



A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Russian Art Focus Prize website goes live this month and this is our call to arms! For all writers on Russian Contemporary art – from artists, to college academics and bloggers on social media – we welcome your submissions until July 1.

Before sitting down to write some or other text on Russian contemporary art, I often reach to my library shelf for a battered copy of 'A-Ya'. That glorious relic published by Igor Shelkovsky never fails to inspire; to go back again and again into its pages brings close contact with the very thought processes that created the cultural legacy of its generation. Like all good literature, it still teaches me something new. This keenness to record the present moment for our own generation is a large part of our publishing activities at Russian Art Focus and our new prize for art writing launched last autumn at [viennacontemporary](#) will reflect this, too.

Our prize is about what is going on now in the Russian art world. We are looking for published texts which cover events that have taken place since 2015. Although, there remains a real need to redress recent art history, to write in the contribution Russians have made over the past seventy years or so, the RAF Prize acknowledges the greatest need is to take care of the present. To “start with our own day” was the premise ‘A-Ya’'s founders made when deciding how far back their journal would go (the late 1950s) and everyone then felt it was best only to “represent the processes that were happening synchronously with the publication of the journal”. It takes more than brilliant intuition and good guesswork to identify which art happenings, if not artists, today will prove to be the most enduring and relevant.

And to you, if you have already published something recently which you would like to submit or if you are looking for a topic to write on, as a piece of art criticism, whether a research paper or blog text published on social media, the key is the timeless ability to put forward your thoughts in a way that communicates clearly your ideas, assembling them into a meaningful form, if for the wider public or for the international academic community.

Art criticism itself, a discipline that in its current form has existed since 18th century European salon reviews, has always attracted diverse voices: artists, curators, journalists, writers, scholars, philosophers among others; it is a rich field. Increasingly, social media has become awash with short opinion pieces on art, bringing gusts of a new pluralism as fresh voices open horizons. And so, to reflect those different genres, our prize is divided into two categories: the first is for any publication on Russian Contemporary art, which can include blogs, articles in the press and social media. And the second is to recognise excellence in research work in the field, such as long form articles, conference papers and research publications.

As contemporary art becomes increasingly complex in a world which has seen globalism spread into all parts of the world over the past two decades, a period of reflection now is needed. We need a plateau amidst such change, in which local contexts and politics have not only become more crucial, but so are ways of communicating the local in a global context.

Where French might have been the de facto language of the art world at the beginning of the last century, for the past half century at least, it has been English. And so, our art prize is to award texts written in English only. A constant in our mission since we were founded two years ago is to plug Russian contemporary culture into the global discourse and create ripples, waves and dialogues. As one Russian artist speaking from his studio in Moscow, in the middle of wrestling with his latest creative project, admitted in a recent conversation, half in Russian and half in English: “As an artist today, it’s important to speak English, even if badly.”

If writing about the culture of a country as huge as Russia not in its native language and, in doing so, removing a layer of nuance, seems a curious challenge, contemporary art itself can be no less puzzling. Art today needs constant explaining, it's an immensely complicated field and full of new turns and historical references drawn from centuries of art history. It is broadening also, becoming ever more inclusive, the voice of authority ever more elusive. As an article on 'A-Ya' published in 'Decorative Art of the USSR' in 1990 rallied, "It is difficult to write simply about complicated things, but that does not mean that one must not try..." So, roll up your sleeves, sharpen your pencils or switch on your screens and let's get writing!

[Russian Art Focus Prize website](#)

Jo Vickery

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