

Art Hiding in Plain Sight

An avant-garde work is discovered at VDNKh Park

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The tower was made of "fish traps." **Courtesy of VDNKh**

At the beginning of this month, the curators at VDNKh Park made an amazing discovery: a round, openwork tower turned out to be a work by the great avant-garde artist El Lisitsky.

Tatyana Goryacheva, a specialist in avant-garde art who curated the recent shows of works by El Lisitsky at the Tretyakov Gallery and the Jewish Museum and Center for Tolerance, began studying some sketches Lisitsky made of structures for the park. She asked the park's historian, Alexander Zinovyev, about the curious tower.

Zinovyev recognized sketches of an advertising construction built in the summer of 1939 by the pavilions of "Lake Utilization," "Fishing Industries," and "Fisheries." Although the pavilions were taken down years ago, the tower done by Lisitsky remained, although it had been altered.

Lisitsky's sketches show that it was originally a blue tower made up of fish traps set vertically. At the top was the headpiece of a diving suit and silhouettes of two metal fish swimming in opposite directions.

In the reconstruction of 1951 through 1954, the decoration changed: the two carps of 1939 were replaced by two sturgeons, possibly based on another sketch of fish silhouettes done by Lisetzky. Today just the tower remains – but now credited to Lisitsky.

“Such discoveries are important not only for understanding the history of the Exhibition of Economic Achievements but also for Moscow as a whole,” Natalya Sergunina, Chief of Staff of the Mayor, said in an official statement announcing the attribution. “It is symbolic that scholars were able to establish the author’s name during the process to revive the historical mission of the park.”

The tower can be seen by Pavilion # 38.

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