

Regarding Texture and Counter-Reliefs

It often behooves one to read complaints about the difficulty of expressing one's thought in art.

Poets have filled their poems with these complaints. Gornfeld, feeling sorry for the poor poets, has written an article called "Torments of the Word."

To look at the form of art, that is, at art itself, as at an interpreter translating the thoughts of the artist from the language of his soul into a language comprehensible to the spectator is a commonplace. For those who support such a view, "the word" in literature is "a color" in the painting—a regrettable necessity. From these "means" available to artists have been demanded, above all else, transparency and intelligibility. Artists have paid lip service to these demands, but in their studios they have gone their own way.

What makes art enchanting?

The outside world does not exist. Equally nonexistent, and equally imperceptible, are things replaced by words, and non-existent are words which are hardly used, hardly pronounced.

The outside world is outside of art. Art is perceived as a series of hints, a series of algebraic signs, as a collection of things having volume, but no substance—texture.

Texture is the main feature of that special world of especially constructed things, the aggregate of which we usually call art.

The word in art and the word in life are profoundly different. In life it plays the role of a bead on an abacus, in art it's a texture. We have it in sound. It reverberates and we listen to it in its full potential.

In life we fly over the world as Jules Verne's heroes flew from the earth to the moon in a closed sphere but in our sphere there are no windows. The entire work of the artist-poet and the artist-painter consists first and foremost in creating a continuous palpable thing, a textured thing.

A poet having as the material of his creation formal structures—not only the word-sound but also the word-concept—also creates from it new things. Good and evil in art are textures. It is wrong to think that art, as it changes, gets better. The very concept of improvement as a rising upward is anthropomorphic.

The forms of art replace one another.

There are minutes when, if art has not declined, it has absorbed a set of elements alien to it. Such, for example, is the work of our Wanderers.

In that case, art lives despite those elements, which take part in its life as a bullet in the chest takes part in the life of the body.

It's wrong to say that Repin is a lousy artist, but it is necessary to remember that he is an artist to the extent that he has decided questions about the creation of a special breed of things—a canvas covered with paint.

On the other hand, artists, often thinking that they are resolving purely artistic problems are, in fact, not

resolving them but merely showing off. The result is the corollary of algebra in painting, that is, an "unmade painting"—a thing essentially prosaic. To such symbolism in painting it is necessary to relegate the school of the Suprematists.

Their paintings are rather "cooked up" than made. They aren't organized by taking account of the continuous nature of perception.

True, here the "question posed" is not about the harmfulness of religion or serfdom, but about the relation of a red rectangle to a white background but, in fact, this is a painting oriented to ideas, too.

Of all the Russian artists, there are two who, more than anyone else, have addressed the question of how to create fabricated, continuous things—Tatlin and Altman.

Altman has done this in a series of paintings in which he has bared the orientation to the texture, where the whole concept of paintings is juxtaposed to flat planes of various roughness. Tatlin is moving away from painting.

In the academy (in the free studios of Vasily Island) I attended an exhibition of things from Tatlin's studio. Unfortunately, I didn't see his own work—the model of the Monument to the Third International.

The model will be shown in November, at which time we will be able to speak of it concretely.

For the time being, though, we can say that Tatlin has left paintings and pictures, which he made so well, in order to move into contrasting one object, taken just as it is, to another.

I did see the work of one of Tatlin's students. It's a big square of parquet, developed in such a way that its pieces

vary in texture and present, in a manner of speaking, several surfaces moving away from one another. One piece of the square is occupied by a piece of copper of irregular form, to which are juxtaposed strips of tracing paper, fastened in front of the basic plane of the work.

The ultimate task for Tatlin and his students is, obviously, the creation of a new world of palpability, the transference or dissemination of the methods by which to construct artistic things, "things of daily life." The ultimate goal of such a movement is to construct a tangible new world.

A counter-relief, a sketch, pieces of some sort of special paradise where there are no names and no voids, where life is like our life today—a "flight in a sphere," from one point to another like traveling on an invisible road, from station to station.

The new world should be a continuous world.

I don't know whether Tatlin is right or wrong, I don't know whether the bent tin-plate leaves of his students' compositions will be able to blossom in the lorp'd counter-reliefs of a new world.

I don't believe in miracles. That's why I'm not an

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Shklovsky
KNIGHT'S MOVE

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION
BY RICHARD SHELDON

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

Translator's Introduction	vii
<i>Knight's Move</i>	
First Preface.....	3
<i>Bundle</i>	
Second Preface.....	5
<i>Setting the Frame</i>	
Petersburg During the Blockade	9
<i>Regarding Art and Revolution</i>	
"Ullya, Ullya, Martians".....	21
Pounding Nails with a Samovar.....	25
Gooseberry Jam.....	28
A Flag Is Snapping.....	31
The Appeasers.....	34
Drama and Mass Productions.....	36
Papa—That's an Alarm Clock.....	39
Collective Creativity.....	42
In My Own Defense.....	46
Regarding Psychological Footlights.....	48
Speaking in a Loud Voice.....	51
<i>The Visual Arts</i>	
Regarding "The Great Metalworker".....	54
Space in Painting and the Suprematists.....	58

Regarding Texture and Counter-Reliefs	
The Monument to the Third International	
Ivan Puni.....	...71
	<i>The Law of Inequality</i>
Parallels in Tolstoy.....	73
	<i>Contemporary Theater</i>
Embellished Tolstoy	79
Folk Comedy and <i>The First Distiller</i>	83
The Art of the Circus.....	86
With Regard to Tastes.....	89
Apropos of <i>King Lear</i>	92
The Old and the New.....	96
Regarding Merezhkovsky.....	98
The Comic and the Tragic.....	101
Shoeing a Flea.....	107
	112
Eating Fish by Cutting It with a Knife.....	111
A Thousand Herrings	
	<i>Completing the Frame</i>
I and My Coat.....	115
	<i>A Rock on a String</i>
Rollercoaster.....	120
Coffins Back.....	122
A Boxer Down for the Count.....	124
A Free Port.....	126
The Tsar's Kitchen .	<i>Afte,</i>
	.130
	—————
Translator's Notes133