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Модерн II (середина XX века). Экспансия и сопротивление

Демченко А. И.

Аннотация. Очерк посвящен периоду Модерна II (1930–1950-е гг.), когда магистральным вектором искусства стали реализм, демократизм и классичность, поставившие в центр внимания фигуру рядового современника. Несмотря на господство этих качеств, в искусстве сохранялась сильная оппозиция, питаемая романтическим мироощущением и радикальными «левыми» тенденциями. Популярные в начале века авангардные течения в этот период отошли на второй план, продолжая развиваться преимущественно в сторону деформации реальности и абстракции. При этом сюрреализм стал самым влиятельным авангардным направлением эпохи, парадоксально сочетая натуралистическую точность деталей с алогизмом подсознания и миром сновидений. Параллельно с этим развивался неоклассицизм, возрождавший античные идеалы и дух классики прошлых эпох. Художественные поиски того времени во многом определялись суровыми историческими испытаниями: «негативный титанизм» тоталитарных режимов и катаклизмы войны вынуждали творцов защищать естественные человеческие ценности. В поисках опоры деятели культуры часто обращались к героическому прошлому, сохраняя при этом вопреки давлению эпохи особое жизнелюбие и «молодость духа». В конечном итоге именно этот созидательный оптимизм позволил искусству середины столетия одержать верх над силами зла и разрушения.

EN

Modern art II (the mid-20th century). Expansion and resistance

A. I. Demchenko

Abstract. This essay examines the period of Modernism II (the 1930s-1950s), when the mainstream artistic vector shifted toward realism, democratism, and classicality, placing the figure of the ordinary contemporary at the center of attention. Despite the dominance of these qualities, a strong opposition persisted in art, fueled by a romantic worldview and radical “leftist” trends. Avant-garde movements, prominent at the beginning of the century, receded into the background during this period, continuing to evolve primarily toward the deformation of reality and abstraction. Meanwhile, surrealism emerged as the most influential avant-garde movement of the era, paradoxically combining naturalistic precision of detail with the alogism of the subconscious and the world of dreams. Simultaneously, neoclassicism developed, reviving antique ideals and the spirit of classical eras. The artistic quests of that time were largely shaped by severe historical trials: the “negative titanism” of totalitarian regimes and the cataclysms of war forced creators to defend fundamental human values. In search of firm ground, cultural figures frequently turned to the heroic past while maintaining a distinct vitality and a “spirit of youth” despite the immense pressures of the era. Ultimately, it was this creative optimism that allowed mid-century art to triumph over the forces of evil and destruction.

The mid-20th century essentially encompassed three decades: the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The artistic culture of that period differed in many ways from the culture that dominated the early part of the century. In the most general sense, this difference can be defined by such concepts as realistic tendency, democratic principles and classicality.

The *mainstream* of artistic development was connected with the affirmation of these qualities. However, there was a persistent and quite strong opposition to this creative process throughout the first half of the 20th century.

This opposition was rooted in a romantic worldview – naturally, in its purely contemporary manifestations. Let us imagine some of them, using specific examples.

The Austrian composer *Anton Webern* was one of the leading representatives of the Second Viennese School, founded by his teacher *Arnold Schoenberg* (we will turn to his music later). Their work is often, and quite rightly, associated with the ideas of Expressionism. However, Webern was far from the aesthetic criteria of this movement;

he was going his own way, developing a unique style of composition. Establishing the principles of twelve-tone technique, the composer took the refinement of sound texture to its limits, resulting in imagery that appeared completely detached from the familiar, soaring to the heights of abstraction.

Along the way, he invented fundamentally new, “exclusive” techniques, including the so-called *Pointillism* effect (from the French word “dot”), in which a common line was assembled from individual highlights and “fragments” freely scattered across the soundscape. We must admit that even now, many decades after writing music like the **Piano Variations, Op. 27**, it still sounds quite unusual, strange, paradoxical and even extravagant to us.

Webern was one of the most consistent adherents of the esoteric, self-contained culture “for the initiated”, associated with the extreme forms of the artistic avant-garde of the early 20th century, which were distinguished by a purely subjectivist, individualistic message. His work resonated with the mindset of that segment of the intelligentsia that preferred to live in “the kingdom of the spirit” isolated from the world.

This estrangement from real life is brilliantly depicted in the Utopian novel **The Glass Bead Game** (1930-1942) by the German writer *Hermann Hesse*. But the character’s fate ended in a disappointing outcome and the dream of an ideal spiritual refuge turned out to be impossible.

The same theme is expressed in another major German novel, *Thomas Mann’s Doctor Faustus* (1947). The tragedy of the main character lies both in the fact that, due to certain character traits, he makes a deal with the devil (this fantastical situation inspired the title of the work), and that the life of this brilliantly gifted individual ends in complete collapse.

Tragic reflections on the fate of the intelligentsia also permeated literature based on existentialist philosophy, which developed primarily in France (*Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus*).

A person could be quite closely connected to the realities of that time and yet stand in sharp opposition to them. As an example, one can take the **Piano Concerto** (1950) by the French composer *André Jolivet*, whose sound texture comes from the Industrial age, directly based on one of its offspring – jazz music. But what lies behind this?

Listening to the finale of the concerto, it becomes perfectly clear that the composer is drawing on the techniques of jazz improvisation. Painting a harshly urbanized picture of a celebration, he uses broken melodic lines, “choppy”, grotesque rhythms and fierce dynamics to imbue it with the tone of furious, dark orgiastic frenzy. This destructive sabbath of gloom hides an anarchic rebellion and the disharmony, the cesspool, the madness of life in a large modern city.

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Marina Tsvetaeva’s poem **Oh, Tears in My Eyes** “with utter openness” (according to Osip Mandelstam) reveals a categorical and absolute opposition to the world as it had become in the 1930s, to the historical time in which she had to live. It was written in 1939, the year when the Second World War began and when the poet returned from exile to her homeland. The phrase “mountain of black” refers to the fascist plague that swept through Western Europe, and it refers to the Stalinist regime in the USSR.

Thus, with her characteristic maximalism, the poet expressed the tragedy of incompatibility with the attitudes and brutal morality of totalitarianism (“*Yes, I refuse to be // In Bedlam of non-man. // Yes, I refuse to see // How wolves of squares do slain. // Yes, I refuse to wail // With field sharks of all ranks. // Yes, I refuse to sail // Down the stream of backs*”) (Tsvetaeva, 1939). She expressed it through the outburst of withering passionate hatred, through the agony of despair. And, as we know, Tsvetaeva made her choice in this resistance – shortly after returning to her homeland, she committed suicide, confirming the decision programmed in this poem (“*It’s time to return back // My ticket to the Lord*”) (Tsvetaeva, 1939).

The same tragic rejection of reality permeates *Mikhail Bulgakov’s* novel **The Master and Margarita** (1929-1940), but it is expressed more calmly, often through mocking irony to miserable life. A true culture of feelings and thoughts in that environment is doomed to internal emigration, to the escape from life into the world of detached contemplation.

In this, Bulgakov could have been supported by the French composer *Olivier Messiaen*. His work drew primarily from two sources: Catholic dogma and the world of birds. In the age of militant unbelief, he developed spiritual themes with remarkable persistence, often taking on mystical overtones in his interpretation.

The works of this kind include the oratorio *The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ* and the orchestral composition *Colours of the Celestial City*. His fascination with bird songs found sound expression in such works as the piano cycles *Awakening of the Birds* and *Catalogue of Birds*, as well as the suite for piano, brass and percussion *Exotic Birds*.

The combination of both can be heard, for example, in the piece **The Virgin’s First Communion** (referring to the Virgin Mary) from the piano cycle **Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus** (1944): the intrinsic beauty of detached contemplation (a sublime choral progression in the lower registers), complemented by the “singing of the fowl of the air” (exquisitely whimsical fioritura in the transparent “blue” of the higher register).

Soaring in the “transcendental world” of such images, detached from reality, the bearers of artistic imagination inevitably sought oblivion in art. Messiaen’s compatriot, the poet *Constant Burniaux*, reflects on this in one of his poems calmly, soberly and even humorously and wonders that someone who suffers hardship nevertheless writes a poem those days.

As a commentary on the quoted words, the following can be stated. If poetry was among the leading forms of artistic expression at the beginning of the 20th century, then it withdrew into the shadows by the middle of the century.

Many poets from the previous period changed poetry to prose (Marina Tsvetaeva was among them). If one wrote poetry, it often resembled prose based on rhyme and rhythm – such as the above-mentioned Burniaux’s poem, or the work of the Russian poet *Alexander Tvardovsky*, who relied on Nekrasov’s narrative style. In other words, the era of realism was primarily a “prose” era.

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Avant-garde artistic movements, which played a significant role in the early 20th century and then asserted themselves with renewed vigor in the second half of the century, were put in the background by the middle of the century.

Nevertheless, “leftist”, radical tendencies, having stepped back, continued their development – primarily in the direction of a sharply expressed deformation of reality, even to the point of complete abstraction from it. Here are some specific illustrations of both.

Russian-born *Ossip Zadkine* chose an extremely dramatic perspective for his monument **The Destroyed City** (1953) erected in Rotterdam – a rearing, literally twisted human figure, cast in bronze as if from disparate planes. The sculpture resonates with a passionate reproach to the past war, and the expressionistic intensity of the image is compelling and fully consistent with the semantic message stated in the title (Zadkine was one of the leading representatives of Expressionism in European sculpture).

Regardless of the embodiment of the motif, defined by the author’s title, **Mother and Child** (1944), the typical work by English sculptor *Henry Moore* impresses with its plastic power, rhythmic integrity and inner tension, which resonate with the dynamic intensity so characteristic of 20th-century sculpture. The spirit of primordiality, emanating from the “barbarism” of the early 20th century, found a perfectly natural expression through abstract forms.

As we see, avant-garde artists inevitably responded to the call of the times, sometimes compromising with reality to varying degrees, while still reserving the right to freely deform it. An illustrative example is *Pablo Picasso*’s painting **Jacqueline with Crossed Hands** (1954).

Echoes of the Cubist style, so important to his early work, are quite evident here. The artist forms a portrait bust by dividing it into component volumes of varying sizes. However, the deliberate deformation of the figure’s actual contours and the resulting exaggeration serve in this case to enhance expressiveness, conveying the model’s unique grace.

The most specific instance of contact with the realities of life is found in the artistic practice of *surrealism*, which, having originated in the 1920s, became the most influential avant-garde movement in the mid-20th century.

In painting, it proved a paradoxical parallel to the then-significant realism not only in its name (*surrealism*), but also in the often extraordinary naturalness of its depiction of individual real forms. Their superb reproduction, through virtuoso painting techniques, achieved the illusion of authenticity so that any phantasmagoria seemed to become a tangible reality.

However, in other respects, this is not so much “*super-realism*”, but “*trans-realism*” (the conventional translations of the term *surrealism*), since the reproduced real forms are taken out of their natural context, completely lose their usual interconnections and appear in combination with various kinds of irrealities as inventions of an unconstrained fiction.

In surrealism, antilogism and pathology become a conscious and necessary creative principle. It proclaimed the subconscious (instincts, dreams, hallucinations) as the source of art and called for trust in the elements of intuitive insights, infantile *thoughtlessness*, and “adult *madness*” (morbid delirium, nightmares, fantastical visions, day-dreams of the bizarre and “forbidden”).

Surrealism found its concentrated and, perhaps, most vivid expression in the work of the Spanish artist *Salvador Dalí*. His unbridled imagination relied on the phantoms of the subconscious, conveyed through a sophisticated, naturalistic interpretation of things, objects and living beings.

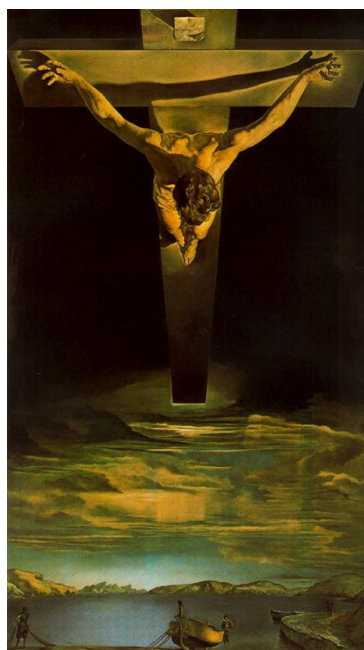


Illustration 01. Salvador Dalí. “The Christ of Saint John on the Cross”. 1951. Canvas, oil. 205 × 116 cm. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, The United Kingdom

Let us take his painting **Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee Around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening** (1944) as an illustration. This extremely detailed title inspires confidence by the imaginable situation of a terrible dream, in which, among all sorts of other unimaginable things, an elephant is hovering in the air, and flying tigers are ready to fall upon a sleeping naked woman.

The object of their “attack” is Gala, a Russian woman who first inspired *Paul Éluard*, the leader of surrealism in French poetry, and then Salvador Dalí, who painted her countless times from every aspect and with varying narrative content.

Sometimes, especially in religious paintings, Dalí complemented his characteristically careful brushwork with classical compositional techniques, as can be seen in the painting **The Christ of Saint John on the Cross** (1951), which seems to imply the image of the crucified Jesus as seen by the artist through the vision of his beloved disciple, the author of one of the Gospels and the Apocalypse. Although based on the hidden meaning, Dalí reached profound hyper-generalizations in such works, plumbing the mysteries of being and proclaiming the foreknown sacrifice of all living things.

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This work by Salvador Dalí, despite its unexpected interpretation of the sacred theme (the crucifixion, raised high above the ground), clearly aligns with a movement that was exceptionally widespread in the first half of the 20th century and was by no means avant-garde in nature. This refers to *neoclassicism* (“new classicism”), a stylistic movement that became extremely representative of the art of that period.

Neoclassicism found its clearest expression in sculpture, where it was often embodied in forms reminiscent of ancient models. In this regard, the artistic legacy of the French master *Aristide Maillol* stands out – a legacy that is based on numerous nude female figures. The last of them is known as **Harmonie** (1944).

Here one can feel direct echoes of ancient Greek classical art, but this is not something ideal or conventional; it is *real* human beauty. Moreover, it is the beauty of a 20th-century person: we can judge by the type of her face or hairstyle – such things could not have existed in ancient times.

Maillol always strove to imbue his works with some kind of general content. The state embodied in this sculpture undoubtedly corresponds to its programmatic title. It is obviously resonant with the features of peace and profound humanity of the image, conveyed through the extremely soft plasticity.

By the way, it is impossible not to notice the striking contrast in the processing of material compared to the sculpture of the early 20th-century, that was often called “*anti-plastic*” (let us remember some works by Rodin, Bourdelle and Golubkina).

Speaking of the *harmony* characteristic of this work, it should be emphasized that it was created in occupied Paris as opposed to the hardships of the times. It is not difficult to see a reflection of the constant qualities inherent in that period, which manifested themselves regardless of external circumstances.

It should also be added that this statue exudes a perceptible zest for life. The ineradicable optimism characteristic of a person of the mid-20th century is also reflected in the following humorous detail. While working on *Harmonie*, the sculptor, being in his eighties, joked: “*Soon I will stand before the Almighty. Let’s see if his beard is as luxuriant as mine!*”



Illustration 02. Aristide Maillol. “Harmonie”. 1944. The Musée Maillol, Paris, France

The neoclassicism of the period under consideration was a part of a broader artistic movement that developed under the auspices of *classicality*. In the direct sense of the word, it consisted in the orientation of modern art towards the spirit and stylistic features of the artistic classics of previous eras.

If we turn once again to sculpture, and in particular to the monument genre, then, in contrast to its metamorphosis observed in the early 20th century (let us remember the monument to Gogol by N. Andreyev or the monument to Dostoevsky by S. Merkurov), we find a return to a centuries-old, high tradition. In accordance with this academic canon, the glorification of significant historical figures of the past by means of sculpture was carried out by emphasizing features of sublimity and poetry.

Two bronze monuments, erected in the 1950s and dedicated to great men of Russian culture, provide a complete picture of this artistic direction: a **monument to Alexander Pushkin** (1957, St. Petersburg, Arts Square) by *Mikhail Anikushin*, and a **monument to Pyotr Tchaikovsky** (1954, at the Moscow Conservatory, which bears his name) by *Vera Mukhina*.

A tendency toward classicism was highly characteristic of the national schools of the Soviet East, where an intensive process of introduction to European artistic culture was underway. Following the high tradition, the representatives of these schools achieved a fundamentally new quality primarily through a more or less strongly expressed national emphasis.

Sergo Kobuladze's illustrations to Shota Rustaveli's poem **The Knight in the Panther's Skin** (1937) are exemplary in this regard. The 12th-century poet's artistic legacy, a source of pride for Georgia, inspired majestic images in which the artist succeeded in combining universal significance with a deeply national character. The classical precision of the graphic relief allows for the superb expression of the ideal type of male and female beauty as it is perceived by the inhabitants of this small but highly distinctive country.

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Having considered examples of neoclassicism and classicality in the visual arts, we have reached the *artistic mainstream* of the mid-20th century. The easiest way to understand the direction in which its main features developed is by comparing the creative aspirations of those who moved from the early to the middle of the 20th century, and more specifically, from the 1920s to the 1930s.

Let us take the German poet and playwright *Bertolt Brecht* as an example. In the 1920s, his protagonist is a man free from moral conventions, often driven by base instincts. The characters of his works are vagrants, anarchists and criminals. Thus Brecht expressed his rebellion against bourgeois propriety, which was one of the forms of the radical leftist reaction of young people against fossilized values and principles. In **The Ballad of the Pirates** (1918), praising the habits of "real men", he exclaims frankly and not without cynicism: "*Like noble beasts they graze and play...*" (Brecht, 1919).

In the 1930s, Brecht's work underwent a radical transformation: no exoticism, but restraint and realistic concreteness. The essence became a sober, harsh truth without embellishment. He spoke simply and clearly about matters important to a great number of people. The defining task Brecht set for himself was to chronicle the crimes committed by Nazism in Germany.

One of the pieces of this chronicle is a poem **The Last Wish**, but in essence it is not even *vers libre* (free verse), since the narrative has neither rhyme nor rhythm. It is just ordinary prose, but broken into a ladder of lines – an extreme example of "non-poetic" versification, discussed in connection with the general position of poetry in the hierarchy of the arts at that historic period.

This narrative is written in the style of a newspaper report, dry in tone, avoiding any kind of author's comments and "lyrical digression." The *fact* should speak for itself about the extent of violence taking place in the country and the resistance to it. This was one of the aspects of the "harsh realism", to which we will return later.

When discussing the artistic process of the period under consideration, the first half of the 1930s deserves special mention. This was a time of distemperance and strenuous pursuits, when new ethical and aesthetic principles were asserted amid a fierce struggle of contradictions. The global economic crisis of 1929-1933 and the gradual recovery from it can be seen as a certain parallel to what was happening in art.

By the mid-1930s, the situation began to stabilize, which led to clarification of style and imagery in artistic creation. In this regard, the oratorio **Joan of Arc at the Stake** completed in 1935 by the French composer *Oscar-Arthur Honegger* is very indicative. Its central episode captures the essence of the work and the meaning of the events that took place in the mid-1930s.

At the moment of the dramatic climax, the character's emotional torment is revealed through intensely expressive declamation. Her frantic cries are heard against the backdrop of catastrophic surges and collapses of the choir and orchestra. And at the breaking point of tension, a major note emerges like rays of sunlight breaking through storm clouds. Its hymnal radiance heralds a desired insight, followed by a cathartic enlightenment that transforms into tender peace of a lullaby. The inner pathos of this "modulation" lies in overcoming life collisions through the communion of the individual with the harmony of national life.

It should be mentioned immediately about another crucial semantic "modulation". *Neoclassicism*, which grew out of an appeal to classical traditions, primarily and fundamentally meant, in artistic and aesthetic terms, a return to civilized forms of existence. This is clearly evident in the evolution of the works by *Igor Stravinsky*, the central figure of this movement in world musical art.

He began experimenting with this style as early as the 1920s, gradually overcoming the "barbarism" of his early work (the peak of its destructive and aggressive tendencies was the ballet *The Rite of Spring*, 1913). A true breakthrough into a new quality came with the opera-oratorio **Oedipus rex**, written in 1927.

Indeed, already in 1927, Stravinsky was discovering the horizons of mid-20th-century art. A year later, *Maurice Ravel's* famous *Bolero* appeared, which also outlined the artistic conception of that period, but in a completely different vein (we will return to this work a little later).

The given dating indicates the thinness and relativity of the boundaries between historical periods. For example, the young Shostakovich created 24 Preludes for piano and Piano Concerto No. 1 in 1933. These were works that seemed to date back in their style to the 1920s.

Consequently, at the intersection of historical periods, artistic phenomena that are both ahead of their time and, conversely, seemingly behind the times, can quite naturally coexist.

Returning to Stravinsky's opera-oratorio, we find that its essence lies in the affirmation of certain universally significant principles, principles of order and objectivity, and, accordingly, in the rejection of everything excessively individual and subjective. This idea is presented through the use of classical myth (Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*) and austere Latin (a relic language sanctified by millennia of Western civilization).

In the musical embodiment, this is reflected in the high classical style, with its correct modernization (in particular, the urban undertones of the intonation-rhythmic vocabulary are quite perceptible). The opening bars sound like the severe demand on man to subordinate his personal impulses to the command of History, and History itself appears in a fearsome guise.

This motivation and the corresponding atmosphere of clearly modern origins, anticipated the features that later would result in the impersonal imperative recorded in art as an attribute of totalitarianism (more on this below).

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The defining quality of the majority of works in the mid-20th century was their *realistic tendency*, which was almost inextricably linked to the unconditional *democratic nature* of artistic thought as such and the corresponding method of presenting artistic material. This is why the ordinary man, a typical representative of his time, became the central figure in the art of those years.

This is particularly evident in countless examples of literature and cinema most widely represented in the USSR. This tendency was less distinct in other forms of art, but it was undoubtedly dominant even there.

If we take the example of classical music, *Georgy Sviridov's* vocal cycle **Songs to Words of Robert Burns** provides a striking embodiment of the theme of the common man with a correspondingly emphasized democratic artistic expression. In the Scottish poet's verses, the Russian composer found everything he needed to reveal the full range of positive aspects of a national character.

The portrait depicts a strong, courageous and straightforward man, who is able to feel and think deeply despite the simplicity and clarity of his view of life. Expressive melody, clear genre features and the reliance on the plot give the image a distinctive character and visible concreteness.

The Sviridov's cycle was written in 1955, when the period under consideration was already approaching its end. Almost two decades earlier, the German composer *Carl Orff*, drawing on various traditions and in similar style, became essentially the first in that period to express the poetry of folk life in all the diversity of its manifestations. This was achieved in the grandiose scenic cantata **Carmina Burana**, which means "*Songs of Beuern*".

For the sake of objectivity, it should be noted that this masterpiece was created in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, which was, as is well known, the seat of Hitler's fascism, and at the precise time of the absolute dominance of the Nazi regime. Thus, it is difficult to agree with the general belief that true art died in Germany during those years.

One of the most characteristic movements of this work revealing the German origins of the folk song material used by composer is **No. 7 "Floret silva"**.

The realistic tendencies of the time powerfully captivated even those who, aesthetically, were in the opposite camp of art.

For example, even the French artist *Henri Matisse*, the former leader of Fauvism, can slack his endeavors for conventionally deformed figures and a riot of colors, in order to convey the charm of a model in his sketch **Blue Eyes** (1935) using only modest means. Moreover, the depicted woman claims nothing extraordinary. On the contrary, her appearance is ordinary, plain, modest.

Now *Pablo Picasso* can also see himself as a quite ordinary, modest man, depicted in his day-to-day, prosaic existence. His **Self-Portrait** (1929) seems to say:

- "After all, I'm just like everyone else";
- or "I am human, nothing that is human is alien to me" (the words of an ancient Greek philosopher, usually attributed to Karl Marx);
- or, rewording the title of Brecht's famous play, "*Frenchman Equals Frenchman*" (the artist portrayed himself in the guise of a typical Parisian).

During those years, many painters strove for absolute realistic images – until they sometimes began to resemble a photograph. Of course, this primarily concerns the portrait genre. Let us turn to the works of *Nicholas Roerich's* son, *Svetoslav*, who spent most of his life in India. He was undoubtedly a Romantic by nature. But the needs of the time urged him to work in a strictly realistic manner, as we find in the portrait **Jawaharlal Nehru** (1942).

Jawaharlal Nehru went down in history as the "*builder of a new India*", a fighter for its independence and its political idol. His high reputation was supported by the fact that he was a man of virtue and possessed great inner beauty. And this is clearly felt in the portrait, although Nehru is depicted in a completely realistic and very ordinary manner, without any pathos.

However, as a rule, artists continued to be artists and did not turn into "photographers". That is why they often tended to *poetic realism*. In this regard, the picture **Devika Rani Roerich** (1946) by *Svetoslav Roerich* is indicative. This is a portrait of his wife, an Indian movie star and grandniece of the writer Rabindranath Tagore.

This true-to-life depiction of a young woman is poetic in itself, due to the expression of her face and the turn of her body with a yellow sari (a traditional national costume, a long strip of fabric wrapped around the body). In addition, she is surrounded by the picturesque greenery (starting with the bouquet of flowers in her hands). And the portrait evolves into a generalizing image – an image of an amazing, blooming, fragrant land.

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The unique aspects of poetic realism can be found in the paintings of the American artist *Rockwell Kent*. He revealed the stark beauty of the North to art, recreating the majesty of ice and rock and the vastness of endless expanses of water in romanticized tones.

Like Sviridov's aforementioned vocal cycle "*Songs to Words of Robert Burns*", Kent's works, such as **November in Greenland** (1930s), while outwardly very clear and simple in design and color, are imbued with great inner strength and depth. It should be noted that the artist almost always puts a human being into this vast, cold and white silence – a simple labourer with his unostentatious courage, patience and invincible calm, as we find, for example, in the painting **Eskimo in the Kayak. Greenland** (1933; a kayak is a long, narrow boat). Rockwell Kent fully experienced the travails of such labourers, since he was once a carpenter and a fisherman.



Illustration 03. Rockwell Kent. "Eskimo in the Kayak. Greenland". 1933. Canvas, oil. 82 × 87 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Russia

Realism could also be quite different. In relation to certain works by Brecht, it was described as the *harsh realism*. It was precisely in this vein that Italian *neorealism* developed, both in cinema (films by R. Rossellini, L. Visconti, V. De Sica, D. De Santis, and others) and in painting, where the works of *Renato Guttuso* particularly stood out. They are distinguished by an exceptional severity, even a certain "nakedness" in the depiction of ordinary people with their sullen melancholy from endless, backbreaking work. This can be seen in such illustrative drawings as **Peasant Heads** (1950) or **The Miner** (1953).

Another aspect of neorealism is found in Guttuso's painting **Man Crossing a Square** (1958). The obviously mundane life of a person, his ordinary, everyday existence in its most unpretentious aspects is conveyed through the figure of a man in shabby clothes. He seems to be anxious, lost in painful thoughts, burdened by everyday fuss.

The paintings of Rockwell Kent and Renato Guttuso bring us very close to the then-prevalent theme of the common man – a theme that condensed the realistic and democratic tendencies of art in the first half of the 20th century. As one might expect, this theme was most widely embraced by artists from the "*Land of the Soviets*", where it was strongly supported and encouraged.

Despite their ideological bias, the best paintings dedicated to the simple labourer, who was perhaps the most important figure in Russian art of those years, are warmed by unconditional compassion and a strong positive charge. *Arkady Plastov's* paintings are particularly indicative in this regard. His painting focused on the lives of people in the Russian village of that time. Characteristic works include **Collective Farm Threshing Floor** (1953) and **Dinner of Tractor Drivers** (1951).

Plastov's painting is inseparable from the life of people in the truest sense of the word. He lived and worked where he was born (in the village Prislonikha in the Volga region, like the writer *Mikhail Sholokhov* in the stanitsa Vyoshenskaya on the Don). That is why his vibrantly colored, absolutely realistic canvases like **Haymaking** (1945) are full of such authenticity and genuine poetry.

Those people who lived in the mid-20th century endured the harshest trials. In the turbulent, explosive atmosphere of that time, fraught with terrible cataclysms, the most important of which was the Second World War, and amid rampant anti-humanism (more on this below), the majority of people strove with all their heart for peace and harmony, through which a natural humanity manifested itself.

Tikhon Khrennikov's opera, dedicated to the events of the Civil War, bears the symptomatic title **Into the Storm** (1939). Its events, of course, are perceived as a projection of the difficult 1930s, when the opera was created. The words of the peasant chorus reflect the striving of the collective character of the opera in his way through the storms and tempests of the time: "*If we could plough now. It is spring ... // Oh, if only there were peace now!*" These words, which could have been spoken with a touch of pathos, sounded surprisingly quiet and sincerely in this scene.

* * *

When examining the 1930s-1950s through the prism of art, it must be acknowledged that it was a grandiose, titanic era. However, this grandiosity and titanism manifested themselves primarily in a negative light. The negative potential of the 20th century as such greatly influenced the existence of that historical stage.

Let us begin with the fact that that period went down in human history as the time of exceptionally active development of totalitarian regimes. Revealing the face of *totalitarianism*, artists acknowledged its inherent power – all-devouring, suprapersonal, colossal and overwhelming force. This power demanded unconditional submission, otherwise it would simply sweep away, crush and destroy. And one can understand those people who were forced to make an inevitable compromise, to yield their conscience and principles in order to survive.

According to the analysis of artistic creativity, something greater lay behind this force – the entity that claimed the significance of objective necessity, resulting in the following definition – the *command of History*. Acting as a dictate of the times, this entity took on the form that combined dark, terrifying and at the same time imposingly majestic features.

The contours of this image were captured with all clarity in music, as this art form has a special ability to create generalizations at the level of abstract entities. Regarding the “imperativeness” as a quality of this imagery, it is appropriate to refer to the characteristic designation of one of the leitmotifs of *Sergei Prokofiev’s* ballet **Romeo and Juliet** (1936).

It first appears in the scene “The Duke’s Command”. The Duke embodies supreme power and absolute dictate. And his *command* is realized in the music through extremely massive, sharply dissonant sound layers. The hyperbolic nature of these cascading sound masses creates the impression of fatal inevitability descending from above upon human destinies.

Dmitri Shostakovich most thoroughly investigated the phenomenon of the command of History, as well as the entire problem of totalitarianism, through musical means. He could in no way be suspected of sympathizing with the then-dominant political regime, of which he fell victim many times. Nevertheless, the composer found the strength to impartially depict not only its repulsive aspects, defined by its inhumane, barbaric, satanic “wolfish” morality, but also to outline its brilliantly imposing “façade”.

Shostakovich first revealed both of these concepts in their full, visible and tangible form in his **Symphony No. 4** (1936). During rehearsals he realized the full merciless depth of his “investigation” and was forced to cancel the performance of the work for the purpose of self-preservation. Its opening night took place only three decades later.

The music of the finale of this symphony signified the triumph of the Stalin era (almost to the same extent one can speak about the triumph of the Third Reich in Germany during the same period). The extremely impressive image embodies the heavy, fatally inexorable tread of some historical colossus. It is a triumph filled with colossal internal tension, demanding sacrifice and self-sacrifice.

This mood conveyed the ability of the totalitarian system to concentrate all the national resources and focus them in a specific direction. And the main direction, which was a direct consequence of the very nature of totalitarianism as such, was systematic and all-encompassing *militarization*.

This was another historical regularity of the era and another great disaster that culminated in the Second World War. To understand the scale of the “grandiosity” and “titanicity” of this event, it is worth recalling that 72 countries were involved, up to 110 million people were drafted, and approximately 75 million died (that is, seven times more than during the First World War), of which approximately 26 million were citizens of the Soviet Union.

The famous **Bolero** by the French composer *Maurice Ravel*, written in 1928, was already mentioned above. It was a direct and accurate prediction of the increasing military preparations. At the same time, a special dialectic of the “germination” of the Moloch of war from a seemingly harmless and even charming initial seed-image is felt here. Later, in a number of other works (for example, in *Symphony No. 5* of S. Prokofiev), this could also find itself through the reproduction of the evolution from children’s games of war to its quite adult, monstrous guise of real destruction.

Indeed, *Bolero* opens with a quiet and tender flute *solo*, resonant with the natural world with its soft pastoral manner. What is worrying is the incessant roll of the snare drum. It is indicated in the score as *tamburo militare*, or *military* drum. And then, as more and more instruments join in, in the course of steady increasing of texture and dynamics, the sounding reaches a deafening *tutti* with the “roar” of brass and the unbearable pounding of percussion instruments.

Thus, gradually acquiring global contours, this musical image begins to personify the tread of a jackboot, a monster of a militarized armada, marching menacingly and inexorably, ready to enslave the whole world. To feel the ominous, terrifying finale of this popular orchestral piece, one must listen carefully to its final bars.

Modeling the process of radical transformation of the original thematic material, Ravel used the classical form of variations on an unchanged melody, transforming this form into a rigid, constructive set course that was so resonant with modernity. Thirteen years later, in exactly the same way, based on the same compositional principle, *Shostakovich* interpreted the same dialectic of transforming a primitive, childlike march into a soullessly thundering onslaught of armored monsters in the famous “invasion episode” from **Symphony No. 7**.

* * *

The art of those decades often captured the military events of modern times through the lens of historical themes. In the pre-war and later in the war years, it constantly turned to the past, drawing inspiring examples of feat of arms and high concepts of “*courage, valor and glory*” (according to Alexander Blok).

Large canvases featuring broad panoramas of the camp of the Russian army appeared in Russian painting during that period. They represented the citizens of the country rising to defend its borders.

Alexander **Bubnov's** multi-figure panoramic composition **Morning on the Kulikovo Field** (1943-1947) draws attention to the image of a powerful rider on a white horse. This is an image of Dmitry Donskoy, gazing into the distance, beyond the canvas, where, as it may be imagined, the enemy army is encamped.

A similar artistic approach can be found in a number of historical works, including **Vladimir Favorsky's Battle** (1937), one of the illustrations for the ancient manuscript *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*. In this engraving, the outstanding master of book design emphasized such features as austere laconism and strict classical style in an appropriate manner.

Incidentally, this masterpiece was created in the same year as Sergei Eisenstein's famous film *Alexander Nevsky* on music by Sergei Prokofiev. The composer used this material to create a large-scale cantata of the same name, which, together with Eisenstein's film and Favorsky's illustrations, formed a grandiose artistic prologue to the premonition of the coming war.

In such works, the depiction of an army with the figure of a commander towering above it strongly asserted the idea of the unconditional unity of the great mass of people and their leader. It can be considered a projection of what was noted above on a general historical scale – the striving, so characteristic of totalitarian regimes, to transform the national community into a monolithic entity. However, in this case, such an approach acquired unconditional justifiability and was interpreted in a purely positive light in the context of patriotic motives.

In connection with the same motives, the art repeatedly emphasized the significance of a single, major historical figure, who focuses the aspirations of the nation and, in times of trial, takes responsibility. A striking example is **Pavel Korin's** triptych **Alexander Nevsky** created at the climax of the Great Patriotic War (1942-1943).

The image that forms the central part of the triptych embodies fierce determination and unyielding, "steely" courage – the figure is entirely clad in chain-mail and plate armor. We can see a contemporary rendering of the mighty Russian knight, revealed through the fresco-like style of painting and the uniquely chiseled relief (the image resembles a sculptural monument). The extreme composure and intense spiritual tension characteristic of this image are conveyed by the emphasized austerity of the composition and saturated color of steel armor.



Illustration 04. Pavel Korin. "Alexander Nevsky". 1942. Canvas, oil. 275 × 142 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

From the first days of the Great Patriotic War, artists began creating a comprehensive chronicle of the events of that war. The starting point for this chronicle can be named according to the large series of prints *The Disasters of War* of the great Spanish artist Francisco Goya.

In the painting **The Fascist Flew By** (1942), the simple story is presented through the lens of a peasant theme characteristic of **Arkady Plastov**:

- there is an enemy aircraft flying away on the horizon;
- there is a scattered, partly perished herd in a birch grove;
- there is a lifeless shepherd boy, face down in the ground, and a small dog barking after the departing plane in the foreground.

Everything is so simple and mundane. However, is it possible to tell the story of the innocent victims of war with more poignancy?!

Is it possible to convey the inner strength of the Russian character, its unostentatious heroism in the face of the enemy more expressively and with the same simplicity of plot and artistic means as was done in **Sergey Gerasimov's** picture **Partisan's Mother** (1943)?!



Illustration 05. *Sergey Gerasimov. "Partisan's Mother". 1943. Canvas, oil. 184 × 229 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia*

The juxtaposition of the two foreground figures (a barefoot peasant woman in poor, homespun clothing and a bull-necked SS man with a whip in his hands) conveys the confrontation with the “dark fascist force” (according to the lyrics of Alexander Alexandrov’s song “*The Sacred War*”, which became the musical banner of the Great Patriotic War). What fortitude and calm defiance we can see in the face and posture of this Russian woman!

* * *

In our panorama of Russian art from the early 20th century, we considered *Alexander Deineka’s* painting *Defense of Petrograd* (1928). Now let us turn to his similarly titled canvas **Defense of Sevastopol** (1942). The artist seems to return to the severity and laconic color scheme of his earlier painting.

This is intended to emphasize that the depicted battle is a life-and-death struggle. The exceptional dynamism of the composition is conveyed through the sharply contrasting spatial planes, intensified by the clash of white (Soviet soldiers) and dark brown (the Germans), put against the backdrop of the flaming city (moreover, this background is crossed by the ominous shadow of a diving fighter). The dynamism of the composition is complemented by the sharp clarity of the figures’ outline, and their inherent state of unbridled impetus is particularly evident in the stocky figure of the sailor, highlighted at the forefront of the canvas. He embodies the reckless courage of the Russian people on the battlefield.

As we have already seen, the art anticipated much of what was to be experienced. Thus, before the coming turn of events, Russian composers clearly anticipated the future war through historical themes.

This was done most clearly and consistently in *Sergei Prokofiev’s* cantata **Alexander Nevsky** (1938) and *Yuri Shaporin’s* cantata-symphony **On the Kulikovo Field** (1939). As their titles suggest, they cover the same topics of the distant past like a number of works of fine art. Both of these musical works are characterized by a purely epic scale in the embodiment of their images, making the author’s designation of *cantata* quite arbitrary. Due to their scope and content, they are purely *oratorical* works.

From this perspective, it is enough to listen to the music of the central movement of Prokofiev’s cantata – *The Battle on the Ice*. This is a case where the essence of the concept of *allusion* becomes perfectly clear. Outwardly, the events of the 12th century are described (as in Eisenstein’s film, for which Prokofiev wrote the music), but in reality, we are confronted with an almost direct reproduction of the future military clash between Nazi Germany (through the image of the Teutonic Knights) and the Soviet Union (through the image of the Russian army).

The fact is that the composer, reconstructing the contours of the Battle of Peipus, makes no attempt to hide the pure contemporary manner of sound interpretation. In particular, the image of the enemy is presented in the pounding and energetic rhythms of the onrushing war machine, and the increasing fury and frenzy makes this aggression repulsive (the use of Latin in the choral part enhances the feeling of something alien, foreign).

As in other forms of artistic expression (literature, film, painting), the epic of the Second World War gave birth to extensive chronicles in music, tracing each stage of the conflict step by step. The most important of these chronicles are *Yuri Shaporin’s* oratorio **The Tale of the Battle for the Russian Land**, *Nikolai Myaskovsky’s* five symphonies (Nos. 21-25), and *Dmitri Shostakovich’s* four symphonies (Nos. 6-9).

Shostakovich’s tetralogy of war symphonies is one of the greatest treasures of world art of that era. Its “focal point” is **Symphony No. 8**, written in 1943, which marked the point of maximum tension and the final turning point in the war (after the Battle of Stalingrad that summer, a decision battle of tank armies took place at the Kursk Bulge).

And, in turn, the “focal point” of Symphony No. 8, the center of its concept, can be considered the middle episode of the third movement and its repeat, which form the core of the work and culminate in the fourth movement. The fundamental essence of wartime imagery is presented in concentrated form.

At first, the face of war in its quasi-imposing quality is presented; it is like a prancing army, an army on parade, a spectacular brilliant dance of militarism, and only the deafening crash of the snare drum reveals the sinister background of the recreated “blitzkrieg”.

Then the toccata of war comes in accordance with the formula “war is work”, but in this case it is the work of executioners, work with the aim of destroying, when the inexorably merciless pulsation of the military mechanism simultaneously resembles both a meat grinder and a pecking huge bird of prey, which is accompanied by sound associations (the whistle and explosions of demolition bombs).

And finally, when the destructive elements come to the peak, the pathos of anger and protest makes itself known, a mournful voice sounds, calling for reason, conscience, humanity (the majestic, sublime intonation of the string unison).

* * *

The events of the Second World War found expression in international music. One of these is attributed to the Austrian composer *Arnold Schoenberg*, who is usually considered a leader of Expressionism. Drawing on his distinctive musical language, he managed to provide a vivid and highly original treatment of the theme of the Jewish genocide. The significance of the *Holocaust* is evidenced by the fact that over 60% of Jewish population in Europe perished during Nazi persecution from 1933 to 1945.

The cantata *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1946) tells the story of the prisoners of the Warsaw ghetto. It is a narration, as the narrator’s role is crucial here. The text is in English, interspersed with individual German words (for example, the cry “*Achtung!*” – *Attention!* – is heard repeatedly).

The declamation is accompanied by structurally “fragmented”, emotionally charged lines and orchestral outbursts. An atmosphere of cruelty, dictatorship and violence against humanity is depicted, and its buildup leads to a climax of humanistic protest and angry rebuke.

The stern sound of the male voices’ unison is precisely reminiscent of what can be heard at the aforementioned peak of Shostakovich’s *Symphony No. 8*. This similarity in artistic approach eloquently demonstrates how much in art is determined by events that take place in the reality.

This voice of angry protest, the voice of reason and humanity, gave rise to a powerful *resistance* movement. It also grew *inside* the country, that had unleashed the war. The best representatives of the German artistic intelligentsia, who had emigrated, gave their all to the fight against fascism and militarism. The most irreconcilable in this struggle were the writers Lion Feuchtwanger and Bertolt Brecht.

Lion Feuchtwanger created a tetralogy of anti-fascist novels, which, like Shostakovich’s tetralogy of war symphonies, is equal in artistic merit to Wagner’s famous operatic tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. These novels (*Success*, 1929; *The Oppermanns*, 1933; *Exil*, 1938; *The Lautensack Brothers*, 1943) were supplemented by a number of other books, which, in one way or another, reflected the events that took place in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s by means of historical plots (they were expressed most clearly in the novel *False Nero*, 1936).

Turning to the work of *Bertolt Brecht*, we will immediately consider a specific example that offers a clear understanding of his attitude as a writer: it is merciless in its revelatory power and at the same time poignant, what comes from the emotional pain of those who were forced into service.

The poem “To the German Soldiers in the East” was written in 1942 before the Battle of Stalingrad took place, but Brecht predicted the inevitable death of his compatriots beyond a shadow of doubt. He speaks for a common soldier who, against his will, “*had put on the shirt of a murderer and now must die like an evil rat*” (Brecht, 1942).

The soldier’s soul yearns for his native land and languishes in the premonition that there will be no return from the snows of Russia. Thus, Brecht predicted the inevitable collapse of Hitler’s adventure harshly and bluntly, long before the end of the war.

The Resistance movement gained its widest scope from *abroad*, that is, in countries occupied by the fascist regime. In this context, corresponding literature emerged producing its most significant results in France. The poetic anthem of the French Resistance was the poem “*Liberty*”, written by *Paul Éluard*, who published several anti-fascist collections during the war (*Poetry and Truth*, 1942, *At the German Rendezvous*, *To Live Worthwhile*).

The poem, written in the same year 1942, as Brecht’s poem cited above, consists of 21 stanzas. Each of the twenty stanzas concludes with the phrase “*I write your name*”, which sounds like an incantation. The increasingly insistent repetition of this “leitmotif” leads to the final stanza, where the poet utters the word in whose name the Resistance fighters went to their deaths without hesitation.

* * *

Despite all the hardships, despite all the negative and oppressive influences, the period in question stood out for its striking, incomparable optimism. Many artworks of those years, including the flourishing of the musical comedy genre, speaks volumes of this.

Within the context of Russian artistic creativity, the Armenian composer *Aram Khachaturian* vividly expressed this joyful spirit. The musical critic Boris Asafyev once said about him “*a feast of music*”. It can be somewhat paraphrased – *a feast of light and joy*. It is no coincidence that his ballet *Gayane* in its original version was titled with poster-like simplicity – *Happiness*. Khachaturian most often conveyed it through dance rhythms and the colorful, elegant national emphasis.

This refers not only to his ballets, but to other genres as well. For example, in the finale of the *Violin Concerto* (1939), the triumph of life finds itself in a whimsically sparkling sound palette that literally glows with the play of “sunbeams”.

The spirit of inexhaustible vitality, so characteristic of mid-20th-century man, found its most vivid expression in the visual arts of that time through everyday, genre-specific perspectives.

It turns out that the war could also have positive aspects like in the painting **The Rest After Battle** by *Yuri Neprintsev* (1951). What a vibrant, lively scene, that radiates smiles, laughter and joy! What precision and freshness in the depiction of real human characters! All of this directly echoes *Alexander Tvardovsky's* poem **Vasili Tyorkin** (1941-1945), considered the pinnacle of Russian wartime poetry.

Another remarkable painting continues the military theme – **A Letter from the Front** by *Alexander Laktionov* (1947). As was often characteristic of the art of that time, we see *realism* in its most direct expression. Everything is visible, concrete and maximally believable (an extremely accurate image of objects). Another self-evident and almost indispensable feature of realism is democracy revealed through the simple and unsophisticated story about everyday life. Finally, the most important thing here is a spirit of pervasive optimism: the canvas is filled with an artless joy; it literally bursts with it.

Of course, the overall tone of artworks inevitably became more austere and “monochromatic” during the war. The cheerful mood began to flourish quite organically and to the full extent in the pre- and post-war years, when the joys of peaceful life and the much-desired workdays were so enthusiastically perceived.

Tatiana Yablonskaya's exceptionally bright, vibrantly colorful canvas **Grain** (1949) is composed like a wide, smooth arc, flooded with sunlight. When you see such fresh and sincere works, it is impossible to believe that they are mere “socialist art”, an ideological myth, pure fiction, and that such people worked like slaves, forcibly driven into collective farms as a product of the Soviet totalitarian system.

Without entering into a discussion on this matter, it is preferable to trust the persuasive power of art and believe that people of that time, despite tough circumstances, managed to maintain a joy of living against all the odds. As for Yablonskaya's painting, let us note the glow of youth of the central figure (a country girl with a shovel stuck into golden grain). This semantic emphasis brings us closer to what might be called the *youth of the era*.



Illustration 06. *Tatiana Yablonskaya. "Grain". 1949. Canvas, oil. 201 × 370 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia*

Looking at the artistic creativity of the early 20th century, we spoke of youthful themes, primarily referring to age gradations such as childhood, adolescence and youth.

Since then, the world and humanity had certainly matured, but they kept a youthful spirit, which is clearly felt in the art of that period, especially in the 1930s. And this youthful spirit was practically inseparable from the zest for life so characteristic of the mid-20th century. These qualities harmoniously intertwined enriching each other.

The synthesis of these qualities formed the basis of the French graphic artist *Jean Effel's* works (not to be confused with the engineer Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, who built the famous Eiffel Tower). We are talking about two brilliant cartoon cycles: **The Creation of the World** (1951-1954) and **The Creation of the Man** (1951-1953). They were combined under the title *The Creation of the World and Man* in the Russian edition.

They represent a free, extremely amusing artistic interpretation of biblical legends, executed by Effel from a position of not militant, but rather a very friendly atheism (recalling his compatriot Léo Taxil's book, *The Amusing Bible*). The charming manner of the humorous drawing, tracing back to cheap wood prints, is complemented by witty comments. For example, one of the sketches of Eve, who has been just created by God, has an inscription, according to which the little inhabitants of heaven ask: “*What else will God create after woman?*” and the Devil replies: “*Nothing else. She is the end of everything*”.

* * *

Earlier we looked at strong contradictions and negative aspects of the period under consideration. This primarily concerned the two countries of “classical” totalitarianism – Germany and the USSR. However, if we trust the evidences of art, regardless of our attitude toward that time and those people, we must acknowledge that it was a grandiose era, an era of strong, courageous, integral and determined people (no matter what goals they set for themselves and how they were assessed).

If we consider the corresponding human character, these qualities were most clearly expressed in the visual arts of Russia and Mexico.

Mexican artists worked in unconventional techniques and used non-traditional materials (for example, synthetic paints).

One of them, *Leopoldo Méndez*, created his engravings on linoleum. It seems to be purely household material, but, unlike wood or copper, it is very flexible and pliable for the cutter. One of his engravings, entitled **The Execution** (1949), speaks for itself: a man facing the most difficult ordeal, at the barrels of rifles, with a grin on his face that emphasizes his calm and contempt for death.

Mexican art reached its greatest heights in monumental mural painting. Three names became its pride: *José Orozco*, *Diego Rivera* and *Alfaro Siqueiros*. These artists created grand cycles of murals in public buildings across the country. This was painting that appealed to a broad audience, imbued with profound universal themes: the working life of people, class conflicts, a public outcry against oppression and a passion for liberty. A publicistic intensity urged to exalted expression, sculptural power and emphasized dynamism of generalized forms.

Alfaro Siqueiros's mural **The New Democracy** (1945), painted in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City, is dedicated to the victory over fascism in the Second World War. The artist conveyed hope for a just and decent post-war world order through the symbolic figure of a woman breaking her chains. The anguish on her face will inevitably be overcome. The artist emphasizes this conviction with the figure's colossal strength of will and its hyperbolically powerful upward thrust.

Russian visual art of the mid-20th century, asserting the image of a strong, courageous and unyielding person, tended towards more traditional forms and means of expression. Although there were some exceptions. For example, *Vera Mukhina*'s sculptural group **Worker and Kolkhoz Woman** (1935-1937) was made from stainless steel so that the ridged, faceted surfaces of the enormous figures somewhat resonated with the tone of the *Stalin* era.

Nevertheless, the purpose of the monument was much more meaningful. It became a symbol of a country striving for the future – a country where constructive work was proclaimed its primary value. The raised hammer and sickle, which were part of the Soviet Union coat of arms, embodied the idea of labor. The impression of power and dynamism is monumentalized to the extreme by gigantic size of the sculpture, and the sense of a bold attempt is enhanced by the effect of a headwind, which lifts the clothing and hair of the female figure.



Illustration 07. *Vera Mukhina. "Worker and Kolkhoz Woman". 1935-1937. Stainless steel. Height: 24.5 m. Russian Exhibition Centre, Moscow, Russia*

The qualities in question were present not only in symbolic and generalized images, but also in portraits of real people of that era. Let us turn to the posthumous sculptural portrait of twice awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union, **General Ivan Danilovich Chernyakhovsky** made by *Nikolai Tomsky* (completed in 1947). He died from wounds at the end of the war, during the East Prussian Offensive.

This portrait can be considered the gold standard image of the Soviet man, as he was expected to be seen and as he often appeared in reality: a courageous, characterful face, frankness, strength and simplicity, an undeniable spirituality of a character dedicated to serving a supreme goal. All of this is superbly conveyed through classically careful modeling of form.

It is noteworthy that, when creating such characters, sculptors of that time were able to combine the monumental and general features with the specific human ones, a striking example of which is *Yevgeny Vuchetich*'s **Warrior-Liberator** (1949). This bronze monument on a granite pedestal was erected after the end of the war in Berlin's

Treptower Park. It is distinguished by the organic combination of epic power and heartfelt humanity, which is expressively emphasized by the corresponding details: the soldier holds a huge symbolic sword in one hand and the frail body of a child in the other hand.

Incidentally, the combination of stern masculinity and lyrical poignancy was generally a characteristic feature of the art of those years, which was clearly reflected, for example, in Soviet popular songs, starting from the 1930s (*Song about Kakhovka* by Isaak Dunayevsky, *Eaglet* by Victor Bely, *Farewell* by the Pokrass brothers, etc.).

* * *

It is quite easy to discern a common characteristic in the sculptural images just mentioned: an epic weight and magnification that conveyed the emphasized significance of the image. This often reflected a sense of strength and the power of human character. *Evgeny Kibrik's* illustrations for Gogol's novella **Taras Bulba** serve as a prime example of this. Using clear contour lines and energetic chiaroscuro sculpting, the artist convincingly conveyed the appearance of remarkable individuals, courageous and unwavering in their sense of the righteousness of their actions and deeds. This was especially true of the depictions of Taras Bulba and his son Ostop.

These illustrations were created between 1943 and 1945, and their imagery directly reflected the heroism of the war raging at the time. But *heroic-epic tendencies* spread even wider in Russian art in the 1950s. There were other reasons for this. Now the powerful potential of the times revealed itself in the pathos of liberation, in the overcoming of the restrictive institutions of the Stalin era. This process took place during the so-called Khrushchev Thaw (a term came into common use after the publication of *Ilya Ehrenburg's* novella **The Thaw**).

The incomparable surge of strength of a country in turmoil could be expressed even in the portrait of a real person. Such was *Sergey Kononkov's Self-Portrait* (1954). At the time of its creation, the oldest master of Russian sculpture was 80 years old (incidentally, he nearly reached the age of one hundred). Mikhail Lermontov's line "Yes, there were people in our time" can serve as a great illustration in this case, since such a ripe old age is impossible to see in the image. He appears as a vigorous, epic hero – bogatyr, majestic and deeply spiritual. He seems to emerge from a large block of marble.

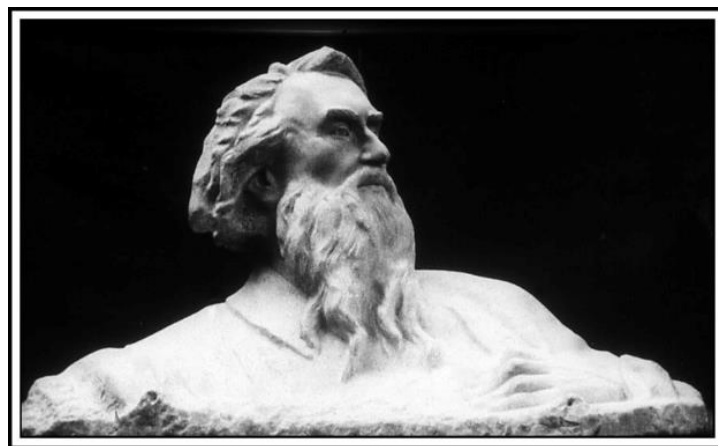


Illustration 08. *Sergey Kononkov. "Self-portrait". 1954. Marble. 75 × 135 × 69 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia*

Moreover, such aspirations of the era could be expressed in figures of a generalized symbolic nature, as is represented in the equestrian **statue of David of Sassoun** (1959), whose image was conveyed in a generalized symbolic form by *Yervand Kochar*.

David of Sasun (Sasuntsi Davit) is the hero of the Armenian medieval epic, which developed in the 7th-10th centuries (Sassoun is a historical region in the mountains of Ancient Armenia). For the Armenians, he is the embodiment of high ideals and the best traits of the national character, a legendary hero who fought for the liberation of Armenia from foreign invaders. This is magnificently conveyed through the powerful expression of stylized forms. Their expressiveness was so impressive that this monument naturally became the emblem of Yerevan.

This is one of the many examples of *heroic-dramatic epic*. This aesthetic trinity-fusion became the most concentrated expression of the scale of the events, an expression of the powerful turn of strong and significant features in the man and in the life of that time.

It is apparent why the *theme of liberation* became so prevalent in artistic creation in the 1950s. For example, in music, this could have been connected with references to the events of October and the Civil War (Georgy Sviridov's Oratorio *Pathetique*), or the First Russian Revolution (Dmitri Shostakovich's Ten Poems and Symphony No. 11, with the programmatic title *The Year 1905*), to the Decembrist revolt of 1825 (Yuri Shaporin's opera *The Decembrists*), and to the distant past (Aram Khachaturian's ballet *Spartacus*). But the main essence remained the same: the steady liberation of the individual and the nation.

That is why an ardent enthusiasm for overthrow was so often felt, one that could find expression in the open depiction of barricade battles, as we can find, for example, in *Dmitri Shostakovich's* non-programmatic **Symphony No. 10**. Written in the year of Stalin's death (1953), one of its movements expresses a "noble wrath" imbued with a publicistic appeal to destroy the prison of life.

Consequently, an inexhaustible supply of vitality inherent in people of the mid-20th century ultimately triumphed over the forces of evil and destruction. This optimism and the light of reason permeate many works of that historical period.

One of such works is Igor **Stravinsky's** ballet **The Card Game** (1937), which is characterized by a playful mood, as befits the title, highlighted by the introduction of appropriate reminiscences from the classics, including the music of Rossini, the brilliant master of opera buffa.

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Благодарность | Acknowledgements

RU Автор выражает благодарность переводчику Кристине Васильевне Соловьёвой, преподавателю иностранных языков Музыкального училища при Саратовской государственной консерватории имени Л. В. Собинова, заведующей отделением «Гуманитарные дисциплины», преподавателю первой квалификационной категории, за помощь в подготовке публикации.

EN The author expresses gratitude to Kristina Vasilevna Solovyova, translator, foreign language teacher at the Music College of the Saratov State Conservatory, Head of the Humanities Department, and teacher of the first qualification category, for her assistance in preparing this publication.

Информация об авторах | Author information

RU Демченко Александр Иванович¹, д. иск., проф.
¹ Международный Центр комплексных художественных исследований;
Саратовская государственная консерватория имени Л. В. Собинова, г. Саратов

EN Aleksandr Ivanovich Demchenko¹, Dr
¹ International Center of Complex Artistic Research;
Saratov State Conservatory, Saratov

¹ alexdem43@mail.ru

Информация о статье | About this article

Дата поступления рукописи (received): 03.03.2026; опубликовано online (published online): 06.04.2026.

Ключевые слова (keywords): мировой художественный процесс; Модерн II; реализм; демократизм; классичность; world artistic process; Modern II; realism; democratism; classicality.