

The First Blast Furnace, massive color lithograph, raised print, depicting a factory workshop and workers dwarfed by its scale, by artist Valentin Alekseevich Novichenko, circa 1980s-90s, 60 x 80 cm, copy #1 out of 15.

The monumental scale of this work, which is quite rare for lithographs, is logically justified here: the perspective of the factory workshop with its giant machinery shrouded in billowing smoke is thus conveyed in a true and emotional manner for us, the viewers.

This is not an industrial landscape but rather an industrial still life, as strange as this may sound. The giant cones, cogwheels and cylinders are distributed on a flat plane as if on Cezanne's paintings that show laid out apples, pears and various household items. Because of this effect of Cezanne's "still life", the people appear as Lilliputians in the country of Giants. Novichenko was among the first to use this technique in Socialist Realism.

The paintings is in overall good condition. There is some slight discoloration of the paper around the white border. The paper itself is mildly worn at its edges and there is crease along the right side, though it is maintained in the white border. The work has otherwise kept up well. The artist has written the name of the painting, "The First Blast Furnace", and its copy number, "1/15", at the bottom left corner. The artist has also signed the piece at the bottom right.

*****About the Author*****

Valentin Alekseevich Novichenko (1927-2010) is a well-known graphic artist from the Urals. He was born into a working- class family. His childhood impressions of industry and the construction of the Orsk Metallurgical Kombinat (group of factories) deeply affected his art.

He participated in the Patriotic War and then graduated from the Sverdlovsk Art School, which he attended from 1956-61. In 1966 he became a member of the Trade Union of Artists of the USSR and a permanent member of all-Union exhibitions. From 1953-63 he worked as a decorator at the Uralkhimash and Uralmash, both of which were gigantic powerhouses of Soviet industry that played an extremely important role in the development of the industrial might of the Soviet Union as well as its defense during the Great Patriotic War. They also played major role in the development of the city of Yekaterinburg (then Sverdlovsk) and the entire Ural Region.

Thanks to Novichenko's art, labor at the factory was aestheticized and glorified. It appeared then that people will always get up early in the morning, and by the factory siren, head to work their shift. They believed that they lead a decent life - a life worthy of being the subject of art, i.e. being reflected in paintings and cinematography. The lithographs by the artist are a memory of the departing character of an entire civilization. The representation of labor in the art of

Socialist Realism and the themes of "labor", "production" and "the worker" had become leading and dominant over all other subjects and themes. In the art of the 1930s-50s, the portraits of people dominate, whereas the sources of power - such as hydroelectric dams, blast furnaces, electric power lines - serve only as a background for their labor heroism. Artist Novichenko turned it upside down: his inanimate objects are far more interesting than the people and whatever they are doing. He was one of the first to create a tendency that would be well established in the industrial Socialist Art of 1970s-80s: the hero and background change places. The people are simply serving the giant objects; they are just a part of the industrial process. This was due to the fact that the portrait of the original hero of Socialist Realism was getting ideologically worn out. Novichenko is presenting a new industrial still nature: giant cones, cylinders, and gears are distributed on a plain as if in paintings by Cézanne, where the household items and fruits attract attention primarily by the play of their forms.

After the death of the artist in 2010, a number of his exhibitions have opened in his native Ural and Moscow, and well known collectors are now trying to acquire his works. As clearly evident from his correspondences with colleagues that is now kept in a private collection, Novichenko had a difficult personality. He never tried to sell his works to collectors or earn good favors from the bureaucrats managing arts; he also refused to sell his painting to the managing committees of exhibitions on their terms. He was a tireless innovator, always in search of new materials and techniques, and this consumed his entire life. His lithographs on metal or so-called "poly etching graphics" that employed various techniques and metal cutting instruments invented by him, and his unusually large lithographs, make his art truly unique and of enduring value.

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