

From the Editor



I have long held translated literature to be somehow fraudulent, and this, together with the fact that I have the Russian-language reading level of a pre-schooler, means that my experience of Viktor Pelevin begins and ends with the hype surrounding the cult writer's books. And yet even though I've never read his work, I feel like I really should have an opinion on him. After all, doesn't everybody?

Has he, for example, brought a fresh understanding to the chaos of the post-Soviet social revolution?

Is he, first and foremost, a cunning PR man with a genius for self-promotion?

Does his writing give a voice to a lost generation who found themselves devoid of an ideological focus? There is an element of truth, no doubt, in all of the above.

More than all that, though, for my money Pelevin occupies a position that simply desperately needed filling in the post-Soviet void, as a social commentator offering insight of sorts into a crazy time. I'll refrain from commenting on his literature, but in general, social commentators are always popular in times of social upheaval, and perhaps the true genius of Pelevin has been his ability to address if not actually answer the questions that society has been asking of itself. That his work should poke fun at both Soviet imagery and post-Soviet consumerism is merely a reflection of just how ironic and fatalistic the average CIS citizen had become by the late 1990s.

The stage adaptation of his lauded 'Chapayev i Pustota' novel comes to Kyiv this week for a one-night-only extravaganza. Reaction so far has been mixed, as it always is where Pelevin is concerned. Beyond all the hype, though, it is a real breath of fresh air to have a cultural happening, and cultural discussion, which are rooted neither in Soviet popular culture nor the Tsarist era of highbrow classics. Such events remain few and far between, but will no doubt come to form the pioneering elements of the new Slavic cultural identity.

Fans of Soviet chic have the chance to engage in a little art collecting this coming week, as ARTEast's popular seasonal Social Realism festivals series continues. Buying quality art will rarely get this cheap, and supplies of this once discredited genre will not last forever, so perhaps the time to enter the market has arrived.

With Revolution Day also set to be marked this week, there will be plenty of Soviet imagery to enjoy around town, and no doubt the Communists will put on some sort of a show. Just watch out for the standard photo that's bound to be published yet again by tired Western dailies of the old lady carrying a picture of Stalin. Please change the record, chaps, this part of the world is not really being helped by that sort of lazy coverage, no matter how attractive it may look to your disinterested readers!

Cheers,
Peter Dickinson
Editor