

Vera Koshkina, Harvard University

From the Space Program to Soviet Video Art: Film Experiments of Bulat Galeev

The aim of this paper is to highlight the close ties between experiment in Soviet science and art in the 1960s. I focus on the work of the physicist Bulat Galeev and his cinematic experiments conducted under the auspices of the physics laboratory at the Aviation Institute in Kazan. Inspired by the writing of Alexander Skriabin on music, light and synesthesia, Galeev founded the Prometheus Institute in 1962. The mission of the institute was to promote a deeper understanding of the motion of light in the service of the Soviet Space Program. At Prometheus, Galeev's team engaged in cutting edge research and experimentation with recorded light and sound producing films intended for Soviet astronauts. The films were later successfully exhibited in European festivals of experimental film and art starting in the 1970s. In 1975 Galeev was inducted into Soviet Cinematographer's Union following the success of his film "Little Triptych", securing institutional recognition for his film work.

The Russian and European Avant-gardes inspired Bulat Galeev's transdisciplinary work. Using his position in the sciences, Galeev gained access to otherwise banned literature on abstract art of Malevich and Kandinsky, theories of the combination of image and sound developed by Eisenstein and Skriabin, amassing a library on Avant-garde and experimental art at Prometheus, held seminars and conferences and publishing widely on light-music experiments and synesthesia. In this paper, I look at Galeev's publications on art and science to trace the conceptual and institutional connections that inspired and promoted his work at Prometheus. I also look at interviews with Galeev and his later publications to bring attention to the larger community of scientists who under the unlikely umbrella of the military-industrial complex self-consciously created experimental art. The study of Galeev's work sheds new light on the existence of experimental art within rather than outside Soviet institutions.