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CONFLICT OVER DESIGNING A MONUMENT TO STALIN'S VICTIMS: 
PUBLIC ART AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN RUSSIA, 1987-96 

KATHLEEN E. SMITH 

Abstract

The idea of raising a monument to the victims of political persecution in the USSR was adopted by a broad coalition of citizens in the late 1980s. At the time, support for commemorating Stalin's victims seemed to be a good litmus test for identifying adherents of political reform. Yet, citizens' design proposals for a monument revealed important rifts in political philosophies. Loyal communists wanted to express their joy at the Party's return to its pure Leninist roots. Those whose patriotism was grounded not in the Communist government but in apolitical or religious sentiments of national pride wanted primarily to honor their dead. And modern liberals, who believed that no single interpretation of the past could satisfy everyone, wanted a monument that was provocative and unheroic. As the Soviet state collapsed, these divisions grew so strong as to shatter the anti-stalinist coalition. Since August 1991 national-patriotic groups have worked intensively to immortalized their heroes in monumental art. Democrats, on the other hand, largely ignored public art and only now seem to realized that they have neglected an important tool for an important task--creating a new sense of national identity.

In 1987 the renowned Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko took up the theme of the need to commemorate victims of Stalinism. His poem "Monuments Still Not Built" challenged Soviet politicians to consider that "there can be no rebuilding without rebuilding memory." With a burst of optimism about the potential of perestroika, he declared that the "time of honest marble" had come. Indeed, political liberalization led by Mikhail Gorbachev opened the way for frank reevaluations of Soviet history. The possibility of winning public acknowledgement of the innocence of those who suffered during the purges inspired a powerful national civic movement. Formed with the assistance of liberal intellectuals including Yevtushenko, the Memorial Society set itself the concrete and seemingly feasible task of raising a monument to Stalin's victims based on donations and design ideas from the public. It also adopted the more abstract and seemingly unrealistic goal of fostering democratization in the Soviet Union. Ironically, the totalitarian political system crumbled in 1991--due in part to civic activism--but a national monument commemorating victims of political persecution has still not been built. Political reform facilitated the design competition for a monument, but simultaneously unleashed increasingly significant and ever more conflictual group identities that undermined the consensus behind honoring Stalin's victims. Moreover, although political liberalization made the dream of a civic monument possible, simultaneous market-oriented economic reform ultimately hampered the effort.
It is not surprising that the attempt to commemorate Stalin's victims through the construction of a memorial generated controversy. The genre of monumental art tends to be political. Monuments serve as sources of national pride not only for aesthetic reasons but also for their content, their contribution to defining the national heritage. Both the public and politicians treat each monument as "a statement about the nature of the nation." Thus, by immortalizing certain individuals or events from history, those who make monuments can attempt to perpetuate an interpretation of the past, to consolidate an unambiguous vision of national history and identity.¹

Political changes, however, can alter the making and meaning of public art. After all, "The very conditions that allow art to come into being--the sites of its display, circulation, and social functionality, its address to spectators, its position in systems of exchange and power--are themselves subject to profound historical shifts."¹ The breakdown of Communist Party rule in the former Soviet Union is one such instance where political reform transformed the conditions for making and appreciating art. In particular, by allowing publics to emerge and to promote their own interests and self-conceptions, the authorities opened up monumental art to new and competing visions of national and group identity.

Under the old Soviet system the prerogative to commission monumental art belonged to Communist Party officials. Soviet leaders, beginning with Lenin, recognized the role that public art could play in defining new national heroes and values.³ Lenin himself helped draw up the first list of figures to be honored with statues--the final version of which consisted of 67 names, including obvious choices such as Marx and Engels and unexpected figures such as Chopin and Gogol. The Bolsheviks' eclectic program left artists great stylistic freedom and some leeway in choice of theme and site. Moreover, the sculptors' representative to the artists union pressed the political leadership "to destroy the conventional jury and to settle for public review of the model projects." Many early monuments met with harsh criticism from ordinary viewers and some--such as a distorted, futuristic figure of Bakunin--were torn down as a result.⁶ Stalin, however, changed the conditions for making art. Subject matter and style were strictly monitored by Party ideologists; Party officials, not the general public, acquired the deciding vote in vetting public art.

From the 1930s onward, the Soviet state sponsored monuments to revolutionary leaders, military victories, outstanding national historical and cultural figures, and scientific achievements such as space flight. With their utopian ideology, Communist Party leaders preferred positive monuments. The leadership's taste ran to realistic, gigantic, and symbolically unambiguous sculpture. Designers were limited to a small number of politically correct motifs--Lenin, the hammer and sickle, five pointed stars, workers or soldiers--from which to create their compositions; thus, their works took on a certain homogeneity. An example of the consequent "totalitarian kitsch" is the monument to victory in World War II at Stalingrad (Volgograd)--
described by an astute American observer as a "gargantuan snarling motherland figure, wielding an immense sword." 7

The underground art scene that evolved beginning in the 1960s also offered little in the way of potential innovation in the field of monumental art. Perhaps it is no accident that "dissident" or "non-conformist" artists of the 1960s-1980s seem to have been drawn more often to painting, drawing and conceptual installations than to sculpture--though some experimented with kinetic and non-figurative works. 8 Sculpting or casting large pieces required studio space and art supplies available only to members of the official creative unions. Moreover, small works could be displayed in private apartments, but monuments' realization hinged on Party permission to use "public" space. When the sculptor and monumentalist Ernst Neizvestny fell out of political favor in the 1970s, he reluctantly chose to go abroad so that he could continue to work.9

Given the paucity of experimental, daring work by Soviet sculptors, it is not surprising that the first real challenge to Party dictated monumental art in the 1980s came not from artists in regard to style, but from politically conscious citizens in regard to content. When Mikhail Gorbachev relaxed the Communist Party's monopoly on speech and association in 1987, a group of young would-be civic activists united around the idea of commemorating the victims of Stalinism. Though the "Memorial Society" coalesced around a broad agenda--to promote democratization of Soviet society, to aid survivors of the purges, to educate people about the "blank spots" in official history--the element of Memorial's program that truly captured the public imagination was the proposal to build a monument to Stalin's victims.10

Constructing a public memorial to victims of repression would serve many purposes at once. Monuments are popular everywhere for their capacity to counter "anxiety about memory left to its own devices" by "anchor[ing] collective remembering, a process dispersed, ever changing, and ultimately intangible, in highly concentrated, fixed, and tangible sites."11 If the victims of Stalin were immortalized in metal or stone, perhaps it would be harder to officially "forget" them, as had happened after Nikita Khrushchev fell from power in 1964. Moreover, the authorities' permission for a memorial would equal an acknowledgement that those arrested under Stalin were innocent. Insofar as monument building legitimizes "by extension the notion of the people who possessed and rallied around such a memory," successful construction of a memorial would also testify to the solidarity of survivors and their allies who had come together to rescue the past.12 Monuments often become physical centers for new rituals which in turn can foster new organizations and new common interpretations of the past. At a monument to victims of political persecution survivors, victims' families, and others could mourn, remember, and even draw lessons from the past together.

The advent of glasnost not only permitted a lively debate about the content of public art, but also revealed the superficial nature of the artistic consensus behind socialist realist style
monuments. Some art critics called for a moratorium on gigantic, trite sculptures. One prominent architect openly questioned whether Soviet artists were up to the challenge of creating a monument that "embod[ied] popular memory—which is sincere, quiet, stern, humble—versus propaganda history which is wordy, didactic, grandiose and aggressive." Memorial organizers hoped that by orchestrating a fundamental shift in the power to commemorate they would be rewarded by innovative designs. To empower survivors and to gather a multitude of perspectives on the past, they chose a diverse jury and an open design competition. They solicited entries both from professional artists and from ordinary citizens. And those who could not draw were invited to describe in words their concept of a monument.

Over a thousand entries, ranging in shape from scale models to pencil drawings and in scope from brief suggestions for a statue to detailed descriptions of whole memorial ensembles, poured in to Memorial from across the country. The results of the call for proposals reflected the difficulty of adapting an art form that is generally positive and self-congratulatory to mark a tragedy—a problem evident in controversies over the design of memorials to the Holocaust, as well as in the acrimonious debate over the American Vietnam Veterans memorial. The entries in the Memorial Society’s contest exposed major differences in how Soviet citizens understood their whole history and in their choice of which values should be enshrined. Besides the conflict between loyal communists, who saw Stalin as an aberration in the otherwise admirable history of Soviet rule, and fervent anti-communists, who argued that Lenin had initiated the Soviet concentration camp system, one also finds competition between pluralist and nationalist principles. The monument designs also reveal that, while rejecting some aspects of their artistic heritage, neither amateurs nor professionals had come to terms with the legacies of socialist realism. Wittingly or unwittingly most were still working in the old Soviet monumental language.

1. Soviet Patriotic Art

Despite some politicians’ fears that memories of purges would provoke criticism of the whole communist experience, a monument to the victims of repression did not have to be intrinsically anti-Soviet. In his treatment of the purges Nikita Khrushchev consistently encouraged people to draw anti-Stalinist but pro-Leninist conclusions, that is, to condemn Stalin’s excesses but to praise the Party’s honesty and resilience in acknowledging its past errors. Khrushchev himself dared to raise the idea of building a monument to victims at the 22nd Communist Party Congress in 1961. Though he never followed through on this idea, Khrushchev would likely have continued the pattern that he had set in his speeches where he avoided identifying any culprits besides Stalin and Beria, paid homage to loyal Party, state, military and non-Party victims of Stalin’s repressions (in that order), and ignored the passivity of the Party and of most victims in the face of the purges. By elevating a subset of victims based on their loyalty to socialism (and
even to Stalinism) and by celebrating those who had previously displayed some special merit. Khrushchev emphasized heroic and patriotic values.

Selectivity regarding victims would allow artists to work within the Soviet tradition of positive monuments. One might immortalize the good, brave Communist prisoner, while avoiding any depiction of culprits, any disturbing suggestions of the Party’s accountability for the purges [fig. 1]13 (for figures see pp. 18 ff.). Or one might focus on the Party’s triumphal repudiation of the cult of personality. One citizen’s entry in the Memorial competition showed the XX Party Congress--where Khrushchev made his "secret speech" denouncing Stalin and the terror—as a bolt of lightning splitting open a Stalinist prison [fig. 2]. Several other contemporary proposals had Stalin cowering as Gorbachev, an old Bolshevik, or other untarnished revolutionary figures stood in judgement.16 Thus, these designs presented the possibility of casting the Communist Party in the role of victim or moral authority rather than persecutor.

Although by 1988 the idea of the martyrdom of ordinary people had been widely established, the notion of dividing the pure from the impure victims remained strong among those who accepted that the Soviet system could overcome its mistakes. For example, a sailor wrote in to the competition with a model that he saw as representing each person’s choice between the truth and the lie. A path with a crystal clear slab with "Lenin" lettered in gold would be followed by red marble slabs bearing "the names of the most outstanding people from our homeland and the international communist movement who were killed during the years of the cult of personality." A second path would begin with Stalin’s name carved in black stone, followed by names of "executioners and those guilty of slander."17 But the impossibility of sorting ordinary victims into "true" and "untrue" meant that the author of this project still ended up using crude political markers and singling out elite victims of the purges for special recognition. Unlike the American Vietnam Veterans memorial, which sought to heal divisions over the past by naming all those US soldiers who died in Vietnam in equal fashion, this design would be exclusive and partisan. Visitors who rejected the path of Stalinism could only choose the path of Leninism; alternative political allegiances would have no avenue for expression.

II. Russian Patriotic Art

For decades Communist officials attempted to foster in Soviet citizens the belief that the nation and the Party were one. But the majority of civic proposals for a monument in the 1980s did not seek to glorify the Communist Party. Instead, one can find clear efforts to replace purely Communist symbols with apolitical, populist or national motifs, as well as attempts to denigrate Soviet rule (the latter will be addressed in the next section). Many survivors and relatives who were critical of the Communist Party’s failure to prevent the terror or to halt the purges before Stalin’s death still shared the Party’s belief that the monument honor something lest it promote
nothing but despair about the Soviet experience. The search for points of pride in the past led
many back to memories of World War II when people had fought selflessly against the clear evil
of Nazi aggression. Still others, however, turned to pre-revolutionary history. Across the USSR
renewed interest in historical "blank spots" went hand in hand with exploration of national
identity.18 For Russians this meant a revival of pride in religious and cultural traditions.

Numerous monument proposals drew on religious culture, almost always Russian
Orthodoxy. Some designers found inspiration in Christian images of martyrdom. For instance,
Georgii Trubetskoii pictured a monument in the shape of a huge cross (20 meters long) born by
life-size human figures dressed to represent different professions and nationalities, but all with the
face of Christ.19 Another entry combined Soviet and Christian symbols by depicting a five
pointed star nailed up on a cross, blood dripping from its wounds. Many proposals incorporated
aspects of church architecture, especially bells and candles, and religious funeral rites [see fig.
31].20 On a basic psychological level a symbolic funeral or grave would compensate all relatives
who had no real remains to bury. But frequently designs for grave sites revolved around Christian
imagery—for instance, one plan featured a model of Christ on the cross surrounded by holders
where visitors could place lit candles, thus creating the semblance of the interior of an Orthodox
church. One person even suggested that the resurrection of the Christ the Savior Cathedral
dynamited by Stalin would be the best monument.21 It would be a mistake to attribute all use of
Orthodox imagery to strong Russian nationalist sentiments, but monument designs that expected
Soviet citizens to unite around such symbols sought to revive an older Russian visual language.
Religion, after all, had been an anathema to Communist ideologists and was associated with pre-
revolutionary Russia and its values.

A second attempt to find a popular symbolic language can be seen in contest entries that
tried to separate out patriotic from communist imagery and rituals. Deliberately non-political
statements of grief were often cast within the realist traditions of Soviet art, and in particular in
the stereotyped forms repeated endlessly in monuments to victims of World War II. For instance,
one Muscovite, who argued that the nation needed to remember both famous and unknown
victims, suggested that the memorial take the form of "many, many little eternal flames"
stretching out through an arch and seen through the grate of a prison window. The memorial, she
opined, should also feature a "bratskaia mogila" [common grave]. A museum to the purges could
be built elsewhere, but she proposed that this memorial be placed at the Kremlin walls next to the
Aleksandrovskii garden. Thus, not only did she incorporate traditional Soviet patriotic images, but
she physically placed it next to the existing Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of World War II.
Other projects mimicked the Moscow monument to the unknown soldier: one included "camp
dust," instead of earth from Leningrad mass war graves; another inscribed the names of notorious
camp sites, instead of "hero cities." on stone cubes.22
III. Democratic/Subversive Art

From the first, some of the Memorial Society organizers envisioned building a memorial complex composed of a monument, museum, archive, and library for research on the causes of human rights abuses. Many political activists saw a monument as merely a complement to civic action--the real guarantee against a return to totalitarianism--and to research--which embodied the continuing search for truth. The Memorial movement with all its activities thus could be seen as the best way to remember the purges. As regards a monument, just as they endorsed confrontational politics, the radical democrats within Memorial wanted a form of commemoration that would challenge people's complacency. They recognized that Stalin alone could not bear full responsibility for the purges. In carrying out mass repressions he relied on the cooperation of Party loyalists and policemen and on the conformity of the masses. The mix of complicity and innocence which characterized life in a totalitarian state could not be "shouted," and hence did not fit with triumphal, positive art. As the activist Nina Braginskaia noted in her review of the monument competition, "Usually, commemoration in sculpture or architectural form suggests greatness, heroism, and glory, but being hit by a press does not in and of itself make a person a hero." One frustrated letter writer complained to Memorial that to put forth a positive lesson the theme of the competition would have to be changed. The monument, he argued, should not commemorate victims but rather be "a symbol of civic resistance to the violence of totalitarianism." In other words, freedom fighters rather than passive victims should be the role models for future generations.

Artists struggled to deal with the problem of turning monumental art into a vehicle for expressing a critical evaluation of complex and tragic events. Several tried to sidestep the dilemma by rejecting sculptural forms. One proposal was that Lubianka square be renamed "Democracy Square" and made into a sort of Hyde Park--thus turning a place that caused people to fall silent in fear into a site for exercising the right to free speech. Another idea called for every town or family that suffered in the purges to plant a tree or post a plaque on a tree in memory of their losses--like several designs it attempted to bring home the activity of coming to terms with the past by advocating the creation of many local monuments instead of a single national memorial. Changing the symbolic face of Moscow alone might imply that only the capital's elite needed to reform their thinking.

A second clear trend among those who saw a memorial as a means of encouraging critical thinking was to subvert monumental forms to match their subversive ideas. To commemorate the Holocaust, young German sculptors created "anti-monuments" or "counter-monuments," such as an obelisk that gradually sank into the ground, to express "deep distrust of monumental forms in light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis." Soviet citizens similarly suggested monuments that took the shape of downward spirals, maelstroms, and pits in the ground, as
opposed to typical sculptural markers that thrust up toward the sky, breaking up the cityscape. One innovative design would have turned the tables on visitors who identified themselves exclusively with victims of Stalinism. It suggested an interactive memorial in which visitors would find themselves marching among life-size figures from the May Day parade of 1937 and then would encounter a forced march of prisoners. Mirrors along the route would reflect back the image of the visitors so that they would see themselves as both members of the conformist mob creating the illusion of monolithic support for the dictator and then as equally faceless cogs in the GULag. This design would have graphically reminded visitors that they could have just as easily been among those shouting pro-Stalin slogans as among those cursing the regime from a prison cell.

Liberal intellectuals expected that would-be designers having been freed from the ideological and artistic strictures of the Brezhnev era would find an image that provoked catharsis by producing both terror and pity in its viewers. But for the most part, adherents of a memorial that promoted democratic principles found it easier to explain what they did not want than to describe their ideal monument. Experts fell back on abstract terms to express their hopes: a good monument would convert terror and even anger into spiritual renewal, would form a bulwark against the return of repression, would have an "all-human" element, a point of view that crossed the bounds of time and space. They were profoundly disappointed with the extremely common, but unsophisticated, designs proposed by amateurs that adopted the perspective of the prisoner and reproduced the prison cell or labor camp, complete with barbed wire, watch towers and guard dogs. Democratically oriented activists and critics insisted that the monument be inclusive as regarded victims, and not privilege one religious tradition. Professionals also rejected entries that tried to shake up viewers by using communist symbols in crudely negative ways--such as a design that joined a swastika with a hammer and sickle.

The monument to victims of repression long campaigned for by Memorial is still unbuilt. The jury, disappointed with the predominance of crude or "Brezhnevite" proposals, could not pick a winner. Having rejected the old monumental style, the democrats who dominate Memorial’s leadership await the construction of a new idiom capable of expressing the complexity of the purges. They also await more money since the depreciation of the ruble has greatly reduced the worth of their treasury. But they did manage in 1990 to mark a site in Moscow for a future monument with a boulder from the first political concentration camp in the USSR. The stone is humble, non-controversial and almost invisible through the shrubbery on a tiny traffic island in the middle of a busy intersection [fig. 4]. Yet the choice of a site for the future monument represented a significant decision. The proposals for placing the monument to victims highlighted the fundamental divisions in interpretations of the purges and hence in functions of the monument itself. Contestants interpreted "sacred ground" variously as Red Square, for its proximity to
Lenin's mausoleum: the square in front of government house, where many prominent Party victims had lived before their arrests; the site of the former Christ the Savior Cathedral, at the time occupied by the Moscow Swimming Pool; the Kremlin walls near the grave of the unknown soldier; Poklonnaia Hill, the home of a new gigantic monumental ensemble commemorating victory in WW II; or within or in front of the Lubianka, where it would provide a contrast to the statue of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, the founder of the Soviet secret police. And Memorial went with the democrats, choosing the Lubianka square where the monument would be visible to today's KGB officers from their office windows.

Even before the Soviet regime collapsed once and for all in August 1991, the concurrent processes of political and economic reform had once again begun to alter the conditions for making public art. First of all, the enthusiasm and consensus behind anti-Stalinist activism faltered in the 1990s. Gorbachev's gradual concessions regarding rehabilitation and free speech sapped some of the urgency from the anti-Stalinist cause. Confident that they had shattered the taboos about criticizing the Soviet past, democratic activists moved on to other issues. Some of them channeled their energy into direct confrontations with the communist regime. Others sought challenges in the new entrepreneurial realm. Meanwhile religious and secular nationalism grew in popularity and intensity. Nationalists began to chafe at democrats' fondness for Western ideas, their modern artistic tastes, and their seemingly constant disparagement of Russian and Soviet history. In response, they looked for points of pride in national history and culture. The very weakening of the old regime forced people to move beyond criticizing the existing government to defining what they wanted from a future state—in the process, the broad anti-Stalinist civic movement gave way to smaller more politically polarized groups. The growing estrangement between Russian nationalists, both religious and secular, and those pursuing a pluralist modern vision of the nation is quite evident in the development of monumental art since the end of Soviet rule.

Nationalists, or patriots as they prefer to be called, have supported the construction of numerous monuments. The range of nationalists' interests can be seen in the work of their favorite sculptor Viacheslav Klykov. Over the past six years Klykov has erected monuments to two members of the Romanov family, the Russian writer Ivan Bunin, the Russian saints Cyrill and Methodius, and the legendary World War II hero Marshal Zhukov—each one a larger-than-life, realistic portrait. Klykov, an unabashed supporter of autocracy, has fought to place his works—and in essence his philosophy—in the symbolic heart of the Russian state. He sought to place Zhukov on Red Square, but settled for the adjacent Manezh square and he tried to get permission to erect Nicholas II in the Kremlin or on the central Borovitskaia square, but was firmly rebuffed. Nevertheless, Klykov's centrally located monument to Cyrill and Methodius has become the accepted location for Orthodox church officials and nationalists to celebrate Slavic
Literacy Day. Nationalist groups and families of veterans have also financed the creation of small memorials to Russian soldiers whose sacrifices in World War I, on the side of the White Army in the Civil War, and in Afghanistan were ignored by the Soviet regime. Patriots nowadays rarely mention the history of the purges because Russian behavior during this tragic period gives them little cause for celebration. They prefer heroic subjects and traditional monumental style to foster public pride in Russia's military, cultural, and religious heritage.

Democratic leaders and groups, by contrast, do not seem to have put much stock in monumental art or in patriotic propaganda in general. In the wake of the democrats' defeat of the August 1991 coup attempt by hard-line communists, many Soviet statues were torn down, including the monument to Dzerzhinskii that towered over Memorial's stone marker in Lubianka square. But the government took no positive steps to use public art to commemorate its triumph. As the curator Irina Bazileva observed recently, Moscow today "is more a site of restoration than innovation." By restoration Bazileva means not only the trend for literally returning pre-revolutionary street names and statues, but also the continued proliferation of monuments in the old triumphal, realistic style. Yeltsin's government has given virtually no material support to the kind of conceptual art championed by dissident artists. Innovative ideas for a new monumental propaganda solicited by the infamous inventors of Sotsart (a sort of pop art that takes off on Soviet rather than capitalist icons) Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, for instance, remain only paper fantasies. Aside from the monument to 1960s idol Vladimir Vysotskii, only plaques commemorate liberal heroes. Inconspicuous markers adorn the last residences of Andrei Sakharov in Moscow and Joseph Brodsky in St. Petersburg. The heirs and admirers of nonconformist literary and political figures seem to prefer museums as a means to foster remembrance. For instance, the Anna Akhmatova house museum in St. Petersburg has hosted controversial exhibitions, and the newly opened, privately funded Sakharov museum and human rights center includes a research library and meeting space for use by current civic activists.

Democratization in Russia freed artists from censorship and permitted citizens to organize into interest groups. But the demonstrated ability to please the public or to impress art critics does not presently determine which pieces of monumental art will be built. As one art expert recently observed, "The shining moment of urban planning democracy turned out to be short-lived." Public hearings and open design commissions have once again vanished. The simplest way to get a piece of public art installed is to donate it to a city or to get a unilateral decision in its favor from a city mayor. Although the process of gaining approval to erect a monument has been decentralized, with more power residing at the city level, democratic principles seldom govern current decision-making regarding public art. The power to make public art, like the power to do many other things in Russia today, lies in access to private money and/or the executive branch of government at any level. As a consequence of the increased importance of financial and political
patronage, a few sculptors—most notably Zurab Tsereteli, Viacheslav Klykov, and Mikhail Chemiakin—have begun to dominate the field of monumental art all out of proportion to the artistic merits of their recent works.

The new patronage system has produced two monuments to Stalin’s victims, neither of which was subject to public vetting. The first, by the Russian emigre artist Mikhail Chemiakin, was installed in St. Petersburg in April 1995. Like most of his works, Chemiakin’s monument to the victims of political persecution draws on historical Petersburg themes and images. The monument consists of two sphinxes, reminiscent of those decorating the imperial Petersburg academy of arts, with half human and half skeletal faces [fig. 5]. Between the two sphinxes stand four blocks of marble stacked to form a prison wall with a small window barred by a cross shaped iron grate. The whole ensemble is located on the bank of the Neva river across from the Kresty prison through which many of Leningrad’s political prisoners passed.42

Despite the sphinxes’ artistic link to old St. Petersburg, they have not been very warmly received. Chemiakin did not seek material or moral support from the public to build his monument. He raised the necessary funds from a local private bank and relied on the mayor’s intercession to get planning approval. Now it seems that residents feel estranged from the artist who has admitted that he rarely visits the city and considers himself too well-established to participate in competitions.43 Ironically, the sharpest rebuke has come from Memorial spokesmen. They were upset that Chemiakin had not invited purge survivors to attend the dedication of the sphinxes and that he had used the inscription that Memorial had engraved on the cornerstone marking the site intended to someday hold its own tribute to Stalin’s victims. Angered by Chemiakin’s disrespect for their years of efforts to represent the wishes of purge survivors, Memorial organizers fired off letters of protest to local governmental institutions and newspapers demanding that the city create a mechanism for consulting with the public about new monuments.44

A second monument to victims of repression was dedicated in Magadan on the eve of the final round of the 1996 presidential elections. The internationally renowned sculptor Ernst Neizvestny created a towering, seventeen meter high “Mask of Sorrow” for this city, which had once served as the gateway to the far eastern section of the Gulag. The huge cement mask weeps tears, each drop consisting of a tiny human face. Visitors can climb up into the interior of the mask where there is a solitary prison cell and, in a chapel like space, a bronze figure of a girl prostrate in front of a large cross.45 Pointing to stone markers featuring symbols from a variety of confessions and a hammer and sickle for communists at the monument’s base, Neizvestny insists that his design does not privilege the Orthodox faith, but simply reflects his Russian heritage.46
Neizvestny from the start refused to participate in Memorial's competition. He preferred to work directly with the local activists and officials in Magadan, Ekaterinburg and Vorkuta who had invited him specifically to design a monument for them. He thought that he could realize his personal vision on the basis of donations and support from local governments, but all three of his projects stalled in the 1990s for lack of funds. The sculptor prevailed on Yeltsin to donate some of his book royalties to the project in 1994, but only an infusion of funds from the federal government allowed Neizvestny to finish one of his three monuments. In exchange, pro-Yeltsin officials—to the dismay of many in the crowd—turned the monument's dedication ceremony into a final campaign rally.17

In the late 1980s, thousands of Soviet citizens affirmed Yevtushenko's avowal that "the time of honest marble" had arrived by sending in money and design advice to Memorial's contest to select a monument to Stalin's victims. As the old regime collapsed, Soviet loyalists, Russian patriots, and liberal democrats abandoned the joint project of commemorating victims of repression in favor of pursuing their own separate interests. It seemed to all but the most committed nationalists that the time for monumental propaganda had passed. And yet today Russia can boast of two substantial monuments to Stalin's victims. Chemical and Neizvestny built their monuments without public review and thereby escaped having to cope with conflicting ideas of what a monument to victims should be like. It is obviously easier for an artist to serve his personal creative vision than to cater to the wishes of others. But the essence of the civic monument as imagined by Memorial—to turn the survivors of totalitarianism from the objects of history into subjects—was lost.18 If, as their financial support of Neizvestny's "Mask of Sorrow" suggests, democratic politicians have finally realized the merit of public art as a means of propagating some kind of patriotic culture, then they need to consider returning to "urban planning democracy." Without mechanisms for public review of monumental art, they may exacerbate social resentment of the wealthy and powerful who seem to have government's ear. They may also fail to find images that truly resonate with their constituency.
NOTES

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3. As James Young observes, monuments once built can "take on lives of their own" that diverge from the "original intentions" of the governments or interest groups that sponsored them. The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 3.


8. For their study of dissident artists Renee and Matthew Baigell interviewed forty-seven non-conformist artists of whom only eight were sculptors and five of the eight had emigrated before Gorbachev came to power. Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995). For examples of kinetic sculptural works see V. F. Kolechuk, Kinetizm (Moscow: Galart, 1994).


10. For a detailed account of Memorial’s formation and activity, see Kathleen E. Smith, Remembering Stalin’s Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).


12. Ibid.


17. He adds on all sorts of relics of Soviet misrule—remnants of a destroyed church, a falling down peasant hut, an ICBM shell, a tree from Chernobyl, and a scarred armed personnel carrier from Afghanistan! Letter from A. T. Sinitsin to Memorial, no. 901, IMSA.

18. On the interaction of anti-stalinism and ethnic identity, see Smith, Remembering, pp. 112-7.

19. Letter from Georgii Trubetskoi to Memorial, no. 133, IMSA.


21. Letter from Andrei Shishkov to Memorial, no. 518, IMSA; letter from Sergei S. Sen’kin to Memorial, no. 2463, IMSA.


25. Letter from N. V. Sokolovskii to Memorial, no. 8696, IMSA.

26. Letter from N. A. Krenke and O. A. Murashko to Memorial, no. 299, IMSA.

27. Letters to Memorial from M. N. Voinova, no. 2268; N. S. Poleshchuk, no. 4698; and Boris V. Loznevoi, no. 8175, all in IMSA.

28. Young, Texture of Memory, p. 32.


30. Letter from Vladimir Kosulin to Memorial, no. 2225, IMSA.


33. “Zakliuchenie.”

34. Smith, Remembering Stalin’s Victims, pp. 174-88.

35. Photographs of Klykov’s recent works can be found in the journal Derzhava, which he founded in 1994. Derzhava, no. 2(3) 1995 and no. 14(4) 1996.


37. A cluster of military monuments to "forgotten wars" can be found on the grounds of the Church of All Saints in Moscow near the Sokol Metro station and in the adjacent park. The civic council in charge of the ensemble has recently added a monument to Russian military personnel killed in Chechnia. Tat’iana Morozova, “Eto nuzhno zhivym,” Pravda, June 4, 1996, p. 4

39. One of their suggestions was "to supplement the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky... with bronze figures of the courageous individuals who climbed onto its shoulders and wrapped a noose around its neck [on the day that the August coup attempt was defeated]." Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamud, "Monumental Propaganda" in Envisioning Eastern Europe: Postcommunist Cultural Studies, ed. Michael D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 66-72.

40. Aleksei Komech, director of the State Institute of Art Studies, quoted in Mašimova, "Kamennoe nashestvie."


46. Zh. Vasil'eva, "Iskusstvo i vlast' nesovmestny?..." (interview with Ernst Neizvestny), Literaturnaia gazeta, August 24, 1994, p. 7.


48. Individuals, local Memorial chapters, and even factories have commemorated their losses in small ways.

49. Ilofe, "Kogda vlast' stavit pamiatniki."
ILLUSTRATIONS

fig. 1 Monument "To those who fought for socialism, innocent victims of lawlessness." Design by Aleksandr Sheremet'ev. Courtesy Interregional Memorial Society Archives.

fig. 2 Monument design by I. S. Alyshev. Courtesy Interregional Memorial Society Archives.

fig. 3 Monument design by Aleksandr N. Vasilevskii. Courtesy Interregional Memorial Society Archives.

fig. 4 Memorial Society's Boulder from Solovki on Lubianka Square. Photo by the author.

fig. 5 Detail from Chemiakin's monument to victims of political persecution. Photo by the author.
Вам, борцам за социализм, благою замученным трудоделом.