ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИСКУССТВО

UDC 73.03+73.05+7.011.3

The crisis of the genre and the symptoms of style: The problem of monumentality in the new Russian art

A. O. Kotlomanov

Saint Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design,
13, Solyanoy lane, St. Petersburg, 191028, Russian Federation

For citation: Kotlomanov, Alexander. "The crisis of the genre and the symptoms of style: the problem of monumentality in the new Russian art". *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Arts* 9, no. 1 (2019): 110–124. https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu15.2019.106

The current state of monumental art in Russia is analyzed in the context of global art and cultural trends. Examples of the newest Russian monuments that, in the philosophy of culture are symptoms of historical trends, is emphasized. The goal is to clarify this symptomatology for subsequent determination of the current situation in accordance with the theory of style. In the second half of the 20th century, monumental sculpture was in a state of crisis. There was a gap between aspirations of modern art and tastes of society. In critical publications, the idea that monuments separate us from history and soften our attitude to its tragic pages had been slipping. As a result, alternative versions of monuments and memorials were developed. The most interesting examples are counter-monuments, which suggest a controversial attitude to the topic, in contrast to the traditional monument, where such meaning is expressed unequivocally. The counter-monument raises the question shifting the response to the sphere of public debates. Thus art participates in the live course of history and calls us to think. The idea of such an alternative is ambiguous and raises questions. It is not clear to what extent these projects are related to the general context of art. Can they really compete with traditional monuments? And, finally, is this attitude to the monumental form relevant in contemporary Russia? The text attempts to answer these topical issues of contemporary theory and practice of art.

Keywords: style, genre, monumentality, monument, Russian art, Russian sculpture, modern art, modern sculpture.

Monumental sculpture in Russia went through a unique path of transformation, during which not only were its characteristic qualities were, but also a process of critical reaction to monumentality as a whole emerged. The main point in this diverse criticism was the very problem of memorialization and monumentalization, because this type of

sculpture was and remains most susceptible to requirements of the socio-political situation, state ideology, and the like.

The difficulty lies in the fact that a monument is located in space, which can place it in a certain public domain, rather than as a work belonging to a specific author. Based on this, society (some part of it) may make claims about the appropriateness of the this work in an urban environment. The negative consequence is that almost any sculpture, regardless of its stylistic nature, will be perceived by a certain part of the public as fundamentally alien. The reasons for this may be different, but overall, even the most successful example of monumental sculpture, if it is installed in an already formed urban space, can cause a discussion about the justification for its placement there. This forces the artist to look for compromise solutions, realizing that the best way to please the public is to include the qualities of a specific "mimicry" in their work, so that it will be perceived as organically part of the space.

However, for all these problems, monumental sculptures may seem prosperous. Proof of this is the endless appearance in Russian cities, since the 1990s, of bronze sculptural works varying in style and quality. The last decades have become (not only in the Russian, but also in the global context) a peculiar epoch of perpetuation, which probably was originally a consequence of general democratization. Society realized its "rights" in relation to art and in accordance with its tastes. In general, our reasoning suggests that sculpture has significantly increased its relevance even in the modern world, despite criticism that could have been presented over the past hundred years. One aspect of such criticism was directed at the stylistics of monumental sculpture. The most obvious and recognizable type of monument is a statue or figurative composition. The realistic nature of its solution turned out to be, as time showed, a peculiar paradigm, not only in the Soviet Union and Russia, but also in other countries, despite the fact that the 20th century offered talented and seemingly promising ideas of alternative monumental sculpture. However, even they confirmed the invariance of that "standard," which is connected with the appearance, material, and figurative character of the monument.

Monumental sculpture contains a certain "text" (partially appearing on its pedestal), information postulating its significance for the space and for the society to which this space belongs, and which acts as a symbolic customer of such a sculpture. Therefore, the characteristic method of monumental and monumental-decorative sculpture is its allegory quality, when it appeals to the public on the basis of recognizable attributes of the figurative language. In principle, these should be recognizable, for which even such means as artistic "mimicry" can be used, a replication of classical examples.

Western European alternative: the rise of counter-monument

After the Second World War, monumental sculpture was in a state of crisis [1; 2] because of a gap between aspirations of modern art and tastes of society. Critical publications witnessed slippage of the idea that monuments separate us from history and soften our attitude to its tragic pages. As a result, alternative versions of monuments and memorials were developed. The most striking examples are counter-monuments that suggest a controversial approach to a topic, in contrast to the traditional monument that expressed that topic unequivocally. The counter-monument raises a question, shifting the response to the sphere of public debate. Thus, art participates in the living course of history and

calls us to think. The idea of such an alternative is ambiguous and raises questions. It is not clear to what extent these projects are related to the general context of art. Can they really compete with traditional monuments?

The issue of the counter-monument is mainly related to Germany; similar examples from England and America also raise attention. In Russia (Soviet Union), the situation was more complicated due to peculiarities of the Russian perception of "public art." Already in the 1950s, discussions appeared in Western Europe about whether it was worth building monuments at all, since after World War II new topics appeared that required memorialization. As time showed, a full-fledged alternative to the monumental tradition was not invented. However, monuments in the spirit of the 19th century were not quite acceptable either, and the general attitude to the shape of the monument changed. As for the role of modern society in the creation of a monument, the attitude of the public to the work and whether the monument remains in its place is more important.

In the second half of the 20th century, some famous modern sculptors created a seemingly new tradition for the monument. While it is unclear if this was a genuine alternative, it is possible to speak of a compromise, about the peculiar monumentalization of the modernist concept of form. Moreover, the main role was played by the individuality of one or another author, talent, energy, and activity. The most obvious example is Henry Moore, many of whose sculptures since the 1950s have been installed in cities of Western Europe and America. They became the "emblem" of the legitimization of modernism that had turned into something like a monument.

At the same time, it is a mistake to consider these works to be true monuments and that they are devoted to someone or installed in honor of some event. In one interview, Henry Moore said, "I don't work with architects except on these generalized problems like size. I don't like doing commissions in the sense that I go and look at a site and then think of something. Once I have been asked to consider a certain place where one of my sculptures might possibly be placed, I try to choose something suitable from what I've done or from what I'm about to do. But I don't sit down and try to create something especially for it" [3, p. 244]. Virtually all his monumental bronze works, taken by many for custom-made works or even monuments, are actually enlarged versions of his small sculptures, not originally associated with any particular site, nor with a focus on the intended environment, landscape, or architecture.

Bronze sculptures by Henry Moore exhibited in parks and squares of London, Berlin, Vienna, New York, Toronto, and other major cities remain his most controversial works. First, it is not clear that they are commensurate with the buildings towering near; it is obvious that the only possible environment for them is a natural landscape. Second, they cannot be called fully authentic works, since they were performed by teams of assistants who mechanically enlarged small sculptural models. Third, most of them are original reproductions of smaller sculptures by Moore from the 1930s or make use his ideas that were recorded in drawings from the pre-war era. The massiveness of these compositions is imaginary; they are hollow inside, and sometimes their volume is created from sheets of metal that are not masked at the joints. Installed on low stone or metal platforms, they are completely different from traditional monuments, despite the fact that they offer a new interpretation of the tradition. But if these forms are perceived precisely as monuments to modernism, as monuments that incorporate both the strengths and weaknesses of the sculpture of the 20th century, then their author's intention is more understandable.

Approximately the same can be said about large-sized sculptures by Alexander Calder and Louise Bourgeois, who embodied in their works the similar modernist monumentality. In comparison, Henry Moore was more diverse and worked with a variable bodily form, and this brought his works closer to traditional monuments. Moreover, his intonation always prevails, therefore their correlation with any particular subject or function can have only a formal meaning.

The monumental result of modernist history was Ossip Zadkine's *Destroyed City* (1951–1953) in Rotterdam. Creating this monument, Zadkine used techniques that brought his work closer to military monuments of the USSR and Eastern Europe. By itself, the form of *Destroyed City* reminded of cubist sculpture, but the explicit expression of the emotional state, enhanced by scale, turned it into a modernized version of a traditional monument. The expressiveness of *Destroyed City* is a consequence of the coincidence of plastic expressiveness with the context chosen for this work.

However, there were examples of a "direct alternative," when in one space one can see solutions for one topic in a particular variety of monuments. Thus, the most important event in the history of post-war sculpture was an international competition for the project of a monument to the *Unknown Political Prisoner* held in 1951 in London [4]. Characteristically, almost everywhere this competition was understood to be a politically engaged event, the purpose of which was to rethink the history of war in favor of the idea of confrontation between East and West. This interpretation was based on the proposal to install a future monument on a hill in West Berlin, where it would be perceived as the antithesis of the famous work of sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich and architect Jacow Belopolsky — the monument to the *Soldier-Liberator* (1949) in Treptower Park in East Berlin.

The leading stylistic direction of works submitted for the competition was abstraction. The work of the winner, British sculptor Reg Butler, looked less radical in comparison with abstract maquettes that won second prize, and the jury, giving him the grand prize, compromised with public tastes, choosing between realism and a completely abstract vision. However, the reaction of viewers of the competitive exposition was generally negative, since the sketch was perceived rather as an abstract-constructivist work, which caused a clear contradiction with the humanistic idea of its theme. The difference between the decision of the jury and the reaction of the public was so great that in the end the competition ended with virtually nothing. The Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner remains just a project. In a broad sense, this whole story marked a deep gap between the aspirations of modern art and the tastes of society.

The second example of the "direct alternative" is located on the territory of the former concentration camp in Buchenwald. Erected under the direction of Fritz Cremer, the leading sculptor of the GDR, the *Buchenwald Memorial* was fully completed by the early 1960s; its central theme was the memory of the feats of prisoners, especially Communists. The idea of Cremer's sculptures is clearly positive: their heroic character speaks above all of the victory of one ideology over another, communism over fascism. The tragic is replaced by the heroic, with the result that the memorial is similar in form and meaning to Soviet military monumental complexes.

The history of the *Buchenwald Memorial* continued after the unification of Germany, when in 1995 on the territory of the former concentration camp there appeared a memorial sign created by the modern German artist Horst Hoheisel. It is a plate built into the ground, on which the names of the nations whose representatives died in Buchenwald

are written in alphabetical order. This stove always has the same temperature, 36.5 degrees Celsius. The object is reminiscent of a small temporary obelisk, which was erected in 1945 in Buchenwald by its former prisoners. This is one of the most interesting alternative projects related to the perpetuation of the memory of the victims of Nazism.

In Germany and Austria there are many traditional modern monuments connected with "sick" themes of history. They have all the qualities of monumental sculpture: they are durable, raised in their scale, based on a pedestal, giving them of a dominant role. Among them*Memorial against War and Fascism* by Alfred Hrdlicka on Albertina Square in Vienna (1988–1991), stands out. Unfortunately, Hrdlicka's sculptures (which are remarkable in their own right) at best look like a modern decorative addition to the existing urban ensemble' at worst they cause a sharp rejection of the public. After a discussion began in the 1990s about Hrdlicka'z "unsuccessful" and "offensive" monument, a decision was made to hold a competition for a new memorial [5; 6]. Moreover, it was dedicated not to generalized ideas of memory, but directly to the victims of the Nazi regime, Austrian Jews. As a result, it was decided to entrust the implementation of this plan to British artist Rachel Whiteread.

Whiteread's most famous work is *House* (1993), a memorial to the destruction of one district in London's East End. The fate of *House* was such that it was demolished because of public discontent with this strange building that spoiled the view of the wasteland, where it was supposed to arrange a park [7]. Many other Whiteread sculptures in their semantic qualities are a continuation of the *House* idea. In the same way, they speak of non-existent space as a kind of ghost. Whiteread's materials also contribute to this feeling: white plaster, light concrete or transparent dehydrated rubber, visually bringing together sculptural "ghosts" with images of ghosts from modern mass culture. She embodied something similar in Vienna, creating a composition that received the unofficial name *Nameless Library* (2000). Its walls are like casts of bookshelves. We look at these "books" and this "library" as if from the side of the walls and see the sides opposite to the spine of books. Whiteread's sculpture is an alternative form that converges on the concept of counter-monuments, but in form and scale also appeals to traditional aesthetics.

One of the most well-known alternative monuments is the *Tilted Arc* by Richard Serra, which stood in Foley Federal Plaza in New York from 1981 to 1989 and was removed after public controversy. This case entered the history of modern art as an example of extreme misunderstanding of the artist and the public, and the collapse of illusions about public art in general. However, after some time the same Serra became one of the authors of the largest memorial project of recent years, the Berlin Monument to Holocaust victims (*Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*). The idea of its construction originated in the late 1980s, but was only realized in the early 2000s. The project of architect Peter Eisenman, which was approved as a result, was chosen during a representative and a long competition, and in fact represents a compromise between opposing concepts of understanding the memorial form. The final version of the monument arose after a rather long discussion of numerous projects, among which were radical proposals. For example, Horst Hoheisel called for the destruction of the Brandenburg Gate as a sign that the Holocaust's memory is inexpressible by means of art. Rudolf Herz and Reinhard Matz offered to lay out in cobblestone one kilometer of one of the German autobahns built during the Nazi period, and Gerhard Merz suggested building an "Open Mausoleum" in the center of Berlin, a giant hole in the ground. The project of Dani Karavan was a square in the shape of a Star

of David dotted with yellow flowers. The memorial built as a result consists of numerous rectangular concrete blocks. The only explanation for his concept is in the abstract, even abstract words of Peter Eisenman: "The experience of being present in presence, of being without the conventional markers of experience, of being potentially lost in space, of an un-material materiality: that is the memorial's uncertainty" [8; 9].

Uncertainty of meaning engenders a corresponding attitude to this memorial. One can only wonder at the ignorance of many Berliners as well as numerous tourists who think that this space is something like an exhibition of modern sculpture in the open air or a large public garden, where there is a lot of sun, shady paths, and places for recreation. Despite round-the-clock security protection for the memorial, it is covered by graffiti; guests of Berlin are photographed against its background, and some even sunbathe or do gymnastics… The uncertainty of the largest Holocaust memorial leaves many questions for researchers and potential authors of monuments. But in contemporary Western society this form of memorial is obviously the only form possible. It puts forward the question without offering a definite answer and transferring attempts of this answer to the sphere of public discussion.

In art of the last decades a fundamentally new concept of memorialization has emerged that American scholar James E. Young "counter-monument." The general meaning of counter-monument lies in its relation to the meaning of the work, unlike the monument, where the theme is unequivocally expressed. According to Young, artists are experiencing a deep distrust of monumental forms in light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis and a profound desire to distinguish through memory their generation from that of killers [10; 11]. Monuments separate us from history and soften our attitude towards it; they can have an anesthetic effect rather than connect us with the past. It is almost as if memory needs monuments, more than us, and as if the presence of the monument is more important than historical responsibility in society. Counter-monuments should not cause aesthetic pleasure; that would be a lie, hypocrisy in relation to memory. Counter-monuments are often short-lived, unlike traditional monuments. Their goal is a direct impact on people—not consolation, but arousing a sense of discomfort.

The most characteristic example of a counter-monument is the *Monument against Fascism* (1986) in Harburg, a satellite city of Hamburg. The authors of this project were Jochen Herz and Esther Shalev-Herz, who suggested installing a four-sided metal column twelve meters high. It was planned to be set up in such a way that it gradually went into the ground, year after year, disappearing from view. The outer surface of the column was covered with lead sheets that allowed it to remain soft enough to leave inscriptions on it. This was welcomed by the authors: those who approached the column could use a special stylus to apply their signatures or some sentences. The meaning of this came down to the fact that people, as it were, signed a collective letter in opposition to fascism [12]. As the column went underground, it revealed new clean surfaces to leave inscriptions. Ultimately, the monument was completely underground, leaving only a small elevation above its surface, which is now almost invisible.

The meaning of the counter-monument is to remind, insist, call the public to make a choice. And in itself (as a work of sculpture), it is not the embodiment of the image marked by these qualities. Among other examples that are close in concept to the idea of a counter-monument are *Aschrott-Brunnen Memorial* in Kassel (Horst Hoheisel, 1987), *The Place of the Invisible Memorial* in Saarbrücken (Jochen Herz, 1993), *The Way of Human*

Rights in Nuremberg (Dani Karavan, 1993), and *Memorial in Memory of the Book Burning* at Bebelplatz in Berlin (Micha Ullman, 1995).

Among alternative monuments are those that are more of an individual art project than "public art." Example include the enormous objects of Claes Oldenburg of the 1960s-1970s (*Clothespin* in Philadelphia; *Batcolumn* in Chicago; *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* in New Haven) that, despite their unusual look for the average person, can be perceived as an alternative to the traditional city monument. The same trend is manifested in the well-known *The Fourth Plinth* project that is regularly arranged on Trafalgar Square in London [13] where for a long time an empty pedestal for sculpture has been preserved.

What deserves special attention in this context are the "monuments" of Thomas Hirschhorn [14; 15]. These is a series of four temporary monuments dedicated to famous thinkers. The first, in honor of Benedict Spinoza, appeared in Amsterdam in 1999; the second for Gilles Deleuze in Avignon in 2000; in 2002 the third, in honor of Georges Bataille; and in Kassel for *documental*. The "monuments" were located in specific public places:in the Red Light District in Amsterdam, in Avignon and Kassel in areas of social housing. Only the first monument, Spinoza in Amsterdam, was connected with a specific place.

The case of Hirschhorn certainly deserves attention in the context of public art and contemporary art in general, regarding forms associated with history, memory, and eternity. His "monuments," temporary and, as it were, self-destructive, tell us about the exhaustion of ideas of the last serious trend of modern art, conceptualism. Moreover, all the efforts of art of the 20th century to develop an alternative to the traditional form of the monument were expressed in a "spontaneous" or "public" monument in relation to which it is not appropriate to apply criteria of art analysis.

Soviet Union: monumental sculpture and public art

The main issues of public art are drawn to sculpture in its broadest sense, from the statue to the installation and land of art. This is because it is the sculpture that possesses the quality of durability necessary to be present in an open public space. For example, monumental painting did not receive any serious development in the last century, if we consider Western art, where the idea of public art was developed. The situation was somewhat different in the Soviet Union, where monumental sculpture, monumental painting, and monumental-decorative art experienced a flourishing—in a specific expression, of course. The ideologists of Marxist aesthetics even projected this "flowering" to the global level, arguing that Soviet art was a leading example for "progressive artists" all over the world: "In the countries of socialism art gained the opportunity to break the framework of individualistic isolation, to become the voice of the people, party, state. The idea of political [party] art, its involvement in the fundamental interests of the people, inspired not only the artists of the socialist world, it had a profound effect on many artists of the capitalist countries, seeking to take a leading position in the common struggle for the ideals of socialism and friendship of nations" [16, p. 6].

Of course, this was not the case, since art in the USSR developed in an situation where there was clearly not enough air for the germination of something alive. It is unlikely that any of the famous masters of art in "capitalist countries" paid serious attention to the works of official Soviet artists after the 1920s, when avantgardists of the "Land of the Sovi-

ets" really excited Western culture. There was, however, one feature in Soviet art that had all the possibilities for fruitful development in the mainstream of public art: its underlined democratic, populist character.

Let us quote a fragment from Iraida Voeikova's *Khudozhniki-monumentalisty* [Monumentalist artists] (1969): "The ensemble of the city or the interior of a public building, in addition to its practical purpose, is designed to promote the ethical and aesthetic education of a person, especially a young person. V. I. Lenin in his conversation with A. V. Lunacharsky outlined the contents of his brilliant plan of monumental propaganda and recalled that Campanella intended to decorate the walls of the fantastic "Sun City" with frescoes that would serve as a visual lesson for young people on natural science and history, they aroused civil feeling, in a word, they would participate in the education and upbringing of new generations. "It seems to me, — Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] said further, — that this is far from naive and with a known changing could be learned and realized by us now… These words like the plan of monumental propaganda itself testify to the great importance Lenin attached to the educational role of monumental art how he understood its role in the urban ensemble" [17, p. 7].

The thoughts expressed in the cited fragment are sensible if they are perceived in isolation from the ideological load, and in many respects coincide with the ideas expressed during the appearance in the West in public art concepts of the late 1940s-1950s. Of course, for "public art" of the USSR, the Plan of Monumental Propaganda and subsequent phenomena connected with the state incentive system was of great importance for artists who carried out official orders. The tradition of making all forms of monumental sculpture from bronze or plaster busts to large-scale memorials became widespread in Eastern Europe. Monumental and decorative painting and decorative and applied art flourished during the Stalin era and beyond, which was, for example, due to the need for interior decoration for metro stations. In higher art institutes in Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities, the main faculties and departments were those where they taught precisely monumental art, a necessary element of state ideology.

In Soviet times, the Lenin statement "Art belongs to the people" was transformed from a casual statement by the "leader of the world proletariat" into a powerful ideological slogan. In connection with this formulation and, in addition, due to peculiarities of the Soviet attitude to private property, we can say with confidence that all official (we emphasize — *official*) art produced in the USSR from the 1920s to the early 1990s was *public* in its status. That is, it was public art in the formal sense of the term. Let us quote another characteristic example of Soviet art criticism: "The main stream [of Soviet monumental art] is emotional elevation, joyful perception of the beauty of the world, the desire to create for the Soviet person in public institutions for various purposes a festive harmonious living environment. Respect for the emotional world of the viewer made the art multifaceted; the art piece seeks to be friendly to the viewer" [18, p. 102].

Special programs were implemented that ennobled cities with small forms of sculpture that in their meaning coincided with the "percent for art" projects practiced in the West. In general, in the Soviet Union, in contrast to the Western world, there was not and could not be a public art problem, just as there could be no real alternative to official monumental and monumental-decorative art.

In recent years, texts of prominent Soviet art historians have become relevant again. Dedicated to problems of art synthesis, the relationship of sculpture and space and of ur-

ban and landscape, they are perceived today as convincing evidence that monumental art cannot develop normally in the absence of a rigid system of rules and restrictions; only in a situation of competent control over the artistic process can creative ideas obtain results amenable to objective professional evaluation. In the 1970–1980s, Soviet art theory went in the direction of the theoretical reconciliation of conservative realism of Soviet art with "progressive" art trends in the West. The reference point in this case were works of artists of the countries of the Eastern European "socialist camp"—Poland, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, as well as the works of Baltic artists who felt themselves quite free (relatively to their colleagues in Russia) under Soviet power. Some examples from modern Western art were also allowed, although not fully recognized by Soviet ideology, but nevertheless respected for professionalism and appeal to universal questions of form and space.

These texts—articles and books, some of which I quote—were imbued with a peculiar romance of renewal in relation to the then tendencies in Russian art, which, of course, was an illusion. But this romantic short-sightedness does not cancel the opinions expressed in them that were logically grounded and objective. An interesting example of this is a fragment from Stella Bazazyants' *Artist, space, environment. Monumental art and its role in the formation of the spiritual and material environment of man. Artist and city* (1989): "A significant feature of our time is the active attitude of the sculptor to space, the desire to give it environmental meaning, spiritualizing this space and filling it with certain idea content. The sculpture not only interacts with the space, concretizing its 'idea' with its pictorial language. The sculpture is also a component of the object-spatial environment, and often its dominant beginning. The space is not only the "field of activity' of the sculpture; it is part of a complex and integral plastic image. Moreover, space itself is the 'material' with which the sculptor 'sculpts' the image. Recall the 'holes' and emptiness in the sculptures of Henry Moore. These are like parts of a sculpture, they are 'not silent' — the more active the emptiness is, the heavier, weightier the mass is, the more connected it is with the surrounding, and in this case — the penetrating space" [19, p. 32].

In Soviet times, a harmonious, logically verified theory of monumental sculpture based on historical laws developed but, for unclear reasons, has been forgotten. As Natalia Polyakova (1982) wrote in *Sculpture and Space*: "Let us begin with the common, main relations that determine any form, be it a small figure or a monumental monument, the interdependence of form and space: 1) the statement of volume in space; 2) the conquest of space by volume (image of movement, life in sculpture); 3) the picturesqueness of the sculpture and its ability to express internal movement and create the illusion of movement — all that is carried out in sculpture due to the interaction of its specially treated surface layer (texture) with the enveloping external space" [20, p. 9].

A remarkable example of this is the book *Monumenty i goroda. Vzaimosvyaz' khudozhestvennykh form monumentov i gorodskoy sredy* [Monuments and cities. The relationship of monumental forms and the urban environment] by Valery Turchin (1982): "The monument… showed and shows history in ideas. Therefore, if the monument 'accepts' the type of image of a particular character, then the one that brought into the world a circle of ideas resolutely reformed it. Of course monuments depicting specific characters far from always really represent persons of such significance; more often there are attempts to 'present' such a character in the halo of the highest historical regularity. <…> The shallowness of the expressed ideas led to a deliberate falsity, and the significance of the aesthetic effect was not achieved. There are, finally, monuments whose image is deliberately false. Such

quality in them can occur due to the discrepancy between the historical significance of the idea expressed in the work and its actual reflection in the life of modern society. <…> The erection of numerous monuments to Bismarck in Germany at the beginning of our century can be a good example. <…> These were monuments of nostalgia for strong power, monuments of pronounced bourgeois nationalism" [21, p. 114].

In the same book there are interesting thoughts about memorial complexes and their relationship with the place of construction: "Forms of the memorial began to develop recently. Most often they exist outside the urban space, creating their own artistic formations—memorial spaces. <…> Any element in the space of the memorial is considered expositional, and the information richness of the environment is of great importance when signs and symbols are actively used. Space outside of its artistic reflection has a certain 'content' as involved in a heroic or tragic event. It is perceived as a kind of relic of the people… The pathos of affirmation is combined here with the spirit of tragedy" [21, p. 143]. And further: "With rare exceptions, bourgeois culture does not accept the forms of the monument as an expression of broad social ideals. The time has passed when the bourgeoisie wanted to speak on behalf of the whole of society. The social base of the monument in bourgeois society has collapsed" [21, p. 157].

Monumental sculpture refers to space due to its specific characteristics of volume, mass, and scale. The architectonics of the monument interact with the spatial environment, activating its landscape qualities. By now, thanks to centuries-old tradition and the twentieth century, the turbulent period of the genesis and development of modern art culture, the basic principles of the interaction of sculpture with its spatial context have been formed and theoretically justified. These principles are of a timeless nature, retaining their relevance at almost any time, any historical period.

Post-Soviet Russia: the restoration of monumental idea

In the 1990s, a new history of Russian art began, although something very important from Soviet times was preserved. First, the high status of official art has not undergone any serious reform. Proof of this are titles of "people's" and "honored" artists, absurd in their meaning but still appealing to conformist-minded art personalities. The problem of ownership has not yet been resolved in Russia, and therefore all Russian art located in open space can be considered as public as in Soviet times.

There are some new additions to this phantasmagoria. First is the renewal of ecclesiastical Orthodox art, which formally can also be considered "public." In general, the cooperation of Russian artists with the church is expressed in restoration projects, but for the construction of new churches, a restoration approach manifests itself, since pre-revolutionary "Russian" and "Neo-Russian" styles are recreated in their architecture and interior design. So is the restoration of the pre-revolutionary tradition of setting monuments to kings, and here it is worth mentioning the new tendency to create monuments to Orthodox saints, where the most landmark event is the recent history of the erection a monument to Prince Vladimir in Moscow near the Kremlin (2016).

All this correlates with the continuing tradition of creating large-scale military memorials, the most significant example if which is the complex on Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow, opened in 1995 to the 50th anniversary of the victory over the Nazis. In the center of the memorial, at the foot of the incredibly tall obelisk (more than 140 m), there is a

sculptural composition depicting St. George the Victorious striking an enemy serpent. One of the authors of the eclectic decoration of the monument is the famous Georgian artist Zurab Tsereteli, who since the mid-1990s has been the leading Moscow sculptor, and who was appointed president of the Russian Academy of Arts in 1997. Tsereteli's authorship also includes such an important projects from the 1990s as decorating Moscow's Manezhnaya Square with sculptural bronzes depicting something akin to a fairy-tale in combination with a pompous dome hanging over an underground shopping center. At the top of the glass dome is the same George the Victorious, in this case the symbol of Moscow. In 1997 Tsereteli erected on the Moscow River a colossal statue depicting Peter the Great (98 m), a genuine monument of the Yeltsin era combining insane pathos with stylistic confusion, as if it were a postmodern parody of a monumental sculpture. The sculptor has more or less successful works, such as the monument *Friendship is Forever* erected in 1983 (Moscow, Tishinskaya Square) in honor of the 200th anniversary of Georgia's accession to Russia, created together with the poet Andrei Voznesensky. The works of Zurab Tsereteli are too controversial both in style and meaning, and it is nearly impossible to perceive them as a manifestation of artistic thinking.

The example of Tsereteli is unique but not entirely unique —since the mid-1990s, Russia has been swept up by a real epidemic of bronze sculpture. One could cite many examples from the work of sculptors based in Moscow and working throughout the country. I confine myself to general characteristics of this phenomenon, which can be described as "monumental folly." The main reason for the indiscriminate distribution of bronze sculptures in Russian cities (with an obvious lack of intelligible expert motivation when installing them), ranging from monuments to prominent public and cultural figures and ending with "monuments" to animals, was the catastrophic erosion of criteria of critical evaluation. First, this is due to the misunderstood freedom of artistic creation, which cynically benefited artists endowed mostly with the talent of commercial promotion. Second, all this reflects the palette of tastes of the plutocratic bureaucracy and the new Russian society whose consciousness and worldview continues to rapidly deteriorate.

As for critical assessment, over the past decade it has been noticeably limited to new ideological frameworks according to which one does not have the right to evaluate something that supposedly hurts someone's feelings. Alternatively, oen has to right to be critical, but then must take into account possible consequences of carelessly words. It turns out that criteria for art are hardly applicable to the newest monumental art in Russia, and therefore we should conclude that this not art, but its surrogate. Therefore, with all the "public" of the new Russian monuments and variability that cannot be described, they cannot be considered a significant phenomenon in cultural history and, hopefully, in the future they will disappear from city streets, squares, and parks.

Of course, among all this there are exceptions, rare examples of alternative monuments. One is *Mask of Sorrow* by Ernst Neizvestny (mid 1990s), a monumental project dedicated to the memory of victims of political repression. Its forms approach in scale the works of Tsereteli, but differs in greater integrity and individual character. It can also be put on a par with such Soviet-era monuments as that of Yevgeny Vuchetich on Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd (1967) and the memorial of the Brest Fortress of Alexander Kibalnikov (1971). First, they are similar in their exaggerated figurativeness. Such sculptures, with all their inhuman dimensions, are in direct contact with the consciousness of an ordinary person without loading him with abstract allegories. The symbolism of such images

(with all obvious hyperbolization) is understandable to all, and therefore can be adopted regardless of the particular manner of performance.

A typical example of Russia's newest monumental sculpture is the work of sculptor Andrei Kovalchuk, *Monument to the Heroes of the First World War* on Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow (2014). From the standpoint of typology, it can be defined as the average between a monument to glory and a monument to the fallen, although stylistically this is a monument to glory, the aesthetics of which were developed in the Soviet era. The bronze figure of a soldier stands on a high pedestal. What is the point of this? The height of the pedestal indicates the status of this figure. But the author of the sculpture did not make efforts to individualize it. It turns out that this is an unknown soldier, but he somehow stands out against the general background, which is is complemented by a color composition, the national flag of Russia. Of course, this is close to the aesthetics of kitsch.

Is it possible to allow the use of poster aesthetics in monumental sculpture? Kovalchuk, a hardened realist, is embarking on a strange experiment and turns almost to pop art. Such techniques are in use as criteria for taste decline, along with the external preservation of the foundations of official style. For example, contemporary official Chinese monumental sculpture is characterized by similar experiments. And if we look for the most similar example, this is a composition installed on the center of Pyongyang, dedicated to revolutionary North Korea (*Mansudae Great Monument*, 1972–2012).

Monuments dedicated to the First World War have been erected in modern Russia according to a program approved by the Russian Military Historical Society. This program is called "Monumental Propaganda," which is not by chance associated with the famous Leninist plan of the same name. The new monumental propaganda is created as a postmodern project in which there is some logic, but with justification is more difficult. First, these are monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. This genre has a rich history mainly associated with the 1960–1980s and some "preface" and "epilogue." The topic we have chosen—the problem of monumentality in new Russian art—is addressed in the epilogue, and so I focus on the 1990s to 2010s. During this time, the theme of the Great Patriotic War acquired truly religious significance, leading to the final erosion of criteria for artistic evaluation. To date, victory in the Great Patriotic War has been made by propaganda to be the greatest event in Russian history. By this logic, military monuments should be created endlessly.

In fact, this situation speaks of bringing sculpture to the level of "media." One wonders whether othrs have compared these monuments, perhaps to find the author's style, compositional finds, spatial position. One may ask many questions, but they will remain unanswered. Criteria for artistic evaluation are not applicable to these monuments, as they are not applicable to any official event, modern political posters, official uniforms, etc. From the standpoint of form and style, art criticism will be perceived in this context as inappropriate and archaic; it is not needed in a situation where political motivation produces images in any material or, in postmodern terminology, in any media.

I will not consider monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, as their history began a long time ago, and functioning traditions remain strong enough to highlight something new and modern in these monuments. Most interesting is the fact of the appearance in Moscow of the "main" monument dedicated to the First World War, described above. Its author, Andrei Kovalchuk, is one of the most influential figures in Russian art today. Here a clarification is necessary: this does not mean he is widely known, or that

his works are of interest from the professional community. First, during the years of Zurab Tsereteli's presidency of the Russian Academy of Arts, this professional community finally lost its authority, and no alternative has appeared. Second, personalities such as Kovalchuk, although they work in our time, paradoxically are not contemporary artists. In essence, they are officials, with some oddities expressed in the fact that to justify their status they need not only to work in an office and move paper, but also to become authors of artistic creations. What for other officials is a harmless hobby, for them is evidence of bureaucratic status. The same can be said about Tsereteli, who floods Moscow and other cities (in Russia and elsewhere) with endless bronze sculptures, made as if their authors are not one sculptor, but several, and maybe more… The latter guess would be offensive in Soviet times, but a contemporary artist can only laugh at such claims.

This suggests an interesting conclusion. While official Russian sculptors follow a conservative Soviet style, they often allow liberties that would never have been allowed by the strict artistic councils of the Soviet era. Now such liberties can be motivated, paradoxically, by the artist's right to express themselves—but this is done by art officials who can hardly have such freedom… The same is true with the problem of authorship. Is this as it was before? For example, imaginary sculptor N works in the 1980s on a monument dedicated to the victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War. His composition involves an architectural solution, with large material and physical costs. For the execution of the project, teams of specialists are involved who do most of the work, but the main author has authority for general decisions of manner and style. When the style of the sculptures of the same author is different, it may mean that he was not at all involved in creating his own work, and did not even work on its model. Anything could happen in Soviet times, but such an attitude to monumental sculpture was a sign of hack work, a manifestation of disrespect for the viewer and for society.

Western culture in recent postmodern decades has taught Russian artists some practices, among which is the method of creating works based on Roland Barthes' idea of "The Death of the Author" and the concept of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by Walter Benjamin. These ideas justify the "substitution," as in the case of Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, who practically do not participate in the creation of works that, nevertheless, are sold for hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars as their works. They also justify and even structuralize examples of large-scale hack work, as is the case with some modern Western painters who use the conveyor method of painting and often use tools that resemble mops rather than brushes.

Monumental sculpture of the last two centuries has progressed in the direction of increasing the industrial component in the process of creation. Currently, this is an industry that has nothing in common with the methods of work of Donatello and Verrocchio, Michelangelo and Bernini (except, perhaps, similarity of materials). At the same time, the authors of monumental sculpture in modern Russia like to speculate about preserving traditions and other demagogy that negatively influences the mentality of a younger generation of artists.

The problem is that Russian art does not have the necessary basis for implementing projects along the lines of contemporary world currents. First, there is a lack of art education. The necessary reforms have not been carried out in Russian art institutes, and what remains is a conservative system of training that degraded in Soviet times. Young Russian artists do not have the proper level of thinking, and the Russian public *en masse* does not

have the proper level of tolerance and is generally disrespectful of works of art, especially in cases when the artwork does not correspond to the ideas of the average person about aesthetics and beauty. In this situation, it is necessary at least to launch a discussion about the future of art education. This is either a radical traditional way—a return to the past and "mummifying" the future of art culture—or a decisive turn to determine the identity of Russian art in the context of global trends, a path of innovative development. None of these paths can be accepted by the majority, and therefore the education of public taste is also of great importance.

* * *

One contentious issue in the practice of developing modern art is ownership. In particular, this applies to large-format sculpture that suggests placement in an open (public) space. An object of art may have certain qualities of belonging, at least depending on location. For example, a system of conventions forms a certain relation to a work exhibited in a museum, gallery, or exhibition hall. Such an elite space can create an inner feeling of piety towards an object in this context. As if by itself, such a space implies that the objects of art displayed have value recognized by experts whose professional authority motivates a respectful attitude to the works of art that they approve.

It is more difficult to perceive a work placed in an egalitarian space, such as a square or a public park. Here the system of conventions acts less strongly, and the main criterion for evaluation is the public's readiness for perceiving this art. And it is difficult to predict such readiness, and therefore even a temporary display of contemporary art in any open (public) space is always at risk of unpredictable consequences. There are many of examples where the public does not accept works exhibited in this way and behaves aggressively towards them, perceiving them as alien and inappropriate. This leads to various cases of vandalism, such as covering such objects with graffiti or paint. The aggressive part of the public subordinates such objects to themselves. Absolute tolerance to contemporary art is rare even in Western Europe; in Russia everything is more complicated because the concept of value of art has always been conditional and beyond public consensus.

As a result of the disappearance of ideological attitudes, and thanks to the emergence of new regional leaders seeking to leave a mark on history, Russian cities since the mid-1990s have been filled with numerous examples of urban sculpture in a wide variety of forms. Most of it has a kitsch character and, at a minimum, is a manifestation of an individual's artistic position. Also, in Russia "public sculpture" continued the tradition of creating pretentious monuments dedicated to outstanding state and cultural figures or to significant historical events.

Is the search for an alternative to the traditional monument relevant for contemporary Russian art? On the one hand, in Russia there are enough examples of individual attempts to create alternative monuments, although they are more likely to exist as projects. Russian society does not have a clear value orientation relative that would make it possible to predict the reaction to such monuments. In addition, the Russian public overall is negatively disposed towards any new artistic form largely because of its lack of awareness. At the same time, it should be understood that an update is necessary, because the language of art in principle can be understood by everyone. Perhaps in the foreseeable future it will be possible to talk about the Russian version of monuments that encourages the public to engage in fruitful discussions, rather than dictating truisms.

References

1. Causey, Andrew. *Sculpture since 1945*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
2. Senie, Harriet. *Contemporary public sculpture: tradition, transformation and controversy*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
3. Moore, Henry. *Writings and Conversations*. Edited by Alan Wilkinson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
4. Lapp, Alex. "Memories of a Monument: The Competition for a Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner, London 1953 — a Discussion of the Powers of Sculpture that Never Existed". In *Memory & Oblivion. Proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art held in Amsterdam, 1—7 September 1996*, edited by Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel, 1051–7. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999.
5. Matt, Gerald, Kunsthalle Wien, und Stadt Wien, Hrsg. *Judenplatz Wien 1996. Wettbewerb Mahnmal und Gedenkstätte für die jüdischen Opfer des Naziregimes in Österreich 1938–1945*. Wien: Kunsthalle Wien, 1996.
6. Widrich, Mechtild. "The Willed and the Unwilled Monument. Judenplatz Vienna and Riegl's Denkmalpflege". *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, no. 3 (2013): 382–98.
7. Whiteread, Rachel. "Carving Space: Interview with David Sylvester". *Tate*, no. 17 (1999): 40–7.
8. Rauterberg, Hanno. *Holocaust Memorial Berlin: Eisenman Architects*. Baden AG: Lars Müller Publishers, 2005.
9. Barris, Roann. "Architectures of memory and counter-memory: Berlin and Bucharest". *Radford University*. Accessed September 1, 2018. http://www.radford.edu/~rbarris/research/Architectures%20of%20Memory%201.pdf.
10. Young, James. "The counter-monument: memory against itself in Germany today". *Critical inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 267–96.
11. Young, James. "Memory and Counter-Memory: The End of the Monument in Germany". *Harvard design magazine*, no. 9 (1999): 1–10.
12. Miles, Malcolm. "Remembering the Unrememberable — the Harburg Monument Against Fascism (Jochen and Esther Shalev Gerz, 2009)". *Dokumentas, Straipsnis leidinyje: Meno istorija ir kritika*, no. 6 (2010): 63–71.
13. Macintyre, James. "From Beckham to Lapper, the ever-changing cast". *The Independent*, August 7, 2008. Accessed September 1, 2018. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/from-beckham-to-lapper-the-everchanging-cast-887463.html.
14. Hirschhorn, Thomas, and Mark Rappolt. *Where do I stand? What do I want?* London: ArtReview Ltd., 2007.
15. Hirschhorn, Thomas, Lisa Lee, and Hal Foster. *Critical laboratory: the writings of Thomas Hirschhorn*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013.
16. Kantor, Anatoly. *Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo XX veka*. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1973. (In Russian)
17. Voeikova, Iraida. *Khudozhniki-monumentalisty*. Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1969. (In Russian)
18. Lebedeva, Victoria. *Sovetskoe monumental'noe iskusstvo shestidesiatykh godov*. Moscow: Nauka, 1973. (In Russian)
19. Bazazyants, Stella. *Khudozhnik, prostranstvo, sreda. Monumental'noye iskusstvo i yego rol' v formirovanii dukhovno-material'nogo okruzheniya cheloveka. Khudozhnik i gorod*. Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1982. (In Russian)
20. Polyakova, Natalia. *Skul'ptura i prostranstvo. Problema sootnosheniya ob"ema i prostranstvennoy sredy*. Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1982. (In Russian)
21. Turchin, Valery. *Monumenty i goroda. Vzaimosvyaz' khudozhestvennykh form monumentov i gorodskoy sredy.* Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1982. (In Russian)

Received: October 1, 2018
Accepted: November 29, 2018

Author's information:

Alexander O. Kotlomanov — PhD, Assistant Professor; kotlomanov@yandex.ru