necrorealism

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Editor
Nelly Podgorskaya

Contributors
Alexander Borovsky
Geurt Imanse
Viktor Mazin
Olesya Turkina
Peter Weibel

Copy Editor
Thomas Campbell

Design
Dmitry Melnik

Translations
Thomas Campbell (from Russian)
Ekaterina Kochetkova (from Russian)
Pavel Kuzmin (from the Dutch)

Assistant
Yana Lukonina

Proofreader
Natalia Makarova

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necrorealism

Moscow Museum of Modern Art is happy to present, for the first time ever in Russia, the full-scale retrospective of Necrorealism, a paradoxical and deeply original artistic movement that emerged in Leningrad in mid-1980s. This group offered an innovative form of resistance to the official Soviet cultural ideology and, in a rather absurdist manner, overturned the heroic attitude to death that was omnipresent in Socialist Realism. Necrorealism, which embodied Russian art on the brink of change, hasn't lost its nerve later, in 1990s, when it appeared in several major exhibitions hosted by European museums, and thus entered the Western context.

Keepings of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art include numerous works by Necrorealist artists that take regular part in museum displays. The intention to organize a large retrospective was in the making for quite a while, and it started in 2009 with the exhibition at the Russian Museum, 'Stroke of Brush: New Artists and Necrorealists' that demonstrated the historic part of the movement at its early stage (1984-1990). The current Moscow project aims at showing Necrorealist art in its full scope and following its evolution since its birth and up to these days.

The exhibition at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art is designed as a total installation that is threaded with motifs of independent and experimental Necrorealist cinema — from the first shorts by Yevgeny Yufit to his latest film, 'Bipedalism'. The display unites historically important works and new pieces by artists who continue Necrorealist aesthetics. The exhibition is accompanied by the catalogue that you are now holding in your hands: its unique contents help retrace the links between history, theory, and practice of this movement.

It might seem that, after so many exhibitions and publications, Necrorealism is already well known in Russia and abroad. However, I truly believe that it is very important sometimes to remind the spectators of the key steps in recent development of Russian art, to try to reinterpret them and discover something new in them. It is no mere coincidence that our exhibition has received the honorary status of the Special Project of the 4th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, which testifies to the relevance of Necrorealism today.

Vasili Tsereteli
Executive Director
of the Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

Translated by *Ekaterina Kochetkova*
(from Russian)

necrorealism

Olesya Turkina

— The dead will advise us.
— And why is that?
— They are unconcerned.
Andrei Platonov, Notebooks

The radical movement necrorealism emerged in Leningrad in the early nineteen-eighties. This was the height of the so-called stagnation period, when unliving, undead Soviet Communist Party general secretaries succeeded one another in rapid sequence, and the main political event in the Soviet Union were the "funeral carriage races" broadcast on TV. Necrorealism arose during the protracted death of the communist regime, during the languishing of the socialist economy and the socialist aesthetic system. The regime's moribund ideology nourished the new movement, which questioned one of that ideology's pillars — immortality. The traditional Christian notion of death as a transition to another, better world had been transformed by communist ideology into the idea of rebirth in life. Revolutionary romanticism, which had taken on board Nikolai Tikhonov's lines "One could make nails from these people: / There wouldn't be tougher nails anywhere in the world,"[1] called for the overcoming of man's biological nature in order to make not only life but also death serve communism. Philosopher Nikolai Fyodorov's "common cause," which proposed gathering humanity's forefathers bit by bit in outer space so as to resurrect them, segued into a tradition of conscious "non-dying." In the twenties and thirties, Andrei Platonov's characters smashed "death's hellish depths" with electricity and the "ethereal path": as if they were laying up onions for the winter, they stored clusters of bodies on a steel cable that stretched from a distant star to Earth so that they "would not rot in stuffy graves."[2] The idea of industrial proletarian immortality reached its acme in the experiments of the Special Labor Reserves Laboratory at the Central Labor Institute, where electricity was used to "teach" dead workers to perform socially useful labor after death — to carry bricks and cement, and to hammer nails.[3] A journalist enthusiastically described the "posthumous procession of the proletariat's vanguard towards a better future, towards communism," how dead men armed with pick axes and shovels and powered by portable generators would hack away at the permafrost in the Far North.[4] The crematorium (symbol of the state's new approach to disposal of the dead body, which no longer had to be preserved until the Second Coming and the future resurrection of the dead) and the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square (the country's principal sanctuary, in which the body of the immortal supreme leader was put on public display) were the two poles of communist immortality.

Every ideology generates its own image of death. Soviet ideology created its own pantheon, a pantheon where the highest ideal was to die for the Motherland, for the just cause. Soviet citizens were inculcated with what Platonov called the "instinct of self-sacrifice."[5] This new "instinct" was programmatic in socialist realist art. The desire to overcome oneself, one's imperfect human nature, compelled protagonists to crawl without legs, speak without tongues, and bring death to enemies with their own deaths. The heroic deed was a means of overcoming one's own death: this deed was performed not from a belief in the soul's immortality and the coming Last Judgment, but from a belief in ideological immortality, which is achieved now and forever. The Book of Life was written in the here and now, when Soviet citizens mined coal, met production quotas, and marched into battle in the name of a perished comrade.

Ideology and death converge in their relation to reality. According to Slavoj Žižek, ideology "is not a 'false consciousness' [...] it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological' — *'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge* of its participants as to its essence" (emphasis in original).[6] Ideology and death are invisible to the living. To paraphrase the well-known saying about death, when we live within an ideological construct, it does not exist, we are not aware of it; when, however, we realize that we no longer exist, we are dead as subjects of this ideology.

The death of communist ideology coincided not only with the physical deaths of its supreme leaders and economic stagnation, but also with necrorealism's recognition of the dominant death idiom. It is at the moment they are dying that ideological constructs become visible and vulnerable to criticism. Despite the terrible ordeals they faced in life, the bodies of immortal heroes are not subject to decay and decomposition. Not only the dead but also "the living dead"[7] from communism's vanguard were incapable of being covered with death spots and bloating after death. Like the cemetery's native soil for a vampire, ideology enabled the preservation of the hero's body: according to a principle of classical aesthetics, excessive suffering was unable to distort its beauty and harmony. Necrorealism transformed immortality as a principle of ideological utopia into a two-pronged artistic task — representation of a person's death during life and of bodily transformations after death. When Yevgeny Yufit, the movement's founding father, coined the term necrorealism in 1984, the reference to socialist realism was perfectly legible. Before the term was coined, however, the future necrorealists had for several years been engaged in "wild and pointless activity," as Yufit put it.

In the early eighties, a group of young men that included artists, poets, rock musicians, and random acquaintances roamed the streets of Leningrad like a pack of wild dogs. They engaged in mock brawls in abandoned buildings

1 Written by Nikolai Tikhonov between 1919 and 1922, "The Ballad of the Nails" had nothing to do with revolutionary romanticism: its real subject was the courage of sea captains. Taken out of context, however, these lines gradually came to be associated directly with the unbending will of the Communists.

2 Andrei Platonov, "Prikliucheniia Baklazhanova," *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Informpechat', 1998), p. 140. For a more detailed account of death's role in the works of Platonov and Fyodorov, see Igor' Chubarov, "Smert' pola ili 'bezmolvie liubvi' (Obrazy seksual'nosti i smerti v proizvedeniiakh Andreia Platonova i Nikolaia Federova," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 107 (2011): 231–252.

3 The experiments of this laboratory, founded in 1921 and directed by Alexander Bogdanov and Nikolai Bernshtein, have been analyzed in detail by the Petersburg philosopher Alexander Sekatsky. Aleksandr Sekatskii, "Proletariat i smert'" [The proletariat and death]; accessed August 17, 2011; http://www.windowsfaq.ru/content/view/810/98/. Sekatsky has literally "resurrected" this forgotten evidence of the revolutionary approach to death in proletarian ideology and practice.

4 D. Gliabin, "O popolnenii legionov svobodnogu truda"; cited in Sekatskii, above.

5 In his notebooks, Platonov writes that the "instinct of self-preservation must be turned into an instinct of self-sacrifice nourished by patriotism." Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye knizhki. Materialy k biografii*, ed. N.V. Korienko and M.A. Platonova (Moscow: Nasledie, 2000), p. 266.

6 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 15–16.

7 This is the phrase that Žižek applies to Soviet Communists, who overcame human nature. "In the Stalinist vision, the Communists are 'men of iron will,' somehow excluded from the everyday cycle of human passions and weakness. It is as if they are in a way 'the living dead,' still alive but already excluded from the ordinary cycle of natural forces — as if, that is, they possess another body, the sublime body beyond their ordinary physical body." Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, pp. 162–63.

New Year celebration.
Yevgeny Yufit is at the left in the front row,
Andrei Panov (Swin) is in the centre
of the back row, 1980

and suburban commuter trains, and they would mercilessly beat a mannequin (a dummy used in forensic investigations) in front of astonished passersby. Vigilant citizens summoned the police to stop these outrages, but the flagrant idiocy of their behavior saved the participants in these riotous actions from serious consequences on more than one occasion. Yufit was the head of this "pack." The most well-known Soviet punk, Andrei "Swine" Panov, founder of the group Automatic Satisfiers, was certain that Yufit was the ideologue of the punk movement, not Johnny Rotten. In an interview, Panov claimed that he did not know any punks, that as far as he was concerned they were figments of Yufit's imagination.

Yufit, however, did not like this word and never used it in reference to the activities of the necrorealists. Despite certain similarities — social protest, a rejection of all values, absurd behavior, and links to musical culture — necrorealism avoided engagement with its own label thanks to its unwavering obtuseness, vigor, and toughness (the necromovement's three principal notions). In addition, because of its frankly deviant behavior, necrorealism was never in danger of becoming a mass movement. We might say it proved more radical than the punk movement insofar as it asserted the universality and popular character of its exclusion. This is perhaps connected to the place where necrorealism emerged, with the fact that during this period it was not only young people in England who felt like "rejects" in the sense of being excluded from active public life, but also the majority of ordinary Soviet citizens.

And the people who took part in these necroperformances would have appeared "normal" at first glance were it not for the fact their appearance was so exaggerated. They did not wear outfits designed by Vivienne Westwood, but medical smocks, sailor jackets, soldier's tunics, and army-issued long johns, and instead of Mohawks they sported earflap caps. Without making any demands, they reduced to artistic absurdity the behavioral clichés of the stagnation period — drunkenness, brawls, unproductiveness, the furious expenditure of vital energy in a massive, euphoric "death drive." The artists were neither for nor against the existing order, and it was this that allowed them to maintain their independence. According to Panov, the police paid them no mind because they "acted like idiots." During a time of harsh ideological control, necrorealism proved as impenetrable as ideology or death itself. Telling in this respect is the story of how Yufit wound up in the clutches of the KGB after one of the group's first film shoots. Vigilant citizens called in the police after seeing what they imagined was a maniac or (even worse) a spy lurking round a corner and filming a brutal beating scene (whose victim was the above-mentioned dummy). According to legend, Yufit was summoned to the Big House (KGB headquarters in Leningrad), where he was advised never to pick up a movie camera again: his interlocutors explained that only the idiocy of the footage he'd shot exempted him from criminal liability.

Necrorealism emerged in a period when art was divided into "official" and "unofficial." Necrorealism refused to adopt either stance. It fought against ideology not by directly negating it, but by rendering it senseless. Moreover, the choice of this particular position was inevitable: necrorealism was capable of discrediting not only the dominant ideology, but also the struggle against it.

Having started with spontaneous performances, necrorealism began to take shape as an art movement when Yufit picked up a photo camera and, later, a movie camera. In his first staged photographs, the inhuman expressions on the faces of his necrocharacters are striking. To achieve this effect Yufit invented special "zombie make-up." Wrapped in bandages, smeared with tomato paste and holosas syrup, their mouths stuffed with cotton, the necrocharacters provoked laughter and horror simultaneously: laughter, because they seemingly parodied characters found in abundance in official art, protagonists gripped by the "instinct of self-sacrifice"; horror, because something else could be glimpsed beyond necrorealism's total send-up of basic ideological values. This non-symbolized remainder, this "refuse," this horror of the Real[8] is more evident in the necrofilms. From the very beginning, cinema was never simply a means of recording the performances (although the first short films serve as documentary evidence of their style), but the "pure" formal experiment Yufit has championed all these years.

In 1984, Yufit launched Mzhalalafilm, an independent film studio that united young cinematic avant-gardists from Leningrad and Moscow. The studio's name, which seemed as meaningless as the name of the Dada movement had in its day, consisted of the word *mzha*, which (in the Tver dialect of Russian) denotes drowsiness, dozing, unconsciousness, and the children's babble word lala. Based in Yufit's studio, Mzhalalafilm released five short films by Yufit, films with the suggestive titles *Werewolf Orderlies* (1984), *Woodcutter* (1985), *Spring* (1987), *Suicide Monsters* (1988), and *Fortitude* (1988). These are silent, black-and-white 16mm films in which members of the necromovement played the characters. In the opening scene of *Woodcutter*, which functions as a kind of newsreel, Yufit himself, wearing "zombie make-up" and bearing traces of a bullet wound to the forehead, presents Mzhalalafilm. The walls are covered with his staged photographs, which resemble casting photos. Yufit speaks at length into a microphone, but his voice is not audible — this is a silent film. Screenings of necrorealist films were accompanied by recorded music. Thus the soundtrack to Woodcutter was the necrorealist anthem "Fat Wax," penned by New Artist Oleg Kotelnikov and Yufit to the tune of the song "Happy Neighbor."

Yevgeny Yufit in a shot from the *Spring* film, 1987

8 We have in mind Jacques Lacan's famous triad of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. See Jacques Lacan, "Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel," *Bulletin de l'Association Freudienne 1* (1982): 4 — 13.

Yevgeny Yufit in a shot from the *Woodcutter* film, 1985

Black-and-white silent cinema was Yufit's main source of inspiration. Fritz Lang, Germaine Dullac, F.W. Murnau, Luis Buñuel, and Dziga Vertov are but a few of his favorite filmmakers. According to Oleg Kovalov, who in the eighties ran a film program at the Spartak repertory cinema (which included screenings of masterpieces from the twenties), the necrorealists sat in the front row during these screenings and paid close attention to the proceedings on screen. The first film critics to deal with necrorealism recognized the trace left by the international cinematic avant-garde in Yufit's early films. Thus, when he labeled *Spring* a "symphony of idiocy" in his article "Spring on the Rue Morgue," Sergei Dobrotvorsky was directly referencing Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1921).[9] In nearly all of Yufit's early films (with the exception of Fortitude), bits of Soviet documentary footage from the thirties, forties, and fifties — a white steamship, marching Young Pioneers, a circus — serve as montage and semantic junctures. These specimens of Soviet optimism supply a particular rhythm to the scenes of brawls and elaborate suicides involving pitchforks, rope swings, and boiling water.

These films were shot quickly, often in a single day. The plots arose spontaneously depending on the peculiarities of the landscape, the roster of participants, and suitable surroundings. Yufit's short films are marked by a high motility generated by the rapid, chaotic movements of characters in the forest, on the outskirts of the city, and in the ruins of abandoned buildings, a motility amplified by the fact that he shot the films in slow motion but screened them at normal speed. They contain the energy of spontaneity and the unrestrained fantasizing of their participants on the topic of suicide, which along with their ragged avant-garde editing gained Yufit a reputation as the most uncompromising member of the cinematic underground.[10]

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Knights of Heaven, 1989

Debil (Yevgeny Kondratiev), who hand-painted his films and shot at the most economical speed, and Andrei Mertvyi (Andrei Kurmayartsev) also worked at Mzhalalafilm. Mertvyi was distinguished by a radicalism that was extreme even for the necrorealists. His ten-minute film *Urine-Crazed Body-catchers*, which is chockablock with sophisticated mock suicide attempts, male friendship, and violence, caused a scandal during the first officially sanctioned screening of necrorealist films, at Leningrad's Dom Kino in 1988. During this scandal, the necrorealists themselves, seated in the front rows, happily supported outraged viewers by shouting, "The people do not need such art!" In the late eighties, Igor Bezrukov and Konstantin Mitenev joined Mzhalalafilm. In 1985, Yufit met brothers Gleb and Igor Aleinikov, Muscovites who dubbed the new cinematic underground "parallel cinema" and founded the hand-printed journal *Cine Fantom*. At the journal's behest, Mertvyi and Debil wrote a study, entitled "The Flora and Fauna of Graves," in which they filled in the gaps of filmmakers' knowledge of necrophages and cemetery plants. The illustrated text is an interpretation and re-elaboration of Eduard von Hofmann's "Textbook of Forensic Medicine" and Jean-Henri Fabre's *La Vie des insectes*.

In 1984, Yufit discovered forensic medicine reference books, which immediately became an iconographic resource for necrorealism. In 1985, he and Oleg Kotelnikov produced the triptych Death of Martyn / Twisters / Ambushed: Yufit copied suicide scenes from Mikhail Avdeev's Soviet-era "Forensic Medicine Handbook" onto the canvases, which Kotelnikov then painted. This was Yufit's only direct use of the source material he tirelessly promoted. Zooanthropomorphs became the protagonists of his own black-and-white paintings, which are reminiscent of animated films. These half-men half beasts round-dance on the perimeter of his canvases, impale themselves on stakes, descend on parachutes whose straps tighten into nooses, and form "couplings" in which the tail of one beast winds up in the maw of the next.

According to legend, Yufit photographed the most pathological scenes of suicide and violent death from Eduard von Hofmann's "Atlas of Forensic Medicine" and distributed them among his confederates. Thus a new chapter in the history of necrorealism began: necropainting. The necrorealists all suddenly began producing pictures, a kind of necrocomics. In *Our Kind Know How To*, Andrei Mertvyi depicts those species (including man) among which cannibalism occurs. Leonid Trupyr (Leonid Konstantinov) produced the painting *In the Reeds*, which became the logo of Mzhalalafilm. This image of two sailors with life-threatening wounds was perceived as a darkly humorous take on a classic Soviet heroic film — *We Are from Kronstadt*, filmed in 1936 by director Efim Dzigan. Debil presented the story of a complicated suicide. The central character of his painting climbs a tree to save a cat hanging from a limb; the man becomes tangled in a rope that becomes the instrument of his spontaneous asphyxiation. A hunter passing by tries to save him by shooting through the rope. The man begins to fall, accidentally grabbing a bolt of lightning as it flies past. Valery Morozov's paintings *Fat Wax* and *Feces* might be termed academic studies were it not for the fact that the body's postmortem transformations serve as their subject: in the former, the transformation of the dead body into adipocere (corpse wax); in the latter, the petrifaction of fecal matter.

Andrei Mertvyi (left) and Vladimir Kustov
at the platform before going out of town, 1984

Despite the fact that from the moment of its inception the nastiest rumors had been floated about the movement (encouraged by the artists themselves), necrorealism never worked with real corpses. Moreover, as their pictorial compositions themselves demonstrate, their source of inspiration was forensic medicine reference books and atlases, in which corpses are arranged vertically for ease of viewing (just as in the paintings of the necrorealists).

[9] Sergei Dobrotvorskii, "Vesna na ulitse morg," *Iskusstvo kino* 9 (1991), reprinted in Sergei Dobrotvorskii, *Kino na oshchup'* (Saint Petersburg: Seans, 2001), pp. 28—36.

[10] For more information on these films and the work of Yufit in general, see Viktor Mazin, *Kabinet nekrorealizma: Iufit i* (Saint Petersburg: Inapress, 1998), which provides the fullest analysis of necrorealism.

Valery Morozov also produced a series of wooden *Totems*, which resemble the idols of Easter Island while also shocking viewers with the savage "subhuman" expressions on their faces. The necrorealists' embrace of the figurine genre might also include Andrei Mertvyi's "Dutik," a plastic doll that when warmed up over gas blows up like a corpse showing the effects of putrefactive emphysema. "Dutik" played a role in Yufit's *Knights of Heaven* (1989), and was exhibited in a miniature zinc coffin in the necrorealist section show *The Territory of Art*, at the Russian Museum in 1990. Yuri Tsirkul (Yuri Krasev), who took part in all the group's performances and has acted in Yufit's films, exhibited variations on the installation *Russian Forest*, which consisted of birch trunks, over the course of many years. Vladimir Kustov, Serp (Sergei Barekov), and Igor Bezrukov also actively engaged in painting. Bezrukov not only shot the film *Visitor from Africa* (1989), but also produced a series of expressionistic paintings on the topics of male friendship and suicide. In the diptych *Sivash Is Still Ours*, we see a dismembered body flying euphorically upwards in the first part of the painting, while in the second part fragments of dismembered corpses are combined with the symbol of the Soviet state — the hammer and sickle — which has also been dismembered. Serp initially took part in the necroperformances organized by Yufit. His vivid, grotesque paintings have seemingly been taken from children's horror stories: *Men's Happiness, In the Meadow, Harvest Festival*, and *The Last Commuter Train* present various forms of dismemberment, the aftermath of male merrymaking and the population's suicidal tendencies. The use of slang and scientific terms borrowed from forensic medicine handbooks, which sound quite innocent at first hearing, were very important for necrorealism. In the title of necrorealist paintings we discover the same love of black humor, social grotesquerie, and absurdity that is typical of necropractice as a whole.

Emerging during totalitarian ideology's dying moment, necrorealism did not so much mimic the traditional themes of heroic death for the Motherland and self-sacrifice, as it produced a new *Ars moriendi* ("The Art of Dying") in the form of black humor, lewd comics, and anecdotes borrowed from forensic medicine reference manuals. We might argue that necrorealist painting is ideologically closer to the medieval dance of death than to socialist realist art. Except that in the *danse macabre* the figure of Death is personified: the skeleton serves as its allegory. In necrorealist art, on the contrary, there is no place for allegory. Bullet and stab wounds, fire that distorts the body into a boxer's pose, putrefactive emphysema — these are all traces left by death.

Sergei Serp
Man's Happiness. 1990
At the exhibition *The Future Depends on You. Collection of Pierre-Christian Brochet, 1989-2007*
Moscow Museum of Modern Art

Vladimir Kustov has scrupulously studied these signs of death in forensic medicine reference books. Kustov began his necrorealist career as a participant in the necroperformances and as an actor on Yufit's film shoots. His first independent work was the object *Bear with Shark's Jaw* (1986), a kind of readymade. Subsequently, Kustov shifted to the production of strict black-and-white paintings. His works can be classified by the causes of death illustrated in them — for example, careless handling of electricity. Electricity, which was supposed to animate the dead in the twenties (as we have seen), kills *The Electricians*, on whose cold-blue bodies various types of electrocution-induced traumas are reproduced. The electricians are "living dead": risen from the pages of forensic medicine manuals, they melancholically display their lethal "patterns" against a landscape featuring a power line. In *The Heraldry of the Current*, the antemortem ecstasy frozen on the face of the protagonist in the painting's center, and the stigmata (schematic depictions of types of injuries) are reminiscent of religious paintings. Finally, Electricity, in which the white lines of discharges from electrodes flare against the backdrop of a black brain, is akin to a visionary landscape. The painting is dedicated to the insane idea of an English scientist who proposed implanting gold electrodes into the human brain in order to control it. For Kustov, the semantics of color is vital: black is the color of life, while white is the color of death.

Vladimir Kustov
Electricians. 1990
Oil on canvas. 147 × 198
Collection of Vladimir Dobrovolsky, Moscow

The series of paintings entitled *Cold* was inspired by the story of the famous fire at the Vienna Opera in the late nineteenth century. The ambiguity of life and death, of fire and cold (also manifested in the "boxer's pose," which is identical to the so-called pose of the chilly man, who perished from low temperatures) is reflected both in the title of the works and in the figure of a skier dashing across a snow-covered field. Kustov renders the stylized male figures into the letters of the alphabet, letters he uses to write his visual book of life/death. He has also developed a "necromethod" based on a reinterpretation of the images of dying extant in culture. The "necro-image" thus emerged in Kustov's literary and painterly practice. The artist focuses on the interval between life and death: he calls this interval, which has been incarnated in his installations, the "corridor of dying" or the "space of absolute dying." Kustov's art of dying is based on a parascientific discourse, as evidenced in this passage from his (unpublished) manuscript "Necromethod": "Having established what the 'human corpse' is on the basis of a certain (usually not very large) number of observations of 'human corpse' specimens, we are now in a position to recognize an arbitrarily large, almost infinite number of other such objects: "animal corpse," "plant corpse," and all objects that are united by the group DEATH qua objects existing from the moment of the cessation of dying to the moment of the loss of form."

Necrorealism achieved international recognition during the early perestroika period. This was apparently due in no small part to the fact that

Vladimir Kustov
Cold. Triptych. 1990
Oil on canvas. 148 × 294 cm

necrorealism had posed the ultimate questions of life and death, questions that were broader than the national context. Necrorealist works were shown at the exhibitions *In the USSR and Beyond* (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1990), Binazionale: Sowjetische kunst um 1990 (Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf; Central House of Artists, Moscow; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem), *Kunst Europa*, a large-scale project occasioned by the reunification of Germany (necrorealist art was exhibited along with Moscow conceptualism at the Kunstverein in Hannover), as well as many others. In 1990, the necrorealists were exhibited at the legendary show *The Territory of Art*, at the State Russian Museum.[11]

Yufit's films garnered recognition at the same time. In 1988, at the height of perestroika, Alexander Sokurov created an experimental workshop at Lenfilm Studios that he invited Yufit, among others, to join. Moreover, the master immediately recognized the artistic independence of the monster of underground cinema, while Yufit fully appreciated the chance to learn how to use professional equipment. Starting with *The Knights of Heaven*, he began working in 35mm. Yufit's next film, *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead* (1991), filmed in Alexei Guerman's workshop at Lenfilm, won the Grand Prix at the Rimini International Film Festival in 1992.[12] The screenplay is based on a short story by Alexei Tolstoy: in the finished film, nothing remains of this source except the family of vampires, relatives of the protagonist, a scientist researching the common shrew. Yufit has to this date made five feature films, which have been shown at film festivals in Montreal, Locarno, and Toronto, as well as at the MoMA in New York. In 2005, the 34th Rotterdam Film Festival devoted a special program to Yufit's work featuring an exhibition of his photographs and the world premiere of his film *Bipedalism*. The leitmotif of his films are incomprehensible, idiotic experiments, such as an attempt to make a hybrid between human beings and trees (*Silver Heads*)[13] or improving "human stock" through interbreeding with apes (*Bipedalism*). The new man whose creation people dreamed of in the twenties has been transformed, in Yufit's oeuvre, into a victim of an unsuccessful experiment, an outcast, a "Z-individual." His necroheroes, neither living nor dead, excluded from the social order, wander the outskirts of large cities, on the remains of a universal ideology that enslaves the individual no less than the totalitarian regimes did. It is no wonder that it was George Romero, creator of a cinematic saga about the "living dead," who introduced Yufit's films at a Russian film festival in Pittsburgh in 2001. Both filmmakers criticize society from a maximally "reverse" viewpoint, the viewpoint of those who have died to society and have returned to instill terror.

Yevgeny Yufit shooting the film
Daddy, Father Frost is Dead, 1991

[11] *Le Territoire de l'Art: Laboratoire*. Institut des Hautes Etudes en Arts Plastiques, Paris/Mus e Russe, Leningrad, 1990 (exhibition catalogue).

[12] On Yufit's cinema and, in particular, the film *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead*, see Anzhelika Artiukh, "Dedovskoe kino," *Iskusstvo kino* 3 (1996): 43—46.

[13] See Olesia Turkina and Viktor Mazin, "Para-Necro-Blockbuster, or Evgenii Iufit and Vladimir Maslov's *Silver Heads*," in Seth Graham, ed., *Necrorealism: Context, History, Interpretations* (Pittsburgh, 2001), pp. 53—59.

Necrorealism was born in the waning days of totalitarian ideology, in anticipation of its imminent death, reducing its basic values to pathology. Despite the fact that one ideology (which glorified the "instinct of self-sacrifice" and devalued life to such a degree that it invented a biomechanics of the corpse) has been replaced by another ideology (an ideology of pleasure-seeking), the question of life and death (or rather, death in life) remains as relevant as ever. The heroes of *Positive Regress*,[14] beast-like zooanthropomorphs armed with pure idiocy, have risen up in rebellion against this new ideology. Whereas necrorealism initially emerged to render senseless a progressive utopia, today it fearlessly rejects the ideas of capitalist productivity and profits.

Translated by Thomas Campbell (from Russian)

Yevgeny Yufit
Untitled. 1990
Oil on canvas. 130 × 190 cm

[14] See Olesia Turkina and Viktor Mazin, "Para-Necro-Blockbuster, or Evgenii Iufit and Vladimir Maslov's Silver Heads," in Seth Graham, ed., Necrorealism: Context, History, Interpretations (Pittsburgh, 2001), pp. 53—59.

history

Trupyr (Leonid Konstantinov)

Svirepyi (Anatoly Mortyukov)

Andrei Mertvyi (Kurmayartsev)

Debil (Yevgeny Kondratiev)

Valery Morozov

Igor Bezrukov

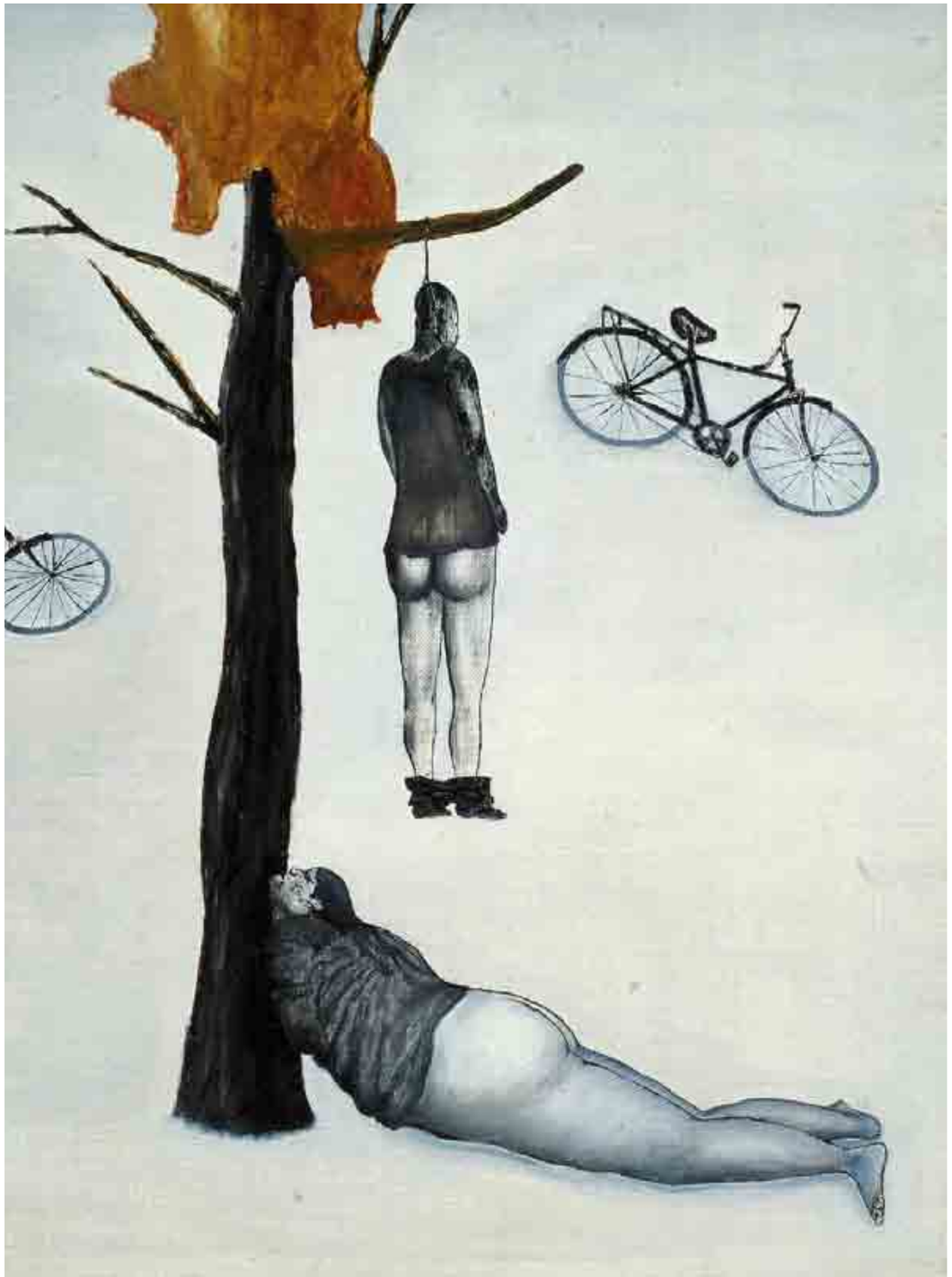
Yuri Tsirkul (Krasev)

Trupyr
In the Canes. 1987
Oil on canvas. 94 × 93 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Trupyr
Snowdrop. 1987
Oil on canvas. 79 × 94 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

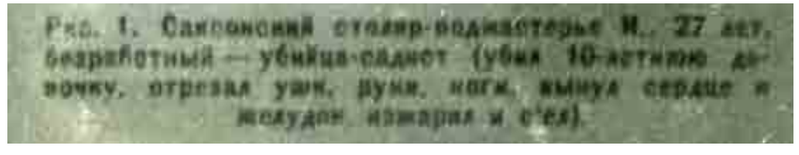
Svirepyi
Stills from the film
by Andrei Mertvyi

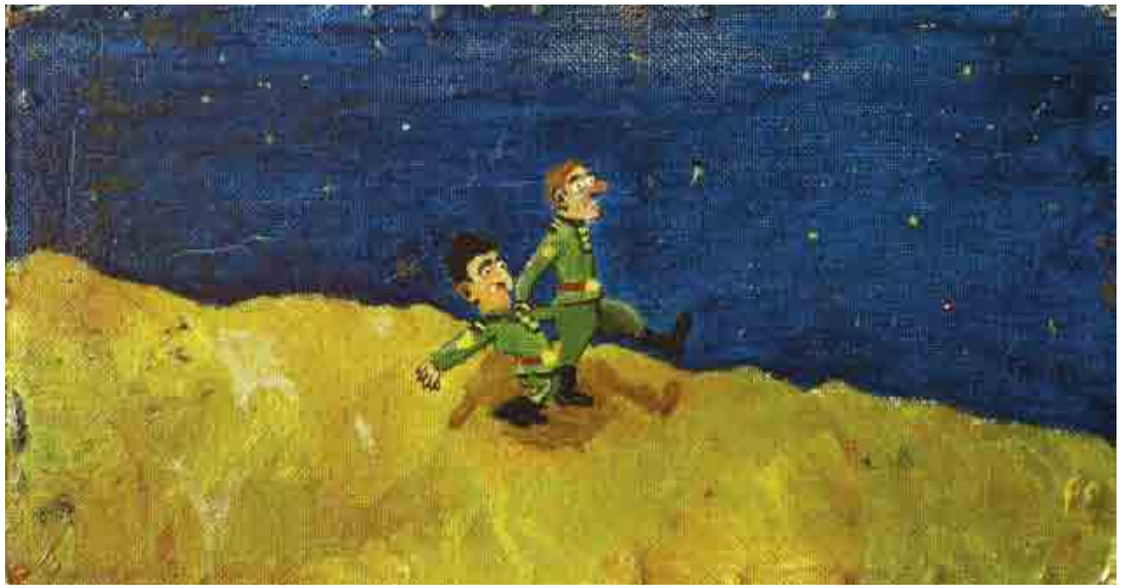
Svirepyi ‣
Walk. 1989
Oil on canvas. 80 × 60 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia



Andrei Mertvyi
Emphysema
and the Bugs. 1989
Oil on canvas. 208 × 149 cm
Private collection, Hamburg,
Germany

Andrei Mertvyi
Rose of Saxony. 1985
Vulcanite, bronze,
black & white photo. 9 × 6 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia





Andrei Mertvyi
Soldiers. 1984
Oil on fiberboard
21 × 40 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Andrei Mertvyi ▸
Our Kind Know How To. 1987
Oil on canvas. 199 × 143.5 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Debil
(Yevgeny Kondratiev)
1985. Leningrad

Debil
Untitled. 1985
Oil and tempera on faux
leather. 69 × 93 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Valery Morozov
Tyre Workers. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

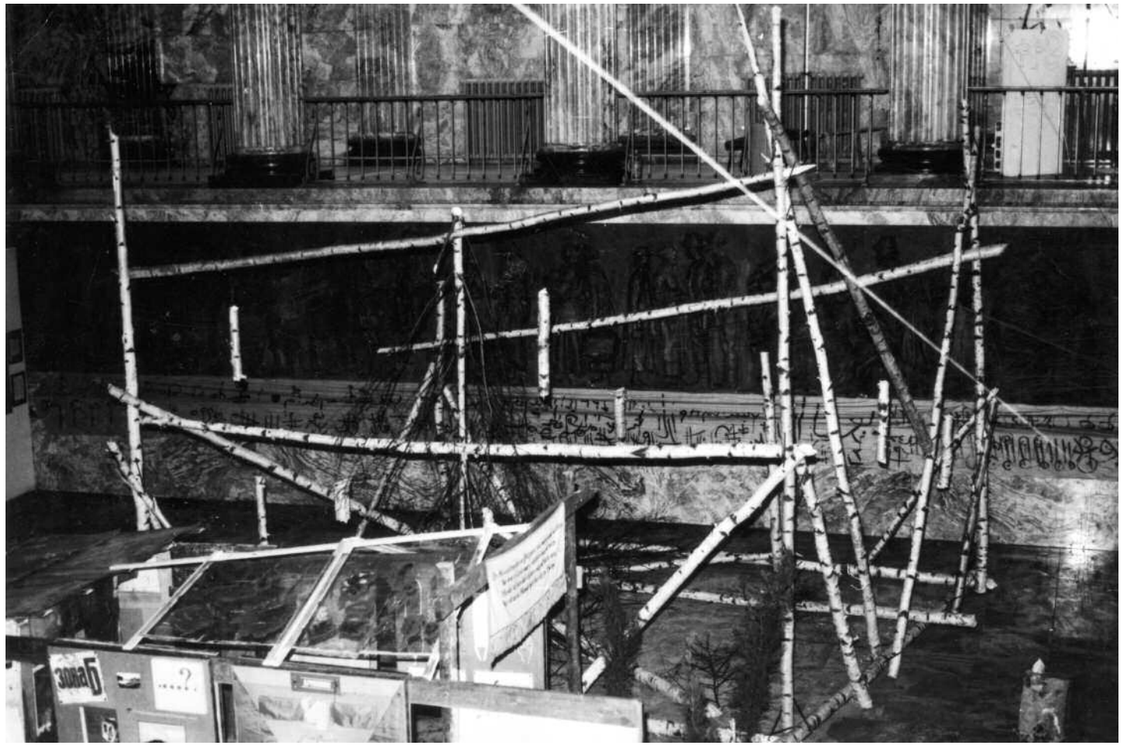
Valery Morozov ‣
Feces. 1989
Oil on canvas. 248 × 153 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

◂ **Valery Morozov**
Fat-Wax. 1986
Oil on canvas
199 × 134.5 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Valery Morozov
Idol. 1990
Stained oak, height 93 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Igor Bezrukov
Ararat Grapes. 1987
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
State Russian Museum,
St. Petersburg

Igor Bezrukov ‣
Sivash Is Still Ours. Broken
Diptych. 1987
Oil on canvas
160 × 75 cm each



Yuri Tsirkul
Russian Forest. 2007
Installation
Gutters, oil

Yuri Tsirkul
Russian Forest. 1991
Installation
Wood, mixed technique

Yuri Tsirkul
Portrait of Artist Yuri Tsirkul. 1989
Oil on canvas. 82 × 83 cm
Private collection

Yuri Tsirkul, 2007

Igor Bezrukov
Born 1959 in Leningrad

Graduated from the Polytechnic Institute, then studied with Alexander Sokurov at the Cinema School of Lenfilm Studios. Directed two films at 'Mzhalalafilm' independent studio founded by Yevgeny Yufit: Guest from Africa and Man as the Last Shelter of the City (1985). Practiced painting and acted in Yufit's films Wooden Room (1995) and Silver Heads (1998). In late 1980s and 1990s took part in numerous actions and exhibitions, performed with Sergei Kuryokhin's Popular Mechanics orchestra. Took part in several exhibitions of Necrorealism group, such as From Non-Official Art to Perestroika (1988), Necrorealism (Mocharnok Galleri, Budapest, 1990), Territory of Art (Laboratory) (State Russian Museum, 1990), In the USSR and Beyond (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1990). Since mid-1990s he preferred cinema and video, directed twelve documentaries, as well as numerous TV broadcasts and videos.

Lives and works in St. Petersburg

Yevgeny Kondratiev (Debil)
Born 1959 in Rybinsk

Moved to Leningrad in 1980, and started doing photography and drawing. Since early 1980s became friends with Yevgeny Yufit and concentrated on his experimental 'wild' cinema. Developed the theory of 'vertical' cinema. In 1984-1987 worked at the experimental film studio 'Mzhalalafilm', founded by Yevgeny Yufit. Directed such 16mm films as Yufit's Necrorealism (1985), Work and Hunger (1985, in co-authorship with Oleg Kotelnikov), Halley's Comet (1986), Nanai Nana (1986), I, Debil, Forgot It (1986-1987), Vertical Cinema (1988), Dreams (1988), Formation of Cinema. Horizontal Primitivism (1988), Creative Search of Boris Koshelokhov (1988), Lena's Men (1989), Drops Remain on Trees (1990), Maksim Maksimych (1993), Stony Wind (1995), Voice of the Motherland (1997), Hello New Year (1998), and others. He also worked with scratch animation, hand-painting and scratching the film. He co-created animated fragments in Sergei Soloviev's Assa film (1987). He performed as an actor in Igor and Gleb Aleinikov's movies Someone Was Here (1989) and Tractor Drivers 2 (1992).

Since 1995 he lives and works in Germany.

Leonid Konstantinov (Trupyr)
1963, Leningrad — 2008, St. Petersburg

Performed with several punk music groups. Since 1980s, acted in Necrorealist cinema. Took part in musical performances, accompanying the screenings of Yevgeny Yufit's early short films with electric guitar. Developed Necrorealist aesthetics in painting. Directed In the Canes film that became the symbol of the independent 'Mzhalalafilm' studio founded by Yevgeny Yufit.

Yuri Krasev (Tsirkul)
Born 1960 in Leningrad

Artist, actor in Necrorealist cinema, author of performances and screenplays. Was a constant member of Sergei Kuryokhin's Popular Mechanics orchestra, and designed costumes for their performances. He was the first in the USSR to introduce military outfit as a scenic costume.
Author of Russian Forest installation (1991, Museum of Ethnography of USSR Peoples) and Russian Forest hymn that was performed many times in Russia and abroad, including the Academic Chapel in St. Petersburg, Xanten and Kassel in Germany.
In 1991 he joined the New Academy of Fine Arts founded by Timur Novikov. Director Ulf Hansen based his movies Bowels (1992) and Mother 2 (1992) on Tsirkul's screenplays. The motifs found in Mother 2 influenced one of Rammstein video clips.
Performed as an actor in Yevgeny Yufit's movies Silver Heads (1998) and Struck by Lightning (2002).

Andrei Kurmayartsev (Mertvyi)
Born 1959 in Leningrad

In mid-1980s he joined Necrorealist movement and since then developed this aesthetics in painting, cinema, and literature. In 1985 he created necro-fairy-tale A Girl and a Bear, and in 1986 wrote a research thesis Flora and Fauna of the Tombs (in co-authorship with Yevgeny 'Debil' Kondratiev). In 1988 he directed the 16mm film Mocheubiytsi trupolovi (1987). Frequently acted in Yevgeny Yufit's movies, including Bipedalism (2005).
In 2008 he filmed a documentary about asphyxia. In 2009 staged his own text A Girl and a Bear by combining slideshow with text reading. He also directed a 16mm feature film Casual Handling of Corpses.

Lives and works in St. Petersburg.

Valery Morozov
Born 1953 in Leningrad

Performed with various music groups, including Rossiyane (Russians) rock band and AU (Authomatic Satisfactors). In 1987 he joined Necrorealist movement and first appeared as an actor in Yevgeny Yufit's Spring film. He also took part in concerts of Necrorealist orchestra 'Mzhalala' directed by Yuri Tsirkul. He developed Necrorealist aesthetics in painting and sculpture, and created a series of wooden Necrorealist Idols.

Lives and works in St. Petersburg.

Anatoly Mortyukov (Svirepyi)
1959, Leningrad — 1993, St. Petersburg

Since the early 1980s, took part in shootings of early Necrorealist cinema and staged photography. In the late 1980s, practiced Necrorealist painting.

peter weibel: death is the capital of culture

A conversation with Olesya Turkina

Professor Weibel, I recall that you once said that necrorealism is the most serious subject in contemporary art, perhaps the only subject that warrants the attention of artists. This happened in 2003 in Graz during a conference dedicated to the Petersburg art projects organized as part of Graz – Cultural Capital of Europe 2003. One of the projects, *Death in the Northern Venice*, which I curated, presented the work of two necrorealist artists – Yevgeny Yufit, the founder of this movement, and Vladimir Kustov. I was shaken by your words, because you talked about what you called the endless struggle for the "right to death." What does the metaphor of death mean for you?

In paraphrasing our meeting during Graz — Cultural Capital of Europe 2003, where we first spoke about necrorealism, I would say that death is the capital of culture. I am following the thesis of the world-renowned Egyptologist Jan Assmann, who in his famous book *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (2001) declares, "Death is the origin and center of culture." It is the experience of the finiteness of life, whose core and cause is death, that compels us to try and expand life's limited span. On the one hand, the Egyptians tried it with mummies on a physical and material level. On the other hand, they tried it on a symbolic, immaterial level with the creation of memory and culture. From James Bond and Lacan we learn that we only die twice. First, we die physically; second, we die symbolically, when people forget us, when we are erased from everyone's memory. When we die symbolically we die finally. Culture is therefore a strategy of endurance, to extend the lifespan symbolically by creating a memory technology. The mummy was the physical storage of a person; culture is the symbolic storage of a person. Memory and culture are the first hard disks to protect us against amnesia. Death is amnesia; culture is memory. Therefore, an art that centers on the experience of death centers on the very heart of art. Art is always fundamentally necro-art. Art is always the enemy of death. Fascism is always on the side of death and against life. Therefore, you find on all fascist monuments the slogan *Vivere no, muerte si* ("No to life, yes to death").

I admired from the beginning the depth of reflection on art by the Petersburg art group known by the name necrorealism. Because the reality of life is that we have to die, just as the reality of imagination is that we are immortal. This imagination was once even expressed in the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda* (around 1920) by the Russian biocosmologists and immortalists inspired by Nikolai Fyodorov. They recognized the fundamental injustice that people have different lifespans. It is bad enough that (as William Blake said), "Some are born to endless night, some are born to sweet delight." It is bad enough that we are thrown into the cosmos as members of different classes by a chance operation called genetic fate. But it is even worse that some of us live in sweet delight for a hundred years, and some have a short, crappy life. Therefore, these Russian technognostics proclaimed "immortality for all" as the true promise of communism. These technognostics were very genuine artists, because the promise of art is immortality. Famous aristocrats and bishops wanted their pictures painted by famous artists to survive in churches and museums, just as the pharaohs survived as mummies in the pyramids. Art is an immortality business in which both artist and client want to become immortal. And it functions as culture shows, but it functions only for a few, for the happy few. Therefore the proclamation was right: immortality has to be for all, just as art has to be for all. ("Art for all," asserted the "living sculptures" Gilbert and George in the 1970s). Art as agent of the pleasure principle is in opposition to the reality principle. Death is a reality for all living creatures on earth; therefore life is always about survival, about reproducing life. Eros is the life principle, like art, set against Thanatos, the death principle. Necrorealism is therefore a kind of pleonasm.

Still from Yevgeny Yufit's film *The Wooden Room*, 1995

The next reason why I admire the art and philosophy of necrorealism is the historic context. Good art is always seismographic. These Petersburg artists realized avant la lettre that "really existing socialism" had ceased to exist. They also recognized early on the collapse of the reality principle governing the communist system. They realized that the system was doomed to die. Realism is a death principle. Realist arguments are always deadly arguments, refusals of escapes, of solutions, of alternatives, of other options, of possibilities. The artists of the necrorealist movement expressed not only the deepest ideas of art, that art is the enemy of death; they also expressed the deepest social analysis that was the death of the dominant social system. Russia at that time was a dying system: reality was dying; only art and culture could transcend this dying society. Going back to the tradition of Russian transcendentalism, which was influenced by German idealism, was a perfect way to reflect the social conditions of art in contemporary society and to express it in a new kind of art.

Since the 1960s, as an artist you have gone through many avant-garde borderline experiences. Your actions were radically different from Viennese Actionism. For example, when you projected onto your naked body footage from a surgical operation you symbolically finalized the process of liberation from one's body that was developed by Viennese Actionists. At the same time, as you said in an interview, the message of this action was that one has to be liberated from one's body through our technological extensions. You did *TV News (TV Death)*, a work that from my point of view represented a contemporary form of the "death drive." How can technology reformulate today's "death drive"?

My actions in the sixties were not derived from painting like the other performances of Viennese Actionism (a term that I coined in a 1969 publication). My actions were derived from media, from film, photography and music. Therefore I did not paint on my naked body like Günter Brus did in 1965, but projected films on my naked body, such as that of a surgical operation or body organs (an ear on my naked back). I substituted representation (images) for reality (actions): electric light for a real fire, the image of a bosom for the real bosom of Valie Export,

my cartoon of an animal for a dog walking in the street, etc. (This was between 1966 and 1969.) At the same time, I developed the ideas of new technological tools as part of my concept of expanded cinema as expanded consciousness and expanded reality, even as expanded evolution — for example, an information unit (1966) that contains a camera, a telephone, a radio, a TV, etc., all the size of an electric razor. I anticipated the iPhone.

The message of my actions was to be liberated from the body and its restraints through technology. At the same time, I showed that the use of technology by the state was a misuse of technology. Therefore I made tele-actions (actions for television) such as *TV Death* (1970, 1972). I argued for the individual use of technology. My idea was that technology was in the beginning a humanization of nature, and now, finally, technology is an individuation of the relation between subject and system, of the natural and social environment. Therefore, technology can be on the side of Eros in an individual use that liberates you from the limits of the body, but technology can also be on the side of the death drive: it can be used to destroy. Today, we still have the same opposition: a highly advanced military technology as agent of the death drive and a highly personalized technology (from the personal computer to the mobile phone, for individual uses and purposes). Art, media art, technological art must therefore be defined, in the words of Friedrich Kittler, as "misuse of military technology."

In 2003, you curated *M_ARS: Kunst und Krieg* (with Guenther Holler-Schuster), an exhibition at the Neue Galerie in Graz. Death was the protagonist of this exciting show. Here, contemporary *danse macabre* was expressed by artists through symbolical figures, physical violence, documentary, bloody brutality and laughter. Mikhail Bakhtin, the famous Russian formalist, developed the idea of the carnivalesque, in which ordinary life is turned completely upside down. When necrorealism emerged in the mid-eighties, right before perestroika, many art critics used Bakhtin's theory to analyze the movement. They argued that the artists were turning upside down the ideological situation, in which the only approved form of death was death for the Motherland. Initially, necrorealism parodied socialist realism. After two decades of fundamental political changes, we could say that necrorealism is still laughing and turning the situation upside down. How critical can the subject of death be in contemporary society?

More than ever, death is at the heart of contemporary society. For several years we have lived — or, more exactly, we have survived — amidst a series of crises: the growth crisis, the financial crisis, the demographic crisis, the environmental crisis, the energy crisis, etc. We observe the collapses of banks, of governments, of insurance and health systems, etc. Most of us have the impression that everything is dying, not only plants and forests and animals and languages and God (according to Nietzsche, he has been dead for a long time), but as a result of tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, and meltdowns of atomic plants. We feel that, "This is the end / My only friend, the end" (Jim Morrison, The Doors). What the artists experienced in the eighties, the collapse of the Soviet system, we observe now on a global level. We are approaching the collapse of the world; therefore a revival of necrorealism is necessary, precisely as a parody turning the system upside down through laughter, through Bakhtin's carnivalesque, through the pleasure principle. "Carnival for everyone everyday" could be the slogan for a new necrorealism instead of "Immortality for all."

Contemporary society must be criticized more massively than ever, because the death drive in society is today stronger and deeper than ever. Bankers and politicians are the classical warriors of the death drive. Therefore art must gain a new power. Art, as Boris Groys argues in *Art Power* (2008), is not a powerless commodity. Art can also function as a tool of political critique. But naturally this critique will be subversive not only towards the system but also towards itself. It will not pretend to possess the truth, but just laugh about any truth. Truly contemporary art knows that it is part of the system it criticizes, that it is supported by the system it criticizes, that it is even a support system of the system. Therefore denial has to mean self-denial. In this paradoxical situation, art will seize the possibility to turn everything upside down again.

I have three aphorisms to offer. The body is the art form of death. Art is the death of death. Art is the symbolic form of life.

the necrochallenge

Alexander Borovsky

I recall my conversations about necrorealism with Wim Beeren, who was director of the Stedelijk Museum when the exhibition *In the USSR and Beyond* was being mounted. The museum's painters were picking out (with an alarming thoroughness) a color for the room specially set aside for Kabakov. Andrei Erofeev, who was then still a "recluse" in Tsaritsyno (this was long before his epic adventures at the Tretyakov Gallery), was jealously arranging the pieces from his wonderful collection — also, of course, in a separate room, which he had uncompromisingly demanded from the show's tolerant organizers.

I was not particularly concerned about singling out our section of the exhibition. On the contrary, I was curious to see how the new Leningrad art (necrorealism, in particular) would operate in any context. If it could speak for itself, it would get noticed. If it could not speak for itself, no amount of expositional trickery would help. This art was then (as the eighties gave way to the nineties) little known, including in Leningrad itself, which was still only on the verge of changing its name. But Beeren knew about this art.

In general, Beeren was an amusing man. This show of (then-) contemporary Soviet art, which a short time before had been considered unofficial, but which then was rapidly gaining representative force, was for the Stedelijk a kind of a makeweight, a supplement to an inter-museum exchange of avant-garde art that was being organized. Beeren, nevertheless, had conceived a sincere passion for this makeweight. He was generally interested in the rapidly changing situation in Russia. I remember how, during the Leningrad phase of preparation for the show, we went to "On Marat Street," a co-op restaurant (still a novelty back then). The latest stormy session of the Supreme Soviet was playing on the television. This Dutch museum director knew the most frenzied orators by name. It seemed that he was generally interested in characters not bound by good manners — in this case, in freakish orators. But he displayed the same interest in artists who did not follow the art establishment's rules. (Why they did not follow them was something he understood dimly. The answer was simple: the majority of our artists knew nothing about these rules back then.) I argued a lot with him: you find these wacky politicians entertaining, but we have to live with them. And our enfant terrible artists? You find them curious, but we are forced to integrate into the world art process using such "human resources." I was naturally eager for such integration in those days, and I considered Beeren's skepticism almost a form of cultural imperialism. Or, at very least, snobbery: we have not even tried what you're sick and tired of! That's all a matter of the past now. I'll note only that the necrorealists (whom he came into contact with while making the rounds of the places where the young "informals" hung out) were perceived precisely in this context — an interest in everything unconventional.

This was how the necrorealists appeared in the poetics of the artistic gesture. Like any contemporary art professional who had been around the block, Beeren was on the lookout for analogies. (By the way, the New Artists, who had also drawn his attention, were less fascinating for him because he detected in their work parallels with German neo-expressionism, which was then undergoing mannerization or academicization — e.g., Rainer Fetting, Salom , etc.) So our polemic, begun in Leningrad and continued in Amsterdam, primarily concerned the contextualization of necrorealism and its "roots." Where had this necrorealism come from? What sociopolitical and artistic moods did it echo? Where was it headed? To what shores? I then emphasized the local social context more: the decline of the Soviet gerontocracy, visualized in a picture obsessively repeated on TV — the irreversible movement of funeral chariots (carriages, that is) bearing the caskets of Politburo elders into the kingdom of Hades. Beeren insisted on a cultural-anthropological approach, recalling L vi-Strauss's bon mot: "We are all cannibals. The simplest way to identify with another is still to eat them."

Vladimir Kustov
Cold. Triptych. 1990
Oil on canvas. 80 × 60 cm each
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Twenty-odd years have passed. It is clear why I have been moved to reminisce. No, not in connection with some anniversary or even overview exhibition. It is just that this twenty-year-old polemic has been left unfinished. Omnibus exhibitions are a way of organizing the movement's material aspect, cataloguing the body of necrorealist works as fully as possible. Here, there is indeed very little to add, just as to the factography of the movement: the necrorealists have acquired careful biographers, and they themselves have proven capable of retaining events and dates. On the contrary, an overarching critique of the movement has hardly been made. Just as was the case twenty years ago, necrorealism is open to interpretation. It thus seems that the questions Beeren and I touched on in our leisurely conversations of long ago have retained their relevance: the genesis of necrorealism, its historical and cultural roots, its poetics, and so forth.

The first thing to be said about the roots of the movement is that an art of direct action had been established in Leningrad by the mid-eighties. At first, it was a fairly integrated movement, but it quite soon split into two currents — the New Artists and the necrorealists. I should note immediately that this watershed could appear quite prominent during a particular period, actually cutting one current off from the other, but more often than not it was more muted, allowing the streams to communicate and share their energies. In the Russian art of the period, the practice of direct action was unique. In fact, not only culture, but real late-Soviet life as well was marked by a well-developed, ossified system of mediations. Thus, between ideology and life lay a powerful, downright geological (in terms of its fossilization) layer of mediations — various kinds of circumlocutions and tropes, as well as rituals and institutions, which did not serve ideas, but their

"other-being." The regime fashioned itself as Marxist, but its actual operation excluded the doctrine's main postulate: the last thing it wanted was for ideas to take hold of the masses and become a driving force. In culture, this system of mediations was also becoming more powerful. Contrary to the tenets of socialist realism, which required direct contact with reality and transfigurative "intervention in life," the ever-thickening layers of this system included, in official art, the schools, the canon, and corporate rules for what constituted "madeness," not to mention requirements of an official nature, which were (old-fashionedly) termed "ideological," but which in fact were profoundly ritualistic and serviced the late-Soviet symbolic order. Unofficial art had also set in stone its own levels of mediation: it had its own canon (in this case, moderately modernist or retrospectivist) and its own institutions.

The young Leningrad artists (initially, perhaps, unconsciously) made it their task to "puncture" this layer of mediations, to break through to real life. This was not a fight "against" (the regime, ideology, authority figures, the directives of official and unofficial art). It was a struggle "for": for one's natural right to unmediated contact with life, for the immediate personal experience of art.

This sense of life was a fundamental aspect of their work. Thus, the "left wing of LOSKh" (the liberal wing of the Leningrad Union of Artists) actively employed the idiom of expressionism as part of its exploration of modernism. Moreover, it was precisely the aesthetic aspect in the expressionist style — the return of previously rejected elements, the expansion of expressive possibilities, etc. — that was made explicit. The New Artists and necrorealists also outwardly appealed to expressionism, albeit in its more radical (transavantgardist) incarnation. However, the expressionist element in their poetics possessed a completely different content and a completely different "gestural force" (to borrow Yuri Tynyanov's coinage). It was utterly bereft of the art-historical aspect (the "school"), as well as aesthetic refinement (the enrichment of the emotional palette, etc.). It was not at all confined to itself. The expressionist gesture of the New Artists and the necrorealists was focused on the immediate experiencing of art. It was a transgressive gesture, an attempt to puncture the layers of mediation for the sake of touching living life.

The title of the Russian Museum's 2010 exhibition *Brushstroke* (borrowed from Oleg Kotelnikov) is a metaphor for this direct action. I think it gives a true picture of the attitudinal, reflexive aspect in the work of the New Artists and necrorealists, and it is time to discuss this aspect. By the mid-eighties, the two groups, notwithstanding the interferences that objectively existed between them, had begun to diverge into their own channels.

Right: **Sergei Serp**
Harvest Festival. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Left: **Valery Morozov**
Feces. 1989. Oil on canvas. 248 × 153 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov, St. Petersburg, Russia

There is always, of course, the temptation to select a universal methodological key for any art movement. In the case of necrorealism, this methodology suggests itself: even outwardly, the attitude of the artists themselves and the behavior of their agents (characters) is flagrantly deviant in nature. So roll out the various recensions of psychoanalysis. The trauma (the trigger for everything that follows) is obvious: death in its late-Soviet, Politburo variety, with all the attendant (cultural-anthropological, symbolic, behavioral, etc.) consequences. Everyone who has written about the movement has noted necrorealism's connection with the late-Soviet "state-sanctioned" discourse on death.

Yevgeny Yufit, Oleg Kotelnikov
In the Ambush. 1985
Oil and tempera on paper. 70,5 × 120 cm
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Should we content ourselves with a description of necrorealism in psychoanalytical terms, a description that literally begs to be made? To wit: repeated state funerals (as a manifestation of Soviet schizoreality) brought to life a steadfast obsession. Ritualizing an obsessive or compulsive action can alleviate the symptoms of severe neurosis. Necrorealist imagery is indeed characterized to a supreme degree by rhythmic motifs of repetition and textile-like patternedness (e.g., Yevgeny Yufit, *Dancing with Sailors*; Vladimir Kustov, *Cold*; Serp, *Harvest Festival*). If we take into account the fact that "compulsive repetition has one definitely unambivalent, ominous trait — its link with the death drive,"[1] then the phenomenon of necrorealism might be considered solved. Nevertheless, the cells of the psychoanalytical grid are too big for the specifics of the necromovement: the fish escapes unaught. The cells of one other totalizing scholarly worldview are similarly "leaky." I have in mind the ideas of biopolitics, as formulated by Michel Foucault and elaborated by Giorgio Agamben: the politicization of "bare life" (*nuda vita*), power's penetration into the bodily, into the very forms of life — into the biological, sexual, etc. It is here as well, in Agamben's work, that we find figures that strikingly recall our subject — for example, the outcast and the werewolf.[2]

It is, of course, tempting to try and select universal ideological keys to any and all phenomena of contemporary art. However, as a rule the result is that these phenomena are appropriated in order to visualize the provisions of a particular scholarly discourse, nothing more. This is also the case here: the attempts to use necrorealist works to illustrate (either directly or speculatively) scholarly postulates of whatever sort are evident. And it is the scholarly discourse that benefits from this, naturally. This, however, does not bring us any closer to understanding necrorealism. The reverse sequence is required here: the use of the specific interpretative techniques of political science and cultural anthropology, the foregrounding of unexpected and "non-core" contexts in order to disclose the aesthetic phenomenon. There are, however, two discourses (which, by the way, are more focused and substantive) that do not appropriate necrorealism (nor other phenomena of

[1] Vadim Rudnev, *Vvedenie v shizoreal'nost'* [Introduction to schizoreality] (Moscow: Agraf, 2010), p. 143.

[2] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 63—64.

contemporary art), but recognize its real presence "inside" themselves. In other words, discourses in which necrorealism is actually rooted.

The first discourse, which we have already mentioned, is the late-Soviet discourse in its corporeal, temporal and symbolic dimensions. The second is the Gothic discourse, which is extremely relevant within contemporary culture.[3] In the contemporary context, the term "Gothic" is provocative and paradoxically multi-layered. The theme of horror — the real and symbolic manifestations of evil (Satanism, Luciferism, vampirism, cannibalism, the transmigration of souls and bodies, exorcism of the Devil, etc.) that have colored contemporary culture, whether elite culture or mass culture — is certainly the flesh and blood of Gothic consciousness. Irrationality, phantasm, mysticism, transtemporality, worship of the alien, extra-humanistic systems of values and hierarchies, the aesthetics of the ghastly and the eschatological: such are the categories in which the phenomenon of the Gothic in contemporary culture is amenable to description.

Aren't these too "weighty" for a movement that originated with an outburst of uncultivated bioenergy that at first did not even aspire to the performance form, much less film? For a movement whose agents/characters are hale and hearty, slightly moronic, unburdened by intellect and not sorry about it?

Moreover, if we examine high-profile western artists involved in the Gothic, it is easy to see that they are the ideological fringe of contemporary art, artists who consciously oppose the mainstream with their over-refined aestheticism and retrospectivism — for example, H.R. Giger, Ernst Fuchs, Klaus J rgen-Fischer, and Zdzis aw Beksi ski. Where are they, and where are our necrorealists, who do not separate themselves from their gutturally primitive characters and do not as it were generally recognize the fact of aesthetic distance? Aren't the necrorealists more similar to another trend within Russian art that, while it never gelled into a movement, was sharply delineated? From the sixties on, there appeared in the Soviet Union a number of artists who addressed the phenomenology of human and social mutations: Oleg Tselkov and his rotten-toothed anthropological bubbles; Vladimir Pyatnitsky and his city imbeciles; Yevgeny Chubarov and his urban Neanderthals; Vladimir Yankilevsky and his freaks, who seemingly surface from out of a seething biomass; and Vyacheslav Kalinin and his maelstrom of violent revelers, thieves, and beggars. They were later joined by Gely Korzhev's social mutants, who bore the burden of civilization's mistakes, Vladimir Titov's cheerful bums, and others. This massive emergence of artists exhibiting a particular mindset was of course neither coincidental nor unnoticed. Alexander Yakimovich hit upon an apt definition for artists engaged in molding and shaping their own populations on their canvases: painters of mutation.

[3] See Dina Khapaeva, *Goticheskoe obshchestvo: morfologiia koshmara* [The Gothic society: morphology of a nightmare] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008).

What did the metaphorics of mutation signify in the context of the sixties, seventies, and eighties? It primarily bore sociopolitical connotations, of course. All changes to physicality — from simple, grotesque exacerbation to the radical production of images of biomutants — were then perceived as part of an "anthropological catastrophe" (the name given in dissident circles to the aftermath of the decades-long "negative selection" implemented, as they imagined it, by the Soviet regime.) The painters were not alone, of course: the "anthropological" motif was a general concern in various segments of late-Soviet culture. (We might recall Vladimir Vysotsky's song "Strange House": "We dine on grass, been eating sorrel for ages, / Our souls are sore, / We've broken out in pimples, / And we've cheered ourselves / With wine a lot, / We brought the house to ruin, / We fought and hung ourselves.")

It would seem all this is similar, no? Nevertheless, the similarity is deceptive: the socio-anthropological allusions of this trend have little in common with necrorealism, primarily because a socially critical attitude is not congenial to necrorealism. A social optics (all the more so, a political optics) — any mediating optics — is outside its concerns. The "Terminological Dictionary of the Moscow Conceptualist School" includes the term "bodily optics," which is defined as a "carnal, depreciating [form of] vision, as well as the ability to view the world (and oneself in it) with the 'eyes' of the communal body." The necrorealists and their alter egos — the werewolf orderlies, zombies, "corpsters" (*trupaki*), and "regular guys" — have no need to "view the world and [themselves] in it." The immediate experiencing of art leaves no time for this: necrorealist characters are busy with themselves and their business. In Bataille's terms, they consume themselves entirely, in "the forms in which man gives himself to himself: . . . laughter, eroticism, struggle, and luxury." This is not ordinary man of course, but (according to Bataille) a "lazy rascal" (*voyou désœuvré*).[4] Correcting for the "conditions of existence" in which the necrorealists found themselves, this man is wholly our kind of chap, an active idler, an idiot in zombie make-up. And his notion of luxury is, of course, different — the luxury of human interaction on the level of animal life, without prohibitions. Necrorealist characters have no need of anyone else's opinions or assessments. Or, for that matter, do necrorealist artists. Their imagery is beyond tropes (allusions, symbols, allegory), because a trope is primarily a form of mediation, whereas necrorealism does not trust any form of mediation. It (I repeat) is direct-action painting, life as it is.

To summarize: necrorealism did not realize itself in a vacuum, of course. It is involved in late-Soviet chronology and (more about this below) operates certain attributes of the Soviet unconscious. But on the whole this movement does not belong to late-Soviet chronology: necrorealist characters exist in their own time, and this is rather the time of collective tribal life.

[4] Quoted in Agamben, op. cit., pp. 40, 39.

They do not feel the catastrophe or eschatology of the present moment, which the "painters of mutation," keen on the political and other realia of the vanishing Soviet regime, attempt to convey. In fact, they are aliens — touched by the late Soviet realm, of course, but aliens nevertheless.

The connection with the discourse of the painting of mutation, localized in the period between the sixties and the nineties, thus proves to be not so significant, despite its apparent solidity.

Does this mean that necrorealism adheres, at least partially, to the Gothic style? But (you ask) what is Gothic about necrorealism? Even on the superficial level they have nothing in common: there is no sign of black leather, Gothic make-up, jewelry fashioned from skulls, and other such baubles. Not to mention (in its more radical phases) staged black masses and (in particularly clinical instances) real Satanism of the Charles Manson variety. No, there is no comparison with the hospital smocks and second-hand sailor's jackets worn by the necrorealists: the movement lacks theatricality and, more broadly, visual appeal. This is true. But in recent years a certain deflation of tone has been happening in the western art marked as Gothic: more brutal practices have been replacing the hyperaestheticism of the masters mentioned above. This was borne out by the exhibition *Tous cannibales*, which took place in the spring of 2011 at La Maison Rouge in Paris. For their part, having outlived their first — reactive and impulsive — period, the necrorealists have dramatically increased the aesthetic component of their art practice. Necrorealism's aesthetic integrity is already relative: we will agree that there is a significant difference between, for example, Valery Morozov's *Fat Wax* and *Feces* and, say, Vladimir Kustov's *Electricians*.

Natural fat (fat nearly untransformed aesthetically) and aesthetic fat are two different things.

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Silver Heads, 1997

Yufit's *Dancing with Sailors*, Andrei Mertvyi's *Our Kind Know How To*, and Sergei Serp's *Harvest Festival*: these are works that no longer evince only gestural force, a message fuelled by shock reactions and macabre dislocations. Here we find a complex poetics with a wide range of references — from cave paintings to the most advanced means of contemporary art: a Beuysian attitude to media, a diverse approach to composition (from a Rodchenkian take on working with foreground and background to a timely playing with mimesis), hyper-realization, and dematerialization. Since Yufit and Kustov began reflecting on the necromethod (in fact, their project was broader: to position necrorealism within culture), the movement's artistic resources have constantly increased. In this sense, its vector of development is analogous to what happened historically with cinematic horror, that strike

force of the Gothic. As Camille Paglia has written, horror films are rituals of an archaic cult. Western man has constantly opposed himself to the Christian faith, which has been unable to destroy paganism. Cinematic horror is like a film negative that reveals the Christian west's "secret craving for Dionysian truths."[5] Yufit and company have undoubtedly gone through the history of cinema (in reverse chronology, I imagine, from the present day to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) in search of aesthetic allies. And not only aesthetic allies: the genre's interest in archaism is echoed by a nearly L vi-Straussian ritual-centrism in necrorealism's principal works. So necrorealism has undoubtedly sipped from the Gothic well.

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
The Wooden Room, 1995

True, we must acknowledge that necrorealism also draws from an even deeper well than the Gothic. Despite its strong cultural nourishment, this phenomenon is nevertheless not comparable with great Russian literature. And necrorealism has definitely constructed its own relationship with that literature. In the film *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead* (1991), Yufit deconstructs Alexei Tolstoy's story "The Vampire Family." Neither hide nor hair remains of the story itself, but Yufit's use of it is telling. Necrorealism (whether directly or indirectly) has inherited the obsessive attention to the irrational and the unreal that to a supreme degree characterizes the Russian literary tradition. (It would be curious to compare the radicalism of the necrorealists with the positivism of the most uninhibited of "mutation painters": the latter still seek out objective explanations for late-Soviet anthropological perversions.) This tradition is even more obsessed with the search for original interpretations of death and the afterlife. (I would refer here only to Dostoevsky's frighteningly radical work "Bobok.") It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the diverse interpretations and experiences of the unreal. I would only underscore the continuity. Thus, in Yuri Mamleev's metaphysical scatology we clearly sense the fantastical anatomy of Gogol's body image, the "stomach as deity." This is not to mention the purely "thematic" line: the reincarnation of Gogol's "unclean spirits."

So much for the Gothic. The second discourse, the late-Soviet discourse, is quite clear. Its texture has been well described by Olesya Turkina, and I have also managed to make certain observations, above. I would only note once more that the necrorealists make no claims to ideological motivations either for the movement as a whole or for their characters/agents. And they also reduce their own "mental life" to the utmost. Of course, as has already been said, they slyly "conceal" their game. And it also happens that they flirt with viewers.

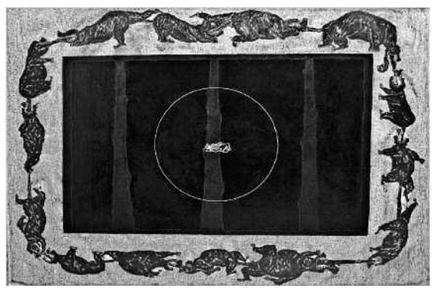
If we compiled a list of things to which the necrorealists have reacted in one way or another, it would be quite extensive: images from visual propaganda (Oleg Kotelnikov and Yevgeny Yufit's painting Twisters is a piece that, in

[5] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 268; quoted in David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 385.

my view, already belongs to necrorealism and practically refers to the Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil*), fragments from iconic films such as We Are from Kronstadt and the TV program "Cinematic Journeys Club," reports from the fields, various medicine and criminology textbooks, as well as meat-cutting instruction manuals, recollections of the so-called Doctors' Plot (rising up from the depths of collective memory), projections of the artists' own experiences as military draftees, Oleg Grigoriev's cycle of poems about an electrician, and many other things — simple images drifting on the outskirts of consciousness.

In his memoirs, Yuri "Tsirkul" Krasev provides a generalized image of the thing that was alien and strange to this consciousness — "the idea." In order to break through to something they could call their own, something living, they had to overcome this moribund layer. They also needed a self-image, an image of someone who did not live according to "the idea," who ignored the presence of this "superstructure." Krasev describes this kindred individual as "stupid and endlessly energetic." And then one more characteristic is added to this image — "gnarliness" (*materost*).

Here I would like to pause for a moment. Why "gnarliness"? We were forced to accept the fact of the necrorealists' self-identification with their agents/characters when we examined the movement's beginnings, the period when it exhibited an outpouring of unmediated, brutal energy: the brawl as unscripted performance, cinema made without film in the camera. Necrorealism's further development was ineluctably bound up with the elaboration of a poetics, which is a complicated business. Necrorealist characters broke free of their creators, which was inevitable. But why did they become "gnarly"? I think that here we are dealing with a certain mode tied to the late-Soviet experience. It is obvious that, in the Soviet tradition, childhood was bureaucratized. Other parts of society — athletes at parades, the military — were similarly bureaucratized, staged, and hyper-ritualized. But what of the marginal elements — the homeless people, idiots, loafers, the Soviet version of the *voyou désœuvré*? These were non-systemic adults, socially disengaged men. Idiotic men, gnarly men; moreover, men who were not individualist intellectuals, men who (as we have already mentioned) were beyond the reach of "the idea." And suddenly they had their own organization. At first, it was based on repression — on fights, violence, and murder; subsequently, on archaic rituals, with their designated rhythm. A theme thus emerges that is interesting and persuasive even on the pre-reflexive level (the simple visualization of gnarliness as power): the perfect modern organization of society (apparently, not only late-Soviet society) bears the telltale marks of childhood and the childish — that is, it is something delicate, fragile, and bitter, perhaps even irrational. The gnarly is organized more solidly.



Yevgeny Yufit
The Sea Retreated. 1989. Oil on canvas. 135 ×185 cm
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Never mind that this is a matter of profound archaicization, of reverse evolution as it were. The seemingly frightening and wild actions of these characters, their "savage mind," is explained by their subordination to other (totemic et al.) codes of behavior, to a different cognitive scheme (what Lévi-Strauss calls the "totemic operator"). This anthropological perspective, which forces us to ponder the axis that runs between the Soviet and the archaic, is a challenge to the Soviet culture of death.[6] It is a challenge more profound than parody or postmodernist stiob (jocular over-identification). It is also, perhaps, a challenge to the west's theatricalized "Gothic" culture of death — that perennial companion of consumerist culture. This is the sort of fighter that necrorealism has proven to be. It emerged from the stunted forest strips of the suburbs, where the first spontaneous, combative necroperformances took place. From the outset, however, necrorealism looked on these sites as a mythological forest. And the archaic treated it as one of its own.

Translated by Thomas Campbell (from Russian)

Vladimir Kustov
Hussars. 1987
Oil on canvas. 147 × 199 cm
Private collection

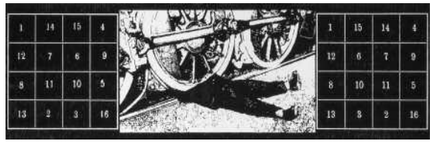
[6] Which had its own metaphorics and hierarchy — from "he perished at his post" (with its connotations of perishing for the sake of an idea, the Party, etc.), to "he burned himself out at work" (which had more mundane connotations). Moreover, it had its own mythology of self-overcoming, which was expressed not only in architecture — in pantheons and so forth. Cinema was also dominated by a symbolically functional principle of exchange: individual or collective death was the price for immortality, for the radiant future. Another fantastic, utopian thread involved the attempt to overcome (to cheat) death using cutting-edge "science" — Olga Lepeshinskaya's "vital substance," Dr. Ignaty Kazakov's "lysatotherapy," etc.

the foundations of necropractice

Viktor Mazin

There is no existence of death, there are the dead, and that is all.

Jacques Lacan[1]



Vladimir Kustov
Train Departure. 2005. Oil on canvas. 60 × 200 cm

the realism of necro

The word *necrorealism* itself points to death's paradoxical presence in life. The word bespeaks a dead [νεκρος] realism, and it calls into question the possibility of any realism other than necrorealism. Is only the still life dead nature (*nature morte*)? Is not the portrait (beginning with the Faiyum mummy portraits) necro? *In the end*, are not paintings, photographs, and installations necro-objects that arouse life? Necrorealism testifies to the impossibility of making sense of life without posing the question of death, as well as to material reality's ambiguity.[2]

Necrorealism's ambivalence as lifedeath emerges clearly on the movie screen: the reality the viewer encounters — cinematic reality — is *dead*. It is always already necroreality, for recorded images of an absent life appear on the screen's dead surface. At the same time, it is *alive*, and the viewer functions as its reanimator. The liveliness of the emotions one experiences testifies to this, but feelings of anxiety are elicited by even the most animated comedy. *Where am I?* is the question that quietly gnaws at the viewer's soul. And if I don't know where am I, how do I know the answer to the questions *Who am I? Am I not dead?*

The word *necrorealism* underscores the ambivalence and continuity of the relationship between the living and the dead, between the natural and the artificial, the ambivalence of the representation of *necro*. It likewise points to the possibility of denying reality when the latter is perceived not as an always-already present absence but as the disturbing approach of something uncannily *real*.

Vladimir Maslov in Yevgeny Yufit's film *Silver Heads*, 1998

from death in nature to death in the home of existence

If we are not silent about death, then how do we speak of it? Aren't the principles of any theory revealed in the face of death? The human subject's appearance in the world is already theory. The questions *Who am I? From what darkness have I come? Where am I going?* already imply the inevitability of theory. Both Yufit and Kustov understand quite well that necropractice inevitably involves necrotheory. We should not forget that the very notion of τεχνη (art) encompasses both skill/craft and knowledge/theory. Current appeals to "abandon theory" are political in nature: they are intended to make us oblivious to death, to enable complete submission to the ideological matrix of nonstop consumption, which is designed to plug up the very same negativity that also generates the human subject.

Is not death the final tie that binds the human subject to the natural world? And this tie is a rupture. Where the connection with nature is seemingly restored, there the human subject disappears. Natural man is waste: corpse, psychosis, bare life. Natural man is a mistake of nature, the scientist's orgasm in the film *Silver Heads*. If it is possible to speak of "human nature," then only in the sense of necronature, which contains fate, inevitability, the limit of predetermination that looms from out of the future. Nature is the Absolute Mistress of the Beyond. Following Shakespeare and Freud, we are forced to say, "You have Nature to thank for death." The human subject is always in debt to Death. Mother Earth awaits it with the open arms of the debt-canceling grave.

The second dimension of death's proximity has nothing to do with nature. It operates in the home of human existence. It is a response to realism's interpretation of life. We might call this dimension the symbolic matrix, language or the dead father. A named thing is always already a necrothing. The life of the newborn subject deals a fatal blow to the Thing. The Thing, as Lacan puts it, "breaks up into the double, divergent beam of the 'cause' (*causa*) in which it has taken shelter in the French word chose, and the nothing (*rien*) to which it has abandoned its Latin dress (*rem*)."[3]

the letter of the law: the home of existence

However many times you abandon its dress, you won't find the Thing underneath it. And reality, however much you animate it, nevertheless remains, in the end, necroreality. The paradox is that reality's symbolic matrix is woven from non-living material — the signs of reality. These signs do not represent reality but manifest it. As the proverb says, "The letter kills, but the spirit giveth life. To which Lacan responds with a sarcastic question: *how does the spirit intend to survive without the letter*? It is the letter that has to do with truth. It is the letter that produces truth. The letter is lifedeath. And it is this letter that marks the field of vision; it is this letter that secures the visible realm, be it a lithograph or a photograph, an object or a painting. The letter is the matrix's alpha and omega.

The alpha and the omega delineate life with their dead trace, thus generating causes and effects, everything and nothing, the thing and the dress of truth.

Vladimir Kustov
Carnival. Object ω. 2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas. 70 × 40 cm

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1 *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: The Formations of the Unconscious, 1957–1958*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, p. 227; accessed August 11, 2011; http://www.lacaninireland.com. The active appeal in this text to the theories of Lacan and Freud is primarily explained by the fact that in today's world (aside from certain phenomena in philosophy and art) it is only in psychoanalysis as erothanatology that we encounter an interpretation of death's fundamental significance in the life of the human subject.

2 In Late Latin, *realis* means "material, corporeal, substantial."

3 Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in *Écrits*: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 114.

The alpha and the omega establish order. And where order is established, ritual carnivalesque disorder is possible. "Carnival" in fact primarily consists of two gestures: where once the alpha was, now the omega has appeared; where once there was real flesh, now there is merely the trace of its removal (the Italian *carnevale* derives from the Latin *carnem levāre*, "put away the flesh").[4] Only signifying traces remain in the place where the flesh was dragged. Only these covered-up traces of what has been dragged away exist. Real flesh has *always already* been taken away. It is a phantasm introduced retrospectively. God forbid that we should come face to face with real flesh!

Being dead in life means being unconditionally inscribed in the symbolic matrix. The matrix is not the mother, but a permit to reside within it is the only condition of life, of that selfsame life in the name of the Father-Totem who structures it.

the father-totem

Valery Morozov
Father's Portrait. 1990
Tinted poplar-wood. Height 89 cm

The subject emerges in the chain of signifiers,[5] and thus may drop out of it. Absorbed by the symbolic matrix, it is born as a subject while simultaneously vanishing within natural spontaneity. Within the symbolic order, within this purely human dimension, the signifier "places him [the subject] beyond death. The signifier already considers him dead, by nature it immortalizes him."[6]

Having learned about death from Mother Nature, the subject finds itself in the symbolic matrix established by the Law of the Dead Father, by his Name, his Signifier. The symbolic father is *always already* dead, for he is not a real father, and his name is what remains from the act of patricide. He is *always already* a totem. He is always already an idol — a statue, a monument. Daddy is dead. Father Frost is dead.

The symbolic order is a machine operating *between* life and death. It is a machine that saturates life with death. Image, letter, number, which animate the subject within the symbolic, are neither alive nor dead. The opposite of this regime of signifiers is the *living corpse*, a disgustingly pulsating substance that insistently asserts itself in the death drive within the Real, beyond the matrix of existence, where Father Frost guards the Law. Necrocharacters abide in a hallucinatory state because they inhabit an interzone, a New Year's-like timelessness, between the symbolic and the real. They are literally *not altogether human*. They manifest the inhuman element of the human. They are simultaneously beyond the rational order and rooted in it, like the death drive itself, which compulsively reprises the return to the impossible Real.

[4] *Carnival*, a series of graphic works by Vladimir Kustov, consists of twenty-four palimpsests marked with the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet. Each letter structures a series of signifiers. Thus, each letter represents an image of a young woman from a fashion magazine. In turn, this young woman represents (as befits a model) a carnival costume. Each Greek letter also contains a number. Each carnival costume is likewise numbered and named. Not only does the letter unfold into a name, but the costume does as well. In addition to the name, each palimpsest also includes a poem about shattered love. And that is not all: behind the young woman's image, each palimpsest also as it were conceals the image of a male serial killer on the tile floor of a morgue.

[5] Such is the fundamental algorithm of subjectivation according to Lacan: the subject emerges by identifying with a signifier, which represents him/her as another signifier. Hence the simultaneity of subject's emergence and aphanisis (i.e., disappearance). Hence the castration of the natural element, the gap, the lack in the symbolic chain.

[6] Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), p. 180.

the ritual of compulsive repetition

Yevgeny Yufit
Fall Time of Migration. 1989
Oil on canvas. 150 × 190

Linked to the death drive, compulsive repetition is explained by the automatism of the symbolic matrix, to which the subject is attributed. The symbolic order is an automaton, a signifying machine. Repetition is as unrepeatable as each new round of the same game. Thus does a child or imbecile demand that a fairytale be repeated. The fairytale must remain the same; the point, however, is that the process of telling it becomes a ritual. The ritual of delineating the dialectic of lifedeath consists in this unrepeatable repetition. This ritual is an attempt to break through to the Real, a drive towards the limits of the symbolic matrix. Necrorealism is situated at these limits. The necromechanism in action: representation is re-production, repetition that is repeated again and again. This mechanism is wound up on the detours and roundabouts of the deathlife drive.

The necrofairytale repeats, thus inserting the human subject within the symbolic matrix, where it can say, *I'm alive, I exist.* The subject composes and articulates itself, and it is "insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is."[7] The loss and rebirth of oneself is recognition of death and unconsciousness of it.

The phrase "He doesn't know he's dead" occurs in a dream recounted by one of Freud's patients. Commenting on this non-knowledge, Lacan says, "Either death doesn't exist and there is something that survives, but this does not resolve the question whether the dead know that they are dead. Or there is nothing beyond death, and, in this case, it is quite certain that they do not know it. This is to say that no one knows, no living being in any case, what death is. It is remarkable that spontaneous productions formulated at the level of the unconscious are stated on the basis of this, that, for anyone, death is properly speaking unknowable."[8]

Yevgeny Yufit
Hello, Daddy, It's the New Year. 1989
Oil on canvas. Detail

necro-aesthetics in the midst of death

Necrorealism is a carnivalesque circumgyration around the unknowable, around the void left by the removed flesh. Death is inexpressible, and Yufit thus inscribes couplings of zooanthropomorphs around the unrepresentable, the unimaginable, the impossible. This coupling points as much to the scene of the individual's death as it does to his/her birth. The carnivalesque circumgyration is situated within the necrocoupling, in the chain of signifiers. That this coupling is masculine once again reminds us of the relationship of feminine and masculine in the symbolic chain. Man is in chains, while woman is the link within the catenary exchange.

[7] Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 295.

[8] Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 123.

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Killed by Lightning, 2002

Movement along the chain, coupling, and carnival already presuppose aesthetics. Faced with death, we cannot do without the aesthetical, the sensual, and the beautiful: "[T]he function of the beautiful [is] to reveal to us the site of man's relationship to his own death, and to reveal it to us only in a blinding flash."[9] The creative act's blinding flash witnesses to the subject's relationship to death. Sublimation is a circling around a blind spot on the edge of the void, on the verge of total negativity. This liminal movement contains the pathos of necrorealism, for subliminal circling itself reveals "the beyond of that chain, the ex *nihilo* on which it is founded and is articulated as such."[10] Necrocircling, non-circling, opens an interspace, formulates the gap between deaths.

interdeath

Death is not singular.[11] The first death is the physical death of the body. It puts an end to human life and supplies the finitude of human being-towards-death. But this is not the limit. It is not yet the end. The living tremble: the dead are capable of returning. The phantasm of the return from the interzone demonstrates the need for a second death that will close the gates tight. The second death, symbolic death, is achieved via ritual. Aestheticization — creation of the necro-image — is meant to prevent the return. The second death is designed to prevent the dead body's regeneration.

Necrorealism is indeed an aesthetics of the second death. Thus, as paradoxical as it might sound, necropractice is performed in the same space between two deaths as ancient Greek tragedy. It is no accident that Yufit has always objected to direct historical (or rather, synchronic) connotations regarding necropractice. Despite the fact that we must speak of necrorealism's connection to the synchronic axis (that is, as a phenomenon that arose in a specific place during the decline of socialism, in the interval between a moribund Soviet culture and an emergent new culture), we should by no means reject diachrony. In the broadest sense of the word, necropractice is a perennial practice situated at the very foundations of culture, or even a practice that differentiates (in the sense of *différance*) culture itself.

The interspace between the two deaths is also the trans-space between self and other in whose tension the human subject as a subject of death and a subject of desire is born. The human subject's desire is always already bound up with death. It is an encounter with oneself, with one's double. This double is manifested in the symbolic chain, in the necrocoupling. On the threshold of another's death, faced with the corpse, we find death in pure

9 *Ethics of Psychoanalysis, p. 295.*

10 *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 212.

11 In his discussion of Antigone, who is entombed while still alive, Lacan follows the Marquis de Sade, who in *Juliette* discusses a second death via which man is endowed with a strength that enables him to liberate nature from its own laws.

form, and it is the "pure and simple desire of death as such."[12] The Father-Totem is the bearer of the second death's Law: desire is the desire of death.[13]

neco-ethics: the forcluded returns

Necrorealism returns the forcluded. It returns what has been rejected by technopositivism in its capacity as today's dominant religion. This religion is based on the paranoid forclusion of the Father-Totem's Law.[14] Technoparanoiscience's principal promise is to cope with negativity, with mortality, with the lack that in fact describes the human subject. The Techno-Scientist's victory over the Father-Totem is a victory of the zoological individual over the subject, whose traces vanish without a trace.

What paranoid technoscientific culture discards, necrorealism brings back via aesthetic means. Human culture begins with the recognition of mortality, with the work of art, the burial mound, the cemetery, and the pyramid, which imprison the other's corpse in their voids. Death's negativity is the *ex nihilo* around which the human subject is formulated. Whereas once upon a time Death was culture's empty center, the site where the subject recreated itself in the sublimational deployment, nowadays, in a world of paranoid immortality, death is marginalized. It is a waste product of technoculture.

Necrorealism's ethics consists in the recognition of Death as refuse. The necroproject aims to preserve the missing link in the chain, the link that alone makes possible the movement of the subject's existence. Without this remainder, without this indescribable *objet petit a*,[15] the human subject is not constituted, instead transforming into a zoological individual. Necrorealism is resistance to paranoid technoscientism, which tosses death into the rubbish bin of its own pathology.

circumvention

Necrocircling comes from the understanding that a direct approach to death is impossible. Necro-aesthetics involves circuitous motion: there is no other path except the allegorical. And in this sense necrorealism continues to move both in the tradition of human culture's foundations, with its burial mounds and funerary images, and in the medieval tradition, with its *Ars moriendi*.

What is the funerary image's original function? To regulate relations between worlds, between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It

Vladimir Kustov
Bear with a Shark's Jaw. 1986
Mixed media. Diameter 47 cm

Vladimir Kustov
Zero Gravity. 1994. Oil on canvas. 75 × 110 cm

12 *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 282.

13 "The dialectical relationship between desire and the Law causes our desire to flare up only in relation to the Law, through which it becomes the desire for death." Ethics of Psychoanalysis, pp. 83—84.

14 See Viktor Mazin, *Paranoiia: Shreber — Freid — Lakan* [Paranoia: Schreber — Freud — Lacan] (Saint Petersburg: Skifiia, 2009). In psychoanalysis, forclusion is the mechanism by which paranoid psychosis forms. According to Lacan, the forclusion from the symbolic chain of certain master signifiers (such as the Name-of-the-Father) is what structures psychosis.

15 This is Lacan's term for the unsymbolizable remainder of the process of symbolization.

is death that reveals the soul by liberating it. Paradoxically, birth — in the sense of the discovery of oneself as one's double — simultaneously prescribes death.[16] At birth, the double in which lifedeath is alienated appears in the literal sense. Loss of the double is loss of *one's own self.* Such is the first necrocoupling, for even during life the double belongs as it were to the world of the dead. After death, on the contrary, the soul is caught between worlds, in a kind of interzone. Since the time of the first funerary images, necropractice has had to secure the dislocation that divides the living and the dead, up to and including the idiom that it is the dead who should bury the dead.

The allegory of necrorealism, of course, is unrepeatable in its repetition of tradition. It is a product of the technologies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is a waste product of technoscientism. If it does in fact have an aim, then it intends to restore death to its rights, to stabilize relations between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In its realism, necro-allegory follows science. This tracking movement is what enables it to gather what science discards.

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film *Bipedalism*, 2005

a harvest of abjects: the waste products of science on a detour

The main characters in Yufit's films are scientists and the waste products of scientific research, intermediate beings who neither alive nor dead. Scientific experiments are the subject of nearly all his films, from Knights of Heaven to Bipedalism. Indicative in this respect is the striking montage in the opening minutes of Bipedalism: the camera first pans from one scientific instrument to another, before showing us two test subjects performing strange movements in a barbed-wire cage.

Forcluded objects are abjects.[17] Abjects are neither subjects nor objects. Why not subjects? Because they practically do not speak. And if they do speak, their conversations are bereft of what is customarily called common sense in the world of human beings. But neither are they objects, for they move almost like people. Almost, but not at all the same way. Abjects are situated between (living) subject and (nonliving) object. That is why they make such an uncanny impression. That is why, during traumatic encounters with them, people try to remove them, discard them. That is at least somewhere — the world of the dead. The abject is taken for a corpse.[18] Abjects are the waste products of scientific experiments. They do not fit into a world that has been lined, ruled, and gridded by modern science. They drop out of the symbolic matrix. The abject is an object that has been rejected by paranoiscience, a transgressive figure of exception. An encounter with it produces revulsion, revulsion at the non-inscribable, the impossible, the negative.

Beyond the matrix of subjects and objects lies not only death, but madness as well. And here we encounter a seemingly incredible phenomenon — the convergence of death and madness, of thanatology and pathology. Thus the anatomical pathologist has nothing to do with pathology in the psychiatric sense of the word, but in his figure death proves to be nothing other than pathology, pathological anatomy. Necrorealism is not only the realism of necro, but also a pathorealism that brings forcluded abjects back from the normative symbolic matrix. The standards for this matrix are established by normal science,[19] whose bases were formulated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Forensic medicine occupies a very special place in the history of normal science.

normal science = forensic medicine

Forensic medicine occupies a special place in the history of necrorealism. Eduard von Hofmann's "Textbook of Forensic Medicine" is a source of inspiration, knowledge, and iconography. Established in the nineteenth century on the frontiers of psychiatry and criminal practice, forensic medicine played a leading role in the positivist paradigm and the formation of the disciplinary society.[20] It is the basis for the emergence of normal technoscience with its authoritative claims. It fashions normality by excluding figures of psychopathology, of "sexual and cannibalistic monstrosity."[21] Figures of perversion and danger are identified in order to establish control over abnormality. The function of the norm is "always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project."[22]

The medical forensic methods developed by Hofmann enabled him to say more about a man on the basis of his teeth and surviving bone tissue than on the basis of his identity card. The scientific narrative is built solely on empirical evidence — that is, on numerous examples of the traces left by strangling, stabbing and gunshot wounds, the effects of electrocution and poisonous substances — nitric acid, mercury, poisonous mushrooms, narcotics, alcohol, extract of fern, nicotine.

Doctor Hofmann's textbook has two parts. The first part is entitled "The Ceremonial": it discusses the work of the medical coroner, the rites and rituals he performs to maintain his position as an expert. The second part is entitled "The Physical": it initially deals only with sexual deviations and sexual violence, and then forms of violent death. This almost 900-page work concludes with a discussion of psychopathology and the problems involved

Tomb of Eduard von Hofmann
Vienna, 2006

[16] In the Lacanian tradition, it is matter of a narcissistic image that, during the mirror stage, supplies an image of the self [*moi*] as an image of an other, a double. It is symptomatic that this double lies at the foundations of western culture — e.g., *Psyche and Eidolon*.

[17] See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Kristeva describes the abject as a kind of waste that belongs neither to the world of subjects nor the world of objects. Between the subjective and objective world lies the abject world of waste products.

[18] Is it any wonder that viewers and professional psychiatrists and art critics, inspired by the name "necrorealism," see precisely corpses in the paintings and on screen? Is it any wonder that the word "necrorealism" distracts professionals from what they might see, suggesting an audible connection with "necrophilia"?

[19] That is, science that, according to Thomas Kuhn, is "firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice." Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 10. The achievements of normal science establish the dominant cognitive paradigm, which is transmitted primarily through textbooks, including forensic medicine textbooks. Here we should note that it is no wonder that necrorealism emerged precisely within Soviet culture. It is not that it emerged in a moribund Soviet culture, or even that this culture was centered on the unliving/undead figure of the Lawgiver in the mausoleum, but that this culture was itself based on the discourse of knowledge, or the university discourse, as Lacan calls it.

[20] The first scientific works on forensic medicine were published in Europe in the early seventeenth century. Due to the fact that for many centuries autopsies were forbidden, medical researchers performed them in secret. Rembrandt depicted one such autopsy in the painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). It is worth mentioning that Kustov made a special trip to the Mauritshuis in The Hague to study this work.

[21] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1974–1975, trans. Graham Burchell (London and New York: Verso, 2003), p. 102.

[22] Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 50.

in establishing whether someone is mentally competent. Forensic medicine thus on the one hand deals with identifying the living; on the other, with identifying causes of death. The refuse of normal science, the products of forensic medicine — all these sexual and anthropophagic monsters, deviants and psychotics, the living and the dead — find their place within the necrozone.

economimesis and the bifurcation of narrative

Whereas the pathologies described in this forensic medicine textbook are outfitted with realistic illustrations bearing such captions as "Crushing of the skull with a pistol shot from thirty paces away" or "Suicide by hanging with a long rope suspended from a crossbar," in necropractice, images from forensic medicine are doubled, aestheticized, and embedded in a double narrative.

The unrepresentability of death as negativity is thus compensated, in particular, by economic or double mimesis.[23] Economimesis is a circumvention of representation: narrative matters less than how exactly it is inscribed within the space of the image. In necro-elaboration, the allegory is aimed at an imitation of the process, at reproducing the work of death — that is, not merely at an impossible (*necro*) mimesis (*realism*), but at a double mimesis (*necrorealism*).

Vladimir Kustov
Life Express. 2006. Oil on canvas. 80 × 200 cm

Thus, in Vladimir Kustov's portrait of Einstein it is not so much the painting itself that points to relativity theory, as the fact that it is painted on boar skin, which due to its extreme sensitivity to ambient humidity and temperature renders the very dimensions of the image relative. The painting *Life Express*, whose prototype is a thought experiment by Einstein, also represents the special theory of relativity. The painting captures an instant that unfolds into a narrative that escapes the bounds of time. The "life express" races like an arrow towards death. The economimesis of time is inscribed into the canvas's relative space. Einstein's thought experiment is as follows. An observer, M, stands alongside railroad tracks. He sees lightning striking an express train at two points, apparently simultaneously. To another observer, M1, who is located inside the express train, the lightning strikes do not appear simultaneous. Skipping over a number of Einstein's arguments, we are finally lead to conclude that it is impossible to say with certainty whether they lightning strikes were simultaneous or not. Time is relative: our answer depends on our starting point. When the fundamental classical notion of absolute simultaneity becomes meaningless, other notions of the absolute and of time are rendered meaningless as well — cause and effect, before and after, living and dead, birth and death. In the painting, the artist's narrative is interwoven with the scientist's: M is not merely an observer, but a subject who has decided to perform an act of urination, which results in death. The stream of urine lands on a high-voltage cable below him, and a powerful electrical charge passes through the urine, hurling him towards the passing express train. Lightning bolts flash before his eyes. At this moment, M senses that he is far from the railroad tracks; he sees the express train hurtling into some kind of strange tunnel and he realizes that he is on this train. Having becoming a internal observer, he sees himself as something external.[24] Inside and outside, M and M1, life and death form a Möbius strip.

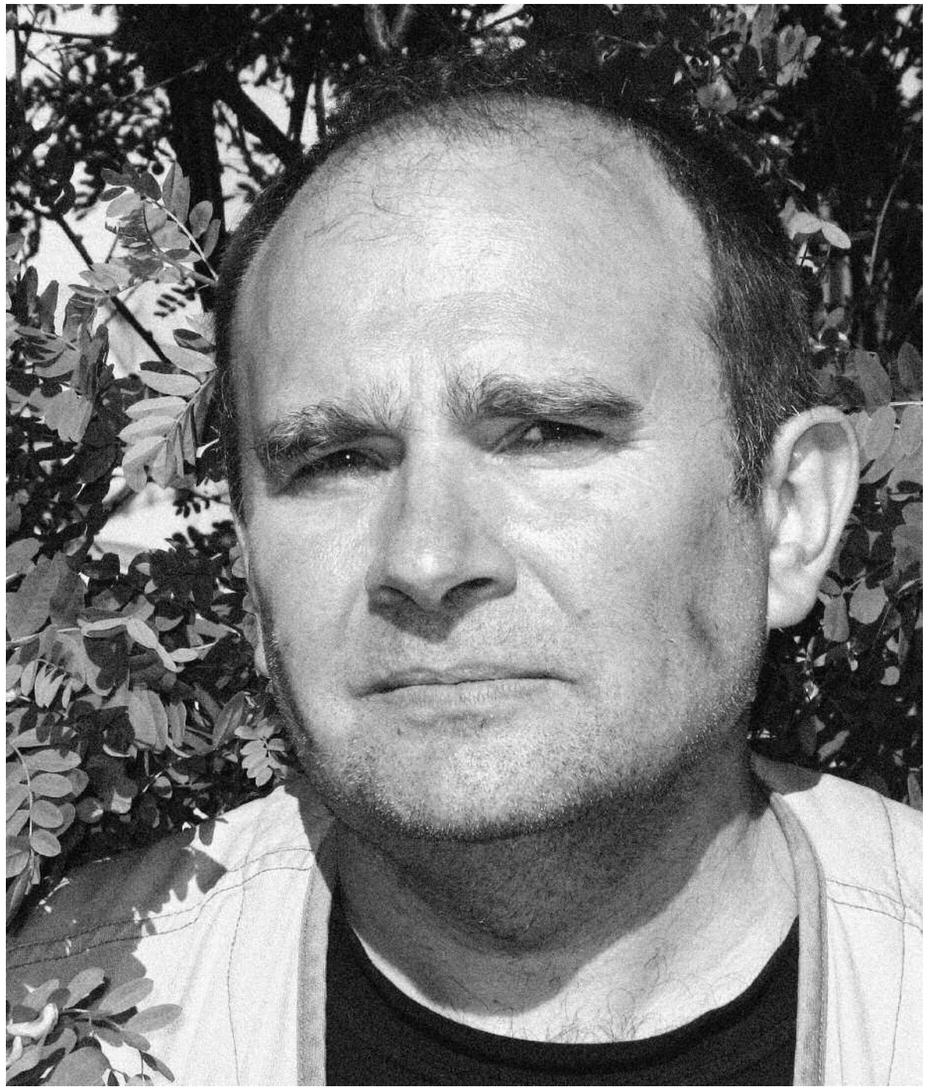
Yufit and Kustov move along this strip. Kustov's pictorial necronarrative traces the fundamental metaphor in his practice — the corridor of dying. Yufit's central metaphor, on the contrary, is the zooanthropomorph that normal science has identified as a psychopathological reject. Whereas the corridor is rendered via the media of painting and installation, photography and cinema are employed in order to bring back what has been forcluded and discarded. What unites these two different necropractices is the realization that today's decisive event is the transition from biopolitics to zoopolitics, the politicization of the discarded individual's bare life.

Translated by Thomas Campbell (from Russian)

[23] See Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11.2 (Summer 1981): 2—25.

[24] See Vladimir Kustov, *Nekrometod* [Necromethod] (unpublished manuscript).

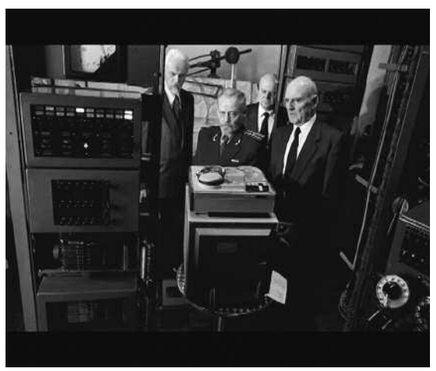
yevgeny yufit



yufit's liminal experiments

Viktor Mazin

Yevgeny Yufit
Feast of Asphyxia. 1989
Oil on canvas. Detail



Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Bipedalism, 2005

Contrary to a number of legends and myths, Yufit has never shot either dead people or dead reality. It is another matter that his living creatures do not behave quite like the living, but you also would not call them altogether lifeless. They are far from dead. Death and life intertwine in a delayed outburst, in the slow explosion of a merry *danse macabre*. His characters are picturesque necrozoomorphs indulging in black-and-white rampages alongside power lines and railroad tracks. His characters are the frozen eyewitnesses of photography, forest belts, and verges of heaven, earth, and water seen by someone. His characters are beings of uncertain identity suspended in the interzone between the worlds of the living and the dead. This indistinct identity is not discharged at the frontier between human and nonhuman, in the place where frenzied zooanthropomorphs engage in their couplings. Psychopathology unfolds on this border between human and nonhuman. Foucault's statement that "madness is the déja-vu of death" might serve as an epigraph to Yufit's work insofar as the head that will one day turn into a skull is already empty now.

However, the head is never empty. There are always thoughts stirring within it, and these thoughts are often about the unthinkable, about death. Death is the nonhuman element within man, the becoming-inhuman, whether psychopathology, deviant behavior or transformation into the animal. The death of Yufit's necrorealism is not biological, but symbolic, anthropotechnological. As the nonhuman within man, death is due to bare life, technoanthropogenesis, and technoscience. Armed with the delirium of the project, the technoscientist aims to create his own new Frankenstein, and the paranoiac goal relentlessly drives him to suicide, generating aimless human waste products along the way. According to the book in the film *Bipedalism*, this project is called "Military Zooanthropotechnics."

Military zooanthropotechnics is technoscience's quintessence. It is the focus of Yufit's interest in zoology, anthropology, primatology, genetics, cryptobiology, forensic medicine, and paleopsychology. On the one hand, science provides the framework for today's symbolic matrix. On the other hand, this framework inevitably requires the discharge of what does not fit within it. Military zooanthropotechnics is focused on the production and exploitation of bare life, which cannot result in anything other than death.

The purpose of the experiments is to create a new man minus the human subject, an individual without fear and beyond reproach, a rugged being combining the hardiness of wood, the toughness of the wild boar, and the industriousness of the beaver. The new man is the naked refuse of mediatechnoscientific experiments. The human dregs in Yufit's films figure as a metaphor for "natural man." Those who have escaped the mad scientist's laboratory enclosure turn out to be the closest to nature. What a paradox: to become natural, one has to lose the remnants of the human while locked in laboratory cage! The farther the individual human is from a thinking subject, the closer it is to the scientist's dream of a creature endowed with a cognitive brain and instinctive behaviors. The closer the experimental scientist's idea is to animals, and the life of his test subject, to bare life, the more quickly is biopolitics transformed into zoopolitics, the more the scientist resembles a suicidal animal tamer from a political freak show.

The only obstacle to the creation of the new man are the remnants of the psychical and, hence, the always-already psychopathological. Given this state of affairs, all that remains is to ask the rhetorical question about the difference between the mental disorders afflicting the mad scientist and the test subjects he is driving to madness. The material world of Yufit's realism of the necro is filled, on the one hand, with instruments and heroically overwrought scientists; on the other, with the outcasts of their scientific experiments, and with the natural world, with its woods, bears, and wild boars. The experiment is conducted on the frontier between the artificial and the natural. The action takes place somewhere within the anomalies of the interzone — on railroad tracks, in a forest belt, in the suburbs — that is, in the only places where the beast-man, the werewolf hiker, and zooanthropomorph can appear. The secret experiment, whether it involves producing a hybrid of man and tree or crossbreeding humans and apes, takes the human subject to the brink of death.

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Bipedalism, 2005

Cinema itself turns out to be another brink, another facet of death. Like Cocteau, Yufit understands that cinema is the only art that records the work of death. Following Godard, he realizes that cinema is vital precisely because it captures life's deathly aspect. Yufit's cinema in fact turns in the first place to the poetics of this work, leaving in the background the auxiliary elements — the narrative's coherent phantasm, the melody that supports it, and the special effects that highlight its key points. Yufit returns again and again to the means and foundations of cinema itself as a form of writing with movie pictures. As a technique for the textual reproduction of what has *already* been recorded, cinema inevitably contains death, tired but incessantly laboring in the silence that breaks through the whirring of a movie camera, the pounding of a woodpecker, and the creaking of a log swinging back and forth.

Translated by Thomas Campbell (from Russian)

Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Bipedalism, 2005

From the series
Transparent Grove. 1992
Black & white photos
Collection of State Russian Museum (Contemporary Art Department); Netherlands Film Museum; Private collection

From the series
Frozen Eyewitness. 1993
Photo series
Black & white photos
Collection of Netherlands Film Museum

Coeval. 2008
Oil on canvas. 170 × 260 cm

Cycle. 2008
Oil on canvas. 170 × 260 cm

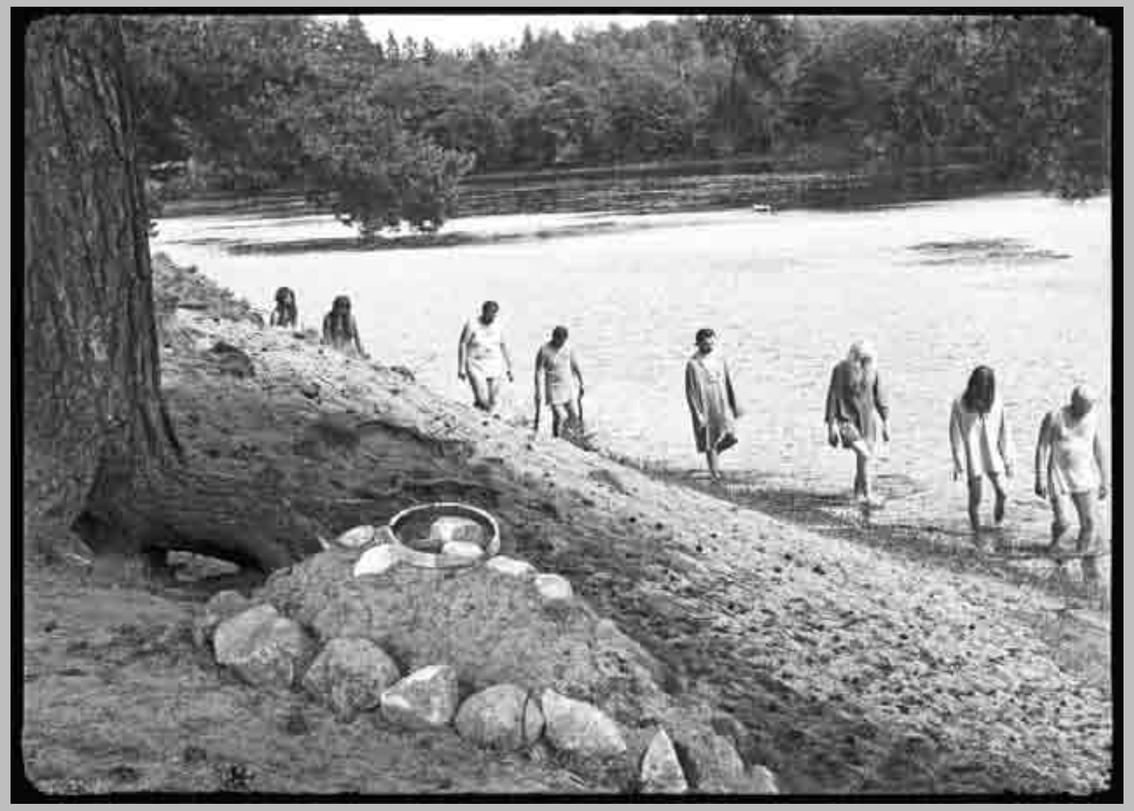



Stills from short films,
1984-1988
35 mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum



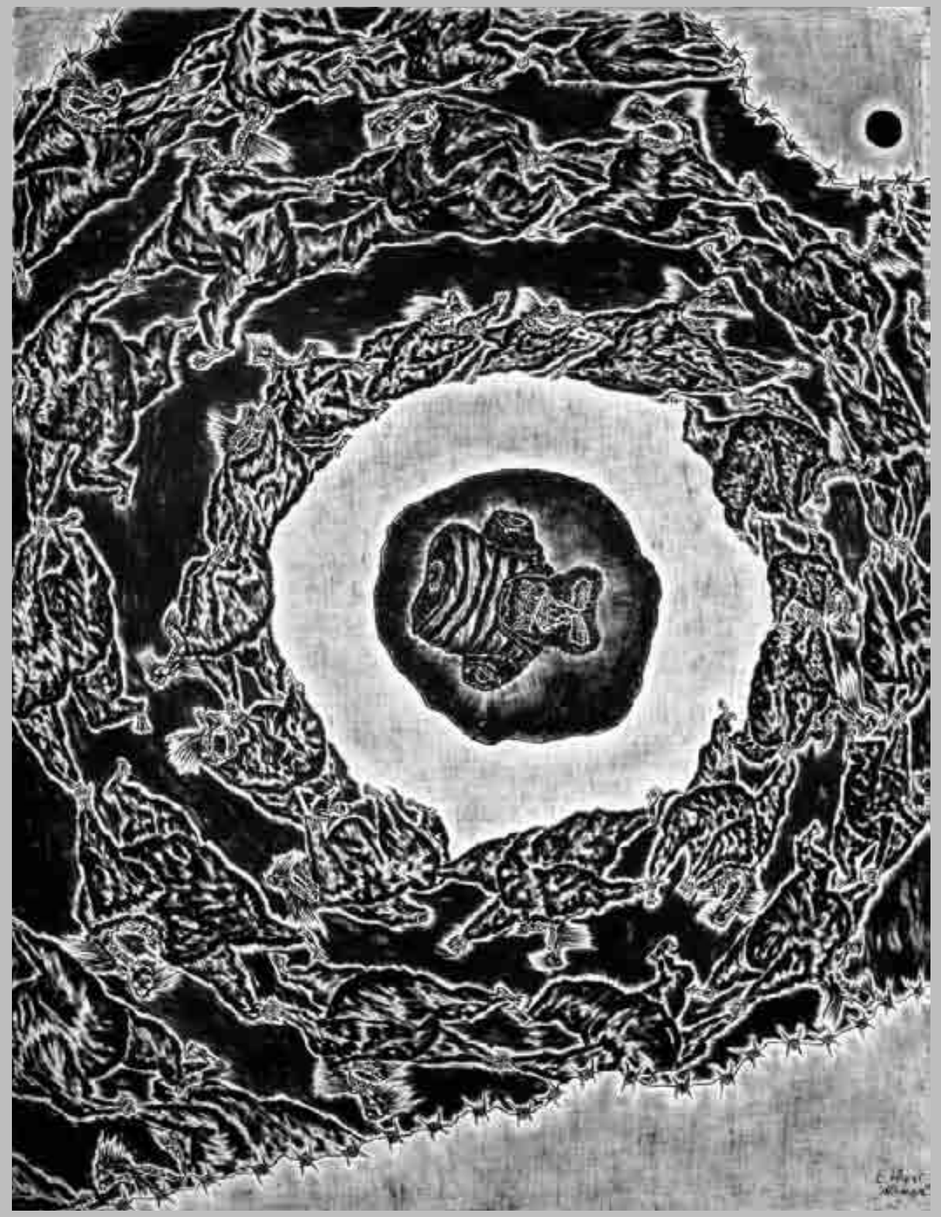

Stills from
Knights of Heaven, 1989
35mm black & white film
Netherlands Film Museum

Sharp-Sighted. 1997
Black & white photo

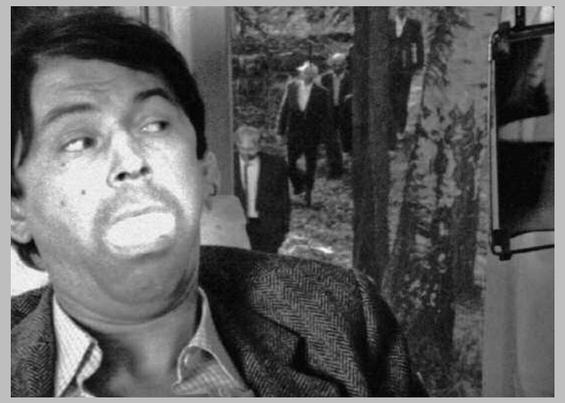


Soon. 2010
Black & white photo

Rebirth. 2008
Oil on canvas. 200 × 150 cm



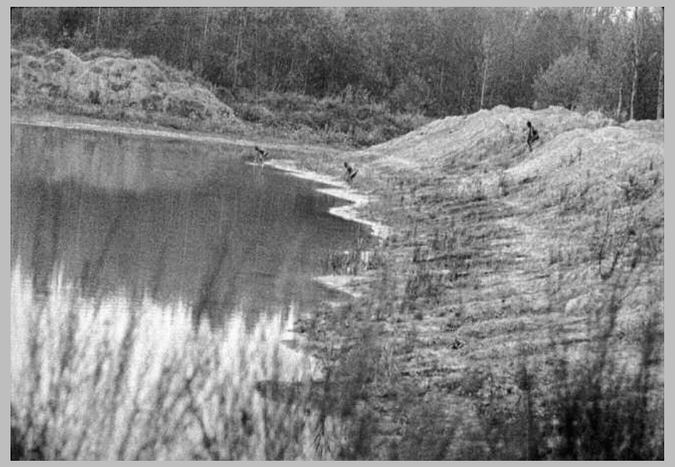
Thirst. 2007
Oil on canvas. 200 × 150 cm

Stills from
Daddy, Father Frost is Dead, 1991
35mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands Film Museum;
MoMA Film and Video Department




Stills from
The Wooden Room, 1995
35mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands Film Museum;
MoMA Film and Video Department



Rebirth. 2007
Photo series
Black & white photos

From the series
Cloud of the Beast. 1992
Black & white photos
Collection of State Russian Museum (Contemporary Art Department); Netherlands Film Museum

Periscope. 2010
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Thaw. 2008
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm




Stills from *Silver Heads,* 1997
35 mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum;
MoMA Film
and Video Department




Stills from
Killed by Lightning, 2002
35 mm color film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum

From the series
Rustle. 1996
Black & white photo
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum

From the series
New Morning. 1992
Black & white photos

Time. Triptych. 2009
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm (middle part)

Mirror. 2007
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm



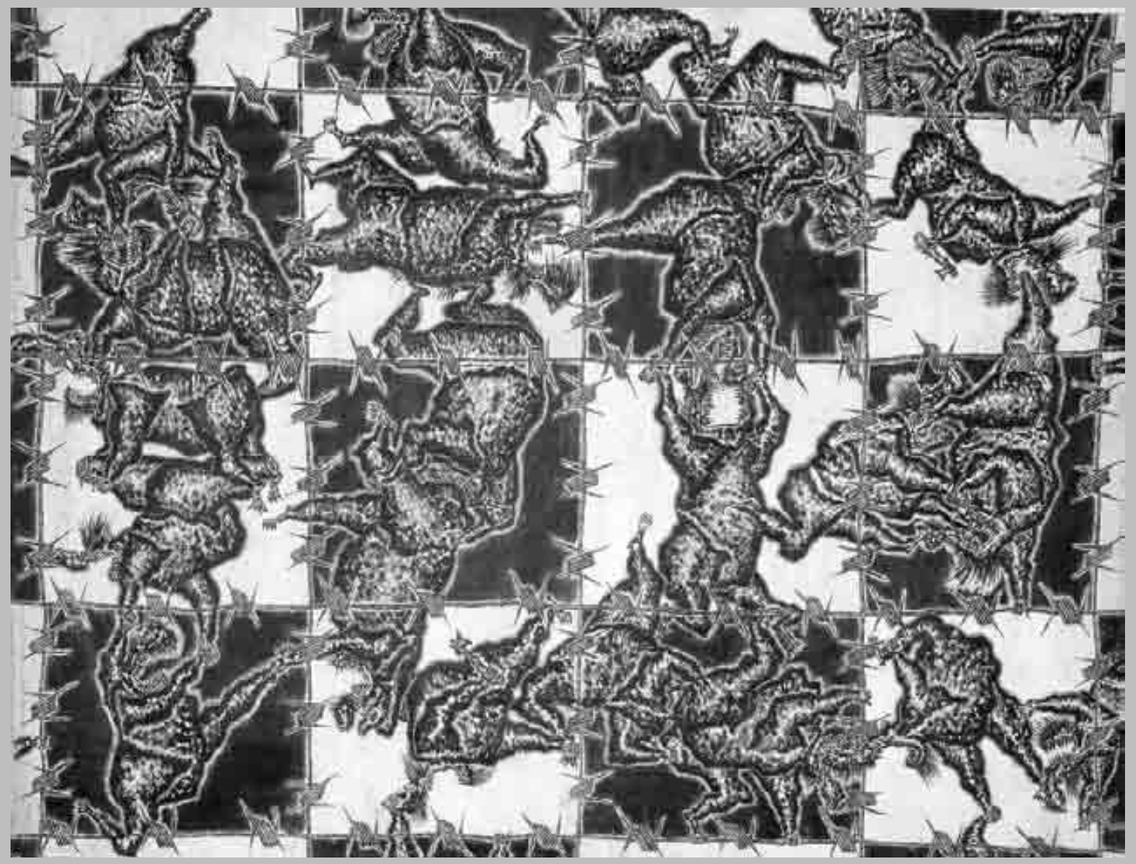



From the series
Longliver. 1997
Black & white photos

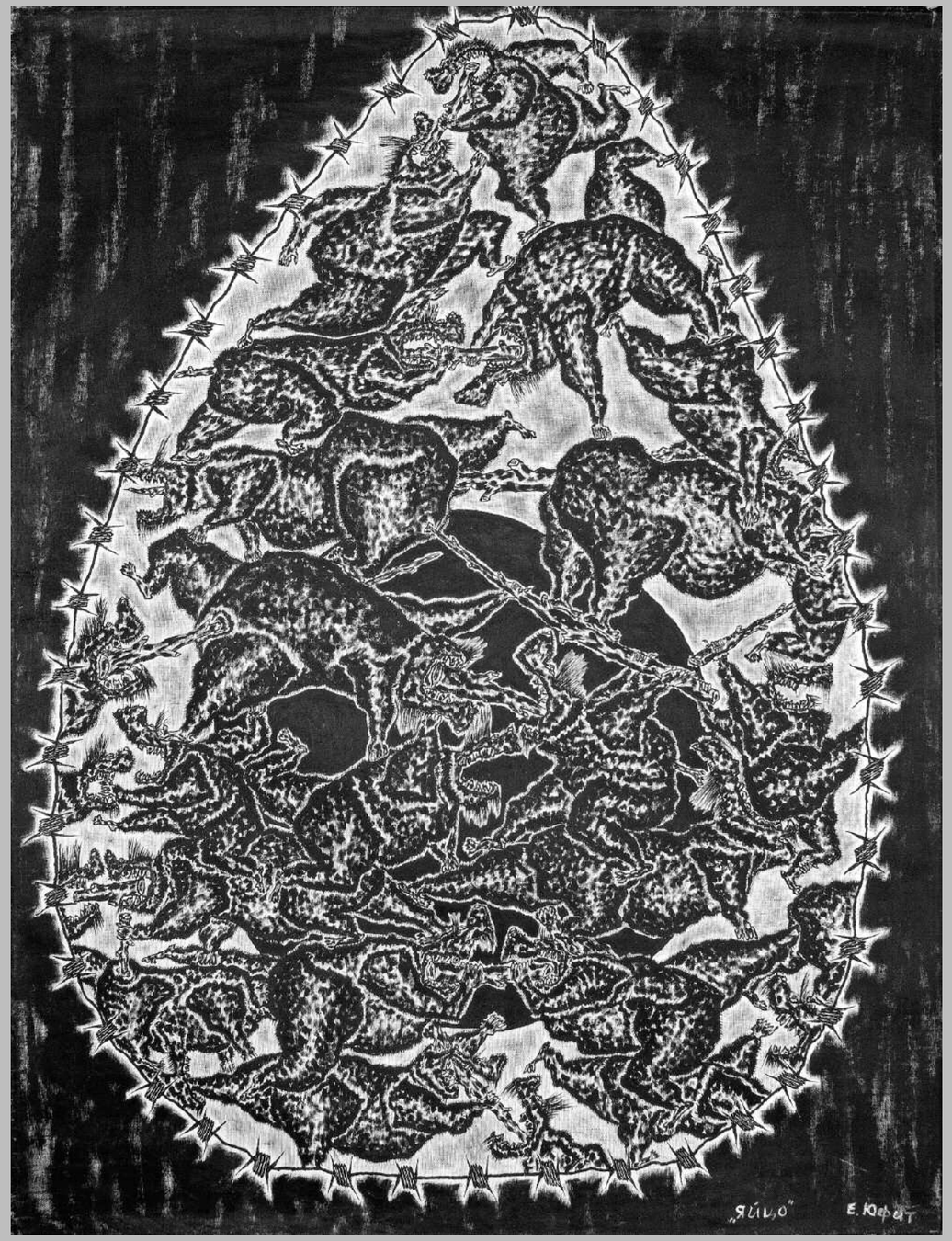
From the series
Spit of Maturity. 1993
Black & white photos

Alone. 1994
Black & white photo
Collection of State
Russian Museum (Contemporary
Art Department);
Netherlands Film Museum

Dew. 1994
Black & white photo
Collection of State Russian Museum
(Contemporary Art Department)



Chess. Triptych. 2009
Oil on canvas
150 × 200 cm (middle part)



Egg. 2007 ▸
Oil on canvas
150 × 200 cm




Stills from
Bipedalism, 2005
35 mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands Film Museum




April. 1997
Black & white photo

Him. 2002
Black & white photo

From the series
Silent Horizon. 2008
Black & white photos

Tired sun. 2011
Oil on canvas
150 × 150 cm

yevgeny yufit

Artist and film-director, founder of the Necrorealism art movement

He was born in Leningrad (St.Petersburg) in 1961. He has been working as a painter, photographer and filmmaker since the early 1980s.
In 1985 Yufit set up the first Soviet independent film studio "Mzhalalafilm" which became a center for radical experiments in art. In this studio Yufit shot seven of his first films, which were influenced by the aesthetics of the early German kino-expressionism, French surrealistic cinema and pathetic of the 1930-50's Soviet official propaganda.

As of 1989 Yufit has made five full-length 35mm films. Each of his new films became an important international event. Yufit's films were shown at all the major festivals of independent artistic cinema. His first feature film "Papa, Father Frost is Dead" (1991) was awarded the Grand Prix at the International Film Festival in Rimini.

In 2005, the 34th Film Festival in Rotterdam included a special program dedicated to Yufit's works — exhibition of his photos and the world premiere of his last film "Bipedalism".

Yufit's paintings, photographs and films can be found in many leading museums of the world: the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; the Museum of the Modern Art (MoMA); New York, Netherlands Film Museum, Amsterdam.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1997 *Screenings of Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead and The Wooden Room.* MoMA/Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA

1997 *Films and Photographs of Yevgeny Yufit.* State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

2002 *Necrorealism at Yale: The Films of Yevgeny Yufit, Complete film retrospective, North American premiere of Killed by Lightning.* Yale University, New Haven, USA

2003 *New York premiere of Killed by Lightning.* MoMA/Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA

2005 *World premiere of Bipedalism Filmmaker in Focus: Yevgeny Yufit, Complete film retrospective and photo exhibition.* International Film Festival, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

2008 *Complete film retrospective.* International Film Forum Arsenals, Riga, Latvia

2011 *Silent Horizon.* Orel Art, Paris, France

Filmography

1984 Werewolf Orderlies
1985 Woodcutter
1987 Spring
1988 Fortitude
Suicide Monsters
1989 Knights of Heaven
1991 Papa, Father Frost is Dead
1994 Will
1995 The Wooden Room
1998 Silver Heads
2002 Killed by Lightning
2005 Bipedalism

Selected Awsrds

1992 Grand Prix, The Rimini Film Festival, Italy
1994 George Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Grant, St. Petersburg, Russia
1999 Hubert Bals Fund Grant, International Film Festival of Rotterdam, The Netherlands
2000 The Foundation Montecinemaverita Grant, Locarno, Switzerland
2001 "Institute PRO ARTE" and The Ford Foundation Grant, St. Petersburg, Russia
2003 Hubert Bals Fund Grant, International Film Festival of Rotterdam, The Netherlands

vladimir kustov

kustov: the necro-image and the corridor of dying

Viktor Mazin

Vladimir Kustov
Asphyxia. 1996. Installation

Vladimir Kustov realizes that he is going down the corridor of dying. Moreover, he is not walking down a corridor already made by someone, but down the corridor he himself creates as he proceeds. The corridor of dying is the space between life and death. Construction of this corridor involves creating an installation that works through the resistance of this space. The necro-installation is born in smashing this resistance: the violence of the way that is paved arises in the process of its creation.

The installation is a total elaboration of the space. Lifedeath consists in motion through it: passing along the corridor of dying requires the expenditure of time, even if that time is a loop. Passing down the necrocorridor involves a reversal in narrative time. Kustov's conceptualism consists in the fact that he creates a necro-environment and describes it: these two processes are inseparable. The story is designed to accompany passage through the corridor like a Necrobook of the Dead read during one's lifetime.

One of the peculiarities of the necro-installation is that, along with a total elaboration of the environment, it should generate a sense of lack, a sense of an empty place, the necrodynamic's *objet petit a*. The totality should not be total. The installation should bewitch, bother and bewilder not only in and of itself, but also through the inclusion of this lack, this place of exclusion, through the inclusion of a blind spot. The lack arises in the tangible "presence" of the absent story and storyteller. The necro-installation is the time of the author's absence, his death outside the necro-image.

Vladimir Kustov's necroconceptualism consists in creating narrative installations in the space between visual art, the development of the necromethod, and thanatology. In 2002, this work led him to establish the Thanatology Center in the Forensic Medicine Museum at the Mechnikov State Medical Academy in Saint Petersburg. Forensic medicine is the prototype of Kustov's iconography: bullet wounds, stab wounds, the early and late stages of corpse decomposition, keranography, the boxer's pose.

Vladimir Kustov
Thanatology Center. 2002
Installation

Kustov's necroconceptualism is clearly situated between art and science. It is no wonder that he paints portraits of scientists — Mechnikov, Sechenov, Korsakov and Serbsky (part of the installation *The Epileptic Status of the Golem*); Pavlov, Mendeleev, Bekhterev (part of the installation *Coma*); Freud (part of the installation at the Freud Museum of Dreams); Einstein, Mariotte.

Edme Mariotte was a seventeenth-century priest and physicist, one of the first members of the French Academy of Sciences. Mariotte had made a discovery that attracted Kustov's attention — the blind spot in the eye. The blind spot is the place where the optic nerve passes through the retina, a

place that is insensitive to light. Not all living creatures have blind spots. Thus, in octopuses the nerve fibers that form the optic nerve are behind the photoreceptor cells on the optic disc of the retina, and therefore there are no blind spots in their eyes. The blind spots in the two eyes of human beings are situated symmetrically in different places and are therefore usually invisible, and, as scientists say, the brain adjusts the perceived image. The blind spot attracted Kustov's attention not because it is one cause of optical illusions, but because it can serve as a cause of death — that is, if the individual fails to notice an object approaching his face and react to it. The negativity of the blind spot is the negativity of death. When he read about Mariotte's experiment with the blind spot, Kustov immediately recalled a story from his childhood, which also became the basis of a painting. In a communal apartment, the head of one family lost his temper while waiting for the head of another family to come out of the toilet. When his patience ran out, he ripped the door from its hinges and delivered an irresistible blow to the other man's face with a meat-tenderizing hammer. The blind spot made it impossible for the other man, who was sitting on the toilet, to react in time. This scene can also be imagined as a male coupling around the blind spot.

Male couplings are the basis of the alphabet. Letters, the alphabet are the focal point of lifedeath. Man's life and death are rooted in letters. Overcoming space-time, they outlive him, and constitute his legacy. The letters:necrocouplings contain the idea of the origins of the human. Each letter is the memory of the occurrence of a criminal male alliance, an alliance reinforced by the prohibition against pleasure that arose as the result of the murder of an animal-like forefather, a zooanthropomorph. At the same time, the necrocouplings:letters secure traits, fastening signifiers into the symbolical order. Necroletters organize the home of existence. In this home, the non-Vitruvian Man Leonardo lives and dies happily ever after. In this home, there is no harmonious fusion of art and science, no human microcosm and macrocosm of the world, no loving hearts. Kustov's painting *Love or Death* is a carnivalesque homage to Vitruvian anthropocentrism. The loop of the circle ruptures the square, and love is inscribed into death. Only in the noose are lovers inseparable.

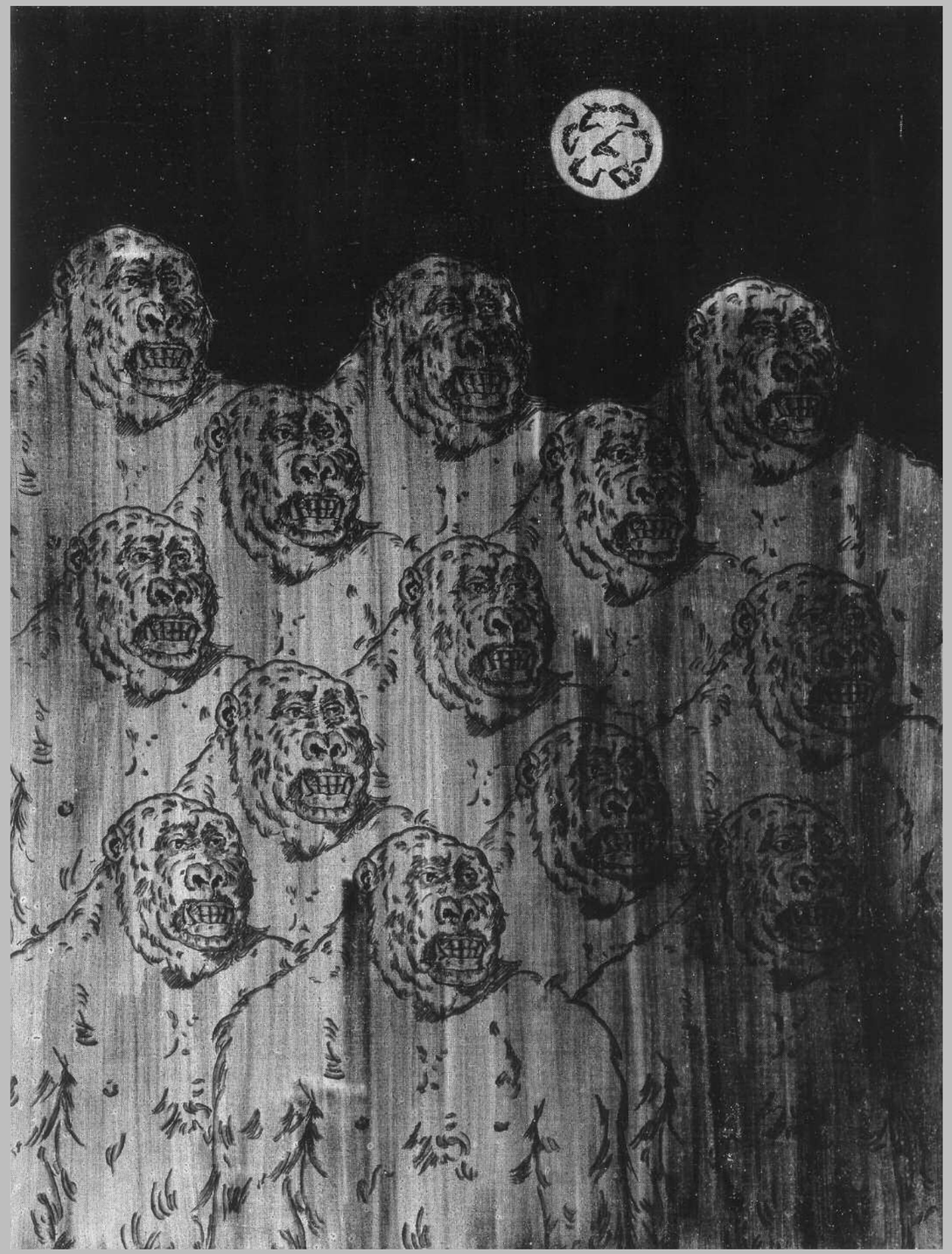
The perennial story of love and death is now also complemented by a threat to the alphabet. It is as if the blind spot is spreading, making it impossible to distinguish the letters. The spot gets bigger and bigger. Necrorealism now operates in the Kingdom of Imaginary Eternity and Techno-Koshchey the Deathless. Necrorealism nowadays — in the midst of a technoscientism that advocates plugging up the lack, that promotes a paranoiac denial of death — is more relevant than when it emerged. The Techno-Scientist is now prepared to take the place of the Creator. When this happens, the

Vladimir Kustov
Mariott. 1994. Oil on canvas. 80 × 60 cm
Collection of Olesya Turkina and Viktor Mazin

Vladimir Kustov
Love or Death. 1994
Oil on canvas. 146 × 196 cm

human will finally give way to the nonhuman, and the Kingdom of Life and Death will relinquish its place to the Kingdom of the Immortality of Death. In connection with the development of cybertechnology, genetic engineering, and neurosciences, the border between living and dead, the very notions of living and dead, are cast into doubt. The artificial technoworld of immortality produces a situation in which all life becomes a computer game, a world of simulacra where bodies and identities are avatars. Soon, new body parts will be generated from genetic material, and the industrial production of entire human bodies will commence. We should recall that the Greek body, σώμα, and the Latin body, *corpus*, combine the notions of living and dead, but originally they only denoted a corpse.

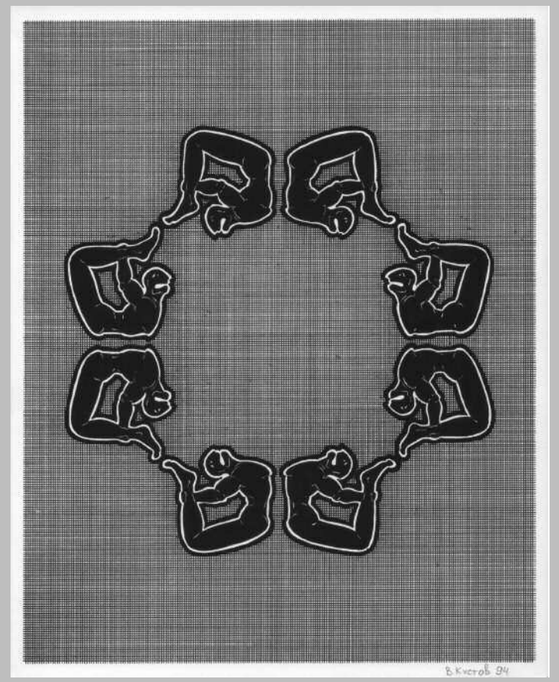
Translated by Thomas Campbell (from Russian)

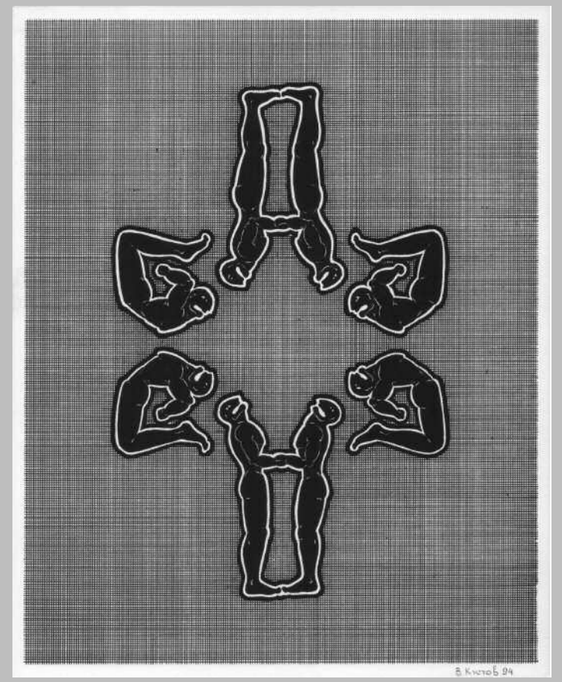


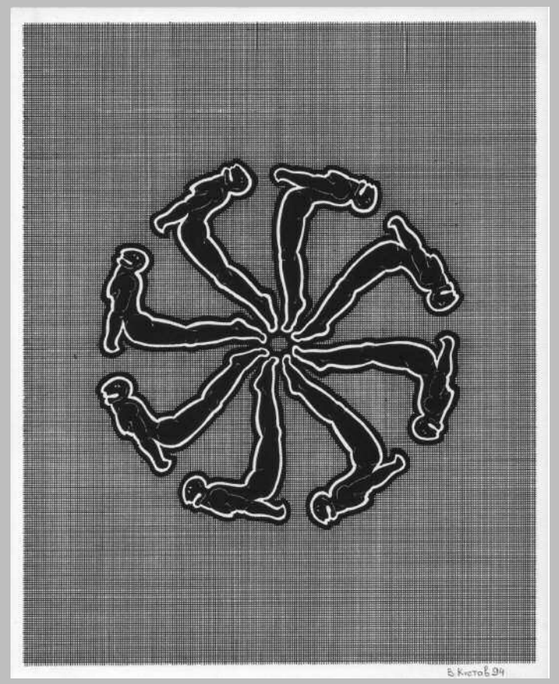
Vladimir Kustov ▸
Surprises of the Sea. 1992
Oil on canvas. 196 × 146 cm

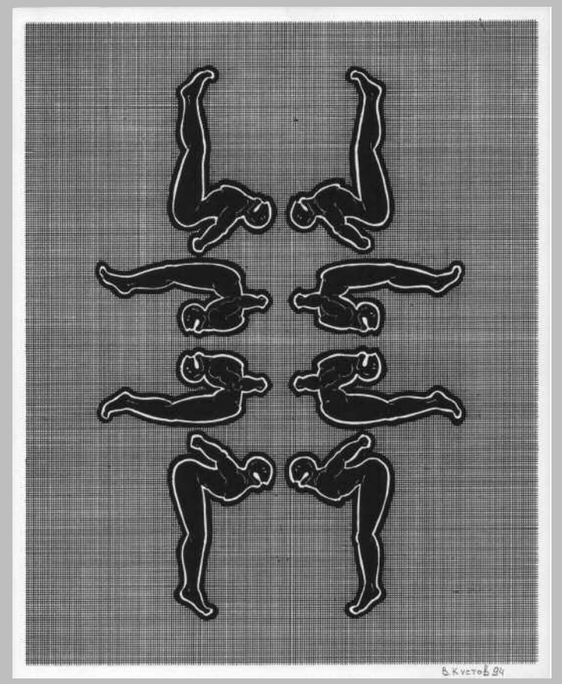
Einshteyn. 1989
Oil on pig-skin. 62 × 55 cm
Collection of Eduard Kitsenko,
Moscow

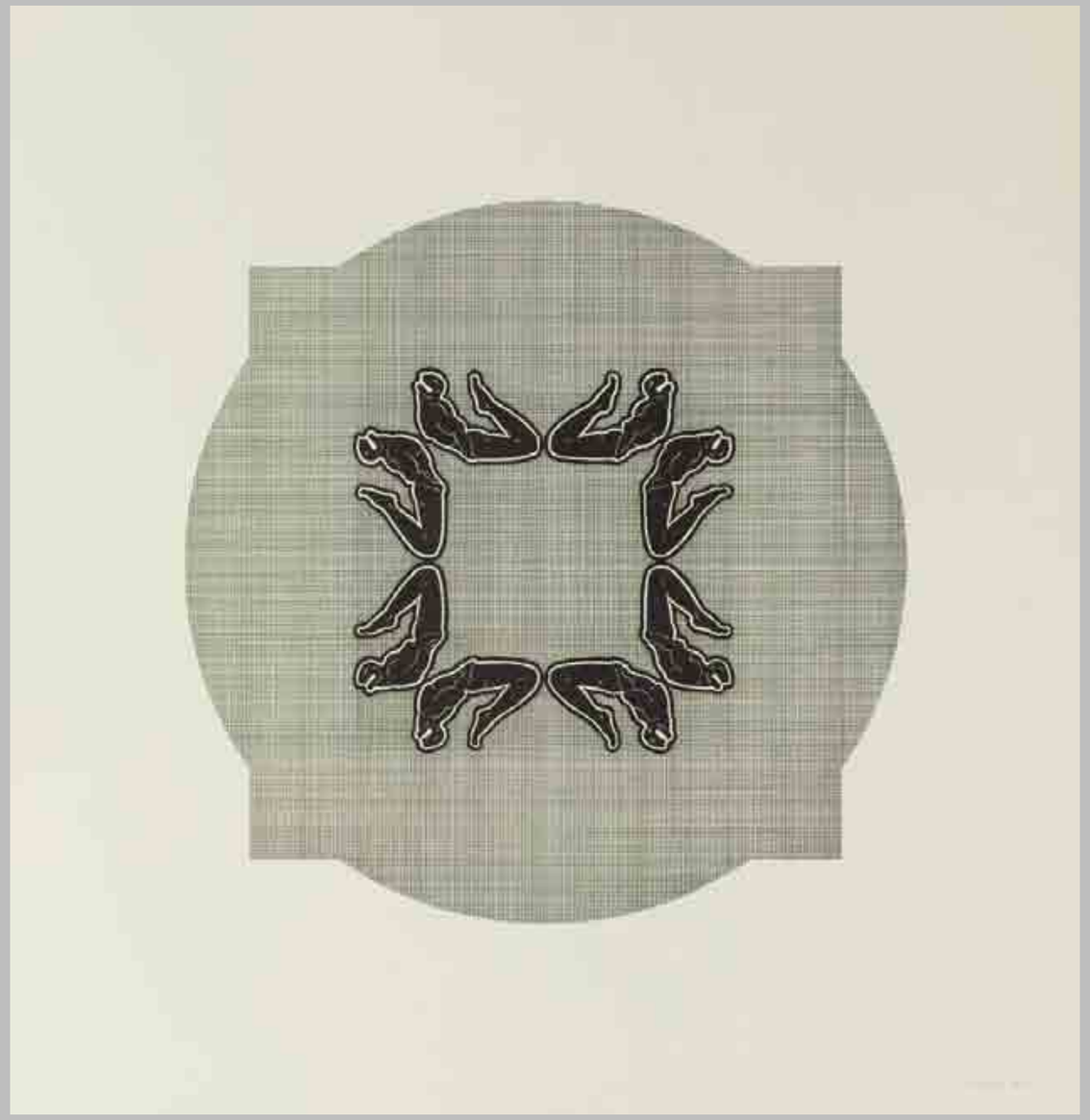
Electricians. 1988 ▸
Oil on canvas. 80 × 60 cm
Collection of Marina Gisich,
St. Petersburg, Russia











Love or Death. 1994
Drawing series
Paper, micro pigment
ink. 30 × 24 cm each

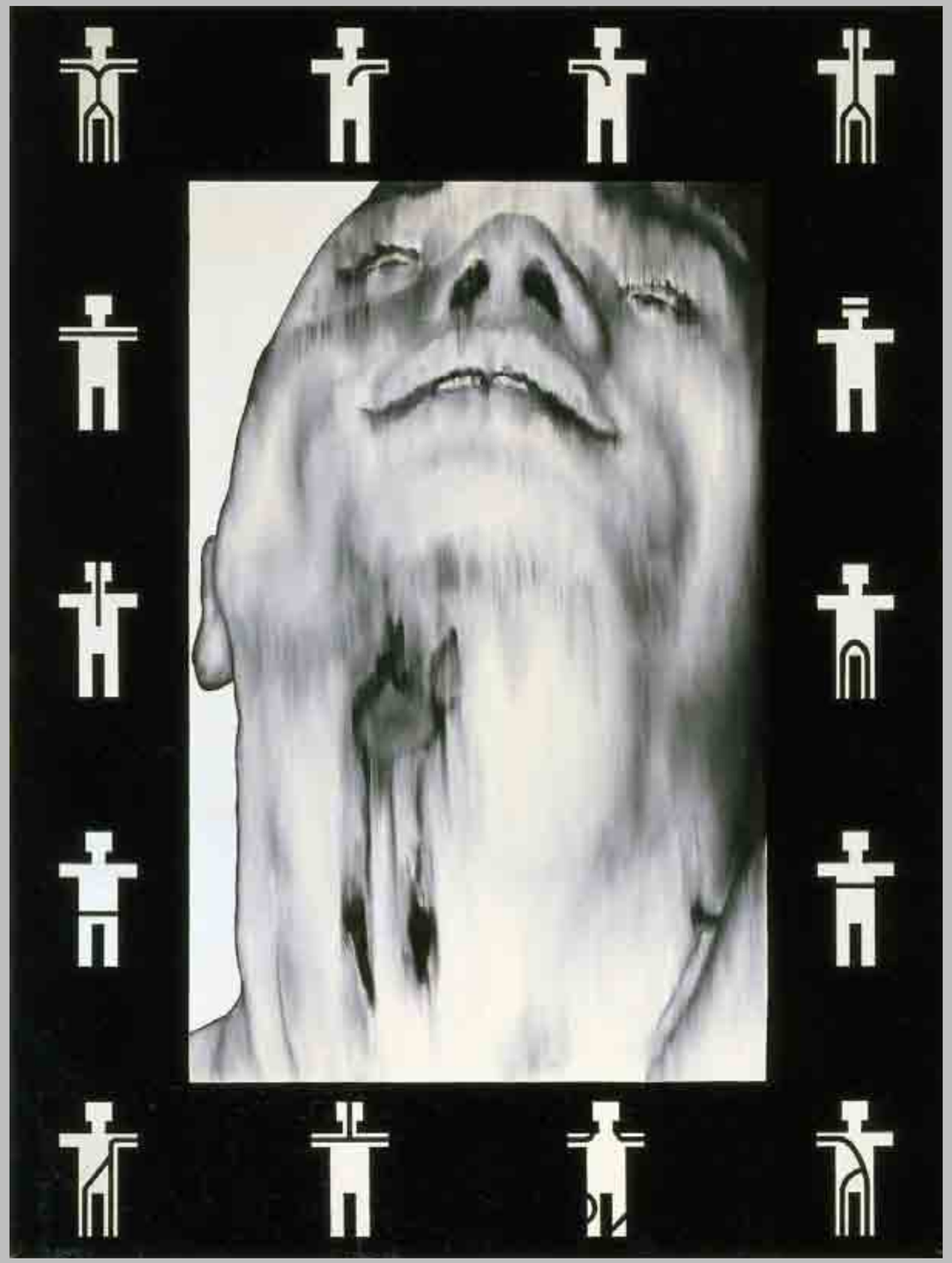
Signs. Square in circle. 1998
Paper, micro pigment
ink. 44 × 42 cm

Courage. 1988
Oil on canvas. 198 × 146 cm

Birthday. 2005
Oil on canvas. 80 × 160 cm

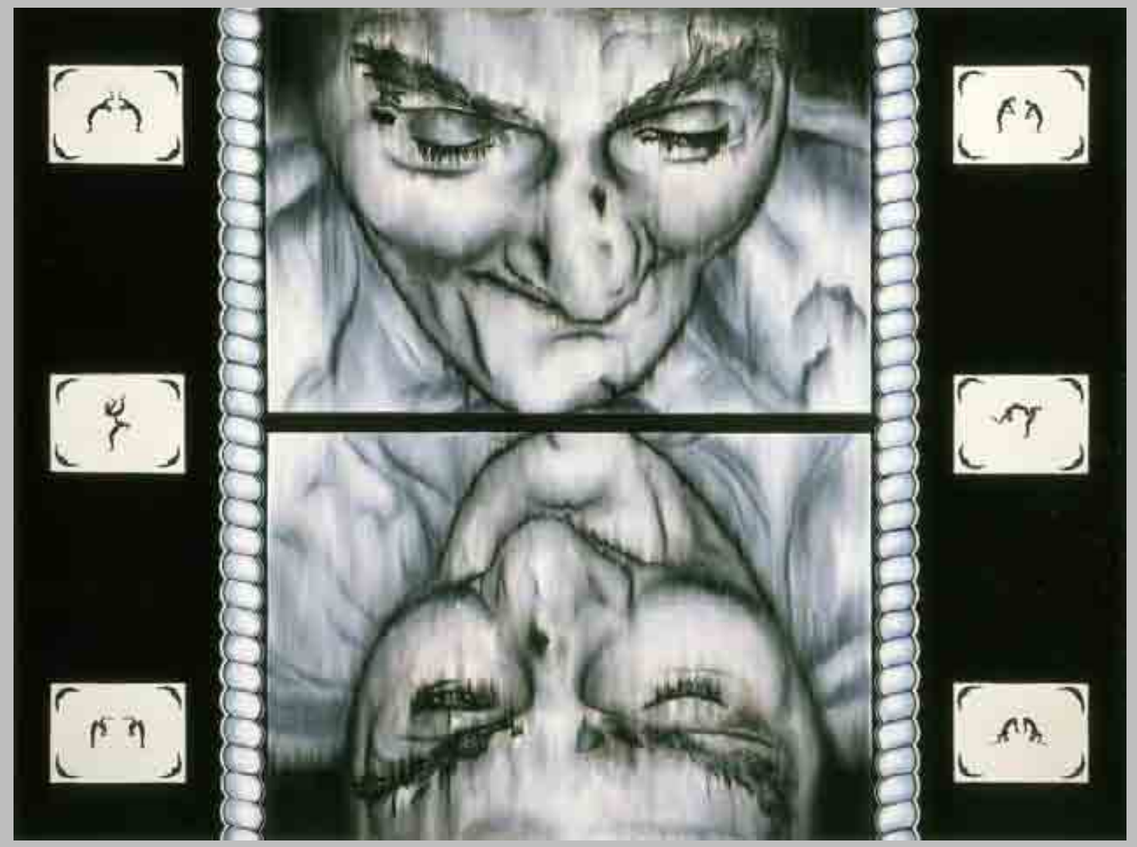
Cemetery. 1994-1995
Photo series from project
Black & white photos

Birth and Collapse of Antisigma-Minus-Hyperon. 1997
Oil on bull-skin. 55 × 80 cm

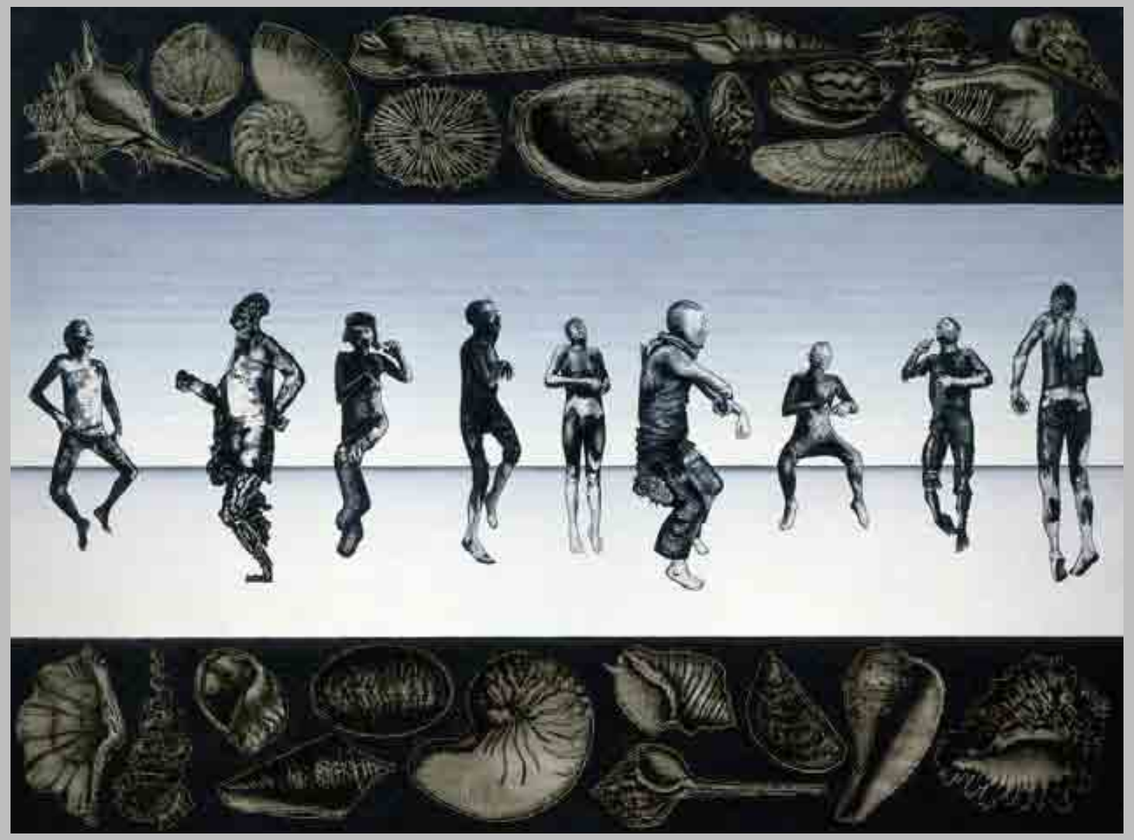


Electric Current ▸
Heraldry. 1994
Oil on canvas. 196 × 146 cm

Pan Spermia. 1994
Oil on canvas. 60 × 80 cm



Animator. 1994
Oil on canvas. 154 × 200 cm

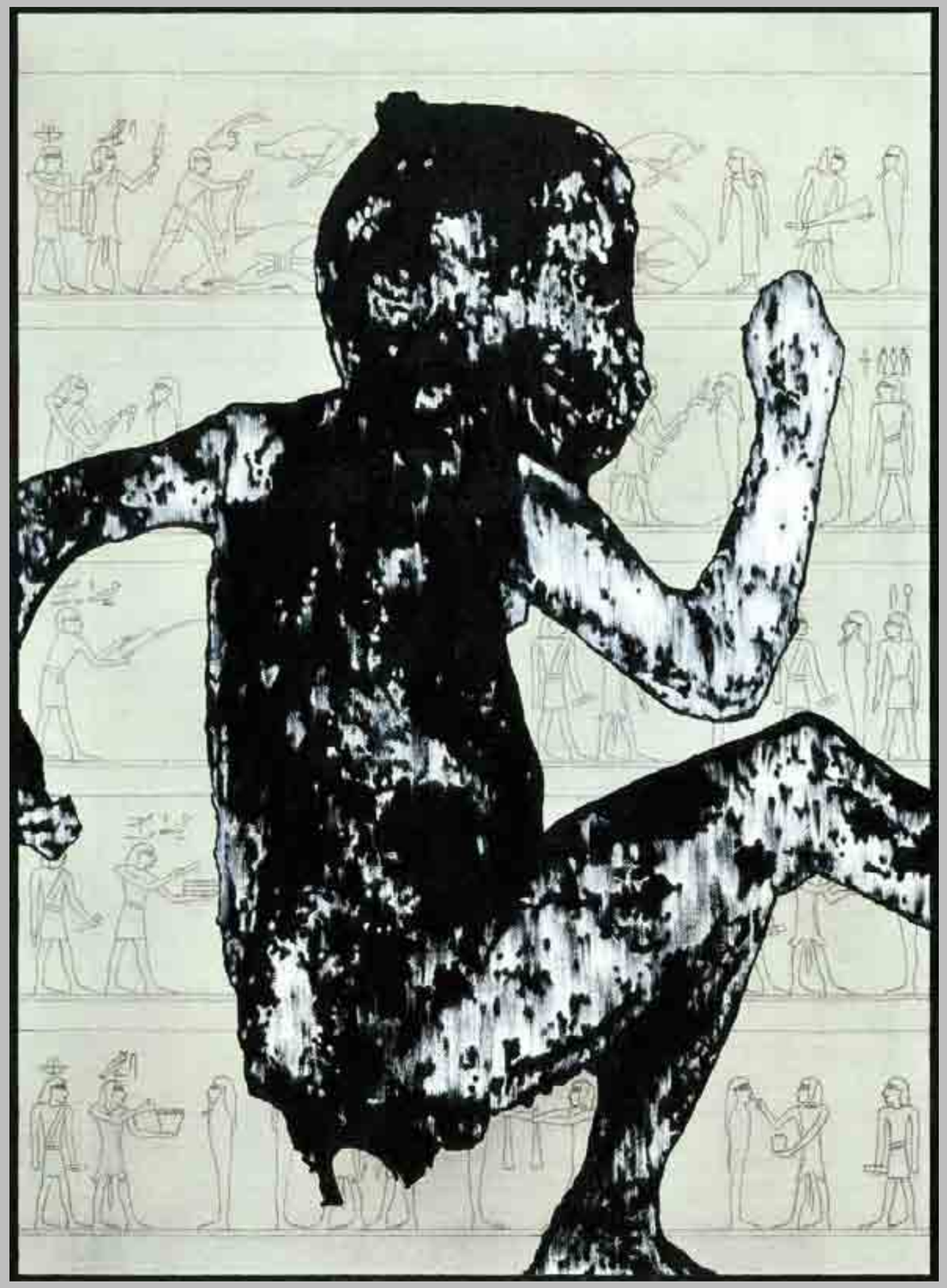


Last Years Nudists. 1995
Oil on canvas. 146 × 196 cm

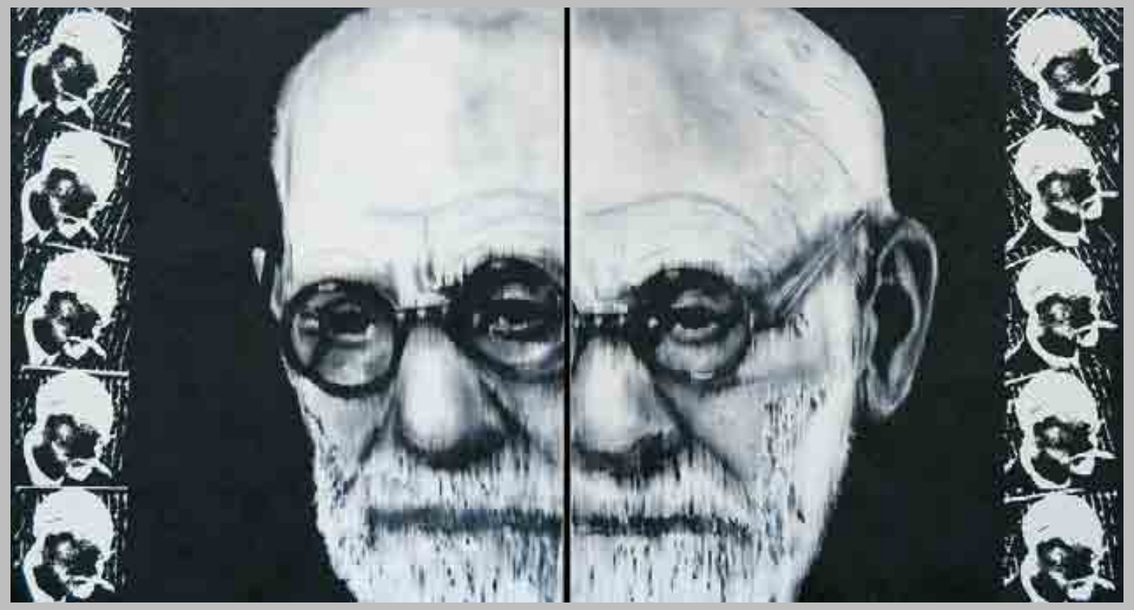
Sashok. 1999 ▸
Oil on canvas. 110 × 60 cm

Life Saver # 07. 2006
Black & white photo

Life Saver # 08. 2006
Black & white photo

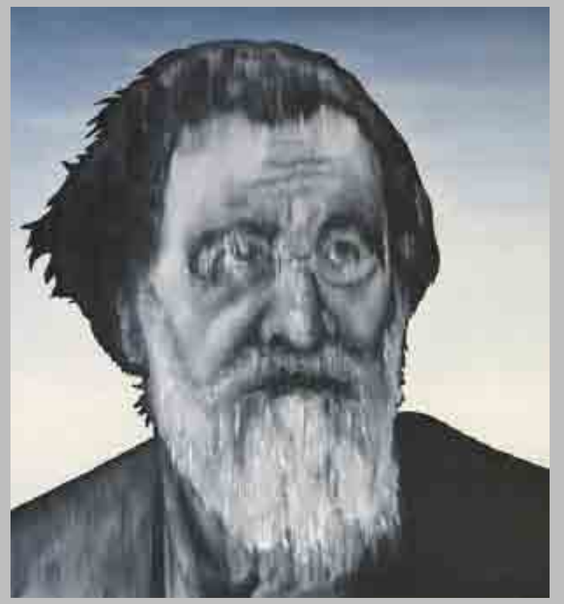


Dancer. 2005
Oil on canvas
110 × 80 cm
Collection of Galina
Zhakkard, Moscow



Freud. Diptych. 1997
Oil on canvas
60 × 55 cm, 60 × 55 cm
Collection of Freud's Dreams
Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Coma. 1999
Installation
Marble Palace,
The State Russian Museum,
St. Petersburg

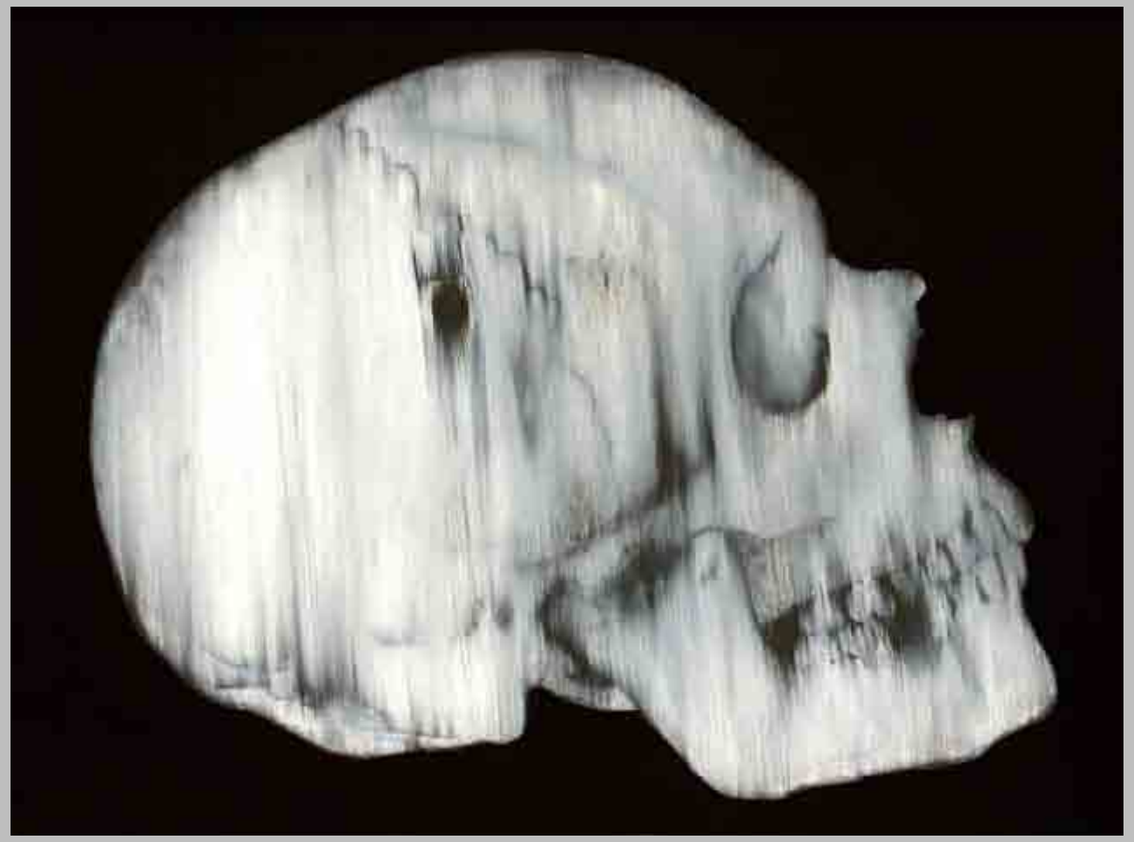


Korsakov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm

Mechnikov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm

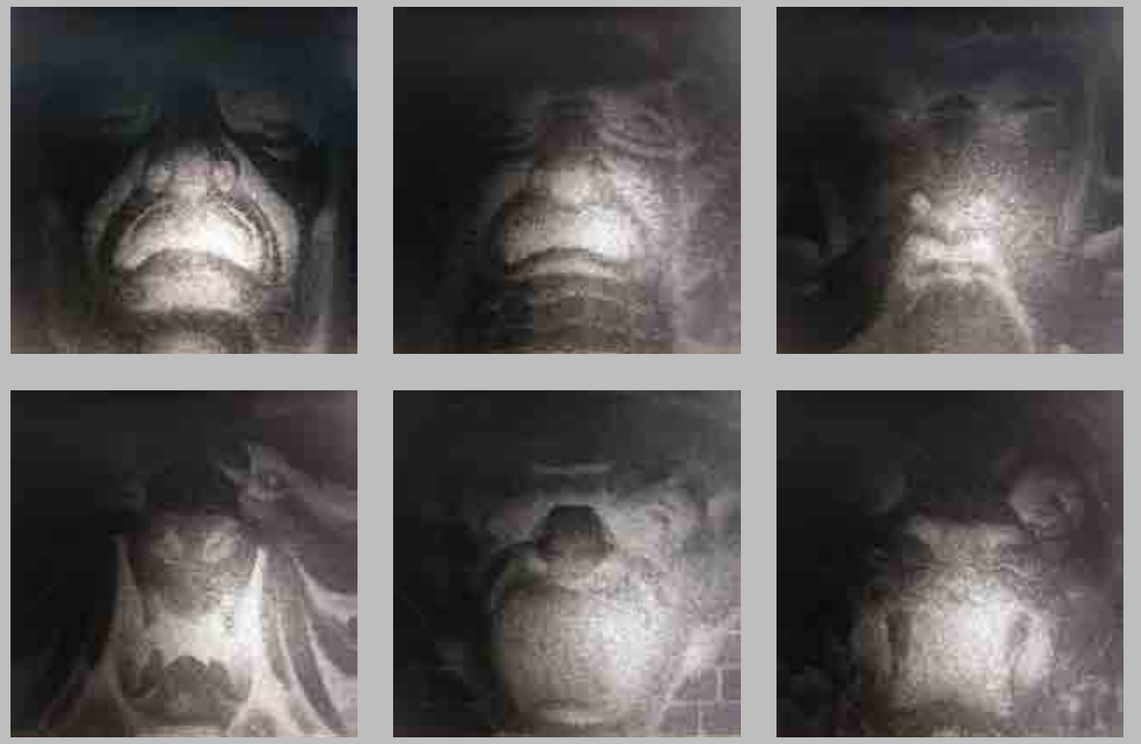
Sechenov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm

Serbskiy. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm



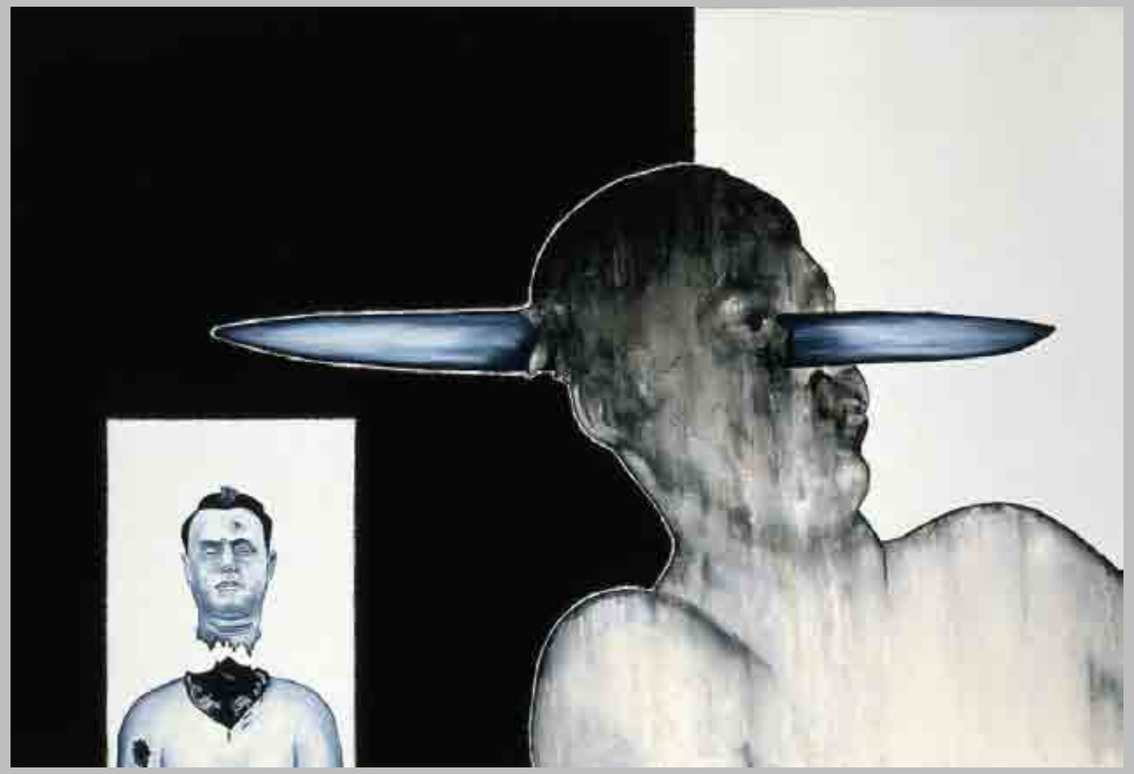
Skill #1. 1999
Oil on fibreboard
100 × 135 cm

Brain. 2009
Oil on canvas
150 × 200 cm



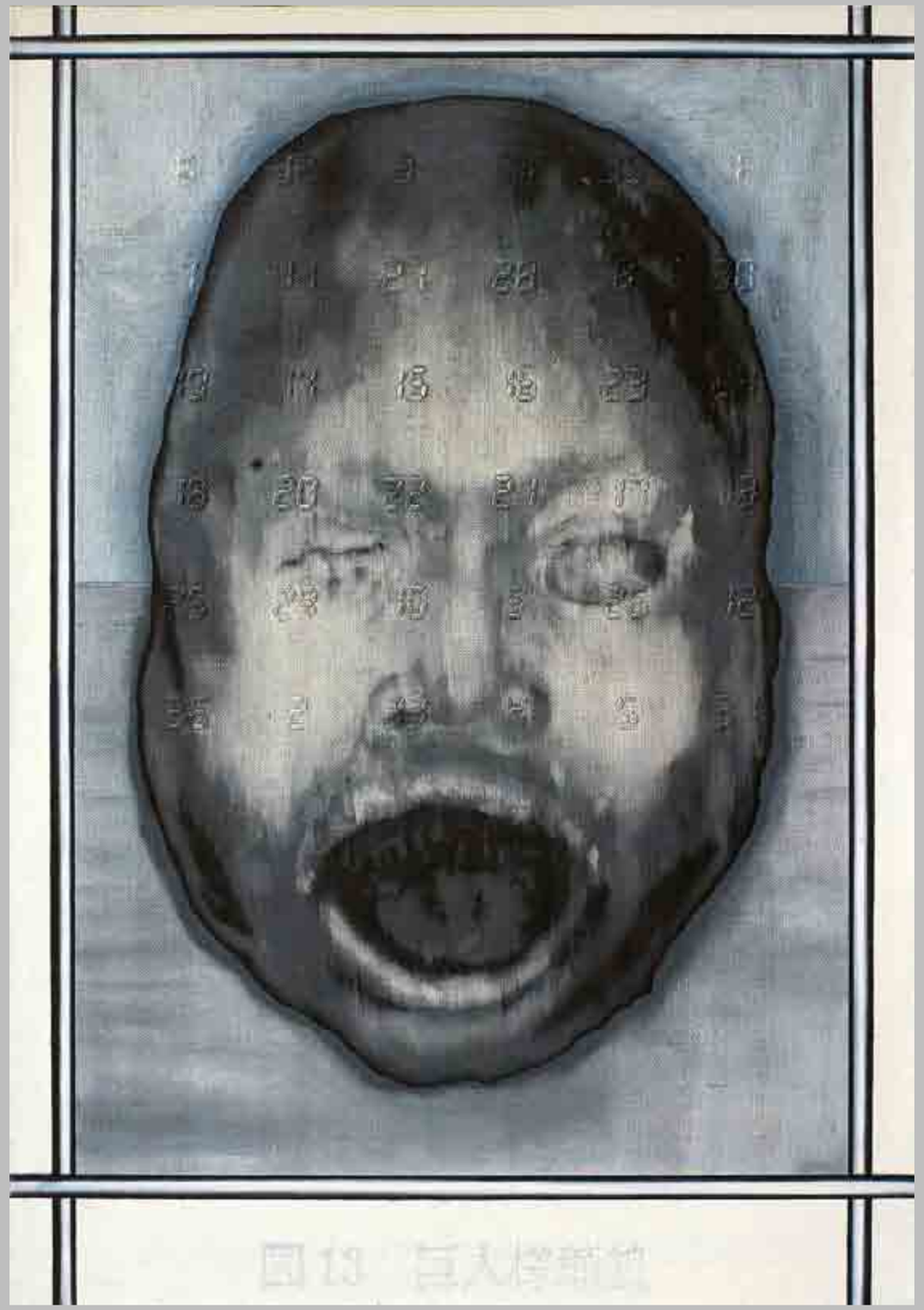
The Nuclein
Dreams City. 2003
Installation
"ROTOR"
association for contemporary
art. Graz, Austria

The Nuclein
Dreams City. 2003
Photo series from
the project
Black & white photos



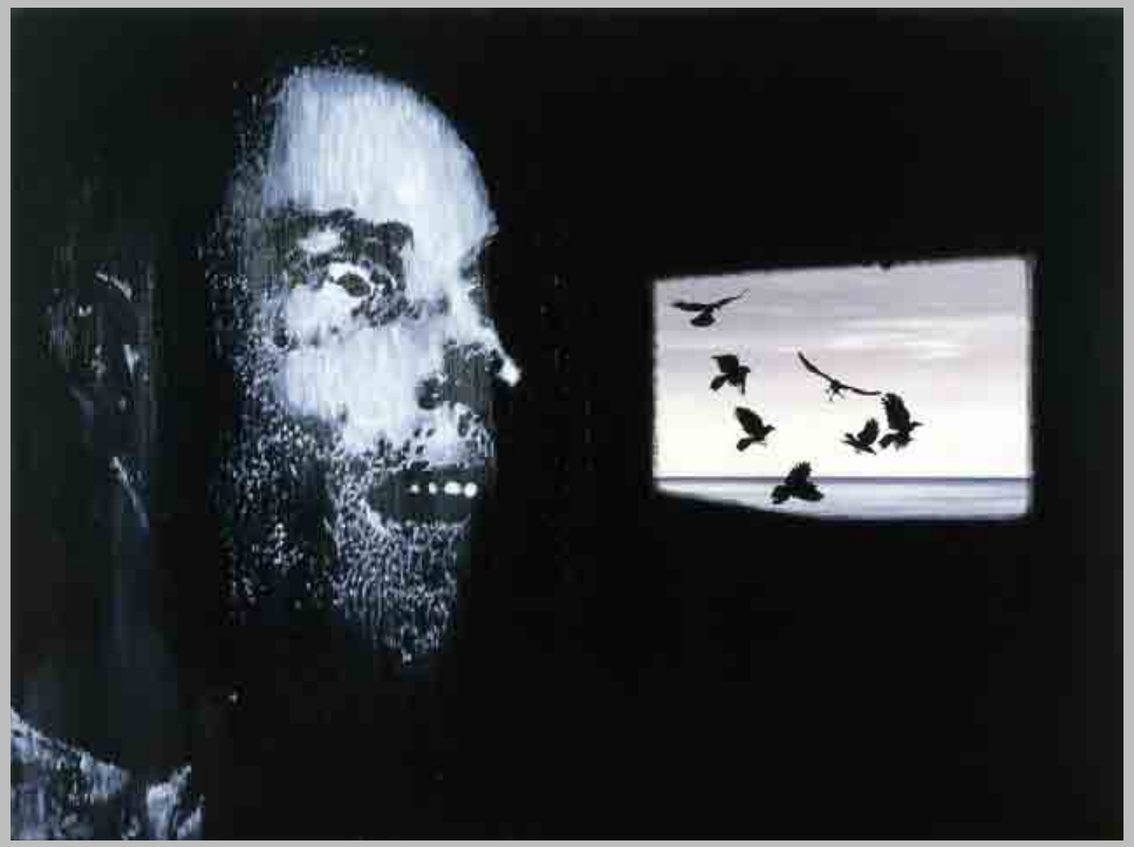
Moscow Virtuosos. 1994
Oil on canvas. 65 × 95 cm

Japan. 2010 ▸
Oil on canvas. 112 × 78 cm

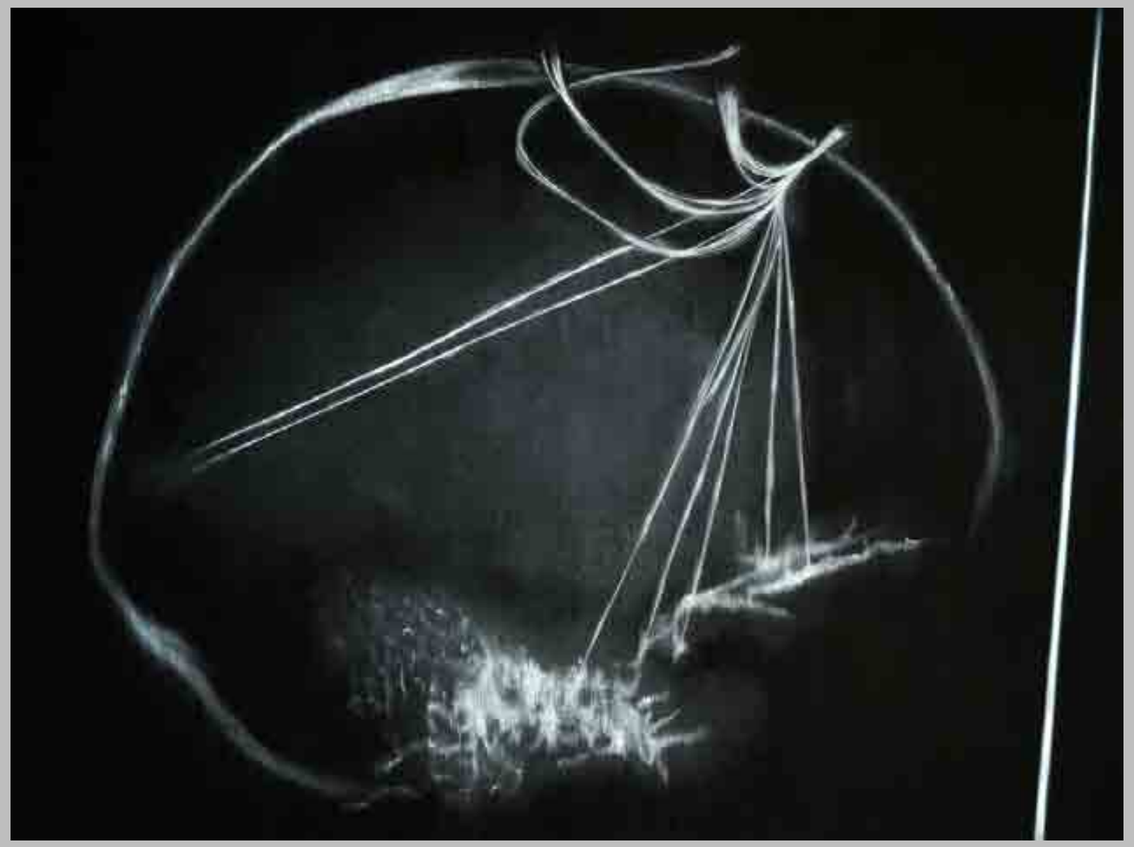


War. 2006
Photo Installation
The State Museum of the History of St. Petersburg, Russia

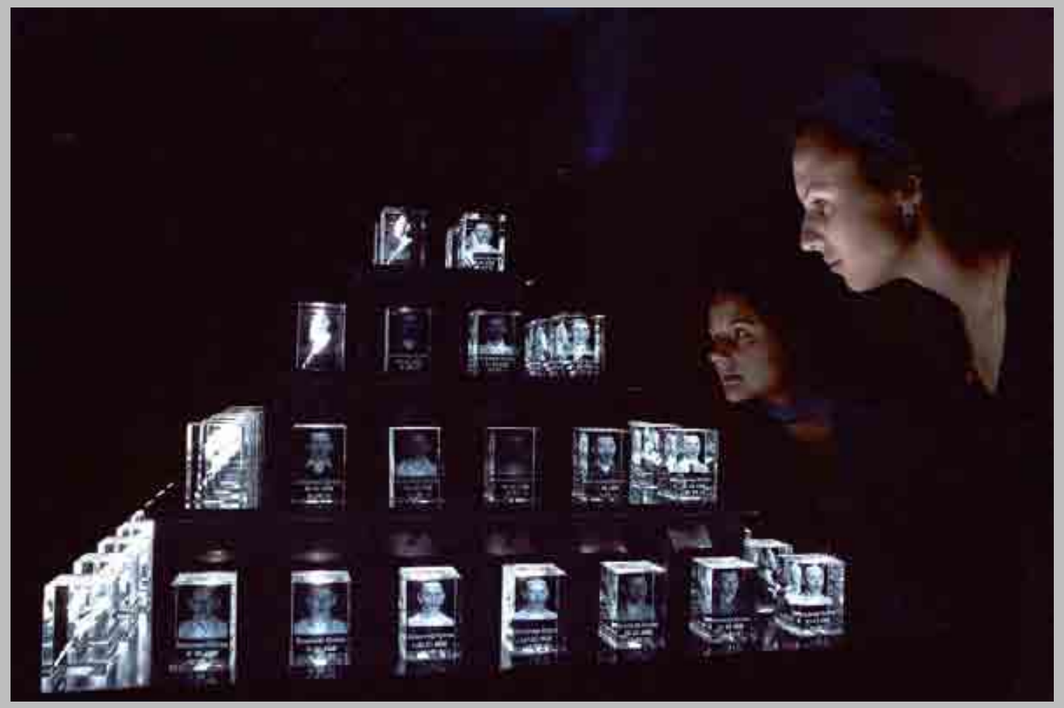
The Signs of War. 2006
Photo series from the project
Black & white photos



Dissolution. 2007
Oil on canvas. 146 × 196 cm



Electricity. 2009
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm



◂ *Crystallization*. 2009
Installation
Marina Gisich Gallery,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Crystallization. 2007
Oil on canvas. 196 × 196 cm

Carnival. 2007-2008
Drawing series.
Mixed media
on canvas. 70 x 40 cm each

Ramses-Rail. 2005
Oil on canvas. 60 × 130 cm

1	63	62	4	5	59	58	8
56	15	49	48	44	19	20	9
55	47	25	28	39	38	18	10
11	22	40	37	26	27	43	54
53	42	34	35	32	29	23	12
13	24	31	30	33	36	41	52
14	45	16	17	21	46	50	51
57	2	3	61	60	6	7	64

Magical Square.
Tunnel. 2005
Oil on canvas. 80 × 80 cm

Spring. Triptych. 1991
Oil on canvas. 200 × 147 cm,
200 × 300 cm, 200 × 147 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

vladimir kustov

Born in 1959 in Leningrad.
Lives and works in Saint-Petersburg.

Vladimir has been working with contemporary art since the beginning of the 80th — performance, cinema, paintings, photographs, literature and installations.

Since 1984 has being working on the esthetics of the necrorealism together with Evgeniy Yufit.

In 1999 Vladimir Kustov and Victor Mazin founded "Freud's Dreams Museum".

In 2002 he initiated the foundation of the "Thanatology Center" at the forensic medicine department of the St. Petersburg State Medical Academy named after I. I. Mechnikov. He organized and supervised artistic thanatological projects of the "Thanatology Center".

Now continues to develop necrorealistic artistic practice.

Works of Vladimir Kustov were repeatedly displayed at the prestigious exhibitions of the contemporary art at the world biggest museums. Artist's works are in following collections: The State Russian Museum, The Contemporary Art Department, (St. Petersburg), The Lenin Museum, (Tampere, Finland), Moscow Museum of Modern Art, (Moscow) and also in many private collections of the Russia, the Europe and the United States of America.

Selected solo exhibitions:

1994 *Morpho-Aesthetical Fields of Evolution*. Muu Gallery, Helsinki

1998 *Petersburg's Cemetery*. Laterna Magica Gallery, Helsinki

1999 *Mausoleum and Necrosymbolism*. The Lenin Museum, Tampere, Finland

Coma. Marble Palace, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

2000 *CrossCurrents. Out of Context. Foreign Body*. The Russian Ethnographic Museum, St. Petersburg

2005 *Memory of the Ground*. The Museum of Forensic Medicine, The Saint Petersburg State Medical Academy named after I. I. Mechnikov

2006 *Crows and Dogs*. Freud's Dreams Museum, St. Petersburg

War. The Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad, The State Museum for the History of Saint-Petersburg, St. Petersburg

Vladimir Kustov. Painting 1987-2006. Marina Gisich Gallery, St. Petersburg

2009 *Bread*. The Museum of Forensic Medicine, The Saint Petersburg State Medical Academy named after I. I. Mechnikov
Crystallization. Marina Gisich Gallery, St. Petersburg

sergei serp

serp: a festival of necrorealism

olesya turkina

Sergei Serp on the background of his work
The Woodcutter's Island, Holiday Hunger
Orel Art Gallery, Paris

Serp began his necrocareer as a participant in the group's spontaneous actions and as an actor in Yufit's films. The artist's signature style was born in the savage "merrymaking" that unfolded in forest belts and the outskirts of the city, in the mock brawls and suicides that symbolized male fraternity. His early works — *Zoya, Oskar, Artek, and Glutton* — combine the primitivism of children's drawings and black humor on the subject of the death wish. His series *Harvest Festival* deals with the ancient tradition of marking the end of the harvest with feasts, which in Serp's rendering almost inevitably end in mundane accidents, often leading to death. Serp's large-scale canvases feature vivid "folk" patterns made up of *raschlenyonki* — dismembered bodies. We might say that Serp is the "agriculturalist" of necrorealism, tilling the soil and bringing in the harvest in late-Soviet space, where the lyrical landscape embodied in Shishkin's paintings has turned into a sullen patch of wind-fallen trees — an ideal place for violent death (whether one's own or someone else's), as in the series *Morning in the Forest*. And a field that delights the eye with its bright colors has become the site of its characters' last encounter, as in the idyllically titled *In the Meadow*.

It is no coincidence that the artist adopted such a suggestive pseudonym. A *serp* ("sickle") is a tool used in the harvest, and at the same time it is a danger instrument that, during the midst of riotous celebration, can be fatal. A festival is a reversal of all behavioral norms, the Bakhtinian carnival. During this carnival, the innocent words of a merry song ("The Last Commuter Train") are easily transformed (in Serp's eponymous series of paintings) into a memento mori, into a reminder that the train might prove to be the last for someone who ends up under its wheels or in a car filled with drunken merrymakers.

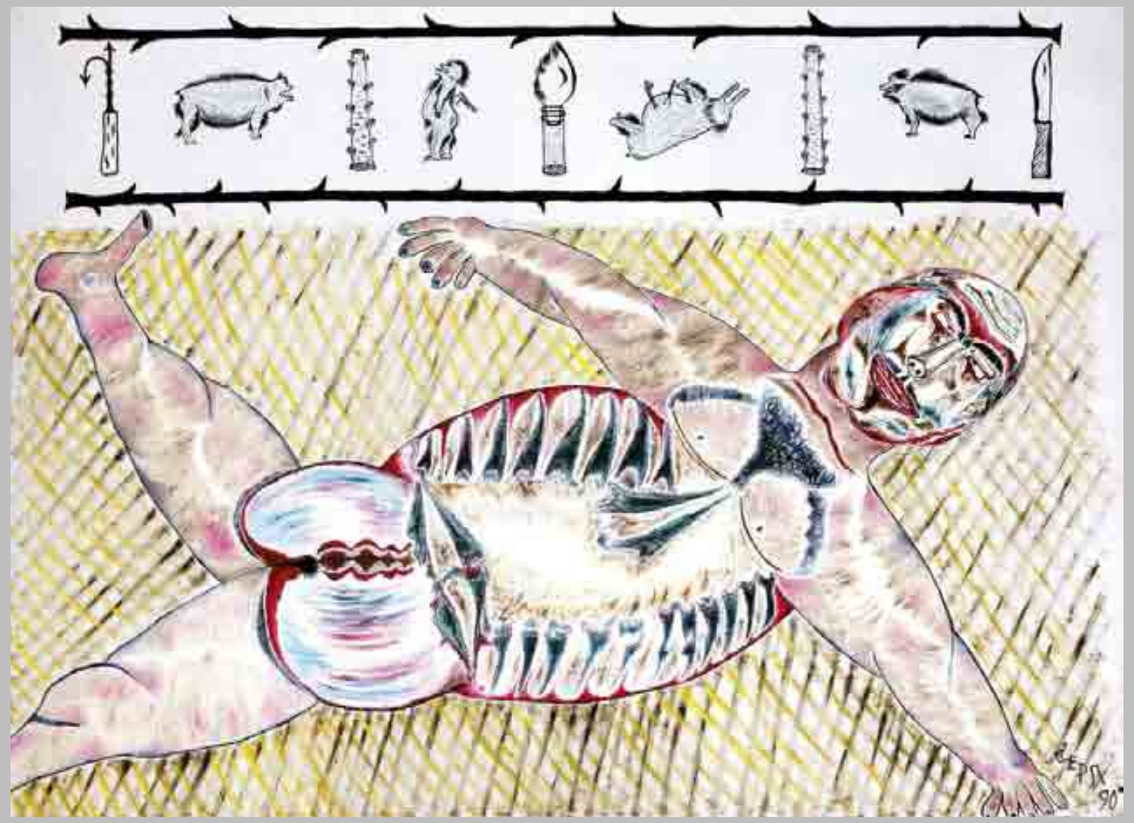
Beginning in the early nineties, Serp gradually gave up bright local color, shifting to monochrome painting and adopting collage as his primary compositional principle. Fashioned from fragments of human bodies and village huts, as in the numerous paintings in the series *Harvest Festival* or the piece *New Glory*, his painting extols the agrarian cult as filtered through the scary fairytale of late- and post-Soviet reality. As we know, however, instances of homicide and cannibalism are common in instructive folktales: it suffices to recall various attempts to roast the hero in an oven and eat him. In Serp's necro-fairytales, the wicked stepmother, Baba Yaga and Koshchey the Deathless are replaced by the force of circumstance, which stops at nothing when his characters are overcome by the death drive that arises in the midst of merrymaking. We might say that in their yearning for death, Serp's characters embody that stupid fervor, that vigorous joy that were formulated at necrorealism's inception in the anthem "Fat Wax," written by Oleg Kotelnikov and Yevgeny Yufit: "After death, guys, / The good life begins."

In the 2000s, Serp began to produce (along with paintings) installations featuring a country house — a symbol of quiet comfort and, simultaneously, a deserted scene of fatal events. As in the installation *Woodcutter's Island*, this house is both attractive, in terms of its uncomplicated lifestyle (lace curtains in the windows, its simple, unpainted frame), and terrifying, because it is the dead shell of an impossible idyll. Unlike horror films, where we are frightened by the contrast between the peaceable setting and the events that unfold in this setting, Serp's hut has long become an archaeological find, a relic of a dead way of life preserved only in the memory of the artist, who is painstakingly restoring it.

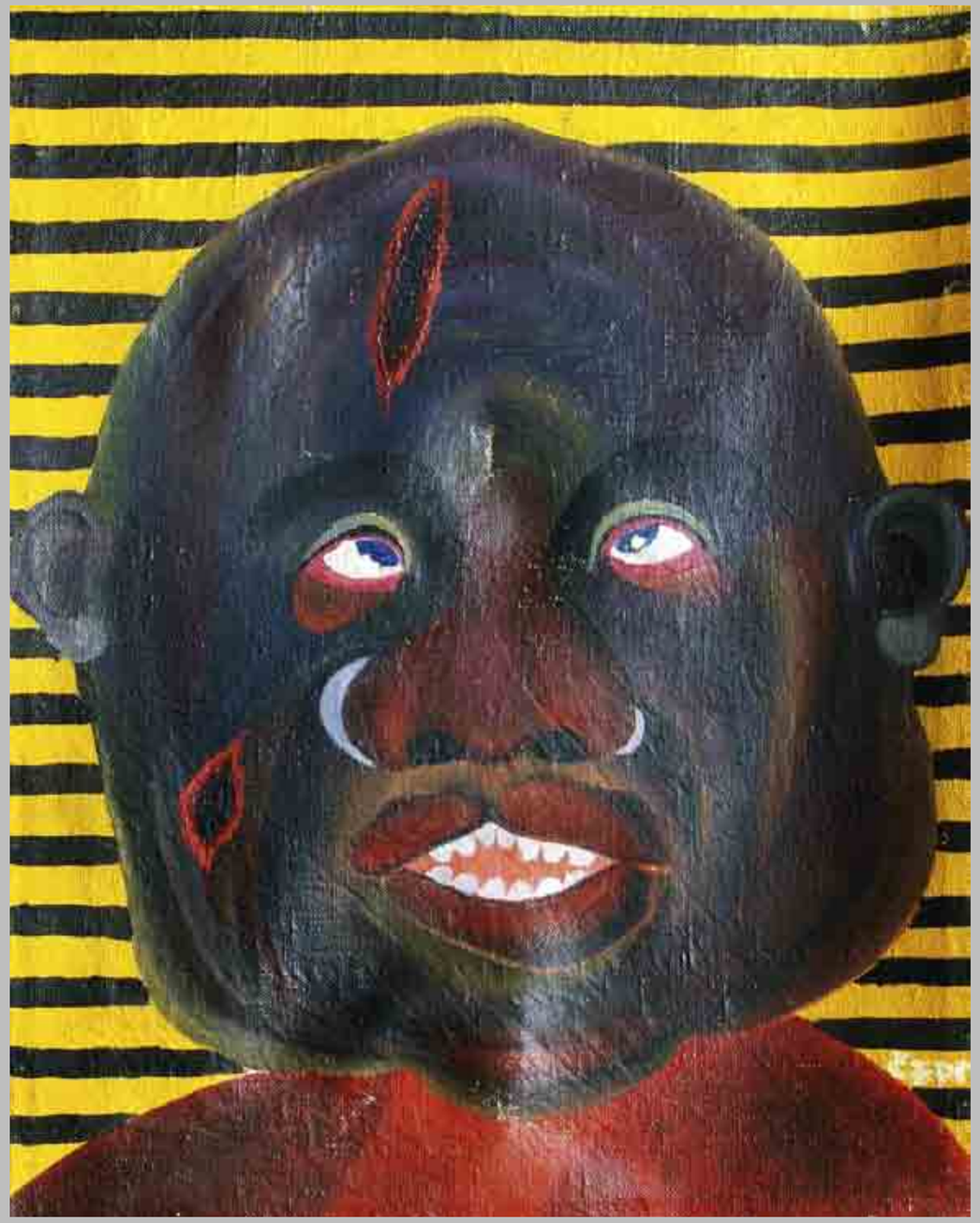
Translated by Thomas Campbell (from Russian)

Sergei Serp
Letter from the Island. Installation
Orel Art Uk Gallery, London, 2009

◂ *Oscar*. 1988
Oil on wood. 72 × 53 cm
Private collection, Moscow



Man on a Hammock. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm



The Glutton. 1987
Oil on canvas. 59 × 44 cm
Private collection, Moscow

The Male Happiness. 1990
Oil on canvas. 300 × 200 cm
Collection of Pierre-Christian Brochet, Moscow

The Father's Lessons. 2010
Oil on canvas. 73 × 60 cm

The Man in Sand. 1989
Oil on canvas. 80 × 110 cm
Private collection, Paris

On a Meadow 1. 1988
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg

Artek. 1986
Oil on canvas. 66 × 73 cm

Morning in the Forest 1. 1988
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Morning in the Forest 2. 1988
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

The Open Navigation. 1994
Ink on paper. 29,7 × 21 cm

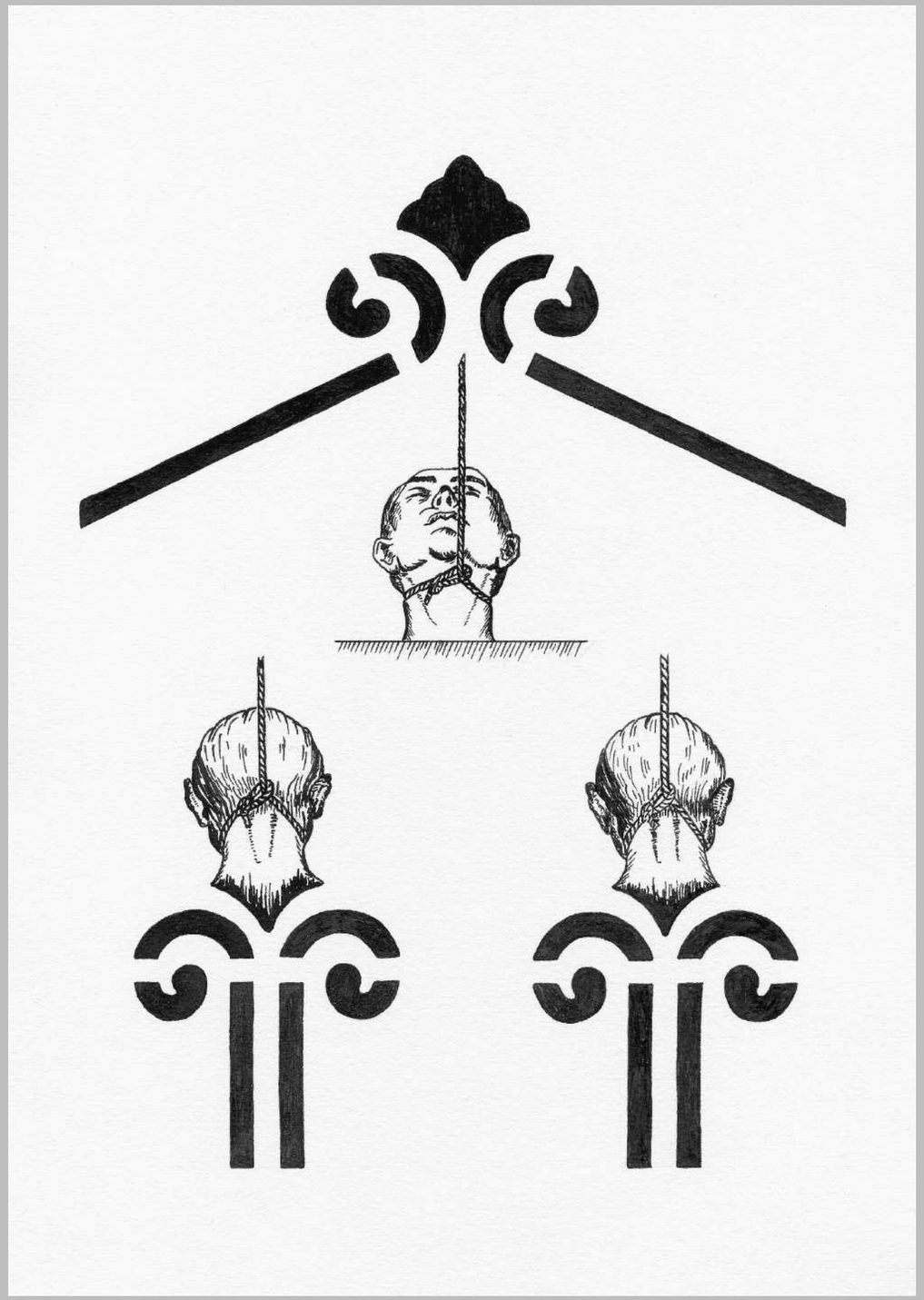
The Sunrise. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

The Last Train 1. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

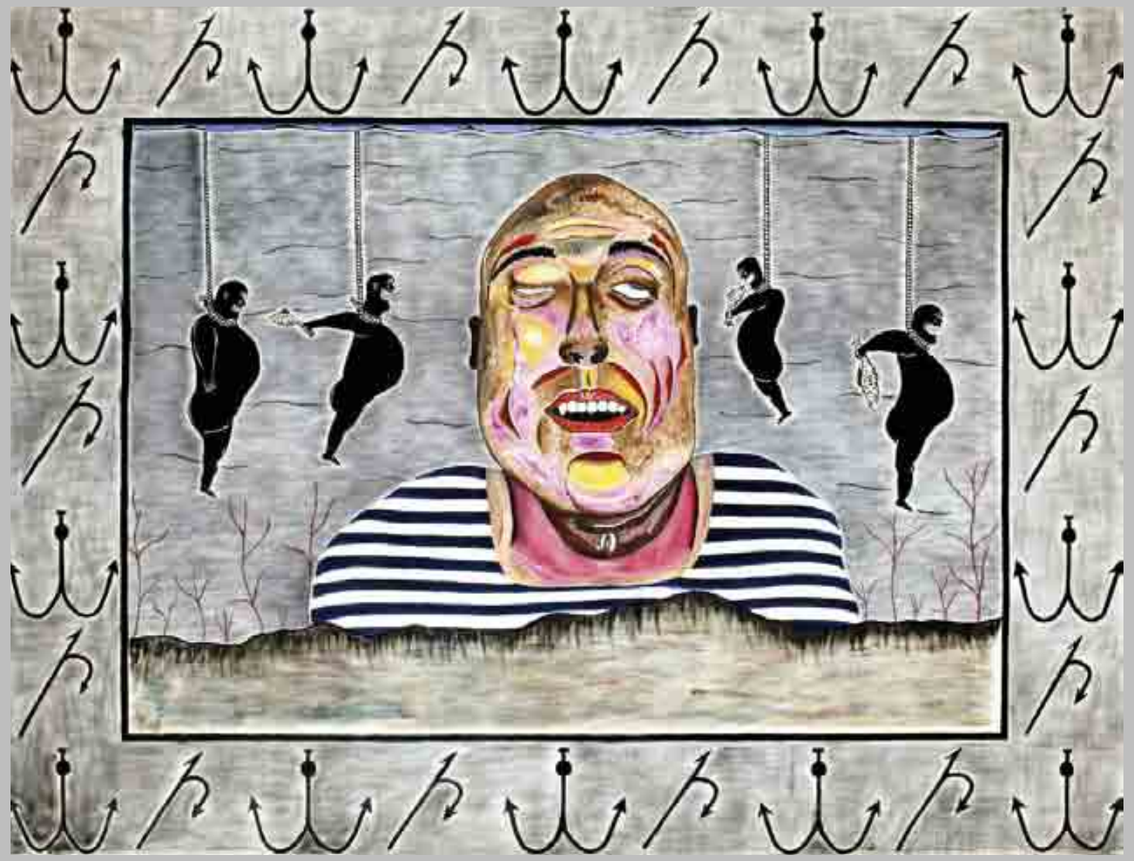
The Last Train 2. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

The Navigation Birth. 1994
Ink on paper. 29,7 × 21 cm

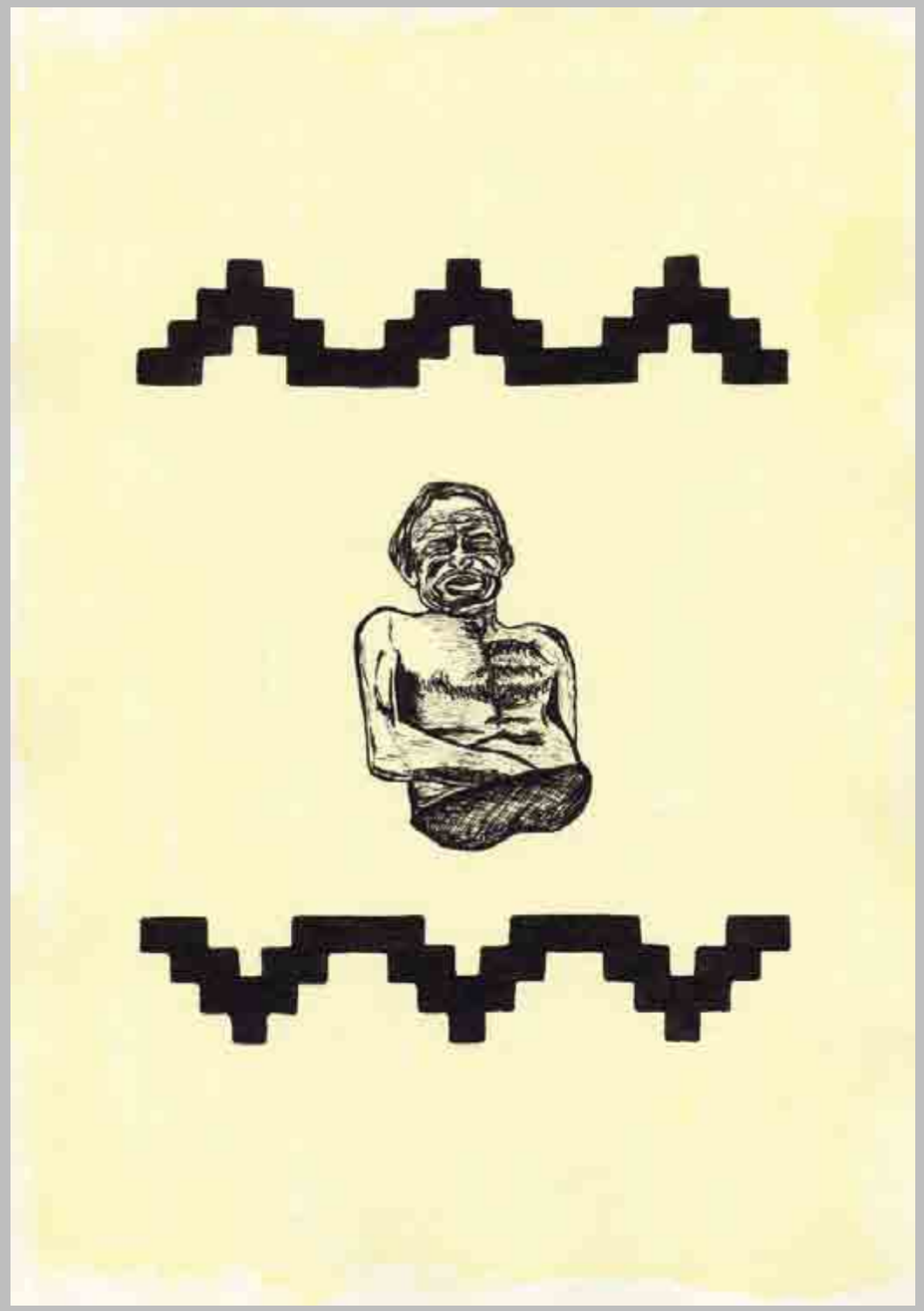
Navigator. 1992
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm



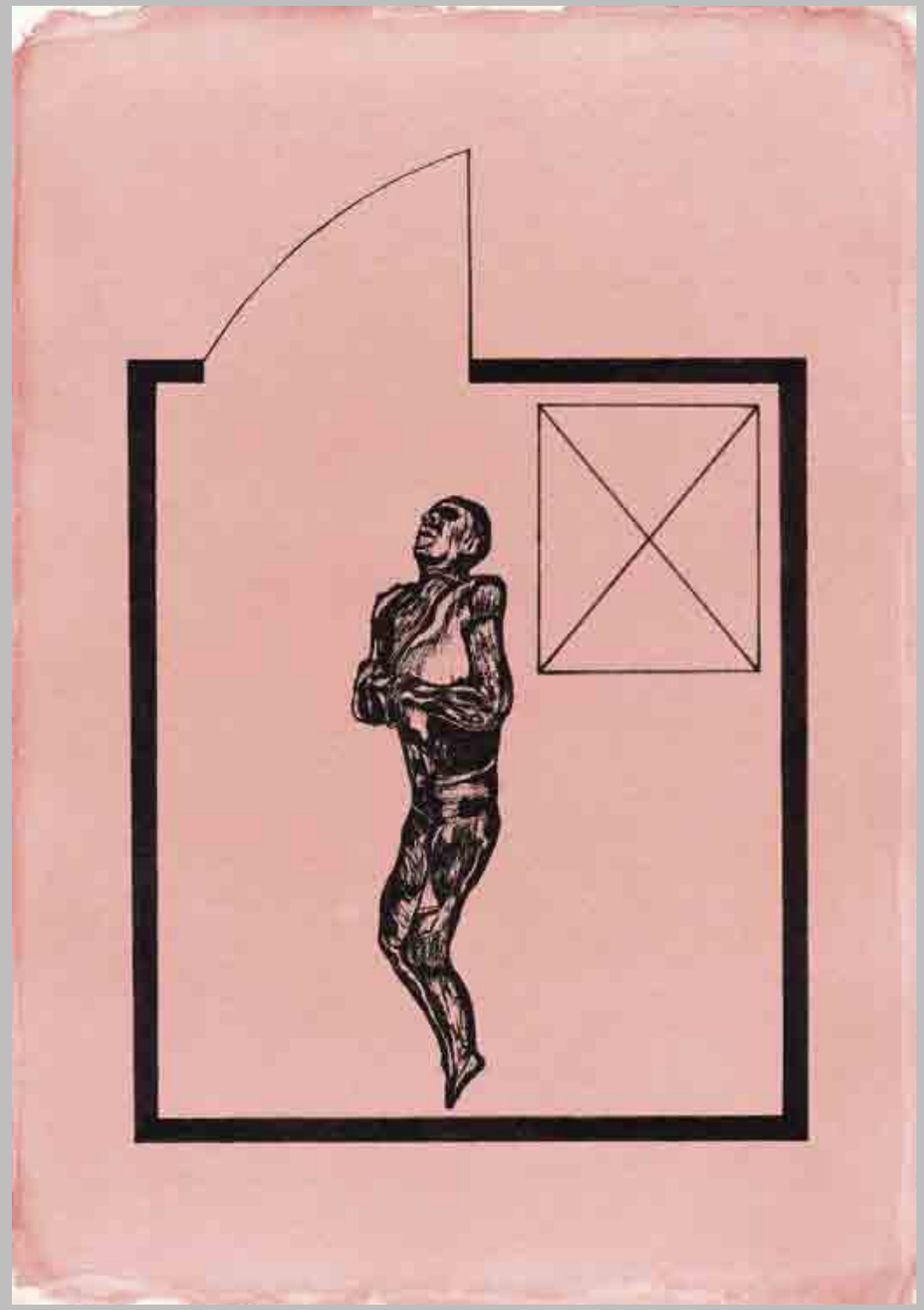
Sonata for strings I. 1997
Ink on paper. 29.7 × 21 cm



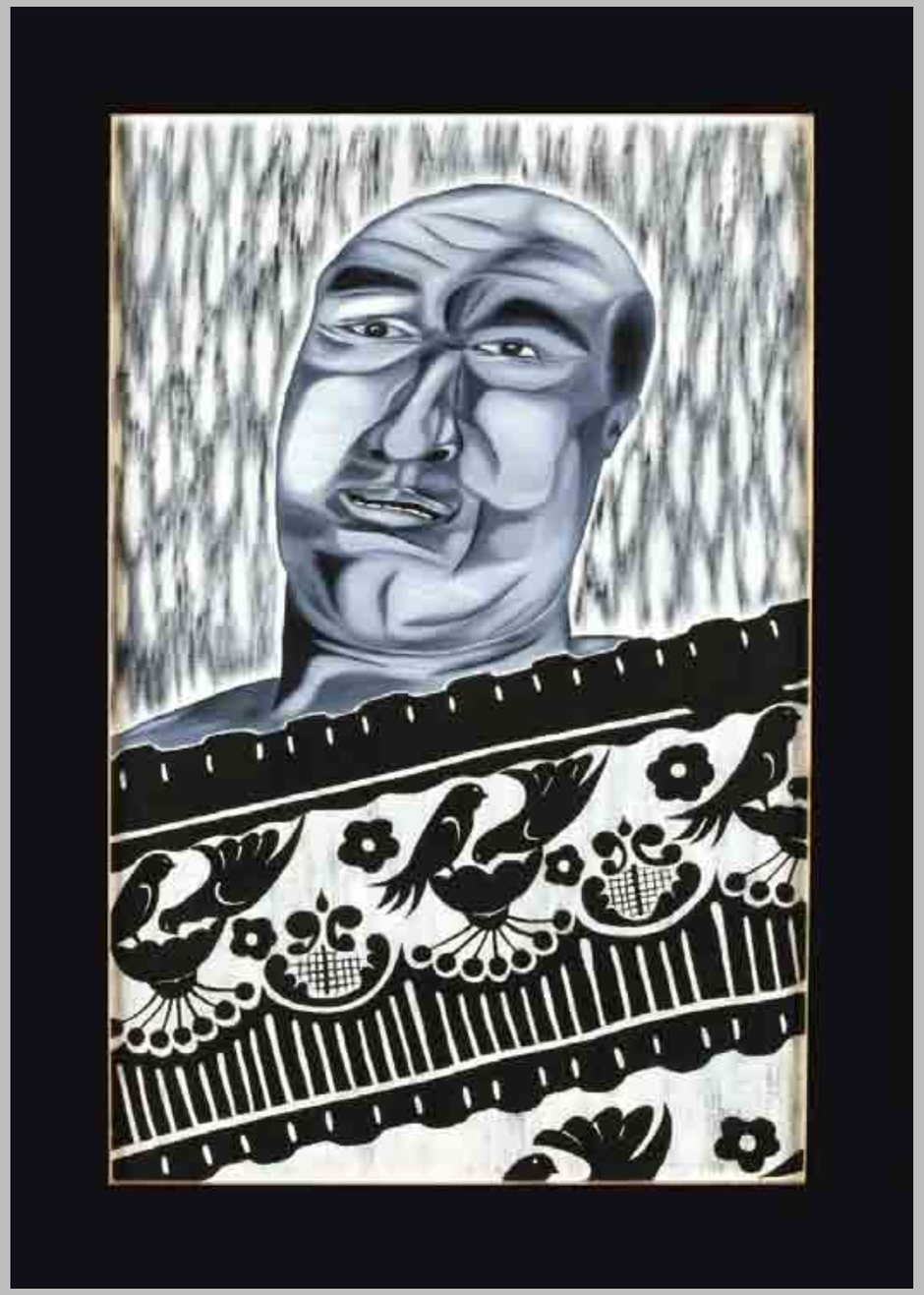
Parasitology. 1991
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow
Museum of Modern Art



Wisdom Festival IV.
Part nine. 1997
Ink on paper. 29.7 × 21 cm



One Way III.
Part four. 1997
Ink on paper. 29.7 × 21 cm

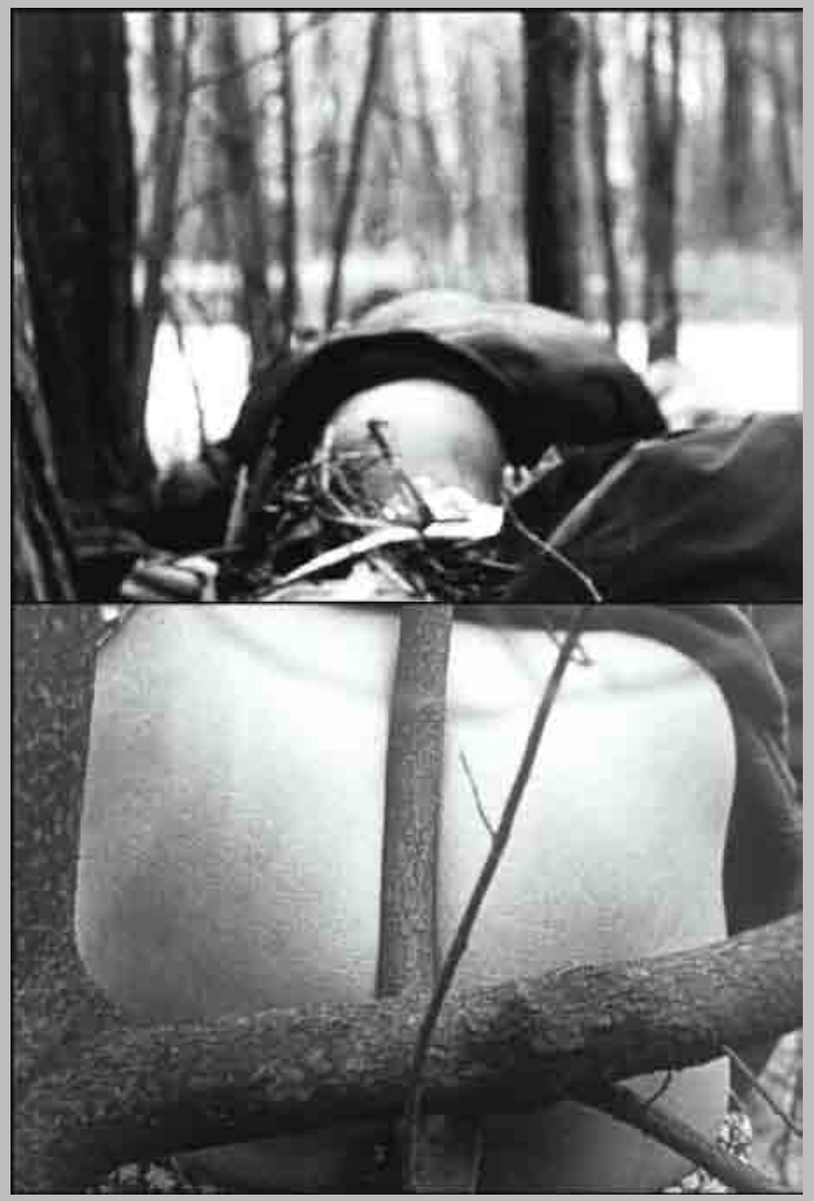


Fragment One from the series
Fresh Autumn. 1994
Oil on wood. 70 × 50 cm

Fragment Two from the series
Fresh Autumn. 1994
Oil on wood. 70 × 50 cm

The Day of Birth. 1994
Oil on canvas. 47 × 36 cm

The New Glory. 1994
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

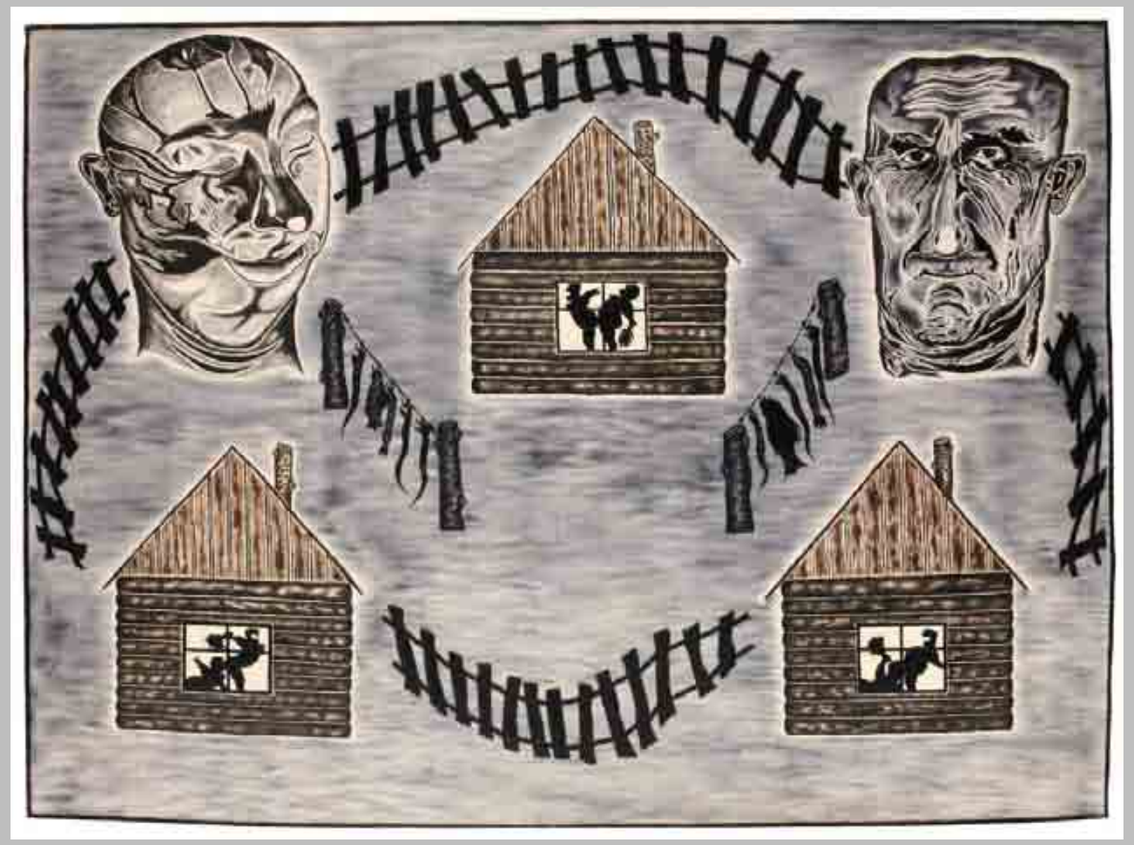


The Ablution. Diptych. 1992
Black & white photo
120× 80 cm

Highway. Triptych. 1992
Black & white photo
60 × 240 cm

The Woodcutter's Island
Installation
Orel Art Gallery, Paris, 2008

The Woodcutter's Island. 2008
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Private collection, Paris



Harvest Festival I. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Pierre-Christian Brochet, Moscow

Father's Day. 2010
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Symphony for a Volcano with an Orchestra I. 2010
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Leopard Hunting on Both Sides. 2009
Oil on canvas. 150 × 50 cm

sergei serp

Born in 1967 in Lvov (USSR), lives and works in Moscow

1984
in Leningrad meets many members of Leningrad's cultural scene such as Oleg Kotelnikov, Timur Novikov and Evgeny Yufit. He starts to draw and act in independent films. Participates in performances by Sergey Kurekhin and his orchestra Pop-Mechanika.

1990
with group Necrorealism takes part in an exhibition "In the USSR and Beyond" (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam) and in an exhibition "Le Territoire de l'Art" (The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg) organised in collaboration with Institute des Hautes Etudes en Arts Plastiques, Paris.

1991-1992
Pontus Hultén, director of the Institute des Hautes Etudes en Arts Plastiques, Paris, invites Serp to study at his Institute. Among his professors are well-known artists and curators, such as Daniel Buren, Sarkis and Serge Fauchereau.

1993-1997
with group Necrorealism actively represents art of Russia abroad.

1998-2001
spending most of his time in France, Serp experiments with new techniques and studies graphics and design. He creates sound effects for the exhibition "The True History of the Vandals" held in Värnamo, Sweden.

2002-2005
Pontus Hultén asks Serp to organise his vast collection of contemporary art, his archives and library. Pontus Hultén's collection, which includes six works by Serp, travels across Europe: Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere e Arti, Venice; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki; and Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

2006-2011
working in Moscow and Paris meets with Ilona Orel, director of gallery and in its Parisian and London galleries Orel Art made two projects "The Woodcutter's Island" and "Letter from the Island".

His work is represented in public and private collections in Russia, Europe and the United States.

Selected personal exhibitions:

1997 *"Hôtelier".* Galerie des Prés. Ousson sur Loire, France

1998 *"Boeufstroganoff".* International Art Performance.Château La Motte, France

1999 *"Évasion des cerveaux".* Galerie de Haut ville. Vaison la Romaine, France

2002 *"New Visuality".* Exhibitision Hall of art magazine "The New World of Art". St. Petersburg

2008 *"Île du bûcheron".* Galerie Orel Art, Paris

twenty-one years of necros: a lot of kustov and a bit of yufit

Geurt Imanse

Vladimir Kustov
If the Boys From Around the World... 1989
Oil on canvas. 150 × 195 cm

The first images of necrorealism I saw were almost instantly burned into my brain. There was no escape. Once again, just as had already been the case on the rare occasions when I was confronted with art from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the thought came over me: "Life's not really okay over there." This time was at the opening on September 21, 1990, of the exhibition *In the USSR and Beyond*, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam — a survey of Russian art from the period 1970—1990. Stedelijk director Wim Beeren had hit upon the idea of this exhibition during preparations for a spectacular retrospective of Kazimir Malevich that was shown in Leningrad, Moscow, and Amsterdam, in 1988 and 1989.

The newspaper art critics did not know how to deal with it. "In addition to the impressive installations by the now middle-aged Ilya Kabakov and Dmitry Prigov, the presentation by the necrorealist group (paintings, sculptures, video) was striking, if only for the many corpses they visualize. [...] Terrible things happen in the works of the necrorealists, but at the same time it's very romantic. This ambivalence is found in many Russians."[1] "Their scenes of severed limbs, corpses and torture could hardly be taken seriously. It does not seem like the most effective way to draw attention to the horrors of the Stalinist era."[2] The necrorealist presentation included work by Valery Morozov, Vladimir Kustov, Igor Bezrukov, Yevgeny Yufit, Andrei Mertvyi, and Sergei Serp, but Kustov's painting *If the boys from around the world...* (1989) was the one the newspapers and magazines reproduced the most. I had never been to the Soviet Union at that time, and I couldn't imagine this would change relatively shortly after this exhibition.

A few months after taking his post (on February 1, 1993), the new director of the Stedelijk Museum, Rudi Fuchs, sent a large number of his curators all around the world to collect material for an exhibition of young talent that would be entitled *Overmoed* ("Recklessness"). So my colleague Jan Hein Sassen and I set off to do research in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kiev, Warsaw, and Łódź. In all these cities we first visited artists with whose work were somewhat familiar, but for the rest we let the local specialists guide us. In Petersburg, these were the indefatigable Russian Museum curator Olesya Turkina and critic Viktor Mazin. On the day we arrived by a night train from Moscow, May 14, 1993, we immediately started with studio visits, and the first candidate was the necrorealist Vladimir Kustov. Right at the start of the interview he stated that necrorealism as a group had in the meantime died a quiet death. As he showed us his paintings — including a portrait of Einstein painted on wild boar skin, a medium extremely sensitive to weather that would cause Einstein's appearance to change over time — he told us about "inner feeling" and "inner dying," and that spiritually he felt eighty years old. He also said that man has an instinctive sense of death, but only recognizes it when he dies, and he quoted Mechnikov, the founding father of gerontology. Kustov spoke passionately and precisely, and our guides said that much of the richness of his language was lost in English translation. I could follow his arguments with some effort, but the most impressive thing for me was his art, which came across as unusually powerful and persuasive, with no need for explanations.

"Recklessness" as a project did not survive long, but the result of the research in Petersburg did. When visiting the city almost a year later, in April 1994, Fuchs became particularly enamored of the journal *Kabinet*, which Mazin and Turkina had launched in 1992 with the Petersburg artists Timur Novikov, Sergei "Afrika" Bugaev, and Irena Kuksenaite. He decided on the spot to mount an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum dedicated to it, so I found myself back in Kustov's studio on April 15, 1994. He showed us his painting *Animator* (1994), which could be seen as an attempt by the artist to depict with paint the performance of his life as a movie. Black represented the color of life, white that of death, and gray the color of all the processes between life and death. The large five-part painting *The Big Horizon* (1993) dealt with the fact that on a ship with no technical means of determining where land is, and when only the sea can be seen from the ship, the people on board can be driven to suicide. The three narrower canvases, which alternated with two larger canvases, thus showed people in different post-suicidal states, whereas all five parts, when viewed from left to right, could also be seen as the process of dying. However crushingly convincing this work was, Kustov would create something completely different for the exhibition in Amsterdam.

But it took a little while, since Fuchs repeatedly postponed the exhibition for a number of more or less plausible reasons. The good side of it was that the opportunity arose to follow the development of necrorealism in places outside Petersburg, in Western Europe. This applied not only to Kustov but also to Yevgeny Yufit, who, as we had already agreed, would also be part of the *Kabinet* show in Amsterdam. Yufit's films and photos, and Kustov's paintings and installations were exhibited in the spring of 1996 in Berlin, Erfurt, and Karlsruhe.[3] Karlsruhe especially was a good opportunity to get to know Yufit's work better, thanks to a lecture delivered on the spot by my mainstay Viktor Mazin. When the dates for the *Kabinet* exhibition were finally fixed — namely, February (the opening) through spring 1997 — it was time to use the summer of 1996 to make final choices. The period of the White Nights in Saint Petersburg seemed like a good opportunity to do this. Thus, on the morning of June 19, 1996, I stood in Kustov's studio again. There was an amazing painting of a man with a split head and the same picture inside it. The plan was to spray the canvas with a chemical to try and change the molecules in the paint, the outcome of this experiment being uncertain. I also saw pen drawings of cows, made for a project with fellow

Vladimir Kustov
Big Horizon. Polyptych. 1993
Oil on canvas. 150 × 350 cm

[1] Jan Bart Klaster, "Eruptie van opgekroptedynamiek en talent" ["Eruption of pent-up dynamism and talent"], *Het Parool*, September 22, 1990, p. 49.

[2] Janneke Wesseling, "Verhuld en versluierd. Twintig jaar Sovjetkunst in Amsterdam" ["Shrouded and veiled. Twenty years of Soviet art in Amsterdam"], *NRC Handelsblad*, cultural supplement, September 28, 1990, p. 4.

[3] *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, Haus am Waldsee and ifa-Galerie (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), Berlin 1995; *Idylle und Katastrophe. Neoakademismus und Nekrorealismus aus Sankt Petersburg*, EKTachrom, Europäisches Kulturzentrum und Kunst, Erfurt, 1995; *Metaphern des Entrücktseins. Aktuelle Kunst aus Sankt Petersburg*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe 1995.

Vladimir Kustov
From the series *Pathology*. 1996
Mixed media on aluminum
44 × 32 cm each

Petersburger and artist Alexei Kostroma, and paintings on aluminum: using a complex process, pictures of people with severe physical abnormalities were printed directly on the aluminum, surrounded by photocopies of microscope images of human cells affected by deadly diseases, from cancer to AIDS. Not a light piece, to say the least. Viktor rightly said it was something you had better start the day with, because afterwards everything would seem relative. Final choices for the *Kabinet* exhibition could, however, not yet be made during those White Nights, as the artistic tide had not reached its peak.

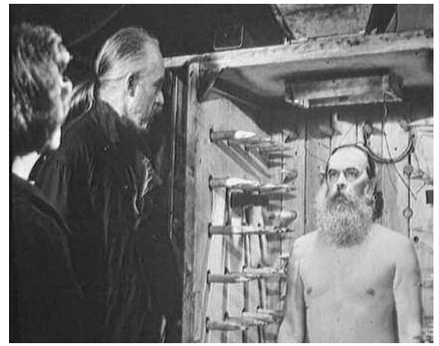
Things sorted themselves out, as is usual in such projects with contemporary artists, only two months before the opening of the exhibition, in this case in December 1996, when my colleague and co-organizer Jan Hein Sassen and I set off again to the city on the Neva. As far as Yufit was concerned, a nice selection of his photos was made in his presence, on December 3, at Olesya and Viktor's house. It turned out that all his films were in the collection of the Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, so a program of the films could be shown in the auditorium of the Stedelijk Museum throughout the Kabinet exhibition. A visit to Kustov's studio on the same day revealed that he had devised for the Stedelijk Museum an installation with paintings and a sculpture of a golem. He had made an accurate scale model that he let me take to Amsterdam for our colleagues on the construction team so they would have an idea of what he wanted. (Talk of precision and care!)

The necros presented two "cabinets" in the Stedelijk in the spring of 1997: Kustov's was entitled *The Epileptic Condition of the Golem*, while Yufit's was entitled *The Ambivalence of the Visible*.[4]

Exhibitions by contemporary artists require follow-up: photos, money, and other things have to be supplied afterwards. Since neither the bank system nor the postal service in Russia had proved very reliable at that time, it seemed wiser to do it personally, so I found myself in the summer of 1997 back in the city on the Neva. Aside from that, I wanted to keep an eye on the artists with whom I worked (and thus admired) — that is just part of one's life as a curator. Unexpectedly, I was able to make a visit (with Olesya, who proposed this) to the set where Yufit was shooting his new film, *Silver Heads*. He showed us a prop for the film, an ingeniously designed cabinet (a kind of village toilet from my youth), in which spears, poking out from three sides, threatened to send the person in the closet to kingdom come. A visit to Kustov was certainly on the program, so two days later I was again with Viktor at the now familiar studio: we saw an astonishing picture of corpses that had been partly preserved in saltwater lagoons, with horses racing past in the background [*Sivash*], and a canvas that devastatingly represented "new Russians." A solo exhibition of his work in the State Russian Museum would take place in January 1998, and he asked whether I would come and have a look. I could not promise.

I didn't make it in January, but I did come to Petersburg in March 1998 to celebrate the centenary of the State Russian Museum, and it was a lucky break. Not only was I able (with Olesya) to attend the premiere of Yufit's film *Silver Heads* at Lenfilm Studios, but I also managed to drop in on Kustov again. Yufit's movie was a marvel: beautiful images, absurdity (to Western European eyes) ruling the roost, and the undoubted influence of Tarkovsky (not the worst teacher). What a joy! Kustov showed Viktor and me his project for the State Russian Museum, a thorough and interesting one, but not yet feasible as no one had the money to do it, neither the museum nor Kustov himself. Nor did I, as I am unfortunately not a millionaire. I did buy one painting from the installation at the Stedelijk Museum the year before, but as I've said, I'm not a millionaire.

The next project Kustov told us about (a few years later, in 2000, when he visited Olesya and Viktor's house when I was there) included a proposal for an exhibition on the history of thanatology in art, which he wanted to mount in 2002 because it was a Leonardo da Vinci memorial year, and preferably at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam because of Rembrandt's presence there. I didn't really have the power to make it happen.



Yevgeny Yufit
Still from the feature film
Silver Heads, 1998

I wrote earlier that as a curator you want to keep an eye on all the artists you have ever admired. I am sorry to say that you don't always manage to do this, especially when they do not live or work near you (and even then not always). There are other interests that come up and you have only one life. Later, in January 2003, I saw Kustov's work during a visit to a tiki bar on Nevsky Prospekt he had decorated. I liked it very much. Still later, on September 27, 2006, I had the opportunity to see — along with Olesya and Sergey "Afrika" Bugaev — Kustov's exhibition at a gallery on the Fontanka. This preview was organized thanks to Olesya because I was leaving Petersburg the next day, when the opening was scheduled. Kustov himself was there as well: he was still busy with the details of installing the exhibition. And again he managed to convince me completely. Aside from earlier work, some of which I knew, he showed me new paintings with rails as the main theme. Moreover (typical Kustov), he had mixed the paint he used for the canvases with rail filings, the chips that are produced when the iron wheels of trains pass over the rails. Yet another detail that was completely thought through, as one would expect only from Kustov. It should be clear that this is a personal story about my limited experience with (the remains of) necrorealism. It cannot be compared with the accounts of the connoisseurs, critics and friends of the artists. But I was asked to record my memories. That is what I have done.

Translated by Pavel Kuzmin (from the Dutch)

At the shooting of Yevgeny Yufit's film
Silver Heads, 1998

[4] See the catalogue *Kabinet. Een hedendaags kunstenaarstijdschrift uit St. Petersburg* [Kabinet. A contemporary artists' magazine from St. Petersburg], Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1997.

group exhibitions

selection

1988 *From Unofficial Art to Perestroika*. Exhibition Hall «Harbour», Leningrad, USSR

1990 *Territoire de L'Art. Laboratoire*. The State Russian Museum, Leningrad, USSR
In the USSR and Beyond. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

1991 *Binationale: Sowjetische Kunst um 1990*. Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany; Israel Museum, Weisbord Pavillion, Jerusalem, Israel
Kunst: Europa, Sowjetunion. Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover, Germany
Nevsky prospekt. Undergraund. Festival Nantes/St. Petersburg CRDC, Nantes, France

1992 *Ex USSR*. Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands
Binationale: Sowjetische Kunst um 1990. Central House of Artists, Moscow

1993 *Russian Necrorealism: Shock Therapy for a New Culture*. Fine Arts Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA
Necrorealism in Hellerau. International Performance Art Festival, Hellerau, Germany

1994 *Europe. Le Territoire du Necrorealisme*. Gallerie de Paris, Paris
Self-Identification. Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until today. Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, Kiel, Germany

1995 *Self-Identification. Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until today*. Haus Waldsee, Berlin; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, Norway; The State Art Gallery, Sopot, Poland

1996 *Idylle & Katastrophe. Kulturhof Kronbacken, Erfurt, Germany*
Self-Identification. Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until today. Marble Palace, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; Sophienholm, Copenhagen, Denmark
Metaphern des Entrucktseins. Actuelle Kunst aus St. Petersburg. Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany

1997 *Five years of The Contemporary Art Department*. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia
Kabinet. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

1999 *The New Acquisitions of The Contemporary Art Department*. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

2001 *Uus Kunst Peterburis, 1990ndad*. Eesti Kunstimuuseumi naitustesaal Rotermanni soolalaos, Tallinn, Estonia
TIRANA BIENNALE 1. National Gallery & Chinese Pavilion. Tirana, Albania

2002 *Snowgirl* — New Art from Russia. Zacheta Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, Warszawa, Poland

2003 *Death in the Venice of the North*. < ROTOR > association for contemporary art, Graz, Austria
Kunst und Verbrechen. Hebbel -Theater Berlin, Berlin

2004 *Kandinsky and the Russian Soul*. Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Palazzo Forti, Verona, Italy

2007 Architecture: AD MARGINEM. Marble Palace, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia
The Future Depends on You. Pierre-Christian Brochet's Collection, 1989-2007. Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia
Adventures of the Black Square by Kazimir Malevich. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

2008 *Red Army Studio*. Ekaterina Cultural Foundation, Moscow, Russia
The Young, Aggressive. Musashino Art University Museum & Library, Tokyo, Japan
Inertia. W139, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2009 *Sinyavinskaya Symphony*. The Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad, The State Museum for the History of Saint-Petersburg, St. Petersburg, Russia
Letter from the Island. Orel Art UK Gallery, London

2010 *Stroke with the brush. «New painters» and Necrorealists*. Marble Palace, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia
Doors open day. A mansion - a gymnasium - a clinic - a museum.
Russian Art, 1989-2009, from the Museum Collection. Moscow Museum of Modern Art
Kandinsky Prize. Exhibition of the Nominees. Central House of Artists, Moscow, Russia

Alternativ mozi Leningradbol Nekrorealizmus -
experimentalis filmek.Mucsarnok, Budapest, Hungary, 1990

Territoire de L'Art. Laboratoire
The State Russian Museum, Leningrad, USSR, 1990

Binationale: Sowjetische Kunst um 1990
Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1991

Kunst: Europa, Sowjetunion
Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover, Germany, 1991

Binationale: Sowjetische Kunst um 1990
Central House of Artists, Moscow, Russia, 1992

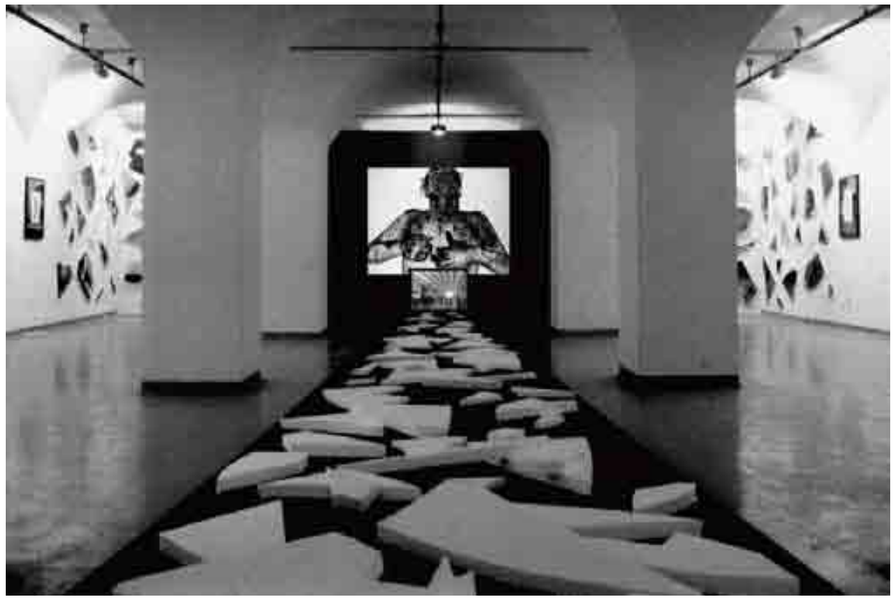
Binationale: Sowjetische Kunst um 1990
Central House of Artists, Moscow, Russia, 1992

Russian Necrorealism: Shock Therapy for a New Culture
Fine Arts Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA, 1993

Russian Necrorealism: Shock Therapy for a New Culture
Fine Arts Center, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA, 1993

Europe. Le Territoire du Necrorealisme
Gallerie de Paris, Paris, 1994

Self-Identification. Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today
Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, Kiel, Germany, 1994



Metaphern des Entrucktseins. Actuelle Kunst aus St.Petersburg
Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany, 1996

Kabinet
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Modern Art In A Traditional Museum. Approaching. The Museum of Forensic Medicine, The State Medical Academy named after I. I. Mechnikov, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2001

The Young, Aggressive
Musashino Art University Museum & Library, Tokyo, Japan, 2008

Letter from the Island
Orel Art Uk Gallery, London, 2009

Stroke with the Brush. «New Painters» And Necrorealists
Marble Palace, The State Russian Museum,
St. Petersburg, Russia, 2010

Stroke with the Brush. «New Painters» And Necrorealists
Marble Palace, The State Russian Museum,
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necrorealism

catalogue of the exhibition
at the moscow museum
of modern art, 2011

Trupyr (Leonid Konstantinov)

Andrei Mertvyi (Kurmayartsev)

Valery Morozov

Igor Bezrukov

Trupyr
In the Canes. 1987
Oil on canvas. 94 × 93 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Trupyr
Snowdrop. 1987
Oil on canvas. 79 × 94 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Andrei Mertvyi
Soldiers. 1984
Oil on fiberboard. 21 × 40 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov, St. Petersburg, Russia

Andrei Mertvyi
Our Kind Know How To. 1987
Oil on canvas. 199 × 143.5 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Igor Bezrukov
Sivash Is Still Ours. Broken Diptych. 1987
Oil on canvas. 160 × 75 cm each

Valery Morozov
Fat-Wax. 1986
Oil on canvas
199 × 134.5 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Valery Morozov
Feces. 1989
Oil on canvas. 248 × 153 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Valery Morozov
Father's Portrait. 1990
Tinted poplar-wood. Height 89 cm

Valery Morozov
Idol. 1990
Stained oak, height 93 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Valery Morozov
Tyre Workers. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov, St. Petersburg, Russia

If the Boys From Around the World... 1989
Oil on canvas. 150 × 195 cm

Surprises of the Sea. 1992
Oil on canvas. 196 × 146 cm

Match Penalty. 1994
Oil on canvas. 70 × 120 cm

Twins. 1994
Oil on canvas. 60 × 110 cm

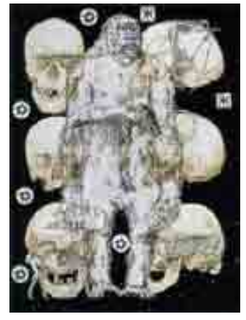
Cold. Triptych. 1990. Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm each
Collection of Pierre-Christian Brochet, Moscow

Mariott. 1994
Oil on canvas. 80 × 60 cm
Collection of Olesya Turkina and Viktor Mazin

Pan Spermia. 1994
Oil on canvas. 60 × 80 cm

Electricians. 1990
Oil on canvas. 147 × 198 cm
Collection of Vladimir Dobrovolsky, Moscow

Last Years Nudists. 1995
Oil on canvas. 146 × 196 cm



Equinox. 1992
Oil on canvas. 196 × 146 cm
Collection of Marina Gisich,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Courage. 1988
Oil on canvas. 198 × 146 cm

Spring. Triptych. 1991
Oil on canvas. 200 × 147 cm, 200 × 300 cm, 200 × 147 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum of Modern Art

Moscow Virtuosos. 1994
Oil on canvas. 65 × 95 cm

Dissolution. 2007
Oil on canvas. 146 × 196 cm

Life Express. 2006
Oil on canvas. 80 × 200 cm

Sashok. 1999
Oil on canvas. 110 × 60 cm

Animator. 1994
Oil on canvas. 154 × 200 cm

Birth and Collapse of Antisigma-Minus-Hyperon. 1997
Oil on bull-skin. 55 × 80 cm

vladimir kustov

Carnival. 2007-2008
Drawing series. 24 objects

Carnival. Object α
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object β
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object γ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object δ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ε
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ζ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object η
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object θ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ι
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object κ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object λ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object μ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

vladimir kustov

Carnival. 2007-2008
Drawing series. 24 objects

Carnival. Object ν
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ξ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ο
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object π
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ρ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object σ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object τ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object υ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object φ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object χ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ψ
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

Carnival. Object ω
2007-2008
Mixed media on canvas
70 × 40 cm

vladimir kustov

The Nuclein
Dreams City
Installation

01

02

03

04

05

06

The Nuclein Dreams City. 2003
Part of installation
Black & white photos

07

08

09

10

11

12

The Nuclein Dreams City. 2003
Part of installation
Black & white photos

The Nuclein
Dreams City
Installation

13

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The Nuclein Dreams City. 2003
Part of installation
Black & white photos

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The Nuclein Dreams City. 2003
Part of installation
Black & white photos

The Nuclein
Dreams City
Installation

25

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The Nuclein Dreams City. 2003
Part of installation
Black & white photos

31

32

33

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36

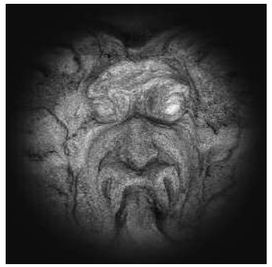
The Nuclein Dreams City. 2003
Part of installation
Black & white photos

vladimir kustov

The Nuclein
Dreams City
Installation

Zoomorphus. 2006
Part of installation
Black & white photos
20 × 20 cm each

01



05

09

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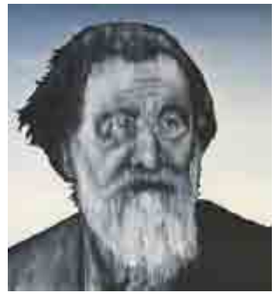
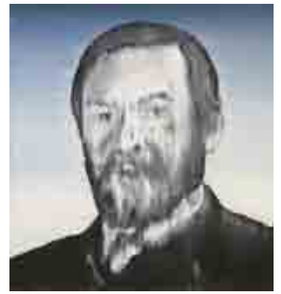
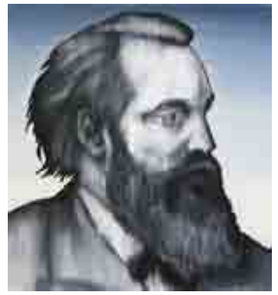
Cemetery. 2002
Part of installation. Video, DVCAM, 60 min.



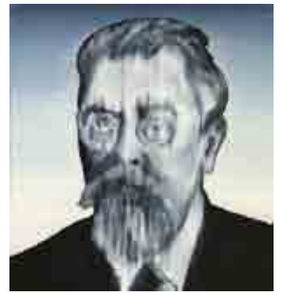
Korsakov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm



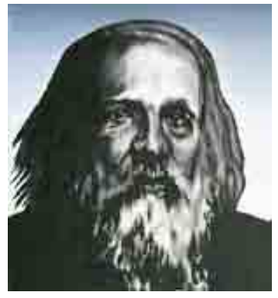
Sechenov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm



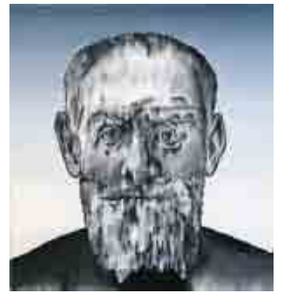
Mechnikov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm



Serbskiy. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm



Mendeleev. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm



Pavlov. 1996
Oil on canvas. 60 × 55 cm

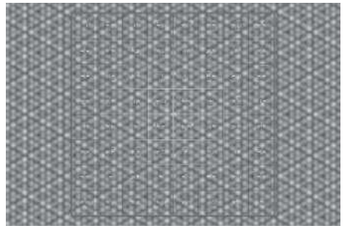
Coma. 1999. 14 pieces
Linoleum, alcohol, ink. 14 × 200 × 30 cm

Black Box of Dying. 1997
Mixed media. 20 × 100 × 120 cm

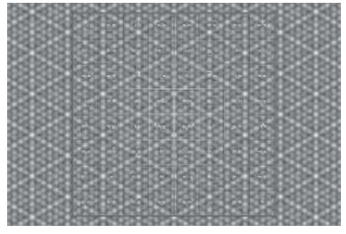
Coma
Installation

vladimir kustov

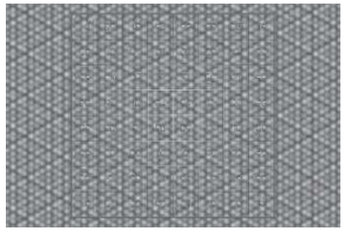
Crystallization
Installation



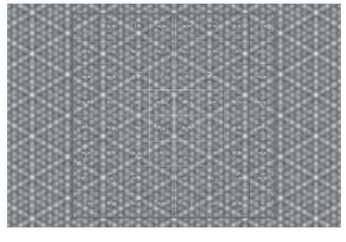
Magical square 021. 2009
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



Magical square 022. 2009
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



Magical square 023. 2009
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



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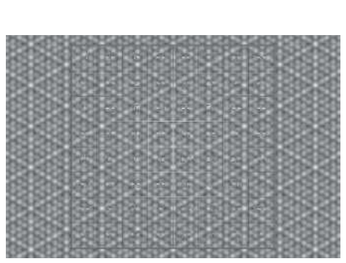
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



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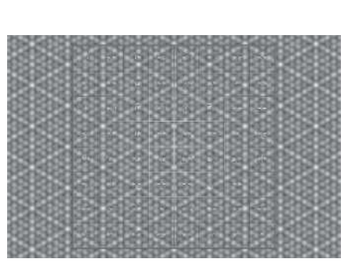
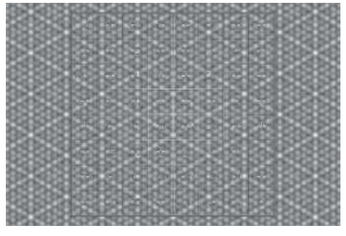
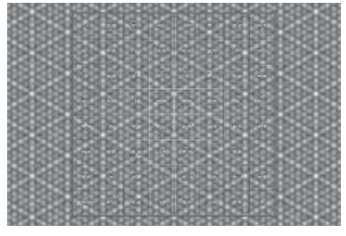
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



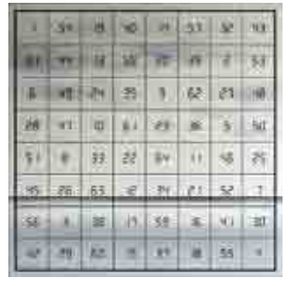
Magical square 026. 2009
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



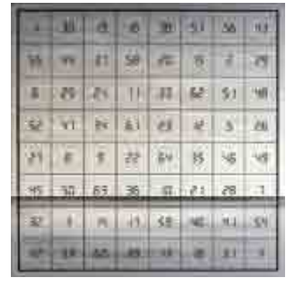
Magical square 027. 2009
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



Magical square 028. 2009
Black & white photo. 60 × 90 cm



Magical square 001. 2005
Oil on canvas. 80 × 80 cm



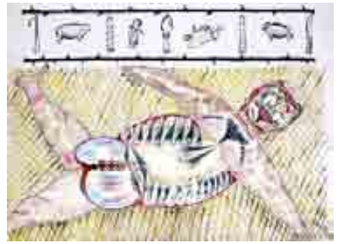
Magical square 002. 2005
Oil on canvas. 80 × 80 cm

Magical square 003. 2005
Oil on canvas. 80 × 80 cm

Magical square 004. 2005
Oil on canvas. 80 × 80 cm

Magic Square 005. 2008
3D laser carving in silica
glass. 10 × 10 × 10 cm

Crystallization. 2007
Oil on canvas. 196 × 196 cm



Man on a Hammock. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Oscar. 1988
Oil on wood. 72 × 53 cm
Private collection, Moscow

The Glutton. 1987
Oil on canvas. 59 × 44 cm
Private collection, Moscow

The Male Happiness. 1990
Oil on canvas. 300 × 200 cm
Collection of Pierre-Christian
Brochet, Moscow

On a Meadow 1. 1988
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Vladimir Kustov, St. Petersburg

Morning in the Forest 1. 1988
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Morning in the Forest 2. 1988
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

The Sunrise. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

The Last Train 1. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

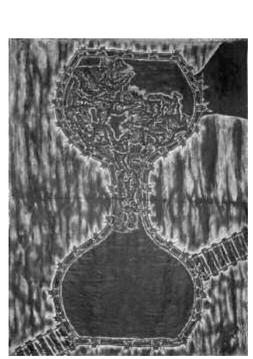
The Last Train 2. 1990
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow Museum
of Modern Art

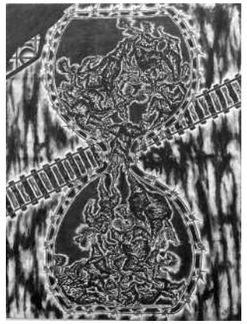
Parasitology. 1991
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
Collection of Moscow
Museum of Modern Art

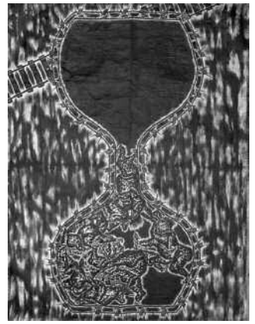
Navigator. 1992
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Secrets of Oceania. 1985
Oil on panel. 66 × 129 cm
Collection of Andrei Dmitriev, St. Petersburg

Birds Come Back in Spring. 1990
Oil on canvas. 140 × 190 cm
Collection of Pierre-Christian Brochet, Moscow





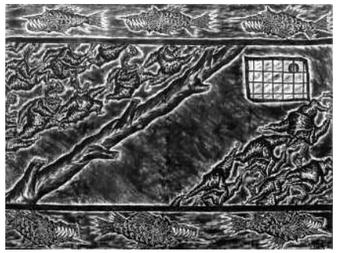


Time. Triptych. 2009
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
each

Feast of Asphyxia. 1989
Oil on canvas. 119 × 130 cm
Private collection

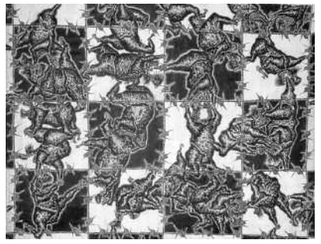
Rebirth. 2008
Oil on canvas. 200 × 150 cm

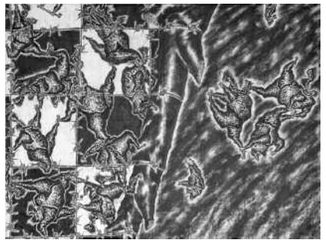
Coeval. 2008
Oil on canvas. 170 × 260 cm



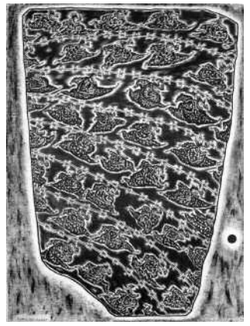
Periscope. 2010
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm

Chess. Triptych. 2009
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm
each

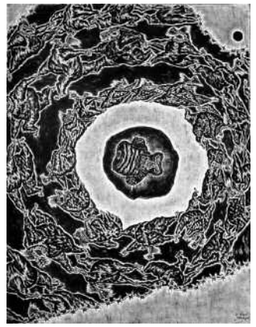




Egg. 2007
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm



Mirror. 2007
Oil on canvas. 150 × 200 cm



Thirst. 2007
Oil on canvas. 200 × 150 cm

Stills from *Silver Heads*, 1997
35 mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum;
MoMA Film
and Video Department

Stills from
Killed by Lightning, 2002
35 mm color film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum

Stills from
The Wooden Room, 1995
35mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum;
MoMA Film and Video
Department

Stills from
Daddy, Father Frost
is Dead, 1991
35mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum;
MoMA Film and Video
Department

Stills from
Bipedalism, 2005
35 mm black & white film
Collection of Netherlands Film Museum

From the series
New Morning. 1992
Black & white photos

From the series
Transparent Grove. 1992
Black & white photos
Collection of State Russian Museum (Contemporary Art Department);
Netherlands Film Museum;
Private collection

From the series
Longliver. 1997
Black & white photos

From the series
Silent Horizon. 2008
Black & white photos

Rebirth. 2007
Photo series
Black & white photos

From the series
Rustle. 1996
Black & white photo
Collection of Netherlands
Film Museum

From the series
Spit of Maturity. 1993
Black & white photos

Alone. 1994
Black & white photograph
Collection of State
Russian Museum (Contemporary
Art Department);
Netherlands Film Museum

Dew. 1994
Black & white photo
Collection of State Russian Museum
(Contemporary Art Department)

Gift. 1995
Black & white photo

April. 1997
Black & white photo

Sharp-Sighted. 1997
Black & white photo

Him. 2002
Black & white photo

Soon. 2010
Black & white photo

Gift. 2010
Black & white photo

about authors

Alexander Borovsky
Head of Contemporary Art Department of the State Russian Museum, art critic, author of more than 300 texts on contemporary art.

Olesya Turkina
Leading research fellow of Contemporary Art Department of the State Russian Museum, art critic, curator (projects include the Russian Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale).

Peter Weibel
Artist, media theorist and curator, founder of the Institute of New Media in Frankfurt, commissioner of the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1993-1999), Chairman and CEO of the ZKM (Center for Art and Media) in Karlsruhe, curator of the 4th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2011).

Viktor Mazin
Psychologist, founder of Freud's Dreams Museum, editor-in-chief of *Cabinet* magazine, author of numerous articles and books on various issues in psychoanalysis, deconstruction, schizophrenic analysis, and visual arts. Publications include *Cabinet of Necrorealism* (St. Petersburg, 1998), *Dreams in Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (St. Petersburg, 2007).

Geurt Imance
Studied art history at Utrecht University 1973-1980, Head of the Library at the Stedelijk Museum 1981-1990, Head of Research at Stedelijk 1990-2000, Head of Staff Stedelijk 1993-1998, Collection curator 2000-mid 2003, Head of Staff mid 2003-2005, Head of Collections 2005-till now. Curator of numerous exhibitions of 20th century and contemporary art, writer of many essays on 20th century and contemporaty art.

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