

Sergei Isupov's *Whirlwind Unguarded Love Teapot* (1997), offers both mute testimony and a primal scream on the dualities of identity, love, and lust. Isupov's teapot form resembles a classical or Renaissance sculpture, mounted on an oval pedestal whose sides are covered with a secondary, explanatory narrative. Indeed, the major protagonist of this ceramic, whose colors recall classic Attic red-figured vases, appears to be a conflation of two creatures from Greek mythology: a centaur and a harpy.

Centaurs, comprised of a human head and torso conjoined with a horse's body, embodied the eternal conflict between animal instincts and human thought, between the id and the superego. Centaurs are best-known for their attempt to kidnap a woman—Hippodamia—and for their attendant battle with her people, the Lapithae, a legendary event commemorated on the marble frieze of the Parthenon in Athens. Harpies (whose name has been interpreted as "whirlwinds") are winged personifications of evil, and are known for their vicious and violent behavior. The sense of menace conveyed by the composite centaur/harpy creature is accentuated by the angry faces, the claws in its wings, and by the tail, coiled like that of a snake or scorpion about to strike.

The naturalistic, three-dimensional head of Isupov's centaur/harpy is a self-portrait of the artist, but it is shadowed by a two-dimensional profile portrait. This black-and-white "doppelganger," perhaps representing the artist's "dark side," resembles a devil, with horns and a forked tongue. He rides on the back of the artist (like "the monkey on his back") and not only appears to be a voice whispering in his ear, but also appears to be guiding the artist's hand. On the other side of the artist's head appears a cubic stool and a fish, perhaps symbolizing, respectively, rational constructed thought and the organic and slippery nature of pure emotions.

A third, smaller red figure on the artist's back resembles a satyr, a creature traditionally depicted with a human head and torso, but with a goat's legs. In Greek mythology, these cowardly and conniving creatures live for pure hedonistic pleasure—especially sex—heedless of the havoc wreaked by their actions. This naked satyr is bright red, perhaps with inflamed rage, lust, or jealousy, and he lacks arms, thus suggesting helplessness and vulnerability. He appears to move forward with the body of the beast, while the artist attempts to turn back. The most prominent appendage on his torso—his erection—is covered by the hands of the black-and-white creature, in a protective gesture resonant with the threat of emasculation.

On the base of the pedestal are two scenes of the artist and his female partner—one in which they are bound together in an embrace prior to love-making, and the other in which the smiling woman rests her head in the lap of her partner in post-coital bliss. In this second scene, her partner's darker side has manifested itself in the form of devil-like wings that resemble those on the centaur/harpy creature above. The couple is observed by a miserable dog, whose emaciated body suggests that its traditional role as a symbol of fidelity is not being nurtured. Surrounding the couple's isolated island of happiness, decapitated heads of the artist are truly at sea, cast adrift amidst a frigid field of icebergs. The life-like colors of the lusting and loving couple are contrasted with the bleak, black-and-white tonalities of the adjacent seascape, which resembles a nightmarish psychological hell conjured by the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish artist Hieronymus Bosch.

Red, yellow, and blue, the primary colors that symbolize life and are missing from much of the primary sculpture, appear in their pure form on the underside of the teapot. A lifeless heart, with an attached umbilical cord, appears on the blood-red ground, and seems to symbolize an aborted love. Nearby, a

woman squatting in a rocky landscape is peeing/defecating, just above the artist's signature. This image, reminiscent of similar subjects in the works of Bosch or Pieter Breughel, serves an earthy reminder that all human beings, and their aspirations, no matter how noble, ultimately can be reduced to the lowest common matter. The artist's signature, which appears in both Russian cyrilic and English forms captures the artist's dual nature of the artist's cultural heritage but also reprises the theme of duality that shapes the entire sculpture—a poignant monument to love, and a memorial to its loss.