

The Exhibition as Citation

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I can confirm: in deciding the fortunes of the present exhibition George Pusenkoff faced an alter-native. His project was simultaneously accepted by two of the most prestigious exhibition forums - the Tretyakow Gallery and the Central House of Artists. The advantages of the CHA were sufficiently obvious. They were prepared to offer Pusenkoff the famous "carre" - perhaps the most effective exhibition space in Moscow, one linked with the names of Gilbert and George, Francis Bacon, Gunther Uecker and others. Nonetheless, in the end he decided in favor of a hall in the New Tretyakov, and it was precisely this venue that gave him the chance to implement his key idea with the greatest effect - the idea of the exhibition as quote.

The quote is the fundamental starting point of Pusenkoff's work. No other contemporary Moscow artist uses this device so consistently and with such systematic adherence to his own theoretical principles. Aware of the exceptional responsibility of the exhibitional gesture in such a significant place as "the storehouse of national art:" Pusenkoff seized the opportunity to make an especially vivid manifestation of the programmatic principles of his art.

The quote is one of the most fundamental principles of post-modern aesthetics. Its general theoretical basis, its ontological horizon is the identification of being and text, i.e., the idea of a totally "texted" reality, a reality which contains no authentic dimension whatsoever. Pusenkoff expresses precisely this situation in his show with programmatic clarity. After all, at the center of his installation stands the motif of the window - since the time of Leon

Battista Alberti a metaphor for the mimetic origin of art. His gesture of blocking the window with a solid row of paintings thus proffers an unambiguous message. There is no dialectic of the external and the internal; here textuality is total.

Accordingly we begin to understand why, in his choice of venue, Pusenkoff gave his preference to the awkward space of the Tretyakov: precisely because - in contrast to the effective "carre" in the CHA - it contains a window; also because this particular window is the window of a museum, and indeed, of a museum that exists in the general consciousness as the very archetype of the museum. The paintings looking out of the window into the halls of the museum - pictures looking at other pictures, text referring to text - constitute a global metaphor of the museum as a repository of the historic memory. The direct confrontation of Pusenkoff's works and the museum space also have an easily decipherable intent: any artistic expression is inevitably related to tradition, to the historical memory. The utterance loses its authenticity, the source of authorship loses its ontological status; the author is completely dissolved in textuality.

Pusenkoff takes this idea to its logical limit. Not only is authorship dissolved in textuality, but, moreover, every separate utterance is deprived of its authenticity in the context of the work of its author. After all, the pictorial panel which has supplanted the window in the hall has been deprived of its integrity: it is made up of separate pictures, each of which in turn consists of separate pictorial quotes. In fact the author is deprived of authenticity even in relationship to himself: his own utterance is nothing other than a manipulation of his own texts, nothing other than a self-citation.

Pusenkoff's exhibitional drama-turgy is also filled with programmatic meaning, built upon the deliberate contrast of

the exhibition space and the panel over the aperture of the window. Indeed, the space which is supposed to provide a medium for the display of objects has been left empty, while the window which is supposed to preserve transparency is filled with objects on display. Finally, rather than being provided with the lighting that one would expect, the exhibition space has been left in gloom, while the window, whose original task was simply to admit light, is plunged here into the most intense illumination possible. And this time the idea put on display by the author is sufficiently obvious. In this exhibition the object of his interest has become less textuality itself than the process of its becoming, the process of the becoming of new meanings in culture, the process of the renewal of the historical memory. Thus the exhibitional gesture is not played out in the space itself, which has been left empty and dead, but rather in the window opening, that is, at the limit of that which can be displayed, at the boundary marked by the historical memory of the space. In other words, new meanings in culture are not born within the boundaries of the museum, where everything is already ordered and inventoried; they are not created beyond the boundaries of the museum, since otherwise they would not be able to be read; new meanings are created precisely on the verge of the museumized and the non-museumized. They cannot be born outside of the museum, but neither can they be born there where they are expected.

Pusenkov's installation and the exhibition space of the New Tretyakov have a certain similarity: they are both profoundly eclectic. And yet their eclecticism is rather different; in contrast to the architecture of the hall, Pusenkov's eclecticism is completely consistent and deliberate. This is what gives him a basis for carrying out his authorial benefit performance, for implementing the present project. The authorial utterance, Pusenkov suggests, may possess a certain authenticity, may even avoid dispersion in the labyrinth of textuality, but only under one condition: if the object of this utterance is the idea of the quotability of any utterance, including itself. As the artist acknowledges, the exhibitional gesture may contribute new Meanings to the sphere of historical memory, but only if the very process of the renewal of meanings becomes the object on display. In other words, the only possible exhibition is the exhibition as quote.