

The Museum of Modern Art

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RECENT CHANGES IN THE ART AND PRACTICE OF FILMMAKING IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION EXPLORED IN A NEW FILM SERIES AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

**Inaugural Exhibition of an Annual Collaboration between
The Museum of Modern Art and The Confederation of Filmmakers' Unions**

***Commonwealth of Independent States: FilmFest*
December 13-23, 1996
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1**

With the fall of Communism there have been fundamental changes in the content of films and the practice of filmmaking in the former Soviet Union. These changes are examined in *Commonwealth of Independent States: FilmFest*, the inaugural exhibition of a planned annual collaboration between The Confederation of Filmmakers' Unions, representing all of the former Soviet republics, and The Museum of Modern Art. The series begins December 13 and runs through December 23, 1996.

Commonwealth of Independent States: FilmFest presents nine programs of remarkable films made from 1993 to 1995—difficult years financially for many filmmakers, but a time of considerable aesthetic exploration. The series includes new work by veteran filmmakers and emerging artists. Six of the films in the series were made in Russia, where the major Moscow studios, Lenfilm and Mosfilm, remain central to the film industry. Latvia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are the other three states represented.

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"The talented veteran and new directors in this series have been working out of decentralized and financially impoverished studios, often using antiquated equipment and hard-to-come-by film stock," says Jytte Jensen, Assistant Curator, Department of Film and Video, who organized the series with Galina Verevkina, Coordinator, and Rustam Ibragimbekov, Chairman, The Confederation of Filmmakers' Unions.

"It is a testament to their ingenuity and commitment," Jensen continues, "that these directors have managed to produce films of the first caliber. The nine programs in the series demonstrate considerable thematic sophistication and formal artistry in their exploration of all aspects of contemporary life."

A number of guests will attend the series. Directors Vladimir Khotinenko (*The Muslim*), Sergei Ovcharov (*Drumroll*), and Lora Stepenskaya (co-director, *The Soul is Burnt Out*) will be present to introduce their films. Galina Verevkina, Nikolai Vaschenko, Chief Consultant, The Confederation of Filmmakers' Unions, and Teimuraz Shengelia, Director, The Foundation for the Centennial of Film, will also be in New York City during the series.

Commonwealth of Independent States: FilmFest opens with two films that explore how the past informs and determines the present: Vladimir Khotinenko's moving *Musulimanin (The Muslim)* (1995), the story of the return home of a Russian man who converted to Islam while a P.O.W. in Afghanistan, and Vadim Abrashitov's forceful *Peesa dla passazira (A Play for a Passenger)* (1995), a parable in which a train passenger and his conductor are caught up in a drama of changing power dynamics.

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Russian films have always drawn on the country's strong literary history. In the series, acclaimed experimental filmmaker Alexandr Sokurov's hallucinatory *Tixie stranichi* (*Quiet Pages*) (1993) draws inspiration from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, while Semyon Aranovich's melodrama *God sobaki* (*Year of The Dog*) (1993), starring Inna Churikova, takes Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as its point of departure.

A drum with a droll personality and a Slavic version of Buster Keaton are the protagonists in Sergei Ovcharov's *Barabaniada* (*Drumroll*) (1993), an inventive and hilarious commentary on current conditions in Russia that features stunning use of sound in place of dialogue. The program's other comedy, Alexandr Rogozkin's wry *Osobennosti nachionalnoy oxoti* (*The Particulars of the National Hunt*) (1995), is equally pointed in its wry social commentary on post-Soviet Russia, complete with prodigious drinking bouts.

From a country where philosophizing is a cottage industry, it is not surprising to find two films that plumb serious moral and spiritual matters. Bayram Abdullaev and Lora Stepankaya's accomplished *Yandym* (*The Soul is Burnt Out*) (1995) depicts the search for deep-rooted humanistic values, and Aivars Freimanis's *Ligzda* (*The Nest*) (1995) is an exploration of the interconnectedness of environment, family, and national identity.

The final film in the series, Sergei Dvortsevoi's *Happiness* (1995), explores the lives and traditions of a family of Kazakh nomads. This stunningly beautiful documentary anchors a program of short works from the Commonwealth.

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Note: The visiting CIS directors and film industry professionals will be available for interviews.

For more information, preview cassettes, or photographs, please call Graham Leggat, Film Press Representative, at 212/708-9752

No. 63