

Alexander Ivanov

Alexander Ivanov was born in Leningrad, now St Petersburg, Russia in 1950. As a child he spent much of his spare time in the Hermitage Museum nurturing his interest in classical and ancient Russian art and by the age of 11, began to experiment with painting.

At age 16, he began studies at the Leningrad Art & Graphic School where he received a classical training. It was his new-found love of 60 s jazz music and the influences of Chagall that began to be reflected in his work and cause problems with his tutors and officials.

Given the social and political climate of Russia at the time, Formalism and Individualism would not be tolerated; Social Realism was the only accepted form of art. Unable to live with the repression of his individual expression, he left the art school in 1972, his 4th year, and decided to search for freedom by joining a geological expedition to the north of Russia. As he always had a romantic notion of the north, he decided to settle near Archangel. There, he became absorbed with the traditions and folk art of the region. He adopted forms of Russian icons into his work and a traditional woodwork technique (Lubek) which can be seen in his work ever since.

Although he exhibited in small exhibitions throughout the early 70 s, his first one man show in 1977 opened and closed the same day, victim of official repression. It was about this time in Leningrad that artists were beginning to organise clandestine exhibitions of their work in private apartments. This drew Ivanov back to Leningrad where he joined a group of artists and was able to exhibit his work there and in Moscow. This was a period of great artistic activity for him and an almost specific style of expression emerged, of which Ivanov was one of the leading lights, accompanied by Chemiakin and Genardier.

Despite his activity as a painter and a printmaker, he was obliged to work in a boiler room to support his family. Such work was a common recourse to intellectuals then, but he was able to spend much of his spare time making musical instruments, as music was one of his great interests.

Musical instruments and players feature consistently in his artwork. In the late 1980 s several Moscow firms published illustrations and calendars of Ivanov s images. His work was discovered by the German government, who invited him to take part in a Russian/German Symposium. From there he was invited to exhibit in Holland and England. His work was then discovered by galleries in America and Japan and is now widely exhibited throughout the world.

In February 1996, the 46-year old Ivanov, one of Russia s major talents, was killed in an accidental fire in his home in St Petersburg, Russia.

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