

Big Pixel, Son of Black Square

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George Pusenkov appeals to the work of his great countryman, the Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich. Our contemporary, however, conducts this conversation as an artist fully armed with the knowledge of what happened in the short century that separates us from the birth of Suprematism and its fundamental figure, the Black Square.

The act of giving birth to the Black Square, which happened in the early summer of 1915, was a metaphysical act. The square black plane appeared suddenly, as it were eclipsing the multicolored composition that stood on Kazimir Malevich's easel.

The painter was forced to submit to the will of the strange, elemental mono-figure that wanted to be materialized. Malevich painted a black plane over the geometrical abstract picture he'd been working on at that moment.

A motto-like phrase appears with obsessive regularity in the canvases and drawings that preceded Malevich's Suprematist period: *partial eclipse*. Dating to the solar discourse of the famous futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913), in essence the phrase pointed to semiconscious processes in Malevich's work that would finally culminate in a "total eclipse" — the Black Square.

Many years later, the red, blue, and yellow elements of the painting's original subject began to appear through the craquelure of the uppermost layer of paint.

George Pusenkov's *Erased Malevich* (2002) is a kind of reflection on this improvised palimpsest, which emerged against the Suprematist's will (although clearly at the will of the Black Square). The upper layer of the Black Square disappeared under the broad gestures of Pusenkov's digitalized hand. He didn't uncover any color composition under the eradicated black paint, however, nor could he have done so. The Black Square has long ago turned into sign and symbol, into a freestanding, geometrically correct figure that always coincides with its own verbal definition and always varies in terms of size, technique, and medium. Even the identity of the artists who paint it sometimes varies.

A profoundly contemporary artist, George Pusenkov recognizes no boundaries between the realms of human creativity. The beginning of his own artistic career might easily have taken place under the sign of the Word, not of the Form. (Although it would be more accurate to say *word-form*: Malevich, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Alexei Kruchenykh loved this centaur-like definition.)

Pusenkov's black square is a figure that was self-generated within the frame of the computer's graphical user interface.

For Pusenkov, the frame is a primary phenomenon. This frame is now likewise primary for an enormous number of people. As the current configuration of our reality demonstrates, knowledge of this frame will only continue its exponential, aggressive expansion.

Pusenkoff's painstakingly drafted frame is the work of a painter, a craftsman. It is the minimalized (or rather, stylized) frame of the screen, and contains a solicitous designation of the image (*Square*) as well as other pseudo-informational parameters.

True, Pusenkoff doesn't say that this is the Black Square. His square is simply that: *Square*. His frame, however, encloses an impenetrably black square. This, then, is the Black Square.

This is when that selfsame Word enters the game, for the Black Square has long been a synonym for Malevich, and vice versa.

Pusenkoff's square arrives from other realms, however. His square is a pixel, the equilateral rectangular element that is the basic stuff of so much in our current reality.

The fact that Malevich's Black Square was born long ago and has accumulated its own fantastic biography only helps Pusenkoff's *Square (Big Pixel 28 KB (1:1) (1995))* to affirm its own separateness, to live its own life. His square is Big Pixel, the hero of our time.

It appears that Big Pixel will also acquire its own biography, a vita distinct from its creator's. It already has its own memory, a memory of its roots. Even its author and propagandist has no conscious knowledge of this.

The geometric figure of the square as the object of art has been bound up with the name of Malevich since 1915.

For Malevich, the square was the basis of the creative act. In the notebooks from his high Suprematist period (1915–1918) we find a sketch of a square-shaped frame. It should have become the container for a drawing, but something prevented the drawing from materializing.

“Prevented” is the right word because later (in 1920) Malevich would explicitly reflect on the semantic potential of framed emptiness: the concluding section of his first solo show featured a series of blank white canvases.

Malevich's artistic and philosophic thought constantly orbited around the universal categories Everything and Nothing. He succeeded in communicating this thought on several occasions. This irrational truth was incarnated in the Black Square, the blank white canvases, and the poetic line “The end of music is silence.”

Only at first glance are we referred to the look of the monitor by the computer frame through which Pusenkoff's black Nothingness peers. As every user knows, computer monitors are rectangular, not square. Big Pixel has thus subordinated the elongated rectangle to its own square forms. Its black-squared essence has bent the frame to its own will.

The true nature of the geometric mono-figure was already revealed to Kazimir Malevich during when it emerged. At *0.10. The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting* (December 1915), Malevich transmitted this essence to visitors by mounting the Black Square in the “red” corner (the place in a room customarily reserved for Orthodox icons).

A few months later, the artist set off a storm of protest when he verbalized his own sacral-sacrilegious gestures. In a letter (dated May 1916) to the hostile critic Alexander Benois, the Suprematist called his painting the “naked unframed icon of my age.”

The high mysticism of the Black Square was also the subject of another letter, which Malevich sent to a Moscow correspondent from Vitebsk in April 1920: “In closing, yet another theme on the Suprematist rectangle (or rather, square), which would bear dwelling on: who it is and what is in it. No one has thought about this, and so here I myself have been occupied with gazing into the mystery of its black space, which has become a form of the new visage of the Suprematist world, of its raiment and spirit. . . . In it I see what people once saw in the face of God. [. . .] If someone from hoary antiquity could fathom the secret face of the black square, maybe they would see in it what I see.”

To this day, certain segments of Russian society, including intellectuals, morally condemn the Black Square. This itself testifies to the freshness of Malevich’s creation. History records no other instances when hundred-year-old artworks were the targets of ethical critiques. To its foes, the non-objective nature of the Suprematist absolute signals a rejection of humanism, that man has been swallowed up by the black hole of entropy. It has been said that such critics thus merely expose their own complexes and phobias.

In fact, the Black Square, which possesses its own astounding energetic charge, is a gift that awakens within the viewer a vivid sense of the universe’s harmony. It can do this because it was born of that very same harmony.

The non-anthromorphic Universe — man is neither creation’s goal nor its crown — instructs and domesticates us through this new icon. And we do the same by entering into a dialogue with it.

George Pusenkoff recently performed a convincing meditation on this essential message of the Suprematist Ūr-figure. Using nanotechnology, Pusenkoff sent his *Single Mona Lisa*, the Black Square’s betrothed, into outer space.

To comprehend the original Black Square, painted in the summer of 1915, one has to encounter the picture personally. Its actual material embodiment, which isn’t amenable to mechanical reproduction, is so important for an understanding of the work.

Malevich’s fingerprints are visible on the painting’s uneasy white background. The red, yellow, and blue stripes of the previous composition show through the craquelure of the irregular square. The moment of ecstasy and spiritual illumination experienced by the artist are thus preserved for all eternity in the Black Square’s energy field.

At the same time, the artist was justified when he labeled his magnum opus a “nucleus of compressed meanings.” Malevich devoted the rest of his life to unfolding these meanings in the “bottomless space of the human skull.”

In our times, this space is called virtual space.

In the Black Square, Malevich revealed the paradoxical unity of seemingly mutually exclusive phenomena: the absolutely visual, which depends on sense perception; and the absolutely virtual, which requires only the speculative capacities of the human intellect to be perceived.

The irrational link between these two poles is now our everyday reality. In the bottomless cyberspace of the computer, black-square microelements make it possible to transform any concept in whatever way we like.

The founding father of geometric non-objective art himself reduced his Black Square to miniature dimensions. Tiny black squares became Malevich's signature and trademark.

Malevich had the feeling — or rather (to paraphrase his own way of putting it) he “comprehended in the depths of intuitive reason” — that his offspring, shrunk to a point, would become the building block of a future technological civilization.

He had always proclaimed that the Black Square was the primordial figure of the new universe, its gene. And he was right.

Whereas Malevich's Black Square was subjected to miniaturization, Pusenkoff's tiny pixel went through a reverse transformation. It grew to gigantic dimensions, thus affirming in this monumentality its own colossal significance.

Speeding towards a vanishing point on the horizon, towards Nothingness, Malevich reduced the Black Square to a metaphysical linear perspective.

The zero of forms, Pusenkoff's pixel is the object of a reverse perspective that is no less metaphysical. The vanishing point, speeding towards us from an invisible horizon, has grown into an enormous square.

George Pusenkoff now constructs Everything — his spatial structures/silhouettes/sculptures — from this square.

Summoned by the will of Pusenkoff from the speculative, incorporeal dimensions of the “human skull,” Big Pixel has been plugged into the project of constructing material, corporeal reality. It has become the material used to build non-virtual spatial works and structures.

Malevich conceived the Black Square as the symbol of the new art, which was ultimately the vehicle for a “new world-planning.”

A traditionalist and a radical, George Pusenkoff has embarked on the massive implementation of “new world-planning,” which has already become a reality. Its icon is the son of the Black Square: Big Pixel.