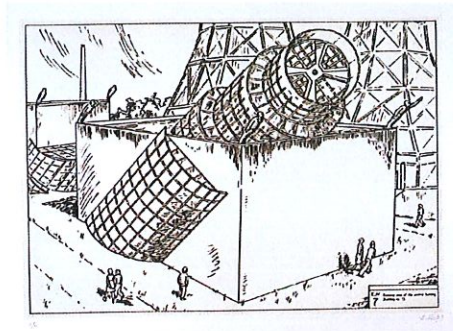


PRESS RELEASE



Ilya and Emilia Kabakov
 Center of Cosmic Energy. Exterior of the central building (building No. 1). No. 7. – Portfolio. Mike Karstens Graphics Editions, 2003
 Collection of Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow
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RUSSIAN COSMOS

curated by Olga Sviblova

Friday 16th December 2011

6 p.m. Press preview; 7 p.m. Inauguration

Open: 17th December 2011 – 26th February 2012

With the support of the highest Italian and Russian government institutions, the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and the Multimedia Art Museum Moscow have organised and present, together with Civita, the *RUSSIAN COSMOS* exhibition as part of the exchange programme for the 2011 Year of Italian Culture and Language in Russia and of Russian Culture and Language in Italy. The exhibition, presented on the third floor of the former Savoy household residence, marks the second phase in the international cultural exchange which, from May to July, presented Russian visitors with an exhibition in Moscow entitled *Arte Povera in Moscow. Works from the collection of the Castello di Rivoli*. This was an unprecedented event for Russia, as stressed by the extraordinary public success of the exhibition. Significantly, *RUSSIAN COSMOS* coincides with the 50th anniversary of the first space flight by Yuri Gagarin and the launch of the principal Soviet, European and American space exploration programmes.

The exhibition is divided into six thematic rooms and stresses the links between the reciprocal influences of the scientific and artistic world on the Russian scene from the 1920s to the artistic experiments of the present day. Russia, a mythological land that has always been projected to living beyond its physical and material reality, has been the place of origin and perhaps pretext for many narratives. One of these possible tales is the dream of outer space and the myth of its conquest. The origins of what would become a veritable historic obsession lie in the ideas of the celebrated Russian scientist, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who laid the bases for the scientific investigation that would lead to the design of spaceships and to the creation of a research institute, subsequently directed by another Russian scientist, Sergei Korolyov. The first spaceships – the sputniks – were constructed under Korolyov's supervision, and opened the way to the first historic space flight with a crew.

Starting with Yuri Gagarin's flight, the myth of the cosmos in the Soviet Union became a powerful mythologem able to cement society. It was an educative myth for all Soviet children, and everyone dreamed of becoming an cosmonaut. The idea of the cosmos, more comparable to infinite space than to the surrounding environment, became the motif for a source of recurrent inspiration for Russian artists and architects. One of the dominant themes of the avant-garde is not the line of the horizon, but the diagonal in works by Malevich and in the photographs of Rodchenko, the emblem of inspiration towards unknown distance.

The exhibition includes objects and models by Tsiolkovsky made by hand and currently conserved in Russian museums, together with installations concerning the first space sputniks and cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. It also presents cartoons and videos, works by artist and architect Yuri Avvakumov, winner of major prizes in the most important competitions of utopian architecture held in Europe and Japan at the end of the 1980s. *RUSSIAN COSMOS* offers too some photographs by Ivan Mikhailov, a young Russian photographer whose works are often to be seen in international shows.

The themes of distance and dream, machine and imagination, conquest and cross-fertilisation appear in the work of the over 30 artists present in *RUSSIAN COSMOS*. Among these, it is worth noting Kazimir Malevich, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Sergei Korolev, Yury Avvakumov, Andrey Savin, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Ivan Mikhailov, Alexander Djikia, Bulat Gallev, ABC (Art Business Consulting), Dmitry Gutov, Timur Novikov, Vyacheslav Mizin, Alexander Pankin, Konstantin Batynkov, Alena Kirtsova, Vladimir Sterligov, Vasiliy Chekrygin, Nikolai Suetin, Iliy Chashnik, Kiril Ass and The Blue Soup Group, Francisco Infante Arana, Gueorgui Gurianov, Igor Veritchev (group NOVYE KOMPOZITORI), Andrei Krisanov, Group ASSA (Timur Novikov, Gueorgui Ostretsov, Ivan Sotnikov, Oleg Kotelnikov), Ilya Kitup and Pavel Pepperstein.

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RUSSIAN COSMOS

Curated by Olga Sviblova

Research work by Olesia Turkina

The Exhibition "Russian Cosmos" is set up as part of the Year of Italian Language and Italian Culture in Russia, and the Year of Russian Language and Russian Culture in Italy. It is connected with the 50th anniversary of the first flight of a human being into space. It embodies an effort to analyze the ties between the notions of Cosmism, created by Russian philosophers, scientists, writers and artists in the early 20th century and Russian contemporary art.

The vast geographic scope, the harsh climate and the innate ability of the Russian people to dream, as well as their religious faith in the forthcoming heaven, whatever the present living conditions, are the background for the appearance of the ideas of Cosmism and of dreams regarding the conquest of outer space. The religious philosopher Nikolai Feodorov (1829-1903) became the first to come up with certain concepts that eventually led to the emergence of Cosmism. At the basis of his theory there was lying a belief in the possibility of common scientific and practical work, done by all the inhabitants of the Earth, aimed at physically reviving their deceased ancestors, as well as the future settlement of the revived and presently existing human beings in outer space. Feodorov's philosophical notions were further developed by his disciple - the great Russian scientist Constantine Tsyolkovski (1857-1935). He was the one who created the scientific foundation for the subsequent era of space flights, at the same time conceiving the theory of the rayonist transformation of mankind, which would give it an opportunity of eternal life and unlimited possibilities to travel in outer space.

In Russia the ideas connected with the future always predominated over those involved only with the present. In the early 20th century they became a source of inspiration for Russian Avant-Garde writers and painters - the poet Velimir Khlebnikov, artists Kazimir Malevich, Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, Ilia Chashnik, Vladimir Sterligov, Nikolai Suetin, Vasili Chekrygin and others. In 1922 Chekrygin, for example, creates a special cycle "Resurrection", devoted to Feodorov's ideas. The aesthetics of Russian Avant-Garde, on the whole, reflected an effort of visually embodying the concepts of the movement towards a beautiful future, connected not solely with transforming reality, but more so with conquering the infinite cosmic space.

Projects of the Russian scientist Sergei Koroliov (1906/1907-1966), whose technological research was inspired by these Utopian ideas, led to the Soviet Union successfully launching the first satellite and the first manpowered ship into outer space. After the October revolution of 1917, the new Soviet Power was at first actively supporting both Russian Avant-Garde and scientific research connected with the ideas of transforming the future. However, already in the 1930s the advance of totalitarianism led to a state of confrontation between Avant-Garde ideas and the totalitarian ideological system. Russian Avant-Garde artists became something superfluous in the epoch of Socialist Realism, which was imposed by directives coming from the new authorities. At the same time many scientists, including Koroliov himself, were imprisoned during the "reign" of Stalin. The post-war Soviet Union, which emerged triumphant, but was behind the West in terms of technology, wanted to be ahead of others. After the death of Stalin the authorities encouraged the persecuted scientists to return to their research work, reviving the idea of

conquering outer space, which thus became not just a technological, but an ideological myth. In 1957 this myth turns into reality – the USSR is launching the first space *sputnik*. In 1961 the Soviet Union and the whole world are stunned by the news of the first man rocketed into outer space.

The project "Russian Cosmos" unites within a single exhibition space the compositions created by Russian Avant-Garde artists, the works of scientists like Constantine Tsiolkovski, with the oeuvre of later Russian artists, beginning with the epoch of Khrushchev's "Thaw" (after 1956) up to the present. Francisco Infante's series "The Project of the Reconstruction of the Starry Sky" (1965-1967) illustrates a new level of interpreting the ideas of Russian Avant-Garde by the post-war generation of artists, who were "cut off" from the former by the ban on Russian Avant-Garde inside the Soviet Union itself. On the one hand, we see the plastic system of Russian Avant-Garde being revived, on the other, the author takes a different look at the very idea of transforming the world, even when it is connected with the Project of its universal improvement. This was a post-totalitarian reaction of the generation which witnessed Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin's totalitarianism. As a result the work of Francisco Infante appears to represent the dualism of a romantic and ironic attitude towards the Suprematist ideas of those who preceded him in the early 20th century.

Cosmism was the only Soviet myth, actively imposed in the USSR since the mid-1920s, which retains its energy up to the present. It was this myth, with its feats, that inspired several generations of Soviet children to form their ideals regarding heroism. For example, in the course of several decades playgrounds for children in cities and towns were adorned with rockets and other attributes of space flights that nourished the childhood dream of becoming an astronaut. The young photographer Ivan Mikhailov made these romantic dreams the object of his cycle "Playground" (2010). Galactic holes turn out to be the focus of one of the leaders of Russian contemporary art, Pavel Peppershtein, in his compositions of the series "Space Holes" (2011). The gurus of the contemporary international and Russian art scenes, Ilia and Emilia Kabakov, create their own version of space mythology – the cycle "Center of Cosmic Energy" (2003). These compositions seem to be a direct response to Constantine Tsiolkovski's drawings "The Album of Space Voyages" (1933), accompanying the cult movie "The Space Flight" (1935), which became one of the sources of inspiration not only for many Soviet people, but also for Kubrick and for Lucas. These drawings by Tsiolkovski, just as a model of a zeppelin that he made and a trumpet "for listening to the music of the spheres", coming from his little house outside Kaluga, where the great scientist lived all his life, are for the first time shown before a wide audience. The works of Constantine Batynkov from the series "Cosmos" (2011) continue the dialogue with Feodorov's notions regarding human settlements in outer space.

The cosmic myth managed to live on through the epoch of total demythologization of Soviet myths, which accompanied Gorbachev's perestroika of the late 1980s. It now becomes a source of inspiration for the new St. Petersburg artists – Timur Novikov, the Group "ASSA" (Timur Novikov, Georgi Ostretsov, Ivan Sotnikov, Oleg Kotelnikov), as well as for Andrei Krisanov, Ilia Kitup, Igor Verichev (the "New Composers" Group), Dmitri Gutov and others. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the cosmic myth survives through all the difficulties. Being interpreted in an ironic or a romantic manner, it still finds its reflection today in the works of Sergei Shutov, the "Blue Noses" Group, Margo Trushina and others.

At present, in the era of total demythologization, the cosmic myth still remains a source of vital energy and gives some hope of overcoming the global crisis in which our world has found itself.