

Aleksander Kedrin
THE FORMULAE
OF CREATION



Moscow 2017





Ceramic Plate
"Magnificent Summer Day"
 1985. Chamotte, glass,
 smalt, colored glaze.
 63 cm diameter

p. 1
Hope for The Incurable
 1994. Canvas, oil.
 80 × 79,5 cm

p. 2-3
Once Again (fragment)
 1993. Canvas, oil.
 77 × 100 cm

p. 5
The Autumn (fragment)
 1989. Cardboard, oil.
 80 × 50 cm





Aleksander Kedrin in His Workshop
May 2017

Aleksander Kedrin
New York, January 2001

Life as a Creative Process

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...*
(Psalm 23)

*I know not, if grace will touch
My soul, in all its sinful sickness,
Will it succeed, rebel and rise again,
Will this spiritual swoon pass?*
Tyutchev

*My age, my beast, who will be able
To peer into your pupils
And with his own blood glue together
The vertebrae of two centuries?*
Mandelstam (tr. I. Bernstein)

I was born in Tashkent, in Asia, where vicissitudes of fate had tossed my father, a graphic artist with excellent education and a member of the Petersburg aristocracy, who graduated the Academy after studying under Dobuzhinsky, Rudakov, Lebedev... He raised me in the centuries-old traditions of Russian culture and instilled in me the taste for art of the Paris school.

Most importantly, my father bestowed upon me an appreciation for ethics, the intuition to perceive beauty, and the pursuit of the sublime. He taught me that one cannot bargain with their conscience, and I took that lesson to heart at an early age. Dishonesty is repulsive in art, just as it is in life and in love. Man’s misfortune begins with his lie, and that lie is even more obvious in art. The Muse is a fastidious lady, and never forgives deceitfulness! Art is a form of confession: a lie cannot be hidden in it. I always tried to speak honestly, in every medium and genre, under every regime, on every continent... Inspiration is, in my opinion, a state of possession by the truth and communion with the infinite. It is necessary and essential to value these moments.

“Religion, philosophy and art are three methods of discovering the truth” according to Hegel. Dante, in the 10th canto of “Paradise” tells the reader “I’ve set before thee; henceforth feed thyself...” That is to say, the end result of the artists labor can be understood by an audience that is not only sufficiently prepared, but is willing to exert empathy. When one looks at a painting, it is obvious if a mystery is present, or not. It is impossible to simulate or hide it, just like love. The third dimension of my canvases, their inner meaning, is the mystery of creation, expression of the sublime. I do not consider myself an innovator or avant-garde; rather, someone that continues the traditions of Russian and World art. Interpreting talent traditionally, as a mission, I overcame the temptation of modernism and spontaneous self-expression.

The bloody chaos, weathered by three generations of both great and hapless Russia, made the turmoil of rampaging metaphors and gestures, and in reality, all rebellion and cynical sneering, tactless. Almost all who confronted this irrational force, irrational inevitability, irrational horror, dramatically changed their perception of the world. Many believed in the inevitability, others – in rationality and even practicality of what was happening in the USSR. All were seized by the realization that there was no way back. This sensation was based on past experience, premonition of the future, and the hypnosis of the present. Many of us were allowed to live only

on the condition that we would hide our nature, and pretend to be one of those, whose world we were now living in. Recognizing myself as an artist, I realized I was a “white crow” — a socially foreign element in the soviet society.

The 60’s began. Our exhibition of student-artists in Tashkent was crushed. In the capital, Pasternak and Brodsky were publicly tried. Everything was still under the control and pressure of the KGB. Socialist realism remained the only art form allowed the artist, called upon to glorify the Communist regime.

Taking my father’s advice, I began to work in ceramics. It was an excellent camouflage: in the eyes of our public officials, I became somehow less dangerous. I did not show my paintings to anyone until 1990. In ceramics, on the other hand, I continued the work of an artist and created that, which no one was permitted to in painting, as the medium itself allowed to conceal serious art under the guise of decorative and utilitarian wares.

To preserve myself as an individual, remain myself, without yielding to conformism, seemed utopian. And yet, somehow it happened, thank God... But, none of us could hope to come out of this meat-grinder unaltered, unchanged, because of the constant ideological pressure that left no other alternative for salvation...

The absolute majority were converted, and turned into obedient executants. People did not even understand what was occurring, and knew not what they did. Only the genius of the poet could fathom the supernatural horror in the rapid deformation of consciousness:

*For the rattling glory of ages to come,
For the high tribe of men,
At the feast of the fathers I have forfeited my cup
And my joy, and my honor as well.*

*A wolfhound-age leaps up on my back,
But I am not a wolf by blood.
Better find me a coat of Siberian steppes
And stuff me inside, like a hat...*

*Let me no more look at the coward, at the mire,
At the bloody bones in the wheel... (tr. I. Bernstein)*

These lines by Mandelstam are completely incomprehensible to those who did not live through the horror of Soviet Russia or were spiritually castrated by conformism and annihilated by conscience. Universal stupor of perverted spirituality ubiquitously established itself, and no one could ever escape unscathed, completely without injury.

In the modern world of imaginary values, the viewer has long lost the ability to distinguish sincerity from simulation. “The blind, how numerous art thou! How few are left that see the light...,” wrote Mother Maria (Skobtseva). Due to the absolute incomprehension by his contemporaries, the artist is condemned to internal emigration. Often working for his own sake in the catacombs and caverns of the megalopolis. In totalitarian states, the politicized culture of contemporary society pursues him even underground, drags him to the public square, demanding nationwide debasement of truth — not only of simulation and treachery, but of vulgarity. And in the West, the laws of “free market” accomplish the same thing — the artist is imposed on to create the swill of popular culture, which is fed by the manipulators of public opinion to a society of consumers, turned into a herd of swine...

That, which is occurring in our time with art and art-business, is comparable to the current soulless technicism and urbanism, and, as a result, leads to the emergence of serious spir-



Silver Spring

1994. Canvas, oil.
68 x 75 cm

itual and ecological problems: diseases of civilization. The Greenpeace movement and the combined chorus of scientists from around the world (about the real danger of environmental disaster) have altered public opinion, and now this issue is being dealt with.

Art is a different matter: nowadays, the muse of a poet and artist has become a cheap harlot, a streetwalker... Mass media enthusiastically advertises the poisonous swill of popular art, and society merrily and thoughtlessly swallows it, not caring a bit about the consequences of intellectual and spiritual poisoning and zombification.

The 20th century state of affairs has long become alarming: the ozone layer, alcoholism, drugs, AIDS, nuclear disarmament and ecological disasters concern millions of people. And yet the rapid deformation of consciousness, under the aggressive influence of false poetry, false literature, false art, false music — almost complete takeover by popularized counterculture — worries very few!

Aesthetic impoverishment and decline, cynicism and marginality supersede talent and thought process... Discussion of such topics at gatherings of poets, philosophers, artists and theologians are only of a private nature. Society is used to seeing a collection of poetry or an art exhibition as an assortment of monsters and anecdotes, likening the reader, viewer or listener to a drunken idler at a village fair.

Degradation, spiritual crookedness and affectation, corrode the artist as well as the viewer. This process is bilateral and, to me, appears threatening, since we are on the threshold of universal spiritual transmutation. I paid with both health and life for the Grace of Enlightenment, but catharsis can never be achieved without cost! I am a very lucky person, maybe that is why I have something to say to people. Yes, I am losing my sight with age, yet it can be an advantage: I no longer notice the repulsive details and trash. "I see not who strolls under the window, but the stars in the sky I clearly discern..." These lines are from Ehrenburg's translation of my favorite poet, Francois Villon. I have loved French poetry and art since childhood.

In 1967, three of my works made it to the international exposition, "EXPO-67", but I was not allowed to travel to Montreal, forbidden to leave the country. Only as an immigrant, 30 years later, was I able to visit it: VAND-ART gallery held an exhibition of my works there.

My works are my thoughts, my attempts to plumb the meaning of life. I see the aim of an artist in sharing with the viewer his experiences and thoughts on the search for the Path, Truth and Life. It may be that there are many more questions here than answers. The confrontation between good and evil, light and darkness, love and hatred — these are the things that excite me. I attempt to answer the question: why does a human, who enters the world in search of happiness, suffers so deeply, so recklessly and contrarily, never exploiting his chance. I am interested in the reasons for the deformation of consciousness and, as a consequence, the downfall of humanity. Man is good; why, then, does he choose the wrong path? I am convinced that the reason is in the spiritual and moral stance of the person. Pyort Kapitsa, a Russian physicist, very subtly noted "Man can learn to be happy in any circumstances; he becomes unhappy only after bargaining with his own consciousness..." Concreteness of a scientist and the figurative precision of a poet.

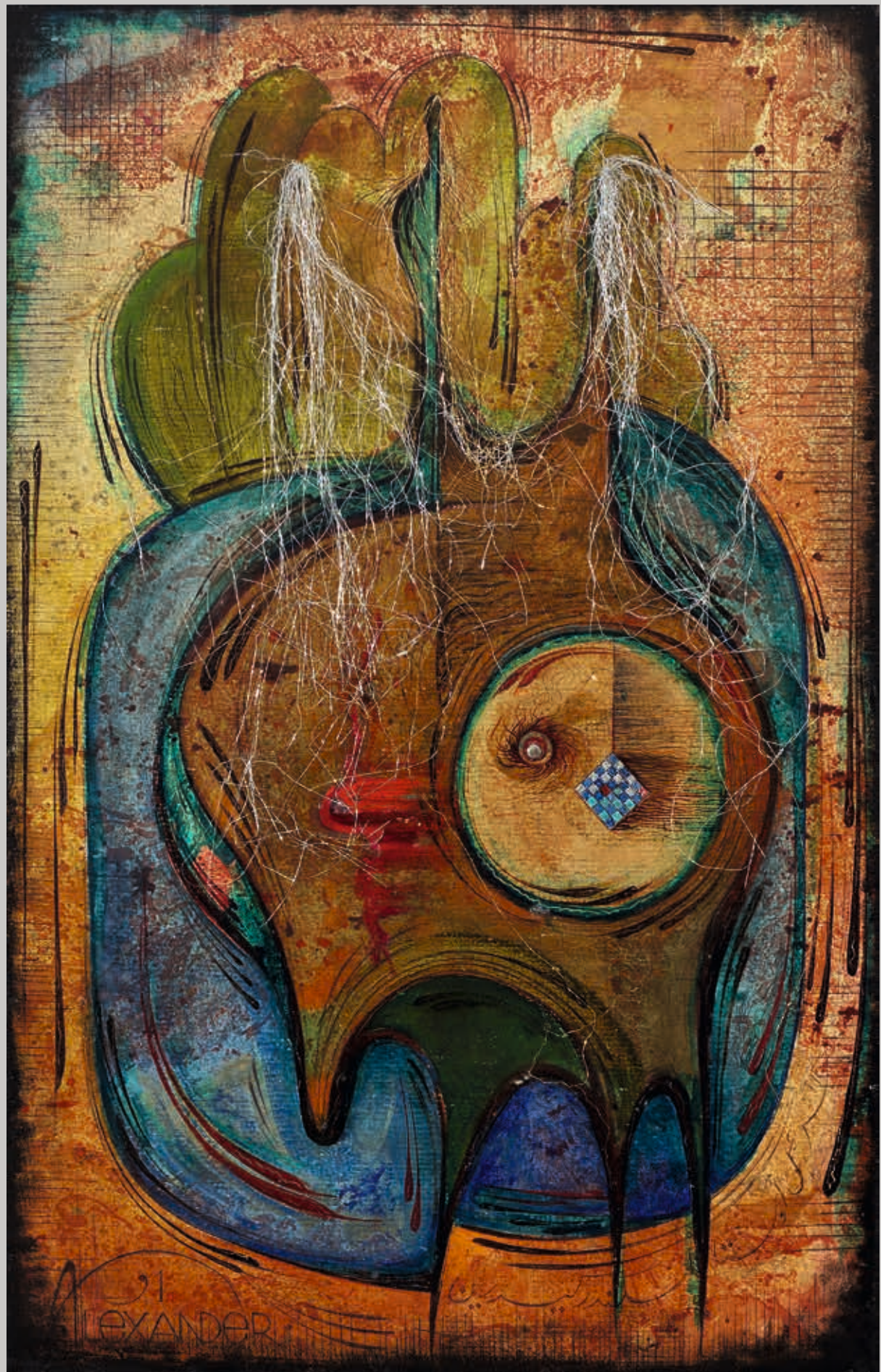
In truth, neither the physicochemical nor the biological aspects are enough to illustrate the actuality of life, not to mention thought or existence. Perception of the world, limited by the scope of time and space, is unable to penetrate the root causes of events, because it is powerless to perceive concepts beyond its reach. I do not even try to reproduce objects that are accessible to sensory perception. The image emerging on the canvas is impossible to verbalize or explain in rational forms, as it is impossible to put music into words or to articulate in prose the melody and phonetic connotation of poetry. Evaluating my works not as "objects" but as "dispatches", I fully understand that I am limiting the circle of those who can perceive my work.

I do not imitate the visible world. My paintings are not illustrations, not rebuses, not allegories nor edifications — they are my musings on the motivations behind the Choice. I try to record them without reproach or condemnation, but with love.

I began participating in professional exhibitions at the age of 17. Thirty years, from 1958 to 1988, I earned a living creating monumental ceramics because to create serious art in a totalitarian state was extremely dangerous. As a monumentalist, I completed many significant projects in Uzbekistan and other parts of USSR — metro stations and art palaces, high-rise hotels and theatres, fountains and cultural centers. Having become, due to my creations, one of the leading artists of the republic, I, unbeknownst to myself, was becoming part of the System, or rather the society that was created by the System, her accomplice. To avoid becoming a cynic, I had to run. The System, on the decline, would have ground me down, for it was already beginning to swallow me up... Duplicity broke even those stronger than I... In 1995 I immigrated to USA.

The genre that I work in, I call "metarealism", because I speak not of what I see, but of what I feel and grasp...





Aleksander Kedrin
New York, January 2001

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Scribes and Pharisees
1993. Cardboard, oil.
80×50 cm

How I Became an Abstractionist, or Fifty Years Later...

*Of all the arts, abstract painting is the most difficult.
It demands that you know how to draw well, that you
have a heightened sensitivity for composition
and for colors, and that you be a true poet.
This last one is essential.*
Wassily Kandinsky (1931)

Image is what others say about you.
It is the key component of a career!

Not that I couldn't care less about ambition, career, fortune and success, or the impression I make on others... No, I am a normal person and I do care about these matters. But... ever since I grew up (starting at age 40), I became more interested in what is happening to me; why I am changing? And what is behind these changes, what is the meaning of life?

My parents loved me very much, I was an only child and sadly, as it often happens, I grew up to be extremely self-centered. I persistently wanted to fool around, to be mischievous, to grimace. My father tried to reason with me that this was no way to live, but his words did not enlighten me, or rather, they did the opposite.

The emancipation from this roguery I owe to my elder comrades: Ernst Neizvestny, Bella Akhmadulina, Eric Bulatov. Each of them independently explained to me that this "innocent fun" is an affront to the memory of the millions tortured and murdered fellow countrymen, each one of whom was more worthy than I. The Muse is a fastidious lady, and abhors deceitfulness, falsehood and frivolity. Art is not an amusement! It is a serious and heavy labor, but an inspired and blessed one... It is not unlike the labor of a peasant, a plowman, but more exciting and the pleasure of it is incomparable...!

...Only to love does music cede to,
But love too is a melody...(Pushkin)

I began reading very early, at four. My father read A. N. Tolstoy's "Buratino" to me, which I fell in love with and, excitedly, kept asking to hear over and over again. My mother would read the book to me and I, watching over her shoulder, learned to read from it. This activity so fascinated me that I immediately began to read fairy tales of Pushkin and Anderson, Hoffman and Perrault, Gauf and Afanasyev. But even more exciting were the daily readings of classics by my father, for an hour and a half, or two, before bedtime. He read Dickens and Shakespeare, Balzac and Stendhal, Kipling and Rostand, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Mayne Reid and Jack London, Thackeray and Galsworthy, Dumas and Hugo, Cervantes and Twain.



View From My Window

1953. Cardboard, oil.
18 × 25 cm

My father, Veniamin Nikolayevich Kedrin, a hereditary Petersburg intellectual, was a brilliantly educated man. In his youth, he completed an elite private institution — Vyborgsk Commercial School. He was fluent in three European languages, knew Greek and Latin, and attended seminars on theories of rhythm in speech by Alexander Blok himself. Subsequently, he completed the Saint Petersburg Art and Industry Academy, and then the Russian Academy of Arts, studying under Dobuzhinsky, Lebedev and Rudakov. He read prose and poetry remarkably well — like a professional reciter.

My mother, Vera Aleksandrovna Denyakina, in 1939 completed the National University of Uzbekistan with excellence, focusing on human physiology, and married my father, who was 12 years older than she was. I was born in May of 1940, and a year later, the war began... Thus, I never had brothers or sisters. My parents focused all their love on me, and this molded me as an artist and a person. My mother loved music; she had a gramophone and a collection of classical music records. Every day she sang romances or operatic arias to me, accompanying herself on a mandolin. I grew up as a sensitive, impressionable child. My parents always said that lying and stealing is unacceptable. And that is how they lived, but around us bubbled a very different life. A life that initially perplexed me, and then incited a heated protestation... But the protest had to be hidden, due to reasons that were obscure to me. My father explained it thusly, a human cannot, and should not, fight a machine. To demonstrate and declare one's disagreement with the authorities is a bad idea. If one is forced to live in a cage with a tiger, provoking him isn't frivolity, it is madness! Of course, you could thumb your nose at him behind his back, but, though safer, there is little point to it...

The relationship between the artist and the establishment has been a problematic issue throughout the centuries. The establishment attempts to use every talented individual to its advantage: to promote the existing way of life. The poet, on the other hand, has his own



Bouquet of Flowers

1954. Cardboard, oil.
33 × 40 cm

goals and objectives, which he already has troubles reaching due to the brevity of life. And, in addition, he must defend himself, so that the establishment does not crush him...

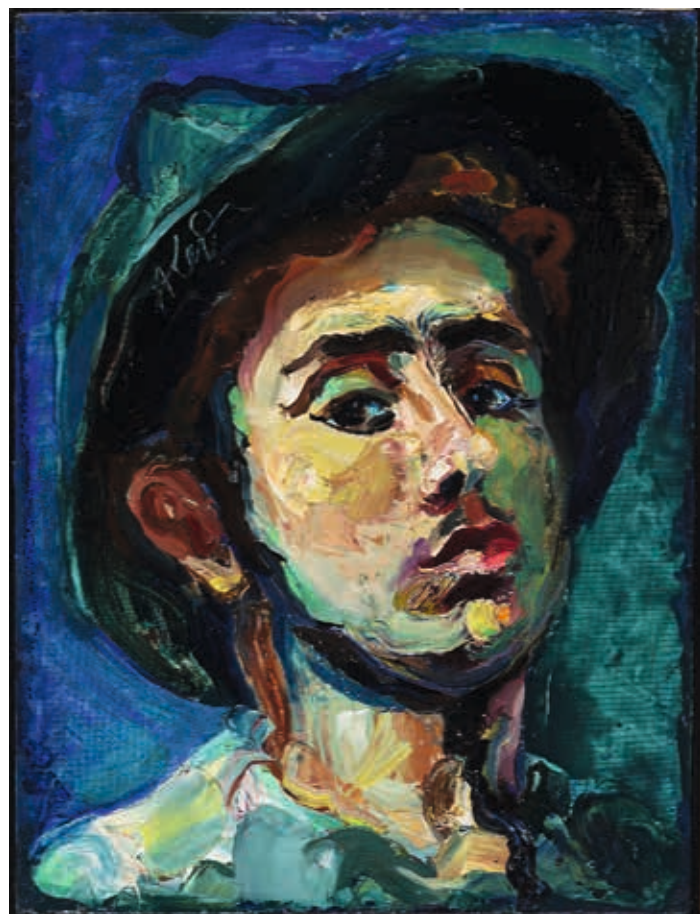
I was labeled a rebel while still in school. Unfortunately, I did not immediately understand the danger of this label. Battling the establishment was not the way for me, but neither was conforming. I absolutely did not wish to waste time on confronting the Soviet authorities, understanding the senselessness of this exercise, and thus I was never a dissident. I was never a part of subversive action. Of course, I despised the established order, and I had scores to settle with it. Yet, I treated it as an unavoidable evil, and tried to find at least something good and useful for myself in it.

*I've never been a hermit, no,
And never wished to burn in flames,
I, merely, was a Russian poet,
Living in the age that called my name.*

These words of Naum Korzhavin — are about all of us — Russian artists of these complicated times.

*I see the world from underneath a tabletop,
Twentieth century — is quite extraordinary.
The more intriguing the century for historians,
The sadder it is for the contemporary!*

And these words of a Moscow poet and alcoholic, Nikolai Glazkov, are about us too. Alcoholism is a cap of invisibility, a great comfort to creative people, but one that, unfortunately, has brought ruin to half of my friends.



**15-Year-Old Captain
(Self-portrait in a Green Hat)**

1955. Cardboard, oil.
32 × 24 cm

p. 17

Irises

1959. Hardboard, oil.
49 × 35 cm

Another unjust label that hung on me since youth was that of an avant-gardist! My only innovation consisted of daring to be myself in the USSR. From the age of five and till eleven, I painted everything in sight, and, like all children, tried to make it look like what my father was doing. At twelve, I, with my father, visited Moscow for the first time, and he unlocked for me the world of French Impressionism, when he took me to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. I remember how, in front of a small pastel by Degas, "Blue Dancers", I felt as if hit by lightning! The whole world changed, I started to see it in color!!! It is at that moment that I decided to be a painter, and only a painter. My parents, hoping to save me from the difficult and ambiguous lot of a Soviet painter, wished that I would become an architect. But I became an impressionist.

My father was a graphic artist. Every day he would go sketch into the labyrinth of streets and dead-ends of old Tashkent. I had accompanied him since I was three years old. Under my father's pencil, the earthen-walled slums and wrecks were transformed into mysterious and romantic ruins, the old mosques that now served as storage spaces or factory workshops, into majestic and abandoned temples, covered in ornaments of extraordinary beauty. That was his Petersburg education... And I, unsuccessfully, tried to imitate him. When I became an "impressionist", all this resounded in color and my work became much more interesting and poetic. To consider this avant-garde is only possible perhaps in an attempt to apply repressive measures to me.

In the summer of 1959, I visited the American Exhibition at Sokolniki Park in Moscow. For the first time I saw the works of Jackson Pollock, Yves Tanguy, Arshile Gorky, and de Kooning. The exhibition both shocked and intrigued me. I decided that the political climate in the USSR must be warming up, and that the impressionists will no longer perturb anyone.



I was already in the fifth year at the Benkov Art College of Uzbekistan. Our art-history professor, Irina Ignat'eva, directed us toward the Russian Peredvizhniki (the Itinerants). Of French "new" art she said "these bourgeoisie van Gauguins — a Soviet painter should stay far away from them." But, emboldened by the American exhibition in Moscow, I decided to participate in the Tashkent student exhibition of the Benkov Art College and of the Ostrovsky Art Institute, where I was to study later.

The hall for the exhibition, in the Cinema House, was offered by my old friend Malik Kayumov, director at Uzbekfilm. All the participants were about twenty years old (± 3 years):

Venya Akudin, Sasha Abdusalyamov, Volodya Burmakin, Sultan Burkhanov, Marik Konik, Sasha Kedrin and Yura Yungwald Hilkovich. Fifty-two years have passed, but I still remember Yuriy Hilkovich's "Portrait of a Red-Haired Boy", painted in the style of van Gogh; remember the Cezanne-like still life paintings of Akudin and Konik; remember my own "Portrait of a Father", done with a palette knife, my landscape in Matisse style and a painting in the style of de Vlaminck... Overall — a collection of student scribbles...

The discussion of the exhibition drew a full house, people stood in the hallways, hung on windows... They battered us from five in the evening until midnight. No one expected such a severe and violent response to a student exhibition. We were all but cursed out... They were demanding an exemplary punishment, and I was declared the leader of avant-gardists-formalists. I initially thought this funny (I was the youngest of the exhibitors). But then the expulsions from the universities began... Marik Konik and Yura Hilkovich ran away to Moscow, to apply to the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography. Sultan Burkhanov was dealt with in the worst way, he was thrust into the prison asylum, from which he never came out. I became a freelancer and began preparing for entrance exams to the Institute. There was no one to study under in either the college or the institute (though there were exceptions in the faculty: Golderey in the college and Podgursky in the institute). We, students, learned from each other.

The country was rolling toward a collapse, but we were looking for a way to earn a living. In 1962, I tried to earn some money through a local art gallery. I handed over a large still life, in oil. It

was appraised at 35 rubles and sold the next day. I was paid the money, but asked not to bring any more art... I was a student at the Institute at the time and the stipend was not enough to cover expenses. Our family was poorly provided for, to say the least. The war and post-war years were especially difficult. The challenges of earning a living were obvious to me from a young age. My father's fees, as an illustrator, were very meager; therefore, he always took advantage of seasonal work in the expeditions of his friends, archeologists and restoration architects, as a sketch artist. From the age of ten, I began to accompany my father, if offered a position of a gofer, handyman or loader. Already in 1956, I was offered a position of an artist for an excavation of a Bronze Age settlement in the Fergana Valley led by V.I. Sprishevsky, and included into the expedition as a digger. The summer seasons of 1957–58 I spent in the expeditions of the Republic Restoration Bureau, restoring the architectural ornaments of Samarkand and Bukhara. Comprehension of the algorithms and laws of oriental ornaments was



Construction

1959. Cardboard, oil.
50 × 35,5 cm



The Neighbor's Yard

1959. Cardboard, oil.
48,5 × 29,5 cm



Our Street in January

1959. Cardboard, oil.
45,5 × 33 cm

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Old Tashkent

1961. Canvas, oil.
103 × 73 cm

very interesting and quite useful. In the spring of 1958, I received my first fee from the sale of an album titled “Reconstruction of the ceiling of a late 19th century residential home in the city of Shakhriyabze, Uzbekistan”, which was bought from me by the Museum of Applied Arts of Uzbekistan.

During the summers of 1959 and 1960, I participated in a competition for the best souvenir, hosted by the UzSSR Chamber of Commerce, and won third and second place for the models of ceramic souvenirs. I constructed them out of gypsum and painted with water-colors, since the rules allowed submissions of models. My father, owing to the hereditary juridical vein, immediately noticed this development and suggested legitimizing myself as a member of the Artists Union by becoming a ceramist. Millennial history of ceramics in Uzbekistan firmly associated that word with pottery or ornamental facing of architectural monuments. In other words, the concept of ceramics, in the eyes of our mastodons of Soviet realism, sounded like something neutral, decorative and applied... Especially since there was, under the Artists Union of Uzbekistan, a folk art section that included potters as well, who were continuing the traditions of national pottery making. The leadership of the Artists Union saw ceramics not as a material, but as a genre of applied arts, and my father suggested that I make use of it.

The most popular article of folk art was a “lyagan”, a large flat dish used for pilaf — the national celebratory meal. I decided to use the surface of the lyagan as an objective plane of a painting. Nobody made me swear that I would only work ornamentally. Plates were painted by Picasso and Chekhonin, Chagall and Kandinsky...

Declaring myself as a ceramist-ornamentalist, I was given a chance to become a member of the Artists Union, which was essential, since a Soviet person must be part of the Komsomol and then become a communist, or, at the very least, a member of a union! Existence outside of the union was practically impossible... That was the time we lived in, that was our Fatherland —

we did not choose it! We lived in it, worked, fell in love, gave birth to children, created and, despite everything, were sometimes absolutely happy...

I am eternally grateful to my parents, who raised and educated me in the harsh climate of the 1940’s, the fatal, war and gunpowder filled years of devastation and hunger. Parents, who imbued me with ineradicable hunger for self-education, and that foundation upon which the identity, that allows one to become creative, is built.

In 1960, the Uzbekistan Art Foundation decided to build an artist colony on the edge of Tashkent, and that is where my father received a small three-room apartment in a two-storied cottage. We moved to 1 Painter Street, apartment 4, in the new year, 1961. In this commune, there were twenty-four apartments and twenty-four workshops. The idea was that every artist living in the commune would also receive a workshop, but in reality that was not so. Workshops, dachas, and cars were all distributed to party members. It was a wonder we received the apartment at all... Until this point, we lived in one room for 21 years. Now my father and I worked in our own rooms...



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**The Muse
of The Eastern Poetry**

1981. Plywood, oil.
100 x 75 cm

But what about ceramics? It clearly requires a workshop! An accidental occurrence helped me out. There were twenty-four storage bins, 4 sq.m. each, in the basement of the Artists House, where the top floors were occupied by airy, 50 sq.m. workshops. But there were also two larger utility closets, 36 sq.m., held as reserves. One of these was allocated to my father's friend, Nadezhda Kashina, as a storage area for canvases and stretchers (she had, of course, a workshop upstairs). But the space turned out to be unfit for the purpose, the canvases grew mold and the stretchers warped within a week. Without ventilation or light, mold growing on the walls, only two meters in height (the workshops upstairs had four meter ceilings) — the space was useless, and everyone understood that. My father persuaded Kashina not to refuse the space, but to transfer it to his name, knowing that neither he nor I would ever be issued a workshop — even though he was a founding member of the Artists Union of Uzbekistan, its first reliable secretary, and irreplaceable chairman of the audit commission. But the Artists Union, like the rest of the USSR, became rapidly criminalized. Furthermore, my father was never a member of the communist party. He was only tolerated, and often not even that. He was arrested several times due to his colleagues denunciations, as a "socially alien element" — since he was a hereditary nobleman.

Thus, thanks to Kashina, I finally had a workshop at my disposal to craft ceramics. My father told me that Nadezhda Vasil'evna was a wonderful colorist and, in the 30s, painted bright, poetic compositions (in the style of Matisse's Tangiers works). She was accused of formalism and made to renounce her works. She began to paint ceremonial, parlor still-lives. But she stayed alive — others were not so lucky: Vadim Gulyaev, a close friend of my father, was executed by a firing squad in 1937, and Mikhail Kurzin spent 18 years in a labor camp in Kolyma.

Kashina and I became friends. She was sympathetic to my painting and gave me excellent professional advice. Every day, exactly at noon, she would expect me for tea at her workshop. She looked over my etudes and sketches, showed me some of hers, and we would discuss them as equals, as if we were not separated by 50 years. I also showed my early work to Aleksander Nikolayevich Volkov — a remarkable painter and poet, and also to Mikhail Ivanovich Kurzin, who had returned from the labor camp. However, they both did not live to see 1958.

To transform my newly acquired catacomb into a ceramics workshop, one needed equipment, materials, and an understanding of technology. As I was starting from zero, I buried myself in books, groping for solutions to the multitude of technical and technological issues. That, in fact, was my only advantage. I began by hacking out a ventilation window, 30 sq.cm. in size, onto the street (it came out to be 2 cm. above the asphalt outside and right up to the inside ceiling). Next, I made another window into the hallway of the basement, and mounted a ventilation fan. I installed an electric cable and hooked up a meter. I set up two tables out of welded iron, because wood quickly rotted. And, finally, bought two electric muffle furnaces at a school supply store. They were tiny — but one had to start somewhere!

Only later did I begin to design and build my own furnaces of necessary size and shape, but first I had to master the jobs of a welder, an electrician and an artificer. I had to study the chemistry of silicates earnestly and solve challenges on the fly that could not have even occurred to me previously... For example, the palette of easily accessible dyes, used in folk ceramics, was very limited; thus, I began using dyes from the porcelain industry and smalt. Technological innovation of the impressionists was their use of white primer for their canvases — colors applied onto it were louder and brighter than those applied to the traditional dark primer — I took this method for myself. Impressionists used optical rather than mechanical mixing of paints — I took this as well!



Loneliness of The Poet

1964. Paper, watercolor, pencil.
41,3 × 29,6 cm

Tondo from the Blue Cities Series

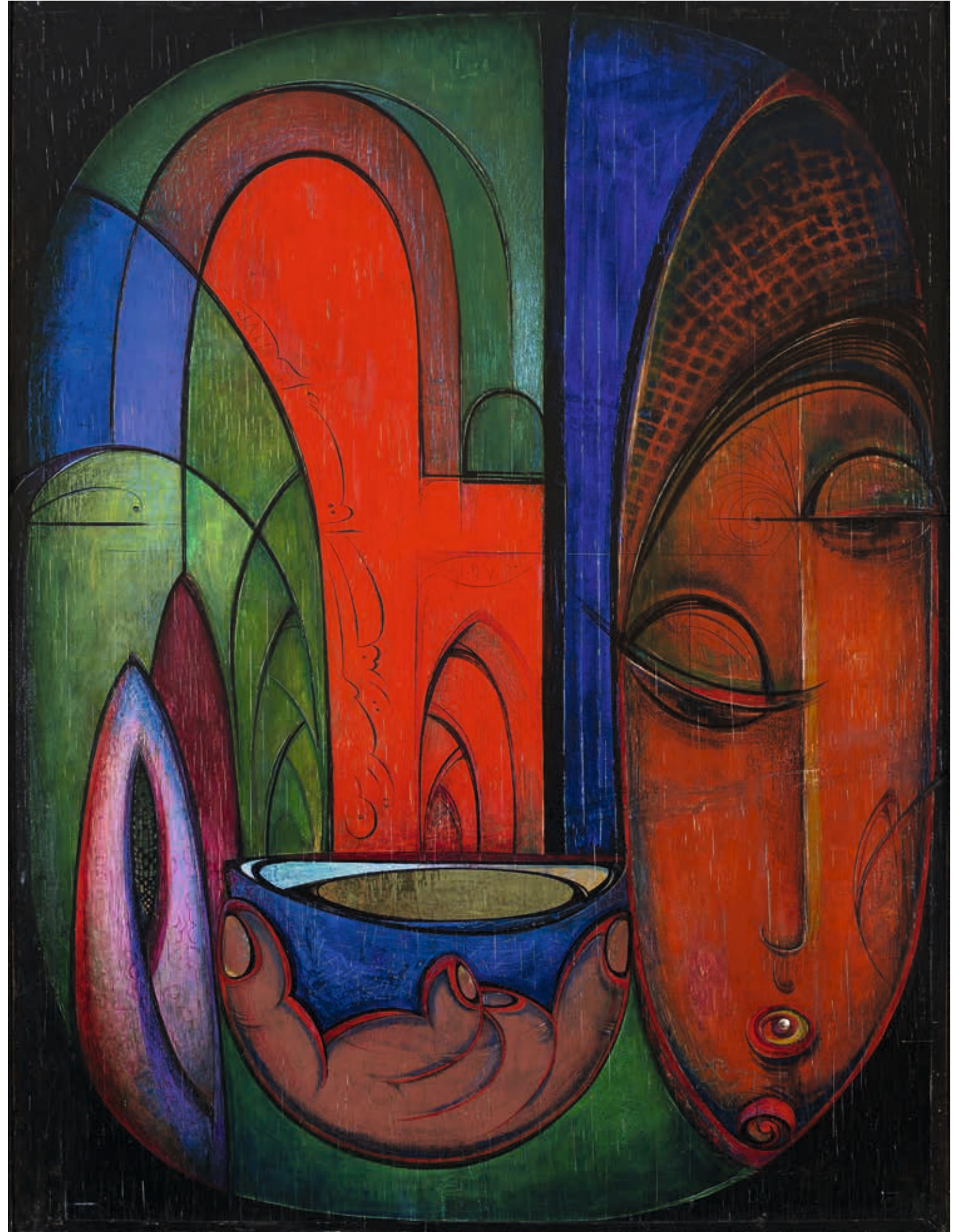
1979. Ceramic.
120 cm diameter

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Blue Cup

1973. Plywood, tempera, oil.
103 × 76 cm

In three years, I equipped my catacomb and myself for serious work in ceramics and became an underground artist both literally and figuratively! My first order for monumental ceramics I received in 1964, thanks to that same Kashina. She suggested that I create six ceramic reliefs “Collective Farm Cares”, based on her sketches. This allowed me to pay off some of the expenses incurred while equipping my dungeon. Next were two orders from architects Muratov and Kommissar for ornamental platters for the interiors of the rebuilding Tashkent. Starting from 1970, I began to work with the leading architect of Tashkent, my friend Sergo Sutyagin, who no longer limited me within the framework of ornament or figurative art in general (though ornament itself is, in its essence, abstract). In 1976 I won the Artist Union of Uzbekistan contest for a large, one hundred meter relief for the state health resort “Uzbekistan” in Sochi, and executed it in ceramics; and in 1979–81 I completed two reliefs and 4500 sq.m. of facing for the Palace of Congress in Tashkent. In 1982 — metro station “Prospect of Cosmonauts” and relief “Garden of Winds” in Chorsu Hotel, reliefs in Khorezm, Kokand, and Zheleznovodsk. My popularity grew; I had excellent relationships with all the architects of the Republic, mutual understanding with the poets, musicians, journalists, great relationships with the older generation of artists, born before 1917.. but with the middle generation and with my own contemporaries I was in constant conflict. I could not fathom their reasons for this irrational hatred toward me. My neighbors in the artists’ commune lived like “spiders in a can” amongst themselves, but were united in their dislike for me. They wrote denunciations of me, as was the Soviet tradition, to every possible authority: police, KGB, OBKhSS (Department Against Misappropriation of Socialist Property), Art Foundation, Fire Department, Sanitary-Epidemiological Station, Central Committee of the Communist Party, etc... Interestingly, my neighbors signed all this drivel unanimously. A man would arrive in response to the denunciations and seal off my workshop. I would then write an appeal to the same authorities, claiming an unlawful action due to a personal squab-





The Petrel
1987. Paper, charcoal, chalk.
37,4 × 30,3 cm

The Petrel
1987. Paper, charcoal, chalk.
35,5 × 28 cm

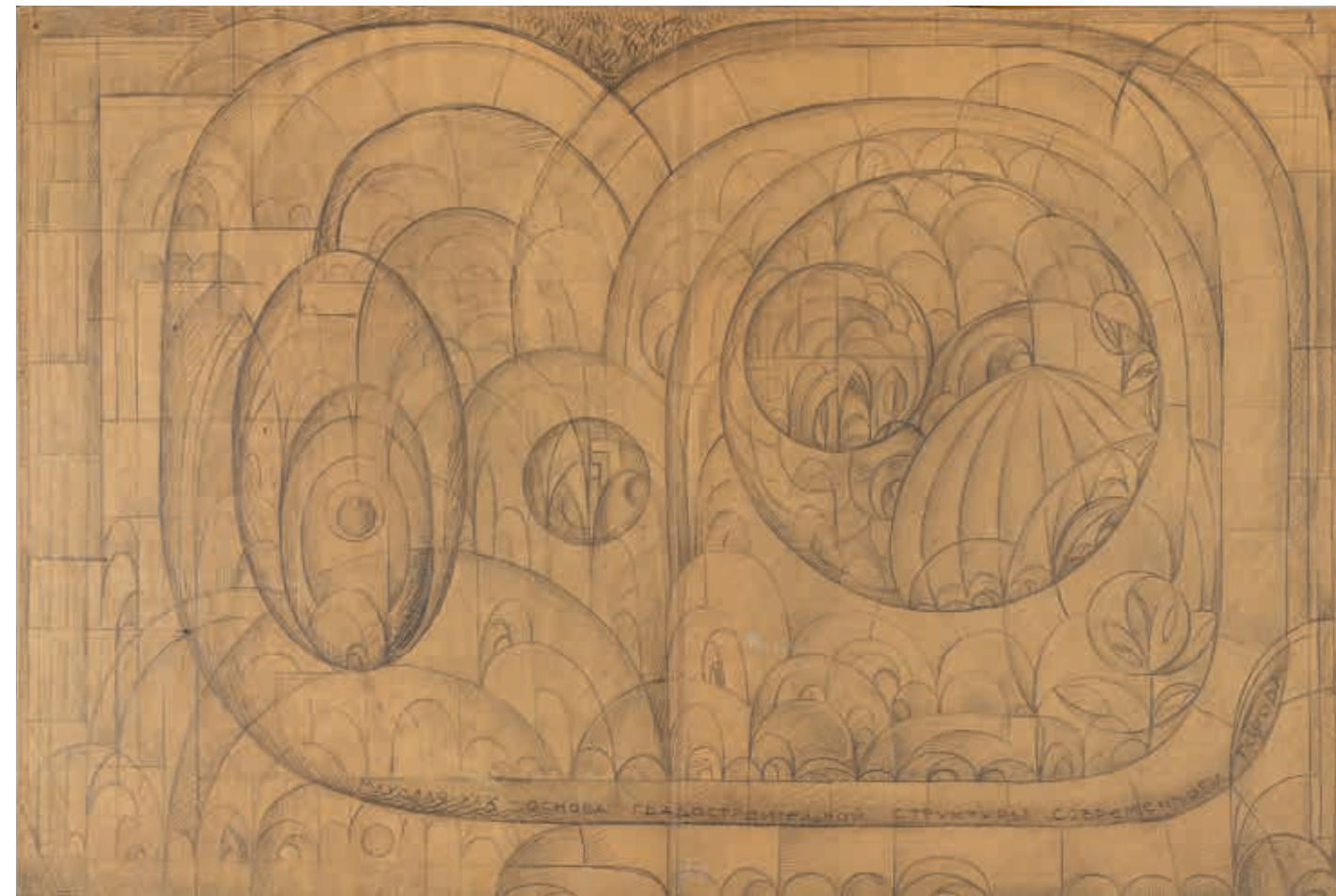


A. Kedrin (БУРЕВЕСТНИК) 1987

ble... The architects would always support me. A month or two would go by and I would be allowed to resume work once again. And thus, every year, for 25 years... I think they tortured me simply because I was a “white crow” in their eyes...

My first abstract compositions in oil appeared in 1962, unexpectedly even to myself. I always gravitated towards leftist art — but not to the left of the heart! Even in childhood, looking through my father’s art books, I sympathized most of all with the impressionists. To me, the cubist works of Picasso seemed like mystifications — simply childish scribbles. I read Kandinsky’s book, “Concerning the Spiritual in Art”, but found his analysis of abstraction unconvincing. Kandinsky’s works looked like an accidental kaleidoscope to me... Later, when I saw these works in person, I began to seriously doubt my earlier assessments. I began to understand that my childish perceptions were due to my underdevelopment...

I understood that the form, chosen by the artist, depends on the goals that he sets for himself. What does he want to say? Does he have anything to say to the viewer? Or is he attempting to recreate that which he sees before himself? In greater detail, as if competing with the photo-camera? Did my ceramic work influence my art? I think that it surely must have! Texture and color, plastics and form, it is inevitable... but it does not define my art. The primary impulse of my art is the desire to contemplate and discuss the cardinal issues — the mystery of the human mind, love, sympathy and antipathy, life and death, reasons for the aberration of consciousness. All these were discussed by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, Shakespeare and Cervantes, and before them — the Biblical prophets: “Woe unto them that call evil good,



Sketch for a Ceramic Relief in the city of Samarkand Mahalla city quarter as the Basis of Town-planning for the Modern City
Paper, pencil. 43,5 × 66 cm

and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20). The Bible is the pinnacle of world poetry and the philosophical system that I share. We clearly see how the world around us is rapidly and abruptly changing: love turns into lust and hatred; sympathy into its antonym, absolutely normal people are becoming cynics and bandits; and that “Achilles’ heel” of humanity, egoism, is becoming an essential component of success. Why is pathology becoming the norm, and the normal — considered pathological?

The militant dislike of my Tashkent colleagues-artists toward myself was a mystery to me. Perhaps the reason was in the rumors that I am doing some other kind of art, though I tried not to show my work to anyone until 1990 — my facade was ceramics... Or perhaps it was just jealousy? Beginning of my artistic journey coincided with the beginning of the 60’s and I, while in Moscow and Leningrad, met and made friends with many metropolitan poets and artists of the 60’s — Vitya Sosnov, Andrei Voznesenski, Bella Akhmadulina, Yevgeniy Yevtushenko, Eric Bulatov, Ernst Neizvestny, Kolya Vechtomov, Volodya Nemukhin, Edik Zelenin and many others.

I visited the Moscow exhibitions: Belyutin’s studio at the Manezh, nonconformists at the VDNKh (All-Russia Exhibition Center). There was not a lot of really talented work, I can remember only Tolik Zverev. It was obvious that neither the social baiting of the nonconformists, nor the modernist forms of Belyutin’s studio were able to hide the poverty of content and lack of talent. Art is always confessional, and any speculation of the form is immediately visible, there is nowhere to hide it, whether in poetry or painting or music... This issue was described remarkably by Goethe: “... he who has nothing to say can still make verses and rhymes, where

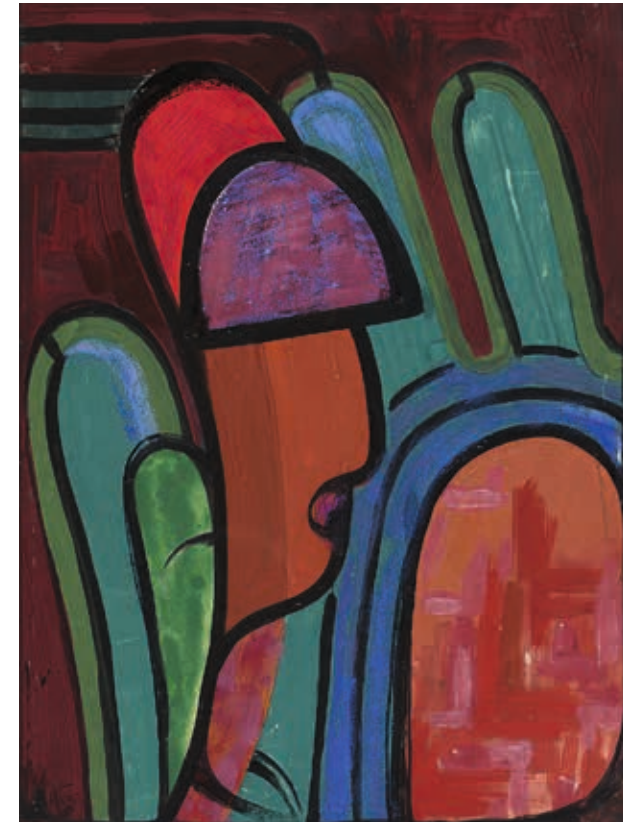
one word suggests the other, and at last something comes out, which in fact is nothing, but looks as if it were something.” (Conversations — Jan 29, 1827)

After the death of Kashina, I did not have a single friend in the Tashkent art community, save Garrik Zilberman, my contemporary, my confederate, romantic and a poet. His works adorned my Tashkent home, and ten of his canvases are on the walls of my New York apartment. Garrik struck me with his subtle poetic intuition, and a deep understanding of the essence of art. Here is what he wrote in the guest book at my exhibition of ceramics at the Architects Union in 1984: “Sasha, you amaze and dismay me at the same time: the pain that nests within you — it is within me as well... We are of one blood — you and I.” Only a true poet, and a loving, perceptive friend, could write these words. Interestingly, we both spent our childhood and grew up in the Muslim quarters of Tashkent, as neighbors, in the slums of “old city”. We both loved and respected our neighbors, the devout Muslims, very tidy people, friendly and hospitable, kind and welcoming, generous and cordial. We loved their way of life, their folk art: ceramics and calking, embroidery and jewelry, woodcarving and carving on wet gypsum (gancha). These were large families, harmonious and industrious. We never even heard of religious fanatics. Knowing that I was an artist, they respectfully called me “Usto Iskander” — usto meant artisan in translation, and Iskander was the eastern transliteration of Aleksander. I liked this very much, and signed my Tashkent paintings just so: “Usto Iskander”, in Arabic ornamental script, which did not spoil the composition.

As it happened, Garrik and I grew up next to each other without ever meeting in childhood... But our art from the 60–70s is very similar, impressionistic, filled with romantic love for the land of Uzbekistan. Later, we met and became close friends, but our artistic paths diverged: Garrik began to complicate the plot, leaning toward hyperrealism, and I headed toward abstraction. Yet, only the form changed, not the substance of our art or our relationship.

Time passed... The bloody events in Fergana began, then the civil war in Tadzhikistan... Garrik prepared to emigrate to Israel. The USSR, “empire of evil” according to Reagan, fell apart. But I did not want to leave, arguing that I, as an artist, do not have the right to spend time on adapting rather than creating. Comfort and security were not determinative factors for me. But my wife, Mashen’ka, said: “...You must think of the children — we have three...” And that was the deciding argument. I began packing...

On the fifth of May, 1995 I landed in New York city. Now my family lives in the world capital. And we are all citizens of the United States of America.



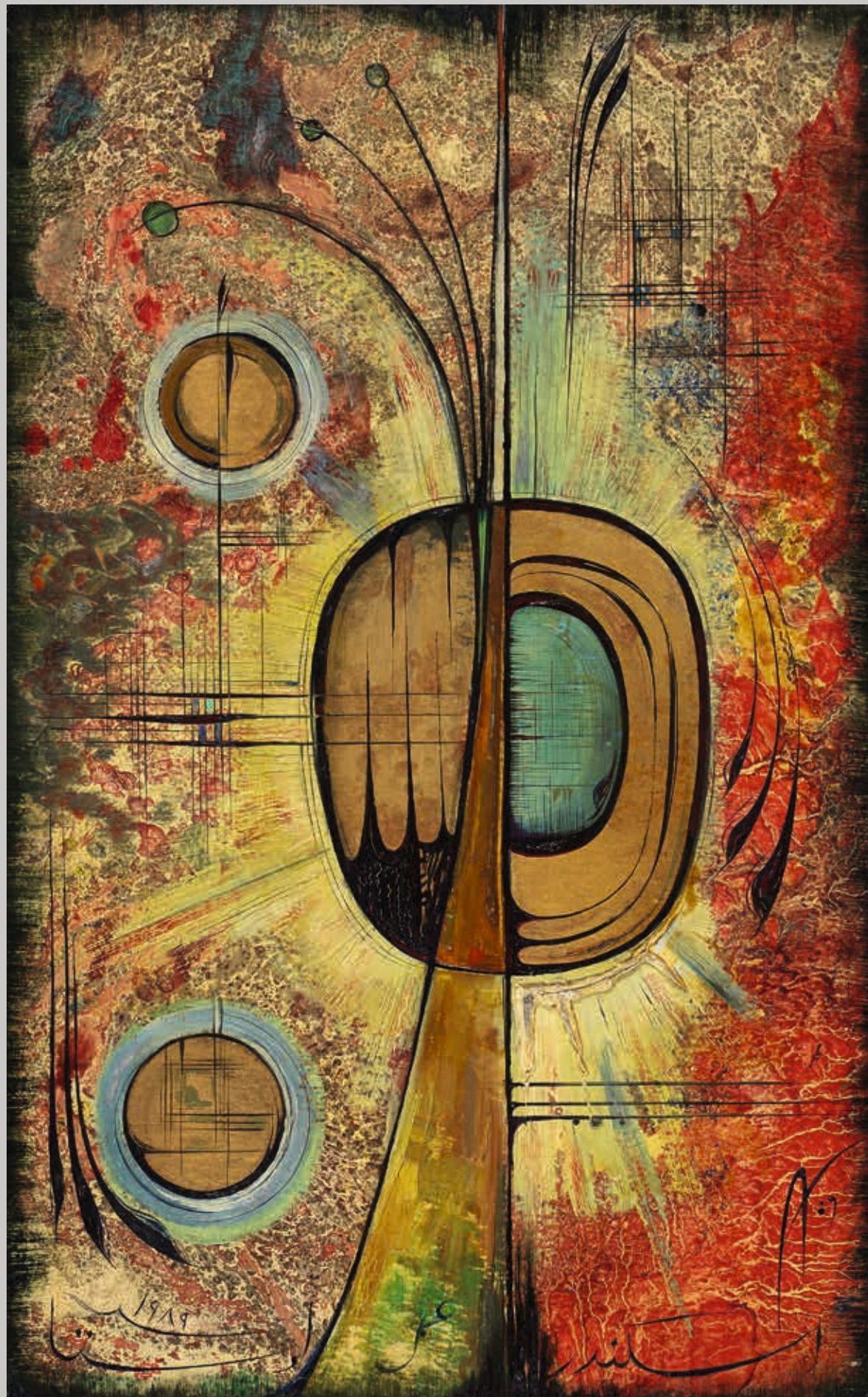
Ibragim

1961. Paper, gouache, ink.
42,9 × 30,8 cm



In the Garden of Love...

2006. Canvas, oil.
75 × 67 cm



Aleksander Kedrin
2014

A Few Words about the Synthesis of Arts:

Poetry is a strange art form that articulates in verse that, which is impossible to verbalize in principle; and yet, my friends — the poets, do so with a pen and paper. I, on the other hand, create it on the canvas, and the viewer is always my co-author!

From my childhood, I have lived and worked in the format of poetry. However, this is due to not only my genetics and the atmosphere around me. Development of poetic feeling and love of poetry is impossible without personal enthusiasm and effort. However, genetics and atmosphere must be given their due as well! My uncle, Dmitri Borisovich Kedrin, has long been a widely recognized poet, a classic. My father, in his youth, was a student of Nikolay Stepanovich Gumilyov. He would read to me, day and night, poetry of Blok, with whom he was personally acquainted. Internal rhyme, rhythm, oxymoron, metaphor are organically inherent in my work.

Cognition and fiction are at the foundation of every art form. The book of books, the Bible, I studied as an anthology of Jewish poetry and the philosophical system closest to me. Impoverishment of contemporary art — is, above all, the impoverishment of ingenuity, and no technical special effects can ever hide this collapse.

In my youth, I tried to recount what I saw before me as close to nature and in as much detail as I could; it is a necessary path in discipleship. Most of my peers remained at this stage, but I was not satisfied. I wanted to converse with the viewer, I wanted to tell him something important!

Presently, I consider my works as a kind of parables or ballads, i.e. something complete and self-sufficient in its message. I am convinced that people deaf to poetry will never be able to feel close to my canvases — they will not understand them ... Aren't there people deaf to music — the most abstract of the arts?!

*I want to be understood by my native land,
and if I won't be —
then what?
Through the native land
I will sideways cross,
Like the passing
of slanting rain.*

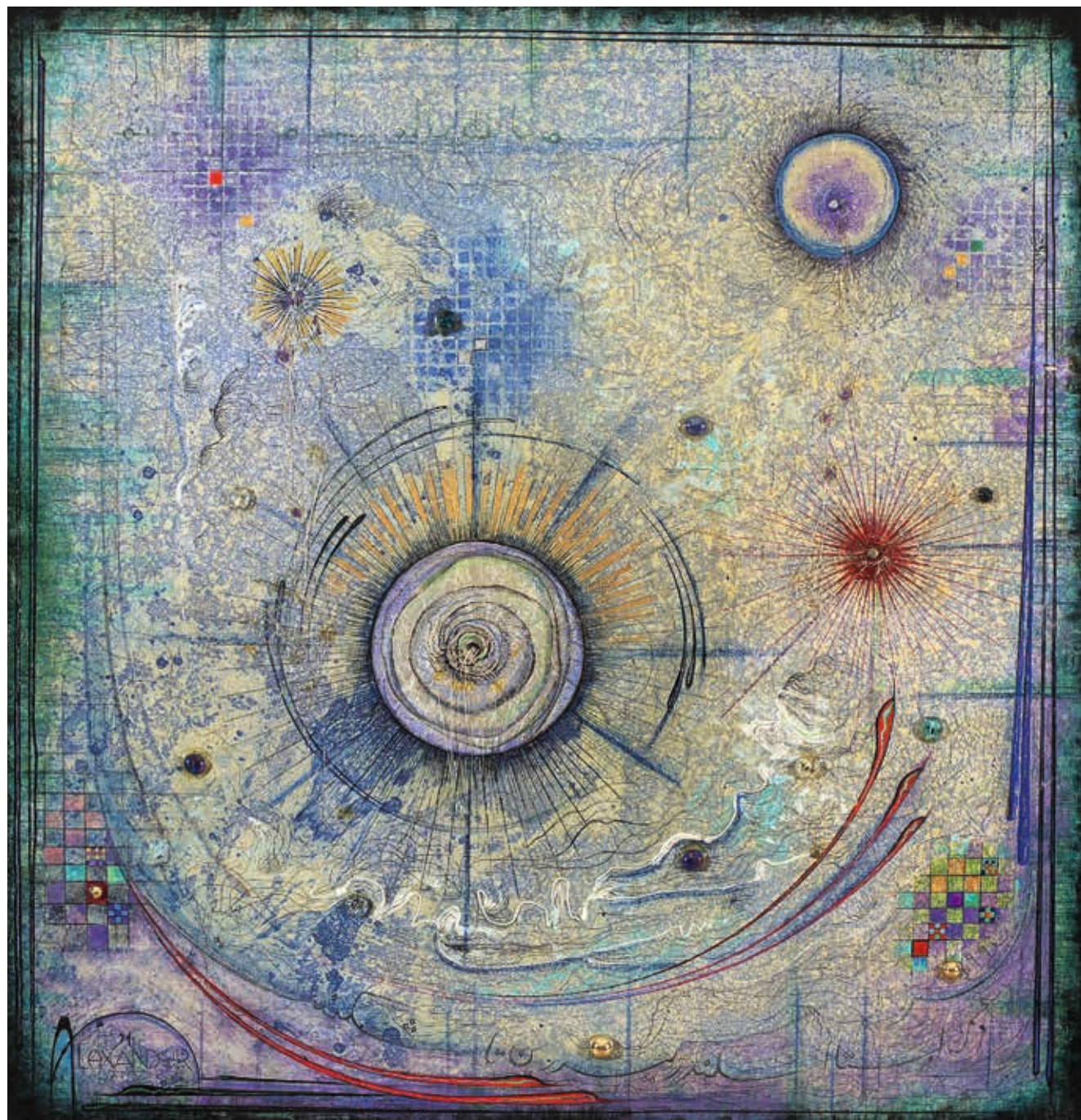
(Mayakovsky)



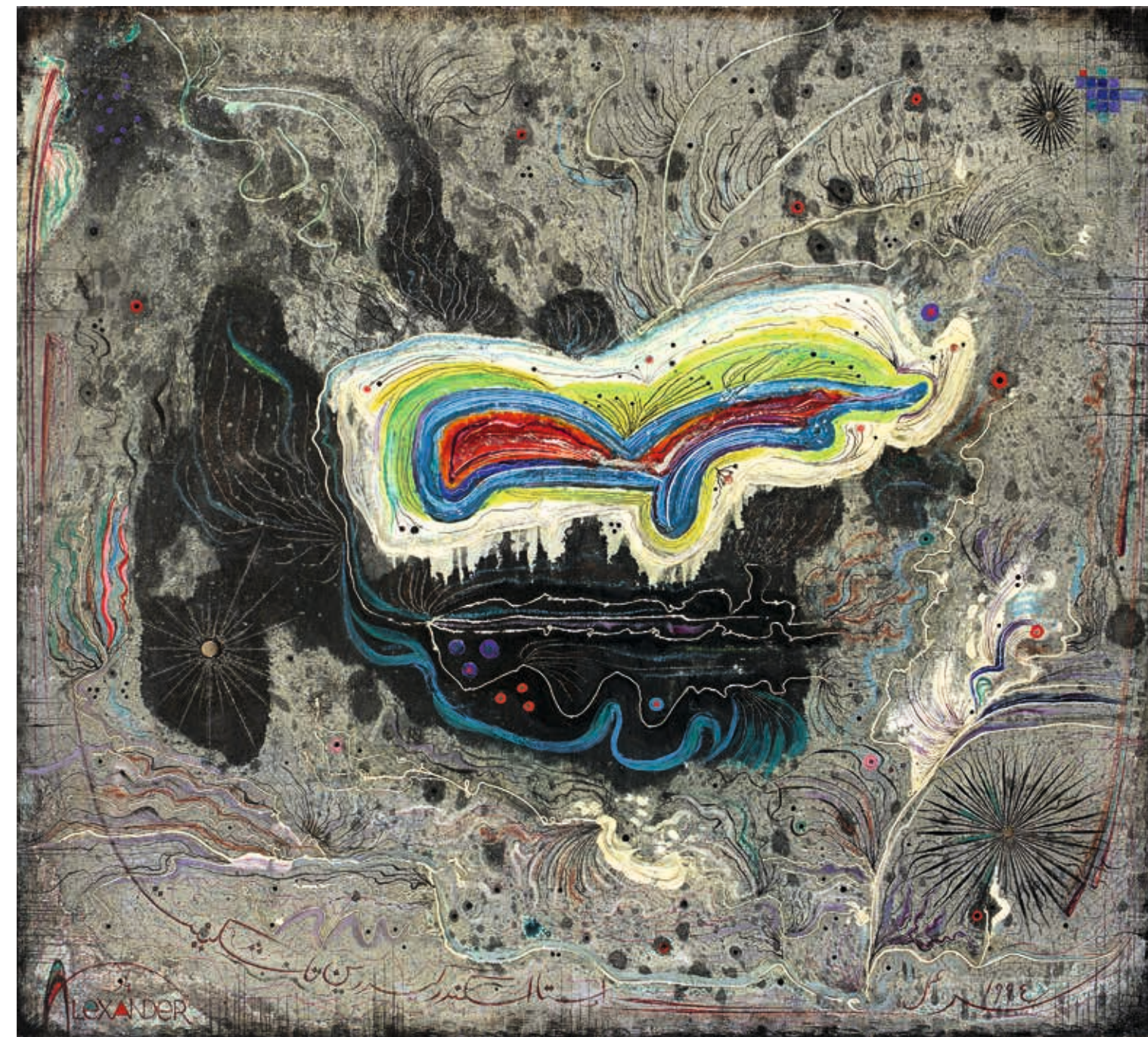
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A Stroll

1989. Oil on cardboard.
80 × 50 cm



The Evening Star
1994. Canvas, oil.
94 x 91 cm



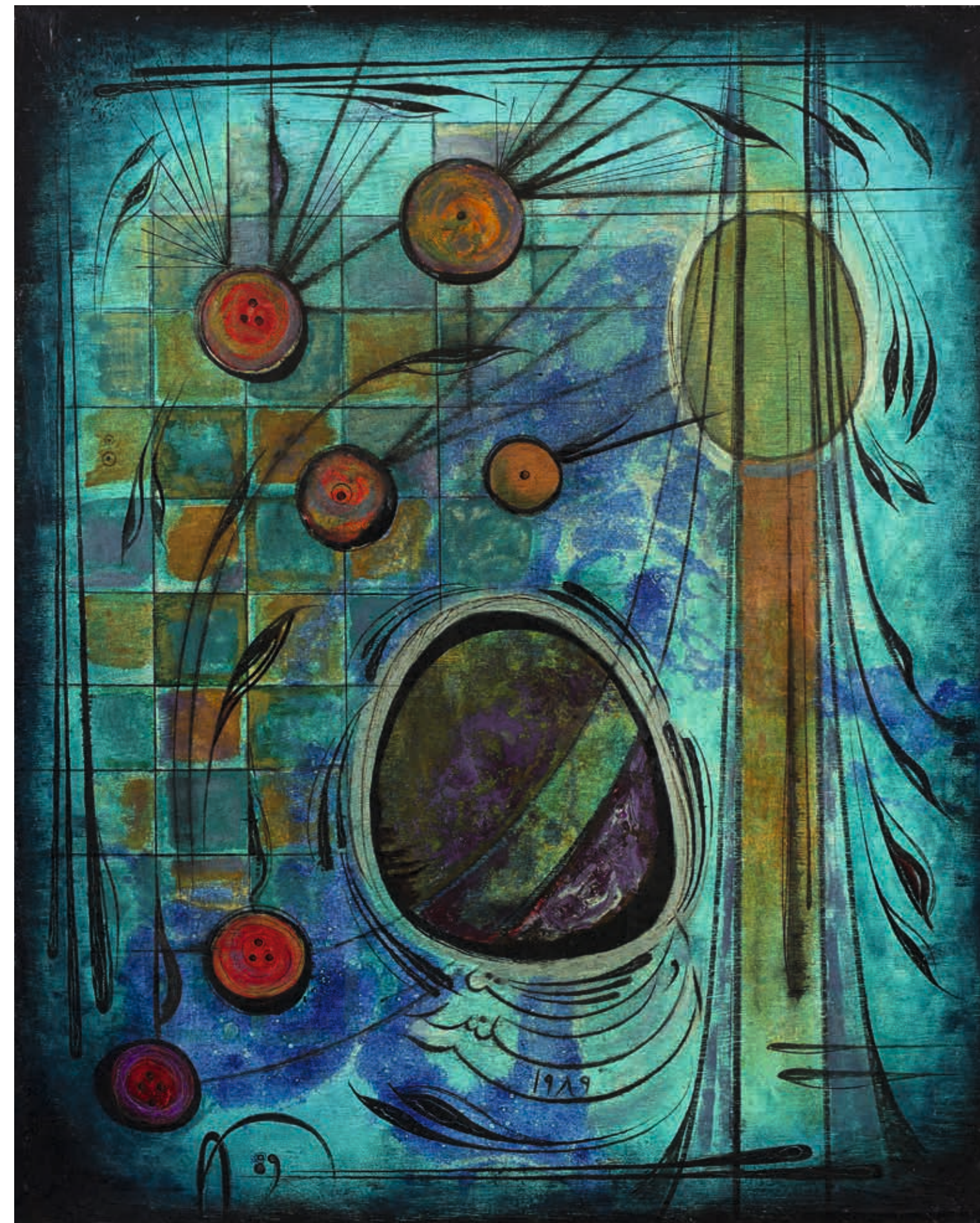
Growth by The Light Truth
1994. Canvas, oil.
100 x 92 cm



**Presentiment
of Reformation**
1994. Cardboard, oil.
68 × 75 cm

p. 35

**Wisdom is Better
Than Strength**
1989. Hardboard, oil
66 × 53,5 cm





**Cherished Block
of Our Childhood**
1994. Canvas, oil.
100 × 100 cm



Song of Songs
1998. Canvas, oil.
100 × 100 cm



Ernst Neizvestny
Sculptor, Monumentalist

p. 38

**To the Memory
of a Great Poet
(B, Pasternak)**

1990, Cardboard, oil.
80×50 cm

The Hermit of Cosmic Depths

(Interview given to the
Russian Television
Network on January 15th,
2001 in New York)

We were introduced by a mutual friend, the architect Andrei Kosinsky, who at the time was successfully working in Tashkent. It was he, who brought me to Kedrin in the spring of 1974. Sasha was still young, though, I too was younger. The works that I saw, I liked immediately, though he was not as mature as he is now...

What did I like? The thing is that artists, especially visitors, Russians who travel to Asia, have an internal impulse to exploit its native exoticism. In some cases these attempts are of a speculative nature — an attempt to quickly blend into the environment, often sincere, but rarely successful. Thus what I liked in Sasha's work, in the colorful ceramics I saw at that time, there was not a fraction of speculation, of an attempt to ingratiate himself to the eastern motifs... Although it was obvious that some elements of eastern symbolism, traditions, light, sun, color, time and space have had an influence over him... But in his works they look natural and integrated. One cannot possibly call his ceramics "decorative", "applied" or "ornamental", no this is full-fledged Art. Despite the refinement, and even preciseness of form, depth and ornamental qualities of color, a breath of true, monumental Art is always present in these works.

Usually ceramics is considered an applied or decorative art. If the artist also paints, he considers this a different art form, easel art for example. Consequentially, the artistic identity is split, but not with Sasha. I do not see a principal difference between Sasha's painting and ceramics, outside of materials and methods of course. Both contain current, I would say, cosmic rhythms...

In these works, there is something that is very close to me in art: a sacred element. I do not mean a connection to a specific church or mosque, no, but a feeling tied to the mystery of being, to cosmic understanding, is present in his work!

Sasha is an unusually wholesome person. He is honest, and was always honest. He is principled, and always was. And unfussy, in that he would work only to create, rather than to "show off" or "pretend". This is noticeable in his persona and his work. I would say he is a devout man, a hermit, in a certain sense. This was always the case, there, in the USSR, and here, in the USA.

That is why Aleksander Kedrin, in this crowd of finicky seekers of fortune, is a solitary, but an incredibly appealing figure.





Sergo Sutyagin

Friend of Aleksander Kedrin,
Architect, Member of IAAM
(International Academy
of Architecture) Recipient
of State and International
Awards Tashkent,
Uzbekistan 13.03.2014

p. 40

Chust, Ferghana, Summer

1956. Cardboard, oil.
47,7 × 32,7 cm

Sasha Kedrin

*Often people are imprinted
By the headwaters, which let them grow.
There are people conceived by flames
And those birthed from dampness.*
I. Guberman

I cannot believe that people, who became close friends, brothers in art, met each other by accident. Each of us, expressing ourselves, proceeding from both tradition and the modern (contemporary to when we started out). And this was not only in art, whether painting, sculpture, architecture or music, but also in philosophy: one influenced those he was close to, borrowing from them in return. Yet, we were all unique, not like one another, and each was an individual, who contributed significantly to the cultural development of our city, of our country and even beyond its borders.

Aleksander Kedrin (Sasha) is one of them. He left a bright light of his extraordinary vision in a seemingly traditional and ancient craft like ceramics, where from prehistoric times all seemed to have been said, crafted, painted, unearthed and exhibited in both households and museum halls.

We weren't just friends, we understood each other from the beginning, when we were still young. And although I knew many other artists, it was him I invited to participate in the creation of the "Palace of Arts" (Panoramic), of the metro station "Prospect of Cosmonauts", of the Kokand Musical Drama Theatre. His contributions to all these projects were not merely "topical" decorations, these were massive works, organically intertwined with the architecture, actively influencing the final product.

I was very nervous, encouraging the creation of the impossible, or so it seemed, since no one had previously used such oversized decorative details, as we had envisioned, to create the effect of infinity, of speed and agility, in a limited, underground space of the "Prospect of Cosmonauts" metro station. In addition, the endless "lines of movement" from white at the bottom, to dark blue at the top, had to swirl, creating large, circular "windows" that would illustrate the twelve stages of space exploration (six on each side of the platform). The harmony of this space is further complimented by a crystal "milky way" in the center of the dropped ceiling and by the crystal columns, illuminated from above.

How simple to speak of this today! But then...it was impossible to actualize the vision without the understanding and support of the head of our government, Sh. Rashidov.

Every day, as I walk into the lobby of the metro station (on my way to and from work), I greet Sasha Kedrin, who has long lived in New York. It is his round, bottomless blue sky and the touchingly grey-blue sphere of Earth soaring above it, placed above the ladder leading down to the platform, greeting all those who enter.

I greet the never-to-be-forgotten Arnold Gan, who painted the 12 stages of space exploration; and his younger brother Victor, with whom we were able to construct both the glass columns of the platform and the "milky way" in the center of the dropped ceiling, again with the help of Sh. Rashidov.



Fountain "Temptation"
at the Tourist Cultural Center
in Tashkent dedicated to Miró
and Gaudi

1988. Ceramics and terracotta.
5m in height

What about the grand in scale and fascinating in content work Sasha created in the Palace of Culture in Tashkent? And in record time too, due to his indescribable energy and incredible work ethic! Every element of the facing in the lobby had to be first forged with the help of the porcelain factory, then fired in the kiln, covered with glaze, fired at a certain temperature, then, with gold touches added, re-fired at a different temperature. He did not spare himself, managed to finish on time, conquered.

Simultaneously, he completed two amazing ceramic panels in two separate buffets, "Spring" and "Autumn". This titanic work, in extreme conditions — kilns, heat, over-fires, under-fires, breakages and so on, could not have left his health unaffected. He damaged his eyesight, and thus could not return to working with ceramics, having completed as much as could only be possible in several lifetimes.

Nevertheless, Sasha Kedrin always continued to work, no matter the conditions. He would create sketches for all his works. He just wanted to express himself: his vision, his philosophy — which stems from tradition but is close to abstraction, unlike any and unrepeatable, whether in his art or sculpture, ceramics, mosaic or canvas.

While living in New York, Sasha participated in the Biennale in Florence and organized exhibitions (both of which he wrote to me about, and I read in E. Neizvestny's accounts).

Kedrin still continues to create his paintings-parables. And I eagerly look forward to seeing him, after so many years apart, in Moscow, where an exhibition of his work is planned.

For now I continue to "communicate" with Sasha not only in the metro, but also at home, by looking daily at his wonderful, in color and composition, platters, "Pomegranates" and "Young Girl's Visage", that radiate light and benevolence.

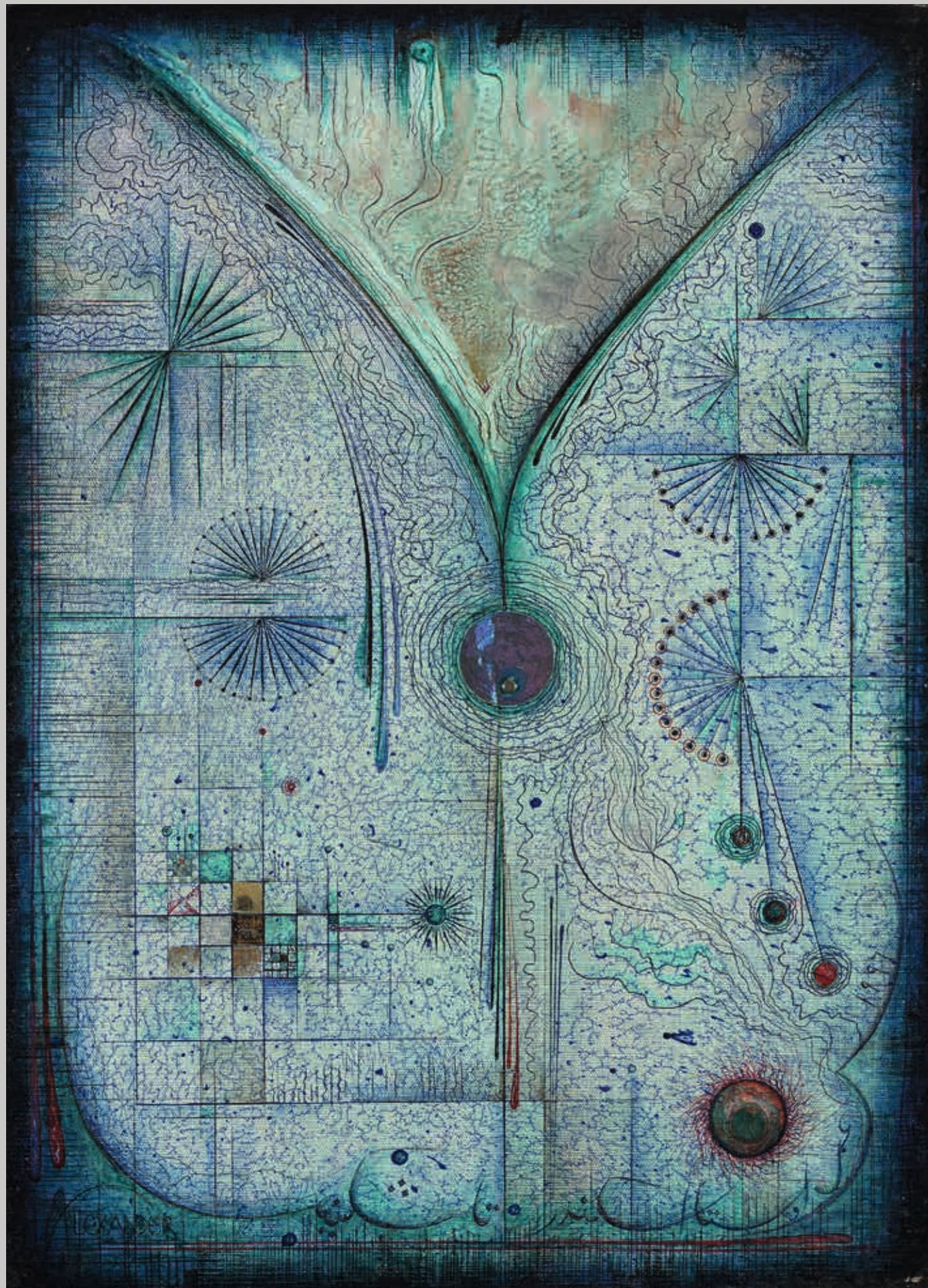
Two other small platters hang in Italy, in the homes of my daughters, Aleksandra and Karine.

It is not by accident that I had met Kedrin, but at the behest from above, since "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..."



Irises

1963. Canvas, oil.
152 × 102 cm



Aleksander Glezer

A collector and exhibitor
of Russian Non-Conformist Art
Moscow, 2009

p. 44

Invariable

1996. Oil, cardboard, canvas.
70 x 50 cm

Aleksander Kedrin

To be an unofficial artist in the USSR, especially in the provinces, was impossible. A loner was easily crushed by the authorities. That is the position in which Aleksander Kedrin, who was born in Tashkent, in 1940, found himself. And yet, his father was a Petersburg native, a hereditary nobleman, graphic artist reared in the circles of Petersburg intelligentsia. His grandfather was an attorney, member of the Russian State Duma, then a minister of Justice in the émigré government in Paris. Bunin and Tolstoy referred to him as a prominent statesman in their writings. The second cousin of Aleksander Kedrin's father was the poet Dmitri Kedrin. When the Stalinist purges began, Aleksander's father decided to move to Tashkent, where the reprisals against dissidents were not as severe. In 1935, he became one of the organizers of the Artists Union of Uzbekistan. But, eventually, repressions reached even here, and Kedrin's father lived in anticipation of an arrest. In 1939, he married a graduate of the Tashkent University, Vera Denyakina and, on the 11th of May, their only son, Aleksander, was born. The threat of war was already approaching and the concerns of authorities were elsewhere. But the war ended and, on September 18, 1945, Dmitri Kedrin was killed in Moscow. The threat of reprisal once again hung over Aleksander's father.

Little Sasha Kedrin began painting before he could walk. Every day his father would go sketch the picturesque surroundings of old Tashkent; Sasha began to accompany him and make his own pencil sketches. There was an album of French Art of the early XX century in his father's library, and Sasha spent much time studying it. As a young man, his father wrote poetry, knew Alexander Blok and Nikolay Gumilev. He raised his son in the traditions of Russian and French art and poetry. At their house, poetry and classical music was always heard. Sasha's mother sang well, accompanying herself on a mandolin. Sasha's parents instilled in him the understanding of ethics, the intuition to perceive beauty, and the pursuit of the sublime. They commanded their son: one cannot bargain with his conscience, and Sasha took that lesson to heart at an early age. They taught him that dishonesty is repulsive in art, just as it is in life and in love. Man's misfortune begins with his lie, both in life and in art: the Muse is a fastidious lady, and never forgives deceitfulness! It is with these covenants that Aleksander Kedrin entered Soviet life.

The Kedrins lived in the old part of Tashkent, with crooked streets, mosques and alleyways. His first experiments in art began while still at school, at twelve years of age. One day his father took him to Moscow; and there they went to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, where Sasha saw the originals of Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Modigliani. This completely altered his perception of art. Interestingly, when he approached Degas work, "Blue Dancers", he stopped stone-still, as if a thunderbolt had struck him with unexplainable mystical excitement. It was then that Sasha decided to become an artist, and dedicate his whole life to it.

And so, the decision was made. His father bought him a sketchbook with oil paints and brushes. Sasha painted numerous still-lives, studies of urban streets, self-portraits and

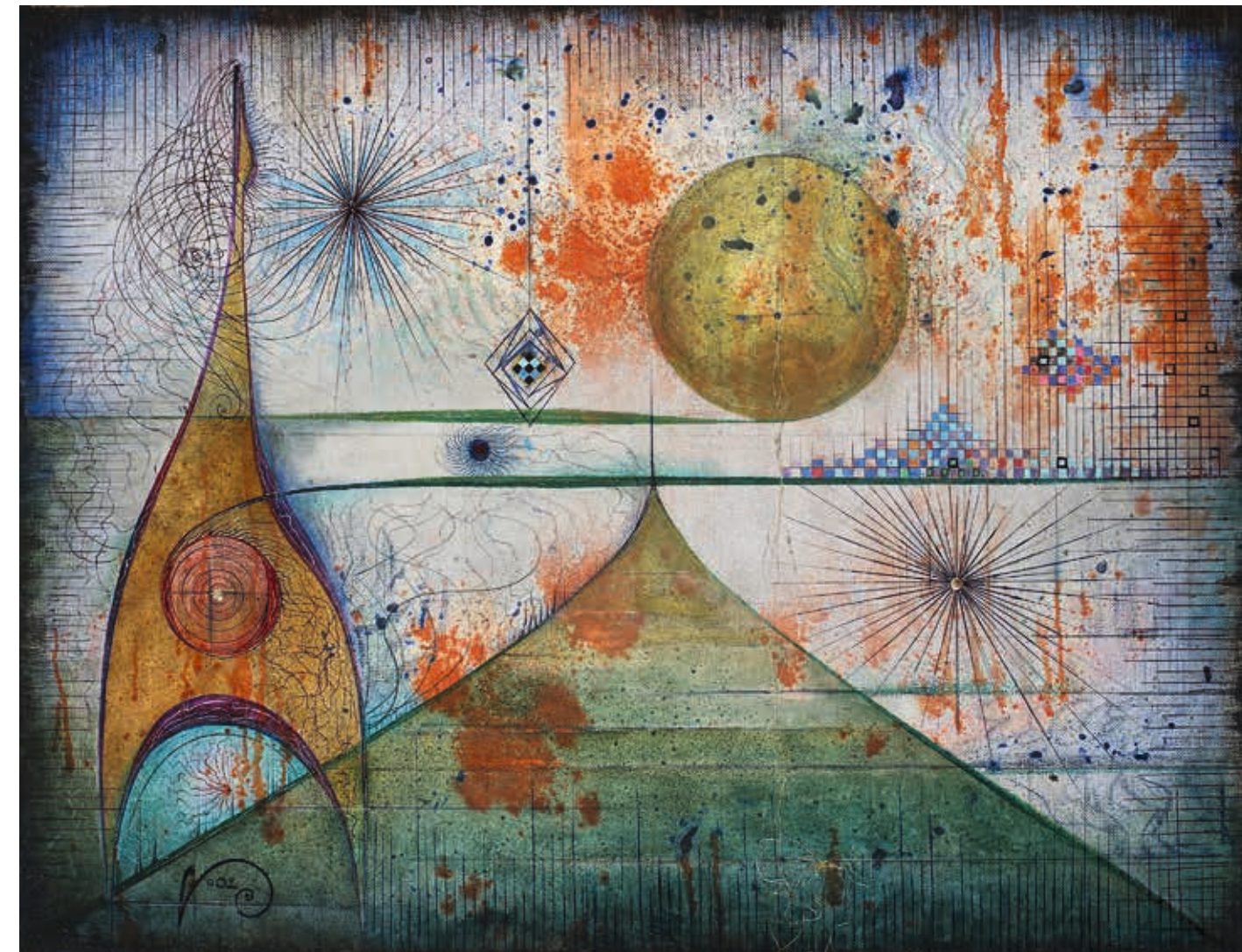


Yes – I am Coming Soon!

1994. Canvas, oil.
98 × 98 cm

portraits of classmates. He was completely under the charm of the Impressionists. His works were approved by the Tashkent artists, Aleksander Volkov and the recently returned from exile Mikhail Kurzin.

After graduating from school in 1957, Aleksander entered the Benkov Art College of Uzbekistan. In the fall of 1959, he organized an exhibition at the Cinema House. His fellow students exhibited their works with him. There were seven of them altogether. All the exhibited paintings were no further left than the impressionists were. Nevertheless, the reaction of the authorities to the exhibition, unsanctioned by the Artists Union, was immediate. There was a discussion of the exhibition by the Artists Union. The student-youths were accused of ideological sabotage and demands were made not only to close the exhibition, but also to expel the participants from their educational institutions. "They have decomposed, became cosmopolitan, deeply alien to the Soviet order" — declared Tkachenko. Aleksander Kedrin's paintings "Shadows of the Past" (currently in the collection of a well-known American collector of unofficial Russian art, Dr. Norton Dodge), "Father's Portrait" and "Art Studio" aroused a particularly violent protest of the Artists Union officials. The exhibition was urgently closed, and penalties were imposed on all the participants. The bloody chaos of the Revolution and Stalinist purges altered the consciousness not only of the officials of the Art-



The Problem of Solitude

2002. Canvas, oil.
76,5 × 99,5 cm

ists Union and the Ministry of Culture, but the psyche of whole generations of Soviet people, living under the oppression of totalitarian government. Many believed in the inevitability of what was occurring, others — in its rationality and even expediency. Everyone, or almost everyone, believed that there was no turning back.

Finally, by demand of the authorities, all the participants were dealt with. All were expelled. Aleksander Kedrin was expelled without a right to apply anywhere... However, taking advantage of the Khrushchev thaw and the warming political climate, Kedrin entered the Ostrovsky Art Institute in Tashkent. Unfortunately, the political climate shifted again. The unofficial artists in the Manezh were subjected to violent criticism by Khrushchev. Reports were made by Khrushchev and Ilyichev. The wave of repressions rose again; again Kedrin was expelled from the Institute, but this time with a certificate attesting to professional unsuitability. After a denunciation by his neighbors, a criminal case was initiated against him, for the charge of "social parasitism". Aleksander immediately began working as a porter, hoping to avoid the fate of poet Joseph Brodsky. He tried to avoid conflict with authorities, understanding that in such a country he would always be a "white crow". The question of his physical existence depended on his ability to become invisible, a man lost in the crowd of faceless executors of the state's will. Many others repented and joined the communist party to achieve this, but Aleksander could not submit to



The Beautiful Fatima

1989. Canvas, oil.
97 × 97 cm

such humiliation. What was left for him to do to achieve the desired legality? One needed to complete one's education and receive a diploma, find a job and join the Artists Union.

From Kedrin's viewpoint, the fact that the authorities sent bulldozers at the unofficial painters in 1974, is impossible to rationalize. On the edge of the empire, in Tashkent, Aleksander Kedrin found a way to survive in this absolutely insane country. Following his father's advice, he continued to master ceramics, and did not show his paintings to anyone. This turned out to be a successful move, since, in the eyes of officials, Aleksander became engaged in applied art only. Ceramics for Kedrin was merely a new medium, very flexible and expressive, allowing him to mask serious art under the guise of decorative. In Moscow, he became acquainted with poets: Akhmadulina and Voznesensky, and with nonconformists: Bulatov, Vechtomov, Neizvestny and Nemukhin. He, however, refused to participate in joint exhibitions, assuming that this would not be forgiven in Tashkent.

He obtained a position of an artist and a member of the art council at a ceramics factory and began working. In the post-Khrushchev period, the ceramics factory belonged to the Ministry of Local Industry, and the Art Institute was transferred from the oversight of Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Secondary and Specialized Education. Aleksander made an appointment with the official of the above Ministry and explained his situation thusly:



Cherished Happy Block

1994. Canvas, oil.
92 × 94 cm

— I am a young specialist. I am not being allowed to complete my education. The people's money has been spent on me, but I was then expelled and not allowed to graduate.

— What exactly is the issue? — asked the official, — were you drinking and getting into brawls?

— Yes, that is why I was expelled.

The official must have liked Kedrin. On the letterhead of the Ministry he wrote a directive: "...enroll as a student into the Art Institute at the discretion of the administration." The Institute's director at that time was Oleg Apuhtin, a reasonably liberal man. He knew about Aleksander's expulsion, but, interested in acquiring a talented student, he took a risk. Aleksander was enrolled into the fourth year of the ceramics program at the Tashkent Art Institute and in May of 1965 he graduated with honors.

One more bastion remained — the Artists Union. His friends — the architects, with whom he actively and closely worked as a monumentalist — help him conquer this one. At the exhibitions of the Artists Union he showed only his ceramics. In the dark basement of the Artists House he built a workshop, and began working on his art underground, not only figuratively, but literally.

Officials of the Ministry of Culture and the Artists Union saw in Aleksander Kedrin an enemy, always ready for ideological sabotage. Thus, the exhibition in the Summer of 1965 on the



The Twin in The Clouds

2014. Canvas, oil.
65,5 × 74 cm

walls of a newspaper editorial office, where not only the ceramic platters were displayed, but also the paintings, was a serious mistake. His friends, the poets, offered to exhibit his works in the editorial office of a youth newspaper, the “Komsomolets of Uzbekistan”. They explained that the viewing would be for friends only and there was nothing to be afraid of — everything would be fine. Alas, even though Kedrin carefully placed his sketches, watercolors and paintings among the ceramics, denunciations followed: “counter-revolutionists have infiltrated a Soviet newspaper and are exhibiting abstractionists!” In vain did the editor of the paper and the staff try to explain: “There isn’t a single abstract work on the walls of the editorial office. Go and look for yourselves.” His friends, poets and architects, went to the Central Committee to intercede on behalf of the young artist. However, the decision was inflexible: the exhibition had to be closed.

Yet, they agreed not to repress the artist, and only scolded him in the newspaper. This was a lucky break for Aleksander. He remembered the lesson well, and only twenty years later, in 1990, did he show his paintings again in the halls of Artists Union. An article about Aleksander’s art and reproductions of his work appeared in a magazine, “Construction and Architecture”. Architects constantly supported him, seeing in him a useful co-author, a smart modern artist, capable of attaining professional goals. These same qualities, inherent in Aleksander, aroused hostility and jealousy of his colleagues in the Artists Union, who were annoyed by everything in Kedrin: how he lived, how he dressed, whom he was friends with. Since he lived in the artists’ colony, he was always in front of them, like a “fly in milk”. They continually wrote denunciations,



Marc Chagall’s Star

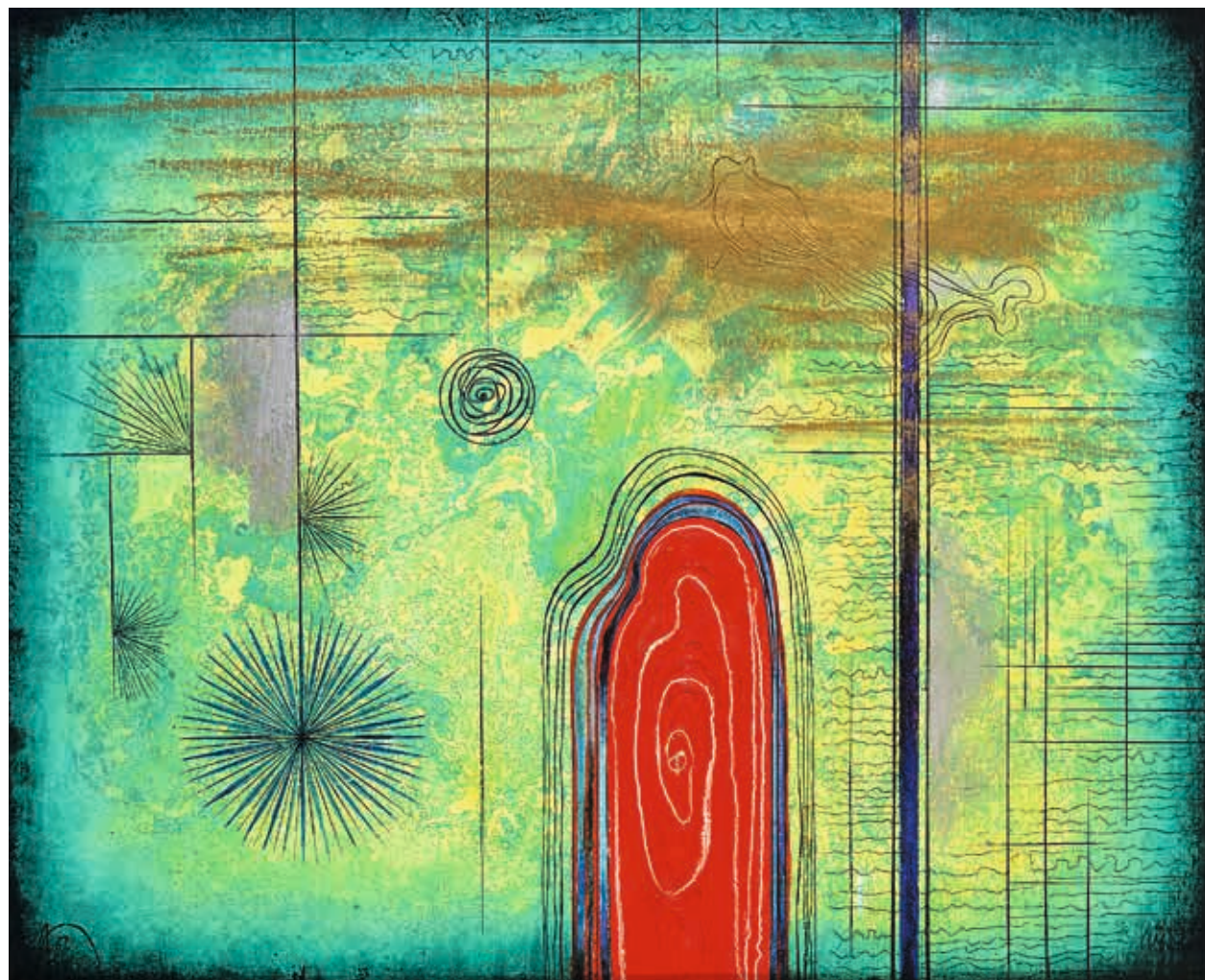
2014. Canvas, oil.
68,5 × 75 cm

accusing him of modernism, of admiring the bourgeois west and insubordination toward authorities. Aleksander had to become a member of the Artists Union to escape danger. Though some of the artists liked his paintings, the leadership of the Union was against him.

It is hard to say now what decided the case: either the popularity of Aleksander amidst the architects, or the changing of leadership, or even a lucky chance, but, despite the fierce opposition from officials, in April of 1971 Aleksander Kedrin became a member of the Union.

Having realized his position as a painter, Aleksander realized his social heterogeneity in the servile environment of Soviet officialdom. “And what was there to do?” — Aleksander asked me, — “One had to use camouflage. For example, Eric Bulatov illustrated children’s books. Ernst Neizvestny carved tombstones at cemeteries. Poets earned a living translating the poetry of others.

As I have mentioned, in 1971 Kedrin was finally accepted into the Artists Union. But how much effort went into this! The fact that he continued to win awards at ceramics competitions helped him. In 1964, N. V. Kashina, one of the leaders of the Artists Union of Uzbekistan and a well known painter of the older generation, offered him a joint project. Aleksander completed six decorative ceramic monumentalist reliefs, based on her sketches — “Collective Farm Cares” — for the exhibition of National Agricultural and Industrial Achievements in Tashkent. In 1966, Tashkent was preparing for the World Exposition, Expo-67, which was to take place in Montreal. Aleksander was lucky: three of his works were chosen for exhibition.



He slowly built up the image of a master ceramist of the decorative and applied genre, and of monumental ceramics. He did not forget the rage of officials that his exhibition of paintings in 1959 and 1965 had brought on; and he did not wish to risk it again. Interestingly, Kedrin continued to explore in the ceramic medium that, which he had began in his paintings in the 60's. On his platters he created abstract, brightly colored, dynamic compositions, impeccable in rhythm and plastics, with intriguing textures — which were unanimously lauded. Architects were increasingly drawn to his works. As it turned out, his platters excellently solved the spatial issues of interiors. Sergo Sutyagin, the leading architect of the Republic, was the first to invite him to cooperate. He offered Kedrin to resolve the issue of interior decoration of the Palace of Arts in Tashkent. For twenty-five years, from the mid-sixties until the late eighties, Kedrin worked with the architects on more than thirty projects. Architectural designers stood in queue to get to him.

Despite the progress made in achieving a social facade, Aleksander understood the shakiness of his position. It was as if he existed in a state of unstable equilibrium, continuing to secretly paint abstract works. His first abstract work was completed in 1962: "Come and See". It is a small composition, based on a gospel parable.

How did it happen that Kedrin's works, that were impressionistic in the beginning, had become abstract? Aleksander's father considered the cubist works of Picasso and the abstract compositions of Kandinsky as something questionable, and would repeat that he is for leftist art, but no further left than the heart. But the son went further than his father. After "Come and

See", he painted "Irises" which only vaguely resemble his favorite Van Gogh. He becomes fascinated by Russian poetry and philosophy of Berdyaev. His idea that poetry and art are suprarational forms of self-knowledge helped him overcome the boundary between objectivity and objectlessness in his art, moving into absolute abstraction. In abstraction the artist gains freedom. Perhaps that is why Kedrin, devoid of freedom, was drawn into abstract art.

His works become meditations and attempts at plumbing the meaning of life. He felt that it was no longer sufficient to depict the world that he saw and sensed. It is not only the totalitarianism, the stupid and unscrupulous people, who tried to break his talent, and force him into conforming, that were the issue. Challenges of a different scale and category presented themselves as worthy of dedicating his life to. The common good, the humankind, the universal — this is what concerned him. Why does a person, who enters this world in pursuit of happiness, suffer so deeply and diversely? What is the prime cause of evil and suffering? Of course, the Soviet Union was a degenerate state, the "Evil Empire" as president Reagan had called it. Aleksander felt the inhumanity of the regime on himself, on his family, on the fates of his closest friends. But people have always suffered, and everywhere; thus poor regime does not appear to be the prime cause of evil. In USSR, during Aleksander's life, the terrors of Stalinist regime were replaced by the Khrushchev thaw, then — the Brezhnev stagnation, Gorbachev's Perestroika and Yeltsin's government... And so? Does progress solve the issue of happiness? Alas, no. Though, as a whole, progress is good...

The problem and mystery of human consciousness remains independent of outside conditions and life circumstances, but depends directly on one's relationship with one's own conscience. Kedrin had always been interested in this issue. It is the reason that he had always wanted to develop as an artist without compromising his conscience, without giving in to idiots — accomplices of the government. "Art is always confessional," says Kedrin, "it is impossible to conceal bargains with your conscience in it."

Having replaced the medium of works exhibited by him, he sent the ideological bloodhounds of the KGB and the Artists Union down a false trail, baffled them by becoming a harmless ceramist from a dangerous seeker of truth. Ceramics made Kedrin financially independent as well: fulfilling the requests of the architects, he slowly became the leading artist of monumental ceramics in Uzbekistan and a well-to-do person.

In September, 1975, he participated in the International Symposium-Exhibition of Ceramics in Vilnius, and brought an Honorary Diploma home to Tashkent. In the summer of 1976, he won the contest for a large, one hundred meter relief in the city of Sochi, and completed it by the end of the year. He spent 1977–81 completing a gigantic project for a large building that was being built in the center of Tashkent, the future Parliament of Uzbekistan. It is four and a half thousand square meters of blue and gold ceramic facing and two reliefs, 81 sq.m. each, blooming with abstract platters. He worked in Samarkand, Kokand, Khorezm, finishing his ceramic works by 1989, since, by then, mimicry was no longer relevant and the KGB was busy enough without having to catch abstract painters with the fall of the USSR looming.

For the first time, Kedrin used a purely poetic method in his 1964 painting, "Hurricane of Nonexistence", combining on one canvas two objects impossible to combine — macro and microcosm. It would seem that such diverse objects cannot be merged in one format, and yet it happened. He continued to use this method in many other paintings. He often experimented with materials for his art: mixings oil paints with sand, cement, eggshells, creating semi-figurative, semi-abstract and abstract compositions on paper, cardboard, particleboard and even metal trays. He used pencil and ink, gouache and tempera. More recently, based on a newly published Akhmadulina poem "Solitude", he painted a water-

Come and See!

1962. Cardboard, oil.
50×61 cm

color “Solitude”. The work is currently in a private collection in Paris. Between 1970 and 1974 Kedrin painted close to fifty objectless compositions, that are centered around the theme of contradiction and tension in the modern world.

I would like to point out that, while in his natural works Kedrin uses infinite shades of colors and undertones, in the abstract composition he uses pure color — achieving optical rather than mechanical blending of paints. Aleksander underlines shapes with black lines to enhance the contrast. In his book, “Painting and Art”, published in Paris, Kedrin’s friend, Eric Bulatov writes: “As it turns out, the flat surface of a painting possesses spatial properties. Of special importance is that, while remaining flat, the surface becomes an expanse; and this expanse can evolve in either direction from the surface of the painting: toward us, or away, deeper into the painting. Absolutely flat images are impossible. And if so, every image, whether the artist wished to make it maximally flat or voluminous, must be constructed and structured in relation to the surface of the painting. Otherwise the image becomes a spatial confusion...”

It is necessary to note that, Kedrin experienced and understood all this in his thirty years of working with architects, and mastered it as a monumentalist. Third dimension in painting — an eternal theme and question, which the artist has always faced, starting from Neolithic times. In eastern miniatures this question was resolved in one way, in European art — quite differently: from Bosch to Pussin, from Brueghel to Turner, painters dealt with this issue by dividing the surface of the painting into three planes: background, middle ground and foreground. This method is considered classical. Kedrin knew this well, as he had studied the method both in the College and Institute. Artists, from Impressionists and Van Gogh, to Picasso, Kandinsky and Chagall freely utilized the European methods, as well as eastern and African, combining in one painting several viewpoints and plots.

Aleksander Kedrin decided to do the following: while keeping the moment of presence in the painting, he attempted to merge a multitude of viewpoints in it, as well as a direct and inverse perspective. Constantly complicating his own artistic task, Kedrin sought to obtain new possibilities of expression. He no longer showed his experiments to anyone, understanding he could no longer take that risk, especially since he became more and more interested in the works of Kandinsky and Miró. At the same time he studied the Bible in depth, as a philosophical and poetical system. According to Hegel: “Religion, philosophy and art are three methods of discovering the truth”. That interrelationship with the Truth became the key factor in Kedrin’s life and art. He often repeated the lines of his beloved Pasternak:

*In everything, I want to reach
The very essence.
In work, in my search for the path,
In heart’s unrest.
The core of days long gone,
And their reason,
The very bottom of the roots,
The pith, the heart itself.*

Aleksander Kedrin told me that he considers Kandinsky and Miró his mentors in art. He feels especially close to Kandinsky, whose theoretical works he studies. Kandinsky wrote that forms of expression came to him as if “by themselves, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly maturing in the soul. These internal maturations are impervious to observation” — Kandinsky continued — “they are mysterious and depend on hidden causes. Only on the surface of one’s soul, an obscure internal fermentation can be felt, a certain tension of internal forces that

clearly foretells the coming of the happy moment, which sometimes lasts an instant, or whole days. I think that this is the spiritual process of fertilization, maturation of the fruit, labor and birth of a person.” In his book, “Concerning the Spiritual in Art”, Kandinsky wrote:

*“The more abstract is form, the more clear and direct is its appeal.
In any composition the material side may be more or less omitted
in proportion as the forms used are more or less material, and for
them substituted pure abstractions, or largely dematerialized objects.
The more an artist uses these abstracted forms, the deeper and more
confidently will he advance into the kingdom of the abstract. And
after him will follow the gazer at his pictures, who also will have
gradually acquired a greater familiarity with the language of that
kingdom.” (Part II, Chapter VII — tr. M.T.H. Sadler)*

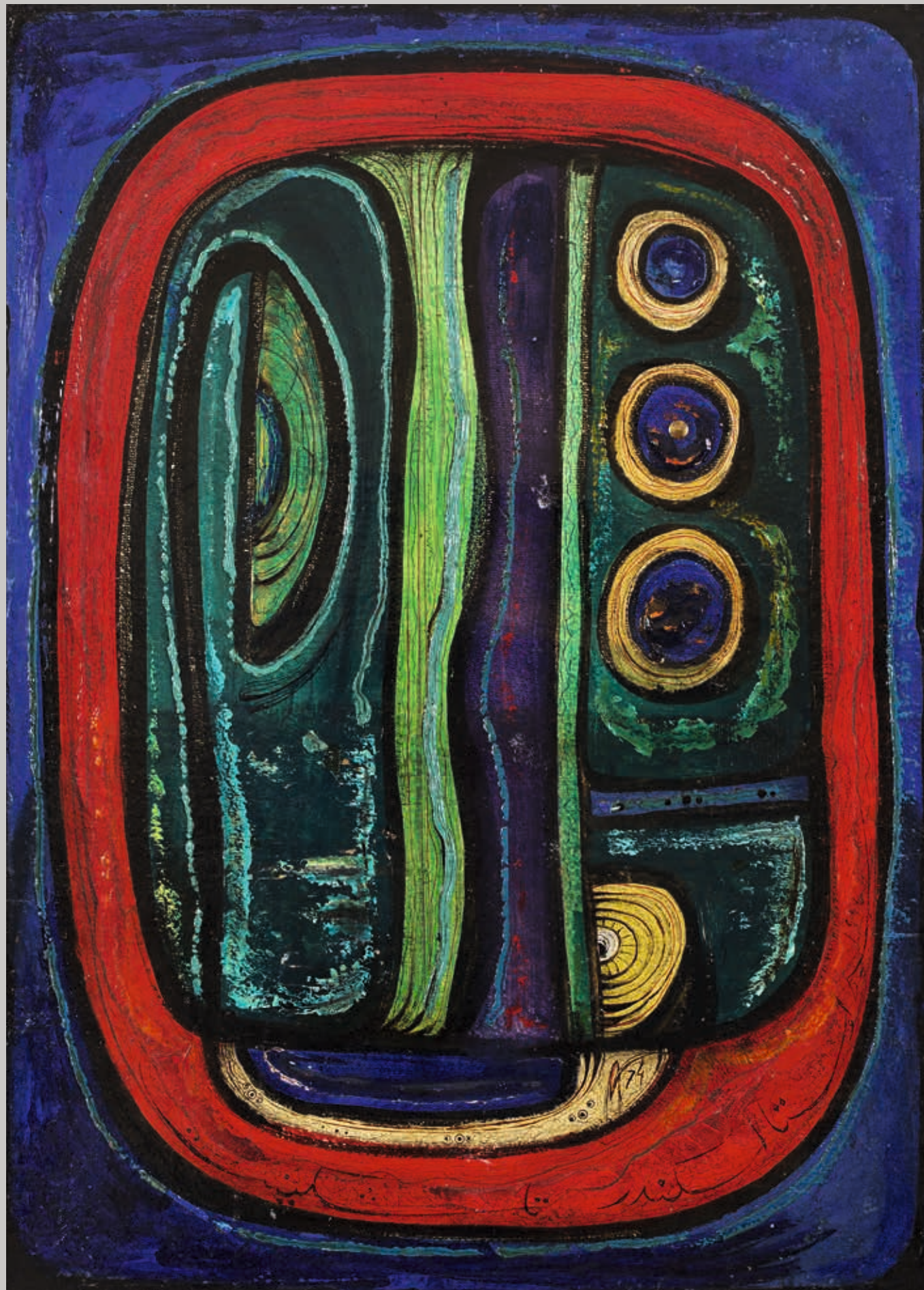
Aleksander Kedrin comprehended Kandinsky’s thoughts clearly, and they enriched him, as did his experience in monumentalist ceramics. This is especially apparent in his works from the late eighties — early nineties. His art became richer and more diverse. When in 1990, in the hall of the Artists Unions, Kedrin showed his paintings for the first time in twenty five years, the exhibition was a great success. His art was christened as “Astral”. “The scholars of bio-energetic and informational processes claim that such paintings reflect higher reality — the astral plan, accessible to the perception of mediums” — wrote Andrey Kudryashov in “Komsomolets of Uzbekistan” from October 9th, 1990.

Encouraged by the first serious success of his canvases, Kedrin painted a series of large-scale works (200 cm. by 150 cm.) based on Biblical motifs. His works demand increasingly more emotional and intellectual expenditures by the viewer, which, of course, narrows the circle of viewership, as many are unprepared or unable to express empathy, compassion and thought.

Kedrin continued to paint the “Catharsis” series, but his decision to immigrate to the USA matured in the nineties. This was a difficult decision, since by this point he was secure and fully independent. Furthermore, he was very popular and beloved by the Tashkent intelligentsia. But who knew what else could happen in Russia and Uzbekistan?! In May of 1995, he permanently moved to New York with his family. In the USA, Aleksander Kedrin actively participates in exhibitions. He has been a member of numerous joint exhibitions of Russian artists in multiple galleries New York, Canada, and in the Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Jersey City. “Vand Art” gallery in Montreal hosted a personal exhibition of his works. Several of his paintings were acquired by Professor Norton Dodge, a noted collector of unofficial Russian art. In December of 2000, the Russian Television in New York produced a film about him, in which the famous sculptor, Ernst Neizvestny, gave an interview about him and his art. In the fall of 2003, Kedrin represented the USA in the International Biennale of Art in Florence. He continues to collaborate with the Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Jersey City. Articles about his art periodically appear in newspapers like “Novoe Russkoe Slovo”, “Shield of David” and “Vechernij New York”.

In conclusion, I would like to add one last thing about the talented painter, Aleksander Kedrin. His works can be found in multiple museums in Uzbekistan, as well as in private collections in Tashkent, New York, Paris and other European cities.





Andrei Kosinsky
friend of Aleksander Kedrin,
World Renowned Architect
and Academician.

p. 56

Composition #3

1974. Cardboard, oil.
70 × 50 cm

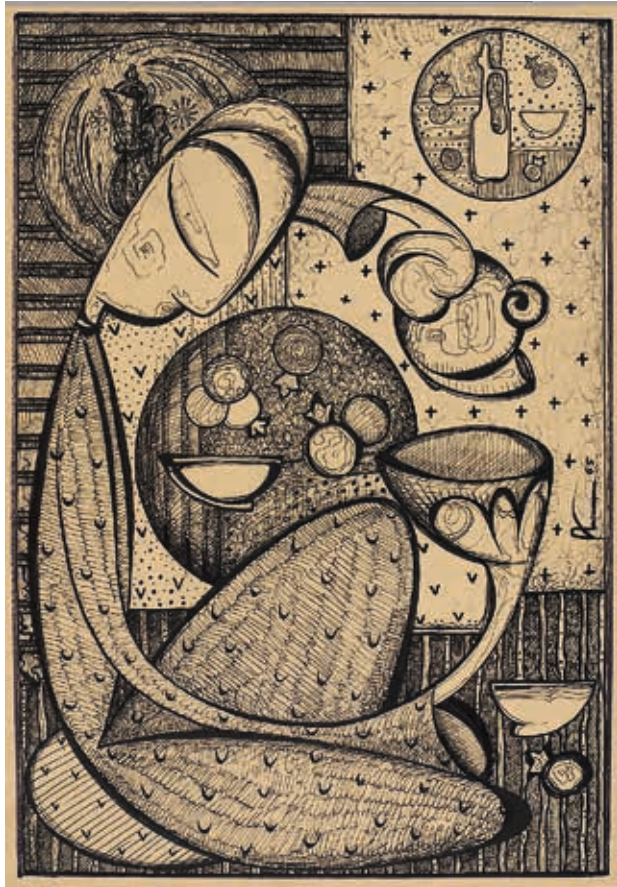
The Last of the Masters

Tashkent, as a city, is comprised of two parts. Two centuries ago, when it became the capital of Turkestan, it was a huge pile of mud houses made of adobe (a mixture of clay, sand, straw and water). Russians flocked to Tashkent after it gained the status of a capital city — for many reasons. Some were drawn by a warm climate. Some wanted to solve their financial problems. Some were escaping persecution by central authorities. As a result, a colonial city sprang up near the old town. It began with small wooden houses with gardens. Gradually it grew taller, and taller and taller. Finally, it turned into the city with tall modern buildings that we see now.

In the early 20th century, fascination with the East was fashionable among European intellectuals and modernists. It began with Impressionists, a little later the fad engulfed the Russian intellectuals. Many rushed to Tashkent in search of spiritual and aesthetic discovery and insight. After the first world war and the revolution, the number of immigrants increased dramatically. The main human flood came from the starving Volga region. Simultaneously, representatives of the old regime noble families continued to gather in Tashkent — to keep away from the power of the KGB. Among them were scholars of Oriental studies. They traveled across the republic with scientific and ethnographic purposes, collected artifacts, studied the historical and cultural heritage. They became acquainted with each other. Some, secretly or openly — accepted Islam.

Sometime in the thirties, an association of artists formed in Tashkent — immigrants from Russia. They called themselves the Masters of the New East. Ideologues of the group were painters, who worked under the influence of European modernists. They were: Aleksander Volkov, Mikhail Kurzin, Nadezhda Kashina and finally Alexander Nikolaev — he was dubbed “Raphael of the East”; and, after converting to Islam, he began to sign paintings with a new name — Usto Mumin (in Uzbek — Quiet (or Gentle) Master). Sasha Kedrin’s father — Veniamin Nikolayevich — joined the group when he moved to Tashkent from Leningrad. A hereditary nobleman, he graduated from St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. Eastern exoticism drew him in, became his flesh and blood and his spiritual cosmos of all his remaining years. Being obsessive people, Masters closely delved into surrounding life, trying to build their worldview on the basic principles of Uzbek life. They painted paintings, inspired by local traditions. It should be noted that the plastic arts as we understand it — as in painting or sculpture — did not exist in Uzbekistan. For one simple reason — Islam forbids images of the objective world. The only exception — the Sher-Dor Madrasah, which is located in Samarkand. There is an image of two leopards on the portal. And, of course, Persian miniature.

In the beginning, while there was no socialist realism, Masters enjoyed the freedom of experimentation. They saw their task of renewing European art with eastern tradition, in a great synthesis of East and West. Unfortunately, their joy was short-lived. In the mid-thirties



The Tea

1965. Paper, ink, pencil.
43 × 30 cm

Wedding

1961–1962. Paper, ink, pencil.
56,7 × 41,8 cm

of the last century, all Soviet artists were “voluntarily” forced to become socialist realists. And here is where the very unpleasant begins. Some were shot, some were made to repent. A typical example — the fate of Nadezhda Kashina. Here was an exquisite artist — and they turned her into hell knows what. Volkov was also broken at the end of life — for which he received the title of an Honored Artist. Remaining Masters were forced to go underground and lead a double life.

It is into this situation of ideological and physical war, between proletarian artists and the modernists, Sasha Kedrin was born in 1940. His family was one of the very needy — thus they lived in the old town, in one of the adobe-walled cottages. When the boy grew older, he was not allowed to go to school, because his mother (while a biologist by training, she had never worked and completely devoted herself to raising her only child) was madly in love with Sasha and was afraid to let him out — especially after dark. Russians were scared of just about everything in Tashkent, although, during the Soviet period, Uzbeks treated visitors in a more than friendly manner. While walking down the street — you were sure to be invited to eat something, some pilaf, by strangers.

As a result, Sasha Kedrin was educated at home, and he was only allowed to attend public school in the upper classes. Imagine the environment in which Sasha matured. On the one hand — his father’s friends, who were called formalists and otherwise persecuted. Usto Mumin, Volkov, Kashina. On the other hand — the energetic socialist realists, who seized power in the Artists Union. They painted countless paintings of leaders, cotton growers, farmers, pioneers, tractors and drummers. A complete disarray in the young man’s head — Which path to choose? Since he grew up among artists, he enrolled in the Benkov Art College.

Naturally, they quickly expelled him, because from the perspective of the teachers, he did not know anything, but in fact it was the opposite — the boy received the finest education in European art from his mentors. After a long ordeal, he eventually entered the Arts and Theatre Institute and, miraculously (one cannot call it anything else), graduated.

I ended up in Tashkent in 1966 — shortly after the earthquake. Sasha was 26 years old. I was eleven years older. We met on the third day after my arrival. From the first day, there was mutual sympathy, which is still ongoing. Incidentally, for over 50 years. Here is some background to this story. I worked in MosProekt. After the Tashkent earthquake, the five of us, young budding employees, were invited to the personnel department. “One of you should go help eliminate the consequences of the tragedy.” By that time, I was thoroughly fed up with the MosProekt situation. Also, my father was killed in Tashkent. This circumstance played a role as well, I wanted to delve into the local archives (and in the end, I managed to find out a lot of things). I agreed. Called my mother, and put her before the fact. “Well done!” — mom supported my decision. — “were I younger, I would go with you.” As it happened, I was leaving on my birthday, in late May. Guests gathered. I said, “Now we have a drink and go to the airport to see me off.” My friends offered to drive me. We got into the car and went to Vnukovo. I checked in my luggage and we went to drink some more vodka. My friends suddenly began to persuade me to get my stuff back and not do “anything stupid”. I went to return the ticket, but I was told that if the luggage is already on the plane, there is no way back. Then I was stuffed into the plane, and when I sobered up, I was already at the Tashkent airport. I took a taxi, went somewhere. I thought that I ended up on some vacant lot on the outskirts of the city, but it turned out that this was the city center. All the buildings were intact. Fortunately, the shocks were vertical, so the buildings survived. For example, earlier, in Ashgabat and in Spitak, there were horizontal shocks — and all the buildings crumbled like a house of cards. All the buildings in Tashkent, on the other hand, were in place, although some had cracked. Old Town was not hurt at all, and if a few adobe blocks fell from some walled cottages, they were immediately put back in place. There were almost no deaths — if someone did die, then it was from a heart attack caused by the shock. Unfortunately, there were still real human tragedies. One kindergarten fell and some of the kids were hurt. But the city was still a city. As I walked the streets I saw people selling ice cream, kebabs, pilaf. Everywhere the teahouses were full of people. However, when night fell, a lot became clear to me. There were no lights in the windows. The whole city went to sleep on the street — on cots. At this time, the leader of Uzbekistan was Rashidov — one of the most influential members of the Politburo. A practical man, he took advantage of the earthquake and suggested “Why not demolish all this faceless junk and build something new, modern? At the same time to solve the housing issue in the city”. Which is what we did. A giant demolition of entire neighborhoods began — starting from the city center. Construction was already speedily unfolding on the empty lots.

Having become friends with Sasha, I noticed that the numerous setbacks left an imprint on his character — he was introverted, he loved to spend time on what is called soul-searching. But he communicated easily — especially with creative people, whom he regarded as his peers. His love affair with ceramics was unfolding in front of my eyes, and I got the impression that he did not yet fully understand what he was creating. He said: “I need money. One has to make a living. And ceramics are currently in demand”. In reality, he was crafting real masterpieces. In the beginning he made only platters. Mostly figurative-type images of objects in Uzbek life (sort of oriental motifs), framed by local ornamental patterns. He had a stove in his studio, and he fired his platters there.

Since financially he was in trouble at the time, Sasha had to earn money any way he could — thankfully he was a dynamic man, always in motion. At one time, he actively collect-

ed shilajit (a thick, sticky tar-like substance used in traditional Eastern medicine). He would go to the mountains (Tashkent is located in the foothills of the Tien Shan), would find the deposits, climb, collect and bring it back. At that time, there was a craze for shilajit in the Soviet Union. Sasha willingly provided me with it, and I sent the fashionable cure to my mother in Moscow. Everyone was happy. Sasha's father was also trying to earn additional income — for example, he designed business cards and bookplates.

Over time, the range of Sasha's works expanded rapidly. As a member of all the arts councils at the time, I looked at all of Sasha's work — as well as other artist's — therefore his emergence as a ceramist happened before my eyes. He was openly disliked in the Artists Union and the Art Foundation — not considered as their "own". Of course! After all, he did not pass the school of socialist realism. Nevertheless, they were forced to recognize his talent. With every passing year, his orders were becoming larger and larger. For example, he was asked to decorate a huge wall — 20 by 20 meters — at the Republican Palace of Congress — ceramic panels with flowers and platters. Then — the metro station, for which he invented a new technique of ceramic production. It turned out beautifully.

I knew that he was painting as well, but he did not show his work to me. I do not know why. Years later, in 1999, traveling by car through America, I found myself in his New York home. It was all covered in canvases of different sizes — from small to huge. This was the first time I saw the whole range of his art.

It is in painting that the poetic subsistence of his soul was revealed. His paintings, in contrast to the ceramics, are not figurative — they are completely abstract. Although each painting has a name — these are mainly abstract as well: "Soul's Strings", "Confusion", "A Dialog with the Cosmos", "Repentance", "A Road Without an End", "Suffering", "Solar Wind". Sasha's synthesis of titles and images — was always a philosophical puzzle that had to be unraveled.

In the West, he was faced with cynical market relations. Local gallery owners met with him kindly, but offered: "Give us 50 thousand dollars — and we'll make you marketable. In three years you could make 200 thousand". Unfortunately, Sasha did not have 50 thousand. That is why such a large amount of work was on the walls of his home. Despite this, his popularity as an artist grew with each passing year.

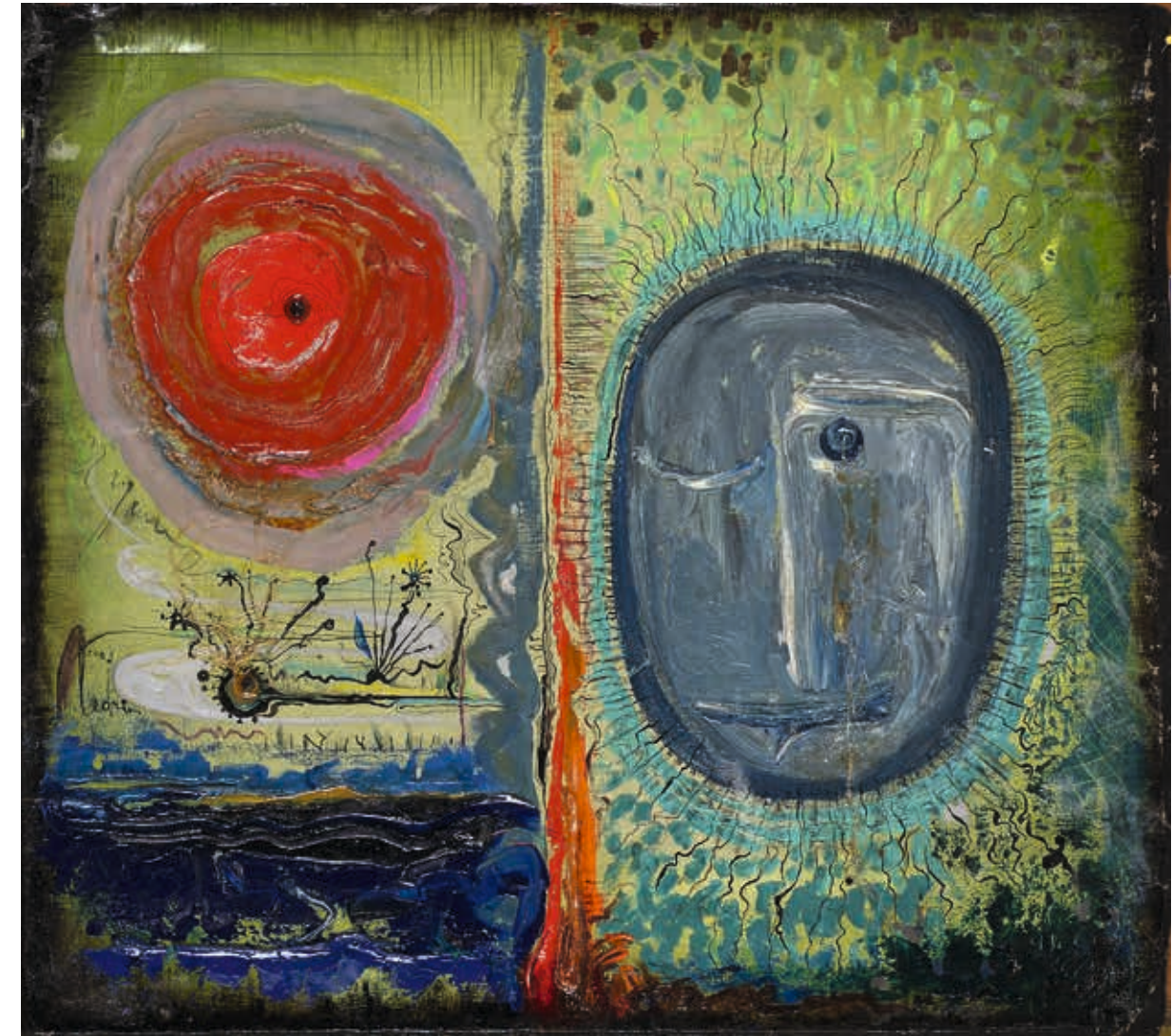
I would call Sasha a cosmic lyricist. A while ago, I designed a house for the famous heart surgeon, Renat Akchurin, who literally pulled me out of the coffin. In gratitude, I came up with the design and followed the construction. I put Sasha's ceramic bas-relief — called "Cosmic Heart" — a symbol of the profession, on the facade. Akchurin was delighted — especially since he's from Uzbekistan — Jizzak. His soul was in harmony with Sasha's cosmic lyrics.

In Tashkent, Sasha was known as a local ladies' man, and young women were constantly hanging around his house. When we met, he had two broken marriages behind him. His other passion was poetry. He was personally acquainted with the leading contemporary poets who regarded Sasha with great warmth and affection. Akhmadulina, Voznesensky, Sosnora, and Feinberg — all gifted him their new collections. They appreciated him as a skilled listener, reader and "workshop fellow". Here is how Yevtushenko inscribed his book, which he gave Sasha on his birthday, May 11, 2003: "to Dear Sasha Kedrin — one of the most pure people I have ever met in



Ceramic Plate "Austere Times"

1979. Chamotte, glass, smalt, colored glaze. 70 cm diameter



The Blinding

2003. Canvas, oil. 67 x 74 cm

my entire life. Thank you for your friendship, for the fact that the existence of people like you in this world gives meaning to my own existence; do not allow me to give up and to grow old — which in essence is the same". Sasha felt that the work of a poet is similar to that of a painter.

One day Sasha came to me and said that he was determined to marry — this time permanently. He finally found his destiny. All would be fine, but his fiancée, Maria, was from a religious Jewish family. She worked as an economist at the factory, and was even a member of the district council. Sasha asked me and Sasha Feinberg to act as matchmakers. We went to her parents' home in my car with a huge bouquet of gladioluses, which barely fit into two buckets. They treated us with uncommon friendliness. However, having driven Sasha home, I told him he was crazy, and that Masha is not a girl from our circle. I assured him that they are completely different people who did not fit together — not by age or upbringing, nor by education or interests. Therefore, they would never get along.

Sasha replied to all my arguments that his decision was irrevocable. Fortunately, my predictions did not come true and the misalliance turned into a happy marriage. From a shy girl from a modest religious family, she turned into a great hostess and patient, loving wife. Sasha and Masha now have three children and grandchildren. They have lived nearly forty years together — I wish them only love and understanding.



**Take Me to the Holy Land.
(Parts of a triptych)**

2007. Canvas, oil.
127 × 127 cm (each)

Although the trip was supposed to last two years, I worked in Tashkent for fourteen, and left many buildings on my return to Moscow. But, a year later, I came back to pick up my car. I decided to drive it back to Moscow. Sasha offered to accompany me. Our trip lasted a week. Partially due to my friend's weakness — he loved to visit his relatives. When we were driving through Voronezh, Sasha offered for us to spend the night at his uncle Zachary's — the younger brother of his mother. We were made very welcome, even too much so. Zachary Alexandrovich's wife plied us with all sorts of goodies and pleasantries, and talked our heads off to the point that, when leaving, I forgot my jacket with the keys to my Moscow apartment at their house. Usually, I leave a spare set of keys at my neighbor's apartment — my friend, Yuri Golubev's — so that he empties my mailbox. But this time, the box was filled to capacity, and when we knocked at my neighbor's door, no one opened. I was frustrated at the prospect of having to break a window (I lived on the first floor).

Walking into the lobby, we heard the non-stop ringing of a phone, which was coming from my apartment. This was Masha calling, worried about us. Fortunately, it turned out that I left one window open. We climbed into the apartment, though with difficulty. But we could not use the door to leave. As a result, we had to enter and leave through the window for a few days, until Yuri Golubev returned.

Whenever he would visit Moscow, Sasha would always stay with me and I introduced him to many celebrities. Ernst Neizvestny and I met in 1954. I just graduated from college. At this time, my uncle was painfully dying of cancer. Every day I took him to the doctors. One day I came home (this was during my first marriage). I walked in and saw a man, with the look and appearance of a butcher from the market, sitting at the table, and with him his beauty of a wife, a copy of Lucia Bose, the movie star of Italian neorealism. We got to talking. It turned out that Ernst came for my soul. My wife's sister studied with him at the Surikov Moscow State Academy. At the time, the government announced a competition for a monument dedicated to the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine with Russia. It was the first post-war all-union competition.



**The Cherished City
of First Love**

2007. Canvas, oil.
127 × 127 cm

Ernst was looking for an architect to participate in the competition with him, and my wife's sister had recommended me to him. We talked through the night. Then, we enthusiastically got to work. The jury awarded the first prize to us. Project winners were exhibited at the Kievskaya-Koltsevaya metro station. Unfortunately, our first prize was not approved at the highest levels, because no one knew who we were. And first place prizes in such large-scale competitions were supposed to be given to eminent people. In the end, the first place was given to a winner of the Stalin Prize, Motovilov. However, the monument was never installed. Yet, Ernst and I became friends, and I invited him to Tashkent — to complete a few projects. That is where I introduced Sasha to him. Subsequently, Ernst played an important role in Sasha's life.

A similar situation happened with Akhmadulina. She often came to Tashkent on tour. She would stay either with me, or at the hotel. Her every appearance would be followed by a feast. Bella loved to have fun. Although on stage she always acted immaculately — the audience went crazy from her inspired poetry reading.

Sasha — is a product of the synthesis of two hostile principles. On the one hand, he moved among the adherents of socialist realism, lived in an era of ideological domination art. On the other — he is the direct heir of truly great masters, whose fate is linked with Tashkent. The art of the Masters of the New East — a true synthesis of East and Europe — still awaits its researcher. For now, we can say only one thing. They were neither avant-garde nor realist. Unfortunately, many of them are not widely known in Moscow. But their works are well-represented, such as the exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in the Uzbek city of Nukus. At one time, the work of the Masters was actively collected by the Uzbek enthusiast, Igor Vitalievich Savitsky. The museum was founded on the basis of his collection. Today Sasha — is the only successor of their discoveries. No one else is left.





Nikita Makhov
Historian, art theorist and critic
Moscow, 2012

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**Ornament #16
(Love is Patient)**

1974. Cardboard, oil.
70 × 50 cm

Aleksander Kedrin's Poetic Mandorla

*In everything, I want to reach
The very essence.
In work, in my search for the path,
In heart's unrest.
The core of days long gone,
And their reason,
The very bottom of the roots,
The pith, the heart itself.*

Boris Pasternak

What can one do if they are from birth imbued with an inspired poetical talent, but their calling is to become a painter? How to combine, in a single creation, the verbal discourse with the plastic, poetic imagery with the artistic one? This is the most difficult task for those, who, by a stroke of providence, possess this dual talent and wish to remain a true poet in their plastic art. Clearly, not everyone is meant to resolve this aesthetical dilemma; only a few, by some miracle, are ever actually able to endow an artistic form with genuine poetic or philosophical meaning. Undoubtedly, Aleksander Kedrin, as an artist and monumentalist, belongs to these chosen, who, in their art, successfully realized this most difficult, artistico-poetic synthesis.

Naturally, no matter what multi-sided talents are possessed by the artist, he must first sense and uncover these within himself before applying them to practice. It is this professional discovery of one's talents and their development that require specialized training, perhaps even an appeal to a mentor, if one is lucky enough to have someone to turn to. Kedrin, born in Tashkent, had a college and an institute under his belt; he first studied at the local Benkov Art College, and later, after being expelled by the soviet authorities for organizing an objectionable art exposition, at the Ostrovsky Institute of Theatre and Art in Tashkent. He was briefly expelled from the Institute as well, for non-conformism, but was reinstated. Kedrin calls Picasso, Kandinsky and Joan Miró his teachers. However, a true guru in comprehending the strategy and tactics of artistic craft for the aspiring painter was Aleksander Volkov, an outstanding Russian painter, draftsman and poet (!), whose mature period of work falls into the first half of the XX century. Volkov, perhaps, proved to be the only representative of global avant-garde tendencies, including the Russian ones, who sought to imbue any forms of abstract orientation with symbolic tone. He could not conceive the elements of plastic expression without some conceptual content. In this sense, the most significant work of the artist, "Pomegranate Tea-House" from the Tretyakov Gallery, is very telling: in the three male figures, enjoying traditional refreshments, one can clearly trace the allusion to the Holy Trinity.

While in his own memoirs, Kedrin often writes of the professional mentorship of Kashina, author of vivid paintings in her early period, it is an irrefutable fact that only from Volkov could he learn to create an artistic image deeply imbued with poetic inspiration and, at the same time, laden with unifying philosophical symbolism. He remained virtually alone among his peers in the avant-garde, motivated by an inherent desire to manipulate artistic forms as if they were iconic values. Judging by the same memoirs, the budding author had yet to fully realize this himself at the time. Meanwhile, in the artistic circles of Tashkent, only Voklov's art, with his admiration for Rublev's symbolism and Russian iconography, and his search for larger symbolic generalizations through radical experimentation, allowed one to dive headlong into the mystery of creation of a plastic substance, leavened by poetic reflection.

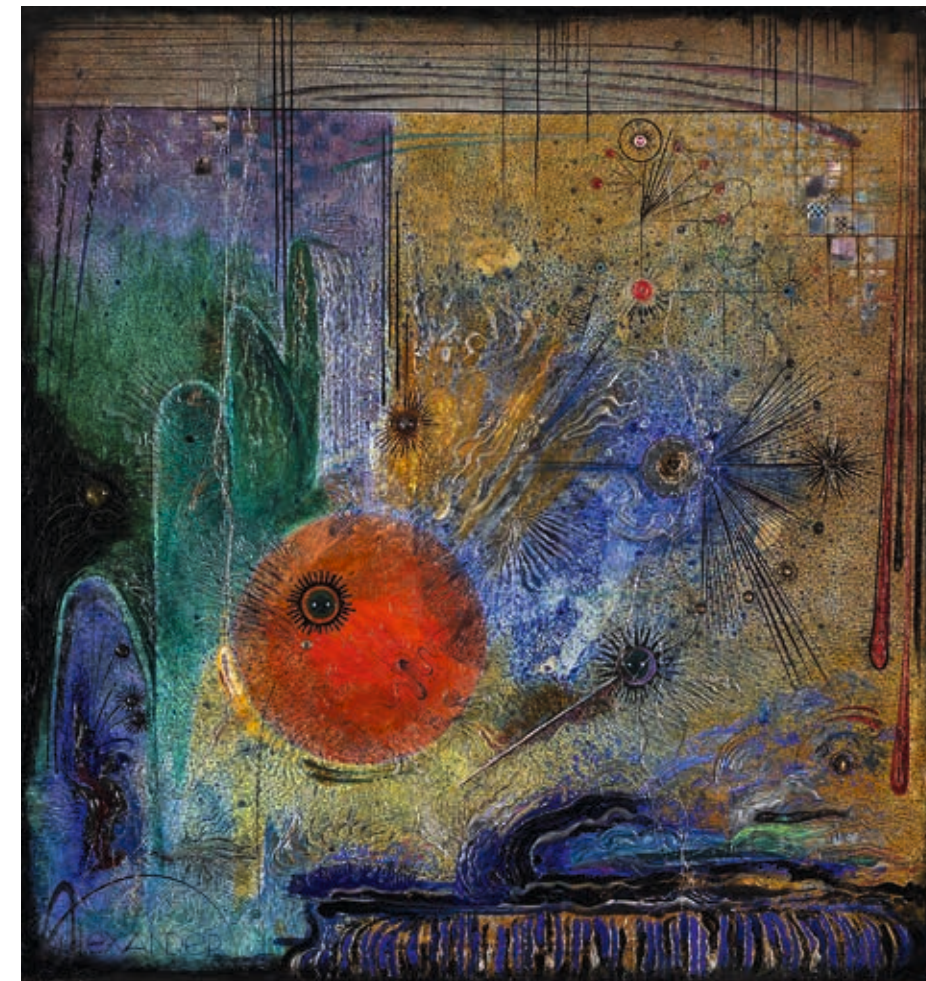


**A Sketch of a Mural
for a Cinema**

1990. Cardboard, tempera.
34 x 49 cm

The second impetus toward developing his own methodology of shapes was familiarization with the art of Jackson Pollock, Yves Tanguy, Arshile Gorky and de Kooning, presented at the 1959 exposition in the Moscow park "Sokolniki". And there, it was not so much the paintings of the "New York School of Abstract Expressionism" that touched Kedrin, but the enigmatic surrealist metamorphosis of plastic formations in the works of Tanguy. For, in order to further implement into artistic practice the spiritual synthesis, found in Volkov's art, one had to study another representative of the second generation of surrealists — Juan Miró. It was he, an artist sophisticated in creating plastic formations, who was able to recreate abstract configurations into visible symbolic phenomena in his paintings and graphic art. As one could have expected, this was all compounded by the influence of the Moscow poets, Bella Akhmadulina and Andrei Voznesensky, whom the painter refers to in his memoirs.

Possessing a powerful artistic potential, Kedrin, of course, could not stop at fruitless imitation of others' achievements. The inner need to find his own subject, his own language of expression, forced him to seek further, beyond the breakthroughs of the abstract wing of Surrealism, often distinguished by a slightly superficial romantic use of visual forms and, as a result of this leaning, predominance of the creative moment. Examining art through the lens of one of the main branches of metaphysical knowledge of being, the painter attempts to unite in his creative method representative achievements of traditional iconography with findings of the abstract surrealists and, first and foremost, with the style of Miró. And it is this attempt that allows Aleksander Kedrin to find a unique solution, which, at its core, uses a



The Acceptable Year

1999. Canvas, oil.
85 x 80 cm

figure whose shape is quite similar to the iconographic mandorla. This figure then becomes a certain pliable nucleus of his paintings and monumentalist ceramic compositions. One could say that this discovery is the quintessence of the exclusive artistic paradigm of the author. And, in all honesty, the closed ellipsoidal shape allows the inclusion or representation of virtually all existential concepts on the visible and invisible realm, and all, without exception, geometry of tactile reality. Naturally, in the age of authorial independence, it is impossible to talk about absolute semblance with the medieval formula. Instead, here one refers to an associative similarity.

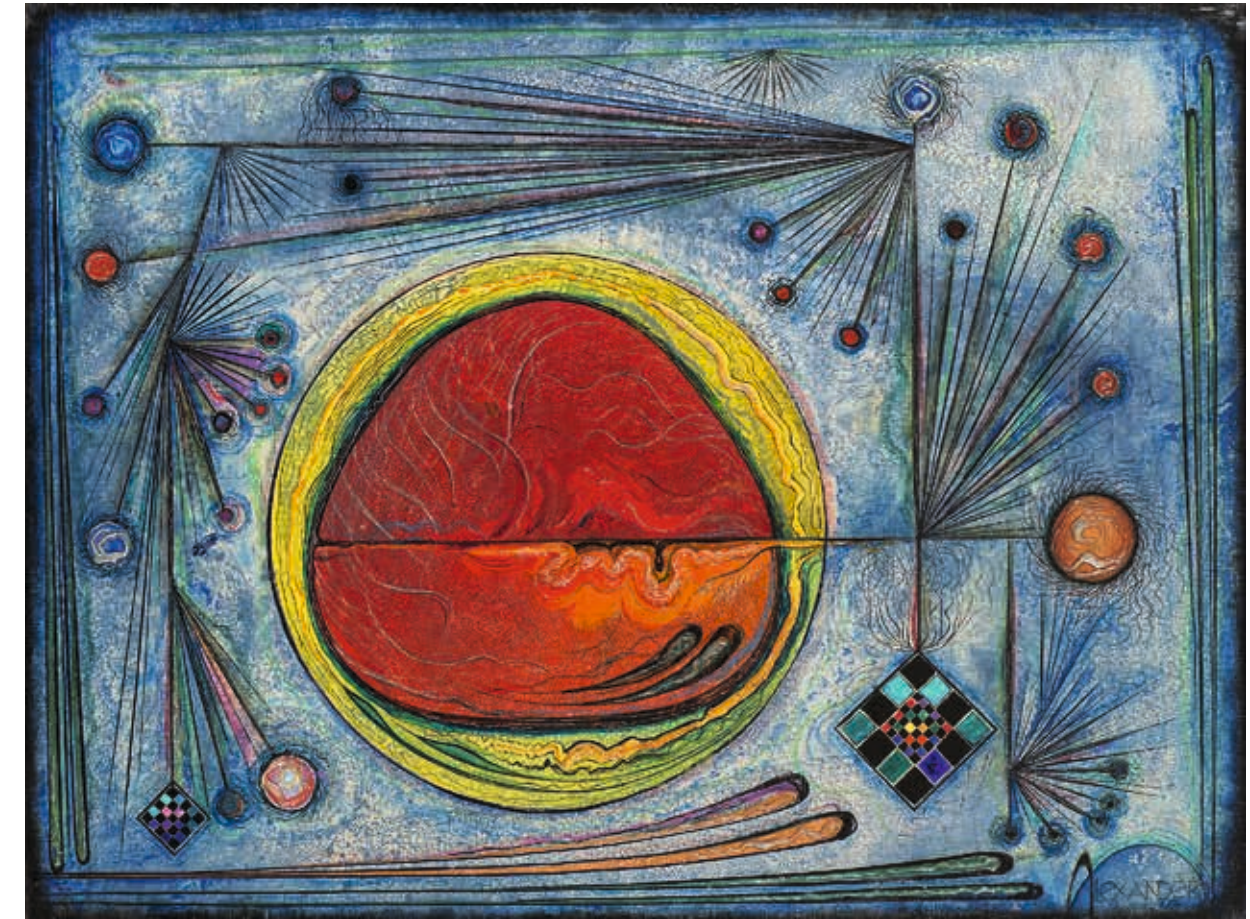
Let us look closer at the above-mentioned configuration. "Mandorla", which means almond in Italian, or rather the "mystical almond" which includes other similar in meaning shapes (like two intersecting circles) symbolizes — divinity, sanctity, the sacred; At the same time, it can refer to virginity, interpenetration of the upper and lower worlds as well as — a flame (symbol of soulfulness). Finally, the shape of mandorla refers to the female womb, entrance into the origins of life itself. Hence it becomes obvious — that all theoretical and worldly categories, from birth and till death, are enclosed within the geometrical symbol of the mandorla. Its shape is reminiscent of calligraphy and represents one of the most perfect plastic formations. In other words, mandorla can be considered the symbolic representation of the very heart of being. Is this not the same "heart" that appears in poetic lines so beloved by the painter and which serve as the epigraph to our discussion of his work? Furthermore, the universal symbolism of mandorla includes in itself the precious concept of love, both spiritual and worldly.

The category of love itself, as it applies to the art of Aleksander Kedrin, should be considered a keystone, holding together the architectonics of the shape-formation in his art. No matter what this author wishes to tell us in his works, the starting point for his intellectual and poetic excursions always turns out to be the feeling of love. This is why he adopted the verses of St. Paul's letters as titles for his works. They are as follows: "Love is Kind", "Love is Patient". It would not be superfluous to cite the poetic passage here as a whole:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. (1 Cor 13, KJV)

As we can see, "love" is the beginning of all — art, knowledge, morals, faith, truth and will. Reviewing Kedrin's works, one reaches the conclusion that, in the process of creating their figurative outline, the author is preoccupied with the comprehension and expression of all the same concepts that are mentioned in Paul's letter and serve as the cornerstones of any manifestation of the universal order. The process of deep, aesthetic contemplation and *Einfühlung*, embodied in the radiant poetic aura of plastic forms — that is the professional credo of the artist.

It reveals itself remarkably in the series of large scale paintings, where a geometric variation on the ellipsoidal figure serves as the central structure-forming element. Let us list them in chronological order: "To the Memory of a Great Poet, Ali-Shir Nava'i. Hurricane of Love" (1964); "Irresistible Power of Love", "Irresistible Beauty of Love" and "The Prophet" (1991); "That Very Apple (of Temptation)" (1992); "The Garden of Gethsemane" (1994); "My Strange and Beautiful Bird" (2007); "Composition #7" and "Old Jazz" (2012). The first — in its compositional placement of the involved objects — triangle and oval — still largely mimics the scenic patterns of Miró. Though, viscous colorful condensation of the background betrays the persistent desire of the author to fill the whole symbolic depth of the canvas with poetic pathos. The second painting and "Composition #7" depict rectangles with rounded corners, which represent a gigantic repository, certain bowls of the world, where the plasma moves, as if in the first days of creation when, for example, the division of the firmament from heavens took place. In "Irresistible Beauty of Love" and "Old Jazz", the form of mandorla unwinds into a giant meander, clearly alluding to the universal claims of the author since the meandering element, or "braid", has been considered a symbol of infinity and interdependence in the ancient cultural traditions of both the West and the East. In "The Prophet", the mandorla morphs into something resembling an egg yolk, out of which, like a protuberance, seeps inner magma. The artist means to symbolize the origin of poetic inspiration through this magma. In "That Very Apple", the mandorla becomes a symbolic form representing the very heart of creation, disseminating energetic circles of its influence to the entire universe. Finally, in the "Gardens of Gethsemane" and "My Strange and Beautiful Bird", the oval



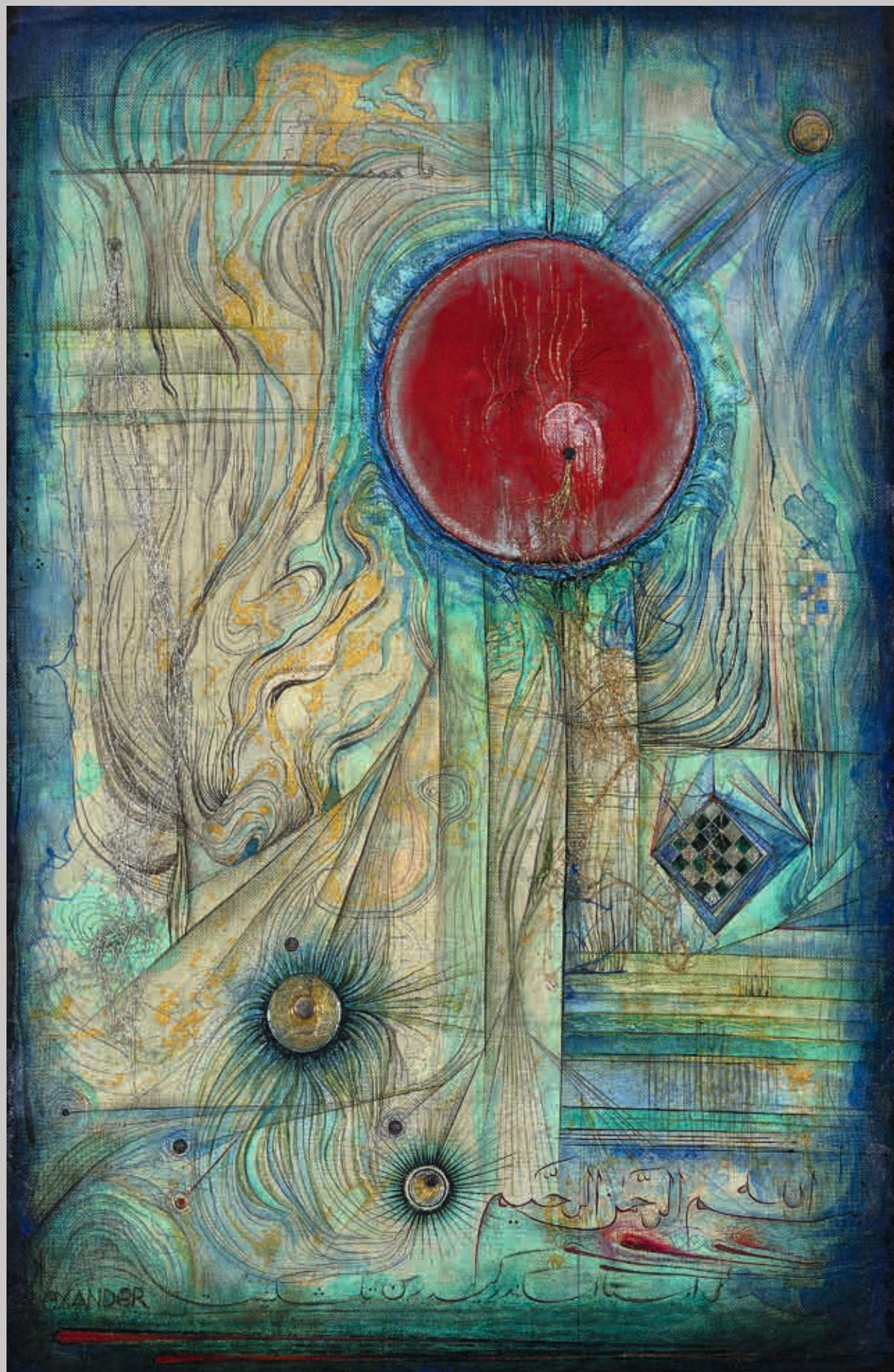
The Human Heart

2004. Canvas, oil.
68,5 × 91,5 cm

of the mandorla once again takes on a form resembling an egg, a fruit or a heart. Hovering in the boundless ocean of the cosmic landscape, this plastic figure allegorically reveals the creative center, or the realm of Logos, disseminating (as in the second painting) streams of knowledge in all directions of the universal abyss. The streams themselves are mere ideas that serve as the prime cause for the emergence of life forms.

In the artworks discussed above, Kedrin's artistic system reaches the highest elevation. The experience of a monumentalist shows through, and this has its own logic to it. To create syncretic, inclusive plasticity of a universal premise is possible only by appealing to an image of corresponding scale. The artist is left no choice but to transfer the expertise, gained while creating monumentalist ceramic compositions, into the layout of his paintings. And that is why these works are created not in an easel format, but in a monumentalist one, called upon to operate in philosophical universals. First of all, this is facilitated by the multifaceted plasticity of the work, which allows the artist to organically incorporate into the iconography of the painting even the arabic braid, with its poetic flair. But even more important is the choice of a coloristic palette, filled with dense, shimmering with ceramic gloss colors, saturated with hues of Eastern savory spices.

In conclusion of this short study, one must say that Aleksander Kedrin's work, in the capacity of its conceptual and plastic arsenal, developed into one of the most impressive versions of postmodern art, that could stand side by side with such leading artists as Anselm Kiefer and Antoni Tàpies.



Akbar A. Hakimov

Professor of Arts, Specialist
in Decorative applied art
Former Secretary of Artists
Union of Uzbekistan.
Head of Decorative Applied Art
Department of the Hamza Institute
of Art in Tashkent

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The Ghost

1991. Canvas, oil.
90×61 cm

Innovation in the Eastern Context

First printed in the catalogue of Aleksadr Kedrin's work
(Paintings, Sculpture and Ceramics). Tashkent 1990

Formation of new kinds of decorative ceramics in the Soviet Central Asian Republics did not take place evenly: in some Republics development was earlier and more intensive, in others — later, as a creative practice of a few ceramists. The development of non-traditional ceramics was most active in Uzbekistan, already famous for its highly developed folk traditions of ceramic pottery and architectural-decorative ceramics.

One of the founders of the new approach to decorative ceramics in Uzbekistan is Aleksander Veniaminovich Kedrin, an Honored Worker of Arts of Uzbekistan, who began his career in the late 1950s — early 1960s.

The Kedrin family belonged to the educated Russian intelligentsia. The painter's father, a well known graphic artist and one of the first easel-painters in Uzbekistan, Veniamin Kedrin, played an important role in Aleksander Kedrin's artistic life. He used to take Aleksander on his tours through the Republic, and these instilled in the young artist a love for Uzbek folk arts, and encouraged him to seriously study Uzbekistan's history of art and architecture. And when the young artist first appeared at the Republican exhibition in May, 1957, it was with pages of traditional designs and ornaments. And in 1960, "Decorative Arts of USSR" magazine published his article "On the Preservation of Decorative Paintings of Uzbekistan", in which a number of such works was reproduced. His interest in pottery was completely accidental. In 1958, the All-Union Chamber of Commerce announced a contest for the best souvenir made in any material or even in an imitation of another original material. The young artist also decided to try his hand. He turned an old grindstone into a potter's wheel, made a small pitcher of plaster, and painted it in watercolor and was awarded the second prize. Then came the years of studying ceramics as a student of P.P. Benkov State Art Institute and searches for new plastic and color combinations of the material.

In 1965, he exhibited a series of porcelain plates, which were his diploma work. Proceeding from traditional forms of Uzbek utilitarian ceramics, he pursues further goals. Picturesque compositions, surpassing the porcelain's functional forms, turn it into a new kind of art. Much of the importance is attached to the lines. All the spots of color are subdued to the motion and flow of these lines. The artist says that plates have never been just utensils for him; they have always served as a decorative surface and as a site for architectural forms.

In late 1960s Aleksander Kedrin created a series of plates and servers that can be divided into several groups: thematic miniature painting, traditional style ornamental painting, so familiar to the artist, and plates with abstract compositions. In each group, Aleksander Kedrin solves problems of composition and color in a different way. Introducing thematic miniature painting, he works in the style of Central Asian miniature but rather than imitate it, the artist, depicts the works of Omar Hayam, Jami, Navoi — the classics of Oriental literature — in his own way. Subtle perception of poetry, typical for Oriental worldview, can be felt in Aleksander Kedrin's works.

Similar to the first group in their stylistic features are the works with the ornamental decorative compositions. In most of them, the artist uses motifs of medieval verdure ornament. Coloring here is mild and warm, of ochre and grey tones. Successful use of Arabic inscriptions accentuates the ornamental composition. Of the most interest are the plates with abstract figures. In these, at first sight quite abstract portrayals, an expert can clearly see the impact of such local Uzbek ceramics as those of Rishtan and Gijduvan schools. The artist does not copy traditional images; the experience of folk artisans is transformed in his vision.

Sure enough, for every period of time and for every group of works the artist creatively assimilates traditions, most often of the local artistic heritage, interpreting the material to fit his vision. Bright colors in the works of Aleksander Kedrin, as well as in folk art, are not abstract games, they do not produce feeling of unorganized diversity of color. Instead, they express the harmony imbued in nature itself, in the colors of the outside world.

Aleksander Kedrin is no stranger to the color symbolism of folk art. Thus the red color, a color of youth and love, a symbol of life and fertility, is used generously but judiciously in his ceramic creations. It is in the fiery-red horses of his miniatures, or the red pomegranates on the works of the same period, as well as the red element delicately combined with general color on decorative plates of abstract character. Another fundamental feature is the juxtaposition of green and yellow which symbolizes the antagonism of the rising force of spring and (autumnal) dying nature, so typical in Central Asian poetical performances. Kedrin successfully used this technique in one of his most impressive monumental works — the decorative panels on the walls of two banquet halls in the Palace of International Friendship in Tashkent — “Guli Nav” (Flower of Renovation) and “Guli Chah” (Flower of Fading), inspired by the poetry of Mashrab.

In both panels the base of the composition is a depiction of a symbolic tree, “blossoming” with colorful plates. In the first, the background coloring is emerald-blue symbolizing the awakening nature, in the second — the terracotta background stands for the colors of autumn. The tops of trees are metaphorically interpreted by the freely located colorful and picturesque plates with ornate relief design. The author tactfully uses the technology of gilded feathering, which emphasizes the positive figurative tone of the whole work. This technique had not been previously used in modern decorative ceramics of Central Asia, and the author borrowed it from the arsenal of porcelain decoration.

From the point of view of continuity of traditions in the art of Aleksander Kedrin, two more facts deserve consideration. While decorating the interior of the Palace of International Friendship, he came up with an entirely unique solution to manufacturing decorative coated tiles by industrial means, and then using them on a large wall surfaces (the total area was over 4000 square meters). Emerald-blue ceramics became the leading color of the palace’s interior. Essentially, the new technological basis renewed the forgotten tradition of blue architectural ceramics of medieval monuments in Uzbekistan. A. Kedrin used the same technology in decorating the interior of “Prospect of Cosmonauts” metro station in Tashkent, which was one of his last works in architecture. Here the symbolism of traditional Central Asian blue and light-blue ceramics is dedicated to outer space. Though innovatory attitude to working with colors is evident, the feeling of emotional melancholy, deepened by the subterranean interior, stays with the onlooker.



Ceramic Plate “Persona”

1980. Chamotte, glass, smalt, colored Glaze. 65 cm diameter

On the whole, in the use of coloristic principles by Aleksander Kedrin we see subtle and sensible attitude to the poetry of folk art; even in his lesser works there is no mechanical transference or copying of traditional methods.

The second aspect of Aleksander Kedrin’s attitude toward traditional heritage is connected with his search in the field of plastic designs, though often less prominent than the color experimentation seen in his art. This refers specifically to his relief compositions. In 1974, a new turn appeared in the work of A. Kedrin. While decorating the second level hall of the “Zerafshan” restaurant in Tashkent, he abandons planar interpretation and turns to low relief. A number of decorative plates with relief images of architectural monuments of Uzbekistan were crafted using this technique. In time, the artist developed principles of designing relief compositions which were reflected in both, the color-rich creations, and those where the use of color is less intense, such as the enormous “Bagi Shaol” composition in restaurant of the hotel “Moscow” (now “Chorsu”) in Tashkent, or mural on the wall of one of the main streets in Samarkand. The principle itself — a relief enclosed in a circle, which was the starting point of the relief designs, was prompted by ideas gleaned from the plastic methods found in traditional Uzbek bread baking, particularly — the Samarkand flat-cakes.

Recently, Aleksander Kedrin began paying more attention to the plastic qualities of his works. So far these experiments have been conducted with undue restraint. One thinks that the introduction of plastic art as audacious and dynamic as the color palette of his best compositions would considerably enrich the creations of the artist. The interior decor of the Drama Theatre in Kokand and a fountain in the patio of Intourist Center Tashkent serve as a testament to the above, decorated by him in sculptural relief design.

Undoubtedly, Aleksander Kedrin’s works are to a great extent motivated by traditional ceramics, but this does not prevent him from rejecting traditional technology, and use metal, smalt and glass his compositions. Naturally, neither does the artist, in his figurative designs, limit himself to the poetry of folk art alone. A number of his recent works, small decorative surface compositions with arbitrary picturesque spots, are based on principles of music-and-color tones.

“Abstract-decorative” works of Aleksander Kedrin have a tendency to exhibit distinctive intonational richness, based on correlation of traditions and contrast of different color accents. This intonational range is wide, from elegiac delicate moods produced by light gradations and color tones, to complex and expressive emotional states achieved by the use of sharp contrasts. The last invention of Aleksander Kedrin, the transfer of “abstract-decorative” ceramic style onto a canvas surface, is both unexpected and predictable at the same time. We should remember the early passion of the young artist’s for painting. A series of paintings, created on the eve of his own semi-centenary, brings the artist to a new level of communication with the viewer, to whom we give right to judge the difficult and uneven road which the wonderful artist, Aleksander Kedrin, has taken over his thirty years of creative work.



Ceramic Plate “Problems”

1982. Chamotte, glass, smalt, colored glaze. 65 cm diameter



Garrik Zilberman

A painter and a friend
of Aleksander Kedrin,
Jerusalem, 2015.

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Red Stars

2016. Canvas, acrylic.
152 × 101,6 cm

The Black Hat

Late 60s, the “thaw” has ended long ago, but in Tashkent — it is spring. I walk up to the fountain in front of the Navoi Theatre, in the center of the city. A bearded, handsome man in a black hat who looks like a Carbonaro walks toward me: I know this is Sasha Kedrin. He was popular in Tashkent, and I knew him from exhibitions, (as he did me), where he showed ceramics hereto unseen in the republic, bright and exciting. We greet each other, although we have never been officially introduced: Eastern manners encourage greeting even between strangers — and it is Spring after all.

We sat down on a bench and insensibly talked for a good hour. It seemed that we knew each other from the cradle. Our tastes and preferences were strikingly similar: two artists, both bearded, both (at the time) in love, both loved the same Impressionists and poets, the same music and literature ... Both in love with folk art of Uzbekistan, folk pottery, carpets, carvings of ganch and wood, and the wonderful Uzbek people, very hospitable, friendly and hard-working.

Sasha invited me to his home, and from that moment, we often visited each other. He took me to the catacombs of the Artists House as well, where, in one of the storerooms, he had a workshop with furnaces for ceramic firing, which he himself had invented, designed and built. There was a circular fountain, lined with ceramic and smalt, before his house, bright and beautiful. In those days, to earn a living, Sasha took up any work offered: his hands were gold — he was welder, loader and installer, carpenter and electrician ... But his main occupation was creating ceramics — bright, dynamic, intense, for which we all knew him...

When we compared our early work, it was very similar, impressionistic ... Sasha earned his fame in Uzbekistan and the world as a monumentalist, working in ceramics, especially after his triumphal exhibitions in Moscow, Leningrad and Berlin in the 1980s.

And when, in the summer of 1990 at his personal exhibition at the Architects Union, Sasha showed his “new” art, it surprised us all: the painting was abstract, beautiful, on par with European counterparts. Then I remembered: his bright, metaphoric ceramics, too, were beautiful and ... startling! The love, the pain and suffering that Sasha was carrying within himself, he splattered into his ceramics — and later onto the canvases.

Marc Konik, a student of the Moscow philosopher Cantor, while selecting in Tashkent works for the All-Union 1982 exhibition titled “Artists — to the People”, that was held on the Crimean bridge, said this about Kedrin’s work: “His pottery is beautiful not only due to and because it is decorative — but because it is easel ceramics!” As if to say, the creations stand on their own... This idea rings quite true: Sasha’s works are inventive and beautifully constructed. They are exquisitely designed, in terms color, melody, rhythm and harmony.

These are parables, in both ceramics and painting, Sasha has always been steadfast, a man of integrity, and his “new” art has helped me to better understand this remarkable man. What a pity that we cannot now see each other as often as before, as one would have desired... He is one of those rare people of whom it is rightly said: “God had blessed him with talent.”

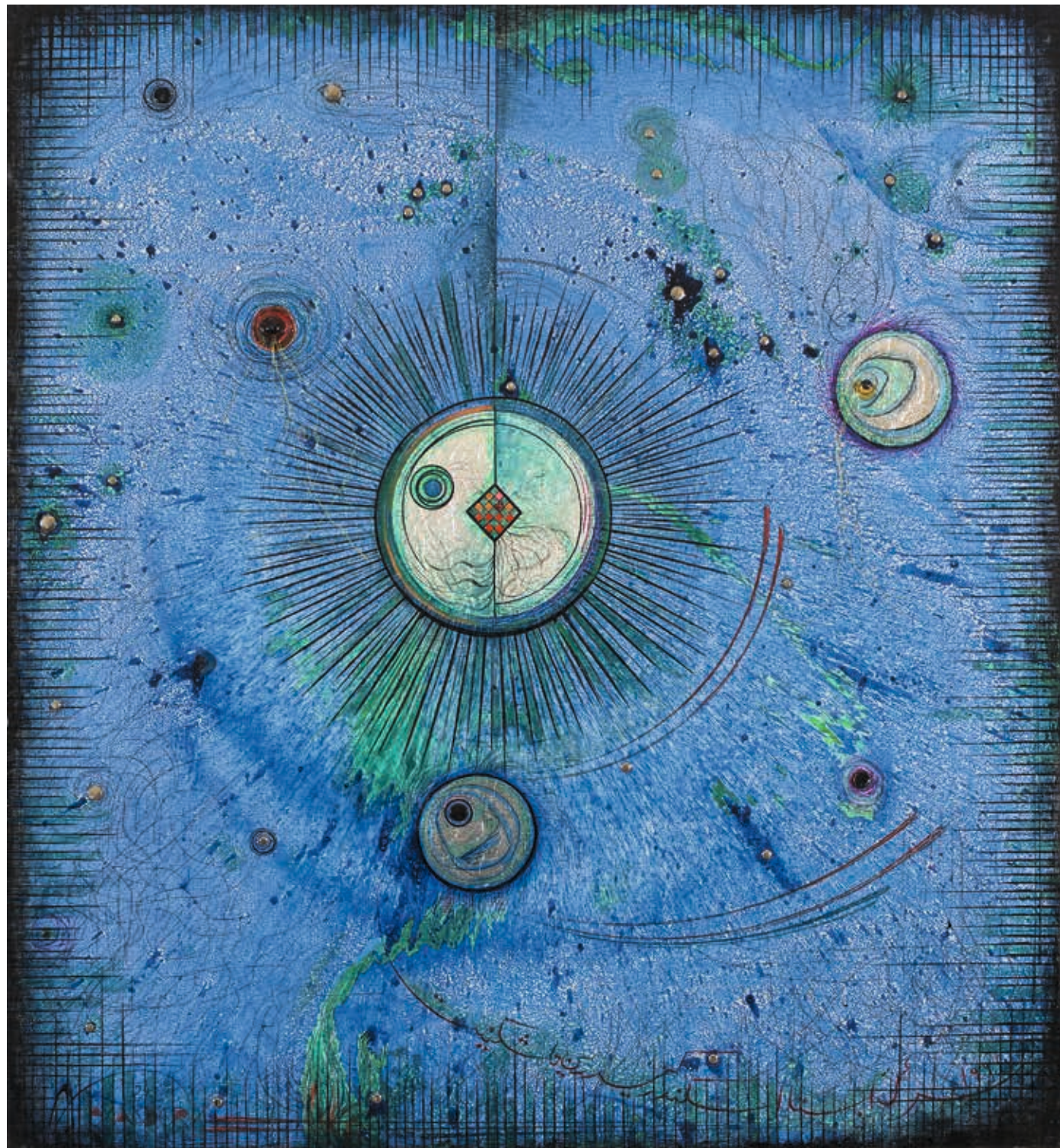




Renewal of the Mind
 1998. Canvas, oil.
 99 x 99 cm



**The Patience of Saints
 in New York**
 1994–1997. Canvas, oil.
 107 x 107 cm



**The Way, the Truth
and the Life**

1994. Canvas, oil.
99 × 92 cm



Keep Thy Name Holy

1994–1997. Canvas, oil.
100 × 100 cm



Svetlana Hromchenko

Art Historian, Senior Researcher
of the National Museum
of Eastern Art

p. 80

**Don't Share
Your Sorrows**

1992. Canvas, oil.
100 × 50 cm

Along the Kelvin Scale

How can an artist convey his ideas and designs to society? Through the methods of decorative or realistic painting? Abstract composition? Or through the vocabulary of contemporary art? These days the question seems inappropriate. However, artists and members of other creative professions who lived in the Soviet Union, remember socialist realism, and the possibility of quite serious consequences that deviation from its doctrine carried.

It is in precisely these conditions that a generation of native cultural agents entered history under the name of “shestidesyatniki” (referring to the decade of the 1960s). It paved its own way in art, coming into resonance with the global cultural process and, simultaneously, restoring broken cultural bonds with the art of previous generations. The materials included in this volume retain echoes of the severity of this process. They vividly and clearly delineate the cultural context in which Aleksander Kedrin’s art was formed.

In a sense, Aleksander Kedrin was lucky. He, at a young age, had the good fortune to be instructed by Aleksander Volkov and Mikhail Kuzmin, legendary masters of Russian art. Later, after several of his exhibitions were closed by the government, he found shelter in Nadezhda Kashina’s studio, who studied under Sergey Gerasimov and Robert Falk. In the 1920s, she participated in associations that were later declared formalistic. After, she became a quite successful soviet-realism painter, but in the 60s returned to her earlier painting style. With her, a graduate of the VHUTEMAS (Higher Art and Technical Studios), Kedrin discussed issues of color, rhythm, tectonics and texture — those same formalistic means of expressing ideas, feared by those who are incompetent in the profession.

In the 1970–80s, in a partnership with the leading architects of Tashkent, Aleksander Kedrin designed objects fundamentally important to the urban atmosphere — metro stations and art museums, theatres and luxury hotels, fountains and cultural centers. Still, despite official recognition, the artist showed virtually no one his objectless, philosophically substantial paintings, as well as the complementary poetic compositions.

Aleksander Kedrin does not constrain himself with styles and genres. In the early, tightly constructed landscapes, he captured specific places in a specific time, painted expressive still lifes, portraits and subject-driven compositions — dedicated to his teachers or eminent cultural figures of the East. In objectless art, he fervently or tenderly expresses musical rhythms, existential moments, sometimes hinting to the viewer the angle of associations with the title — a gospel story or mythological figures.

Enchanting expanses of the objectless compositions are like the Cosmos, subjects to the law of gravity, in which masses and energies interact and the temperature is measured on a different scale — the Kelvin Scale. Originally not intended for a wider audiences, these canvases, sincere to the limit, are a testament to the deep and focused spiritual work, internal crises and insights.



Bespredel (Lawlessness)

1989. Canvas, oil.
98 x 98 cm

Special attention is given to the surface of the canvas — glossy, as if covered with a clear glaze, unites Kedrin's paintings with his ceramics. On the other hand, the tactile feel of the ceramic mass could have influenced not only the density and materiality of the colors in his canvases, but the texture of the colorful surface.

Picturesquely-plastic conception of Aleksander Kedrin's art, European in intent, nonetheless deeply connected to traditional Eastern culture, significantly widens the understanding of character and trends not only of Russian but of global art.



**The High-Minded
are Blessed**

1994. Canvas, oil.
67 x 74 cm



Igor Dudinsky
Journalist and Art Critic

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Black Stars

2016. Canvas, acrylic.
152 × 101,5 cm

The Formulae of Creation

Aleksander Kedrin considers non-figurative art the apogee of his path in the world of fine art — a sort of mathematics, which creates universal formulas that furnish the keys to understanding the world around us. Abstract composition allows the manifestation of maximum creative freedom. Shape, released of its literary content, in concentrated form expresses the quintessence, the substance, the core of any idea.

Critics consider Kedrin “the forefather of the method which allows the creation of matrices, which lie at the core of created and potential reality”.

Introvert, idealist, researcher, he is fully dedicated to mystico-cosmic principles of existence. By manipulating mystical essences, he attains the universal language of the Cosmos, spoken by celestial beings, and immediately connects with the higher spheres. This motion allows him to expose to the audience the inner “mechanics” of the bottomless and infinite celestial hierarchy.

He seemingly transfers harmony into algebra in order to reach the main mechanism and decipher the all-encompassing and all-consuming pleroma, “fullness of being”, with whose help the objective controls the subjective, morphing the human into a product of his time.

In his work one can perceive cosmic mechanics, in all their beauty, the long-awaited divine equation — the only, treasured and mystical Formula of Creation — that will allow to restore and recreate “form within” not only the Act of Creation, but to see the future fate of the material and spiritual Cosmos.

Aleksander Kedrin was born in 1940 in Tashkent- the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan. The Kedrin dynasty is rich with talented personas. The artist’s great-grandfather was a barrister, the deputy of the State Duma in Imperial Russia, and after the revolution became the Minister of Justice in emigrant government in Paris. Bunin and Tolstoy wrote of him as an outstanding politician. His father’s second cousin was a famous soviet writer- Dmitri Kedrin, who mystically and tragically died in 1945. His own father, a hereditary Petersburg nobleman and famous graphic artist, escaping Stalin’s repressions, was forced to move to Tashkent where he became one of the creators of the Artists Union of Uzbekistan.

Young Sasha Kedrin started painting before he could walk. This was no surprise; he was surrounded by the best artists of his time. From an early age, he was enchanted by local oriental patterns with their mystical symbolism. Every day his father would go out to sketch, through the picturesque warped streets of old Tashkent, not yet desolated by earthquake, with its clay-walled cottages, mosques, workshops and craftsmen — and he brought his son with him. Their house was always full of local and metropolitan intellectuals, who evacuated to Tashkent during the war, and thus full of classical music and poetry. Sasha’s mother sang well, accompanying herself on a mandolin. Since the atmosphere in the Kedrin home was soaked

through with poetry, Western, Eastern and Russian poetry, it is not surprising that Sasha began to even live in the poetic form — as the famous Leonardo once said, “Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.”

Following his father’s advice, Aleksander sought his own way from his very first steps in art — trying to differ himself from the omnipresent “socialist realists”. The true revelation for him became his trip to Moscow, where for the first time, during Khrushchev thaw, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Art exhibited the Shukin-Morozov collection of French modern artist. From that moment, he traveled to Moscow every time American and European avant-garde classics were exhibited in the capital.

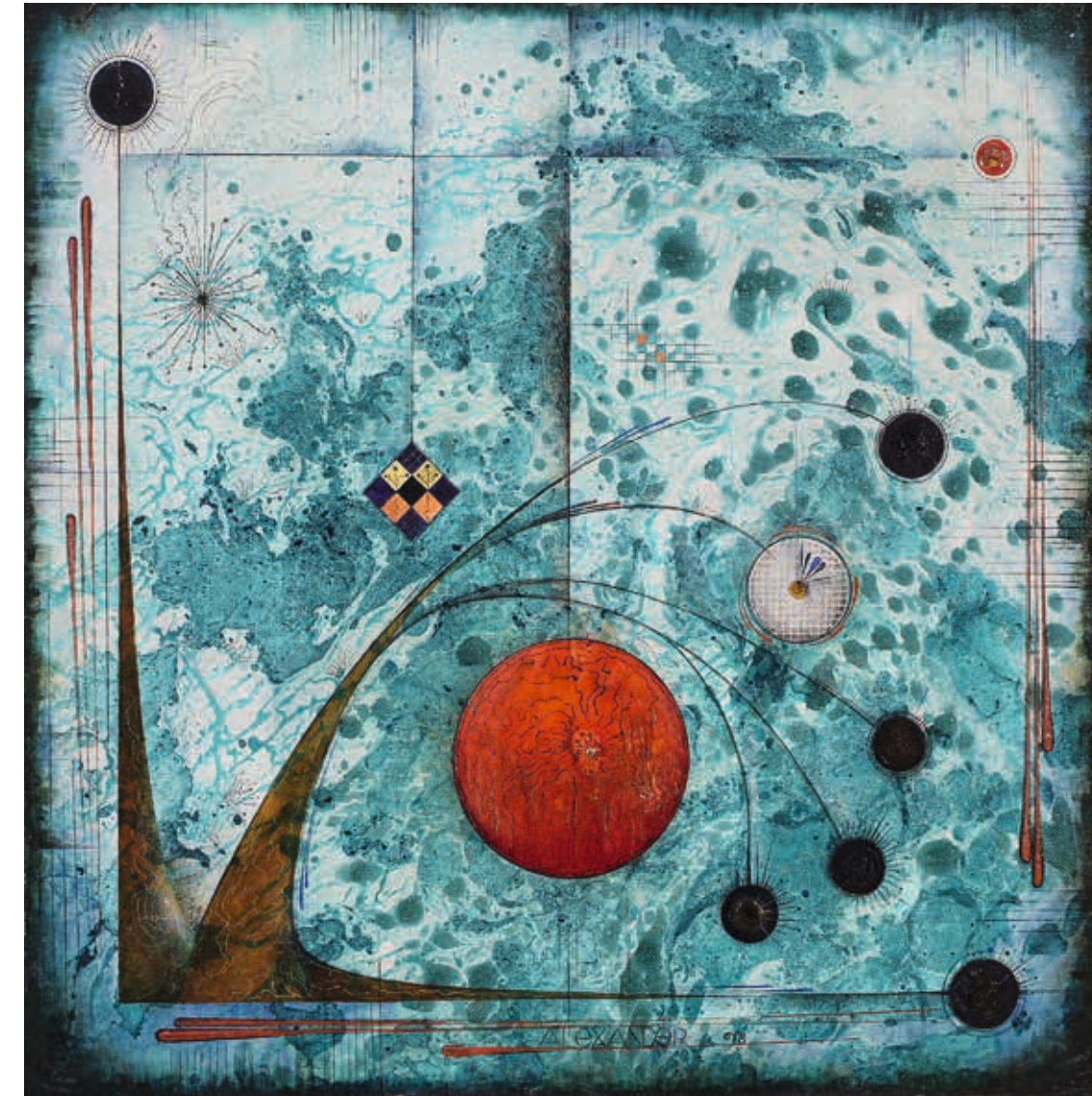
Although formed under the influence of Asiatic Cosmos, the artist’s interest gradually concentrated on Western non-figurative art. He consider Kandinsky, Miró and Yves Tanguy as his primary teachers, who opened him to the Cosmologic possibilities of art.

After graduating from school, Aleksander Kedrin entered the Benkov Tashkent Art Institute. In 1959, as a student of the 3D form, he organized a collective exhibition of seven young like-minded artists who decided to step aside from academic cannons and work in a freer style, attempting to connect East and West in their works. As a result, all of them were accused of ideological sabotage and expelled from the institute with a marred permanent record.

After that fateful exhibition, Aleksander understood that, in the USSR, an artist is always seen as a suspect by authorities and a white crow among his compatriots. Kedrin never aspired to the role of innovator or avant-garde artist. His mission is to continue the traditions of Russian and World art. He considers talent as a duty or a mission, received from higher forces. That is why he is an opponent of spontaneous self-expression in art. Creative work must conform to a concrete idea. Early on, he understood that such difficult notions as love, hatred and faith are impossible to express through allegory or realism, and began to search for new forms. Forms that allow the viewer a more accurate perception of the reality, which the artist inhabits, since it is not his task to simply retell his vision.

Using his father’s connections, Aleksander was nevertheless accepted into the Ostrovsky Art Institute. But soon the story repeated itself — the student that didn’t wish to humble himself and repent was excluded with reference of professional non-practicability. In addition, a case was brought against him for parasitism. Kedrin had to get a job. Following his father’s advice, he chose the local ceramics factory. In early 60s ceramics, along with other monumental decorative arts in USSR, experienced a second birth. Artists-monumentalists were even allowed to make formalistic experiments — as long as it was “beautiful”, that is — decorative. Aleksander found himself in his element. Ceramics turned out to be excellent camouflage. In the opinion of the authorities, the artist was no longer dangerous. Philosophical discoveries, masked under “Uzbek national patterns and motives” gained recognition. Kedrin graduated from the ceramics program in Ostrovsky Art Institute with excellence, entered the Artists Union (and later, the Architects Union) and acquired his own workshop. Thanks to participation in Moscow exhibitions, he joined the metropolitan creative intellectuals’ circle and became acquainted with Neizvestny, Akhmadulina, Voznesensky, Bulatov, Nemukhin and Vechtomov.

At the same time, all the leading architects lined up in a queue to the best ceramic artisan of Uzbekistan. They dreamt that compositions of the famous artist would decorate the facades and interiors of new monumental buildings that were being urgently built in Tashkent after the earthquake. Kedrin decorated with images and mosaics more than one hundred objects in total (palaces of culture, sports complexes, sanatoriums, restaurants, subway stations and administrative buildings) all over the USSR.



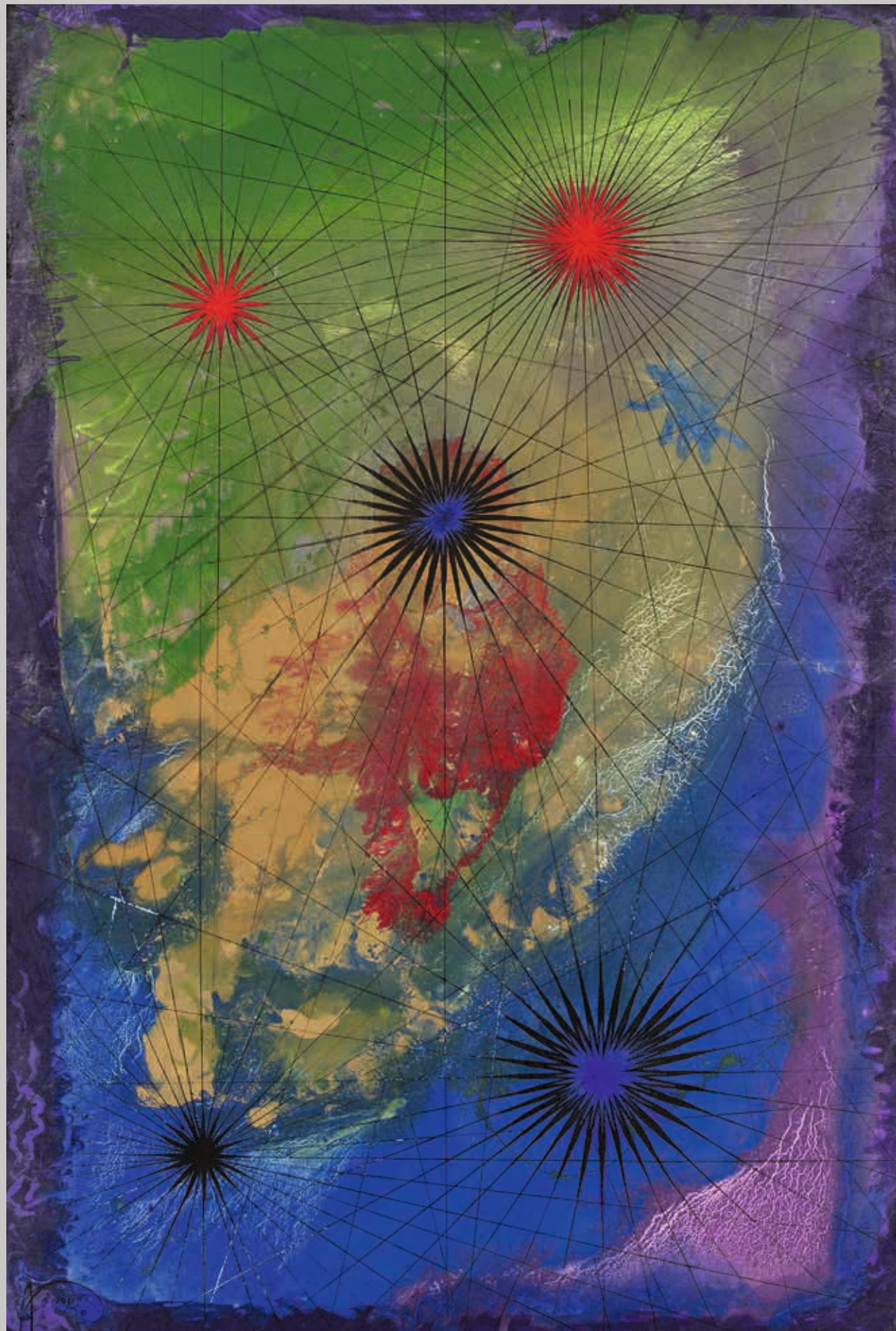
Glory of Men

1998. Canvas, oil.
99,5 × 99 cm

At first glance, the situation was turning out more than favorably. However, the real passion of the artist remained philosophical and metaphysical non-figurative art, which he faithfully and secretly continued painting in oils. Unfortunately, during the Soviet period, it was impossible to show these works to the general audience.

Perestroika began, and it brought long-expected freedom, but exacerbated national problems. After the disintegration of the USSR, Russians were being actively forced out from social life of Uzbekistan. Contract offers were declining. A wave of bloody fratricidal conflicts swept over the Asiatic republics. And this lead Aleksander, with his family, to move to the United states in 1995, and settle in New-York, where he actively joined the artistic life. His works were obtained by many museums, galleries and collectors. Mass media, as well as art critics and historians, write about him. Kedrin was invited to represent USA at the Florence Biennale exhibition of modern art. In 2001 American television recorded a series titled “Russian celebrities in America,” where the masters of modern art, including his friend Ernst Neizvestny, spoke about the painter.





Simon Kriheli
Editor, Shield of David, New York

The Cream of the Russian Immigration

(Originally published in the "Shield of David" newspaper from June 2006, New York)

Aleksander Kedrin was born in May of 1940 in Tashkent, in Central Asia. His father — a hereditary Petersburg intellectual, poet and artist Veniamin Kedrin — had moved there in the 30s. From a young age, Aleksander was fond of drawing and helped his father at work. While still in high school, he began to participate in professional art exhibitions. After graduating, Sasha attended the Benkov Art College and Ostrovsky Art Institute. In December of 1959, he participates in the first Tashkent exhibition of nonconformists, at the House of Cinema. He considers Kandinsky, Miró and Gaudi as his teachers.

Since the only authorized genre of painting in the Soviet Union was socialist realism, Aleksander was completely unacceptable for the official Artists Union. However, in subsequent years, successfully working in monumental ceramics together with architects Kosinsky, Rozanov, Sutyagin, Spivak, Usmanov and others, he completed numerous reliefs, mosaics and sculptures for a number of objects in the USSR: the metro station "Prospect of Cosmonauts", Palace of Arts and the Palace Peoples' Friendship in Tashkent, sanatorium "Uzbekistan" in Sochi and Zheleznovodsk, Drama Theatre in Kokand, the airport in Urgench, and so on.

Aleksander became a popular artist. After his participation in the World Exhibition "Expo-67" in Montreal in 1967, he was accepted into the Artists Union and the Architects Union of the USSR. In 1983, he received the title of distinguished artisan and was nominated for the Lenin Prize. Solo exhibitions of his work were held in Berlin and Magdeburg in 1985–86.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the weakening of ideological pressure, Aleksander once again showed his paintings at solo exhibitions in Tashkent, in 1990–91. In 1995, Aleksander immigrated to the United States; he resides in New York City, where he regularly participates in exhibitions of Russian artists. In 1998, a solo exhibition of his art was held at the "Vand-Art" gallery in Montreal (Canada). In 2001, Russian television in New York produced a half-hour film "Aleksander Kedrin" as part of the "Cream of the Russian Immigration" series. In 2003, Aleksander Kedrin represented the US at the World Biennale in Florence.

Now Aleksander paints in the style of abstract mystical romanticism. His works are in the National Museum of Art in Nukus (Karakalpakstan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Moscow (Russia), Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Jersey City (United States) and at the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Jersey (USA), as well as private collections in Uzbekistan, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Pakistan, South Korea, Israel, England, France, USA and other countries. Kedrin's works can also be seen online at www.Kedrin.com.



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Stars

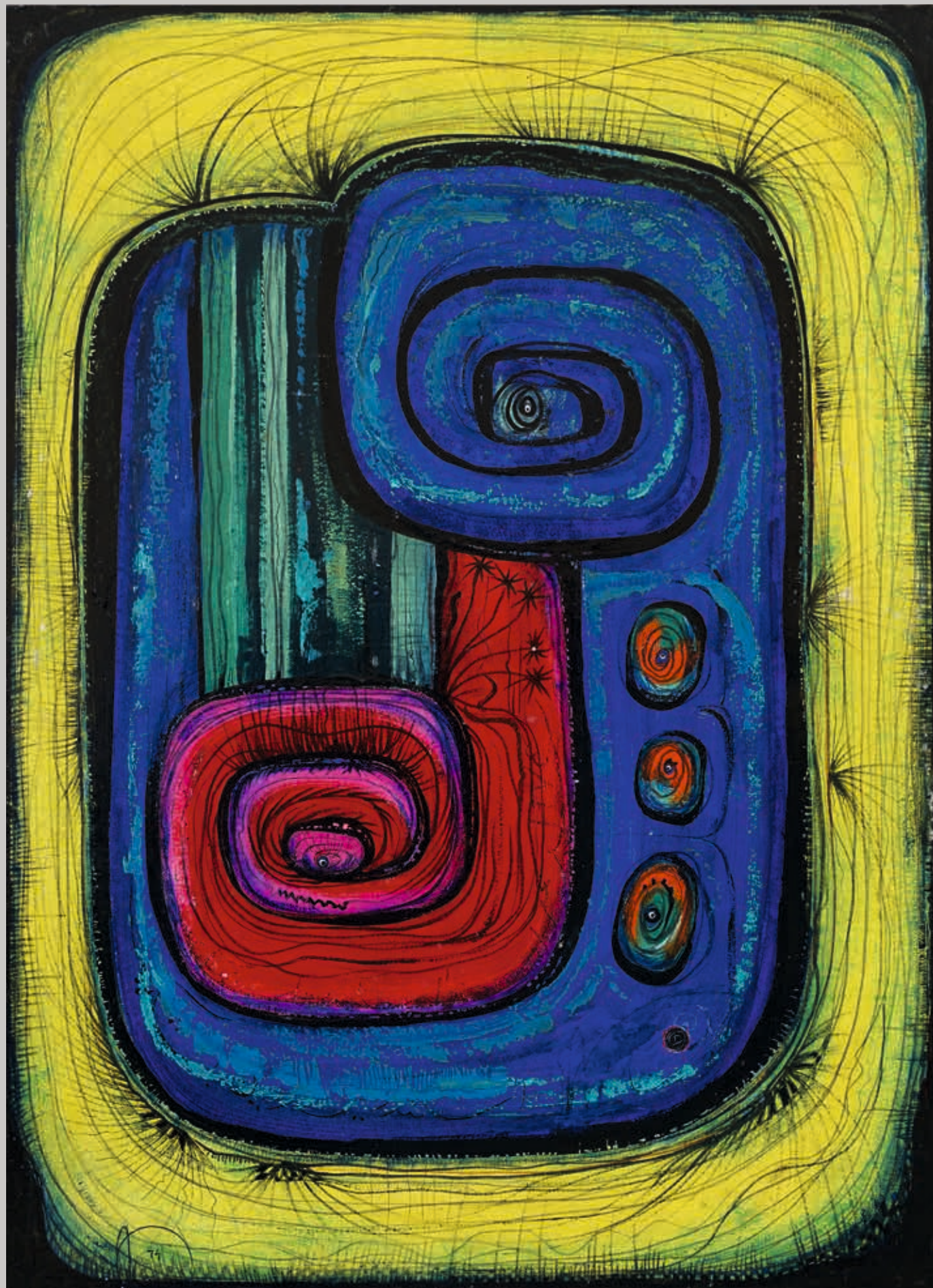
2016. Canvas, acrylic.
152,5 × 101,5 cm



**Parallel Worlds
of Thirteenth Year**
2013. Canvas, oil.
68 x 75 cm



Earthly Love
1994. Cardboard, oil.
65 x 75 cm



Olga Plevaya

Television Anchor in the 80s
and a star of Uzbekistan's
Committee for Television and
Radio Broadcasting, as well as
A. Kedrin's friend. Lives in the USA

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Enclosed Garden of Love

1974. Cardboard, oil, tempera.
70 x 50 cm

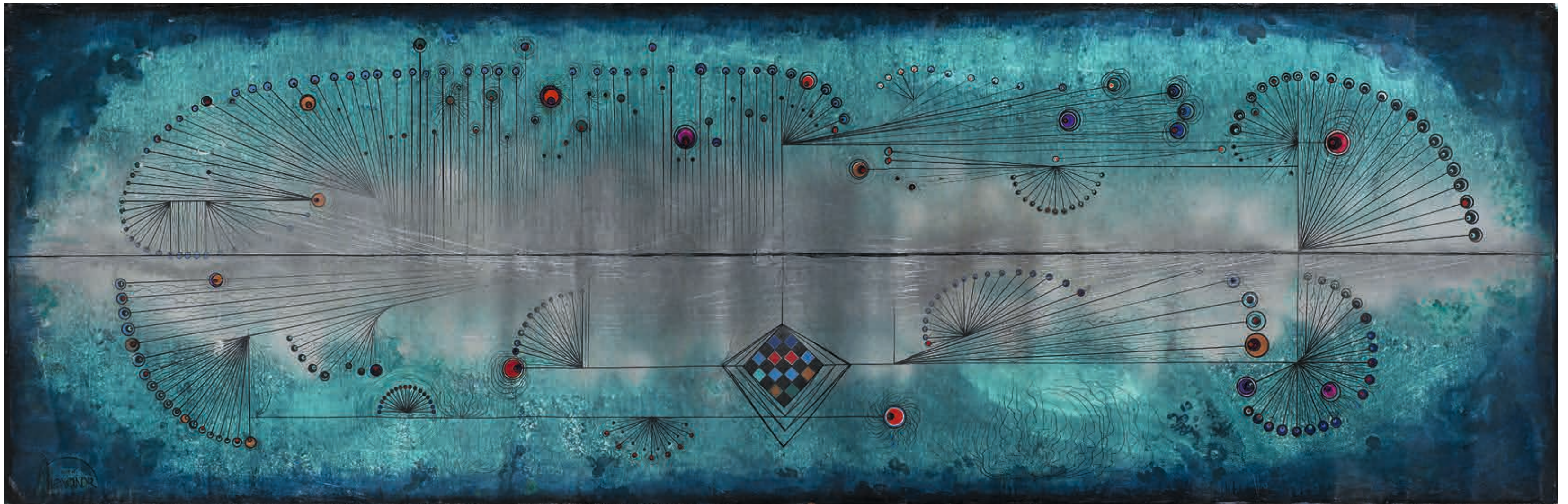
He Sees the Essential

I have known Aleksander Kedrin so long that we can say — all my life. We are old friends, even in the literal sense. After Sasha moved to America, we did not see each other for many years, and neither of us even dreamed of meeting again. Nevertheless — we did meet. What would we do without surprises in life! We reminisced about all of our friends. Firstly, the kindest Sasha Feinberg — a remarkable poet, his merry, humorous ballads: "Branded forever as a hooligan in USSR, as a hoodlum known in the accursed Art Foundation, the nervous artist lives on alone. The hungry artist paints a roast; and the brush, like a skimmer, sings in his hand when he covers the tomatoes in carmine and smears with soot the hot cauldron".

Aleksander Kedrin, the artist and the man, lived a difficult, interesting life, rich with pleasures, passions, and sufferings — both creative and human. He had been exalted and subverted, excommunicated and forgiven, loved and hated — both as a painter and as a person. He fell in love and was loved, led away other people's wives and his own wives left him; and yet he searched for an answer to the question: "why is a man so imperfect and defenseless", and many times fell into despair. However, emerging from the subsequent quagmire, he, again, recklessly — with joy and love — threw himself back into life, as if realizing how beautiful it is; how amazing the world around him; and how much he still had left to say. Today, his soul is in perfect harmony with the outside world.

When I first walked into his New York apartment, the enormous amount of his works displayed shocked me. "I see that many of these were painted in Russia. How did you manage to export all these treasures?" - I asked Sasha. "It really wasn't easy — he smiled. — The packing alone took a year. I brought seven huge containers to New York, weighing four tons in total. In addition, according to the rules of our Ministry of Culture of Uzbekistan, I was obliged to buy back all of my work from myself. The back of each canvas has a purple stamp, which confirms that the product is allowed to go through customs. Besides, I redeemed not only my work, but also my father's — his every sketch and bookplate. I owe everything to my father."

Unfortunately, I bitterly learned that Sasha lost a significant portion of his vision, which cannot be recovered. His illness is not yet treated in any country of the world. Nevertheless, the master continues to work. Probably, the source of Kedrin's attitude — his huge soul — leads the artist's hand with brush and paints, bringing us to the delicate inner world of the creator. His relative — the poet Dmitri Kedrin — once accurately wrote, "Homer was blind and Beethoven — deaf, and Demosthenes tongue-tied. Yet who has ascended to their level? Who is as used to the muses as they? Then why does the pedant, frowning, write that creativity is given only to those who are sharp in vision, of subtle hearing, and can speak beautifully? Or do they, of unenlightened spirit, know but one law — to create with too sharp of an ear and too long of a tongue".



"Poor vision — is a huge advantage," Sasha explained to me. "Due to it, I do not see unnecessary details — but I see the essentials. Remember these lines? "I see not who strolls under the window, but the stars in the sky I clearly discern. I am awake at night, and sleep during the day. I tread the ground cautiously. Not milestones, but the mist I trust. The deaf will hear me and understand." (Francois Villon)

I asked Sasha: "Each of your paintings has a title, "And Still of Her," "White Horse", "Dreams of the Master." How do you work? Paint first, and then, like a newborn child, it receives a name. Or vice versa? A title emerges in your mind, embedded in the idea, which is then translated into a painting?" "Most often this is a combination of the two," Sasha answered after some thought. "Although sometimes the idea comes first, then the painting, and sometimes vice versa. But usually — a combination. It is like a jazz improvisation. By the way, you named the three works that make up the triptych on the theme of catharsis — the purification through suffering that a person experiences. I am convinced that suffering is not sent to a person in vain, it is necessary for the formation of personality, spiritual growth and improvement. Therefore, a person must cherish their suffering — as paradoxical as it may sound. The theme of catharsis seems very important to me, and I wanted to discuss it with the audience."

Sasha's wife, Maria, believes that she was epically lucky in life. Fate sent her Aleksander Kedrin, whom she considers an outstanding personality. "He is not only an amazing artist, but also an incredibly caring father and husband. He is so tender toward me, and the children," — says Maria, — "I am immensely grateful to God for the happiness that I feel every day from communicating with Sasha."

I am convinced that many, many years will pass; none of us will be in this world any longer, yet Sasha's art — as a symbol of immortality — will live on to please the future generations. "I was born to comfort you, to gild both ecstasies of love and the anguish of death," — wrote the poet Dmitri Kedrin. His descendant and spiritual heir, the artist Aleksander Kedrin, sees precisely this as his lofty destiny.



Memories

2013. Canvas, oil.
79 × 246 cm



Andrei Kudryashev
Journalist, Art Critic for
the "Komsomolets of Uzbekistan"
in the late 80s –early 90s

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**The Apple
of Temptation**
1992. Canvas, oil.
70 × 110 cm

Astral Painting of the Honored Artist

(Originally published in the "Komsomolets
of Uzbekistan" newspaper from October 9th, 1990)

The term "Astral painting" was not invented by art historians, but rather by those studying bioenergetic processes — esotericists and occultists. They argue that metaphysical paintings reflect the ultimate reality — the astral plan, perceptible to mediums. Honored Artist of Uzbekistan Aleksander Kedrin believes that the theme of his work is life itself. One cannot simply write about the complex. It is better to discuss it.

I invited a famous psychic, Galina Styagova, to join me at the artist's studio.

- "I am an old friend of your newspaper," began Aleksander Veniaminovich. "My first solo exhibition was held in 1965, in the editorial rooms of "Komsomolets of Uzbekistan".
- Who were you then, in 1965?
- Nobody. I was even kicked out of the Arts and Theatre Institute.
- What for?
- More like "why?" Right then, as if on purpose, there was a scandal at the exhibition in the Moscow Manege devoted to the 30th anniversary of Moscow Artists Union where Nikita Khrushchev almost got into a fight with abstractionists. Then he held a historic meeting of the First Secretary with the creative intelligentsia in the Kremlin. Khrushchev read a lecture, which was then published in the "Pravda". This reactionary speech was used to settle accounts with undesirables already in place.
- And the wave of attacks on the abstractionists reached Tashkent?
- Yes, although I had nothing to do with abstract art at all. They just settled accounts with me. Put together a petition, and took it to my neighbors. They all happily signed it, stating that I'm a parasite; neither work nor study anywhere, and should be forced to move out of the city as a public enemy. The fact is that I lived and live in an artist colony, in my father's, Veniamin N. Kedrin's house. All my neighbors are artists themselves or teachers of fine arts. I think that says it all. You yourself probably know that differences in tastes and affections are often sharper than the ideological ones.
- Perhaps. And what did you do?
- I never felt like a dissident. On the contrary, I have always been too much of a Soviet citizen, unfortunately. First, I was hired as a loader at a coal depot. Then I went to see some public official. I complained to him that a young professional like myself is unable to complete his education. I was expelled from an art school as well. This is disorder. Mismanagement. The people's money was spent, and there is no return for the state. The official empathized with me and wrote a note, which reinstated me into the Benkov College on probation. This meant that I had six weeks to pass 35 exams. However, in the spring, I was already defending my diploma. It was then that the journalists of "Komsomolets" invited me to hold an exhibition in the editorial rooms.



**Blessed Are Those Who
Are Merciful**

1994. Canvas, oil.
90 × 94 cm

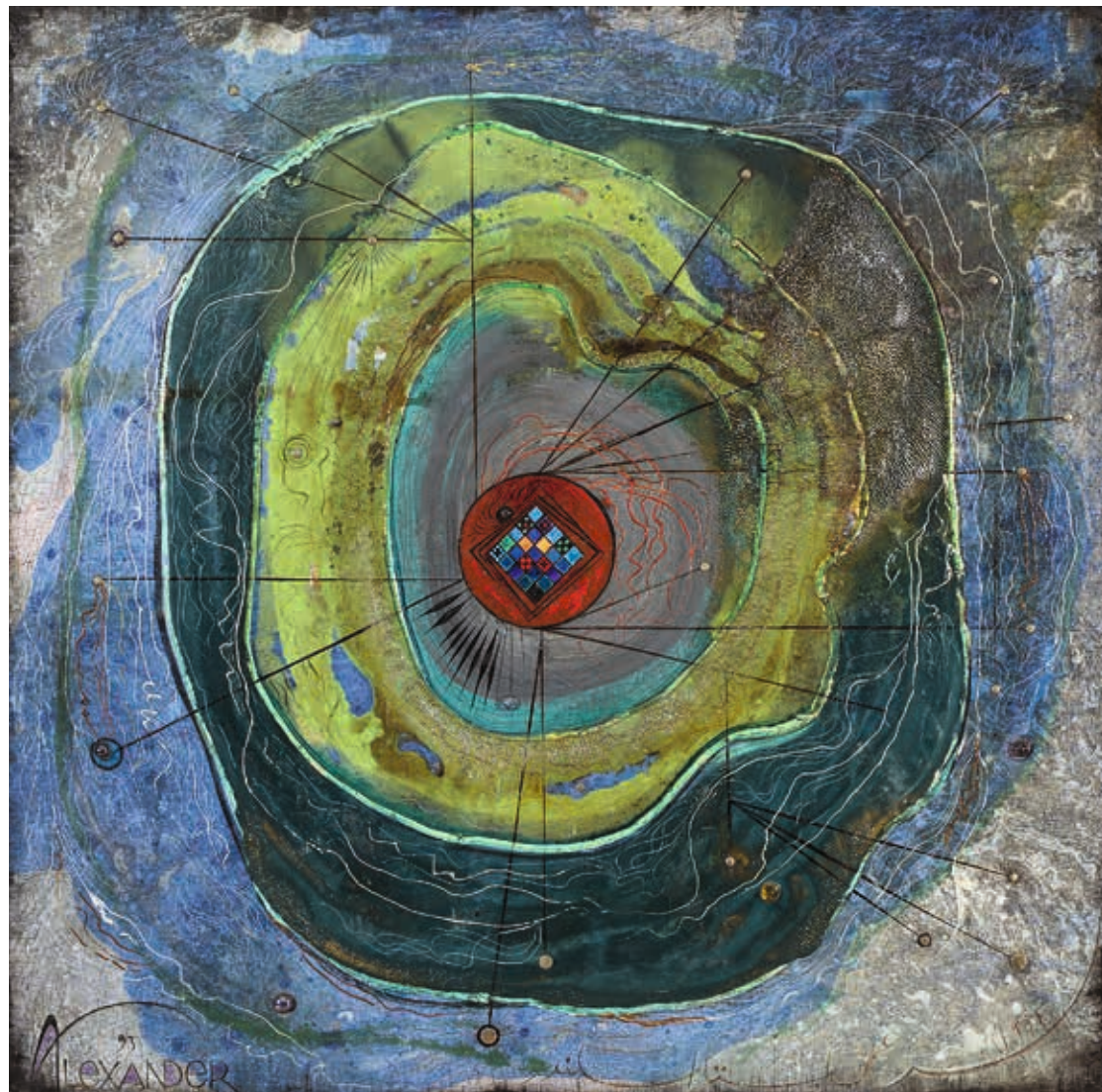
- Your friends?
- Of course. Overall, I was mainly friends with writers, poets and journalists, and had almost no contact with my own colleagues
- Did the exhibition nearly become fatal for the newspaper?
- The newspaper had its own “neighbors”. One of them wrote a letter to the Central Committee, which stated that counterrevolutionaries penetrated the Soviet press, and are organizing exhibitions of former parasites and misfits.
- However, it all ended well, right?
- When the editorial staff was called “to the carpet” and the editor, Y. I. Rybkin was about to be devoured, they were able to prove that there was no abstractionism in sight. Mikhail Kirilov, head of the culture department, suggested for the authorities to look at the works, and see for themselves that there was no abstraction. Everything worked out, but the exhibition was taken down.
- So they removed it?
- They were removing it for two months, one work a day. That way I, at least for some time, became unsinkable.
- While doing ceramics?



Pendulums

2014. Canvas, oil.
73 × 65 cm

- Diploma work I was able to defend easily. I realized that painting could always be easily hacked to death for political reasons. Therefore, you had to choose something neutral. For example, ceramics.
- Many of the articles that discuss your work strongly suggest that you draw inspiration from folk art. Is it a kind of formula for orthodoxy? An ideological amulet?
- I really am not avant-garde, but a traditionalist. An incompetent person can see my work as abstraction, but my artistic conceptions have always been traditional. By the way, my first serious exhibition that I put together at 16 was purely scientific and called the “Restoration of Mehmonhona Ceiling in Shakhrisabz.”
- But you were still periodically attacked from the right and the left?
- Once I even fell into a depression, began to doubt myself. I thought that my detractors were right. I packed a few works and went to Moscow, to see Ilya Ehrenburg himself.
- Why him specifically?
- It so happened that Ilya Grigoryevich was friends with a relative of mine, the poet Dmitri Kedrin, thus we were somewhat connected. In addition, I admired the poetry of Ehrenburg. Ilya Grigoryevich was a rather gloomy man. When I complained that I was misunderstood, he shamed me. He said, “Young man, shame on you! If you had gone through what I, and my



**The Dynamics
of Perfidy**

1994. Canvas, oil.
99 × 100 cm

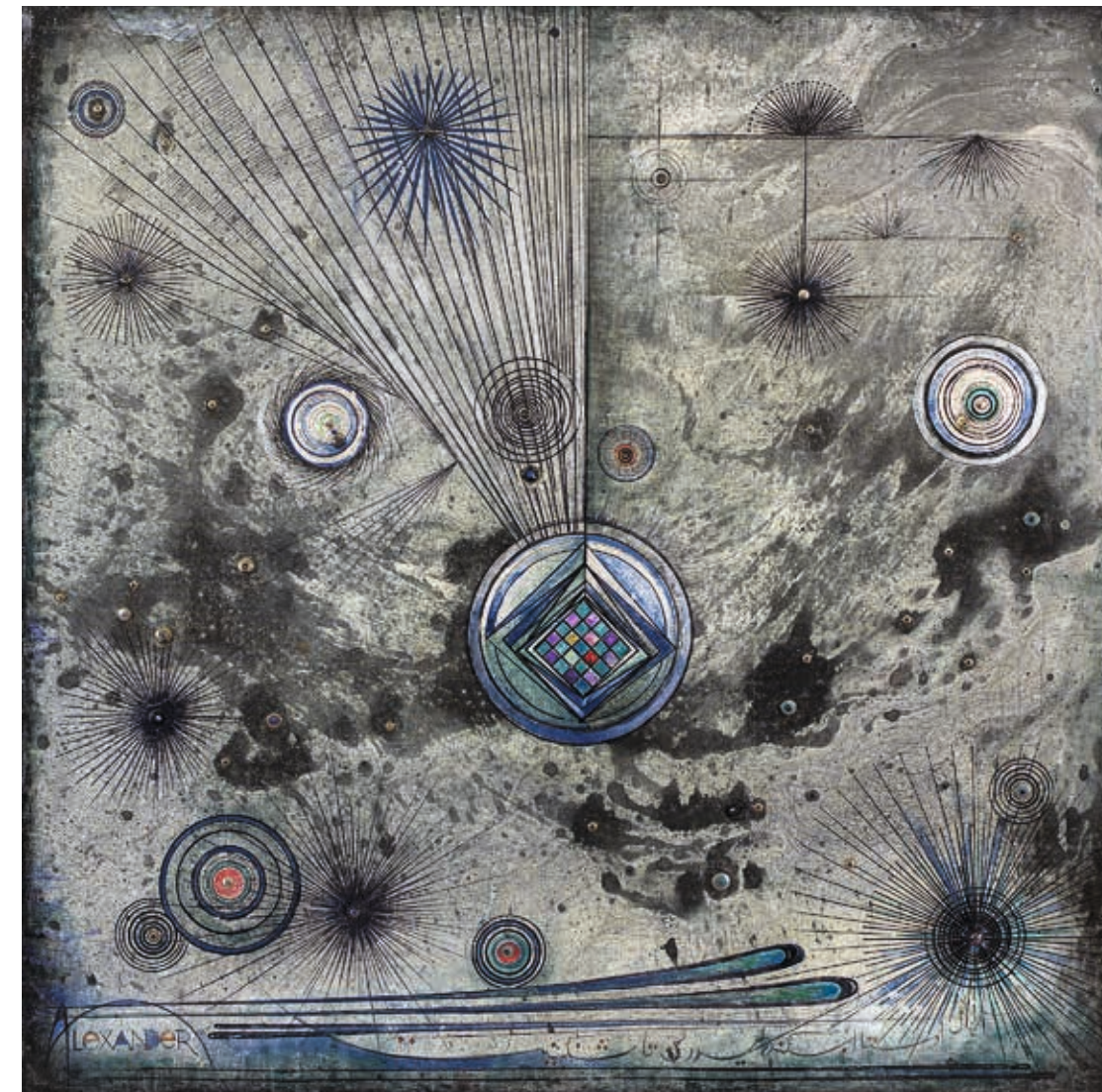
generation of the Soviet intelligentsia, had experienced. No one executed you, no one put you in jail. So stop twitching and fussing. Just work.” However, Ernst Neizvestny assessed the situation with young artists, indirectly affected by the defeat of the abstractionists, quite differently.

— How?

— He even depicted the situation graphically, as a charcoal drawing. In the center of the image he placed an Ass. Around it, and holding hands, academics form a barrier. The young people are pushing in from the outside, trying to break through the cordon. Academics ask the Ass, “What are we to do? Our hands are busy.” The Ass replies: “Beat them with your feet!” Oh, if the naive Ass only knew that the young people are not eager to fight, but rather lick it — in fact, more efficiently and at a lower cost. I think this happens every time a generational shift occurs, regardless of the political system.

— And what happened after?

— The Moscow architect and academic, Andrei Kosinsky, a namesake and fellow student of the poet Voznesensky, did a lot for our city, restoring it after the earthquake of 1966. Although, outside of the baths at Chorsu and the residential area on the Bohdan Khmelnytsky Street, implementing any large-scale plans proved impossible, yet serious projects and ideas remain.



**The Bright
Morning Star**

1994. Canvas, oil.
100 × 100 cm

— Was it Kosinsky who decided to get you and Neizvestny to work together?

— Yes. However, the offer of cooperation came already directly from Ernst.

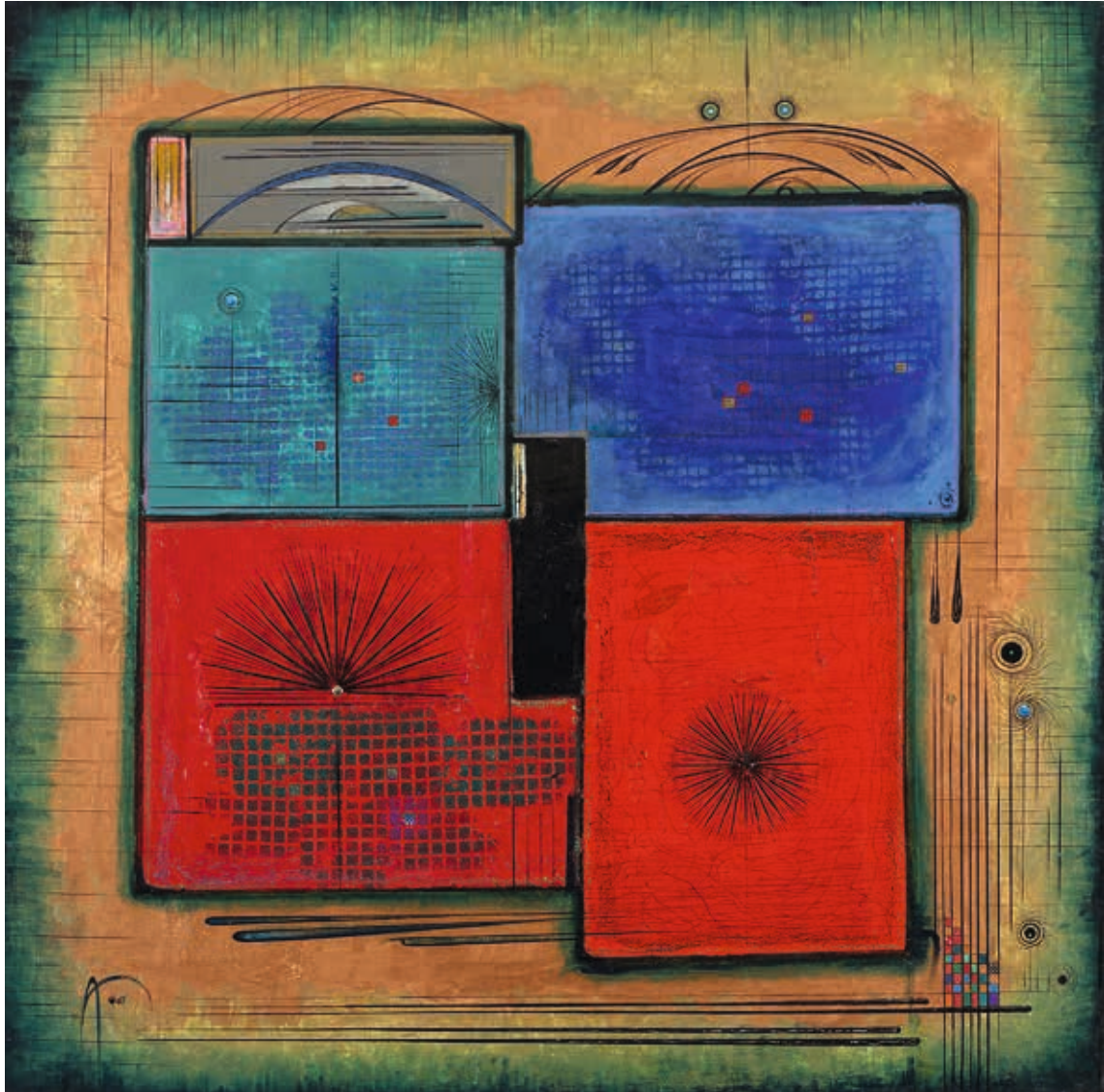
— But there seem to be no Neizvestny works in the city.

— Right here, in my workshop, in 1974, we worked on a bas-relief together, which was to decorate the back end of a nine-story building at the approach to Tashkent from the airport. However, we are very different people. Ernst is older than I by 14 years. He is a real Titan; extremely hard, paradoxical. He thinks and acts instantly, articulates his ideas clearly. I am the exact opposite — both in temperament and outlook. In art too, we had different preferences. We were like Bourdelle and Maillol, two opposite poles. He was Bourdelle, of course. Our work, according to the plan, was to be built on this contrast, which, incidentally, is in the spirit of Ernst.

— And that was Kosinsky’s plan?

— Exactly. Have you ever seen anything by Neizvesny in color? And you could not have. I think his element is form, but not color. Color is where I could be useful to him. At least so he claimed. Thus, I was to oversee the coloristic portion of the bas-relief, and Ernst was to create the form.

— And where is the bas-relief?



**My Home
is My Cherished Fortress**

2007. Canvas, oil.
91,5×91,5 cm

- Here on the wall is the sketch.
- And in life?
- Our work was interrupted, before completion, due to differences with the client.

Neizvestny decided not to wait. He packed up and left.

- The same way he later left the country?
- Something like that. After all, he was popular, loved, swamped with orders. No one exiled him. Nevertheless, one day, Ernst told his friends that life is too short, so spending it on anything other than art — is criminal. In our country, it is difficult to follow his covenant. One is constantly distracted by God knows what.

- Even now?
- No less now than during the Soviet period.
- And yet, you aren't planning on going anywhere?
- No. Although I am still being pressured — even at the household level. Several years ago, I decided to build a playground on an empty lot near the house, which was mainly used as a dump. My neighbors, out of hatred toward me, secretly destroyed it. I had to give out a few knuckle sandwiches. Only journalistic intervention saved me from arrest.

- Everything was fine in the end?
- Astrologers say that I have cosmic protection. Nevertheless, I am still afraid that this protection may not work one day. As you know, "there is no defense against a crowbar".

Basically, claims of the envious detractors against Kedrin can be reduced to the following charges:

1. He has never studied anything seriously and thoroughly.
2. During the Soviet era, he was a favorite of Sharaf Rashidov and received the most profitable orders.
3. For monumental projects, he hired "laborers" and payed them a pittance.
4. His works contain little innovation, and only in provincial Tashkent, they have no comparison.
5. In general, he does nothing without financial benefits.

It is no secret that many creative people like to spread gossip about themselves. Kedrin has no need to create legends around his name. He has enough enemies as it is, among whom, perhaps, there are people unjustly offended. Who among us is without sin? However, I will take it upon myself to say that this is irrelevant when it comes to art. I like everything that Kedrin created, though I sometimes cannot explain why. Among other things, the inability to somehow explain the artist's work can also serve as a pretext for the attacks, especially in our society, which is accustomed to the idea that art must serve the people.

Let us remember the episode in the Gospel. A woman anointed the feet of Jesus with perfumed myrrh. At that Judas murmured, saying that this ointment could have been sold and the money distributed to the poor. Then Jesus said "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." (Mark 14:6–8)

I believe I know a universal explanation. Every artist, poet or musician in his own language and in his own way says only one thing: "Love me. Love me not for something nor in the name of something. Love me for who I am. Love all." This eternal theme of creativity and life, common to all, regardless of personal qualities and reputation, can be justified only by intense, spiritual work. In this sense, any genuine work of art can be called astral, referring to spiritual work expended by the author.

Real art can always be identified by a certain kind of magnetism, logically inexplicable, but perceptible. And unique for each person at that. I asked the psychic, Galina Styagova, who has been carefully examining Kedrin's paintings during our conversation, what she feels.

- These works have a massive biofield.— Galina said.— Don't you feel it yourself?

Of course, I felt it perfectly well. However, at the same time, I felt rather uncomfortable under the weight of the energy collapsing unto me. I tried, but was unable to find analogies, and thus — definitions, for the artworks of my interlocutor. They were so far outside of the usual framework, that I felt that had they gone just a bit further, I would have to accept the fact that I absolutely do not comprehend art, people or life.

- "I began seriously perusing visual arts at the age of 14, when I first saw Degas," recounts Kedrin. "His work made a stunning impression on me. Until then, I painted the same way all the children did. But here... I was initiated. I studied and came to love the Impressionists. Their direct relationship to poetry is especially near to my heart."

- What about folk art?

— It is part of the same whole. What connects me to folk traditions of the East is their understanding of the absolute unity that architecture, music, painting, sculpture and poetry represent. However, traditionalism and academism — are not at all the same thing. Once tradition freezes, it turns into academism. In their own way, abstract art, cubism and surrealism can all be academic. Traditionalism, on the other hand, is the development of existing traditions.

— Where to? To what extent? Till infinity?

— Unfortunately, we cannot know the limits and boundaries of art. For me, it was important to develop my own unique language, not illustrative but another. Then, through it, I would be able to influence the audience immediately and directly, not through plot, nor even through allegory, but directly. It is generally accepted that, in purely abstract, non-objective works, mastery is much easier to falsify, compared to the plot based or figurative ones. And that is absolutely true — but only at the lowest level. The higher the artist or critic rises, the less significant the manner in which the work is executed. What is more important is that I have something to say. I, as a traditionalist, am concerned with eternal themes: good and evil, subjective and objective, sin and sanctity, life and death. I resolve them in my own way, at my own level. Any subject for me is an occasion to convey my perceptions.

— The perceptions from what? By the way, I ask not because I do not know. Rather, this is the most frequently asked question of the artists by the audience.

— Only the perceptions of what, not from what. My perception of the world, of time, of my place in the world and in time. Actually, I believe the creative process is pure improvisation. Sometimes I imagine the painting even before I start working, and I mean the whole thing. Often I cannot really explain why a certain detail should be placed in this specific location. But I am always certain that everything should look this way, and not otherwise. Later, psychologists explain to me why that is so.

— And do their explanations match your perceptions?

— In general, yes. Take, for example, this work. It is called “The Slums”. I grew up in the slums of old Tashkent. Here there are no specific slums drawn, nor even an allegory of the slums, but rather the state that they induce in the soul.

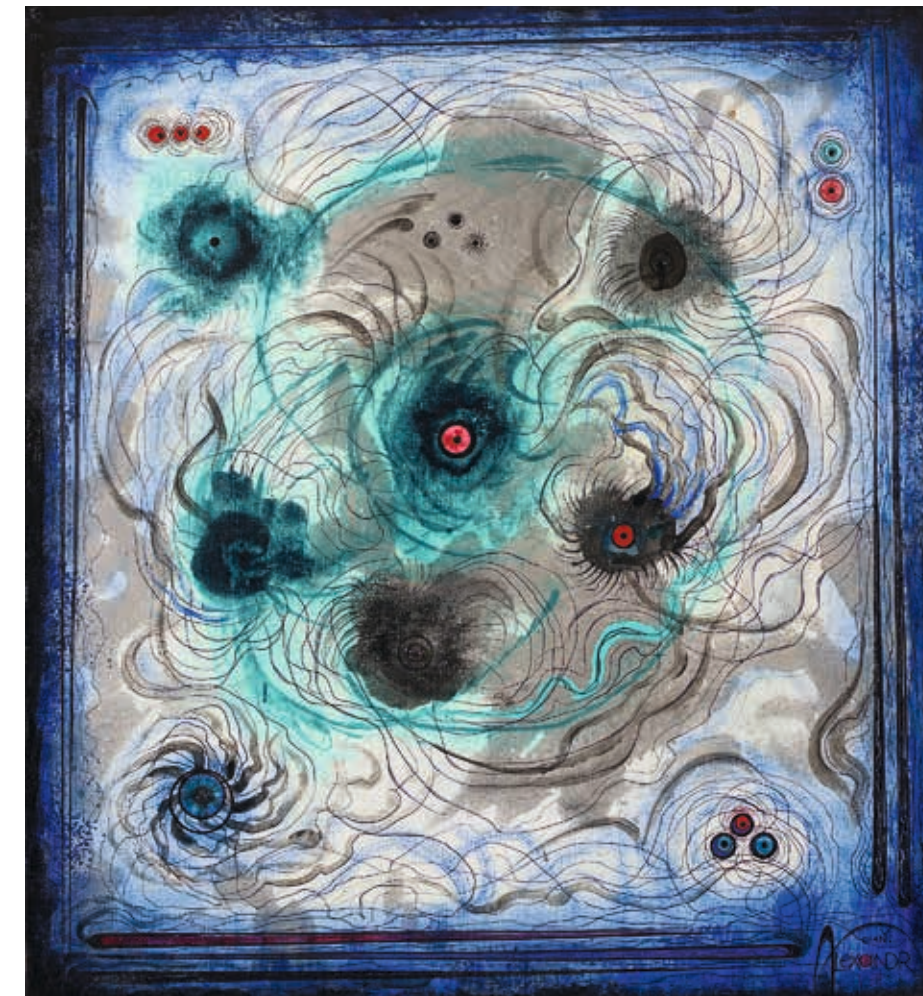
— In my opinion, the painting manifests the process of overcoming, eradicating the sentiment imposed by the slums.

— Of course. Just do not try to solve my paintings like crossword puzzles. That is not what they are for.

— I am not trying to. It is just easier for me to view your works than describe them.

Perhaps because your art is more of a research instrument for the soul, and of the subtle reality overall, than the final result of the study.

Realistically, I should not even approach the mass audience with such an “anti-scientific” idea, but I have no other choice. One cannot discuss Kedrin’s work in the language of the evening news. Someone once wrote of Marina Tsvetaeva, that she has earned the right to simplicity. Without a doubt. However, the artist, and indeed any person, must also be entitled to complexity, in fact it is one of the inalienable rights of the individual. Moreover, it is imperative to determine the level of complexity for oneself, without being prompted from above or below. Methinks that a discussion of Kedrin’s works on the level of philosophical categories will be had by the art historians of the future. For now, let me speak of the living with the living.



**Sing and Dance
in a Ring**

2014. Canvas, oil.
75 × 68,5 cm

— By the way, how do you feel about the term “astral painting”?

— Fine. Although the term is rather conditional. You can call it any other kind of painting, the essence will not be altered.

— Nevertheless, Galina Styagova considers your art precisely astral, associated with otherworldly entities.

— That does not surprise me. Psychics and esoterists are often interested in my paintings.

— Are you interested in esotericism?

— My interest in occult theories began quite recently. I was familiar with esoteric literature already, but it did not seem relevant to me. Then, I saw Paul Globo on TV, and took him for myself. The fact is — we are superficially similar, like twins. When the situation availed itself, we met in person. Afterwards, I began to communicate with one of the leading astrologers, Vladimir Dubitskiy. I began to attend seminars on astrology and bioenergetics.

Here is a perfect time to terminate our dialogue. In my opinion, Aleksander Kedrin’s painting is quite interesting in itself, without the spicy note of occultism. Especially since a few days from now, another exhibition of his work will open at the State House of Architects. I would rather not anticipate it with imposed templates and definitions. Better to see it for oneself and make your own conclusions.





Aleksander Fainberg

National Poet of Uzbekistan,
author of 15 published collections
of poetry, and a personal friend
of Aleksander Kedrin

p. 106

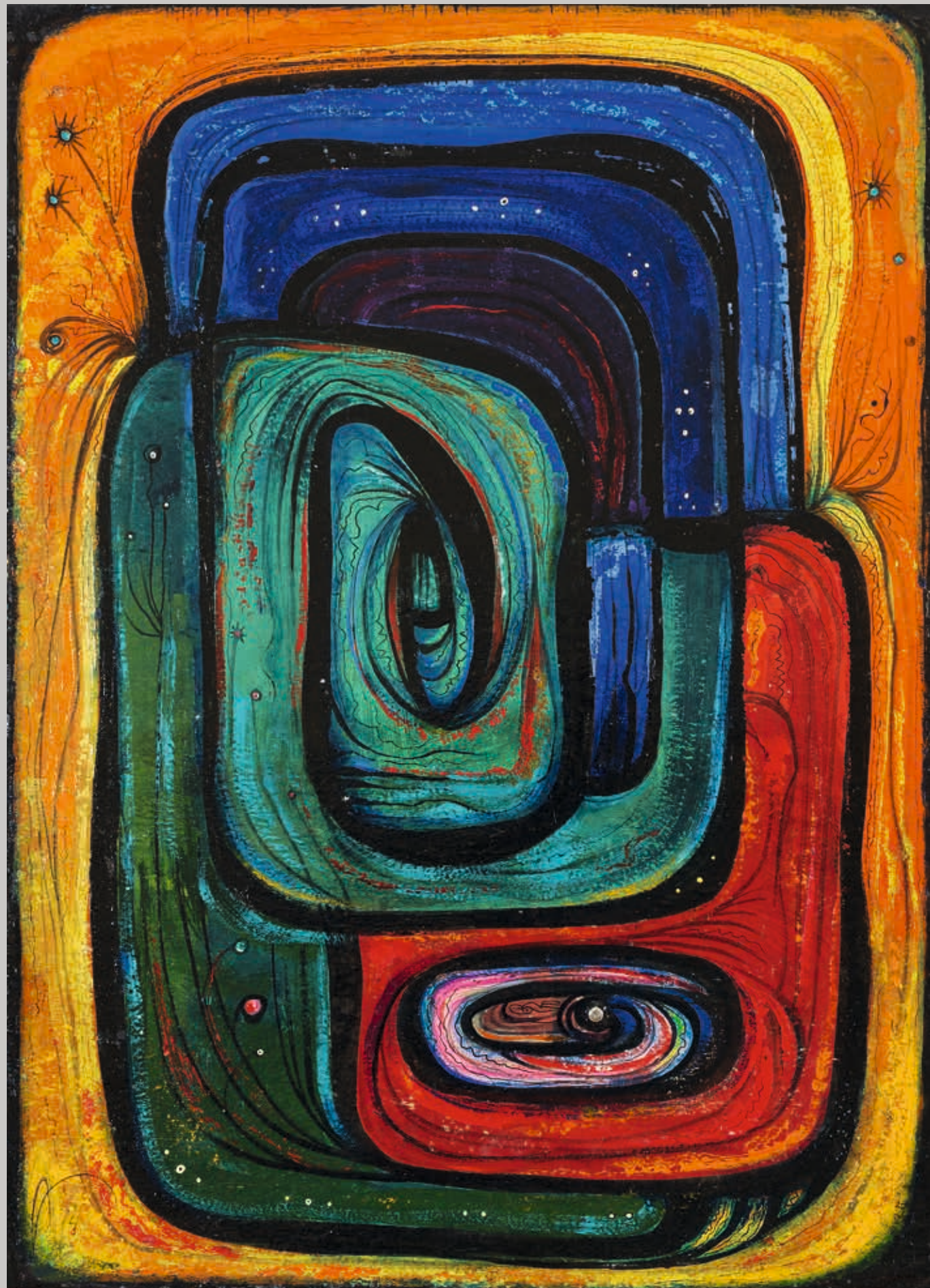
Two Points and Three Stars

2015. Canvas, oil.
102 × 76 cm

Ballad about Art

(Dedicated to Aleksander Kedrin)

The hungry artist draws a stew, the brush,
A skimmer, singing in his hand,
As he covers the tomatoes in carmine
And blackens the hot cauldron.
The meat is steaming in the painting,
Like mustard, he slathers the paint on.
The carrots glow, the onion — silver,
And that does please the hungry eye.
The sated artist, on the other hand,
With pain and sorrow, whitewashes empty pots.
And, chewing on a cream filled pastry,
Forms a rustic rusk on the table. He draws,
Having knocked back a glass of wine,
The dust of forgetfulness on empty decanters,
And the skinny cat stares from the painting,
As his steak is searing in the kitchen.
The critic and the biographer — two glorious rascals,
Having thoroughly studied both artists' creative path,
Declare the phenomenon "only natural,"
Fusing life and art into perfect harmony.
And, to the world, this conclusion seems simple:
The personal, in the life of the artist, can be debated,
And what is consumed, cannot be recreated,
Thus, both are right in their own way.
And sinking knee deep in the April mud,
I composed this ballad at the marketplace,
The circles round my eyes were getting darker,
As I stood, playing with an empty satchel.
And next to me a car, with body billowing,
The critic and the biographer loading paintings.
The door of the shop creaking and slamming,
And the puddles smelled of real spring.



Vladimir Chernomorsky
Reporter for the "Shield of David"
October 2007, New York.

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Fire of Love
1974. Cardboard, oil.
70 × 50 cm

Boundless Talent: The Paintings of Aleksander Kedrin.

(Originally published in the "Shield of David" newspaper, issue 97 from October 2007, New York)

An exposition of Aleksander Kedrin's paintings opened at the prestigious gallery, "Amsterdam Whitney" in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City. His monumental ceramics brought him fame in his home country of Uzbekistan. He decorated palaces of arts, metro stations, prestigious resorts and airports. "Architects were standing in line to see Mr. Kedrin", wrote the "Novoye Russkoye Slovo" newspaper on September 14th, 2007.

Kedrin's ceramics were ubiquitously successful during Sharaf Rashidov's leadership of Uzbekistan; he was not only made a member of the Artists and Architects Unions, he was awarded the title of a Distinguished Master of the Arts. His personal exhibitions in Tashkent, Moscow, Leningrad and Berlin were immensely successful. However, this was already in the eighties.

The beginning was in the late fifties, during the Khrushchev "thaw", when Kedrin was still a student in Tashkent. Already then, Kedrin's paintings looked avant-garde, and thus the government routinely closed down his exhibitions. Abstract Art was dangerous business in the Soviet Union, and young Kedrin began to earn his living with monumental ceramics. For thirty years, he did not exhibit a single painting, only a few collectors and experts knew that Aleksander did not give up on his "serious art". It is no wonder that, as soon as Kedrin arrived in New York, the famous collector, Norton Dodge, began acquiring his paintings.

Ceramics were an effective façade for the painter in the Soviet Union. Both his ceramics and his paintings are abstract, colorful and decorative. The artist himself does not make a distinction between his ceramics and paintings. Ernst Neizvestny, emphasized this thought in his interview, "Usually ceramics is considered an applied or decorative art. If the artist also paints, he considers this a different art form, easel art for example. Consequentially, the artistic identity is split, but not with Sasha. I do not see a principal difference between Sasha's painting and ceramics, outside of materials and methods of course. Both contain current, I would say, cosmic rhythms..."

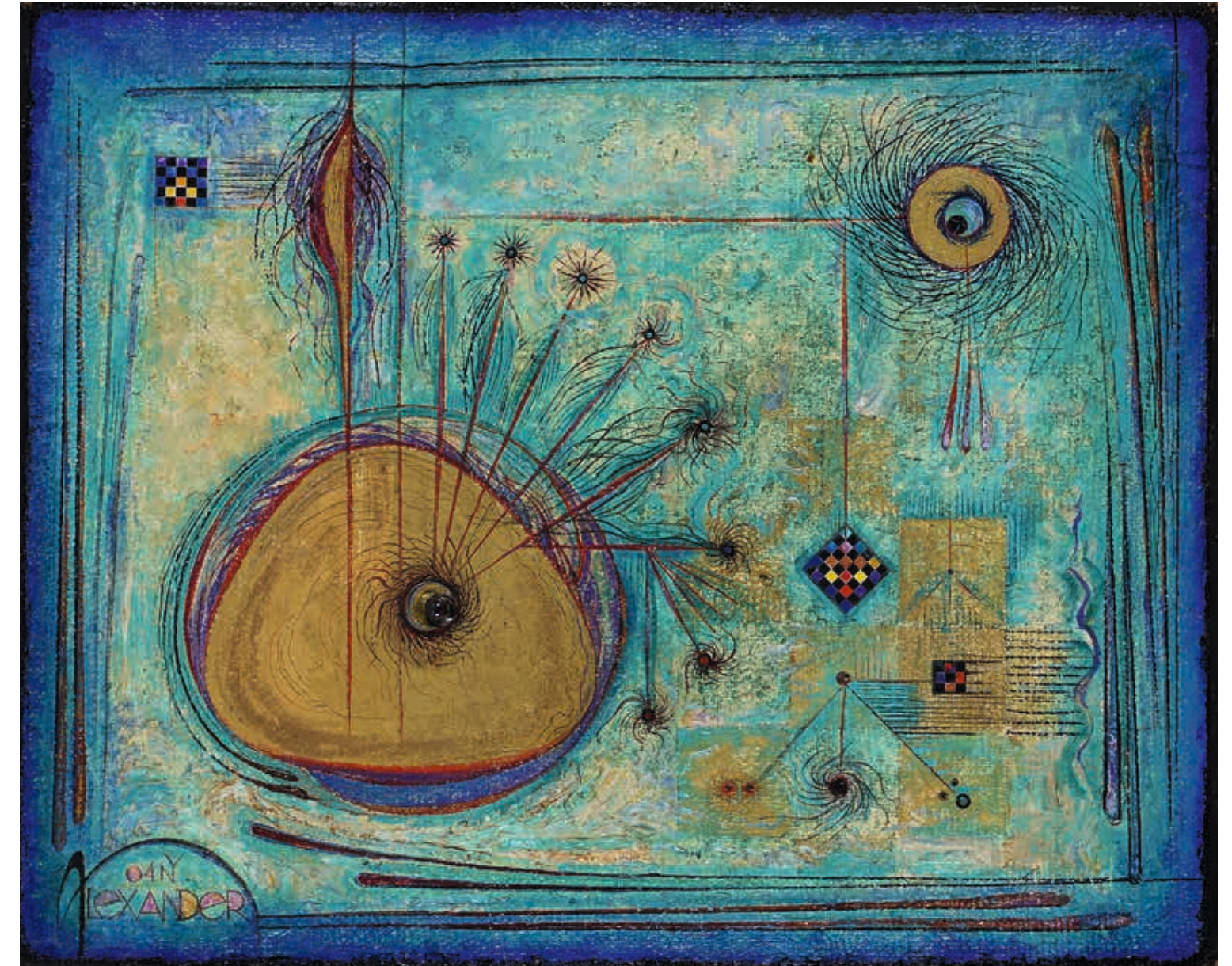
Aleksander Kedrin was always a successful artist — in the Soviet Union, and here in New York; he is a prominent figure in the cultural elite. He exhibits his works not only in NYC, but also in Florence, Montreal, Zimerly Art Museum and the Contemporary Art Museum in Jersey City. His works are displayed in private collections around the world.

Aleksander Kedrin, as the phrase goes, comes from a "good family". His great-grandfather, the famous E. I. Kedrin, was a member of the tsarist (and later — the immigrant) Duma. He was written about by Tolstoy and Bunin. His cousin, the famous poet Dmitri Kedrin, is studied as part of the school curriculum in Russia. Aleksander's father, the poet and artist Veniamin Kedrin, was a prominent figure in Tashkent, where he moved to from St. Petersburg in the thirties. Aleksander's children also write poetry and paint.

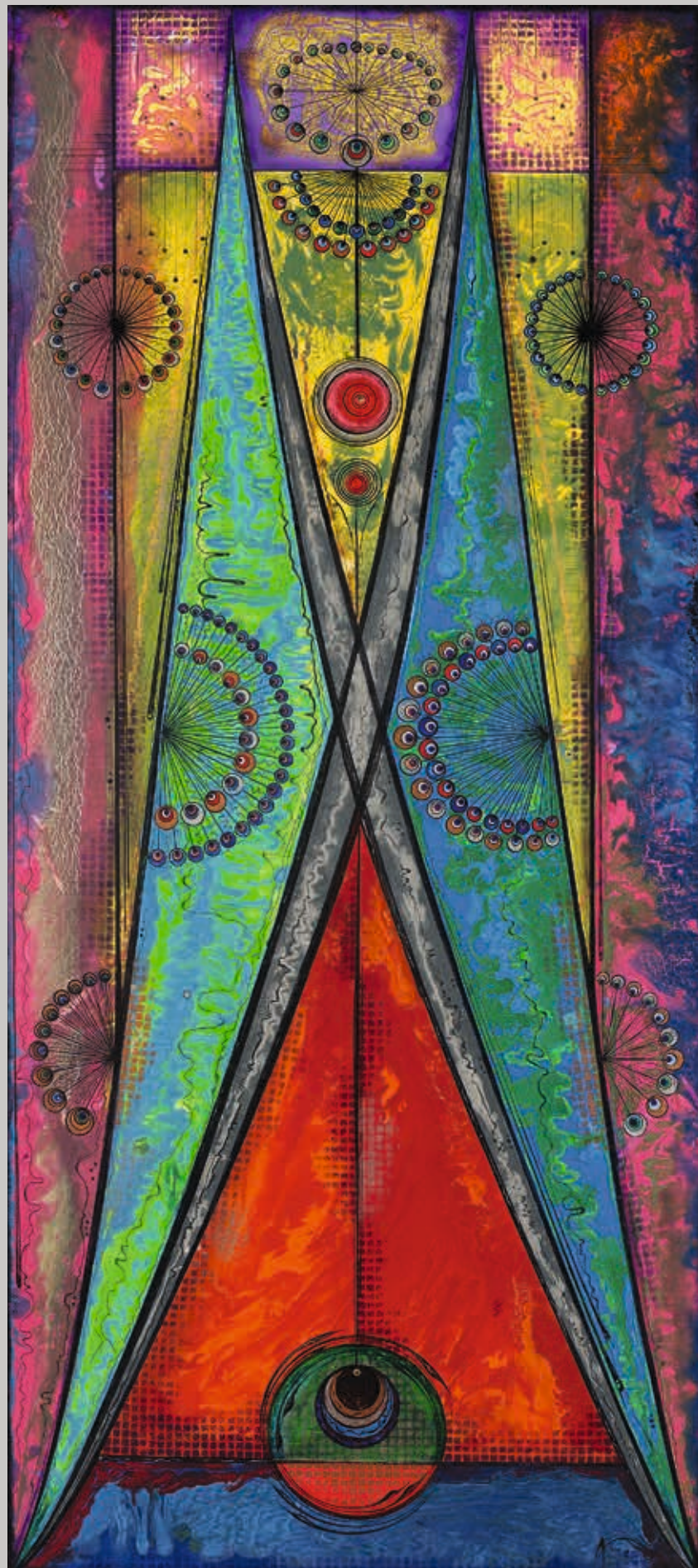


New Jerusalem
1994. Canvas, oil.
88 × 80 cm

His poetry is on canvases. What are the paintings about? "Parallel Worlds", "Do not Squander Your Sorrows", "Awaiting Spring", "Watch, Ye!", "Antiworlds", "Angel of Destruction"? They are about the eternal, life and death, about love and the complicated human relationships. To interpret, to explain abstract art is no simple task. But who ever said that serious music, serious poetry or serious art must be as simple and unambiguous as a road sign? Of course not. All this takes serious effort and empathy from the audience. As they say, "let the one who has ears, hear." Someone sees one thing in the work of the masters, the next person — another; yet, both say that the work is beautiful. Is that not the main point? Beauty can save the world, can it not?



**Master's Last (Lost)
Dreams**
2004. Sackcloth, oil.
61 × 77 cm



Dmitri Kedrin

A Moscovite Painter, nephew of Aleksander Kedrin, grandson of the famous poet, Dmitri Kedrin who was murdered in Moscow on September 18th, 1945.

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The Double Pendulum of The East

2016. Canvas, oil.
228,5 × 102,2 cm

Occasionally, It Pays to Change the Medium

A Confused Letter from Abroad to My Uncle, the Plastic Dissident.

Tail end of the seventies. I am sixteen, a gloomy teen. I have long hair and a faint moustache. TU-154, lightly rattling its plastic, carries me to Tashkent, to see my uncle, the artist Aleksander Kedrin. Below us is the snow-white cotton wool of clouds. The engines hum rhythmically. Near me, several elderly American tourists have not stopped chatting for a second. I listen to their un-English English and do not even suspect that seventeen years later it will become the natural linguistic environment for my uncle, the artist Aleksander Kedrin.

I have known for a long time that when I grow up and drink to the dregs the bitter cup of professional education, I will become like him — handsome, bearded, confident and humorous. But most importantly, I will be surrounded by the exhilarating and dangerous mystery, into which only I, and a few dozen others like myself, will be consecrated. For I will be an ARTIST-RECUSANT, like my uncle, the artist Aleksander Kedrin.

I grew up. The cup turned out to be quite bitter and considerably damaged my nerves. My senior advisor tried several times to have me expelled from the Art School (hereditary!) for ignoring bases of methodical teaching, to speak plainly — for non-conformism. I was self-satisfied and proud — all was going according to plan, as was intended.

Then the Soviet Union fell, the ideology rotted, legendary and romantic Soviet non-conformism lost its sacral meaning. Sometimes I felt cheated. However, the new Russia soon lost its head for Contemporary Art and ran full speed ahead. I was left on the sidelines with my archaic “canvas / oil”, and, with a bit of a stretch, can now be considered “non-conformist”. Although, in a different manner. Though, overall, all is well — I have not betrayed the ideals of my youth.

October 2011. Night. I am sitting in my studio on the Garden Ring road in Moscow. In front of me are letters from NYC, written by my uncle’s hand, in the same expressive handwriting I have known since childhood. A certain unique and irreproducible, purely kedrinesque calligraphy. This is exactly how artist’s letters should be. And my handwriting is chicken scratch... Oh well...

Uncle, in one letter you write that you were never a dissident, though many have tried to mold you into that image. Yes, you were never a political dissident — you didn’t walk around with signs in ‘68, didn’t distribute “Chronicle of Current Events”; you weren’t being knocked out by drugs in a mental institution, and the camps were not graced by your presence. But you were a PLASTIC dissident. The early declaration of plastic nonconformity by you and your like-minded friends provoked an immediate reaction from the rotten Tashkent KGB and Komsomol. Your student exhibition was destroyed, and to think — a whole three years before Khrushchev and “pederasts”. Go Tashkent! Your ceramic camouflage sells you out. You fooled the stupid functionaries, who thought that décor, and



**Two Stars
and Full Moon**
2015. Canvas, oil.
117 × 132 cm

any other spatial organization, is some kind of secondary, subordinate creative system. The idiots were badly mistaken. We know of many examples of the opposite. Just look at your splendid futuristic composition “Bakhor”. Of course, the pathetic and hypocritical phrase “decorative and applied” has no connection with this defiantly modern sculpture. It is a mysterious android, biotechnological mechanism of the future, carrying out its function using unknown, and most likely unearthly, energies. This work alone easily refutes the myth about the absence of modern sculpture in the Soviet Union. There wasn’t a lot, but there WAS some. Ironically, “Bakhor” was installed in the most ideologically conditioned official space.

Truly, this is the case where the skies sometimes place the most important role into the hands of fools. We observe a paradoxical situation: the artist has not betrayed himself for a second; he places the same plastic objectives before himself and resolves them. His aesthetic and spiritual foundations are only improving. He is the same Aleksander Kedrin, once condemned to total obstruction for his formalism. He only changed the medium — and, out of nowhere, has gained popularity and respect of the authorities.

If we are to talk about the impact of Oriental tradition on your art, as, for example, in the large relief “Blue Sheikhtaur”; it is founded on the architectural plastic of the Middle East and one cannot help but think of the possible connection between Islam and abstractionism. After all, you were, in fact, quite organic, living and working in an environment where realistic images are a cultural taboo.

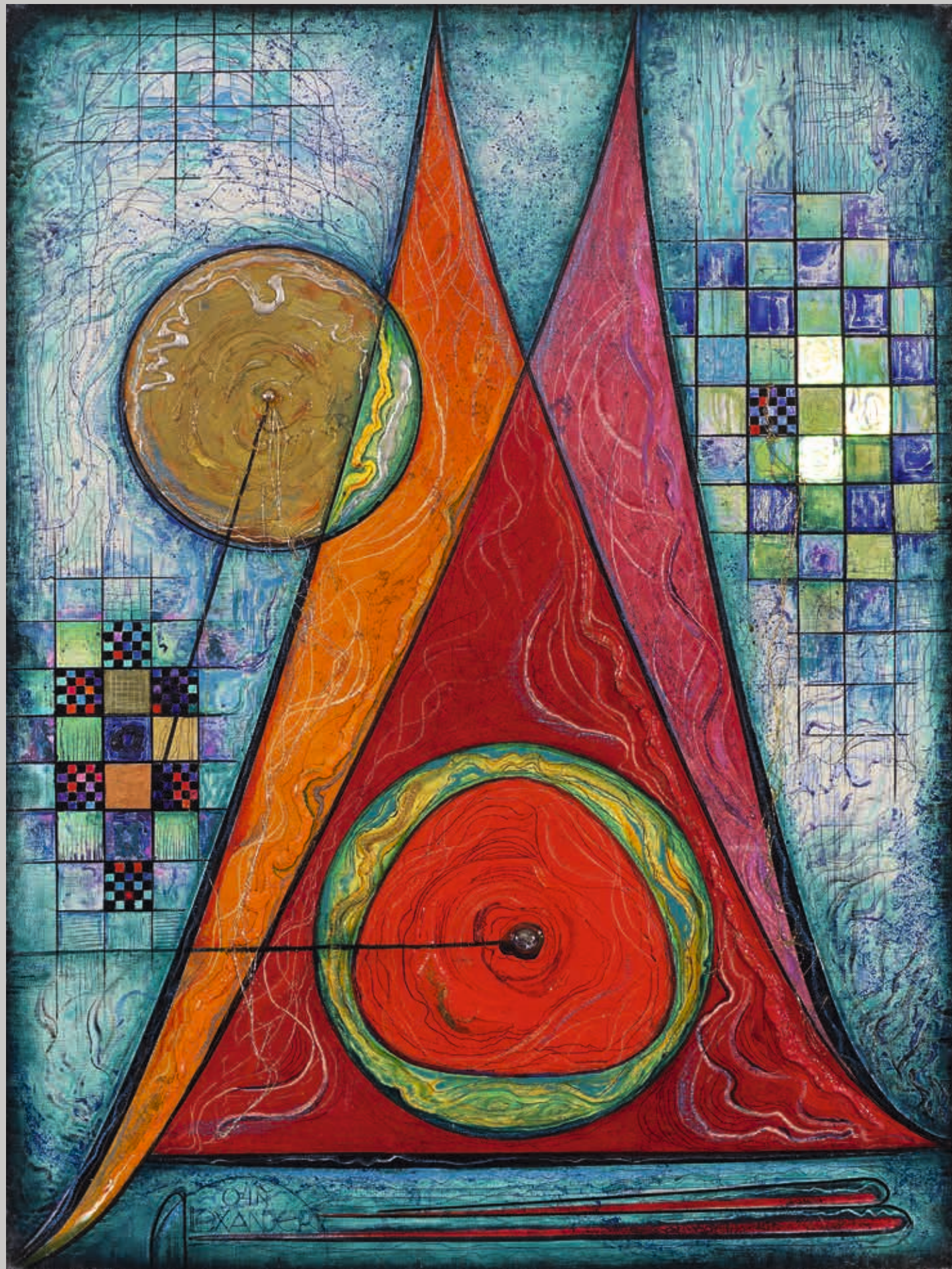
Of course, Ernst Neizvestny was right when he spoke of your ceramics as inseparable from your painting. Indeed, they are the same — the only difference is medium. In some of the works, you even darken the edges on the painting on the perimeter, creating a visual effect of volume. Canvas is too thin for you. While traveling in the gentle and complex expanses of your art, I observe the exciting relationship

between worlds, where even conflict is ordained by the will of the Cosmic Architect, it is logical and necessary. The threads, connecting these worlds, arrange the high logic of time and space; inside the emerging paradigms, all is absolute and harmonious. What, in your art, is a macrocosm, and what is a microcosm? And where is the boundry between them? Maybe your son, Mitya, raised among these paintings, became a medical researcher and, looking through the microscope, sees the whole sensitive and sensible system of your worlds.

But, for now, I am sixteen. The plane landed successfully. I exit its womb onto the ramp. It is spring in Tashkent in February, and, lightly walking toward me on the concrete of the runway, I see a man whom I wish to emulate. He is wearing an unbuttoned suede jacket (which I still do not have), and the airport wind balloons the flaring bottoms of his blue Wrangler jeans. Hello, my uncle, the artist Aleksander Kedrin!



Ceramic Plate “Solaris”
1983. Chamotte, glass,
smalt, colored glaze.
67 cm diameter



Yuri Mergold

Friend of Aleksander Kedrin,
Soviet Architect who participated
in the reconstruction of Tashkent
after the earthquake.
New York, 2011

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The Unanimity

2004. Canvas, oil.
91 × 68,5 cm

A Dialogue with the Sun

Originally published in the "Architecture and
Construction of Uzbekistan" magazine, issue #2
from 1991

I first heard of him in the early 70s. Saw his works. Back then, to a student discovering the mysterious world of architecture, Kedrin's platters and reliefs reminded one of the works of Léger and Le Corbusier, and the master himself, with such a sonorous "artistic" last name, seemed a venerable classic in a velvet smock and with a full beard.

Later we met in person. The beard was real, but that was it. The thirty-year-old master, in worn jeans, heatedly playing ping-pong in the courtyard of his house. That was during the collaboration of Ernst Neizvestny, Aleksander Kedrin and the architect, Andrei Kosinsky on the relief of the house on Bogdan Khmelnitsky Street. Then there was work in Kosinsky's studio and the continuation of my acquaintance with Sasha and his art. We also had a moment in our lives when I was working on an important contest and Kedrin, already a well-known master, surprisingly subtly, deeply and accurately commented on the ideas and proposals of a then quite young architect.

Judging from nearly twenty years of insight into the man allows me to suggest that, despite the fact that we are quite different, Kedrin as an artist, is dear to me; and, what is perhaps most important, he is interesting to me as a person. Someone quipped that it is simple to determine the value of an artwork: if you want to hang it above your bed — that means you like it. Therefore, it is necessary for me to live in a hanger for spaceship assembly, where I, with the help of the artist, can accommodate on the gigantic wall the astonishing collage named "Kedrin's Metamorphosis". It will be a voluminous composition, where each detail — graceful plates, relief dishes, fireclay monsters and other layered compositions — would play the role of accurate, vibrant and saturated brushstrokes; the whole work would become a gigantic, fire breathing canvas, in scale worthy of comparison to the frescos of Michelangelo and the paintings of Bosch. This metaphor isn't at all strained nor does it contain much literary extravagance. Only, Kedrin's art must be followed from the general to the specific; this will allow for an easier understanding of his work, and explain how Kedrin developed his worldview.

The first time I saw Kedrin's paintings was at his studio. When he showed them to me — I was initially taken by surprise. What was this? Easel painting? Sketches for new ceramic pieces? Kedrin considers this his art, where he started, and to which he organically returned. I will not dispute the artist. How he perceives his esthetics in his creative world is deeply personal. The impact on the viewer is more important, is it interesting? Yes, the viewer is key, because an artist is the director, and his creative world — a theatre. Kedrin explains his art through astral, surreal motivations; he sees in his works the reflection of some cosmic processes and, of course, finds an audience that reacts to all this with enthusiasm and understanding. Personally, I am closer to another religion, a knight of whose order Aleksander Kedrin remains. Its name is Architecture.

The Kedrin phenomenon appeared despite the dull, uniform spaces and their twisted textbook interiors. He brightened, revived the lifeless environment like a magician, like a master painter, who, instead of canvas and paper used walls and building facades. And instead of a brush and paint he used the pulsating glow of ceramics, which are in a never-ending dialogue with the hot Tashkent sun — helping rays exhibit their beauty to the fullest, and sometimes even throwing a challenge to the bright star.

That is why Kedrin's art looks so natural and logical. The artist flipped his creative register to the more intimate, chamber-like scale. As far as the magnetism and biofield of his paintings, it is pointless to deny the presence of these components. However, there is nothing miraculous here. Even if the creative process does not include the heat of a muffle oven and multi-ton ceramic fragments, still, the refined lightness of images on the canvas automatically, regardless of the author's wishes, absorbed and incorporated the powerful energy emissions from decades of daily communion with the heavy weights.

This is who he is, woven from contradictions, delicate, elegant, but able to turn over huge boulders; generous, sometimes cocky and conflicting hermit, living in his lovingly inspired workshop-castle, rooted with his whole being into the flesh of the land that serves as his inspiration. For a true artist and intellectual, to be in tune with the soil on which you live and create is as natural as breathing.

Kedrin comes from a family of intellectuals. His ancestors include famous lawyers, artists and poets. You must agree — it obliges. Leonardo da Vinci said, "Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen." This thought is dear to Kedrin. The whimsical and tragic world of poetry is one of the most powerful components of his work. Kedrin's art, his every canvas, is an associative illustration of poetic images. Graphic designs of his father, Veniamin Kedrin, bear a striking dissimilarity from the handwriting of his son, but in spite of this, you understand the continuity of the Kedrin "brand" — whether firm like a taut bowstring, or proudly grand.

Finally, one other spring of Kedrin's worldview is the art of a former Tashkent resident, and now a citizen of Israel, Garrik Zilberman. Many of his paintings hang in Kedrin's home. Though they perceive the world differently, the surrealist romantic, spiritual friend, associate and the abstractly detached colorist Kedrin are linked through the singular source of their creativity.

What is ahead? What will the unpredictable Kedrin surprise us with next? Will he, perhaps, once again escape from the interiors into the urban sphere? I think it is there, in the urbanized spaces, where Kedrin is really in his element. Every time I pass by the Palace of International Friendship and observe its limp and cardboard-like architecture, contrary to the sonorous interiors Kedrin had worked so hard on, I think that Sasha must return to this project. I can see Kedrin's golden and ultramarine majolica explode from within the palace and spill out onto the theatrical box of the façade. Then, the volume of powerful color will "unify" the oversized structure. I trust that the work ethic and energy of the artist will bestow a part of itself onto the kindergartens and school of the faded neighborhoods, and, together with architects, will produce original and innovative works.



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Recently I heard that Sasha interrupted his work for several days to binge watch a classic film in a small movie theatre. Federico Fellini's "Rome" — several times in a row. A paradox? At first glance the two artists have nothing in common. Fellini populates his movies with a host of comic and tragic characters and personages. Kedrin, on the other hand, is abstract; the palate of his imagery does not contain living beings. And yet, there is logic here. Fellini drew Kedrin in by creating his own, unique world, with inimitable rhythms and music. A world in which time passes in a special way, and the mannequin-people who inhabit it are unlike anyone else.

Sasha Kedrin, too, had created his own world. And this world exists now on its own, independently from its creator. It has its own depth and philosophy, its own biofield of unique kedrinesque coloristics, and the overflowing energy of his artistry.

Twenty years after the publication of the original article, Yuri Mergold, having moved to New York, penned the following lines:

We have not seen each other in ages, as happens often in life. Especially during the time of great changes. That country no longer exists, though the walls of the city will be forever adorned by the enchanting works of Aleksander Kedrin, flashes of his soul and pure heart. Purity of heart — that is the key to understanding the art of a true master. This is especially true for Sasha Kedrin, an intellectual, a philosopher called upon to bestow, to pour out onto the outside world dynamic clots of elastic lines and images, or the whimsical phantasmagoria of bright ceramics.

Twenty years have passed, but he is still the same — elegant, graceful and svelte. It seems that even now he, like in his youth, can draw from the oven with his bare arms an unliftable, fantastical sculpture and, gently like a baby, place it into the most exact and fertile place — all as part of his perpetual service to Beauty.

Outside of the noble streak of grey in his "proprietary" beard, he has acquired a deep wisdom in his slightly melancholy eyes. This makes him resemble the realistic portraits of El Greco and the virtual characters of Don Quixote. As well as the noble Athos, whom the namesake of Kedrin, Alexander Dumas once entrusted with the words, so in tune with the Sasha's philosophy: "What is offered from a pure heart must be accepted with a pure heart."

He has the same cozy home, spiritually inspired by his talent and hard work, which smells of real Uzbek pilaf and oil paint. Next to him, the beloved Masha and the kids. Therefore, the magic instrument of the Artist continues to regularly switch the invisible registers and the music of artistry still rings in his pure heart.

With affection and respect,
Yuri Mergold



Ceramic Plate "Pomegranates"

1977. Chamotte, glass,
smalt, colored glaze.
65 cm diameter





Lydia Tartakovskaya

PhD in Philology, author of academic works on Pushkin, Venevitinov and other poets of the Golden Age. Widow of the literary critic, Petr Tartakovsky, author of a biography of Dmitri Kedrin. Friend of Aleksander Kedrin. Lives in USA.

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Evening in Mahalla

1960. Cardboard, oil.
81 × 60,5 cm

At the Crossroads of East and West

Sasha Kedrin walked into our home as a boy, or, perhaps, a youth. The reason for it was a book that my husband, Petr Tartakovsky had written about the wonderful poet, Dmitri Kedrin. Having learned of our interest in his famous relative's work, Aleksander paid a visit to our home along with his father, Veniamin Kedrin, an unusually striking and interesting man and a talented graphic artist. He was known in Tashkent as "The Beard".

Once we were acquainted, Veniamin Kedrin saw our wonderful library and created one of his famous ex-libris for us. It was dedicated to our family and the image contained all that the family has stood for. My husband studied the synthesis of East and West in Russian culture. I worked on the golden age poets, and my daughter — the poetic inheritance of the silver age. The ex-libris depicts a building in the oriental style, the needle of the St. Petersburg Admiralty, as well as the profiles of Pushkin and Akhmatova, encircled in an oriental ornament.

Subsequently in his art, Sasha Kedrin began working on the issues of interaction between the Western and Eastern cultures. His first paintings incited a storm of indignation among the Tashkent cultural officials. No surprise — not only did Sasha's art not fit the framework of socialist realism, it did not fit the frame or realism as a whole. Sasha always, from his first artistic steps, sought out new forms. He was an innovator, as they say, in form and content, in spirit and in mentality. Naturally, there was no path forward for Sasha in Uzbekistan, in Tashkent — a rather provincial Soviet city.

Therefore, he decided to change his tactics, he tried to realize his search through traditional Oriental art — ceramics. This was a fateful decision, especially since Oriental art, from ornaments to miniatures, is based on abstract, objectless forms. As a result, Sasha got a second wind, and relieved himself of the necessity to be a "realist". His studies in Western-Eastern synthesis became even brighter, more demonstrative and compelling. We keep a small, 30–40 centimeters, ceramic sculpture of his in our New York apartment that we managed, with great difficulties, to transport to the other side of the world, thousands of miles away. We practically carried it in our arms the whole way, to make sure that it did not break or become damaged. It is very characteristic of Sasha's art. We see a head of an Uzbeki man, and as a continuation of the theme, his robe. He holds a traditional piyola, which is integrated into an Uzbek teapot. However, Sasha placed a face of a maiden, who modestly (or coquettishly) closes her eyes, into the robe of the old man. At first glance, the girl is middle-eastern. Yet, Sasha completes her form in a European tradition; in the lines of the portrait, one can discern the outlines of El Greco, Modigliani and even the graphic designs of Nadya Rusheva. No wonder Pushkin admired the universal empathy of the Russian soul!

Gradually ceramics disclosed its secrets and capabilities to Sasha. The leading architects of Uzbekistan and the leadership of the Republic noticed his experiments. State orders



for monumental projects became abundant, as if falling from the horn of plenty. The older generation of Tashkent remembers particularly, and with love, his design for the metro station “Prospect of Cosmonauts”. That is because Sasha chose a deep blue palate, typical for the Uzbek tradition, which adorns our historical monuments from the ancient times — palaces, mosques and madrassas. If one is to cast a mind’s eye over Sasha’s architectural inheritance, it is easy to see that he has greatly contributed to the culture and life of Uzbekistan. He has left behind numerous monumental works, which to this day adorn the cities, street and interiors of our sunny, but sadly — forsaken by us — homeland.



Mysterious Dastarkhan

1995. Canvas, oil.
68 × 85 cm

Biographical Summary



Aleksander Kedrin considers non-figurative art an apogee of his path in the world of fine art- a sort of mathematics, which creates universal formulas that furnish the keys to understanding the world around us. Abstract composition allows the manifestation of maximum creative freedom. Shape, released of its literary content, in concentrated form expresses the quintessence, the substance, the core of any idea.

Critics consider Kedrin “the forefather of the method which allows the creation of matrices that lie at the core of created and potential reality”.

Introvert, idealist, researcher, he is fully dedicated to mystico-cosmic principles of existence. By manipulating mystical essences, he attains the universal language of the Cosmos, spoken by celestial beings, and immediately connects with higher spheres. This motion allows him to expose to the audience the inner “mechanics” of the bottomless and infinite celestial hierarchy.

He seemingly transfers harmony into algebra in order to reach the main mechanism and decipher the all-encompassing and all-consuming pleroma, “fullness of being”, with whose help the objective controls the subjective, morphing the human into a product of his time.

In his work one can perceive cosmic mechanics, in all their beauty, the long-awaited divine equation — the only, treasured and mystical Formula of Creation — that will allow to restore and recreate “form within” not only the Act of Creation, but to see the future fate of the material and spiritual cosmos.

Aleksander Kedrin was born in 1940 in Tashkent — the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan. The Kedrin dynasty is rich with talented personas. The artist’s great-grandfather was a barrister, a deputy of the State Duma in Imperial Russia, and after the revolution became the Minister of Justice in the emigrant government in Paris. Bunin and Tolstoy wrote of him as an outstanding politician. His father’s second cousin was a famous soviet writer- Dmitri Kedrin, who mystically and tragically died in 1945. His own father, a hereditary Petersburg nobleman and famous graphic artist, escaping Stalin’s repressions, was forced to move to Tashkent where he became one of the creators of the Artists’ Union of Uzbekistan.

Young Sasha Kedrin started painting before he could walk. This was no surprise; he was surrounded by the best artists of his time. From an early age he was enchanted by the local oriental patterns with their mystical symbolism. Every day his father would go out to sketch,

Ceramic Plate “Potter”

1977. Chamotte, glass,
smalt, colored glaze.
62 cm diameter



Ceramic Relief "Garden of Winds"

1983. Ceramics and Colored Glass.
4 × 25 m



Alexander Kedrin Visiting His Son.

July 2016

through the picturesque warped streets of old Tashkent, not yet desolated by earthquake, with its clay-walled cottages, mosques, workshops and craftsmen — and he brought his son with him. Their house was always full of local and metropolitan intellectuals, who evacuated to Tashkent during the war, and thus full of classical music and poetry. Sasha's mother sang well, accompanying herself on a mandolin. Since the atmosphere in the Kedrin home was soaked through with poetry, Western, Eastern and Russian poetry, it is not surprising that Sasha began to even live in the poetic form — as the famous Leonardo once said, "Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen."

Following his father's advice, Aleksander sought his own way from the very first steps in art — trying to differ himself from the omnipresent "socialistic realists". The true revelation for him became his trip to Moscow, where, during Khrushchev thaw, the Museum of Fine Art exhibited Shukin-Morozov collection of French modern artists for the first time. From that moment, he traveled to Moscow every time American and European avant-garde classics were exhibited in the capital.

Although formed under the influence of Asiatic cosmos, the artist's interest gradually concentrated on western non-figurative art. He considers Kandinsky, Miró and Yves Tanguy as his primary teachers, who opened him to the cosmologic possibilities of art.

After graduating from school, Aleksander Kedrin entered the Benkov Tashkent Art Institute. In 1959, as a student of the 3D form, he organized a collective exhibition of seven young like-minded artists who decided to step aside from academic cannons and work in freer style, attempting to connect East and West in their works. As a result, all of them were accused of ideological sabotage and expelled from the institute with a marred permanent record.

After that fateful exhibition, Aleksander understood that, in the USSR, an artist is always seen as a suspect by authorities and a white crow among his compatriots.

Kedrin never aspired to the role of innovator or avant-garde artist. His mission is to continue the traditions of Russian and world art. He considers talent as a duty or mission, received from higher forces. That is why he is an opponent of spontaneous self-expression in art. Creative work must conform to a concrete idea. Early on, he understood that such difficult notions as love, hatred, faith are impossible to express with the help of allegory or realism, and began to search for new, own forms. Forms that allow the viewer a more accurate perception of the reality, which the artist inhabits, since it is not his task to simply retell his vision.

Using his father's connections, Aleksander was nevertheless accepted into the Ostrovsky Tashkent Theatrical and Artistic University. But soon the story repeated itself — the student that didn't wish to humble himself and repent was excluded with reference of professional non-practicability. In addition, a case was brought against him for parasitism.



**A Kedrin and G Zilberman
in His Workshop**

Tashkent 1983



Professor Norton Dodge at the Kedrin Home

New York 2001

Kedrin had to get a job. Following his father's advice, he chose the local ceramics factory. In early 60s ceramics, along with other monumental decorative arts in USSR, experienced a second birth. Artists- monumentalists were even allowed to make formalistic experiments — as long as it was "beautiful", that is — decorative. Aleksander found himself in his element. Ceramics turned out to be excellent camouflage. In authority's opinion, the artist was no longer dangerous. Philosophical discoveries, masked under "Uzbek national patterns and motives" gained recognition. Kedrin graduated the ceramics program in Tashkent Art Institute with excellence, entered the Artists' Union (later the Architects' Union) and acquired his own workshop. Thanks to participation in Moscow exhibitions, he joined the metropolitan creative intellectuals' circle and became acquainted with Neizvestny, Akhmadulina, Voznesensky, Bulatov, Nemukhin, Vechtomov.

At the same time, all the leading architects lined up in a queue to the best ceramic craftsman of Uzbekistan. They dreamt that the compositions of the famous artist would decorate the facades and interiors of new monumental buildings, which were being urgently built in Tashkent after earthquake. Kedrin decorated with pictures and mosaic more than hundred objects in total (palaces of culture, sport complexes, sanatoriums, restaurants, subway stations, administrative buildings) all over USSR.

At first glance, the situation was turning out more than favorably. However, the real passion of the artist remained philosophical and metaphysical non-figurative art, to which he was faithful and secretly continued painting in oils. Unfortunately, during the soviet period, it was impossible to show these works to the general audience.

The Perestroika began, and it brought long-expected freedom, but exacerbated national problems. After the disintegration of the USSR, Russians were being actively forced out from the social life of Uzbekistan. The contract offers were declining. A wave of bloody fratricidal conflicts swept over the Asiatic republics. This led Aleksander, with his family, to move to the United States in 1995, and settle in New York, where he actively joined the artistic life. His works were obtained by many museums, galleries and collectors. Mass media writes about him, as well as art critics and historians. Kedrin was invited to represent USA at the Florence Biannual exhibition of modern art. In 2001 American television recorded a series titled "Russian celebrities in America," where the masters of modern art, including his friend Ernst Neizvestny, tell about the painter.

Solo Exhibitions (painting)

- 2013 The Formula of the Universe. A3 Gallery. Moscow, Russia
- 2011 Poetry in Art: Aleksander Kedrin. Angel Orenszanz Foundation. Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York, USA
- 2007 Synergetic Cavalcades. Amsterdam Whitney Gallery. Chelsea, New York, USA
- 2002 Russian Evenings in Manhattan: Aleksander Kedrin. SDA Church. Manhattan, New York, USA
- 1999 The Paintings of Aleksander Kedrin. Vand-Art Gallery. Montreal, Canada
- 1997 The Paintings of Aleksander Kedrin. Orange Bear Club. Tribeca, New York, USA
- 1990 The Paintings of Aleksander Kedrin. Union Architect. Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Solo Exhibitions (ceramics)

- 1986 The Society for German-Soviet Friendship. Gesellschaft fur Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft. Magdeburg, Germany
- 1985 The Society for German-Soviet Friendship. Gesellschaft fur Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft. Berlin, Germany
- 1985 The Society for German-Soviet Friendship. Gesellschaft fur Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft. Halle, Germany
- 1983 Ceramics of Aleksander Kedrin. Artist’s Union. St.Petersburg, Russia
- 1983 Ceramics of Aleksander Kedrin. Architect’s Union USSR. Moscow, Russia
- 1972 Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Ceramics of Aleksander Kedrin. Museum of Fine Arts
- 1965 Sasha Kedrin: Ceramics, Paintings, Drawings. Komsomolets of Uzbekistan Newspaper office. Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Group Exhibitions

- 2007 Amsterdam Whitney Gallery. Chelsea, NY
- 2005 Contemporary Russian Art. CASE Gallery. Jersea City, NJ
- 2002 Russian Evenings in Manhattan. 232 West 11th St, Grinveetch Village, NY
- 1997 Russian Art. METLife Building. Manhattan, NY
- 1997 Fine Art Association. Brooklyn, NY

International Exhibitions

- 2006 CASE Museum. US
- 2003 Florence Biennale. Florence
- 1975 Contemporary Ceramics. Vilnius
- 1967 EXPO-67. Montreal

Major Monumentalist Objects

- 1988 Tashkent. Cultural-Informational Center. Fountain Temptation
- 1987 Kokand. Theater Hamza. Relief Blue Cities
- 1985 Samarkand. Relief Mahallya
- 1985 Zheleznovodsk. Sanatorium Uzbekistan. Relief Uzbekistan



- 1983 Tashkent. Hotel Moscow. Relief Garden of Winds
- 1982 Tashkent. Metro. Relief The Sky — my native Land
- 1981 Tashkent. Palace of People’s Friendship. Reliefs Gulli Nav and Gulli Chah
- 1979 Tashkent. Palace of Arts. Relief My Favorite City
- 1977 Tashkent. Ulduz. Relief Bakhor
- 1976 Sochi. Sanatorium Uzbekistan. Relief Sogdiana
- 1970 Tashkent. Cafe Blue Dome

Works in Collections

Zimmerly Art Museum. Rutgers — New Brunswick, NJ, USA
CASE Museum of Contemporary Russian Art. NJ, USA
Museum of Ceramics. Vilnius, Lithuania
Museum of People of the East. Moscow, Russia
Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia
State Museum of Arts. Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Museum of the Culture of the People of Uzbekistan
Museum of Applied Arts. Tashkent, Uzbekistan
State Arts Museum of Karakalpak Republic. Nukus, Uzbekistan
Kazakhstan Museum of fine Arts after Nevzorovs. Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan
Private collections of Russia, Germany, Poland, Israel, Turkey, Pakistan, UK, USA, Canada, France, Korea, Denmark, others

Ceramic Relief "Sogdiana"
dedicated to Ali-Shir
Nava'i Dining Hall
of the Uzbekistan
Sanatorium Sochi

4×25 m

ARTSTORY Gallery

Aleksander Kedrin
THE FORMULAE
OF CREATION

Project Curators
Mikhail Opegeym
Lyusinne Petrosyan

Translation and Editing of the English Text
Mikhail Lipyanskiy

Photography
Alexander Savelyev
Mikhail Lipyanskiy

Design and Publishing
Igor Ermolaev

The Authors of the Texts
Aleksander Kedrin
Ernst Neizvestny
Sergo Sutyagin
Aleksander Glezer
Andrei Kosinsky
Nikita Makhov
Akbar Hakimov
Garrik Zilberman
Svetlana Hromchenko
Igor Dudinsky
Simon Kriheli
Olga Polevaya
Andrei Kudryashev
Aleksander Fainberg
Dmitri Kedrin
Yuri Mergold
Lidia Tartakovskaya

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