

Mmmm... Malevich

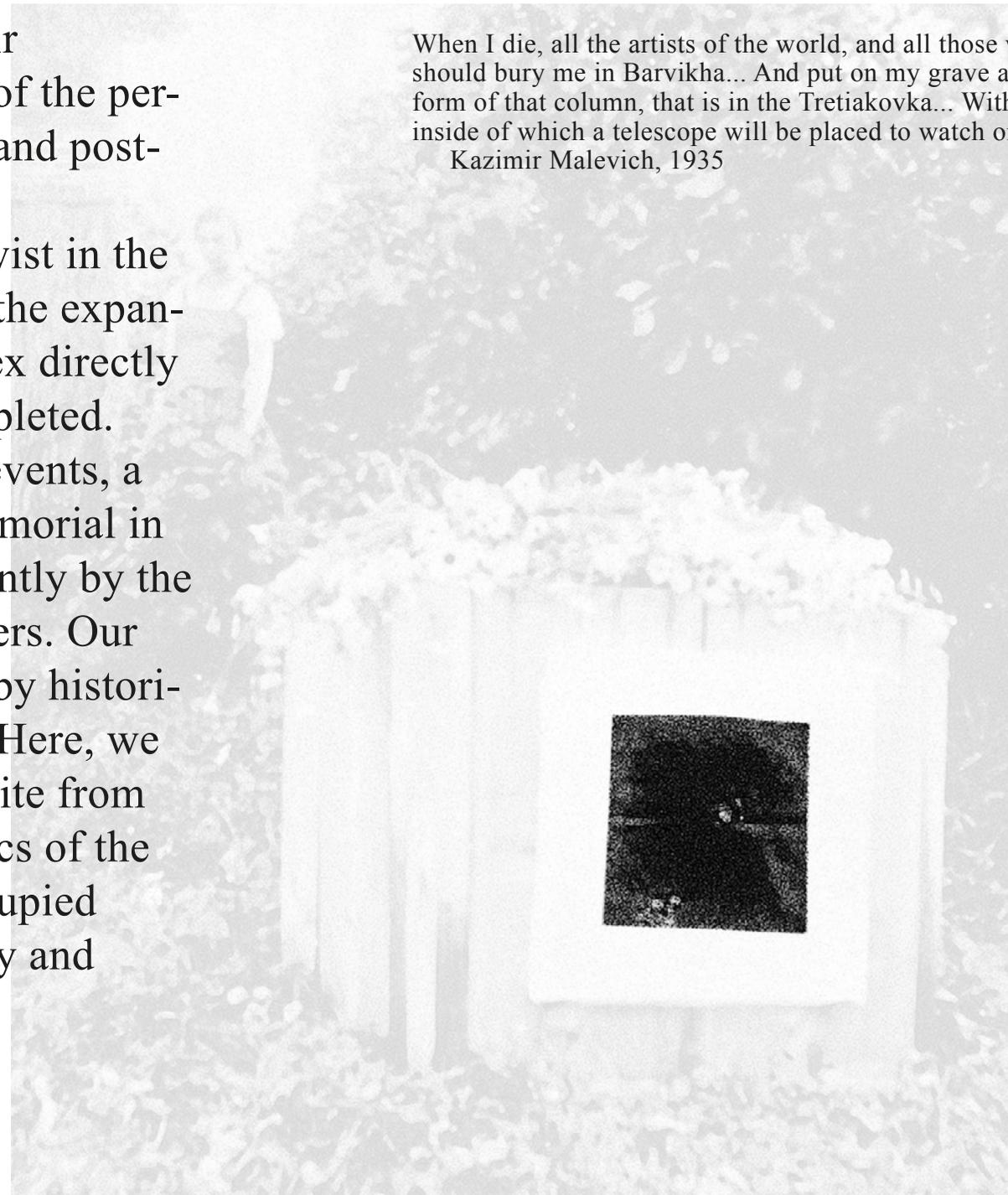


A research project on the history of Kazimir Malevich's ashes burial site in the context of the perception of historical avant-garde in Soviet and post-Soviet culture.

This work has been urged by the latest twist in the tortuous history of Malevich's grave, with the expansion of the Romashkovo residential complex directly onto the presumed burial site recently completed. After a moderate public response to these events, a dubious competition for the design of a memorial in honour of the artist was announced, run jointly by the local authorities and Romashkovo developers. Our critical approach to the situation is guided by historical and architectural research and enquiry. Here, we juxtapose the transformation of the burial site from 1935 until the present day with the dynamics of the position that historical avant-garde has occupied in the Soviet and post-Soviet cultural policy and ideology.

When I die, all the artists of the world, and all those who know me, should bury me in Barvikha... And put on my grave a tower in the form of that column, that is in the Tretyakovka... With a watchtower, inside of which a telescope will be placed to watch on Jupiter.

Kazimir Malevich, 1935



The idea for Malevich's memorial stone came for the first time to the artist himself in his correspondence and conversations with friends.

On May 15, 1935 Malevich died of cancer in Leningrad. Under the artist's will, his body was placed in a suprematist coffin and moved to Moscow where it was cremated. The funeral urn was buried under an oak tree at the outskirts of Nyemchinovka. Nikolai Suetin, a fellow artist and a former student of Malevich, designed a wooden cube with a black square to mark the burial site. A plaque with a memorial inscription "Here lie the ashes of the great artist Kazimir Malevich. 1878–1935" was nailed to the oak tree.

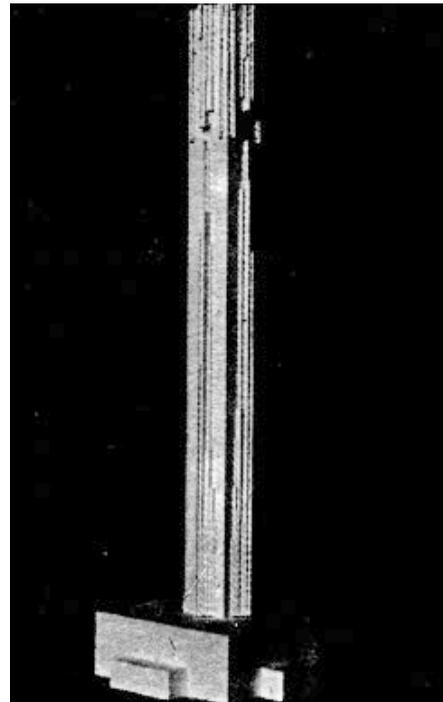
During World War II the memorial and the tree were destroyed and the burial site was lost. Its location was rediscovered much later by a group of enthusiasts. Another



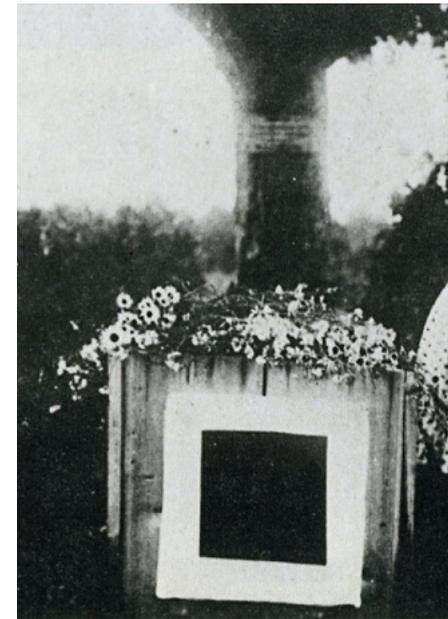
Malevich's funeral. Front and center is Nikolay Suetin, the author of the first monument for the artist

memorial to the artist was put up in 1988, a few kilometers away from presumed burial site, since the site itself turned out to be part of a cultivated field.

Today the construction of a new building on the site is nearly complete, as part of the expansion of Romashkovo residential complex. In 2013 the Moscow Region's Department of Culture and the development company that erected Romashkovo jointly announced a competition for a preliminary design of a new memorial in honour of the artist. A small concrete plot at one of the residential courtyards was chosen as the future memorial site.



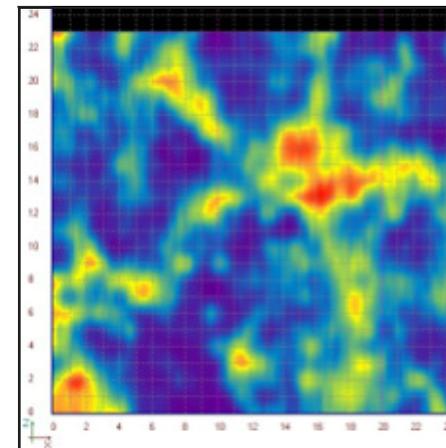
Kazimir Malevich
Vertical Architecton
mid 1920s
Original is not preserved



The first memorial beneath the oak tree



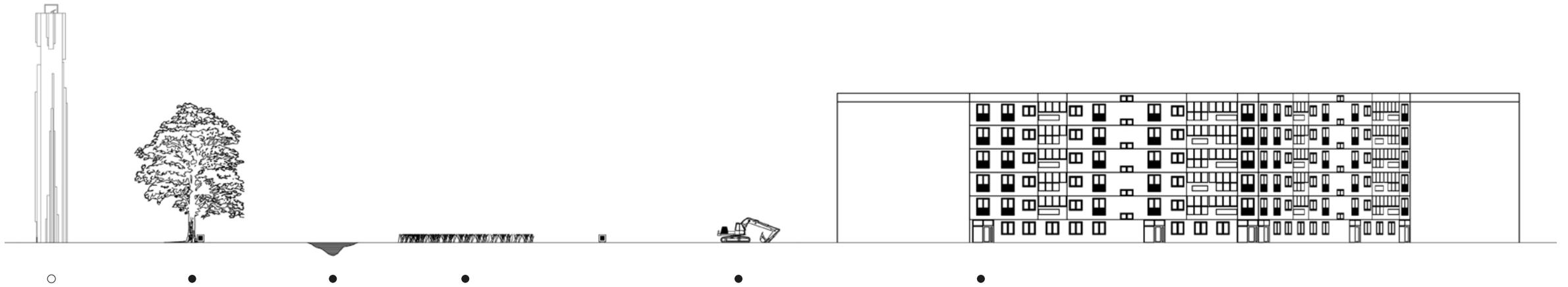
The memorial sign installed in 1988 near the burial site of Malevich's ashes



Ground penetrating radar data



General Staff of Armed Forces map of the area, 1939



Suprematist tower with a telescope

Oak tree and wooden monument

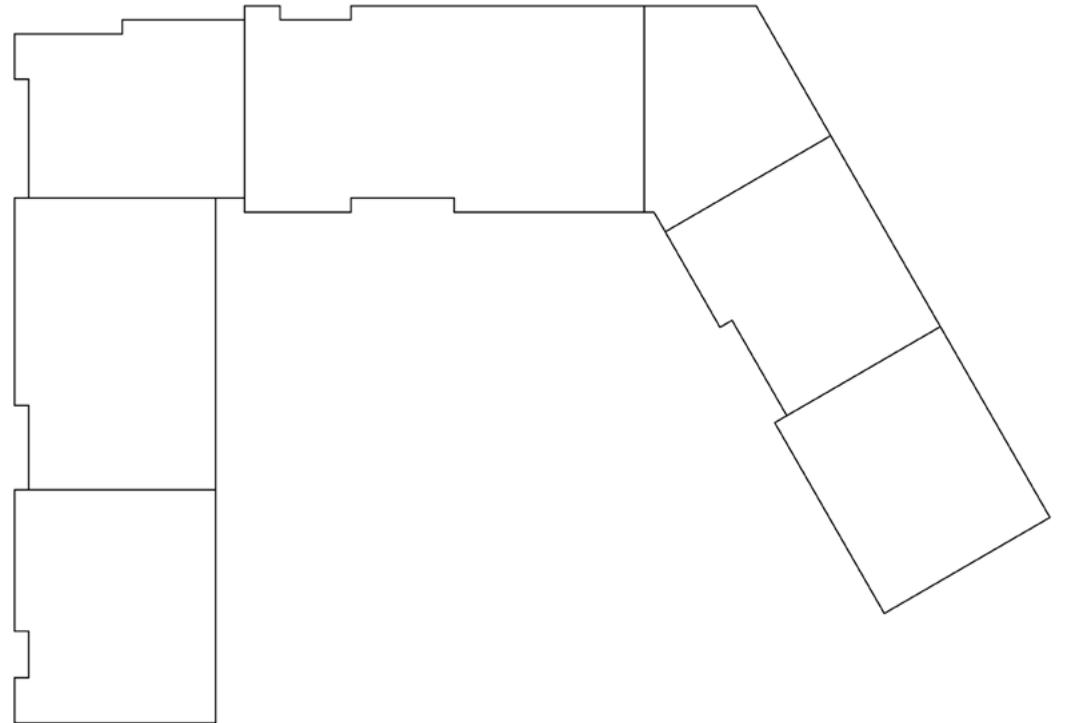
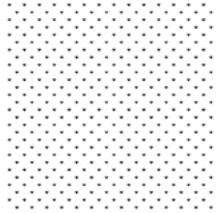
Oak tree uprooted

Collective farm

Concrete monument (nearby the site)

Construction of Romashkovo

Romashkovo residential complex



Installation of a wooden monument and a memorial plaque on an oak tree near Malevich's ashes burial site

The oak is uprooted. The land becomes part of a collective farm field

Search for Malevich's lost grave

A monument is erected near the presumed burial site, as access to the site itself is prohibited

The construction of Romashkovo residential complex on the presumed burial site

Open announcement of the competition for a preliminary design of Kazimir Malevich memorial

1914

Suprematist period started

1935

1941-45

1960-80e

1988

2013-14

>

A radical transformation of the cultural politics in USSR. Dissolution of independent artistic groups, establishment of artistic unions in 1932. The proclamation of the social realism as a dominant style and an inherent part of the state cultural policy at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.

The government policy aims to "bury" historical avant-garde art pieces in the storerooms of provincial museums, or even destroy them.

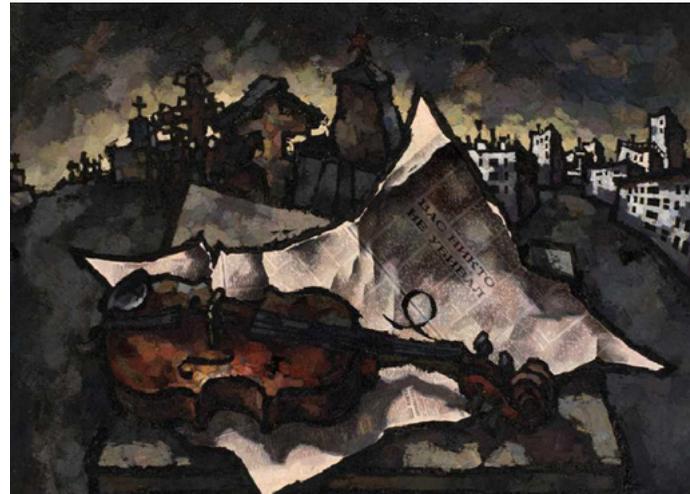
The interest to historical avant-garde within the Soviet mainstream and underground culture grows. Valorisation and promotion of the Russian avant-garde at the global art market.

The postmodern era of Yury Luzhkov is superseded by low-quality neo-modernism in Russian architecture.

In the beginning of the 20th century Nyemchinovka was a typical Moscow suburb squeezed between the city's outskirts and the countryside. Malevich used to live and work there since 1909 and was eventually buried nearby. The suburban landscape, in which the image of houses at the edge of the field emphasizes a clear line of the horizon, became an important element in his work. Sergei Eisenstein described the quite controversial nature of this area (no longer a city, but not yet a village) in his short story about visiting Malevich at Nyemchinovka. He wrote: "If you turn your back on the scenery, vast horizons seem to stretch behind you. But if you face it, you will see it was all an illusion and what seemed to be a river bank unexpectedly becomes a slope towards a path overgrown with some trash."

In the officially approved Soviet art, especially in film, suburbs were shown as being gradually absorbed by the fast-growing city economy. By contrast, the representatives of Nonconformist art, such as the members of Lianozovo group named after another village near Moscow, pictured the suburbs differently. The suburbs' position outside, and yet next to, the city limits can be seen as a metaphor for the group's ambiguous relationship with the official culture.

The idea of leaving the city in order to settle in the no-man's-land between city and Nature continued to develop in the 1970s. For example, "The Collective Actions" group performed a series of actions called "Trips out of Town" during that period, some of them directly inspired by Malevich's work.



Oskar Rabin
Violin at the Cemetery, 1969



Collective Actions
The Third Variant, 1978





Visiting the Romashkovo residential complex leaves an uneasy impression. Described on the developers' website as "the modern interpretation of a traditional urban block development, typical for historic city centers in Europe, [...] situated in a picturesque meadow", the complex however can also make an impression of a set of pseudo-modernist temporary constructions left in a wasteland.





The construction of a new bulk of the residential complex “Romashkovo” directly on the presumed burial site of Kazimir Malevich’s ashes sparked a media response. In the following months, the Moscow Region’s Department of Culture and the development company that erected “Romashkovo” jointly announced a competition for a preliminary design of a memorial in honour of the artist. A small concrete plot at one of the residential courtyards was chosen as the future memorial site.

Needless to say that Kazimir Malevich has a legitimate cultural value for today’s Russian establishment and real estate. The essence and relevance of such a value however, seems to remain vague to them. This recent comment of Vladimir Putin on the “Black Square” suggests

that the top levels of Russian political elite express a similar attitude: “It’s a kind of philosophical expression of a vision of something.”

The rules of the design competition state that the aims of erecting a Malevich monument at Romashkovo are to “enhance the appeal of the residential complex and foster ideological and patriotic education”. In this motivation, the pragmatic aspirations are blended together with a vague anxiety that the proximity of the concreted ashes of an exotic celebrity brings about.



МИНИСТЕРСТВО КУЛЬТУРЫ МОСКОВСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ

РАСПОРЯЖЕНИЕ

18.11.2013 № 193-р
г. Москва

О Московском областном конкурсе на лучший эскизный проект
памятного знака К.С. Малевичу

В целях увековечивания памяти художника-авангардиста Казимира Севериновича Малевича:

1. Провести с 01 декабря 2013 года по 25 марта 2014 года Московский областной конкурс на лучший эскизный проект памятного знака К.С. Малевичу (далее – Конкурс).

2. Утвердить положение о Конкурсе (приложение №1).

3. Создать Конкурсную комиссию и утвердить её состав (приложение №2).

4. Управлению профессионального искусства и художественного образования осуществить совместно с руководителями органов управления культуры муниципальных образований Московской области подготовку и проведение областного Конкурса.

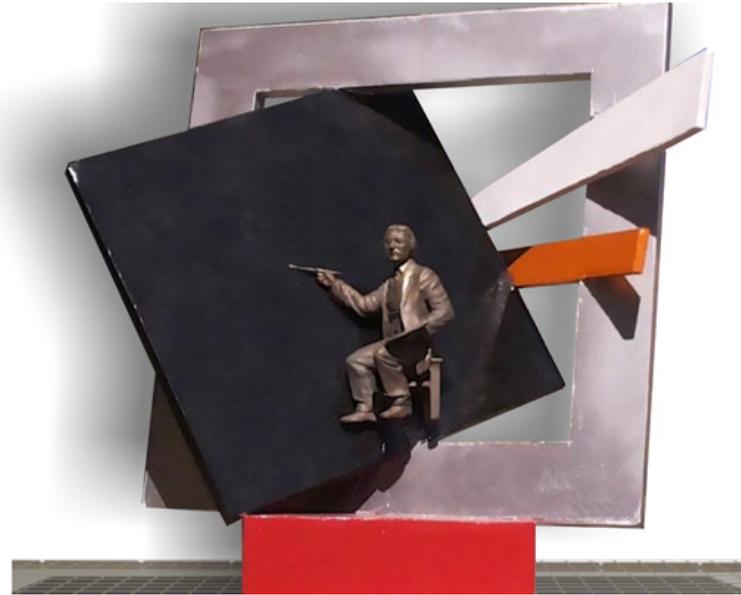
И.о. министра культуры
Московской области

А.Ю. Мурашов



Future memorial site

The winning proposal is a monument, designed by Alexander Rozhnikov, a Honoured Artist of Russian Federation, corresponding member of Russian Academy of Art, as well as the member of the jury of the competition. The press release doesn't clarify how did the member of the jury become the participant, and eventually the winner of the competition. However, it explains the winning proposal: "The composition comprises of the three main elements: architectural volume, made of geometrical figures, which by its forms vividly symbolize Suprematism; a black square, as if protruding open space and the third element – the figure of the artist (Malevich) himself."



Alexander Rozhnikov
The project of the monument of K. Malevich.
Image courtesy Ministry of culture of Moscow Region.

Приложение №2

УТВЕРЖДЕНО
распоряжением Министерства
культуры Московской области

от 18.11.2013 года № 193-р

Состав Конкурсной комиссии
Конкурса на лучший эскизный проект памятного знака К.С.Малевичу

Олег Александрович
Рожнов

Председатель комиссии –
министр культуры Московской области

Светлана Александровна
Анохина

Заместитель председателя –
Заместитель министра культуры Московской
области

Нармин Октаевна
Ширалиева

Советник Губернатора Московской области
в ранге министра

Татьяна Ивановна
Короткова

Начальник Главного управления социальных
коммуникаций

Константин Васильевич
Худяков

Президент Творческого Союза художников
России, Заслуженный художник РФ, академик
РАХ

Александр Александрович
Рожников

Заслуженный художник РФ, член-
корреспондент РАХ, скульптор

Александр Иванович
Беглов

Заслуженный художник РФ, Председатель
Правления Союза художников Подмосковья.

Алексей Александрович
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Руководитель Администрации Одинцовского
муниципального района

Александр Владимирович
Богданов

Родственник К.С.Малевича

Станислав Владимирович
Богданов

Родственник К.С.Малевича

Леонид Федорович
Микишев

Представитель ООО «Ронд»

Addendum to the
competition regulations

Selected artworks of Alexander Rozhnikov



Not intended as a submission to the competition, the proposed architectural intervention represents a reflection on the burial site history.

Technically, the new building of the Romashkovo residential complex erected directly on the artists' grave perfectly fits the definition of a gravestone: an architectural or sculptural object placed on the burial site. However, memorial gravestones usually bear an inscription. Closing the twisted chain of the grave's history, we place on the new building's rooftop the inscription that was once borne by the plaque nailed to an oak tree at this very spot: "Here lie the ashes of the great artist Kazimir Malevich. 1878–1935".



“Here lie the ashes of the great artist Kazimir Malevich. 1878–1935”

