

VLADISLAV EFIMOV



# New Leningrad

**4th June to 18th July 2010**

**Opening 3rd June 2010**

6 rue des Grands Degrés  
75005 Paris



roots contemporary

# VLADISLAV EFIMOV

Both as a conceptualist artist and a photographer, Vladislav Efimov has always been concerned with objects. This has been the case ever since his first solo exhibition of a set of images of objects, in the "Shkola" gallery in 1991.

Later he turned to real objects, rather than their images. He then evolved from a "chamber" photographer into a video and media artist, working with the computer adept Aristakh Chernyshevsky (Moscow) and Sergei Denisov (St. Petersburg). He also established himself as a noteworthy professional photographer of architecture for various journals.

Meanwhile, his beloved objects underwent extraordinary transformations in various interactive installations: they grew feathers, appeared in a fiery halo, made table formations or lined up in ranks, formed absurd organisms and mechanisms. They did "genetic gymnastics", or self-destructed after being photographed and lay down in small box-coffins.

Efimov has always lived and worked in small premises, surrounded by a multitude of objects, from old useless things to modern gadgets and professional equipment. However, in his living space, there is none of that romantic chaos associated with creative natures. All the small objects are neatly tidied away, awaiting that magic moment when they will be made to come alive. The artist's source of inspiration, though, does not come so much from fairy-tales, as from alchemy and the mythology of classical science. His chosen objects are either old-fashioned or extremely simple.

As photographer, Efimov has produced a meticulous inventory of the Constructivist architecture of Petersburg (then Leningrad) and Moscow. His work is represented as a series of photos and luminous boxes in his "New Leningrad" exhibition, which will be presented in Paris on 3rd June 2010 by the Brussels gallery « Roots Contemporary».

In 2009, Efimov won the Innovatsia prize for the best Russian artist, with a project on radio and free speech. He has had exhibitions in Russia, France, Sweden, and Germany. He is photographer for the NCCA Moscow Modern Art Centre.

Throughout 2010, the ROOMM space in Paris is presenting special projects in the framework of the France-Russia Year.

"New Leningrad"

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# NEW LENINGRAD

## Architecture

***“The 1920s and ‘30s saw the intensive development of Russian avant-garde architecture, drafted to create an image of a New World: a world in which the working masses built a new domesticity, a new industry, a new education, and a new politics”***

That vital aspect of the Russian avant-garde, Soviet Constructivism - or the architecture of the 1920s-30s - does not feature much in central Petersburg. Soviet architectural art is mostly visible in the outskirts of the city, and predominantly as Stalinist architecture dating from the ‘50s.

From 1914 to 1925, very little was built in Petrograd, owing to economic and political factors. There was also a lack of ideas strong enough to permeate the conservative professional circles of the city. The monarchy favoured orthodox and national traditions; Liberals - neo-classicism and academic art. As for the bourgeoisie, it generally preferred all that was elegant, refined and at the same time rational and practical. By the time the city was renamed Leningrad in 1924, it had not undergone any major change, apart from losing some of its shine.

Change came with Kirov, who wanted to transform it from a city of ancient decaying palaces, ministries and barracks into a vibrant industrial hub of the region, with a buzzing port, factories, electricity stations. In spite of a lack of building material and builders, a huge amount was achieved in the ‘20s and ‘30s, as testifies this exhibition of the architecture of pre-war Leningrad.

What mostly characterizes the new Leningrad architecture? A multitude of tendencies of early 20th C architecture is reflected in it. Amongst other things, there is the idea of the town-garden with low-rise buildings. There are elements of symbolism and of suprematism; there is the forbidding functionality of industrial shapes. Though there are examples of monumental architecture, in general the buildings are of medium size and tone, simple and sober, and in that can be contrasted to the more showy, “militant” architecture of that period in Moscow. In Leningrad’s new architecture, there is little propagandistic thrust or striving for the fashionable; new social conditions and new artistic categories gave rise to an austere, contained style, where something ethereal co-exists with functionality.

Some of the common features of these buildings - their grey colour, their concrete or plaster surfaces, their cold, neutral simplicity - repel the masses, as a symbol of something official and “soviet”. Indeed, the architecture of that time is not sensual, but rather austere; the architect’s individuality is mostly subsumed, and both details and materials are pared down. However, a large part of this architecture was subjected to the city’s 1935 planning committees, which ensured that it did not contradict the city’s stylistic traditions. Classicism did not disappear, it became less ostentatious and more serious and gloomy. Gracious colonnades and pastel tones gave way to heavy columns and pylons, façades lost windows and light.

It is a Moscow photographer, Vladislav Efimov, who, having been shown these treasures by Petersburg friends, took on the task of photographing them. Understated, austere yet luminous, this architecture does not lend itself easily to photography. Some of its more delicate peculiarities are easily lost when they come into contact with the powerful instruments of modern photography. In the ‘30s and ‘50s, these buildings were photographed, but they somehow looked different. Smart, and anchored in a political context, they nevertheless lacked an aesthetic dimension. Today, Efimov’s photography strives to show that these are not just buildings of a particular time, but that they are truly modern works of art. His photographs of the understated Leningrad avant-garde architecture are in a sense “brighter” than life - which in itself is a feature of modern art.

