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Philipp Meuser

## **Galina Balashova**

### **Architect of the Soviet Space Programme**

That which Galina Balashova mastered cannot to this day be learnt at University. Nor were there any examples upon which the Russian herself could draw since she was a space architect. In twenty-eight years service to Russian cosmonautics, the now over eighty-year-old designed abodes that defied the rules of gravity. She bestowed aesthetic form on space capsules, space stations, space shuttles and their interiors, constituting one of the most unusual tasks in architecture.

The monograph *Galina Balashova. Architect of the Soviet Space Programme* presents a unique collection of designs, plans and technical drawings, some of which have never been published before. On the architect's desk lay the construction plans of *Soyuz* capsules, the space stations *Mir* and *Salyut* as well as the *Buran* space shuttle – evidence of a technical race between the USA and the USSR. Since her job as an employee of the aerospace group *Energiya* was subject to confidentiality, her designs remained unknown. Balashova's tasks were a strictly guarded State secret – which only unravelled following the demise of the Soviet Union.

The watercolours and technical drawings – composed with precise lines and loving attention to detail – show the wide range of her unusual tasks. These ranged, for example, from the ergonomic design of a living and sleeping area, to comfortable chairs for the cosmonauts or the design of a space-quality bathroom facility. The effort to create a more pleasant life for cosmonauts in space is visible throughout all the documents. Balashova thus addressed questions concerning spatial proportions and the psychological effects of colours and materials, as well as the functional distribution of technical equipment. In order to facilitate orientation, dark colours insinuated the floor and bright colours the ceiling. The major focus, however, was on questions of safety: the fastening of objects under the weightlessness of space, to securing the cosmonauts when sleeping. The materials were not allowed to be flammable or possess toxic properties – a fatal risk in space. Lighting too came within Balashova's sphere of responsibility. Her designs for the base unit of the International Space Station (ISS) are still in use today. In parallel with this, she also designed medals and mission insignia – including the emblem for the encounter of global political significance between the Americans and Soviets within the framework of the *Apollo-Soyuz* Test Project in 1975. In addition to all these documents, the book also contains Balashova's biography, as well as studies on heraldry and private drawings.

Galina Balashova's work reveals her own experience of cosmos through an eagerness to experiment in terms of technology and design. She lends harmony and an aesthetic touch to the high-tech world of carrier rockets, laboratories and survival equipment. In common with a few of these talented people, she too has gradually

stepped out of the shadows of cosmonauts who are celebrated to this day as heroes and peacemakers in Russia – the only woman in the history of space to have decisively shaped four generations of spacecraft.

This book is more than a monograph: it documents a striking artistic oeuvre that constitutes both a collection of sensational contemporary documents and the unique biography of an extraordinary woman who delivered ground-based work for an airborne client. Today Galina Balashova lives in Korolev, near Moscow.



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