

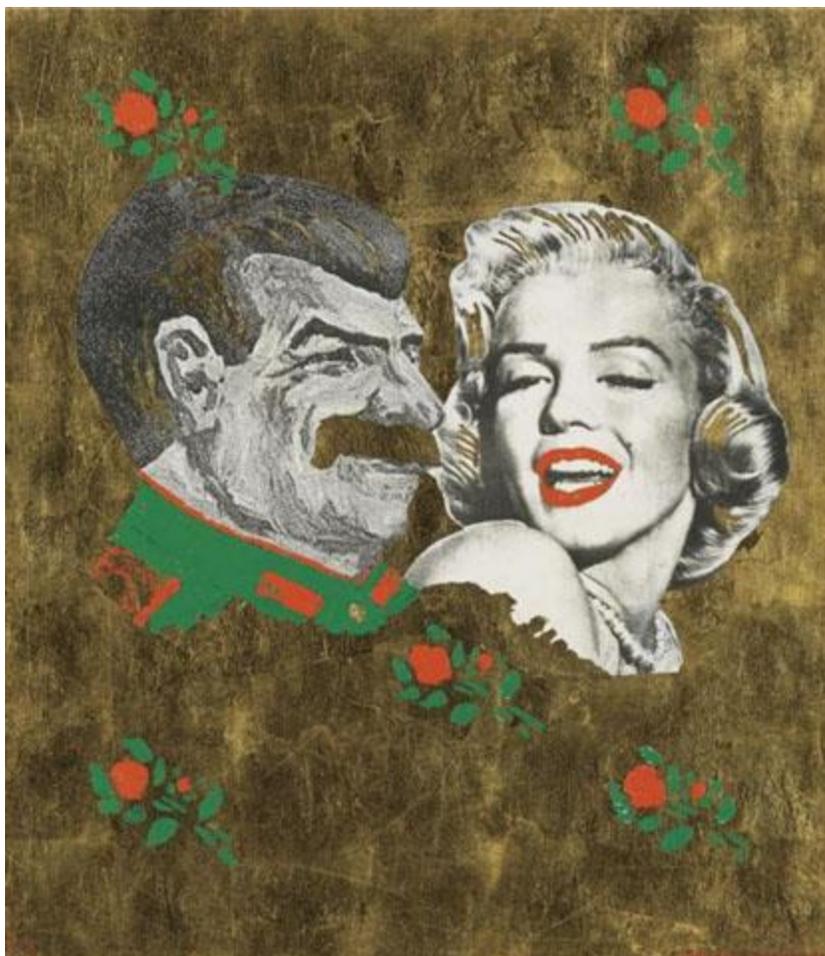
Stalin and Monroe: The Cold War as a Gendered Conflict

Matt Schnizer

Professor Munger

Hum 104

9 April 2019



Artifact:

Stalin and Marilyn by Leonid Sokov¹

¹ Sokov, Leonid. *Stalin and Monroe*. 1991. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

Leonid Sokov's painting *Stalin and Marilyn* inspires an investigation into the nature of how art is viewed in the context of its era.² The painting depicts the heads of Cold war era American entertainment icon Marilyn Monroe and Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin very close to each other, but not looking in either's direction. Sokov is a Soviet era painter who moved to New York in 1980 and specialized in non-conformist Soviet Art.³ Sokov's decision to paint the artifact is relevant and intriguing because of the relationship or lack thereof between the two individuals in the painting. The American, feminine centric, upper class, and materialistic lifestyle of Monroe starkly contrasts Stalin's life as a Russian, communist and highly masculine dictator. The artifact inspired the research question with this juxtaposition; why use a figure that is emblematic of the Cold War with a figure who had little to do with the conflict? It is because Stalin and Monroe represent certain gender stereotypes that Sokov uses to imply that the Cold War is gendered, with the US being feminine and the USSR being masculine.⁴ Revolution surrounds this artifact in that the artifact causes an upheaval surrounding the narrative of the Cold War and moves the perspective which it is portrayed from an ideological, political, and military perspective, to the perspective of gender.

² Sokov, Leonid. *Stalin and Monroe*. 1991. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

³ Saatchi Gallery. "Leonid Sokov." Leonid Sokov - Artist's Profile - The Saatchi Gallery. Accessed April 13, 2019.

https://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/leonid_sokov_breaking_the_ice.htm.

⁴ Dumancic, Marko. "Rescripting Stalinist Masculinity: Contesting the Male Ideal in Soviet Film and Society, 1953–1968." Order No. 3418515, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010. 67

MacCannell, Dean. "Marilyn Monroe was Not a Man (Book Review)." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 114.

Sokov's decision to include Monroe in his painting was obvious, if his goal was to illuminate Monroe's American and feminine status in juxtaposition to Stalin. Historians highlight Monroe's lasting effect on the American public in that over 30 years after her death, her iconicism is still relevant to everyday life.⁵ If she is still relevant to Americans after this long of a period, then there must be something particularly magnetic about her to Americans, especially if her impact is as permanent as historians say. This American magnetism to Monroe cements her as an American icon and therefore someone who can be used to represent the US.

In terms of the Cold War, Monroe isn't directly connected. She wasn't a policy maker or war hero, however, her role in film during the Cold War has relevance. Monroe had a lead role in the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), in which she plays Lorelei, a young gold-digging woman, who goes through a Cinderella like metamorphosis where she learns how to truly value both people and money. Historians and film critics allege that Lorelei's transformation is demonstrative of the strength of American capitalism and a dramatization of the process of containment.⁶ If that is so, then Monroe as Lorelei could be used to represent American values in artwork.

⁵ Jack Mathews, Jan Stuart, Gene Seymour, John Anderson. "WHAT IS IT WITH THESE GUYS? we're Still Under their Spell, 30 Years After the Death of Marilyn Monroe, 15 Years After Elvis Presley's. are we just Pathetic? Or were they really Unique? SIDEBARS: 1) Sunday, Aug. 5, 1962. 2) Tuesday, Aug. 16, 1977. 3) Reserved for Elvis: The Stamp of Greatness (See End of Text)." *Newsday*, Aug 02, 1992, Combined editions.

⁶ Andres, Jan Michelle. "Secrecy through Excess: Strategies of Concealment in Cold War Literature and Film." Order No. 3559244, The Claremont Graduate University, 2013. 97-101

Monroe's portrayal of Lorelei not only focuses on representing American values but also stereotypical feminine values. Lorelei is obsessed with materialistic ideas such as beauty and fashion, however by the end of the movie she professes the value of femininity to society in order to convince her fiancé's father to approve of her marriage to his son.⁷ This demonstrates that Lorelei appreciates both the material and abstract parts of being feminine. Thus, Monroe's portrayal of her could be used to illustrate both material and abstract feminine qualities.

This portrayal combined with the maintenance of Monroe's femininity in the film, could be connected to Sokov's artwork in that in *Stalin and Marilyn*, Monroe represents American values of capitalism and containment through a feminine medium. Thus, giving the "American" portion of Sokov's artwork a feminine aspect.

In contrast to Monroe, Stalin represents the ideas and values core to Soviet era Russia. According to historian Marko Dumancic, Stalin displayed the most important of Russian values: he was a strong and unshakeable leader.⁸ His portrait is present everywhere in modern day Russia despite the De-Stalinization effort that followed his regime. From Taxi cabs to museums, Stalin is still an icon, despite his heinous crimes and death more than seventy years ago.⁹ Given the Russians' obsession with him, one could argue that Stalin is representative of the Soviet

⁷ Andres, Jan Michelle. 97-101

⁸ Dumancic, Marko. 67

⁹ PHILIP TAUBMAN, Special to the New, York Times. "DISMANTLING THE STALIN MYTH: NEW EFFORT UNDER GORBACHEV." *New York Times*, Mar 15, 1987, Late Edition (East Coast).

Union of his era and thus his qualities and faults can also be representative of the Soviet Union during his era.

Coupled with the fact that he represents the Soviet Union, Stalin's symbolic masculinity is also important. Dumancic again discusses how Russia moves on from Stalinist masculinity into post Stalinist masculinity as a movement from a "superman" emphasized masculinity to a more diverse masculinity.¹⁰ If Stalinist masculinity is dominated by the idea of the "superman", and Stalin is a representative figure of the Soviet Union of the time, then when considering the Soviet Union, we must consider these traits.¹¹

Further amplifying his ultra-masculine image is Stalin's love for violence. Stalin was known to enjoy American Western style movies because of their action-packed skirmishes and standoffs.¹² Though this contradicts his appearance as a representation of the Soviet Union due to the American nature of his beloved films, the association these kinds of films have with the idea of masculinity affirm that Stalin himself can be used as a symbol for male machismo. Stalin's focus on the hyper emphasized masculinity of supermen and violence, thus illustrates a picture of the Soviet Union accommodating opposing values to those portrayed by Marilyn Monroe and the US.

Considering the historical significance of Stalin and Monroe in the context of the Cold War, the conclusion can be made that the two individuals clearly represent a juxtaposition in

¹⁰ Dumancic, Marko. 48

¹¹ Taubman, Phillip.

¹² Sebag, Simon. "Stalin was a Film Junkie:" *Edmonton Journal*, Jun 05, 2004.

terms of national identity and gender. Given this statement Sokov clearly incorporates both individuals into his painting with purpose. That purpose is to send a message regarding the state and nature of the Cold War conflict and in doing so by using such a unique combination of individuals, Sokov sends a unique message; the Cold War goes beyond conflicting military, ideology, and politics. This is where Sokov's gendered painting comes into play, with Monroe representing femininity and the US and Stalin representing masculinity and the USSR, Stalin is able to depict the Cold War as a gendered conflict. Sokov further cements this with the actual style in the painting itself; Monroe and Stalin appear close to each other yet are both looking off in different directions. This could possibly represent the US and USSR's differing approaches to the Cold War in that each nation set their sights on similar territories and conquests but had vastly different ideas and plans for them. This emphasizes the importance of Stalin juxtaposing both gender and the US-USSR conflict through Stalin and Monroe.

Sokov's decision to utilize highly gender charged individuals in his artwork is importantly related to the Cold war because of the nature of Sokov's art style. Sokov was part of an era of non-conformist Soviet artists who refused to paint the art the Soviet Union wanted them to or commissioned them to.¹³ Sokov's artwork includes careful choices as he was risking danger to produce it. Therefore, including Marilyn Monroe in one of his paintings is a peculiar choice; why include a notable American figure in the art, especially considering anti-American and anti-capitalist sentiment in the Soviet Union. A possibility includes the idea that is previously

¹³ Buhler, Clinton J. "Life between Two Panels Soviet Nonconformism in the Cold War Era." Order No. 10970785, The Ohio State University, 2013. 9

considered in which Monroe is a vehicle by which to portray the US. In an era where it would be dangerous for Sokov to create artwork positively portraying Soviet enemies, Sokov utilized an important American figure who was unrelated to the Cold War to smokescreen his message from people and groups who would seek to do him harm because of his political perspective. This supports the idea that Monroe is meant to represent the United States and some of its value in compliment of the feminine values she represents. Sokov could also simply use Stalin to represent the Soviet Union because there was no harm in depicting one of the nations beloved progenitors in his artwork, in fact it may have given Sokov more prerogative to produce the artwork in the first place.

A possible counterclaim to the argument that Sokov meant to illuminate the Cold War conflict through gender is that he did not wish to portray the Cold War conflict at all. One possible explanation for Stalin and Monroe appearing in the same painting is Sokov 's tutelage under Andy Warhol. Under Warhol, Sokov studied to create anti-Soviet propaganda art.¹⁴ Given this, Stalin and Marilyn could be a piece of anti-Soviet propaganda, in which case Sokov may have been attempting to demean the ultra-manly Stalin by including him in the same portrait as the ultra-feminine Marilyn Monroe.¹⁵

¹⁴ Baker, R. C. "Leonid Sokov's Cocktails and 500 Cocks." *The Village Voice*, Feb 06, 2013.

¹⁵ Dumancic, Marko. 67

Sokov's dedication to consumer art could also be a possible explanation for this painting.¹⁶ Sokov made paintings that were sellable so that he could make money.¹⁷ This art falls under the definition of kitsch as defined by Clement Greenberg, in that it dumbs down the ideological conflict of the Cold War to the faces of Stalin and Monroe.¹⁸ Taking Greenberg's definition into consideration: these simplified ideas are more marketable to the masses and therefore more profitable. In this case, perhaps Sokov believed that a picture of a pop culture icon and historical icon together would create a kitschy image that appealed to the masses, thus allowing Sokov to accomplish his goals: continue to be an artist and make money. However, Sokov could also have intended for the to utilize the kitschy style of his painting to gain the attention of the masses: the easiest way for him to display his painting and further the idea of a gendered Cold War is for as many people as possible to consume his art. Therefore, Sokov's decision to make his painting kitschy could have been a strategy to advance his ideas on the Cold War rather than a decision to maximize the profit of his art.

Despite the ideas of the painting being a kitschy commercial production, it is more than likely based on other Sokov works and his style of Soviet non-conformity that Sokov was

¹⁶ Degot, Ekaterina. "'LEONID SOKOV: POINT OF VIEW'." *Artforum International* 50, no. 9 (05, 2012): 170.

¹⁷ Degot, Ekaterina.

¹⁸ Greenberg, Clement, and Saul Ostrow. *Avant-garde and Kitsch, Fifty Years Later*.

addressing the Cold War and using Monroe and Stalin as symbols to represent opposing sides of it.¹⁹

In today's world, the Cold War is primarily viewed as an ideological, political, and military conflict, with ideological and political battles raging in Central Europe and proxy wars being fought in East Asia. However, the painting *Stalin and Marilyn* introduces the idea that the Cold War could be viewed as a gender-based conflict, in that America's capitalist and containment style can be viewed through a feminine lens,²⁰ whereas the Soviet Union's dominating foreign policy tendencies can be viewed through a masculine lens.²¹

Sokov's work is revolutionary because it shifts the conversation around the Cold War from a lens and perspective of ideologies, politics, and militaries to one of gender, which is an unusual perspective to portray the Cold War with. This revolutionary shift highlights that the Cold War and other conflicts can be viewed in this way and that historians can expand their interpretations of conflict with a gendered lens. This could advance scholarly discussion around not only how groups go about conflicts in a gendered way but also the treatment of various genders during conflict, thus bringing gender balances and rights into another scholarly conversation.

¹⁹ Stacy, Nick. "ART REVOLUTION: Russian Artists Buck Conformity." *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, Nov 29, 2010.

Buhler, 9

²⁰ Andres, Jan Michelle. 97-101

²¹ Dumancic, Marko. 64-68

Bibliography

Andres, Jan Michelle.

"Secrecy through Excess: Strategies of Concealment in Cold War Literature and Film."
Order No. 3559244, The Claremont Graduate University, 2013.

Baker, R. C.

"Leonid Sokov's Cocktails and 500 Cocks." *The Village Voice*, Feb 06, 2013.

Buhler, Clinton J.

"Life between Two Panels Soviet Nonconformism in the Cold War Era." Order No.
10970785, The Ohio State University, 2013.

Degot, Ekaterina.

""LEONID SOKOV: POINT OF VIEW"." *Artforum International* 50, no. 9 (05, 2012):
170.

Dumancic, Marko.

"Rescripting Stalinist Masculinity: Contesting the Male Ideal in Soviet Film and Society,
1953–1968." Order No. 3418515, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010.

Greenberg, Clement, and Saul Ostrow.

Avant-garde and Kitsch, Fifty Years Later.

Jack Mathews, Jan Stuart, Gene Seymour, John Anderson.

"WHAT IS IT WITH THESE GUYS? we're Still Under their Spell, 30 Years After the
Death of Marilyn Monroe, 15 Years After Elvis Presley's. are we just Pathetic? Or were

they really Unique? SIDEBARS: 1) Sunday, Aug. 5, 1962. 2) Tuesday, Aug. 16, 1977. 3) Reserved for Elvis: The Stamp of Greatness (See End of Text)." *Newsday*, Aug 02, 1992, Combined editions.

MacCannell, Dean.

"Marilyn Monroe was Not a Man (Book Review)." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 114.

Saatchi Gallery.

"Leonid Sokov." Leonid Sokov - Artist's Profile - The Saatchi Gallery. Accessed April 13, 2019. https://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/leonid_sokov_breaking_the_ice.htm.

Sebag, Simon.

"Stalin was a Film Junkie:" *Edmonton Journal*, Jun 05, 2004.

Sokov, Leonid.

Stalin and Monroe. 1991. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

Stacy, Nick.

"ART REVOLUTION: Russian Artists Buck Conformity." *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, Nov 29, 2010.

Taubman, Phillip.

Special to the New, York Times. "DISMANTLING THE STALIN MYTH: NEW EFFORT UNDER GORBACHEV." *New York Times*, Mar 15, 1987, Late Edition (East Coast).

