

LOOK, EVERYBODY

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New Generation of Collectors Emerges in Russia

They turn a private business – acquiring works of art – into large-scale social projects.

In the 1990's people were collecting objects of art in Russia in order to improve their companies' image (first corporate collections of Capital, INKOM Banks), later on – for decorating their homes. Now it has become clear that the happiness is not just in owning a Rembrandt (speaking figuratively) but in granting others an opportunity to share that happiness. Apart from this, the memory of Shchukin, Morozov and Tretyakov (famous Russian collectors and philanthropists of old) lives in the hearts of Russian entrepreneurs. So, now these burgeoning collectors start establishing museums.

The first private museum of the topical Russian art Art4.ru (Art for Russia) opened its doors on May 31, 2007. The exposition includes all big names, from Ilya Kabakov up to Oleg Kulik, from Viktor Pivovarov up to Valery Koshlyakov. The selection on display is just beautiful. If you want to get a concentrated idea of the Russian art in the last 40 years, you should visit it.

The museum is true to ultra-modern trends. For instance, no captions accompany works of art on the walls. It was done on purpose, in order to avoid all deference to rank and focus the viewer on the art itself, and not on reading captions under the paintings. (Different areas of the brain deal with reading and with perceiving the visual information.) If you for some reasons do not know the artists' names, you will leave the museum with your original happy ignorance, but being certainly impressed emotionally with the exhibits. Most likely, it is not that terrible: those most interested can find the information on its Web site.

Visitors are issued two labels, a black and a white circle for marking the best and the worst works. As of now, the undisputed leader in the black category is a small photo showing male genitals peeking out of wet long shorts. The author is Boris Mikhailov, a world-famous photographer from Kharkov, now living in Germany.

The museum owner is Igor Markin, a businessman.

In the 1990's he earned money by manufacturing plastic glass packs for modern windows. Approximately each tenth window in Russia uses his components. Mr. Markin is a colorful figure. One can get an idea of his Rabelaisian temperament reading his blog in the Live Journal. His daily mantra goes like this: "Oh, God, send me a blond with large tits tonight. Or, two would be even better. Or at least, a slim brunette. Well, just send anyone, oh, God!"

Or in the spirit of the famous Memento Mori: "If and when I die, do not



get upset. Because they will give a farewell banquet in the Museum. Naturally, I want to personally announce the list of those invited in advance. If you are not on that list, but you want to attend that postmortal banquet, just leave an application stating the reason why I should invite you.”

...Six years ago Mr. Markin started collecting works of art.

Now he has about 800 items. In order to view the paintings in normal conditions and not in storage and also in order to increase the collection capitalization Mr. Markin established his museum. He describes his motives as an advice from a handsome angel: “Change your social sphere, leave your old girl, build a museum, pay attention to yourself – read some books, start a blog, do something else.” Today by his popularity Mr. Markin is far ahead of any other plastic glass packs manufacturer.

...We are talking in his office on the second floor, above the museum display.

- Igor, what major successes have there been in the first months of the museum operations?

- Both successes and upsets are linked to the fact that we actually need to invent the museum. I used to think that the collection equals the museum: just acquire them, hand them on the walls and that's it.

But it turns out that some live needs to be maintained here.

In this country museums are dull and quite unfriendly: they frisk you at the entrance, custodians shout at you in the rooms.

In my museum it should be as cozy as in a good restaurant. Here you can have a coffee, read books and magazines, DJs have their shows on Fridays. For the opening of Dmitry Lion's exhibition we invited Space-Cats music group: a strange synthesis of the modern vanguard music and Lion's sophisticated graphics resulted. They seemed quite incompatible, but everything turned out quite stylish.

...The drawback of Art4.ru museum is its high admittance fee – 200 rubles. Even for the Picasso and Matisse they charge less in the Pushkin Art Museum. So now just 40 visitors come daily, instead of the planned one hundred. But maybe the owner, being a reasonable entrepreneur, will change something in the pricing policy.

A clear contrast to Mr. Markin is Senator Sergey Gordeyev: he has no Web blogs, does not indulge in confidences concerning his private life, pointedly keeps his distance and prefers to talk not about himself but about Russian Avantgarde Cultural Heritage Preservation Foundation he has created.

The Foundation is located in Burevestnik Club designed by Konstantin Melnikov. After the repair work the building shines like a new penny, it amazes one with surprising harmony and perfect proportions of its interiors and impresses one as much as a Gothic cathedral and ruins



of antiquity. Being inside it you realize what really great architecture we had in the 1920's. But they in the Foundation are not happy with the repair work and plan to restore everything, down to a last smallest item.

Here in the Club a restoration workshop is also housed where now they are reviving the archive of Ivan Leonidov (1902-1959), his contest pads with designs of cities and buildings. One can appreciate in what a sorry condition they get here and how thoroughly they are restored. Such work just cannot be praised high enough: Ivan Leonidov is one of the most influential architects these days. He has not built practically anything during his lifetime but his ideas have anticipated the time. Drawings of the first Exhibition of Economic Achievements built in 1923 on the site of the contemporary Gorky Park are in a pile on the floor. Each sheet awaits its turn: it will be straightened, fastened to a base, digitized and placed in a special box.

The museum collects archives of Russian architects. The work volume is such that the Foundation staffers look enthusiastic but somewhat intimidated. When previously there were plans to open a café, a movie and lecture hall in Burevestnik Club, by now they have been adjusted. The main thing is to preserve, restore that bloody heritage, make it available to researchers, make a museum out of Melnikov's House, publish books, and create several Web sites.

In addition to this, in 2007 the Foundation restored the Russian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, organized the Lost Vanguard: Soviet Modernist Architecture, 1922-1932 exhibition of works by Richard Pare, photographer, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, prepared, jointly with the Moscow City Committee for Protecting Cultural Heritage, documents for 50 buildings in the capital to be granted the cultural monument status.

Gordeyev and Markin are vivid but not the only examples of the new attitude towards art. There is Ekaterina Foundation established by Ekaterina and Vladimir Semenikhin that actively pursues its Kultur-trager policy. Their collection numbers over 500 works of the Russian and Western art. Ekaterina holds large-scale exhibitions of the Russian art abroad.

All this shows: it is not art that is so important as the social life swirling around it. 

