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REVIEW: Oleg Vassiliev: Paintings 1967 – 2012, Faggionato Gallery by Ali Hood

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Oleg Vassiliev: Paintings 1967 – 2012, Faggionato Gallery by Ali Hood

Faggionato's current exhibition, *Paintings 1967-2012*, explores the work of one of the leading Soviet Non-conformist artists, Oleg Vassiliev. A posthumous retrospective following on from his first major solo exhibition in London at Faggionato in 2008, *Paintings 1967-2012* provides an insight into Vassiliev's long and prolific career. The exhibition features previously un-exhibited works and some of his last works prior to his death in January 2013.

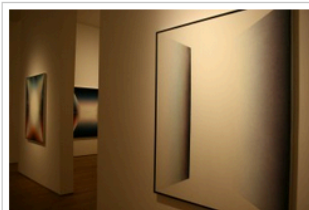


Image courtesy of Ali Hood



Lusja with Tulips, 1967, Oleg Vassiliev, courtesy of Faggionato

Despite the small selection of works on show, the exhibition provides the viewer with a sense of Vassiliev's unique style and accomplished artistic career. Considered as one of the key figures of the Non-conformist Art movement, or "unofficial art", as it was sometimes known, Vassiliev's work was in direct opposition to official Soviet ideology. Supporting himself with a day job as a children's book illustrator with friend and artistic collaborator Erik Bulatov, the two artists developed an inimitable aesthetic style. Bulatov and Vassiliev created an approach that united the romantic, lyrical qualities of 19th century Russian Realism with constructivist graphic elements from the Russian avant-garde.

Lusja with Tulips (1967) was painted 27 years earlier than the other works exhibited, and is the only work on show that predates his emigration to the United States in 1990. It demonstrates perfectly his juxtaposition of realist portraiture, still life, and abstract forms. Working so closely together, Vassiliev and Bulatov's work often share a visual language; realist scenes juxtaposed with text and flat forms that violently break the illusion of space. They play with illusions of space and embrace the flat quality of the canvas, forcing it upon the viewer. In Bulatov's *Nebo/More* (Sky/Sea 1985) the realistic scene is completely undermined by juxtaposed text, crudely breaking the illusion of image and perspective.

Vassiliev's *Welcome* (2012) also explores the characteristics of the canvas through optical illusions and playing with the notions of depth and perspective.



Nebo/More, 1985, Erik Bulatov, courtesy of artnet.com

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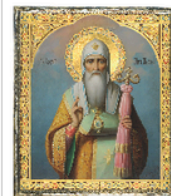
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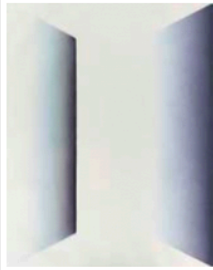
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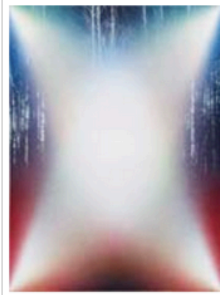
Russian Art Auction 27 November 2013



Welcome, 2012, Oleg Vassiliev,
courtesy of Faggionato

A major theme in Vassiliev's work is the idea of memory. As he explained in *On Memory* (1980): "To me, the visible and tangible world is more a thing of remembrance than of perception of reality. The present is saturated with the past as a live sponge is saturated with water. Through the workings of memory, light comes from the past and illuminates, snatches out of the dark that which is not of this moment." *Space and Landscape* (1994) hints at a faded memory of a silver birch wood, dissected by the imposing overlaying forms. A symbol of Russia, birch trees give the impression of Vassiliev's personal memories of a Russia he left behind. The geometric forms, evocative of bursts of light, pull the eye deeper into the painting and into the fading illusion of the wood.

This exhibition provides an invaluable opportunity to see Vassiliev's distinctive work and forms part of a current surge in interest, particularly in the West, in art of the Non-conformists. Renowned collector of Non-conformist art, Igor Tsukanov, recently agreed a **five-year partnership with the Saatchi Gallery** to follow on from last year's *Breaking the Ice: Moscow Art 1960-80s* exhibition at the gallery. In addition, Vassiliev's work was sold as part of **Sotheby's Contemporary East** sale, the first ever auction dedicated solely to Russian and Eastern European contemporary art during this November's Russian Art Week. Half the lots achieved prices above their pre-sale high estimates, bringing the total up to £2,429,038. The Zimmerli Art Museum in New Jersey has also **extended its exhibition of Non-conformist artist Leonid Sokov** until 31st



Space and Landscape, 1994, Oleg Vassiliev, courtesy of Faggionato

December. There is no doubt that these are all promising signs of the increasing exposure that these unofficial artists deserve. *Paintings 1967-2012* at Faggionato plays an important place in this rise and is well worth a visit.

Faggionato Gallery

49 Albemarle Street, 1st Floor

London, W1S 4JR

Oleg Vassiliev

Paintings 1967-2012

November 25 – December 21, 2013. Extended until January 17.

http://www.faggionato.com/exhibitions/oleg-vassiliev_1

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