

A DIALOG OF CULTURES:
CONTEMPORARY ART IN
RUSSIA

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1. The decade 1980-1990 was a period of dramatic transformations in the cultural mentality of Russia. Aesthetic and social priorities of the totalitarian epoch desintegrated and waned. The ideologized discourse and the hierarchy of national values and traditions (the Russian ones being their centre or summit) underwent a radical dismantling.

2. The ideological centre of the Soviet art found itself in the so-called "thematic picture" - a large-scale painting dedicated to a theme considered specially important by the State authorities. Taking a "privileged" theme, a painter had the possibility to comply fully to the official conception of art - however, many artist who had a strong aversion for the officialdom were to develop alternative solutions of "ideologically important" themes. Nowadays the engaged art, both official and alternative, seem to disappear completely. But the "exhibition easel painting" keeps the dominant role among genres and types of art, despite the active growth of other forms (p.e. installation). The visual plastic culture is estimated very high by many leading artists.

3. The prevailing modification of this new pivotal value - the plastic culture - is inspired by the Russian artists of about 1890-1930, beginning with the early Symbolism up to disciples and followers of VKHUTEMAS (Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops). Simultaneously, the cultural horizons of our artists are expanding to the West, and greatly impregnated by the contemporary artistic internationalism.

4. The ideologized opposition "tradition versus avantgarde", with the stress on the first member of the formula, which was maintained earlier is now practically swept away. Classic and avantgardist conceptions enter into a dialog in creating the visual image. So, the dialog of cultures (old and new, home-centred and brought from outside) comes to be one of the basic features of the contemporary art in Russia.