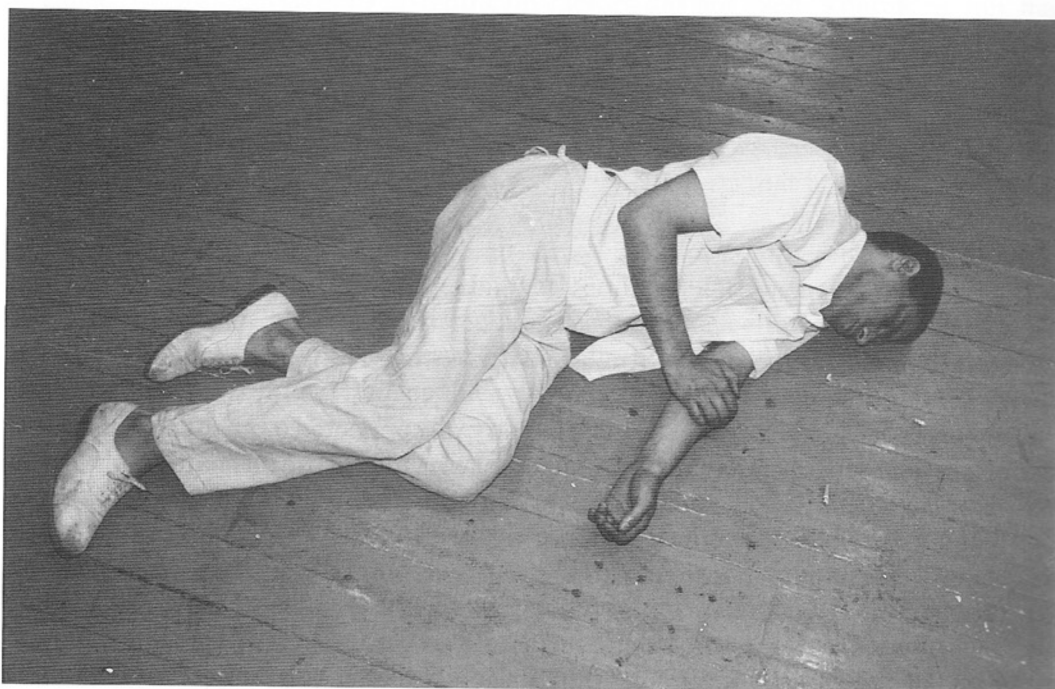
Ekaterina Degot

Avdey Ter-Oganyan, *Toward the Object*, 1992

In the morning of July 16, 1992, a Moscow art critic, Andrey Kovalev, met with the artist Avdey Ter-Oganyan at the latter's request. Their encounter was in anticipation of the opening of Ter-Oganyan's solo show, set to take place the same evening in Trekhprudny Lane Gallery, a small, artist-run space at the center of the city. The ensuing preparation, in accordance with the artist's concept, consisted of Kovalev helping Ter-Oganyan become dead drunk on various kinds of cheap alcohol, transporting him to the venue, installing him unconscious on the gallery floor, and making sure he slept through the whole opening. Taking on the status of both object and subject, the artist's inebriated body was the sole "artwork" in the show, which the artist titled *Toward the Object*.[1]



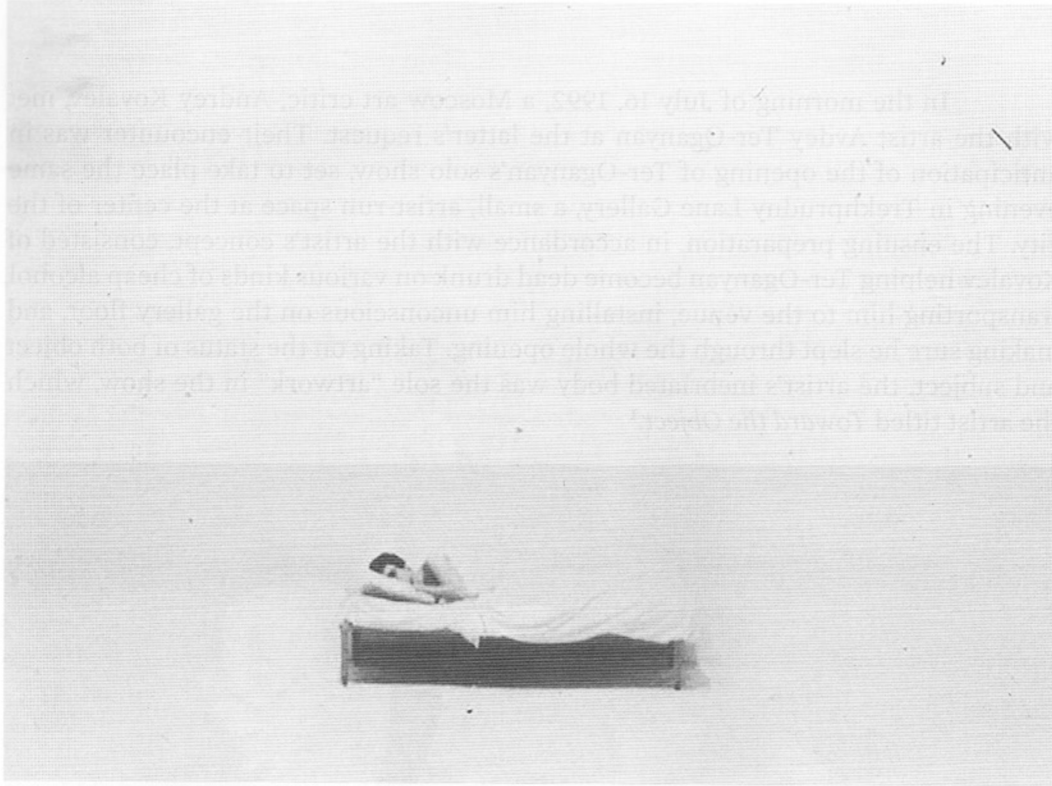
Installation view of *Toward the Object*, Trekhprudny Lane Gallery, Moscow, 1992

Other artists had and have publicly slept in galleries before and since that moment, or at least pretended to do so. In the postmodern era in the West, sleepy private-ness was sexualized and spectacularized in a true seizure of exhibitionism when in the 1990s and 2000s artists such as Tilda Swinton and Marina Abramović slept in art venues, in beds or in vitrines. Others, such as Carsten Höller, offered a similar experience to museum visitors, with beds either rotating or slowly trundling through the halls—presaging (save for rotation) the "sleepover" activity that many museums now actually sell to the public.

But it started differently. The drastic confrontation of the most private state of the human body and mind with the utterly public situation of panoptic exposure was staged in *Bed Piece* (February 18–March 10, 1972, at Market Street, Venice

1. **Accounts of the show differ. According to one, the artist arrived drunk but still conscious and the first visitors watched him drink himself to unconsciousness.**

California). Chris Burden spent twenty-two days in bed in the gallery, not moving at all during public hours and very little outside of them. Burden radicalized the concept in *White Light White Heat* (February 8–March 1, 1975, at Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York), where he constructed a platform in a corner and lay there for, again, twenty-two days without eating, talking, or otherwise appearing. He was invisible to the audience, his presence empirically unverifiable.



Installation view of Chris Burden, *Bed Piece*, Market Street, Venice, California, 1972

A sleeping person is in the most solitary, disconnected moment possible—that moment of self-absorption that Immanuel Kant considered the ultimate condition for self-expression (self-expression being, for him, the creative act *par excellence*). The Kantian definition of aesthetic experience as pure and free from socioeconomic contingencies contributed enormously to the romantic construction of the figure of the Western "lonely artist," set apart from bourgeois society, and sleeping and dreaming became a metaphor for it. The basic contradiction of contemporary art that emerged at the end of eighteenth century was that this individual, highly subjective, dreamlike art production actually exists in social, material, public space. Both of Chris Burden's pieces described above can be read as references to his confinement in his solitary "freedom" and lack of agency in the public sphere.

Contemporaneous underground artists in the Communist or just-post-Communist East did not struggle with this dilemma, as the public sphere was unavailable to them. Independent art took place entirely in the artists' private lives: they created, communicated, and exhibited in their own apartments, deprived of everything but force of imagination and, importantly, time. Unlike their Western counterparts, artists in the Eastern periphery enjoyed a strange freedom, unencumbered by a sense of guilt for being free.

There, sleep could seem a metaphor for true creativity built on unalienated time and unburdened by the capitalist insistence on production. That theme

was already present in the early Soviet avant-garde, for instance as when in 1929 the architect Konstantin Melnikov planned a "Sleep Sonata," a laboratory of collective "rationalized sleep" in his project of a Green City for workers—or, rather, for new citizens who would transcend the division of labor and become post-professional in their attitude toward life. It was clearly polemical, a privileging of work under socialism.[2] Dreams—sleep's elusive result—would then represent a new product, artistic or otherwise, whose umbilical cord to its producer's life would not be irreversibly cut.

This was expressed most notably in Mladen Stilinović's series of staged black-and-white photographs *Artist at Work* (1978), usually discussed in relation to his much later text "In Praise of Laziness" from 1993, written around the time of Ter-Oganyan's piece under very similar historical conditions of abrupt transition to capitalism (and the frustrations related thereto). There, Stilinović states that it is the historical role of an Eastern European artist to challenge the capitalist production machine—even to become its gravedigger: "Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists but rather producers of something. . . . Their involvement with matters of no importance, such as production, promotion, gallery systems, museum systems, competition systems (who is first), their preoccupation with objects, all that drives them away from laziness, from art. . . . Artists from the East were lazy and poor because the entire system of insignificant factors did not exist. Therefore they had time enough to concentrate on art and laziness. Even when they did produce art, they knew it was in vain, it was nothing."[3]

In his text, Stilinović refers to Kazimir Malevich's treatise "Laziness: The Real Truth of Mankind" from 1921, where Malevich states that he wants "to remove the brand of shame from laziness and to pronounce it not as the mother of all vices, but as the mother of perfection."[4] But Malevich is not completely Stilinović's ally here, especially in the matter of seeking perfection, something in which Stilinović is not interested. Malevich is concentrated on reaching perfection of action by thought only, by a gesture of immaterial creation he calls, pompously, "so be it" (*da budet*, or *fiat* in Latin). According to him, people who have mastered this already exist. Besides political leaders, they are "idea-givers" and "perfection-achievers" (*ideedateli* and *sovershenstvodelateli*, two of Malevich's awkward neologisms), who will open new perspectives for humanity. "In reality each idea-giver through his thought has found a certain idea, which sooner or later will raise all the people and regroup them in new ranks of life. The perfection-achiever who discovered the new body, machine, or device will raise a lot of working hands to augment the latter, and the world is taking another form with its further perfection; his thought is creating those machines that augment his action, freeing the man from work."[5]

What Malevich describes in his confusing terms, but prophetically, is the shift of emphasis from objects to ideas, toward immaterial production and then further away from work, to the immaterial recontextualization that today is called curating. It is the shift toward postindustrial ephemeralization that characterizes both post-1960s capitalism and Conceptual art, and found itself complicit with the former. By the time Stilinović, Ter-Oganyan, and many other artists reached the authentic Western or local Westernized art scene in the early 1990s, this scene had already figured out very well how to produce sleek perfection out of nonproduction (something Stilinović means by laziness)—out of erasure of work. And this was the problem Ter-Oganyan faced when he made his move *toward* the object, not away from it.

In 1992, Ter-Oganyan was, as was Stilinović, somewhere between Communism and capitalism, between the old model of community-centered life-art

2. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 114; and Tony Wood, "Bodies at Rest," *Cabinet*, no. 24 (Winter 2006–7): http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/24/wood.php.

3. Mladen Stilinović, "In Praise of Laziness" (1993), accessible at http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/l/laziness/in-praise-of-laziness-mladen-stilinovic.html.

4. Ibid. See also http://shifter-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/malevich_laziness.pdf.

5. Kazimir Malevich, *Len Kak Dejstvitelnaja Istina Chelovechestva* [Complete Works in Five Volumes], vol. 5, compiled and ed. Aleksandra Shatskikh (Moscow: Gilea, 2004), 84. My translation.

Mladen Stilinović, ***Artist at Work*** **(1978)**

in private spaces with private audiences and the new, although still a bit imaginary, paradigm of professionalized production, exhibitionistic display, and newly passive spectators. The advent of the latter model, as of everything capitalist, was described as "normalization." The first "normal" commercial galleries started to emerge in Moscow in the late 1980s.

In 1983 the Moscow conceptual artist Andrei Monastyrski brought an artwork of his to a show at APTART (more on this important group/gallery later). It was an ordinary gray cloth cap with a button and a strip of paper attached to it. The paper bore the inscription "Lift." By lifting the cap by this button, one discovered another paper that said, "One can lay it down, one cannot grasp it." The pun was that "grasp," meaning "comprehend" (*poniat'*), is almost homonymous with "lift" (*podniat'*) in Russian. But the deeper meaning was related to the very gesture of "laying down," or depositing—that is, installing—an object. By Monastyrski's instructions, the hat was to be put on a table or, better, a pedestal.

That was a prophecy. Very soon, in the early 1990s, with the advent of the Western-model institutional system in the former Soviet Union, works started to be systematically "put in place," "laid down," by newly emerging professional curators and gallerists—meaning, isolated and installed in space, rather than left in peace in the artist's living quarters—and also "laid down" as opposed to hanged, which would apply to more conservative frameable media. And this isolation did not contribute to comprehension. Indeed, it served to decontextualize artworks, removing them from their relational and discursive field. This created a completely new situation of display that required new reflection, and Trekhprudny Lane Gallery was part of it.

In 1990, a group of young artists from the southern Soviet Union (this quirky community from the town of Rostov-on-Don proudly bore the name "Art or Death") moved to conquer Moscow; previously Soviet law would not have allowed them to settle in the capital. Others joined them: the first group included Pavel Aksionov, Vladimir Dubossarsky, Viktor Kasyanov, Alexander Kharchenko, Ilya Kitup, Valery Koshlyakov, Konstantin Reunov, Alexander Sigutin, Oleg Tistol, and Ter-Oganyan. They squatted in two big apartments in an abandoned house in the not-yet-gentrified city center. Having discovered an attic that conveniently came with a separate entrance, they decided to turn it into a common space for showing art, and Trekhprudny Lane Gallery was born.[6]

Apartment exhibitions did exist in the Soviet Union before, most notably in an immensely important conceptual underground movement that called itself APTART (Apartment Art, and also a pun on the word "art" spelled first in Cyrillic lettering, then in Latin lettering), which existed from 1982 to 1984. APTART ran (or, rather, *was*) something they called a gallery, which was in reality a tiny sleeping hole of one of the young artists who was lucky enough to have his own place, but it remained clearly a living space with a bed, a messy kitchen (also used for exhibitions), and no separate entrance.[7]

Trekhprudny Lane Gallery flourished from September 1991 until May 1993, when it disappeared in the roaring abyss of the real estate market. In this pre-Internet, pre-cellphone era, artists fixed a time for openings (every Thursday, seven to nine in the evening) and decided they would not bother opening the gallery on other days and hours, as the art crowd would only drop by at openings anyway. Typically for this recently post-Soviet situation, the organizers were a boys' club; no women were represented. Ter-Oganyan was indisputably the main ideologist of the gallery, its inexhaustible driving force.

6. Scholarly attention both in Russia and abroad to this important artist-run space and their weekly exhibitions is surprisingly meager. One of the few critical texts about it, my own, is virtually unfindable since the print run and distribution were so small. See Ekaterina Degot, *Trekhprudny Lane: Moskva 1991–1993* (Rolfstorp, Sweden: Hong Kong Press, 2000), and Andrej Kovaljev, "Trekhprudny: Time to Ask Naive Questions," *Umělec Magazine*, January 1, 2007, http://www.divus.cc/london/en/article/trekhprudny-time-to-ask-naive-questions.

7. For more on APTART, see *APTART: Moscow Vanguard in the '80s*, with introductions by Margarita Tupitsyn and Victor Tupitsyn, ed. Norton Dodge (Mechanicsville, MD: Cremona Foundation, 1985).

With its approximation of a white cube, Trekhprudny Lane Gallery could be described as a site-specific and performative reenactment of the spatial and temporal codes of a commercial art gallery—although without the commerce, there being no art market in Moscow. It was a "gallery as a fiction" akin to Marcel Broodthaers's various *Musée d'Art Moderne* installations, which the Belgian famously wanted to "exist as a museum and fiction at the exact same time."[8] The critical mimetic approach situated Trekhprudny Lane Gallery somewhere close to the legendary *Messe2ok*, a politically engaged, highly analytical alternative fake art fair project organized by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, Dierk Schmidt, Birger Hübel, Michaela Odinius, and others in 1995.

Installation view of *Toward the Object*, Trekhprudny Lane Gallery, Moscow, 1992

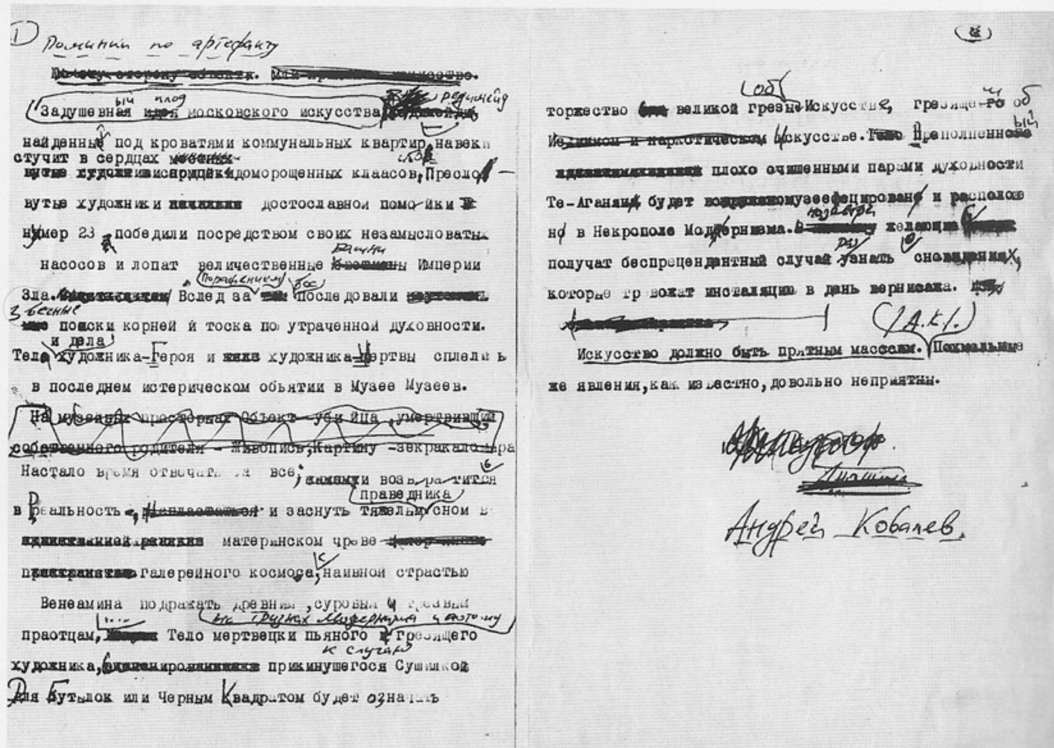
The early 1990s witnessed a sudden awareness of art's display conditions. This was also the era of the rise of the medium of installation, whose conditions—the artist's full control over space, light, and, increasingly, the time of the viewer—were expanded to other media. It was around now that Ilya Kabakov's "total installations," which emerged in late 1980s, reached their most self-reflexive state. His *Toilet* (1992), a fictional tale of Soviet families living in public toilets, was presenting, poignantly, unalienated communal life and culture production as an endless chain of immeasurable violence. Distance and alienation, the division of life's physiology from its cultural ambitions, would have been a salvation here. Conversely, *NOMA or the Moscow Conceptual Circle* (1993) centered on artist friends from Kabakov's times in Moscow, and wallowed in nostalgia about those times and places where an artist's bed was his sole work station, and no object production was expected of anyone called an artist. It is in this context that we have to look more closely at Trekhprudny Lane's fictional commercial gallery, as well as the role of the artist's drunken body in it.

Toward the Object might sound like a performance or a happening. But it should rather be inscribed in a different lineage: that of a singular artistic gesture realized as an exhibition, in the medium of the exhibition, even of the artist as curator. The whole narrative of the Trekhprudny Lane Gallery was about public display in a white cube, then still something stunningly new in Moscow. From time to time,

8. Marcel Broodthaers, "A Conversation with Freddy de Vree" (1971), in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 135. For more on Broodthaers's "museum" project, see Dirk Snauwaert's essay in this volume.

the gallery offered space to solo projects by other artists, but its main fare was the Trekhprudny group's own conceptual exhibitions questioning this particular medium. These exhibitions followed the usual rituals of gallery shows: the exact timing of the opening, installation shots being made, a signature "complimentary drink" (dry juice concentrate stirred in a spirit diluted with water, in plastic cups). They were never announced as performances, although some of them arguably were, but instead as exhibitions. The events also provided the usual critical apparatus that could position the exhibition as a professional one: there was always a "publication," a photocopied A4 page folded in four, containing a text by an art critic or someone from the Trekhprudny artist community. (In the case of *Toward the Object*, Kovalev, the critic who helped Ter-Oganyan get drunk, also penned the accompanying text.)

There was no bed in *Toward the Object*, and the project involved sleep as neither an oneiric state nor a reclusive hideaway, but as a means of bodily immobilization, to the maximum extent possible. For all we know, Ter-Oganyan would have chosen to drop on the floor literally dead, should such a condition have been reversible. Visitors understood this perfectly and reacted to the body in the same way they would have reacted to an abstract sculpture, taking a quick look and then returning to the usual gallery small talk at a safe distance from the "object." What was in play was the petrified exposure of the artist's body, which meant, at the same time, its awkward presence, and the scandalous absence of the artwork whose place the body took.


Поминки по артефакту

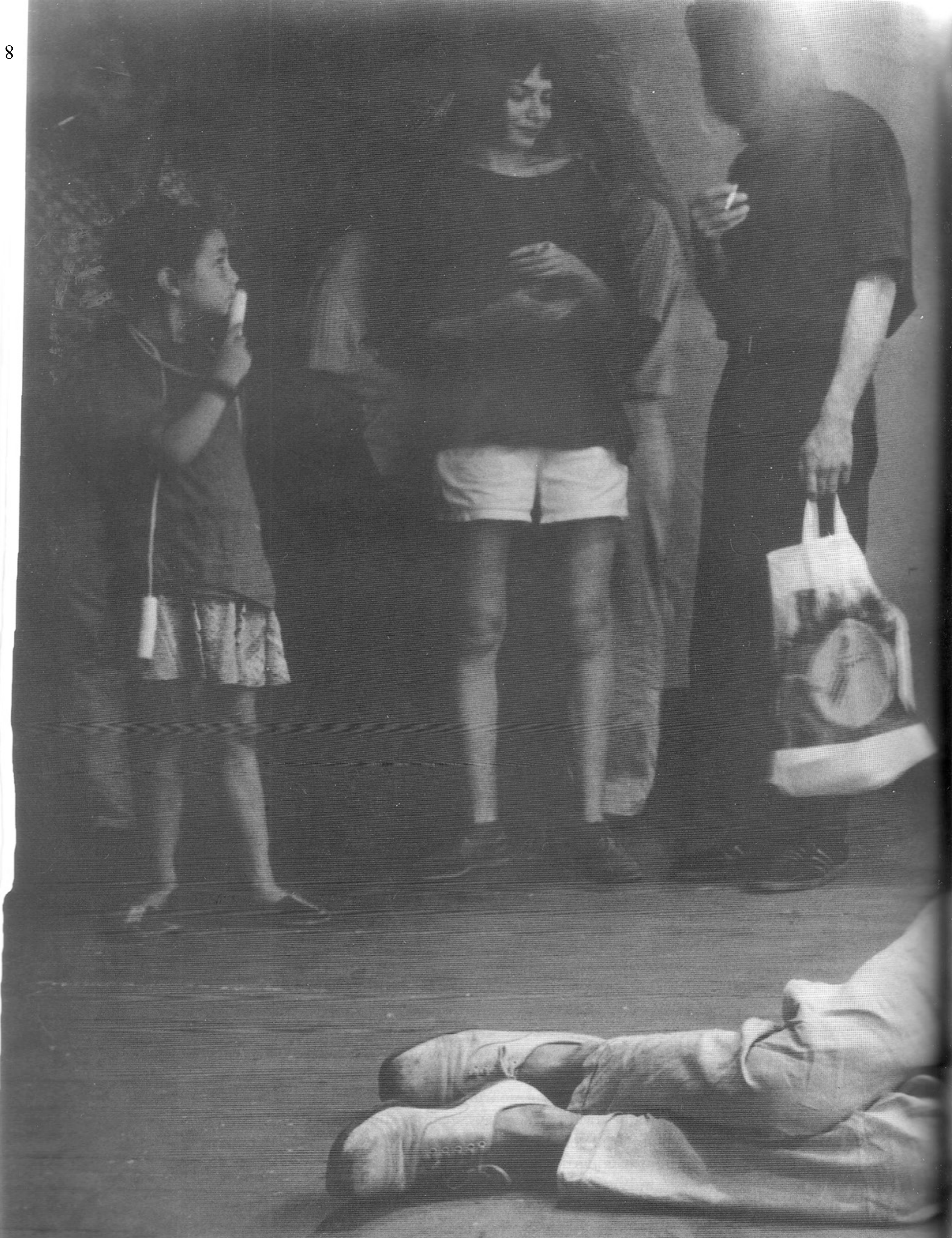
Задушевная идея московского искусства,
найденные под кроватями коммунальных квартир, навеки
стучит в сердцах доморощенных классов. Преслову-
тые художники достославной помойки
номер 23, победили посредством своих незамысловатых
насосов и лопат величественные Империи
Зла. Вслед за последовали
поиски корней и тоска по утраченной духовности.
Тела художника-Героя и художника-Жертвы сплелись
в последнем истерическом обьятии в Музее Музеев.
Настало время отвечать за все;
в реальность и заснуть тяжелым сном в
материнском чреве
галерейного космоса, наивной страстью
Венеамина подражать древним, суровым
праотцам, Тело мертвецки пьяного и грезящего
художника, прикинувшегося Сушилкой
для бутылок или Черным Квадратом будет означать

торжество великой грезы Искусства, грезящего об
Искусстве. Переполненное
плохо очищенными парами духовности
Те-Аганян будет музеефицирован и расположен
в Некрополе Модернизма. желающие
получат беспрецендантный случай
которые тревожат инсталяцию в день вернисажа.
(А.К.)
Искусство должно быть приятным массам. Похмельные
же явления, как известно, довольно неприятны.

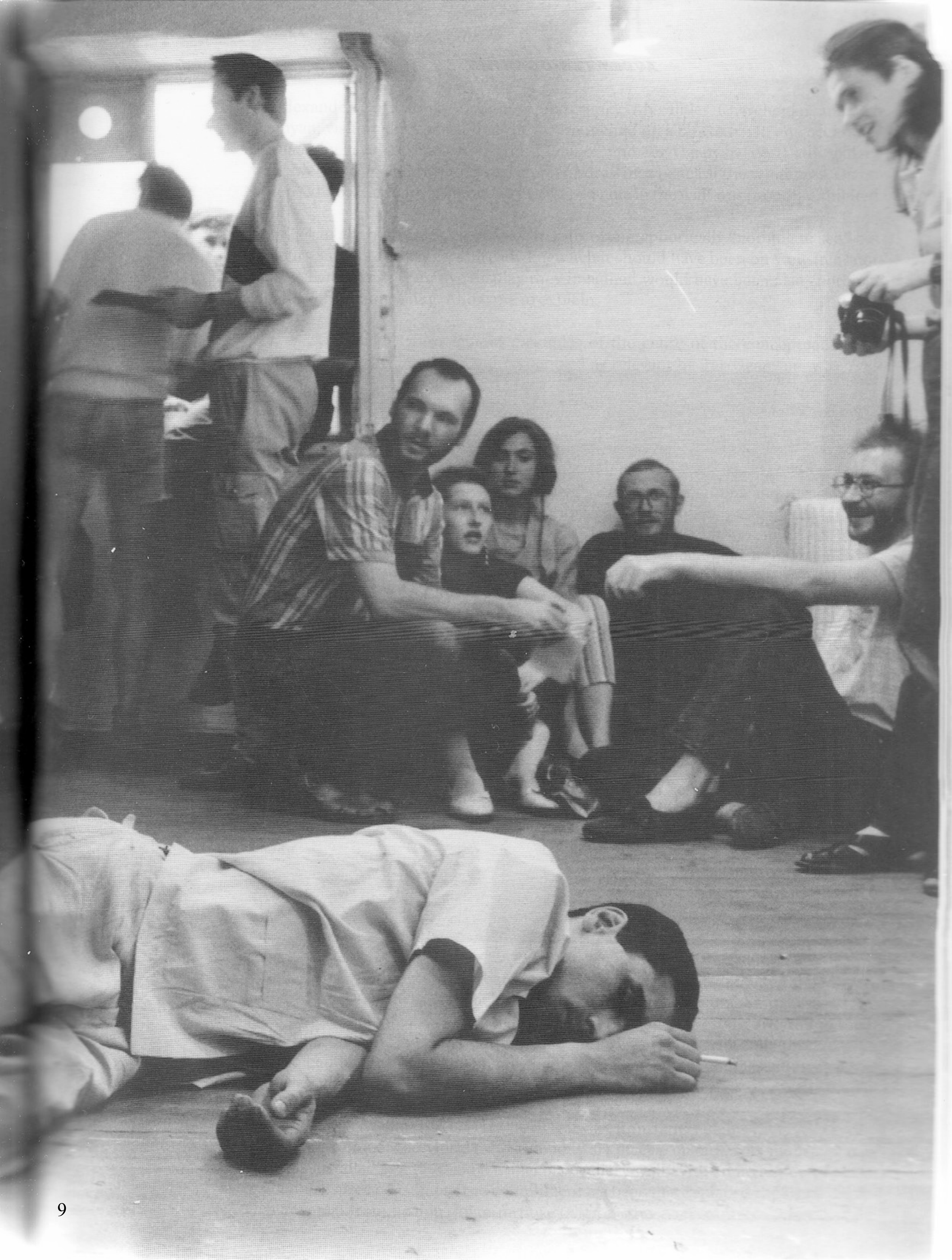
Андрей Ковалев

Andrey Kovalev and Avdey Ter-Oganyan, hand-corrected draft typescript for the *Toward the Object* exhibition pamphlet (1992)

Absence was a genre of choice among the Trekhprudny Lane Gallery's artist-curators. Most Thursdays, visitors could expect to be pleasantly disappointed at being offered some sort of "nothing." In *As Always*, a 1992 presentation by Viktor Kasyanov, in a participatory touch often relevant to Trekhprudny projects the audience found themselves the only object in the room, while the business-as-usual of every "normal" opening (chitchat and drinking) went on. In Alexander Sigutin's *Demi-Season Exhibition* (1991), the coats visitors took off (as is customary in overheated Russian spaces) gradually filled the walls instead of paintings. In *All Moscow* (1992)



Installation view of *Toward the Object*, Trekhprudny Lane Gallery, Moscow, 1992



Installation view of Alexander Sigutin's *Demi-Season Exhibition*, Trekhprudny Lane Gallery, Moscow, 1991

by Alexander Gormatiuk, Vladimir Dubossarsky, Alexander Kharchenko, and Ter-Oganyan, visitors discovered that they were invited on a bus tour. On one occasion—*Meander* by Pavel Aksenov, Konstantin Reunov, and Ter-Oganyan (1991)—the gallery walls were stripped down to reveal amateur drawings beneath the whiteness. On another—Viktor Kasyanov's *Beyond Art* (1992)—a hole in the wall was proudly exhibited.

In all these cases, there was literally or metaphorically "nothing to see," but of course artists and visitors already knew what should have been on view in a "normal" gallery. This normative display they imagined would have been also "nothing," albeit a different nothing. Allow me to explain:

One of the most famous examples of the genre of the conceptual exhibition—undoubtedly known to and recognized as relevant by Ter-Oganyan—was Yves Klein's *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée* (The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility), better known as *Le Vide* (The Void) (April 28–May 15, 1958, at Galerie Iris Clert, Paris). Klein hid art's object in plain sight by making the conditions of its display his main focus. It was a groundbreaking shift. This show is often referred to as having programmatically disappointed visitors' expectations and assumptions by exhibiting "nothing" rather than the expected collection of artworks. But in fact, Klein's "nothing" was highly aestheticized. What he did exhibit was, as he put it in a lecture he later gave at the Sorbonne, painting in an expanded field: a "palpable pictorial state in the limits of a picture gallery . . . an ambience, a genuine pictorial climate, and, therefore, an invisible one."[9] The gallery walls were painted white in an extremely sophisticated manner, a sensuous procedure in which Klein combined pigments and varnishes of his own invention. A sumptuous curtain added to the effect.

This show, which drew curious crowds, was also an institutional mimetic performance. Klein grotesquely emphasized the framing devices of an exhibition (the printed invitation cards were of excessively fine quantity, there was an opening speech, impressive guards were hired, and so on), and of an exhibition in a very established commercial bourgeois gallery (something Galerie Iris Clert was not at that time). What happened, as in the whole practice of the highly influential Klein and other artists around that time, was a shift in what is considered art: from traditional displays rich in details to "chic nothing" that was sleek, pure, and immaculately conceived without the artist's manual work, bearing almost no trace of the artist's body. The fact that Klein famously used women's bodies to produce his paintings only underscored the fact that his own "touch" was now hidden, all the better to achieve a more prestigious immateriality. With this, the principle of negation established itself as a principle of valorization.

This "nothing"—or, rather, its sleek and pure style, its immaterial pedigree, its intellectual elegance, its capacity to produce an elite—was something the artists of Trekhprudny imagined as a paradigmatic manifestation of Western art. And to their mind, this "nothing" was not nothing enough. It was not immaterially produced: it was too handmade, too anthropomorphic, too derivative in its mimesis. It was not a real readymade.

In *Not a Fountain* (1991) by Ter-Oganyan, Konstantin Reunov, and Alexander Kharchenko, one of the world's most famous art pieces, or rather its industrial matrix, *was installed as a functional urinal on a gallery wall, with an invitation to put it* to good use after consuming the complimentary beer that replaced the usual drink. That reversal from upside-down (a reversal from the gesture Andrei Monastyrski

9. Yves Klein's Sorbonne lecture, entitled "The Evolution of Art Toward the Immaterial," delivered June 3 and 5, 1959, is reproduced in Peter Noever and François Perrin, *Air Architecture:* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004),

described with his "lift" hat as an ultimate gesture of display) was a clear critique of Western art standards, delivered with the typical clever self-deprecation of artists from the Eastern periphery. In Russian, "not a fountain" is a colloquial expression meaning "not very good." In this tongue-in-cheek view, a functional urinal was a priori not prestigious, stripped of artistic value, but something artists had to settle for, as Marcel Duchamp's original was unavailable (in the absence of a museum of modern art in Moscow).

In *Toward the Object,* Ter-Oganyan *himself* was like this "fake-because-real" urinal—too human, too real, like a bad actor playing a role. In fact, his own dumped carcass was impersonating an unnamed potential object of exhibition display—an object as such, or rather a desire to become one (the exhibition, after all, was called *Toward the Object*). It would not be exaggerating to say that this sculpture could have been mimetic in itself, like one of Duane Hanson's hyperrealist molds, part of the imaginary "museum of twentieth-century art" to which Ter-Oganyan was constantly referring. We cannot forget his *Paintings for a Museum* series, also of the early 1990s, where he copied, in a consciously sloppy hand-done style and in a tiny format, black-and-white reproductions of canonical Modernist works from poorly printed Soviet books of anti-Modernist critique—works that were never shown in the Soviet Union and that now, with the rise of their market value, would be forever missing from museums in Russia.

The title *Toward the Object* was borrowed from an important 1990 exhibition organized by Moscow's Tsaritsyno Museum that showed the very first state-owned collection of what had formerly been underground artworks from the 1950s onward.[10] The title stressed (but didn't really question) the process of the new objectification and commodification of "free creativity" products from the Soviet Union, for instance the very notion of the artwork as a finite and displayable unit. Curators insisted, as did many Russian art historians and critics of that time, on describing the artworks in this collection with the foreign-sounding word "objects" despite the fact that many of them were obviously handcrafted wooden sculptures and not fabricated readymades.

The term "object" immediately brings to mind Donald Judd's "specific objects," the term he explained in his seminal 1965 text, in which he presented the new artwork as singular, seen at once and not part by part, not scattered and not as composed: "The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting. The main things are alone and are more intense, clear and powerful. They are not diluted by an inherited format, variations of a form, mild contrasts and connecting parts and areas."[11] Judd understood the new artwork as a readymade of sorts, but one that had been "cleaned," its relation to production and industrial history fastidiously wiped away.

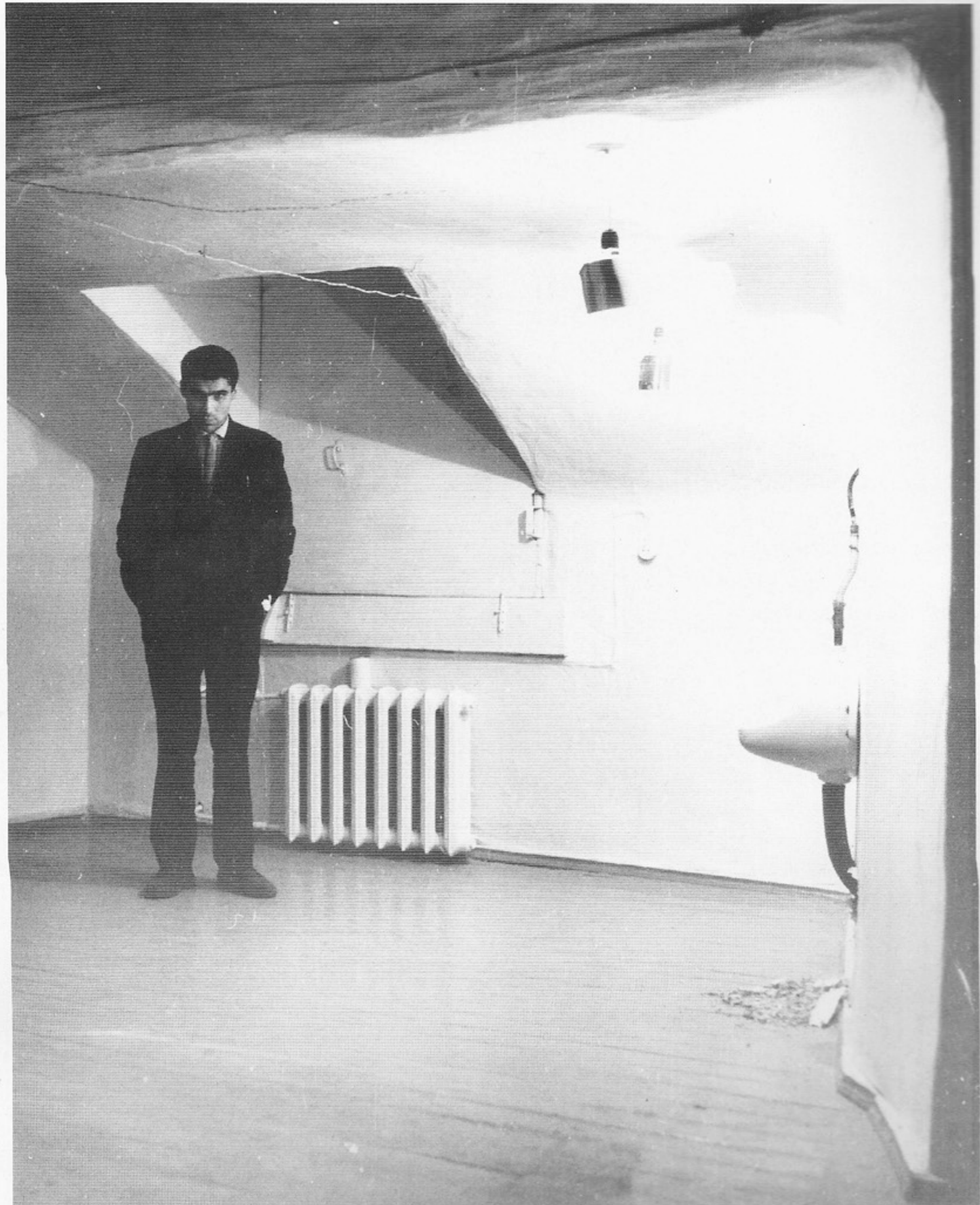
In this context, Trekhprudny's functioning urinal, exhibition visitors themselves, their coats as display objects, and, yes, Ter-Oganyan's drunken body seem like satirical illustrations, performative versions of Michael Fried's famous critique of Donald Judd's positions in *Art and Objecthood* (1967). In it, Fried accuses minimalist objects of being crypto-anthropomorphic and theatrical, the latter term meaning for him inclusive of beholders in the situation.[12] Fried's text was prophetic even if his criticism was misplaced; he outlined many of the paths contemporary art would take. Without calling them minimalist, the aesthetics that combine a readymade device with sleek and clean nonnarrative laconism continue to dominate the Western art scene, and especially its normative condition of display, the still-white cube. In this sense the drunken and clumsy body of Ter-Oganyan reprised the ghostly presence of the repressed and excluded history of the new universal Western minimalism: the mimetic, the realistic, the narrative-based, the formally redundant, the belated, the unoriginal.[13]

10. It took place not at the museum, but at the Na Kashirke municipal exhibition hall. It was also displayed as part of the exhibition *In the USSR and Beyond* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1990, and later became part of Tretyakov gallery, where it is now a core part of the permanent historical display.

11. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," first printed in *Arts Yearbook*, no. 8 (1965), and reprinted in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax, Canada: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975).

12. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," first published in *Artforum* (June 1967) and reprinted in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

13. One should also note that *Toward the Object* was the subject of an enthusiastically exacting remake (including a replica of the accompanying booklet) one year later by another artist, Vadim Kruglikov; Ter-Oganyan was officially named the "curator" of the project.



Installation view of Avdey Ter-Oganyan, Konstantin Reunov, and Alexander Kharchenko's *Not a Fountain*, Trekhprudny Lane Gallery, Moscow, 1991

The role of alcohol in this narrative of self-deprecation and exclusion was crucial. In many Trekhprudny exhibitions, alcohol represented the archaic category of "content" versus "form." This occurred most notably in the 1991 *Form and Content*, by Konstantin Reunov and Ter-Oganyan, curated by drinking assistant and art critic Andrey Kovalev, where visitors were encouraged to bring and exhibit drinks of their choice in vessels of their choosing, and in *Sea of Vodka* of the same year by Pavel Aksenov, Konstantin Reunov, Valery Koshlyakov, and Ter-Oganyan, where a stormy landscape was juxtaposed with an installation of full vodka glasses. This spirit was the only field in which post-Soviet artists felt themselves able to reach the perfection of the "pure nothingness" that otherwise seemed to them too expensive and too institutionalized. Laziness and inaction were in fact already almost out of reach even for Stilinović in the moment he was writing his manifesto. A drunken Ter-Oganyan lying on the floor represented an artwork full of good spiritual plans and ideas, but too unfashionably concrete and, in fact, too hardworking to be invited to the new, immaterial club of the West.