

STENOGRAM OF THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE ARTISTS OF THE UNION OF SOVIET ARTISTS OF MOLDAVIA (15 MAY, 1951)

Agenda: Preparation for the organization of the Republican Exhibition of Moldavian Artists.

Chaired by: Comrade Grigorashchenko, the chair of the executive committee.

Present at the Meeting: Fourteen members of the Union of Soviet Artists of Moldavia.

In the presidium—members of the committee: comrades Merega, Dubinovskii, Ershov, Sevastianov, Kobizeva, Livshits.

The chair, Comrade Grigorashchenko, presents a brief report on the preparations for the Republican Exhibition of 1951.

Comrade Grigorashchenko: Comrades! The question regarding the organization of the 1951 exhibition was discussed at the plenum of the Organizational Committee of the Union of Soviet Artists of the USSR. During the debates at the plenum it was pointed out that our socialist reality is not sufficiently conveyed in the work of our artists. . . . The executive committee [*pravlenie*] set new tasks before the Moldavian artists: to start preparing for the exhibition of 1951, to discuss the thematic range, etc. but one sees no development in the artists' work. The committee also left this work to chance. The heads of the sections have lost

their sense of responsibility in this regard. The deadlines for the review of the sketches were not met.

Comrades! It is necessary that we start the work again and that things not slip from the hands of the committee. It is necessary to help artists materially. All the funds in the Artists' Fund must be made available to artists. It is necessary to organize creative bases. In a very short time it is necessary to form creative brigades for the preparation of the exhibition.¹

Regardless of the short deadline, the exhibition must be held in accordance with the highest artistic standards, and we must not leave this work to chance.

[*The head of each section reports on the progress of its members.* O.E.]²

Comrade Kobizeva [*Head of the Sculpture Department*]: Even though the sculptors have been busy working for the All Union Agricultural Exhibition, they will also participate in the Republican Exhibition.

Comrade Dubinovskii is currently working on the theme—“Tamara Cheban.”

Comrade Averbukh—on “The Korean Family.”

Comrades Dobroshinskii and Krakoviak are working on the portraits of the heroes of socialist labor, comrade Keptenaru on portraits of heroes of labor, comrade Nobizeva on a work entitled *The Oath of Democratic Youth to Peace and Friendship*.

We will provide Kotovskii's and Lazo's one-meter-long models and the thematic composition *Comrade STALIN among the Moldavian People*.

Comrade Sevastianov [*Head of the Painting Department*]: Comrades! [. . .] Based on the individual plans of the members of our section for the Republican Exhibition, we have lined up the following thematic compositions: Gamburd must submit the work entitled *Kotovskii at the Kishinev District Court*. He hasn't yet started to work on this theme. For now he wants to go to the countryside in order to collect materials and paint portraits for the planned exhibition. This means that we don't really know whether Moisey Erimovich is going to work on this

1 The term “brigade” (*brigada*, in Russian) denotes a group within the workforce and was widely used in the former Soviet Union, especially in agriculture, where it was introduced during the mass collectivization drives of the late 1920s and '30s.

2 The word “section” (*seksia*) here refers to the Unions' departments organized according to an artistic medium—for instance, the Union's Painting Section, Sculpture Section, Decorative Arts Section, or Section of Critique.

painting or not, so we cannot yet have a clear idea about the fall exhibition. [. . .]

Grigorashchenko is working on a series of watercolors entitled *The Friendship of the Moldavian and the Great Russian People* [. . .].

Gabrikov is working on a sketch *Lenin and Stalin*. He hasn't shown the sketch either in the section or to me as head of the section. He has asked for more time to gain clarity about his compositional theme and then he will show it [. . .].

Comrade Livshits [*Head of the Art Criticism Section*]: The basic plan for the Art Criticism Section is to work on a book. However, the section will take part in the work on the exhibition. Now the section is working together with the committee to help the artists: it will offer consultations to artists. Lectures will also be organized that will help artists who are producing works, especially lectures concerning the question of nationality in art and the process of art-making.

The main work of our section will be done after the exhibition: to prepare the catalogue, to debate the exhibition, and to get coverage in the press. Maybe we will also be able to organize a few lectures for the workers in order to demonstrate the achievements of Moldavian art [. . .].

[*After the reports submitted by the heads of the Sculpture, Painting, and Art Criticism Sections, the artists begin debating.* O.E.]

Comrade Grecu: Comrades! I think that our meeting must look into those shortcomings in our work that prevent the successful preparation for the exhibition which has been planned for some time. This is the main objective of our meeting today. Of course, we have to list what we have done and say who is working on what. All the heads of the sections have set out the work that still needs to be done for the 1951 exhibition which will take place, as you all know, in November. These presentations by all the section heads were bureaucratic without exception because they limited themselves to enumerating who was working on what, and the head of the graphics section even declared that one artist is already working while another hasn't started working yet [. . .].

We have a range of rather basic unanswered questions that concern the artist's work on himself, the relation of the artist to his work. When such questions are raised there are people like the artist Vasiliev, who uses quotes from Lenin to offend a comrade. When, during our last discussion, I asked a question about [redacted] in order to come to a

conclusion regarding a certain issue, Vasiliev stated that Lenin once said: “One fool poses a question and one hundred wise men cannot answer it.”

This is how we react to something that must be thoroughly clarified and discussed. Therefore our art critics must step forward and think more seriously about every comrade, to try to understand his shortcomings, conduct a series of lectures, conversations, and discussions in order to bring to light everyone’s weaknesses and reach concrete results.

I think that we are just not working enough, and we are not active enough because of certain moments that each of us experiences. Recently I was in the studio of Dubinovskii, and when we started discussing an interesting issue on which I was speaking in my last creative report, concerning certain creative exercises that each artist must carry out daily in order to find in a painting that moment when its psychological content is illuminated, or the materiality of that moment, I was told: “Comrade Grecu, you’re wasting your time with nonsense.”

I think that such an attitude toward me is not really a good one and it cannot help me grow [. . .].

Our collective would be capable of solving these questions, but why there are biased opinions about individual comrades, I just don’t know. For instance, comrade Livshits says: “Comrade Grecu, I think you are a Cézannist!” Every time I come to [him] with some question he always answers me like a person whom he knows from a certain position, even though he did not find this out himself—someone told him about it. I feel offended both after my creative report and in relation to individual comrades, because comrade Livshits has a prejudice toward me. If he sees my shortcomings, then he needs to look at them more deeply, be patient and find a way to convince me; if I am wrong, he needs to tell me that I am lost, and that’s it [. . .].

Comrade Dubinovskii: Comrades! The situation is very alarming indeed. This is my personal opinion, and we need to talk seriously about this now.

The first thing is the complete indifference. Take, for instance, our meeting today. It is always the same people who gather here and who also participate in our exhibitions, but those to whom we must talk most of all, work with them, give them attention; those who contribute the least—they remain again on the sidelines.

I cannot agree that one of the reasons for the complete indifference

of certain comrades is the reason comrade Grecu talked about. That's indifference to one's profession, [for] they are like singers who do not find it necessary to practice their arpeggios in order to develop their voices; instead, they sing only when they are before a concert, when they can receive money for this. We have to talk very seriously about this obligation today. This problem closely relates to our exhibition and it can have an impact on the exhibition itself [. . .].

I literally feel the inertia on the part of the majority of Union members, not only with regard to the exhibition but to everything [. . .].

I believe that our mistake, the mistake of the committee first and foremost, is in fact that we did not come to this meeting with precise evidence; we don't know who is working on what. Formally speaking, everyone can take up an interesting theme, but we must not end up in the situation of Rudenko from Tiraspol or of Maloi, who could not realize the themes they had conceived.

I believe that by merely listing who is working on what we cannot have hard knowledge of how the work is going, and we cannot see the true face of our exhibition.

I think that literally from tomorrow on we need to reconstruct our work in order to visit each artist, in order to see who is working on what, activate people toward daily work. The situation is grave, comrades, very serious. There are 5 months left until the exhibition [. . .]. We have forty-four members in our Union. I don't know what puts the brakes on [their] work. Today we have to uncover the reasons why the artists have sunk into complete indifference; they have ceased being artists and are only listed somewhere as artists [. . .].

Comrade Ershov: [. . .] One can conclude, from the statements [and] speeches made by the heads of each section, it seems to me, that the artists are uncertain about their themes. Specifically, it is not clear to me, who is working on what; nothing has been said about this until now. Is it possible to say who is working on what? It is possible. But can anyone in such a short time develop a theme more or less seriously? No. Why? On the one hand, these people are so to speak badly provided for materially, and on the other hand, we do not have concrete instructions as to who is supposed to be working on what. Take for instance Semyonov: he was working on this painting *Kotovskii*. The painting is done. The acquisition of this picture or its rejection is unknown [*sic*].

I consider that one of the reasons is clear enough, because the art-

ist cannot work anymore. He cannot provide for himself materially, and if he ever paints another painting in the future and if this uncertainty still persists, he would simply paint for himself. I think that on the part of the Directorate of Artistic Affairs and on the part of the museum administration, it will be necessary to think seriously about such comrades. After all, we are dealing not only with Semenov; we also have Khazov who hasn't finished his portraits, and a number of other comrades who do not know what lies ahead of them [. . .].

We have also talked a lot about brigades. We need to organize brigades, comrades [. . .]. We have too many geniuses who consider themselves great artists and who do not want to form brigades.

In order to be able to paint something big and serious in time for the 1951 exhibition, brigades have to be formed. Take, for instance, the theme "The Construction of Hydroelectric Power." Can one artist succeed in painting such a theme in the course of three months? Why not create a brigade? [. . .]

Comrade Silin: In his report, the chairman of the executive committee, comrade Grigorashchenko, painted a rather dark picture of the current state of the work of our artists for the 1951 exhibition. [. . .] The committee has apparently not understood the objectives placed before the artists of Moldavia by the Third Congress of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Moldavia, the objectives that were put forward by the plenum of the Organizational Committee of the Union of Soviet Artists of the USSR—with comrade Grigorashchenko in attendance—and finally the objectives put forward by the Directorate of Artistic Affairs of Moldavia, of which comrade Grigorashchenko has unfortunately not said a single word. The committee must immediately review this question; since there is very little time left until the exhibition, it is imperative for everyone to raise his sense of responsibility in preparing the artists for the 1951 exhibition and to offer the artists every kind of practical help, for such a work pace seriously risks the failure of the exhibition we are presently discussing, and it seems to me that no one will allow this to happen [. . .].

In our Socialist reality, artists must—I want to underline this especially—they must show the Socialist labor of the Soviet people by creating truthful and life-affirming, deeply political, and party-minded works that glorify the greatness of our time, [works that are] worthy of our Soviet people. In this case, and on the request of the vice chairman of the Directorate of Artistic Affairs of the Moldavian SSR, comrade

Prilepov, who is absent today due to illness, I just want to convey to you that only such works will be bought by the Republican Museum of Art. There is money for acquisition, but there are no artworks.

If the artists present such works, the acquisition could even take place tomorrow. When I told comrade Prilepov that the available amount may not be enough for the acquisition, he declared—and asked [me] to tell you—that if the available amount of fifty thousand rubles is used, then the Directorate will find ways to add that same amount, but the main thing is that there is nothing to buy. So far the artists haven't submitted anything [. . .].

Comrade Averbukh: The Directorate of Artistic Affairs gave us a signal regarding the 1951 exhibition. Without this, nothing would have happened. Several reviews of sketches were planned, they were not provided [. . .].

When the executive committee was just formed, we invested great hopes in this, but unfortunately these hopes were not justified. I'm not saying that we need nannies, but still we need to pay attention and find out what the artists are doing. I made a political caricature in wood, Boris Nikolaevich looked at it, approved of it, but was anyone really interested in it? Did anyone else say one word of encouragement? Nothing [. . .].

In this way the committee is detached from the collective; it takes decisions outside of any connections with the collective, it's simply indecent to hear the talk that is circulating [. . .].

The committee must always be informed about what the artist is working on. The other day I made a sketch, but I'm afraid to work on it. I'd like the comrades to look at it, because this is a totally normal thing. The committee must always be in close contact with the artists [. . .].

Comrade Meregá: [. . .] On the 29th of March, the Committee for Artistic Affairs of the USSR issued an order requiring the organization of the exhibition of 1951. We called a meeting for March 30 in order to clarify the tasks set forward before the Union of Soviet Artists of Moldavia. Among them was the immediate task of preparing for the 1951 exhibition. I will not keep your attention on this any longer. I will read you what activities have been planned as part of the preparations for and execution of the 1951 exhibition of works by Moldavian artists.

[Reads the plan of activities.]

Comrades, these are the activities planned by the executive committee for the exhibition of 1951 [. . .].

Comrade Grigorashchenko: What are the comments regarding the activities?

Comrade Dementiev: I'm surprised that the leadership of the collective hasn't made use of such an old and proven method as the socialist competition.³ This may bring very effective results!

Comrade Silin: Comrade Dementiev! Socialist competition is practiced first of all in those socialist institutions where labor is determined by certain norms. As a matter of fact it is not recommended we take on socialist obligations if they will make for more work than a person is allowed to take on. How could artists even compete in creative activities? We could misinterpret here the very principle of socialist competition! [. . .]

Comrade Gamburd: We are discussing here a whole range of questions that have been raised already in our collective during general meetings and in our sections. To find solutions to these questions is not that simple, but there is one question that we must fundamentally discuss, the question of how artists relate to the surrounding reality, and how they work and live. It is no secret that we work very little on improving ourselves and come to exhibitions with an insignificant number of pieces that are also not of high quality. Such meetings are organized every year, and each year we worry that we will fail the exhibition. I believe that the main cause behind the inertia within our collective lies in the collective itself, even though everyone is blaming the committee [. . .].

Comrades, it is the artists who are guilty!

Comrade Ershov: [. . .] Comrades, we have transformed this meeting into empty talk.

Comrade Sevastianov: I think that the main question that interests us right now is the exhibition of 1951. [. . .] Shall we go to each artist's home? How can we characterize this? On April 19 at the sectional meeting it was decided that we would look at the sketches during the first days of May, but nobody presented anything. Of course, the committee is guilty. Since nobody does any work, it will be the committee that will have to prepare the sketches. Is this how you see it? [. . .]

Comrade Grigorashchenko: A lot has been said here today,

3 The socialist competition was a part of the Soviet economic model in which socialist workers were encouraged to "over-fulfill" their quota in order to reach production targets. Those who managed to do so earned the title "hero of labor."

but nothing specific. I will begin where Dmitry Kuz'mich stopped—I would like to talk about discipline, which is now badly needed in order to mobilize us and the whole collective [. . .].

Yes the committee has made a mistake, and now they must acknowledge it, and not only acknowledge, but also quickly fix it [. . .].

We could now talk for a long time about who is guilty. Everybody is guilty, and first of all the committee. The committee will try very soon to bring to life the planned events, which hopefully will get things moving, but a lot will also be demanded of you. It will be demanded first of all that you demonstrate conscientiousness toward those tasks that have been placed before you.

Comrades! I will not hold you here any longer, but at the end of my speech I would like to note that under any circumstances the exhibition must and will take place. An assurance of this will serve the very sharp speeches made here today, speeches that will also have practical usefulness and help us straighten the course of our work. This, in any case, is the wish of those who gathered here today. We can all rest assured that they will take part in the exhibition.

On this note, let me please close this question.

TRANSLATED BY OCTAVIAN EȘANU