

# Posing Nearly in the Nude in Moscow Since 1977

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For almost 40 years, students at the Surkov Institute have honed their craft by painting model Viktor Parygin.

Viktor Parygin can be found, young and old, all over the walls of the Surikov Institute, one of the most prestigious art schools in the country.

He is not an artist or a sculptor but a model, who has been posed clothed and unclothed for budding artists at the institute for almost 40 years.

"I wasn't any fatter then," said Parygin, 63, with a hint of pride as he pointed to a painting of himself on one wall.

He — or at least his body — can also be seen in Christ the Savior Cathedral, as he modeled for one of the sculptures that was made for the church when it was rebuilt in the 1990s.

When you meet Parygin, it doesn't seem surprising that he poses for budding artists as he has

the kind of expressive face that would make even the most hopeless of artists reach for a pencil.

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A couple of hours before, he had been posing in a smart pair of jeans and a checked shirt for first-year students. The female students giggled as Parygin chatted and joked with them, although he said later that he mainly remains quiet. He also remains very still.

Parygin ended up as an artist's model purely by accident. He was a fourth-year student in Moscow and had just returned from a hard trip to Kazakhstan, where students were sent to do construction work, when he met his friend.

"He said 'What are you doing?' I said 'Nothing.'"

"Grab your sandals and we'll go tomorrow," his friend told him. "What will I do?" he asked.

"Nothing, just sit and don't move."

His friend was a gymnast who had been working on construction sites, so they were both in the muscular form needed for artists studying how to draw a body.

That was 1977.

His first experience was posing for a portrait. Taking his clothes off came later but he said it was no big deal. "At 25 you can get undressed, can't you?"

Parygin was studying at a strict institute where you had to have your hair cut and wear a tie.

"I saw that you don't need that here and that's why I liked it," he said.

He remembers well how much he was paid: One ruble 30 kopeks for nude modeling, 77 kopeks for clothed and 70 kopeks for portraits.

"A bottle of vodka was two rubles 83 kopeks back then," he said, "So three sessions and you had enough for a bottle and a bite to eat."

Today the pay doesn't go far.

The nude modeling is not completely nude. Parygin and the other male models wear a special garment called a gulfik — a codpiece. "It's a cloth triangle," Parygin said. "You wear it so that the male [parts] are covered and everything else is visible, so they can draw all the muscles."

"It's not comfortable, but they need to be able to see everything," he said.

Modeling might seem easy, but it is tiring work as the model has to keep the same pose and not move for long periods. Parygin usually has three sessions in the morning and three in the afternoon and works most days of the week. You keep a pose "for 15 to 20 minutes then you can move a little bit, stretch and then you are OK," he said.

"You get tired on Friday. Even if you are sitting down, you get tired, your back gets tired."

As he walks around the institute, Parygin is recognized by both students and teachers. He has been part of the institute for a long time.

"At the start you sit and listen to what teachers say about art and how the students react. Then after five years, 10 years, or 15 years, you start to understand," he said. "The best of the students that I knew became teachers and stayed in the institute to teach new students."

He says that he tries to stay fit and eat well for the job.

"I don't plan to quit. I like it," he said. "It feels like home."

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