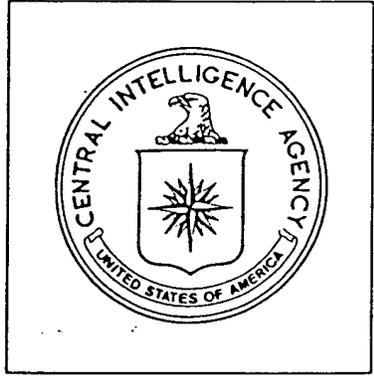


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STAFF NOTES

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SOVIET UNION - EASTERN EUROPE

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Ernst Neizvestny Lectures at
George Washington

On October 4, emigre Soviet sculptor Ernst Neizvestny spoke to a poorly publicized symposium at George Washington University on the "catacombs of Soviet culture." Neizvestny seemed very much on guard, clearly wishing to avoid the political aspects of his topic. As a highly politicized artist, however, he did not wholly succeed. There follow some interpretive notes from this gathering.

Neizvestny is best known in the West for his altercation in December 1962 with Khrushchev over the merits of abstract art and for the monument that he sculpted in 1974 for Khrushchev's grave. He wished people knew more about the 5,000 other works he has created, many of which dot the Soviet landscape and adorn its public buildings. The best of the lot are not publicly displayed, however, or were never purchased by the state. Neizvestny has managed to take most of the latter category out of the USSR, though much remains "stored" there (according to an embassy report, at the dacha of Khrushchev's son Sergey--a detail Neizvestny omitted). During his career in the USSR, Neizvestny was never permitted to exhibit his works, despite--and after 1964 probably because of--his reconciliation with Khrushchev and subsequent close ties with the family.

By his own count, Neizvestny tried sixty times in vain to visit the West to "fertilize" his art through contact with nondidactic ideas. Last year, he finally decided, and indeed was part pushed, to emigrate "to Israel," a step requiring renunciation of citizenship and thus exile. Neizvestny did not mention the tribulations he underwent--including KGB harassment and his numerous appeals to his various contacts in the Central Committee--before he received an exit visa last March.

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The sculptor described himself not so much a dissident as a "normal man" who would not accede to corruption of his conscience and his art as required by the state. Neizvestny said he slid into independent thought and action early in his student days when he and a handful of others organized cultural study circles. The aim was to bring knowledge of the humanities and even some frivolity to those suffocated by the pompous diet of communist doctrine and Marxist history that characterizes a non-technical Soviet education.

Neizvestny repeatedly emphasized the gulf between the "official" art of socialist realism and non-doctrinaire, "unofficial" art of all kinds. The latter is not all good, but it is imaginative, rich and flourishing in the "catacombs." He implied, however, that most artists serve both the state and their art, to the extent that the income from state-commissioned work enables them to do their "real" work.

To dramatize the sometimes bizarre aspects of Soviet official culture, Neizvestny displayed a pamphlet issued by the artists' union intended as a guide for sculptors. Listed in hierarchical order were the following examples of state-desired statuary, each with a suggested list price:

- Marx, full length, commanding the top price
- Marx, bust, a little cheaper
- Lenin, full length, cheaper still
- Lenin, bust, even less
- corresponding treatment of lesser lights in the communist pantheon, each commanding a somewhat lesser price, as do the following
- group of workers
- a worker alone

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--group of workers and peasants

--one worker, one peasant

--a peasant alone

--child playing with red star

--child playing

Neizvestny added that needy artists naturally sought out commissions for full length Marxes or at least Lenins, being thus assured not only of money but of fame. He explained that such statues require unveiling by the top political leader of the region or institution that commissioned the work. Since no such leader can unveil anything but the best, the work is always declared outstanding.

Touching briefly on the competence of the regime's censors at the Central Committee level, Neizvestny referred somewhat favorably to the times of "Ilichev's ideological commission"* whose staff, he thought, had a simple but clear grasp of what was permissible. Neizvestny seemed to imply that while current practice may at times result in more leniency, it is also more arbitrary and, for a sculptor, unpredictability of this kind can be costly. (~~CONFIDENTIAL~~)

*From 1962 to about 1965 party secretary for culture L. F. Ilichev also chaired a newly created ideological commission attached to the Central Committee apparatus. Its task apparently was to synthesize the related tasks of several Central Committee departments which the commission outranked. Following Khrushchev's fall, the commission apparently was dissolved, perhaps coincident with Ilichev's removal from the Secretariat in March 1965. The relevant Central Committee departments thereafter presumably resumed their earlier roles under the supervision of Ilichev's successor, Demichev.

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PUBLICATION OF INTEREST

Directory of USSR Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Officials, CR 76-14079, September 1976. This publication is an unclassified reference guide to leading officials of the Soviet Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces. It includes a Ministry of Defense organization chart and a listing of party positions held by military officers.

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