

CREATIVE AND CURATORIAL STRATEGIES OF MODERN BELARUS

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Contemporary art curation, which began its development only after the country gained independence in 1991, is one of the youngest areas of professional activity in the artistic field of Belarus. The end of the 20th century was marked by the active development of curatorial practices in Belarus, through the possibility of free expression, opening of new exhibition venues: galleries Salt Warehouses and At Pushkin's in Vitebsk, the Sixth Line, A.V., NOVA, M-Gallery, and others in Minsk, U Maistra and Tizengauz in Grodno, and others, by holding festivals and events of contemporary art In-Formation, Art-Pragnoz, ART-SESSIO in Vitebsk, international performance festival Navinki in Minsk, and so on. In the 1990s, the process of intensive development of international cultural relations began. The first exhibitions of contemporary art in Belarus, including Photography from Minsk (1994), The Echo of Silence (1996), Belart. Contemporary Art from Belarus (1996), The New Art of Belarus (2000), and others, created by Belarusian and foreign curators, were exhibited abroad.

Art historian Mikhail Barazna should be credited as the first or one of the first officially named curators in Belarus, since it was with him as official chief curator that the first private gallery of contemporary art At Pushkin's in Vitebsk signed a contract in 1994. Artist Vasilii Vasilyev was the curator of the gallery Salt Warehouses in Vitebsk; in Minsk, art historian Larisa Finkelstein was the curator of the gallery Brama, photographer Uladzimir Parfyanok was the curator of the gallery of visual arts NOVA, art historian Inna Reut was the curator of the gallery A.V. Since the late 1990s and the early 2000s the concept of "curator" has been established firmly in the contemporary art of Belarus. Since the end of the 20th century, Belarus has been applying novel strategies of curatorial activities: the intervention of contemporary art, institutionalization of artistic and curatorial practices.

The position of artists as curators of their own proj-

ects is typical of the art field of Belarus and characteristic of the authors of a conceptual orientation applying curatorial approaches, such as the development of the project idea, its theoretical substantiation, the creation and selection of works specifically for the project in their artistic practices. These are, for example, the conceptual projects of Sergei Voychenko and Vladimir Tsesler: The Project of the Century. Twelve from XX (1999), Igor Savchenko's The Temptations of Sergeev (2001–2002), Viktor Petrov's The Green Wall of the Old House 2 (2014), Igor Kashkurevich's Thus Drew Zarathustra (2018), Uladzimir Parfyanok's MEMENTO (2006), Alexander Boldakov and Ivan Rusachek's Oculis elementaris (2014), Olga Sazykina's The Stories of Everyday Life (2006), projects by Rozalina Busel: Armor (2015), The Process (2016), Isolation (2019), and others.

Artist Igor Kashkurevich has a desire for philosophical understanding and myth-making. He seeks to understand the diversity of the world around him, to delineate its boundaries, and try on the actions of his characters.

Igor Kashkurevich is a significant author of underground art, one of the pioneers of performative practices in Belarus working in graphic and painting techniques, sculpture, installation, performance. He comes from a creative family; his father is the famous Belarusian graphic artist Arlen Kashkurevich (1929–2013); Arlen's sons Todar and Igor and Igor's daughter Agnieszka also became. In 1982, Igor Kashkurevich graduated from the Belarusian Theatre and Art Institute (currently the Belarusian State Academy of Arts), majoring in graphic arts. Since 1978, he has participated in exhibitions; in 1984, he co-founded the informal art association Pluralis, the Sixth Line in 1994, an independent gallery of contemporary art in Minsk. From 1998 to 2018, the artist lived permanently in Berlin, made sculptures from glacial boulders, taught, participated in exhibitions, and made performances. In 2018, Igor Kashkurevich returned to Minsk where, in addition to exhibition activities, he

began to hold regular open days in the Studio of the Creative Dynasty of the Kashkurevich Family.

1988, Narva, the All-Union Festival of Underground Art, The Holiday of Art. Narva-88. The Dual Horizon, a joint happening action of Igor Kashkurevich with the artist Niko Tsetskhladze on the shore of the Gulf of Finland. A three-trunked birch growing on the edge of the forest bumping into the shore, a stick picked up by Niko Tsetskhladze on the shore, a black and white rod made by Igor Kashkurevich the day before, and white cloth—the attributes of the action—are harmoniously combined with the restrained Estonian landscape. The two artists, standing back-to-back, lean against one of the birch trunks, the assistant wraps the men and the tree with the white cloth forming a sculptural group. The stick and the rod bide their time in the openings between the three trunks. In the silence, you can hear the sound of leaves, the rustle of the sea, the artists' breath.

The group is released from the white cloth, separating the participants of the action. Taking the stick and the rod in their hands, respectively, the artists choose their own paths independently from each other and go to the sea. Reaching the edge of the surf, the figure with the rod (Igor Kashkurevich) turns right, heading for the figure with the stick (Niko Tsetskhladze). When they meet, the figures come in contact with each other, share their warmth, and turn back-to-back. The hand with the rod draws a triangle on the sand, with the lines not matching. Following the impulse, the figure creates an hourglass grapheme and becomes the center of one of the triangles turning into a fixed point that sums up the warmth received when the backs touch. Coming out of the triangle, the figure leaves a trace of the point as an appeal.

In the second triangle, the hand with the stick draws a line parallel to the horizon that goes beyond the triangle. The artist perceives the stick as a dangerous sharp tool. The line is continued by the rod turning it into a circle enclosing the artist's figure. With a jerk, the hand with the stick draws a circle at the feet of the figure with the rod. After a tense pause, the figure with the rod leaves the circles and places the rod in the leftmost corner of the hourglass grapheme triangle. The figure with the stick, facing the sea, raises his hands with the stick several times, then plunges the stick into the sand. Walking into the sea, the figure stops and looks into the distance. The other figure draws a diagonal line from the corner of the

triangle to the forest with the rod, stopping at the border strip loosened by the tractor. Lowering his hands, the figure turns to the sea and looks into the distance.

In the overcast evening silence, the two vertical human figures and the geometric shapes of a triangle and a circle created by them freeze at the borderline between the shore and the sea, the sea and the horizon, the physical state of stillness and constant movement of sea and air masses, completing the metaphysical study of the duality of the world. Conscious and artist-driven thoughts and actions, as well as natural phenomena not controlled by them create the ritualism of the event.

1988, Vitebsk. The creative association Kvadrat hosts the project 110 years of Kazimir Malevich in two venues and invites the Minsk group Pluralism and the Association of Experimental Fine Arts from Leningrad as participants. The exhibition is divided into two parts: the exhibition hall of the Union of Artists hosts the exhibition Experiment presenting the works of members of the creative association Kvadrat and documentary material about UNOVIS; the Spartak cinema is at the disposal of Pluralism and the Association of Experimental Fine Arts [2].

The Resurrection of Kazimir, a performance by Igor Kashkurevich and Lyudmila Rusova, begins with a procession of its participants in ritual clothes, such as red, black, gray robes, white capes, through the city. After the procession through the city, the action continues in the foyer of the Spartak cinema.

The main object around which the performance is built is an elongated white suprematist figure whose end is shaped as a square inscribed in a cross, symbolically recreating Malevich's coffin. On the upper horizontal plane of the object, there are two red geometric shapes, a circle at the head and a square at the foot. From the red square, a white strip of paper descends pointing to the end wall on which there is an inscription SUPREMUS and two sheets of white paper located below it with the contour images of two squares and one circle. Directly opposite, on the other wall, there are two tin squares and a disk, painted white on one side.

The two figures in red robes hit the suprematist tin squares—drums with black and white sticks. After a pause, a black-clad figure hits the tin disk with a massive club. Four participants in the action in gray robes approach the coffin. A hit on the disk follows, and the

figures in grey remove the coffin lid and move away with it. In the coffin, you can see a motionless female figure in black (Lyudmila Rusova). To the rhythmic hits on the disk, the figure slowly rises out of the coffin. The women in white approach her: two of them put a suprematist stole on the figure, the third one places a black cap on the figure's head, completing her turning into Kazimir. Kazimir comes out of the coffin, turns and faces the suprematist drums and steps into the black paint spilled onto white paper. Following the rhythm of hits on the disk, Kazimir, leaving black footprints, goes around the hall successively loosening the tubes of eight suprematist iconic batiks in red, black, and white colors fixed under the ceiling and tied with black cords that descend to human height. After hitting the disk, Kazimir approaches a sheet of white paper on the wall with the outlines of two squares and a circle. The thundering sounds of the first square-drum accompany the action of Kazimir—painting over the first square with black gouache, then over the second square to the sounds of the first and second drums, and over the circle to the sounds of two drums and the disk. There comes silence, and the women in white slowly release Kazimir from ritual suprematist attire and hang the items of clothing on a hanger to the right of the SUPREMUS inscription.

After a pause, a loud shout of SUPREMUS is heard. Hitting on the suprematist disk-drum completes the performance.

textual documentation of the action preserved by Igor Kashkurevich's lists the performance's participants: Lyudmila Rusova, Irina Sazanova, Alyona Bitkolova, Svetlana Komarova, Sergei Kovalskiy, Alexei Zhdanov, Grigoriy Ivanov, Konstantin Goretskiy, Irina Ryzhkova, Elena Zhdaneniya, Boris Vasilyev, Igor Kashkurevich, Viktor Shilko, Aleksandr Malei, Valeriy Schastnyy, and Aleksandr Dosuzhev.

In his 2014 interview, Igor Kashkurevich spoke about the origin of the idea of performance: "... Perestroika had begun. And we went to St. Petersburg where an exhibition of Malevich from western collections opened... After that, we had a desire to make our own replica action. No, not in revenge. I wanted to invite different artists (not necessarily associated with the traditions of Suprematism) and perhaps find out who we could identify with. There was no intention to call ourselves Malevich's students. But I wanted to arrange a provocation with his

death and subsequent resurrection. We were interested in Malevich's figure not only because of his charisma. It's an exemplary irony of fate that everything that happened to him fitted into the system he created..." [1].

The performance took place on 4 November 1988 in Vitebsk and repeated in Minsk in 1989 and in Moscow in 1990, theoretically justified and carefully thought out. The theoretical justification consisted of seven declarations, three points, and a conclusion. The declarations called for understanding the world through the experience of Suprematism, proclaimed Suprematism as the universal language of nature and the beginning of a new era in thinking. Man should think suprematically, renew the integrity of the world in ritual actions that combine sign, sound, and gesture. The suprematist studio was declared an abstracted image of the world. The system of complex transitions from the forms of creativity to ritual was proclaimed as an opportunity to synthesize the way of thinking and action into a harmonious being. Three points explained the choice of the performance object: the suprematist coffin as a kind of Malevich's testament, and declared the special position of Malevich's work. The final clause declared Malevich a resurrected symbol of suprematist optimism.

Thirty years later, 2018, in the Academy gallery of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts in Minsk, an exhibition-mystery of Igor Kashkurevich, *Thus Drew Zarathustra*, was exhibited. The artist who lived and worked in Berlin since the late 1990s and returned to Belarus at the end of 2017 presented a series of large-format black and white and color works. The works, acrylic on paper, created in 1999-2000 under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, had not been exhibited in Belarus before. The creative idea of the series was based on two intentions of the artist: "Thus wrote Friedrich Nietzsche in the guise of an imaginary Zarathustra" and "thus I, Igor Kashkurevich, created this series of drawings in the image of Zarathustra the artist." The works are not direct illustrations to the text, but should be understood as an interpretation of what has been read, as a parallel interaction with the author of the novel.

Expressive and mystical, unexpected and emotional, poetic and philosophical works introduced the viewer into a mysterious space, into a mystery in which, according to the author, "only after a long hundred years, our

Zarathustra returned safe and sound, though no longer as a poet, but as an artist.” Igor Kashkurevich presented the idea of eternal return of the thinker to his homeland.

The author’s performance Friedrich Nietzsche’s Moustache shown at the opening created an associative bridge between the events of recent history and the present.

Choosing a character to create a myth, Igor Kashkurevich listens to himself. There is no other way, because the artist must be interested, there must be a clue that makes it possible to spin the wheel of meanings that moves along the spiral of ritualization of the (not) held phenomenon and ironic reinterpretation of the

conceived event.

The current curatorial practices in Belarus are based on the study of the contexts of universal space in contemporary art. Curatorial activities are a way of cognition that allows updating information, generating new meanings, raising questions, rethinking curatorial and artistic practices, and transmitting knowledge. Curatorial practices combine forms and meanings, form a socially significant cultural product and update the production of knowledge. In the broad field of art, curators create new forms of experience and understanding, encourage visual and mental activity.

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