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# Overwhelmed by Choice at Moscow's MMAM

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A Russian man playing a game of billiards, captured by Eleazar Langman around the beginning of the 1930s. **Eleazar Langman**

Since the days of cave painting, the definition of what counts as artwork has constantly expanded. Here in Russia, artists like Kandinsky and Malevich, now revered as artistic geniuses, were once ridiculed and dismissed as not being "serious" art. Even today, new technologies and ideologies allow individuals to stretch the profession's boundaries.

One venue in Moscow currently featuring the cutting edge of Russian art is the Multimedia Art Museum, which has recently opened six new exhibits as part of their summer season.

These exhibits cover art forms ranging from paintings and photography to newer mediums such as installations and videos, and feature works by well-known artists such as Eleazer Langman and Oskar Rabin as well as up-and-coming artists like Rostan Tavasiyev.

Inozemtseva was quick to say that the six new exhibits were in no way related: "Here in the Multimedia Art Museum, we commonly have artists working with very different mediums and subjects ... because there isn't much else going on at this time in the summer, we realized that we could open all six exhibits at the same time, and we thought it would be advantageous to do so."

Rostan Tavasiyev's installation piece, called "Everything is Complicated," has been set up in the lobby of the museum and is one of the first things that visitors see. Initially, the installation does not seem particularly unusual, being made up of a series of strange plush figures which look like they would be more at home on Sesame Street than in a contemporary art gallery. A closer glance reveals a series of computer screens on the wall displaying the Facebook pages that Tavasiyev has created for all of his strange creations.

Katya Inozemtseva, the general curator of the museum, described the function of these Facebook pages, saying that "on their pages, they write to each other, they respond to fans ... from their comments, their individual personalities become clear, and we can see which character is the philosopher, which one is the gossip, and so on." Inozemtseva described the longevity of the museum's relationship with Tavasiyev, saying that they had first taken an interest in his work when he was a young and relatively unknown artist. Having seen his work displayed at the Aidan Gallery in Moscow, the museum opted to include his work in group exhibitions and other exhibits, eventually resulting in the solo installation that visitors see today.

Tavasiyev's exploration of the role that technology can play in the future of art seems to be nicely complemented in the exhibit "Playtime: The Mythology of Videogames." Organized by a consortium of Swiss museums and brought to Moscow as part of the year of Switzerland in Russia, the exhibit looks at the evolution of video games and the way that people interact with — and through — them.

Beginning with the earliest games of the 1980s — like the world-famous "Pac-Man" — and working up chronologically to the most revolutionary games of the present day, the exhibit looks at the evolution of the game in several different categories, focusing on game architecture, communication, and the consciousness of the "gamer" when playing the game: how people negotiate the divide between the virtual and visual realities.

Inozemtseva hesitated to describe video games as art, saying the exhibit "isn't really about portraying the games that way [as art]. This is an exhibit about contemplation, about considering who is a gamer and how we interact with these games, and how they change the way we see ourselves."

The exhibit contains numerous computers, allowing visitors to try for themselves the games on display. Naturally, the exhibit attracts large swathes of teens who gather in crowds around certain popular games, resolutely refusing to move — at times giving the museum the feel of a very classy video arcade.

If visitors tire of the rambunctious Russian youth and the flashing video screens that draw them in, the exhibits of Eleazar Langman and Oskar Rabin are a thought-provoking and welcome relief. Though these two artists worked in different mediums — Langman in photography and Rabin in prints and paintings — their atmospheric works share an old-

fashioned, highly Soviet aesthetic.

Rabin's prints, which seem to be dominated by images of empty vodka bottles, are bleak but convey a sense of time and place, taking the viewer back to the early days of the Soviet Union and a very different Moscow. Langman, who worked as a photojournalists, has a fascinating collection of images of workers in steel mills, struggling to fulfill the next five-year plan, as well as some good shots from travels in Central Asia.

The final two exhibits that have opened most recently are "Bestiary" — a collection of animal paintings by Gregory Maiofis, and "Why do we go to see exhibits" — a series of conceptual works by a variety of different artists. Both of these exhibits are also interesting, but feel mildly like irrelevant padding amidst the rich jungle of other new material.

*All the exhibits are open until Sept. 8 at the Multimedia Art Museum, 16 Ulitsa Ostozhenka. Metro Kropotkinskaya. 495-637-1100.*

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