

## Mine

“Grandfather is a miner, father is a miner, mother is a shaft worker,” Arkady Petrov begins his biographical narrative. The life of a mining village and childhood in the post-war years will become one of the central themes in the artist’s art. In his texts and paintings, he describes in detail, with attention to detail, the everyday work life and simple character of his compatriots. Arkady Ivanovich again and again broadcasts the story of the “little man”, giving the space of his canvases as a platform for demonstration, not allowing him to fall into oblivion.

In early works from the 1970s, we see panoramas and landscapes where, in a cubist manner in the shades of Van Gogh's Potato Eaters, small human figures are woven into the infrastructure of a workers' village. This painting, written under the influence of post-impressionism, is the result of the artist’s experiments and searches, in which he is just groping for his main narrative line.

\*In Oleg Lang’s miniature, the formula of factory architecture accompanies the stylistics of early painting by Arkady Petrov. Both artists stylize volumes into geometric modules, denoting their belonging to the technogenic world.

Later in the 1980s, the camera zooms in and reveals life scenes and portraits. However, only in the 1990s did the artist come to the final type of his heroes, the miner-miner and his family, bringing his plastic expressiveness to radicalism. The artist returns to a restrained color scheme. Against the background of charcoal-gray monochromes, miners' Adam and Eve, miners' Venus and her admirers, and miners' pastorals appear. Life in its most prosaic phenomena takes place in space without horizon or perspective. The only points of support are red stars and flags that determine the ideological affiliation of the characters. The working class, the basis of all Soviet society, is caught in a lyrical and everyday moment without the aura of the party agenda and labor glory. As if their bodies and faces were carved out of rough stone, they were made by the artist in a primitivist style.

\*\*“To the mountain!” Vladimir Potapov is based on a photographic image captured using the author’s technique, fundamental to the concept of his “Inside” series. The image of a miner with a trolley filled with coal is close to the official postcard image allowed for broadcast in newspapers and news agendas. The work is adjacent to artifacts from the artist’s family: a miner’s lantern and a fiber miner’s helmet from the 1940s-50s.

It seems they are so far from the catchphrase “On the mountain!” – symbolizing the result of labor and in its form determining the nature of socialist production. Coming from miner's slang, the phrase is similar to the mythological image of the legendary Stakhanov (who set a record in 1935 by producing 102 tons of coal per shift against the norm of 7 tons). But where is that unshakable image of the socialist hero, whose name we still remember, and the real person, every day descending into the bowels of the earth, putting his life at risk, removing from its flesh valuable rocks so necessary for the socio-economic stability of society. Arkady Petrov demythologizes the ideal, groping for a nerve from the depths of the human soul.

## Rest

Laconically describing in his stories, the hunger, theft, drunkenness that accompanied the life of a workers' village in the post-war years, Arkady Petrov every now and then weaves in vivid details of peaceful leisure: dancing, dates, holidays. In the paintings of Arkady Petrov, rare episodes of relaxation are associated with wine drinking rituals, in which the culminating moment is a toast "to health." The same unprepossessing characters in suits and dresses peacefully celebrate significant dates against the backdrop of the Kremlin walls, reminiscent of castles from paintings by Romantic artists. The private life of a Soviet citizen, interest in which was not welcomed in any form of art, always occupied Arkady Petrov. It illustrates the innermost hopes of happiness, but not of universal equality and brotherhood, but of personal well-being, dreams of a place where one can relax peacefully.

\* Treasured smoke breaks are counterpointed in the workday schedule. In the work of Ivan Simonov, the text with an image of a cigarette is combined in the logic of poster art, which clearly narrates the norms and rules of life.

Questions about the "correct" Soviet holiday were raised as part of the discussion about the education of the "new Soviet man". Resorts, to which not everyone had access, represented the highest reward. In heavenly sanatoriums, workers recovered their health in order to return to work again to exceed the plan.

\*Landscapes of Koktebel, a favorite resort of the Soviet creative intelligentsia, in a series of gouaches by Yuri Zlotnikov are depicted in the spirit of French pointillism, also close to the new painting of Arkady Petrov.

To create the image of a vacationer, Arkady Petrov turns to the aesthetics of kitsch. Couples are depicted in full growth, surrounded by exotic flora: doll bodies are surrounded by the same plastic and paper flowers. Scenes of swimming, dancing and walking in the park - all these simple events, peripheral subjects for the public, candy wrappers of life, were carefully selected by the artist and preserved.

\*The problematics in the art of Mikhail Roginsky originate from the same source as Arkady Petrov. They were both interested in the intervals of life, insignificant moments not regulated from above. Through everyday details they built their vision of the microcosm of Soviet people.

## Memory

Arkady Petrov is not interested in the topic of historical memory as a tool of the collective unconscious; he peers closely at the biography of the average person. According to the rules of ceremonial iconography, he paints men and women in weekend suits, maintaining a serious expression on their faces, as if facing eternity, half-length portraits - busts in frames and decorations or family portraits. We see in them collective images of relatives, as if long forgotten, but so familiar. The artist finds a universal code of self-representation of his generation: constrained poses, stern facial expressions, framed by festive outfits.

Photo cards for memory were supplemented with lyrical lines and letters - calls to "not forget" or primitive songs and poems with love lyrics, the lines of which were included in his canvases by Arkady Petrov. Such portraits, intended as a gift to a dear person, were not intended for wide viewing. However, Petrov pulls them out, including them in the visual field along with important people and political figures, adding the subjective to the universal.

\*One of artist Oleg Lang's favorite techniques, collage, is used in his work "Letter", in which, in addition to a real envelope, a piece of fabric with red polka dots is added. The image of writing, as a sign of human relationships, is also found in the paintings of Arkady Petrov.

Soviet ritual rites, eclectic in form, were aimed at perpetuating the services of the deceased to society. He was seen off with speeches, recalling his labor successes and positive characteristics. In his painting of the Drunken couple, Arkady Petrov hints that a Soviet citizen does not lose face even after death, but only acquires angelic wings. And he is accompanied to another world by a number of funny kitschy animals presented in the work "Pavel Nikanorovich".

\*The pagan traditions of treating the dead, which were certainly accompanied by feasting and drinking right at the cemetery, could not be eradicated from Soviet society. A piece of bread is a cornerstone symbol of the diet; in the work of Anatoly Osmolovsky, it has not only a sacred meaning, but also a symbolic affiliation with a memorial ritual, as part of a funeral meal.

\* If for Petrov oval tablets are an attribute of a certain cultural tradition, then for Pavla Markova they are a space for expression and a form of social agenda. In the tombstone portraits produced by Markova, one can read irony and black humor, neutralizing the fear caused by the theme of death.

## Duty

By choosing primitivism as a contrast to Soviet academicism, Arkady Petrov, in fact, successfully implements the communist idea of equality in visual form. The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” with faceless blank heads, over which the text of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels spread like a curtain, is proof of this. The Holy Scripture of all communists became a unifying substance, but lost its semantic component, as did the faces of the bearers of this knowledge. Service to the socialist state does not consist only in adherence to ideology, but also in tacit consent. The “board of honor” with images of the same physiognomy expresses continuity and solidarity.

\*Paradoxically, Andrei Andreev in his series “Sales List” resorts to the same method of depersonalizing modern participants in capitalism. Obviously, conformism and the human desire for community are manifested in any social system.

One of the central works of the exhibition, “Cabinets”, in unison with previous works, is built on the principle of repetition of an element. The monotonous rhythm of the cells, in which hats are distributed instead of portraits, determines the pulse of life in military service. In fact, this work is a dedication; the artist also calls it: “In memory of the sailors of the Kursk submarine.” Each cell stores a set of dress uniforms, which the sailors leave behind when they set sail. The tragic context here is expressed through the same monotonous repetition of nameless red signs.

\*On the contrary, the sailors from the work of Rostislav Lebedev look festive and bright. A poster inscription of an existential nature instills in the viewer a certain mood. The artist works in his art with the philosophy of the absurd, showing semantic inconsistencies, unexpectedly connecting concepts from different semantic categories.

The man in uniform on the canvases of Arkady Petrov is sculpted from the same material as the miners and workers. We see a certain type with beady eyes, animal faces and puffy bodies. These are the same heroes, only when performing duties, they carry the banner and carry out commands. The work “Private Petrov to Me” demonstrates the rules of army marching: the left leg rises 15 centimeters above the ground, the left hand is completely pulled back, the right hand is moved forward, which, in essence, constitutes the iconographic image of a warrior.

\*One of the main methods of work of Vladimir Kupriyanov was to rethink the found photograph. Images of unknown men in military uniform are mounted together with colored paper, which can signify the veil of time, hiding the details and facial features of the person being portrayed, leaving only a silhouette in memory.

\* The psychologism of Andrei Grositsky’s objects is a special feature of his art. A real human drama can unfold in the portrait of a lonely boot. Because we don’t know if the boot was lost or if the owner only needed one.