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Cosmos as a Unifier through Transition: The Russian Avant-Garde

My research sets to examine the history of governmental initiatives for fine artists in the field of space and rocketry in America and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War. It will outline governmental goals, tones, and preferences given to the artists for output, and analyze the resulting work, often made from a surprisingly high level of fine artists. In studying the artwork produced by these initiatives, I intend to not only show a complex dialogue between America and the U.S.S.R.'s desires for their public image relating to space, but also governmental interaction with the artists, and the interactions between groups of artists who would normally not be associated with each other. These programs not only provide commentary on the artistic tone at the time of the Space Race, but also the cultural goals of some of the most hugely utopian, secretive, and potentially destructive military sections of their individual governments. I also intend to show their methodologies in artist selection, links between selected artists, and how they produced, what in some ways were surprisingly similar thematic outputs.

Specifically I aim to highlight the unity and differences in the cultural narratives given by super powers during the Cold War. My research focuses on output from the NASA Art Program, and the original Eyewitness to Space program with which it began. It discusses the goals of its formulation, artist selection, and mission. Despite being such a modest residency, the caliber of artists recruited was phenomenal, including Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Norman Rockwell, Jamie Wyeth, Alexander Calder, Vija Celmins, and Tomas Saraceno, among others. It still continues to this day. While it often approached topics of nationalism, competition, and power, various cases also had undeniable elements of universalism, the beauty of nature, and environmentalism. This surprising move was not exposed, but instead mutually replicated within official art by U.S.S.R. counterpart for fine art produced for its media outlets and the VDNKh space exhibition.