

The Monument to the Third International
(Tatlin's Most Recent Work)

The days run together like train cars overflowing with strange and variegated vehicles, cannons, crowds yelling about something or other. The days thunder like a pile driver, blow after blow, and the blows have already blended and ceased to be heard, just as people living by the sea don't hear the sound of the water. The blows thunder somewhere in the chest below consciousness.

We are living in the quiet of thunder.

In this paved air has been born the iron spiral of a project: a monument the size of two Cathedrals of St. Isaac's.

This spiral, which is leaning on its side, is prevented from collapsing by its powerful, diagonally standing form.

Such a basic structure of the project for a monument to the Third International is the work of the artist Tatlin.

The twists and turns of the spiral are united by a network of leaning stanchions. In their transparent hollow turn three geometric bodies. Below moves a cylinder with a speed of one turn a year; the pyramid above it turns once a month and the ball at the apex completes a full turn every day. The waves of the radio station standing at the very apex continue the monument into the air.

Here for the first time iron is standing on its hind legs and seeking its artistic formula.

In the age of construction cranes, as fine as the wisest Martian, iron has the right to go on a rampage and to remind people that our "age," for some reason or other, has been calling itself the "iron" age since the time of Ovid, though there was, as yet, no iron art. One could argue at length about the monument. The bodies turning in its body are small and relatively light in comparison to its enormous "general" body. Their turning itself hardly changes its appearance. It has more the character of a project than a finished product. The monument is imbued with utilitarianism. This spiral may not aspire to be an apartment building, but all the same it is somehow being put to good use.

According to the plan, in the lower cylinder we have the rotating Sovnarkom (Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov) in the shape of a globe, and in the upper cylinder we have "Rosta"(Rossiiskoe Telegrafnoe Agentstvo).

The word in poetry is not just a word. It draws in its wake dozens and thousands of associations. It is permeated with them just as the Petersburg air during a blizzard is permeated with snow.

A painter or a counter-relief artist is not free to choose in this blizzard of associations the movement across the canvas of a painting or between the stanchions of an iron spiral. These works of art have their own semantics.

The Soviet of People's Commissars has been taken by Tatlin into the monument, or so it seems to me, as new artistic material, which will be used along with "ROSTA" for the creation of artistic form.

The monument is made of iron, glass and revolution.

Ivan Puni

Ivan Puni is essentially a shy man. His hair is black, he speaks quietly. On his father's side of the family, he's Italian. Only at the movies did he see on the screen quiet, shy people.

A house painter with a long ladder on his shoulder, is walking down the street. He's modest and quiet. But the ladder catches on people's hats, breaks glass, stops street-cars, destroys buildings.

As for Puni, he goes on painting his pictures.

If you were to collect all the reviews about him in Russia and squeeze out of them their rage, it would be possible to collect several buckets of extremely caustic liquid and, by inoculation of this liquid, infect all the dogs in Berlin with hydrophobia.

In Berlin, there are 500,000 dogs.

Puni offends people because he never teases. He paints a picture, looks at it and thinks, "What have I got to do to it? That's how it has to be."

His paintings cannot be altered and are needed.

He sees the spectator, but is organically incapable of taking him into account. He accepts the abuse of critics as one would accept a change in the weather.

While Puni lives, he makes conversation. So Columbus, sailing on his ship to undiscovered America, sat on the deck and played checkers.

Meanwhile Puni is a painter's painter. Painters don't understand him yet, but they're already nervous.

After Puni's death—and I don't want his death; we're the same age and I'm also lonely—after Puni's death, a museum will be built over his grave. In the museum will hang his pants and hat. People will say: "He was a genius and yet how modest he was. With that gray hat pulled down to his eyebrows, he was hiding the rays that emanated from his forehead."

Someone will write about his pants, too.

And really, Puni knew how to dress.

On the wall will hang the gas bill for the Puni studio. The bill will have been paid with special care. Our time will be called the "Punic era." May all those who come to cover our graves with their written praise be covered with leprosy.

In our name they will oppress future generations, the way food is compressed in a can.

The recognition of an artist is a means of neutralizing him.

And maybe there won't be a museum?

We'll do our best.

Meanwhile Puni, with his polite smile, attentively paints his pictures. He carries under his gray sport coat a furious red fox, which quietly gnaws on him. That's very painful, even though it's just a story taken from an elementary school reader.

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Shklovsky
KNIGHT'S MOVE

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION
BY RICHARD SHELDON

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