



Komar and Melamid, *Air Superiority*, 1997, Tempera and oil on canvas, 66 x 66 in. (167.6 x 167.6 cm), Photo: Zindman/Fremont, Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York / www.feldmangallery.com

KOMAR and MELAMID

Russia, 1943/45–

Artist team (Vitaly) Komar and (Alex) Melamid were both born in Moscow in 1943 and 1945, respectively. They studied together at the Moscow Art School and Stroganov School of Art and Design, graduating in 1967, the same year as the first showing of their collaborative work. The pair immigrated to the US in 1978. By 1972, they had founded the Sots Art movement, which was Soviet Pop and Conceptual Art based on Socialist propaganda and mass culture. The works were largely portraits in the style of propaganda posters with social leaning slogans. They also created Conceptual installations that included paintings, photographs, found objects and sound. These pieces centered around ideas such as their struggle to gain permission to immigrate to the US, the totalitarian rule of their homeland and artistic censorship. After decades of successful partnership, the artists ended their working relationship in 2003-04. Some of the public collections that house their work are the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, MoMA and the Met. Their awards include an NEA grant in 1982, the first Russian artists to do so. They were visiting artists at Cooper Union and University of California, Berkeley. Ronald Feldman Gallery was the first to show their work in the West in 1976 (which Soviet authorities denied them permission to attend) and continues to represent their work. The Wadsworth Atheneum staged their first solo museum show in 1978; 1985 saw their first traveling exhibition in Europe. They were also the first Russian artists to exhibit in Documenta in 1987. Phillips London sold their most expensive piece at auction in 2010: a 1972 painting realized \$1,010,653, almost five times the high estimate of \$230,000. -MJP