

Against the New Middle Ages: Imperial Remodernism in Contemporary Russian Visual Culture

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The notion of the “new Middle Ages” is often used today in socio-political discourse to characterize the new ideological role of the Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia. The “conservative turn” in Russian politics and culture, the concept of “traditional values” and new legislative initiatives of the State Duma are sometimes described as “the end of the Enlightenment” (Vladimir Sorokin). However, were we to refer directly to works of the advocates of the contemporary radical conservative thought such as Alexander Prokhanov, Alexander Dugin or Maxim Kalashnikov, we would become aware that these are not medieval guilds and traditional values at all but imperial neo-industrialism which is the key metaphor in these projects. It is precisely the existing oligarchical globalism that is seen as the new Middle Ages through the conservative prism whereas the conservative utopia (Novorossiia, USSR-2, the Eurasian Empire) exemplifies the reemergence of the republican idea and the industrial empire.

Contemporary Russian conservative artists (Alexei Gintovt, Alexei Morozov, Mikhail Rozanov, Denis Egelsky, Natalia Zhernovskaya, the Doping-Pong Group, Anton Chumak, Stepan Liphart) offer a vision of imperial remodernism as an alternative to the postindustrial new Middle Ages. Remodernism is characterized by a fusion of the leftist idea of social justice and the rightist idea of overcoming fragmentation and localization through the weakening of corporations and the oligarchy along with strengthening the state. Aesthetically, these ideas are manifested in a style, which can be described as *industrial neo-classicism* reminiscent of Greco-Roman antiquity, the European Enlightenment, the Soviet modernization project, the era of industrialization and space exploration. Industrial neoclassicists visualize the aesthetic utopia of the “new antiquity” and “new order” as an alternative to the chaos of neoliberal postindustrialism, which, in their opinion, has set us back to the new Middle Ages with its ethnic nationalism, fragmentation, irrationality, and uncontrollable emotionality.