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## FOREWORD



When in 1959 Nikita Khrushchev returned from the United States, he decided to open a museum of modern art. I was called by Demichev, "responsible for culture" at that time, and he told me: "We want the museum of modern art to be".

Why did they address me? At that time I was the leading artist at the Institute of history and ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, I have managed to open the department of Georgian ethnography at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and organized an exhibition "Man and Nature", studying the sources of the avant-garde. There were drawings on stones, crosses and other objects of archeological excavations in Georgia.

I asked Demichev: «Can you change the ideology?» A museum of modern art needs artists that were forced to leave the country after the revolution. I gave him some names: Falk, Malevich, Shagal, Byriyik, Demichev understood that it was too early to found the museum.

Today times have changed - it's an epoch of creative and initiative people, of free thinking.

The opening of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art is just the beginning, and it has its continuation. Probably, branches of the Museum are going to be opened in St. Petersburg and Tbilisi, and maybe other cities.

First of all, how I came to the thought of the museum. When I was young, it always astonished me that there was no museum of modern art in the USSR - neither in Moscow, nor in Petersburg, nor in Tbilisi, nor in the Baltics. I remember all those works that I examined so closely when I visited The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts or the Hermitage. There was practically no Russian avant-garde or modern art presented. I studied at the Georgian Academy of Arts. I had good tutors - those artists who came to USSR from America, France, who practiced and communicated with Leger, Chagall, Picasso and the others. There was an unwritten law: when our artists returned from abroad, they weren't permitted to live in the capitals. They were given right to live in Georgia. It was happiness for us. At that time modern, free thinking developed in our minds. Another important period in my life - when I got to Picasso's workshop in 1964-1968; there I met Chagall very often. So it was not at all accidental.

When I was elected President of the Russian Academy of Arts, I felt the great responsibility and took the foundation of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art in my hands.

The Museum is not just a building or a collection that you can gather and then show to the public. That is what can be done at galleries. Every museum has its unique philosophy. When I travelled abroad, I studied carefully everything in those museums - their structure, specifics, to know how I must organize everything for Russian viewers. For example, the exhibition of works by graduates of Surikov and Repin Art Institutes that I organized in France, - it was not a random experience.

More than half of works are my property that I granted to the Museum. Is there another way of founding the Museum? I gave more than 2,000 works to the collection. Today I'm the director of the Museum that has the license and official status - Moscow Museum of Modern Art. I will do my best for the Museum to show those works that are not so easy for the viewers to see. I want to introduce them to the works that they usually look at but don't see properly. I had all those things in mind when I refused to organize the permanent display how it's usually done in museums: to group the pieces of art on the principles of periods or trends. My main principle was: if this work is avant-garde and of worthy quality, then it has to be in my collection. Being an artist, I see why the works of some particular artists must be placed together. Near Burlyk's work there can be one by Nesterov or Nazarenko, or a piece by another worthy artist. At the entrance of the Museum small reliefs show the development of the art. For us not to forget: art is a continued process, but each epoch has its own manner, everyone has his own, unique way of thinking. That's why the entrance that I created is a separate sculpture put close to the wall, nearly touching the facade, but still separate. I have plans to change the entrance sometimes - for example, to make it of crystal. There will be others, as I see it, made of different materials. That's the entrance in its full meaning. Avant-garde thinking starts from the entrance.

The display will constantly change. I want to organize such exhibitions as "Ethnography and Modernity", "Ethnography and Avant-Garde". Ethnography is what neither menshiviks, nor bolsheviks appreciated. It's not the way and art-critic thinks, it's a description of the fact that you cannot pass by. An artist has to master drawing, and only then develop his individuality. Picasso, Malevich, Kandinsky - all of them painted wonderfully, they studied academic painting. I want to show "Black Square" by Malevich along with his self-portrait for people not to think that Malevich's works are limited by his "Black Square". Malevich did it because the art of that era was over. Many artists came to this crack, because they couldn't be slaves - couldn't imagine one thing and create something else. That's why the ones who were true emigrated, and those who were not - they changed themselves, they sold themselves, and now we see empty studios, empty galleries.

I wanted all Russian museums to participate in the creation of our Museum of Modern Art. I offered all of them: if you have a collection, here is the building - come and join. If someone has complains about lack of their own venue - take initiative. Today times have changed, today the American President doesn't think twice whether to found one more museum of modern art in San-Francisco or New-York, or not. This is the personal initiative that we didn't have for 70 years. So there's nothing strange that those people shout: we have works, but we don't have buildings! If you have found works, you should find the venue, too.

I had to close the Museum for two weeks, because I didn't expect so many visitors - 500, 600, 800 people each day. Such a big cloakroom wasn't provided, so we had to close the Museum for rearrangement. And I'll also organize the basement like in the Musée Picasso, to sell books on contemporary art there. I've already bought plenty of books, and I want to make a huge library there.

I think that in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other Russian cities various museums should be opened, and those of modern art among them. What's the use? It brings diversity into art. This particular philology will enrich Russian art and make it more diverse. I don't want another extremity: to get the only school and, like we had it for 70 years, to have the same works everywhere.

If we turn back and watch the art of the 20th century, then, first of all, we see its entirety, but not separation of art-critics and artists, as in the zoo, where animals stare each other aggressively from the cages.

Former confrontation of art styles doesn't exist anymore, as well as the endless fight for one's only possible truth against the views of other artists. It's obvious now that we should all struggle together for the future artistic developments. We should act not for the only school or group of artists, but for the development of united Russian art.

Zurab Tsereteli

*Extracts from the book by Valery Turchin "The 20th Century Reflected in the Collection of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art", Moscow 2003.*