

Artist Valery Aizenberg's Journey in 'Migration'

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Valery Aizenberg's retrospective takes visitors through his meandering artistic journey with works in many genres from many times and places. **MMOMA**

The Moscow Museum of Modern Art has opened a retrospective exhibition of works by Valery Aizenberg, an acclaimed artist from the 1980s who remains one of the most influential figures in the Russian modern art scene.

The show features over 100 works created by Valery Aizenberg in the last 40 years, displayed across the four floors of the Museum. Visitors are invited to descend from the top floor down to the first. In the process, they follow the artist's own life journey — from Ukraine to the U.S. — and his creative development, which is more a play of concepts and formats than a straightforward path to find his artistic self.

However, the structure of the exhibition is not chronological. It flows in accordance with

the artistic concepts and historical context. The spirit of the retrospective is an installation called “Intellectual Forest,” which allows the viewer to wander around the dense woods of the artist’s unconsciousness, pulled back to reality by multiple cultural references, direct quotes and striking images.

A Visual Forest

The show itself is a forest of paintings, objects, and performances — text, video and photo. Most of the pieces do not stand alone. They are groups arranged in series. Some works, such as “Maslenitsa,” “Oka River,” and “Snow Flies,” are curated to capture the rhythm of the compositions produced by colors, lines and texture. Here you begin to understand the point of the Forest. It’s not the painting itself that Valery Aizenberg is interested in, but the context his series create within the art space as the pieces are either installed away from the walls or hanging from the ceiling.

“It was Aizenberg’s spectacular idea to place the pictures this way. Installation is one of his art strategies,” Leonid Bazhanov, curator of the exhibition, told The Moscow Times. “He wanted to show the pieces from an unexpected angle.”

The installation lets you see a painting from the front and back and compare the original names of the pieces with the official titles on the museum plates. The visitor literally looks at the art space between the paintings by moving between hanging artworks and mentally “migrating” through the art series.

Escapism

A theme of escapism, which Valery Aizenberg calls “fly,” runs throughout the installation. Alongside the “flying” paintings, the artist’s constantly repeating images of stars (“Danae and the Acid Rain”) and airplanes (“Asphodels” and “Airhive”) create a strong theme of striving for freedom. One of the most significant works of the retrospective is Aizenberg’s most recent “Vulgarians.” In the installation, cats and flies hover around a Magritte-like self-portrait. It is an illustration of absolute freedom from substance and context: an artist freeing himself from the physicality of pictorial art.

Aizenberg captures the viewer’s imagination with a series of video art performances created as part of his ESCAPE series. These are the most conceptual works displayed in the exhibition. In “The Eye” the artist scratches the image of an eye on paper with a knife and provokes a deep emotional response. The “Red Welder” deals with the transformative power of art.

Aizenberg’s conceptual journey ends with his series “Malevichism.” This is not a set of direct quotations from the avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich, but an attempt to bring Malevich into the artist’s personal space and realm of perception. Bazhanov explains: “Modern Russian artists are regularly engaged in a dialogue or polemics with Malevich. For some it’s a tribute to a style, for others it’s a way to focus their artistic obsession.”

Visitors become part of the context the moment they enter an installation. In the “Endless Ukrainian Landscape with Water Tower and Shadow,” Aizenberg explores the

idea that the viewer can never fully comprehend the artist's world. To see what is on the paintings, you have to strain to look through a small opening.

This innovative approach to painting and the ability to “migrate” into different genres has given Valery Aizenberg the reputation of one of the most profound conceptual artists of our times. The show will run until March 5.

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