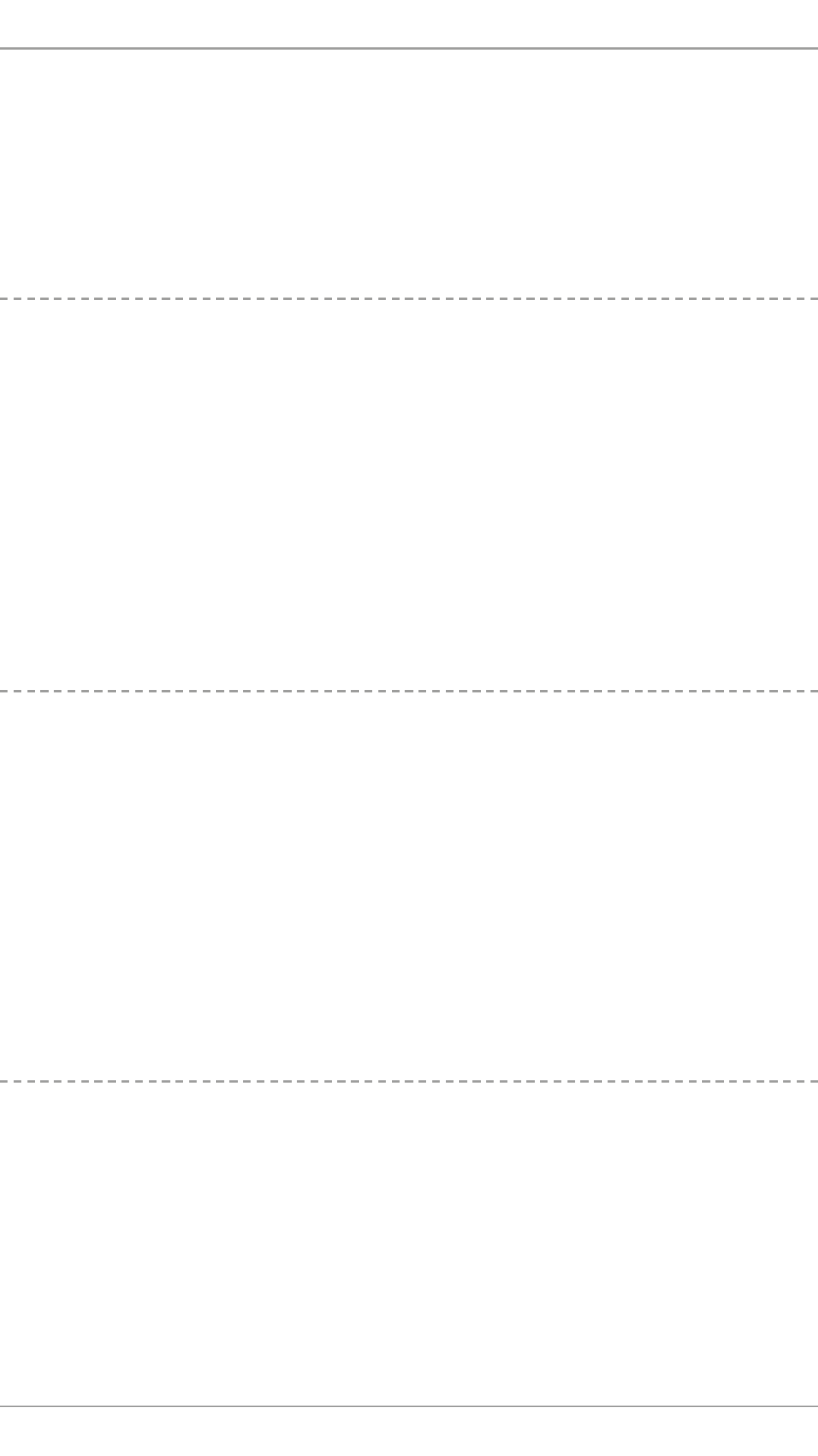


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Star Vengeance is both an exhibition and an essay. It explores ideas that seem fantastical despite having been conceived by scientists alongside concepts and narratives imagined by artists that seem quite believable. At the centre of the exhibition is the figure of the fully-realised human being: a scientist, writer, artist, and experimenter who creates the world anew, piecing it together from personal ideals and precise facts, imaginings and scientific experiments, general principles and private concerns.

Star Vengeance takes its name from a five-part novel by the Russian science-fiction writer Yuri Petukhov, the hero of which battles the universal forces of evil alone. Petukhov has the same surname as one of the exhibition participants, the artist Alek Petuk (Petukhov), and the similarity of their names led to reflections on how coincidences, both real and imaginary, have influenced European conceptions of the role and place of the individual in the world.

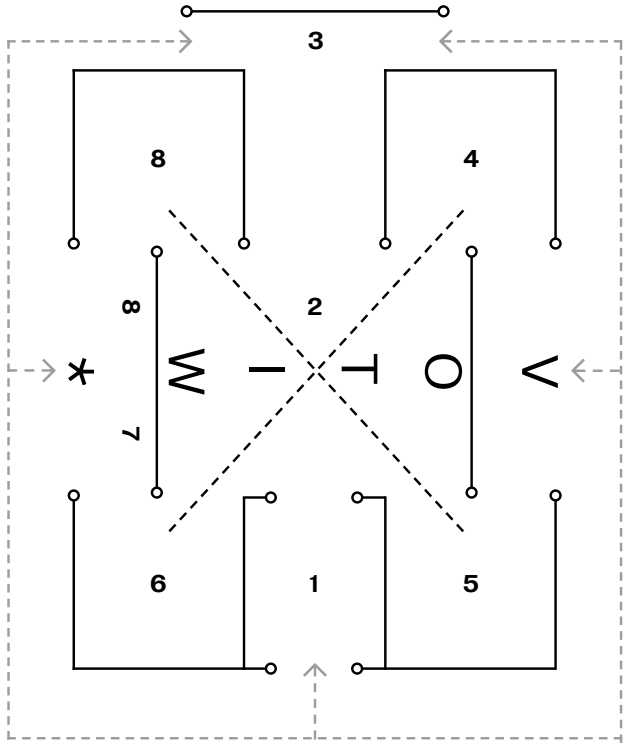
Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (circa 1490) illustrates an idea that has been at the centre of Western culture over the last centuries: the human being is the foundation and measure of all things. "As above, so below" states the principle of likeness or analogy. This tenet of hermetic philosophy was of great influence on Renaissance scientists and thinkers and all European culture of the years that followed. According to this idea, man and the universe are seen as mirror images of one another. Accordingly, the purpose and task of man is to return the world to its original harmony, the foundation of which he must find within himself. The European alchemists pursued the same end. They searched for the philosopher's stone because it would enable not just the transformation of "base" metals into "noble" silver and gold, but also the transmutation of matter, the transfiguration of consciousness—that is, it would enable the world to be brought into correspondence with a higher, desired order.

Today, in the context of the increasing spread of social networks, of artificial intelligence, and of a personalised approach in all spheres of production and consumption, human consciousness seems poised to merge with the global informational and technological environment, and the Early Modern era's promised "Reign of the Human Being" looks more probable than ever before, although it does not guarantee humans freedom. Amidst today's digital informational flows, which greatly exceed the cognitive ability of any single individual, we find ourselves alone once again, each of us forced

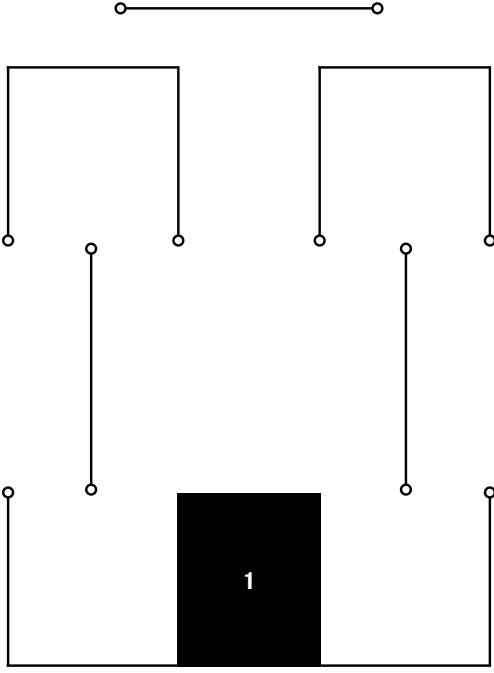
to seek a formula of the world (a philosopher's stone) that will allow us to piece together a coherent picture of it from an endless diversity of knowledge and practices, symbols and objects.

The protagonists of *Star Vengeance* are united in their search for such formulas. The artists Francisco Infante–Arana and his son Severin Infante; the utopian thinker and scientist Nikolai Morozov and his ideological successor, the mathematician and graphic artist Anatoly Fomenko; the artist, book designer, and poet Evgeny Strelkov and the interdisciplinary Order of Sophic Marxists; the science fiction writer Yuri Petukhov and the contemporary artist Alek Petuk (Alexei Petukhov), a member of the Coincidental Institute project and a student of the logic of coincidences. The architects of this exhibition, Katya and Yura Plokhov, who are also members of the Coincidental Institute, were inspired by the ideas of the architecture theorist Stephen Lauf, the author of “The Timepiece of Humanity,” an article that interprets the body of the *Vitruvian Man* as a measure of time.

The symbolic relations running between the main characters in this exhibition and its spatial structure are arranged according to the principle of analogy, creating a maze of reflections in which members of the curatorial group also recognise themselves. Visitors are given a choice—to view the exhibition in its entirety and construct a general picture from all of its elements, or to choose a single thing; to stay within the maze or to venture beyond it.



1. Library



One finds a small library at the main entrance to the exhibition. It contains works that either portray key figures in the project or were written by them, as well as books that showcase the range of themes and subjects touched upon by *Star Vengeance*. These works can be taken down from the shelves and read in the exhibition hall.

Images generated by the Order of Sophic Marxists using the ruDALL-E neural network are also displayed here. This anonymous group of philosophers and artists published a programmatic text in 2022 titled “Marx the Alchemist,” in which these images featured as illustrations.

“Marx the Alchemist” examines the philosophical views of Karl Marx from a hermetic and alchemical perspective, bringing dialectical materialism into dialogue with religious philosophy in general and sophiology (the teachings of Vladimir Solovyov, Sergei Bulgakov, and Pavel Florensky) in particular. Both systems of thought share an anti-authoritarian logic: the concept of a certain universal divine or communal (in Marx’s terminology) human element, the essence of which is freedom and creativity. This element allows humankind to attain immortality, omnipotence, and justice by revealing its inner potential rather than through submission to external institutions and authorities. The article holds that the alchemical processes of the transmutation of matter and the transfiguration of consciousness are ultimately identical to the process of socio-economic transformation in Marxism.

The text contributed by the Order of Sophic Marxists can be seen not only as dealing with alchemy but as being, in a way, a product of it: its authors blend historical elements of the hermetic and Marxist traditions with fictions of their own invention. Ultimately, the Order considers speculative games of meanings as an effective method of altering reality.

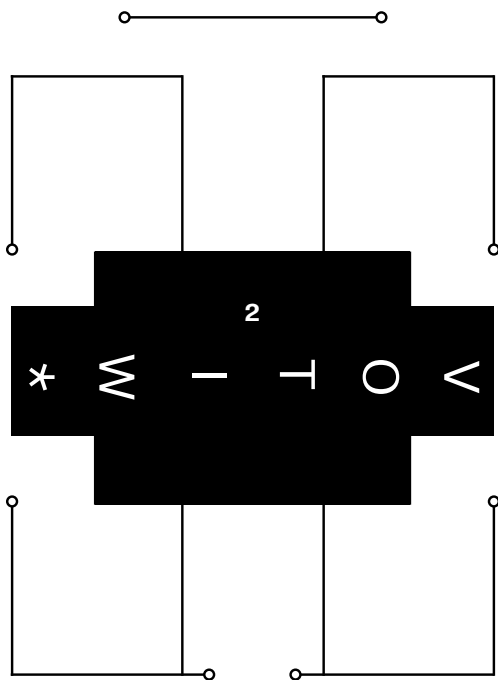
The group’s use of neural network image generation reflects their fascination with artificial intelligence as a tool capable of enabling the development of collective imagination and of teaching people as well as learning from them.

You can read “Marx the Alchemist” by scanning the QR code.

2. VOTIW*

Coincidental Institute and Alek Petuk, 2018–2023

Performative lecture / novel, architectural installation



*VOTIW** comprises elements of architectural installation embedded in the structure of the exhibition, a series of site-specific performative events, and an eponymous artist's book intended to summarise and illustrate the knowledge gathered through these processes.

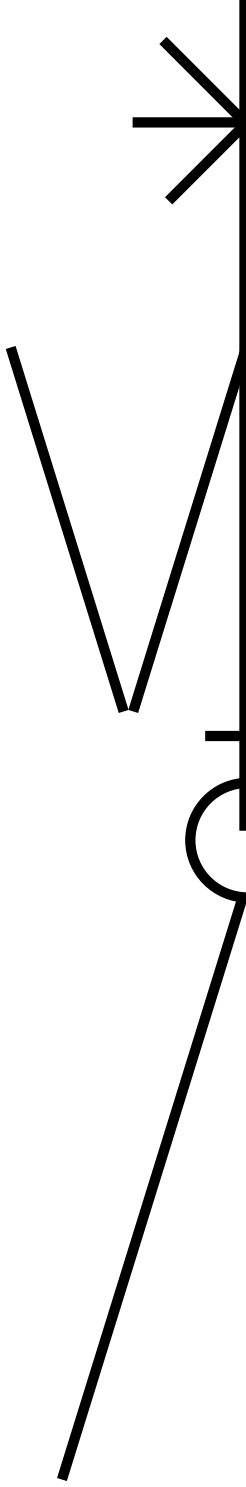
In this work, Alek Petuk and the Coincidental Institute develop a process of phenomenological reduction that seeks and affirms the minimal requirements for an artwork to be considered an artwork. Such searches determined artistic life in the first half of the twentieth century, and are discernable in the literature, fine art, and music of that period. In fine art, one of the most famous examples of this approach is Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*, a painting that declares the meaning of an artwork to lie in the opposition of figure and background within a rectangle. The *VOTIW** project takes its cue from a poem by the mathematician Francois Le Lionnais, who was also the founder of the OuLiPo literary group, other members of which included Marcel Duchamp and Italo Calvino—in this poem, Le Lionnais proposes that the literary work be reduced to a single letter.

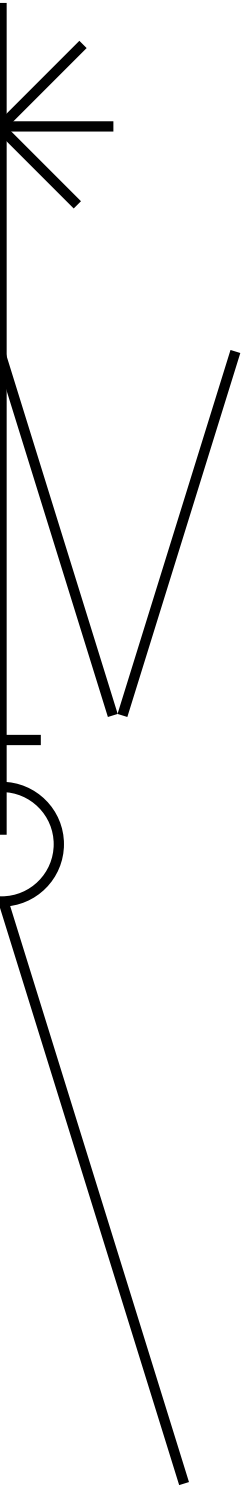
Through study of Le Lionnais's criticism, the history of modernist art, and Wassily Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane* (1926), Petuk derives a synthetic work of five letters and seven symbols. According to Petuk's concept, the purpose of this work was to "place historical time in oneself and work as an assembler of semantic diversity." Visitors can learn more about Petuk's concept and mechanism from his artist's book and performative lectures.

Another important component of *VOTIW** is the K-fitness educational public programme, which combines theoretical discussions and body practices. K-fitness will conclude with a collective performance staged by programme participants. To view the lecture schedule and register, please visit the GES-2 House of Culture website.

Star
Vengeance

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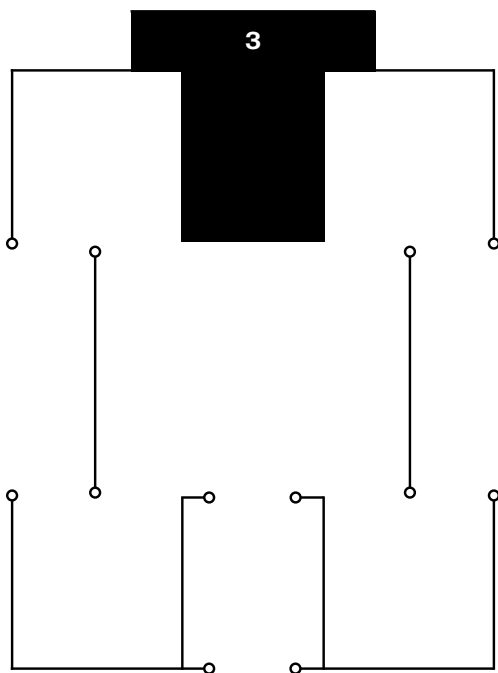




3. *Petukhov : petukhov*

Alek Petuk, Anna Pronina, 2023

Multimedia installation



The *Petukhov : petukhov* installation was made especially for the *Star Vengeance* exhibition. Its starting point is the similarity of the surnames of the artist Alek Petuk (Alexei Petukhov, b. 1984) and the writer Yuri Petukhov (1951–2009).

In contemporary Internet folklore, Petukhov is a science fiction writer primarily known for his *Classifications of Extraterrestrials*, a work which fantastically combines the classic monsters of Western mass culture and the heroes of Russian fairy tales. In the 1990s, Petukhov became known as the publisher of the newspaper *Voice of the Universe* and as the author of sci-fi blockbusters. *Star Vengeance* is his most popular work—it went on to spawn four sequels, becoming a pentalogy. In this work, Petukhov constructs a fantastic universe in which humans coexist with numerous other races and travel through space using the “axial dimension”—a meta-space for transit between worlds. The task of *Star Vengeance*’s main character, the space trooper Ivan, is to avenge his parents and save the Earth.

The central part of the *Petukhov : petukhov* installation consists of a video-essay in which two narratives intermingle: the personal history of Petukhov the artist, who was born in Ukhta in the 1990s and spent his childhood and youth there, and a reconstruction of the legend of Petukhov the writer’s death. The artist Alek Petuk returns from Moscow to his native town in the Komi Republic, meets his friends and family, and visits the abandoned village of Petukhovo where his father’s family originated. In parallel, the writer Yuri Petukhov lives out his last days.

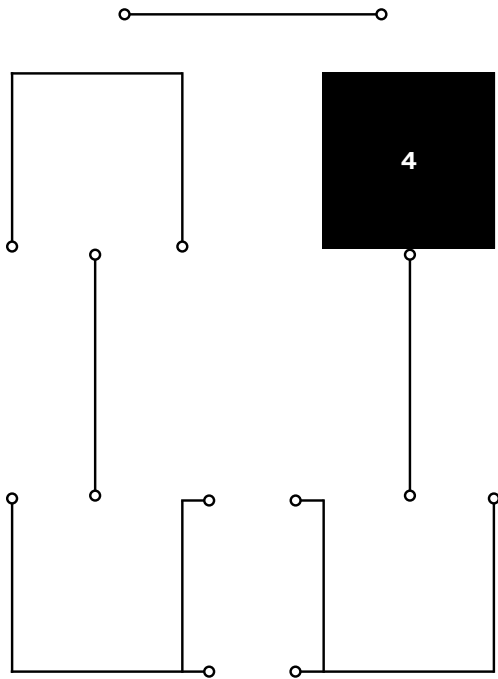
The authors of the video-essay draw on the “materialist dialectic of coincidences” method developed by the philosopher Yoel Regev (b. 1972). The Coincidental Institute, the transdisciplinary group to which Alek Petuk belongs, works on the practical development of this method. Petukhov the artist analyses his own biography and the life of his generation through the prism of Petukhov the writer’s views and work. Yuri Petukhov’s zone of critical focus is profound post-Soviet resentment, which finds creative expression in his namesake’s artistic practice. Petuk also attempts to understand the aspirations that led him to abandon his family profession and a prestigious job in his native town to become a contemporary artist.

The installation includes a series of objects that investigate and supplement the narrative of the video-essay—the sculptural

depiction of the Demon, for example, which represents images of aliens in Petukhov's *Classifications*. The sculpture is reminiscent of gargoyles, the stone figures that adorn the façades and decorate the drainpipes of Gothic architecture. Petuk's creation holds a monitor in its mouth, which plays video material that was not included in the final version of the video-essay.

Opposite the Demon, one finds the original illustrations of Petukhov's books by Alexei Filippov. One also finds another object beside the video-essay: *The Alchemist's Box*. This is a reconstruction of a small box from the Ukhta apartment of Petukhov the artist's mother, Irina Evgenyevna Petukhova (née. Alexeeva). It contains a strange selection of items—cheap knick-knacks from a hardware store, readymade objects including a map of the village of Petukhovo drawn by the local resident Vladimir Zelenin, fir branches from the grave of Alexei Vladimirovich Petukhov, the artist's grandfather. A dry hogweed branch which accompanied the film crew on their trip to the village of Petukhovo also forms a part of the installation.

4. Nikolai Morozov



In his youth, Nikolai Alexandrovich Morozov (1854–1946) was a member of the *Narodnaya Volya* party. He went on to become a multidisciplinary scholar, a populariser of science, an aeronaut, a cosmist, and a poet. He was an acting member of the Russian Physical and Chemical Society, the Russian Astronomical Society, and the French Astronomical Society, and an honorary member of the Moscow Society of Science Enthusiasts and of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Morozov owed this encyclopaedic development to a twenty-five-year jail sentence served for the revolutionary convictions of his youth. Over the years, his circle of acquaintances would include Leo Tolstoy and Dmitri Mendeleev, Ilya Repin and Valery Bryusov, Anatoly Lunacharsky and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky.

The leitmotif of Morozov's research and cultural popularisation was not merely the idea of discovery—rather, Morozov aspired to the transformation of the world. He developed a hypothesis of the possible transmutation (“evolution”) of atoms, according to which a given chemical element could be transformed into a different one. This hypothesis was outlined in his *Periodic Systems of the Construction of Matter* (1901), a work which long predated the twentieth-century discoveries of nuclear physics.

Morozov's study of science led him to rethink world and religious history. In his book *The Revelation in Thunder and Storm* (1907), he proposed an original interpretation of the Book of Revelation as a metaphorical description of a real natural phenomenon which, according to his theory, John the Apostle would have observed on the island of Patmos. His seven-volume work *Christ* (1924–1932) was the result of further investigations. In this work, Morozov radically re-examined generally accepted historical beliefs, claiming that a number of historical figures and even ruling families had in fact been the same people. Morozov's revision was founded on the dates of solar eclipses and a mathematical comparison of the genealogies of different dynasties. The founders of the contemporary “new chronology,” Anatoly Fomenko and Gleb Nosovsky, consider Morozov their direct predecessor.

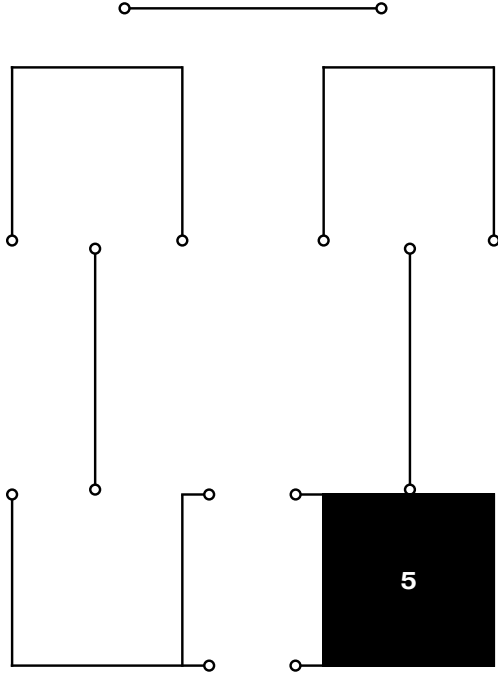
The figure of Nikolai Morozov is important for this project not just as a thinker and embodiment of the Renaissance man: Morozov was also the conscious successor of revolutionary hermeticism in the spirit of Giordano Bruno. Telling in this respect is his interest in the history of alchemy, as shown in his work *In Search of the Philos-*

opher's Stone (1909), as well as his alleged involvement in Russian Freemasonry and, most importantly, his interest in the transformation of society through knowledge.

The paradoxes running through Morozov's multifaceted oeuvre are of great significance to this exhibition. On the one hand, Morozov's work partly originated in a firm belief in the rationality and potential omnipotence of humankind, and much of Morozov's long life was dedicated to proving this in practice. Yet a number of his contemporaries saw his radical reconsiderations as having been motivated by a grievance from the long years he spent in prison. The writer Yuri Olesha described this aspect of Morozov's personality: "So, you deprived me of the world? Very well then! Your world never even existed!"

The section of *Star Vengeance* dedicated to Morozov exhibits personal items, furniture, gifts from friends and admirers along with other items from the Memorial House-Museum in the village of Borok (Yaroslavl Oblast). There are also several graphic collages from the series "Thunder and Dream" dedicated to Morozov by another participant in the project—the contemporary artist Evgeny Strelkov.

5. Evgeny Strelkov



Evgeny Strelkov (b. 1963) is a modern-day Renaissance man. An artist, poet, physicist, curator, populariser of science, and creator of museum exhibitions, Strelkov is one of the most important figures both on Nizhny Novgorod's art scene and in Russian art of the last three decades.

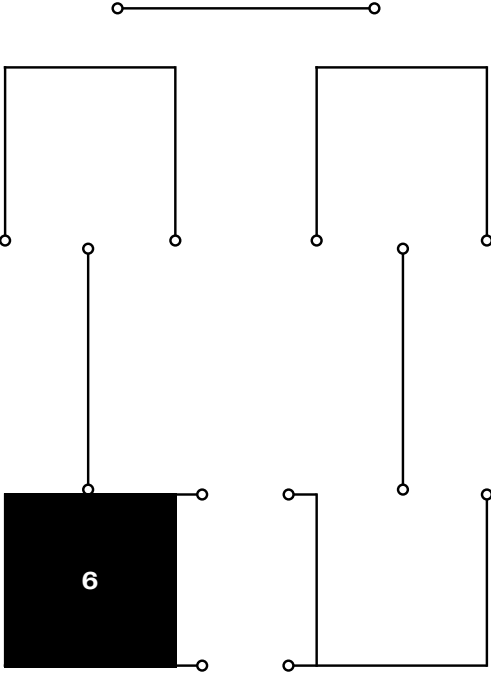
Strelkov's projects often feature figures who, like the artist himself, find themselves at the boundaries of different fields of knowledge or dispute these boundaries by unconventional methods or theories. These include both historical figures and fictional characters synthesised by Strelkov on the basis of real prototypes — Andrei Sakharov, for example, the creator of the Soviet hydrogen bomb and human rights advocate who spent six years in exile in Strelkov's native Nizhny Novgorod (then Gorky). Three issues of Strelkov's graphic almanack *Black / White* were dedicated to Sakharov—*Triade A. D. S.*, *Throne of Nature*, and *Synthesis*, and fragments of each of them are on display in the *Star Vengeance* exhibition. The academic Vsevolod Troitsky, another of Strelkov's heroes, played a key role in the development of Russian radio physics, took part in founding the international SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) programme, and proposed a method of diagnosing malignant tumours using intense thermal radiation. These subjects are featured in the almanack *The Problem of Contact*. Along similar lines, the fictional rocket engineer Ilya Strafievsky, the protagonist of Strelkov's artist's book *The Canals of Mars*, enjoys the very process of creating fictional worlds and fantastic creatures.

Nikolai Morozov holds a special place in the gallery of Strelkov's characters for this exhibition—Morozov's legacy formed the basis for the *Thunder and Dream* graphic almanack prepared by Strelkov especially for the *Star Vengeance* project. This work can be found in the memorial part of the Morozov section, which Strelkov took part in preparing. Strelkov sees Morozov as a cultural hero who casts a "long shadow" as much in the real history of the twentieth century as in its historical mystifications—and these are, Strelkov insists, just as important.

Strelkov thinks of himself as a postmodernist, and deliberately makes no distinction between affirming the alchemic omnipotence of the human being and ironically criticising man's self-importance. On the other hand, when characters begin to vanish and the artist is left alone with his imagination and erudition, the register of his

work shifts almost imperceptibly. *CyberNeuroFauna* is an example of this—its detached and ironic play with images and stories of the past makes way for the approach of a scholar and artist who, like his characters, genuinely enjoys the act of creating fantastic beings and utopian worlds.

6. Anatoly Fomenko



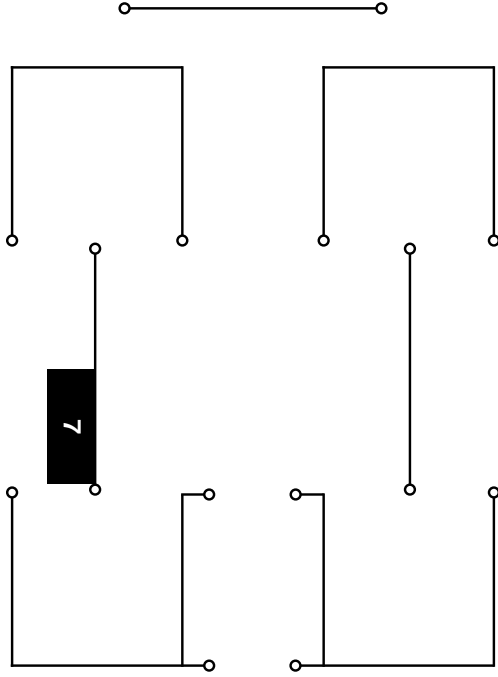
The Soviet and Russian mathematician, academic of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and winner of the State Prize of the Russian Federation Anatoly Fomenko (b. 1945) is primarily known to the wider public for his “new chronology,” a historical theory he has been occupied with since the early 1980s. Continuing the legacy of Nikolai Morozov, Fomenko’s historical views are based on a theory (which lacks support in the scientific community) according to which the real history of humanity is much shorter than people believe and most historical narratives are mere phantom reflections of one another: they arose, according to Fomenko, as a consequence of various translations, retellings, and adaptations, and sometimes through deliberate manipulations by historians and chroniclers. Thus, Fomenko believes, the narrative of world history should be fundamentally re-examined and, once duplicate events have been removed, its chronology ought to acquire a more ordered and elegant appearance.

The *Star Vengeance* project does not set viewers the task of definitively assessing Fomenko’s historical views, but rather invites them to explore his artistic legacy. From the second half of the 1960s, Fomenko developed a process of synthesis of abstract mathematical and mytho-symbolic thinking in cycles of graphic works. The products of this process can be seen in the “Images in Topology,” “Images in the Theory of Manifolds,” “Images in Mathematical Analysis,” “Images in the Theory of Differential Equations and Physics,” “Images in Variational Calculus,” “Images in Algorithmic and Computational Geometry,” and “Images in General Mathematical Concepts” series. Each of these graphic works is supplemented by two types of annotation. One explains its mathematical provenance, the other its mythological significance.

Through this approach, the reality of an abstract model and the objective, cultural, and historical reality of life are contemplated as a single whole. Fomenko does not assert the omnipotence of an imagination capable of creating and transforming entire worlds. Building his image system on a precise mathematical foundation, he highlights its objectivity, justification, and authenticity, reaching beyond people’s limited ideas. By emphasising the mytho-symbolic meaning of his works at the same time as he roots them in the history of culture, Fomenko endows myth with the meaning of practical formulas—things that not only can but must exist.

Fomenko's practice can be compared with the ideas of the philosopher and writer Nick Land (b. 1962), particularly Land's concept of hyperstition, which makes itself real and acts from the future on the present, deliberately piecing together the former out of the latter. For Fomenko, the field of action becomes the past, which can be mathematically revised and reassembled to change everything here and now.

7. Timepiece of Humanity



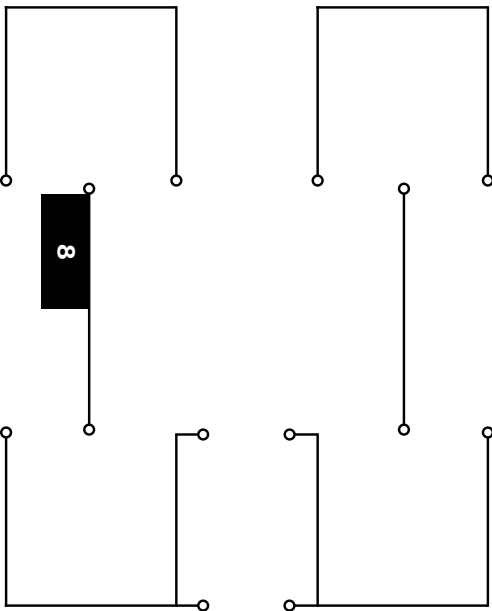
The ideas of “The Timepiece of Humanity” laid the foundation for the “theory of chronosomatics” of the architect and artist Stephen Lauf (b. 1956). Analysing the artistic tradition of the depiction of the Annunciation during the Renaissance, Lauf corrected Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man, combining the centres of the square and circle in which he is placed. According to the author’s concept, the structure of the human body becomes a three-dimensional and symbolic model of the collective reality of all humanity—its past, present, and future.

Lauf’s work combines architectural theory, art history, personal history, and avant-garde artistic methods. The “theory of chronosomatics” has become the life’s work of its author. Lauf regularly updates archives of his work dating from the late 1980s on the websites *quondam.com* and *museumpeace.com*.

Lauf’s attention to issues of historical chronography brings him into dialogue with other participants in the *Star Vengeance* project. *The Timepiece of Humanity*, which is represented in this exhibition by an illustration to Lauf’s original article reproduced in wood, conceptually resonates with the VOTIW* installation, which proposes that the production of collective knowledge be seen as a bodily-symbolic, performative process. According to Lauf, we currently find ourselves at chest level on the calendar incarnate. In the VOTIW* sign system, this part of the body is symbolically equated with the letter W.

You can learn more about Stephen Lauf’s ideas by listening to an audiobook on headphones at the exhibition, as well as by reading his programme articles.

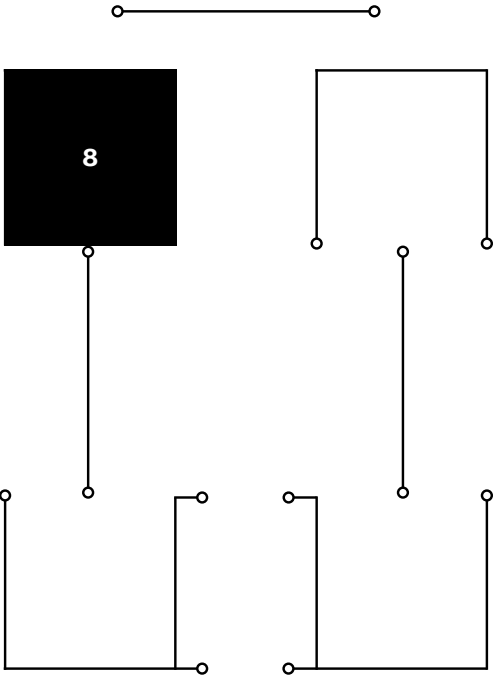
8. Francisco Infante- Arana and Severin (Paquito) Infante



Francisco Infante–Arana (b. 1943) is a recognised classic of unofficial Russian art of the second half of the twentieth century, one of the pioneers of kineticism and land art. His abstract compositions, moving objects, and installations made important contributions to the ideas and approaches of the Russian avant–garde in the post–Thaw period, and expressed global artistic trends of the 1960s and 1970s. The idea of universal systems is highly important for Infante–Arana, whose artistic thought is embedded in the logic and structure of natural processes and landscapes.

Infante–Arana’s early geometric composition *Birth of the Vertical Line* (1962) is often seen as a manifesto in which the link between the vertical and horizontal, the dialectic of their unity and opposition, is revealed in the language of abstraction. Infante–Arana’s symbolic gesture consists in dividing the whole into two equal parts. This operation begins with the central horizontal axis, which crosses the surface of the canvas, and continues in each of its halves. The new horizontal line divides the resulting vertical volume in half once more. A new axis is born from these continuous divisions. It also divides the canvas in half, but this time vertically.

Perpetual division can be interpreted as an image of the birth of the world, a summary of its history. This interpretation gives Infante–Arana’s *Vertical Line* an affinity with other works in this exhibition, in particular, with the VOTIW* project, and with Stephen Lauf’s *The Timepiece of Humanity*—independently from Infante–Arana, the latter carries out a similar operation, setting its vertical scale as a sequence of circles and squares aligned with one another, where each pair is exactly twice the size of the previous one.

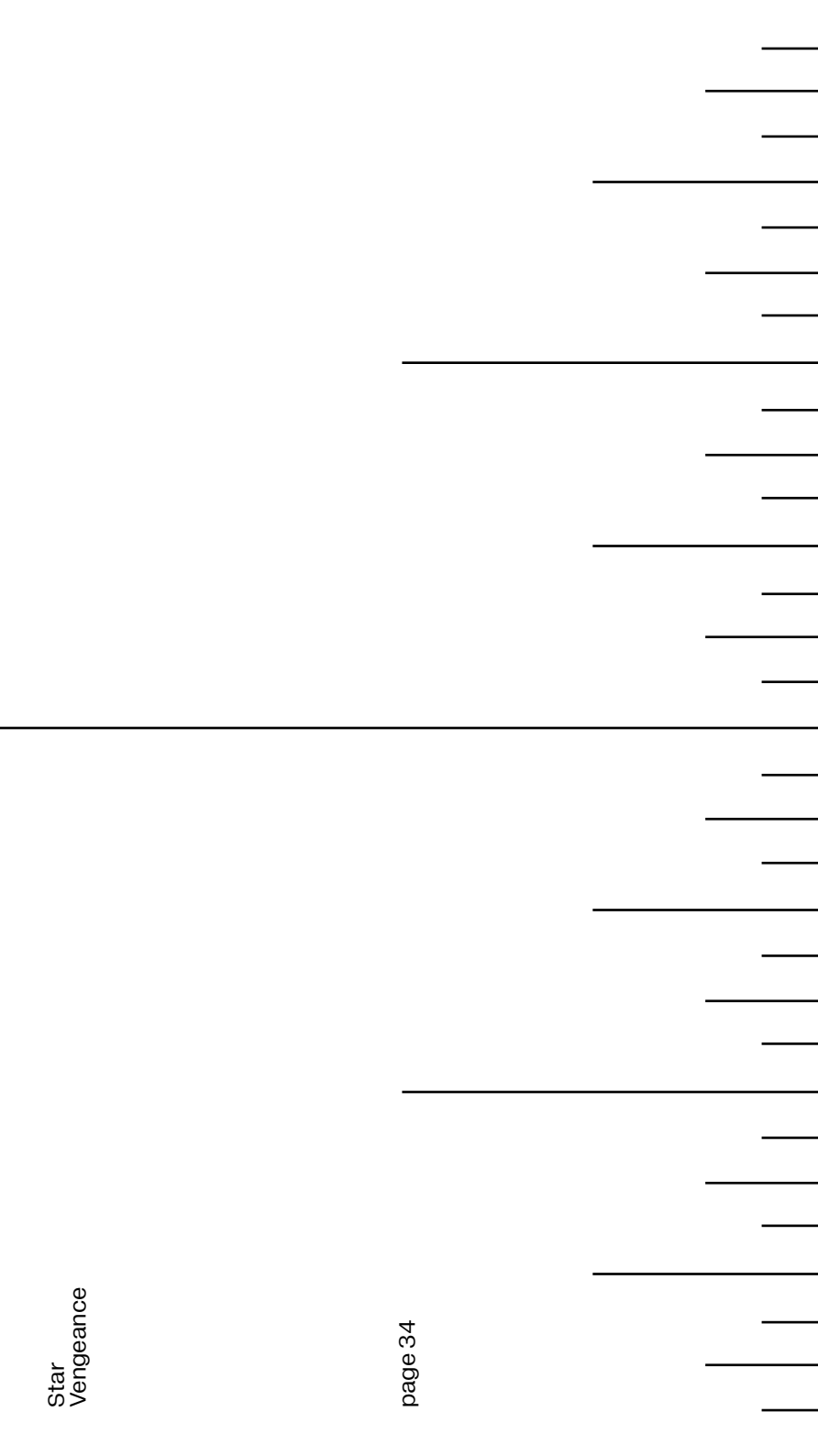


A similar symbolic line can be traced in the context of the Infante family history, from father to son.

The artist Severin (Paquito) Infante (b. 1971) is often regarded as his father's successor. At first glance, Severin's art does indeed represent a development of the ideas and approaches of Infante Senior—albeit in new, often more technically complex mediums and forms. However, an internal family conflict lies behind the similar methods used by father and son. Severin and Francisco have long been engaged in a battle for supremacy in discovering the foundations of reality itself, its Mystery. Ultimately, this is a battle for fatherhood in the metaphysical sense.

In his autobiographical book *AutoAlbum*, Francisco Infante-Arana dedicates a chapter to his son. He writes about his son's *infantility*, but also notes his profound artistic gift, which reaches beyond art into the realm of mystical forces and visions. Infante Junior, whose given name is Paquito, took the name of Kazimir Malevich's father, Severin, as a pseudonym, thus asserting his symbolic primacy in relation to the entire Russian avant-garde.

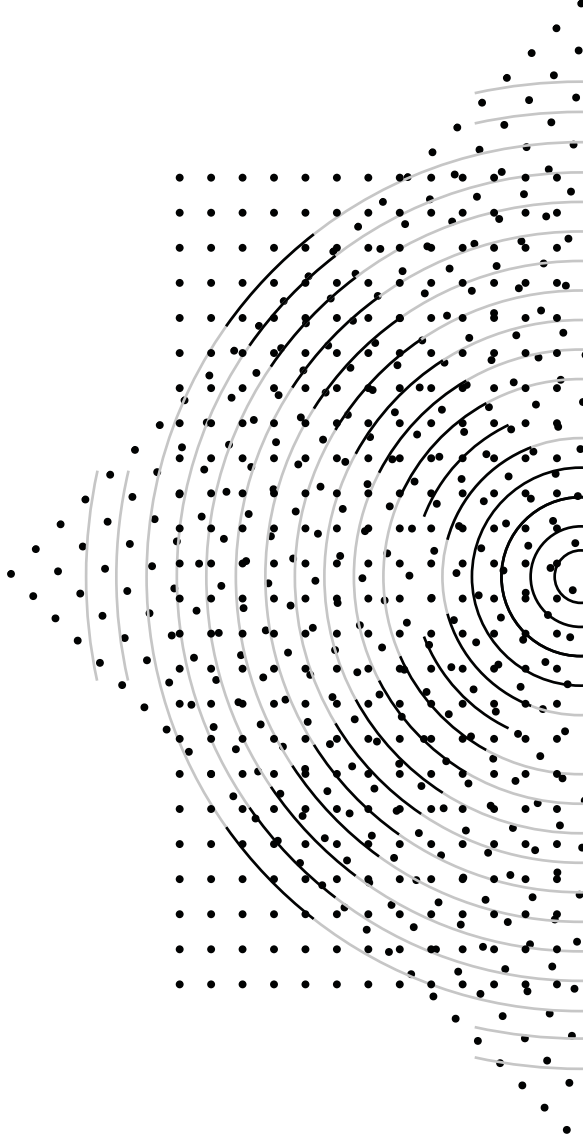
The tension of these relations can be observed in the *Spatial Experiment: Square* (1997, 2023) project by Severin Infante and Anya Goryunova, exhibited together with Francisco's painting. This is a light and audio-kinetic installation, designed to be viewed lying on the floor and looking upwards at an LED square flickering in the darkness. The construction gradually descends, rotating around its axis, approaching the viewer's head. The birth of the vertical thus becomes an event in time and space—an abstract formula is transformed into a sensory experience.

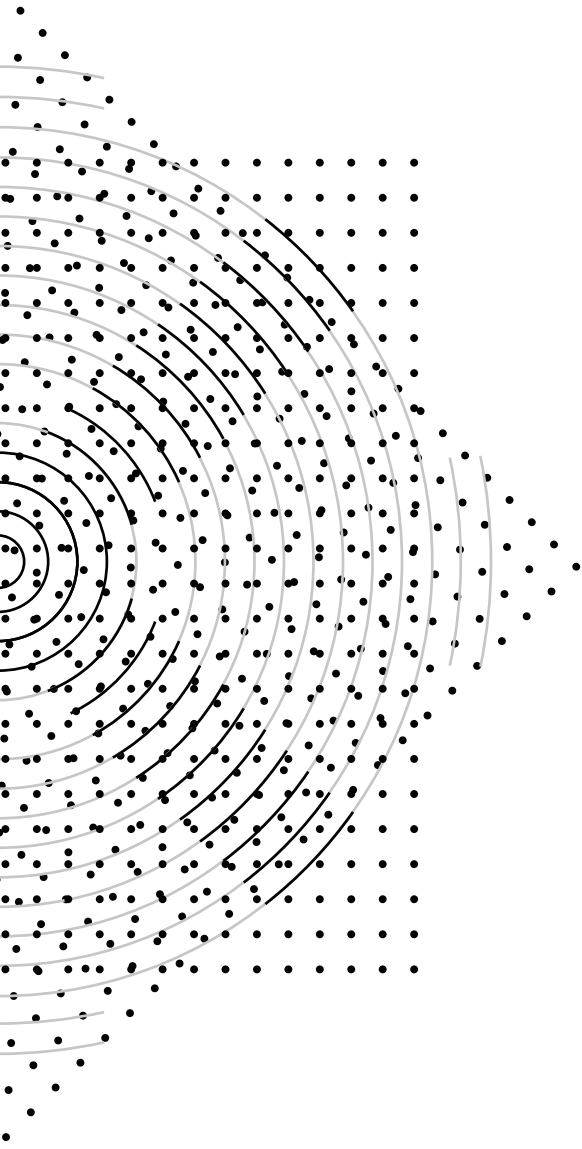


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Alek Petuk

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Francisco Infante-Arana
Stephen Lauf
Nikolay Morozov
Order of Sophic Marxists
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Evgeny Strelkov

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