

# Socialist Realism Goes Under the Hammer

Many of those, whose pioneer childhoods happened many years ago, may well have forgotten that 19 May used to be Pioneer's Day in the Soviet Union. But ARTEast gallery still remember the holiday and offered an auction of Socialist Realism painting as part of their festive program.

Happy workers building a 'new life', peasants shearing sheep, Stalin posing heroically as organiser of the October revolution, Soviet construction sites... Such pictures are practically unknown for the generation of Ukrainians who were born after the collapse of the USSR. For the rest of Ukraine, however, such images form memories etched into their minds against their will through their school history books and the museums and posters of their youth.

Foreigners on the other hand see them as kitsch, as a taste of a society whose symbols have all but disappeared.

Dubbed 'totalitarian art' and 'propaganda art' during the Cold War, during the last decade Social Realism has built up great interest abroad. According to Svitlana Stehniy of the ARTEast gallery, foreigners started to buy the works of Social Realism in early 90's and the trend is still continuing.

Moreover, some forgers, having noticed the profitability of the genre and started producing counterfeits particularly, the works of well-known Social Realist painters. Svitlana, however, admits that nowadays it's more difficult to acquire the works by artists such as Tetiana Yablonska or Serhiy Hrygoriev because they are mostly in museums or private collections throughout the world.

Svitlana Stehniy also recalls cases when Western people came here with the particular purpose of buying Socialist Realist paintings and one collector even bought 95 examples. "Foreign people are so keen on social realism pictures because they show something they didn't have and something which has become history and will never return", she explains.

For many Ukrainians, on the other hand, it is a heritage not worthy of collecting, given the time and effort spent getting rid of both the regime alongside the genre.

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*Not quite Socialism but realism anyway*



*Oksana of Art East gallery enjoying a 'Pioneer' cocktail*

