

# The Dvizheniye Group: Toward a Synthetic Kinetic Art

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**T**he Dvizheniye (Movement) Group was organized about 30 years ago. Its sociocultural background and its basic principles reflected the atmosphere of the "thaw" of the early 1960s in the Soviet Union.

During this period, the stimulation of intellectual activity, the search for new reference points and the urgent creative atmosphere encouraged the exchange of information among various spheres and led to the destruction of boundaries between traditional art forms. It was a time in which such matters as physics, lyrical poetry, cybernetics and communities of the future influenced artists. The air was full of ideas relating to the reappraisal of values and the comparison of things previously thought incomparable. Some felt this new climate would last forever. One could call them Romantics, which of course they were, because only Romantics would recklessly rush into the unknown, burning bridges behind them without any thought of looking back.

In 1962, a group of young artists, primarily students at the art school affiliated with the Surikov Institute in Moscow, made their first attempts to unite on the basis of their common interests in art. Initially, the theses of their new art platform were convincingly presented in the graphic works of L. Nusberg, F. Infante, A. Krivchikov, V. Akulinin, V. Shcherbakov, R. Zanevskaya, M. Dorokhov and G. Bitt, the first members of the group. Later the group would become known as the Dvizheniye, a name that first appeared in 1964 [1].

The group was active on both an artistic and a theoretical level (producing manifestos, scripts and articles as well as artworks). The Dvizheniye members' productivity in these two areas makes it possible not only to compare the development of their art and theory, but also to retrace in time the evolution of the group's activities and of the inner and outer stimuli that were the mainspring of its creativity. Its first stage of art production resulted in the creation of graphic works and spatial compositions with geometric structure (Figs 1 and 2). A transformation in the thinking of the majority of the group's members next led them to the sphere of conceptual design. This transition was evident in a 1964 exhibition of work by architects, painters and members of the Dvizheniye group called "Toward a Synthesis of the Arts," held at the Prospect Miza Club in Moscow. The new developments were closely connected to the life-transforming tendencies and the wish to redesign the surrounding environment that were common in art at that time.

Nusberg, the ideologist of the group, devoted his first printed materials to defining his own original, basic theses and searching for historical analogies and supporting points in the objective reality of the 1960s. His understanding of the internal artistic urges that form the basis of kinetic activity is reflected in the following propositions:

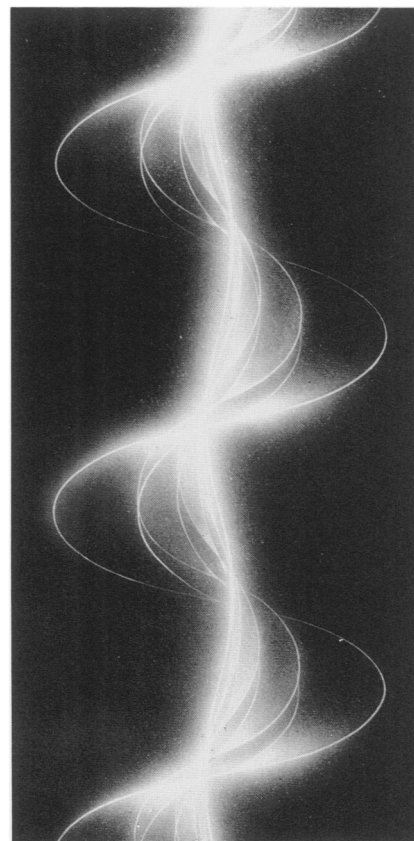
We work on what we conditionally call kinetic art, but it needs to be added that it is also a synthetic art.

Movement is the main principle for us! By this word I mean change, transference, mutual penetration, development, struggle, condition, etc. In other words, it is the condition of all that lives, fights and moves (of course, not in a biological but in an aesthetic sense).

## ABSTRACT

The author discusses the artistic and theoretical works of the Dvizheniye Group. He traces the group's development from its founding in the early 1960s to its demise in the 1970s, describing activities ranging from early, static works in painting and sculpture to kinetic constructions, performance, installations and projects related to urban planning.

**Fig. 1. F. Infante, *Spiral of Infinity*, tempera paint on cardboard, 80 × 40 cm, 1963. Infante's painting exemplifies the expression of geometric structures in graphic form typical of the Dvizheniye Group's early work.**



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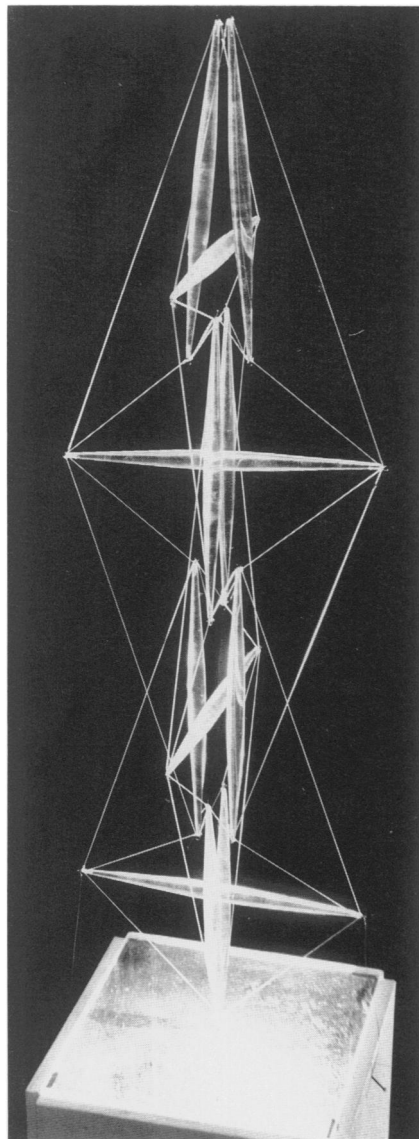
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The second principle we believe in is symmetry! This term is also conditional. By "symmetry," I mean balance and the mutual dependence of the separate parts of a whole.

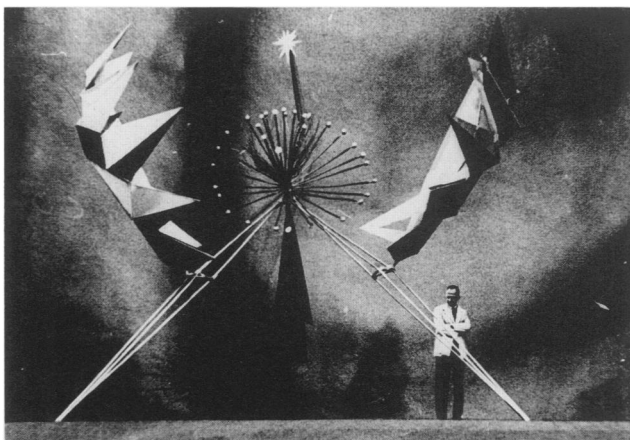
Everything that is material, internally correct and organic is symmetrical. This is the idea of natural (cosmic) harmony; this is the world of necessity. The main thing for me is not an object or phenomenon in movement, but the movement of this object or phenomenon!

The synthesis of different technical means and art forms is another important side of our searches. An artist must take all the basic means that exist in nature—light-color, sound, movement (not just in time and space), scents, changing temperatures, gases and liquids, optical effects, electromagnetic fields . . . , etc. All depends on the creative fire of the individual [2].

**Fig. 2.** V. Koleychuk, *Mast*, self-tensile structure of Plexiglas and fishing line, 60 × 20 × 20 cm, 1966. This spatial construction with geometric form is representative of the early stages of the Dvizheniye Group's artistic production.



**Fig. 3.** L. Nusberg, model for *The Flower*, 1965. The anonymous on-looker standing next to the structure gives the viewer an idea of its scale.



The majority of the official art critics in the USSR did not perceive kinetic objects and graphics as independent artworks, viewing them only as elements of decorative art or exhibition design, which were relegated to a lower rung in the official hierarchy of creative artworks [3,4].

During the early 1960s, the Dvizheniye Group's two approaches to creative work—an intuitive, artistic tendency and a more logical, projective design consciousness—developed along parallel lines, having a mutually positive influence on each other. Members of the group felt free from traditional artistic boundaries, and this relaxation of artistic consciousness transformed their concepts of nature and led to the use of new media and the instinctive creation of the Dvizheniye Group's visual style.

The first, prekinetic period of the group's artistic activity was based on the assimilation of geometric and structural form. Among the works characteristic of this period are Nusberg's *Cross* and *Programmed Picture* (1963), which are notable for their quasi-computerized symmetry, similar in style to "cold"—or extremely regular—structuralism. In the works of Zanevskaya, the geometric theme became a method for achieving optical effects. Her compositions combine an illusive sense of movement, vibrations and the transformation of subjective images. Shcherbakov's linear graphics, which share characteristics with the spatial works of N. Gabo, are limpid, elegant compositions that appear to be woven from bunches of thick lines. Infante at first developed a style of design that was notable for its multistep structure, involving the color nuancing of infinitely repeating ornamentation. He then turned to methods of ornamental and compositional construction,

which he used in a number of his spatial compositions in a manner similar to the fitting of matshëka dolls one into another.

The group's first kinetic exhibition, "Performance of Kinetic Art," was held in Leningrad in 1965 and showcased the group's experience in creating kinetic works, as it presented a wide spectrum of kinetic expression.

Nusberg's *The Flower* (1965) was a kinetic composition containing tubes with lights at their ends (Fig. 3). These tubes radiated from the tip of a central cone. Another cone at the juncture of the tubes was mounted to the axle of a motor in such a way that it could freely move inside the cone cup, which was lined with copper contacts (similar contacts were also placed in the inner cone). A fan served as the support for the cone with the light tubes and could also rotate with it. The fan's complicated movement was accompanied by flashing lights, creating unbelievable light compositions with meditative qualities.

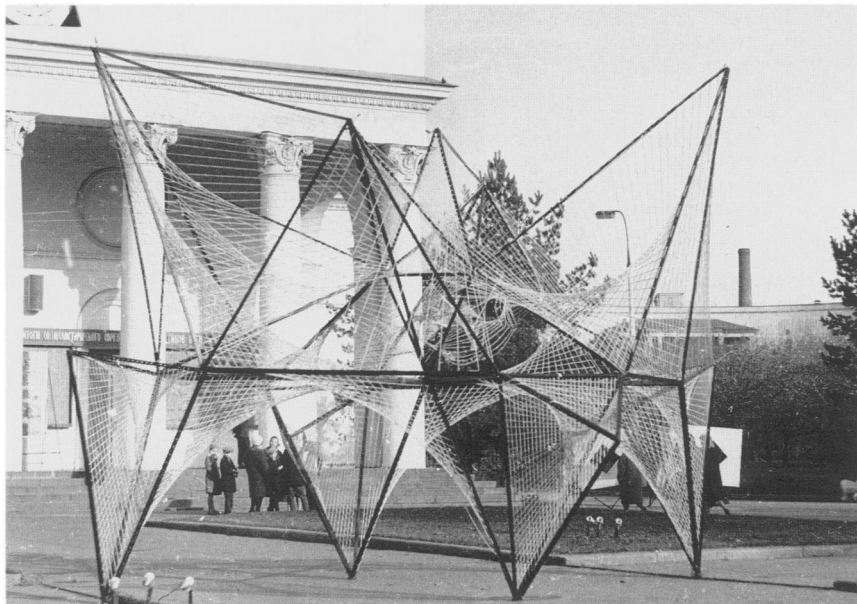
Infante's kinetic composition *Soul of Crystal* (1964) was striking in its see-through structure and the purity of its material—transparent Plexiglas lit up by slowly changing colored light. Three similar transparent compositions, each one decreasing in size and made up of square planes, were placed one inside the other. This rhythmical superpositioning of several levels of transparent Plexiglas created a barely perceptible concentration of light in the center of the composition, producing the effect of an elegant game of shadows.

Another composition by Infante, *Space—Movement—Infinity* (1963–1964), consisted of two cubic frames, one mounted inside the other. Kapron threads [5] were stretched along complex planes, and small lights were placed

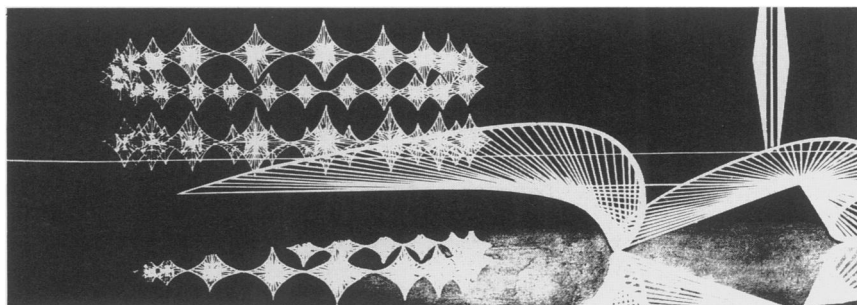
on the apexes of the frames. Each cubic frame rotated independently. The entire composition looked like a space object defying gravity and freely rotating in space. It was impossible to catch every detail of all the changes in every part of the composition at once; this characteristic transformed the composition into an object of movement and form. Infante used similar elements and types of motion in later compositions, such as his 1967 kinetic composition *Galaxy* (Fig. 4), in which small parts rotated within the larger structure of the installation. *Galaxy* was constructed in front of the pavilion of the Exhibition of Scientific Creative Works of Youth (VDNKH).

In 1965, the group created a project entitled *The Square of Nine Muses* (part of which is illustrated in Fig. 5). The project's sense of empty space and its techno-scientific forms were influenced by ideas for cities of the future that were widespread in urban planning at that time, and also by a similar project for the Civic Center of Brasília by O. Nimejra. This project was Dvizheniye's first attempt to direct its activity toward city planning. Stationary compositions with internal and external light sources were placed on a giant square that was crossed by footpaths. The absence of people and the grandiosity of the dimensions of some of the compositions and of the square itself recalled architect I. Leonidov's projects, which were also drawn on a black background in a similarly delicate graphic style. The project was reflective of the ideology of Soviet city planning in the 1960s, with its practice of creating public spaces or town centers that were vast open areas of inhuman dimensions, with rarely any buildings in sight. The distinguishing feature of Dvizheniye's project lay in its view of the objects as transparent shroud lighting, or immaterial systems.

In 1966, the "Exhibition as Performance of Kinetic Art" was held at the House of Culture of the Institute of Atomic Energy, named after I.V. Kurchatov. Along with the work of two other artists, the exhibition included six kinetic dramatic performances of Nusberg's *Metamorphoses* by the Dvizheniye Group. These performances represented a first attempt to realize Nusberg's theoretical work on synthetic theater in an actual production that included kinetic objects, light-color effects, miming, experimental music and poetic texts. It is a pity that this performance was but a preliminary



**Fig. 4.** F. Infante, *Galaxy*, light-kinetic composition, 6 × 12 × 15 m, 1967. The composition was installed in front of a pavilion where the Exhibition of Economic Achievements and the Exhibition of Scientific Creative Works of Youth were being held. The inner part of this structure rotated.



**Fig. 5.** Dvizheniye Group, detail of a drawing for *The Square of Nine Muses*, installation, 1965. The project was the first attempt on the part of the Dvizheniye Group to bring their activities into the realm of urban planning and development.

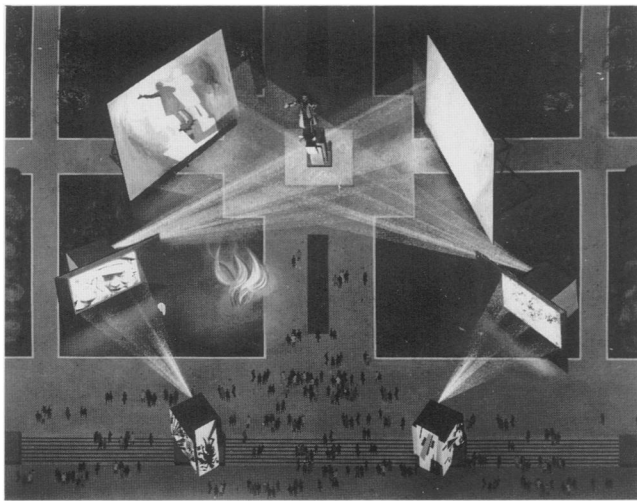
model, a feeble reflection of the idea. The group did not have the opportunity to complete this idea, either at that time or later, although the artists presented a portion of the performance in Kazan in 1967.

While preparing for the 1966 exhibition, the group wrote the "Manifesto of the Russian Kineticists." After the exhibition, the original group split up. I broke away from the group and subsequently organized the independent group "Mir" (which translates as either "Peace" or "World"). Some of the Dvizheniye artists moved to Leningrad to design a project devoted to the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian revolution (Fig. 6). They were invited to participate in this project on the basis of their work for the 1966 exhibition, which had been seen by V. Petrov, the

main architect of Leningrad. The invitation was also due to Nusberg's design project for the University Embankment.

In 1967 a model of *Cyberevents* was completed in the engineering block of the Petropavlovskaya Fortress. In an artist's statement, Nusberg wrote:

The idea to create *Cyberevents* occurred in 1965–1966. With my fellow kineticists, I built a section of the entire large model of *Cyberevents* during the summer and autumn of 1967 in Leningrad. It was a semiautomatic working model (measuring 20 m<sup>2</sup>) that consisted of 13 smaller working cybermodels. In the plan, the largest of the cybermodels was to be 35 to 50 m high, and the smallest ones, 5 to 10 m high. All the action was programmed (as were each of the objects), and it followed a general script. The full size of *Cyberevents* was to be about 5 km<sup>2</sup>. It would have a specially created landscape with planes



**Fig. 6. L. Nusberg, detail from a 1 × 1 m drawing from a project for a light-kinetic installation in Leningrad, 1967. The project was devoted to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian revolution.**

that crossed geometrically and naturally; different pools (on different levels), some of which had white-water 'rapids' (special color-light-musical effects with scents); and various kinds of lighting of the water. Also it would possibly have caused the natural deformation of the landscape and the disappearance of some of the elements of living and nonliving nature. The entire territory was provided with radio communication and had active color television communication. There were special safe footpaths, some of which led across water or fire or across crystallic media made by means of holography. Other travellers encountered pools with a depth of about 8 to 15 cm. (It was planned to provide visitors with special clothing and footwear, and in the places where one could encounter real fire or gas, or where a cyberbeing could appear, special safety measures were planned.) The roads might lie right in some cyberbeing's path, and people could take part in the action with the creatures, experiencing with them fright and despair, joy and pleasure. Holography would be used in an especially active way. Many of the members of the Dvizheniye Group took part in designing the project and in making models for *Cyberevents*—Galina Bitt, Viktor Buturlin, Francisco Infante, Lev Nusberg, Natalia Prokuratova, Irina Strelkova and others [6].

At that time, Nusberg also articulated his idea of Cybertheater [7].

In evaluating the group's activity from a historical perspective, it is possible to see its breakup as the natural result of processes going on inside the group. During a 5-year period, some of the artists working in the group were able to realize their artistic vision and rose in their professional ranks; as a result, the framework of the group became too

confining for them. Others were disappointed and gave up their work in art. The remaining members continued to pursue their business by inertia, aided by the fact that interest in the group, both in this country and abroad, was great. At the same time, new, young artists became members of the group.

The new membership completed a number of projects, including the design for the pioneer camp "Orlnok" and "Baby's Game Town"; the exhibition-performance "50 Years of Soviet Circus" (with the participation of Nusberg, Prokuratova, A. Grigor'ev, N. Kuznetsov, S. Zorin and others); an exhibition in 1970 held under the auspices of the Ministry of Electronic Industry; design work for the film *Committee of 19* (V. Grabenko, Nusberg, Bitt and Prokuratova); and the creation of three kinetic compositions for the international exhibition "Electro-72," held in Moscow. Part of the exhibition installation is shown in Color Plate D, No. 3.

When comparing the original group's work from the early 1960s with the newer work, a change in style can be noted. The new work displays a more frank use of light and more of an emphasis on plastic density and impenetrability in compositions. It aspires to greater figurativeness and realism, as manifested in a garden of kinetic trees exhibited at "Electro-72."

A transformation in the style probably occurred not only because of the change in the group's membership, but also because the idea of "order" greatly influenced the group's thought about its projects. And, of course, changes in the

orientation of the artistic thinking and culture of that time played an important role. A trend toward self-reproduction became apparent. The 1969 project Artificial Bio-Kinetic Media (ABKM) was an attempt to go beyond this trend. This ambitious project for a city of 30 to 40 million inhabitants consisted of two mutually supplementary parts: Macropolis, a bagel-shaped city measuring 55 to 60 km in diameter, and its antipode Antimacropolis, an underground anti-city built at a depth of hundreds of meters.

This project could be considered a concrete prototype of the unnatural world that would become the necessary environment for the birth, development and self-perfection of an especially clever being (a new *Homo sapiens*). In the project, one can clearly see a life-transforming trend, the desire to modify human consciousness by artistic and technical means. Totality, grandiosity and technical centrism, as well as the absence of spirituality, methods of reaction, and elements of self-organization converted this project into the kind of frightening monster that, if it does not eat its parents, changes them into something unknown.

By autumn 1974, the group had ceased to exist, both in this country and abroad, although Nusberg, the group's leader (who emigrated to West Germany in 1976 and now works in the United States) wanted to keep it going [8]. What is left? The artists with the creative drive who continued their work have remained. Also, some traces of creative fire—the mythological aura surrounding every creative work—are still there.

## References and Notes

1. For a summary of the group's basic tenets, see "Russian 'Movement' Group," *Leonardo* 1, No. 3 (1968) p. 319.
2. Taken from the manuscript of Nusberg's treatise, located in the author's personal archives.
3. L. Nusberg, "Cybertheater," *Leonardo* 2, No. 1, 61–62 (1969).
4. Lev Nusberg und die Gruppe "Bewegung," Moskau, 1962–1977. Museum Bochum. Kunstsammlung, 25 Febr. bis 2 April 1978, exh. cat.
5. Editor's Note: Kapron is an artificial fiber, similar to nylon, produced in Russia.
6. Quote taken from author's personal manuscript archive.
7. See Nusberg [3].
8. See [4].