

CENTRE AND PERIPHERY
IN CONTEMPORARY ART OF
RUSSIA

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Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union tumultuous and contradictory artistic life was concentrated in such centres as Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Riga and Tashkent. These centres were the seat of the leading artistic schools, and it was here that major exhibitions were held. The capitals of all the republics and some of the university towns of Russia, the Ukraine and the Baltic republics, such as Sverdlovsk, Lvov and Tartu, were minor centres. Artistic life was like a big river: small exhibition streams flowed into larger exhibitions in republican centres or in the "zonal" centres of the Russian Federation, and further on to major exhibitions in Moscow. Conversely, directives of official art were sent from Moscow to remote regions. At the same time Moscow and Leningrad as the main intellectual centres were the source of opposition trends and spread waves of "another art".

At the time of the disintegration of the USSR this hierarchical system is retained as long as the crumbling but persistent old structures of the Artists' Union still exist. The viability of these structures can be explained by the way of life, especially away from Moscow. This hierarchy is supported by the centres of academic education - the old ones in Moscow and St. Petersburg and the new one in Krasnoyarsk. However, the correlation between the centre and the periphery has greatly changed since 1985 because of the changes in art itself. In the beginning the violent revenge of the forces of avant-garde and transavant-garde which had been suppressed for a very long time gave an advantage to the old centres more closely associated with international artistic life,

that is to Moscow, St.Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. But soon there

spring up in a more or less remote cities and towns original artistic centres not connected with the habitual contest of "realist" and "avant-garde" groups. These centres aim at liberating individual creative conceptions and regaining the long lost old imaginative ways and ideas. New centres of artistic training take shape here - in friendly circles (in Orenburg, Chelyabinsk), around unassuming schools (in Ivanovo, Tver) or just around talented leaders (in Krasnoyarsk, Nizhni Tagil). The contemporary art of Russia to a great extent owes its revival to the former provinces.