

## **Assailing the Monolith: Popular Responses to the 1952 All-Union Art Exhibition**

**Key words:** Aleksandr Gerasimov, Aleksandr Laktionov, Fedor Reshetnikov, socialist realism, Iosif Stalin, visitors' book.

There has been a shift in recent scholarship away from the notion of Soviet art and culture as a monolithic entity that was imposed on the unsuspecting masses by a firm and unyielding regime.<sup>1</sup> It would be more accurate to describe socialist realism as an ill-defined concept that evolved through a protracted process of debate, interpretation and manipulation, over the decades following Stalin's first use of the term in 1933. Official dictates on art and culture were often inhibited by a prevalence of empty rhetoric and sloganeering that offered its producers, critics and audience little concrete guidance. Thus this "method not a style" was to be "national in form, socialist in content", and aimed to show "reality in its revolutionary development" for the purpose of "the ideological refashioning and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism". Definitions were marked by a wealth of signifiers with a spectacular absence of signification, as, for example, in a statement from the president of the Academy of the Arts, Aleksandr Gerasimov:

"Our great epoch has placed an honourable and difficult task on our artists: to imprint the events of our day in simple, majestic, stirring forms, to create tremendous examples of the valour of Soviet people, their great patriotism and steadfast love for the motherland".<sup>2</sup>

As in the overblown prose of socialist realist literature, every noun is adorned with an extravagant adjective and every verb is emphasised aggressively

with a complementary adverb.<sup>3</sup> In its peculiar ability to formulate elaborately descriptive language into labyrinthine but ultimately meaningless sentences, Soviet rhetoric could often leave its bewildered recipient little the wiser.

Nonetheless, I have chosen to use the term "monolith" here in reference to the perceived monolithic nature of Soviet art amongst those who participated in its production and reception. I will argue here that the Soviet masses were empowered to express a kind of ownership of the socialist realist project, which they interpreted as a vehicle for their enlightenment and enjoyment, something akin to the American entertainment industry of the 1940s and 1950s. One might expect a Soviet art exhibition to have functioned as an exercise in educating and moulding a homogenous public's tastes, but in fact the reverse seems to be true. At least for those visitors who chose to contribute to the visitors' books, a Soviet art exhibition was a chance to assert their personal opinion as a discerning consumer of socialist realist art. If, as Clement Greenberg has argued, one of the goals of socialist realism was to flatter and placate the masses<sup>4</sup>, it enjoyed limited success – the reality was often divisive and provocative.

I am focusing on the 1952 All-Union Exhibition as a case study for two reasons. Firstly, this exhibition provides a fascinating example simply because the visitors' comments have been preserved in a coherent and intact form. Nine bound volumes, their cov-

ers emblazoned with a golden image of Lenin and Stalin, reveal a passionate dialogue on art and taste, as irate exhibition-goers were stirred to assert their own opinions, dispute the opinions of others, cross out entries, underline words and phrases, scribble abuse in the margins, even to write poetry or rip out pages.<sup>5</sup> In her pioneering work on Soviet era visitors' books, Susan Reid has described them as "a kind of virtual public sphere, something like an internet message board"<sup>6</sup>, a place where people can express honest opinions from a perceived position of safe anonymity. The candid nature of many comments at the 1952 All-Union Exhibition suggests (perhaps surprisingly) that the visitors' books were largely left unattended and unmonitored, which makes them a valuable and unusual resource in the context of Soviet research. As one unhappy punter wrote:

"It's a great shame! The most interesting thing at the exhibition is the visitors' book; here is all life, arguments and battles of opinion. And what about the paintings? Flatness, varnishing, serenity or ill-proportioned posters. Shame on you, comrade-artists!"<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the exhibition was significant because 1952 was a watershed year in the course of Soviet art. The so-called "mini-Thaw" of the post-war years had ended, to be replaced by an iron-fisted cultural policy that limited creative freedom as never before. The late Andrei Zhdanov had, through a series of draconian dictates on literature, music and theatre, re-instigated a 1930s-styled culture of paranoia in the art establishment. A pervasive fear of persecution obliged artists and critics to steer a safe and conservative path that eschewed European influences such as impressionism and Cezanne-ism, which were denounced as cosmopolitanism or formalism by the small group of artist and critic-oligarchs who held sway at the Academy of the Arts.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, theme and subject matter were constrained by the still prevalent "theory of conflictlessness" (*bezkonfliktnost'*), which stipulated that the art of a healthy socialist society could depict only the positive aspects of life.<sup>9</sup> The majority of artists working in official channels sought refuge in "safe" works depicting labour themes, genre scenes, or works of the leader cult, which had reached a fervent peak of idolisation

in the post-war era. It was in the early 1950s that the Soviet art establishment came closest to resembling the monolithic stereotype promoted by some Western commentators.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, simultaneously, the first signs of change were already making themselves apparent, as a new generation of creative intelligentsia started to make its voice heard. Whether it was a backlash against the stifled creativity of the period, or a perception that the right to question had been "earned" through the ordeal of War, dissent was entering the public sphere, albeit in a cautious and limited way. For some writers and art critics, including Ilya Ehrenburg, Vladimir Kostin, and Nina Dmitrieva – all of whom had been subjected to repression for their outspoken views in the late 1940s – it was time to start reassessing socialist realism, and to move away from the stale conflictlessness and "varnishing of reality" (*lakirovanie destvitel'nosti*) that had come to represent the norm. A belief was emerging that Soviet art could credit its viewers with more substantial themes, and that the contemporary audience had grown weary of glossy sentimentality and official bombast. Their reviews and responses to the 1952 All-Union Exhibition were daring and antagonistic, and their words no doubt emboldened the public to express their own opinions with more candour.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 1. Fedor Reshetnikov, *Low Marks Again! (Opiat dvoika!)*, 1952, oil on canvas, 101 x 93 cm. Courtesy: State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

The first few pages of the first visitors' book were graced by a series of neatly written and polite comments which praised the general level of the exhibit, and paid tribute to the continuing high standard of Soviet art and sculpture. But critical and abusive comments began to appear by page seven, less than one week into the exhibition. The heated and often humorous comments were interrupted only by several pages of respectful and sombre entries at the start of volume seven. On March 5, 1953, midway through the exhibition, Soviet society was shaken to its very foundations by the unanticipated death of Stalin, an event that stimulated an unprecedented outpouring of grief. For several days the question of art was eclipsed by widespread bereavement as exhibition-goers were moved to express their heartfelt sorrow at the passing of their leader. The popular mantra, "Stalin is life, and life has no end!" was repeated solemnly in numerous entries.<sup>12</sup> But the period of mourning did not last long, and by March 12 the arguments had reignited, and continued to rage until the closure of the exhibition in May.

Many of the critical comments were directed at the large-scale, heavily varnished parade paintings and works of the leader cult that had come to dominate Soviet art exhibitions over the previous two decades. In particular the grandiose paintings by established academic socialist realists like Aleksandr Gerasimov and Boris Ioganson were attacked by some visitors. One wrote:

"How nice – the students are overtaking their teachers. It's no bad thing that the worst paintings at this exhibition are those of Gerasimov and Sokolov-Skalia ... These kinds of paintings only make it into the exhibition because of a complete absence of criticism and self-criticism".<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, a group of schoolchildren wrote a rehearsed phrase praising a poorly executed painting of Stalin with his mother:

"I. V. Stalin Visiting His Mother is an amazing painting. The feeling of it is so well depicted! There is so much happiness and light".<sup>14</sup>

An unsympathetic response was scrawled underneath by a more cynical visitor: "Poor kids! You

have been deceived." One mysterious visitor, who signed himself only as "V. S.," wrote over 100 disparaging and often comical short verses throughout the course of book eight. The following is a comment on Boris Ioganson's *Our Wise Leader, Teacher of the Path*:

"You've put a huge effort into your canvas  
The subject is significant and momentous,  
But considering your great talent,  
We are waiting for a successful variant!"<sup>15</sup>

But it was a pair of comparable genre paintings of intimate domestic scenes – *Low Marks Again!* by Fedor Reshetnikov [fig.1], and *Into a New Flat* by Aleksandr Laktionov [fig. 2] – that attracted the vast majority of comment and debate throughout the volumes of visitors' books. Reshetnikov's small, brushy canvas was hailed almost uniformly as the "masterpiece" (*iziuminka*) of the exhibition, and was praised for its welcome dose of comic relief. The work depicts a rosy-cheeked, tousle-haired schoolboy who has received another *dvoika* at school. His mother looks on in loving disappointment, while his high-achieving sister smugly reads a book, and his little brother, too young to understand, grins at his sibling's discomfort. An iceskate pokes guiltily out of the boy's satchel, while the family dog, unaware of his master's discomfort, jumps up, eager to play. Laktionov's painting, on the other hand, was the subject of intense dispute: a large, detailed, heavily varnished work depicting a "typical" Soviet family of the post-war generation in the process of moving into a beautiful, spacious new Moscow flat, it was admired by a minority of visitors for its striking verisimilitude and technical mastery, and considered by others to be a work of "vulgar, tasteless naturalism".<sup>16</sup>

"Laktionov's work is philistinism, really nasty philistinism"<sup>17</sup>, is how P. Vakhitova described *Into a New Flat*, in January 1953 – her comment was underlined for extra emphasis. Yet others disagreed, and instead expressed their appreciation of the artist and his latest work. Some pages degenerated into heated disputes as visitors were compelled to reply to previous comments, and to assert their own opinions about the painting. A handful of contributors

were moved to fill several pages with dense handwriting in a tribute to their favourite artist, perhaps feeling the need to fight his corner in the face of the harsh and open criticism that was in evidence elsewhere. One of these devoted fans begins a three page monologue on the work with the following words:

“I really can’t understand why many of the visitors have cursed the artist Laktionov in the previous visitors’ books. It seems that the harder he tries, the more they curse him. In his new painting, *Into a New Flat*, Laktionov has surpassed himself. Laktionov remains sure of himself, and Laktionov remains Laktionov. His painting *Into a New Flat* seems to me a miracle – a genuine miracle.”<sup>18</sup>

But for many other visitors, Laktionov’s painting was anything but miraculous. Some complained that the colour, finish, and intense detail of the canvas brought to mind retouched photographs from the pages of glossy magazines such as *Ogonek*, and accused the artist of photographism and naturalism. One flippant comment read as follows:

“The colour photography co-operative needs a new photographer – would the retoucher Comrade Laktionov urgently apply. You can find the address at the information bureau. Appallingly executed work.”<sup>19</sup>

Others felt that the uniform level of detail with which Laktionov had rendered not only his protagonists but also his still life, as well as the background and corners of his canvas, was detrimental to the laudable theme of the work. A pair of artists wrote:

“Outrageous! When did we start showing such anti-artistic things at our exhibitions? It is breeding bad taste among young people. I’m writing about Laktionov’s painting *Into a New Flat*, where everything from the new parquet flooring to the suitcase, the radio, the flowers, and the figures of the people are drawn in the same way!”<sup>20</sup>

“Taste” (*vkus*) was a word that recurred time and time again throughout the visitors’ books, especially in reference to Laktionov’s naturalistic style of painting. A number of exhibition-goers felt that the

painting did not conform to their concept of tasteful socialist realist art, and that it might exert a harmful influence on other visitors:

“A lot is being said about Laktionov’s painting, but really it would be better not to have exhibited it – the benefits would be greater: there would be less discussion and there would be no items of bad taste at the exhibition. It’s not art, it’s hackwork; hackwork and a copy of painting. And it has been drawn, in all probability, with a brush with only one hair (which probably came from the head of the “artist”).”<sup>21</sup>

A group of students argued:

“Laktionov!!!! Just because you have bad taste doesn’t mean you should inflict it on those around you!”<sup>22</sup>

The repeated use of this word is perhaps surprising in the context of Soviet art, in which ideology was supposed to outweigh such subjective considerations. It implies an audience that was responding not only to the political dimension of the works on display but also to their aesthetic merits, and that was defining and differentiating itself based on these factors.

If Laktionov’s painting represented the controversy of the 1952 All-Union Exhibition, then Reshetnikov’s canvas was, without doubt, a runaway success. Throughout the exhibition visitors’ books, comment after comment pays tribute to this painting, and to its touching and humorous subject matter:

“Every exhibition has its masterpiece. This time the masterpiece is Reshetnikov’s *Low Marks Again!* Out of all the genre paintings this is the brightest. The faces are lifelike. It’s possible to stand at the painting for hours, and laugh from your soul.”<sup>23</sup>

And of course one remark repeats itself with predictable regularity: “I would give *Low Marks Again!* full marks.”<sup>24</sup> Reshetnikov’s small and unassuming genre painting was in many ways the antithesis of the pompous brigade work that had so dominated the proceedings in previous years.



Fig 2. Aleksandr Laktionov, *Into a New Flat* (*V novuiu kvartiru*), 1952, oil on canvas, 130 x 113 cm. Courtesy: Donetsk Regional Art Gallery, Donetsk

There are a number of superficial similarities between *Low Marks Again!* and *Into a New Flat*. Both artists have attempted to depict a typical Soviet family of the post-war generation: a working-class single mother with several children. Both mothers are dressed in headscarves and patterned clothing reminiscent of traditional peasant attire, and both sets of children are dressed smartly in modern shirts and blouses. Yet in Laktionov's painting the family members are statuesque in pose and expression. Like the varnished finish of the painting, their faces are glazed and inexpressive, and their stances are artificial and affected. Their faces carry little active characterisation or narrative substance – Who are they? Why have they been awarded a new flat? In contrast to Laktionov's near-photographic representation, Reshetnikov's family is marked by minor imperfections and idiosyncrasies: the naughty schoolboy's hair is ruffled and his nose is red and shiny from the cold, the mother's brow is wrinkled and she is wringing her hands in concern. These small concessions to the real world distinguish Reshetnikov's painting from the somewhat disturbing perfection of Laktionov's work. As a satisfied visitor noted:

“The main thing that struck us about [*Low Marks Again!*] was the expressive faces of the characters in the painting. The painting is startling in its truthful portrayal of this small everyday scene”<sup>25</sup>

A recurring motif in Soviet art criticism of the early 1950s was a demand for representations of “living people” (*zhivyye liudi*), perhaps in response to Stalin's own words at a 1933 art exhibition, which was the only time he was ever known to comment directly on a work of fine art.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, these very words recur three times in *Iskusstvo's* review of *Low Marks Again!*<sup>27</sup> Unlike Laktionov's stiffly realistic family, Reshetnikov's was lifelike, appealing, and familiar.

Above all else, the painting represented a welcome break from the one-dimensional harmony that had defined Soviet art during the previous decades. Reshetnikov's canvas was one of the first paintings of Soviet socialist realism to depict a scene of failure, no matter how trivial or temporary, and in this sense was something of a groundbreaking work. *Iskusstvo* declared him to be “a master of psychological characterisation, and a great director”<sup>28</sup>, and a number of exhibition visitors were quick to agree:

“*Low Marks Again!* Goodness, what a surprising, new thing it is. Two of the faces – the young boy and the dog – how sweet they are. The greatest numbers of people gather around this painting. There are no dry pedagogues here. Here there is life, here even a sad event contains humour – and that gives us great strength”<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult now to imagine the sense of release that this painting might have engendered upon its exhibition in 1952. To a Western observer the dramatic impact of the scene appears somewhat crude and couched in sentimental Soviet imagery, but to the contemporary Soviet viewer this was a genuine innovation, and a rare opportunity to laugh out loud amongst the more solemn displayed works of art. In spite of its relatively small scale, subdued palette, and brushy execution, the painting was hailed as a great success, with many visitors calling for the artist to be awarded the prestigious Stalin Prize – little understanding that there was hardly any likelihood

that their views would be taken into consideration in the distinctly undemocratic process of awarding these prestigious prizes.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the volumes of visitors' books one gets the sense that the Soviet public hoped and believed that its opinions would be acknowledged and acted upon, with some people even leaving an address in anticipation of a reply. One helpful visitor contributed the following:

"Once the exhibition has ended it would be sensible to bring the critical comments of the visitors (except, of course, the stupid and loutish ones) to the attention of the artists to which they relate. This would have a definite benefit".<sup>31</sup>

It is not easy to evaluate how seriously the comments from these books were taken by the exhibition organisers. In the case of the 1952 exhibition, most of the comments were compiled in typewritten notes for further analysis, but there is little evidence to suggest that they had any direct impact on future exhibition policy. It is clear that some art organisations were at least aware of comments and general opinions expressed in these books. Artists and critics from the Moscow Artists' Union made frequent references to the visitors' books in their evaluation of the exhibition, at times even quoting directly from the comments. Likewise, certain artists, including Laktionov, claim to have read the visitors' books in order to gauge the popular reception of their work.

Whatever their concrete influence may have been, these books provided a welcome opportunity for Soviet citizens to express an opinion in a public forum, and to read and respond to the opinions of others. The institution of the visitors' book was treated as a valuable part of the exhibition, and was itself the subject of heated debate. One visitor wrote:

"Not one minute goes by when the visitors' book is lying idle on the table, it is being continually passed from hand to hand. Because of this, it is impossible for people to write in it, since it is always occupied by those who want to simply read it. Moreover, not only is it

impossible for everyone to write in the book, but if someone succeeds in glancing at it out of curiosity about what others have written, they can consider themselves lucky".<sup>32</sup>

Contributors expressed a sense of ownership of the books, and were angered when filled volumes were removed and replaced with a new one:

"Who is hiding the completed visitors' books? It is madness! What is the point? It certainly doesn't help our fine art ... The critics don't like it, the artists don't like it, and the administration doesn't like it! I demand that the comments of the visitors not be hidden!"<sup>33</sup>

It is likely that the exhibition organisers did indeed wish to conceal the negative comments of some visitors, and to encourage a more measured response in each fresh volume. By 1957 the convention of the visitors' book had been replaced by ballot-style slips of paper, which were deposited into a sealed box, thereby precluding the possibility to read and comment on the opinions of others, presumably in an effort to prevent the same passionate arguments and dialogues that arose in 1952.

The differences of opinion and dissent that were in evidence at the 1952 All-Union Exhibition paint a picture of a public that did not, in the field of fine art, simply submit to the Party line. The Soviet citizen was by no means cowed by the monumental canvases that constitute a stereotype of socialist realist art, and in many cases scorned such works in favour of more intimate treatments of everyday life. Whether by crossing out comments, scribbling abuse, or neatly writing pages of reflections, the Soviet exhibition-goer was expressing a desire to be listened to, and asserting his or her status as a cultured individual with personal taste. Most importantly, many of those who wrote in these books *expected* their comments to be read, taken seriously, and acted upon by the exhibition organisers, artists, and even policy makers. Many of the contributors to the 1952 exhibition visitors' books felt that it was their duty as Soviet citizens to contribute to the debate on art and taste, and to mould the monolith of socialist realism to their own demands as its target audience. Far from existing as a suppressive and

unyielding art form that was simply accepted by a compliant audience, it in fact stimulated passionate and diverse responses. In creating an art form for the masses, the policy-makers of the Soviet art establishment made every citizen an art critic.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A number of works have emerged in recent years in which socialist realism is treated as an aesthetic category in its own right, with an acknowledgement that its artists produced diverse and significant works of art that demand serious analysis above and beyond their political dimension. See for example Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic 1890–1934*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999; and Evgenii Dobrenko, *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon*, Sankt Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000. See also two collections of essays from recent exhibitions of Soviet art: Miranda Banks (ed.), *The Aesthetic Arsenal: Socialist Realism under Stalin*, New York: Institute for Contemporary Art, 1993; and Boris Grois and Max Hollein (eds.), *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Gerasimov, 'Put' sovetskogo khudozhnika' ('Path of the Soviet Artist'), in: Aleksandr Gerasimov, *Za sotsialisticheskii realism: sbornik statei i dokladov (For Socialist Realism: Collection of Articles and Statements)*, Moscow: AKhSSSR, 1952, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Gutkin, 1999, pp. 64–80.

<sup>4</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in: *Partisan Review*, VI no. 6, 1939, reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Woods (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993, p. 539.

<sup>5</sup> *Knigi otzyvov Vsesoiuznoi vystavki 1952 goda (Visitors' Books from the 1952 All-Union Exhibition)*, Gosudarstvennaia Tre't'iakovskaia Galereia (State Tretyakov Gallery, hereafter GTG), F-8.II., O-2, D-6-17.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Reid, 'In the Name of the People: The Manege Affair Revisited', in: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2005, p. 680. See also Susan Reid, 'Socialist Realism in the Stalinist Terror: The Industry of Socialism Art Exhibition, 1935–41', in: *Russian Review*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2001. Jan Plamper has considered the history of the institution of visitors' books in the Soviet Union and studied visitors' comments at exhibitions of the Stalin Cult. Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult in the Visual Arts, 1929–1953*, PhD dissertation, Berkeley: University of California, 2001, pp. 170–226.

<sup>7</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-10, p. 18, dated 29/1/1953.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of the Zhdanov-era reconstruction of the art apparatus, and shift in rhetoric towards an emphasis on the Russian Realist School as the foundation for socialist realism, see Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition*,

New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, pp. 180–186.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 228.

<sup>10</sup> "Russia, as she eventually shakes off Khrushchevism no less than Stalinism and Leninism, will not remain troglodyte. She will yet re-enter the mainstream of man's creation and appreciation of the finer nuances of life and civilisation." Albert Parry, 'Are They Kul'turny?', in: *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1957, p. 135. The article deals with the assimilation of classical art and literature into Soviet culture, and attributes this development to an envy of the West amongst the Soviet intelligentsia. Fifty years on, the article is more interesting as an example of Cold War mentality and its culture of mutual resentment and suspicion.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Nina Dmitrieva, 'Vsesoyuznaya khudozhestvennaya vystavka 1952 goda: bytovaya zhivopis' ('The All-Union Exhibition 1952: Genre Painting'), in: *Iskusstvo*, no. 2, 1953, pp. 13–22; and Vladimir Kostin, 'O nekotorykh voprosov masterstva v zhivopisi' ('On Several Questions of Mastery in Painting'), in: *Iskusstvo*, no. 4, 1953, pp. 53–54.

<sup>12</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-14, pp. 1–18. By way of example, a comment from p. 1 reads: "March 5 will be remembered by all working people as the most tragic day – a day marked by a heavy loss. Our people, who passionately love their dear leader, are feeling a great sorrow on his demise. There are no words that can express our compassionate grief." Dated 8/3/1953.

<sup>13</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-7, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> The comment is signed: "10th year schoolchildren from 146 School", GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-16, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-8, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> The comment is signed: "Alekseev", 26/1/53, GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, pp. 8–10.

<sup>19</sup> The comment has been crossed out in red pencil, and was not included in the typed notes from the visitors' book. GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-7, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> The comment is signed: "artists x 2", GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, pp. 33–34.

<sup>21</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-11, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-8, p. 19, signed: "students MGBI", 28/1/53.

<sup>24</sup> For one of many examples, see GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> The comment has several signatures. GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-8, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Cullern Bown, 1998, p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> *Iskusstvo*, no. 1, 1953, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. The reviewer goes on to suggest: "The painting can be interpreted as a small novella about Soviet life, children and school", and declares it to be a major step forward for the artist.

<sup>29</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-9, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Reshetnikov never did win the award for this painting, although he had won it previously, for a 1949 portrait of Stalin.

<sup>31</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-16, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-12, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> GTG, F-8.II, O-2, D-12, p. 1.

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## Ardant monolitą: liaudies reakcijos į 1952 m. Visasąjunginę dailės parodą

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Aleksandras Gerasimovas, Aleksandras Laktionovas, Fiodoras Rešetnikovas, socialistinis realizmas, Josifas Stalinas, lankytojų knyga.

### Santrauka

„Kas atrenka darbus parodai? Jų pavardes reikia publikuoti, kad liaudis galėtų iš jų pareikalauti atsakomybės.“ (A. S. Lebedevas, Visasąjunginės dailės parodos lankytojas, 1953 m. sausio 5 d.).

1952 m. vykusį Visasąjunginę dailės parodą žymėjo sovietinio meno posūkį. Socialistinio realizmo doktrina beveik du dešimtmečius dominavo oficialiajame mene, o vado kultas buvo pasiekęs viršūnę. Neseniai įkurta SSSR Menų akademija su Partijos paskirta taryba diktatoriškai kontroliavo sovietinį meną, pradedant užsakymais ir parodomis, baigiant meno žurnalų redakcijų kontrole. Praktiškai tai reiškė, kad parodoje dominavo imponantiškos monumentalios drobės, brigadinė tapyba ir portretai, sukurti gerai žinomų privilegijuotų menininkų. Tačiau pagrindinis socialistinio realizmo architektas J. V. Stalinas neišgyveno iki tos kontraversiškos parodos pabaigos.

Parodos lankytojų knygos pateikia vertingų duomenų, atskleidžiančių nepasitenkinimą, kurį juto daugelis sovietinių piliečių žiūrėdami į eksponuojamus kūrinius. Devyniuose įrištuose tomuose, su Lenino ir Stalino atvaizdu ant viršelio, užfiksuotas tarp visokio plauko lankytojų vykęs turiningas ir aistringas dialogas: nuo šaltai išdėstytos atmintinai išmuktos retorikos iki atviro įžeidinėjimo ar nuoširdžių pagyrimų. Iš komentarų galima susidaryti apibendrintą sovietinio parodų lankytojo, kaip tvirtą nuomonę turinčio individo, vaizdą – tai priešingybė homogeniškai masei, kuria dažnai remiasi šiuolaikinė literatūra.

Straipsnio objektas – dvi drobės, sukėlusios karštas diskusijas parodos lankytojų knygose: Fiodoro Rešetnikovo *Vėl dvejetas!* ir Aleksandro Laktionovo *Į naują butą*. Rešetnikovo humoristinė buitinė scena buvo plačiai pagerbta kaip parodos šedevras, o Laktionovo ideologiškai korektiškas žanrinis paveikslas daugelio buvo pasmerktas kaip „vulgarus“ ir „beskonis“ iš mados išėjęs stalinizmo reliktas. Kilusi diskusija išskėlė svarbius klausimus apie visuomenės skonį ir valdžios kontroliuojamos meno sistemos vaidmenį. Ji žymėjo sovietinio meno vieno laikotarpio, kartu ir monolitinių galios struktūrų, kurios palaipsniui artimiausiu metu irs, pabaigą.

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