

On Maxim Komar-Myshkin's *Vladimir's Night*

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The Russian author and artist Efim Poplavsky (1978-2011), always maintained that he was neither an artist nor an author. His pseudonym, Maxim Komar-Myshkin, connotes in Russian a mouse and a mosquito, and he perceived his work through the attributes of these animals: the mosquito, parasitically feeding on the blood of “big” and “real” humans (be them powerful politicians or venerated cultural personae), and the mouse, feasting on leftovers and stashed goods and connoting infiltration and dirt. Both mouse and mosquito suggest a nuisance rather than a major threat (yet, given the right circumstances, they can become deadly), and both are domestically present even as they strive to remain hidden and invisible. Poplavsky thus described whatever he was discreetly producing as “private dreck.”

Soon after Komar-Myshkin immigrated to Israel in the late 90s, he founded the *Buried Alive Group*, a tightly knit collective of ex-soviet young artists, actors, musicians and writers. Here again the name is telling, for it conveys not only the rather morbid sense of humor typical of the group but the schizophrenic spirit of its activities. *Buried Alive* were resolutely alienated from the local Israeli cultural scene towards which they felt inherently superior, yet they were also experiencing the tremendous hardship and insecurity stemming from their seclusion. For *Buried Alive*, the Moscow unofficial artists of the 60s and the 70s were thus not only a main source of artistic influence (*Vladimir's Night* is akin in form to the earlier albums produced by artists such as Ilya Kabakov and Viktor Pivovarov); they saw themselves as continuing the autonomous, intimate and publicly unrecognized existence that typified the Moscow circle: a self-sustaining artistic scene devoid of hierarchies or material value, based entirely on personal friendship and passionate commitment. For Poplavsky, however, the name also conveyed the actual fear explored in Edgar Allen Poe's tale *The Premature Burial*, colored by the acute paranoia he suffered from.

Efim Poplavsky believed that Putin had a personal vendetta against him, and that even though he was anonymous, unemployed, and had left Russia more than a decade ago, he is a pertinent target for assassination attempts. *Vladimir's Night*, in that sense, was Poplavsky's secretive artistic retaliation: animism literally employed to avenge a nemesis.

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