ONLY PERSIST

Works by Ernst Neizvestny

from the Collection of Wayne F. Yakes, M.D.

September 13 - November 8, 2012

The Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

Curated by Simon Zalkind

Battle of Children, 1986
acrylic on canvas, 44 3/4″x 69″

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by Therese Jones, PhD

Three Masks, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 28″x 22″

When we think about the scientific process, we think about laboratories, experiments and facts. And just as the sciences require special facilities to support human discovery, so also must the arts have distinctive spaces to celebrate human imagination. "Only Persist: Works by Ernst Neizvestny" is the inaugural exhibit in The Art Gallery at the Fulginiti Pavilion, which is dedicated to bridging the cultural divide between science and art in order to explore the most fundamental questions about human experience: who we are and how we care for one another.

It has taken years of persistence, patience, generosity and creativity to complete this facility at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus (AMC). In all academic health centers, the whole of a person — his or her cultural identity, experiences, beliefs — is often reduced to the discrete components of a patient — symptoms, test results, diagnoses. The visual arts can be a powerful corrective to the dehumanizing excesses of contemporary health care, as well as an immediate reminder of the wondrous complexities of life and death. However, no other academic health center has a building like the Fulginiti Pavilion. It is unique, offering the campus community and the greater community a place to exchange ideas, inspire collaboration, foster compassion, fuel imagination, transcend boundaries and realize the universal appeal of the arts.

There are many people to thank for this major accomplishment. First and foremost, we would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Vincent A. Fulginiti, Chancellor Emeritus of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, and his wife, Shirley. Their passion for the arts and their commitment to education have inspired this gallery, a space that Shirley believes will quickly transition from being unusual and "ahead of its time" into something that students, faculty, and patients will recognize, and even expect, as a critical element in health care education, practice and research at AMC. We would also like to thank Professor Mark Yarborough, former Director of the Center for Bioethics and Humanities, for his leadership and vision, and Dr. Dori Biester, current Acting Director, for carrying that vision and us forward. Special acknowledgment also goes to Dr. Richard Krugman, Vice-Chancellor for Health Affairs and Dean of the School of Medicine, who has served as both guide and champion throughout the long journey from bright idea to first exhibit and to Dr. James Shore, Chancellor Emeritus, and Marguerite Childs, retired Vice-Chancellor of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. We would also like to express appreciation to the faculty, affiliated faculty, and staff of the Center for Bioethics and Humanities.

There are two additional groups of individuals who have played a crucial role in this endeavor. The first are those who generously donated time and money to the project with special acknowledgment to the Louis and Harold Price Foundation, to past and present members of the Center for Bioethics and Humanities Advisory Board, and to members of the advisory board for the Arts and Humanities in Healthcare Program. Their gifts are due, in large part, to the support of the CU Foundation with special appreciation to retired President and CEO Wayne Hutchens, Cheryl Kisling, Ashton Chase and Elizabeth Mueller. The second group are those who actualized the project, including master architect, Noel Copeland, from the Office of Institutional Planning; project manager, Kathy McNally, from Facilities Projects; and Mollie Young, Manager of Facilities and Planning for the School of Medicine.

Finally, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the dedication, knowledge and expertise of Simon Zalkind, curator for this exhibit and the four to follow in the inaugural year of the gallery. Zalkind also introduced us to Dr. Wayne Yakes, who has generously loaned us the works in this exhibit from his personal collection. It seems especially fitting and fortuitous that a working physician from our own community — one who is recognized for both his tireless commitment to patients and his deep appreciation of the arts — has helped launch this gallery on the Anschutz Medical Campus. Dr. Yakes has been a long-standing supporter and Clinical Professor of Interventional Radiology and Interventional Neuroradiology at the University of Colorado, donating his services and collaborating on patient procedures with many of our distinguished faculty. We thank him very much.

Therese Jones, PhD
Director, Arts and Humanities in Healthcare Program
Center for Bioethics and Humanities

Falling Totems, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 22″x 30″

INTRODUCTION

by Simon Zalkind

Anatomy of Masks, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 30"x 24 3/4"

On April 22, 1945, near Heisendorf, Austria, an exploding bullet found its target and lodged itself in the chest of eighteen year-old Lieutenant Ernst Neizvestny. His spine was shattered and his internal organs mangled. That mutilating event and his long and painful recovery from the deformities it inflicted have provided the central themes and motifs of Neizvestny's art for the last sixty-five years. His intimate engagement with the human form as the site of transformative suffering, personal epiphany, and the holistic synthesis of body, intellect and spirit provides the context from which one can engage Neizvestny's art. In turn, Neizvestny's commitment to the physicality of his art is infused by the heroic ideals of the Russian avant-garde — Kandinsky, Malevich, Tatlin — as well as by the tragic moral vision of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, and the Christian utopianism of Nikolai Federov. Also relevant to Neizvestny's vision for the future of "embodiment" is his optimistic regard for technology's positive impact on an evolving human culture.

Neizvestny describes his aesthetic and philosophical allegiances as a fusion of "post-religious Russian philosophy with the ideals of the Russian avant-garde."[1] Neizvestny's description of the Russo-centric sources of his art appear to ignore or exclude Western influences. However, the art of the mid-20th century, particularly in America, is rich in moments of "epiphany," moments of enormous breakthroughs of energy and insight which are then articulated in pictorial terms. It is difficult to imagine that Neizvestny did not have at least some exposure to developments in American art during the 1940's and 50's, and to American artists' engagements with mythic, archetypal and transcendent themes. At the same time, the eloquence of his mature vision is impossible to separate from his experience as an artist during the most repressive periods of the Soviet regime. Those grim, barbarous decades when totalitarian idealogues sought to erase authentic human presence from human culture oriented Neizvestny to place, with great urgency, the body at the center of his concern. Neizvestny's art seeks to restore to the embodied self the potential to manifest freedom.

Death, love, torment, and redemption — the tensions between flesh and spirit — are all lived through and within the body. Neizvestny's sculptures and paintings, through their integration of human subject, human gesture and human affect are invariably linked to the human body. In particular, the long-worked motif of the Crucifixion, the afflicted and pathos-ridden body of Christ, began increasingly to proliferate in Neizvestny's work. It is that particular body that occupies center stage in almost two millennia of Western art. However, in the modern period, the image of Christ crucified has been exploited on many levels, often in conformity with specific cultural or national agendas that are not necessarily related to the values or creedal formulas of Christianity. For a modern artist to adopt the Crucifixion as a central and recurring motif positions his or her work in deep historical and psychic contexts while it simultaneously speaks to the crisis of belief that characterizes modernity. It is especially powerful within totalitarian cultures, asserting — against a frightening proliferation of disincarnate and anarchic possibilities — a morally and spiritually meaningful universe. How we see the body mediates and conditions every aspect of how we live an embodied life. Neizvestny's crucifixions compel us to look and look again.

Neizvestny's career spans six decades, during which time he has seen seen the ascendance of abstract

art followed by Pop, Minimalism, Conceptualism and a slew of newer, technology-based avant-garde movements. Neizvestny remains a singularly resolute figure, loyal to the old-fashioned mediums of painting and sculpture, and to "classic" subjects such as the human body and face. Through a series of auspicious coincidences combined with single-minded determination, Neizvestny was eventually able to move to the United States in the late 1970's. When the interest in Soviet dissident artists exploded in the 1980's, Neizvestny, although a generation or more older than most of those artists, was accorded a place of great prominence. During that same period in which his achievements were "discovered" and celebrated, Neizvestny's art continued to evolve within the atmosphere of pluralism and diversity that the American context afforded him. He continued, unhindered, to paint and sculpt works of great pictorial force, to create art that seeks to integrate our conscious and unconscious processes and to translate the derelict remains of the failed ideologies of the 20th century into living metaphors of human dignity and moral commitment. His art helps us understand the nature of our experience while it salves our wounds.

My first sustained encounter with the extraordinary work of Soviet dissident artists was in 2002 when I organized an exhibition entitled "Russian Revolutions: Generations of Russian Jewish Avant-Garde Artists" for the Singer Gallery of the Mizel Arts and Culture Center in Denver. Early in my curatorial process it became increasingly clear to me that my efforts to produce an exhibition that could claim any degree of coherence or significance depended on two propitiously linked individuals: Mina Litinsky, the owner and director of the Sloane Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Russian Art, and Dr. Wayne Yakes, an exceptionally determined collector and patron whose collection was especially rich in first rate examples of work by the Russian dissidents that Litinsky was able to secure for him. Ten years later I can still happily claim them as friends and colleagues. Mina Litinsky is a force of nature, protecting and nurturing the artists whom she represents with maternal ferocity and determination. Though she is without pretense or guile, she hovers behind almost every major exhibition of modern and contemporary Russian art organized in the United States in the last thirty years. I'm especially grateful to her for lending Ernst Neizvestny's iconic painting, *The Horseman,* to this exhibition.

Dr. Wayne Yakes' commitment to art and artists continues to expand in myriad and unexpected ways. In recent years his patronage and support have been essential to the realization of many first-rate exhibitions and exhibition-related projects in Colorado. His collection keeps evolving into fresh, unexpected areas — encompassing major works by "canonical" modern masters as well as works by young emerging artists with freshly minted MFAs. He believes that it is art's essential mission to nourish and sustain the human spirit and he takes big, generous risks to ensure that mission augments and flourishes.

Simon Zalkind, Curator

Notes

[1] Quoted in Ernst Neizvestny, *Space, Time and Synthesis in Art, Essays on Art, Literature and Philosophy* (Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1990), pg. xlii.

The Horseman, 1982-1988
acrylic on canvas, 76"x 47"
Collection of Mina and Eugene Litinsky

ERNST NEIZVESTNY:
MY ODYSSEY WITH ERNST

by Dr. Wayne F. Yakes

Ernst Neizvestny and Major Wayne F. Yakes, M.D., 1987, New York, holding *Insight Magazine* with Neizvestny's *Mikhail Gorbachev* drawing on the cover. *Tree of Life* sculpture in the background.

Photo courtesey of Wayne F. Yakes, M.D.

Alexander Calder, the great American artist, once said to Ernst Neizvestny, "All my life I create the world of children, and you create the world of man".

Shortly after emigrating from the Soviet Union in 1976, Neizvestny came to the United States. In just a matter of a few years, he established himself as an internationally-renowned modern American master.

My personal odyssey with Ernst Neizvestny began in Denver's Sloane Gallery of Art in 1984. Owner/Director Mina Litinsky showed me a few works that she had just received from Neizvestny. Stunned by their complexity and color, I told her that I did not know what to think about them. For days I could not get them out of my mind. Compelled to understand him better, I sought out the British author John Berger's 1969 book about Neizvestny entitled *Art & Revolution* hoping to gain more insight. It was enlightening. Berger's book led me to read Erik Egeland's 1984 book *Ernst Neizvestny: Life and Work*. Described eloquently in Egeland's book was Ernst Neivestny's 1962 art exhibition and encounter outside the Menage building in Moscow (where the KGB was headquartered at the time) with Nikita Kruschev, Premier of the USSR, accompanied by Leonid Breshnev (who would later depose Kruschev), and Yuri Andropov (then Head of KGB, later a short lived Premier of the USSR). The incident manifested Neizvestny's moral strength and fearlessness in challenging these purveyors of ultimate power in the Soviet Union. Now I was hopelessly intrigued with the man and his art. My odyssey was beginning in earnest with Ernst.

Collecting Neizvestny's paintings began first. One of the early pieces I acquired, *Crucifixion* a large dyptich, was chosen by Simon Zalkind for the cover of this exhibition catalogue. Captivated by the conceptual complexity inherent in his works, as well as his bravura use of color and imagery, I immersed myself in his art and the philosophy that informed it. Drawings, sculpture, paintings – I was compelled by all of it. As we say in Texas (I was born in San Antonio) "I could not get enough of it". My main limitation to my acquisitive frenzy was financial. I was a US Army Radiologist stationed at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center trying to collect art. In essence, I had "champagne tastes on less than a beer budget." I would take leave (vacation time) and cover other Radiologist's practices in Colorado and Wyoming while they were on vacation. This strategy allowed me to subsidize my new compulsion. Mina always said that I was "a victim of art".

In 1987 Neizvestny had a solo exhibition at Edward Nakhamkin Gallery in New York. There were two paintings in that show that I knew I had to have. Mina contacted Ernst informing him of my wishes. Ernst went immediately to Nakhamkin Gallery and removed the paintings from the show and sent them to Denver. These two works, *Tree of Life* and *Self Portrait, 20th Century Apocalypse* are also included in this exhibition. I was "moonlighting" for a vacationing Radiologist's practice in Riverton, Wyoming at this time. The money I earned for that week of work was ear-marked for the acquisition of those two canvases. Mina said that she would leave them on display in the windows of the Sloane Gallery in downtown Denver for me to see when I returned from Riverton. While at the airport in Riverton, I chanced upon and purchased a six week old AKC miniature black poodle, "Beaux-Beaux", as a gift for my fiancé Nona Kaczor, whom adored them. Once when I visited Neizvestny in his studio in New York, I took Beaux-Beaux with me to New York for his first time. As Ernst and I spoke of philosophy and art in his studio, Beaux-Beaux had a field day terrorizing Neizvestny's cats who only found safety perched atop his tallest sculptures – a very humorous sight.

In December 1987, I met with Ernst to interview him for two future articles that would appear in the *New York City Tribune* (3/29/1988 issue; *Ernst Neizvestny: A Chilling View of a Darkened World* and 9/28/1988 issue *Ernst Neizvestny: Monumentalist of Our Time*). My fiancé Nona Kaczor, Mina Litinsky, and artist Eduard Erlich accompanied me. Neizvestny was so focused on our interview that despite there being four of us present, Ernst took vodka out of his freezer and pulled only two glasses from his cupboard – one for me and one for him. Nona and Eduard left while I interviewed Ernst. Mina remained to help with the Russian translations during my interrogation of him. Mina later pulled her own glass from the cupboard. Ernst was very intent and serious during the entire interview. He described how his political enemies once wished to trap him during a convocation of the USSR Politburo in Moscow. He was asked to address them. As Neizvestny relayed the event, his expression changed at once and it was as if he was transported back in time, standing at the Politburo lectern, speaking the same words with the same intensity as he did those many years before, "I stand before you, not as an artist, but as a Russian who spilled his blood, as our people spilled a river of blood, protecting our country in WWII". He then walked off the stage. First one Politburo member stood and clapped, then another, then another, until the entire Politburo stood cheering and applauding. I will never forget his far-away visage reliving that event.

Now, as a committed Neizvestny acolyte, I was eager to speak even more with him about his art, his philosophy, his history. I was fortunate that these opportunities would come to pass. In 1988 I attended in New York the dedication and unveiling of Neizvestny's design for the Republic of China's (Taiwan) *New Statue of Liberty*. One of the photographs I took was chosen by Neizvestny to be the first photograph in the monograph that was published commemorating this event. Later, Neizvestny was invited to the Vatican and met privately with Pope John Paul II and presented His Holiness with a model of this sculpture. Previously, while he was Krakow's Archbishop, Karol Wojtyla had installed in his private chapel the Neizvestny sculpture *Heart of Christ*. When Wojtyla was elected Pope John Paul II in 1978, he brought this Neizvestny sculpture to Rome and placed it in the Vatican's permanent collection. This sculpture is included in the current exhibition.

In 1986 in New York, accompanied by Mina Litinsky and Russian artist Yuri Krasny, I attended an exhibition of works by the renowned German artist Georg Baselitz at the Mary Boone Gallery. The paintings on exhibition during this event were the "upside down" paintings for which he was notorious. But one small painting that was not "upside down" captured my eye. It was painted in 1964 and was titled *E.N. Idol.* I was disappointed that it had already long been sold and was only being lent by the owner for this exhibition. Baselitz was honoring one his artist heroes. The letters *E.N.* in the painting's title stood for *Ernst Neizvestny*.

E.N. Idol, 1964
oil on canvas, 39"x 32"
Artist: Georg Baselitz

December 1987 at Carnegie Hall was the New York premier of Ottorino Respighi's opera *La Fiamma*. My sister, mezzosoprano Lynnen Yakes, a Juilliard graduate and one of the 1985 Walter Naumberg Opera International Competition Champions, performed. My mother Frances Yakes, my fiancé Nona Kaczor, Mina Litinsky, Eduard Erlich, and Ernst Neizvestny all attended the performance. Neizvestny was so taken by Lynnen's passionate rendition that he was compelled – on the spot – to create a drawing commemorating it. That drawing is still proudly displayed in Lynnen's home in Brooklyn. When I was initially introduced to the art of Ernst Neizvestny in 1984 in Denver, I couldn't imagine that one day he would profoundly affect every member in my family. In gratitude, on one of my trips to Egypt to treat patients and lecture at the International Medical Center in Cairo, I travelled to Aswan and photographed – from conventional and eccentric viewpoints – the world's largest sculpture by Neizvestny, *The Lotus Blossom Monument*. I then made a timed powerpoint cavalcade of those images with background music from a 2006 performance in Milan by my sister Lynnen of Gounod's *Ave Maria* and *Camille Saint Saenz aria Mon Coeur* from the opera *Samson and Delilah*. Ernst and his wife Anna subsequently placed it on his website.

In 2010, Mina Litinsky and I visited Ernst and Anna Neizvestny in his New York studio. Ernst and Anna, as always, were impeccable hosts. We visited for several hours and I again studied the works in his studio. Neizvestny was very gracious and hospitable to me. But with Mina, Neizvestny spoke only Russian in a hushed, serioous voice. This went on for a few hours. Mina was uncharacteristically silent, listening intently, and hinged on Neizvestny's every word. After his soliloquy, Neizvestny seemed somehow relieved. He was suffering from a brain tumor, a long-standing meningioma which was my diagnosis after reviewing his recent MR. Given the quiet intensity with which Neizvestny spoke for several hours, we knew he was exhausted. We thanked him and Anna for the wonderful visit, shared one final embrace, and departed. In the taxi returning to our hotel Mina told me that Neizvestny's conversation with her was essentially a monologue of things he truly needed to say - his final confession as it were. Now I understood Mina's uncharacteristic silence.

The monumental scope of his art spans the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa and North America. Neizvestny's images of despair, survival and hope, are palpable tributes to the existential human condition and to human kind's struggle for freedom and self-determination.

It is immediately evident that Neizvestny's art is uncompromising. Bathed in vivid color, the paintings exude a dynamic strength and power. The monumentalist character of his work resonates so strongly that even the most casual viewer cannot remain unresponsive and/or unaffected. Neizvestny's works on canvas are unique, intellectually complex and enigmatic. In recent years, Neizvestny has embraced textural relief in his paintings, adding a dimensional quality to them that links them directly to his sculpture.

While visiting the Sloane Gallery of Art in Denver, Colorado, I witnessed an event that demonstrated the potent impact of his work. A woman walked past the gallery and stared at the works by Neizvestny visible through the gallery's window. She then stormed into the gallery and shouted, "I've walked past your gallery several times and I want you to know that I absolutely hate the art!" She whirled on one heel and exited, not waiting or caring for a response. Her maniacal outburst was a cathartic expression of the furious energies that Neizvestny unleashes in the soul of the viewer. Though she knew nothing about Neizvestny, every time she passed the gallery, she felt compelled to express her opinion and respond to his art – she was consumed by it. It was a remarkable scene.

Even though Neizvestny was persecuted by Nikita Khrushchev, Neizvestny honored a request in the Soviet leader's will and created a memorial sculpture for him in marble, granite and bronze. This sculpture now stands on Khrushchev's grave in Moscow. It's a magnificent example of Neizvestny's capacity to utilize classical materials of heroic and commemorative sculpture (granite, marble and bronze) in the service of modern strategies and concepts. Although Khrushchev (unofficially) admired Neizvestny's art, he was contemptuous of modern Russian artists working outside the officially prescribed styles of Socialist Realism. Those two formidable characters – Neizvestny and Nikita – had a confrontation at the Manege art exhibition held in Moscow in 1962 that has attained mythic status. During it Khrushchev screamed at Neizvestny "There is an angel and the devil in you!"

Neizvestny's portrait of Mikhail Gorbachev, which appeared on the cover of the March 30, 1987 issue if *Insight* magazine, is consistent with Neizvestny's non-commercial graphic style. It is a very intellectual work sketchily rendered in a monochromatic palette, symbolic, perhaps, of the "grayness" of Soviet existence. This draws our attention to the vibrant red birthmark traversing the forehead of Gorbachev. This red nevus could symbolize the fact that communist

Mikhail Gorbachev, 1987
pastel and colored pencil on paper, 10 1/4"x 8"

doctrine indelibly marks Gorbachev's mind and being. But as Neizvestny stated himself, "In Russia this type of birthmark is associated with qualities of fire and anger in the individual bearing it". Those who encounter people with this birthmark would do well to be cautious. Gorbachev's facial expression appears serene and pacific, devoid of emotional excess or complexity. Yet upon closer inspection, Gorbachev's

shadow appears to be screaming. Neizvestny may be suggesting that Gorbachev's outward expression is a misleading one, totally at odds with his inner allegiances. The work utilizes the conventions of portraiture to subtly express what Neizvestny has publicly said regarding Gorbachev, "Be very careful."

Although not officially embraced in the Soviet Union during the turbulent period when "dissident" artists courted censure and imprisonment, Neizvestny's art gained recognition and accolades beyond the borders of the communist state. In 1965, an international jury awarded him first prize in an art competition sponsored by UNESCO in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, to honor Dante's 700th anniversary. Among the other artists competing for the award were such established figures as Salvador Dali and Robert Rauschenberg.

Neizvestny frequently looks towards other artists – visual, musical and literary – for inspiration. He considers his drawings based on the writings of Samuel Beckett to be especially significant. Further, at the request of his friend, cellist Mtislav Rostropovich, Neizvestny created a bronze bust of composer Dimitri Shostakovich. It was to be their gift to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., on the occasion the composer's 70th birthday in 1977.

In 1969, an international jury in Egypt selected a proposal by Neizvestny – which was smuggled out of the Soviet Union – to become the Aswan Dam magnum opus, towering *The Lotus Blossom Monument*, one of the largest examples of public sculpture in the world. The artist secured another colossal project when Taiwan chose him to create that country's *Freedom Memorial Monument*, located at the Kaohsiung Harbor. Constructed on a scale similar to the *Statue of Liberty* in New York, the interior contains an exhibition hall, an auditorium, a movie theater, a restaurant, an aquarium and a spiral gallery containing works that illustrate 5,000 years of human civilization. Taiwan initially sought to commission a monumental work that symbolized Taiwan's "march toward freedom and modernization". They desired a work that would commemorate the nation's success story and inspire other third world countries on a similar path towards progress and modernity. Neizvestny broadened the concept to include a vision for the future of "a new Pacific age" – one that would look to the East just as the *Statue of Liberty* in New York welcomed generations of freedom-seekers to the West.

When I consider the course of art history to find an artist whose "monumentalism"both rivals and parallels Neizvestny's, Michelangelo comes to mind. Like Neizvestny, Michelangelo was commissioned to design and construct numerous large-scale projects, such as: the Sistine Chapel, the tomb of Julius II and the dome of St. Peter's Basilica, come immediately to mind. However, a little known fact about Michelangelo is that in 1506 he received an invitation from the Turkish Sultan, a devoted Muslim, to execute a project in Constantinople. He considered accepting the commission to create a work for the Byzantine capital but decided, instead, to accept an offer from the Vatican, apparently convinced that he was better served by remaining on good terms with Pope Julius II. At the time, Islamic religion and culture were considered antithetical to Western-Christian values and civilization. Michelangelo, so closely involved with Christian themes and papal projects, would have been an unlikely candidate for an Islamic art project. The fact that it was offered to him testifies to the power of his art to dissipate entrenched political and religious animosities. Neizvestny possesses a similar transcendent and conciliatory power that links him to the "monumentalist" tradition best exemplified by the Italian Renaissance master.

I am extremely pleased and honored to share the work of Ernst Neizvestny with a new audience, particularly one so identified with my own chosen profession. I believe that the ethical dimension of medicine lies at the heart of its practice and that an engagement with great art can expand and enhance your capacity to heal and revive whomever is entrusted to your care.

My Ernst Neizvestny art collection had its genesis while I was a Radiologist/Interventional Radiologist/ Interventional Neuroradiologist at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center. I wore many hats training residents and fellows at Fitzsimons AMC from 1984 -1991. To have my Ernst Neizvestny works as the inaugural exhibition at the Fulginiti Pavilion for Bioethics and Humanities, Anschutz Medical Campus at Fitzsimons is truly fitting. The circuitous, serendipitous, and incongruous events that led from my initial introduction to Neivestny to this exhibition have come full circle. As with any meaningful endeavor, I along with Ernst Neivestny, encourage you to *Only Persist*.

Wayne F. J. Yakes MD, FSIR, FCIRSE

ONLY PERSIST - THE ART OF ERNST NEIZVESTNY

by Matthew Baigell

Poliphony, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 77" x 60"

First, a few words about Neizvestny's background. He was born in 1925 in Sverdlovsk, a city in the Ural Mountains. When serving in the army during World War II, he was severely wounded and declared dead. Obviously, he did not die and after the war he studied and taught in art schools through the late-1940's and 1950's. In 1955, his talent undeniable, he became a member of the Sculpture Section of the Union of Soviet Artists, even though his art and ideas were not always acceptable to the authorities. His most famous confrontation occurred in November 1962, during an exhibition intended to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Moscow branch of the Artists' Union in the Manege, a building near the Kremlin. For whatever reasons, and these are still being argued today, the authorities allowed radical (for the Soviet Union) art to be exhibited. Premier Nikita Khrushchev attended and thought the works were dreadful and reviled the artists for creating bad art. He got into a shouting match with Neizvestny who bravely defended his colleagues in what has since been called the "belly bumping debate." The artist survived the encounter (in Stalin's day he probably would have been killed) and it solidified his position as an important "underground" artist, one of those who created works that did not depict the Soviet Union as a worker's paradise. These artists are now considered to be the most important contemporary Russian artists. In 1976, after a contentious career in the Soviet Union, Neizvestny was able to leave the country, settling first in Zurich before moving to New York City in 1977. The works in this exhibition were created after that date.

How can we interpret Neizvestny's art? At first glance, his images are easy to identify. These include people and bodies, for the most part, as well as some objects, but how should we interpret them and place them in an understandable context? Forms are angular, muscles abruptly enlarged, body parts hollowed out, religious subjects placed next to secular ones, and many disparate objects, large and small, juxtaposed often in a helter-skelter manner for no apparent reason. All of this prompts the questions: what's going on and what am I missing? The answers come easy enough to figure out once one understands Neizvestny's point of view and the central ideas that motivate his art. Beyond that, the viewer needs to allow his or her imagination to run freely alongside that of the artist's as well as to have a certain amount of empathy for his intentions. That is, one must enter the universe invented by Neizvestny.

What is his context? Although there was a break in the development of art in the Soviet Union due to its rejection of modernist art in favor of realistic styles that furthered the purposes of the Communist regime, Neizvestny can be considered an heir of such great early -twentieth century modernists as Vasily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich, but not in terms of style as much as in the belief that art has the power to change society, that art should have cosmic meaning. For the earlier artists, one did not simply make art. An artist was somehow involved with the fate of the universe and felt a moral responsibility for it. Neizvestny, acknowledging his debt to his artistic forebears insofar as art should have a higher purpose than mere manipulation of colors and forms, wanted his art to resolve opposites into coherent wholes — man and nature; the ancient and the modern; past, present and future combined; feeling and mechanization; myth and science. The artist, according to Neizvestny, should aspire to become the mediator, the transformer, the conductor of emotions and ideas to bring about this great synthesis. Art, then, is to be created with a purpose, not to enhance the artist or the state, but to provide a glimpse of the infinite through the particular, of the unified whole through a specific encounter. As Neizvestny has suggested, the artist is the smallest figure, the core inside a matryoshka doll, each one enclosed by a larger doll, so there is the suggestion of infinite expansion to encompass the universe and ever-expanding relationships.

But how does this work when creating a particular sculpture, painting or print? The human body is Neizvestny's chief means of expression. Early in his career, the body was seen in extended states of being — anguished, broken, limbs akimbo, inflexible, doubled over. Partly, their forms reflected the state of his own body as a result of his war wounds, and partly in response to the idealization of the human form as demanded by the regime — muscular, smiling, well-proportioned people toiling for their love of their country and their Soviet government. In totalitarian Soviet art, as in fascist German and Italian art of the 1930's and 1940's, the approved style combined the idealism of classical Greek figures with a realistic portrayal of recognizable contemporary figures made to look more heroic than was humanly possible. But Neizvestny's figures have always been what we might call chunky and clunky. Why? Because he was not interested in bodily perfection which only revealed what the exterior of a figure looked like. Beautiful surfaces hid what the human soul might feel and within these surfaces all manner of emotions might be lurking, searching for release. Thus, there might be contradictions between the appearance of a figure and what the presumed soul within might have wanted to express if given the chance.

Neizvestny, strove to capture the tension between the outer and the inner. That is, how the body might express itself to suggest moods, emotive states, even abstract ideas. Therefore, extended limbs or enlarged musculature might reflect anxiety or uncertainty; suggest dialogues (or arguments) between flesh and spirit, raising the stakes beyond mere body parts to consider tensions within contemporary society. Neizvestny also believed that different kinds of body postures might suggest innate differences between mechanical robots and humans. Deformations, then allowed the artist and the viewer to imagine all sorts of syntheses and juxtapositions in tense configuration. In some instances, depending on a figure's contortions, empathetic responses might even create in the musculature of a viewer a kind of unconscious kinesthetic response similar to the unconscious muscle-tightening and flexing responses felt in those attending dance performances, especially when the dancer is in the midst of an especially difficult jump or turn. Not only does he program the figures in the particular work, he wants to direct his viewers, as well.

For Neizvestny, even when working with a specific theme, interpretations must always remain open ended because his intention is to encompass a variety of different thoughts into a unified whole, gathering together opposites into a coherent unity. These might include body and spirit, happiness and sadness, violence and passivity, love and hate, and so on. Each work, then, is intended to build itself in the mind of the viewer to encompass an ever-expanding universe of the imagination. But, of course, a unified whole, a harmony within the cosmos, cannot ever really be achieved. It is the attempt, the purpose of his art, which gives it meaning.

For example, his designs for *Paolo and Francesca*, based on Canto 5 of the *Inferno* by the Italian author, Dante, do not merely illustrate the text but also reveal the psychological pain resulting in their adulterous love affair (fig. 1). Their bodies are stiff, Francesca turned slightly to the side, as if rejecting Paolo's advances. This is not a happy scene. But Neizvestny illustrated the story through the forms, as well. By themselves, they must also collaborate with the theme in the sense they need to harmonize with the story line. So, such physical properties as contrasts between open spaces and closed solids, bulging muscles and narrowed joints, as well as notions of compression and expansion must enlarge the emotions underlying the psychological issues of their affair.

Fig. 1: *Paolo and Francesca,* from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 38 3/4" x 29 1/4"

Fig. 2: *Pantheism*, 1972
bronze, 25 1/4″x 17″x 7″

Thinking of his work in this way lets the viewer understand that, say, rough edges of forms or meandering lines are meant to embellish emotional meaning. Smooth forms, in contrast, might indicate calmness. In effect, we witness the struggle between different processes and opposing forces, and not least in *Paolo and Francesca*, morality and immorality. Their story and the way their forms are arranged and manipulated by the artist, then, represent a microcosmic moment in the macrocosm of the entire universe. They are constantly being reborn in other contexts. They are, in Neizvestny's world, connected to everything else, or, to say it another way, hopefully resolved into the unified whole of humans and nature, ancient times and modern times,and a single moment and an endless eternity.

Another and different kind of example of such open-ended connections appears in the sculpture, *Pantheism* (fig. 2). A man's head appears on one side, a woman's on the other. Two other heads are included, one of a youth, the other of an old person. And, finally, a fish that lives in the ocean and a bird that flies in the sky are added to the composition. So, we have man and woman, the three ages of humankind, and creatures that live in the water, on earth and in the air. This expresses an intimation that each had experiences in the past, present, or future; and suggests a summation of the history of all living creatures.

Neizvestny has sculpted numerous crucifixions. In the past, he had wanted to create one as a type of memorial to the death of the human race and its implied resurrection, another way to fuse past, present, and future together. But beyond the artist's concern for time sequences, as well as mortality and immortality, Neizvestny himself is both a spiritual and religious person. He stated in his book concerning the importance — the necessity — of art for linking the here and the beyond through faith:

> *Real achievement in art cannot exist without faith, because in reality art cannot be reduced to satisfying man's rational needs. Rational needs may exist within art, but that does not exhaust art. Without faith, creative work is impossible…Faith is a striving, an endeavor, a means of overcoming man's cosmic solitude and a premonition of the ultimate answer which simultaneously resounds both within and outside oneself. Great art has the power to inspire people with hope in the meaningfulness of everyday existence.*[1]

One might look at his crucifixions, then, and find in their different forms are insights into one's own character and struggles, the connections between the mechanical and the organic, and the evolution of forms that evolve one from the other. For example, in *Heart of Christ* (fig. 3), Jesus appears wrapped within a robotic figure on one side, and, on the other side we see a form suggesting a halved fruit containing organic shapes indicating a life-giving force. Among various interpretations, we might compare and contrast the notion of Jesus as encased within mechanical, forms of religious observance and Jesus possessing organic life-invigorating and life-sustaining powers.

Fig. 3: *Heart of Christ*, 1973
bronze, 23 3/4″x 16 1/2″x 8 1/2″

Fig. 4: *Large Crucifixion*, 1974
bronze, 35″x 26 1/2″x 9 3/4″

In another work, entitled *Large Crucifixion* (fig. 4), the figure of Jesus seems to be suggesting both strength and weakness because he seems to be wrestling with the Cross on which he is impaled. By extension, one can expand this idea to include one's thoughts about the effects of the power and/or limitations of a religions' traditional imagery as captured through extreme bodily exertions. In another image, *Crucifixion Materialism,* dated 1983 (fig. 5), Neizvestny considers Jesus from a different point of view. The sword and animal's skull certainly indicate sacrifice, but the bulbous forms suggesting body parts imply that Jesus nevertheless lives physically and spiritually within the minds of his followers.

In such works, Neizvestny's sense of a unified whole will not always resolve itself or become static, but rather contains tensions held in an unsteady equilibrium, opposites held together in a shaky balance. Couple that with forms that purposefully lack classical Greek perfection, indicating conflicts between body and soul, and thus you have a typical Neizvestny product. Unification, which, ultimately, is never fully achieved, is not to be seen in a seemingly stable finished product, but rather suggests itself in as many conflicting ideas as possible brought together in a flowing, rhythmic composition.

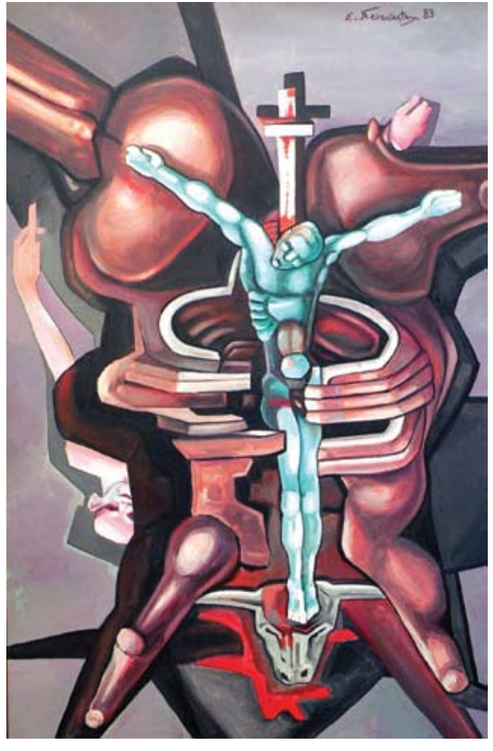

Fig. 5: *Crucifixion Materialism*, 1983
acrylic on canvas, 68 ″x 43 1/2″

Figs. 6,7: *Crucifixion Diptych* from the *Tree of Life* series, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 48″x 137 1/2″

Similarly, the multi-figured crucifixions (figs. 6, 7) suggest various tensions between opposite potentialities. In this *Crucifixion Diptych*, some figures, whatever their size and presumed physical power, have heads or hearts missing, denoting a lack of intelligence and feeling, the opposite of what Jesus represents. Those figures, then, might represent forces allied against Jesus. There are also both strong and weak images of Jesus on the Cross, as well. Neizvestny might have wanted to suggest how Jesus or any other person might respond at different moments to the ordeal of crucifixion. The large, muscular figure on the right might allude to Jesus' spiritual strength, but physical weakness on the Cross, as well as to the strength or weakness in one's belief in the Crucifixion and ultimate Resurrection, the latter indicating the potentially thin line connecting affirmation with doubt in one's religious beliefs. (He was, after all, a product of the Communist educational system.)

Strength and weakness, or aggressiveness and passivity, can also be considered a part of the subject matter of *Matriarchate-Patriachate*, dated 1986, but in a "secular" environment (fig. 9). The strong, heavily muscled arm on the left is posited as the opposite of the bound, frontally exposed women on the right.

Fig. 8: *Tree of Life*, 1984
acrylic on canvas, 44"x 68"

Other works in this exhibition are part of a gigantic project, the *Tree of Life,* initially conceived in 1956 (fig. 8). Neizvestny thinks of it as "the apotheosis of the human soul and human knowledge," of the human mind embracing the inseparability of faith and the spiritual with the logical and the technological—essentially a spiritualized universe. The *Tree of Life*, if ever constructed, is to be housed in a huge complex consisting of a central building or sculpture 500 feet tall and 500 feet in diameter within a circle of

Fig. 9: *Matriarchate-Patriachate*, 1986
acrylic on canvas, 44 1/4"x 68 1/4"

intersecting roads. A series of seven underground tunnels representing the seven deadly sins. At the central entrance, enormous letters serve as portals symbolizing the gates of understanding and the gates of knowledge. Frescoes and sculptures, as well as contemporary technological achievements, are to be exhibited. They will be replaced as they become obsolete. Visualizing how finite individuals can relate to Neizvestny's plan, which is preserve the timeless character of the *Tree of Life*, he thinks of each person as a blood cell passing through the various parts of the project.

The project is a grand one and totally unbuildable, but it emphasizes in spectacular, if not megalomaniacal fashion, Neizvestny's desire to find unity in the totality of our existence both on earth and in the universe.

The works in this exhibition are consistent with that desire, which is nothing less than trying to find meaning in our lives and relating that meaning to larger purposes about which we can only manage a rare glimpse in our imaginations. Neizvestny's art is an ongoing series of bold attempts to give material appearance to that search, essentially through the shapes and forms of the human body and the inventions of the human mind in all their beauty, richness and imagined possibilities. What his art represents is the fact that we, through our physical beings and our thoughts, give shape and meaning to the universe. However, odd and strange his forms might appear, in their totality they are meant to give order to the chaos out there. Neizvestny's artistic trajectory starts in the finite realm of the human body, extends to the infinitude of the human mind, and then points to the limitlessness of the cosmos.

Notes

[1] Ernst Neizvestny, *Space, Time, and Synthesis in Art: Essays on Art, Literature, and Philosophy* (Oakville, Ontario, Canada, Mosaic Press, 1990,) 155.

Self-Portrait, 20th Century Apocalypse, 1986
acrylic on canvas, 44 1/2" x 68 1/2"

Matthew Baigell is Emeritus Professor of art history, Rutgers University. He has published widely in American art and has co-written and edited with his wife Renee two books of interviews as well as several articles on "underground" or "non-conformist" artists during the Soviet period. "Underground" artists were those who had not adhered to the acceptable styles of Socialist Realism. In 1987, with the advent of *perestroika*, they were finally able to come above ground and, like artists in the west, create freely and openly for the first time since the 1920s. Neizvestny, a major "non-conformist" figure, was one of those who, basically, was thrown out of the Soviet Union as a trouble maker. The books are *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995) and *Peeling Potatoes, Painting Pictures: Women Artists in Post-Soviet Russia, Estonia, and Latvia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Materialism with Portrait of Karl Marx, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 22" x 29 1/4"

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERNST NEIZVESTNY

Conducted by Renee Baigell

Paolo and Francesca, from *Dante's Inferno* series , 1987
pastel/conte crayon on paper, 39 1/4"x 27 1/4"

RB: ***In political terms, what kind of artist did you consider yourself to be?***

EN: I did not consider myself a dissident because dissidents have a pure political and ideological agenda. I had neither.

RB: ***What about your background?***

EN: I was born into a very special family in Russia. My mother was of Jewish extraction, but she came from a Catholic family from Spain with the title of Baroness de Jour. In Soviet Russia it was dangerous to be from such a family. My father was a capitalist from the Ural Mountains, and he was a White officer during the revolution. Under Stalin families such as mine had a special name. They were called "lishentsy", which means deprived people of the dregs of society. Still, I was not a dissident, but, by virtue of being from a family such as mine, you could say I came from a family of dissidents. I did not even belong to the Young Pioneers when I was young. With regard to dissention, I will say that I was an organizer of a group of students in 1949, an unofficial group, but it was not involved in political issues. Rather, its main function was to distribute information. At that time I was a student of philosophy at Moscow State University, and I also studied at the Surikov. Let's say that when studying, I realized that if we were to continue to study philosophy as it was presented at the university, then we would surely graduate as ignoramuses. What we studied about Lenin came from Stalin and material about Karl Marx came from Lenin. I wanted to read authentic material. So we formed a group of four in order to obtain information. The other three were in different disciplines — cinema, journalism. I was the only one with military schooling, since I had been an officer in the army. I had volunteered and had been decorated, and I was wounded four times. I was even awarded the Order of the Red Star posthumously, but I lived. The goal of our underground group was purely a scholarly one. We emulated somewhat St. Ignatius Loyola. Each one of us had the right to get acquainted with one other person and that person would be introduced to the group in order to give information.

RB: ***How did you get information?***

EN: That was a big task. Certain people knew foreign languages, and so they read and translated things that were forbidden. Some people had access to special archives. This is how information would trickle down.

RB: ***Was it dangerous?***

EN: Yes, very dangerous. But our quest for information was not with political goals in mind. Our goal was to collect everything that we could in order to preserve knowledge. During Stalin's era, the only social group that was able to exist was a social group of drunks, young lively people, playboys and so on. We pretended that we were the same — carefree, young people who didn't think about anything but ways to amuse ourselves and to have a good time. We pretended that we were happy drunks. At that time, we wrote songs which were forerunners of "sots art", but were also of high poetic quality. They were student songs. In fact, I just spoke with a friend in Moscow who told me that the only other living person from our group, a man named Arkhemenko, recently made a speech in which he described how we wrote the songs. The entire country sang those songs, and still do.

RB: ***Who composed the music?***

EN: Young composers. The name of one song was "Ya bil ego v beluiu grud'," which means "I Struck Him on His White Chest." This was a parody of nationalistic songs. Everybody sang them — poor people, beggars

on trains. (People took these songs seriously). We also wrote a song called "Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy," another that translates as "The Venetian Moor, Othello," and one called "Hamlet Strolling with a Gun." What type of songs were these? We took the official form and filled it with unofficial content. Just as in the Middle Ages there were anti-liturgies, and during Roman times, parodies of the emperors, so we accepted the convention and imbued it with a different content and meaning. I would not call this dissident activity since in our circle there happened to be a number of professional Communists. They were also progressive and liberal-minded people. During Gorbachev's time, they came into power. And they knew where they came from and where they were nurtured. After perestroika, my biographer, Edik Igelaut, printed my story in *Continent*. It was called "The Journey of the Underground Culture." He met people who told him it was all true. But I don't call myself a dissident. In Russia, everyone was a dissident, even Mikhail Baryshnikov. I was only an artist who wanted to be left alone, to work, an intellectual hungry for knowledge.

RB: ***Did you have commissions?***

EN: Yes, some during Stalin's era. I made a number of vulgar sculptures while he was still alive.

RB: ***Were these official works?***

EN: No, I have them here with me now. They could not be official. Some here in my studio are from a series called "The War." When Stalin died, I began to work on a monument called "Victims of Stalinism or Communism." This was in 1954. Together with Andrei Sakharov, somewhat later, I formed a group, called "Memorial," around this monument. The authorities did not know about any of this.

RB: ***What were your relations like with the state?***

EN: As a sculptor of monuments I wanted to work for the Soviet state, but the state did not want what I wanted. It demanded compromises and I was not one to compromise. During my creative life as an artist — from 1954 to 1976 — the government bought only four works from me. So I worked as a mason, a bricklayer, a porter, and as an assistant to a sculptor (in order to make money). I was a dissident to the extent that I insisted, as an artist, on having rights to my own individuality and private life. So, there arose some controversy between me and the government. Everyone knows about the quarrel I had with Khrushchev at the Manege exhibition in 1962. I was the main person there. It is in John Berger's book.[1] My own history is linked to my struggle for an artist's right to have freedom and to be whom he wants to be. That struggle can be dated back to 1956, the year of the Soviet intervention in Hungary. An official document was issued that it was stated that I was a major revisionist in Moscow. I was denied the right to work as an artist partly because of that document. My work was not exhibited in Russia and I received no commissions until 1972 when some architect friends of mine intervened on my behalf. [This was probably the work he made for the main pavilion of the "Electro-72" exhibition held in Moscow.] I was also able to make a few large pieces when I was still in Russia. I made all of my works without pay. I was driven by pure energy. Was I harassed and persecuted? Yes, I was. A few times I was in some very dangerous situations. On one occasion the police put out some lies that I was involved in military espionage. I had to undergo an interrogation and so did my friends. I was also investigated about some currency operations at the Lefort Prison. Even after I had left Russia, under Brezhnev, the authorities tried to sully my name. They dreamed up a story about a murder in my studio. They called in all my friends on that one, too. But it was all hot air. My friends did not sell me out. Nobody would agree to lie. Recently, Russian television began a series of reports on KGB investigations. One was on the intelligentsia called "The KGB and the Intelligentsia." It told how they hunted people like Rostropovich and myself.

RB: ***How were you able to leave Russia in 1975?***

EN: I never wanted to leave permanently. I applied for a two-year leave about sixty times because I had so many exhibitions of my work abroad. I also had commissions for religious pieces—crosses for churches. I was able to get works out by illegal means. Foreigners took pieces with them. All the artists had to do this. Besides, after John Berger's book came out I became well known. In an international competition to illustrate Dante in 1965, I won first prize over Dali and Rauschenberg. — probably the illustrations for Dante's *Short Works* (Moscow, Nauka, 1968). Still, I could not get permission to leave. In the end the authorities promised that I could leave for two years with a Soviet passport, but they deceived me. Then, I really began to

behave as a dissident. I would give interviews in which I would say why I thought Brezhnev and Podgorny were fools. Then the KGB told me I could leave on a Jewish passport. Still, they wouldn't let me out. Finally, people like Henry Moore, the sculptor, saved me. He organized a committee to protect me. Ted Kennedy and other Democrats supported me. Kosygin was petitioned directly, and they finally let me out. But all of my family and friends remained in Russia.

RB: ***You were already a mature artist when you left Russia. Have there been any significant changes since then?***

EN: Yes and no. My basic philosophy has not changed at all. I am working on another *Tree of Life*, which is my life's work. Some of it's elements have changed. Larger elements have grown smaller and vice versa, but, philosophically I am the same. Technically, things have changed because of the availability of materials. Let me tell you my views. I was an avant gardist when I began to work as an artist. During my first years at the Surikov I befriended Tatlin. I made purely constructivist works as a result. Gradually, I pulled away because I grew disenchanted with its Fabian socialist overtones. I became disappointed with technical progress as an answer or remedy for the human condition. At the same time, I understood that technology was permeating our lives and had become a part of them. Since I was wounded several times in the war, the idea of how metal enters a person was important to me. As a result, I began to make ambivalent sculptures, part metal and part human. I took advantage of the avant-garde, but never moved away from the figurative. So, my true spiritual fathers became Malevich and Kandinsky. They seemed to progress from the human to the abstract to the machinelike, or mechanical. Then, I went to a different level in my progression by going from the mechanical back to the human. In this way, I combine elements of constructivism with the fundamental problems of man's spiritual life, and between one's spiritual life and the body. I would like to say that I am trying to combine constructivist ideas with psychological and philosophical elements. I also like St. Augustine and respond to his philosophy.

RB: ***When did you first see modern Western art?***

EN: The notions that we Russians are barbarians is simply not true. I studied Russian avant-garde art when I was a student and also when we started our underground group. I certainly did not have the option of seeing the efforts of the last sixty years of Western modernism, but I did see a lot. Also, what I call the heroic 1960s in the West did have an impact and left its imprint on my consciousness. When students at the Sorbonne rioted in 1968, I was one of their five idols. Their slogans and their pamphlets were my works. But what did we know in Russia? If you look at the last half-century of Russian activities, it might appear, on a superficial level, that we did not know anything past the 1920s. This is not true. Let me make an analogy to German expressionism in the time of Hitler. Artists who worked as German expressionists did have some knowledge of abstract art and of the Bauhaus style, but they could not study or produce purely formal works. So their works seemed old-fashioned when compared to works in other European countries. A similar thing happened to me. Although my inner spiritual needs did not prompt me to work with pure form, I was, nevertheless, concerned with formalist problems. I was steeped in Russia avant-garde art. Within the context of my life, however, and the struggles of my soul, I no longer trusted Fabian socialism. I kept coming back to spiritual needs, to the needs of the human soul. It is not that I ignored notions of artistic progress, but that my aim was to say something about the fundamental problems of the human race.

RB: ***In order to work out your ideas, did you have problems obtaining materials?***

EN: Yes, big problems. I used scrap materials and also had to cast rough in my studio because of the lack of adequate technology. I also made lots of drawings because I often had no paint.

RB: ***Even though you were a member of the union?***

EN: Yes. When I was still a young student, an honor student, the Tretiakov Gallery bought my work. I had a lot of prestige. I joined the union when I was still a student. But I was kicked out three times. I just didn't like socialist realism, which is a mistake, not a style.

RB: ***Did you take part in the Bulldozer exhibition in 1974?***

EN: No. I will tell you why. It is my belief, and not only mine, that when I had the confrontation with Khrushchev at the Manege exhibition in 1962, it was the result of a provocation. We were used for some other purpose, not just to argue art with Khrushchev.

The provocation did not succeed, thanks to the fact that I found the strength to tell Khrushchev the truth. The Bulldozer exhibition was also a political provocation. I saw it this way. There were tensions between the militia and the KGB. The KGB wanted to organize an exhibition to show the militia, as well as the Moscow bureaucrats, to be barbarians. So they invited artists to show their works, knowing that these would be cut to shreds by bulldozers. It was a set up, the whole thing. I was invited but did not want to participate. But, I will say that the artists were heroes and so were the organizers, Oskar Rabin and Alexander Glezer. Others who were very young were less involved.

RB: ***Did you take part in apartment exhibitions?***

EN: Yes. For the most part these were held in the apartments and institutes of scholar and scientist friends. Many people came to these shows.

RB: ***Could you sell anything during those years?***

EN: In my time, I did not have this option. But after I left many people were able to sell their works. Only George Costakis bought my work when I was a student. He was my first buyer. I met Norton Dodge in Russia, I believe. I think I just gave him works for free, but he also bought something.

RB: ***You said that you were a loner. Did you have many friends?***

EN: When I began I was very much alone spiritually. People who were around me in the 1960's, like Yankilevsky and Kabakov, were much, much, younger than I was. Now, the age difference doesn't matter. And I was not close to the younger people who were involved with *A-Ya*, the magazine published in Paris. But I also had friends who were philosophers, and people like Pasternak and Shostakovich were in my circle.

RB: ***Do you maintain ties to Russia, now?***

EN: It is important to do so, even if you don't want to. Now that I have commissions for monuments, I certainly have ties there.

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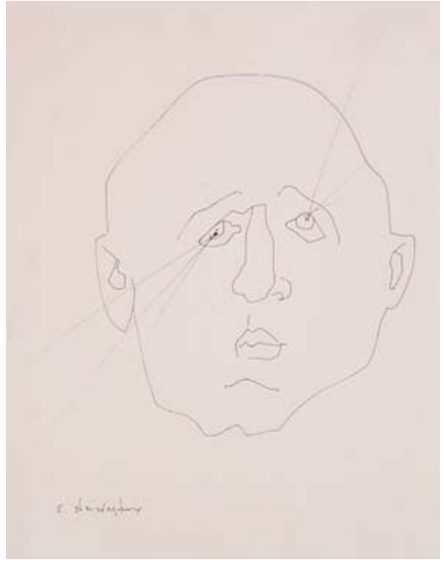
[1] John Berger, *Art and Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 79-86.

Anatomy of Masks, 1973-1975
etching, 8 1/4" x 6 1/4"
Courtesy of the artist and Astley Nyhlen of the Ernst Neizvestny "Tree of Life Museum", Uttersberg, Sweden

This interview with Ernst Nievestny is excerpted from Renee and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Artists: Interviews After Perestroika*, Rutgers University Press, 1995. Reprinted with permission of the author.

BIOGRAPHY



Self-Portrait, 1981
pen and ink on paper, 24 3/4″x 17 1/4″

Ernst Iosifovich Neizvestny, born on April 9, 1925, in Sverdlovsk, is a famous Russian-Jewish sculptor of the second half of the 20th century. He currently lives and works in New York City.

His parents were purged in the 1930's. At the age of 17, Neizvestny joined the Red Army as a volunteer. At the close of World War II, he was heavily wounded and declared clinically dead. Although he was awarded the Order of the Red Star, "posthumously", and his mother received an official notification that her son had died, Neizvestny managed to survive.

In 1947, Neizvestny was enrolled at the Academy of Arts in Riga. He continued his education at the Surikov Moscow Art Institute and the Philosophy Department of the Moscow State University.

His sculptures, often based on the forms of the human body, are noted for their expressionism and powerful plasticity. Although his preferred material is bronze, his larger, monumental installations are often executed in concrete. Most of his works are arranged in extensive cycles, the best known of which is the *Tree of Life*, a theme he has developed since 1956.

Well-known works he created during the Soviet period are *Prometheus* in Artek (1966) and *The Lotus Blossom Monument* at the Aswan Dam in Egypt (1971). In 1976, he emigrated from the USSR to Switzerland.

During the 1980's, Neizvestny was a guest lecturer at the University of Oregon and at UC Berkeley. He also worked with Magna Gallery in San Francisco, and where he had a number of shows in the mid-1980's which were well received. The Magna Gallery also asked him to create his *Man Through the Wall* series to celebrate the end of Communism at the end of the 1980's.

In 1996, Neizvestny completed his *Mask of Sorrow*, a 15-meter tall monument to the victims of Soviet purges, situated in Magadan. The same year, he was awarded the State Prize of the Russian Federation. Although he still lives in New York City and works at Columbia University, Neizvestny frequently visits Moscow and celebrated his 80th birthday there. A museum dedicated to his sculptures was established in Uttersberg, Sweden. A number of his crucifixion works were acquired by Pope John Paul II for the Vatican Museums. In 2004, Neizvestny became an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Arts.

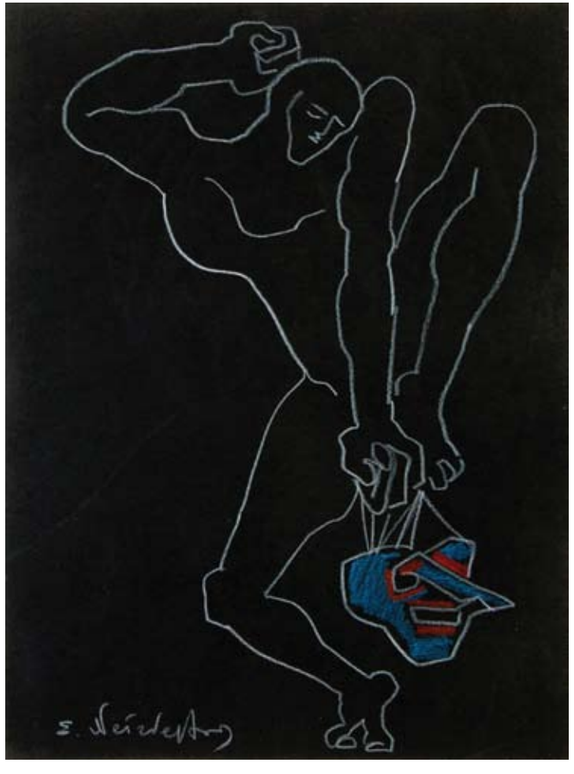
Sinner from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1973-1974
drypoint etching, 7 7/8″x 5 1/2″

Death of a Giant, 1987
acrylic on canvas, 44″ x 68 3/4″

Running with Metal Mask, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 76 1/2″ x 59″

Giant's Paw, from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1987
pen and ink, colored pencil, pastel on paper, 27″ x 39″

Minotaur, 1986
pastel on paper, 12″ x 9″



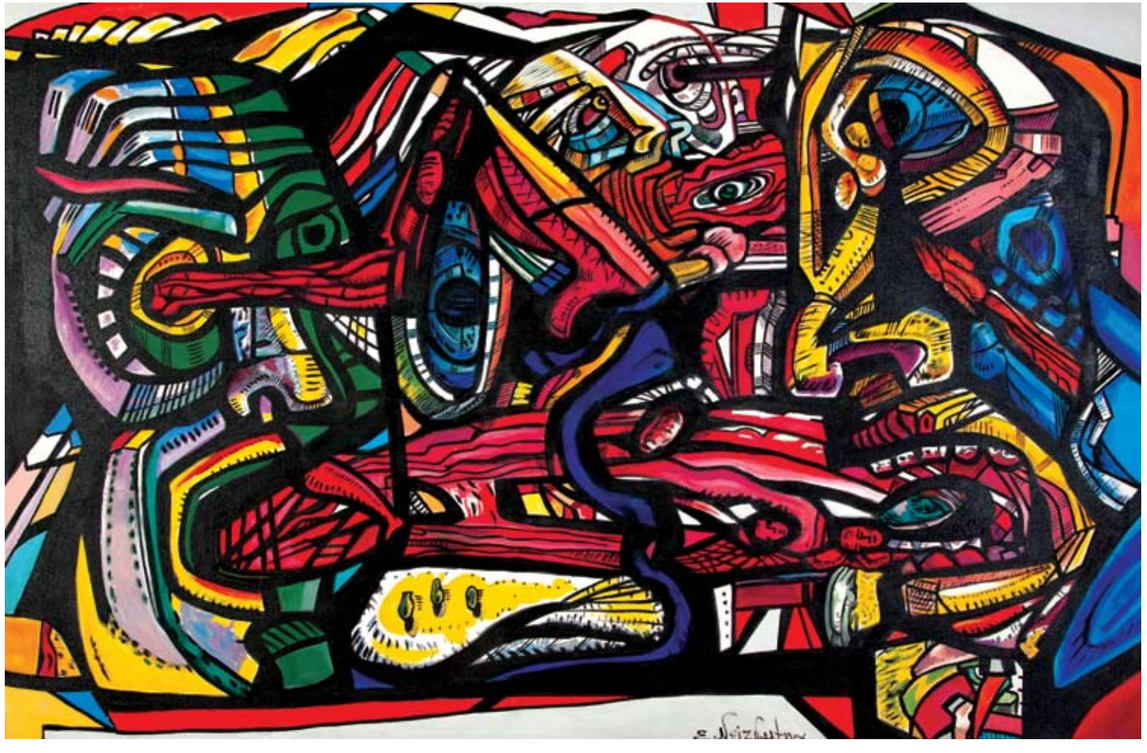
Dance with the Mask, 1986
pastel and colored pencil on black paper, 12″x 9″

Death of Centaur, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 78 1/2″x 61″

Two Masks-Male and Female, 1981
acrylic on canvas, 47 1/2″x 35 1/4″

Born in Head, 1981
lithograph, 18 3/4″x 27″

From Tree of Life Series #5, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 43 3/4″ x 67 3/4″

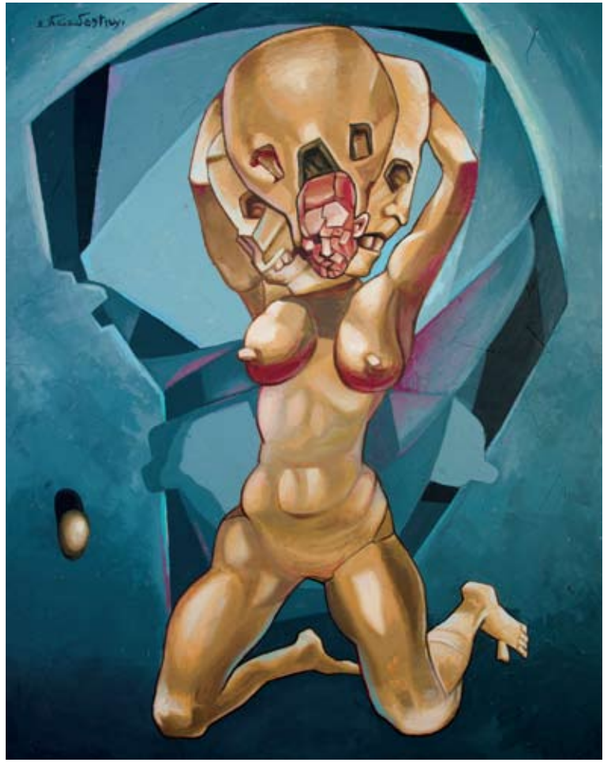


From Tree of Life Series #6, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 43 3/4″ x 67 3/4″

Adam and Eve, 1992
acrylic on canvas, 47 1/2″ x 35″

Skull, Mask, and Hand, 1987
acrylic on canvas, 24″ x 18″

In the Shadows, 1980
acrylic on canvas, 39″x 29 1/4″



Woman with Skull, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 71 1/2″x 61 3/4″

CHECKLIST OF PLATES

Mask and Hand, 1978
bronze, 8 3/8″x 6 3/4″x 2 1/4″

pg. 2 - Battle of Children, 1986
acrylic on canvas, 44 3/4″x 69″

pg. 4 - Three Masks, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 28″x 22″

pg. 7 - Falling Totems, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 22″x 30″

pg. 8 - Anatomy of Masks, 1985
acrylic on canvas, 30″x 24 3/4″

pg. 11 - The Horseman, 1982-1988
acrylic on canvas, 76″x 47″
Collection of Mina and Eugene Litinsky

pg. 17 - Mikhail Gorbachev, 1987
pastel and colored pencil on paper, 10 1/4″x 8″

pg. 20 - Poliphony, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 77″x 60″

pg. 23 - Paolo and Francesca, from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 38 3/4″x 29 1/4″

pg. 24 - Pantheism, 1972
bronze, 25 1/4″x 17″x 7″

pg. 25 - Heart of Christ, 1973
bronze, 23 3/4″x 16 1/2″x 8 1/2″

pg. 26 - Large Crucifixion, 1974
bronze, 35″x 26 1/2″x 9 3/4″

pg. 27 - Crucifixion Materialism, 1983
acrylic on canvas, 68″x 43 1/2″

pg. 28, 29 - Crucifixion Diptych from the *Tree of Life* series
acrylic on canvas, 48″x 68 3/4″
acrylic on canvas, 48″x 68 3/4″

pg. 30 - Tree of Life, 1984
acrylic on canvas, 44″x 68″

pg. 31 - Matriarchate-Patriachate, 1986
acrylic on canvas, 44 1/4″x 68 1/4″

pg. 33 - Self-Portrait, 20th Century Apocalypse, 1986
acrylic on canvas, 44 1/2″ x 68 1/2″

pg. 35 - Materialism with Portrait of Karl Marx, 1988
acrylic on canvas, 22″x 29 1/4″

pg. 36 - Paolo and Francesca, from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1987
pastel/conte crayon on paper, 39 1/4″x 27 1/4″

pg. 43 - Anatomy of Masks, 1973-1975
etching, 8 1/4″x 6 1/4″

pg. 44 - Self-Portrait, 1981
pen and ink on paper, 24 3/4″x 17 1/4″

pg. 45 - Sinner from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1973-1974
drypoint etching, 7 7/8″x 5 1/2″

pg. 46 - Death of a Giant, 1987
acrylic on canvas, 44″x 68 3/4″

pg. 47 - Running with Metal Mask, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 76 1/2″x 59″

pg. 48 - Giant's Paw, from *Dante's Inferno* series, 1987
pen and ink, colored pencil, pastel on paper,
27″x 39″

pg. 49 - Minotaur, 1986
pastel on paper, 12″x 9″

pg. 50 - Dance with the Mask, 1986
pastel and colored pencil on black paper,
12″x 9″

pg. 51 - Death of Centaur, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 78 1/2″x 61″

pg. 52 - Two Masks-Male and Female, 1981
acrylic on canvas, 47 1/2″x 35 1/4″

pg. 53 - Born in Head, 1981
lithograph, 18 3/4″x 27″

pg. 54 - From Tree of Life Series #5, 1989
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pg. 56 - Adam and Eve, 1992
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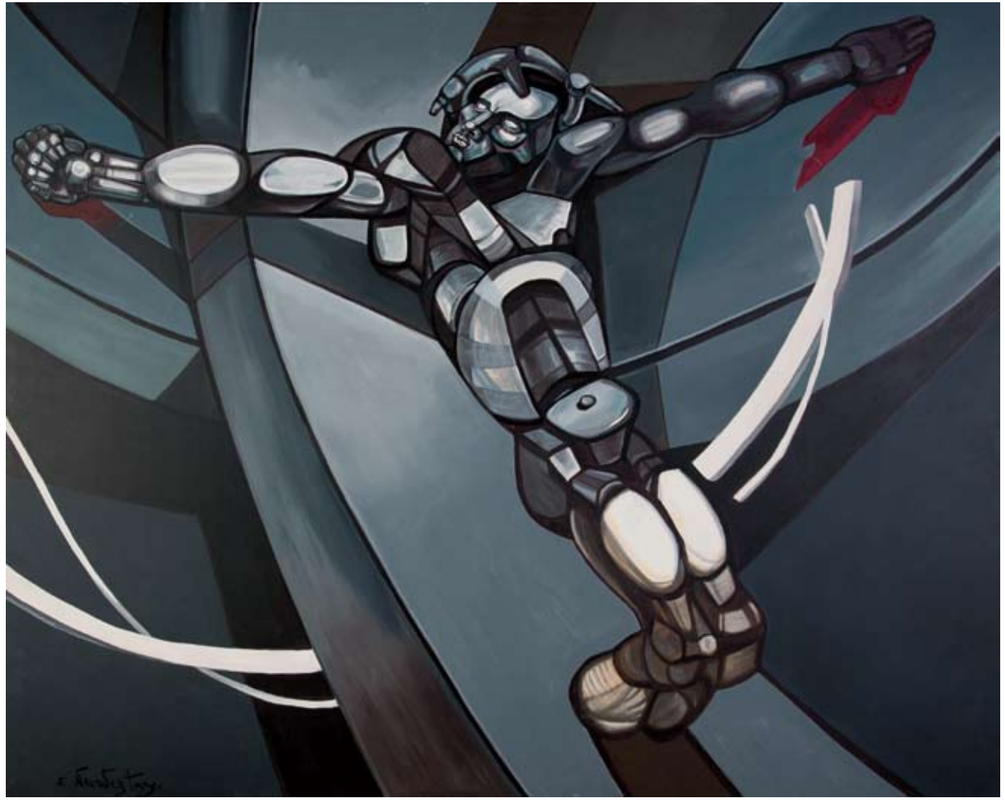
pg. 57 - Skull, Mask, and Hand, 1987
acrylic on canvas, 24″x 18

pg. 58 - In the Shadows, 1980
acrylic on canvas, 39″x 29 1/4″

pg. 59 - Woman with Skull, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 71 1/2″x 61 3/4″

pg. 60 - Mask and Hand, 1978
bronze, 8 3/8″x 6 3/4″x 2 1/4″

pg. 63 - Large Crucifixion, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 71 1/2″x 90 1/4″



Large Crucifixion, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 71 1/2″x 90 1/4″

ONLY PERSIST

Works by Ernst Neizvestny

from the Collection of Wayne F. Yakes, M.D.

Ernst and Anna Neizvestny, 1993, at his solo exhibition at the Russian Federation Mission to the United Nations in New York, NY.

Photo courtesey of Wayne F. Yakes, M.D.

Curated by: Simon Zalkind

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