



Vladimir Tsivin  
(born in 1949)

# DIALOGUES

## Decorative composition

Leningrad, USSR

1981

*Grog, matte glaze*

About the project

<https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/>





SELECTED BY

***Olga Kopeychikova,***

*Curator of the Collection  
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as well as Modern Designer Tapestries  
and Traditional Carpets*



When I joined the Tsaritsyno Museum in 2000, I, much to my shame, knew very little about Soviet decorative and applied art, as it was not part of the basic curriculum of the Department of Art History at Moscow State University. I first came across it when I started working in the Department of Records, and I became more familiar with it when I took over the ceramics collection, which includes a collection of studio pottery by masters from the USSR republics.

The first thing that struck me about Soviet decorative and applied art of the 1960s–1980s was that the main artists of applied art proclaimed a so-called departure from utilitarianism. This means that they shifted their focus from developing things for everyday life to creating exclusively exhibition works, in other words, works that could only exist in an exhibition space. Many of them often keep the form of everyday objects such as vases, teapots, and dish sets, but they are in fact no longer such.

A prime example of one of these works is the composition ‘Dialogues’ by Vladimir Tsivin, one of the best artists of the Leningrad school of ceramics.

In 2023, Vladimir Tsivin gifted to the Tsaritsyno Museum a collection of 15 works representing the artist's work in retrospect from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. This gift was a very valuable addition to the museum's holdings. And I had the honor of receiving and describing this collection.

I believe it to be one of the most significant works of his early period and one of the best pieces of art in our ceramics collection.

The composition ‘Dialogues’ comprises five figures, created based on the sculptures from the eastern pediment of the ancient Greek temple Parthenon (5th century BC) in Athens. The two female figures on the left almost perfectly replicate the forms, poses

and gestures of the goddesses Demeter and her daughter Persephone. As Tsivin himself says, 'the translation is almost literal'. The male figure in the centre and the two female figures on the right are, in the artist's words, 'free improvisation'. The Parthenon sculptures are made of marble, while the figures from the 'Dialogues' composition are ceramics. In his book 'Comments', the artist writes that in this work he accomplished the 'translation into the language of another material'.

It is no accident that the composition is called 'Dialogues'. For Tsivin, working on it became a conversation, a dialogue with the creator of ancient sculptures — the great Phidias, who was called the 'Creator of the Gods'. But not just that. In his book, Tsivin writes: 'This composition is not only my dialogue with Phidias, clay with marble, figures among themselves but also a dialogue of obverse and reverse, the front side and the back... From the front these figures are covered with white matte glaze and by the way the light reflects from them they resemble antique marbles, but from behind, from the back, they are pillars, flattened cylinders with traces of gluing the layer, revealing a modern ceramic language. It seems that two completely different languages, two times collided in one form'.

In the composition 'Dialogues', Vladimir Tsivin shows his love and admiration for antique art and at the same time expresses the idea that ancient sculptures, even damaged by time, in ruins and shards, remain beautiful and do not need to be improved and restored.