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Partecipazioni Nazionali

IRINA NAKHOVA
THE GREEN PAVILION

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Margarita Tupitsyn, Editor and Curator

Russian Pavilion

56th International Art Exhibition — Venice Biennale 2015

STELLA ART FOUNDATION

IRINA NAKHOVA
THE GREEN PAVILION

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Venice Biennale 2015

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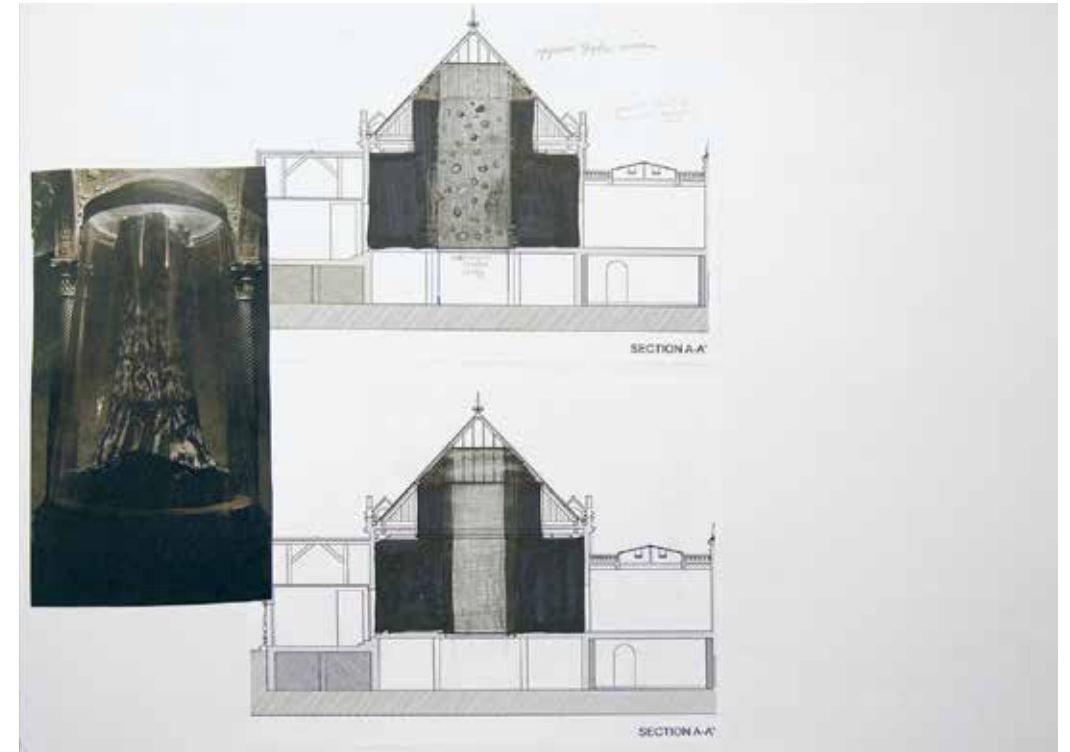
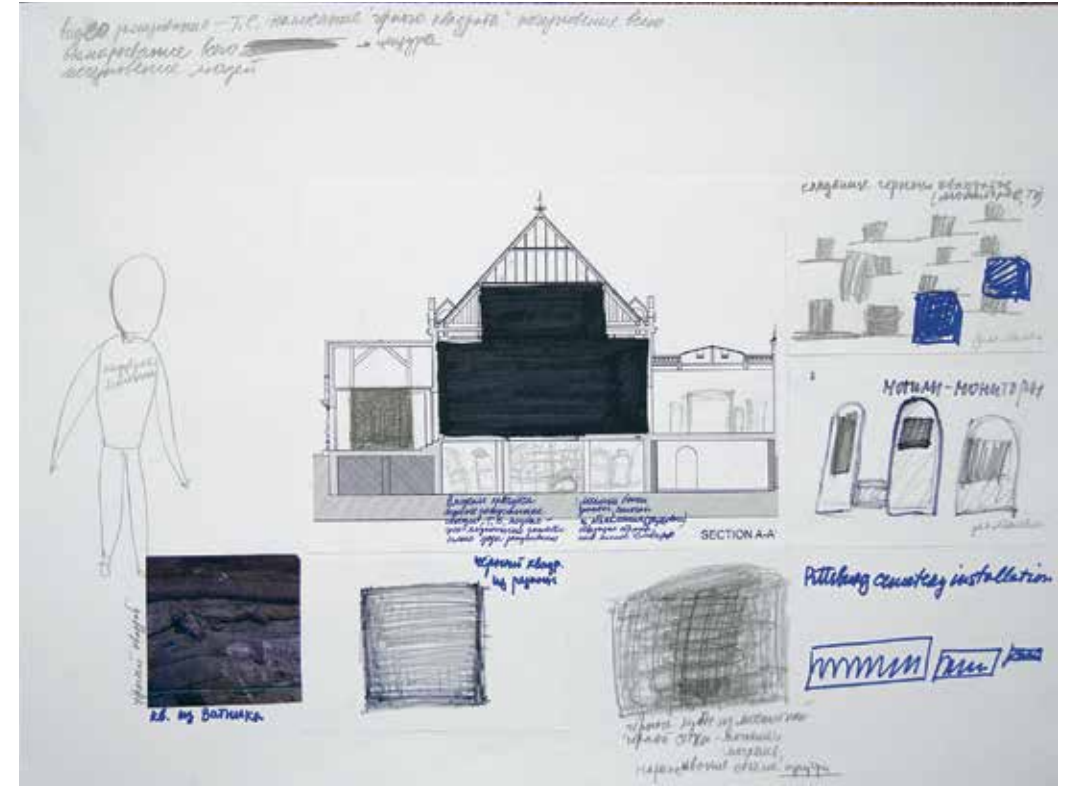
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The Green Pavilion:
Sketches, Production, Results







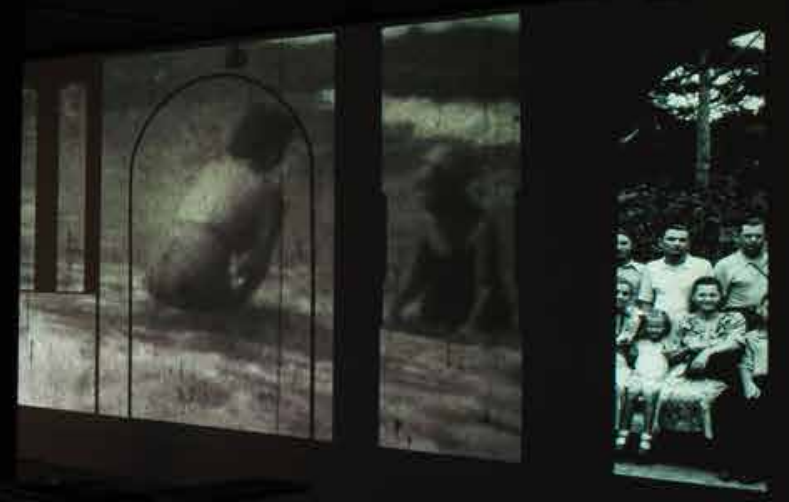














Irina Nakhova, Philippe Picoli, and John Tormey (left)
at work on *The Green Pavilion*, Venice, 2015

FOREWORD

This year, the Russian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale has turned green. Following up on the installations by Andrei Monastyrsky and Vadim Zakharov, who represented Russia at the last two Biennales, the Russian Pavilion is home to Irina Nakhova's *Green Pavilion*. In an intuitively feminine manner, Nakhova and the distinguished curator Margarita Tupitsyn have set forth an original interpretation of the complex genealogy of the Russian avant-garde and its contemporary reception. Nakhova's work imbues the Stella Art Foundation's presentation of Moscow Conceptualism with the kind of sensual and deeply emotional dimension that only a female artist can achieve.

Based on a dialogue with the pavilion structure itself, designed by Aleksei Shchusev in 1914, *The Green Pavilion* relates to installation art as much as it does to architecture. As with Zakharov's project, the architectural features of the pavilion comprise an important component of Nakhova's installation. This time, an opening has again been created between the first and second floors of Shchusev's building, plus the exterior is painted green. The result: the Russian Pavilion takes on the appearance of a romantic gazebo, while concealing within itself the spatial metaphor of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915). Nakhova's installation offers a thrilling journey into the depths of this canonical modernist painting. Using cutting-edge technology, she has connected the two floors of the pavilion in a manner that enables Biennale visitors to partake in a unique, integrated aesthetic experience.

We are very proud that, at this Biennale and its two predecessors, the Stella Art Foundation succeeded not only in showcasing a constellation of the brilliant founders of Moscow Conceptualism, but also in revealing the evocative potential of the Russian Pavilion, which, for more than a century, has been celebrating the highest achievements in Russian art.

STELLA KESAEVA
President, Stella Art Foundation



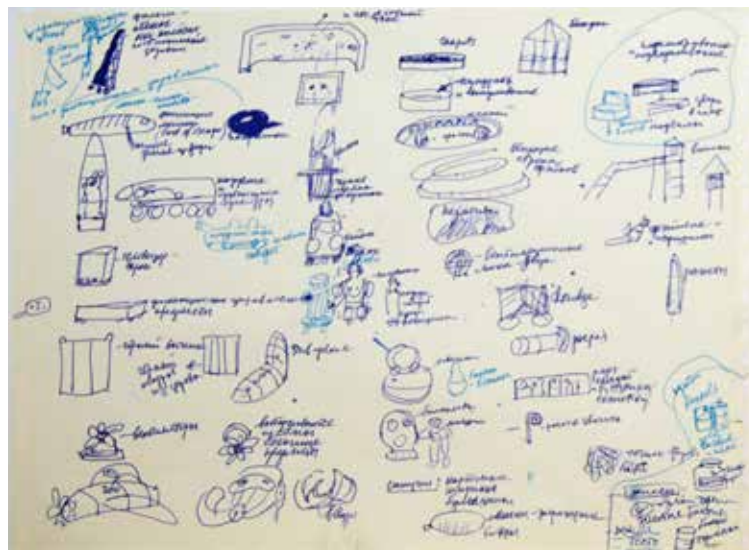
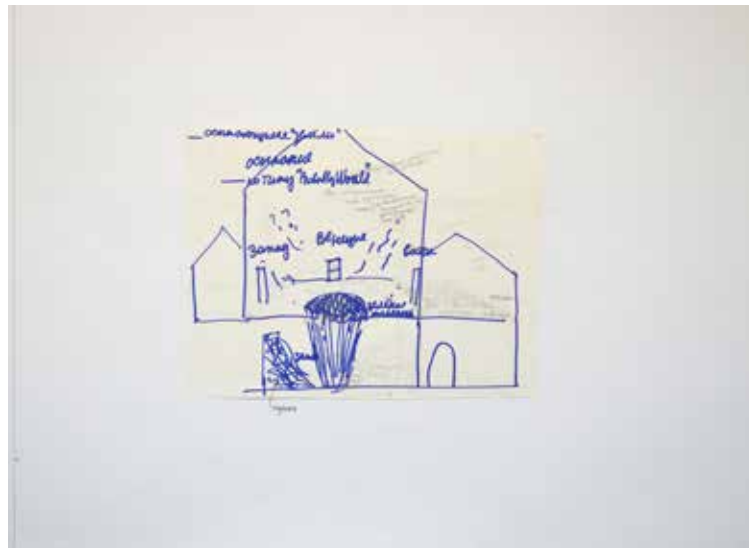
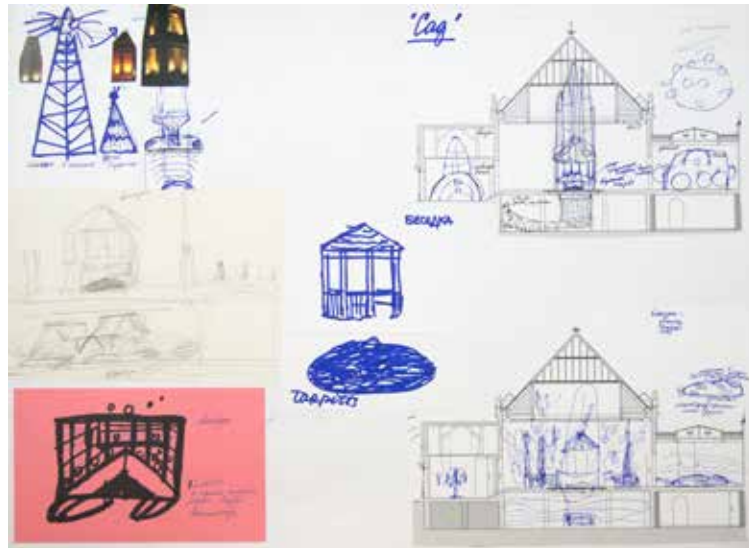
Margarita Tupitsyn and Irina Nakhova at the doorway
of the Russian Pavilion, Venice, April 2014.
Photo: Aleksandr Rytov

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

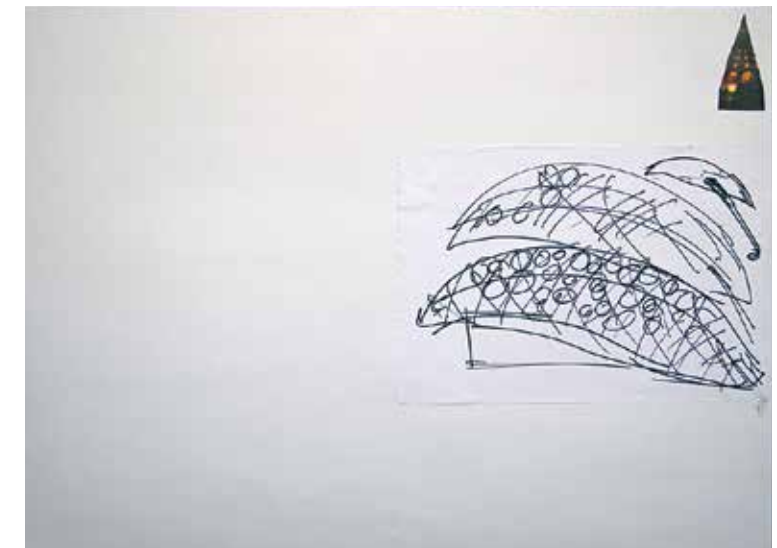
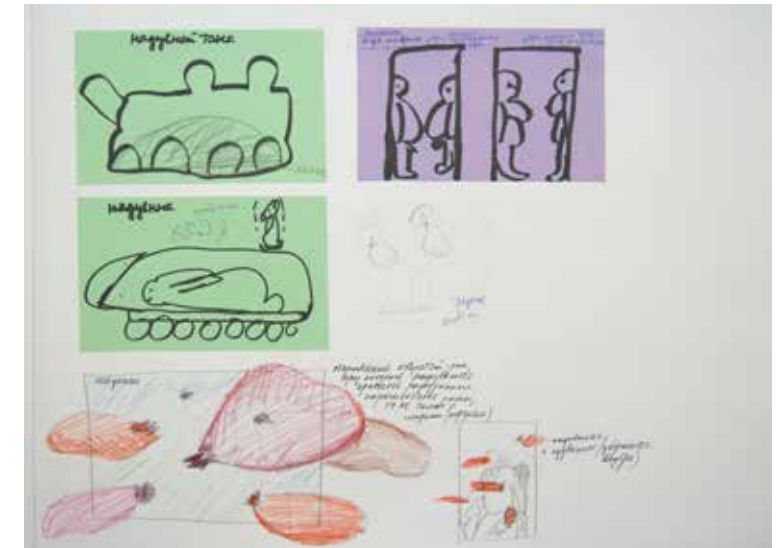
Engagement with space is the most important element in my work. That's why my first visit to the Russian Pavilion, which, by the way, I had never seen before, was very important to me. The pavilion was empty, and I experienced the powerful sensation of observing the sky through the skylight on the second floor. The sky, thrown open before me, drew me in; I just wanted to sit there—watching the birds fly, the trees swinging in the wind, and the clouds flowing. Something else that struck me (but in an unpleasant way) was the color of the pavilion, which was completely unsuited to Aleksei Shchusev's architecture. Because, first and foremost, the Russian Pavilion is fundamentally garden-style, "gazebo" architecture, a style that evokes the illusion or impression of green, and on my visit it was a lackluster yellow. But this was just my first reaction. I was unaware that the pavilion was originally green, yet my desire to repaint it green, in order to dissolve it into the trees and the lagoon waters, was absolutely spontaneous and very strong. From my perspective, the key to this project is not what happens in the individual rooms, but the process of moving from one space to another. That's why I pay such close attention to details: in order to produce a shocking contrast or a gradual movement through space, as well as from one time period to another. Every space of the pavilion contains references to the future or the past, or a concentration on the present, as in the central room, where we simultaneously observe what's happening under our feet and what's transpiring up in the sky. All of these references, tricks, and hints are meant for the viewer. But at the same time, and to an even greater degree, they're intended for me.

IRINA NAKHOVA

Translated from the original Russian. This comes from an interview with the artist conducted by Vladimir Levashov in Moscow in 2015.



Sketches for
The Green Pavilion, 2014



Collective Actions' performance
The Russian World, Moscow region,
March 17, 1985.
Photo: Igor Makarevich

2013

VADIM
ZAKHAROV

2015

IRINA
NAKHOVA

1993

ILYA
KABAKOV

2011

ANDREI
MONASTYRSKY



The Russian World: A Hare or a Bear?

Margarita Tupitsyn

Looking at the photograph of the performance *The Russian World* (pp. 34–35), staged by the Collective Actions group on March 17, 1985, makes me feel fortunate as an art historian. Here, in one shot, are Ilya Kabakov, Andrei Monastyrsky, Vadim Zakharov, and Irina Nakhova, four artists from the Moscow conceptual circle who had solo exhibitions in the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in the post-Soviet period between 1993 and 2015. During *perestroika*, the vanguard artistic milieu—the antithesis of the official Soviet realm and dubbed “Russian world” in the Collective Actions performance, where it took the form of an enormous hare (in ironic contrast to the bear, the customary symbol of the official Russian realm)—was more than ready to emerge onto the international art scene. The first of these post-Soviet installations in the Russian Pavilion was Kabakov’s project *The Red Pavilion*. Created for the 45th Biennale of 1993, *The Red Pavilion* was erected not in Aleksei Shchusev’s edifice but on the grounds surrounding it: a potent metaphor that embodied the noninstitutional status of vanguard artists and the conclusion of the hermetic phase of postwar Soviet art. More than twenty years after *The Red Pavilion*, Nakhova’s *Green Pavilion* revisits this experience in a new context, provoking questions concerning the methods and potential of the de-interiorization of local visual cultures.

Nakhova’s act of restoring the exterior of the Russian Pavilion to its original green hue was shaped by her recognition of the importance of color discourse in the context of modern and postmodern Soviet art. From the October Revolution onward, Russian artists used color to announce their social and political stance: black denoted anarchism, red was identified with revolution, while green, the color of the overcrowded *komunalki* (communal apartments), initially connoted communality, but later, after becoming identified with *perestroika*, morphed into a symbol of sociopolitical transformation and renewal. The Moscow Conceptualists embraced the signifying powers of color; indeed, it often served as their trademark in the West. For example, the collaborative pair Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid entitled their first show at the Ronald Feldman Gallery *Color Is a Mighty*

Power! (New York, 1976), while the first exhibition I conceived of during my visit to Moscow in 1987, twelve years after I emigrated to the United States, was *The Green Show* (Exit Art, New York, 1990), in recognition of the fact that this hue had been treated discursively by several generations of Moscow artists. Returning the pavilion to its original color scheme and updating the arsenal of color significations, Nakhova’s *Green Pavilion* continues the genealogy of “pigmented Conceptualism.”

In the early 1980s, Nakhova created a series of environments that fused the painterly tradition of late modernism with conceptual and installation practices. These environments—her Rooms—became a historically significant project. Their austere emptiness was a response to the lack of institutional support for Moscow vanguard artists at that time. For that reason, the Rooms were not simply artistic environments that tested various regimes of visual perception, but addressed social allegory as well. Nakhova’s fellow vanguard artists visited the Rooms, expressing their reactions to them in a series of dialogues (excerpts of which are published in this catalogue) that shaped the discourse on the installation genre. Launched by Komar and Melamid’s *Paradise* (1972), and further developed in Kabakov’s and Nakhova’s environments of the early 1980s, installation is a significant medium in postwar Russian art for its intimate connection to the specific, local context in which it emerged; it was a response to the vanguard community’s lack of access to exhibition spaces or public forums on modern art, in addition to the mass of unneeded art objects that had accumulated in artists’ studios as a result.

In the three decades since she created the Rooms, Nakhova—working in an atmosphere of vast sociopolitical change, in addition to making regular trips between Russia and the United States—has demonstrated an inexhaustible potential for formal and technological innovation and discursive reflection. In *The Green Pavilion*, Nakhova revisits her previously developed strategies as well as enters into a dialogue with the legacy of the Russian avant-garde, in particular, Kazimir Malevich’s *Black Square* (1915). Like other Moscow artists from her circle, Nakhova was most drawn to the conceptual rather than formal prospects of Suprematism and Malevich’s iconic modernist painting. This is important because in the West, Suprematism has primarily been associated with American Minimalism, rather than with the postwar Soviet modernists. While the Minimalists preferred Malevich’s brightly colored geometry, the Russians followed Alfred Barr’s dictum that “each generation must paint its own black square.”

The fact that for the last three Venice Biennales, Commissioner Stella Kesaeva has entrusted the Russian Pavilion to artists from the Moscow conceptual circle is vital, both for the history of Russian art and its reception in the West. This is because, starting in the late 1960s, that circle of artists became an engine in the development of aesthetic and conceptual models that, while reflecting local issues, also fit successfully into the discourses that were being developed by their contemporaries in the West. Indeed, it can be claimed that the 1970s and 1980s were the last era when a channeling of local contexts into an international language was effectively realized, just as in the period of the historical avant-garde.



Irina Nakhova and Andrei Monastyrsky in an impromptu action in a rented room in a communal apartment on Ovchinnikovskii Lane, Moscow, 1974. Photo: Georgii Kizevalter



Andrei Monastyrsky in an impromptu action in a rented room in a communal apartment on Ovchinnikovskii Lane, Moscow, 1974. The happening included some of Irina Nakhova's paintings. Photo: Georgii Kizevalter

* * *

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Stella Kesaeva for the invitation to curate the Russian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. For me, this serves as recognition of my sustained efforts to promote and recontextualize Russian art in the West. It was no less important to become the curator of the first showing of a woman artist's work in the Russian Pavilion and to collaborate with Irina Nakhova, whose art I have admired since the mid-1970s and have exhibited since the *perestroika* era. I was privileged to undertake work on this project in an atmosphere of fruitful dialogue and collegiality afforded by the staff of the Stella Foundation; I am especially grateful to the foundation's director, Aleksandr Rytov; its public relations director, Anna Svergun; and catalogue designers Irina Chekmareva and Andrei Shelyutto of the Faro Studio. My thanks as well go to the authors of the texts and to Jane Friedman for her diligent and intelligent copyediting. I am also extremely grateful to the photographers and artists Igor Makarevich and Georgii Kizevalter for supplying priceless historical photos from their archive and to Sabine Hänsgen for making available rare video footage of *Room No. 2* (1985), which makes its debut at the Russian Pavilion of the Biennale. Finally, I would like to thank Victor Tupitsyn, the editor of the texts in the Russian-language version of the catalogue, for his day-to-day support, intellectual brilliance, and professionalism.

Милая Витюша и Ритюля!

Я вам давно написал письмо, но оно,
видно, не дошло.
Боюсь, что это мне не дойдет и буду краток.
Во-первых, наш адрес. Малайя Грузинская,
д 28 вл 70. Моностырскому А.
Как вы понимаете, Васи есть что рассказать нам.
Витенька! Как же у тебя там дни и ночи и
какие успехи и планы?
Как тебе нравятся Америка? Как Рита,
поступила ли учиться?
У нас по-прежнему. Соинники, депрессировали как
прежде.
Напиши нам подробное письмо, пожалуйста.
Я тебе тоже напишу сразу, как получу твое.
Привет Лиде, Игорю, Худякову, Сидмонову,
Мамлееву, Бахчаняну.
Целую,
Ваши друзья Андрей + Ира

From Moscow to New York: Andrei Monastyrsky and Irina Nakhova's letter to Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn, 1975 (translation appears on p. 43)



Andrei Monastyrsky and Irina Nakhova in an impromptu action in a rented room in a communal apartment on Ovchinnikovskii Lane, Moscow, 1974. Photo: Georgii Kizevalter

[1975, Moscow]

Darling Vitiusha and Ritulia,

I wrote to you ages ago, but apparently the letter didn't reach you.

I'm worried this one won't, either, so I'll be brief. First, our address: A. Monastyrsky, Malaia Gruzinskaia 28, Apt. 70, Moscow.

As I understand, you have news for us. Vitenka [Victor], how are your days and nights there, what successes have you had, and what are your plans? How do you like America? How is Rita [Margarita]? Has she started studying? Here, things are a bit jumbled. We're working and getting depressed, same as before.

Please write us a detailed letter. I'll write back, as soon as I receive your letter. Regards to Lida [Lidiia Masterkova], Igor [Kholin], [Genrikh] Khudiakov, [Eduard] Limonov, [Iurii] Mamleev, [Vagrish] Bakhchanian.

Kisses,

Your friends Andrei and Ira



Irina Nakhova and Georgii Kizevalter in an impromptu action in a rented room in a communal apartment on Ovchinnikovskii Lane, Moscow, 1974



Irina Nakhova, Andrei Monastyrsky, and Lev Rubinstein in an impromptu action in a rented room in a communal apartment on Ovchinnikovskii Lane, Moscow, 1974. Photo: Georgii Kizevalter



Seated, left to right: Viktoriia Mochalova-Kabakova, Vladimir Sorokin, and Irina Nakhova.
Standing, left to right: Dmitrii Prigov, Ilya Kabakov, Joseph Bakstein, Sabine Hänsen, and Anton Nosik in Irina Nakhova's apartment on Gruzinskaia Street, Moscow, 1985



Collective Actions' performance *Beyond K/D-2*, Moscow region, January 16, 1988.
Left to right: Irina Nakhova, Margarita Tupitsyn, Andrei Monastyrsky, and Nikolai Panitkov.
Photo: Igor Makarevich



Room No. 1, Moscow, 1983

An Interview with Irina Nakhova in *Room No. 2*

Andrei Monastyrsky

ANDREI MONASTYRSKY: What's this work called, and what can we see here?

IRINA NAKHOVA: I'm sick of living in my apartment. Don't interview me. It won't work out.

MONASTYRSKY: Why? This is serious; it's not a joke. You mean to say you made this Room in order to—

NAKHOVA: In order to exit to some other space.

MONASTYRSKY: So, for social, not creative, reasons, not reasons of form.

NAKHOVA: This Room refers more to my paintings. On the one hand, I wanted to show pictorial space and kind of get inside it, and on the other hand, to simply destroy the space that's around me, as I find it difficult being within it.

MONASTYRSKY: Do you mean your living space? The studio?

NAKHOVA: Actually, something strange happened. I anticipated that everything would get larger, but because black absorbs a lot of light, instead everything got smaller. In the first Room [*Room No. 1*], the space is white, reflecting light, and it's like being in a mirage. In short, everything dissolved.

MONASTYRSKY: Can you compare the concept behind the first Room with this one? They're very different . . .

NAKHOVA: The concept behind both Rooms is space. Here, the space should be illusory, but it isn't. And in the first Room, there turned out to be a different kind of space—psychophysical, physiological—because of various factors, including some positive ones. And here, because the space is somewhat illusory and can depict representable things from a wide vantage point, then I, the person sitting here, feel like I'm not to scale.



Anton Nosik in *Room No. 2*, Moscow, 1984

MONASTYRSKY: Look, the way you organized this space: it's more of a painting than the first Room.

NAKHOVA: Undoubtedly . . . Because all of the walls are different, an overall pictorial composition emerges. In the other Room, everything was built on sameness. The space there is a bowl, and here it is somehow accentuated. Accordingly, this Room is more of a picture than the other one . . . The main idea is that white should read like space, while black, in certain cases, should be experienced as architecture. But sometimes it's the other way around, like a gap, although in a few places it bunches up. Now, I'll have a look from the ladder. Looking down: from here, the white is better.

MONASTYRSKY: Better how: purely speculatively?

NAKHOVA: No, purely visually. It's best from here; come here.

Translated from the original Russian. The interview was conducted in Moscow in early 1985.

Interviews with Moscow Artists in *Room No. 2*

Joseph Bakstein

IGOR MAKAREVICH: If we compare it with that work [*Room No. 1*], in both a meditation is created, but there, if I analyze its effect on me, going into the isolated space of this room I completely lost my cool; the overall effect of the image was so strong, it bore down on me in such a way that it was as if I was in a crowd. Of course, that was my initial reaction . . .

JOSEPH BAKSTEIN: Why did you say that there was a Pop Art element in the first Room?

MAKAREVICH: In comparison to this one, because that one had scattered collage-like shapes and figures, an external aesthetic; I don't mean an internal structure—that's not like Pop Art. And there's the most intense feeling of displacement, the feeling that these are tiny images that you can examine. But there's no need to let the viewer examine them, unless there's a barrier or certain conditions causing them to bewitch or torment, because it's impossible to examine them close up, and everything that's depicted in this room is an obstacle to what you want to see in your dreams, in the external world, and that creates an internal discord of consciousness. It's a consequence of this work that I'm discussing so freely, because it's Irina's desire, which she expressed in the work, and which affected me in this way.

BAKSTEIN: Can you see any sort of logic? Does it presume the evolution of the room genre, or is everything finished with these two Rooms?

MAKAREVICH: It depends on how you look at it. If you examine these two works, they're balanced. The first has an element of irritation that requires a contrasting state. There's nothing of that here. Because of the aesthetic, the delicate transfer of gray and black, a musical dimension arises, in the rhythm of the shapes, the examination of the stripes, their length; it's a sad melody, a very strong feeling. In the first Room, there was noise, a certain chaos.

* * *

JOSEPH BAKSTEIN: Come over here. Take your shoes off.

ILYA KABAKOV: I'll take my shoes off, yes.

EDUARD GOROKHOVSKY: Just keep your socks on.

BAKSTEIN: Just your socks. Art demands clean feet.

KABAKOV: Is there a queue here? Do we need tickets?

BAKSTEIN: Just move that aside, and enter over there. Then, turn the lights on.

GOROKHOVSKY: Yes! Marvelous! . . . If you spend some time in this Room, you could go nuts from such a crazy contrast.

KABAKOV: There are halogen lamps here, powerful halogen lamps.

GOROKHOVSKY: So the room is now essentially turned into a work of art.

BAKSTEIN: Yes, in a way.

GOROKHOVSKY: . . . I see in this an apocalyptic mood; to me, it's sort of a localized end of the world. I'll even say more specifically—a plane crash. The very moment of impact . . . the moment of impact when . . . everything bursts, and the person sees the light that is, simultaneously, the end . . . You understand—there's been a crash here, and that's why everything is shapeless . . . As far as color, this gray is reminiscent of the gray aluminum paneling of an airplane, while the black—also symbolic—is the color of the explosion, the end, in contrast to the white . . . the white; that's the path to freedom, an instant of freedom, but freedom nonetheless. Death, yes, and the black holds the people back, even though everything is falling apart under their feet; the fissure, after all, is also the end. And it all produces this very real, horrifying impression . . .

KABAKOV: Very convincing.

GOROKHOVSKY: That moment a person registers just before the end—it's just like that. The loss of all color, everything just collapses into black and white, and there's nothing else.

KABAKOV: Yes, yes, a very strong impression—wonderful—a genuine artistic image. Everything Ira [Irina] does in this respect is marvelous. An entirely blind, internal action, monstrous energy and power. I must say that I'm struck by the general concept—by its power and originality, and this concept is made real, it's here.

GOROKHOVSKY: We've gotten inside the painting, and now we know what it looks like on the inside.



Stills from Sascha Wonders's
(Sabine Hänsgen's) video
of *Room No. 2*, 1985

* * *

BAKSTEIN: Do you remember the other Room [*Room No. 1*]?

OLEG VASSILIEV: I remember it well.

ERIK BULATOV: Such miracles and transformations in space all the time. The moment you get used to one—boom, all of a sudden there's another.

VASSILIEV: I think it's even better without glasses . . . the glasses interfere with this type of sidelong vision. I'm curious: did she actually do this on the wall?

BAKSTEIN: No, this is just black paper.

VASSILIEV: No, no, I understand that. Did she glue on the white, and then paint on it?

BAKSTEIN: There's paper on this wall and on that one, and then black paper is glued on top of everything.

BULATOV: Yes, it's beautiful the way it came out . . .

BAKSTEIN: Of course, she first drew everything carefully.

BULATOV: Oh, that's good. I really like all these rotations, one after another. Life in the ruins . . . Personally, I get the feeling of an emotional uplift—you can see in it the degree of intensity with which it was made, a kind of dynamic intensity . . .

BAKSTEIN: The first Room was symmetrical, and that's why it was important to have it evenly lit, and here it's more free-form . . .

BULATOV: The transformation of objects into space-time—it's perceptible and quite clear . . . The difficulty lies in these gaps. . . This one lies well on the floor—the white . . . Because the horizontal lines are perceived very differently . . . It's difficult to organize space along the horizontal . . .

VASSILIEV: There's another transformation occurring here involving the wall, which can be precisely discerned. The changes are right here: the floor is painted black, then white and gray. And for some reason, in some sort of rhythmic pacing, this rhythm somehow suddenly devours everything.

BULATOV: A free-form rhythm—deep, free breathing.

VASSILIEV: And it's fascinating. . .

BULATOV: There are analogies to entirely real space. These rotations of objects in space are quite satisfactory. Our life experience speaks to us, and everything



Stills from Sascha Wonders's
(Sabine Hänsgen's) video
of *Room No. 2*, 1985



Triptych (detail). 1983. *Triptych*.
Oil on canvas, each 150 x 150 cm

is recognizable and plausible . . . To search for analogies in art: that's not a very high priority. If there's an analogue, if impressions arise—that means it's a living work . . .

VASSILIEV: And you recognize her painting, her theme.

BULATOV: And there's something here—the way it is in such works, in declarative works, there's a kind of joy, an intensity of joy, of revelation. This doesn't lie . . .

VASSILIEV: And there's also another criterion. I dragged myself here, tired as a dog, seeing gray all around me. And now, I'm completely at peace, the fatigue is gone—that means the piece works. It's a very important sign.

BULATOV: Ira [Irina Nakhova] is, of course, a heroic woman. All of this will have to be dismantled, and it can't be reconstituted . . .

* * *

JOSEPH BAKSTEIN: Here, the effect of presence is important.

DMITRII PRIGOV: A mathematical template of a room.

BAKSTEIN: Which works better, planes or volumes?

PRIGOV: Everything together, of course.

BAKSTEIN: And what kind of associations do you make, psychological or aesthetic?

PRIGOV: For me, they're more like metaphysical. Yes, I can't even say which predominates, the aesthetic or the metaphysical. Now, that room [*Room No. 1*] prompted psychological associations . . . I love black and white. I like color a lot less . . .

BAKSTEIN: Your general appraisal, the one you started with: How did you begin?

PRIGOV: I began with "motherfucker."

BAKSTEIN: And then?

PRIGOV: How beautiful . . . I think, okay, two poles: black is "motherfucker," and white is "how beautiful."

* * *

ANATOLI ZHIGALOV: Here, there's a cave-like effect. Of course, you can't really say that it's a comfortable womb; it puts you on your guard, it excites you . . . How do you feel here, having spent so much time in this space? That's the most interesting thing.

BAKSTEIN: As I saw each stage of its creation, I find it difficult, I switch right off.

ZHIGALOV: When we had a black cube with a black surface, many people found that really challenging.¹ The fact that there's white here somehow mitigates the sharpness. A complexity arises when you pack such a punch—a space altered so greatly—and here the space is kind of ambivalent; yes, that's its ambiguity, it does not allow you to fix yourself in a position with regard to black and white. Attempts at volume are the only illusion that allow you to . . .

BAKSTEIN: Hold your ground.

ZHIGALOV: Hold your ground . . . All in all, it's pleasing; purely visually, it's a black cube in the midst of its total destruction during the process of being unearthed. Here, you pinpoint that state when something begins to be unearthed from a hopeless, black space, a halfway state . . . Amusing.

Translated from the original Russian. The interviews were conducted in Moscow in 1985.

1. Zhigalov is referring to his and Natalia Abalakova's performance *Black Cube*, presented in Moscow in 1980.



Irina Nakhova dismantling *Room No. 2*,
Moscow, 1985



Materials used in *Room No. 2*,
left in a Moscow garbage dump, 1985



Irina Nakhova at work on *Room No. 3*, Moscow, 1985.
Photo: Anatolii Gritsuk

A Triologue on Rooms

Joseph Bakstein,
Ilya Kabakov,
and Andrei Monastyrsky

ANDREI MONASTYRSKY: What are we going to talk about? Rooms?

ILYA KABAKOV: Yes, rooms . . . including the problems that might arise when discussing Ira's [Irina Nakhova's] Rooms. In other words, we'll discuss the environment as a room.

MONASTYRSKY: First of all, it would be a good idea to touch on the problematics of this genre and its newness. [Ilya,] you made your "Room" in 1985, correct?¹

KABAKOV: Yes, in 1985.

MONASTYRSKY: And Ira?

JOSEPH BAKSTEIN: Ira made hers in the past two or three years.²

MONASTYRSKY: One might say that this is a relatively new genre for Moscow Conceptualism.

KABAKOV: Can anyone recall a room as such appearing in exhibitions?

BAKSTEIN: There was a tradition of using rooms as a place to exhibit works.

KABAKOV: But that doesn't relate to our topic.

BAKSTEIN: Yet, there are some associations here, and they're not necessarily incidental to our discussion. Using a domestic space that isn't designed to exhibit works is not an accident.

1. Here and elsewhere in this text, the references to Kabakov's "Room" or environment pertain to his installation *The Man Who Flew into the Cosmos from His Room*.

2. By the date of this triologue, Nakhova had created *Room No. 1*, *Room No. 2*, and *Room No. 3*. She executed five Rooms in all, the last of which was realized in the exhibition *Iskunstvo: Moscow-Berlin*, Bahnhof Westend, West Berlin, 1988.



Exterior view of Ilya Kabakov's *The Man Who Flew into the Cosmos from His Room* in the artist's Moscow studio, 1985.
Photo: Igor Makarevich

KABAKOV: And is it relevant to our two subjects at hand—Ira's and my rooms?

BAKSTEIN: Yes, because for Ira it was partly a forced situation. She said that, ideally, the work needed to be realized not in a domestic space, but screened off within an exhibition space.

MONASTYRSKY: Yes, and Ilya wanted to do the same thing.

KABAKOV: Yes. A screen is important here because it demarcates the environment, indicating it to be a pure form of the genre. A person should know whether he is on one side of the boundary of the artwork or the other. This has to do with the workings of consciousness. The viewers need to be certain that everything they are shown is a unique (read: isolated) outcome of their general impressions and knowledge, which they'll compare with what they'll be shown . . . Other forms of creative production are not aimed at the isolation of the artwork, but, instead, connote participation in the entirety of the viewer's impressions with regard to the totality of his experience. Such as, for example, *Collective Actions*, in which the performance would take place in a field, delimited by no one; the field went right up to the road, and some sort of action took place there . . . This theme concerns the problematics of sacrality, which we'll subsequently get around to discussing. Despite what they say, a person with a normal state of mind makes a sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane.

MONASTYRSKY: That is, between the everyday and the mediated.

KABAKOV: Yes, they are archetypal forms, and they're unavoidable . . .

MONASTYRSKY: Don't you agree that an interesting transformation occurred here? In the 1970s, conceptual "objectness" was minimal; all of those works, including your triptych *Along the Edges* [1974], comprised about ten percent of the aesthetic experience at the time of their perception, i.e., ten percent of the sacrality. Ninety percent of that sacrality was assumed in the discourse, in the discussion of the work, which took place before and within the space that was free from it, as an object. In some sense, because conceptual objectness was so limited, sacrality was dispersed into the realm of the everyday, especially in your case; I mean, conceptual objectness increased to 120 percent, that is, more than the conceptual norm. It turned out that you and we were pulled inside that conceptual objectness by its mass. In that way, a desacralization of the space took place near and around the work. Maybe this sort of transformation occurred here because the "Room" made a very strong impression on us, a transformative impression . . .

KABAKOV: That's more or less correct; of course, it's correct, but don't exaggerate the extent . . . Although, actually, in Ira's last Room [*Room No. 3*] there's a cupboard, a table . . .



MONASTYRSKY: But in your case, it's less reduced . . . I perceived Ira's second Room in particular as akin to a picture: the windows as the foreground, and the lateral planes, upper portions, and ceiling I read as similar to vantage points for looking at the picture. Yours is a different case . . .

KABAKOV: Returning to the discussion of objectness and the suggestiveness of this "Room," I'd like to cite the opinion of some friends (I won't name them) who are more sensitive, not to the speculative or, as [Dmitrii] Prigov calls it, the "phantom character" of objects, but to the artistic end product. In this regard, we can invoke, for example, [Vladimir] Yankilevsky, among others. Regardless of the fact that it is full of everyday components, rubber, texts, a table, they saw in this work . . . They were distressed by the inferior naturalism of these items. In the canonical definition [of the genre], an environment ought to have, as in those of [Edward] Kienholz and [George] Segal, an absolutely vital set of components that constitute life. It is as if the fictive quality here is harmful. One could remove from it the surreal, semantic, and other elements, but if you decide to make a room, then, to put it bluntly, make a motherfucking room, and not . . . I experienced an internal resistance. I didn't want to reproduce that naturalism. For my consciousness, it also turned out to be important, conceptual and reflexive; the "Room" was distanced from it from the very beginning.

MONASTYRSKY: That's how it is.

KABAKOV: Right. For that reason, I also related to it [the environment] like a phantom, but, in contrast to other works, this one was three-dimensional. There was a hint: "It's as if he lives here." But there is no evidence of that substance, that vitality. Everything remains phantom-like . . .

MONASTYRSKY: And thus, the person isn't actually in your "Room." The person himself isn't depicted anywhere. Everything is presented only in the modality of possibility, of formation. Like the genre itself, it's very important. Because the anthropological problem is one thing, but the formation of the aesthetic genre and the powerful realization of it as a viable formation is another. That is an extremely interesting and very tense element.

KABAKOV: Yes, exactly . . .

BAKSTEIN: But note what happens from this perspective of "possibility."

Installation view of *The Man Who Flew into the Cosmos from His Room* at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 1988.
Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



Room No. 3, Moscow, 1985





Irina Nakhova in Collective Actions' performance *M*,
Moscow region, September 18, 1983.
Photo: Igor Makarevich

Unlike in a conventional presentation, a conventional attempt to re-create phenomena on the morphological level, to re-create a specific situation, here that possibility resides in the fact that the absence of a character prompts the viewer and commentator on the work to create a series of viewpoints on that person. In any case, the actuality of a context that, apparently, is not present, is hereby established.

KABAKOV: Of course. To which one might add the following: In the same way that there are various means of discussing a character, there is also an open-endedness to the manner of discussing the artist who made the work. Whereas in a traditional work the artist is “he,” or “he, a good artist,” that is, a concrete and archetypal figure, in this mode of art, aside from the fact that all variations of these possibilities are discussed, there also arise different possibilities regarding the character who made it. They, too, are subject to the entire spectrum of open-endedness . . . It’s also different from looking at a traditional picture in a frame, where we have sufficient premises for understanding, and they are completely object-based; all of those viewing structures are already incorporated into the morphology of the work. Here, we discern the need to move beyond the bounds of morphology and endow the viewing position with a new semantic . . .

BAKSTEIN: . . . The specific character of the conceptual position is that here, aside from the schema of operating with objects, things, and symbols, there’s the schema of consciously and deliberately operating with an understanding of the genre . . .

KABAKOV: Yes, and according to a certain definition (that deployed, for example, by [Margarita] Tupitsyn, who quotes Baudelaire),³ it is the ultimate aim and the ultimate meaning of the existence of the aesthetic actor, the artist. For that reason, he is an artist and is unlike a prophet, because he establishes these new types of genres.

MONASTYRSKY: Absolutely right. The artist establishes new viewpoints and frameworks that define aesthetic autonomy. As far as genre—although perhaps I’m incorrect in stating this—I think that, having established several genres in the process of your work, in “Room” you created an anthropological centering of an event rather than a genre-based one, and for that reason the existential came to the forefront . . .

BAKSTEIN: Why do you define the method in that way?

MONASTYRSKY: Because, as Ilya said, his “Room” is a conceptual piece. It presents only a possibility. There’s no character; he flew away, and all that is left of him are

3. Margarita Tupitsyn, “Ilya Kabakov,” *Flash Art*, no. 126 (February–March 1986): 67–69.

chaotic scraps, but they are presented to the viewer as the surface of the event. In any case, the first time I saw the work I didn't manage to detect that intense element of formation in the transition from structure to objectness (the element of genre). In observing the metaphysical bases of a conceptual artwork I didn't see a conceptual formation in the sense of aesthetic autonomy; I didn't detect the enactment of the rules of the formation of a new genre. That's probably because there wasn't any reflection on "installationness" in the work [as in this one].

KABAKOV: Andrei, I understand that. But why not do so, and aren't we partly doing so right this minute? Because I'm convinced as never before . . . that the unconscious and the conscious continually exist in the need to be accompanied by that great paper package, wrapped in verbal foil, which is no less rustling, ringing, and shiny than what it encloses. It reminds me very much of the silver sphere in the Collective Actions performance *M*.⁴ That fat, silver sphere housing a cocoon in which an egg was encased . . .

BAKSTEIN: Nevertheless, I'd like to return to the formal side of the question, the source of the attempt, in search of a genre, to literally tie oneself to the line going back to the installation. You see, a certain danger and ambiguity in interpretation also emerged with regard to the quasi-theatrical nature of the situation.

MONASTYRSKY: Yes, and the same thing happened with Ira . . .

BAKSTEIN: But why? I'd like to discuss what was at the basis of the dissatisfaction with, and lack of understanding on the part of, some artists, the reproach that the "Room" should have been made more concretely, given that the idea was to re-create some sort of interior. At its basis is the ambiguity of the space. It is simultaneously domestic and symbolic . . . And therefore, it's neither one nor the other. That seems to be the secret . . .

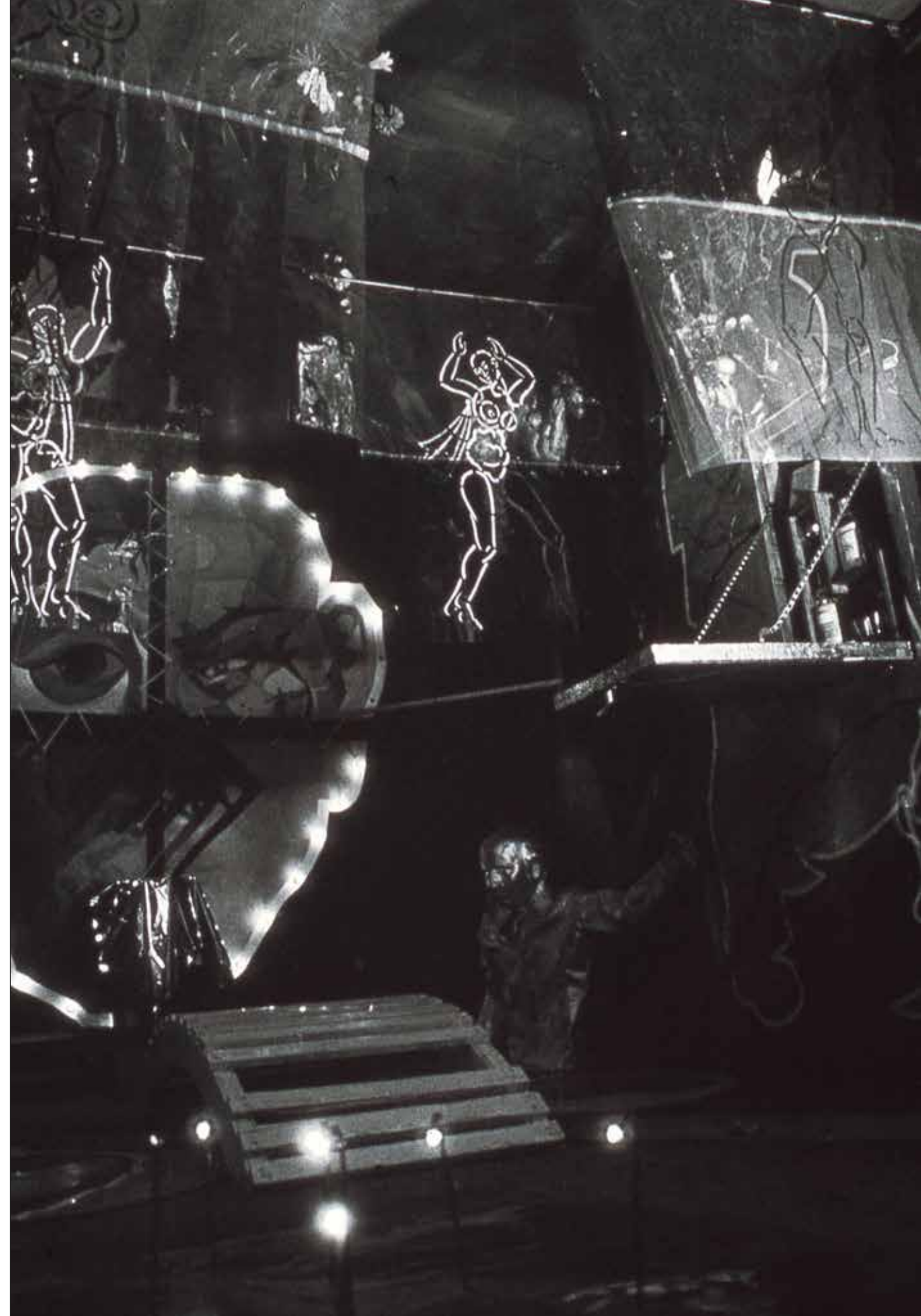
KABAKOV: Yes, exactly! Ordinary people didn't want to look at it; it's either a room, or an image of a room.

BAKSTEIN: Yes, one thing. And that ambiguity leads us to conclude that this is a conceptual work, which requires commentary.

KABAKOV: Precisely . . . Due to the objectness of this room, the problems of the

4. *M* was staged in the Moscow region on a field near the village of Kiev Gorki on September 18, 1983.

Installation view of Vitaly Komar
and Alexander Melamid's *Paradise* in a private
apartment, Moscow, 1972



boundary of free consciousness are very important, which is what it's about, and in the name of which we do this; in other words, everything is done in the name of the person, of humanity. In every situation, even in the oven, a person should remain free, and, if one wishes, drink a glass of cold water there . . . Returning to the principle of boundaries, I'd like to say that at the moment of approaching the environment a person has a heightened sense of fear that he will now see what he doesn't see from the outside. This situation is similar to that of getting vaccinated at school. We don't know whether it will hurt or not, but there's a terrible sense of panic beforehand. I see the same thing when people approach the environment. For a split second, their conscious actions cease. Is art there, or not . . . Oh, now we'll see something! And that very particular state arises . . . Then they see the same sort of rubbish as before. Or, let's say, something different. A person reveals his freedom at the moment of transition, and at that boundary a very interesting deliberation takes place: What should I do now, leave or keep looking? And maybe we'll keep looking?

MONASTYRSKY: You mean the viewer's defenses have come down, like the artist's.

KABAKOV: Yes, the artist is also defenseless.

MONASTYRSKY: . . . We're terribly scared of theatricality. We're always trying to make the everyday and the mediated reveal, albeit slowly and gradually, a boundary between ourselves, such that art isn't so "in your face." A soft entry and a soft exit. In the theater, it's the complete opposite. There, this "softness" is a substitute for tradition, but the aesthetic act itself is very sharp: You take your seat, the curtain rises, and sacrality begins. It's not important whether it's heaven or hell . . .

BAKSTEIN: We've spoken many times about the fate of [Vitaly] Komar and [Alexander] Melamid.⁵ Unlike those of your works exhibited in the West, their artistic stance and their handling of the Russian myth consisted in the fact that the metaphysics of their works, even from the point of view of thematics, cannot be compared to the metaphysical studiousness of yours. At the same time, the mythological specificity and the specific signs of ethnic origin are very clear and pronounced in their work, which accounts for their success.

KABAKOV: Exactly. A fantastic fixation and accommodation of a myth.

BAKSTEIN: I'll ask a question: Wasn't this handling of the myth in its crude, visible forms an attempt to overcome a kind of excessive metaphysical refinement, into which local art is prone to fall?

MONASTYRSKY: Yes. Myth and culture are different things. Myth is closed and culture is open.

5. In 1972, Komar and Melamid realized the first postwar installation, *Paradise*, in a private Moscow apartment.



Installation view of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid's exhibition *Sots Art* at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 1982. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

KABAKOV: Of course, that's obvious. The relationship to myth is, first and foremost, an object of reflection. The unconscious takes on form, and, as form, becomes a mockery of the idol, a discussion of the idol from the other side, but with the understanding that the idol is real.

MONASTYRSKY: Of course, given the fact that in culture everyone creates his own individual myth. And when a person comes up against the myth of collective consciousness, he experiences a strong resistance to it, as the extent of his existential freedom is put in doubt.

KABAKOV: Yes, but here there's a certain distinction between the universal and the individual myth, where the latter celebrates victory in the form of withdrawal . . .

MONASTYRSKY: In principle, the so-called "avant-garde" is a process of the eternal cleaning of the Augean stables on various levels, a constant liberation from old meanings and mythological constellations. Strictly speaking, it's a "correction of names." The avant-garde's aim is always to find a place of openness within culture so that it doesn't lose its historical character. In essence, the basis of history is personal myth, which is possible only in an open culture, a culture with "gaps." And there are various stages of the "historicization" of personal myth: from below to above, including the phase of building the stretcher, priming the canvas, painting, varnishing, conventionalization. Komar and Melamid work somewhere at the border between varnishing and conventionalization, whereas Ilya's "Room" is located at a more fundamental level, and that mythological beast with which he is involved, or, more precisely, the symbolic gesture of that beast, its position of power in the game of the collective and the personal, its cunning manipulations, performed in order to close the exit, the gap of the personal, requires a more fundamental means of struggle. So that Ilya, in some sense, works not with the historical symbol in the present (in which case he, of course, would be "historicized," although critics and the context perform that function), but with the personal and the cultural.

Translated from the original Russian. The text comprises edited excerpts from a dialogue held in Moscow on August 2, 1986. It was originally published as I. Bakshtein, I. Kabakov, and A. Monastyrskii, "Dialog o komnatakh," in *Sborniki MANI* (Moscow: Biblioteka moskovskogo kontseptualizma, 2010), 217–50.

Color, Space, Obstruction

Margarita Tupitsyn

On the Path to *The Green Pavilion*

I will begin this essay by discussing some aspects of Irina Nakhova's oeuvre that put her on the path toward the concept of *The Green Pavilion*. In 1983, Nakhova astounded veteran members of Moscow's vanguard artistic milieu with the first of a series of environments, entitled Rooms and realized in the studio portion of her apartment. The fascination with Nakhova's achievement stemmed from her ability to invent a paradigm that expressed the frustration vanguard artists collectively endured over the inaccessibility of public spaces for showing their work, and, with it, the suffocating accumulation of art objects. Nakhova saw in the Rooms both a remedy for these dire conditions and a directive, as it were, for how to obstruct¹ the flow of unneeded art objects. She expressed her discomfort with spatial limitation early on in her practice by depicting roofs and walls as a dialectic pair of escape/no escape (pp. 78–79). Roofs provided a vantage point that barred the view of the repressive Soviet *byt* (everyday reality), turning Moscow into an “ideal city.”

The grid has played a vital role in Nakhova's work since its earliest beginnings; it is a device that has served the artist on many fronts, including as a means to both liberate herself from dependence on classical themes and deconstruct Socialist Realist clichés. In *Visual Boundaries* (1980; p. 80), Nakhova began to accentuate the modular and repetitive structure of the grid, heightening the geometric reduction of forms. Rosalind Krauss observes that “by its very abstraction, the grid conveyed one of the basic laws of knowledge—the separation of the perceptual screen from that of the ‘real’ world.”² This property of the grid is what prompted Nakhova to convert her living and working space, a site of isolation, into an artistic space that required no institutional endorsement.

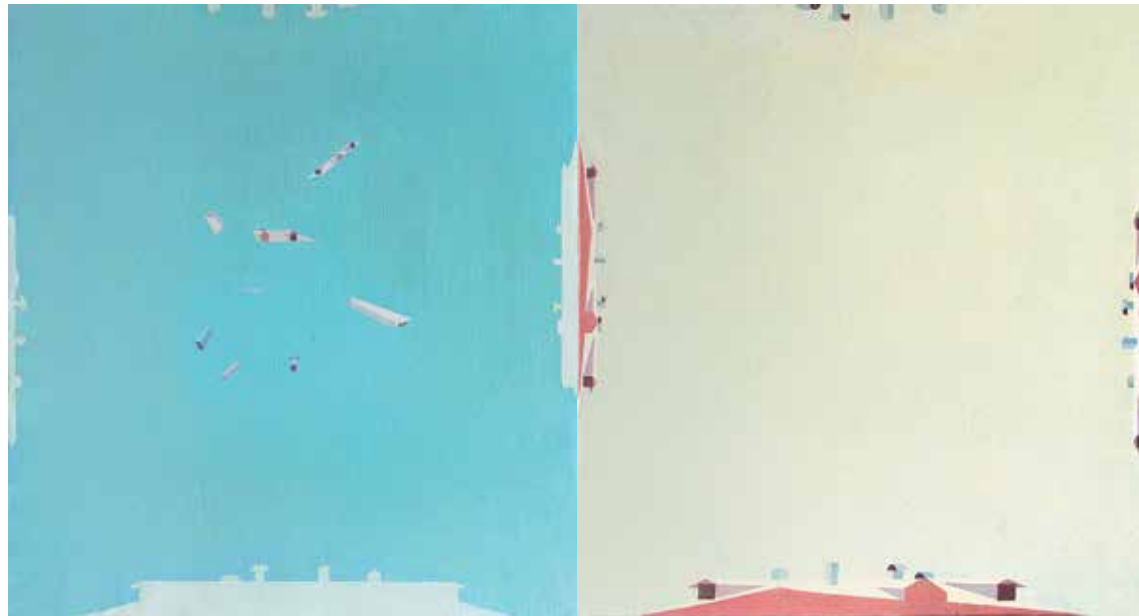
To create *Room No. 1* (1983; p. 81), Nakhova mercilessly shredded color magazine cut-outs into grids that she glued onto white paper and used to cover the entire room. Being in this space of defeated mimetic images must have given Nakhova a tremendous sense of triumph. In *Room No. 2* (1984),

1. The Latin *obstructus* (built against) is the past participle of *obstruere*, from *ob-* (against) and *struere* (to build).

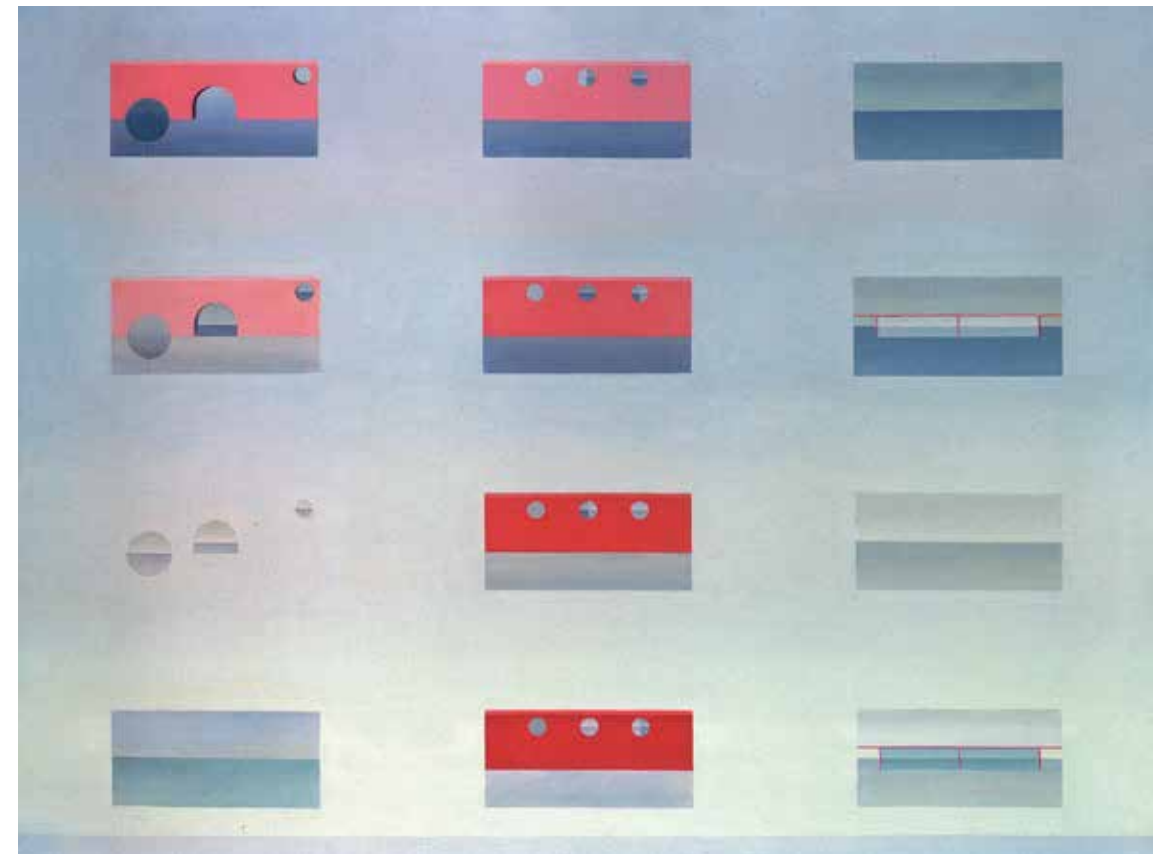
2. Rosalind E. Krauss, “Grids,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 15.



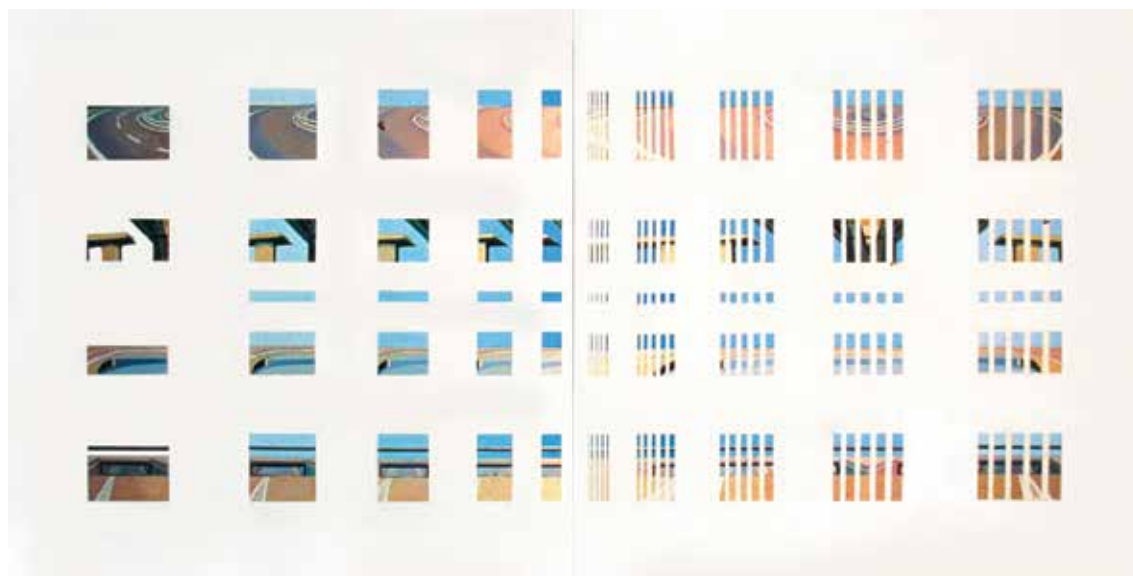
Irina Nakhova at work on *Möbius* in Kulturhuset, Stockholm, 1990



Roofs. 1976. Diptych.
Oil on canvas, each 48 x 46 cm



Wall. 1978. Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm



Visual Boundaries. 1980. Diptych.
Oil on canvas, each 100 x 100 cm

Nakhova collaged abstract black shapes that were gray at the borders, onto a reapplied layer of white paper. The artist's abrupt shift to the nonobjective and the "colorless," I contend, was the result of the artist's encounter with Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) in the exhibition *Moscow–Paris* (State Pushkin Museum, 1981).³ In the eyes of Moscow's vanguard community, the *Black Square's* otherness, with respect to Socialist Realism, its immunity to ideological intrusion, positioned this seminal modernist canvas as the "newfound quiet," a new beginning for autonomous art. Regarding the *Black Square* as a "body without organs," and transforming the monochrome painting into a constellation of partial objects, Nakhova broke the *Black Square's* silence, creating a space for interpretation and discursive accumulation.

The inviting atmosphere of *Room No. 2* was ruthlessly abandoned in *Room No. 3* (1985), the hermetic intensity of which derived from its being entirely airbrushed with black paint. In this next installment of the Room series, the studio's contents—its furnishings, the artist's paintings and easel—

3. The overall composition of the torn planes is also reminiscent of Robert Motherwell's *Wall Painting No. 4* (1953), featured in the *American National Exhibition* (Moscow, 1959). While not seeing the exhibition, Nakhova continued the legacy of the nonconformists' fascination with Abstract Expressionism, expanding it from easel painting to installation.



Room No. 1. 1983.
Installation and collage, 260 x 400 x 400 cm

remained in the space, but the feeling of being sealed-off was intensified by the artist's decision to wrap everything in black paper. Again in dialogue with the *Black Square*, Nakhova created the sensation of being "inside" the black grid, whose perfect stillness hindered interpretation. *Room No. 3* is arguably the most emblematic work of the Brezhnev era, a time when no one "believed in the possibility of change."⁴

The fresh air of *perestroika* blows through Nakhova's *Psychiatric Clinic* (1986; p. 82) and *Amphitheater / The Palace of Congresses* (1987; p. 83). During the Soviet era, both institutions were associated with danger: the former threatened the unemployed and the disobedient with confinement, while the latter hosted Party meetings that dictated and enforced repressive ideologies. Nakhova rendered the clinic's exterior in a state of decay, while depicting the palace's interior from a blurred perspective, in both cases allegorizing the political thaw beginning to be enjoyed by noninstitutional artists at that time. The reduction of control is further manifested through color. In *Psychiatric*

4. Margarita Tupitsyn, "In Conversation with Irina Nakhova," in Margarita Tupitsyn and Victor Tupitsyn, *Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein: Moscow Partisan Conceptualism* (London: Orel Art Gallery, UK, 2010), 28.



Psychiatric Clinic. 1986. Diptych.
Oil on canvas, each 150 x 150 cm

Clinic, the overall red (propagandistic) palette is diluted by white patches, in imitation of snow. In *Amphitheater*, the incursion of white surfaces and stripes into the red space of the palace's spinning interior destabilizes the notion of the Communist Party's purported endurance. The dereddening of Soviet everyday life continues in the four-meter-long polyptych *Tower* (1988; pp. 84–85), whose collapse into a state of horizontality and formlessness suggests the ruined carcass of the Red Empire.

Along with diminishing the state's control over cultural matters, *perestroika* finally afforded Soviet citizens the freedom to travel abroad. For underground artists, whose gaze had always been turned toward the West, this represented an opportunity to live and exhibit there. Despite the great interest in these artists in the West during the final years of the Soviet empire, by the mid-1990s, this interest had begun to wane, while private galleries and collectors emerged in Russia to provide much-needed support. By that point, many vanguard artists, already accustomed to residing in the West, were unwilling to return home, a situation that largely stemmed from their wariness of the political situation in Russia. Living abroad while visiting and exhibiting in their native homeland became a common practice for a number of these artists. Nakhova was among those to adopt this custom, ending up



Amphitheater / The Palace of Congresses.
1987. Oil on canvas, 140 x 200 cm.
Private collection, Switzerland

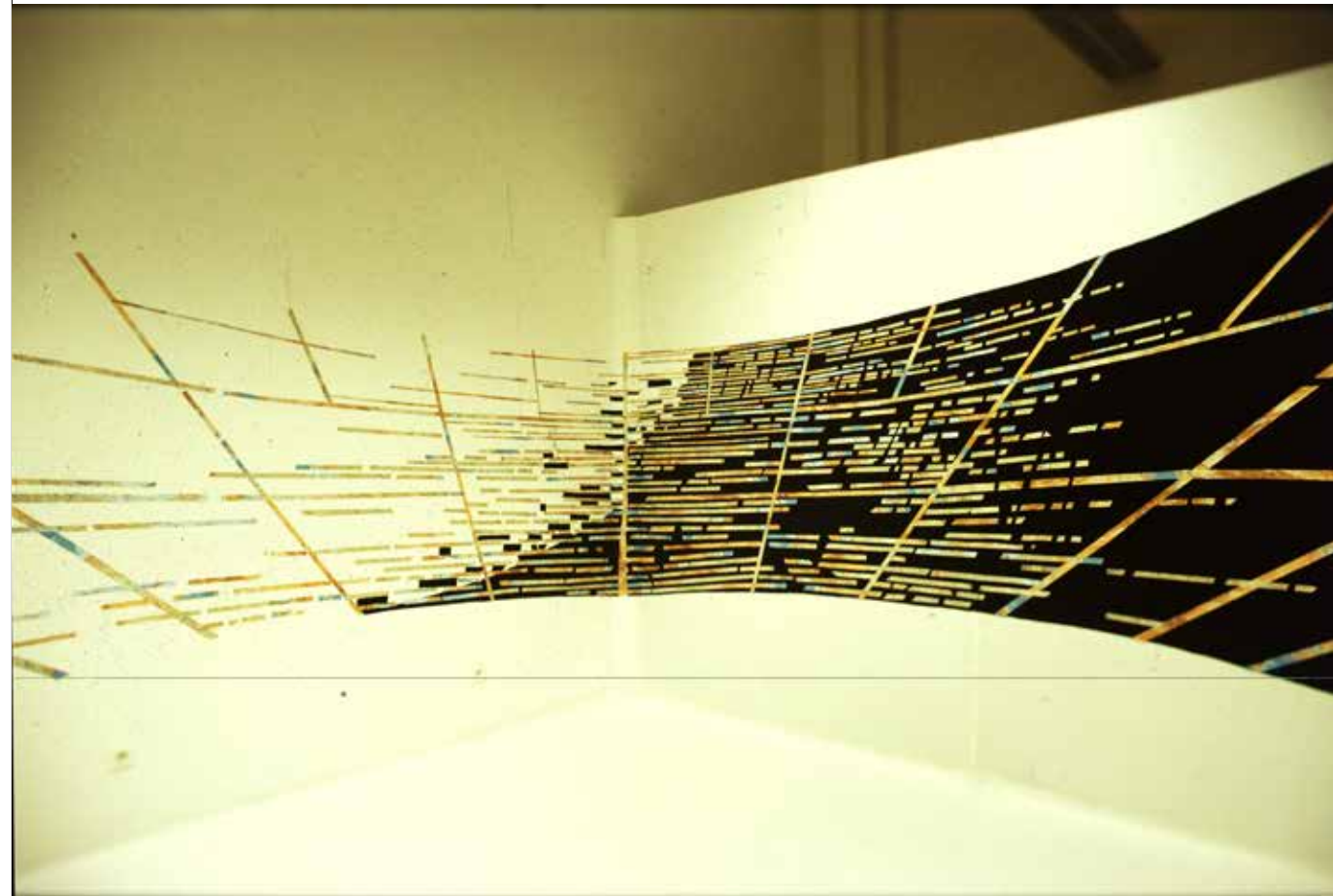
“at the crossroads” between a chaotic homeland and the novel mechanisms of Western institutional networks.

To overcome this heterotopia—the separation between cultures that, in another context, could have become “connecting vessels”—Nakhova developed the concept of an animated, inflatable sculpture. The notion of a compact art object, particularly one that could be repeatedly folded, unfolded, and refolded, easily placed “into one’s pocket,”⁵ freed Nakhova of the need for a permanent studio. The ability to carry art on her person had other advantages as well, most notably, allowing Nakhova to easily carry the work through post-Soviet customs. In their ephemerality, Nakhova’s inflatable sculptures functioned as brilliant commentary on the Soviet industry of bronze monuments that were being toppled in great numbers at that time. Also at stake was the issue of theatricality, for it was the viewer who triggered these objects, which contained a sensory-activated mechanism that would cause them to inflate or deflate as the viewer approached.

5. *Ibid.*, 31.



Tower. 1988. Polyptych (four panels). Oil on canvas,
each 100 x 100 cm. Private collection, United States



Installation views of *Room No. 5* (1998) as re-created
in the exhibition *Iskunstvo: Moscow–Berlin*
at the Bahnhof Westend, West Berlin, 1988
(continued on pp. 88–89)





Installation view of *What I Saw* (1997) at the XL Gallery, Moscow, 1997

As such, Nakhova's inflatable sculptures performed a dual role: they enabled the artist to engage with the Russian viewer, while also showing him how to interact with contemporary art, which had long been eclipsed by Socialist Realism.⁶

Nakhova's first inflatable objects speak to the changes that had occurred in the public's perception of forbidden subjects and stereotypes, both domestically and abroad. *What I Saw* (1997; above) is an allegory of Russia made in the likeness of a bear, which was and still is an embodiment of ideological folklore rooted in the mindset of Western and Russian politicians. Having entered a state of hibernation in the 1990s, the bear has awakened from time to time, becoming a dangerous, wandering animal (a specter of instability), as in its depiction in *Moscow Installation* (2006; p. 91). *Big Red* (1998; pp. 92–93), in the formless state of deflation, attests to Big Brother's weakened aggression toward nonconformist culture in the wake of the Soviet collapse. *Stay with Me* (2002; p. 93), a black "womb-box" with an opening in the form of inflated pink, radish-like shapes, suggestive of vaginal lips, pushed the bounds of

6. Nakhova describes her visit to the studio of the nonconformist artist Viktor Pivovarov as "the first time [she] saw the work of a contemporary artist." This suggests that for Nakhova, official art did not qualify as such, or, as she puts it, "I simply didn't notice Socialist Realism." In Tupitsyn, "In Conversation with Irina Nakhova," 21, 22.



Installation view of *Moscow Installation* (2006) at the Künstlerhaus, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2006.
Sound: Dmitrii Kasian

tolerance for public sexual imagery in Russia after years of absence, which led to a kind of celibacy in the public eye. Once inside the installation, one would hear the voice of an elderly woman speaking to the viewer as if he were her child, complaining about the infrequency of visits. The maternal smothering, combined with the ambiguity surrounding the child's gender, created an obvious reference to childbearing and the separation of the mother and child after birth. This psychoanalytic dimension of *Stay with Me* again speaks to the exclusion of particular discourses (such as psychoanalysis) from the realm of disciplines recognized by the Soviets.

Nakhova would go on to use inflatable sculpture for less explicit social allegories and significations, as with the large-scale piece *Resuscitation* (2010; p. 94). In this work, two sets of three heads, executed in gray silk (signifying ambiguity) and white plastic (embodying transparency), and connected by pipes, are stretched out across the floor, forming a vast horizontal expanse. To create *Resuscitation*, Nakhova embraced the Constructivist prescription for artistic production, progressing from drawing to laboratory object (the plastic version of the piece), to factory product (sewn silk). The silk version inflates (revives) and deflates (expires) as the viewer comes near. In the process, it fluctuates between the formless (when deflated) and the abject (when inflated),



Installation view of *Big Red* (1998) at the Eboran Gallery, Salzburg, Austria, 1998

Installation view of *Stay with Me* (2002) at the XL Gallery, Moscow, 2002. Sound: Nina Dementeva

as the multiple heads together comprise a bizarre rendering of a human face, with a long pipe extending from each mouth. The white plastic version of *Resuscitation* is made from “unsellable material,” thereby serving, as Nakhova puts it, as “a throwback to my Rooms installations, which I made ‘to be discarded.’”⁷ In the plastic variant of the work, she exploited this material’s “great potentiality to mutate as an art form and cultural tabula rasa,” as well as embrace a “dual quality of the common and the poetic . . . that makes it the perfect invention for metaforms and metaphors.”⁸ With both versions of *Resuscitation*, Nakhova continued to defy the notion of sculptural permanence, in addition to the medium’s long-standing association with masculinity, enabling her “homeless” (uncanny) object to operate within intervals between

the “time of action” and “empty action.”⁹ This quality sets the work apart from contemporary commercial public sculpture (both in Russia and the West), and Neo-Pop objects, whose creators thrive on the deliberate monumentalization of the trivial. Instead, *Resuscitation* is more closely aligned with performative aspects of representation as such, originating in Nakhova’s sustained engagement with performance, initially in the mid-1970s in the form of domestic Dadaist happenings staged with her husband at the time, Andrei Monastyrsky, and a handful of underground artists and poets; and, later, in her regular participation, starting in 1983, in the performances of the Collective Actions group. In fact, Nakhova has stated that the group’s action *Balloon* (June 15, 1977), in which a large fabric bag was filled with inflated balloons and left to drift down

7. Ibid., 31.

8. Bradley Eros, “There Will Be Projection in All Directions . . .,” *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 43/44 (Summer/Fall 2005), <http://mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ43/Eros.html>.

9. These are terms deployed by the members of Collective Actions.



Installation view of *Resuscitation* (2010) in the exhibition *Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein: Moscow Partisan Conceptualism* at the Orel Art UK Gallery, London, 2010

the Kliazma River (not far from Nakhova's *dacha*), made a strong impression on her, informing the artist's inflatable sculptures.¹⁰

Resuscitation also serves a bridge between Nakhova's inflatable sculptures and her work in video, which she began to incorporate into her installations around this same time. Both forms of expression underscored Nakhova's intention of prolonging the viewer's experience, emphasizing his participatory role, and re-creating the historical moment of his singular (in a studio) rather than collective (in the Soviet museums) encounter with the artwork. Nakhova's predilection for moving images may be seen in terms of her desire to compensate for Moscow artists' almost complete disregard for film and video cameras as means of production and documentation,¹¹ during the

10. Tupitsyn, "In Conversation with Irina Nakhova," 24.

11. The exception was the Movement group, founded around 1963. Embracing Constructivist strategies, its members emphasized the aesthetic role of technology. Lev Nusberg, one of Movement's founders, owned a film camera beginning in the early 1970s, if not earlier.



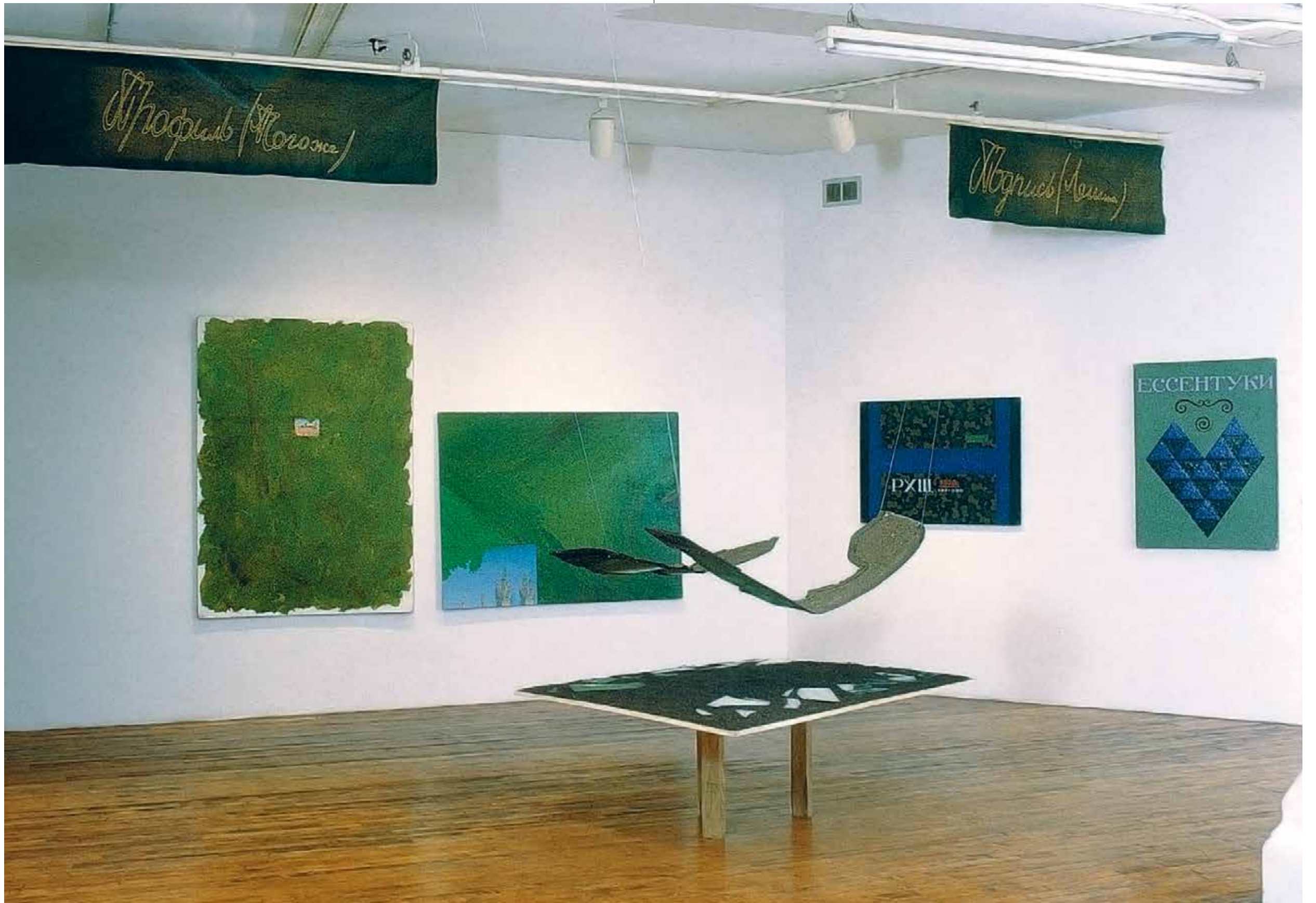
Installation views of *Ears of the Sky* (center) in the exhibition *The Green Show* at Exit Art, New York, 1989 (continued on pp. 96–97)

Soviet period. For example, although Nakhova's family owned an 8mm camera, she never thought of using it to record the Rooms. Similarly, from the start, Monastyrsky was patently indifferent toward the availability of a film camera to document the performances of Collective Actions.¹² At the dawn of *perestroika*, both Nakhova's *Room No. 2* and Collective Actions' performance *The Russian World* (1985) were videotaped; however, this was not done by the artists themselves but by a German scholar, Sabine Hänsen, who explains that she filmed the pieces "not on [the artists'] request, but on her own initiative."¹³ This clear lack of interest in what was at the time advanced technology endowed still photography with a special status among Moscow's vanguard artistic community, giving rise to the notion of auratic factography.¹⁴

12. At least one of Monastyrsky's friends owned a film camera, and recorded the group's early performance *Liblich* (April 2, 1976).

13. Sabine Hänsen, e-mail to the author, February 2, 2015.

14. In the context of various theories of factography (including those of Walter Benjamin, Nikolai Chuzhak, and Sergei Tretyakov), which negate the presence of the auratic in mechanically reproduced artworks, this is a paradoxical term.



The Green Pavilion

*So-called artists! Stop color-patching on moth-eaten canvases . . .
Give new colors and outlines to the world.*
—Editors of *LEF*, 1923

*In some eras, painters use primarily one color; in others—different ones . . .
In each era, every artist has his or her own favorite palette. This phenomenon
is not accidental: different colors influence an individual's psyche differently.*
—Vladimir Friche, *The Sociology of Art*, 1926

*Color must be studied as a tangible industrial material rather than
an aesthetic supplement.*
—Gustav Klutssis, 1926

Nakhova's concern with space, the viewer, and her ability to activate the symbolic function of color—developed in response to political and social transformations—underlie her concept of *The Green Pavilion*. She began the project with the idea of returning the Venice Biennale's Russian Pavilion to its original green hue, demonstrating her characteristic interlocking of the aesthetic and the sociopolitical. She initially conceived of repainting the pavilion for aesthetic reasons: to correct the blunder that occurred during the building's latest reconstruction, when it was painted a drab yellow. *The Green Pavilion* restores the building's harmonic integration into the Venice Giardini and the lagoon, an integration envisioned and achieved by the pavilion's creator, the architect Aleksei Shchusev. Yet, Nakhova's act of restoring the pavilion's original pigment also meant restoring the color's historical symbolism, for, to paraphrase Sergei Eisenstein, "color is first of all ideology."¹⁵ In Russia, the symbolic meaning of green changed over the course of various periods. For Shchusev, it represented the endurance of the monarchy, while for Ilya Kabakov and other Moscow Conceptualists, it metaphorized communal decay and the emptiness camouflaged by the optimism of red; for the *perestroika* generation, green carried utopian connotations.

But before the pavilion could be painted, it first had to be covered in Sheetrock.¹⁶ The unplanned use of this additional material that engulfs the building's exterior began to function as a signifier of the vanguardists' interiorized being, caused by its exclusion from cultural institutions, audiences, and the press during the Soviet period. *Perestroika* eradicated artists' physical isolation, but what about the artists' unrealized projects? Have they lost their relevance? Although oppositional art is not exclusive to the Soviet Union, there, to a greater degree than anywhere else, the visible could become invisible when it did not respond to the official cultural dictum

15. The original phrase is "Form is first of all ideology," quoted in Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), xx.

16. This decision was made when Nakhova's request for permission to permanently repaint the pavilion green was denied.

that art must be "national in form and socialist in content." And this, in turn, brings us to the current debate concerning the notion of national pavilions as the "most anachronistic of exhibition models,"¹⁷ based exclusively on one's cultural identity or historical referents. If such is the case, could national pavilions serve as stages (at least at this Biennale) for a potential rereading—much like the rereading of Marx's *Capital*¹⁸ in the Arsenale—of aesthetic paradigms that emerged in tandem with the twentieth-century incarnations of Marxism (*The Green Pavilion* being one of these incarnations)?

Indeed, twentieth-century Russian art developed in relation to the prior readings of *Capital* by Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin—the grouping of Russian Marxists proposed by Okwui Enwezor, curator of the 56th Venice Biennale, in his official statement. In the late 1930s, the avant-garde's fate was in jeopardy, when Marxism's negative dialectics were defeated by the monolithic wholeness of false Soviet ideology. It was at that very moment that Clement Greenberg articulated the difficult mission to be undertaken by the avant-garde: "the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to 'experiment,' but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence."¹⁹ For their part, Aleksandr Rodchenko and Valentina Kulagina fulfilled this mission in the pages of their diaries, which they kept during this most hopeless and dangerous period of the Russian avant-garde. Both their brevity and their instructions on how to survive tragic historical moments astonish even today. By the time Stalin's "ill"²⁰ reading of *Capital* was replaced by Khrushchev's misreading of it, the specter of the capitalist economy was exorcised from Russian soil. And, along with it, disappeared the mechanisms that had traditionally operated in the Western art world, but were absent throughout much of the Soviet period: galleries, collectors, museums of modern and contemporary art, critics. One of Nakhova's goals in *The Green Pavilion* is to articulate the noninstitutional sensibilities that emerged in Soviet culture, and incorporate them into broader discursive formations.

Inside the pavilion, Nakhova reverently preserves Shchusev's architecture, and incorporates his spectacular skylights into her conceptual semantics. In each room of the installation, color asserts its optico-psychological function. In the first room, painted a metallic gray in imitation of a fighter jet cabin and resulting in a claustrophobic space, one encounters a sculpture of the head of a pilot, wearing a helmet, oxygen mask, and goggles; at two and a half meters in diameter, the sculpture seems to overwhelm the moderate-sized dimensions of the room. The scene is reminiscent of a plane

17. From Okwui Enwezor's official statement on the Biennale's website; <http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/exhibition/enwezor/>.

18. In that sense, Guy Debord's phrase "The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image" is noteworthy. See *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 24.

19. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 22–23.

20. From Enwezor's official statement on the Biennale's website.

crash, and the fractured object, paraphrasing James Joyce, may be described as “A Portrait of an Artist as a Young *Letchik*.” As a neologism based on the root “to fly” (*let*), *letchik* implies that the artist is both a vital social navigator as well as victim of his own high aspirations and expectations. Beyond this association, Nakhova’s installation triggers a host of others, among them, Aleksei Kamenskii, the Futurist poet and one of the first Russian pilots, who crashed his plane in 1912 but amazingly managed to survive. However, for the Biennale visitor, the image that will likely come to mind is Joseph Beuys’s mythical plane crash in Crimea during World War II. Nakhova’s motif of the artist as pilot also evokes Vladimir Tatlin’s flying machine *Letatlin* (1932), whose title incorporates the artist’s name. In all these cases, the artist is imagined as an independent fighter who wants to flee the backward world while simultaneously aiming at its conquest. Nakhova sums up these contradictions as follows: “The figure of the pilot is the figure of the Artist, isolated from the whole world, sealed off in a cabin of a superjet while fulfilling a personal, unpredictable mission. His communication with the surrounding world is very indirect: the selection of familiar gestures is limited; the audience’s reaction to them is inadequate.”²¹

Intended to direct the viewer’s gaze, the movements of the pilot’s eyes are permeated with this sense of ambiguity and inadequacy, rooted in Nakhova’s not having had public showings prior to *perestroika* and thus not being accustomed to the artist’s encounter with the viewer in a public space. But, as she visually articulates this suffocating void from the past, she also ridicules the viewer’s pervasive presence today, a gesture that involves two discrete aspects of theatricality, one of which is a creative act and the other an act of perception. The system of connections between the dramatically different historical moments evoked in the installation perform a dual role, enabling the pilot to make meaningful decisions, while prompting the viewer to examine both his role in the culture industry and the ways in which his “alienation from and submission to the contemplated object occurs.”²² With her characteristic irony, Nakhova describes the viewer’s encounter with her sculpture thus: “The Power of [the] artist’s gaze out of a glass mask forces the layman, who happens to be in close proximity to the artist, to turn around, lift up his head, and direct his gaze—usually aimed at the floor or at something no higher than a TV set—toward the sky.”²³ When this occurs, the skylight, covered with an electrically sensitive film, becomes unblocked, and the “transition from the colorless world [of the room] to the world of color, takes place.”²⁴ In other words, “the individual’s own gestures are [now] no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere.”²⁵

Although the pilot’s head is operated by means of cutting-edge technology, it has an artisanal look. This convergence of technology and the primitive draws on the strategies of the Russian Futurists, who confounded

21. From Nakhova’s proposal for *The Green Pavilion* (Variant 2).

22. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 23.

23. From Nakhova’s proposal for *The Green Pavilion*.

24. Ibid.

25. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 23.

Filippo Marinetti during his visit to Russia in 1913. The head’s uncanny quality comes from the material that Nakhova used to create it: a grayish, quilted fabric filled with cotton and commonly used in the so-called *vatnik*—a generic jacket that the Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin envisioned as an example of *odezhda-normal*, casual clothing for the proletariat. In the 1930s, the *vatnik*, or *telogreika* (body warmer), acquired negative connotations because it was part of the uniform worn by prisoners in the Gulag, while during the postwar period this “egalitarian outfit” remained an irksome reminder of the disastrous state of Soviet light industry.

The intense encounter between the viewer and the totalitarian-resonant art object is followed by the complete absence of the object in the pitch-black, 144-square-meter central space of the pavilion. The grand skylight is partially painted, so that only its uppermost square section remains a light source. On the floor, there is a square opening covered by glass and electro-sensitive film. When the viewer steps on the glass square, the film recedes and becomes transparent, revealing a video installed below, on the ground floor. During the moments of transparency, the gazes of the viewers above and below converge in a reciprocal exchange of the type of vantage points associated with modernist photography.

The color black, combined with the central square form, whose state of opacity/transparency depends upon the viewer’s position, constitutes an explicit reference to Malevich’s *Black Square*. Nakhova selected this painting as the central image of *The Green Pavilion* for several reasons. For one, it was painted around the same time that Shchusev designed the Russian Pavilion. The *Black Square*’s formal radicality and severity of color stand in striking opposition to the fairy-tale coziness of Shchusev’s edifice: a disjuncture that symbolizes the divide between Malevich’s and Shchusev’s respective social standings at the dawn of World War I, when Malevich was a Futurist and a member of a small avant-garde milieu craving political change, while Shchusev was an official architect supported by the monarchy. In addition, Malevich painted the second *Black Square* (as part of the triptych *Square, Circle, and Cross*) for the Russian Pavilion of the 1924 Venice Biennale after the Italian government officially recognized the USSR (ironically, in the immediate aftermath of Lenin’s death). The pavilion’s first-ever inclusion of *Soviet* artists was planned in a manner typical of mid-1920s eclecticism, carelessly mixing figurative and nonobjective art. Aware of this fact, Malevich sent instructions for how to display his works, specifying that the triptych had to be hung in a vertical column. The upshot of this curatorial precision was the pavilion organizers’ failure to find a place for Malevich’s works, imbuing nonobjective art in general and the *Black Square* in particular with the status of a specter haunting the pavilion.²⁶ Nakhova’s rendition of a black square within the dialectics of perceptual ambiguity and direct dependence on the viewer’s presence, speak to what T. J. Clark called the

26. Disappointed by this outcome, Malevich urged El Lissitzky, living in Europe at the time, to “provoke a scandal in the media.” Preparing for his return to Moscow, Lissitzky “wisely decided not to involve himself in the conflict,” as Nikolai Molok noted in a gesture of support. See Nikolai Molok, ed., *Russkie khudozhniki na venetsianskoi biennale, 1895–2013* (Moscow: Stella Art Foundation, 2013), 218.

Black Square's “undecidables,” along with its persistent contentiousness at home.²⁷ Another reason that Nakhova selected the *Black Square* was that Malevich initially conceptualized his reductivist form as a theatrical curtain (for the 1913 performance of the Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*), rather than a painting, thus making it reliant on the viewer from the start. Malevich’s avant-garde contemporaries such as Varvara Stepanova and Rodchenko immediately recognized the *Black Square's* innate theatricality, claiming that Malevich’s black paintings had “no light, color, or form.”²⁸ This did not bother Malevich, and in a letter to Stepanova, he even bragged about filling up a theater in Vitebsk with Suprematism.²⁹ In addition to its theatrical origin, the *Black Square* has been theorized as Malevich’s bridge from Suprematist painting to Suprematist cinema.³⁰ Malevich explored the latter progression under the influence of his friend and collaborator, the Marxist critic Aleksei Gan, who, beginning in the early 1920s, was committed to the decommodification of aesthetics through the practice of film and photography.

In *The Green Pavilion*, Nakhova continues the avant-garde project of aesthetic dereification by rendering an objectless black square with compelling conceptual potential. She does so in two ways: first, by emphasizing the *Black Square's* form, color, and light, which is precisely what Stepanova believed it lacked, and, second, by making the square function as a transient still. The viewer initiates contact with the square’s performative qualities from a distance, as he faces a silent, “weakly, flecking square”³¹ that absorbed the entire past history of the Soviet epoch and covered it with a “gauntlet.” He then proceeds by violating this distance and stepping into its domain. This makes the electro-sensitive film withdraw like a curtain in a theater, replacing the square’s opacity and silence with transparency and “roaring.”³² The latter emanates from the panoramic video installed on the ground floor, presenting an artistic image of Soviet history with grotesque implications.

To reach the video room, the viewer must descend a staircase. Stepping into the viscosity of the floor projections (composed of water, moving crowds, worms, and vegetation) makes one lose one’s balance. The resulting sense of vertigo is perfect for grasping the architectonics of factography, in the form of the material that Nakhova downloads from public and private archives and then incorporates into the grids of digital re-creations of architectural modules drawn from Shchusev’s iconic buildings, among them, the Lenin Mausoleum and the Moscow Hotel, demolished in 2004 under the initiative of the city’s mayor, Yurii Luzhkov. These

27. Indeed, filmmakers of the stature of Andrei Konchalovsky are able to attack the legacy of the *Black Square* on national television.

28. Varvara Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda: Pisma, poeticheskie opyty, zapiski khudozhnitsy* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sfera, 1994), 71.

29. Ibid., 153. Later, the Minimalists, whom Michael Fried accused of theatricality in his 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood,” would consider Malevich their inspiration.

30. By way of example, see my *Malevich and Film* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

31. From Nakhova's proposal for *The Green Pavilion*.

32. The words “roar” and “gauntlet” come from Velimir Khlebnikov's poem “Roar! Gauntlets,” which Malevich illustrated in 1914, the year he most likely painted the first *Black Square*.

superimpositions suggest that architecture is not simply a silent witness but also an accomplice of the reformers and their antagonists who have been succeeding each other on the stage of Soviet and Russian political theater. They also suggest that architecture is that very trace—at times interrupted by wars or negligence—that is in danger of disappearing, like “a face made of sand.”

Nakhova’s vertiginous amalgamation of photographic records of bureaucracy, militarization, human pleasure, and social revolt immediately conjures Kabakov’s series of works entitled *Four Essences: Production, State, Love, and Art* (1983). On four green panels, he attached official images illustrating these recycled themes of the Soviet mass media. For Kabakov and Nakhova, the archive “emerges in fragments . . . with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates [us] from it.”³³ Yet, Kabakov’s rendering of Soviet reality, an unmediated archive of magazine illustrations and postcards, proposes no verdicts or signs of history’s rereading in search of falseness. Instead, the work deliberately camouflages its deconstructive mechanisms, in part because the artist made *Four Essences* during the turbulent period following Brezhnev’s death, with its rapid succession of Soviet leaders.

At first glance, Nakhova might be seen as a belated interpreter of the Soviet archive, for, during *perestroika*, this theme had been discursively tackled by a number of vanguard artists.³⁴ However, this occurred in the context of a vastly different sociopolitical climate, when the denunciatory campaigns vis-à-vis the totalitarian past, seemingly forever defined its negative essence. On the thirtieth anniversary of *perestroika*, this has proven not to be the case. In fact, at this moment, Soviet history is awash in challenges to the revisionist readings of the nation’s totalitarian past set forth by some Russian historians, while all of the former Soviet republics are undergoing their own form of historical vertigo amid the traumatic memory of their former dependence on Russia. Through the phrase “Worm of History,” the title of the video in *The Green Pavilion*, Nakhova bluntly conveys the interpretational schizophrenia toward historical baggage, underscoring this point by infusing the video with images of swarming worms (also an allusion to the mimetic nature of a computer worm). The latter allows Nakhova to experience pleasure from abjection, since, in the words of Georges Bataille, “Pleasure only starts once the worm has got into the fruit.” The effectiveness of Nakhova’s carnivalesque mentality lies in its dialectic nature: while reflecting a condition of feast in time of plague,³⁵ it is also liberating in its potential to reclaim a space for utopian thought. And this latter possibility sends us back to the moment of the October Revolution, famously narrated in Sergei Eisenstein’s

33. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 130.

34. On this, see Margarita Tupitsyn, “Against the Camera: For the Photographic Archive,” *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 58–62.

35. This expression, popular in Russia due to its appearance in Aleksandr Pushkin's *Little Tragedies*, to some extent characterizes the Russian psyche.

Production of the video installation, *Worm of History*, the Russian Pavilion, Venice, 2015 (pp. 104–105)





Primary Colors 2. 2003.
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 116 x 183 cm

film *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926), in which the sailors revolt because they are fed worm-infested meat.

If in the video the ruins of history are presented as content, in the “green-red” room, adjacent to the “black room,” the same message is delivered via form and color. Entering the green-red room after the black room, the viewer is blinded by the brightness and sense of totality achieved by the all-over abstract pattern painted on the walls and printed on material laid on the floor. The abstract composition comes from Nakhova’s earlier canvas *Primary Colors 2* (2003), imbued with the Russian avant-garde’s reductive color theories, including its exit “from painterly mixture into independent entity,”³⁶ and embrace of what Malevich termed a “new color realism.” Applied mechanically, the latter transgresses the boundaries of the canvas to operate in literal space. In this sense, Nakhova’s green-red room is a postmodern (Jamesonian) hybrid of color-form and color-text in which one can locate the traces and distortions of society as a whole. The room can also

36. Kazimir Malevich, “Suprematism,” in *10-ia gosudarstvennaia vystavka: Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematism* (Moscow, 1919), 16.



From Nowhere: Field. 2004.
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm

be seen as Nakhova’s take on Henri Matisse’s and Mark Rothko’s chapels, the difference being those artists’ positioning of color as a vehicle of spiritual and aesthetic equilibrium, as opposed to Nakhova’s belief in color’s potential for psychological violence.³⁷ For example, the red evokes violent revolution, the enflamed décor of the oppressive Red Square demonstrations, the fire at the Russian White House set during the 1993 coup; green is the color of a second layer that appears “from nowhere,” as Nakhova’s canvas *From Nowhere: Field* (2004) suggests. She demonstrates that green is able to shatter the supremacy of red, exposing what red camouflages, namely, the failure of the communal and the by-products of militarization. In the green-red room, the two colors enter into a direct battle for pride of place as reigning pigment at the present moment. Does the Russian Pavilion’s repainted green exterior tell us who the winner is? Is there any guarantee that green, like red, will not become yet another means of camouflaging the new failures on the historical stage?

37. Nakhova formulated her concept of color as signifier of violence in her series *Color Exercises* (2008).



Color Exercise 1. 2008.
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm



Color Exercise 2. 2008.
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm

In this green-red space, the Ariadne ball of red thread is truncated. Unfurled in the historical labyrinth where one can move from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period or get lost amid the present, this thread will undoubtedly help the viewer find his way back to the exit. In *The Green Pavilion*, an encounter between Theseus (the viewer) and the Minotaur (the abjection of history) takes place on the level of consciousness; and if the Minotaur manages to stay alive, he will undoubtedly continue the upsurge of the labyrinth's sinuosity.



Detroit–New York: An Interview with Irina Nakhova

Victor Tupitsyn

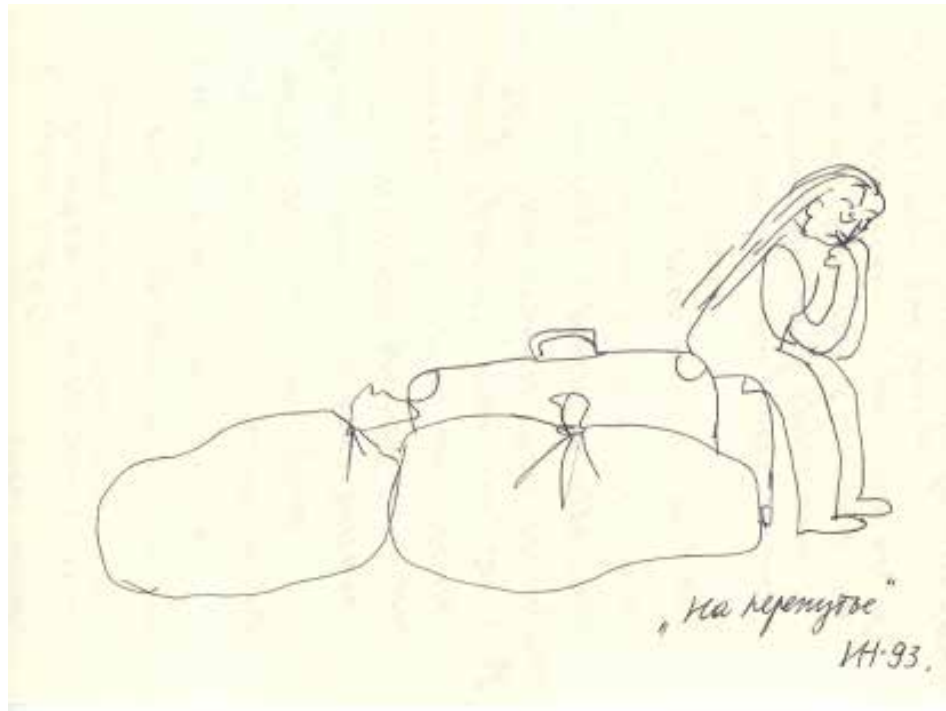
VICTOR TUPITSYN: Ira, please discuss teaching at the university, your creative plans, and your impressions of American life.

IRINA NAKHOVA: Vitya darling, working in Russia right now is like working in a zoo. Wild animals are ripping each other's throats out in the struggle over a fresh piece of meat. Meanwhile, the poor artist, accustomed to the comfort of a nest she's been warming with her own ass, is running around in search of a safe corner where she can sit and try to squeeze something out. In such an atmosphere, it's gotten really difficult to do your work. That's why art in Moscow at the present manifests the tendency to engage in similar, snarling, animal-like stunts: bang one's wife, slaughter a piglet—or else it [art] is no less cowed, sluggish, and paralyzed than a man whose limbs are frozen in terror, and who cannot make a single free gesture.¹ But this mainly applies to those who react to their environment, who are alive. Sometimes, it's worse: the inability—either because of fatigue or some other reason—to accept diverse lifestyles or strategies and respond to them properly, paralyzes some people to such an extent that they are essentially in a waking sleep, continuing to function the same way they did twenty years ago as though nothing had changed. Then you're really screwed, and this pertains mainly to Moscow "artists." Another important factor in "Wild Russia" is money. In the early 1990s, many artists were so down in the dumps, they went into business and are now successfully feasting on sturgeon. The very few who have access to independent Western sources, such as Lena [Elagina] and [Igor] Makar[evich],² are able

1. This is a reference to the Animalistic Projects festival, organized in Moscow in 1992 by the Regina Gallery. It was conceived and executed by the so-called *teleshniki* (corporeal artists) Anatolii Osmolovskii and Oleg Kulik, who authored such happenings as *Leopards Break Into a Temple* and *Piglet Offers Gifts*. They marked a "gray period" in the history of Moscow contemporary art, when its intellectual rigor gave way to spectacle and media attention.

2. The artists Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich work both as a team and individually. Since 1979, they have been members of the group Collective Actions.

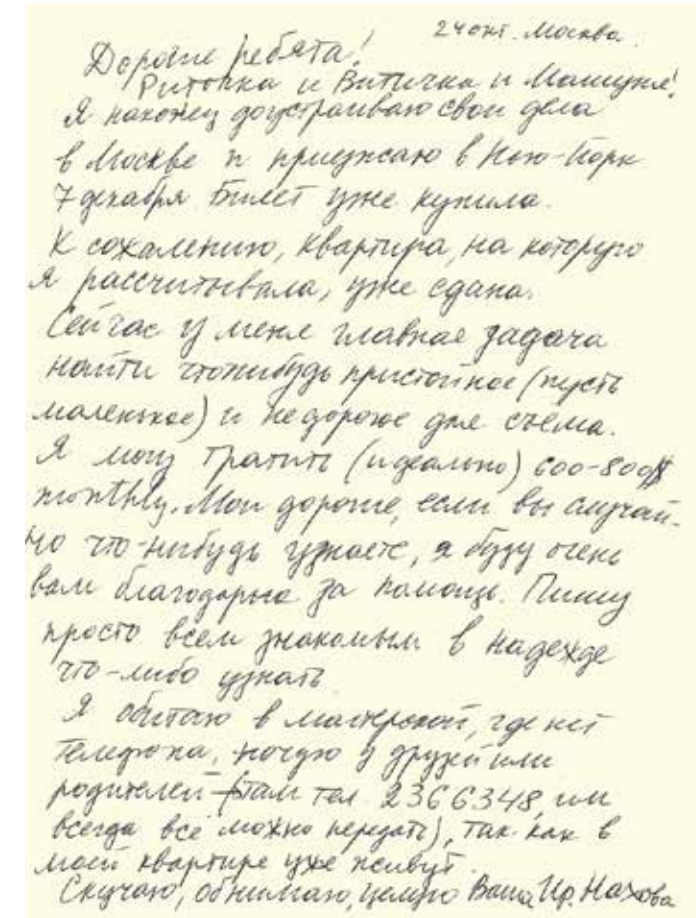
From the series *Friends and Neighbors*. 1994



From Moscow to New York: Irina Nakhova's letter to Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn (verso), 1993 (recto and translation appear on p. 117)

to continue working as usual. From what I can tell, the conditions in the West, and the United States in particular, seem less harsh than those in today's Russia. As for me, I find myself in a strange position that I sometimes see as ideal. Being suspended between two continents—that is, the simultaneous connection and distance—means, on the one hand, involvement in the intensity of a situation, and, on the other hand, the distancing required for creativity. In the U.S., all work is created under competitive pressure, which requires a greater expenditure of energy than the work itself. Unfortunately, a great deal of energy has to be invested in the finessing of social, intra-cultural, and business ties. That's a brief answer to your question! Actually, I'm bored here. I keep asking myself: What am I doing here [in Detroit³] instead of being

3. Nakhova, who taught painting at Wayne State University in Detroit in 1994–97, has recalled her time in Detroit as follows: "The Detroit train station [Michigan Central Station], a colossal 1913 structure similar to Grand Central Station in New York, but completely abandoned and neglected, caught my attention. I found out who owned it, and, after contacting these people, somehow got permission to use the building for classes and student projects. One year, we did a lot of projects there, and when it was open to the public the entire city turned out." In Margarita Tupitsyn, "A Conversation with Irina Nakhova," in Margarita Tupitsyn and Victor Tupitsyn, *Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein: Moscow Partisan Conceptualism* (London: Orel Art UK, 2010), 30.



October 24, 1993, Moscow

Dear guys, Ritochka, Vitichka, and Mashunia,

I'm finally finishing up my business in Moscow, and will be arriving in New York on December 7. I've already bought my ticket. Unfortunately, the apartment where I was planning to stay has already been rented. Now, my main goal is to find something decent and inexpensive to rent (even if it's small). I can (ideally) spend \$600–800 per month. My dears, if you happen to hear of anything I would be very grateful for your help. I'm writing to everyone I know in the hope of finding something.

I'm living at the studio, where there isn't a phone, and sleeping at my friends' place or at my parents' (the number there is 236 6348; you can always leave a message for me), because there are already people living in my apartment.

I miss you.
Hugs and kisses,
Your Ir. Nakhova

Свобода имеет дело с иными категориями, нежели общество, менее трибунальными, обнаруживает иные связи, оперирует более крупными блоками. Свобода ~~никогда~~ обнаруживается на, так сказать, "уровне осознания" на уровне "морей" Тално. Дистанция "туда", открытие нового происходит только при "отсутствии" схем, паттерн непрерывности, генетичности всего, и свободы от "basic instincts," это равно Скандинавия.

Я себя ощущаю достаточно свободной (и ощущала), чтобы ~~не~~ утратить себя какой-либо программой. Никогда не чувствовала себя тем-либо задвижкой. Если и была несвободной, то страдала только от "животных" инстинктов в себе самой. Когда приходит осознание простоты этого вопроса знаешь с тем борешься в себе. Собственно осознание то имеет частичное освобождение.

A handwritten excerpt from Irina Nakhova's answer to Victor Tupitsyn's questions, 1994

in New York? But, it's okay; maybe I'll manage to stay here a year or two. I'm going to work. How's Norton?⁴ What does he think? I read Rita's article in *Art in America*.⁵ I really liked the way she slammed these exhibitions. And, in general, I think she's doing a lot more for Russian art than everyone else combined. I'm very grateful to her! Please call me more often—I'm getting depressed here all alone. I'll definitely come over for Christmas!

TUPITSYN: What are your views on feminism?⁶

NAKHOVA: My views on feminism are fairly simplistic. I believe that our entire civilization is at an embryonic stage of development, in a rocking cradle, as it were. We are governed by animal instincts, basic instincts, such as the desire for material possession, fear, competition, and so forth (to put it more simply: Eros, Thanatos, and "feed me"). This gives rise to the problem of "otherness"—as defined by gender, race, or behavior deemed different (homophobia,

4. Norton Dodge (1927–2011), American collector of Soviet nonconformist art.

5. Margarita Tupitsyn, "Shaping Soviet Art," *Art in America* (September 1994): 41–45.

6. On this subject, see Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 177–81; and "If I Were a Woman," *Third Text* (London) (Fall 1997): 85–93.



Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn, Lucca, Italy, December 2009. Photo: Irina Nakhova

xenophobia, etc.). The fear of difference exaggerates the threat coming from "the other."

TUPITSYN: I agree. Hysteria about differences is a characteristic of European consciousness and, in particular, Eurocentrism. But when we stop exacerbating differences and start celebrating them, we also go too far. As for animals, we're different from them because we know we're mortal. So Thanatos plays a decisive role here.

NAKHOVA: The one thing that makes us different from all other animals and makes us human is our brain, which we ignore because for many it's all (or mainly) about the stomach, the vagina, or the penis. At the "brain level," all people are equal.

TUPITSYN: You're right. The brain is the most egalitarian organ. The problem is that it's corrupted by the stomach, the vagina, and the penis.

NAKHOVA: The brain is the driving force in the development of human civilization. And once we become fully aware of this fact, the problems of gender, skin

color, and other differences will disappear. There will be an understanding of identity based on equality (a very utopian concept for the here and now). But at present, society is built around the animal laws I was talking about. The structures it develops—politics, family, religion—operate on “basic instincts,” and keep humanity within those “animal” boundaries, thus making the “herd” more manageable. It turns out that our society is “retrospective” and “reductive,” since it plays to the lowest common denominator; it’s also “reproductive,” since it reproduces all the vile things that it often claims to denounce and fight against. A society built on reproductive schemas is completely unfree. (This is where I bring the category of freedom into my discussion.)

ТУРТСУН: “Reproductive” and “reductive” schemas are inspired by Eros and Thanatos. At least, that’s what Freud believed. “Retrospective” schemas are discussed in Herbert Marcuse’s book *Eros and Civilization*. From the conservatives’ point of view, the metamorphoses of Eros are just a *libertinage* dictated by the desire to break free from the tyranny of time. But that’s just an aside.

НАКHOVA: I’ve always been intrigued by the question of why society allows an unproductive, “parasitic” group such as artists (as opposed to utilitarian artisans) to exist within its boundaries, and doesn’t keep them in lunatic asylums, prisons, or poorhouses. Sometimes, it even gives them grants and otherwise supports them. Something is wrong here . . . There has to be a reason. Art is the only thing that addresses freedom as such, outside of any restrictions. I think that society (probably unconsciously) experiments, allowing artists to work on the edge, while also granting them a “digestible” freedom which it can then utilize and appropriate. Artists are the “lab rats” of freedom (and society). Freedom has to do with different, less trivial categories than “society” and reveals different connections, operating in larger blocs. Freedom is founded on the “human” level of awareness, on the cerebral level. The discovery of the new occurs only amid the complete absence of schemas or biases, only when everything is permitted, and there is freedom from the basic instincts that are equivalent to such schemas. I feel (and have always felt) free enough that I can afford not to burden myself with any doctrine. I have never felt oppressed by anything. Even when I was unfree, I suffered only from my own “animal” instincts. Once you realize how simple these questions are, you know what you have to fight within yourself. Actually, awareness is already partial liberation. On a societal level, questions of equal rights are tackled by politicians (if not of their own accord, then under pressure from voters). But feminism and other egalitarian movements can be regarded as an important step toward my kind of utopian society, a “society of brains.” Becoming aware of identity is a path toward overcoming it. I see my task as a broader one. Any

From the series *Friends and Neighbors*. 1994



framework, especially that of a doctrine, limits individual freedom. On the other hand, under the same laws of freedom, you can use anything you want as fodder for building other connections. Thus, for instance, this past summer, it was internally unacceptable for me to do non-political work in Yugoslavia. I mean the summer of 1994, when the topic of war was being discussed in a hysterical way, and I felt exploited on an emotional level, when I made a purely political installation. In that context, it was straight to the point and worked wonderfully. Whether it would be able to survive under different circumstances is another question. If a work of art rises above politics (incorporating politics into itself), then it can fit into other contexts as well; if not, it is merely a situational illustration. Naturally, in private life, the artist can subscribe to any opinions or schemas. That is his or her personal prerogative or “civic duty”; however, art, which I regard as the only sphere of human freedom, demands different qualities. Sorry to give you such an incoherent answer.

TUPITSYN: I appreciate your taking the time to do this.

Translated from the original Russian. The interview was conducted via correspondence September 16–October 8, 1994.



Michigan Central Station, Detroit, 1995.
This was the site of *Cathedral of Time*, a project conceived by Irina Nakhova and executed in collaboration with Wayne State University students (continued on pp. 124–25)



Two Halves of a Rotten Apple, or On Techniques for Separating Consciousness from the Body

Irina Nakhova

The 1980s were split into two halves—black and white, rotten and sweet or crunchy. With the passing of time, I have started to think that even in the rotten half there were some surprisingly important events and personal decisions that would have been impossible amid a different political climate and that impacted my future, my personal fate. Two brilliant halves—the most deadly and apocalyptic years and the joy of being freed, the possibility of flying out of the jam jar into another world, the desperate opportunity to find oneself on the other side of the curtain for the first and last time . . .

On the Separation of Consciousness from the Body: Dreams and Rooms

I'll begin with a disproportionately long preamble. To me, the aging process is one of gradual separation of consciousness from the body. It is looking at yourself more and more from the outside. And the moment of death, as it has been described, is when you can finally see yourself from the outside. In childhood, consciousness and the body comprise a united, happy, unreflexive whole. I'm not sure whether this is one of my memories, or a result of how I see myself in one of the very few photographs of my childhood, but I seem to remember sitting in a basin at the *dacha* my parents rented forty-two kilometers away on the Kazan railway, and I can clearly see the grass I'd ripped up floating around my naked body and how these cockerels' tails tickled. The blades of grass would become "cockerels" or "hens," as when, pressing a long blade of grass between your thumb and index finger you ask your friends or, more often, your grandpa, "Is a cockerel or a hen?" in the hope that your casual interlocutor won't guess what will emerge from between your strong fingers. I was one or two, judging by the time of year. Am I imagining this, or do I actually remember the feeling of cozy summer warmth, the smells, the absolute identification with that warm summer day and the comfort of closeness to the earth and to family?

They say that the first separation of consciousness from the body occurs when one experiences shame, and that's probably true. Another



Senses: Apple. Diptych. 2010.
Oil on canvas, each 78 x 78 cm

photograph—grandma and me in Anapa, by the sea—invokes another memory. Some woman rudely tells my grandma, “Put some underwear on the child, she’s big already.” I’m around five years old, and I experience the first sharp feeling of shame about my body, that I’m doing something I shouldn’t, and I’m terribly upset. The subsequent separation of consciousness from the body takes place during the period of adorning the body—beautiful dresses, ribbons, red patent leather knee-length boots with green tights that my father brought back from a work-related trip to Poland. All of this inspires the well-deserved pride of a fourth grader, but there’s still no clear understanding of why it’s necessary to adorn the body—it’s just that other girls don’t have these things; they’re something special. It gets worse. With the early onset of puberty comes the realization of how other people see you, and a strict diet from age thirteen so that the body overfed by grandma slims down. The teenager sees herself from the outside and doesn’t like herself. Later, there are mirrors, makeup, and everything in fast-forward: hairdressers, exercises, vitamins, doctors, medicine, an increasingly intense examination of yourself and your fellow condemned. The latter is a revealing slip of the tongue—instead of “condemned,” I meant “contemporaries”—signs of decrepitude, flabbiness, and an ever-increasing lack of comprehension as to how this wholly unaltered young consciousness lives in such an uncomfortable, clumsy, decreasingly obedient and attention-seeking shelter. And from there, as smart people say, one can see the next stage of separation: it’s when you see your completely motionless body from a height of two or three meters. Whether or not the separation of consciousness from the body has any advantages is open to question. And if so, to what would those advantages relate: the body or consciousness?

Dreams

The first half of the 1980s, prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain, was very conducive to sleeping and dreaming as the realization of one’s fantasies while awake. Dreams are a natural, inherent, protective form of separation of consciousness from the body. The title of a film from the period, *Flights in Dreams and in Reality* (1982), reflects the limited/unlimited possibilities of Brezhnev-era stagnation. In those years, I particularly loved dream time. It was more meaningful and more real than waking time. I would sink into a twelve-hour sleep that was more eventful than the other half of the day. In the space of dreams, I often found myself in the same places. One urban locale in my dreams was called “Vienna.” There, I knew the boulevards, the little streets, how to cut through backyards to find one house or another, how to find the shoe repairer, and where my room was. Sometimes in my sleep, I would leave for Italy in an old train carriage with *huge* windows filled with the light of the setting sun. With a blissful smile, I can recall that it was almost like Gogol’s “on one side the sea, on the other Italy; yonder the huts of Russia can be seen.” These dreams were meaningful, rich, with parable-like imagery, explaining reality and representing a way out of it. Today, I remember these dreams more clearly than things that actually happened when I was awake. I remember without photographs, without the instrument of photography.

The Construction of My Rooms

My Rooms are built spaces for a different domestic experience, built because of extreme domestic necessity. The period spent working on them was the most sensible, happy, warm, and, strange as it may seem, joyful time, although it was a forced undertaking, because of the gloom, grayness, cold, and dirt of the winter of 1983, when New Year’s depression first made me wrap the shedding Christmas tree in newspaper and glue. Before long, having abandoned this fruitless exercise halfway through, I began to remove every object from my workroom, leaving nothing, in order to start again from scratch. To construct a new world for myself from ground zero, with different horizons, to insert myself into a new environment where I would only engage in creative work and be physically situated within the results of my physical and intellectual labor. That is, I was building my state according to my own rules, and if it wasn’t an ideal city, then at least it would be an ideal room. The technique of escapism in action! I could populate this space with my friends. But, as I now understand, the Rooms also expressed my experience of being in the same confined space of exhaustion and depression as everyone else. The urgent need to undertake something in your own world—which, in the best case scenario, in terms of space, amounted to your own apartment, the private place of the Soviet prisoner, the only space where you could do something radical without particular risk—is an action to save yourself as you’re drowning and suffocating in the airless space of the geriatric feebleness and insanity of the state’s power. The Rooms didn’t survive long—one or two weeks at most—although they each took one or two months to make. The process itself was a sensation of happiness, joy, meaningfulness, something that every day snatched me from meaningful sleep, dumped me out of bed, and made me work for days on end. I now understand that this was in part due to the rubber adhesive that was used in huge quantities in the enclosed space, and that made me and Mitya Chernogaev, a teenager at the time, laugh, sing songs, and be in a mood of constant elation during work on the Rooms. This space was used for other things as well—paintings and my work on children’s book illustrations—and for that reason the Rooms were mercilessly destroyed and thrown into the rubbish heap.

The only thing that remains are photographs, my sketches, a very short video by our German friend Sabine Hänsgen, who even then was armed with this new technology, and audiocassettes recorded by Joseph Bakstein featuring the impressions of visitors to *Room No. 2*. Shortly after *Room No. 2* was completed, Joseph invited and interviewed people, mainly respectable male, “founding father” artists, about their experiences of the piece. I would leave the apartment or hide in the kitchen. As I did then, I still feel that the artist, having done her job, can leave. The artwork no longer relates to her, doesn’t belong to her, and therefore engaging with it is not her concern (or work). As Margarita Tupitsyn notes in one of her essays,¹ Bakstein appropriated

1. Margarita Tupitsyn, “Unveiling Feminism: Women’s Art in the Soviet Union,” *Arts* (December 1990): 66.



Installation view of Daddy Needs to Relax (1996)
at the Obscuri Viri Gallery, Moscow, 1996.
Collection: Open Gallery, Moscow



Daddy Needs to Relax (detail)



Left to right: Lev Rubinstein, Irina Nakhova, Andrei Monastyrsky, and Nikita Alekseev in a rented room in a communal apartment on Ovchinnikovskii Lane, Moscow, 1974. Photo: Georgii Kizevalter

the Rooms, launching them into the male, patriarchal discourse, and, although I didn't see it this way at the time, I unconsciously resisted it.

Transition

The transition from one half of the 1980s to the other took place imperceptibly, as if by accident. No one (no one!) in my circle—and, of course, that includes me—even suspected that there would be any kind of change. I don't remember where I heard that a resolution had been passed allowing people to travel to other countries by private invitation. It was in 1987. I called Gabriela in Bologna, a friend of my close friend, Natasha B., who had died in 1986. As I now realize, I experienced Natasha's illness and death in a manner akin to the embodiment of the death not only of an individual but of everything living, which matched the general mood of the time; similar to the struggle to love and the belief in the possibility of recovery, and that after death, a new life would ensue—as always, given to us from above, by order of those in charge.



Upper Management, from the installation *Untitled*. 2013. Laminated print on vinyl, board, and parachute silk, 190.5 x 300 cm

On Photography: How We Went from Being Dream Travellers to Travellers in Reality

For me, and, I think, for other amateur photographers, the phenomenon of photography became real, or became visible and fundamental, in the second, sweet half of the 1980s. Therefore, I would like to discuss the phenomenon here in some detail. Photography is one of the most effective means of separating consciousness from the body, especially when you photograph the body, be it yours or someone else's. Of course, when you draw or paint, you also separate consciousness from the body, but, as the process of drawing or painting is long and not momentary, as with photography, the body is so engaged with consciousness that it doesn't even notice itself. Even when you're painting a self-portrait you're not painting yourself but another person, since you're studying the surface, even though it's your surface; but alienation and concentration on likeness are so complete in the process of painting, that your own body seems

more foreign than someone else's. For whose benefit is this alienation? I think it's mutually beneficial. It's like when you're living in a communal apartment, or sitting in a cell, or living with the feeling that life is over, you did everything you could, it's a dead end, there's nowhere else to go, your neighbors in the communal apartment make you sick—here, having separated itself from communal existence in the body, consciousness makes an important discovery thanks to necessity and begins to operate of its own accord. The camera reveals to us what we don't see, which is why we look at ourselves with horror and disgust, not acknowledging ourselves, denying ourselves with time.

Until the rupture, in 1987, professional photographers made very particular photographs of people's private lives. Going through old photographs, I place them in several piles according to categories: a rare visit to the photo studio; the marking of a child's growth, or a family anniversary, or another life event such as completion of the first year of school or college. Photography reveals a new space: rarely are there holiday photos of new places, such as "the resort of Anapa." In our family, dad owned a camera and a movie camera, and he got them out only for trips. Digging through the detritus of dad's trips, I sorted through thousands of unprinted films, uncut slides, unedited 8mm film reels. All of these unconscious travel exercises shocked me by the almost total absence of people. It's very surprising that I didn't find a single photograph taken in our house on Donskaia Street, not a single portrait of our relatives—not even mom or me, nor grandma or grandpa, although the five of us lived together in a two-room apartment. Dad took photos of his travels around the country and abroad. People appeared by accident, like part of the landscape of a *nomenklatura* traveller beyond the Iron Curtain, in East Germany, Italy, Greece.

In general, it's a pointless collection of images of popular spots that, in terms of quality, are decidedly inferior to postcards. Maybe it was a good way to save on expenses. But in his 8mm films, dad's gaze paused on place names—Yasnaya Polyana, Sex Shop (from the outside, of course, not going into the forbidden zone). Maybe he was really a philological tourist, visiting endless famous sites, monuments, houses, and squares that I knew from books and travel guides. It obviously never occurred to dad to ask someone to take his photo as a memento. The unconscious mastery of space in dad's 8mm films is charming. This pure motion was filmed from dad's car, which he bought, as I recently learned in the archives, using rehabilitation money; my maternal grandfather was shot in Leningrad in January 1939.

This mastery of movement and space in a completely stationary and spaceless country was the highest expression of the freedom and happiness of travel. If we agree that the perceptible world is given to us only on the surface, which, the longer I live, the more convinced I am is true, then speeded-up travel or a change of surface explains life more than anything else. In a country where travel was limited or impossible—registration, the Iron Curtain—and where space was limited, film and photography manifestly fulfilled broadening functions; they were instruments of freedom. Now, I prefer to travel without a camera in order to see, examine, remember. Travelling with a camera, you substitute exercise for seeing. The shutter closes—we'll see how it turns out later.

In our circle, cameras were used strictly professionally, for the most part. I didn't have a camera until 1987. I used to invite wonderful, professional photographers to shoot my pictures on large-format film. The need for high-quality documentation arose in the mid-1980s, around the time of *perestroika*, when we realized the relative value of what we were doing. That occurred when some French diplomats we knew, wanted to buy a work and take it with them, at the end of their posting in the USSR. Forever. The understanding that you'd never see that work again forced you to make professional photographs. Prior to that point, it never occurred to me to photograph my works, even if I were giving them away to friends or acquaintances for some reason or another. Those reporting on art events—actions, apartment exhibitions, readings—were also professionals, the photographers and artists Igor Makarevich and Georgii Kizevalter. The rupture happened with the purchase of the "soap dish," a simple, light pocket camera, and with the appearance of a large number of photo labs and the industry of the developing and printing of film. This radical change took place once it became possible to travel to the West. I got soap dishes for those happy occasions when I travelled abroad, the first time being to Italy, to see Gabriela! Predictably, my photographs started repeating those taken by my father.

The transformation of the privileged segment of the population into travellers and, by default, into photographers, hereby took place . . . The profession of photographer began to disappear with the widespread purchase of cameras and their simplification. It finally fell into oblivion with the advent of the "eye-phone." I observe how easily and unconsciously telephones click automatically, fixing events. It seems to be a matter of entrusting, delegating the process not to the "eye" of the apparatus, but to one's hand. We're transforming seeing into an indicative gesture: "Here, look!" Yes, this will probably become a characteristic of globalization. The index finger replaces thinking, literature, seeing, communication. Even without saying "look!" the finger points like a magic wand and the world is "captured," set aside and mostly forgotten. The deed is done, and forgotten. Unconscious visual accumulation, visual obesity, stupefaction, becoming accustomed to visual noise and aural noise—these changes began with the purchase of soap dishes, like the assimilation of another, open world, in the mid-1980s. In the West, it happened ten or fifteen years earlier. And this radical change is coming to an end now.

Translated from the original Russian. Written in Moscow in October 2012, this essay first appeared in Georgii Kizevalter, ed., *Perelomnye vosmidesiatye v neofitsialnom sovetskom iskusstve* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 418–27.

Installation view of *Paradise* (2014, video installation) at the Winzavod, Moscow, 2014 (pp. 132–135)





Irina Nakhova was born in 1955 in Moscow, graduated from the Graphic Design Department of the Moscow Institute of Polygraphy, and belonged to the Union of Artists of the USSR from 1986 to 1989. Her work has been featured in various solo and group exhibitions throughout the world. The artist's solo exhibitions include *Irina Nakhova: Repair* (Stella Art Foundation, Moscow, 2012); *Irina Nakhova: Rooms* (Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2011); *Disagreeable Matters—Disarming Icons* (Kimmel Center, New York University, 2007); *Probably Would* (Nailya Alexander Gallery, New York, 2005); *What I Saw* (XL Gallery, Moscow, 1997); *Friends and Neighbors* (Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 1995); *Momentum Mortis* (Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York, 1990); and *Partial Triumph I* (Vanessa Devereux Gallery, London, 1989). Among the numerous group exhibitions in which she has taken part, are *Post Pop: East Meets West* (Saatchi Gallery, London, 2014); *Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein: Moscow Partisan Conceptualism* (Orel Art UK, London, 2010); *Moscow Installation* (Künstlerhaus, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2006); *Berlin–Moscow / Moscow–Berlin, 1950–2000* (Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, and State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 2003–04); *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (Queens Museum, New York, 1999); *Laughter Ten Years After* (which travelled to six museums and galleries in the United States and Canada, 1995); *After Perestroika: Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen* (Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1993); *The Work of Art in the Age of Perestroika* (Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York, 1990); and *Iskunstvo: Moscow–Berlin* (Bahnhof Westend, West Berlin, 1988). She has taught at various art schools and universities in Europe and the United States, including Carnegie Mellon University and Wayne State University. She received a Kandinsky Prize in 2013 in the category “Project of the Year.” Nakhova lives and works in Moscow (Russia) and New Jersey (United States).

Margarita Tupitsyn is an independent curator, scholar, and critic. She received a Ph.D. in art history from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. In 1981–83, she was the curator of the Contemporary Russian Art Center of America in SoHo, New York, where she organized the first exhibitions of Moscow Conceptualism in the United States, among them *Russian New Wave* (1981). Her many exhibitions include *Andrei Molodkin: Liquid Black* (co-curator; Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, 2012); *Rodchenko and Popova: Defining Constructivism* (Tate Modern, London, 2009); *Against Kandinsky* (Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, 2006); *Klutsis and Kulagina: Photography and Montage after Constructivism* (ICP, New York, 2004); *Verbal Photography: Ilya Kabakov, Boris Mikhailov and the Moscow Archive of New Art* (co-curator; Museu de Arte Contemporanea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal, 2004); *Malevich and Film* (Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon, 2002); *Bauhaus: Dessau, Chicago, New York* (Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany, 2000); *El Lissitzky: Beyond the Abstract Cabinet* (Sprenkel Museum, Hannover, Germany, 1999); *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (co-curator; Queens Museum, New York, 1999); *After Perestroika: Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen* (Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1993); *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* (co-curator; Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1992); *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (co-curator; ICA, Boston, 1990); *The Green Show* (Exit Art, New York, 1990); *Sots Art* (New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1986); and *Apt Art: Moscow Vanguard in the '80s* (Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D.C., 1984). Tupitsyn also created art events involving the Kazimir Passion group, at MoMA PS1 (1982) and the Kitchen (1984).

In addition, Tupitsyn has authored or contributed to many exhibition catalogues and anthologies, including the forthcoming *Moscow Vanguard Art, 1922–1992* (Yale University Press); *Exhibitions*, in the series Documents of Contemporary Art (Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2014); *Object:Photo: Modern Photographs; The Thomas Walther Collection, 1909–1949* (Museum of Modern Art, 2014); *The Archive*, in the series Documents of Contemporary Art (Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006); *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow* (Getty Research Institute, 2003); *The Soviet Photograph* (Yale University Press, 1996); *Montage and Modern Life, 1919–1942* (MIT Press, 1994); and *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the Present* (Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1989). She has written art criticism in *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, and *Flash Art*. In 2000, Tupitsyn was a Berlin Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin. The following year, she received a research grant from the Société Kandinsky of the Centre Georges Pompidou, and in 2011 she was awarded a Creative Capital / Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant.

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