



History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism (MIT Press)

Boris Groys

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In the 1970s and 1980s, a group of "unofficial" artists in Moscow -- artists not recognized by the state, not covered by state-controlled media, and cut off from wider audiences -- created artworks that gave artistic form to a certain historical moment: the experience of Soviet socialism. The Moscow conceptualists not only reflected and analyzed by artistic means a spectacle of Soviet life but also preserved its memory for a future that turned out to be different from the officially predicted one. They captured both the shabby austerity of everyday Soviet life and the utopian energy of Soviet culture. In *History Becomes Form*, Boris Groys offers a contemporary's account of what he calls the most interesting Russian artistic phenomenon since the Russian avant-garde.

The book collects Groys's essays on Moscow conceptualism, most of them written after his emigration to the West in 1981. The individual artists of the group -- including Ilya Kabakov, Lev Rubinstein, and Ivan Chuikov -- became known in the West after perestroika, but until now the artistic movement as a whole has received little attention. Groys's account sheds light not only on the Moscow Conceptualists and their work but also on the dilemmas of Soviet artists during the cold war.

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