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New Monument for Malevich's Lost Grave

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A competition to select a design for a monument to Kazimir Malevich will be conducted before the end of the year, Moscow region culture minister Oleg Rozhnov told RIA Novosti on Tuesday. The completed monument will be erected near the presumed site of his grave within the Romashkovo housing complex in the Odinstovsky district of Moscow region.

These remarks were intended to end the controversy sparked last weekend by news that the site of Malevich's grave had been paved over and would soon be covered by a luxury apartment complex.

Alexander Mitta, an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Arts and director of the film "Chagall–Malevich," reacted to the news in an interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta: "The tomb of the great artist should be freed from asphalt. A monument should stand upon it. And those guilty of scoffing at Russian culture should be punished." Many members of the arts community have reacted with similar disgust over the past week to the reports of the grave's

destruction.

Ask any Russian about famous Russian works of art and it is relatively certain that among the first pieces they mention will be the famous painting "Chyorny Kvadrat" (Black Square) by Kazimir Malevich. Born in Kiev in 1879, Malevich was a dominant figure in abstract arts movements of the early 20th century and has achieved lasting fame as a pioneer of Suprematism, an art movement that emphasized basic geometric forms and colors and later influenced artists like Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Malevich died in Leningrad in 1935 yet requested that his ashes be buried underneath his favorite oak tree in the village of Nemchinovka, now located just outside the MKAD to the southwest of Moscow. At the time, a monument was placed over his tomb, yet both the monument and the oak were destroyed during World War II, and the exact location of Malevich's grave was lost.

Yury Petrov, deputy director the Rond development firm that now owns the property, told Rossiiskaya Gazeta that "when our company started construction of the housing complex in 2011, we had no idea that the location of Malevich's tomb might fall within the construction zone."

Indeed, only after the territory had been purchased and construction had commenced did the organization "Nemchikovka and Malevich" contact the builders and warn them of the location's cultural heritage. After this notification, it was agreed that construction would be halted in the area of the grave's probable location until a full investigation had been conducted.

At that point, much of the housing complex had already been constructed, and the probable location of the grave fell within the interior courtyard of the complex, close to one of the entrances. While the developers recently paved over much of the courtyard, the Rond firm noted that it had left the area presumed to be the gravesite.

The developers propose to construct a monument in the suprematist style on the remaining piece of ground, though Malevich's descendants have objected to having the grave so close to the building's entrance. The developers have also expressed a willingness to excavate the dirt, which presumably contains Malevich's ashes, and relocate them elsewhere for a more suitable memorial.

According to the Lenta news agency, Malevich's relatives have already taken a portion of the dirt from the area and placed it in several capsules. One of these capsules will be reburied at the Romashkovo complex, while the others will be placed in locations associated with the artist's life and work.

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