

THE STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM

MIKHAIL SHVARTSMAN



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This is the first ever academic publication fully covering the life and work of Mikhail Matveyevich Shvartsman (1926–1997).

The master called his works *hieratures*.

The book includes previously unknown statements by Mikhail Shvartsman, excerpts from the memoirs of those who personally knew him and reproductions of all his works.

The articles by leading experts on modern art offer a deep and detailed analysis of the artist's oeuvre.

This book is likely to be of interest to experts, collectors and all lovers of art.

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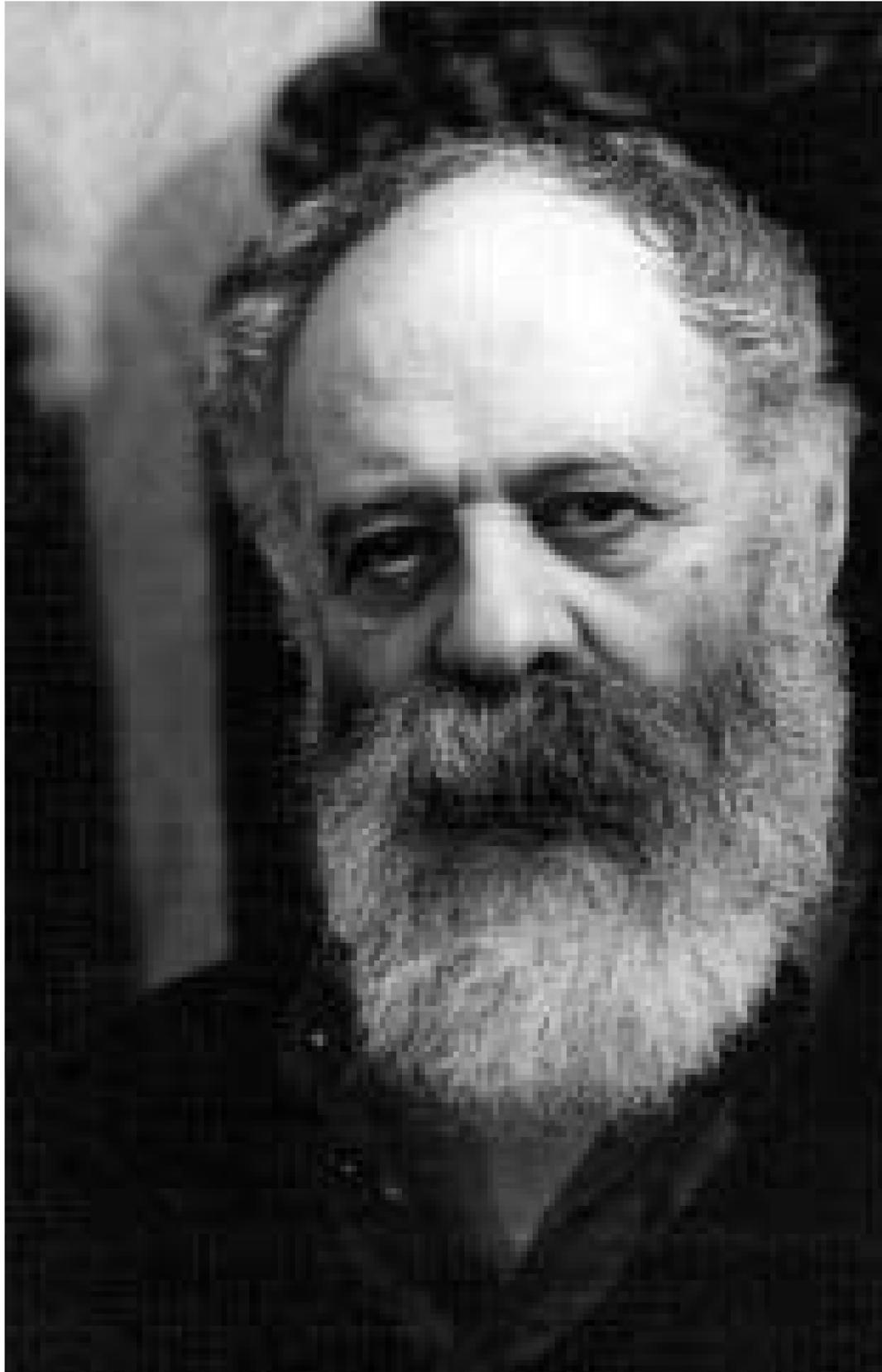
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ВСТУПЛЕНИЕ



Mikhail Shvartsman
13 February 1991

... A miracle does not depend on us. With what can one compare the joy of a trumpet pouring light, the voice of the light. Terrible only to miss, to omit, the promised – never to learn. Oh, what a torture it is! And what a torture of joy, the slow, drawn-out, sweet pain of learning. Thousands of torturous metamorphoses dying under the quick-sighted hand. The sluggish hand becomes prophetic, each finger ends in an eye following (feloniously) the birth of the sign (£). Vision is so graced by pain. How rare it is! At night time, weary, weary, weary, you wander, not discerning the path, fearing to shake the dust of paradise from your eyes.

You wake up again audacious in hope, and again victims and victims (of the finest forms) for the sake of the last promised land, every time the last. That is the heavy prayer through deeds.

You are sometimes trampled into the dirt and, grief-stricken, you wail in bloody tears of self-loathing ...

Yes, yes! Only homeward to the abodes!

Mikhail Shvartsman



Mikhail Shvartsman. Lyubertsy, 11 February 1968

"Thoughts and memories are like clouds in the sky; they do not fit into verbal forms. I am not, in general, a fan of biographical memoirs. My path in life has been far from easy – children's home, colony, army. My father disappeared in the camps. It is sometimes told ... in a conversation ... spontaneously. I am confused by questions. When you speak, everything seems that way, yet perhaps it is not. Everything gets mixed up, sometimes it seems that everything, except what I do, is a dream. And so one lives in the corners of dreams..." (from a letter to the poet Victor Sosnora dated 5 October 1987)

SHVARTSMAN ON HIMSELF *

In my childhood, I remember our family constantly moving from place to place, owing to my father's imprisonment. He was arrested in 1938 and died at a camp in Nizhny Tagil in 1942. That was what they later told my mother.

I began to draw at an early age. Several times, my mother attempted to get me into art school, but all her attempts ended in failure. I ran away from every place. In 1950, after serving five years in the army, I joined first the metal and then the monumental departments of the Higher School of Art and Industry (former Stroganov School). The nominal length of the course was eight years, but I skipped two years and finished early, in 1956.

In my first years at the school of art, I was interested in Byzantine and Old Russian art, frescoes and icons. Some student friends and I got together to quietly [such interests were frowned upon] discuss the art of icon-painting. We even organised an expedition to the St Ferapont and St Cyril Monasteries in northern Russia.

I then passed through a period of interest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French art, studying Cézanne, Matisse, Derain, Picasso and the Fauvists. Many poked fun at me, for the general idol at that time was Ilya Repin.

While still in the army, I married Iraida Alexandrovna Nikolskaya, who gave birth to our daughter Nadezhda in 1951. As I was a married man with a family, this also kept me slightly apart from the other students. In those years, I spent more time with my teachers Pavel Kuznetsov, Alexander Kuprin and Kazenin. A former student of Konstantin Istomin, Kazenin was an outstanding, magnetic personality (for which he appears to have been later expelled from the institute).

After graduating from art school, I had a series of jobs, designing industrial art, book graphic art and posters. I took whatever work I could find, as I had to feed my wife and young daughter. But I continued to paint in my spare time.

I did not have any close contacts with our "unofficial" artists – only casual acquaintanceships. I knew some of them from exhibitions. My attitude towards such artists was one of deference, rather than love. By that time I already had other ideas, other lines of thought, other professional tasks.

In the 1960s, I met Ilya Kabakov at the musical concerts of Andrei Volkonsky. Although I later struck up an acquaintance with Dmitry Plavinsky and Vladimir Nemukhin, I tended to associate more with writers – Kruchenykh, Dombrovsky and Steinberg the elder. I was also acquainted with Sergei Barkhin, George Costakis and Savely Yamschikov. Dmitry Sarabianov was a regular guest.

In the 1970s, I befriended many poets from St Petersburg and Moscow – Elena Schwartz, Victor Krivulin, Olga Sedakova and Sasha Velichansky.

Despite these friendships, I was regarded as something of a recluse. This was not something that I specially cultivated; it was simply my character. I had a personal distaste for the prevailing air of bohemianism at that time.

In the 1960s, I mainly worked in poster design and for publishing houses. I was harassed and oppressed by this lifestyle, which entailed much feverish work and paid little. There was a lot of unpleasantness and racked nerves. I therefore jumped at the chance when, in 1966,

Alla Levashova, a corresponding member of the Academy of Arts, invited me to become head designer of the graphic sector at the newly-opened Special Bureau of Art and Construction.

I put together my own group – or school – of young artists at the Special Bureau of Art and Construction. We were the focus for all those who, it would now be said, were interested in getting culture moving. The central principle of the school was my "hieratic" concept. Some members contributed to exhibitions of industrial graphic art or book illustrations, along with other nonconformist artists; others did not exhibit at all. Personally, I do not consider it important whether or not an artist participated in the unofficial exhibitions of that time. The division of artists into official and unofficial, according to whether or not they contributed to underground art life, is, in my opinion, a device later thought up by art historians.

We ourselves designed and studied the designs of Kazimir Malevich, Mikhail Larionov, Vladimir Tatlin and Natalia Goncharova. It is widely held that the aforementioned artists regarded design as only of secondary importance. This view, however, is quite wrong; Malevich, Rodchenko and other artists of the 1920s treated design as the most important constituent. It was a natural union of art and architecture, a single creative process.

As far as my own oeuvre of the 1950s and 1960s was concerned, all my early works were linked to the hieratic concept. The relationship with the experience of man in life and his experience in death. In life, man creates an icon of himself; in the face of death, he leaves an iconnic trace of himself entombed. This is like a spiritual birth in death, which also creates its own countenance, its own icon. Work on this countenance was the main aim of my early hieratures. Besides professional mastery and free historical orientation, I believed it very important to achieve a high degree of spiritual concentration. My study of twentieth-century art led me to the thought that, with his Suprematism and innovative ideas, Malevich was nevertheless not quite on his own.

Take, for example, Malevich's *Square* (1915) and icons of the *Saviour in Majesty* (12th to 16th centuries). These works clearly have something in common. To a certain extent, they emanate from each other. Speaking in the language of today, the icon is Suprematist. I believe that Malevich was moving along these lines. And I think that the deeper an artist's roots are, the more original he is.

Sometime around the mid-1960s, I crossed over to my current emblematic-architectonic hieratures. Work proceeded not mechanically, but organically-metamorphically, first surging forwards, then going backwards. These symbols appeared at the same time as the countenances.

While the stylistic links were clearly visible in the early hieratures, the sign gradually acquired independent and theological meaning. Yet even when the emblematic hierature developed tempestuously, I did not depart from the countenances. They continued to appear in my works, and the countenance or proto-phenomenal hieratures appear to this day. Moreover, I think that I must return to them more fundamentally at a later date. They may well form an alternative to our avant-garde future, particularly as it is now clear that the Sots Art line, which developed so carefreely, leads to an impasse.

Man, in his sacramental sense, will always be interesting, above all to artists...

Mikhail Shvartsman
Moscow, 22 November 1987

* Text compiled on the basis of an interview given by Mikhail Shvartsman to Larisa Kashuk in 1987. Mikhail Shvartsman read the print-outs of the conversation and made several corrections to the text. The heading was provided by Iraida Shvartsman.



Mikhail Shvartsman 1994

THE LIFETIME PATH OF MIKHAIL SHVARTSMAN

Compiled by myself on the basis of memoirs and diary entries
Iraida Shvartsman
2002

Mikhail Matveyevich Shvartsman is born in Moscow on 4 June 1926. His father, Matvei Grigorievich Shvartsman, was an entrepreneur: "He had constant brushes with the law. He was sent to prison on several occasions, bought himself off each time, before he found himself behind the barbed wire again in 1938." His father dies in a prison camp in 1942 and is buried in a common grave in Nizhny Tagil.

His mother, Rakhil Isaacovna Fishmann (1899–1963), works as a sanitary inspector.

Following Matvei Shvartsman's imprisonment, the family frequently move from place to place. They live in Nizhny Novgorod and various places outside Moscow, including Chelyuskinskaya, Nemchinovka and Losino-Ostrovsky. Mikhail has a younger brother, Anatoly (born 1929), who now lives in Israel.

Knowing that her son has almost perfect musical pitch, his mother wants him to study the violin under Professor Mikhailovsky. When the professor sees him drawing (he loves to draw, even in his early childhood), he advises his mother to send him to art school. She does so, but he does not settle in there.

Following the death of her husband, Mikhail's mother remarries. Mikhail's stepfather is Moisei Aronovich Goldenberg.

In the early 1930s, the family lives for a while in Nemchinovka outside Moscow, where Kazimir Malevich also lives. Mikhail's mother shows her son's works to the artist, who expresses his approval of the young boy's art. Mikhail remembered that Malevich particularly liked a drawing of a blue house.

Spends his early childhood in Losino-Ostrovsky outside Moscow. Enters primary school in 1934. Describes this period of his life in his childhood diary. Holds a competition with his neighbour at school to see who can draw the most strokes. Although his neighbour draws more and Mikhail less, the latter's are of better quality. A fight breaks out between the boys at break time. Mikhail writes: "And so began my years of study." His second year at school is spent in Moscow. Mikhail describes his schooldays and teachers in his diary, giving exact characteristics of the latter. His "phenomenal" memory makes studying easy and he is popular with the teachers.

1941

Finishes seventh grade. Nazi Germany attacks the Soviet Union and he is evacuated to the town of Syzran. Works in a foundry at the age of fifteen.

1943

Returns to Moscow with his mother and younger brother. Works as a loader to help his mother. His father has, by this time, died in prison camp.

1944

Meets Iraida Alexandrovna Nikolskaya. The two become close friends, sharing a mutual interest in poetry and painting.

Decides to devote himself to artistic creativity. Prepares works in order to enrol at the former Stroganov School of Art.

1945

Fate decides otherwise and he is called up into the Soviet Army in May 1945. Studies at military academy. Writes in a letter to Iraida on 10 October 1945: "I experience a burning thirst for knowledge, knowledge, knowledge and intellect. I so want to read, create and think. It is painful to feel chained and squeezed into narrow borders. I regret the empty days spent doing nothing and each non-productive hour. I want to immortalise every single second." Sent to a transit point for making a careless remark. Serves as a sapper, combing the frontlines for mines. Steps on a mine and is hospitalised. Spends his last years in the army at Kapustin Yar, a secret-missile testing site (1947–50).

Writes in a letter to Iraida in 1949: "What am I to write to you, my dear? Where I live? Forbidden? How I live? Forbidden. What is the meaning of life? Impossible to say. Worse than Kuprin [a reference to his story *The Duel*]."

After leaving the army, says that it is a school of life which hardens a man, depriving him of unnecessary feebleness – and not only physical weakness.

1946

Awarded leave, travels to Moscow and marries Iraida.

1950

After five years in the army, enters the metal and then monumental departments of the Higher School of Art and Industry (former Stroganov School) in Moscow.

1951

Birth of daughter Nadezhda.

1950s

Interested in Byzantine and Old Russian art (frescoes and icons) in his first years at art school. Such interests were frowned upon at that time and he has to travel secretly to the St Ferapont and St Cyril Monasteries in north-west Russia.

Studies under Pavel Kuznetsov, Alexander Kuprin, Kazenin and Yegorov at art school. Dissatisfied with the prevailing styles in Soviet art, begins planning his own concept. The national idol is Ilya Repin. Studies with passion at art school. Becomes the unofficial leader of his group and gains permission for more time to be spent on life studies and less time on Marxism-Leninism. Founds the Scientific Student Society. Paints studies on Sundays. Many fellow students are not interested in art and only interested in receiving a degree. They laugh at him and ask: "Well, Shvartsman, have you created your own concept yet?"

1956

Graduates from art school after six years, instead of the normal eight, as an external student.

1957

Moves with his wife and daughter to the town of Lyubertsy outside Moscow, leaving the eighteen-metre room in a communal flat



Mikhail at the age of two with his parents Rakhil and Matvei Shvartsman Nizhny Novgorod, 3 July 1928



Mother and grandmother Ekaterinburg, 1917



Photograph inscribed on the back To Grandmother and Aunt Gita in loving memory – moustached grandson and nephew, Misha 3 July 1943



Photograph inscribed on the back You will only see me if you look long and hard into my eyes – which only happens when you look with sorrow. Yours, M.



Iraida Shvartsman. August 1948



Mikhail Shvartsman at art school. 1950s



Mikhail Shvartsman (third from the left) at military training while at art school. 1950s



Mikhail Shvartsman (bottom) at military training. 1950s



Mikhail Shvartsman (bottom row, second from the right) in his second year at primary school



Mikhail Shvartsman working at the Education Pavilion of the Exhibition of Economic Achievements. 1957

(Apartment 3, Block 4, 63 Eighth of March Street) which they had shared with his wife's relatives.

1957–58

Principal designer of the Education Pavilion at the Exhibition of Economic Achievements in Moscow.

1958

Quits the Exhibition of Economic Achievements, finding it backward and uninspiring. Dreams of becoming a painter, but knows that he has a family to keep. Holds a series of jobs, designing industrial art, books, advertisements and posters.

Late 1950s

Develops the first stage of the defamiliarisation (*ostranenie*) concept (strangeness "not of this world"). Paints *Carousel* (1957), *Glass of Water* (1957), *Pink Earth* (1957), *Torebeyevo Women* (1958), *Pregnant Woman* (1957) and *Woman with Child* (1958).

1961

Visits Daghestan and paints a cycle of pictures, including *Kubachi*, *Daghestan*, *Green Head*, *Two Heads with Black Plaits*, *Aqueduct* and *Landscape*.

Continues the period of defamiliarisation in painting and graphic art in *Flute Players* (1958) and *Fox Cub* (1962).

In the 1960s, meets many unofficial artists, whom he engages in a tactical dialogue, showing them "deference, rather than love". He has a different way of thinking and pursues other tasks: "Demonic forces, tempests and cataclysms are tamed by the sun – the festival of light. God is the higher clarity. To create a festival implies dissolving in God. That is the basis of my cause in life ... Organic transformation is the basis of the new art."



Mikhail and Iraida Shvartsman
Lyubertsy, 11 February 1968



Top row: Mikhail Shvartsman, Alexei Kruchenykh, Nikolai Khardzhiev;
bottom row: Gennady Aigi, Natalia Aigi, Rudolf Duganov. 12 November 1965



Mikhail Shvartsman. 1965



Iraida, Mikhail and Nadezhda Shvartsman. 1968



Mikhail and Nadezhda Shvartsman
at the Inpolygrafmash exhibition.



V. Oleinikov (poet), Leonard Daniltsev, Iraida Shvartsman,
Mikhail Shvartsman and Yulik
Lyubertsy, 11 February 1968



Frequent contacts with artists, poets and musicians. Demonstrating his excellent understanding of poetry and music, his thoughts and statements are highly rated by his milieu.

Many artists are influenced by his painting and begin copying his style, showing their works at different exhibitions. Mikhail is shocked at these hasty and unprofessional imitations: "Good God, I look at all this like a peacock at its feet [a peacock has particularly ugly legs]. Is this really how they see me!?"

Creates the concept of hieratic painting in Lyubertsy: "The relationship with the experience of man in life and his experience in death. In life, man creates an icon of himself; in the face of death, he leaves an iconic trace of himself entombed. This is like a spiritual birth in death."

The Defamiliarisation cycle dominates in the early 1960s. This is a pre-death structure: "This is the last utmost expression in the form of a still sensual world." The Defamiliarisation cycle is followed by the Countenances, as he initially calls these works: "The countenance is the start of a new life." Works include the *Heralds* cycle (1962–76) and *Mikhail is a Proper Noun* (1962).

Later crosses over to emblematic-architectonic hierature, in which the hieratic symbol acquires independent spiritual and theological meaning: "Signifying the end of the heartless preoccupation with everything technical and standing on an equal par with the grand styles of grand architecture."

Associates with the artist Sergei Barkhin and the collector George Costakis. Later meets the restorer Savely Yamschikov and the artist Ilya Kabakov. Befriends the poets Alexei Kruchenykh, Gennady Aigi and Genrikh Sapgir, the poet and translator Steinberg the elder and the musician Andrei Volkonsky. Visited by the art historian Dmitry Sarabianov.

Works in poster and advertisement design. Contributes to local, national and international shows, including exhibitions of Soviet posters in the United States (1967) and Holland (1967), design in Bulgaria (1969) and Poland (1969), graphic advertising in France (1961), graphic art in Moscow (1963), *Forty-Five Years of Soviet*

Mikhail Shvartsman lived in this house in Lyubertsy from 1957 to 1971, occupying the flat with the two windows on the ground floor nearest the door. Photographed in 2003

Graphic Art, exhibitions of Soviet circus posters (1967) and shows in the United Kingdom (1966–67) and Poland (1968).

Creates three monumental panels from cement and smalt with G. Dauman at the Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics.

Wins honorary diplomas and prizes. Awarded first prize for his *Equestrian Circus* poster. Wins first prize for a cycle of frescoes at the All-Union Exhibition of Monumental Art.

1963

Death of the artist's mother. At this difficult period finishes painting *Mama* (begun in 1962).

1966

Alla Levashova, corresponding member of the Academy of Arts, invites him to take up the post of principal designer at the Special Bureau of Art and Construction.

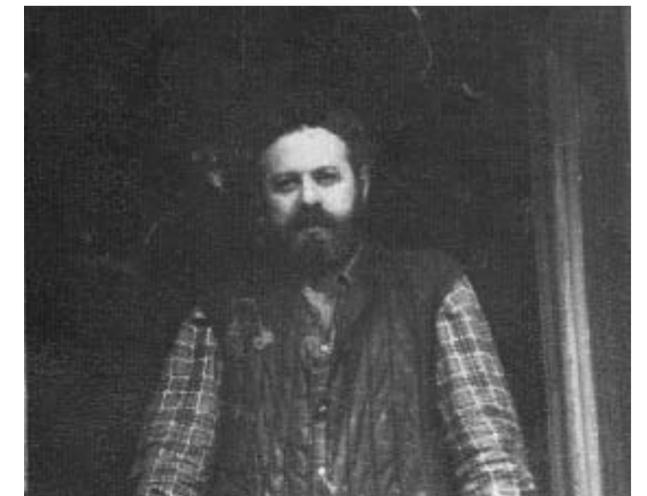
Heads a group of young artists and founds a school of brand label design based on the hieratic concept, creating trademarks for light industry: "We want to break away from dry, mundane design ... and illustrative false-significant posing ... with new transformations, we spontaneously incarnate the eternal dream of a magic Sign ... we seek the fullness of designation, high emblematic independence and the happy silence of hieratic taurus." The group designs labels and studies similar works by Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, El Lissitzky and Alexander Rodchenko.

1967

Meets Yevgeny Schiffers, a director who later becomes a theologian. Schiffers' attempts to become Shvartsman's ideologue are unsuccessful. Differences emerge when Schiffers leads all contact away from painting. His capricious demands evoke the distaste of the artist: "Either name or burn your works." Shvartsman believes: "Any naming (verbal naming) of the hierature is merely a tribute to the common emotional 'regulation', that is, the custom of 'storing' and crowning with a 'name tag'. There is no genuine, i.e. mystical, requirement for this."

1968

The artist Mikhail Shemyakin is impressed by Shvartsman's painting and travels from Leningrad to see the artist. Shemyakin later emigrates to Paris, where he implements what he has seen.



Mikhail Shvartsman. Lyubertsy, 24 August 1969

Facade of the artist's house in Lyubertsy. Photographed in 2003





Iraida and Mikhail Shvartsman at home. 1972



Iraida and Mikhail Shvartsman at home. 1972



Mikhail Shvartsman and Dmitry Gorokhov on the balcony of his house on Third Cable Street. 1977



Mikhail Shvartsman with his grandson Dmitry. 1977

1969

Mikhail Shemyakin's friend, the art historian Vladimir Ivanov, visits Shvartsman from Leningrad. When he marries and stays in Moscow, he becomes a close friend of the artist, who shares his ideas with the critic in long conversations with him. In the early 1970s, Ivanov writes an article inspired by Shvartsman entitled *Metaphysical Synthetism*.

1970

Following his mother's death, moves with his family into her former room in a communal flat on Third Cable Street in Moscow. Not possessing his own studio, he paints where he lives.

Converts to Christianity, although in his heart he has always been a Christian.

Working at the Special Bureau of Art and Construction, tells his graphic section about his hieratic concept. Formulates the concept of



Mikhail Shvartsman lived in this house in Moscow from 1971 to 1984, occupying a communal flat on the second floor. Photographed in 2003

hieratic pedagogy: "Know the pragmatism of things ... Be clear as a master, know the measure and the reckoning. Value a clear line, the magic of unforeseen curves, know the paint and the intoxication of colour." A need for spiritual contact arises. Two members of his group express the desire to work with Shvartsman and paint in an hieratic style. The artist explains the concept and method of hieratic painting at one of their studios, but the experiment ends in failure and with great mental anguish for Shvartsman.

1972

Visited at Third Cable Street by the Czech art historian Jindrich Chalupecky, who has already visited him in Lyubertsy in the late 1960s. Looking at the artist's works, he makes the succinct comment: "Suggestive Shvartsman." The artist is touched by his understanding.

Jindrich Chalupecky visits the artist with his translator Joseph Presnyakov. Chalupecky says that he is writing essays of his visits to Moscow artists for a British magazine called *Studio International* and would like to include Shvartsman, but has very little time. When Shvartsman receives a translation of the essay on him, he finds a complete lack of understanding of his works. He writes a withering letter to Chalupecky: "Shortness and a lack of time and place are no excuse for inaccuracy, indiscernment and superficiality, evoking dissatisfaction and displeasure."

Birth of the artist's grandson Dmitry: "I thought that I was only participating in life and only now, this summer, when Nadezhda was suffering birth pains, and afterwards, did I understand, in a spasm and perturbation, how I love my daughter to death and how terribly dear she is to me."

1974

Visited at home by several young followers, who seem dedicated to hieratic painting. Despite the mental anguish caused by his first experience of working with students, he decides to make a second attempt and agrees to become their teacher, having already crystallised his concept in solitary. Throughout the 1970s, he experiences a need for a spiritual environment, students, hope and understanding. The artist founds the hieratic school of painting in the studio of one of the artists, Anatoly Chaschinsky at Sokolniki, sharing his ideas and painting method.

1975

Shvartsman meets the art critic Boris Groys when holidaying in Koktebel in the Crimea. Groys consequently pays a return visit to the artist and writes articles on him. Shvartsman later claims: "Groy's views evolved from a shrewd and fresh prophetic intuition to snobishness."

1977

Collector George Costakis emigrates and acquires three paintings and three drawings from Shvartsman. The artist presents him with a drawing and Costakis promises to exhibit the works in the West.

Shvartsman finds it very hard to part with his works – "I have betrayed my children" – and suffers a long period of depression. He is helped by the prospect of being able to acquire boards, flax cloth and paints and the chance to make money to keep up Chaschinsky's studio and support his family.

Paints in tempera on chalk primed boards.

French journalist Paul Thorez visits Shvartsman. Returning to France, he accuses Mikhail Shemyakin of plagiarism in an article entitled *A Career on the Misery of Others in Quotidien de Paris* (No. 807, 1977): "These interviews and texts, which he has compiled for his catalogues, describe him as the founder of the 'Leningrad group' – which existed only in his imagination – and the 'metaphysical synthetism' theory of painting. We know the creator of this theory, his name is Shvartsman, he lives in Moscow and works on his own."

Thorez writes the article without the knowledge of Shvartsman, who does not agree with some of his conclusions. Shemyakin sues Thorez. Shvartsman supports Shemyakin by sending a telegram to the court: "I did not write the article on metaphysical synthetism." This was enough for Shemyakin to win the case. As Shvartsman explains: "The article on metaphysical synthetism, written by the young Vladimir Ivanov (very raw), was inspired by myself and my work. This is not a concept, but a declaration, in which I agree with far from everything."

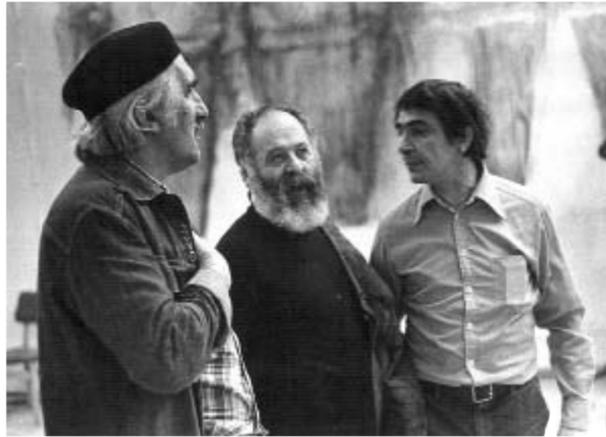
Visited by the French art historian Jean-Claude Marcadé.

Throughout the 1970s, associates with such talented poets from Moscow and St Petersburg as Elena Schwartz, Victor Krivulin, Olga Sedakova, Alexander Velichansky and Dmitry Bobyshev, who dedicate verses to him. Complains of creative loneliness: "Loneliness like the loneliness of a monster that has outlived its species" (Léon Blois). He

refers, of course, to creative loneliness.



Mikhail Shvartsman and Anatoly Chaschinsky outside the studio in Sokolniki. 1979



Mikhail Shvartsman's first ever exhibition at the Municipal Committee of Graphic Artists. From the left: Vladimir Nemukhin, Mikhail Shvartsman, Eduard Steinberg. May 1983



At Boris Messerer's exhibition. From the left: Boris Messerer, Mikhail Shvartsman, Sergei Barkhin. September 1981



Mikhail Shvartsman with his daughter Nadezhda and son-in-law Mikhail. 1980s



Robert Rauschenberg and Mikhail Shvartsman at the Central House of Artists in Moscow. 2 February 1989



Exhibition opening at the Municipal Committee of Graphic Artists. From the left: Ilya Kabakov, Mikhail Shvartsman, Oleg Vasilyev. 17 May 1983



From the left: Francisco Infante, N. Nikitina, Boris Groys, Mikhail Shvartsman. 1975



From the left: Malik, Eric Bulatov, N. Bulatova, Iraidia Shvartsman, Mikhail Shvartsman, Nonna Goryunova, D. Infante, N. Nikitina, Boris Groys, Ivan Chuikov. 5 June 1980



Mikhail Shvartsman and Yevgeny Schiffers visiting the Steinbergs. 25 November 1987

1979

The hieratic school of painting splits up, leaving the founder dissatisfied. Deprived of Chaschinsky's studio, he concentrates on graphic art at home until 1982, when he begins to work with Dmitry Gorokhov, his last remaining student. Shvartsman has known Gorokhov's family from as far back as 1962, when Dmitry's mother worked as artistic editor of the *Soviet Export* magazine, where Mikhail often designed the advertisements. When he is twenty, Dmitry writes to Shvartsman, asking to become his student. He joins the hieratic school and becomes the artist's godson in 1977.

1980

Declines the offer of Peter Ludwig to contribute to a group exhibition at the Cologne Kunsthalle.

In the 1970s and 1980s, associates with representatives of Conceptualism and Sots Art. Formulates his attitude towards these movements, explaining his unwillingness to contribute to the exhibitions of the period: "They are conceptualists of various suits, inventors and combiners, self-taskers and self-inflated, nihilators. This entire fraternity, hoping (seriously) to vindicate themselves through the end of the world, even provoking the end. Their activities are based on hope for 'ratio', intellectualism, hopelessness and degeneracy sanctioned by them. They correlate themselves to 'technical progress'. It is an impasse and depression."

1982

Begins to work with his student Dmitry Gorokhov, who graduates from college and teaches in a school, where he is awarded premises for a studio.

Meets the Italian poet and script-writer Antonio Guerra, who invites him to Italy, but he is refused an exit visa by the Soviet authorities.

1983

Exhibits for the first time at the Municipal Committee of Graphic Artists in Moscow (six graphic works; catalogue).

Works in tempera, except for several early oil paintings. Work on his

hieratures proceeds "not mechanically, but organically-metamorphically, first surging forwards, then going backwards." This sometimes lasts for several years.

His works grow in size – *Heralds cycle* (1962–76, 49 x 40 cm), *Keeper of Silence, Forefather and Horoscope* (1970s, 100 x 75 cm), *Alignments of Day, Bitter Grasses, Start of Wisdom and Found Space* (1970s–80s, 100 x 100 cm or 105 x 105 cm) and *Delight of Height, Winged Heart, Heaviness of Fire and Rubicon* (late 1980s and early 1990s, fibreboard, up to 250 cm).

1984

Moves with his family from their communal apartment to a separate flat on Veshnyakov Street.

Receives a samizdat copy of Ilya Kabakov's article *The Seventies*, in which the author, despite long years of friendship since the 1960s, is highly disparaging of Shvartsman's artistic abilities.

He replies: "Dear Ilyusha, your concocted New Year's present and accurate have finally reached me. I make haste to gladden you. I am sorely poisoned – only not by what or how you wrote (both the one and the other are thoroughly bad). What poisons me is your meanness and treachery."

Kabakov's article is later published in a magazine without the sections personally attacking Shvartsman.

Invited by Jürgen Harten, director of the Düsseldorf Kunstverein, to hold an exhibition in West Germany. When Harten asks the Soviet Ministry of Culture for permission to export his works, he is told that there is no such artist in the Soviet Union. When Harten claims that he saw him only yesterday, the Ministry of Culture explains that he is not an official member of the Union of Artists, "but artist number one in terms of export from the Soviet Union" (such a list really did exist).

Shvartsman never joins the Union of Artists, knowing that it is a club of confederates alien to him. He used to joke: "Better to be the only member of Bosch than a member of Mosch [abbreviation for the Moscow branch of the Union of Artists]."

1985

Starring in the mini-series *Peter the Great* in Moscow,



Mikhail Shvartsman at home on Veshnyakov Street. 1988

German-born actor Günther Maria Halmer visits the artist and purchases his early oil painting *Minna* and several drawings. This proves to be a turning point in his life. A year before the official retirement age, he leaves the Special Bureau of Art and Construction, where he has worked for nineteen years, to devote himself to painting.

1986

Meets Valery Dudakov, a leading art historian from Moscow, collector and representative of the Culture Foundation. Dudakov buys *Blue Hierature*.

Meets the American art historian John Bowl.

1987

Visited by art historians Margarita and Victor Tupitsyn from the United States on 12 January.

Visited by the Italian ambassador, Giovanni Melillo, and his wife Dagmar on 19 March. The couple acquire paintings by the artist.

Visited by Hans Christoph von Tavel (director of the Kunstmuseum in Berne) and his wife on 17 July.

Visited by the Swiss collector Jolles, his wife, daughter Claudia and Martin Walterkirchen on 18 July.

In August, his wife falls ill and is hospitalised. He remains alone for the first time in his life and leaves the following bequeath:

"When I die, burn the remains...
I was happy in love, in the work of my hands, in my children and my friend..."

M. Shvartsman

8th day of August in the year of Our Lord 1987, Moscow, on the night of the seventh and the eighth."

Interviewed on 3 October by the British art historian Matthew Cullerne Bown, who takes transparencies for his book on modern Russian art (1987).

Visited by representatives of Christie's, but declines to auction his work.

Invited by David McKelvin to exhibit in London, but dreams of first holding a one-man show in Russia.

Dmitry Gorokhov spends two months abroad. Abandons his studio and works at home, creating a cycle of drawings leading to a new series of hieratures, including *Instruction*, *Doors of the Sky*, *Form of Time*, *Catcher* and *Delight of Height*.

1988

Birth of his granddaughter Alexandra.

Begins a new cycle of large-scale hieratures. Although the chalk primed boards are replaced by fibreboard, the artist continues to paint in tempera.

Meets the German art historian Professor Karl Eimermacher and cultural adviser Klaus Schrameyer on 5 January.

The French collector Garik Basmadjan acquires the painting *Triad* and two graphic works on 30 January. Exhibition of the Basmadjan collection at the Tretyakov Gallery on 5 May and then at the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad (catalogue).

Visited by Jose Alvares (publisher), a representative of the Galerie de France and Irina Yefimovich (art historian) on 5 May.

Visited on 21 May by Meda Mladek (American art historian) and Andrei Ostroukh (translator), who suggest holding an exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution (Soros Foundation).

Visited on 6 July by Miriam de Costa (emissary of the Galerie Claude-Bernard in Paris), who offers to hold an exhibition. Promises to send works in two years' time. Despite continual offers over a number of years, never exhibits his works in Paris.

Visited on 7 July by Christoph Vitali (director of the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt-on-Main) and Thomas Krens (director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum).

The Boston Museum of Fine Arts offer to hold an exhibition, but the artist is adamant about holding his first one-man show in Russia.

Visited by David Elliot from the Museum of Modern Art. Contributes *Hierature of Hopes* to an exhibition in England curated by Valery Dudakov, celebrating a centenary of Russian art (catalogue).

The artist's works in the West are shown at a group exhibition in Berne (article on Shvartsman in the *I Live/I See* catalogue by Yevgeny Barabanov).

1989

Austrian collector Judo Fraenckel purchases the *Milky Way* hierature.

Visited by Lord Camoys and Simon de Pury of Sotheby's. Submits five large works, which are never auctioned.

Meets the famous American artist Robert Rauschenberg when he holds a one-man show in Moscow. Shows his works to Rauschenberg, who is impressed.

Albrecht Martini of Deutsche Bank constantly offers to hold an exhibition at the Bochum Museum. Agrees to travel to Germany and look at the offered exhibition sites.

Travels to Germany with his wife on 17 September at the invitation of Dr Marina Sandman. Tours six towns and inspects possible exhibition sites. Visits Dieter Honisch (director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin) and Alexander Duckers (director of the Stchkkabinett in Berlin). Duckers suggests holding an exhibition of graphic art, but the artist believes that his graphic art should not be shown first.

Visits the Hamburg Kunsthalle, where director Werner Hoffmann offers to hold an exhibition alongside Russian icons. The artist declines the offer, fearing that his works will be regarded as new icons.

Visits Albrecht Martini of the Bochum Museum and inspects the permanent collection. Agrees to exhibit fifty paintings and fifty works of graphic art, but when he returns to Moscow he learns that at least 150 paintings are needed for commercial reasons. Refuses to lend such a large number of paintings and the show is cancelled.

Visited by James Billington of the US Library of Congress on 11 November.

1990

Visited on 28 January by Luca Gassner, Nicola Genni and Paolo Logli from Swiss television, who shoot material for an unmade film.

Visited by Peter Spielman (director of the Bochum Museum), who attempts to convince him to exhibit at his museum, but refuses to contribute more than fifty paintings and fifty works of graphic art.

Negotiations on 23 May with Lesley Hershman (gallery owner) and



Mikhail and Iraida Shvartsman at home. 1986

Natalia Osmolovskaya (head of the exhibition department) from London on the purchase of works.

Unsuccessful negotiations with representatives of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

Barbara Kusenberg from Germany shoots a documentary film on the artist at home and in his studio.

Eddy Navarro photographs the artist for an album.

1991

Visited on 2 June by Dr Franz Sels and his daughter Clara Maria (owners of a gallery in Düsseldorf), Pavel Khoroshilov (*Soyuzkhudozheport*) and his assistant Fyodor Ogarev.

Receives a letter from Dr Franz Sels on 13 November with a contract for a gallery exhibition in Düsseldorf, but declines the offer.

On 18 November gives transparencies and photographs to art historian Ekaterina Degot, who is writing a book on artists of the 1970s and 1980s and contemporary Russian painting. The book is published in the United Kingdom.

Dr Thomas Deeke (director of the Ubersee-Museum in Bremen) visits the artist and offers him a one-man show at his museum, but the offer is declined.

Hermann Wiesler (professor of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin) offers the artist a post with his students in Berlin, but is rejected.

Valery Dudakov contributes Shvartsman's *Blue Hierature* to the *Other Art* (1956–76) group exhibition held at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and the Russian Museum in Leningrad.

1992

Lydia Jovleva (deputy director for academic research) and Olga Yushkova (curator) invite the artist to hold a one-man show at the Tretyakov Gallery. Although he has an alternative offer from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, he agrees to exhibit at the Tretyakov Gallery. He is helped by Olga Yushkova, whom he calls the initiator of his "Tretyakov expectations". When asked to give names to the exhibited works, to make the paperwork easier, he refuses: "The hierature cannot be verbally named. It is a Sign and, as a Sign, has its own tacit name." In a compromise decision, he agrees to give the works nominal titles.

1993

Meets Yury Luzhkov (mayor of Moscow), who awards the artist his first ever studio, which he unfortunately never works in.

1994

Major *Hieratures* retrospective at the Tretyakov Gallery from 15 March to 20 April, consisting of sixty-eight paintings and forty works of graphic art (catalogue). The exhibition enjoys great public resonance and the artist is referred to as a national asset.

"The first exhibition of the most enigmatic, most inaccessible and probably the most influential artist has opened ... A large number of people were present at this historical event" (*Kommersant Daily*, No. 47, 17 March 1994, p. 12).

One-day show at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in honour of the visit of the Israeli head of state.

Donates two paintings – *Ricerca* and *Meta-Portrait* – to the Tretyakov Gallery (followed by *Morning Sphere* in 2001). The Tretyakov Gallery purchases three paintings – *Trinital Space*, *Idea of Place* and *Hierature of Breakthrough* – and six works of graphic art (the artist later donates one more). Donates the



Opening of Mikhail Shvartsman's Hieratures exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery
15 March 1994

painting Tokko to the *Literary Gazette* for a charity auction.

The Galerie Clara Maria Sels in Düsseldorf buys seven paintings and twenty works of graphic art for itself and the Clemens-Sels Museum in Neuss.

Mikhail Shvartsman School (Brand Labels of the Special Bureau of Art and Construction 1966–84) exhibition (catalogue) shows that "Mikhail Shvartsman's works in applied design are just as unique as his works of fine art" (*Kommersant Daily*, No. 164, 1 September 1994).

Presents *Joyous Herald* to Mikhail Shemyakin for helping to publish the catalogue of his one-man show at the Tretyakov Gallery.

Breaks his collarbone and is hospitalised.

1995

German collector Jacob Bar-Gera purchases two paintings – *Exit* (1972, 100 x 75 cm) and *Former Incarnations* (1970, 100 x 75 cm).

Mikhail Shemyakin promises to publish a monograph on the artist. He sends Arkady Lvov to photograph all the artist's works and secure his archive of theoretical writings.

Opening of Mikhail Shvartsman's Hieratures exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery
15 March 1994



Declines to contribute to an exhibition of art accompanying a festival of music in Lockum in Germany due to a lack of organisation and insurance.

Antonio Guerra shoots a film on Shvartsman directed by Garik Paradjanov.

Breaks his hip and spends two months in hospital.

Gives Mikhail Shemyakin seven fundamental graphic hieratures as an advance for his promised monograph on the artist.

Contributes *Dolphin Formula* to an exhibition in memory of Kazimir Malevich at the UNESCO International Federation of Artists exhibition rooms in Moscow.

1996

Agrees to hold an exhibition at the prestigious Naschokin House in Moscow after Natalia Rurickova (director) sees his works at his one-man show at the Tretyakov Gallery in 1994.

Norton Dodge acquires the painting *Sundew* (1972, 100 x 75 cm) for the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers, State University of New Jersey.



Mikhail Shvartsman. 1997

1997

Contributes thirty-four paintings and forty works of graphic art to a one-man show at the Naschokin House in Moscow (catalogue). "Shvartsman's creative world and personality are one of the greatest surprises of the artistic life of recent years" (A. Vasinsky, "Greetings from the Year 3835", *Izvestiya*, No. 24, 7 February 1997).

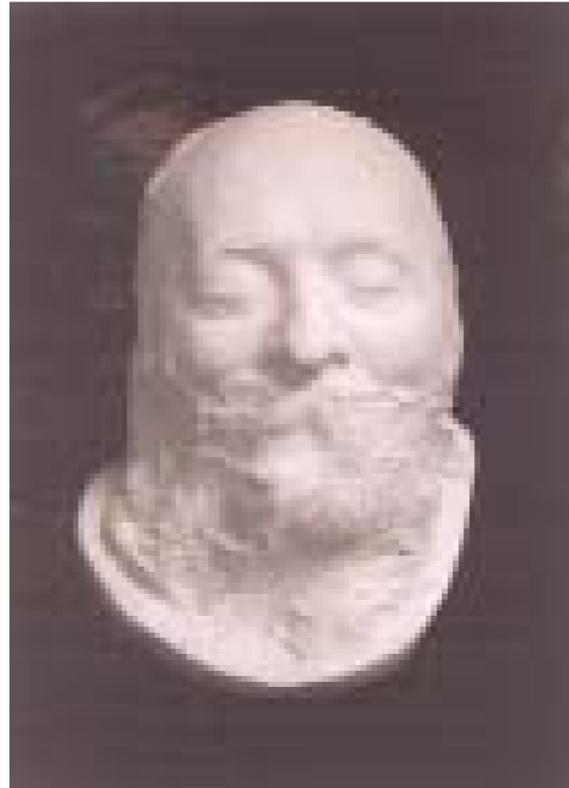
Falls ill on 6 November and rapidly deteriorates, despite all the efforts of the doctors and nurses.

DIES AT 9:25 AM ON 18 NOVEMBER 1997

"A leading artist, legendary man and model of fate has passed away..." (Ekaterina Degot, "The First and Only Hierat of Russian Painting", *Looking from St Petersburg*, No. 90, January 1998).



Mikhail Shvartsman on his death bed
9:25 am, 18 November 1997



Mikhail Shvartsman's death mask,
made four hours after his demise, at 2 pm on 18 November 1997
Property of the Russian Museum



Gravestone of Mikhail Shvartsman (1926–1997)
Don Cemetery, Moscow
Photographed in 2003

**THE LITERARY HERITAGE OF
MIKHAIL SHVARTSMAN**

This book introduces readers to the literary heritage of Mikhail Shvartsman. Only short extracts from this heritage were published in the artist's lifetime,¹ followed by more excerpts after his death.² This new album places these writings in their historical context of meaning.

The book publishes the main body of texts written by Mikhail Shvartsman, offering a fascinating insight into the artist's creative world. They include theoretical constructions, diary-like observations, notes, exhortations, discussions, letters, poems and authorised extracts from interviews. They are intended to help explain the artist's key ideas, concepts, positions and attitude.

The main material in the Notebooks section is the notes for Mikhail Shvartsman's planned *Book on Hieratism*. These entries include a list of possible titles for the book itself and the individual parts, sections and chapters. The list is reproduced here in its entirety:

HEADINGS

1967

Contents

- Graphic experience and reflections on the sign
- The sign and work on the sign. Graphic experience and several conclusions
 - The sign – Good silence
 - The sign as a higher form of tacit communication
 - The sign as a title – a tacit name
- Ecstatics – birth of the sign, entickening of the sign
- The ecstatic experience of spirit-manifestation – birth of the sign
 - The principles of hieratic pedagogy
 - Self-manifestation. The sensual aspect
 - Cardiographic linear experience
 - Linear spirit-manifestation
 - Crystallisation. Recognition
 - Pedagogical conclusion
 - Sign hieratures
- Spiritual experience pressed in the sign

As the compilers have not found any further development of this plan, the notes of Mikhail Shvartsman are published in chronological order, rather than grouped according to theme. This helps the reader to better understand the correlations between the unaltered and changing elements of the artist's line of thinking. The majority of notes were, unfortunately, not dated by the author. They are therefore grouped under such general headings as 1960s, Early 1970s and Late 1970s. All datings – both in the headings and in the square brackets preceding individual entries – are by the artist's widow, Iraida Shvartsman.

The published texts are based on the handwritten notes in the personal archives of Iraida Shvartsman. Besides writings in jotters and albums, many entries were made on individual scraps of paper, accompanied by scorings, lines, drawings, scribbles and corrections. Several texts exist in different versions, rewritten in the artist's handwriting, often with later corrections.

The translator has attempted to retain the original structure of the sentences, in order to facilitate a parallel word search in the original language and to better convey the spirit of the Russian. The orthography of certain words often reflects the artist's own spellings – for example, *hieragraphy*, instead of the more usual *hierography*. The use of capital and small letters follows the original, as does the use of the hyphen in such terms as *thought-essence* and *proto-existence*. Entries are separated by asterisks.

The correspondence section reproduces several letters written by Mikhail Shvartsman. Preference has been given to those shedding light on artist's theoretical constructions and cardinal points of view regarding art and the artistic community. The letters are based on the originals or copies.

The poetry section reveals an unexpected and new side to the master, also throwing new light on his personality and art.

The compilers

1960s

Art will not disappear.

Deformation and bare construction are, in a certain sense, similar. Organic transformation is the basis of the new art. A synthesis bearing in mind the achievements of the Suprematists and abstractionists and others (from abstraction to the concrete), from divisions towards synthesis, via an understanding of forms, from lost significance to new synthetic significance (religious). Synthesis: unity in the battle of the Suprematist with the plastic, revealed as the subconscious → conscious ↔ overconscious. The whole: an unbelievable image (sign, code), not foreseen, not conceived, realisable in labour, in movement towards the ending of a picture, in spontaneous impulses. The crisis of painting, the disappearance of art? No, no. No.

Enormous significance is once again attached to the transcendental, inexpressible (significance) received in the "overconscious ↔ conscious" process. In the age of fear at the worldwide agony. The highest collectedness of moral forces in a rational calculation of the preceding divisions + spontaneous overcoming of I ♢ I + reborn significance (post-abstract, individual, spontaneous, transcendental, in the volitional process) in labour (the search for a higher significance), a significance not realised by the sharpness of the process of the epoch of analytical divisions (Malevich, Kandinsky, Mondrian and others).

The post-abstract process of synthesis, the morally significant tension of the will of codal self-expression.

The end to the placings of the (even deformed) personae is what is introduced into the picture, the indubitable conceivedness of the picture (the course of pre-abstract work, false and sluggish), outside the unforeseen (and consequently higher) "overconscious ↔ conscious". Nothing should be introduced into the canvas (picture), everything has to be obtained from the canvas. Only this can bring out the unique world of the individual and thus enrich the world. Here is meekness.

Deformation is fracture, fabrication, falsehood, illustration and empty chatter.

Transformation (having, for the uninitiated, the appearance of deformation), found in the spontaneous quest for links inside the picture (subconsciously), in turn realisable and realised, and arising organically – that is the modern task.

The "economy of energy" (for me) is not topical, on the contrary. This was good for the epoch of divisions (Malevich and others).

1965

I relinquish the field of hostility to anyone desiring victories on this field. I have no time for enmity – I am too busy.

1968

Demonic forces, tempests and cataclysms are tamed by the sun – the festival of light. God is the highest clarity. To create a festival implies dissolving in God.

That is the basis of my cause in life.

9 November 1969

Early 1970s

1970

My concept is myth and counter-concept. Myth is irratio. Movement through cultures, exploding their "labyrinths", embracing, absorbing, imbibing the "Ariadne's thread" of the memory immured in the flesh, following the visions of millennial tasks, left to themselves, opening eyes to the signs of the promise, recognising them in the intersections and destruction of metamorphoses. I find the truth, the only truth of the myth. The sign of the Spirit presses in itself a myriad of diligent truths, overcoming them for the sake of the myth – the vision of the Lord.

Death does not stop the hieratic work of "I". I will find the task of faith, anew incarnated. That is my hieratonics.

The process of the manifestation of the hieratic image (sign) is teleological. When it arises – albeit even in the anguish of a search – the master recognises it. It is the crown of the deed.

"When seeking beauty, man lived in anguish," while "before the ideals of beauty created by the past and bequeathed to us in the everlasting inheritance, we pour out often our whole longing for the present, not from helplessness at our own lives, but the opposite, from a burning desire for life and the longing for an ideal, which we achieve in anguish" (Dostoyevsky).

"In the worldly steppe, the Castilian spring, enliven exiles" (Pushkin). I would say "creates the exiled ... those exiled into the future." As Gogol said, it may appear in two hundred years' time.

Do not speak about *katsaps* (Russians) or Jews; speak about people creating testimonies of the Holy Spirit through patient passion, then you will be able to understand the creation of man here in his single essence.

There will be no need then to defend national originality through fighting or jeering. It will become a genuine reality reposing on a spiritual basis.

National originality does not require an importunate defence. It exists and that is all. Fights internationalise – evil is international.

The mouths and entrances into the secret – I saw them at the beginning and I saw them at the end. There are entrances. Nothing is needed, only to find these mouths. They are the sources of ex"l"stence. If there are sinews in heaven, they are open to those who seek. They feed on them. Renounce yourself and you will see.

The substantial meaning of things, and not an impression of them, is revealed as a result of genuine knowledge. Genuine knowledge is not a collection of information, but mystical reality. Only knowledge transformed in spiritual practice is genuine.

"We should be clearly aware of everything (!) and accept loneliness and poverty" (Van Gogh).

Oh, Lord! May you not forget the vision (sie est theos).

The teleology of the hieratic Deed (hieratonics) is that the image (sign) is already present beneath the surface of the paper or board. The work consists of cutting open and inculcation inside the planes, manifesting, liberating the image, recognising the image by degree of liberation, tormenting oneself in anguish: an instant – it instantaneously hit me – the prayer for Transfiguration gave fruit – the sign of the Spirit is revealed.

Hieratonics – liturgising through hierography – a sacred rite through the act of the hieratic Deed – the reading of eternity.



Inscribed on the back: To Misha Shvartsman, portrait of the artist Shvartsman made by the architect Tsekhnovits'er summer 1966 in the city of Petersburg

The signs of elevation are hieratures, the secret is in them.
 The signs of churches (their noumenal designation) are meta-texture.
 From the inside and on the outside, from far and near, enormous outside you, intimate inside you – the light-saturated and light-resonant hierature – spiritual architectural-emblematic testimony of the House of Higher Life, the concentrated idea of hieratic architecture, its image – (deincarnated tectonic proto-phenomenon). Multi-worldly and multi-dimensionally.³

Vision and imperceptibility (a summons to begin).
 There is no need for a court of people, only the Judgement of God (I know, I was there, when I saw the light of the Creation), the happiness of the Creation (creation – the Creation – ending mark) and this light (the Judgement of God) is always with me.
 The largest (equivalent to flight in a dream). The anguish and happiness of labour is painting a church.
 Shedding and rubbing in paint like blood with the effort of a dream and anticipating. Touching, rubbing, sliding and following the trace of the dream.

[1970]

1972

Teberda, 12 April 1972
 I was in an Alpine meadow. I lay on the gnarled snag of a birch tree. It absorbed all the furious and perishable meaning of the body. My freed Spirit dissolved in the lace of the aromas of the blossoming crown of a willow tree, in its dark downy haze, the drone of the bees. The horizon overturned. The mountains formed the font of John the Baptist. The dark gold of times shone through the half-closed eyelids. Everything melted in the heavenly light of good silence. Pink robins engaged in tomfoolery and daybreak in my beard.

This sorrowful diversity, this sorrowful void of Muscovite quantities. My God, what spiritual loneliness, what flogged cynicism, what, moreover, vanity under a lid, and the soul of frenzied faith, purity, sincerity and clarity must survive this harsh, perfidious, troubled time.

The hieratic Sign, manifesting itself, reveals sabbath calm.
 There is no evening in it.
 The Lord blesses the eternal sabbath with the Sign.
 The revelation is unutterable, the Sign is an indecipherable secret.
 Invention is a form when the hiera-sign knows through the hierat.
 The engendered sign is illuminated through the pledge of sign-birth.
 The aroma of laundry brought in from the air.

We see the genuine, i.e. the fantastic or, to be even more exact, the mythological, i.e. the Higher reality of colour in nature. What tones merely spy and push in valeur is a lie. Irratio is the truth and ratio is a lie, useful for the given moment.

Summer 1972

The Year of Our Lord 1972

A new figurative structure of modern architecture has now been found in hieratics. To be more precise:
 An architectural style signifying the end of the heartless preoccupation with everything technical and standing on an equal par with the grand styles of grand architecture.
 The principles of the birth of the forms of this new architectural style are designated prophetically by the acts of the hieratures.

Empty madeness is not mastery, but the archness of mastery.

1973

The great carnival of pain, pride and death. The high passion grief of the stars. The death of joy. Beyond the veil of the rain. The door to silence. Loosen the fabric of the nights. Loosen the yarn of the days. What for, why do we die so many deaths.
 Baptism, anointing, marriage, repentance, priesthood, communion, anointment.
 Life appears to be a disease and death is the cure.
 I sit on a cloud and fly towards myself. Do not imitate thy afflictions. Why does thou, masking wailing with singing, hurrying from the depth, a sleepy mistake, bad dreams, the refuse of nonsense, the riffraff of nightmares. A skin-coloured meadow. The eye thaws out. I knew without recognising, I knew without wondering. Drown in thyself, in the world in which everything is under doubt. Oh! The incandescence of the truth or, more accurately, the contagion of the truth. The houses are lit by darkness. Life is slippery.

Hieratic painting, the hieratic image, arises as a trace of movement out of the darkness (the ungrounded or groundlessness) by the will of the light – the highest freedom, slow astounding sweet meditation, through images of the phenomenal world, through the layers of cultures beyond death towards the Holy Spirit. And when this trace entickens – dreamt out and saturated with this movement – like the Sign of the Spirit, it is incomparable and beautiful.

We shall be saved by beauty. By the beauty of salvation.

March 1973

A reflection on the Byzantine province, where the Spirit of the grand form is manifested more profoundly and significantly than in

the centre. Just as the Muscovite school and “royal painting” are downturns and emptiness when compared with Pskov and Novgorod, not even mentioning Tver.

Oh! Oh! Tver culture! The greatest, tragic testimony of the Holy Spirit – and it is trampled asunder by Moscow.

May 1973

11 November 1973

Veshnyaki [...]

The Suprematist idea is expended in two or three canvases, when referring to painting. Gouging on this place is positional squawking. The Suprematist idea is valuable as an idea. This idea is, in sections, pragmatically fine and that is all. The Suprematist idea does not resolve the architectural designs of spirit-testimony, although it is excellent in matters of construction. Malevich himself understood this, but it was not given to him to discover hieratics. He understood this because he was religious.

When we imbibe and when we analyse the iconic structure (an analysis by degree of its possibilities, applied to the practice of isography), it must be admitted that the Suprematist element (speaking in the language of today) is only part of things, only part, albeit a very important part.

For example, the *Saviour in Majesty*.

The constructive in the icon is analysable, the fullness of the act of testimony does not submit to analysis, for it is born spontaneously and (oh! the paradox for the materialists) on abundance, i.e. on a mysterial line, on a personal and congregational spiritual experience.

Another thing about the hieratic. Besides all our definitions once given, the hieratic – hieratic structure is, first and foremost, a sign situation, concentrating inside itself the irrational, the over-personal, a personal mystical experience and a personal emotional self-manifestation in sign, constructive and inexorably Suprematist (in the positional and terminological meaning of the word) forms. Supremus is the Latin for the highest or supreme.

Unlike the deformative features of a work of Expressionism and Surrealism, unlike the constructive schematism and the schematisation of Suprematism and unlike the engineering inventiveness of Constructivism, the hieratic transformation is born, namely born, only spontaneously and cyclically – laying one spontaneous cycle of the hieratic spirit-manifestation onto another (rhythmically as the cycle is extinguished). The results of the links of these cycles are then critically realised.

Hence: reason – spontaneous – realisation.

The hierat's method of work is meditative.

The tokens are perceived in the following structure:

Ladder	First cycle	Higher cycle	The co-participant of the master-hierat is the Rapture of spirit-manifestation (a feeling familiar even to an actor)
	Invention Phantasmagoria Metamorphosis	Intuition Imagination Metamorphosis	
	First row	Higher row	

A remark outside: rapture is the highest, yet inexplicable category, an eternal category, in the cycles of appraisal!

Digressing from the miraculous bombasticness of the task, I will also note: master! Make a prayer to the Holy Spirit before beginning.

“To the King of Heaven, Soother and Soul of the Truth, be everywhere and fulfil everything; treasure of good things and Giver of life,



Mikhail Shvartsman. 1974

come and inhabit us and purify us from all evil and save, Blessed One, our souls.”

Follow your vision. Manifest the trace of this vision. Austerely, sincerely, not pleasing yourself, without regard for ignoramuses, blessings or reward, for you receive it by strengthening your vision. What reward can possibly compare to your delight?

Know the pragmatism of things as firmly as the Word of God. Be clear as a master, know the measure and the reckoning. Value a clear line, the magic of unforeseen curves, know the paint and the intoxication of colour.

“Hey, King Lord! Give me the power to see my sins and not condemn my brother, be blessed for all ages. Amen.”

The sign is not preconceived, but born. It is the result of transformations (metamorphoses).

The hieratic sign is non-expressive, it indicates the result of the overcoming of expression. The hieratic sign is lordly and independent.

The scheme is dead, it does not bear any relation to the sign born unforeseen (excluding the tranquil signs of analysis). The nature of the scheme is its givenness. Create an analysis, it is needed, needed for metaphysical synthetism. Do not create analysis in an off-hand manner. Do not be tedious, do not be sanctimonious, be merry, kind and artistic (even in work). Leave tastes and aestheticism to the tailors. Taste is objective in the sincerity of genuine work and high mastery. Taste can, for the actor, be virtually a task of life. For you are an hierat, not an actor. Taste for you is a *priori* in spirit-manifestation.

A master hierat, in his calling and fate, is born, raised and creates in a congregatory-hieratic channel in which each real master is meta-historically and meta-temporally on a single line. Not even the historical dialectics of the tasks change the position.

The correlation of hierats is charismatic-hierarchic.

The signs of hieratic spirit-manifestation are also strictly hierarchic (analyse the matter) and proceed from pre-hieratic structures of defamiliarisation (*ostranenie*), which are also hierarchic.

Defamiliarisation is a pre-death structure characterised not by overcome elements of expression, characterism, an external link of meaning or content of meaning and so forth. This form is popularly

called “not of this world” – sacraconversazione links and sacraconversazione heroes.

The highest hierarchy of defamiliarisation is the countenance of death in the coffin. The highest link of the heroes of defamiliarisation is a link within the bounds of sacraconversazione (sacred conversation)–silence.

The structures of defamiliarisation or, rather, the images and heroes of defamiliarisation, live in the sensual sphere and can be observed in life. The popular phrase “not of this world” still exists.

But the highest hierarchies of defamiliarisation in the compositional sense are manifested outside the mise-en-scènes. For example: the early Italians, Roman Gaul, medieval plastic art and the highest specimens of folk creativity.

The chain of hierarchies of defamiliarisation arises from simple strangeness via an image “not of this world” to the countenance of death. This is the lower hierarchic step of the hieratic structures, for when dying, man creates an iconnic countenance emblematically concentrating the spiritual meaning of his past life.

For the hierat, in any case, the death of a man is the creation of an icon of himself. It is not a face any more, but a countenance, i.e. an hieratic structure.

The structures of defamiliarisation can be characteristic, but never grotesque. The grotesque is a form born by deformation. Hieratic structures are trans-death structures. Let the asses consider this a metaphor.

These structures enticken the images of spiritual hierarchies.⁴

1974

The trace of pain.

Innovation (who knows?) can be originally grandiose, extremely orthodox, and in this sense, if ideas or concepts seem dullards per se or already existent, then they, these ideas, are natural, new and vital, i.e. fruitful.

“The majority of people gifted with the consciousness of a stone” (Spinoza).

Mythological thinking is the only correct way of thinking. “Everything beautiful is as difficult as it is rare.”

A thief, scoundrel and idiot in the one person, like Shumilin,⁵ is worse than a stone.

“Whether in powerful joy or powerful sorrow, the soul of man is forced, as a result of which it feels this and regards as the most evident and completely truthful, although things do not quite stand like this ... Every pleasure and every frustration embodies something like a nail; it nails the soul to the body, strengthens it and makes it like a body, so that it begins to think that what the body considers real is true” (Plato).

[Early 1974]

The trace of pain.

A petty thief says: “When they take a little of much, that is not stealing, but redistribution.”

A bigger thief says: “It has always been so, in nature,” as he can (finding this, albeit with difficulty) consider his own: “I will take it for myself.”

[...]

Oh! Pigs! Oh, thinking stones!

Only what is perceived as always being is organic and fruitful. Yes! We find the tokens of the hieratic with the Egyptians, in old icons and even in neolithics, but try to be able to find (meditate-relax), enticken

the sign of the Spirit, find the hieratic sphere, not through science (it is far from everything), but through a real mystic experience. Develop, ultimately, a method of things and so on, and so on, and so on.

God has always had everything! Just pray! The Saviour said: “Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?!”

According to the thinking of a pig: if the earth turned before Copernicus, it is possible to smear Copernicus and indeed necessary to do so on this basis. Hurrah for dullards! They have a powerful argument.

Oh! The secret bitterness of rowan trees! Oh! Carnival of pain.

No, it is not your concern, Mikhail, go where you have been called. Do not look back and remember: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Amen!

To the heeding student:

Do not steal. Theft will convince you of your own nothingness, and you will be dissipated.

If you try to escape suffering, the Lord will not give you this. You should not attempt to escape the torments of the cross! You will only get something much worse – the anguish of falling. You will never escape the pain from hitting the ground. If any one of my students does not understand this, then he has not learnt anything. Do not get carried away with victories. Are you sure they are not defeats?

The congregational principle, which I constantly spoke about at the classes of the hieratic school, was understood by the scoundrels (Shum[ilin] and Tr[ofimov])⁶ as the “free right to steal” (everything is, after all, ours), to steal, passing one’s own and gratifying one’s own so-called artistic vanity (where does Spirit-testimony come in here?). There is no place for rogues in the Congregational Work. A strict hierarchy, personification and charisma reign in the Congregational Work.

In the course of things (or through the course of things) it has to be confessed that the counter-post situation, albeit more multi-signifying and multi-linear than with the old masters, has enormous importance in the manifestation of the hieratures and meta-lectures. And so one more token, left to us in past incarnations, is read... (by past incarnations). Yet... never forget: a perspective can also be straight; that is also in the course of things and this is one of the possibilities, yet in spite of the “Renaissance” not the only one, but together “with” an essentially different nature of space – hieratic space, i.e. meta-space.

Any pre-hieratic situation (i.e. accumulation) or, as I called it, mixture, is in itself nothing. It is only a more or less “successful” reason for its consequent defamiliarisation and then exit into hierato. But “success” here can only be called a “success” at first appraisal, because it can, as a consequence of this first appraisal (only according to reason, and this means little for the hierat), only slow things down by being called a “success”. The first appraisal of the first mixtures are far from always prophetic (especially without hierographic experience). An artist, and not an hierat, being an artist, is vain and therefore always hurries, hurries to place himself in rank and so always falls into an attributive appraisal: taking the mixture for spirit-manifestation.

To the hierat:

Every sheet of paper, every started canvas, even if only manifested in the form of a few lines (even seemingly chance ones), is already an organism with its own spiritual (and, accordingly, physical) genetics. The task is to open and reveal it in such a way as to bring out and

express that for which the Lord has roused you each separate time. The correspondence to the law of tectonic connection, colour connection, linear connection, capable of being rediscovered every time, even in labour pains, corresponds to the will of the Lord, rousing you to enticken with form the sign of the Holy Spirit.

An enormous possibility of admiration is laid within us. Does that imply that God refers to the necessity of an answer equal to this possibility?

That is the secret of prayer through deeds.

The prolific sign of confluence with the divinity is given.

The metaphysical penetration into the eternal initial is given.

Thus arises the criterion of the high structure of form, thus arises the hope of resurrecting an hierarchy of values – the natural state of acts of culture.

If the children of God understand this, it will be empty for the talentless, who have forcibly placed themselves in line. Oh, how they have binged! Cesspits await them. “By their deeds shall ye know them.”

Everything that is not of Faith is sin.

We walk by Faith and not by sight (St Paul the Apostle).

The virtues of pagans are shining sins.

Worship the Lord God and serve Him alone.

“Death, where is your sting; hell, where is your victory?”

To draw an hiera implies giving names to the creations of God as prescribed, for the creation of the world continues.

Meta-life (the secret of hieratisation).

“Twice two makes four, and such positiveness is not life, gentlemen, but is the beginning of death” (Dostoyevsky).

A lumen naturale nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati (The natural light is nothing other than a likeness through simultaneous participation to the uncreated light).

“Everyone knows that it is impossible to remake the world. An ignoramus who does not know this is found by chance ... and makes discoveries” (Einstein).

“Reason does not and cannot have any one universal and necessary truth. No one, except the Creator, is permitted to insert laws into the structure of existence” (L. Sh[estov]).

“Do not laugh, do not delight, do not hate, but understand” (Spinoza).

AMA⁷ frets about “knowledge”, yet simply fails to understand that knowledge is from the Creator and in the power of the Creator, but he wants to make the Creator depend on knowledge. This is Hellenism – one cannot amalgamate the truth of Greek philosophy with the truths of the Bible (with the revelation).

Spinoza: “The intellectual love for the God of our Soul is part of the endless love of God for Himself.”

This is the self-evident truth of reason, and not the “idiocy of preaching” ...

[To Yevgeny Schiffers]⁸

Zhenya! You tell me: why (at least under Paul) were Hellenic statues regarded as idols? This is art and, in this sense, Spirit trace?!

This is because they are the visibility of man and, thus, you worship the corporeal. And E[rnst] N[eizvestny], praised by you, is, by a misunderstanding, an idol-maker, also makes [the Hellenic], only torn, this is naturel, entropied naturel, yet nevertheless naturel, even weighed by a literary idea. From the point of view of “grand form”, idols, for

example the real ones, will give E[rnst] N[eizvestny] as a form 1000 points in front on the scale of a marvel.

In the categories of so-called art, this is vulgar but bearable; well, it will do, for example, as a nery illustration of the entropic present world or, what is very high for him, as an “expression of this world”. But if this phenomenal naturel, a thousand pardons, is considered a manifestation of the prophetic, then only by the blind writers whom he (E[rnst] N[eizvestny]) hails and instructs in his own manner.

Only the Hellenic believed the visible, only he came to believe in the Bio. In the nery and corporeal fabric and, through it, in the “necessity”. Any summons (including through art) expressively, raggedly, nervously, dynamically or anything else in this vein nails my immortal soul to the body, then makes me accept bodily sufferings and so forth for the truth and corporeal acts for acts of the Spirit. Expression and its presentation are admissible as artistic manifestations, but not as acts of Spirit-testimony. The body is the body and the Spirit is the Spirit.

One cannot dash between Scylla and Charybdis here. Wax the corporeal ear!

Even physical form-manifestations (not forgetting about the writings-instructions – the spiritual “prophylaxis” of our holy fathers), even form-manifestations, are strictly and extremely Hierarchic.

According to the act and scale of the marvel and what is called grand form, the real savage idols give the “great” E[rnst] N[eizvestny] the bum’s rush. For this is imaginative.

In this way (Oh! mistake!), a purely corporeal, expressive manifestation cannot even be called a sign (as the sign, according to the hierarchy of forms, is a purely hieratic manifestation), while corporeal manifestation is, at best, an indication, a gestural manifestation, i.e. an attributive or, if need be, an emblematic sphere.

Lord, how clearly aware this was to the Egyptians; they did not suffer any confusion between the demonic, pictogrammic and the hieratic, by which they mean the acts of only a mysterial structure. Amen!

An invented form is deformative – not an act of metamorphosis (and, accordingly, attributive). A form not invented or even meditated, but imaginative and unforeseen, is spirit manifestation; such a form cannot be called emblematic. Only do not mistake the subconscious imagination of “savages” for the overconscious imagination of Christ.

“The love of beauty is the metaphysical longing for one’s former abode” (Plotin).

Shambhala

Hieratic net.

Hieragraphic chain.

Hieratic topography.

Hieragraphic corpus.

Hieragraphy is the technique of the quest for an hieratic structure.

Spiral soaring – hieragraphic meta-tecture compositions ... topped into the light, like worlds of silence, clarity and serenity, are (I think) a graphic psalm.

Hierature – countenance of the Spiritual hierarchy – sign of gates and passage to the noumen, token of the noumen and sign of its passage, spilling onto us, towards us.

They arise agonisingly slowly, like growth, by the prophetic application of one transfiguration onto another, their mutual destruction, the meditative concentrated and elemental manifestation of the points

of hieragraphic topography, their meditative reading with superimposition on one another and the downfall of transfigurations – and so on until the full manifestation of a rich and clear hieratic metamorphosis – the sign of the Spirit (hierature, meta-lecture). Whom shall I tell? Lord!

Inspiration.
Vision.

A theological hieragraphic situation is an aimed hierature (with the attribute of self-canonisation) founded (this time) by pre-prepared reuniting pre-hieratures, each of which arose spontaneously as self-significant bodies, with an unforeseen aim.

Pre-hieratic phantasmagorias

1. Philosophical (?)
2. Theological
3. In the trace of a vision

“The truth points to itself and to the false” (Spinoza).

I do not feel the slightest urge to make geometric, stereometric, perspective and spatial focuses. No. My hieratures, meta-textures and other holy signs, i.e. hieratic situations of irrational worlds, express the noumenal essence of architecture. Like the countenances of the spiritual hierarchies, they arise spontaneously, unforeseen, and represent a spiritual shelter, a light-bearing House of Higher Life – a tectonic sign. These signs are a silent psalm, like all hiera-structures are hierarchic, where the lowest hierarchy is related to inventions and the highest hierarchy is inexplicable in the fullness of the expressed metamorphosis.

Sunday the 17th day of November in the Year of Our Lord 1974

I thought that I was only participating in life and only now, this summer [1972], when Nadezhda was suffering birth pains, and afterwards, did I understand, in a spasm and perturbation, how I love my daughter to death and how terribly dear she is to me

Authentic colouring is the clarity of mutual entrances and penetrations in the essence of emblematic hieratic links. The erroneous Renaissance contradiction between line and colour will then be dispelled. Both masculinity and femininity are typical of nature. Fools regard “softness” as an indication of painting. And they consider loss or general weakening of the line to be softness. No, no, no! Softness is a linear characteristic. Line expresses both the softness of the structure and hardness. Linear clarity in any case (in this and that) is typical of a large form.

By the nineteenth century, the concept of “softness” had been reduced to the depressive concept of *valeur*. These sluggish idiots have even artificially “softened” the icon during restoration to please “taste”, depriving it of its high linear structure and the emblematic clarity of the colour masses.

Exact a festival, a festival is *irratio*. It is natural and, therefore, fantastic. It is born and not appointed.

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!

Softness and hardness are essential characteristics, but not the characteristics of interpretation.

Our life is a chain of hopes, but the chain of indignation is hopelessness.

Another speciality of the hieratures and meta-lectures – a speciality and a feature: plane, façade (right, left and so forth) – everything is compressed in a single hieratic resolution, in then hieratic structure of a sign – an hierature. Perception (presence) on all planes. Vision imbibes all planes.

Reason. The deductions of reason are the impulse for the freedom of self-manifestation. Whether the impulse is correct (in the right place) is then clearly defined in spontaneous self-manifestation. Comprehension comes later. Grace lies inside self-realisation and outside reason. You experience the sensation of striking a ray – like flooding joy. Enjoy, summoned one!

Where is the criterion of completion, of the appraisal of work, of the fullness of expression?

Here it is: when, against the will, there comes a sweet likeness of death, confluence with something extra-sensual, extra-everyday, extra-expressive, extra-real. When you perceive the spiritual, the inexplicable, as reality (you live in the ray), clearly and really permeated by unity with the Higher. Here is the happy sign of completion – grace.

Everything here is honest. Delight crowns the deed. He who has experienced this at least once has received the criterion and will always follow it. And then the beautiful will be the genuine fruit of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and not the result of merely professional burdens and their criteria – these, seemingly convincing suspensions of wilful efforts and ambitious industry. Master, come to the festival!

Self-manifestation: manifestation of the Holy Spirit (spirit-expression).
How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! (Psalms 84)

Pre-hieratic accumulation is defamiliarisation.

Manifesting the romantic consciousness. Overcoming defamiliarisation. Reading in signs. Noumen.

The very concept, developed in all aspects and their multitude. The form is developed and expressed.

The fruits are designated:

Formulated practically by pictures.

The prophetic lines are formulated.

The search method is developed.

The method of hieratic topography is developed.

Hieratic imagination.

Pre-hieratic accumulation: defamiliarisation.

Defamiliarisation realities – accumulation.

Hieratic pedagogy.

It is necessary to cast aside all self-arrangement. Do not turn your work into the applied, assisting something (!). Serve beauty, pray through your deeds, remember that world-creation continues and you are a participant in the mystery of eternity. Beauty saves, whereas chatterboxes and manufacturers of “truths” hamper creation.

The execution of vanity.

1970s

On defamiliarisation

The metamorphosis of death – transformation – “Grand form”. The image of death is the last step – an icon of the life of man, a pre-hieratic structure – defamiliarisation. This is the last utmost expression in the form of a still sensual world, the lower hieratic (in the pheno-

menal world) trace of the Spirit. Defamiliarisation is the first testimony of the Spirit.



Mikhail Shvartsman. 1977

Tokens and attributes of defamiliarisation

1. The human countenance in the coffin. The countenance as the start of a new life.
2. The first-testimony act in an iconnic form – countenances (what is this? write).
3. The Middle Ages.
4. Familiarisation (as the lower form of defamiliarisation) in modern painting (example). Not of this world.

Apothatics

Deformation is not defamiliarisation,
Grotesque is not defamiliarisation,
Sharp characterism is not defamiliarisation,
Sur is not defamiliarisation,
Expression is not defamiliarisation,
The expression “not of this world” is the first stage of defamiliarisation.

“The secret of the attraction of the historical past is linked to the transforming active memory.” “The beauty of the past is beauty in the creative acts of the present.” (Berdyayev)

Defamiliarisation is passing through death for the sake of resurrection in an hieratic image.

The forms of defamiliarisation are incessantly destroyed for the sake of bringing out the hieratic sign (Testimony of the Holy Spirit).

Metamorphosis.

Charismatic hierarchism is genuine hierarchism.

Berdyayev is right only inasmuch as Kierkegaard is right, only extremely “un-Socratesly” expressing foreign thoughts with aphoristic pathos without reference. Concern ruins everything – this is the path



Mikhail Shvartsman. 1977

towards death – creative eschatology – the start of the resurrection.

Reconciliation with the ruinous nature of “progress” is only possible in hope in resurrection, otherwise life does not have any sense. Technical progress turns man into an object, into an anonym. History is coming to an end.

The hieratic image is a congregational-inferable image (even if it is entickened by one single personality, for it is hierarchic in entickening and hierarchic at the stages of manifestation) in the empirics of the deed, since its (the hieratic image) manifestation follows the lines of the dying out of the hierarchic structures of defamiliarisation and enrichment by them or rearing from them, as well as by the work of the resurrecting memory – transformation of the eternal, the pathetic dialectics of movement through the layers of culture, after tokens left to ourselves in past incarnations.

The hieratic sign is, therefore, an image manifested in a congregational channel, as both the modern and the old master are on one line here.

All forms proceeding from the mind, combinative, sur-form and expressive are deformative, indubitable, false and temporary – not Spirit-manifested or transforming the eternal.

Transformation into the eternal is hieratic metamorphosis. It is manifested in unforeseen and spontaneous forms, in the forms of transformation:

Lower: invention – phantasmagoria – metamorphosis.

Higher: imagination – dawning – metamorphosis.

I write: with the hieratic I unwind the thread of the ancient memory immured in the flesh.

Hieratonics is the process of salvation (one of), the deincarnation of honey (and honey is the sublimation of florescence).

Dissatisfied with the writings and conclusions of contemporaries on painting, I put aside my brush for a day (God will, I think, forgive me) to utter a WORD ABOUT THE CAUSE OF MY LIFE.

Christian painting split into two streams: one is Byzantine – sublime (spiritual, hieratic) – Palestine, Byzantium, Caucasus, East Slavs, Rus.

The other is Latin – sensual, corporeal, analytical (Italy and the whole of Europe).

Both were initially healthy: the first with sincere faith, silverlessness, congregationalism (constructivism) and monumentalism. The second with popular sensual directness, faith, the defamiliarisation of images and scale.

Both were enticed.

First Latin (by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) – by exaltations, silver, Man-God analysis, removing the directness and ambition of the great masters, i.e. the Renaissance of Hellenism.

The first was then enticed by the second.

The Testimony of the Spirit was thus tragically expended. By the seventeenth century, both lines were enclosed in common delight. A dazzling array of painters-sportsmen, manufacturers of museum effects, was formed by the hypnosis of the physical world and by the civilising missionaryism of scholarly sectarians of culture reproduced by the recipes of academic dressing. With false criteria, they ousted and proffered everywhere the testimonies of the Spirit, the acknowledged and initiated prophets of the good silence of colour and form.

The Byzantine and Latin lines enclosed, the first enticed by the second. A snake biting its own tail.

Impulse (Testimony of the Spirit) frozen in a closed circle, in a sensual circle of artful mise-en-scènes of theatricalised or spied life, frequently breaking through with the directness of individual creators.

The Hellenic dispersion occurred. (The concept of the “Hellenic dispersion” comes from the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles).

For more than three centuries, in a witch’s sabbath of spiritual blindness, in stupid civiliser’s confidence, grandiose losses – convulsion of the spirit were given as achievements.

Ineptitude, forcing itself into rank, as well as the task of painting today, are amalgamated with “technical progress” which does not have any relationship to the Testimony of the Spirit by the sign of painting.

Can I regard the Renaissance as a strange-enigmatic impulse? If we know the poured-out Grace of the icon, impulses of secrets, colourful lines, irrational thought-essences, entickened inexplicably and non-manually.

What is Raphael to the heart – this tender-calculating genius of the Renaissance? What is the genius of faith in the indubitable structure? The placement of wonderful Hellenic supernumeraries. The utilitarian-sublime set of heroic characteristics and angles. The Hellenic dispersion.

And Buonarroti? The suffering marathon runner, by miles of muscles and the retribution of mighty earthly evil measuring the Judgement of God? The Hellenic dispersion.

And the genius Leonardo with his strange-smiling faith in the ratio? The Hellenic dispersion? The delightful Hellenic dispersion.

Even Dostoyevsky, travelling in the nineteenth century to “bury Europe”, was enticed. The touching Muscovite-Slavophiles were intoxicated (not understanding even the old Italians). With what? The Sistine chocolate box – strange, unbelievable! And meanwhile the Kremlin Saviour Furious Eye waited beneath a black layer of old drying oil.

And the countenance of the Saviour of Zvenigorod, perhaps, already then rested at the bottom of a barrel with rainwater – and this is the work of God, for everything else was pecked by the hens of Great Russians awaiting the Great Religious Mission of Russia.

No one escaped the Hellenic dispersion:

Not even Gogol, Tolstoy and Solovyov. Meanwhile, the sweet aroma of putrefaction let itself be known (and here too, perhaps) virtually from the fifteenth century, while the quite elegant reign of Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich, with his isographers (Simon Ushak, ° Vladimirov), all his charming mode, terems, Swiss cavalry and delightful “Dago” leaves – led straight on to Peter the Great and his much-promising and far-going awful atheistic tick. What is this? The air of a Muscovite direction?

No, Gentlemen, this is, of course, of course, all in the past...

The city of St Petersburg has been renamed Leningrad.

St Paul the Apostle understood all this (two thousand years ago) fiery-passionately (this is to my heart), fiercely understood what the “Hellenic dispersion” was. His eyes were opened to the thick of incarnations.

Now the responsibility typical of us, like death, calls to continue the Testimony of the Spirit shown by the icon.

The tokens of this voice of the Spirit – an impulse-testimony with a Spiritual eye, sees in old icons – they are visible, my “I” sees them. These testimonies are material, for they address physical man, while their essence is spiritual and address spiritual man. The old iconnic testimonies differed from the illustrative testimony of pictures (Dago harmony) in their sign tendency (significance).

The new cycle of the Testimony of the Spirit is expressed by sign materialisation – the hieratic structure of painting. The mental henceforth was painterly materialised: the sign of the mental – new painting. It is difficult (at first) for the uninitiated to perceive these signs (for example: someone born blind before an operation). Then they (the signs of this painting) will act like on someone blind from birth seeing after an operation (like a blind man who sees). Is it necessary to prove – even now a classical old icon of astounding beauty is far, far from comprehensible to everyone... (and is an old icon of astounding beauty comprehensible to everyone?!).

Hieratism – new hieratic painting – anew (after long convulsions of the old) gives the first testimonies of the Spirit, significant and tense, with all the fullness, heat and depth typical of synthetic expression: constructive, strong in colour and divine surface. Here, on a new circuit of spiritual work, the yarn of the link with the old masters, here, in this new spiritual work by the miracle of colour and linear tokens, by the seeing of new impulses unbroken into individual, spins the testimony of the Spirit with the eternally inexplicable and enigmatic attributes of wise beauty.

Hieratism – today – is a sign of the spiritual first-image, inscrutably-gracefully poured out. It is not similar to the physical image of a man, it cannot be pre-projected, it arises unforeseen (spontaneously), in the excruciating and sweet tension of a quest (for visions) and the manifestation of the logo-essence, thought-essence, where its links – sign-links will appear as a composition.

The hieratic (sign) materialisation in the single image of a cycle of (lines) incarnations not submitting to designation by a name.

There is no place here for a vain choice along the lines of aesthetic affiliations (a three-dimensional illusory mise-en-scenic space adroitly juggled by the supernumeraries). These physical categories do not define anything. They always, like oil in a puddle, swim on the surface, evoking a spiritual rejection – a form of revulsion. This is a sign of the absence of directness – and nothing more. The criterion of the testimony of the Spirit in the very testimony. Painting again becomes something to serve and not Caesar’s service. Painting is a theurgic act.

No wittingness or pedantry, no obstacles to the feeling for the decorative, vivid-joyous or murky, yet always essentially happy, self-manifestation.

The white-hot happiness of colour emanating from the fingers and

creating a trace of vision as a continuation of finger-lines. I wish to partake of this beneficial pain until I dies, until my very last hour.

Do not deprive me, Lord, of this inscrutable conversation with Thee!

To the renewer and restorer

Skilled craftsman, do not spoil what has been made before you by an inspired master. Unskilled craftsman – do not study spoiling the old, do your own thing. Having learnt, do not drive the old under your own style – you cannot measure the Divine with your own yardstick. Do not drive the river of the Spirit into the narrow pipe of your talent. Remember! God has many tabernacles. Judge inside yourself and this will give you humility, Beneficial concentratedness and vastness, for the Testimony of the Spirit is multi-significant – merely squashed and alloyed in a single sign. Do not unreasonably, presumptuously and hastily suppress the Spiritual testimony of the master.

Teacher, do not conceal, for your information is not for epigones (the dead among the living), but to be revealed to the living – tokens of the new Testimony of the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord lives and your soul lives.

Always judge about a man and about everything in goodness and then your conclusion will be correct, for Goodness is the light. Colour is not judged in darkness, but in the light of Day – this is the light of God. And this judgement is the truth. You will carry the purity of a conclusion made in goodness into the darkness. Do not believe the hysterics of quantity.

He who is afraid of death has nothing to discover.

Death is an excellent way to resolve all problems. Death answers all questions. Music, painting, poetry, weaving and sculpture are directed straight to designate the noumenal, to show that the world is integral: the phenomenon is not separate from the noumen. The phenomenon is dead without the noumen.

The glossolaly of mental movements – to slowly carve (manifest) the sign through colour-line. I see the spirit through the inner essence of vision.

The thread of eternity is immured in the flesh.

Defamiliarisation expresses and signifies, through form, its presence, but not the thread itself.

The hieratic sign – it itself.

After thousands of disappearances and comings, transforming itself through destruction and rebirth, form is realised and convinces by cognition, self-crystallising. The changing of the metamorphoses in hieratics is an inevitable process, like the changing of the generations or times.

The master is included here only by feasible participation within the bounds of joy or fatigue. His reward is the delight of cognition. Thus is hierature born – constant sacrifice.

The hierat is a signifying, unpronounceable name – a silent name.

The sign of the Spirit is a silent name, the sign of the unpronounceable, “I signify an unpronounceable name” – M. Shvartsman –

a cosmic name – I – a cosmist.

An hierat means a cosmist.

The hieratic means the cosmic. The hierature is a cosmic monad – a galactic sign (let us say). It is a dedicatory secret-script.

Hieratonics is the process of naming, liturgising with the hierature. Such is the self-consciousness of the hierat (the matter of super-art – a non-profaning monologue). A non-profaning silent text, a silent trans-

mission of the cosmos, the study of the secret, the perception of a call, a transcendental destiny.

An answer to the constant question: avoidance (fear) of profaning. A breakthrough (an exit outside), a providential appearance, is now approaching. Such is the strategy of providences, I have nothing to do with it.

The signified material (culture), an entire, enormous gene-fund of hieratonics – the hiera-fund – the fore-language of the third millennium.

Any spontaneously arising sign has the right of existence ... and does not become a sacrifice, if there are no new metamorphoses. It (the sign) will assert itself, if it is recognised. The recognition of the emblematic pledge (meta-task) is the natural limit of things.

A mark on a drawing is the running of a familiar thought.

Any emblematic sphere is a stream of symbols coming at us (and in us). This is a sphere of prophecies which, willingly or unwillingly, we form and which will be read by the cosmic consciousness of the future. The cosmic consciousness exists and grows.

The transcendental meaning of these symbols and their links (sign-links) in the mystery of the world (the composition in hieratism is sign-links). The transformation and destruction of these signs (metamorphosis) set in motion the genetic process of the birth of hieratures – the process of hieratonics. The result of the process of hieratonics (my term) is the recognition of the emblematic habitation – the sign is recognised and the process is complete. The preceding processes, the stages of the sacrificial metamorphosis, are brutal, inevitable and peremptory, like the changing of the generations.

The hierature implies a meeting of emblematic links, their deeply contradictory existence implying the life of the soul (souls) and the passing of “I” in historical strata, in the strata of cultures. Today, now, the hierat unaccountably seeks the meta-task of his “I” in these strata. This process is the hieratonics of the birth of hieratures.

The hierat completes.

The hierat opens.

The hierat begins.

1. The hierat reads silence, combines – quiet, those born with the quiet of the pre-born, and creates the sign of quiet.

2. The hierat creates a bridge uniting us and our lives with the life beyond death. So that those who are summoned to go can freely go there and back. That is true reality (signified sign reality).

We rise

with you

and leave the sunset to ourselves

un – divide – dly

Oh! Sunset!

It is fraught

It is fraught with the sunrise

if you are a light

if you are a luminary

dedicated – shine.

Stream of consciousness

The most important premise of hieratism, its “for”, its essential position, the production-sojourn in which the hierat is realised, the setting-sojourn in which the intuitive viewer finds himself, is the exfoliation of a thousand “I’s”, a multitude of incarnations or, to be more exact, the “I” of each incarnation (to, God willing, express myself better) to separate from one another (“I” from “I” from “I”), emblematically-fully tracing the meta-task of “I” of each incarnation. This is what gives birth to the beauty of salvation, (salutary) beauty. At the moment of perception or in a chain of moments of creativity simultaneously. Openly-nervy, undefendedly psychically, openly-intimately, spontaneously, exfoliated into a thousand “I’s”, to remain in this position. I repeat: to really be in a myriad of “I’s”. This removes reflection (caution!). This is the fullness of permeation with the Spirit – the guarantee of concurrent occurrence in the hierarchies of contradictory spaces, in the multi-temporal touchings of different worlds, substantially and essentially merged in a single instant.

An independent observation: in the tactile perception of the result of the hieratic practice, the most important thing is the principle of the open hand.

Praise be the Active in Thee, Faith, in the name of the Holy Spirit! (historical prayer).

The Lord’s Humility, the unimaginability of freedom given to us (by the Lord) signifies the madness of the Trustfulness of the world (of the Lord).

The hierature (strictly speaking) is not verbally nameable. It (hierature) is a sign and, as a sign, has its own silent name.

The sphere of the hierature is the Aleph-sphere.

Hieratonics is the process of the birth of an hieratic sign, liturgising in the Aleph-sphere.

Hierasign – Hierature – Aleph-sphere

The Aleph-sphere (is like) a crystal, where meanings and essences – the meanings and essences of the mystery – are signified concurrently and realistically. The meaning is compressed (enthickened) – the essence is enciphered. The crystallising cosmic consciousness, the growing of this (consciousness) will henceforth open the possibility and the sober right of reading the hieratic sign – the Sign of the Spirit. The actualisation and arrival of ontological reality – possibility – necessity of deciphering – reading – transmission of the transcendental givenness of the Sign of the Spirit £ (the transcendental task of the Spirit £).

Praise be the Active in Thee in the name of the Holy Spirit – old prayer.

For non-believers, this is temptation and abracadabra, but for believers it is the bombastic line of love. Everything is in the Light and everything on Light – Everything on the World is in the Light. Everything is clear. I hurry: while I have not been born into death, to say again and again: the cosmic consciousness is ripening and has ripened. The hieratic is the cosmic. (This is before the bombastic). Much is now being rehabilitated, rehabilitate bombasticness.

Do not obscure bombasticness. This subject – hieratism – will only be expounded bombastically.

Mikhail Shvartsman – an hierat by the grace of God.

On the consciousness of the hierat

Information is not knowledge, but intelligence, a feature of civilisation. Knowledge is mystical reality. This is shown to the cosmic consciousness. Such is the consciousness of the hierat.

The hierat, he through whom the cosmic (ecumenical) sign-stream passes.

The mysterical location of the objects of life is divided into layers in the hierature. Through vision, the soul reads a multitude of its states – positions in a multitude of cycles of its proto-existence, even now. The presence of “I” is simultaneously on all levels. It lives inside the object, like the object, alongside the object, enclosing its scale, over it, in its environs – from all sides. All this is concentrated in emblematic links through a multitude of metaphorically forming spatial positions – self-dividing, calligraphic, counterposing, self-denying and, finally, giving the evasive illusion of enthickening, even of objectification.

Space¹⁰ is directly perspective, space is calligraphic, spherical, reversibly perspective, it is counterposing in the hierature. The hieratic seems to want to objectify itself. This is one of the hieratic paradoxes (illusionised by an object). This is the paradoxical aspect of hieratics, i.e. the hieratic paradox – its essential attribute is perceived from without as a contradiction.

Self-spreading space.

Self-refuting space.

Any excitement of the eye to feel an object as a whole or its detail is instantaneously refuted by the essences of the construction of the whole. Everything in the hierature is in an harmonic, even constructive whole, but everything is contradictory, everything slips away, everything is indefinite, everything metamorphosises.

The essence of the hierature is in its emblematic links; this is its composition, its language is sacral. The hierature is a monad...

Any naming (verbal naming) of the hierature is merely a tribute to the common emotional “ordering”, that is, the custom of “storing” and crowning with a “name tag”. There is no genuine, i.e. mysterical, requirement for this.

Below is a list of the cipher and deciphering of hieratures, inasmuch as this is possible.

Hieratures are immanent and hierarchic.

Hieratures are mutually hierarchic.

Hieratures are contradictory, tectonic, architectural and architectonic.

The hierature, its structure, is not the verbal language of the future.

This language is concentrated and compact – sacral.

Calligraphy – position sheet No.¹¹

Non-verbally – verbally.

The verballity is the life and position of the verbalisers (!). My term.

“Avant-garde” is a lie. This is vanity and the desire for advantages. With this shriek, ineptitude forces itself into rank.

Not the “avant-garde”, but the organic sprouting of living branches on the tree of Eternal Life – that is the meaning of creativity.

Muscovite gentlemen and other assorted avant-gardists, do not stylise à la avant-garde – do not be ivanproud. That is a bad job.

And you, “Comrades”, fulfillers of ideological commissions, do not think that you are alive merely because you are paid – you are dead.

Malevich thought and said that it was necessary to break. He hoped to build the new on a cleared place. This will not be the “new”,

however, for it will be built on death, and the link of life will disappear. Even if one single link of life disappears, life will collapse. So the eternal links of life – ecology – were and are destroyed.

I, Mikhail Matveyev Shvartsman, think, say and invoke:

Do not kill, pull down or smash, but metamorphosise. This is the behest of life.

And now, the still engagable is an obsolete behest, a clumsipot covered in the prestige of the avant-garde – “break!” It is necessary, abhorring to cast it off.

Here is the new behest of the avant-garde: do not break – metamorphosise.

The fratricidal consciousness of the old avant-garde has proven, to itself and everybody else, that destruction is the ditch of the nether regions and the end of life.

The change of metamorphoses in hieratics is an inevitable process. It happens, I would say, with inevitable brutality, like the changing of the generations and times.

Note: that is why notes on drawings can often and often do disappear in the course of this peremptory process without appeal. That is why these notes are made.

The happiest hours of the night. They, I hear, I feel, destroy my heart, and we are flying ... homewards, to death, my heart and I are flying.

I call my works ¹² Hieratures. My thing is hieratism. I am an hierat – the term came to me in a vision. I am an hierat, he through whom the universal stream of signs passes.

I signify a silent name – the Sign of the Spirit of the Lord.

Through the meeting of a myriad of signs and the sacrificial changing of emblematic metamorphoses, I form the hierature.

The mystical experience of man is architectonically compressed in the hierature.

The hierature is born ecstatically. The signs of the mystical experience are displayed by the popular ¹³ consciousness, fore-memory, fore-consciousness.

I create the new, non-verbal language of the third millennium.

While I, an hierat, have still not been born to death, I say out loud: “The language of the third millennium is formed and crowned by the acts of the hieratures.”

Mikhail Shvartsman

As long as man will anthropomorphise the world, he will not understand the world. The hierat examines the world emblematically, without anthropomorphising it, and the secret of the world is silently opened to him. Birds, fishes, snakes and, finally, insects open new worlds, their meanings and essences, new energies – their sublimates.

It is all our world, its right and rightness are in the insanity of incredulity that we, for some reason, fear, fear like the plague. These evaluation categories are not typical of him. The sign crystally enthickens the essences.

The world is neither terrible nor kind; the anthropomorphic evaluation of the world is terrible for its straightforwardness and is therefore barren.

What are hieratics, i.e. hieratic material, for the hierat?

The processes of the existence of the world: the metamorphoses

of the lives of stones, rocks, the textures of trees, etc. They express the spiritual essence in signs. That is why the emblematic interpretation of these metamorphoses is so important to the hierat. The theurgic result of this interpretation, for whose sake dreadful labour, work meekness, silent patience, is the hierature. Is spontaneity removed in this process? No! On the contrary, it is activated to a level of remarkable freedom.

Article on the Jews and the hatred of them

I hear thousands of explanations. All of them, correct or incorrect, explain much, yet fail to answer – why hatred? They elucidate. But the most important thing – the only feature – is given mysterially.

1. Pitiful is the Jew who does not understand what the hatred of the Jews stands on, its sign and law.

2. Pitiful because, not understanding the religious calling of the Jew, the bearer of a mysterial and prophetic task, he adapts himself to the sensual conditions of existence, decadents, losing grand form (the sign of the Spirit), disfigures his outer appearance, flickers, reprimands multiply, shifts and dodges. He plays up to an alien form of existence, one not genetically typical of him, thereby only irritating the people in whose environment he lives, evoking hatred. There is no calling of the Jew in this, it is merely corporeal and ethnic.

3. Other Jews, who do not comprehend the religious calling, hold themselves in proud distinction, respect their own minds, comprehending the national signs of talents and so forth and so forth, holding themselves with independent aloofness, interpreted from without as arrogance or conceit. This also evokes hatred, as a result of which they suffer, unable to understand its logics. A multitude of reasons “why” can be quoted and all this will be particularities bringing out the different faces of the Jews, fostered by life and ethnos.

4. The Jews must accept hatred with love, blessing those who hate them, for the Lord never deceives: “And God will scatter you among those who hate you.” That is the essence and root!

5. The calling of the Jew is God.

The Name of the Lord is written on the Jew (Jew by calling).

6. It is said in the Testament: You will suffer much for my Name ... You will be hated.

(Read Moses...

read Isaiah

read, finally, Christ,

investigate the scriptures).

7. What is comparable to the happiness of suffering for the name of the Lord!?

No one has lifted or is lifting the electedness of the Jews. Electedness is hated.

8. It is necessary to comprehend the calling and to transfer the law of hatred to oneself with calm humility.

9. Comprehension of mysterial existence, its permeation, should illumine the life and creativity of the Jew, just as it should everyone here on earth. Jews! Be yourselves!

10. No forms of adapting or adaptation – psychological, historical, geographic, creative, military, economic, social or revolutionary – will lift the hatred from the Jews.

Such is the law of the mystery and its laws in Genesis. The Lord says: You will suffer much for my Name.

11. Anyone bearing the name of the Lord, Jew or Gentile, is part of the Spiritual Israel.

12. This participation is easy to define:

love – participation, hatred – non-participation.

13. Being part of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob fills me with indestructible composure in the face of all the afflictions of existence.

We discourse on man from the point of view of reasons and for, while he himself is his own reason, for he is created in the image of God. Creativity, creation – herein lies man’s likeness to the Lord.

Creation, creativity – i.e. co-creation with God – that is man’s likeness to God. That is why it is said: “By their deeds shall ye know them.” A deed for the cause of God implies one of the Gods (God’s).

Student, adapt the master, like weaving after a reklo, ¹⁴ cutting off your inability, defamiliarisation with the grandeur of a deliberate isographer. His birth occurs at this crossroads, here the student becomes a master, incites things and crystallises the ability to detect the essences given from on high.

While the apprentice is under the master’s hand, let him be humble!

Do not be arrogant in service. Do not proudly consider your own what has been made in the sphere of the mystic habitat of a master called by God for the testimony of God and crystallising this talent. Use vigilant meekness to butter up artistic vain-glorious arrogance, else you will eject yourself from the sphere of the mystical task of the master through whom you receive initiation (there have been and are examples). The vain-glorious even thinks that he is departing himself, yet when he remains alone, existence shows how pitiful, weak and helpless he is. And if you bear your ordeal to the end, you will learn the Will of God, whether or not you have been called to the Holy Cause.

If you are not called, belittle yourself and remain in your own hierarchy, meekly serving the cause. Know that not you yourself select your hierarchy; God places you. And how will you know? You will know through time and inside yourself, by the Deed and by the Word, of the master (calling you), for it is said:

– He called to Him

Those whom He wanted

And they came to Him.¹⁵

It is said about us in the Gospel, those who do on the field of the Lord:

– By their deeds shall ye know them.

Mikhail Matveyev

SHVARTSMAN

– hierat

“The death of an artist should not be excluded from the aim of his creative achievements; it should be regarded as the last, conclusive link in the chain” (Osip Mandelstam).

Death is not terrible. It is terrible to die without completing the task given from on high.

Hierature – cosmic sign – monad, sign of the name of the spiritual hierarchy, immanent in all internal sign-links, spatial-contradictory, polystylistic, self-creating and self-refuting.

Late 1970s

Post-exhibition thoughts

Love of “unanimity” is when it is possible to strangle all together, as a single whole. This is precisely for what “unanimity” is worked out. In Chile, naturally.

“Word-weaving” is when a basket is woven from words, hollow inside.



Mikhail Shvartsman. June 1978

There is no culture, but there is a form of civilisation to which it is necessary to pay heed – to be obedient.

The artist addresses everyone, pronouncing (summoning) names by form, so that they are recognised and through them (the names) distinguished the spirit-bearers of names and loved them. One of the tasks of hieratics (maybe the most important one, perhaps the only one).

Today, art critics, or so-called philosophers, speak in such a way so as not to, God forbid, express love or even favour, because, should opinions or tastes change through time, they need not be held accountable or heed the reproaches of the smarties following them. They speak even about things that do not bear the slightest relation to the subject, so that no one can catch them red-handed in their ignorance. They oppress with their assembled erudition and mould anything to anything (crushing with impersonal associations). As the Russians would say, “like dung to the wall”. No one notices (they are frightened) that this is said of them: “You are not cold and not hot and so I will disgorge you out of my mouth.”

You, co-questioners, have been called not to teach and not to cool, but to learn to create and, possibly, to assemble.

These philosophers arrive with their heavy bookcase. This bookcase has all topical books, various clever last and second-last Germans. They press everyone into the corners with this bookcase and everyone, quailing, are afraid to squeak, the bookcase will be dropped and squash them.

No to you, gentlemen! Passion-love requires responsibility and strength of the spirit. And you want to sit on the fence and, “in the event of something,” to chat your way out of it (without traces) even from future generations. Gentlemen, culture is not made without spilling blood.

Culture is an enthickened, heated prayer. Christ prayed until the blood poured like sweat.

At a discussion

Therefore, gentlemen! Do not be afraid to commit a gaffe or somehow slip up. If you cannot swim, at least flounder, speak out sincerely, unafraid of insults. Those generations of Maleviches were not cowards.

The following genius, Vasya,¹⁶ does not “assiduously destroy” the preceding. No. He changes his view, perhaps, approach, material and other things and continues to create. He creates in the likeness of God and like God. That is why it is said in the Testament: “I came not to destroy, but to fulfil.” This image is given in edification. And so it is, co-questioners of this world.

The energy of birth is the energy of resurrection.
The hieratic is the energy of resurrection.

Oh! Beauty is not subject to reason and even, oh paradox! does not conform to reason, for reason does not save.

Beauty is subject to the Holy Spirit. Beauty is both the result and the channel of Spirit-manifestation.

The fear of breaking one’s willfulness of wills, before a new clear call of the Lord, prevents me from continuing the canvas. This call and voice of his my “I” always listens with the trepidation of recognition.

[...] “We reject Reason or recognise it, we instrumentise reason.”

Man is now being led away from the right, chosen by him, of the old, accepted, cosy decadence towards high forms and, enriching materially, is no longer satisfied with simple functionality (in architecture, for example). This process is like comprehending the mystic via the understandable (develop this). A master appears. The right to democratic art is a spent lie.

1980s

Leonardo dreamt of leaving the transient to Eternity. Mikhail dreams

¹ Mikhail Shvartsman. *Zhivopis’*. Risunok, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1994; Mikhail Shvartsman, Dom Naschokina Gallery, January–February 1997, Moscow, 1997.

² Mikhail Shvartsman, Palace Editions, St Petersburg, 2001.

³ Written in the margins of the text in Mikhail Shvartsman’s handwriting: “For my book on Hieratism.”

⁴ Dictated to Alexander Shumilin by Mikhail Shvartsman. Preceded by a later entry (December 1973) in Mikhail Shvartsman’s handwriting: “Dictated to the perfidious lackey A. S. Shumilin, whose calculating servility was triply atoned by evil, piracy and boorishness – that is the face of the rabble and it serves me right: don’t cast your pearls before swine. ‘Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?’ (Christ’s question).”

⁵ Alexander Shumilin was a student of Mikhail Shvartsman and worked for him at the Special Bureau of Art and Construction.

of evoking in the transient the countenance of Eternity and of encouraging the transient with the Sign of Eternity.

Hieratism – the deed of my life.

The hope of the transient – the Sign of Eternity

The hieratic Sign – the Sign of the Spirit.

The spirit is immortal – the Sign of the Spirit –

The sign of pre-birth – the trans-mortal sign

The sign of foundations, reasons and links.

Mikhail Shvartsman

An hierat

by the grace of God.

The sign of the manifestation of the spirit is beauty.

Beauty saves

– the sign of Hope – the sign £, the sign of victory £,

The token of victories £ over the forces of Evil.

This is genuine, veritable reality, its essence is called a silent name – the Sign of the Name, an hieratic sign.

The new (current) hieratic impulse of naming, still unfamiliar to theologians and not adapted by them, the innermost experience of naming.

An example of hieratic permissiveness

can be a built-up

natural piece of earth

with allowance for natural relief:

with waters, ravines, forests –

Everything in the intersection of (forming) metamorphoses

Occasionally, they think essentially,

more frequently, nostalgically –

even more frequently, they do not think at all,

and this is salutary, though awful.

The madness of mistrustfulness: Death gnaws the heart

the happiest hours of the night.

⁶ Worked under Mikhail Shvartsman.

⁷ Family friend.

⁸ Director who later became a theologian.

⁹ Should read Simon Ushakov (1626–1686).

¹⁰ Written in Mikhail Shvartsman’s handwriting: “Insert: sheet on spaces.” Rewritten by Iraida Shvartsman from an unknown drawing.

¹¹ Mikhail Shvartsman’s term. Quill drawing. Basis: calligraphy of positional texts.

¹² Rewritten several times by Mikhail Shvartsman with minor discrepancies.

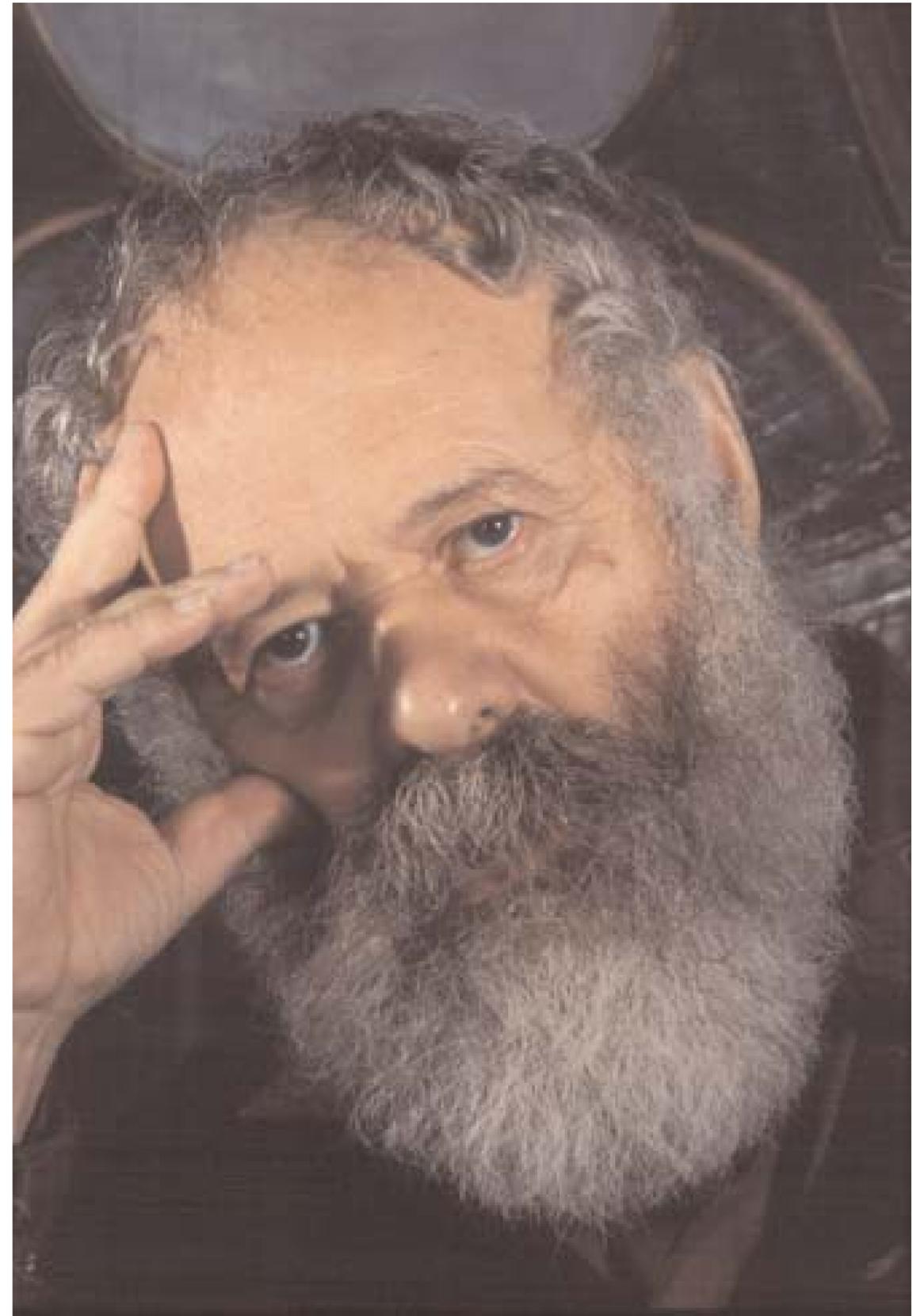
¹³ Inserted version: “graphic and colour”. Further: “Without reflection, I saturate the sign gene fund of the planet Earth. Responsibility is typical of us like death.”

¹⁴ Expression often employed in the artist’s family, implying “embroidering on the basis of a previously applied contour.”

¹⁵ Inaccurate quotation from Mark 3:13.

¹⁶ Iraida Shvartsman believes that this is a reference to Russian art historian Vasily Rakitin.

Mikhail Shvartsman
1990



THE CORRESPONDENCE

Letter to Jindrich Chalupecky

Reflective rough draft of a reply to the nonsense written by the Czech art critic for *Studio International*¹⁷

M. Shvartsman, September 1972, Moscow

To Chalupecky (to his nonsense)

As you ask me to state my opinion,¹⁸ I will allow myself to do so in an honest and impartial form.

1. A set of associations instead of judgement.
2. Shortness and a lack of time and place are no excuse for inaccuracy, indiscernment and superficiality, evoking dissatisfaction and displeasure. The lack of place in your article given to me is only compensated by the exact and penetrating shortness. Although desirable, you have none. Penetrating shortness: I give it to you to manifest. That is what is scientifically correct – unlike your set of associations in place of judgement.

3. My judgement on European critical thought (as something extremely circumstantial) might be old-fashioned, but it is very necessary to me (for I am busy with matters). Many Europeans coming here to Russia, however, evoke an aggravating revulsion with their emptiness, superficiality and cheap thirst for negative exotics, at which dullards warm themselves. Our “Slavonic bazaar” has been reestablished on former Nikolskaya Street, now 25 October Street (25 October Street – how un-Russian that sounds). But if the “Slavonic bazaar” is good even on a renamed street, I do not go there. Do not hold a “Slavonic bazaar” on the basis of your impressions of modern isography.

4. Your judgement on hieratic practice is essentially incorrect, because it cannot be built on the experience of West European art practice. These are two different ways of an artistic (or rather) spiritual structure of thinking. Do not confuse the bitter with the sweet. And what you (sweetly) call “traditionalism”, i.e. congregational spiritual work, is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, but the European tendency for destruction (self-destruction) can today be called traditionalism.

Calling the artistic practice of the West an “artistic mistake”, Father Pavel Florensky also confused the bitter with the sweet in his brilliant book *Iconostasis*.

The artistic practice of the West is not a mistake, but is fine as artistic practice. Iconnic practice (the practice of isography) – hieratic structure, however, is simply another practice, another form of artistic and (to be more exact) another structure of spiritual thinking. Over there, it is rational and physical; here it is profoundly metaphysical, no matter what the so-called art critics say about this; here, the more inexplicable and marvellous the beauty (artisticness), the more irrational the image. For sure – Solovyov loved to repeat Dostoyevsky’s words “beauty will save the world.” “Save, Lord, thy people!”

The spiritual is materialised by the hieratic act – sign form – (is signified), while it would be a “scheme”, if it were pre-invented a priori. But no, it is born slowly.

5. Only heads?! Nonsense and lies! If it is unimportant for me that my eyes, being blue, seem black to you, such daltonism in a judgement on the matter of my life is inadmissible. In this case, nothing would have been better.

6. The word “stylisation” in relation to me is, to put it mildly, offensive rubbish, or perhaps this term has different meanings here and in Europe?

7. For some reason, you have Klee on the brain. He is alien to me and, besides reverent indifference, I have nothing inside me. He was an artist, whereas I am an isographer.

8. Only the summoned can engage in isography, as the wilful desire to be in line is impossible here, just as stigmata are impossible by choice. Isography is fate. There is an enormous difference (you can understand) here between the artistic activities of an artist and spirit-testimony by fate. I do not say what is worse and what is best. I simply say that they are different things.

9. In my first canvases, feeling my way, I was a painter who did not desire any “stylisations”, but sought “sacraconversazione”, as the old Italians said, and large, defamiliarised forms like those of the Middle Ages. The path to Hieratics passes through defamiliarisation.

Letter to Jindrich Chalupecky

Final version

Dear Mr Chalupecky,

Yesterday I received a translation of the passage in your article in which, through comparisons and historical-cultural associations, you characterise my work.

Despite the fact that during our conversation you so astutely defined me not as a painter, but an iconnic, you have penned an image in which I can hardly recognise myself.

1. I am deeply alien to “traditionalism”, which is, today, only self-destruction. I have never produced “planar stylisations”, for the course of my fate has inevitably taken me away from them into a congregational-hieratic course.

2. Always paying my dues to the imaginative power of the Aborigines and Negroes, I believe that those individual specimens in which the mind manages to rise up above the subconsciousness and sensual magism are highly instructive. My aim is the proto-image, i.e. the trace of the Spirit, and the meditative course sweeps aside external associations. Imaginations are also typical of the hierographies of my working process.¹⁹

3. It is not true that I did not want to speak about art at all. On the contrary, I consider artisticness extremely high when it is spontaneously sublimated by the act of spirit-testimony, and not artistic choice.

4. You say that my oeuvre is “exclusively heads”. That is not correct. The countenances, which you call “heads”, are merely one of several cycles – the Hierarchy cycle.

5. These works are not “schemes realising colour processes” and hieratic signs. The nature of the scheme is given. In my signs, form-line-colour are immanent and develop organically, gradually and unforeseen, right up until the very end of the work. It is the organics of an hieratic sign – and not a preconceived scheme. Neither are they Masks. Masks in Russian are “guises”, i.e. an expression of the demonic. That is not my sphere.

6. I love the old Italians, Netherlandish Primitives and Jan Vermeer, but Paul Klee is not one of my artistic affiliations.

I am linked, by fate, solely to icon-painting. I am an hierat.²⁰ Let there not be any reservations: hierography is a theurgic act. The criteria of hieratics are in no way linked to the criteria of artistic practice. In actual fact, the hierat extremely artistically manifests himself as a master.

I do want to say: this is worse and this is better.

But I do say: these are different fates and different spiritual genetics.

I do not compile iconostases – they arise – and this too is fate.

Mr Chalupecky! I would like to think that these observations might find in you a favourable understanding and do not offer grounds for erroneous judgements on something that is sacred to me. But if, contrary to expectation, these thoughts contradict the concepts of your article, I would prefer to postpone the publication on me.

With deep respect, M. Shvartsman

My address: Flat 6, 2 Third Cable Street, Moscow, E-24
Mikhail Matveyevich Shvartsman.

Terms: in the letter to Chalupecky.

1. Congregational, das Konsilium

– The “common” in the sense of the congregational work of the generations, their congregational intelligence, congregational talent, spiritual creation.

2. Countenances (лики)

In hieragraphy, the countenances are a curved sphere

– i.e. images, not volumetric heads (European), rather the face as the entrance into spiritual space (world) and certainly not masks, which is, in the essence of things, incorrect, as “masks” (in Russian) are “guises”, i.e. an expression of the demonic or the false.

3. Hieratic sign

– The sign of the Spirit – a materialised expression of the spiritual proto-image, spontaneously born by an act of hieragraphic meditation.

4. Immanent

– Here the equal-significant, equal-essential, organically linked by single-significance and common features. Any change of one changes the other and enters essentially into the other.

5. Imagination (in the European sense of the word)

– The complete joint experiencing of a spiritual phenomenon. The term is employed in the theosophical meaning.

Imagination in the hierographic concept

– The possibility of joint experience and sublimation by form, bringing out the Sign of the Spirit by an act of form.

6. Hieragraphy (my term)

– A summons to spiritual work, the basis of which is testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, the hierat²¹ is a master, the matter of whose oeuvre is hieragraphy, its school and its conception.

7. Hieratics

– the result of hieragraphy, the materials of hierographies, the conception of hierographies.

The spiritual genetics of hierographies.

8. Meditation

– The exit into prayer reflection, a departure from the everyday.

Letter to Vitaly Krivulin²²

1976 from the Nativity of Christ, Moscow

January

Dear Vitya,

Received your letter, thanks. I would like, of course, to head off for the Hermitage, only when that will be, I do not know.

I read your article on the show of the Leningrad avant-garde artists. Hack writing simply recycling and corrupting someone else’s words. You are a great poet, why do you need it? Not even a parting state-sponsored commission is worth that. This social ephedron²³ is dark.

I believe that the exhibition is a tragedy and deserves to be treated as such in print, with knowledge of the subject. In my opinion, incidentally, everything is all right; I could keep mum, only I (no ear, no snout), not privy, was buggered. Surely this is not obligatory?! Kiss it – a label.

Here is Klee, and Kandinsky has also been slapped on, even Malevich too (even though your humble servant is nevertheless constructive). Indeed, in icons (for example) the so-called “Suprematist moment” is only part of things, where does Malevich come in (did you perhaps outdo the one standing nearby?). You cannot, of course, muffle up every mouth, but, treasuring our relations and my love for you, I have decided to ask, for the sake of Christ, to clear me out of there. It is better to sink anonymously among the commercial iconnic hills and the commercial assemblages of Moscow.

Take care, Vitya,

I desperately want to take a look at your new verses and the ones you read in the summer, please send them, and don’t let this letter make you angry.

My regards to Tanya; Ira and I hug you and invite you to visit us.

Greetings to Lev Al[exandrovich].²⁴

Yours, M. S.

Letter to Vladimir Yankilevsky²⁵

21 Sept. 1977 (To V. Yankilevsky) (Reply)

Dear Volodya,

I understood your “passive” delivery of Shemyakin’s request, like speaking actively to a boy aged between three and five:

“Boy, tell me this and only this...”

After I spoke to you on the telephone, I reread Thorez’s article, sent to me by Kabakov, in which Shemyakin is accused of building his own career on the misfortunes of others.

While confessing to a healthy dislike of weighing up priorities on the scales of street fame, I sadly see that it is time to help Shemyakin.

As I told you, I think it is better not to write anything, but since you ask and it is necessary for Shemyakin, then I will explain:

Back in Russia, Shemyakin, delighted by the forms of my concept, attributively, in his own taste, adapted these forms. At the start of his new life in Paris, he continued to operate with these adaptations, calling his work “metaphysical synthesis”.

The term “metaphysical synthetism” belongs to Vladimir Ivanov. That is the name of his article, which Shemyakin has now published in his *APOLLO 77* magazine, five years after arriving in Paris.

I do not know what “metaphysical synthetism” is, because Shemyakin did not write anything on this question, while the article written by Vl[adimir] Ivanov is not a concept, but only a declaration, which devoutly extracts a series of familiar anthroposophical tenets.

The positions and methodology of my concept cannot be declaratively expounded or called “metaphysical synthetism”.

It is clear from the catalogues of Shemyakin’s works that he is gradually overcoming the previous attributions and his current forms possibly correspond to his notions of “metaphysical synthetism”.

If M. Shvartsman is portrayed as someone unfortunate or, worse, robbed, then I refute this.

M. Shvartsman

Letter to Dmitry Bobyshev²⁶

[1977]

Dear Mitya,

It is no calamity, really no “calamity”, that you have decided that I did not like the third part of the “meditations”. What is important is that I really felt you were “on the verge of understanding”; I therefore allowed myself two serious words, albeit hastily and in the fissure between daytime and night-time studios.

I am not against and neither am I for bombastic (lexica). The (only) thing needed is not to rehabilitate bombasticness: Testimony of the Holy Spirit itself gives birth to a high metamorphosis. Transformation in a testimonial act also transforms the fabric. In the act of the testament, the creators of the testament, the successors to the Good News, were not written in a “hi-falutin style” as such or (moreover) artisticness. There was no option – they were free. The spirit enthickened by high beauty; the phenomenon of the sign of the Spirit is inexplicably fine and therefore high; high and therefore fine. It does not imitate a take-off, for it is before the bombastic. As for before the “mediastina”, they are truly not guilty of anything. My answer can be read (this time too) in the fissures between things. I am simply against the commonplace, non-meditative mutual-loans of Petersburg. These loans are only literary and mere verbiage. I am not for notebook lexicon prepared in an actual, comprehended self-commission. He who is called – who has no choice – is free.

I do not impose upon innocent words and, much as I regret it, do not really believe that you have understood me this way – if only because we desperately lacked the time.

Eschatology is now no less than the Bible, a fearsome monster, false are the lexical guises and lexical and lectures of Party general secretaries-wettaries, little hope for choice. And there is hope – eternity is before us – we live on a radioactive background – what’s the hurry – just love.

Downright Dante’s lava... (and bubbles on it, mother of mine!).

It was nice to receive your short letter, I am sorry for delaying my reply: no time, please excuse me – written straight out (that is, alas, in draft form). May Christ be with you, dear Mitya, it is hard for you and your father. Wherever you look, everything is a wedge. Either you won’t go off on parallelisms, either you can’t straighten out a warp. It is a sin and that is all.

May Christ be with you!

Greetings from Irina. Yours, M. Shvartsman.

P.S. Even better, come for a visit.

Letter to Igor Zhestkov-Epstein
[Answer to Igor Zhestkov 12/XII – 82, Moscow]²⁷

There is not the smallest trace of the genetic experience of a mystery in what you write to me. There is not even the trace of a personal mystical experience. It is simply soft – vain even – civil, empty words about “white slippers”. I can say that even if the colour is changed, I relate to them exactly the same and you are completely right.

Regarding your so-called pleroma, I can, from my side, say to absolutely anyone that it greatly reminds me of a pissed sheet, which might be worthwhile taking out onto the balcony for an airing, without forgetting to squeeze it, so it is not blown away by the wind, or the winds which are launched so successfully.

Incidentally, I probably agree with absolutely everything that you write, notwithstanding your rough understanding of what was expounded. All these maps remind me of the maps for the drainage of civilisators’ sewage on the Lyubertsy irrigation fields. As you said, children even drown (without supervision) another time there.

As far as concerns (speaking about students) hasty (even polite) opposition, then this is vain futility desiring to justify itself – the quest for rocket fuel for alienation, only the fuel has clearly still not been discovered, for if you make dashes, hooks, inverted commas or some closed “sectarian” sign, that is not it; inverted commas do not object to the sign, nor does the sign object to the inverted commas, but in gradually created sacrifice, the sacrifice of the sun to us, in our sacrifice to the

sun, in the sacrifice of the plants to us, in the sacrifice of the grains to us, in the earthly sacrifice to us, in the sacrifice of the air and the waters and, ultimately, in our sacrifice to them. But this is a special essence and I find it unbearable and shameful to speak of it on a prosaic or, if you like, professional level.

I have met various philosophers like Schiffers and Groys,²⁸ who, in order to vindicate their existence, pretend to be alive and write about an object that they do not know, not remembering and not knowing that one has to be initiated into this, and not only by the force of spirit. The sign, which could be referred to, if you knew anything about this through mystical experience, is the form born of the changing of metamorphoses and their constant sacrifice.

I do not have the strength to tell you more than this, for there is nothing worse than profanation in the form of professional texts. And there remain the sediments born of devastating telephone word-manifestation

I do not have the strength to tell you more than this, for there is nothing worse than profanation in the form of professional texts. And there remain the sediments born of devastating telephone word-manifestation, and here again you are more convincing than you are right. I wish you a happy new year which, in spite of you, I hope, will be even better than the last. With European greetings.

I am opposed to intellectualism elevated into a religion, I am in favour of sacred handicraft, all “obsolete” medieval values and the transubstantiation of the material in the sacral practice of the cause. I am constantly sickened by barren Conceptualism, chattering intellectuals crawling into what does not concern them out of vanity and insolently hoping to suppress reflectants doubting their intellects. I am sickened by those desiring to use speculative devices, no matter what, on the level of a “rag”, to chomp themselves a road through the social porridge. Cook, little pot, cook!

The intellect now creates an extra-ecological order of things, destroying the organics of natural existence, virtually in every sphere, as well as in what we still call art.

12/IX–83

But what is designated in the process of history, in the process of human existence as a phenomenon of painting, has its own paths and essences, its own tasks, its own paradoxical metamorphoses. Modernism always believed, even worked out, a certain obligation, a certain impossibility of something else, namely: if something “new” has not been invented, something definitely previously unexisting and, finally, something not turned upside down, unrefined, etc. All this could be rightfully called “old hats”, ridiculed, worthy of courage, and any hallooing of clowns, clumsipots and the ham-fisted after social tragedy, after mystical tragedy. The demonic joy of degeneration was and is lustfully cultivated. Before the master of art, a multitude of demonic obstacles enter into our era of newspaper-pulp. The most important of them is the diktat of mercantilism in the West, ideology in the East, and now also the racket of upstart intellectuals hungry for income and success from the quashed philistines (explaining gentlemen).

Basta! The mystery shows the genuine path and prophecies the sacral link of knowledge and mastery. Knowledge is not a collection of information, but mystical reality. We realise the great affair of man, unworped by civilising reflections, creating a trace of mystery with responsibility typical of us, like death. The end of the untalented forcibly placing themselves in line!

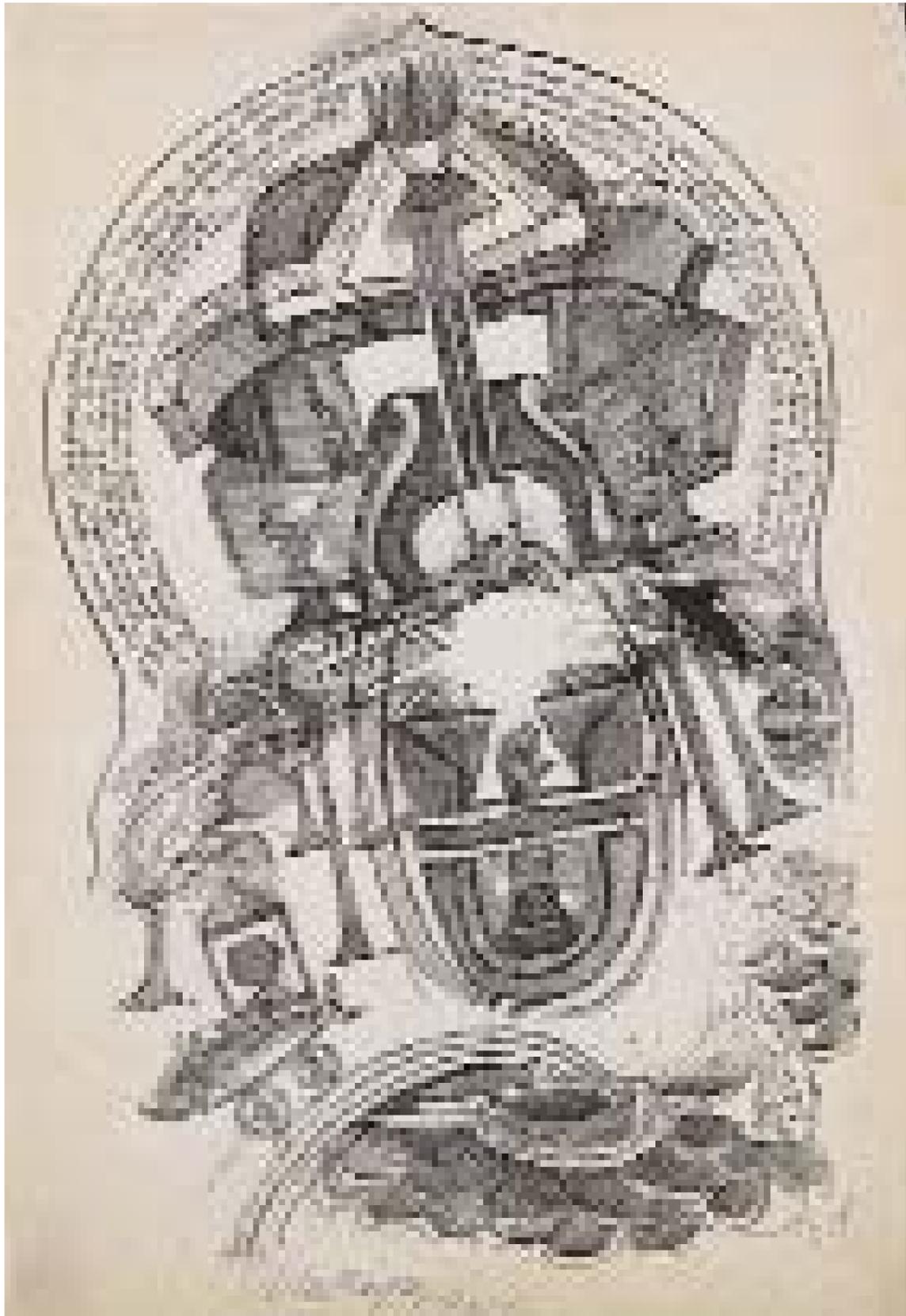
Excerpt from a letter to
Vladimir Ivanov. 1969



This does not by any means imply that it is necessary to encourage epigones obligingly seeking social and philistine engagement and pronouncing: “What can I do for you?” Even now they stylise themselves after the avant-garde, draping their “nothings” in annihilating laughter. Painting is a matter for the initiated. (Highlight in a separate series those working in “applied”. The work of epigones is not for us.) The end, the end to “avant-garde” imitation. Let there be sacrificial cryptovision of the hierarchy of masters and a sincere metamorphic act of the birth of signs of the spiritual! Gabo (Pevsner) told how, knowing (seeing) the stoppage (the end of Suprematism), Malevich had said: “An image is required.”

From the earliest times, any trace of spirit (sign of it) or sign of a bearer of the Holy Spirit, drawn or painted, was called an image. Icons were called images. Or an act of spiritual phenomenon or event. The impulse to create an image has now reappeared. A new inspiration – the impulse to create an image – given from on high.

Kabakov²⁹ hopes that with his (anthropomorphic) annihilation of existence he will express the time and himself and thus soothe the depression living inside him. This is the sign of interment instead of the essence of death, as eternal renewal, as the sign of a new life, i.e. metamorphia. Kabakov is an epistle of interment. He is a singer of the dust whipped up by the wind. Lulling dust is sweet to him – dust lulling the madness of the credulity of the world – relaxing garbage. The world frightens Kabakov, Kabakov is tortured by fears, there is no faith, hope or love in his world. Everyone dancing around him, all the so-called Conceptualists, all this relaxing intellectual “brotherhood” is the copulation of the blind in nettles. Kabakov only tempts those who are powerless. They follow him in the hope of easy realisation. They are allured by self-inflation – realisation without initiation. Those who applaud them win over the joyous feeling of understanding jeering. An unprecedented entrance without initiation, so as to say. This elev-



He Created
1973
Cat. 475

ates them in their own eyes: I'll say, it turns out that everything is so simple.

The madness of the credulity of the world is substituted by the derisive belief of intellectual ignoramuses. That is all that is needed.

The common "joy" of jeering.

Letter to Vitaly Krivulin

To Vitya Krivulin for his epistolary host

1986

Dear Vitya,

I even bless our unbemadled wilderness. It is only hard in our youth. Yet what concentration is possible!

Your verses are good, only not everything, epistolaries hold a vigil in some places: everything is somehow in revenge for someone else, a reply to something: everything is somewhat acmeic.

I dream of an independent form – like in the Bible – widely and wholly. In *Circle*³⁰ at least, someone was the best, only what is the measure? No culture – no criterion. Who will the "adaptants" touch?

"Prigov is coming"³¹ – shove it, let him come: he himself, all the adaptants – kitsch – styliser! Ah-me! an impasse there too.

Letter to Victor Sosnora³²

1987 from the Nativity of Christ, Moscow, January

Dear Victor,

thank you for your letter. It spent a long time waiting for us. I relaxed with a friend in the country after my illness – I apologise for taking so long to reply.

I agree with almost everything in your letter (most of it, that is). Regarding Leonardo, though, I am forced to disagree.

While loving him with all my heart, I am forced to note the difference in our aims. He (his words) wanted to leave the transient to Eternity. I leave the signs of Eternity to the transient. That is why the difference in aims differs the form in the drawings. So what sort of "manner" can there be here?! But shaving clarity can unite, by directing. If you want or can accept it: I move not by concept, but by revelation, although I stand on it seriously – everything irrational (analysis has

¹⁷ The heading was written in Mikhail Shvartsman's handwriting on the back of the rough draft. The reason for the letter was the short diary entry of Jindrich Chalupceky, a Czech art historian who visited the artist on 22 June 1972, after meeting Victor Kalinin and Yevgeny Rukhin. Chalupceky's text was entitled *Moscow Diary* and published in *Studio International* (No. 183, 1973). The excerpt on Mikhail Shvartsman is reprinted here in its entirety: "I was awaited, however, by an artist who still lives in a completely different world of fine art – Mikhail Shvartsman. He is older than the others (he was born in 1926). When I last visited him, several years ago, I saw figurative paintings, simply and convincingly stylised on a plane. Although the large, decorative form often seemed ostentatious, there were also small pictures and drawings showing something else. Shvartsman's strength lies in his ability to concentrate. His works arise slowly and, towards the end, achieve an exceptional intensity. Shvartsman is a traditionalist, only a special type. His theme is exclusively heads; the linear basis is ingeniously taken from Byzantine specimens. It is reduced to fore-forms recalling Aborigine cave drawings or African masks and then, inside these schemes, a colour process recalling the meditative art of Klee takes place. The artist arranges his pictures in a complete series, giving rise to something like an iconostasis. He does not like to speak about art, he wants his work to be regarded as a religious act, like the old icon-painters. He has a beard like a prophet and cunning black eyes; his friends tell me that his civil profession is principal designer of the *Journal Mode* and that he is an outstanding poster designer. Evening approaches and, in the courtyard beneath the windows of the multi-storey block where he lives and paints, a nightingale sings at the top of its voice" (Jindrich Chalupceky, "Moskovskii dnevnik", *Avangard: mesto v zhizni*, Moscow, 2000, p. 12).

¹⁸ Shvartsman did not manage to react to Jindrich Chalupceky's comments about his

shown) lies in a rational form, while the process is volcanic – spontaneous, the result is immediately lit up by recognition. Accept my wishes for a happy new year.

Mikhail Shvartsman.

I nevertheless relate well to young people. Ours are banal (this is the American influence) or cynical (this is a Russian property), it is sickening, but what can you do? There are, nevertheless, some good kids. I have met them.

Letter to Vitaly Krivulin

We have, thank God, no news at all; I am only daubing.

There was an exhibition here of "15 Jewish artists".³³ Everything is very nice, even People not devoid of abilities. One thing is incomprehensible: where does this apartment-reproduction Jewish-settlement nostalgia with little Chagall come from? What does the late-ethnic ennui of a persecuted Jew give? All this is nothing more than an episode, moreover a late one. Even, if you seek images, even on the lines of persecutions, even then the phenomenal side is more powerful and unbelievable. Who needs chewed-up probabilities? A genuine Jew – a Testament figure – Elijah, Isaiah, David, Judith, Mary, Paul, John. In short, he on whom the word of the Lord is written.

If it is not so, if the high-spiritual calling of the Israelite is replaced by an ethnic concept, then it is more correct to designate it by the humming, Polack word "Yid".

A Jew is not a geo- or an ethnographic, and not even a national concept; it is a religious concept. The Jew is a calling. Here is the genuine and highest type of Jew: Abraham, Moses, Christ.

In my opinion, the Pope is also a Jew, if he is a believer. That is why I cannot accept frayed and Jewish-settlement smiling-tearful stylisations. This was natural for Chagall. The icon is a form born of the Spirit of the Testament. I do not want to say that this lot stylises after the icon, but I do say, as an example of a high form, that there are other examples.

I am dying to take a look at your new verses.

Greetings to Tanya.

Yours, M. Shv. Ira and I hug you.

"suggestive painting" on his first visit.

¹⁹ Alternative version: Always giving my dues to the imaginative power of the Aborigines and Negroes, I believe that those specimens which rise up above sensual magism and the subconsciousness are highly instructive. My aim is the proto-image (the over-consciousness) and the meditative course of my working process sweeps aside external associations. Imagination is also typical of the hierographies.

²⁰ Replaced by the word "hierograph" in the original draft.

²¹ Replaced by the word "hierograph" in the original draft.

²² Vitaly Krivulin (1944–2001): Poet from St Petersburg.

²³ Iraida Shvartsman claims that this word had a meaning similar to "backside" in the artist's vocabulary.

²⁴ Friend of Vitaly Krivulin.

²⁵ Vladimir Yankilevsky: Russian artist. Lives in Germany.

²⁶ Dmitry Bobyshev: Russian poet. Lives in the United States.

²⁷ Dictated to Iraida Shvartsman. Igor Zhestkov-Epstein was the nephew of A. B. Pevsner, a friend of the Shvartsmans. He began to draw under the influence of Mikhail Shvartsman. He now lives in Kemnitz in Germany.

²⁸ Boris Groys: Russian art critic. Lives in Germany.

²⁹ Ilya Kabakov: Russian Conceptualist artist. Lives abroad.

³⁰ Literary and art miscellany (1985).

³¹ Prigov: Russian poet.

³² Victor Sosnora: Writer from St Petersburg.

³³ The name of an exhibition held in Moscow on 10 March 1990 (curated by Leonid Voitsekhov).

MIKHAIL SHVARTSMAN
POEMS

Painting Pictures

Good Friday?
An instant of instants
Through the haze
of time
through the pearls
of dreams
and
tears
I plunge into the vision:
Prophecy
is linear.

Through the ulcers of whispers
Through the spasms of expectations
And Golgothas,
A derisive
boom,
Calumny,
Calumny,
Calumny!
The poplars – roots upwards
Are linear
In a blue puddle.

Through the fates of creeks,
The breathing of white mallows,
April
The lip is cherry,
Through the beads
Of tears
And dreams
The sound
Uprising by colour,
Like a crucified man,
Is linear.

You fear the blue
The flowers are flattened out
Nestled by luxury
The moisture is flattened out
The pen is flattened out
The gardens are flattened out
You fear the blue

The Platonic fore-green of leaves
The fore-yellow of a Vermeer dream
The fore-silver in the hallway of
Honeyed calm
The fore-rustling of dragonflies
With fore-moth wings
You fear the blue
M. Shvartsman. 1974 from the
Nativity of Christ

Behind everything lies something different:
the different shines
the different silvers
the different in colours
the different in calm
You fear the blue
1974

Verses in a Spirit
1983 from the Nativity of Christ, Moscow
To my Iroida on her Birthday

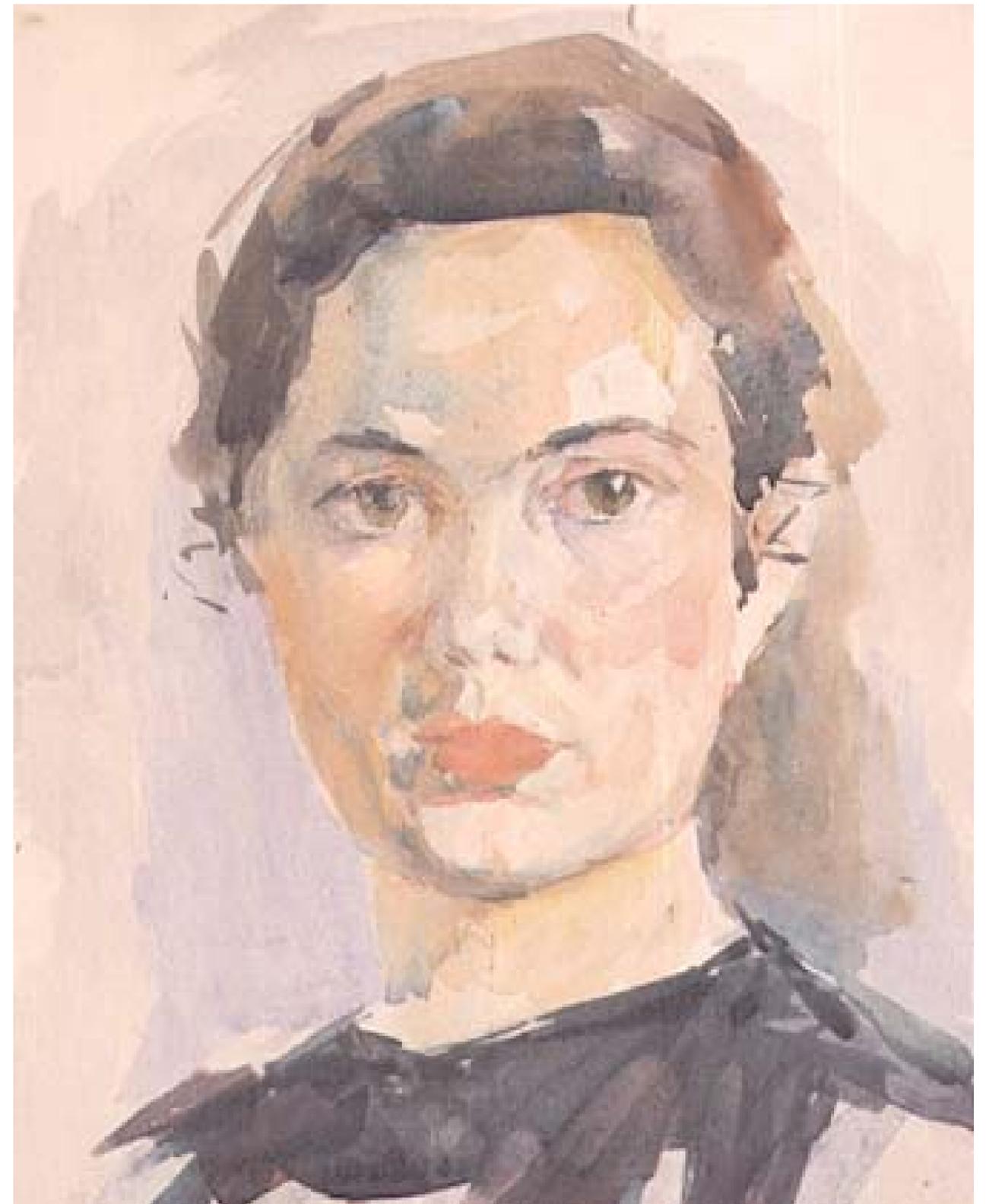
Looking at me, as if at myself,
I suffered
endured
grew accustomed – Believed
for nights I waited at the keen door
for the tired one,
fearing for him,
I prayed
Here he is: It has passed!
he knows the beast –
– its number
Who is this – the Gift of my Fate?
You are Iroida.
And do not remember
Either teardrops
or offences.
How I love –
I have not overloved: Everything is still not
enough
I live for you
for your sake
I shine with you.
Hierat

Dedicated to... A Confession
Oh! Can you comprehend?!
a blue angel is familiar to me
My "I" extracts the rustle of yellow wings.
And the guardian of my Spirit
Is the Archangel Michael, now white.
All seven. And the restrained colour
on the feathers of wings. And the light
appears.
I see their lines of flights, eternity is
disjointed.
Here is their trace: I see, I see, I see
the essences (I) feel the numbers
the lighting step of warps,
The vision of celestial plains is immobile
and the meaning of the prophetic voice.
Oh! My friend, know:
I am called there
where the eye is inward
they look and hear
with the eyes of hearing the voice
they read the deathly quiet
and the rudiment is elected.
Mikhail Shvartsman
[late 1980s]

The sunrise is fine
The sunset is fine
But not our delight is the reason for that

And the light has its depths
The object with its dark edge
Does not in any way border the light,
But comes from under it, probably
or in it.
[After 1987]

Whoever loves God
is part of Him.



Portrait of the Artist's Wife Iroida Shvartsman. 1952
Cat. 260

CONVERSING
WITH MIKHAIL SHVARTSMAN

Costakis: Tell me about the hieratic concept.

Shvartsman: It is not a concept; it is a revelation. Hieratism can only be grudgingly called a concept in the civil-philosophical sense, gravitating by profanation and flowing into a customary channel. It goes without saying that there is an entire series of reasons, which are expounded: it has its own apothatics.

The hieratic experience of mankind dates thousands of years. Strictly speaking, however, the hieratic testimony of the Holy Spirit was interrupted for more than three centuries. To appear today in old, congregational forms is lifeless stylisation. A new summons is made from on high.

The hieratic school teaches the reading of tokens, which the initiated left for themselves in past incarnations. We hear the voice of our "I" – an immortal particle of God in us. The "I" of the hierat engages in the eternal work of "I", enthickening the Spirit and concentrating it in a sign of the Spirit.

The hierat expresses his transcendental task. He traces Ariadne's thread in the labyrinths of cultures, a thread immured in the flesh. The sign of the Spirit is an hieratic sign.

Hieratism is a Greek word, meaning the sacred, the spiritual, the sacred-significant – the innermost-signified. A total of fourteen notions. The hieratic signs are strictly hierarchic. The hieratic structure of images is iconnic, i.e. canonised each time, in every act, before a concrete incarnation.

The hierat does not name the sign and is not tempted by a verbal name, for in its essence it creates the silent name Hiera-sign. The Bible speaks of prohibiting any mention of the sacred name.

Everything will be told in its own time and in its own place. The summoned initiated will read the entire mystical text of the given incarnation of the hierat. His labour is endless. The secret of the ecstatic arising is indecipherable. In the existence of the master, sign-manifestation occurs spontaneously on the lines of existential responsibility, as typical of us as death.

Costakis: How does the master know when the sign is manifested?

Shvartsman: Very easily. Just like when Abraham was given the promise and went, not knowing where he was going, but knowing that when he saw, he would know.

Not by myth, but by kerygma.³⁵

Costakis: Are beauty and the fine removed?

Shvartsman: No and no! On the contrary: when manifested,



George Costakis and Mikhail Shvartsman. 1977

the Spirit leaves a specially fine trace – the Sign of the Spirit. Artisticism inside things is particularly great and uninhibited. That is why uninitiated artists, delighting at the beauty and freedom of hieratic forms, adapt them as attributes and in vain operate with artistic aims. But this is like oil in a puddle. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Costakis: What is the countenance in the coffin?

Shvartsman: This is the designation of one of the hierarchies of forms. One great writer, for example, wrote about the face of a dead man: "His face expressed previously unknown knowledge." The sign of this knowledge is an icon of a passed life, its iconnic sign concentrations, broken off by death from everything fleeting and sensual, enthickened by it and frozen, like the last token to the living. This is the highest hierarchy of defamiliarisation, the "Grand form" – the first hieratic hierarchy. The signs of the countenances – the hieratures of countenances – begins with it. The countenance – sign of the Spirit is something that opens.

Costakis: Do you mean to say a mask?

Shvartsman: Oh, no and no! A mask is a guise, not a countenance. It does the opposite, it hides. The Africans have masks. This is from the subconsciousness. The countenances, however, are the sphere of the over-consciousness. That is all I will say for now.

Costakis: What is it about your pictures that makes them shine?

Shvartsman: I do not know. But it is clear that all the completed hieratic images shine, one way or another. This is a real feature of the hieratic colourlit. "Luminescence is typical of the Sign of the Spirit."

Costakis: Does the hierat paint icons?

Shvartsman: No. I can, but I do not. Although icons are also hieratics. That is what icons are and should be called.³⁶

Costakis: What are hieratics?

Shvartsman: This is hieratic material. It is extremely multi-layered. Everything done in hieratism is hiera-material and not exhausted by the manifested signs.

Costakis: How do you relate to Malevich?

Shvartsman: Malevich is a titan.

Costakis: And to Suprematism?

Shvartsman: Suprematism is titanic division.

Costakis: What is that?

Shvartsman: Take icons, for example, the Saviour in Majesty. We see that the Suprematist aspect here is only part of things. The grandeur of Suprematism, however, is that it has proved the right of pure construction to an image.

Costakis: And what follows on from this?

Shvartsman: What follows on from this (and Malevich realised this with anguish) is that an image, and not the right of an image, is required. When Malevich created his square, there was nothing to do on this line, everything went into applied.

Costakis: And what about the Suprematists?

Shvartsman: While the innovation was signified, the Suprematists made, each depending on his own talent, beautiful things in a fine impasse.

Costakis: But didn't Malevich himself, for some time, move these forms?

Shvartsman: No! He went into applied, i.e. he sought a function for them. In the spiritual sense... No! There was no spiritual sense. It is manifested in the image. Malevich pined for the image.

Costakis: Yet "beautiful things" were still made?

Shvartsman: No, it was "positional squawking."

Costakis: But there are still Suprematists, even now.

"The soul is only soothed when I am in my studio."
Mikhail Shvartsman

You know, for as long as I can remember, whether it is raining or snowing, hot or cold, people scurry about, while I am either going to the studio or from the studio. Everything seems to occur past me and I past everyone. I am busy with my own thing and only notice with surprise: yesterday the nightingales were still singing and today snow has fallen.

And now...

That's just it. Another year has passed...

The most important thing is to say to whom, what a person is engaged in, on what life is spent, show all this ... to a normal person ... In the best case, they will sympathise with you – above all with your wife and loved ones. By the way, this concerns you too, sir. For the common sense (so called "common sense") that which we engage in from day to day is madness of the clearest water. Many probably think about me: "He is not quite right in the head." I am not lying. What are you laughing at? Do you think I am lying? Not a bit of it. That is what they think. And thank God! It is boring to be normal. I couldn't do it.

Yesterday I went to visit N. He asked me: "Mikhail Matveyevich, who will you speak with in this language?"³⁹ I replied: "I will speak with you."

But how will you explain something to someone who does not see anything?

Every time you convince yourself that you are doomed to miscomprehension, you might as well cry.

Foreigners, those who come over here, have a nose for things. You show your canvases and they automatically select the best. That's the way they are. They see quality, the scale of a personality. They do not understand what it is, but they feel that it has something which they still do not understand. They have a nose for the living, like sniffer dogs for drugs.

N recently came to see me. I see that he does not understand anything, but badgers me to sell, sell. That, by the way, is not a bad sign. The desire to own is the first step to understanding.

What time is it on your silvers?⁴⁰

Three.

The journey here has worn me out. Travel, travel and more travel ... An hour and a half just to get here.

Come on!

You come off it. From home to the underground station is ten to fifteen minutes. Forty minutes on the underground. Then you stand for ages at Polezhaevskaya, waiting for a trolleybus to come. The trolleybus ride is another fifteen to twenty minutes, then five to seven minutes by foot to the studio. Simply...

Isn't it quicker to travel to Sokolniki?

Sokolniki? At least if there is nothing there you can flag down a car. No, no use at all. And now you can't catch anything anymore. And it is longer in time.

But don't you think that I am complaining. Don't you believe it. Even if I had to spend even longer travelling here. I would still consider myself the happiest man alive. I speak the truth. Cross my heart!

Have you ever noticed that when children begin to argue about something between themselves or to play, from aside it seems like jackdaws chattering. Like in summer. It is very nice...

Yes, only it is even nicer when they chatter at a distance.

You're not wrong there! They would try the patience of a saint!

Tell me what you like here. At least something. Even only a little piece. Here, for example.

And what do you not like?

Well, I don't know. Perhaps this...

And what do you see here?

A medieval city...

Is there nothing urbanist here?

I wouldn't say so. I don't see anything.

Turn it round. Now?

Yes, that is better. Like a head in a helmet.

That is bad. What is good here? Here are some sort of jaws. Daub it with something.

What?

At least with white. Here, give it to me. You spend a long time digging. You have to be more spontaneous. You spend a long time thinking. Very clever. What is there to think about here? Let horses think. They have bigger heads.

Leave everything as it is. Now do the background. Alexander Vasilyevich Kuprin⁴¹ used to say: "They bring in some student. I ask him, what can you do? He says, I can paint backgrounds. I say, then there is nothing I can teach you."



Studio at 2 Zhivopisnaya (Painting) Street in Moscow. 1983

So come on, add more colour. Put it on the side. Only clean the frame first.⁴² I saw a razor lying near the window a minute ago.

Do not destroy the curve.

Leave the edge.

Here the brush should go like a cat's paw.

You very much like to reflect. Leave it. Now let the layer rise. Then we begin again. Only for Christ's sake, no crap. Try to do it right away. Then the light will appear; like that, however, it is merely painted plywood.

Touch it! Has it dried yet?

Yes?

On you go then. May God be with you!

Excellent! More, more!

You see yourself – the light has come out from under your hand. Hold on to it. Take more water. Smooth it out. Excellent! Fine, very fine. Don't go to town. Leave it the way it is... Do you see, the light has appeared.

A-ha.

I'll give you a-ha. And you say: Shvartsman is a sucker, Shvartsman is a sucker.

No I don't.

Well, it's unimportant.

Dimenty, cut off a piece of levkas.⁴³ It is absolutely awful. Have you overcleaned it or something? It does not withstand a layer of paint of such brushwork. Or they steal glue from the tempera and you have to add acrylic. I will phone Sava⁴⁴ once more, he promised to get me some.

Didn't I tell you? Sheinkman⁴⁵ once visited me. He examined everything closely, so subtly, and then asked: "Why do the layers appear to be cut out here? What is the reason for this?"

"Well, do you like it?"

"Yes, very much so."

"That is what it is for."

Mikhail Matveyevich! Why can't I seem to understand your painting from a distance? And then I come closer and I cannot tear myself away?⁴⁶

Well, only look closer then.

Zhenka Borisov was once here.⁴⁷ He said:

Old fellow, your brushes on the window there are well worn. Give them to me. You will only throw them away. And I adore working with worn brushes.

I am ready to give two new brushes for this worn one. On others only two hairs remain. But sometimes even these are necessary for work.

I thought with you everything was worked out by kolinsky brush.

No, no, mostly by these worn brushes.

Do not forget that for an artist, besides a brush, he should also have at hand a cloth, a razor, a finger-nail, a slaver and a palm. Be initiative, do not freeze. Be lively. Rub three times with the arse if need be, just do not be limp.

Mikhail Matveyevich, look.

Brilliant, old fellow. You can go and sleep.

Is it bad?

You are going the same old way again. Like in the song: "The right leg further left, the left leg further right."

...

There is no folly. Folly is required. Why do you want to be cleverer than yourself?

Look at children's drawings.

Take Yurok, for example, he is on the whole a worker and joiner, not an artist. You ask: "Draw what God puts on your soul." Such things happen. Those primitivists – they pass themselves off as primitives, yet this is genuine, living and natural. Lavish folly occurs.

There is no place for a clever man in hieratics.

The canvas must be nursed like a child. Washed with a paintbrush, with the palm of the hand. Oiling can also help. But very carefully. It does not pay to hurry. I am not very fond of an oil surface. But sometimes there is no doing without oil. It seems to make the colour brighter and richer. But I prefer the mattness of frescoes. I fall back on oil, whenever there is no other way out. Or when a red-hot surface is desperately needed.

I think that piece should be oiled.

You think s...?

S...?

So?

How?

You think so?

A-ha. Yes.

I am not sure that I agree. But place the bottle with the oil in the sun. Let it get some light.

Turn it round.

...

Wash it with strontium. Do not scratch it like a cat's paw.

...

There you go, something has appeared.

Mikhail Matveyevich, do you remember, you once said that you were capable of spiritual work? You listed several qualities necessary for a student. I only remember two – a sense of hierarchy and returning one's dues. There were some others, only I've forgotten them.

You should have written them down.

Do you feel how, after the studio, you go out into the light of God and all the colours around become more acute? The feeling for colour grows more acute. I liked Chaschin,⁴⁸ we would sometimes go out of the studio and he would say: "Mikhail Matveyevich, look how beautifully the sky is washed." I am probably a realist at heart. I have a great feel for nature. In my own way, of course. Hieratics, incidentally, has all of this – man, trees and flowers, only on such a scale and expressed in a sign, sublimated in a sign.

Hieratics do not contradict nature. On the contrary. They bring it out with even greater power, more profound and crystal-like.

There's a number 59.⁴⁹ Will we make it on time?

There was a good piece there and you destroyed it.

You celebrate and then this happens.

You are slipping past. There are no criteria. You paint senselessly, like a hen with its foot.

If you want to know, this piece of yours could be the tuning-fork for the whole thing, but you have completely ruined it. A terrible person. I once said to Dyukov: "You are a terrible person."⁵⁰ He flew at me: "Me?!? A terrible person?" He was offended. He does not understand humour. I am afraid of such people.

What is this? Merely a set of details. You do not sense the whole. You do not see the large sign. Seek the sign. There should be a sign. Else nothing will turn out.

What do you think? Should the hieratures be exhibited?

It is best to revolve the hierature in the process of exhibiting.

The viewer, for example, according to his or her desire, could turn the canvas on its axis. But how can this be done? The boards are so heavy.

And the light?

I prefer diffused upper light. In any case, not bright light.

Is it necessary to turn the boards over?

They can be exhibited just like that. Fumed oak – what is wrong with turning? I like it. If the worst comes to the worst, the canvas could be placed inside a box, with small margins, as if in a niche. I have seen such examples. I liked them.

You've been brightening it up again. Your favourite. I can't cure you of this.

Look: red and blue and green and yellow. Plus black to boot. What are you thinking of? Clean it off while it is still wet, use whatever you want, and begin with two – at least with black and sienna. Maybe, maybe, add some more white, but only if the worst comes to the worst.

Shvartsman paints with three colours. Which is a lot as it is. Four is already an orgy. And you have gone even further, it is sickening to even look at.

Genka⁵¹ was once at a friend's studio. He saw his friend adding all the paints he had to the palette. Like a rainbow, simply dazzled the eyes. He said: "I want to achieve the same effect as Shvartsman." Genka said to him: "Shvartsman works with four colours." "What, I don't believe you." And he didn't. He thought that Genka was deliberately hoodwinking him.

Incidentally, when Nemukhin⁵² was here, he also asked: "Do you use Windsors?" "No, our own casein." I don't think he believed me either. He probably decided that I was hiding something, afraid that he would find out.

You have exhausted everything. You are collapsing into the usual scheme of things.

There is not one single living place.

Leave it.

May I daub it all?

Leave it. You can do an imposition later. Take the invention,⁵³ the one you like, and make an imposition.⁵⁴

Only first of all, wash it three times. With strontium and pink.

Take this canvas. Paint it as God puts it on your soul. Do not ruin the good. There is much good here. The sidewings are not bad. In general, you yourself know everything, you have already been trained. On you go. With God's help!

If you do not know what to do next, take the invention. It will prompt you.

An invention is an accumulator of ideas. Just take it easy, without any hysterics. Adapt timidly, but do not lose spontaneity. If you do, the invention will no longer let you fall lower than the level which you have already found. Then we can see. It might turn out that it will already be enough as it is. Set to it and pray.

Come on now, show me that little canvas by the wall. Not bad at all. Ah?

Look, an excellent canvas, and I wanted to continue something. That is what it means to leave something at the right time. With some others, it is the other way round. You bring it home, it is ostensibly finished, time goes by and you haul it back. Or it is sometimes like this. You go to bed a genius and wake up talentless.

How much work remains ... Look, so many excellent things. Only a slight wave of the brush remains. Particularly with today's experience. When will there be time to do it?

But bear in mind – if I do not manage in time, exhibit it as it is. They can stand up for themselves.



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1983

All right, paint something here?
How?
How now, brown cow. Without thinking. As God places on the soul.
Without looking back. Without crap.

It is not good that it is like an icon. Direct associations are an indication of overcoming something. For I don't know how many years, I have been unable to rid myself of several pieces on the canvas, left from the lazy adaptations of students. How many times do I have to say "I do not paint icons."

Tolya⁵⁵ used to be all ochres, but now he has this thing about reds. Pleased to death – like on icons. It seemed to him that this was exactly what was needed. With what difficulty all this had to be later overcome. Adaptation also needs to be done with the mind. And he, after a drinking session, used to come and start kneading with a "mare's head". He would suddenly take it into his head – let's do it directly out of the tube onto the canvas. Then nothing falls in place and you don't know the reason why. All this is, for the large part, a result of helplessness. Dough⁵⁶ should also be made with a brain, and not any old how. Lazy adaptation is worse than a cracked bum. Torture, both for the student and for me.



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1983

All right! Take a paintbrush and clean water. And wash off everything down to the old.
Wash off everything?
Yes. Without mercy!

...

All right now! The old was a hundred times better than the new.
Well, the old is always wiser than the young.
Don't you believe it. I knew so many old fools. Such fools... So don't you believe it.

What a shame, Mikhail Matveyevich, about the beautiful patch? Can't we perhaps leave it?

You are just like Nikita Medvedev.⁵⁷ He loved to stand behind me and watch me paint. All you would hear would be: "Mikhail Matveyevich, Mikhail Matveyevich, that's great, a work of genius, leave it the way it is." And he would simply howl when he saw the metamorphoses changing on the canvas. Such beautiful things vanished. No aesthete would have dared do that. I said to him: "Try to understand, the important thing here is the Sign and everything can be sacrificed to it, even something that was considered a success yesterday. And all is fair in love and war." It is important not to dash past headlong. I remember one canvas, you know it, with the blue inside, the metre ones, it still stood here, at the wall. I very much regret not stopping on time. What a flight that was. If only I had stopped. What idiotism!

But it's excellent even as it is!

Yes, but you did not see the way it was. Nikita shouted out: "Mikhail Matveyevich, stop! Ah, ah, ah!" Now I regret it. Yet neither do I like crap. There needs to be measure. Do you know what talent is? It is a sense of measure!

You are designing again. Why not use a drawing device! An hierature is not a blueprint. It no doubt seemed to you on several of my drawings – *expletive* – that they are architectural projects. Many people think that. This makes them more comprehensible and everyone likes them. They are bought for quality no worse than Cranach. Multi-parted, detailed. I spent years on this. But there are also hierarchies higher than these. In other, normal, natural conditions, having your own form, working with a group of students (alongside oneself), you know how much benefit there would be. What rich food could occur, for both architects and sculptors. They have no essential ideas. Only compilations. A profound crisis. Particularly in sculpture. What an hieratic sculpture could be provided. Someone could make a name for themselves on that. Lazarevich,⁵⁸ incidentally, senses this. But I am afraid to get involved in this. He is very vain and does not sense a large form. But very subtle, with taste. And, to tell you the truth, I do not want to be distracted. Now it is important to daub with concentration. Particularly now, when enormous experience has already been gathered. So I am glad that nothing is distracting me, there could be so many temptations... I would spend an enormous amount of precious time on conversations and teaching... Very well. Turn this small canvas round and identify the time.

Oh! Leave it. This is already something. Now leave the invention. This place here is taboo. Have you remembered this? Or else you will say later that you have not heard anything about it. Paint only around, where you want, only not where I showed. This will be the tuning-fork. For the time being. For today, that is taboo.

I left this stack of metre boards for subsequent metamorphoses. They have to be adapted in pencil on paper. While I am away, do this. Tomorrow.

What would you call this canvas?
... The Sacred Tree.
A-ha! Roerich! What else?
The Life-Giving Source.
Immediate associations with icons. That is no use. It should be more abstract.

The Rustle of the Rain.
Oh! Vulgar!
Well, I don't know.
Whatever I ask you, all I get is "I don't know." I know that you don't know, but think.

Dream.
On a midsummer night – *expletive*.
Why on a midsummer night? Simply Dream.
Simply a fit.
What Tit?
Simply ... a fit. Call it *Simplyatit*.
Come on. You're joking again.
All right then. What else?
It could be called simply On a Yellow Background.
Once in May.
Why in May?
Directing the Launch to the Shore.⁵⁹
You're at it again...

Let's call it simply *Cheremysh, Brother of a Hero*.⁶⁰ What are you laughing at? It is easy for you to laugh; I am in anguish.

If it were possible to record, at every stage, the metamorphosis on a film, at least a black-and-white one, this would bring together the richest research material. How the metamorphosis changes on the canvas is no less interesting than the final result. True, neither does one want to give food for epigones. Nothing disappears without trace in hieratics. All previous metamorphoses are pressed in. You see – they are like traces of generations. Like how your ancestors are visible in you. At least in the colour of the hair, the shape of the head, etc. This pressed thing in hieratics provides unusual depth and power. Therefore an hieratic canvas is so staggering close up. One wants to touch it. I sometimes even say to visitors: "Don't be afraid, you can touch it if you like." That is why an hieratic canvas takes so long to paint. On account of Shvartsman's idiotic aspiration towards extremities and crystallinity. This, unfortunately, concerns everything. Incidentally, in relations with people, I am exactly the same. This is not always useful. It is sometimes necessary to be even somewhat light of mind. I cannot stand this forced seriousness. I hope that I am not like that. I feel even something like boyishness.

Hieratics is another thing. You won't go far here on fluff-fluff. There should be, on the one hand, extreme openness to God and complete belief in oneself. Prayerful modesty and spontaneity, paradoxical as it may seem. You will not get here on will and personal qualities alone. You will not achieve anything by smash and grab in hieratics. Have you ever seen me come and start kneading? No. I am an out-and-out wolf in my work and there should be working modesty. Particularly for students. "Can you imagine it?"⁶¹

Like any good hunter, I follow the trail for a long time, afraid to frighten it off. And then – bach! And then Handel...

And you miss.
Yes, sometimes that happens.

No one is insured. And only again, without hysterics, step by step, not spoiling anything good, you move towards the Aim. You can't achieve anything until you have done your head in. It is extremely rare when it is a case of one, two, and all is ready and you are on your horse.

Look! Do you see what has happened?
One mighty blow, contrast, and everything falls into place. Nothing now traumatises. How everything began to play. There is no longer this falseness. That is how important a neighbour is in painting. One blow, in the right spot, and everything immediately falls into place. Can you feel it? Like right into the scabbard, as if everything were always this way. Recognition has taken place. Look at this powerful Sign. Agree? And how it has settled? How spread out and deep all at the same time. A paradoxical situation. Look, the sign appears to have smoothed out and taken off. Have you paid attention that they almost all seem to soar? That is their attribute.

Now turn it round.



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1983

Look. It is fine that way. As a rule, if everything has been resolved on one side, then the same applies to the other. But it nevertheless seems to me that the previous position was better. The sign is more abstracted. Yet there are, nevertheless, mundane associations. This is like a globe, but in that position it is a celestial sphere. Correct? That position is preferable. But, strictly speaking, this is a plafond situation. It should be looked at from bottom upwards. Now everything is ready. Clean the frame.

I will have to invite Irinushka. I wonder what she will say?

After this canvas, it is already clear how to continue these ones. Now only they have awaited their hour. You see how in hieratics nothing can be done specially or previously planned and say to yourself: "I will do it like that and be right." One canvas pulls another. Several canvases are often painted at the same time. Sometimes years pass before a new precedent for continuation appears. By the way, hieratic pedagogy is precedential. It is impossible to teach to paint from the head. It is like trying to teach swimming in a gymnasium. Many people are offended when I say that I have no formulae and think that I am hiding something. And it is not so. There should be a precedent, even if it is a scrawl on a scrap of paper. Do you remember the commandment given to Moses? "Do not worry how and what to say." Legend has it that he was tongue-tied. In painting too and in hieratics in particular.

Well, what are you standing there for? Clean the frame.

You do not trust yourself.

Look: you have gone through once, twice. And killed the curve. Snuffed the life out of it.

Do it all in one breath, that way there will be a living line. Do not reflect. Reflection is from personal distrust. This concerns everything, not only painting.

Do a curve – all at once. Do not stop, do not return and do not correct. Better make a mistake. Or at least begin again later. And everything that you have drawn is horrible to look at...

The Chinese are right when they say: "In the perfect, the Soul misses the imperfect." What is, after all, perfection? In hieratics, the criterion of perfection is the moment of recognition. It is not important whether the canvas took one year or one day to paint.

They say that Turner washed his watercolours 30 (?) times. And we wash them 130 times and this is not the limit. Tempera likes to be washed. Tempera is a divine medium. Oil cannot be even compared to it. It is a sensual material. Tempera is a spiritual material. It is the one closest to my own heart. In oil, it is difficult to overcome its annoying slipperiness. I previously worked in oil, but always degreased it in my own way. Now, true, acrylic is fashionable. But it quickly dries and you cannot wash it away. That is not quite what is needed. But we will assimilate it too, if tempera vanishes. Whatever the case, acrylic is better than tempera made from PVA glue.

But casein tempera is the thing for hieratic painting, you mark my words. Surely they won't stop making it?

I want to say to you: "Bear in mind at what stage the Sign wants to become an object. It objectifies. It wants to say all the time, 'I am a thing, I am volumetric.' Therefore the hierat should always be on the alert!"

And what is so bad with that?

Nothing bad, but there is little that is good. An object and an object. At best, on the level of defamiliarisation, phantasmagoria, etc. It is too straightforward. For some, even this hierarchy is enough as it is. The hierat sees the Sign spread out, in flatness. It only illusionises towards the Object. Objectivity will slip away every time. Only the eye will catch, somewhere, a direct perspective, almost architecture – stop – what is that? – you are already in a reverse perspective or in general in another dimension. The viewer simultaneously sees the Sign both outside and inside, on the left and on the right – from all sides.

Like in music, counterpoints are a feature of hierature. During the Renaissance, they loved to place the figure of someone in a special way, turning it to the viewer so as to show them from all sides. This is called counterposting. I will show you the next time we are in a museum. In hieratics, very often you can see a counterpost situation, only of a sort different to that of a Renaissance master. Medieval spread is closer to the hieratic Sign. Remember, in an icon, the figure, clothes, script and ornamentation live in a special unity, in a paradoxical space. As Kierkegaard used to say: "Paradoxical dialectics." This is a property of hierature. The Renaissance considered the Middle Ages as something backward, old-fashioned and almost unnecessary. The last one who still preserved the tradition was Giotto. But he was sort of on the demolition of cultures. That is what made him a genius. On the one hand, he is a profoundly medieval artist, but the interest in a demonstrative, direct-perspective space can already be felt. With Giotto, essentially, the downfall begins. The following generation became infected with the discovery of perspective. They simply raved about it. They say that when he went to bed, Uccello used to say to his wife: "Wife! Oh, what a sweet thing is perspective!" A brilliant master, by the way. Do you remember his hunters? Hieratics has all of this. You can suddenly see archaics, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, only without strain or stylisation. The hierat sometimes passes through worlds that are simply terrifying. In general, any stylisation, any repetition of outside incarnations, is a crime against the Holy Spirit.

But everyone, at some time, imitated someone or something?

That is another matter. At a certain age, imitation is a school. I speak about direct stylisations testifying only about the personal tastes of the author. On these grounds, one need not expect any revelations. At best, out of good intentions, to be no worse than the specimen. At worst, to tickle one's pride. And we all know where good intentions lead.

The task of the hierat is testimony of the Holy Spirit, through revelation, and not through likeness, not even by way of the best specimens. In hieratics, the inner link of cultures makes it simultaneously profoundly traditional and to a high degree contemporary and original. Pressed, rather than juggled forms. Metamorphosising and not compilation – that is the path of the hierat.

Incidentally, confirmation, so typical of the humanist school, is alien to hieratics. In this sense, it is closer in spirit to archaics.

Beauty, constructiveness and concept – all that is only part of things, part of the method. And the method is born by the Idea. And not the other way around. One big knob once declared: "I only learnt the method from Shvartsman." Idiot. He does not understand that this is a complete whole.

One cannot only learn how to wave a brush across a canvas. You can learn to do that in a week at my studio. You yourself know that to paint beautifully is not a problem. This is not the task of an Hierat. I always quote the example: "The river does not concern itself with the beauty of its banks." Are the Psalms of David not beautiful from the point of view of poetry? It is blasphemy even to speak about aesthetics where a miracle has taken place.

In hieratics, if a miracle has not taken place, one can construct whatever beauties you like, deceive yourself and others that it is already fine, one can cry or crap – nothing will satisfy (without grace).

It can be seen immediately – a good artist and an honest master, yet there is no grace, which you cannot purchase at the bazaar.

And if a miracle has taken place on the canvas, you are immediately assured of delight and recognition and beauty... salutary. Hieratics only takes a little and then you have a Miracle!

When the Miracle has taken place on the canvas, stop. Enough. Do not alter anything. Do not make it "even better". It is tempting. It is worse than a pissed arse to make it better when everything has already taken place. That is the temptation. The evil one never sleeps. "Correct it here, straighten it out here with a kolinsky brush, it needs to be tidied up a bit. You are guaranteed to spoil it. Let it settle. "God will give a day and so God will give food."

A problem, a problem, again a problem... And each time a new one. It is easier for an icon-painter. Canonic painting removes a mass of problems. He knows where the red or ochre should be; disperse here and animate there.

In hieratics, any repetition is a sign of overcoming, i.e. continuation – imperfection. It is easiest of all now to resolve this canvas in the spirit of the last one. A white breakthrough at the top and things are ready and the problem is solved. Everything immediately falls into place. Or imagine a cross, white say, in the centre. It sits and everything is ideal. Consider the canvas to be resolved.

Yes, it would be fine. I do not ever recall such a resolution.

Well, the cross will resolve almost any canvas. I deliberately do not slip onto a conceptual level. Then anyone will immediately say: "I understand everything." Everyone will no doubt like it. Because it will be comprehensible. A familiar association is always convenient and comfortable. It can be said: "This canvas means this or that." It will all be too "finger-pointed". Now it is extremely fashionable to do abstraction or Suprematism, compulsorily cramming in there either a menorah or a cross or something similar, so as to say: "This is religious art." All this is mind games and nothing else, didactics.

This is not the path of the Hierat. The Hierat goes by way of revelation, expressing himself emblematically, via a change of sacrificial metamorphoses.

So, again a problem, a problem... And there is no one to ask.

There is no criteria. You sculpt by touch, wherever the curve takes you; like a child, you do not sense where the good is. You make it and break it. It is possible to knead without end, like milling the wind. You have learnt a lot and have spontaneity and no end of mastery, but without criteria, without understanding, for the sake of which a canvas is painted, nothing will turn out, it is the labour of Sisyphus. You can't fly up to heaven on hot air alone.

A student can have different criteria. One can honestly and conscientiously adapt the invention. That will already be enough for me as it is, already a worthy hierarchy.

He will come into my hands and I will find what to do next, be sure of that – "I will settle, like God with a tortoise." That will be beneficial for me and a schooling for the student.

It is possible to appear on the level of taste. It is unimportant whether this answers to today's task or not, I will get to the bottom of it. But this too is also a criterion and quite a large one – another hierarchy.

It is even possible to simply manifest yourself, like a savage, who does not know anything, but expresses himself sincerely. This hierarchy is as important to me, only at a definite stage.

And finally, there is an hierarchy in which the student acts like an experienced and wise assistant, who has already passed through all stages of study from direct adaptation to maturing in the loin of the school, received the criterion and is acquainted with the task. I do not need to explain anything to such a student. He should understand the Master right from the word go. Then work proceeds like yeast.

Otherwise, one has to waste precious time on conversations, including philosophical conversations, and on teaching and training. All that used to be enough for me. Now, however, I only want to daub.

How much effort has to be spent on overcoming all these imperfections of students. Either sluggish, lifeless adaptation, or the love of some for motley and the anthropomorphic, or simply technically slipshod training, which becomes apparent many years later, when it is already too late to correct.

Although for me any daubing, even toothless crap, can be dough, there would be a precedent. But a student should nevertheless be on a high. His work is to prepare the take-off, a trampoline for the hierat. And when I am obliged to repair the runway, i.e. adapt myself, days or months can pass. That is why students are needed. The best form of study is to work alongside the master – and not a course of lectures. I am for the pedagogics of precedence.

Remember, that the life of hierature lies in curves. Or, to be more exact. The life of the curve is the language of hieratics. It speaks in the language of curves. They let the space and the form breathe.

Can it be said that the line in hieratics is the subject?



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1987

It can. In a certain sense, this is so. But I want to talk about something else. A sign is not an object, which can be touched and coloured or which casts a shadow. It has another reality. This is a thought existence and it is expressed by the inexplicable life of the curves. Prophetic curves, their relationship is the enigma and essence of an hieratic work. The hierat does not even concern himself with colour (the choice of colour). The colour metamorphoses can change up to a hundred times a day. Curves are, if you want to know, oxygen for the hierat and the hieratic school as a whole. You know, back at the bureau,⁶² how many kids I sent to the library to study architecture and sketch entases and arches? How many lectures I read about curves? Many have assimilated this school well.

Look here. This curve is hollow, biological, anthropomorphic, a bum's curve. In short, pretty awful. You don't have a hope of reaching the spiritual sphere with those curves.

Look at this simply lifeless scheme. Zoomorphic lines are like plants or flowers. Not exactly high flying.

By the way, a slight lack of overcoming has remained on some of my own things. And this continues to rankle. Curves should be melodious and tense – spiritual and always spontaneous. A line should breathe – that is my commandment.

You say: "What sort of freedom is this if you take an invention and adapt it for the canvas?"

I reply: if you adapt mechanically, disinterestedly and soullessly, then yes, this is not freedom, but anguish. In general, if you want to know, complete freedom is the absence of choice.

When you hold an invention in your hands, you will never fall down. It will not allow this to happen. This is like the score for a singer or the safety-wire for an acrobat. He can also be sure that he will not fall and smash. And this gives him confidence and freedom of movement.

So it is an invention in the hands and a master behind your back... In the hieratic school, the freedom is astonishing.

Chaschin⁶³ used to say: "Mikhail Matveich, why is that when you stand behind my back, I feel as if I am flying, or delight when you are right beside me, yet there is none of this when I get home?"

And you say: "Freedom, freedom." Freedom from what?

Mikhail Matveyevich, why have you abandoned this work?

I planned to continue it, but now I see that defamiliarisation is its hierarchy. It told me so itself. You remember, how much I struggled with it, while it, as if on purpose, insists on its own way, you could cry. Perhaps these narrow formats have deliberately defined their hierarchy. I resolved to leave everything the way it is.

Put all these narrow boards in one row, let's take a look.

You see, they are all related, even though they were painted in different years. And all in one hierarchy. Moreover, please note, not according to my will. I never work voluntarily. You will not achieve anything in hieratics by choice. Only by fate. And not only in hieratics. In life, act only according to fate, then you will not be wrong. There are so many of these self-inflated people. If you have to be like this today, they are like this. Tomorrow, it is advantageous to be different, because they are different. For example, I want to be a Suprematist or a primitivist – you're welcome. No risk at all. You can "graduate into the bullies without a fight at all." It is difficult to live according to fate. You will probably be considered a fool. Your humble servant is one of them.

I can't recall you being considered a fool.

Simply out of politeness. They go home, lie beneath the blanket and think, like Chekhov's hero, thank goodness I am not like that, and blissfully fall asleep.

Mikhail Matveyevich, why have you dated this work a decade earlier?

Everything is correct. Canvases take years to paint. The problematics of this particular work were topical in the 1970s. It is not important that I have only got to it now. In general, how a work is to be dated is the prerogative of the master, that is all. Understand?

I understand.

"What the old man got the old woman's goat with."

You are getting back into your old habits again. Axes. Here are the axes, there, on these boards. How long can this go on? Choking already. You love to slide into a usual scheme. Where is the initiative? If you want to know, there should be some madness. Spoil it all if you like; you have done everything so correctly that I could cry.

You really enjoy embroidering. How will you fit your beloved schemes into that? I don't understand, surely you do not actually like doing this? I would have long since died of boredom. I do not know, perhaps there is something I do not understand. It would be better to sit and churn out some still-life. Seek different colours and perfect yourself. Kolya Smirnov⁶⁴ was an expert at this. But spontaneity and love of the subject are required here. Look closely at the old Dutch masters. What mad mastery and, despite it all, lightness, without this wearisome wanking that is so fashionable today.

In general, what I want to say to you is this: no matter what, you have to be alive. We do not have any other option.

You have to understand yourself, nothing can be hidden behind eyes, mouths, flowers or clouds in hieratics, you cannot hide behind the subject or even the concept, like in Suprematism, for example. We have other resources. Virtually imperceptible ones. We almost paint in hints. What can you answer the Soul of man with? Or surprise with? If you yourself are empty and have nothing to say, except repeat yourself and past stages. Better to go and sleep. No, my friend, you have to be alive and to attempt to be different. It makes no difference whether you are tired or not. Best to sit down and rest. But once you have approached the canvas, that is it. You should fly.

As the proletarian poet once said: "I hate all dead meat. I love all life."⁶⁵

I remind you once again: we do not have any special resources like, for example, the icon-painter. Icon-painting has a canonic system. Everything is pre-planned – the stages of work, what to begin with, how and with what to finish. In academic painting, one way or another, the artist can hide behind the subject, the illusion of naturalism.

Let us take *Hunters at a Stopping Place*. I have loved it ever since I was young. Strictly speaking, this is not even painting; it is the artist's sincerity and honesty.

In Suprematism, it was also possible to hide behind the construction or, ultimately, think up something. Nothing to do with me. Although, of course, they have their own anguish too. I do not want to belittle others' achievements, but they have that "salutary straw".

Take *Sots Art*, for example. Exercise yourself in wit and you will already be sailing, at least for some amount of time. And everyone likes it. You do not even need to be able to do anything. You know the compilation and each takes it from there. There is no need to study anything. The viewer is always contented when there is no need to exert himself. Everything is comprehensible; it seems that even I (the viewer) can do that. Everything appears so simple. The viewer begins to think that he is being duped when he sees something incomprehensible, where it is necessary to induct himself, be able to do something, develop

himself in some way. In this sense, the Conceptualists hit the mark. The public likes to be entertained. Everything is different in hieratics. There is nothing to hide behind. Nothing can be thought up. There is nothing with which to entertain.

You look and see something like some creatures – non-creatures, no hands or legs, construction – non-construction, nothing like geometry. Yet nevertheless, something is looking at you, only it is not clear with what. Something is attracting you, only what?

The hierature speaks with the viewer as if half-hinting. The hierat has a minimum of resources. You cannot say for definite what is depicted, you cannot attach a label. What is there to answer the Soul of man with? Or to surprise with? How can you be different here? It is very difficult. Or, as someone said, "archi-difficult". On your own, you cannot shift such a large, cumbersome object. The only hope lies in the Lord. In this sense, I am fully aware of this. Alone, I am nothing. We are only like God in co-authorship, and not in our external attributes. One must never forget this and attempt to keep the Soul pure and be open to the Lord. And when the entire Soul is in shreds, what kind of work can there be, it is self-deception.

Imagine that you are playing on a string. You are holding one end, while the other is in the heavens. If you weaken the string, there will not be any sound. If you pull too hard, you will break it. So it is in hieratics. Constant prayer through deeds.

What happens when the heavens turn away? A string has two ends! Do not worry. The Lord takes care of His own.

You are probably thinking, I've lost count of the days Shvartsman has gone to his studio, not even touched the canvas, and left tired, as if he has spent the whole day loading bricks?

Why, no, I understand.

You wouldn't believe it, but I sometimes grow more tired when I am meditating. This work sometimes takes more out of you than simple waving the brush. Believe me, I am not lying. Irina constantly asks me: "What did you do today in the studio?" And I have nothing to say. She sometimes even feels hurt, thinking that I am hiding something from her. But what can I say? I really did go to the studio, sat down at a canvas and even forgot to change my clothes. And so I sat until dusk, not tearing myself away. True, I did drink some tea, I think. This stage of meditation is the most difficult. Like a lion about to leap. Like the calm before a storm. When you mentally prepare for a dash. That is the most important moment. The canvas is almost ready. Everything would seem to be there, the only thing is not to make a mistake, not to tie your will to providence. That will immediately be noticeable on the canvas.

That includes you too, sir, by the way.

Do you know what makes Malevich completely unacceptable for me? What?

He said that every fifty years, a town should be broken up and rebuilt in a new way. Such thinking is alien to the hierat. Metamorphic work is, in general, alien to the spirit of the destruction of the old in the name of the new. He had a revolutionary consciousness. Mine is transformative. The old should give life to the new not at the expense of its own complete destruction, but transforming itself, like a caterpillar into a butterfly; or compressing itself, like a tree turning into charcoal. Or, neighbouring, giving unexpected combinations of mutual unity like, for example, the construction of a monastery in a place where new and natural constructions have attached themselves to the old ones by the order of life. Only everything dead and lifeless can be destroyed,

sacrificing itself to new metamorphoses. Incidentally, the ancient constructions had to be cleaned of more recent stratifications. So the new does not by any means always surpass the old. True, the natural elements sometimes interfere in this process. The eruption of volcanoes, various cataclysms, fires and wars. An entire layer of culture, plus simply enormous expanses of living nature, are destroyed. But these are natural elements, tragedy. Yet even after such phenomena, time passes and lakes form on the place of the burnt earth, trees grow up again, with even greater force.

But wilful destruction is not for the hierat. Sometimes, a fragment lives until the final moment on my canvas, without disappearing. Metamorphosis should exhaust itself and not merely destroy itself. It has its own length of life. This must be felt. Not before or after, but when this is needed.

And when is it needed?

That is the whole point.

Nothing can be resolved speculatively in hieratics. You cannot say, for example, do it this way and it will be better. Even if this particular course works on other boards, that does not mean that the formula will work in all cases of life. I can never say with certainty how the metamorphosis will move. In hieratics, the hand is cleverer than the head. Trust the hand. Begin and you will see what is correct. Only not with a mare's head, but by concentrating and praying.



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1988

From the positions of an Hierat, species have their own hierarchy, unlike any known system of the theory of views. The hierat sees the world emblematically, through the world of curves and the special spaces created by them. Lines create forms and a form has its own hierarchy. From this point of view, any beetle or fly bewitches me far more than, for example, a dove or even a peacock. Although birds are commonly regarded as ambassadors of the divine hierarchies. Angels are likened to birds. It is difficult for me to dispute anything here. I have, I confess, a different experience of interaction with nature and other priorities. I do not know whether I will succeed in making myself understood, but the mosquito or scarab beetle, from the point of view of the pure monumentality of form, are higher than an elephant or giraffe. Amazing as it may seem, a genuinely large form is concealed inside small dimensions. This is the mystery of nature. The ancients understood this, by the way, particularly in the east. Have you noticed that any defamiliarisation is slightly insect-like? This is clearly visible with some medieval masters and the primitivists. The same turn of the head, feet, clothes, hats and armour as a small insect or horned beetle or moth. In general, like an inhabitant of small worlds. Although, who knows, which of the worlds is bigger?

Look at Vishnyakov's wonderful portrait of the Fairmore boy. I really love it. The red camisole alone makes it all worth it. Isn't it wonderful? Here the face is not so important. Where did you get that postcard?

I bought it in a bookshop.

Let it stand here for now, for reflections. That is very important. It is possible to study this forever. How the red is taken is simply crazy! And how the figure is planted. Uh? Understand?

Ye-es.

Look. A puppet or a bird, flying or dancing, the gesture is defamiliarised. That is a school.

I want to read you a short lecture, the fundamental one at the bureau. All my students there are familiar with it. I give it the nominal title of Transformation and Deformation. Do you know what the difference is?

Only in the general features. We touched upon it in physics. But I don't really know.

I will explain it by way of the following example. A flower stalk grows towards the sun. Its growth is preprogrammed. No matter what obstacles are placed in its path, bending round them and transforming, the line of the stalk, its curve, will naturally continue its movement towards the Light, sometimes taking on the most unbelievable forms. Throughout the entire course of its life, the line of this stalk (transforming!) fulfils its main transcendental task – movement towards the Sun.

There is another path. You and I know that a flower should grow in that direction. We take the stalk in our hands and pull it towards the Sun (with Bolshevik zeal). It must, after all, grow in that direction. And what will happen?

Correct. The flower will soon wilt. This is the path of deformation. This aspect should be understood very clearly in art. Deformation of form is most often a demonic thing. Transformation is sublime. Deformation is simpler. Everyone can deform. Caricature, grotesque, unbalance, boorishness – all this is deformation. It is always loud. The art of schizophrenics is, for the large part, deformative. Illness deforms people, but they are nevertheless fine, if spiritual work occurs inside them. The face of an old man is corroded by wrinkles, scars and sometimes even injuries, but it is the result of the work of providence and, if these signs of time are natural, they make the face of the man more significant and handsome than in his youth. People sometimes specially make scars on their face or wilfully disfigure themselves, in order to make them-

selves look more masculine. This is pure demonry and deformation.

Have you ever noticed how death transforms the face of a man? The secret of this is truly great. For the hierat, the "countenance in the coffin" is always a revelation and always the sign of something. Each creates his own icon. And we can observe its features not only in the "countenance in the coffin", but also, say, on old, faded photographs, sometimes in accidental momentary facial expressions, sometimes in images made by people who feel this transformation of a living face.

By the way, the "countenance in the coffin" is, for the hierat, the first hierarchy of defamiliarisation. When the features are still clear, recalling the fabric of life, only the signs of a different world grow more and more distinct. These transformations are remarkable. In a familiar face, you sometimes see features of ancestors, for example mongoloid characteristics, not previously spotted. I also once noted a funeral ceremony, a corpse, and could not tear my eyes away from the metamorphosis of the face taking place directly before my eyes. It all seemed somewhat inappropriate, even sacrilegious. But an artist sometimes sees the miracle at the most inappropriate times. Remember? "The miracle is given to you and you do not see it." That's how it is.

Why speak about that at the design bureau?

Here is why. In order to understand how styles develop, in architecture for example, it is necessary to understand the transformation of forms depending on the tasks of the era – where the entasis in columns comes from or how the "broken pediment" appeared in the Baroque period. Without understanding how the forms of architecture and their inner links are transformed, it will seem that everything is thought up by the will of the artist, i.e. deformatively. But that is not right. As an example, I show my students an icon and, for example, a portrait by Picasso. In both, the person is depicted anatomically incorrectly, but what an abyss between them! What a sublime transformation in the icon and what mischievousness the deformation of the early-twentieth-century artist seems. Although I highly rate many of them – Rouault, Modigliani and many other fine masters – when you discover the old masters and the icon, they all seem like children. But they are in their own hierarchy and I would not like to lower their significance.

I remember myself when I was young. I could spend hours mentally transforming the objects, houses and trees I saw in front of me. It was extremely entertaining. Particularly when I was interested in the figurative. I was never drawn to masks, freaks or monsters. All that seemed too simple and uninteresting. What interested me particularly was the search for the hidden sign in the Face. I noticed that two eyes were a sign, two eyes and a nose were a sign, two eyes, a nose and a mouth were also a sign and so on. I was simply absorbed by all this. Then this hierarchy exhausted itself. The hieratures appeared. But this is a special conversation. So the ability to transform, not deform and, most importantly, discern the one from the other, is the first necessary skill for working under my guidance.

Have you understood anything?

Something.

Very well then, when we are in a museum, I will show you a clear example.

No, my friend, you have to learn to paint in red. This is not a colour, it is puke with blood added. It is like an open wound. No use at all. Look at the old masters, look at their red, simply terrific. The divine red on old, faded gobelins, medieval miniatures and icons is inexplicably fine, on the verge of madness. They pacified the red, that is why it is so enchanting. No one understands the colour red any more. In any case, I have not seen it with anyone. Everywhere it is either shrieking and expressive or a helpless, sluggish pink or vulgar lilac. By the way, I do not like crimson. I sometimes employ it for washing off. Carmine is



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1988

another matter.

You have to be particularly careful with red. In the mixtures, it sometimes springs a surprise. Like a grated perineum or a wound. A very perfidious colour. You cannot be high-handed with it. There was even a special expression – a "neo-blood" colour. That is red.

You are dividing again. The longer and longer you paint, the smaller and smaller the details become. If I do not stop you, you will probably divide everything into atoms. And then what? They are not fractions – a tenth, a hundredth, a thousandth. Fig to arithmetics.

I, on the contrary, aspire towards laconic brutality. Do you remember my early, figurative works? What a large form there was there, yet with it asceticism and collectedness. I would have dreamt of achieving the same purity of form, only on these current canvases.

Are you nostalgic for your earlier works?

I do not say that I am nostalgic. The previous form has exhausted itself. To return again to the previous hierarchies would be boring even. I say that I want to achieve, in the hieratures, the same simplicity as in these early works. But this is much harder. The sign itself was somehow simpler in the figurative works. The hierarchy of defamiliarisation seems more laconic *per se* in comparison with the multi-part and complex hierature.

But bear in mind, the complexity of the hierature is not the end in itself. Eternal subdivision is not the path. I, on the contrary, fight against pettiness. A petty form is not typical of hieratics.

If you have ever seen superfluous details on my canvases, this has either been left because of the unresolvedness of the Sign as a whole or does not irritate so much as to be taken up.

Let it be the way it is.

So remember, I do fight against pettiness, while you simply have a passion or a mania to turn everything into grains.

Seek a large Sign.

Hold on. Don't switch on the light. The twilight must be exhausted. Don't rush, sit down...

See how everything comes together in the twilight? The minutiae depart by themselves. The main thing remains, which is what we now see. Remember, if it is fine in the twilight, everything will be alright in the light.

All beautiful things are bewildering in the light. More aestheticism. Sometimes they obscure the way forwards. You are afraid of spoiling.



Mikhail Shvartsman in his studio. 1987

The twilight removes many problems. For me, this is an extremely important state. I sometimes simply await this state, without approaching the canvas. The best time for meditation. You see, the daylight departs and everything seems to settle down on the canvas. It is already clear here that the inside must be washed off and the contrasts raised.

Now the sign can be seen more definitely, without sentimentality.

Yes, twilight is a beneficial state. I very highly rate those minutes of the dying day.

Bear in mind, what your efforts cost is always visible in the twilight.

You cannot deceive yourself.

Here it is – the metamorphosis of the day.

Everything helps to paint the canvas.

Alright. Let's find out what time it is, so as not to stay too long, and then we'll turn on the light.

It's already nine.

You're having me on. Hey, we have very little time. Turn on the light.

...

Ohhhh! What a bore. That's what happens when you move from daylight to electricity. Pure torture. You have to grow used to it. Let's have a cup of tea while we wait.

It's stone cold.

No matter, I like it that way.

How many lumps?

Oh! That's enough. "Dimently, I am dying." Butter the bread, will you? Only spread it thin, I'm not supposed to eat butter. Now I can feel my blood pressure rising. I will have to take a *kurantil*.⁶⁶ He-he-he-he-he...

Mikhail Matveyevich, let's hold a small exhibition in the recreation room, before the school holidays end.⁶⁷ When else will we have the chance?

Well, alright, if it is not too difficult.

We'll do it right now.

You know, I have never seen my works in a large hall. I was even slightly nervous, in case the large space would suddenly press down. Nothing of the kind. Look at that power. What monumentality. Even the small hieratures sound forth. That is what a large SIGN means... What scale. Now I need have no fear, they will assert themselves in any space.

I always kept this scale in my head – and was never wrong. How useful it is, it appears, to take your canvases out into large halls. You immediately see where the sound and where the squeak is.

Look how the hieratures begin to work with one another. Huh? Well, well, well. What do you say?

Great, Mikhail Matveich!

A-ha?

A-ha.

And you thought. Shvartsman was not made by a finger. And you say...

Bear in mind, monumentality is not achieved by simple, mechanical increasing a miniature to the size of a wall. It will still remain a miniature. It is now fashionable to increase everything to the size of a house and pass it off as monumentalism. This is self-deceit. A minute form will always be minute, no matter how much it is inflated. As they say in Odessa, shit will always be shit.

A truly large form can withstand any diminution and will not get worse. That is the law.

Bear in mind also that when you work on a wall, for example, painting a fresco or working on these large formats, do not take everything to the point of razor-sharp accuracy, as if you are painting a miniature. This requires another form of painting and another approach to the details. The size of the canvas dictates the interpretation. The texture should be harsher and the painting should be simpler. If you have ever visited the St Ferapont Monastery, you probably went up close to the wall. That is where the school of monumental painting is. I do not plan to take these large boards to the same quality as those metre ones. That would be tasteless. You will say, but what about Rublev's large church icons, for example?... Yes, but our work is closer to frescoes, particularly in large formats.

So bear in mind, when you begin these boards, first drive on the texture. A smooth surface is not the thing for that size. The surface should be brutal from the very start. Wait until the layer of paint reaches the necessary condition – an expensive pleasure, wouldn't you agree?

Imagine that the Sign is found and the canvas is resolved, but the surface is almost mirror-like. What then? It will look like watercolours on paper. It will evoke vexation. Best avoid that right from the start.

You like to take everything to wearisome "perfection". You must not. If you sit down at the canvas with the aim of creating a masterpiece, you are guaranteed to be bored. It should be easy. It is not possible to be wearisomely serious all the time. To play on the one high note all the time. There should be artisticism. Press down somewhere and release somewhere else. Look at how a calligrapher works. The line should be alive. It is not a blueprint. Not that some blueprints are not like this. I have seen some absolutely terrific blueprints from the time of Peter the Great. What graphic art, now that is a school.

And what do you have? Everything would appear to be done correctly. In textbook fashion. In hieratics, that will not take you far. I do not ask you to "chicken-foot", but it is not necessary to kindle that tedium. You are either this or that. It's horrendous. Have you ever seen me strike such a pose at the canvas? I can't work like that. To sit for hours, not tearing yourself away, like the damned, from all bloody piss and sweating, to create a masterpiece. Work should not turn into hard labour. Remember this, nothing is more tiring than senseless work. Alternatively, you can work all day like a clockwork toy and never tire. That is when you are absorbed. Have you never observed children drawing? They do not notice anything around them. They grouch something beneath their noses. They turn and spin, humming something there. It then turns out that they have drawn a beetle or a bumblebee. For them, this is a continuation of life. The heart is open. They have still

not developed the vanity of mastery. The beating of the heart leads the hand. The cardiographic curve never lies or attempts to be a genius.

You talk about Pollock all the time. What about Pollock? Do you suppose he grew up in an empty place? His Tachisme is the purest form of naturalism. His "lyrical hero" is entropy. One theory states that the world aspires towards entropy. Human activities counteroppose entropy. If, for example, something is left for a period of time, for example this room, first everything is covered in dust, then there is a gust of wind and broken glass, and off it goes. One year, ten years later, there are ruins. A house without an owner falls apart. This is a manifestation of entropy. Some people clearly help and intensify this process. I regard Pollock as a participant in this entropy. But this is also life, like any decay. True, this does not occupy me at all, quite the opposite...

Pollock is not, of course, Betsy the macaque. He controls the process and knows, for example, when to finish the work, etc. He has his own creative anguish.

Could Tachisme be the dough for the hieratic canvas?

Anything can be the dough. It is simply a different element. But far better the daubing of a macaque than boring, toothless adaptation. Do you understand what I am hinting at?

Do you know where Holy of Holies is right now?

Here, I think.

Perhaps. Turn it round.

...

And now where is Holy of Holies?

Here, I guess. Although... I don't know.

There you knew, but here you don't know.

Can Holy Place be there at the turn and, originally, there?

As you see. You would like me to say: "As the 'heart' is here in one position, then it is there at the turn." No, my friend, there can be no protocols, stamps, signatures of insurances here. I cannot insist that it should be one way, with everything here. It is only in everyday life that I can insist on something, and even then it has been all the same recently. But here, in work, I do not like any voluntary gestures. At least, I try to be that way.

The thought of summer depresses me...

Why so?

It just does. The only thing would seem to be work. The days are long. Daylight until late. But no. The Evil One does not sleep. And it is necessary to take a holiday.

Why don't you do that in winter?

I still have to live until winter.

Irina is right when she says that it is important to collect strength, soak up the sunshine and look at the grass. So as not to collapse the entire winter. Do you remember last summer, no rest at all and then ill all winter. Weakness. I hated myself. You need the strength of a sculptor to paint an hieratic canvas. Look at that large cumbersome object. There is nothing for the sickly to do round here. Anyway, my "poor heart" feels that I will have to go and rest. Ho-rri-ble... If only you knew how I hate these interruptions in work. You return and everything seems so foreign, you do not know where to begin. How should the canvas be continued? Masses of time passes before you get back into your stride and rhythm. It is simply terrible. Why don't you do something to cheer me up?

Well, you yourself said: "You have to listen to the metamorphosis." As it falls together so naturally, it should be taken as it is. As you say – do not kill it off. Act metamorphically. Relate fatefully.

You are using my own weapons on me, you villain. I was simply gouching, that's all. I know how it will be. Ho-rri-ble...

A Frenchwoman came here and looked at the canvases. She said: "I much prefer brightness, African art, the French." In short, she didn't like what she saw. Everything seemed too harsh and gloomy. I said to her: "But you are in Russia, not Africa. Go there then. It would be strange and uninteresting to see the same thing everywhere."

Plus, what is brightness?

Any old icon, from the point of view of "brightness", will leave all Frenchmen far behind with their sirup. They are accustomed and everything is here. Give them the Frenchmen in Antarctica. Otherwise, there is not enough *joie de vivre*, *valeur*, see how gloomy it is. She says: "Mikhail Matveyevich, you are probably a gloomy person?" "Why no, quite the opposite."

In Japan, for example, black is a festive colour, a symbol of joy. In some places in Europe, it is the other way around. You cannot measure everything solely by the French.

She left unhappy. I did not justify her expectations. Just imagine, she came to Russia to see modern painting and everything turned out to be not the way it is in France. What a disappointment. Just think ... stupid woman.

One can only talk about painting as such in Russian art beginning with Victor Borisov-Musatov.

Softness is a linear and not a *valeur* situation.

Why are you sulking with me? I am talking sense. I am not trying to offend you. You saw yourself how the work was going. Headlong. What sort of mutual offences can there be here? At such moments, you do not feel the ground beneath your feet. Anything can roll off the tongue. Have you ever seen a group of horses tearing across the steppe? I have, in my youth. You can immediately picture nomads. The entire mass heading towards Russia, sweeping away everything in its path. Nothing can stop a group of racing horses.

When there is an aim, a headlong pursuit begins, there is no place for sentimentality or wounded pride. We are all in the same boat. You remember how horrendously difficult it was with the "little old man". "Mikhail Matveyevich, I am choking!" He could not endure Shvartsman's mad energy. Such people are no use for the hieratic school. That is why I am afraid to take L. into the school. You say something to him in a temper and he is offended forever more. Taking offence is a sure sign of an untalented person. Talented people never take offence. Too much free time is needed to take offence.

I pray that God gives me the strength to finish my undertaking. I can already feel some weakness, I am often ill. I do not like all this. When I do not work, I begin to hate myself. Everything irritates me – people, objects. What sort of a Shvartsman is it that does not paint his canvas. It is no longer Shvartsman. Can you picture an old Shvartsman who no longer works?

Can't someone be ill sometimes?

I don't ask to be completely cured, only to get healthy again for at least some time. The important thing is not to land back in hospital again. Each day is important.

It is terrible to think of the years I lost when I was young. Six years in the army alone. Can you imagine it, six years! The golden years slip away. You spend your youth like water and then hoard them like pen-

nies. There will not be any time to say the final word, while time is constantly spent on such things as illness or conversations.

Do not forsake me, Lord...

You say a contradiction. Yes, if you want to know, I am made of contradictions. What is an hierature if not a contradiction?

Mikhail Matveyevich, what was your opinion of the kids yesterday?

I liked them, they are fine kids. I remembered myself when I was young. I was far more naïve and stupid. You would not believe it, I seriously discussed Repin. Today's youth no longer falls for that.

And what about "dear comrade"?

Volodichka? Narcotius Nikolaevich? I liked him. He's lost his wits, don't you think?

U-huh...

Did you notice? He simply froze when he saw the painting. He is, of course, a bit frightening to look at as it is. Anything can happen with someone like that. He can knock you on the head if he doesn't like something. A dangerous person. But one feels that he likes painting. You can see that right away. There is no fooling me. Someone else will come, pose and puff themselves up. And I see that it is all "boots made for papa." But not this one. I immediately saw how his eyes lit up when he was looking at the canvases. That costs. And is extremely rare. There are few people who really like painting. For my part, I have encountered extremely few. Music, for example, is far more popular. That is the honest truth. But painting – alas. There are heaps who love to bullshit about painting. Take those others, for example. They are very nice people, but I see they don't understand the first thing about painting. And there is nothing you can do about it.

Here, though, I clearly saw the excitement on his face. I do not think he even thought that such painting was still possible. After our meeting yesterday, he is already a changed person.

They say that Mikhail Vrubel did not even consider those who did not understand painting to be people. I can understand him...

Take some blue and disperse it the way God dictates to your heart.

Blue? Why blue? It does not fit into the gamut. There is nothing for it to latch onto here.

That is exactly why – out of nowhere, for provocation. You need to rebel, all you do is stand in one place, everything is too successful. I want to explode this state. I call it "colour provocation". Incidentally, this blue is capable of reorientating the entire colour structure of the work. That is the only way in which the colour life of the canvas should proceed. I do not understand how the colour scheme can be pre-selected and the canvas painted in compliance with this. What if this hinders the subsequent metamorphosis? Although colour plays an important role in hieratics, it is not the most important thing. The quest for the Sign always takes priority. I am willing to sacrifice painterly beauty for the sake of a large form. The Sign of the Spirit of the Lord – that is the AIM.

I do not like this manner that other artists have of shackling everything to their own bed of Procrustes or pre-selected scheme.

I was recently leafing through a glossy album on icons. And what do you think? In compliance with the book design, they sliced off the edges of several icons. You see, they had a module. I would tell them where they could stick their module. For them, the module is far more important than the icon – the reason for printing the book in the first place.

All I ask is that people be careful of the material they are using. No one in their right mind would think of cutting a picture if it does not fit into the frame. Although there is no shortage of fools out there.

You try your hardest, the canvas even appears in your dreams, and then some idiot decides to make an album and does everything the way he thinks best.

Now do you understand everything?

Mix any colour you like and enter spontaneously. With God's help!

If you want to know, a myth is a higher form of reality. And should be treated with all seriousness.

I will never forget the tale of one explorer, who took a photograph of a tribal chief and showed it to him. He looked at it and said: "Surely that is not me? This is how I am." And he placed his hands above his head, as if to make out how enormous he was. What is a photograph? Prose... Reality, but for the most part flat, expressing little. A banality.

I once saw Mayakovsky's letters to Lily Brik. All his sappy phrases simply turned my stomach. So much for Bawler, Tribune and Lump. This "reality" does not, in essence, describe anything at all. The myth of a man is much deeper, significant and even more realistic than reality itself. Haven't you noticed?

I don't know. Another will bluster some lies about himself or someone else, and you will listen. Isn't that right?

So what! Dostoyevsky said: "Let 'em lie."

Here in Russia we don't like people who we cannot deceive or spin some yarn or fairytale to. We call them straight-speakers. I, for example, always let someone lie, I sometimes even believe them myself, if they do it with talent.

No, I don't enjoy lying myself and cannot stand when others lie.

More fool you... I mean, you do so in vain...

Some foreigners recently visited me. They told me the following story. They visited the studio of one elderly artist. They wanted to buy painting of the 1930s–50s, which is now fashionable with them. What is known as "totalitarian art". They came specially to Russia and even trawled round the provinces. They asked: "Do you have anything from this period?" He was pleased that they were interested in him. Foreigners! And you know how everyone relates to foreigners here – like celebrities. He told them that was all a government commission, wait here and I'll show you some real painting... And he brought out a Jack of Diamonds work of 1910 vintage. The foreigners were horrified. They had travelled to the other end of the world – for that! He started saying: "I am now painting like I did in my youth. My whole life, I dreamt of working in this style, but was not allowed. Everyone demanded Soviet subjects and Socialist Realism. But now I have finally lived to a time when I can work the way I like." Everyone just stood there. Although they did not want to hurt the old man's feelings, they could not hide their disappointment. How could they find a way to tell him that these pseudo-spontaneous, daubed repetitions were of absolutely no interest, even if they were painted "like I did in my youth". And, strange as it may seem, the Soviet period was more original and interesting than this once prohibited Impressionism. So they left without buying anything. He had thrown out all his earlier works, believing that they compromised his good name.

I see this innocent weakness to imitate one's youth even in the works of leading masters. Pseudo-spontaneity "like I did in my youth". Even Picasso was slightly guilty of this. Like playing at "big balls". It is like a virus. It creeps up unnoticed. Few have avoided this in their later period. Sometimes the exact opposite occurs. In youth, even epigone pictures can be more vivid than their specimens. There is still no shame in youth, while a lot becomes embarrassing later on.

It's a shame that R. has sold out...

Uh-huh.

He gave in to the temptation. The desire to get down to ploughing your own field. It already seems that he is ready. Everyone can be sent to the farm. He was too quick, something he still does not understand. He still needs to spend another year working with me. But he thought that he has already understood everything. Let God be his judge. How much he worked and thank you for that. He learnt something himself, sometimes we were helped, and thank God for that. I do not hold onto anyone by force, but you need to leave at the right time, and not just when you want. The master will say to his student: "Now try working on your own. You have my blessing." You have to part like two human beings. I am even grateful to him. He introduced some savagery. I like that. True, he does have a tendency to do everything with "sheep's balls".

What do you mean?

When a man has sheep's balls, there is no way he can hide it, it is visible. I can always spot his adaptation. Claptrap all over the place. Everything is slightly spermatozoid. It is very difficult to get rid of this later. I used to say to him all the time – such a sensuality of forms is no use in hieratics. You are forever slipping into biology. The forms look like bums or tits or something else. I spent a long time trying to help him... There's no entering the spiritual sphere with associations like that. Although that is better than simply learning by rote. I sometimes even asked him to knead something savage, so as to smash the state of contentment. It sometimes happens that he churned out something awful. You look and the subsequent metamorphosis begins to faintly show through. If need be, make a sacrifice. In the hieratic school, any degree of talent will be of use, except hamfistedness and boredom. Something else I liked about him was his horse-like health and implacability. He is so thick-skinned. His nerves must be as thick as a finger, no less. When you are completely surrounded by people with a subtle mental state and nerves on their sleeves, people like Olezhek introduce some much-needed balance. While blind optimism and "keep smiling" turns my stomach, endless reflecting irritates me just as much.

Are you an optimist or a pessimist?

Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee! Don't ask...

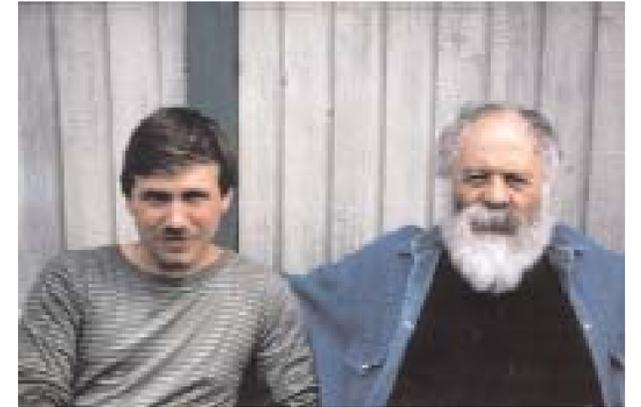
Amazing. The eighteenth century, the fall of spirituality, the golden age of academic knowledge, schools of philosophy and, suddenly, Ivan Sebastian Bach. Contemporaries simply did not understand him. Even his close friends called him a stubborn old man. He did not fit into the fashion of the time. It is hard to believe it, but Bach was forgotten for a hundred years, though many milked him for all he was worth. What unselfish devotion to something. Quite instructive, in fact, wouldn't you say? Quite pitiless, really...

I deliberately do not take womenfolk into the hieratic school. That would only lead to a lack of freedom, temptations and jealousy. A working mood is more important, although I can say for sure that many of them would work well, much better than some.

What about your bureau? There are loads of womenfolk there.

That's a different case. It's a state institution. Like going out into the light for two days a week. Although there is, unfortunately, more than enough there of all the bad things I have already mentioned. I know what I am saying. There is no need to tempt fate.

So forget all these things, please, and "stop behaving like a hooligan this instant, comrade."⁶⁸



Dmitry Gorokhov and Mikhail Shvartsman. September 1992

You know, yesterday they played Ella Fitzgerald on Voice of America. I was simply transfixed. That is true freedom. She is, by the way, not all that young. But what incandescence of real life. I feel it instantly and not only in painting. It is the same height as everything real and alive, both in the ancient past and in the future. Imitation never survives. It must constantly imitate life in order to exist in the environment. The living aspires towards the living, the real aspires towards the real and imitation aspires towards imitation.

Why do you look like someone who was dropped in the tank today? Those schoolkids have gotten to me.

You have to be more light-hearted. You've found a place to worry. They do not listen to a word I say. I bawled at them and broke a ruler on a desk. Annoying little...

I did not want to shout. The minute a noise arises in the classroom, I pick up a ruler. Rap it three times on a desk and everyone shuts up. At least for five minutes, then it starts all over again. How much of it can one man take? The ruler splintered and I had to throw it away. The children were pleased...

Yes, I have seen the way you react. The minute they begun to shout "Markovich, come out!" you are all wound up and run after them and they just scatter in all directions.

I caught one of them at least.

And what happened?

I slapped him across the head.

That's the very thing they're waiting for, for you to raise your hand against them. You are a real find, a present from fate for them. It is great fun to bait a teacher when he reacts. And so lively. Elderly teachers are physically incapable of that. Do you know how some love to tease dogs? It gives them great pleasure.

There was one young teacher at our school. Like you, he also taught drawing. For some reason, everyone called him Drofa the Cardboard Balls. He was in love with our physics teacher. During the break, someone would yell out his nickname and he would tear after them, red in the face. I remember the great joy and delight he gave to the young generation – the fact that it was possible to wind him up – with his mad response. Just one shout and he would be foaming at the mouth. Teasing Drofa was the most entertaining part of school. And then suddenly, just imagine it, he stopped reacting. We didn't know what to do. It was as if he didn't hear a thing we said. The physics

teacher probably told him to stop paying any attention and we would soon lose interest in him. I remember our disappointment. His indifference had deprived us of our favourite toy.

I'll give them a toy alright...

You see, you're wound up again. Do you seriously think that they won't live to a grand old age if they do not learn how to draw a plug?

No, there should be no pardon, otherwise they will only get worse.

Yes... The old saying is true – as stupid as two teachers. What are you laughing at? It's true!

Why two?

Because one is only a half measure, whereas two is a complete measure of stupidity.

Don't worry, I'll make 'em dance.

Watch out, else they'll cart you straight off to the lunatic asylum, direct from the classroom. That would really give them something to laugh at and remember for the rest of their lives: "What a fine teacher Dmitry Markovich was! So responsive and so easy to wind up. It was simply a joy to drive him up the wall. Like a cuckoo clock. Only not quite right in the head..."

Don't worry, I'll make them draw plugs as good as gold.

And fly and fart?

That's right.

Well, well! Good on you, old man! Do you know the saying – as stupid as an old woman's navel?

They keep knocking him, but he's still there...

Show me what you've done.

It's not very good...

Don't worry, I'll understand... What is the name for the science when you define by the excrement what the animal is and what it eats? Don't you remember? I am a dab hand at it. What are you laughing at?

I haven't managed to do anything here.

So what, who can say what you've managed to do or not? Let me have a look.

Look how fine everything is on the palette, you could hang it on the wall, compared to the awful mess on the canvas. All your spontaneity has gone on the palette. That is the problem with many. It does not matter whether it is the start, middle or end of work. Everything should be spontaneous at every stage. All trepidation should be on the canvas.

The day is already at an end. You can't leave a work in such a lifeless state.

I'll finish it tomorrow.

What if you don't? Who knows what will happen tomorrow. You cannot leave it like that. Each stage must promise. Not finished perhaps, but at least promising a continuation! Understand? All is not lost. Wash off a couple of times in pink and ultramarine, and we'll take it from there. As God will give the day, so God will give the food.

You see, they've brought the boards and broken the meniscus.⁶⁹ You will have to be careful in catching the right tone, like you know how, only do not rush it. Rushing is only for catching fleas. In short, today your job is to be a restorer.

We will test your feeling for colour tone. At the Stroganov School of Art, we were told that Arkhip Kuindzhi could discern the colour tonality beyond the boundaries of normal human vision. They showed two colour cards and asked which one was darker. Some said the one on the right, some said the one on the left. This was a test at the Academy of Arts. There finally remained two students, who guessed. They showed two absolutely identical cards. Which one is darker? No one replies. Kuindzhi said the one on the right. They tested them out on

their apparatus and he was right. Why do I relate this? The light holds up on his canvases at any distance. You can go right up to the canvas, so that the brushstrokes themselves are visible, but the light does not disappear. This quality can also be observed in the works of his students, by the way, to the same extent – Krymov and Roerich.

Your humble servant, I may add, is no worse than Kuindzhi when it comes to colour tonality. The light, however, is of a different sort.

You, of course, think that I am immodest. You think so in vain. If you want to know, modesty is defined not by how a person behaves in public, but how he lives. Other "modest" people can easily be seen for what they are the minute you find learn about their lifestyles. You yourself know how I live. I have nothing to hide. Can you say that I love immodestly? No. Then say so. Who needs modesty? Only if there are no other qualities.

There I go again! Immodest! You can't help it...

Did you notice how many pretty girls there were yesterday at the opening of Savushka's⁷⁰ exhibition?

Really? I can't say I do.

You're inattentive. But I noticed them all. L. was there.

Yes, I saw. She's nothing special. I remember you describing her as a real beauty. She looks all hot and sweaty. She probably had a temperature, you could see the ill-health on her face. Gloomy.

Oh, you don't understand the first thing about women. She is not sweaty, but moist. Not gloomy, but simply sad-eyed. Not ill-health, but tearfulness. A refined, snow-white face with a hint of darkness about it. Straight out of a medieval miniature. You do not sense the difference. You are still young. A delicate woman. Elegant. You are only interested in vulgar ones.

Why? I do not like vulgar women.

Come on. I know that you are immediately on the spot if the wench is vulgar, simpler and, in general, a slut. You simply do not notice any other kinds. You simply do not know what to do with them. As if everything is different with those ones. Or so it seems to you. Incidentally, you can also, in fact you must also ... those...

Yes, I notice. Why?

Today in the trolleybus, for example, what a beauty was sitting opposite us, a perfect dream. She kept looking at you.

It was you she was looking at.

No, no, I am too old for her. Though she did see that I was an unusual personality. She was looking with interest. And you just sat there like a lemon.

I was not in the right mood.

You never are. Give it to me straight, stop talking crap. Had she been simpler, you would have been in the mood alright. I know you.

I've been looking at that board for so long. Everything looks alright, but it cannot be left like that. Nothing comes together. There was some curse on it, even at Sokolniki. Only I can't understand why. Either I overwashed it or the white is just shit.

Wipe these spots and do them again. Then hit the right tone. Can you do that?

I'll try.

Someone else tried... And do you know what happened?

What?

... she gave birth! You don't know your folklore. I had all these humorous sayings dinned into my head back in childhood.

Would you like to return to your childhood?

No, it was an onerous time. My father was constantly on the run from the authorities, creating an atmosphere of nervousness and fear.



Mikhail Shvartsman's palette

My mother kept frightening me: "Misha, keep quiet, don't tell anyone..." She frightened me so much that later on she could say with pride: "Misha is as quiet as a grave." Then there were the constant fights in the yard. You know yourself where I lived. That part of Moscow was popularly known as *Amerikanka*, because the houses in which we lived were based on American designs for Negro ghettos. Only riffraff lived there – criminals and thieves – you know that sort of public.

I am completely satisfied by my current life. Just so long as things do not get worse.

Take a look at what I've brought, old man...

What is it?

I don't know, I found it at the bus stop. There were a lot of them just lying around. I think they are trolleybus parts.

I know what it is. It is the screw off a trolleybus bar. They skip along the wires. I did not know that they were made of copper.

Look, they are like old, archaic forms, don't you think?

More like a detail from medieval armour.

Place it against the canvas.

...

There's something there, isn't there? We need to collect about ten of them and lay a frieze out along the dowel. It might turn out very well. Have you ever seen assemblages created from various bits and pieces?

I have, only I can't imagine you making any.

You think so in vain. It's not forbidden and does not contradict anything. By the way, there is also what would now be called a "pop moment" about an icon. Have you ever noticed?

I can't say I have.

As Yurok used to say: "Somewhere, yes." Have you never seen the basma setting of an icon inserted with precious stones, crosses and carvings? What do you call that?

Why, that is just for decoration...

What it is for is not important. Everything here works towards the main idea, not just the icon-painting. Sometimes all these attributes come together so paradoxically with the fabric of the painting that you

simply gasp. True, it sometimes looks like kitsch, particularly on later icons. Talent is always needed, nothing works without talent.

I'd better go and pick up all those copper pieces, before the janitor takes them away.

Yes, we need to keep them, they might lead to something unexpected.

Let me nail this piece on here...

Wait a minute, don't rush. What's the hurry, where's the fire? Rushing is only for catching fleas.

It is a torturous story, I can tell you, going outside. You have to give names to your canvas. You say *Hieratures* and the Soviets immediately jump on you: "Religious art? We understand..." Then you regret that you ever got involved with them in the first place. And if you don't exhibit, that's even worse. People accuse you of being a hermit. There's an enemy hidden wherever you look. You could cry. Hieratism has to be served up in a more polished form like cosmism. Ultimately, a cosmogonic element could probably be found in hieratics. The hierature is a certain form of monad. If you like, call it a planet.

Anyway, if you agree to an exhibition, you have to make terminological concessions. To avoid evoking unnecessary political irritation, you have to come to some form of agreement regarding the terms.

But icons are exhibited and even published and there are no ideological complaints. Yamschikov recently at the Rublev Museum, for example.⁷¹

Yes, I know, but that is all under the sauce of "Old Russian painting". They have found this formula for the Soviet Union, so as to avoid using the word "icon". Sava also has to squirm before his bosses, like a fish in the frying pan. There are so many well-wishers, not without exclamations of delight. Do you think they have even once considered holding an exhibition of my works? Not a bit of it. A mere mention of my name is enough. They immediately say: "Ah, so you are for Shvartsman? Isn't he a Jew?" And that's enough for you to fall under suspicion. Do you know the following joke? A policeman asks: "Comrade Ivanov, why don't you work? Where did you get the money for

your car and dacha?

“My father hid two Jews from the Germans during the war. They now live in Israel and send parcels as a mark of gratitude. I have enough.”

“But they are already old and will die soon. What will you do then?”

“After the war, I also hid two Jews. They also help me now.”

“But they too cannot live forever.”

“The thing is, citizen policeman, I am hiding two Jews at the moment...”

What are you laughing at? It’s all very well for you, you are Russian. It’s me who suffers. It’s not all that easy to be Shvartsman as it seems, my good sir. Not everyone wants to have something to do with you. Jews, for example, say: “Oh, so you’re a Christian, that means a traitor.” There is even a saying: “A healed horse, a forgiven thief, a christened Yid.”

Why didn’t you take your wife’s surname? Then you could call yourself Mikhail Nikolsky and you wouldn’t have any problems.

You may joke about it, but I even suggested to Irinushka that she keep her maiden name, being the times as they were. But she wanted nothing to do with it: “Then that’s my fate. I want us to share everything.” So there you go, brother of mine, that’s the way she is. She soon found out which way the cookie crumbles, what it means to have the surname Shvartsman. But she always says that she doesn’t regret it for a minute. That’s the sort of person you need to be an artist’s wife. Whether I am worthy of her or not is another question. I have an unbearable character... I sometimes hurt her ... She suffers and then I can’t find a place for myself. But I know that if anything were to happen to her... my star rose in the sky.

Mikhail Matveyevich, do you want to look at children’s drawings? I have amassed a lot over the past week.

With pleasure. I enjoy looking at children’s drawings. There is much to learn from them... Oh, look at the wonderful mess! That is a future artist, you can see right away. That one is not, he has been hopelessly spoilt by cartoons. They are simply a scourge. They all want to look like Disney. Inflated, podgy lines – sickening to look at. It is impossible to learn on those ideals and there is no need anyway. All you need do is shove them a piece of paper, they will go about it themselves. I see that you have some very talented children. I went up to one and asked: “Who do you want to be when you grow up?” “I don’t know” “An astronaut?” “No, I’m not good enough to be an astronaut, I only got a C for gym.” “You know, if you become an artist, you can also be an astronaut and anything else!” “Really! Have you ever been on the moon?” “Yes, many times. I am an artist.”

I know who that is, it was Arkashka. That one is still an astronaut. He draws and asks me: “Dmitry Markovich, do you like to set fire?” “To what?” “Things.” A future artist. Will you take him on as your student when he grows up?

I doubt it, he is sure to burn something.

He will say it was an artefact.

A little Herostratus in the making.

Mikhail Matveyevich, aren’t you afraid that all these inventions will be considered projects of future hieratures. Some tempera works are absolutely identical.

No, not at all. For starters, who knows what people will say. “You can’t stuff a cloth down every throat.”

An invention is not a project. The moment of recognition has been left here. The linear resolution is visible in its emblematic fullness. This can give an impulse for a large board, even a wall. This is not a project, because every time, adapting it for the canvas, I await new metamorphoses from it. Recognition took place in the drawing, that is true, but it cannot be said for certain that the same thing will happen on the canvas, if the image is formally magnified. You have seen how. Even after a quality adaptation, with strokes and constant layers of paint, the works cardinally changes. The invention with which everything began can only be recognised with great difficulty. What you regarded as “magnified inventions” (do I understand you correctly?)...

Yes.

... were an exception, rather than the rule. This particular metamorphosis suited me, that was all. The work was resolved at this stage. I have no intention of continuing a canvas just so that no one can recognise the invention from which it proceeded. You won’t be surprised to learn that an enormous novel had an idea condensed to several lines in the writer’s notebook. The genetic delivery is important.

Is that something like the subject?

If you want to put it that way and that is easier for you to understand, we’ll call it the subject, only don’t insist upon it. The emblematic metamorphosis is not projectable. If someone believes that hieratic painting is coloured, magnified drawings, then he doesn’t understand a thing.

Spanish works are on show in Pushkinsky. If you haven’t managed to go yet, I highly advise you. While it is mostly museum works, Velázquez and El Greco are the pearls.

I heard that they only brought the Velázquez school and not his works.

They can go to... school... they don’t understand a single thing. If only you could see how one female head was drawn, an absolute dream.

These lousy art critics think that if most of the surface is painted by apprentices, then that is Velázquez’s school (counting who painted which parts). He might only have stood at the back or just given his students instructions and left them to it. They did the preparatory work and he went up and waved his brush. Look specially to see what the touch of a master means.

With El Greco, the restorers have removed all the glazing and spoilt the work. Write El Greco school or El Greco himself, but the work is ruined. The artist becomes the hostage of the negligent restorer.

You put your whole heart, soul and labour into a work and a haughty descendant comes along and wipes away all your temperas with a damp rag and you will be judged on the basis of these ruined works... That’s the Velázquez school for you.

Mikhail Matveich, hurry up! The underground will soon be closing... Hold on... I can’t get my scarf on right. Does that look alright?

Yes, fine. Come on, let’s go.

I still don’t like it. Last time I tied it better. I can’t stand these frail scarves, they are impossible to tie... How about that?

Fine, fine.

Really?

Yes, yes.

No... That’s for old fusties. How about that?

I don’t know. I tie it this way.

The way pensioners tied scarves before the war. That’s unartistic. There are ways of wearing a scarf.

There weren’t any pensioners before the war. Pensions only began to be paid under Khrushch.

Well, Party veterans then. That’s the way they tied their scarves. Tastelessly, but solidly.

What difference does it make? It’s dark outside, who will be able

to see it?

Don’t say that. The way you dress speaks volumes about the way you think. Haven’t you noticed? I can tell you about a person’s level of thinking by the way he ties his scarf.

Mikhail Matveich, your scarf and the level of thinking will be the death of us. The underground will close and we will have to take a taxi.

Hold on. It’s stuck in the collar. Give me a hand. Now it’s okay-chik. Okaychenko sounds like a Ukrainian surname... And you say I take a long time. What time is it on your watch, sir?

Already past midnight.

That’s no good at all. I’ll only be home at two o’clock. Pure anti-semitism! Come on, old man, let’s fly!

Listen, old man... I have been invited to work in Germany. What do you think of that? If the two of us went with Irina? They said they would provide us with accommodation and a studio. Your opinion?

Will we have to take our own canvas?

What for? Everything is already there. They say that it is expensive and difficult to bring canvases from here. It is easier to organise everything and work there. What do you say?

For how long?

Two or three months.

...

Why the silence?

I’m just trying to imagine you in these conditions.

And?

The first month will be spent preparing the boards and getting used to the acrylic paints (there is no casein tempera there). We still don’t know how things will go. Acrylic dries quickly. You spend a long time working and they will need everything quick for the opening of the exhibition. They will hurry you and you will get irritated. You will say goodness knows what to them, each side will start making claims about the money spent

³⁴ George Costakis proposed calling this interview with Mikhail Shvartsman – supplemented by biographical information on the artist (omitted from this publication) – ‘The Rising Star’. The text is published here for the first time.

³⁵ Kerygma (Greek *kerugma*, preaching, proclamation; from *kerux*, *kerug-*, herald): The proclamation of religious truths, especially as taught in the Gospels.

³⁶ Version of this reply: “No. Although I know this matter through and through. By the way, the icon is named, even should be named, because it is, in the strict hieratic sense, not a sign, but an emblematic structure, i.e. attributive, designating not the sign of the Spirit, but a witness of the Spirit, for example, a saint, the Mother of God, the Incarnated Saviour, Gospel acts – festivals, etc.”

Another version of this reply: “No, although he knows this matter with pedantic precision. An icon is named, even should be named, because it (the icon) is, in the strict hieratic sense, not a sign, but an emblematic structure, i.e. attributive, designating not the sign of the Spirit, but a witness of the Spirit, for example, a saint, the Mother of God, the Incarnated Saviour, Gospel acts – festivals, etc. All these emblems are based on a proto-phenomenon once incarnated, a prototype or phenomenised mystical action. Thanks to the congregational-decreed foundation, this entire hieratic material is strictly canonised and obligatorily named. These names are not hidden, but are clearly revealed to the ear and eye. Thanks to this position, believers raised by the church, congregational ascertainties and the church tradition learn the spiritual prototype (Father Pavel Florensky spoke sublimely about this in his *Iconostasis*).

The hieratic school designates not the witnesses of the spirit, phenomenised mystical actions or even Gospel acts. Its signs are not signs (albeit of the higher truth) of a myth, but an act of kerygma, direct thickening of the Sign of the Spirit – spirit-extraction in the sign act, in an extremely ascetic, even hieraglyphic hieragrophy. And so we have come to the question of hieragrophy. What is hieragrophy? Lord! Help me to incarnate this in a world! Immense labour! Unblessed! Writers are a heap of wily demons playing at phantoms.”

³⁷ Vladimir Weisberg (1924–1985): Artist.

³⁸ Mikhail Shvartsman called his studio (*masterskaya* in Russian) his *maesterskaya*, from the Russian word for *maestro*.

³⁹ A reference to the “language of the third millennium” – hieratism.

⁴⁰ Your watch.

⁴¹ An artist who taught at the Stroganov School of Art in Moscow, where Mikhail Shvartsman studied.

⁴² All Mikhail Shvartsman’s works contain “frames”.

⁴³ Levkas is a prime coating beneath the tempera traditionally used in icon-painting.

⁴⁴ Saveli Yamschikov: Art historian.

⁴⁵ Kirill Sheinkman: Artist, icon restorer.

⁴⁶ Words spoken by Vladimir Weisberg.

⁴⁷ Fellow student of Mikhail Shvartsman at the Stroganov School of Art.

⁴⁸ Anatoly Chaschinsky: Painter.

⁴⁹ No. 59 bus.

⁵⁰ Andrei Dyukov: Graphic artist.

⁵¹ Gennady Spirin: Graphic artist.

⁵² Vladimir Nemukhin: Artist.

⁵³ The *Inventions* were a cycle of drawings by Mikhail Shvartsman.

⁵⁴ Imposition: transferring a piece of an invention onto canvas.

⁵⁵ Anatoly Chaschinsky.

⁵⁶ Dough was Mikhail Shvartsman’s term for a “pre-hieratic situation (accumulation)” and the “grounds for its subsequent defamiliarisation and exit into hierato.”

⁵⁷ Painter.

⁵⁸ Ceramicist.

⁵⁹ Words from a popular ditty.

⁶⁰ Name of a book popular among Soviet teenagers before the Second World War.

⁶¹ Statement once made by a four-year-old girl in the presence of Mikhail Shvartsman.

⁶² Special Bureau of Art and Construction, where Mikhail Shvartsman worked for nineteen years as the principal designer.

⁶³ Anatoly Chaschinsky.

⁶⁴ Artist.

⁶⁵ Vladimir Mayakovsky.

⁶⁶ Medicine used to treat heart disease.

⁶⁷ Mikhail Shvartsman’s studio was in a school building.

⁶⁸ Post-war phrase often used by Soviet policemen.

⁶⁹ Meniscus: Smooth transition of the layer of paint onto the frame surrounding the picture.

⁷⁰ Saveli Yamschikov.

⁷¹ Andrei Rublev Museum of Old Russian Art in Moscow.