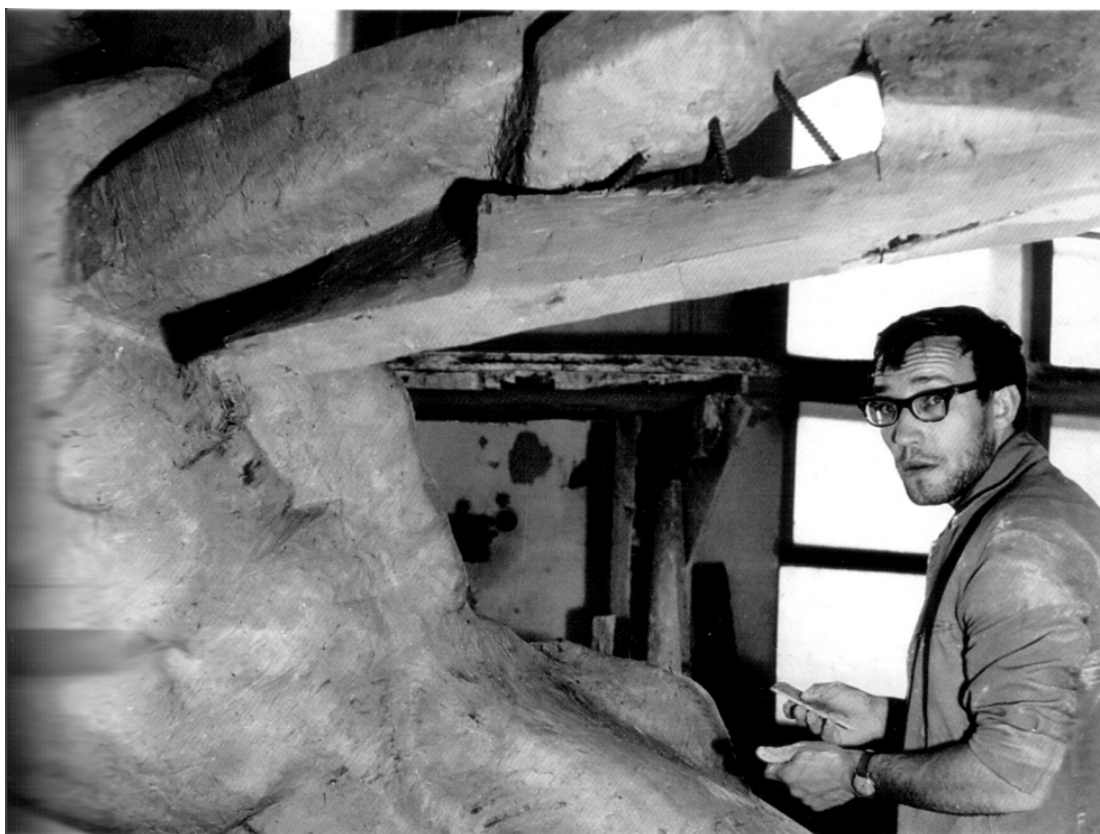


It seems he was conceived as a vector. However, bureaucrats filling out forms changed the word to Viktor, considering "Vector" not as a name, but as some kind of reservation. That's how I remember him: as if Viktor. And unquestionably, Bokarev. He captured something very clearly by intuition and sculpted for me a portrait in the form of a sculpture, standing upright but very persistently. One hand supported the other with the palm under the elbow, and the other covered the face like a mask; as if there was no face. But due to the spread fingers, the face looked like it was being swallowed by the mask. This was just one of the figures in a whole series that depicted not heads or skulls, but a powerful brain and a face where the eye sockets and other hollows and protrusions focused bundles of vectors of attention, converging at one point. The object of contemplation, invisible to us, in different works, was sometimes very far, sometimes very close. The brain covers were transparent, like everything in its environment. In the transparent world, the brain relied only on the shoulders and forearms, as the medieval image of the Earth's hemisphere relied on three elephants and a whale. Bokarev's sculptures made verbal commentaries redundant. They were more eloquent than all poetic experiments of the 50s-60s, everything read and heard before Galich and Vysotsky. Such were the typical constructions of his sculptures in the 62s-63s.

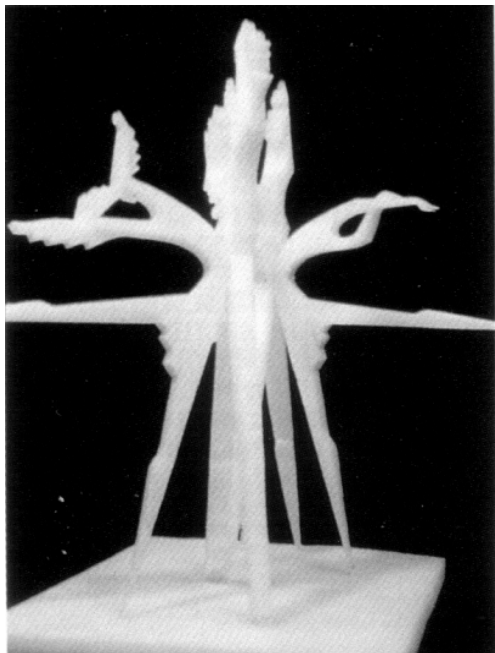
Yury Dinaburg

"Campanella and Michelangelo - Basements Captives"

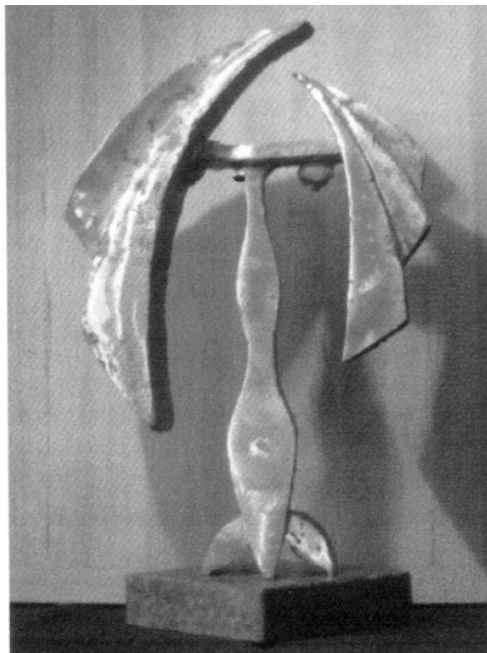


There are many legends about Vitya Bokarev. One says that before engaging in sculpture, he was quite successful in ballet, but after attempting a split jump on a battery during practice, he broke his metatarsal bones and quit choreography forever. Another legend suggests that at a banquet celebrating the completion of UUPI (Ural Institute of Applied Arts), Viktor dramatically tore up the freshly issued diploma and immediately went to study with the notorious Ernst Unknown. There, he spent a whole year kneading clay, preparing mixtures, and working as a janitor for a pittance. Another story claims that even before these feats, he, as a young assistant to a carpenter, would carve boards in the hope that they were meant for creating a work of art. However, it turned out to be a well-made house. The teacher turned out to be a coffin maker. Yet another tale is that he always carried his thick boards with reliefs, much like Christ, and dragged tons of clay.

Legends of another kind depict Viktor as a typical "leftie," rebellious and arrogant at times, at other times a melancholic outcast, and fortunately, more often, a large, powerful, and unsurpassed artist in the search for new forms. My childhood coincided with his stay in Chelyabinsk. His name was inseparable from a mass of cultural events, constituting the natural atmosphere of our family. Going to see the gallery of Viktor Bokarev's heroes was as essential as listening to Gilels in Saint-Saëns, Babanov in Wilde, or watching Ulanova in "Giselle." This was the beginning of the sixties.



Ballet



Portrait of Nikolai Gogol

When our own "Bulldozer Exhibition" happened in Chelyabinsk, it was not on Khrushchev's insistence (who, as noted by the same Ernst Unknown, didn't understand a thing about art), but by the order of local fighters against "ideologically foreign" trends for the Soviet people. Since only three were attributed to formalists in the Southern Urals - Dyakov, Antonov, and Bokarev - they almost honored the workshop of the latter, considering him the most vibrant and significant reformer in sculpture. At that time, Viktor had a very good place - literally a basement - for our collection, he had a permanent exhibition - a voluminous basement in the Railway Workers Palace. Ah, the soldiers who were smashing the sculptures of great dreamers-utopians (sometimes the same ones whose monuments Viktor had dreamed of!): where are you? Tell the world how you shattered the foreheads of Campanella and Gorky, the horns of Prometheus, Demon, and Icarus! Not like the knights-murderers? They later wrote memoirs and enjoyed memories of shots - at the faces and hearts of Sverdlovsk pioneers. Later, though, they suffered and went mad: they envisioned a stern gaze of the heir under the barrel.

And here are the sculptural characters of Bokarev, with tormented souls, abandoned in a city garden, which will likely haunt someone's fiercely party conscience for years. There was one concrete character with distinctly human eyes - a scratch on the skin, like many of Bokarev's heroes! In the dynamics of a sharp turn, he directed his gaze into a hostile space: pain and challenge were readable in him. We then called this work "Silent Reproach." However, now, going through life's trials, I believe that it was "The Slave's Rebellion." Viktor's enigma is related to his reluctance to name his works. On that, as yet unbombed, exhibition, he declared this position: I give the viewer space for fantasy. Everyone will see what only they see. Thus, the Bulgarian magazine "Mladezh," in 1970, astonished, said: "няма названия" (no names). There, it was easy to translate into Russian, and he said little about himself and a lot about creativity.

As for rebellion of all sorts, Viktor had plenty of it. He was interested in heroes. His heroes are full of courage, and strength; they are brutal and mighty. They are always in motion, in overcoming. The personal human qualities of the artist - his eternal opposition to a clumsy environment, to misunderstanding, his heroism in creative seclusion (he locked himself away from all the bureaucratic intrusions - even knock if you dare! - and worked desperately!), his chronic "hard work," to use the words of V. F. Taynitsky - made a master of strong character.

Therefore, the motif of active work is natural for him in creativity, regardless of the type of art it relates to. This is his Paganini, an image to which he returns repeatedly. Whether using rough pine boards or ordinary steel

rods, for our collection, he created the image of Paganini on four sheets with yellow strokes (one of the forced participants in creation—be it a sculptor, a tractor driver, a soldier, or a pilot), they were looted too. Craftily, in the absence of the owner, intruding like thieves. After the second defeat, this art rebel was plunged into a long shock. We believe: these were the years 1963-1965. Bokarev could not move a finger or a foot for a long time: his wings were broken.



Rachmaninoff: The Last Concert

And wings were his fundamental idea - flight. He was even interested in the formal problem: how can mass fly? How, in creating a sculptural work, to convey the state of flight, in the entire set of artistic and technical means? That is, how can you suspend or support such a work? Thus were born his *Demon*, *Prometheus*, *Icarus*. In *Icarus*, Viktor came closest to embodying his idea. Made of forged copper, he still flies in the so-called *Zlatoust-36*.

But the *Demon* was never realized, although there are many graphic versions.

In general, Viktor is a wonderful draftsman. This quality is evident in both sculpture and especially in wooden reliefs.

The graphic element does not disappear here but rather coexists with, and complements them. And although he thinks in masses, in large volumes, his graphic gift has never gone anywhere.

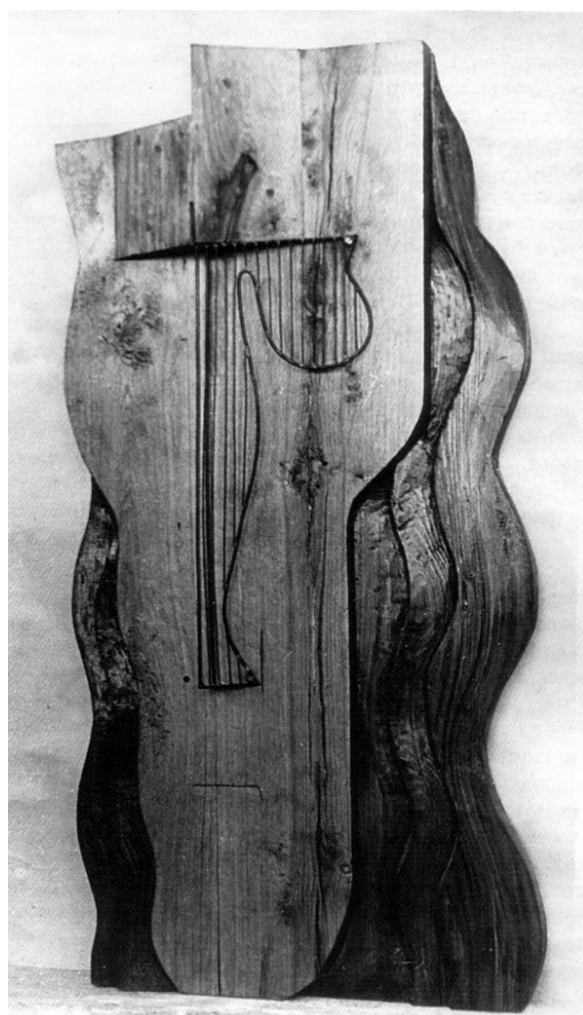
Here is a relief in plaster "*Rest*", and here are the wooden reliefs (sometimes translated from plaster), wood carving, partially painted. Work on profiled wood, considering the natural pattern, and knots. Mostly it's pine - the cheapest you can get. And here he has many things - here's "*Ballet*", here's "*Centauress*"...

Models had to be made of styrofoam, which Viktor perceived as inexpensive - a technique of the Chelyabinsk period), where a quarter of the face equals a quarter of the guitar neck and body, and the framing silhouette of hair - undoubtedly representing the strings. The abundance of asymmetry combined with favorite contrasts - the wave line and straight lines (which, by the way, at the intersection of the main features of the face, form a cross) - creates an illusion of sound filling the sheet. The same Aeolian strings dominate on another sheet, representing Apollo, enclosed along with the blue music stripes in a circle of his muscular arm.

One artist even promised to reveal to me the secret of creativity, realizing that I was "in love with Bokarev's line", but then forgot, apparently also captivated by Vitya's works. We only reasoned for a long time about Campanella - an image that varies in the artist's creativity - why does he sculpt his utopian figure with closed eyes? Maybe because the dream is unattainable, and it is always a utopia: it will never happen. Or perhaps to prevent others' gazes from scaring away the dream? The mystery, dreamlike creativity, mysterious smile, fire instead of a hairstyle, and an obvious resemblance to another outstanding Chelyabinsk figure from the past - Yuri Dinaburg - make Campanella attractive and magically compelling in all aspects. This is known to everyone in whose apartments the author of "City of the Sun" resides...



Vincent van Gogh



Niccolò Paganini

After all, even the foreman's house on Vorovsky Street, where he, as always, in the cold and forgetting about food, worked on his dynamic laborers who, with effort, overcome the stubbornness of matter (he is interested in them in motion), was an offense. The absence of real materials was also a form of oppression. And he dreamed of them - bronze, Swedish granite. But he had to be content with clay, plaster, concrete, and... iron shavings; over time, such works would take on the appearance of rust, which looked like an extraordinariness.

Viktor is an inventive, innovative artist. Breaking the lines of bodies, and reforming forms, he gives space to new rhythms. Perceiving them in nature, he rediscovers the world. This is reflected in his current silhouette sculpture. Someone said he loves... holes. It's simply an expressed attitude toward Bokarev's "negative space," where a piece is subtracted from the material, giving way to different associative connections. Beloved contrasts

are born: volume - void, plane - infinity. This applies to the beloved flying figures and even to the faces of saints when the cross fits into the void, becoming the axis of the face, the personality. This "minus-space," in the words of Yu. D. Trosmann, leaves us with the same relief, where instead of a wall or a stele, there's Air.

Playing with contrasts is Bokarev's forte. For instance, if in the Chelyabinsk period, he created sheer strength, and masculinity, sculpting all these flexing slaves because he passionately believed in the possibility of human muscles changing life, then in subsequent years, in Moscow and Zhukovsky, where he found himself even now, he gravitated towards the elders, the holy fathers, the spiritual pillars of the Christian world. That's when the airy foundations came, space for the soul!

And have you heard about Bokarev and music? About how we, regulars of philharmonic evenings, marveled at the abundance at concerts of other artist-brothers: when Vitya's friends played, the best Russian musicians like R. Kerer, I. Zhukov, N. Gutman, and others.

Thanks to the efforts of friends, among the photographs of his works from the Chelyabinsk period, there is, for example, a photo of Rudolf Kerer (an outstanding pianist-camper, playing scales on logs) against the backdrop of Bokarev's Campanellas and a self-portrait.

Let's talk about friends. Let the city be grateful to those who preserve these photographs, the works, and the memory of that unfortunate and remarkable time.

Despite the sculptor's fall from grace, many helped him - some with the acquisition of a new basement, some with welding work, and some just with a cup of hot coffee brought to the cold construction hut from the nearby bakery... Off the top of my head, we can mention those no longer with us: R. Shron, S. Perepletchikov, A. Dammer, as well as Yu. and I. Trosmans, M. Knyazeva, G. Tselms, V. Tainitsky, A. Kerbel, V. Voinov, Yu. Dinaburg...

Thanks to them, the Chelyabinsk period ended at least not tragically.

Tell me, is there anyone in the city who hasn't bowed their head before the monument to the soldier with the flag at School No. 1?

Not impressed by this work? But few know that the author is Viktor Bokarev, as during the years of disgrace, this name was silenced, and the orders executed by him were never accepted by the Soviet management.

So he went to Moscow. He loaded his concrete works into a five-ton container and left. The capital is so vast, it's easier to get lost, but here everything is in plain sight.

And having lost himself in the Russian space, he found himself. No, we do not agree with one of his friends that, like Michelangelo, Vitya was born half a millennium earlier. However, to tell the truth, I always thought that they had a great portrait resemblance, especially if we consider Bokarev's Michelangelo. Not to mention the fact that this sculptural portrait, like the model in clay of Campanella, literally breathes - such an extraordinary sense of material in Viktor!

Here, he was a true underground artist. He worked underground using only makeshift materials. Like Gogh: no primed canvas - we paint on burlap, fully utilizing the available texture.

A master of rough forms? Indeed!

However, now he's free, forever emerged from the underground! He joined the Union so that his projects could be realized. He wishes to embody the ideas of connecting with the souls of ancestors in sculpture. For us, earthly beings, the utopian thoughts of the elder do not give him peace. He reads Carlos Castaneda. As always, he thinks without respite.

He built a house in Zhukovsky, near the cosmonauts, on a large piece of land. He sculpts whatever he wants. He taught his elder son Vadim stonemasonry, and he now teaches it in America. There, where Rachmaninoff stands, sculpted by Viktor... (Now the master has his workshop in Jersey City, on the other side of the Hudson.) Recognizable plot, repeated.

Viktor was twenty when in 1961 they met with Trosmann, and the first question from Yuri Dmitrievich surprised him: "Do you believe in God?" He replied in the spirit that he doesn't have a religious feeling. "You're wrong. After all, it's all not for nothing - both us on Earth and everything else..."

Clearly, not for nothing.

Come, Viktor, to our Bokarev's exhibition! The gallery promises to organize it.

Natalia Rubinskaya
January 2003