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Theme: 1 Tradition and Art - Memories and Visions

BACK TO SQUARE ONE
by Innesa Levkova-Lamm

This slide-illustrated talk will describe how Malevich's Square has emerged in the language of Russian modern and contemporary culture as one of the icons of the twentieth century and has become the "stage" or fundamental element that artists cite or address in their research and experimentation. In fact, the whole evolution of modern Soviet art can be traced through the history of artists' changing attitudes towards Malevich's Square.

In the post-War era, in addition to renewed awareness of the innovations of "the father of Suprematism," other new horizons opened up before Russian artists. After the death of Stalin not only culture, but also scientific and technical theory and practice revived, as witnessed in the creation of a space program that sent satellites into orbit in 1957 and the first manned flight into outer space -- Yury Gagarin's -- in 1961. All of this caused the creative elite to think differently than they had during the years dominated by socialist realism. Cosmic eternity was again revealed to them, as it had been to their predecessors during the early days of airplane travel, together with problems of the universe, mysterious links between the heavens and the Earth, and the parallel nature of phenomena in space and on Earth.

Toward the end of the thaw under Krushchev, the works of Malevich were exhibited in a number of venues. Once again a wave of speculation and conjecture about the nature of the "Black Square" rolled through the hearts and minds of young artists. What is it? artists asked themselves. A hole or

abyss in a white void? A super-object or the trace of an object? Or a black tunnel into the white cosmic void like the "black" and "white" holes that were described by astronauts in the early days of space travel?

But during the epoch of accelerated socialist development in the 1970s, a time that has ironically gone down in history as "the period of stagnation" — the contradiction between State propaganda and everyday life reached its apogee, and the idealism of Malevich and his contemporaries and their utopian dreams began to come into conflict with criticism that ever more frequently called into question those earlier icons.

Perhaps the first radical opposition to Malevich, Kliment Redko's painting *Uprising* (1923-25), played a significant role in the development of the visual language of the 1970s. The majority of Russian artists had already been using Malevich's language in the 1970s as an idiom or code for deconstructing paradigms. This reappraisal corresponded to parallel movements in the Western art world. At this point it must be noted that the emigration of artists to the West played a significant role in the changes that took place in the Soviet art world in the late 1970s and early 1980s; these artists formed a direct "East-West crossroads."

In the 1980's and later the Square became a central image of deconstruction of modernistic paradigms, a simulacrum in the post-modernistic practice of Russian artists.

BIOGRAPHY

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