

On the Development of Russian Contemporary Art

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Abstract: Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, although we rarely see Russian contemporary artists in the media and ordinary art activities, Russian contemporary artists have never been absent from the most important international art exhibitions for decades. A large number of mature contemporary art institutions are becoming more and more active, promoting the development of Russian contemporary art. The promulgation of relevant national laws and policies has also played a vital role in the development of Russian contemporary art.

1. Introduction

The term “contemporary art” has been played badly by different artists and theorists, and almost no one can give its true definition. The uncontrollable and blind worship of consumer culture and high-tech progress have formed the main appearance of contemporary art. Under such circumstances, the mainstream Western media has also experienced reporting imbalances and biases. They have carefully constructed a fictitious globalization while deliberately neglecting or even suppressing certain countries and regions, such as Russia. Dasha Zhukova, the founder of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, has publicly expressed this view in the media more than once: “Russian contemporary art has always been deeply hostile to the world's mainstream art media.” Under the propaganda policy, Russia, which once made great contributions to the development of classical art and modern art, seems to disappear from the vision of contemporary art, but is the fact really as reported by the Western media?

2. The Development Status of Contemporary Art in Russia

Let us first look at the actual situation of Russian contemporary art. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, although we rarely see Russian contemporary artists in the media and ordinary art activities, in the most important international art exhibitions-Venice Biennale and Kassel Documenta, Russian contemporary artists But he has never been absent in decades. In addition to the stunning performances of the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017 and 2019, since the 1990s, Russian artists have consolidated their prominent position in the art world through top international art events, such as participating in Venice Artists of the Biennale Alexander Brodsky, Alexander Ponomarev, Yuri Avvakumov, Konstantin Zvezdochetov and the artistic group “Escape” (ESCAPE)), AES+F, etc. At the Kassel Documenta in 2007 and 2013, Russian artists also performed wonderfully.

Due to the high popularity of Zhukova and her boyfriend, Russian rich man Abramovich, the Garage Contemporary Art Museum she created is expanding in the Russian capital on the one hand, and on the other hand is becoming more and more active on the international stage. Become a business card of Russian contemporary art. In the first Russian Contemporary Art Triennial, the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, through the content design of seven sections, reflected that Russian culture and art are advancing with the international level, and people clearly remember that constructivist and realist paintings give their views. The shocking experience brought by the artist, at this moment, the whole world is looking forward to seeing a unique contemporary art belonging to Russia. The different directions and different symbols represented by these seven sections convey the voice of the awakening of contemporary Russian art. The tendency comes from a consensus on urban culture and natural life: Russians create through their hard-working hands and smart minds. To create a unique “mythological level” society, they hope to convey the common voice of

Russians through different individuals in the exhibition and express their attitudes and emotions of actively participating in international discourse activities. Except for the rising star of the museum under the halo of the “Czar of Art”, Russia also has a large number of mature contemporary art institutions, including the National Contemporary Art Center managed by the Russian Ministry of Culture. At present, this art center has about 4,000 artworks. There are branches in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and many cities in central and western Russia, the Ural Mountains and Siberia. In this official background center, through cooperation with art museums, research departments and non-governmental organizations, the Moscow Biennale and academic conferences are held, related books are published, and some art exchange meetings are organized to let more people understand Russian contemporary art. In addition, many influential private art institutions have also emerged in recent years, such as the Vinzavod Wine Factory and Art play Gallery in Moscow, and the ProArt Gallery and Ros photo Gallery in St. Petersburg.

In addition, there are two annual awards in the field of contemporary art in Russia: the Kandinsky Prize sponsored by the Art Chronica Foundation and the Innovation Prize co-sponsored by the Russian Ministry of Culture and private funds. These two art awards seem ordinary, but they include many awards such as the best work of the year, the best curator, the best publication, and the best young artist. Behind these awards is a large number of Russian A team of experts mainly composed of local art critics and theorists. The strong academic atmosphere ensures that these art awards have sufficient gold content.

The most common forms of contemporary Russian art are installation art, video art, performance art, photography, and other post-conceptual art forms based on philosophical texts. In addition to private collectors, the collectors of these art also include Russian national, state, or municipal museums. Before 2018, although these state-owned institutions collected a large number of contemporary art works, most of these works were created by the so-called “disturbed” artists in the Soviet period, and most of these artists have now become famous and live in New York, London, Cologne or Paris. These works do not represent the true development of contemporary Russian art.

3. Factors in the Development of Russian Contemporary Art

What really contributed to the prosperity of contemporary Russian art was a national law promulgated in January 2018. This decree on the import and export of Russian artworks stipulates that artworks created in the past 50 years should be regarded as luxury goods and subject to 30% import and export taxes. The promulgation of this law has officially opened up Russian contemporary art to the world, and has attracted a large amount of domestic or foreign capital to complete the construction and development of art institutions in Russia. In just over a year, the number of art galleries, auction houses, and collectors in Russia has almost doubled. Gas tycoon Mick Helson invested US\$300 million through his VLC Art Foundation to transform the power plant near the Kremlin into a 20,000-square-meter contemporary art space. It was only after the introduction of this law that construction began. It is worth mentioning that the promulgation of this law is the result of Abramovich's admonition to Russian President Putin. Zhukova herself is one of the main investors in Artsy.net, the world's largest art trading website.

In the chaotic period after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the export of many cultural wealth, including modern and contemporary artworks, was banned, which in fact stopped the import of Russian artworks completely. The huge tariffs imposed on the import of art have forced Russia's wealthy people to place their collections in Western European countries. Many of them were blacklisted for sanctions by the West for political reasons, but these wealthy people instead focused their funding on young Russian artists, and re-displayed a large number of banned works of art in the Soviet era. before. It can be said that the Russian government's open attitude towards contemporary art and the strong support of Russian private capital have given Russian contemporary art a relaxed environment and sufficient motivation, and gradually integrated into the international art world. Take collectors like Mick Helson or Zhukova as examples. The new policy allows them to store their collections in Russia and hold exhibitions in Russian state and even municipal museums, which further encourages domestic Many art institutions, including colleges

and universities, are involved in the transformation and creation of contemporary art. For example, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg has developed contemporary art courses on the basis of traditional plastic arts. Its director Simon Mikhailovsky has been the chief curator of Russian contemporary art exhibitions for many years, including The curator of the Russian Pavilion of the 56th, 57th and 58th Venice Biennale has won the respect and praise of the world for contemporary Russian art.

4. Summary

Russia, with its profound cultural resources, has undergone the baptism of modern art. When the 21st century came, it was attacked by the mainstream Western art circles due to political reasons. However, through wise national policies and the blessing of private capital, they have broken out a new way to develop contemporary art. This further validates the sentence “on the profound historical and cultural soil, bright artistic flowers will bloom.” The rising China is also facing a similar dilemma. How to “tell the Chinese story” is an important step for us to achieve cultural renaissance. For the transformation and breakthrough of Chinese contemporary art, Russian practice may also inspire us.

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