

A Few Russians, before and after Tolstoy.

”For the art of the future, there will serve only such sentiments as draw men toward union or already unite them in the present; and the form of the art will be such as will be accessible to all men. And so the ideal of the future perfection will not be in the exclusiveness of the sentiment which is accessible to but a few, but on the contrary, in its universality and not in the bulk, obscurity, and complexity of form, as it is considered at present, but, on the contrary, in its brevity, lucidity, and simplicity of expression. And only when art shall be such, will it not amuse and corrupt people, as is the case at present, demanding for this a waste of their best forces, but be what it ought to be—a tool for the transference of the religious consciousness from the sphere of reason and intellect into that of feeling, thus bringing people actually in life itself, nearer to that perfection and union which the religious consciousness indicates to them.”



The Icon, from the earliest days to the late 19th C.

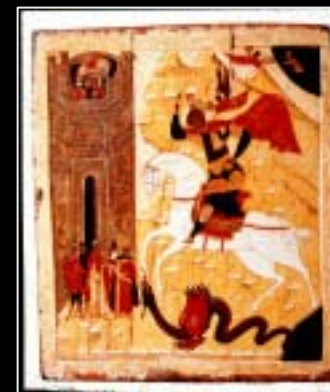


The Icon Painter St. Alimpij

Why they mattered—an art of power



Why they mattered—an art of power



Why they mattered—an art of power, and it was remembered



But Peter the Great and then Catherine “Europeanized” Russia (made it modern) and Catherine founded an art school so artists would know how.



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and Catherine founded an art school so artists would know how.

And by the mid 19th C. they knew how to entertain the bourgeoisie.



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Others set out to wander Russia to show “real” life.



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And real life is neither amusing nor nice

Yaroshenko, Nikolai Aleksandrovich

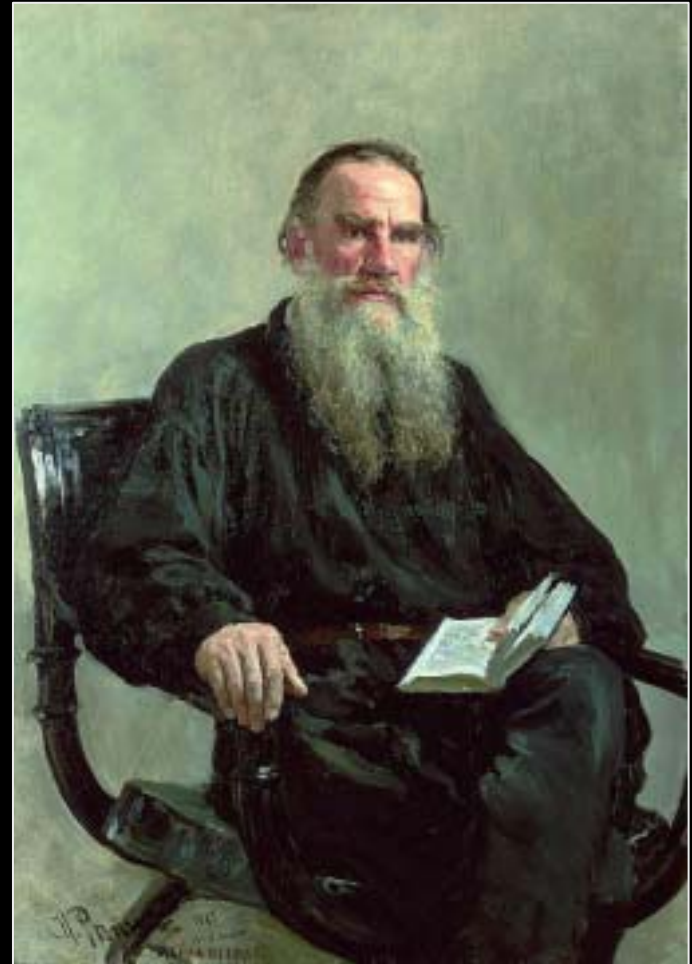
Life Goes on Everywhere 1888. oil on canvas, 212 x 106

The topic of social contradictions was very important for Yaroshenko. The picture was painted under the impression of a story by Lev Tolstoy entitled *What do people cherish in life?* The artist originally planned to call his work “Where there is love, there is God.” In the window of a wagon carrying convicts, the prisoners have crowded together as they feed pigeons. The idea of the painting is humanity which is preserved in inhuman conditions. The central group reminds us of the Holy Family Like many of the Itinerant (Peredvizhniki) artists, Yaroshenko used parallels from the Gospel to enhance the social resonance of his canvases. “This speaks so very much to the heart,” Lev Tolstoy said about this painting.



Others set out to wander Russia to show “real” life.

And real life is neither amusing nor nice



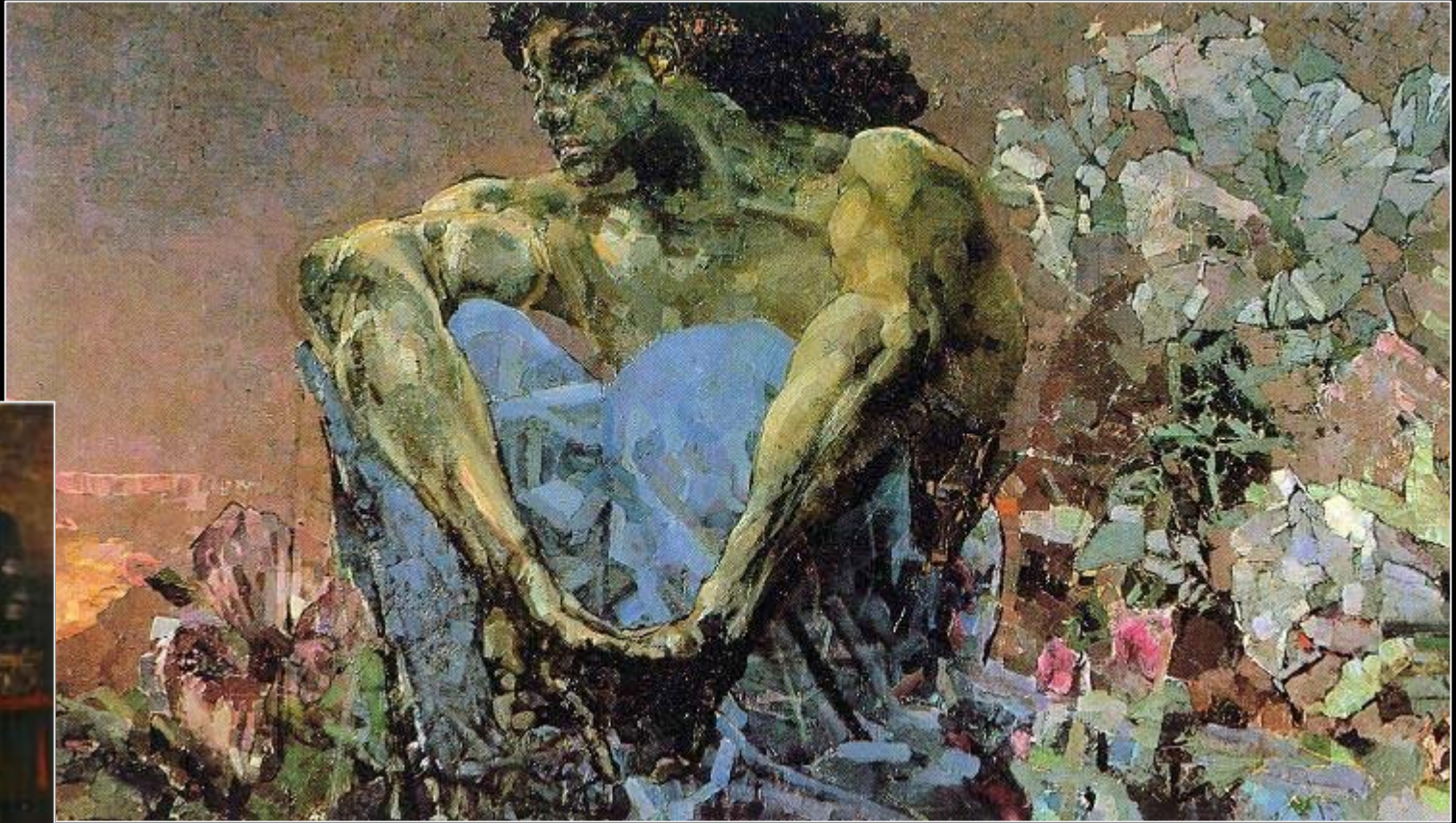
By the end of the 19th C., Tolstoy was writing his “What Is Art”...

From Leo Tolstoy, "What Is Art?" (1898)

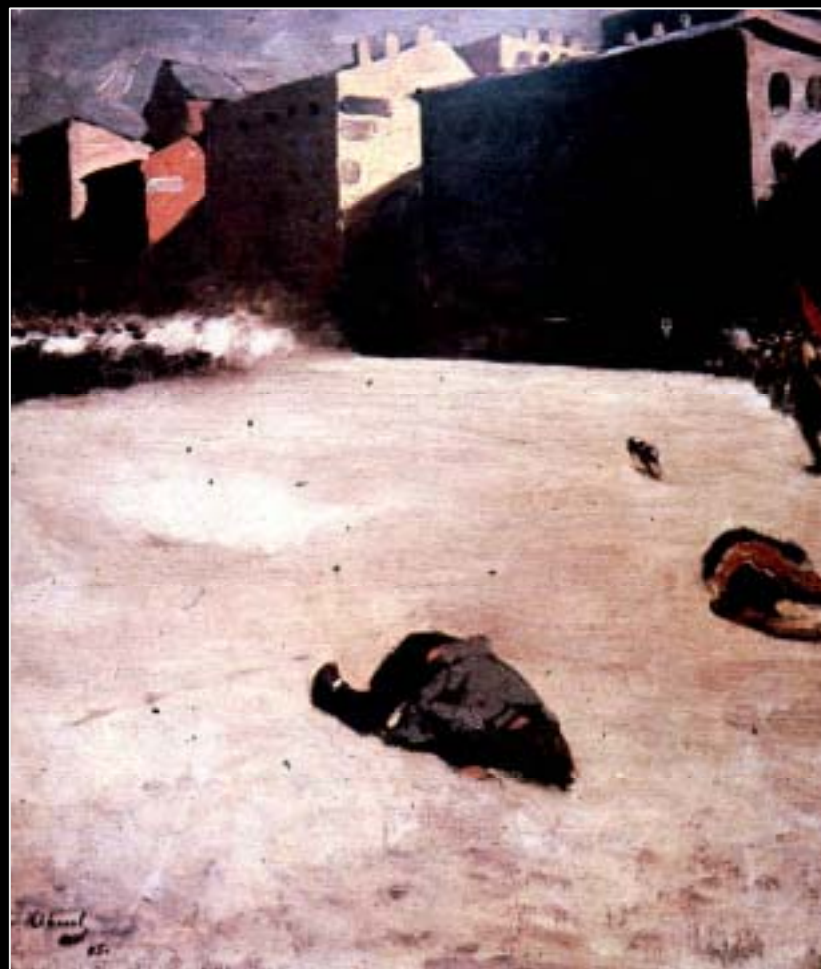
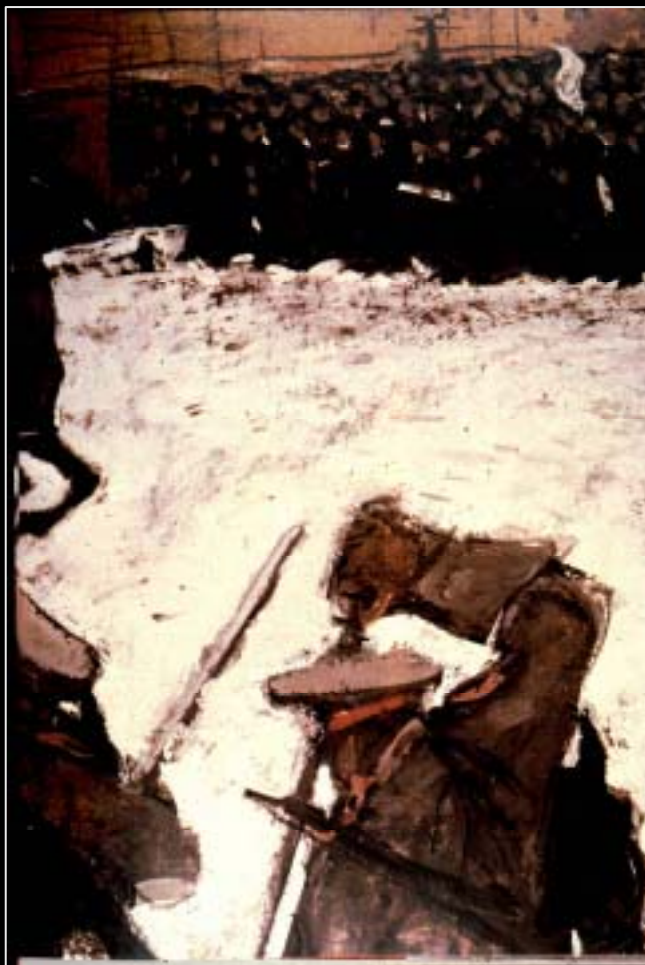
Art is a human activity, which consists in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, communicates to others the sensations experienced by him, so that other men are infected by these sensations and experience them.

The arbitrary union of beauty, truth and goodness, incommensurable and mutually alien conceptions into one has served as the foundation of that remarkable theory according to which there was completely wiped out the distinction between good art, which conveys good sensations, and bad art, which conveys evil sensations; and one of the lowest manifestations of art, the art for enjoyment only, against which all the teachers of humanity have warned men—began to be regarded as the very highest art. And art did not become that important work which it was destined to be, but instead became an idle amusement for idle people.

Becoming poorer and poorer in contents and less and less comprehensible in form, art has in its last manifestations lost all the properties of art and has given way to semblances of art.



While S. I. Mamontov supported and Vrubel painted a Seated Demon that scandalized and thrilled the art world of “The men of the wealthy classes demand from art the communication of sensations which are agreeable to them, and the artists try to satisfy these demands. But it is very hard to satisfy these demands, since the men of the wealthy classes, passing their lives in idleness and luxury, demand constant diversions from art.



And while by the early 20th C. the world began to fall apart...

The “event” of 1905



Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—

Malevich and Cezanne.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—

Malevich and Cubism.

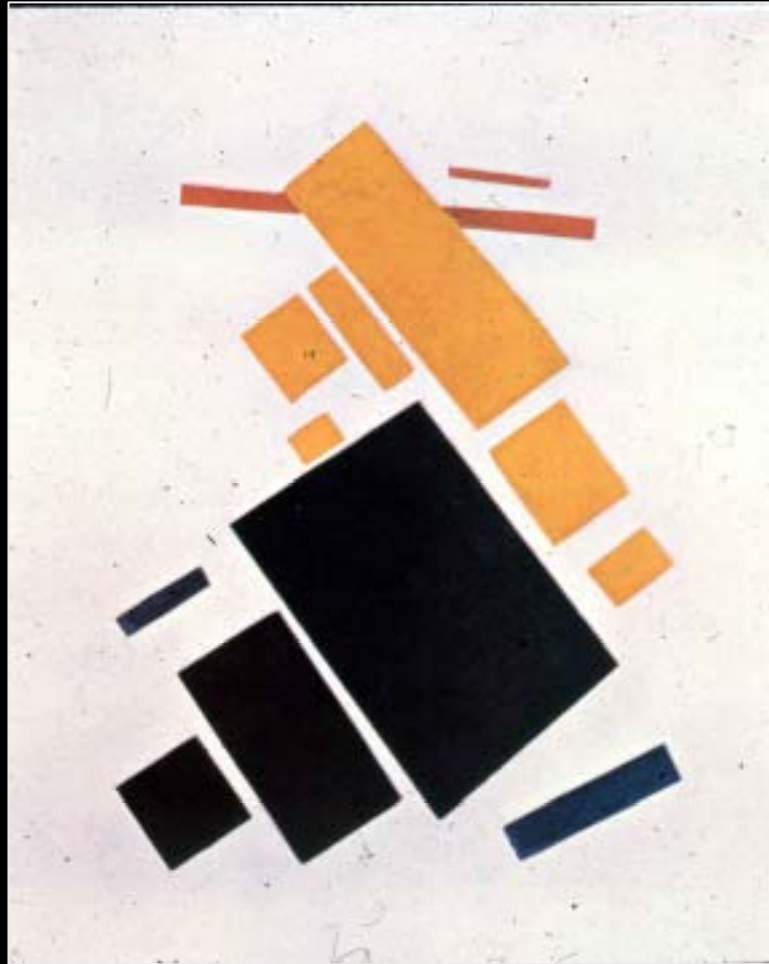
(What would Tolstoy say?)



Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—

Malevich and Futurism.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



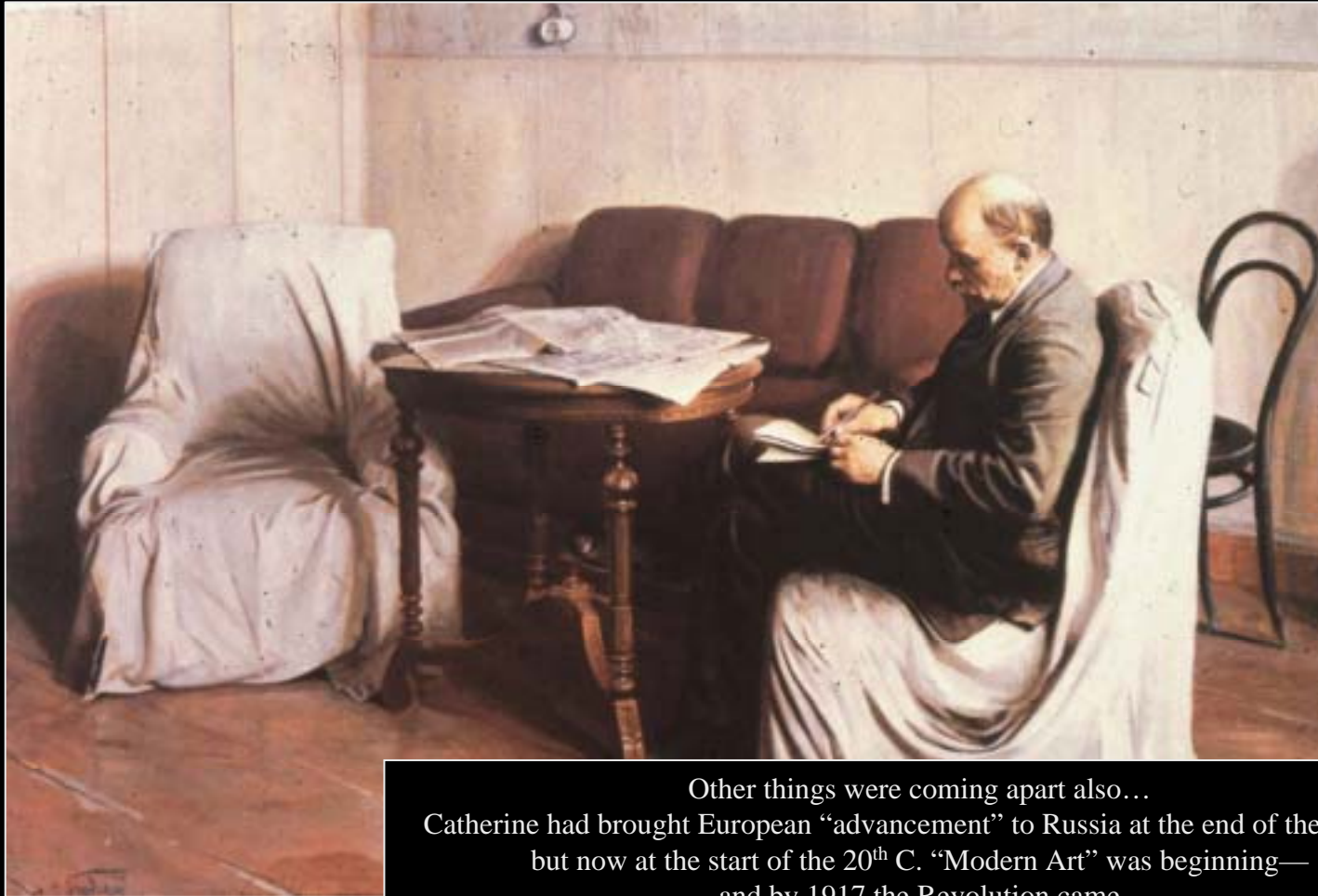
Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—

Malevich and Suprematism—the Russian “Non-Objective Art”.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—
and by 1917 the Revolution came
(What would Tolstoy say?)



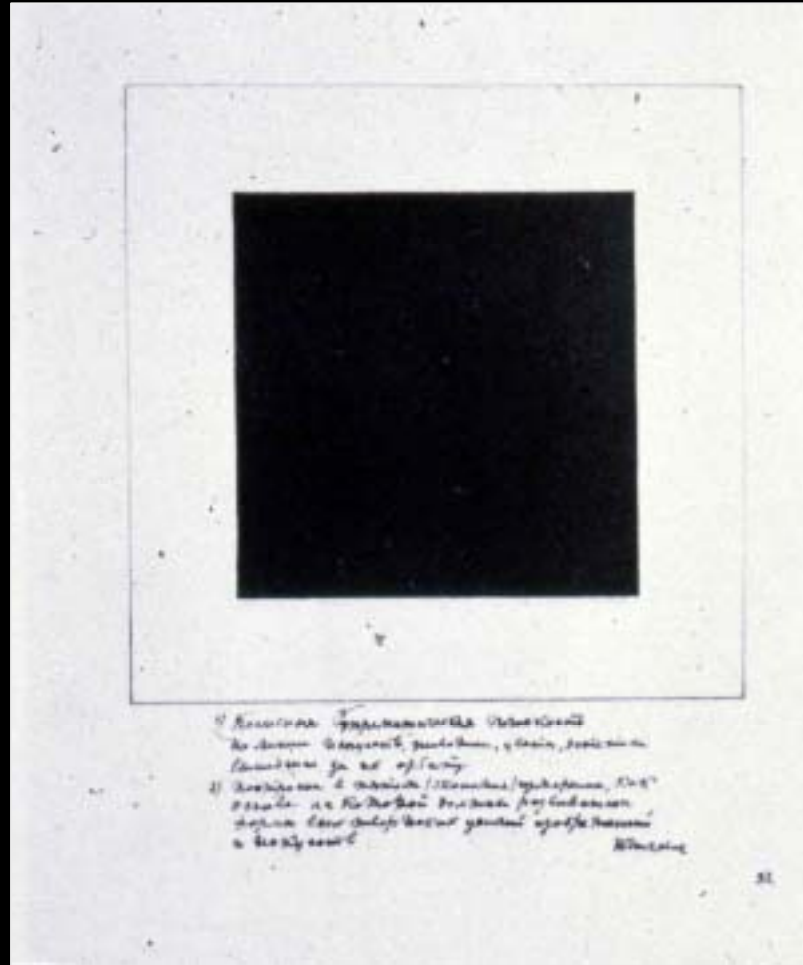
Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—
and by 1917 the Revolution came
and Lenin said when art shall be such, it will not amuse and corrupt people, but be a
tool for the transference of the political consciousness from the sphere of reason and
intellect into that of feeling, thus bringing people actually in life itself, nearer to that
perfection and union which the political consciousness indicates to them.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—
and the Revolution was Bathing the Red Horse

(What would Tolstoy say?)



Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—
and the Revolution was Bathing the Red Horse while Malevich
was making the Black Square
(What would Tolstoy say?)



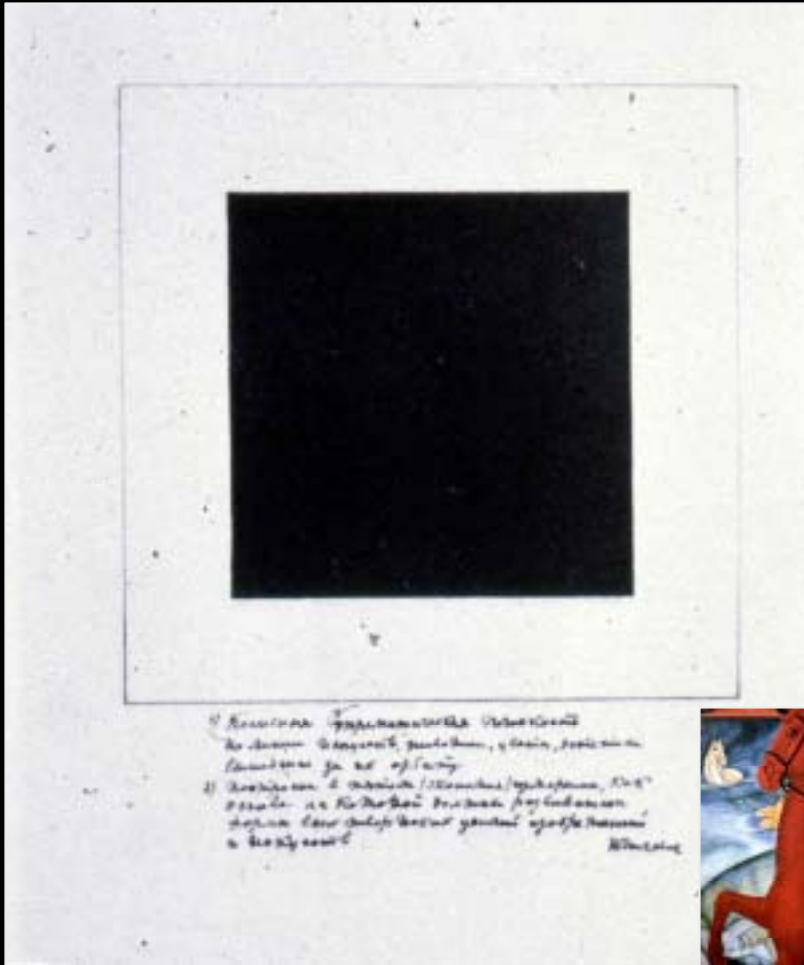
Other things were coming apart also...
Catherine had brought European “advancement” to Russia at the end of the 18th C.,
but now at the start of the 20th C. “Modern Art” was beginning—
and the Revolution was Bathing the Red Horse while Tatlin was imagining
his Monument to the Third International

(What would Tolstoy say?)



By the mid 1920's Stalin came to power as Chairman of the Communist Party, the party of the people. And as Chairman of the Party, he was "In any given historic time and in every society of men there exists a higher comprehension of the meaning of life, attained by the men of this society, which determines the highest good after which this society is striving." Stalin preferred to Bathe the Red Horse.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



By the mid 1920's Stalin came to power as Chairman of the Communist Party, the party of the people. And as Chairman of the Party, he was "In any given historic time and in every society of men there exists a higher comprehension of the meaning of life, attained by the men of this society, which determines the highest good after which this society is striving." Stalin preferred bathing the red horse to any black squares or turning towers "sounds like they won't last."

(What would Tolstoy say?)



And so it came to pass that Tatlin died poor, obscure and forgotten (although the tower remains a monument in the architectural memory of the West); and Malevich found out he had better put the Black Squares away and start painting peasants.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



Fig. 51. Malevich lying in state in his Leningrad apartment, May 17-18, 1935



Although Malevich found out he had better put the Black Squares away and start painting peasants, he kept them in his bedroom, and his friends remembered them.

(What would Tolstoy say?)



Although Malevich found out he had better put the Black Squares away and start painting peasants, he kept them in his bedroom, and his friends remembered them when he died.

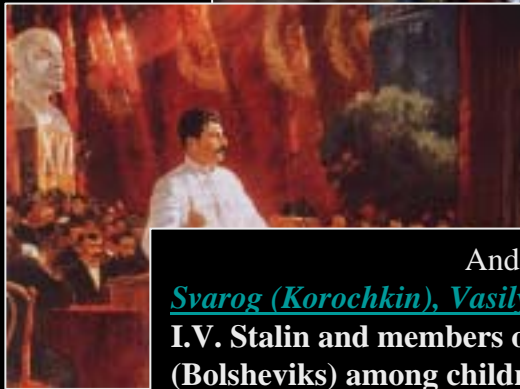
(What would Tolstoy say?)



And so Stalin set out to do what Tolstoy had said was the goal of art—

“And only when art shall be such, will it not amuse and corrupt people, as is the case at present, demanding for this a waste of their best forces, but be what it ought to be—a tool for the transference of the religious [political] consciousness from the sphere of reason and intellect into that of feeling, thus bringing people actually in life itself, nearer to that perfection and union which the religious [political] consciousness indicates to them.”

(To make what Stalin called “:The New Soviet Man”)



And so Stalin set out to do what Tolstoy had said was the goal of art—

Svarog (Korochkin), Vasily Semenovich

I.V. Stalin and members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) among children in the M. Gorky Central Park of Culture and Rest in Moscow 1939

Despite the descriptive name of the work, it does not reflect the actual content. The meeting between the children and the country's leaders – I.V. Stalin, K.E. Voroshilov, M.I. Kalinin, V.M. Molotov and M.M. Kaganovich – was an event that could occur in reality, but in a painting it takes on the features of a myth. A glow is radiated not only by the faces and the figures, but even by the landscape, the sky, everything around. What occurred has, as it were, been passed through the filter of a dream about the unity of government and people.



And so Stalin set out to do what Tolstoy had said was the goal of art—

Yefanov, Vasily Prokofyevich (Prokopyevich)

An Unforgettable Encounter. The leaders of the Party and Government of the All-Union Conference of Women Home-makers and Engineering and Technical Workers in Heavy Industry in the Kremlin. 1936–1937. oil on canvas.

The canvas depicts a joyful meeting of non-working women with engineering and technical personnel of enterprises in heavy industry as well as their enthusiasm for the leaders of the Soviet nation. In this work the artist for the first time brought together elements of a group portrait and historical painting that were popular in Socialist Realism. He composed the painting as a staged theatrical culmination with typical stage-managed details - the rhythm of the applauding hands, the flower which has fallen onto the papers of the chairman and the unsteady leaning chair.



And so Stalin set out to do what Tolstoy had said was the goal of art—

[Gerasimov, Aleksander Mikhaylovich](#)

I.V. Stalin and K.E. Voroshilov in the Kremlin after the Rain 1938

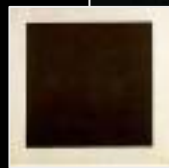
Alexander Gerasimov was a complex and contradictory figure in Soviet art of the 1930s–1960s. His outstanding capabilities did not prevent him from being a party functionary in the arts over a period of 20 years in the USSR Academy of Arts where he an active fighter for the principles of Socialist Realism and an opponent of all deviations form the official doctrine. For an entire generation of artists and lovers of painting Gerasimov personified the totalitarian regime in art.. Gerasimov applied in his work a rather different “photographic” compositional approach making use, very likely, of numerous photos and depicting the party and government leaders on strolls in the Kremlin, along new parapets on the bank of the Moscow canal then under construction.



And so Stalin set out to do what Tolstoy had said was the goal of art—

But Tolstoy also said—

“The men of the wealthy classes demand from art the communication of sensations which are agreeable to them, and the artists try to satisfy these demands. But it is very hard to satisfy these demands, since the men of the wealthy classes, passing their lives in idleness and luxury, demand constant diversions from art. It is, however, impossible at will to produce art, even though of the lowest description. And so the artists, to satisfy the demands of the men of the higher classes, had to work out methods by means of which they could produce subjects which resemble art, and so methods of borrowing, imitation, effectiveness, and entertainingness were worked out.”



The USSR fell in the 1980s. There came once again to be rich business men—the “Oligarchs.” Malevich and all came back as collector items for rich people. And Komar and Melamid ridiculed it all... Even ridicule is an entertainment for the rich.
(What would Tolstoy say?)



As contents for the art of the future, there will serve only such sentiments as draw men toward union or already unite them in the present; and the form of the art will be such as will be accessible to all men.—a tool for the transference of the religious consciousness from the sphere of reason and intellect into that of feeling, thus bringing people actually in life itself, nearer to that perfection and union which the religious consciousness indicates to them.

When?