

МУЗЕЙ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ИСКУССТВА ГАРАЖ

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MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

**GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART PRESENTS:
IF OUR SOUP CAN COULD SPEAK: MIKHAIL LIFSHITZ AND THE SOVIET SIXTIES**

March 7–May 13, 2018

This exhibition celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the scandalous publication of *The Crisis of Ugliness by Soviet philosopher and art critic Mikhail Lifshitz*. The book, which first appeared in 1968, was an anthology of polemical texts against Cubism and Pop Art—and one of the only intelligent discussions of modernism's social context and overall logic available in the Soviet Union—making it popular even among those who disagreed with Lifshitz's conclusions.

The result of a three-year Garage Field Research project, *If our soup can could speak* takes as its starting point Lifshitz's book and related writings to re-explore the vexed relations between so-called progressive art and politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as the motivations and implications of Lifshitz's singular crusade against the modern classics. His appraisal of the crisis in twentieth-century art differs fundamentally from the standard attacks on modernism in government-issue Soviet art criticism, and in fact can be read as their direct critique. All the while, Lifshitz is in constant dialogue and debate with the century's leading intellectuals in the West (Heidegger, Benjamin, Adorno, Horckheimer, Levi-Strauss, and others), searching for answers to the questions they posed from the perspective of someone with a unique inner experience of the Stalinist epoch's revolutionary tragedy.

The exhibition unfolds as a narrative of archival documents, art works, and text fragments, which are situated in a sequence of ten interiors that could be seen as spatial forms for landmark moments in the evolution of modernism, or in Lifshitz's thinking. It intends to provoke a discussion of art after the triumph of modernism and its contradictory position in a crisis-ridden world where Lifshitz's radical diagnoses seem more relevant than ever.

Initiated by artist-curators David Riff and Dmitry Gutov, the initial Field Research project (through which the exhibition was developed) involved a combination of archival mining, translation, and public discussions of the controversial themes and dramatic historical contexts of Lifshitz's work. Since November 2015, the research team has reviewed more than 200 folders of documents from public archives, such as the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts, the Central Archive of Sociopolitical History of Moscow, and the State Tretyakov Gallery, as well as the private archives of Lifshitz's daughter, Anna Pichikyan, and others. Retrieved documents include unpublished questionnaires, records of political purges, correspondence, manuscripts, stenographs of Lifshitz's lectures, personal photographs. These more conventional research methods were complemented by a large-scale visual study—both online and offline—delving into the references and sources of Lifshitz's work and its institutional and everyday contexts, as seen in pictures and films.

Artists include Albrecht Dürer, Oleg Filatchev, Valery Khabarov, Larisa Kirillova, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol.

Mikhail Lifshitz (1905, Melitopol–1983, Moscow) was a philosopher, cultural theorist, and one of the most influential Russian intellectuals of the twentieth century. After enrolling at the avant-garde art school VKhUTEMAS in the early 1920s, he experienced a creative crisis and turned to the classical legacy. Aged 20, he was invited to teach dialectical materialism. In 1933, Lifshitz published his key work *On the Question of Marx's Views of Art*, where he demonstrated that Marx had a coherent system of aesthetic opinions. In 1938, this study was published in English in New York as *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx* and subsequently appeared internationally in many

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other languages. In the 1930s, Lifshitz was at the epicenter of intellectual life in the Soviet Union. He lectured prolifically at several Moscow institutions and edited a number of classic works on aesthetic theory. He also briefly occupied the post of Assistant Director for Research at the Tretyakov Gallery and took part in the period's most heated discussions on art. In 1941, Lifshitz volunteered for service at the front. After demobilization in 1946, he fell victim to the unfolding anti-Semitic campaign "against cosmopolitanism." After the death of Stalin, he quickly returned to the spotlight when *Novy Mir* magazine published his article "The Diary of Marietta Shaginyan" (1954), which painted a satirical picture of the Stalin-era intelligentsia. However, his manifesto "Why Am I Not a Modernist?" published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* newspaper in 1966, stirred up controversy: along with the new generation of readers, even those who had admired his boldness in the 1950s now accused him of obscurantism. For decades, Lifshitz remained a symbol of the Brezhnev-era campaigns against the avant-garde and contemporary art. This image was reinforced by the publication of his book *The Crisis of Ugliness*, in which he offered a radical critique of cubism and pop art. Burning his bridges, in 1976 he published an article titled "The Right Path" on the exhibition of young artists to mark the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Lifshitz's philosophy, centered on his belief in the tragic fate of art in modernity, was only partially explained in the writings he published during his lifetime, and remained largely unstudied in his archive of over 700 files. Most of his books were published after his death: the majority of them in recent years, which have seen a dramatic shift in the understanding of his legacy.

As part of the field research project, a first English translation of *The Crisis of Ugliness* has been made by David Riff. The book was published in February 2018 as Volume 158 of Brill's *Historical Materialism* series and was produced in collaboration with Garage Museum of Contemporary Art.

If our soup can could speak: Mikhail Lifshitz and the Soviet Sixties is curated by David Riff and Dmitry Gutov in collaboration with Garage curator Anastasia Mityushina.

This exhibition is organized with the support of Aksenov Family Foundation.

Garage is grateful to V-A-C Foundation for their assistance.

GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art is a place for people, art, and ideas to create history. Through an extensive program of exhibitions, events, education, research, and publishing, the institution reflects on current developments in Russian and international culture, creating opportunities for public dialogue, as well as the production of new work and ideas in Moscow. At the center of all these activities is the Museum's collection, which is the first archive in the country related to the development of Russian contemporary art from the 1950s through the present. Founded in 2008 by Dasha Zhukova and Roman Abramovich, Garage is the first philanthropic organization in Russia to create a comprehensive public mandate for contemporary art and culture. Open seven days a week, it was initially housed in the renowned Bakhmetevsky Bus Garage in Moscow, designed by the Constructivist architect Konstantin Melnikov. In 2012 Garage relocated to a temporary pavilion in Gorky Park, specifically commissioned from award-winning architect Shigeru Ban. A year later, a purpose-built Education Center was opened next to the Pavilion. On June 12, 2015, Garage welcomed visitors to its first permanent home. Designed by Rem Koolhaas and his OMA studio, this groundbreaking preservation project transformed the famous Vremena Goda (Seasons of the Year) Soviet Modernist restaurant, built in 1968 in Gorky Park, into a contemporary museum.

Garage is a non-profit project of The IRIS Foundation.

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UNIQLO

UNIQLO designs functional, innovative, and affordable apparel. The LifeWear line's DNA is high quality, simplicity, longevity, and trendiness regardless of a person's lifestyle or style.

As part of the strategic partnership between UNIQLO and Garage, a series of special events and activities are held. Garage and UNIQLO has launched UNIQLO Free Friday Nights, continuing the tradition of free admission for all visitors every Friday evening at such key art institutions as MoMa in New York and Tate in London. Garage visitors can enjoy free admission to all exhibitions every Friday between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Garage Lounge Zone opened at the UNIQLO Atrium store, Moscow, in 2017. Customers can immerse themselves in the art world with books and magazines about art, fashion, and contemporary culture. The zone is also a space for free lectures and master classes, as well as special projects by Garage.

PIK GROUP

PIK is the largest real estate development company in Russia. Constructing modern and comfortable homes, it sets a new standard for architecture and quality of life. PIK is known for clean, minimalist design with a few bright accents. Inviting emerging architecture studios to design its facades, and combining their input with its own technical expertise, the company offers new solutions for urban construction.

As partners, PIK and Garage will join forces and expertise to create public spaces that will be comfortable and interesting for all visitors. When they buy a new home, PIK customers will receive a free GARAGE card that will grant them free priority admission to Garage's exhibitions and special events, as well as discounts at Garage café and Bookshop for one year. Garage visitors will be able to take part in events organised with PIK's support.

INGOSSTRAKH

Ingosstrakh has been a major player in both the Russian and international markets since 1947. The company is the national leader in Russia based on total insurance premiums in the voluntary insurance sector (not including life insurance). Ingosstrakh is authorized to handle all types of insurance services (in accordance with the insurance company's specialization) specified in Article 32.9 of the Insurance Law of the Russian Federation, as well as reinsurance services. For many years, Ingosstrakh has provided insurance services for important works of art and other valuable historical objects. The company has 149 locations throughout Russia, as well as branches and subsidiaries worldwide.

Ingosstrakh is the Official Insurance Partner of Garage Museum of Contemporary Art for the second year running. For Ingosstrakh, the partnership with Garage is an important stage in expanding cooperation with leading museums in Russia and across the world. The company insures the artworks exhibited and, jointly with the Museum, implements a wide range of special programs for visitors.

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BMW Group has had a presence in the art world for many years thanks to its BMW Art Car project that lists artists like Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, Roy Lichtenstein, Frank Stella, and César Manrique among its participants. Since racing driver and art enthusiast Hervé Poulain invited Alexander Calder to paint the first car in 1975, some of the world's biggest artists have created nineteen unique designs based on the company's models. BMW Group is also a long-time partner of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and has organized long-term projects in collaboration with Tate Modern in London and the National Gallery in Berlin.

Garage helps to promote art and culture and inspire millions of people to discover new things. For BMW Group, which celebrated its centenary in 2016, the partnership with Garage is a wonderful opportunity to support contemporary art. Starting from 2017, BMW Group supports one of the Museum's main programs, offering Art and Technology grants to contemporary artists.

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