The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Living in Dmitry Krymov's World

By John Freedman

June 09, 2013



I kept running into a woman I have known in Moscow for 20 years or more. She had an enigmatic smile on her face, as if she was squinting to look into the distance and was finding something of interest there.

As I passed her for the third or fourth time she said, "I can't make up my mind which of these rooms I want to live in. I keep walking back and forth but I can't choose. I only know that I want to live here."

My friend Marina Korostylyova, who works for Kultura television, was doing the same thing as I and 1,000 others — she was taking in the opening of the "Rock, Scissors, Paper" exhibit at the Novy Manezh exhibition center in downtown Moscow. This was last Monday, but that doesn't matter — you can still see the exhibit because it runs through July 7.

"Rock, Scissors, Paper" is an installation created by Dmitry Krymov and two of his most accomplished former design students, Vera Martynova and Maria Tregubova.

Krymov, of course, is the former designer turned-painter turned-theater director deluxe, who has wowed the world with astonishingly inventive theater over the last decade. Martynova and Tregubova were once his students, but are now his designers.

The two usually alternate shows with him. For example Martynova designed the spectacular "As You Like It," which Krymov opened to rave reviews in England late last summer. The show before that, "Gorki-10," was designed by Tregubova.

That kind of parity exists even within shows sometimes. Martynova designed the first half of Krymov's masterful "Opus No. 7." Tregubova created the second half.

Martynova, for the record, is hitting the stratosphere these days in her own right as the house designer at the fabulous new Gogol Center.

Krymov, speaking in an interview with Novye Izvestia, says "Rock, Scissors, Paper" tells the story of "sixteen of our productions, some still running, others not. It was organized by the Bakhrushin Museum, the Manezh and us. But these are not merely design models, it is an installation 'a propos.' For me this is not so much about the productions, but about our work in general, the atmosphere in which we work."

It's the implications of that last phrase that had my friend Marina — and not only Marina — wandering around in a happy daze at the opening.

The atmosphere created by the exhibit at the Novy Manezh is one of wonder. It has the feel of a child's playroom. It has elements of a stuffy museum exhibit of old, dusty objects. It feels like it isn't finished and tomorrow someone will come to clear away all the junk and put things in order. It presents fascinating design elements that are works of art in their own right, even as they remind you of the shows, out of which they grew.

You walk into one room and are greeted by a huge, felled tree that is no tree at all. It is a tree built from other trees, the layers and slices of the trunk looking very much like something from a high school science project, while he upper branches and leaves are deceptively real in their unconcealed artifice.

This is from Krymov's production of "As You Like It," which for the uninitiated, is actually an interpretation of the Pyramus and Thisbe story in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

In that same room there are drawers filled with photos and video clips on electronic tablets telling the story of Russian theater's past — Meyerhold's productions juxtaposed against 19th century actresses. There is a table cloth that appears to be hanging in mid-flight, the myriad cups and saucers and containers that once were standing on now in seeming free fall. I don't know what show this refers to, but it's beautiful and evocative.

The second room holds more delights.

Along one wall hang a series of over-sized, full-body portraits, mostly of musicians. Their cut-out mouths move as they sing, their cut-out feet wiggle as they dance. There is no attempt at historical likeness here, but if you try hard enough you might see Billie Holiday or Louis Armstrong or John Coltrane in some of the images. As you walk past them faint

recordings of their music wafts to your ears, drowning out, for a moment, the sounds emanating from the neighboring portraits.

These appear to be oblique references to a wall of body portraits that is created in real time in "Opus No. 7," but I could well be mistaken.

One of my favorite items is a miniature working conveyor belt filled with tiny, colorful toys, pictures, mini-sculptures and the like. This obvious reference to the huge moving sidewalk in Krymov's "Tararabumbia" is funnier and more childlike than the full-scale original, which occupies the entire length of the huge Manezh hall at the School of Dramatic Art, but that is just what Krymov meant by talking about the "atmosphere" in which he and his collaborators work. There is joy and humor and beauty in everything they do.

Who wouldn't want to live there?

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/06/09/living-in-dmitry-krymovs-world-a34430