili** created threatening scenes with surrealistic overtones that appear to be part of a bad dream. Ghostly figures of the night are trapped in enigmatic situations. A gloomy atmosphere guides the other wash brushstrokes too. In contrast, Kocheishvili's abstract and ornamental pastel seems positively cheerful.

In **Vladimir Jakovlev's** painting of the white flower, color seems to practically blot out the form. The white petals radiating out from the innermost whorl of the flower with its stamina have evolved into a pure vision of light. One painting presents a portrait of a girl. Its dull and broken eyes make us think of the artist's severe eye disease that finally left him blind.

According to **Vadim Sidur**, the basis of his work goes back to his traumatic war experiences of being equally victim and perpetrator. Sidur warns against war and violence calling instead for love and solidarity among people. Especially the ink drawing reminds us of Picasso's prints because of its delicate lines. The Swiss artist **Markus Raetz** does without lines altogether in his woodcut: the black-and-white surfaces form a complementary embracing couple.

**Igor Vishniakov** mixes painting and photography in his works since the first decade of the new millennium. With the paint medium he covers the photo template with a translucent veil. In this way he produces a tantalizing game between concealment and revealing, which especially his series *Akt* (Nude) demonstrates.

The studio belonging to the photographer **Sergei Borisov**, Studio 50 A, became a popular meeting point for artists representing non-official art approaches in Soviet Russia. Borisov is not only famous for his portraits of famous non-conformists. He was also internationally acknowledged in the 1980s with works spotlighting the contradictory ambience and the shrill characters of the perestroika era.

**Eduard Gorokhovski** is regarded as a pioneer of photographic image design in contemporary Russian art. His series of pictures *Rotes Kreuz* (Red Cross) shows 13 image edits of a woman's portrait from the 19th century. The red-colored photographs are horizontally and vertically distorted to the extent that ultimately only two lines remain. Placed over one another the two lines form a cross. The artist has reduced a traditional portrait photograph of a woman to a purely abstract form.

In his art **Ivan Chuikov** addresses the problem of how illusion and reality interrelate. He combines photographs with color-pencil drawings in order to explore the relationship of each medium to reality.

## Muscovite Conceptualism

Conceptualism in Moscow developed in the 1970s and ironically explored language rites, codes and figures of thought intrinsic to the Soviet system. Criticism of Soviet society and its seemingly sacrosanct principles, moral concepts, and laws was the very heart of this conceptualism. The founder of this group of artists was **Ilya Kabakov**. Because he was accepted by the Soviet state as an illustrator of children's books, Kabakov could afford a studio. There he pursued his own non-official art projects. He transposed the aesthetics of children's books into his art. Thus he used schematic imagery that, also typical for illustrations in users' instructions and encyclopedias, became paradigmatic for the Muscovite conceptualists. He was concerned about the relationship between image and text or commentary. When viewing his works we often cannot find a logical sense linking the two, leaving the observer ample room for interpretation. Hence the 1984 collage with an abstract composition has the following text: «Please go away, go, I beg of you please go, please go! Get out of my sight! I am surrounded by so many fascinating things but because of you I see nothing. You obstruct totally! ....»

In his pictures **Oleg Vassiliev** merges the traditions of 19th-century Russian realism with the formal productions of the Russian avant-garde. He was engrossed by the relation between pictorial surface and painterly illusion. This he expresses very lucidly in his 1988 color-pencil drawing.

**Erik Bulatov** unites spatial illusion with two-dimensional surfaces and texts in his paintings. His color-pencil drawing from 1999 depicts a cloudy sky as if viewed from behind bars. The diagonal dividing the

composition into a lighter and darker half produces an optical interplay between inside and outside: As viewers we simultaneously feel we are behind bars and roaming freely beyond them. In Bulatov's art the sky repeatedly crops up as a symbol for freedom.

**Dmitri Prigov** is one of the co-founders of conceptualism in Moscow. In his work he explores the symbols, myths, and rituals of (post-) Soviet mass culture. His drawings represent projects for numerous room installations in which he repeatedly uses props such as eyes, curtains, wine or blood, and people such as plumbers or cleaning ladies as ironical personifications of «working heroes.» The artwork *Face* from 1992 portrays an eye with a red tear. The symbol Prigov uses most often is the eye. It stands not only for God but also for the omnipresent control executed by the Soviet state. Prigov points out by means of the newspaper *Pravda* (truth) the «only valid truth» of Soviet propaganda and mourns the sufferings of the victims of Soviet rule with a blood-red tear.

In the gouache by the Swiss artist **Martin Disler** the glowing red eye can be understood as the eye of the artist. By hovering in air it is related to dance, which Disler views as an important prerequisite for artistic creation. In its creativity the eye constantly sees everything.

**Viktor Pivovarov** also belonged to the first generation of the Muscovite conceptualists. Like Kabakov he embraces a children's book aesthetic in his work. Pivovarov creates color-pencil drawings in which realistic and imaginary elements conflate into the insistent ambiguity of surrealistic scenery. The still-life *Rot und Gelb* (Red and Yellow) with its cheap and much-used crockery is probably a

memento from Pivovarov's childhood as well as – or – an allusion to Soviet communal kitchens. In the private hanging arrangement of her collection, Arina Kowner presents Pivovarov's still life together with **Robert Mangold's** abstract triptych. The curators were fascinated by the comparison, and decided to show the two paintings the same way in the exhibition, including additionally also several other non-Russian artworks from Kowner's collection.

**Vadim Zakharov** is seen as the chronicler and archive specialist for conceptualism. The artwork *Aus der Vita des durchnässten Staretz* (From the Life of the Wet Staretz) comprises two concertina photo albums. They contain pictures of initials that were decorated by his artist friends; each initial is paired with a photograph of the respective artist as a child. The title of the artwork references a literary character, «wise Staretz,» invented by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. People began to doubt whether Staretz really was a saint when his body began to stink after his death. The Russian word «promokshji» has many meanings. It can be translated as «wet» Staretz, but it can likewise refer to the abbreviation for the Moscow Conceptual School of Artists (MOKShA).

**Pavel Pepperstein** got to know the art scene in Moscow already very early in life through his father Viktor Pivovarov. As the founder of the artists' group «Inspection Medical Hermeneutics» he belongs to the second generation of Moscow conceptualism. The ideology of the group of artists sharing his ideas merges post-structural philosophy, Taoism, psychoanalysis, pharmaceuticals, and folklore. Pepperstein's hurried sketches have something child- and fairytale-like

about them. His paintings are the exact opposite with their thick application of paint uniting abstract forms with landscapes.

The med-hermeneutician **Sergei Anufriev** traces the outlines of the fortress structure of a Kremlin (citadel) with power lines in his painting *Himmlischer Kreml* (Heavenly Kremlin). Numerous birds watch over the inner area. Here with a critical eye Anufriev addresses the book *Die Weltrose* that was published in 1991. Daniil Andreev wrote the book after being released from the Gulag (penal camp) in 1957. With his drawings and watercolors Anufriev creates absurd scenes that evade any clear logical interpretation. The American artist **Bruce Nauman** too places the observer in an absurd situation by hanging a head made of cardboard from the ceiling.

For his series *To give Names to Kefir Grains* the qualified chemist **Yuri Leiderman** «bred» kefir communities and gave them names in the way usually done for pedigree dogs. Thereby the artist takes up the issue of two terrible massacres that were carried out respectively by the Soviet secret service and German forces during the Second World War in his thought-provoking artwork *Die Opfer von Katyn und die Opfer von Khatyn treffen sich in den staubigen Hügeln der Vorstadt von Kapstadt* (The Victims of Katyn and the Victims of Khatyn Meet in the Dusty Hillside of the Suburbs of Cape Town).

Still today **Yuri Kalendarev** inquires into and explores Jewish traditions, religion and culture in his work. With the pieces *Alef* (= first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) and *Shma* (Hebrew for «to listen») Kalendarev refers to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish prayer. The expressive wash brushstrokes, however, are reminiscent of traditional Buddhist pen-and-wash calligraphy. The artist created the sound sculpture *Engel* (Angel) especially for Arina Kowner. Kalendarev learnt how to work metal so it produces musical sounds over a period of two years in the Paiste factory in Nottwil. The piece of wood hanging from iron plate hits it when moved by wind and thereby produces a variety of harmonious tones. In the Kunstmuseum Bern visitors are invited to produce different sounds themselves by varying the way they hit the iron plate.

## Agenda

### Öffentliche Führungen:

**Sonntag**, 11h: 4./11. Dezember, 15./29. Januar, 12. Februar  
**Dienstag**, 19h: 6./13./27. Dezember, 3./17./31. Januar, 7. Februar

### Filme im Kino Kunstmuseum:

Das Kino Kunstmuseum zeigt im Januar u.a. den sowjetischen Kultfilm *Assa* (1987) von Sergei Solovjov, an dem mehrere der in der Ausstellung vertretenen Künstler beteiligt sind, ausserdem Alexander Sokurovs *Russian Ark* (2002) [www.kinokunstmuseum.ch](http://www.kinokunstmuseum.ch)

### Kurs in Zusammenarbeit mit der

#### Volkshochschule Bern:

**Dienstag**, 17h30 – 18h45:  
 17./24./31. Januar  
 Anmeldung: Volkshochschule Bern  
 T 031 320 30 30, [info@vhsbe.ch](mailto:info@vhsbe.ch)  
 Leitung: Cornelia Klein Toffler,  
 Kunstvermittlerin  
 Kosten: CHF 60.00 für 3-mal

### Vorweihnachtliches Konzert mit russischer Musik:

**Alexander Neustroev** (Cello) und  
**Oleg Lips-Roumiantsev**  
 (Akkordeon/Bajan)

**Sonntag**, 11. Dezember, 12h30.  
 11h öffentliche Führung. Eine  
 Veranstaltung des Kulturvereins  
 «OKNO – Fenster zur russischen  
 Kultur». Ohne Anmeldung, CHF 35.00  
 (inkl. Ausstellungseintritt)

### Private Führungen (auch in russischer

Sprache) / *Visites pour groupes*  
*(aussi en russe)* T 031 328 09 11  
[vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch](mailto:vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch)  
**Öffnungszeiten / Heures d'ouverture**  
**Dienstag / Mardi:** 10h – 21h  
**Mittwoch – Sonntag / Mercredi –**  
**Dimanche:** 10h – 17h  
**Feiertage / Jours fériés**  
 24./30./31.12.2011, 01.01.2012:  
 10h – 17h  
 25./26.12.2011, 02.01.2012:  
 geschlossen / *fermé*


### SAMMLUNGSMONOGRAPHIE / MONOGRAPHIE DE LA COLLECTION

«Passion Bild. Russische Kunst seit  
 1970. Die Sammlung Arina Kowner».  
 Hrsg. und mit einer Einführung von  
 Arina Kowner, mit Beiträgen von  
 Maria Chevrekouko, Sandra Frimmel,  
 Sabine Hänsen, Ada Raev, Jule  
 Reuter und mit Künstlerporträts  
 von Alexandra Engelfried. Zürich:  
 Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010.  
 343 Seiten, Deutsch.  
 ISBN 978-3-85881-199-8. CHF 75.00  
 (im Buchhandel CHF 99.00)

### KATALOG / CATALOGUE

Ergänzend zur Sammlungsmonographie  
 erscheint eine Publikation, die u.a.  
 Interviews mit der Sammlerin und den  
 Künstlerinnen und Künstlern enthält.  
 CHF 25.00  
 Katalog und Sammlungsmonographie  
 zusammen CHF 89.00

# Exhibition

<b>Duration of the exhibition</b>	December 03, 2011 – February 12, 2012
<b>Opening</b>	Friday, December 3, 6:30 p.m.
<b>Kurator</b>	Matthias Frehner, Monika Schäfer
<b>Admission fee</b>	CHF 14.00 / reduced CHF 10.00
<b>SBB RailAway-Offer</b>	Benefit from 20% savings on train tickets and entrance fee. The RailAway-Offer is available at all train stations and at the Rail Service on 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min). More information: <a href="http://www.sbb.ch/ausstellungen">www.sbb.ch/ausstellungen</a>
 <b>SBB CFF FFS</b> <b>RailAway Offer</b>	
<b>Opening times</b>	Mondays closed Tuesday, 10 a.m. – 9 p.m. Wednesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
<b>Public holidays</b>	24./30./31.12.2011, 01.01.2012: 10h – 17h 25./26.12.2011, 02.01.2012: closed
<b>Guided tours</b>	T 031 328 09 11 or <a href="mailto:vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch">vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch</a>
<b>Patronage</b>	His Excellency Igor B. Bratchikov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Switzerland
<b>Supported by</b>	<b>Stiftung Gegenwart</b> <b>Dr. h.c. Hansjörg Wyss</b>

Kunstmuseum Bern  
Hodlerstrasse 8 – 12, CH-3000 Bern 7  
T +41 31 328 09 44, F +41 31 328 09 55  
[info@kunstmuseumbern.ch](mailto:info@kunstmuseumbern.ch)  
[www.kunstmuseumbern.ch](http://www.kunstmuseumbern.ch)

  
**CREDIT SUISSE**  
Partner of the Kunstmuseum Bern