

Case Study 2: Art on Trial

Group Balalaika Abstract - Danielle

Chapter 5: Dissent in Art

This chapter discusses different artists and art groups that were prevalent in the 'dissent art' movement of the early 2000's. 'Dissent art' is defined as a "pronounced disagreement with the 'proper order of things'." These art pieces or performances are absurd and ironic in nature, taking on a "carnival culture", and should not be taken literally. When they are taken literally, scandal often follows as was the case with Avdei Ter-Oganyan's 'Radical Abstractionism' series. If the series was to be taken at face value, Ter-Oganyan recognized that he could be "accused of a number of charges, from abetting the use of drugs to genocide." These perceived interpretations of the series prevented it from being shown in an exhibition in Paris in 2010. The chapter is then divided between the dissent art seen in galleries and those seen through street art, performances and graffiti.

The section on gallery art is sub-divided into descriptions of 3 art groups and 2 themes commonly found in dissent art. The first group discussed is the Sinie nosy, or the Blue Noses. This group stirs up controversy with provocative pieces that often depict authority figures in compromising positions. These pieces comment on national discourse in a playful way, however, their works were removed from state museums and many were confiscated when the group tried exhibiting their pieces abroad. The second group is PG. They take on a very strong leftist position on political matters which often shows in their art. Despite the controversy they caused with many of their pieces, they were awarded the Kandinsky Prize in 2008 for their piece 'Mounting Mobile Agitation'. The group attacked not only the government establishment, but also the art-establishment. Their piece 'Purification' is a scathing commentary on the commercialization of art. However, the message clearly didn't come across to an art fanatic who wanted to buy the piece. The last group the section discusses is the Protez group whose works depict the darkest sides of reality. Their series 'Pornoholocaust' grotesquely reflects 6 months of media reports about rape, battery and sexual mutilation.

Finally, the section briefly discusses two common themes in dissent art, "against police" and "against authority". 2009 boasted the highest peak of distrust of the police in Russia. PG latched onto this, releasing a graphic piece called 'A Defeated Policeman,' which became highly criticized. On the other hand, Grigorii Yushchenko's "Magical Psychedelic Police" gave a playful, though grotesque, depiction of the corrupt police force. As for the second theme, "against authority", Konstantin Latyshev comments on the authoritative and stagnant nature of the Putin regime. Also, as already mentioned, Putin and other authority figure is often the central character in works of dissent art.

The second section discusses art outside of galleries by focusing on a movement and a group. The first is the 'monstratsiya' movement started by Artem Loskutov in rural towns. These events are a mix of a carnival and a demonstration with ridiculous chants and dress. The monstratsiya spread around to other cities before the police attempted to shut them down. The main focus of this section, however, was on Voina. Voina is a group of students whose performance and street art mock authority by using shocking displays in order to gain media attention. They are known for elaborate pieces like 'Prick: Prisoner of the FSB' for which they

painted a giant phallus opposite the headquarters of the FSB. After their 'Palace Coup' piece in which they flipped over a police car, two members of the group were arrested and detained. The art community in Russia rallied around them and famous street artist Banksy came forward to pay their bail. Despite their controversy Voina won the Innovatsiya Prize which is given by the federal government.

The chapter concludes with a discussion about where these art movements are heading. Many view these protest pieces as a modern replacement for ordinary political protests. However, paradoxes still remain. Voina was awarded a federal prize for an anti-government piece and PG was paid for a piece that attacked the commercialization of art. From this movement in the early 2000's, young artists are becoming more active in the political scene.