

# Study on the Mayakovskaya Metro Station as an Example of Stalinist Architecture in the 1930s

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## ABSTRACT

This study takes Mayakovskaya station as the research object, explores the memorial space and socialist realism public art, and analyzes how the station wins the function of Stalin's politics and official discourse through design. Mayakovskaya Metro station was opened on May 15th, 1938. It was built and designed by architect Aleksey Dushkin and painter Aleksandr Deineka. Mayakovskaya station belongs to the "neoclassicism" style. It is considered to be the product of Stalin's society. It is a product of its time of art, society, culture, technology and politics.

**Keywords:** *Neoclassicism, The Mayakovskaya Station, Stalinist Architecture.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Mayakovskaya Metro Station was opened on 15 May, 1938. The underground platform was built by architect Aleksey Dushkin. The 35- mosaic cycle, as well as stainless steel and semiprecious stone ornamentation was designed by painter Aleksandr Deineka. The Mayakovskaya Metro Station belongs to the "neoclassical" style, with the architectural characteristics of classical palace style. It was representing the power of Architectural art and technology affecting people's daily life movement. The soviet government shew a strong attention to the station and announced the inauguration of this vaulted station of the Gorky Radius months ahead in 1937 without the finishing of the second phase of the Metro project.[6] It was considered as an underground palace, which is a representative social event in the Moscow history [4]. According to the words from the architect of the station, Aleksey Dushkin, people were crowded with happy noises, which created a feeling that people were not in the depths of Moscow underground.[3] There are a total of 35 images of colorful mosaics on the ceiling describing life activities in Soviet worlds including airplanes flying, athletes training and pleasure from harvesting. There is no question that all those features are related to the culture, society and time of revolutionary in Soviet Union.

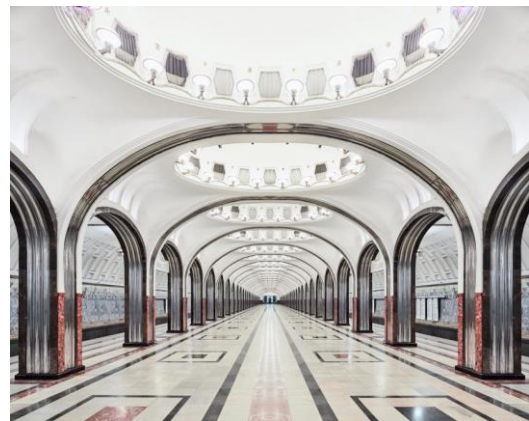


Figure 1 Photos of Russia's Gorgeous Soviet Era Metro Stations. Source: David Burdeny, Photos of Russia's Gorgeous Soviet Era Metro Stations, Picture, <<https://petapixel.com/2017/03/13/photos-russias-gorgeous-soviet-era-metro-stations/>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

## 2. THE FUNCTIONS OF STALINIST SOCIETY

The Mayakovskaya Metro Station is considered as a product of Stalinist society. It is people's underground palace. Considering the influence from the Revolution earlier than 1930, there was a unstable state of movement of different classes. According to Australian historian Sheila Fitzpatrick:



Station is neoclassical, many art elements from Deco was used to make the station look both elegant and light, sweeping away the staid solemnness of the neoclassical station. It has a striking feature of the Deco with strict regularity and bold by using of geometric shapes. Compared with the constructivism that also has these characteristics, Deco in the Mayakovskaya Metro station is more rich in color and complicated in pattern in the images of mosaics. The structure contains folded line, step form, wide and dynamic curved line.

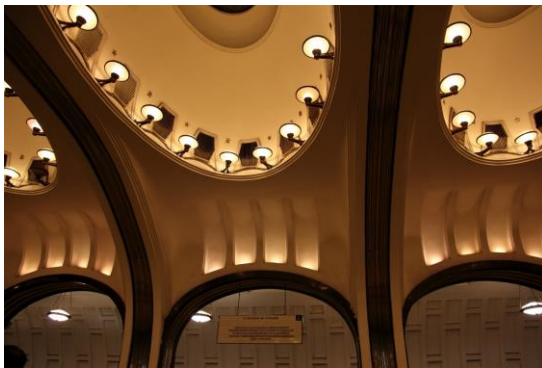


Figure 4 Moscow metro station dome, Russia. Source: Shuxian Wu, Moscow metro station dome, Russia, digital photograph, Picture, <<https://www.quanjing.com/imgbuy/QJ9106383259.html>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

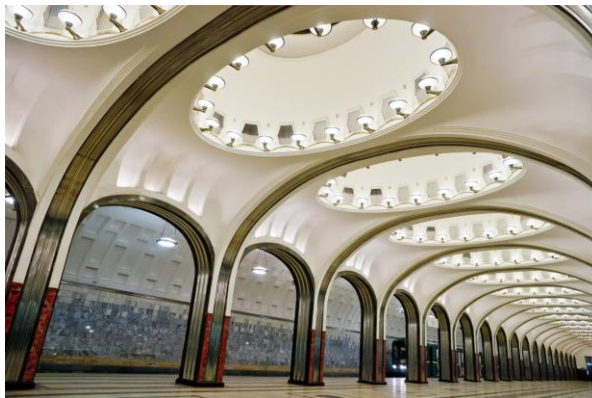


Figure 5 Metro station, Moscow. Source: Deposit photos, Metro station, Moscow, digital photograph, Picture, <<https://www.quanjing.com/imgbuy/QJ8422304228.html>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]



Figure 6 Mayakovskaya metro station, Moscow: the ceiling, Digital image, 1999. Source: Halbe, Roland, Mayakovskaya metro station, Moscow: the ceiling, Digital image, 1999, <[https://www.ribapix.com/mayakovskaya-metro-station-moscow-the-ceiling\\_riba4236](https://www.ribapix.com/mayakovskaya-metro-station-moscow-the-ceiling_riba4236)>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

At the same time, the Deco also has the characteristics of gorgeous elegance and luxury which the constructivism does not have. Aleksandr Deineka used unusual building materials such as stainless steel and glass pieces in the mosaics. Aleksandr Deineka worked with Dushkin to combine the building and mosaics to sweep the solemn and purge ancient board temperament of neoclassicism subway station, both elegant, and light grace. The columns ribbed by stainless steel shew the country's management power and a strong feeling of Deco. Together with the noise and the odors emanating from massing, it created a new underground experience to educate users how advanced the communism was. It means that the users would enjoy the structure frame from Dushkin and the mosaics from Deinkeka ,which makes interaction at the same time with the function of education.

The mosaics representing proletariats is enjoyed by viewers. Images on the ceiling are aestheticized in its color and shape. It showed a communism attitude that the traditional and beautiful art works should be shared by proletariat but not bourgeois. The reason was that the works were created by hardworking from proletariat. It shows that Aleksandr Deineka has put his passion on the soviet society to decorate the metro using mosaics.

#### 4. THE ARTISTIC FUNCTION OF STALINIST OFFICIAL DISCOURSE

Stalinist official discourse and art in the 1930s influenced the Mayakovskaya Metro. It means that the metro has a poetic meaning servicing politics

rather than the pragmatic function as a transport place. According to Wolfgang Holz's observation, 'allegory again became dominant in Socialist Realism because of the traditional affinity of allegories with ideology in general, and more particularly because of the role of Soviet art in social planning, which tended to move art away from the hallowed ideas of individual 'insight' and 'expression.' [4] It explains the reason why there are people with traditional signals such as cloths in the image. By using this allegory, users with different backgrounds could understand how people build up the Soviet Union from mosaics. It will largely replace the pre-revolutionary thoughts as a substitution of the historical story, which is related to the parts about educating users.



Figure 7 metro station, Moscow. Source: Deposit photos, metro station, Moscow, digital photograph, Picture, <<https://www.quanjing.com/imgbuy/QJ8766941112.html>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]



Figure 8 Mosaics. Source: OLEG KRASNOV, Mosaics, Digital photographs, 7 August 2017, <[https://www.rbth.com/multimedia/pictures/2017/07/08/treasures-of-the-moscow-metro-4-green-line-stations-you-shouldnt-miss\\_798037](https://www.rbth.com/multimedia/pictures/2017/07/08/treasures-of-the-moscow-metro-4-green-line-stations-you-shouldnt-miss_798037)>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

The Mayakovskaya Metro station educates people with different backgrounds by imagination. Aleksandr Deineka said: 'The role of fine arts is not only to explain the new in our life, but also to show it to society through art one can love, feel the new, one can see better.' [1] According to Deineka's words, he utilized 'Trompe-l'oeil' in the Mayakovskaya Metro station: 'Go down into the Metro, raise your head, citizen, and you will see the sky on the roof' [2] Users with different backgrounds have different thoughts drawing the image in their minds in the Mayakovskaya Metro station. An oval frame is attached to each mosaic image. When users were raising their heads, things in the backgrounds such as bodies, objects and context were less focused and uncertain in terms of virtual feelings. It means that Deineka used optical skills to encourage users to draw their own image by imagination in order to complete the fragmentary image in the ceiling. Comparing with the idea of synaesthesia by mixing feelings from sense organs, the optical skill is merely on visual. The synaesthesia is playing a role of encouraging and guiding positive thoughts for basis, and the optical skill makes users to automate the utopian world automatically.



Figure 9 First mosaic. Source: Annie Gerin, First mosaics, digital photograph, Picture, <<https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6749/1/424660.pdf>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

The mosaics decoration of Mayakovskaya Metro Station showed the development and innovation in economy and technology in the 1930s. On the first image of mosaics, there are two aeroplanes upon an apple tree branch. It is a combination of natural and artificial things. They are TB-3 bomber with four engines, which was designed from 1929 to 1934 as a proud of red army. The meaning of putting military and agricultural product at the same time is to show the cooperation in military and agriculture. This image is a symbol of peace according to Yuri Shutovsky [9], which shows welfare in both could be achieved at the same time. The apple trees and the aeroplanes are not traditions in the Soviet Union. Referencing to the function of educating users mentioned before, the peaceful way how we used weapons in our production was given to users.

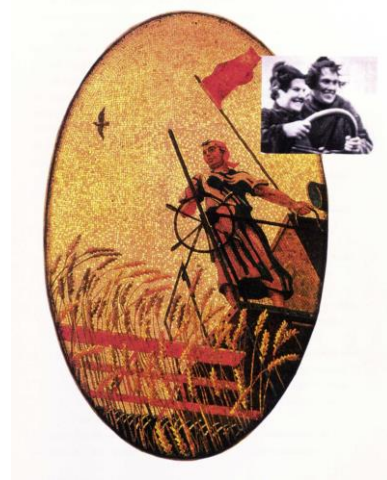


Figure 10 Eighth Mosaics. Source: Annie Gerin, Eighth Mosaics, digital photograph, Picture, <<https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6749/1/424660.pdf>>[Accessed 6 December 2021] An image of women operating harvesting machine. Source: Annie Gerin, An image of women operating harvesting machine, digital photograph, Picture, <<https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6749/1/424660.pdf>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

On the eighth image of mosaics, there is a large harvesting-machine with a woman standing on it. The black and white photo shows two women teaching each other how to use the harvesting-machine. It shows a great pension from people to things with highest technology during that time. For example, we can see the machine on the cover of magazines at that time. Farmers become possible to afford harvesting-machines. According to Lewis Siegelbaum, 'Between 1936 and 1938, the average worker's wage was increased in connection with the Stakhanov movement.' [10] The machines as a product of the industrial revolution became popular in farms in decades after revolution, but the Europe took a generation to achieve this. It gives people a positive imagination of future. Moreover, the harvesting-machine acts a capital product in the resources of production is painted in the same color as the red flag. It is easy to see how people admire a life with welfare from industry revolutions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Mayakovskaya Metro Station is a product of its time of art, society, culture, technology and politics. Aleksey Dushkin used the structure to response to those factors and cooperate with artists. It is useful for the images of mosaics to explain how the station is response to those factors. There

is a strong connection between the meanings from images, which means the meanings are not isolated from one another but combined and influencing each other during that time.



Figure 11 Speech by I. Stalin with a report dedicated to the 24th anniversary of the VOSR at the solemn meeting of the Moscow City Council. Unkown, Speech by I. Stalin with a report dedicated to the 24th anniversary of the VOSR at the solemn meeting of the Moscow City Council. Mayakovskaya metro station, November 6, 1941, Photograph, <<https://travelsort.com/moscow-metro-tour-with-happy-moscow-tours/>>[Accessed 6 December 2021]

Nowadays, people still use the Mayakovskaya Metro Station for transportation and enjoy the mosaics, which inspires hopes and imaginations to people about better life under the world first communism nation. Meanwhile, Users would find connections in images of sports, work and nature. Decades later, people still can feel the passion from Dushkin through mosaics. Even though the Soviet Union is not existed anymore, the core of encouraging people to fit for a better life does not change.

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