



**UPCOMING EXHIBITION EXPLORES DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL ART
IN MOSCOW THROUGH PIVOTAL WORKS BY APPROXIMATELY 50 ARTISTS,
INCLUDING MANY ON VIEW FOR FIRST TIME IN U.S.**

***Thinking Pictures* Introduces the Artists and Creative Approaches that Set Stage
For Contemporary Practice in Russia and Around the World**

New Brunswick, NJ—July 6, 2016—Opening on September 6, the exhibition, *Thinking Pictures* will introduce audiences to the artists and work that defined the development and evolution of conceptual art in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s. *Thinking Pictures* opens with Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid’s pivotal 1973 installation, *Apelles Ziablov (The World’s First Abstract Art, Painting from the 18th Century by the Serf Artist)*, which features a series of paintings and artist-created archival material that present the artists’ sudden discovery: an original creator of abstract art, the semi-fictional character Apelles Ziablov. The work, at once humorous and incisively critical of authority, whether governmental or historic, encapsulates the underlying spirit of the diverse practices and approaches that comprise “Moscow Conceptualism.”

The exhibition follows the narrative arc of such major installations—several of which have not previously been displayed in the U.S.—highlighting the incredible range of work created by Muscovite artists during this period and the unique sociopolitical contexts that bore it and made it distinct from analogous developments in the west. Featuring nearly 50 artists and approximately 100 works, *Thinking Pictures* brings to the fore work that is formative to the development of contemporary art practices and yet has been little known or shared as part of the global dialogue. The exhibition will remain on view at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers through December 31, 2016.

Moscow Conceptualism was born in opposition to regime-mandated Socialist Realism, which required lifelike depictions of prosperous Soviet life, best expressed in painting. Forced to engage with traditional conventions of painting as the only true and allowable form of creative expression, the subversion of the medium became a necessary part of artistic dissent. Despite constant threat of censorship and harsh reprisal, the two successive generations of artists that defined the movement created work that eroded the formal and visual boundaries between painting, installation, and performance.

Presented predominantly within small inner circles of friends and colleagues, their work sparked a dialogue on the definition art, the creative process, and the role of the creator and viewer. These ideas and currents can be traced to the work of contemporary artists in Russia and around the world, and remain potent as today’s practitioners continue to grapple with art’s role in social and political spheres. Among the featured installations are:

- **Viktor Pivovarov’s** *Projects for a Lonely Man* (1975). Pivovarov is credited as being one of the founders of the album genre, which offered a bridge between painting and other forms of visual representation. The featured installation is the artist’s most ambitious work of the Soviet period, and is considered one of the major early works of the movement. It features six panels that detail

in text and image the ordinary, daily routines of a solitary man, including such things as his schedule and the layout of his personal space. The installation encapsulates the underlying premise of much Pivovarov's work: that solitude is necessary to the understanding of the self and the world and has meditative and spiritual qualities. At the same time, it deals with two principle concerns of many Muscovite artists of this time: the relationship between image and text and engagement between artist and viewer.

- The first U.S. presentation of **Ilya Kabakov's** *The Great Axis* (1984). Kabakov is also considered a founder of the album genre, having come to the idea of using the book and photo-album as a medium at the same time as Pivovarov. *The Great Axis* consists of three paintings and 29 brief explanatory texts, handwritten on paper. The texts represent viewer response to the idea of joining the earth's axis with that of the sky, as depicted in the adjoining paintings. The installation is meant to simulate a communal space in which all voices and creative thought are heard.
- A recreation and documentary materials of **Irina Nakhova's** *Rooms* (1984-1985). Between 1983 and 1987, Nakhova staged a series of immersive installations in which she covered the walls of a single room in her Moscow apartment with collage fragments and painted paper. The experience simulated the sensation of being inside a painting, while utilizing the tools of a participatory event. As participants engaged with various iterations of the installation, it also had a disorienting effect, as the space at once appeared familiar and distinct. The exhibition will feature photographic documentation of *Room No. 2* (1984) and a recreation of *Room No. 3* (1985).

Major featured installations are augmented by paintings, sculpture, photographs, works on paper, and mixed-media works by a diverse range of artists, including **Yuri Albert, Nikita Alekseev, Eric Bulatov, Ivan Chuikov, Elena Elagina, Igor Makarevich, Oleg Vassiliev, and Vadim Zakharov**. The exhibition concludes with documentation pertaining to performance art, in particular to the staged actions of Collective Actions led by **Andrei Monastyrski**. Additionally, archival material, drawn from Moscow Archive of New Art (MANI), will provide further historical detail on the varied, underground practices of these artists—much of which has not been seen in the U.S.

“The artists featured in the exhibition greatly expanded and enhanced the scope of visual practices—blurring the lines between media. In their work, paintings entered installations, albums joined text and image; modes of disseminating propaganda were subverted, but often implicitly addressed. Yet, their work is largely missing from the global dialogue on the development of conceptual art in the 1970s and 1980s,” said Dr. Jane Sharp, Curator for *Thinking Pictures*. “This is in part due to their very real experiences living through the last decades of the Soviet regime, which made their work seem ‘other,’ and their own identification as ‘outsider’—not only within the Soviet Union but within broader international art circles as well. With *Thinking Pictures*, we are engaging contemporary audiences in the cultural and historic contexts that bore this work, as well as its impact on both conceptual and post-conceptual art and artists.”

Featured works are drawn predominantly from the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection at the Zimmerli, the largest and most comprehensive collection of unofficial Soviet art in the world. The collection includes more than 20,000 works by more than 1,000 artists from Russia and the Soviet Republics. The collection was assembled by American economist Norton Dodge during his many business trips to the Soviet Union in the 1960s through the early 1970s, and through relationships with artists who later moved to the United States. *Thinking Pictures* offers the most comprehensive view of the breadth and depth of the collection to-date, and shares for the first time artworks that might otherwise have been lost to time and circumstance.

“In many ways, this exhibition represents the heart and core of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection, the primary goal of which is to engage a wider audience with art movements that were previously only

shared in very limited, inner circles. *Thinking Pictures* is an opportunity to provide a broad view of the depth and scope of art created by those working in the Soviet underground during the 1970s and '80s," said Marti Mayo, the Zimmerli's interim director. "Today, the 'otherness' of this work feels contemporary and immediate, as our global society continues to tackle issues of government censorship, artistic freedom, and extreme nationalism."

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND CREDITS

Thinking Pictures: Moscow Conceptual Art in the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union is organized by Dr. Jane Sharp, Associate Professor, Department of Art History, and Research Curator, Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union.

The exhibition and accompanying publication are made possible by the Avenir Foundation Endowment Fund, The Thickman Family Foundation, and by donors to the Zimmerli's Major Exhibition Fund: James and Kathrin Bergin; Alvin and Joyce Glasgold; Charles and Caryl Sills; Voorhees Family Endowment; and the Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable Foundation, Inc.-Stephen Cypen, President.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a book, edited by exhibition curator Jane Sharp, that features a collection of essays exploring Moscow Conceptualism's historical significance within the globalized context of conceptual art practices, past and present. The book includes new scholarship, presented by major and emerging voices in the field, including Adrian Barr, Sabine Haensgen, Matthew Jackson, Yelena Kalinsky, Terry Smith, and Jane Sharp. The book will additionally contain a checklist and illustrations of featured works, as well as an extensive bibliography on Moscow Conceptualism.

ZIMMERLI ART MUSEUM|RUTGERS

The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum houses more than 60,000 works of art, ranging from ancient to contemporary art. The permanent collection features particularly rich holdings in 19th-century French art; Russian art from icons to the avant-garde; Soviet nonconformist art from the Dodge Collection; and American art with notable holdings of prints. In addition, small groups of antiquities, old master paintings, as well as art inspired by Japan and original illustrations for children's books, provide representative examples of the museum's research and teaching message at Rutgers. One of the largest and most distinguished university-based art museums in the nation, the Zimmerli is located on the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Established in 1766, Rutgers is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and a premier public research university.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Admission is free to the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers. The museum is located at 71 Hamilton Street (at George Street) on the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick. The Zimmerli is a short walk from the NJ Transit train station in New Brunswick, midway between New York City and Philadelphia.

The Zimmerli Art Museum is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m., and the first Tuesday of each month (except August), 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and major holidays, as well as the month of August.

For more information, visit the museum's website www.zimmerlimuseum.rutgers.edu or call 848-932-7237.

SUPPORT

The Zimmerli's operations, exhibitions, and programs are funded in part by Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and income from the Avenir Foundation Endowment and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Endowment, among others. Additional support comes from the New Jersey State Council of the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts; the Estate of Victoria J. Mastrobuono; and donors, members, and friends of the museum.

###

For additional information, please contact:

Local Media Contact:

Theresa C. Watson, Communications Coordinator
press@zimmerli.rutgers.edu or 848-932-6709

National Media Contacts:

Alina Sumajin, alina@paveconsult.com, 646-369-2050
Sascha Freudenheim, sascha@paveconsult.com, 917-544-6057