



Tuesday 6 October 2020

#Klassiki

Masters of Animation: Andrei Khrzhanovsky

The Glass Harmonica (1968)

Andrei Khrzhanovsky's animation is an allegorical tale about the purifying nature of art and the corrupting effect of money, greed and power. *The Glass Harmonica* is notorious for being the first animation to be banned in the Soviet Union. Its message of beauty as humanity's moral compass and the challenging surrealist imagery proved too challenging for the state. It was a case of life imitating art.

In Khrzhanovsky's film, a musician creates a magical glass harmonica. When he plays it, the sounds turn into bouquets of red flowers and land in the hands of those touched by the music. Bureaucrats storm the square and take not only the musician and his harmonica away, but the flowers too. Khrzhanovsky himself released a statement saying his animation pertained to capitalism and control, as opposed to corruption within the Soviet state. But the censors' fear confirms the message in *The Glass Harmonica*: it is not just the artist that is silenced, but society.

The townsfolk, in a surrealist vision, or more aptly nightmare, cavort around the town leaving swathes of destruction and worshipping the so called 'yellow devil'. They tear down the clock tower, the central point of their city and an obvious symbol for tradition, memory and social values. The yellow devil is doled out by a mysterious man in a bowler hat. The coins spin round his face, like a hypnotising kaleidoscope as he administers them to the public.

The bowler hat is a symbol clearly inspired by Rene Magritte's famous paintings. The much commented upon irony of the bowler hat motif is that it subverts the anonymity of the bourgeoisie. In Magritte's hands the faceless bowler hat wearer, one of a crowd, is made mysterious and bathed in intrigue. The viewer of a Magritte painting places their own narrative onto the man, or sees the artist himself. In *The Glass Harmonica*, Khrzhanovsky plays with the irony of that. He makes the wearer the unassuming face of capital, greed and evil. It is notable that in the animation as the townspeople become monstrous, the man in the bowler hat remains stoic and serene.

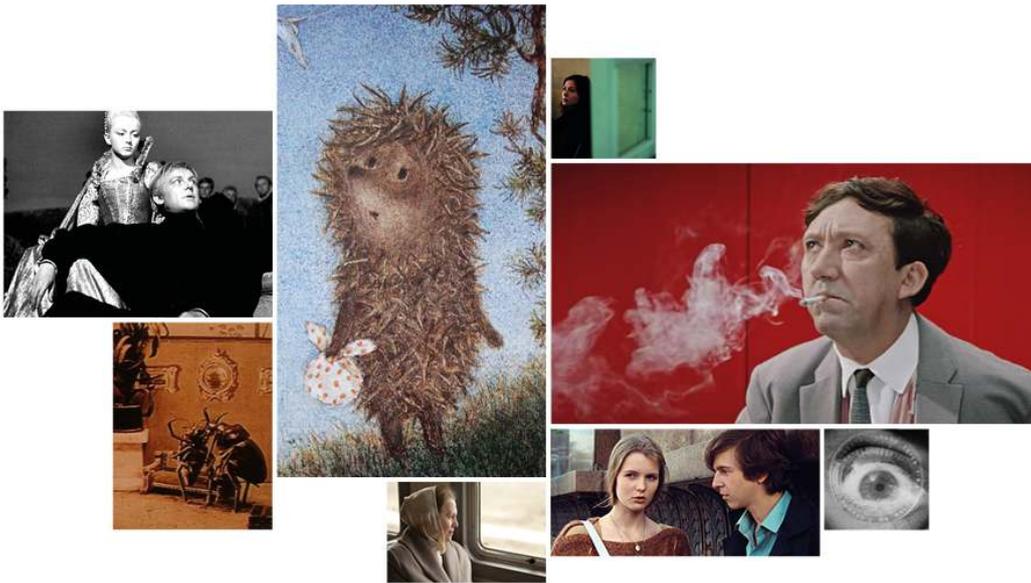
At the end of the animation another musician comes to the town. At the beginning of the film this musician managed to keep a bouquet of inspiration from the first musician's performance showcasing art's lasting resonance.

The Butterfly (1972)

This ten minute animation, about a young boy capturing a butterfly and learning respect for nature is eerily beautiful as it relays a message many of us were taught in our youth. Drawn like an exquisite painting, Khrzhanovsky plays with styles and aesthetics as he takes the little boy from a realistic cityscape, into first a luscious oasis and then into an ever evolving dreamscape. The visuals look akin to rotoscope as all scenes, from the typical to the illusory are drawn with such a realistic touch.

The butterfly first enters the little boy's life, casting a shadow across a room filled with military toys. The boy turns to the window and his first response to beauty is to capture and own it. With this moment Khrzhanovsky's view on social values is made apparent. The violence that is celebrated is made insidious by the image of a young boy, in a small room surrounded by emblems of war. As the young boy leaves his room to chase the butterfly, we become immersed in the city Khrzhanovsky has created. It is a believable Soviet scape: identical tower blocks fill the area, the only artistry to be found is in the form of beautiful but sinister adverts and a display in a shop window. This display exemplifies the film's themes: the futility of trapped beauty. The display, an artificial and untouchable thing, is the only place of vibrancy inside the city. It also shows where the young boy learned his propensity to catch and keep.

When the young boy enters a dream the tone changes. The butterfly grows large and captures him, but does not overpower him, instead introducing him to the delights of nature. It becomes a visually stunning and almost hypnotic spectacle as the little boy first flies through the air, carried in a net by the butterfly, with a bird's eye view of the fields. When the boy is dropped down into the waters, Khrzhanovsky displays the extent of his artistry and talents as he shows a stunning underwater world that quickly and seamlessly transitions into the boy's awakening and visions of a night sky. Khrzhanovsky's aptitude for movement as an animator is second to none: convincingly he shows the twitching of butterfly wings, the elegance of flight, the jerkiness of machines and wonder of human motion. *The Butterfly* is a beautiful and touching parable, reducing the viewer to a child. It is also a testament to the capacity of animation.



Andrei Khrzhanovsky

Andrei Khrzhanovsky was born in 1939 in Moscow. Multi-talented, he is a screenwriter, animator, documentary maker and director. In 1962 he graduated from VGIK, having studied under Lev Kuleshov. His 1968 film *The Glass Harmonica* was famously banned in the Soviet Union. This led to his forced military service for two years. On his return from military service he made *The Butterfly* (1972). In the 1970s he worked on cartoons based on Alexander Pushkin's works: such as *The World of Fables* (1973) and *Autumn* (1982). A close friend of Yuri Norstein, since the 90s the two famous animators began their own studio for production and training.

About Klassiki

Klassiki screens a highly curated selection of director led films, with each week's choice introducing UK audiences to an important filmmaker's work. An opportunity to experience online a weekly curated selection of the best of Soviet, Russian, Caucasian and East European cinema, and KLASSIKI choices range from early silent cinema, to masterpieces of animation, from post-war classics to contemporary Cannes winners. Supplementing the film experience, KLASSIKI offers specially commissioned and downloadable programme notes as well as podcasts and filmed introductions which give biographical, social and political context to each film. We also program film seasons, including RED FRONT: 75 YEARS OF RUSSIAN WAR CINEMA and TASHKENT FILM ENCOUNTERS, to spotlight classic cinema from Central Asia.

This is the birth of Klassiki, our planned free streaming platform, which will allow you to stream great cinema from the region, literally on the hop.

Support Us

Kino Klassika is a UK registered charity (1150791). We rely on the generosity of our supporters. If you want to encourage education and engagement with classic Russian language, Eastern and East European film, please support us by making a donation.

Our bank details are as follows:

Account no. 69358087

Sort code 60-15-33

Or please donate at our website:

www.kinoklassikafoundation.org

About Kino Klassika Foundation

Kino Klassika is the only organisation in the world dedicated to spotlighting cinema from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The foundation creates programmes of film restorations, publications, art commissions and events to educate audiences about classic Russian language and Eastern cinema. This includes a 2-year programme to spotlight the pioneering work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and our first restoration projects *Hakob Havnatanyan*, *Arabesques on the Ploshmani Theme* and *Jirdan* (1969). We have recently completed *Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus*, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Francais, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham.

KLASSIKI continues Kino Klassika's longstanding undertaking to showcase classic films from the region. By giving audiences access to unseen gems as well as the opportunity to meet and chat with directors and filmmakers from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Kino Klassika are a trusted, credible and essential part of the UK's specialist film exhibition sector.

Kino Klassika was founded by Justine Waddell. The trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE. The patron of Kino Klassika is Ralph Fiennes.

The Kino Klassika Team

This screening could not happen without the unstinting support of the Kino Klassika team: Joseph Andreyev, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

Upcoming Klassiki Screenings

Klassiki will screen a new film in our weekly curated series, every Tuesday from 2pm. Please check in with us on social media or via our website to access each week's new screening. And please share the news with your friends!

#kinoklassika #cinemaonthehop #kinoklassiki



@kinoklassika



@kinoklassikafoundation