

THE 1990S: EXPERIMENTATION AND NOSTALGIA FOR TRADITION

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The end of the 20th century proves a time of tensions. There is no country on earth where passions are not running high and where bitter and dramatic clashes of views and of conflicting concepts are not going on in search of ways leading toward the rebuilding of the world for the benefit of all people. Our new perception of time and space has made it imperative for us to see how the relationship between the national and the universally human has changed. As never before the interests of people in any one country are now closely intertwined with those of earthlings everywhere. The interests of every nation have gotten enmeshed with global problems we are faced with on a universally human scale and the subjective residing in each individual's consciousness finds itself in close rapport with people's world outlook everywhere.

Such developments appear particularly aggravated and complicated in this country. Perestroika destroys and wipes off the tenets and dogmas that have been inculcated in our minds for decades on end; it unmask and reveals the true face of idols and moves to the foreground problems of genuine morals and humanism as a pledge of man's future prosperity.

This could not but make an impact on the arts. New realities make heavy inroads into the artist's consciousness. Freedom of thought was naturally followed by freedom of art.

The drastic change of people's awareness could not but bring in its wake a plethora of views voiced by proponents of various art movements. That bitter clashes of views are raging on in

art and that conflicting criteria are proposed to demonstrate what true art really is prove only logical and result from the ongoing destruction of outdated stereotypes. Truth may only emerge out of such clashes of views. Freedom of expression is a noteworthy development and a pledge of future progress in the arts.

We see today a stunning diversity of artists with their highly contrasting personalities, frames of minds, emotions and portrayals of the world around us, or the innermost recesses of human psyche. Realistic representational art, or the numerous forms of avantgardism demonstrate that artists work at a hectic pace in a desire to make the language of art richer.

Our artists' appearance on the world art scene, exchanges of art shows, foreign trips made by our artists, personal invitations and commissions have combined to remove the Iron Curtain and made it feasible for our artists to join their fellow artists across the world; our artists have won fame and recognition in foreign countries, their pictures are offered for sale, they are commissioned to produce works for art exhibitions and sale, they arrange auctions. It appears that they have everything they need to produce still better art. But their obsession with the art market is likely to render them excessively prolific. Our artists are now all the rage and viewers' fascination with their art is only natural, for their art is fueled by a multitude of movements and personalities after the stereotyped and official painting they used to turn out on commission. But they may be tempted to go to any lengths in an attempt to make a brilliant display of themselves as soon as possible

so that they could attend as many events as possible. Such a thirst for fame and recognition (and money-grubbing) may downgrade their genuine craftsmanship and prevent them from studying art in depth. The art business may become their overriding concern and even jettison the progress that has been achieved by many generations of artists.

The problem of the avant-garde has again assumed an urgency. In this age of global challenges it is quite natural for people to grow excited about studies of the innermost world of man's psychological experiences evoked by the awesome problems of today's realities and resulting in experiments with new means of expressing the concepts that our regular art forms are no longer adequate to give justice to. The avant-garde is a manifestation of man's intellectual emancipation. Our new thinking and our fresh global concepts have rendered it imperative for us to think in terms of associations, symbols and the language of new rhythms and resonant colors so that we could alert the viewer's awareness to things "unspeakable" through simple means he or she has grown accustomed to. But there is a danger that lurks in this art form: the art of the avant-garde may be infiltrated by the artists who have nothing to contribute to it, or the avant-garde may prove a loop-hole for hacks. Here the yardstick we use must be an exceedingly exacting appraisal of the aesthetic worth of the works viewers are expected to pass judgement on.

We mentioned that the interests of individual nations grew closely intertwined with our universal human challenges cropping up across the world in this age of difficulties and complica-

tions. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the art of Soviet nations today keeps abreast with the art of the world in some situations. There are no more clear demarcations lines dividing official and unofficial art forms. The vigorous evolution of the avant-garde in its diverse forms is evidence at hand. But it should be pointed out that our perestroika has exacerbated the nationalities problem in no small measure and perhaps is responsible for occasional feelings of nostalgia for the art forms of the past that are exclusively national in meaning and for the fact that regional art will not always keep in tune with solutions to art problems on a worldwide scale.

In contrast with West European art Soviet art took an unambiguous stand on national traditions at the very outset of its evolution. After audacious and progressive experiments with the art of the avant-garde (and sometimes concurrently with it) national means of expressiveness would at times mould the quintessence of an individual phenomenon, or work of art. In the late 1920s and the early 1930s the ideological thrust of artistic activities in individual Union republics matched that of the country's arts that had proclaimed socialist realism as their official policy.

Based on experiments with brand new art forms the concurrence of Western art and its Soviet counterpart the monopolistic domination of the art that was "socialist in content and national in form". Here we would not proceed to discuss whether the art of those days gave justice to national traditions, or the naturally assumed properties shaped by the national character of one or another nation as well as its

psyche affected by historical, social and economic changes. The totalitarian regime ushered in dogmatism that put up stiff opposition to diverse artistic trends and movements, even though artistic activity in the country ~~was~~ never confined to just one trend, or movement.

The absence of unique national identity in modernist works, cosmopolitanism and globalism at present has widened the gap between those works and ethnically original ones.

However paradoxical it might seem in the context of our common objectives and the drive for integration in West, the continued evolution of art in this country of many races ~~cannot~~ but usher in exclusively specific art forms in the time of drastic changes in economic, social and political life. National revival cannot leave problems of national culture on the sidelines, for culture is national in form and content alike. We should look for uniting rather dividing factors in things national, for the national is not an isolated phenomenon but one produced by a fusion of numerous nations' cultures.

Recent architectural practices show a disposition toward religion, a disposition that is so typical of today's social life. Church buildings are erected everywhere and church design contests and competitions are now major events. The alternative problem has again cropped up against the backdrop of contextualism, affecting the moulding of structures' artistic images. Prototypes, occasional direct "quotes" and national symbols are preferred to forms of contemporary architecture. This phenomenon should not be viewed as a distant echo of aliusiveness. Rather it should, perhaps, be described as

attributable to a desire for self-expression in architecture. Even though it ought to be pointed out that the practice of architectural life again demonstrates a yearning for traditional forms and elements and is likely to boil down to some anachronistic phenomenon. At the same time, we would refrain from discussing the theoretical issue relating to the essence of the national in architecture.

Thinking in terms of the near future in the area of architecture and figurative art, we must raise the following problems: has the groundwork been really laid for all the regions to move into a "common home" and will regional interests not affect the overall evolution of art in the context of our new civilization during the last decade of this century?