

# Bruce Sterling



**NEO-ACADEMISM  
IN SAINT PETERSBURG**

## **The Artists**

Saint Petersburg is famous for art movements. This was once the home of the Wanderers group, the first self-conscious gathering of Russian painters. Wassily Kandinsky and the Jack of Diamonds group used to hang out here. Saint Petersburg was the birthplace of Russian Futurism and Neo-Primitivism, it was the home of Mayakovsky and Malevich, it harbored Suprematism and Constructivism.

Then Stalinist Socialist Realism hung around its neck like an anchor for 70 years. But there were still subterranean cultural fires in Saint Petersburg: poverty-stricken, persecuted, avant-garde dissidents held "shows" in each other's homes, even calling themselves the Conceptualists, Sotsart, and the like. As things eased up in the hippie Aquarium era, new little movements came thick and fast: the Friends of Mayakovsky, the New Artists, the Necro-Realists.

Now, finally, in the 20th century's fin de siècle, a group of local artists has made a delightful and possibly significant discovery: after a hundred years of avant-garde abstraction, classical beaux arts can shock the bourgeoisie.

The restoration industry is very much alive here. But this isn't just a case of dry-as-dust archaeologists taking their camel-hair



brushes and regilding old mosaics. In Saint Petersburg, classic, academic, representational art is really *new* again somehow; it's become possible to do this with *attitude*. This is not a joke. It's actually workable. It's done with cameras and computers. It's a sensibility. It's a form of local art that looks like nothing else on earth. It's become possible to *really disturb people* by digitally bending and warping classical art – to knowingly play on Russian society's cracks, flaws, and discrepancies. To break the zombie sleep, to revitalize Russia's walking dead.

The movement is called Neo-Academism, and its guru is a hippie theoretician named Timur Novikov. The movement was born in 1991, the first year of the New Russia. Neo-Academism has been gathering force ever since, and while skeptical Saint Petersburg straights like to dismiss Novikov as an emperor with no clothes, they're forced to admit that he is an emperor. Of sorts.

This is the first manifestation out of the New Russia that actually impresses me. Neo-Academism is a weird, digitally enhanced shotgun marriage between gilt-and-marble classical grandeur and total, poverty-stricken, street-level hippie junk art. It's as if a non-stop Burning Man festival had broken out in the giant, rotting palace of Catherine the Great. Neo-Academism is big, and getting bigger: it's an across-the-board creative movement. Like Surrealism once did, it fancies itself not merely a form of expression, but a way of life. Neo-Academists are sculptors, photographers, set designers, costumers, filmmakers, actors, musicians, graphic artists, curators, magazine publishers.

Most avant-garde art movements fizzle and come to very little. Avant-gardism is an old game now, easy to dismiss, full of predictable moves. It's been a long time since the 20th century spawned any art movement that could really get under people's skin. After Pop Art – well, no, after Jeff Koons – it might seem that the entire conceptual territory had been clearcut and plowed with salt. But Neo-Academism is so weird looking, and it arises from such unique cultural and economic circumstances, that it looks to me like it might actually get somewhere. This might become the first digital art movement that really matters.

It's not that Academism has never been neo-ed before. Hippies in particular have a continuing romance with gooey-dreamy representational art by the Pre-Raphaelites, Alphonse Mucha, Maxfield Parrish. A little closer to the target is Lawrence Alma-Tadema, a British High Victorian who specialized in classical marble effects, with a lot of learned period detail, not to mention luscious Greek and Roman bath girls. The Neo-Academists have a big thumbs-up for Alma-Tadema, a man they clearly regard as a spiritual ancestor.

But the capo of Neo-Academism, Timur Novikov, is a fin-de-siècle avant-garde sophisticate; he knew Warhol, he knew Rauschenberg, he knew Haring. Neo-Academism, Novikov argues, is not a gimmick or a reaction; it's the future of Saint Petersburg's native culture. It's the authentic path forward.

Neo-Academism had its roots in the compost of Necro-Realism, a sullen little outburst of the late 1980s. The Necro-Realists earned their name through their interesting discovery that rotting bodies hadn't received a lot of aesthetic attention. They studied decay. They claimed that they were reacting to the central lie of totalitarianism: the evil fantasy that says that the body can be butchered for some abstract ideal - Nazism, communism - while the unstained soul somehow lives on, gloriously. In reality, it was the spirit that was killed long ago by totalizing ideologies, while the body lingers on, as a rotting monument and visible reproach.

Andrei Khlobystin is an art critic, curator, and art historian, but, he insists, he is not a postmodernist. He's a blazing Neo-Academist zealot. Although Neo-Academists like postmodernists enough to marry them (and even reproduce), they're just not very postmodernist anymore.

Andrey sat down on the battered family couch above the night's throng of Nevsky Prospekt, lit a cigarette, and launched into a full-scale, no-holds-barred, conquer-the-world, revolutionary Russian art rant. It was the first Neo-Academist sermon I'd ever heard. He was using terms and jargon that were totally unfamiliar to me. I



was thrilled. I couldn't have been more surprised if I'd found a baby coelacanth frolicking downriver from Chernobyl.

Andrey blithely described Neo-Academism as something that had once been an "art movement" but is now a lifestyle, a sensibility, and a community. It's the Neo-Academists' measured response to "the disappearance of repressive power" and its weird new reappearance as "the seductive power of mass media." And Neo-Academism, Andrey solemnly declared, is prepared to eat mass media.

Eat it? I inquired cautiously.

Oh yes. You see, that's a tactical reaction to "the triad of sex, power, and repression." It's a "new semantic revolution." It's a new creative answer to the collapse of communism's official future and the consequent "total crisis of identity for everybody." It's about finding the space to communicate the positive energies, a "position of creative joy," "especially for the rave generation and the hackers" - but it's not merely generational.

You see, Andrey mused aloud at a smoking 56,000 baud, "we live in a very strange town that looks like an ideology in stone." But you get a "very cold feeling when you see the difference between yourself and the façade." The city's energy derives from this stark contrast between the magnificent shell and the squalid reality of trash-filled inner yards and brutal communal apartments.

But Saint Petersburg has a great advantage: it has no art market, no "market for souls." Neo-Academist art is created by "people who are making art because they cannot do anything else." It's no longer about "art" per se, because "art has no substance now - only media." This is avant-garde media for media's sake, basically; it's daily life conceived as media, "daily communication as a work of art." The core of the Neo-Academist effort is quiet, supportive gestures from person to person, network freebies really, on "the naïve level of everyday life." It's about sustaining creativity in the free space, through potlatch - realizing your own interior riches, and deliberately giving creativity away.

Neo-Academism is squatting inside the dead shell of classical art. Its proponents like classical art because it's old and it's public domain - now classical art is media freeware. "Neo-Academism is

an aesthetic ghetto, but all the other places were occupied by political correctness and crowds of other people. This is a backyard, a rubbish-place. It's free, and we can do anything with it."

There was a great deal more to Andrey's speech - all about Cartesian rationalism, Russian spiritualism, beauty, nature, language, the Superman, "killing things by names," and "breaking through the white wall." But enough of Andrey's rhetoric; how does this actually work? What separates Neo-Academism from neoclassical schlock - say, a Maxfield Parrish *Saturday Evening Post* cover? Well, first of all, Neo-Academism isn't that cute. It's not soothing, it's not decorative. It's pretty, but it's dangerously pretty.

And it's also magnificent - this may be the oddest element. People in Saint Petersburg live in a city where magnificence was a political weapon, where the ideology and architecture of an aristocracy is still a living and compelling part of the environment. Preindustrial aristocracy is an *alternative* society now, a lost world of patricians who would have roundly scorned our servile acquiescence in the unchallenged rule of cash over human affairs. Aristocracy is not communist, bourgeois, capitalist, or commercial.

Saint Petersburg's architecture always made communism look bad - and the detritus of dead aristocracy is also a living reproach to any society prostrated by Pepsi, Marlboro, and McDonald's. Peter the Great was building to last. Who builds to that standard these days? People will pay good money to get into the Church of Spilled Blood - what has anyone built in the past 20 years that people a hundred years from now will pay to visit? We're infinitely faster and better informed now, but also much more disposable.

The last 20th-century people who talked seriously about building for the long term were the Nazis. The "Thousand-Year Reich." The Nazis were also very much into academic revivalism, and they possessed a great sense of set design. Albert Speer and his spotlight cathedral rallies, the Nuremberg raves. The costumery of the SS still inspires fetishists a full 60 years later. Nazi conquerors looted and emptied galleries and museums all over Europe and took special pains to obliterate every czarist palace in Leningrad they could get their hands on. Nazi art is the great buried and denied art of the 20th century. It's pseudo-neoclassical, and it's the one form of



20th-century art that still shocks and frightens people.

The Neo-Academists aren't Nazis. They're only barely living in the 20th century. But they've thought a lot about who the Nazis were and how they worked. Yeah, they're supposed to be harmless hippie eccentrics. But they know history anyway. And it shows.

Nazi art used classical motifs with a thud and a blunder and a crunch. Neo-Academist sculptor Julia Straussova does heroic busts of her friends and colleagues. But these go well beyond parody – they actually hurt your brain. They have the full-scale classical façade – laurel wreaths, Greek helmets, symmetrical pedestals, an air of timeless glory – but the faces are life masks of contemporary human beings. They're no führers or god-emperors, they're *people*: Roman majesty and gravitas, but with Andrey Khlobystin's friendly-goblin mug grafted on. Julia Straussova once did a series of busts of 12 German techno DJs: "The Twelve Caesars of the Techno-Imperium." Twelve rave DJs? Well, why not? Why *shouldn't* disk-spinning pop stars be treated just like Caesars – it's all about fame and glory, isn't it? It's all about celebrity. It's media.

Neo-Academists don't do postmodern irony. They do something else entirely, something they call cruel naïveté. It's beyond mere cynicism. It only works when done with a straight face.

The catalog *Passiones Luci* (1995) shows the Neo-Academist community in full cry. Here we have a full-scale photographic tableau vivant that reproduces selected episodes from *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius. This was an inspired choice from Roman classical literature. *The Golden Ass* has been indecent for 2,000 years and will probably be even more indecent 2,000 years hence.

Doing the book as a series of costumed stage photos was a challenging effort, but that Neo-Academist potlatch ethic came to the fore. Everyone pitched in. Artists become unpaid models. Alla Mitrofanova ran high-level interference and helped squeeze some art funding out of the local George Soros art center.

Everybody crowded in front of the camera: the team of Oleg

Maslov and Viktor Kuznetsov, Timur Novikov, Olga Tobreluts, various local hippies, rock stars' wives, artists' boyfriends and girlfriends, the guy down the hall at the squat. The intended end result, as Ekaterina Andreeva (a Neo-Academist and director of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts) puts it, is "an unraveling of historical time." Those eerily symmetrical costumes are certainly weird enough – but the photographs, careful imitations of 19th-century staged photography, were subjected to digital photomontage to an effect beyond collage. It's profoundly weird, as if raw computational power had somehow caused history to disintegrate.

And they know that's what's happening. As Andreeva says, "Technology aspires to magic; society aspires toward maximum technological expertise and precision, to create lifelike doubles and substitutes for reality." In Saint Petersburg, this isn't merely a techie conceit; it's helping artists get a grip on their profound cultural dilemma. "Technical lifelike doubles entangle and exceed the boundaries of reality," says Andreeva. "They create the illusion of the reversibility of historical time."

Suddenly the true Neo-Academist wildcard emerges: the digital imperative. This is what truly distinguishes Neo-Academism from all those previous attempts to resuscitate dead beaux arts. The Neo-Academists *have the technology*. They can get a different kind of grip. They can cut and paste it. Photoshop is their friend.

There's no question who the truly wired Neo-Academist is. Olga Tobreluts is a 26-year-old Petersburg native who's never done anything but digital art, like altered digital photography and video montage. She is the current Queen of the Neo-Academist Scene.

Olga Tobreluts has been a model for other Neo-Academist efforts, and it probably doesn't hurt much that she is stunningly photogenic; but that's not why Timur Novikov recommends her work to foreign journalists (like me). He considers her the Neo-Academist to watch. Twenty-one years old when the Russian Federation was established, Olga Tobreluts doesn't have the crushing historical burdens of the Necro-Realists. She was a child in



Leningrad; and she's one of the very first artists to become an adult in the New Russia.

Olga's work is digital, and it's media, and it's all about heritage and identity. It's not a stretch or a novelty for Olga to work with digital art. It's just another means – the best means, the natural means – of coming to grips with her subject matter.

Olga Tobreluts lives in a building that might have been set-designed for a Neo-Academist. It's a deeply eerie downtown Belle Epoque pile that was built in full-scale Pharaonic Egyptian replication. The structure is almost 100 years old now and is falling photogenically apart at the seams, in a mummified Necro-Realist fashion. Like all Saint Petersburg apartment buildings, every inch of public space in the structure is in a state of utter neglect. The stairwells smell and are totally unlit, since any fool unwise enough to install a 35-cent lightbulb would find it immediately stolen. The elevator is a maelstrom of heavy-metal rock graffiti. Olga's door is a retrofitted portcullis of makeshift armor plate.

But beyond the door, it's Finland. There's a working studio, an atelier. There's furniture, TV screens, a computer. There are caged birds and flowers and a lot of rave promotion posters. That's a par-enthetical oddity: you'd think that, to be consistent, Neo-Academists would be into neoclassical music, perhaps some kind of digital restorationist work involving sackbuts and harpsichords. In point of fact, they're all techno-rave fanatics. This doesn't strike them as contradictory. They're contemporary people, not antiquarians. Their native music is rave music, sampled Eurodigital electronica. Olga's husband owns a techno night club. Timur Novikov does raves. The Riverniks organize and promote rave events. The official Neo-Academist house band is Novy Kompository, the New Composers, whose work is meditative Brian Eno-like honks, bleep, and ambient thudding. In fact, Eno was just in town hanging out with the Novy Kompository, who found themselves to be very much on his wavelength.

Olga's work isn't postmodern virtual art; it isn't the supposed wonder and marvel of virtual reality. It's Art first, and digital as a distant second. Olga Tobreluts's work has to do with the stark fact

that she's Olga Tobreluts: a child of Leningrad, an adult in Petersburg, a Russian woman with a Baltic heritage and Baltic surname Tobreluts – which wasn't Slavic enough.

(She's not alone in that problem. Anatoly Chubais, Russia's greatest spin master, is also from Saint Petersburg. He's also of Baltic ancestry. He isn't Slavic enough, either. Although he's running the country.)

Olga could be Olga Komarova if she wanted – her infant son is Yakim Komarov, an unimpeachably Russian name – but she is passionately Olga Tobreluts and will not back down. She's gifted, and young, and energetic: but the thing that makes Olga Tobreluts truly significant as a Saint Petersburg cultural figure is that she so clearly knows who she is. She uses computers, video montage, and digital photography to *prove* who she is.

When I first saw Olga's series *Family*, a set of eight computer-altered photographs of herself and her ancestors, I told her that they seemed familiar – somewhat like the posed historical photographs of Cindy Sherman. This produced the instant retort that Cindy Sherman is a *postmodernist*. Cindy Sherman's art is "ironic": she treats portraiture as a pose, a joke. The *Family* series, on the other hand, is a set of old black-and-white photos that have been montaged, colorized, altered, transformed. This isn't fake identity, fragmented subjectivity, alternate identity, or virtuality: it's an artist whose identity was *already* destroyed, repressed, and fragmented by political repression, who is using a computer because it *redeems her and it proves who she is*. That's a subtle difference, but it's all the difference in the world.

Olga also works in video. She did an instant Neo-Academist classic called *Woe from Wit*. It's a brief video, done on no budget to speak of and featuring various potlatch friends as unpaid stars. It's based on a 19th-century Russian drama, but this *thing* that's been done to this classic play with Olga's mouse and Return key is more than mere parody. *Mutation* would be a far better term. Period-costumed amateur actors wander about the set reciting the fractured lines, while canvases on the wall change their subject matter without warning. Curtains turn into waterfalls, classical



nudes morph on their pedestals. There's a whole other world in that video, maybe a whole other century. Certainly not our century. The coming century of a young Russian woman.

Three or four years ago, Timur Novikov used to mutter to his intimates that computers were the work of the devil. The future lay in the past – in transforming Petersburg into a “green zone” for forms of art that are obscured, forgotten, too troublesome, no longer practiced. People should be taught to *draw* again, to understand perspective, proportion, classic Greek aesthetics. Timur doesn't condemn computers any more. Timur has his own Web site now. He knows that Olga Tobreluts, a woman who showed up in his circle as a teenage architecture student, has become the apotheosis of Neo-Academism.

As for Timur himself ... I met him, of course. I would never have turned down the chance to meet Timur Novikov after hearing his disciples talk about him. They literally speak of his magic.

A skeptic would say that it's not all that hard to be “magic” when large numbers of your nearest and dearest are skull-whacked on shrooms and ketamine. But Timur Novikov is pretty damned magic, when you're sober and in broad daylight. He's not a gifted artist; he's more than that: as they used to say of André Breton, he's the torch who lights their steps. *Everyone this man knows* has been turned into an artist. He's a Breton, or a Warhol, only more so – because the people in his orbit need him more. Breton was on the Left Bank when Paris was the ne plus ultra of Euro-intellectual chic. Warhol was in New York when the Youthquake was happening, the economy was booming, and there was art money all over the place. Timur Novikov is in Saint Petersburg when the economy has crashed, the rule of law is a pious fraud, and people are at their wits' ends and drinking themselves to death.

But Timur is a “titan artist of a new type” – at least he is according to his own publicity ([www.dux.ru/virtual/timur/index.htm](http://www.dux.ru/virtual/timur/index.htm)). Timur decided that his situation required an artistic titan, so he made himself into one. A touch of megalomania is a real asset in a situation like Timur's: it helps you deal with the Soros art center,

with pesky foreign journalists who don't speak your language. He's got a major ego, and on him it *looks good!* It gets him out of bed in the morning, day after day, to inspire and organize the lives and psyches of temperamental Russian artists.

In point of fact, pretty much nothing has happened in Saint Petersburg art in the past 15 years without Timur Novikov either lurking in the background or strutting on the stage. He started his first art movement, the New Artists group, when he was a mere 24. Next year it was the New Composers music group, with Timur neck deep in artistic design for the rock bands Popular Mechanics and Kino. In the mid-1980s he decided it was time to leave the aquarium, and he left to exhibit and study in Germany, Finland, Yugoslavia, France, and the US. Then, in 1993, he opened the New Academy of Fine Arts, the semi-official front group for the Neo-Academist movement.

Timur creates videos, photos, tapestries, and paintings, but he's a rarer thing than a mere artist: he's a great critic and a great inspirational figure. He radiates charisma – when he takes his turn in Olga Tobreluts's video *Woe From Wit*, in period costume, he looks like the Duke of Wellington.

And today, this unquestioned master of the Saint Petersburg art scene is still not quite 40 years old – and he's blind. The illness began to attack his eyesight about three months ago. His sickness has been vaguely described as meningitis, but whatever it is, it's serious. This titan artist is very sick. He looks 60.

It's truly one of the saddest things I've ever witnessed. Meeting Timur Novikov was a raw confrontation with unappeasable Russian tragedy. His friends say that his blindness has somehow made him stronger, more magical even. But this is a man who's been an art critic since the age of 15, and he can no longer see his art. He was proud and eagle-eyed – and now he's gaunt and blind.

Lately he's been arranging press interviews in a fine old graveyard, near the hospital, conducted in excellent English and betraying not just kindness and generosity, but also a first-class mind. He talks about retrofitting obnoxious Modernist buildings with classical façades, a serious scheme which amuses Timur no end.



After all, why stop at merely retrofitting tedious old churches? Turn the whole city Neo-Academist, transplant the past wholesale "repair" that which needs no repair. It would be helpful, too, Tim thinks, if tiresome 20th-century Modern Art, which has clearly failed, could be removed from the aesthetic landscape and kept in a vault somewhere for a hundred years or so. (Then, you see, it might become interesting and valuable – in much the same way that long-frozen czarist art is suddenly valuable now.)

Timur is a little tired of squats full of ravers and druggies; given his choice, he'd like to dwell in the Mikhailovsky Palace, elegantly surrounded by busts of electroplated DJs and Russian ambient music. He'd be a figure liberated from history, surrounded by "beauty." Beauty is not a mere figure of speech in Timur's concepts. Beauty seems to be a substance to him, an objective reality, a thing as omnipresent in Petersburg as bad communist cement.

## **The Russians**

What does it mean to live in a country where the male life expectancy is 57 years? It means that for every man who dies at 74, there's a man who dies at 40. That's Russian reality now. They're not being communists, but they're not getting healthier. They don't yet understand how.

Today Russians are adapting an Americanized, or at least a Europeanized, façade just as fast as they can stand it. The people of Saint Petersburg are particularly good at this; it's why their city was created. That's a project dear to their hearts. There's a sour joke in Petersburg now that says they should declare independence from the rest of Russia, become a little Baltic state like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – and then declare war on Finland and lose. Because Finland was Russian territory not so long ago, and now it's a relative paradise of clean streets, socialist health care, and Nokia cell phones.

But Saint Petersburg isn't Europe, and Russians aren't Americans. They say they want to be "normal," and this is as close as they've gotten lately, but they're just not normal yet. They're not dues-paying members of the Group of Eight who merely happen to have been through 70 mind-warping years of murderous totalitarianism. They weren't much like Americans before that episode, and at the far end of it, they're still not like Americans, and not at all sure what to make of themselves. They have a very deep, very classically Russian problem right now, and it's a problem at which they have failed, repeatedly and disastrously.

Sometimes a great people can rise by the good fortune of having great enemies. Before our long quarrel with the Soviets, America was basically a giant farm, a country whose hayseed soldiers boated over periodically to sort out the troubles in Europe. At the end of all that, we've become the first truly global superpower, the first military power whose cultural and technical preeminence is so overwhelming that we can't even be bothered to steal other people's land. We don't need their land. We don't want it. It's of no use to us.

But the Russians aren't the only great people with a spiritual problem. We Americans are a very strange nation. When you stay a while in Europe, or even in Russia, you can glance back and you can come to see that there's a strange, scalped quality about the US. There's a creepiness about us, a blankness, a darkness. Behind all the glitzy military-entertainment video product, our satellite rock and roll, our disposable diapers, and our racks of shiny fluoride-strengthened teeth, there's a gum-popping Whore America, who can be led to culture but who can't be made to think. We're a facile, careless culture, so mired in Babbettesque philistinism that savaging the NEA is our national sport.

Digital America is faster and maybe even richer, but it isn't much prettier, and it might be even less civilized. Here we suddenly have a brand-new class of ruling postindustrial moguls, a gang of digital hustlers to take their historical place beside the five-and-dime store magnates, the railroad barons, the steel monopolists, and the oil trusts. And yet these American titans, astoundingly,

don't have any taste. None. Even 19th-century soap-and-starch salesmen would build parks, libraries, public statuary. Even their bric-a-brac weekend castles would last 200 years. But not US computer moguls. They're spectacularly rich, a true techno-aristocracy. But in their heart of hearts, they're workaholic Dilberts, guys whose idea of fine art is a nailgun splash in *Doom*, or maybe a Hollywood dinosaur eating a lawyer.

Russia is in bad straits, but I will swear with my hand on a Unix bible that when Olga Tobreluts enters the room, the image-crunching jockeys at Industrial Light & Magic ought to genuflect and spit up holy water. She's an Artist. No kidding. She's got something they just don't have. They need it, too. They need it a whole lot.

We ought to work something out here. Now that we've given up staring each other down, we ought to water the cultural roots and feed the butterflies that follow. This could work. I can foresee a world where American computer moguls actually like and buy Russian computer art. Maybe even *collect* it. I'd really like to see a few Russian titan artist become zillionaires - that could liven things up considerably. Besides, the Russians are a little too sanctimonious about their righteous poverty - I'd like to see them deal with *our* famous artists' problems and see how they like it.

The whole population could do this. We could all dump our dated hippie Pre-Raphaelite posters from our college dorms and yuppie dens and replace them with some chrome-coated, deeply eerie, Neo-Academist digitalia. It's just as "pretty," but it's a lot more true to our time and our basic predicament.

America may not be up for this. We might just chew this stuff up, spit it out, and use it to sell running shoes. But not every country on earth has our personality problems. There's still hope, it's a big global world now; the Neo-Academists could get a long way just by becoming big in Japan. Japan is country that knows a very great deal about pseudo-Westernized façades and deep, dark, sticky interiors.



And at the end of the day, art is still art, even when it's media. There's a bigger issue at stake here. Photography – the first fully machine-mediated art form – was a time bomb in the basement of representational painting. Why go on with that always-bogus “fidelity to nature” when a camera can give you real and objective fidelity at the click of a shutter? Baudelaire knew that the camera was the enemy of painting. But he was a 19th-century figure; he didn't know that the camera had an enemy, too. The camera's enemy is the computer. All so-called fidelity melts and warps before the 21st-century scepter of digital imagery, the new usurper that can kill the camera and avenge its grandfather: a paintbrush driven by the human mind and hand.

And painting's just one part of it. Even the Church on Spilled Blood might quail before the untapped power of the Neo-Academist computer. What is a “mosaic” anyway? A mosaic is *stone pixels*. That's all there is to it! Computers can handle pixels. You yes, *you* – could get a computer, scan any image you want, have the computer break it up into numbered, colored pixels. Then you go out and you break some colored pop bottles with a hammer, and you buy a tub of superglue. Then you find some forgotten wall in the barrio, some obscure and evil place where people are murdered like the czar, every day, without even God caring. You get some unemployed friends and some workgloves, and you glue that broken glass up on the wall, pixel after pixel. Presto – order out of rubbish! Beauty – it spreads like fudge! Czarist fine art for nothing!

Do you like those magnificent stone altars with their fantastic hand-etched curlicues? No problem! Scan them in on 3-D models, and have a machine tool dig them out of solid rock with CAD/CAM. Detail that would have blinded and killed Fabergé artisans can be yours – just for the willpower it takes to do it. Not for a fortune. Not for years of arduous labor. Yours for a gesture. Yours for potlatch.

Of course, you won't do it *now* – not just because you read about it in a magazine. But you'd do it if Timur Novikov lived next door. You wouldn't be able to stop yourself. He'd make you realize how rich you are, inside.

**The New Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA)** was established in 1989 by St.Petersburg artists as a non-governmental organization. Its mission is to preserve the classical traditions of fine art. The New Academy administers both educational activities and exhibitions. The exhibitions are hosted by the NAFA's own museum as well as by various other spaces in St.Petersburg, Russia, and abroad. The educational course is designed for three years, during which students are free to use the study ateliers of the New Academy. Many of the students get enrolled in the NAFA's post-graduate program. The New Academy publishes a number of periodicals, runs a feature program on St.Petersburg TV, and maintains a web-site.

NAFA Faculty: Timur Novikov, Denis Egelsky, Oleg Maslov, Viktor Kuznetsov, Andrey Medvedev, Alexander Medvedev, Olga Tobreluts, Georgy Gurianov, Bella Matveeva, Egor Ostrov, Stanislav Makarov, Julia Straussova, Aidan Salakhova (Moscow), Ivan Dmitriev (Moscow), Sergey Shutov (Moscow).

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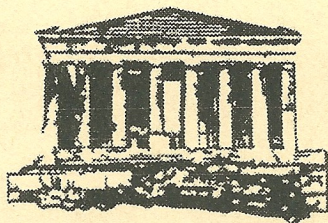
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# НОВАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ



САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГ 2000