

ENCOUNTER WITH THE CURATOR

Jean-Louis Prat, in what way is the exhibition “From Chagall to Malevich, the revolution of the avant-garde” an original production this summer at the Grimaldi Forum?

What makes it original is the presence of all the artists who lived through that dense and tragic epoch and the sensation of living, unceasingly, thanks to them, in discovery. They are all opposed and opposable. The title of the exhibition underlines the confrontation between two major artists of the 20th century: Chagall and Malevich. They lived during the same period, each with rich and contradictory styles. Tolerance is present in that unending “opening up” that is what all artists offer. Men or women, and the women will be numerous, and equal, communicated the sensation of living a new epoch. The exhibition will cover 25 years of creation, from 1905 to 1930. I chose 1905 with the idea that with the first revolt by the St. Petersburg population, everything violently changed sides. The Empire was approaching its end, and the artists had already felt for many years that need to say things differently. I end the exhibition in 1930, the year of Mayakovsky’s suicide, the poet of all the avant-garde.

Twenty-five years are thus explored but, give or take a few years more or less before 1905 or after 1930, one finds in that period the fertile terrain of a nation in motion. With forty artists present and visions so different, our world of today seems to be one of immense banality! From a still classical period, one moves to the adventures of Neo-Primitivism to Rayonism, and then to Cubo-Futurism. All these artists worked side by side, travelled and exchanged iconoclast ideas that however were in fact carried out: that was their power. Generosity is ever-present and the cultural events were so numerous that they bear witness to the richness of a country already in utter upheaval. We accompany them, astonished, on that trajectory truly unique to the 20th century.

Well-informed collectors bought and exhibited these artists in their private mansions in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Good ideas followed upon one another and appeared at the crossings of unexpected roads. Suprematism and Constructivism are revolutionary in spirit. These movements superimposed on one other and were nourished from the infinite contributions of artists who were living in the hope of a new world of which they would be the ultimate witnesses. The dreams and the utopias were a part of those times. All the aesthetic upheavals of the 20th century are contained in those tragic moments: World War I and the incredible hope brought by a Revolution to which all adhered with enthusiasm. This is the theme of this exhibition that brings these creators out of the shadows of the past, creators committing themselves with fervour and passion to those key moments of our history. I won’t cite any particular names because each one is important, all in expectation and hope of the enthusiastic encounters that they were continually making with life.

2015 will be a great year of celebrating Malevich. It's clear from the commentaries about the Grimaldi Forum exhibition that the theme goes far beyond the vision of that particular artist to embrace other visions, other artists who at that same time contributed to the evolution of the artistic style....

Of course all the artists who lived, worked and invented before, during and after the 1917 Revolution will be represented in the Grimaldi Forum exhibition. Forty some creators tell the story with exactitude of the upheavals of the society but also those that they induced in the pictorial world, frozen for several centuries in academism. Chagall, Malevich, Tatlin, Kandinsky, Popova, Larinov, Goncharova, Rodchenka... and many others created different styles so as to fully and generously describe what was happening in all domains.

With the exhibition to open in a few months, can you tell us which are the key works of art, which will mark this Grimaldi Forum exhibition and make it exceptional?

The exceptional aspect of the exhibition comes from the loan of major works from Russia, works which rarely leave the national galleries: the Pushkin Museum, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg. Of course the arrival of *The Theater of Jewish Art* by Marc Chagall and of its seven large panels is definitely an event, and the same can be said for the "*Quadrangle*", the "*Cross*" and the "*Circle*" by Malevich. But all the works are of this quality. For this exhibition, there has been a generous and exceptional collaboration by Russian's prestigious institutions, not to mention the museums in the provinces whose works are mostly little seen, being rarely accessible even for the most curious of travellers! Add to that, the loans from the Pompidou Center such as the "*Tower*" by Tatlin, the works from the famous Costakis collection in Greece, and those from the Thyssen Museum in Madrid, and of course from many private collections. Let me also mention the historic documents, catalogues and reviews: all very rare testimonial accounts. All this contributes to providing an exhaustive portrayal of the events of History marching toward a new world, punctuated by the First World War and the October Revolution. And thus to a realization that the true revolutionaries are often, if not always, the creators...