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EXHIBITION STRATEGIES OF RUSSIAN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE ARTISTS ABROAD (1896–1912)

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

The names and terms widely known to an English-speaking readership are given in their conventional forms. All others transliterated from the Russian Cyrillic alphabet are rendered in accordance with the ALA–LC transliteration scheme (2012) without diacritics. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Methodological concerns

The output of scholarship focused on late-19th to early-20th century art has never decreased, and has experienced another surge in the last couple of decades. The more work is done in this field, the more questions arise about the criteria that drive the ongoing art-historical discourse and foreground certain events and personalities over others. Revisionist approaches that have been gaining momentum since the 1970s are in constant expansion, until today legitimately premised on a scheme of inclusion of previously excluded categories. However, they less commonly scrutinise the exact circumstances of these exclusions and often use traditional art-historical tropes to de-marginalise subjects or characters. There exists a widely acknowledged need for awareness of these inherited patterns that still infiltrate some studies. Philological analysis that contextualises contemporary criticism is not exempt from the risk of this fallacy because many of the tropes that spread through the art-historical discipline in the first half of the 20th century were grounded in late 19th-century criticism.[1] There is currently an increase in pursuits to combine a well-sourced historical study with 'revisionist' approaches that not only seek to revisit the canon and include marginalised subjects, but also to question, to some extent, the very premises of art history writing.

The social history of art as pioneered by T. J. Clark and Arnold Hauser forcefully argued that it is fundamental to consider the social and political dimensions

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[1] It often idealises contemporary sources over successive criticism, on the grounds of the former being the closest to the events under scrutiny. Nonetheless, they are also often influenced by a lack of information, or are biased in other ways. Moreover, it often considers to a lesser extent the complexity of the historiographical interpretation that becomes accepted regarding the issue over the decades of scholarship and exhibition history. Re-examining historical testimonies and juxtaposing them next to the key readings (the most influential and repeatedly reissued publications or, for example, the most attended exhibitions) that made the aftermath of an artistic phenomenon under scrutiny might offer a more panoramic perspective.

of late 19th-century art, and laid the groundwork for the subsequent studies that emphasised its economic aspects.[2] Clark, however, was not very much interested in expanding the canon of modernist art; rather, he was focused on investigating the circumstances that created it by looking at it as one aspect of the 'broader experience of modernity' (Spiteri 2010: 2). He surely paved the way for later studies which distance themselves from formal analysis as the fundamental tool, as was inherent in both the Greenbergian dogma and the 'demythologising criticism'[3] that eventually emerged around the *October* journal.[4] The practice of art history has for long refused to revisit its basic presumption that is based on the idea of art's historicity. Just as the spaces of museums ascribe value to objects by often placing them within a narrative, art history in its traditional form rhetorically positions itself beyond the boundaries of the art system, presenting itself as being profoundly shaped by the general model of scientific knowledge (Brzyski 2007b: 342; Belting 2003: 62). This tendency also hinders the emergence of inquiries about the links and reciprocal influences between art history and art practice that became particularly decisive in the late 19th century, but are examined more rarely than those related to contemporary art. Considering art history as 'simultaneously a taxonomic construct and a method or epistemological technology for producing knowledge about peoples, places, and historical periods' (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 364) may allow for a more concise understanding of the argument and possibly encourage a vital shift in the discipline.

This thesis will attempt to reconcile this dichotomy by shifting the focus from the artworks themselves as central elements of the art-historical narrative to the

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[2] See classical works, such as Clark 1973a; Clark 1973b; Clark 1984, alongside the final volume of Hauser's Social History of Art (1999) that deals with the 19th century.

[3] As Rosalind Krauss called her programme on the pages of *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Krauss 1986: 170).

[4] His pursuit to link certain expressive devices to specific socio-political trends was continued by the work of his disciples, such as in Martha Ward's study of Neo-Impressionism's ties to anarchism (Ward 1996).

concrete practices that determine and shape them throughout the stages of their presence within the field of art. It will analyse a series of contributions that fin-de-siècle artists from the Russian Empire (or those who made their reputations in the Russian cultural field of the epoch) made at Europe's international exhibition platforms and in particular to those mounted by independent art associations. In order to do so, it will adopt a distinctive category of art practice that was emphasised by Robert Jensen and comprehensively addressed by Anna Brzyski, characterised as 'the entire spectrum of activities and behaviour, including but not limited to art-making, in which individuals who identify themselves and are recognised as professional artists' operate. The perspective offered here emphasises the need for changing the approach from being centred around art objects to one that concentrates on 'the social environment (not just the context) of their production', while giving space to investigate the 'discursive and institutional afterlife' of the latter (Brzyski 2007b: 340–341).

Today, revisionist approaches are adopted in an apparently harmonious synchronicity with the developing trends of the Global – or previously World – Art History. The ambition to incorporate all geographical areas into it, broadening the scope of the discipline beyond the Western tradition while nevertheless operating through its inherited historiographical schemes, make Global art history, however advanced it may be, a descendant of the colonial situation. This issue was mentioned by Belting as one of the core reasons for a crisis allegedly experienced by the field at the end of the last century, triggered by the presumed neutrality of Western art-historical patterns that are often keenly though incautiously applied to cultures that did not produce similar descriptive apparatuses (Belting 2003: 63). Currently, scholars are questioning these practices, addressing the very fundamentals of art-historical

writing.[5] Yet another question may be raised in this regard: that is, what are the objectives of what Belting calls 'structural changes [to art history] when extended to other cultures', and whether such objectives are not overly ambitious. Moreover, it would be important to consider that those cultural contexts that have appropriated the patterns of 'Western' art-historical discourse tend to not draw any distinction between themselves and the 'original' ones. It would therefore be logical to doubt whether these contexts could be disjointed from the model of Western art-historical discourse at all, and vice versa. These ambiguities suggest that it could be useful to approach this process through the margins and centres perspective,[6] where subjects are eventually defined reciprocally.

As this study focuses on the Russian art of the turn-of-the-century period, when cultural exchange had a truly predominant role in artists' careers, it will endeavour to adopt such an attitude. It will therefore be confronted with another concern that arises in this area of study, namely the issue of cultural, artistic, but chiefly national identity. The latter was of paramount importance to the artists active during that ethnocentric historical period. It was also one of the primary vehicles in the formation of national schools and local art-historical canons, both back then and later on, when these artists' work eventually became part of such canons. National schools were products of entangled interests that were humanistic but simultaneously politically competitive, both on the international and domestic levels, because they, like the modern museum, were usually fuelled by 'the enthusiasm of a bourgeois elite' (Belting 2003: 107).

Meanwhile, the cosmopolitan outlook that characterised World Fairs (where art was arrayed within a universe of leading production of all kinds) and international

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[5] As, for instance, in Kaufmann and Dossin (2015). Although not all the essays in this volume critically locate their own standpoints, it decidedly is one of the key up-to-date reflections on the project of Global art history that revises the art-historical apparatus, its devices, and the forms it produces.

[6] For the current debate on the subject that relies on the legacy of Bourdieu (1992), see Buchholz 2018.

art exhibitions was derived precisely from the mechanism through which national schools were legitimised in the process of the reciprocal approvals. To a large extent, this thesis deals with the reception of the work of artists of a specific geographical or, as it would be more accurate to say, cultural origin in external contexts. As a result, it cannot escape the issue of identity and the uses and abuses of this concept in art-historical research. Is identity a relevant category? Although being a seemingly logical path for analysing the phenomena of artistic exchange and, in particular, the cases of artists exhibiting abroad, do the optics of collective cultural identity offer a valid viewpoint for this task? This study will try to employ the concept critically and suggests that it would be more fruitful to move the focus from the question of cultural identity to the question of strategy, as this approach defines one's artistic path in active terms rather than leaving it as if it were dependent on some intrinsic features exclusively associated with cultural background. Identity, whether cultural or artistic, is highly dynamic and may transform through the artists' life. Moreover, the artists of modernity were eager to manipulate this notion within their public image, and Russian artists were no exception.

The issue of diaspora is of critical and yet underestimated importance for any discussion of the art produced by turn-of-the-century Russian artists. Works that are included in the panorama of Russian art were often made in countries other than Russia or were deeply influenced by the experience that artists of Russian origin or descent gained abroad. Therefore, it would not be accurate to speak about *the* identity of one artist or group of artists, especially in the turbulent period that is considered in this dissertation, since they constantly changed their views (especially in the earlier periods of their careers), travelled rather actively in many cases, and often emigrated to different states. It would be inaccurate to speak of them as having once reached a certain identity that supposedly shaped their creative production. Of course, many artists questioned their cultural background as representatives of a specific national tradition, but it would be incorrect to assume that any of them ever found an

exhaustive answer deprived of contradictions. It would, therefore, be more efficient to apply a sociological approach to the debate about 'artistic identity', substituting it with a concept of a set of multiple, fluid, or combined identities. Identity is closely linked to representation or, rather – to follow the premises expressed by Bourdieu – *is* a representation. His arguments regarding the issue of identity expressed in the essay *L'identité et la representation* written in 1980 can also be useful for the discussion of artistic identity. He writes that representations can contribute to creating what they apparently just describe or outline, and points out that their components can be, and often are, strategically manipulated by those who carry them (Bourdieu 1980: 65). Indeed, he argues that there are both collective and individual strategies through which social agents aim to manipulate the distinctive features by which they are being categorised, in accordance with their economic or symbolic interests (Bourdieu 1980: 69). In this regard, the proclamation of oneself becomes an extremely important and powerful gesture.[7]

International exhibitions were among the most important contexts within which expressions of national identities were constructed and performed. 'Almost without exception the major international exhibitions were sponsored by nations with colonial dependencies. Each displayed its colonies, or its internally colonised peoples, to its home population, to its rivals and to the world at large'. In this process, 'audiences came to expect certain types of performances from particular nationalities

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[7] Bourdieu's main concern in that essay lies in the realm of 'regional' or 'national' identities. However, he makes a vital comparison between their driving mechanisms and those of art movements, which is highly instrumental to this discussion: 'The fact that struggles over identity – that being-perceived which exists fundamentally through recognition by other people – concern the imposition of perceptions and categories of perception helps to explain the decisive place which, like the strategy of the manifesto in artistic movements, the dialectic of manifestation or demonstration holds in all regionalist or nationalist movements' (as translated by Thompson and Raymond in Bourdieu 1991: 224). Original passage: 'Le fait que les luttes pour l'identité, cet être-perçu qui existe fondamentalement par la reconnaissance des autres, [ont] pour enjeu l'imposition de perceptions et de catégories de perception explique la place déterminante que, comme la stratégie du manifeste dans les mouvements artistiques, la dialectique de la manifestation tient dans tous les mouvements régionalistes ou nationalistes' (Bourdieu 1980: 66).

or ethnic groups' (Benedict 1991: 5). Throughout their history, these exhibitions formulated various patterns and stigmas that had an enormous impact on nations, identities, and the arts and cultural production. In part, their 'strong sense of history' (Benedict 1991: 6) was often an instrument of juxtaposition between the dominant culture and the dominated ones, where the former had a significant pedigree to show while the latter existed in a sort of suspended temporal dimension without an articulated chronology.

There is extensive literature that covers the issues of exhibitions and national identity, the former being one of the principal arenas for peaceful rivalries between nations. Indeed, the rise of national sensibilities is closely tied to processes of economic and social modernisation (Thiesse 1999: 15). European national identities gained momentum around the same time and derive from roughly the same roots as the development of industrialisation and international trade. They were engendered by defining, circumscribing, and endorsing each nation's heritage, composed of language, history, monuments, and other symbolic features. Yet the assemblages of these elements had to be comprehensible by others on the international level. International exhibitions provided the setting to exhibit identities, and served as celebrations of 'symbolic commerce' (Thiesse 1999: 13). The matrix of the World Fairs affected the taste and conception of what was considered 'proper' cultural heritage vis-à-vis practices associated with other, dominated cultures. Even those exhibitions that did not feature sections or pavilions organised by national committees, but just showcased artists of various origins grouped by country, were often perceived as a competition of national arts. This logic imposed that all group exhibitions that featured artists of mixed origins 'were perceived by various commentators, including the artists themselves, as the arenas of international competition', while the 'artists [...] were always treated first and foremost as representatives of their countries' (Brzyski 2007b: 349).

Belonging to a tradition associated with a specific area, and later with a national identity, was for a long time a crucial descriptive category in art narratives. The fascination of art history with 'national schools' (Teh 2016: 28) is so deeply rooted in its very ancestry as a discipline that it has long been taken for granted. Throughout the 19th century, art was a powerful instrument in constructing narratives that served as elements of ascending national identities. 'The arts were used as an effective means of differentiating societies and civilizations', while 'national schools' were the most common tool in this classification of European art (Joyeux-Prunel 2019: 418). Furthermore, the modern museum was intended to exalt this idea by contributing dramatically to the construction of timelines of artistic traditions arranged geographically and chronologically. As was emphasised by Claire Farago and Donald Preziosi in their insightful anthology about the museum, the 'concept of a national culture was, in fact, a construct that public museums made possible' (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 231). Together with literature and large-scale cultural showcases such as international exhibitions, they shaped the modern Western nation-state and the idea that the latter should perform a civilising role in respect to its citizens.

The assumption regarding fine arts' status as the ultimate articulation of the culture's development meant that it was extremely important for the nation to demonstrate that it had both a strong contemporary national school and a long-standing tradition associated with it. They proved the endurance of its past and the vigour of its contemporary phase and outlined its strengths in the realm of worldwide artistic competition (Brzyski 2007b: 351). Accordingly, an inquiry into one's cultural descent, whatever that might mean, became a willingly accepted artistic strategy by the late 19th century. In the first decades of the 20th century, formalist attitudes in both art practice and criticism were spreading rapidly. At the same time, cosmopolitanism rigorously entered the realm of art discourse, aided by urban culture. However, this cosmopolitanism was not mutually exclusive with the category of the 'national'. The

ambition to produce a work of art that would be universal enough to conceal the cultural background and origin of the artist was, to a great extent, driven by the eagerness to make it competitive and, ideally, influential. This pattern is entrenched in the system of international exhibitions where 'national schools' are presumed to contest.

Criticism inspired by the works of Foucault[8] was of great significance the for analysis of exhibitions of different kinds that collectively form part of a system of knowledge production. This ensemble includes art exhibitions. To treat them as a subject of study means to interrogate the social and political dimensions of an exhibition's value and the 'terms of its becoming-public' (Steeds 2016: 16). In recent decades, both the new museology (Vergo 1989) and the expanding field of exhibition histories or exhibition studies addressed these issues in a general attempt to expose the mechanisms of representation that were perpetuated from the 19th-century World Fairs to the modern museum and to contemporary displays. At the core of this debate is to challenge 'the assumption that an exhibition could represent that wider world in a meaningful way' (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 2). Museums and large-scale exhibitions created the imageries that came to be associated with specific cultures and geographical areas. Their role in the perpetuation of colonialist discourses and in the construction of the Europe's 'Other' has been investigated in numerous studies. Among them is Timothy Mitchell's work (2004), who indicated that the sophisticated 'apparatuses of representation' of modernity, in which the World Fairs were the most distinctive element, might be called 'the exhibitionary order', as in Tony Bennett's 'exhibitionary complex' (Bennett 1995) and, accordingly, a 'colonial order' that shaped numerous exhibition practices through the 19th century. Following a Saidian perspective, he suggests that this order had been long producing 'the Orient as a political reality' (Mitchell 2004: 267). This mechanism can be used to describe not

[8] For a sweeping panorama of Foucault's legacy in cultural critique and recent museum studies see Hetherington 2015, 21–40.

only the presentation of the Orient, but any dominant motif exploited within the practice of exhibitions. Numerous artists were influenced by the need to confront their origins and to translate them in their works in order to arouse the interest of the international community. As will be illustrated in this dissertation, exhibitions had a decisive role for the arts of modernity that cannot be understood outside the limits of the aforementioned system. In fact, this system 'was the precondition for the birth of the modern visual arts' (Birnbaum and Wallenstein 2019: 26). Its expansion that marked the second half of the 19th century, combined with the steady spread of reproduction facilities, allowed the image to circulate on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, it further promoted the European universalist claims that gave birth to this representational paradigm in the first place, alongside the associated historicist perspective that aimed at encompassing all epochs and forms.

The matrix of the modern exhibition derives from the 19th-century vision of history and the imperative for taxonomic classifications, as does the corresponding critical reflection of the time. Meanwhile, systematic knowledge about the exhibitions has, in fact, deeper roots that go back to the era of Enlightenment, and probably even beyond. The Salon criticism brings in a brand-new form of appraising art, alongside the higher concern with the 'strategies of display [...] and the kind of narrative that is staged' (Birnbaum and Wallenstein 2019: 13). This argument is essential to the thesis and will be addressed in the following chapters.

This modern culture of display imposed the concept of an ensemble of items that may encompass the widest range of epochs and subjects. The retrospective rolling out of a certain slice of art history was increasingly exploited within the exhibitions through the last third of the 19th century and reached a peak at its turn, when progressive arts fully adopted the means of independent display within their market stratagem, with the designation of 'classical' representing the grounds and providing a validating model for 'more recent art' (Belting 2003: 128). For example, in the 1900s, numerous editions of *Salon d'Automne* paid homage to the 'modern masters' through

extensive, often posthumous, monographic sections. By doing so, it was simultaneously endorsing the living artists displayed next to them by insinuating a link with the earlier generation that was entering the category of established or even already hallowed artists, and it was contributing to the emergence of the myths of the latter that influenced the art of entire countries for decades to come.

Most surveys in the field of exhibition histories or exhibition studies focus largely on the contemporary period, with particular emphasis on the years after World War II. Not least due to their connection to the curatorial sphere, they often emphasise the role of the exhibition curator and seek to investigate the most innovative events. In the meantime, the shows dating from the late 19th to the early 20th century or earlier periods have received lesser attention from the standpoint of those disciplines. This attitude prevails, for instance, in many editions of the widely acknowledged and successful series published by the Afterall Research Centre[9] and in the journal and projects of OnCurating[10]. By doing so, it inescapably positions them in a historicising perspective that links very diverse exhibitions in a single frame of the development of the curatorial 'thought'. It is interesting how this attention to the exhibitions that are known to be 'canonical' or have embraced the range of work forming a certain canon, paradoxically imposes, in turn, a specific canon of 'ground-breaking' exhibitions, even if it is attempting to extend it with milestones from outside of Western art centres.[11]

This poses some far-reaching problems and raises the question of whether there could be any generic tools for both contemporary and modern art. Current interest in exhibitions – both contemporary and those that came to be considered the

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[9] For complete list of publications in the series, see Afterall 2022.

[10] They published many issues dedicated to the topics of biennials and contemporary politics of display. See OnCurating 2022.

[11] As Saloni Mathur pointed out, there is a tendency to privilege the events that took place in the post-war and recent periods, while the exhibitions of other epochs have been largely marginalised by the optics of the field of exhibition histories (2019: para. 5).

major avant-garde experiments – is rooted in the role they acquired as cultural phenomena throughout the 1970s–1980s. Nevertheless, this emerging field that stands partly within and partly outside art history faces some serious methodological challenges. What added value may it bring to the discourses of art and visual studies? How can it rely on the accounts which are generally available on exhibitions, namely photographic materials, organisational documents and communication exchanges, reviews and guestbooks, memoirs, and other archival sources? Even if installation views represent a vital source for writing these histories, they are also rather illusionary: 'because exhibition views combine space and time, they are not, however, reproductions' (Parcollet 2017: 5). It would also be wise to avoid treating exhibitions 'merely as a class of primary sources for an ever-expanding global art history'; in effect, 'nothing about [the] exhibitionary form is self-evident' (Praepipatmongkol, in Mathur 2019: para. 2–3).

Is it possible to investigate the exhibitions of the modernist period, which often might be less documented than contemporary ones, while nevertheless seeing them as a 'discursive product in the Foucauldian sense' (Mathur 2019: para. 4)? It is not a coincidence that exhibition histories started being extensively written in the era of digitalisation, when an event may leave much more evidence behind than in the past. Yet, to foreground exhibitions as the events which consolidated artworks, criticism, specific worldviews, and understandings of aesthetic issues in a public and thus political dimension may be illuminating for the study of artistic, and more broadly cultural, phenomena. Indeed, the 'Western procedure of exhibition was always about capital, whether cultural, political, or fiduciary', as was stressed by Caroline Jones who wrote extensively on World Fairs and biennilisation (Jones in Mathur 2019, para. 1; Jones 2016). The study of exhibitions should not stress a given, intrinsic value of a specific list of shows, but regard them as a product of a system where these types of capital have vital role. This system has long been considered more of an external circumstance of art, rather than one of its main driving forces.

Research around the history of art exhibitions should move in both qualitative and quantitative directions. It is pivotal to situate specific exhibitions within the art-historical narrative and the personal strategies of the artists. At the same time, it appears necessary to improve, enlarge, and create new databases that collect information about art exhibitions and their chronologies and composition. Among the successful and valuable projects of this kind is, for example, the initiative 'Database of Modern Exhibitions (DoME) — European Paintings and Drawings 1905–1915' of the University of Vienna that aimed at creating a digital archive of European modernist exhibitions.[12] Interestingly, this project encompasses many other shows and artists who are not necessarily considered as belonging to the vague criteria of the modern, demonstrating the eliminatory nature of the long-standing art-historical tradition that propagated these very criteria. Another valuable project that points out the diffused character of 19th and 20th century art – as opposed to the classical way of writing the art history of this period – is Artl@s, led by Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, which provides multiple databases and maps.[13]

In previous decades there were some noteworthy publications that anticipated theses databases. A monumental work that is undoubtedly a source that had a tremendous impact on the study of the late-19th-century Parisian art scene is the forty-seven-volumed *Modern Art in Paris, 1855-1900*, edited by Theodore Reff (1981). This mammoth recollection from 1981 features the reproductions of two hundred exhibition catalogues. Similar data for other turn-of-the-century art centres would be of great use for scholars. Another important database is the anthology by Donald E. Gordon that documents a very large number of shows and includes lists of the presented works, which was published in Munich in 1974. Although rather selective – a limitation that was nevertheless acknowledged by the author in the title –

[12] See DoME 2022. The project is currently concluded.

[13] See Artlas 2022.

it presented a very rich and inclusive panorama of 'modern art exhibitions' from 1900 to 1916 (Gordon 1974). It covered the exhibitions that were held in Paris, Munich, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin, Milan, but also Budapest, Prague, St Petersburg, and Moscow. This collection focuses primarily on independent art associations and secessionist exhibition groups, and, quite interestingly, includes a lot of Russian artists, both émigré and based in Russia. These two aspects make this edition remarkably valuable for the present study and, at the same time, indicate an important lacuna concerning the exhibition societies of that period that should be addressed by subsequent scholarship.[14]

Regarding the participation of Russian artists in the 'modern art exhibitions', this inventory, although being subjective in prioritising the members of major modernist and avant-garde groups, provides an advanced mapping and can be seen as a starting point on which to build a comprehensive account of their presence in the exhibition process of the epoch both in Russia and abroad. This thesis will attempt to partly fill some of the gaps in the examination of Russian artists' contributions to exhibitions in major European art centres.

Forms of self-presentation within the public display of art evolved, keeping pace with how both pictorial styles and artistic practices changed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Increasingly, through the use of the outsider pattern, 'the exhibition becomes a strategy', as Daniel Birnbaum (Birnbaum and Wallenstein 2019) observed. If one takes a closer look, there are more similarities between Courbet's Pavilion of Realism of 1855 or Manet's 1867 pavilion at the margins of the *Exposition*

[14] The focus on regular shows reviewed year by year can help to mitigate the effects of the canonical art-historical narratives that excluded, while filtering the events through their alternating optics, the widest range of actors in the field. These shows are sometimes the only events that document the participation of certain characters in the art processes of the epoch. This does not only apply to artists who were overlooked by the public and critics, but also, frequently, to those who received a momentary acknowledgement but did not manage to carry it on or were not favoured by the subsequent artistic discourse.

Universelle[15] and the drive behind the foundation of the Société des Artistes Indépendants, rather than between the latter and the state-sanctioned compromise of the Salon des Refusés. The division made between the official selection and the refused proposals was the line reinforced and exploited by the artists themselves and turned into their advantage.

Artists were becoming increasingly concerned with the way and the contexts in which their works were displayed by the end of the 19th century, and consequently experimented with new devices. Whether it was through accentuating the single paintings with well-spaced single rows, wall colouring, or specific lighting, one of the main goals was to market it the best way possible. Paradoxically, while the ambition articulated was to distance the art from everything else at the cloudy Salon or trade stands of the World Fairs, independent art exhibitions often borrowed some of the means from commercial spaces and pursued their clientele among the public.

The intensifying circulation of artists, audiences, and images undoubtedly served as additional factors that determined the ways that artists positioned themselves throughout those decades. They allowed for what might be described as a process of art internationalisation; however, this was rather an assumed condition that made the participants aware of it act cautiously in relation to their perceived rivals. The flourishing intercultural exchanges amplified existing tendencies to classify cultures in accordance with different principals, concurrently bringing to the table the contradictory but yet interconnected ideas of national art and the cosmopolitan dimension of regular artistic gatherings (Joyeux-Prunel 2019: 419). A truly poignant manifestation of this paradox was on regular display at the fine arts sections of the

[15] However different the evaluation given to them by contemporaries may be from the way they were historicised later, actions of this type represented eminent precedents for the following generations of artists and critics. As Hans Belting discussed while echoing Arthur Danto's ideas, the ambition to be inscribed in the history of art was intrinsic to virtually all artists, including those who acted within the avant-garde model (Belting 2003, 116). It would be even more precise to say that it was a dominant struggle in the modernist and avant-garde settings, and exhibitions, as exceptional occasions for public presentation, were of utmost importance in it.

World Fairs since the mid-century. To be an exponent of a national school became an imperative for artists exhibiting next to peers from other geographical areas. Moreover, the need to assert their national identity through the practice of art became, by the end of the century, a fundamental concern not only of those artists who were confronted with the diversity of the main European cultural centres, but for all of them. The comparisons that inevitably emerged served as catalysts for further imitation of the most widespread styles but were also a means that enabled artists to better construct their personal images (Joyeux-Prunel 2015: 15).

When modernist art is examined from a more critical standpoint that considers its social dimension, emphasis is usually placed on its struggle to attain and expand its share in the market (Jensen 1996: 22). This goal established a new way of presenting works of art, namely through independent art exhibitions. Nevertheless, there is another crucially important issue that drove 'modern artists' which is rooted perceptions of time and history and came to dominate the European intellectual sphere in the 19th century. Historicism constituted a paradigm that immeasurably influenced artistic production, encouraging artists to place their aspirations for historic significance practically above all the other ambitions. The urgency to create 'historically significant and therefore innovative work' became common to 'virtually all professional artists interested in receiving symbolic and economic rewards for their work' (Brzyski 2007b: 361). Innovation therefore became a logical benchmark to follow which, for instance, made expat artists enthusiastically experiment with new techniques and trends while in Paris, Munich, or Berlin.[16]

One of the most telling examples of how a group or an artist could strategically programme their careers was by interacting with different artistic communities that they were not previously associated with. Although artists travelled

[16] For a detailed discussion of this question, including the reasons that stood behind the fact that some trends first had to gain full recognition in the land of their origin, as it was in the case of Impressionists, see Brzyski 2007b: 353–356.

before, and the tradition of grants for journeys to Italy issued by academies persisted in many countries, they were above all a form of recognition that followed the institutional recognition of an artist. Those that had been travelling independently sought, on the contrary, to apply their foreign experience to advance their careers at home and achieve this recognition through it. It is no coincidence that cases of successful expatriates were rare before the late 19th century; the obstacles that they had to overcome were too rigid before the art scenes of the European capitals slowly started to decentralise, as was the case, for example, when the Paris Salon's hegemony began to weaken. Participating in such gatherings may have had little impact for the status of foreign artists in Paris's internal market but was of high importance for gaining recognition in their home countries (Brzyski 2007b: 353). This *external validation* mechanism was equally efficient in other exhibition venues emerging henceforward around Europe.

In recent publications that analyse art shows of different historical periods (Malone 2006; Lippard 2009; van Dijk 2017; Greco 2019), the term 'exhibition strategies' has become increasingly recurrent to describe a set of deliberate decisions made by the artists or exhibition organisers. These include the types of rhetoric in use and the ways to approach the audience and often to direct the critical response. All this was made to create, or at least to approximate, a specific image, to present a vision of oneself that would be competitive and hopefully successful. By adopting this concept, this thesis will not be limited merely to display designs but will rather seek to encompass all the issues linked to the exhibition, understanding the latter fundamentally as a social event or the result of processes of collective action[17] where social agents relate to each other following their interests and where this network of relations eventually defines the value of creative production and ideas. In addition, it

[17] Collective action is one of the definitions of art offered by Howard Becker in attempting to emphasise its social dimension, where any event is revealed to be enabled by a network of actors who behave according to a range of conventions (Becker 2012 [1982]: 369–70).

will be argued that the concept of 'exhibition strategies' represents the most adequate and comprehensive choice of words for describing the way in which art exhibitions were curated before the concepts of curator and curating entered the art-historical and the broader cultural field.

2. Literature review

This section will survey the literature that examines the exhibition practices developed by Russian artists between the 1890s and the early 1910s. A series of recent studies suggest that this examination is necessary. The works that apply a more sociological perspective or the tools of institutional history that apply to Russian art and cultural history, although still limited, are on the increase. It is important to acknowledge that a massive block of art-historical literature on Russian art dating back to the 1970s touches upon the relevance that exhibitions acquired in the cultural life of St Petersburg, Moscow, and beyond. Indeed, exhibitions were phenomena that structurally changed the entire landscape of the artistic and intellectual spheres at the turn of the century. The classical histories of Russian fin-de-siècle and early avant-garde art associations (e.g., Lapshin 1974) are, to some extent, the histories of their exhibition initiatives. Lately, interest in this subject has been growing as more documental sources are being discovered and examined. In addition, there have been studies of the history of Russian art that attributed primary significance to exhibitions (for instance, Logutova 2005 and, especially, the very detailed surveys conducted by Severiukhin 2003; 2018). Some recent works build up the whole history of the 'avant-garde' period on a sequence of group exhibitions (Dulguerova 2015). Nevertheless, the role of artists' participation in foreign exhibitions, and in particular, at venues promoting a specific aesthetic vision or institutional blueprint – such as in the European secessions and other independent societies – remains only occasionally addressed in the relevant literature. The contacts that Russian fin-de-siècle artists established with these institutions are undeniably difficult to explore because the potential primary sources are usually scattered over numerous locations and require a systematic and long-term approach.

In recent decades, there was a durable trend in the research literature to locate Russian art of the late 19th–early 20th century within a growingly international

perspective, partly due to the general rise of Global art history (as in Kaufmann and Dossin 2015). Still, not all the studies that set similar goals actually examine the connections between Russian artists, critics, and other cultural figures with their peers from the other counties. Some of them are limited to the questions of stylistic or subject-matter influences and comparisons that naturally may arise from the formal analysis their works. Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s, the internationalist perspective remained topical in Soviet scholarship, often unable to perform extensive comparative studies due to the insufficient, or very poor, travel and publishing channels available. Despite its limitations, this scholarship introduced seminal contributions covering the subject that opened it up to the following generations of researchers, such as the volume by Sarab'ianov (1980) analysing Russian painting next to the 'European schools'. Overall, the basis for today's discussion was doubtlessly provided by Soviet historiography, which includes a considerable body of literature that has matured with time. Of particular importance for the field are numerous publications of diaries, epistolary exchanges, and selected press coverage that appeared during the second half of the century. The process of rethinking and summarising this heritage is still underway. It is worth mentioning, in relation to the main arguments of the present dissertation, the works by Soviet authors such as Sternin (1970; 1976; 1988). The method introduced by his concept of 'artistic life' that drew on links and relations instead of specific events or stylistic developments has the advantage of encompassing the processes that escaped the gaze of prior research. Other figures whose work is essential for the present analysis are Lapshin (1974), mentioned above, and Zil'bershtein (1971a; 1971b; 1982a; 1982b; 1990), who published numerous volumes collecting the correspondence of personalities such as Sergei Diaghilev, Valentin Serov, and Konstantin Korovin, among others.

Over time, an extensive array of literature covering the cross-cultural exchanges of Russian artists between the 1890s and the early 1910s has emerged. The generation of studies whose transnational approach was encouraged, among others,

by the landmark exhibition *Paris-Moscou* (1979) that shared a preoccupation with the 'international' dimension of modernism and focused on transfers and interactions between French and Russian art of the first three decades of the 20th century, cannot be considered conclusive. However, several of these works proved very important for determining the main research questions of the present project (even though not all of them lie in the realm of this thesis' chronology). In particular, these include studies such as *Khudozhniki russkoi emigratsii* [Russian émigré artists] by Tolstoi (2005), the anthology *Russian and Soviet Views of Modern Art* by Dorontchenkov (2007), as well as finely documented collections of essays, such as *The Avant-Garde Frontier: Russia Meets the West, 1910-1930* (Roman and Hagelstein Marquardt 1992), *Russkii avangard 1910-1920-kh godov v evropeiskom kontekste* [The Russian avant-garde of the 1910–1920s in the European context] (Kovalenko 2000), *Russian Art and the West: A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (Blakesley and Reid 2007), *Russische Kunst im Wertesystem der europäischen Moderne* [Russian Art in the Value System of European Modernism] (Raev and Wünsche 2007) and *Critical Exchange: Art Criticism of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Russia and Western Europe* (Adlam and Simpson 2009). Moreover, recent museum publications by the Tretyakov Gallery or the Russian Museum on the occasion of the large-scale monographic retrospectives dedicated to Repin, Serov, Somov, Goncharova, and others indicate a renewed approach towards the examination of these masters' international contacts and their role in the creative process of their time.

However, only in the most recent monographs can one see a fully articulated attention to the role of international exhibitions in artists' careers, both in terms of attending and participating in them (Sharp 2006; Shevelenko 2017; Mojenok-Ninin 2019; Shabanov [2014] 2019; Malycheva 2020). A series of new studies has indicated the importance of the World Fairs and, critically for the purposes of the current project, that of the art sections of these major events (Dianina 2012; Zavyalova 2017;

Chernysheva 2019). The interpretative matrix within which the period's Russian art has long been situated frequently lacked any inclusion of economic perspectives. These lacunae have recently been addressed by some scholars, a potent example of the incorporation of such a viewpoint being available in Shabanov's (2019) examination of the circumstances in which preceding generations of artists, such as the Wanderers, operated. In these circumstances, it is no surprise that the exhibition enterprises of the most illustrious protagonists of the Russian art world of the 1900s and the early 1910s, such as Diaghilev, are currently receiving renewed attention (Chernyshova-Mel'nik 2018; Dorontchenkov 2019a; Dorontchenkov 2019b). A very solid contribution to the scholarship of the reception of the exhibitions organised in Russian Empire and their significance for the local cultural environment and the aesthetic shifts it underwent is currently being made by Dorontchenkov (2019a; 2019b; 2020; 2021). Overall, there is a notable and stable interest in the reciprocal influences between Russian and Western modern art. The aforementioned works also cover the critical feedback from both sides, thus providing a space for a re-evaluation of the role of the art shows. In this context, the display practices of Russian artists abroad inevitably attract the gaze of scholars.

Nevertheless, the literature covering their contribution to the turn-of-the-century art exhibitions promoted by secessionist groups or independent associations is rather limited, representing a lacuna in the field. Although Russian artists were regular exhibitors in numerous exhibition venues at the turn of the century, the only thorough examination of their activities concerns their participation at the Venice Biennale (Bertelé 2011a; 2011b; 2017). Bertelé 2011a is of particular importance for my research question, as it analyses all the relevant episodes over period between the founding of the Esposizione to the outbreak of World War I. A valuable and comprehensive description of participants in the Vienna Secession can be found in the exhibition catalogue *Silver Age: Russische Kunst in Wien um 1900*, edited by Akinsha (2014). Yet, no comparative study of the participation of Russian turn-of-the-century

artists in more than one venue has been undertaken to date. Indeed, a study combining a thorough chronology and philological scrutiny with a process of geographical mapping that examines episodes involving different contexts and characters runs the risk of being unfeasible. Such an orientation may, however, may offer fresh insights on the subject.

Concerning the groundwork that exists on the historical context, secondary materials on the World Fairs and works that deal with the Russian and Western European cultural history of the late 19th–early 20th century prove highly useful in mapping the contexts that determined the artistic pathways of the protagonists covered in this dissertation (these include Gilmore Holt 1979; 1981; 1988; Facos and Hirsh 2003; Joyeux-Prunel 2005; 2018; Fisher 2003; Hardiman, Kozicharow 2017; Chuchvaha 2015).

The correspondence of artists and press materials of the time, both in Europe and Russia, form two fundamental types of sources that the current project relies on. Surprising comparisons emerge when comparing the ways that the works of Russian exhibitors were welcomed at shows abroad and how the same episodes were reported in local art and literature reviews such as Mir iskusstva, Vesy, Zolotoe runo and Apollon. Some of the key documents, even if they had been previously published, were reviewed in their original formats, since many details that are of relevance in the present work such as organisational details and personal comments (often revealing the broader spectrum of problems that bothered the artists) frequently escaped the editors' attention, since the core set of the relevant publications were published before the surge of interest in such aspects of artistic practice. In the cases where they were, this applied only for major events.

I will be paying attention to the documentation that is related to the artists who contributed, or were involved in, the exhibitions in European art centres between 1896 and 1912. Their work forms the body of the selected case-studies in this project. Although the exhibition catalogues are evidently crucial to this survey, their use

presents a series of limitations, mainly due to the fact that the catalogues of the time were rarely illustrated, and the works were listed under general and often vague titles. Primary sources concerning the organisational issues they faced are very rare, as not all the venues' archives survive today.

Biographical dictionaries containing entries about Russian artists are very resourceful for retracing the networks of the modernist groups. In particular, the two volumes edited by Severiukhin and Leikind (1992; 1994) represent a valuable platform for research of this orientation. Moreover, virtually all the literature concerning the cultural exchange between Russia and the European countries in the late 19th–early 20th century is of high interest. Studies that aim at reconstructing specific bilateral influences were fundamental for the present project. These include, for example, the comprehensive works by Raev (1982; 2000; 2007; Raev and Wünsche 2007) and Tostoi (1983; 2002; 2005) that trace both the real contacts of the artists and the indirect effects of their activity in the art system of the European fin-de-siècle capitals. Furthermore, some important questions are currently being addressed in a growing number of research papers, which, however, largely deal with singular cases or are confined to biographical perspectives and are, consequently, insufficiently comparative (Musiankova 2015; Nesterova 2017). A major interrogation and a potential track for examination that merits further expansion was launched by Hilton's proposal (2018) based on her previous research (1979: 284–285), suggesting the pertinent influence of exhibitions abroad on the way that Russian artists looked upon their own work. This perspective opens up a broad spectrum of issues – such as regarding the way artists approached the display of their work – that were until now only sporadically addressed by art historians and remained scattered or subordinated between other arguments. The present work wishes to meet this need for both a theoretical and an historical reconsideration of the aforementioned aspects that are currently underexamined in the relevant literature.

3. Dissertation aims and outline

The questions discussed here inevitably create a junction of rather diverse historiographical domains, namely spanning Russian art, Russian émigré culture, the history of art exhibitions, and artistic modernism (the latter probably being the most problematic of all). Moreover, it finds itself positioned between a methodology that is mainly applied to studies of contemporary art or well-documented topics in modern art, and a field that in Western scholarship is either mostly treated with notable hesitancy within the so-called 'global' debate or rests in the realm of Slavonic studies.

It is worth mentioning that in the last decade, the use of the term 'Russian modernism' to embrace the entire scope of cultural production that emerged among actors in the Russian-speaking literary and artistic milieus at the turn of the century is gaining momentum over the more traditional concept of the 'Silver Age'. For practical purposes, it is adopted here as a concept that embraces a wide range of practices. These can extend from stylistic pursuits tending to absorb and interpret formal trends – such as impressionistic brushstrokes and the way of depicting light effects, or Art Nouveau flattening colours and curved lines – to symbolist attitudes, mythology and philosophical questions, and the manifesto-centred outlooks of the early avant-garde groups. In so doing, the terminological choice of this research echoes studies such as Dorontchenkov (2020), Shevelenko (2017), Sharp (2007), Hardiman and Kozicharow (2017), Malycheva (2013), and others. However, this term is always intended as a historiographical construct and is not presented as an organic phenomenon.

This dissertation aims to relate to this terminological shift and to further extend it to the domain of the visual arts. In addition, it will argue that it might be more accurate to regard the careers of 'modernist' artists as being driven predominantly by sociocultural factors rather than aesthetic ones. This approach's validity will be demonstrated through a detailed exploration of the circumstances of a

selected circle of personalities. Many artists were often excluded from narratives about the 'new' or 'modernist' art precisely based on the fact that pure aesthetic innovation was not their primary concern. Nevertheless, if one look more critically at the way that the modernist paradigm functioned, one may see how their professional strategies actually fit its context in terms of their choices of how to present and market their work.

Since the 1890s, Secessionism and international art exhibitions have created a new mode of interaction between artists, collectors, and the public in European art centres. Their new forum-like institutional system shaped artists' career pathways while exalting the role of the art show as a means of communication that aimed to reach a broader public and as a site for testing new representation and display strategies.

Meanwhile, Russian art also underwent a radical change due to the disruption of the hegemony of academic supervision in the exchange process with the European art world. An increase in Russian art's presence in European exhibitions coincided with the growth of private initiatives at the turn of the century. Many studies address this period of Russian art history in terms of cultural influence, which might limit it to a matrix of appropriation. In this regard, Russia's relation to Western art cannot be reduced to the idea of direct intercultural transfers, but rather seems to be one of a complex fluctuation of interpretations of its own artistic and cultural identity in response to changes in European art centres.

The presence of Russian artists in international art exhibitions in the 1900s–1910s instigated a growing polarisation of opinion on the definition of national heritage and of its place in creative processes. The internal aesthetic dilemma was fed both by modernist dynamics in Europe in terms of style and institutional layout, and by a need to revisit one's cultural identity within an increasingly global field. Throughout their careers, Russian exhibitors abroad had to (re)formulate their

position vis-a-vis the international art community and their own background and history.

This research views the role of Russian artists in fin-de-siècle international art exhibitions and secession movements as a stimulus for the debate on modern aesthetic in Russia. It aims to investigate the display models employed throughout the last years of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century in order to rethink the evolution of expressive language in Russian art and the creation of cross-cultural networks, in connection with the rise of new exhibition strategies and, more generally, work patterns among artists.

Such an analysis cannot be complete without paying attention to the broader context. It will, therefore, combine methodological approaches that emphasise the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the art process and take into account the agendas of the institutions involved. In Chapter One, I will discuss the growth of new cultures of display across Europe at the turn of the century, highlighting the role of secessionist organisations and artist-driven societies to delineate the context in which Russian exhibitors positioned themselves. The chapter will provide an interpretative overview of the problems inherent to artistic debates in Russia at the end of the 19th century and discuss the reactions that arose within then concerning the alternative art societies in European cities. Chapter Two will address the processes launched by those artists and creative groups that sought to transfer the model of independent exhibition societies to their native country and simultaneously to engage and exchange with their peers abroad. I will illustrate these processes through the cases of the Russian contributions to the Munich Secession in 1896 and 1898, which aspired to attract the international audiences' attention. Chapter Three will examine the emergence of 'archaising' tendencies and of the growing semantic field related to the 'Russian North' next to the revivalist attitudes that were circulating in contemporary European culture. It will emphasise how these were reconciled in the works of single artists and were validated by exhibitions, such as in the case of the kustar section at the

1900 World Fair in Paris and in the *Russische Künstler* hall at the Vienna Secession in 1901. Chapter Four will focus on the process of re-evaluation of the exhibition as an artistic means that occurred in the Russian cultural field of the era, being encouraged by rapidly spreading Gesamtkunstwerk ideals that aimed at incorporating the principles of unity of the arts in the creative practice. Finally, Chapter Five will look at a milestone exhibit titled *Deux siècle de peinture et de sculpture russes* presented within the framework of the *Salon d'Automne* in 1906, in order to argue that from then on, positioning oneself within a historical narrative incorporated into an exhibition becomes a recurring strategy among Russian modernist artists. By so doing, they sought to provide a legitimising genealogy to their pursuits, an attitude that also characterised the Russian section at the Vienna Secession in 1908 which in turn echoed some developments in the Parisian exhibit. It will also address similar patterns evident in other minor contributions, such as the Sonderbund in Cologne (1912) and the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London from the same year. All these manifestations marked the point when a subordinative use of history began to decidedly enter the arsenal of artists in their attempts to position themselves within the international field.

The chronological framework delineated here focuses on the evolution of artist-driven initiatives of the generation that mainly came of age in the last decade of the 19th century. The thesis is particularly concerned with showing how these artists attempted to establish international networks beyond the existing centralised and state-backed projects. This way, a watershed of 1914 often used in the studies dedicated to this period seems less relevant because the circulation of the works of fin-de-siècle artists from Russian Empire did not have a sharp end date. It was simply

overshadowed by the political cataclysms and the activity of the younger generation, but in fact it persisted through the years thereafter.[18]

Drawing on press reviews, catalogues, and epistolary exchanges, this thesis will try to define the criteria for the selection of the artists and their works and trace the feedback that their presence at those events drew. It will also attempt to understand reactions to this presence on behalf of the local, Russian art community. In doing so it seeks to decode the significance of this participation for both the reception of these artists in a European cultural context and for their own evaluation of their path.

Not all events discussed herein were of equal significance, neither in terms of dimensions as seen by their contemporaries nor when considered retrospectively as meaningful steps in some ongoing process of development. Yet they represent a crucial testimony as to how diverse the uses of exhibition could be in the careers of artists belonging to the Russian cultural space and active in the years delineated by the framework of this thesis. These cases form a non-linear sequence (although they are presented chronologically for the sake of convenience) that indicates a range of personal circumstances and conceptual connections rather than some concrete 'development', as has become an inherited practice in such studies to sustain. In so doing, this work seeks to translate the sense of complexity that determined the instrumentalization of exhibiting abroad in the careers of Russian artists who were establishing themselves both locally and globally in the fin-de-siècle. Thus, the main concern of the present research is to situate these exhibitions not as a timeline of narrative-building events that punctuate the history of Russian art, but rather as the elements of a swift process where the market and the agencies of individuals involved are as important as the quest for a renewed collective identity.

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[18] One of the examples of the longevity of pre-avant-garde expressive languages at the international exhibitions was the Russian Art Exhibition mounted in New York in 1924. This event has recently become the subject of a research exhibition organised by the Museum of Russian Impressionism in Moscow which included a broad reconstruction of that historical show (Grabar' and Brinton 1924; Iurkina 2021).

I. CULTURES OF DISPLAY IN EUROPE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY AND MODERN RUSSIAN ARTISTS EXHIBITING ABROAD

1. Secessionist art associations: programmes and policies

Various aspects of the impact of the rise of exhibitions and of the phenomenon of display more generally during the turn-of-the-century period are broadly acknowledged. It is legitimate to claim that the exhibition process was growingly synonymous with the artistic culture of the time, and that this phenomenon was clearly noticeable and a source of critique and debate. Yet it is prevailingly used as an auxiliary argument in narrating the development of modern aesthetic in Europe and beyond. A refreshing point of view in this regard can be offered by a perspective that interprets social structures as vehicles of change in visual culture. Institutional histories that trace the emergence of art associations that enjoyed a relative independence from the local academic artistic establishment in the end of the 19th century (Markela 1990; Jensen 1994; Schorske 1979) stress the fact that their ascent, even if subsequently neglected, was driven not by a mere aesthetic and formal discontent that a number of artists had against the dominant tradition, but was greatly influenced by the political and economic circumstances that these artists were experiencing because of it. These factors are crucial for developing a better understanding of the complex matrix of the art process of the time.[19]

Leaving aside the criteria of taste or quality makes it easier to perceive the motives that inspired European secessionist art groups and societies in the late 19th century and allowed them to succeed on so many levels. These motives were strictly linked to the art market and to the local policies where these societies were set up. In

[19] The expressive means and the changes they underwent throughout those decades, albeit of considerable relevance for art-historical disciplines, tend to be analysed in terms of innovation and regression, which, by consequence, contributes to the a general understanding of the period that conforms to dominant stereotypes, such as that of the artist as a militant pioneer underestimated by the conservative critique. For this point of view regarding the Munich Secession see Makela 1990: xvii.

fact, the imagery they promoted was often much more rooted within the existing aesthetic standards in visuals arts than the conventional art-historical stance suggests. It is, therefore, of great interest for this study study to review the key aspects of the process that contributed to the expansion of these groups. Firstly, because they sparked significant interest in the Russian art community inasmuch as they were often international in their stance and actualised the need to confront that competitive context. This tendency concerned both art and criticism. Secondly, these practices and ideas of these associations had a direct impact on the artistic discourse in Russia as an institutional matrix for emerging modernist groups.

The transformation of the art world that resulted in the dominance of art commerce forms where the commissioner was replaced by a wider liberal market demands was widely recognised as a key point in the history of 19th-century art. Conceptualised as the 'dealer-critic system' by Cynthia and Harrison White (White and White 1965), it continues to attract the gaze of scholars who are analysing the role of social and economic foundations in the transformation of the ways art was produced, consumed, and historicised within the framework of what is conventionally placed under the umbrella-term of 'European modernism'. The last third of the 19th century witnessed the emergences and growth of numerous associations founded by artists to protect their interests and, in most cases, exhibit collectively. This period might be rightfully considered as 'le temps des sociétés' (Bouillon 1986). This form of cooperation between artists allowed for an additional channel of sales for their works. This was often the only avenue to secure some stability in a saturated environment where the number of artists were increasing while the structures rooted in academism were rarely adjusted to these needs. In this context, as Robert Jensen (1994: 182) suggests, the societies of a secessionist type represented the archetypal model of the 'transitional institution between public and private patronage'.

During the 1890s, three major art secessions were established in German-speaking countries: in Munich in 1892 (the Verein Bildender Künstler Münchens), in Vienna in 1897 (the Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs) and in Berlin in 1898, all preceded by entangled struggles and debates within and around them. Within the Austrian-Hungarian Empire other similar unions were concurrently founded in Krakow and Prague, namely in Sztuka in 1897 and Mánes in 1898, respectively. Even though these first three are the formations that are usually considered to be at the core of the secessionist phenomenon, independent artist-driven societies appeared in many bourgeois art centres, including the notable oppositional Paris-based associations such as the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts with its annual exhibition known as Salon du Champ-de-Mars, and the Société des Artistes Indépendants with the corresponding Salon. All the aforementioned groups and bodies, in fact, virtually struggled for a public and sometimes even egalitarian display as their main goal.

Even though the groups behind these associations are often thought to be precursors of the avant-garde art wave of the first decades of the 20th century, the breakthrough in the art system that they instigated in most cases did not carry the radical expressive manner that is claimed to be the main vehicle of the oft-repeated history of modern art. Their programmes were usually characterised by a strong innovative rigour articulated in opposition to the existing old institutions, which were declared obsolete or poorly managed on the level of selection process and awards. Even if it is still conventional to explain the passage that took place as though nourished by predominantly aesthetic discoveries, it was a complex multistep process in which the self-organisation of the artists in response to the market and political conditions played an absolutely pivotal role.

For a long time, the historiography of 19th-century art considered the aesthetic programmes of the most well-studied art groups and societies as the main force responsible for the decline of the Paris Salon and the academic artistic

authorities in other countries. In this sense, the disregard towards the complexities of the late history of the French Salon (fuelled by a narrative favouring mainly the individual manifestations of the rebellious masters) had, for example,[20] long obscured the fact that salon-centred infrastructure persisted and had vast influence on contemporary artists' careers.[21] As was underscored by Patricia Mainardi (1993: 10), what usually evades attention are the entangled dynamics inside the very system it expressed and the fact that it had to manage an ever-increasing caste of artists alongside the widening of the aesthetic forms practiced by them.

Requests for independent display facilities were a constant phenomenon of the century, and the growing claims for alternative outlets for recognition were to a large extent dictated by a simple expansion of the number of artists (Boime 1969: 419) and were symptomatic of their articulation as a social group independent from any specific institution. Throughout 1880–1881, the Salon des Artistes Français replaced the Salon of the Academy of Fine Arts after a series of abortive proposals for change.

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[20] In the late 1970s–early 1980s, publications that concentrated on the role of exhibitions in the 19th century were aspiring to propose a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Several reveal that even before the mid-century, semi-official and artist-driven shows were occurring regularly (such as Hauptman 1985). Among those that illustrate how the art infrastructure changed under the influence of the World Fairs are the anthologies by Gilmore Holt (1979; 1981; 1988). The growing democratisation of the exhibition system is presented here through a collection of critical remarks expressed upon the art presented at the World Fairs and on state-sponsored art exhibitions throughout the last third of the 19th century. The subject was significantly enlarged by an extensive bibliography on Parisian art criticism written by Christopher Parsons and Martha Ward (1986), which, however, relates only to the period of the Second Empire.

[21] In the following years, the studies of exhibitions followed a more concise plot. For instance, the history of the French Salon was largely reconsidered recently. The fact that all 'counter'-exhibitions, such as the Salon des Refusés and the Salon des Indépendents that were for decades ascribed an outstanding significance, were not seen entirely as such by their contemporaries is now reframed in accordance with a larger pool of historical documents. Meanwhile, even though the monopoly nature of the Salon is the factor mentioned by most of the studies on both 19th-century art and 20th-century modernist movements, the issue of it never effectively fulfilling the needs of the artists (Vaisse 2011: 2) remains overshadowed. This is demonstrated by the number of proposals for a remodelling of the juries and schedule, and by calls for changes of venues and retribution criteria. However, these were obviously not implemented. Instead, changes were primarily attributable to the constant adjustments of internal and external political stakes that France experienced.

Thus, during the preparation of the 1880 official Salon some adjustments were made, including the addition of electric lighting – which allowed a larger number of visitors thanks to the ability to display in the evenings – and various attempts to rethink the installation logics, which, however, were not successful due to an excessive number of exhibits (Mainardi 1993: 75). These changes were not very warmly received by a conservative part of the jury and by the government, who proceeded to initiate a discussion regarding the issue. Finally, it was agreed to abolish state control and sponsorship of the Salon and to cede it to the artists. By this time, this idea had already penetrated artistic communities, who were directed both towards displaying in a more individual manner and towards establishing a market for their work that would be less determined by the dominant modes of the conservative establishment.

The subsequent establishment of the *Exposition Nationale triennale* in 1883 represented an extremely outdated format to be instituted in a context where history paining was about to be irrevocably displaced by the force of the art market that was gaining momentum. The newly founded elitist substitute for the Salon, despite securing the best months of the season that were previously reserved for the annual show, was not able to handle the competition from the shows organised in private galleries such as the Galerie Georges Petit. In the German-speaking environment a similar role will later be assumed, for example, by the Galerie Schulte. What is remarkable is also that many of these opted to name their spaces and the events they promoted as 'salons' (with examples ranging from Schulte to the Kunstsalon Cassirer, both in Berlin), deliberately alluding to the new French salons, i.e., foregrounding their 'freshness' and independence from conservative platforms. Moreover, their choices of markets and artists to represent were often in line with the scheduling of the Parisian venues.

Over the span of time between the Paris Commune and the outbreak of the First World War, the number of salons multiplied across Europe; just in Paris, this resulted in four of the largest art associations with their respective salons leading the

art scene (Vaisse 1979: 141). Their aesthetic programmes and organisational structures varied significantly, not always corresponding to the image of the absolute creative pioneers and egalitarianists that art history often automatically assigned to them. This, for instance, was more complicated in the case of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, revitalised in 1890, which, despite being a cutting-edge example of the time, was not avant-garde in its ambitions and enjoyed forms of government support (Cain Hungerford 1989: 71). Nevertheless, it is vital to underline that at the time it was much more influential for subsequently flourishing secessionist movements than the Impressionists' shows (which were long considered as its precursors *par excellence* among different art unions and drew the primary attention of historians in this realm) and the Salon de la Rose + Croix combined. In their turn, the Impressionist exhibitions have also been the subjects of more critical analysis by scholars in the last decades. Among them is Martha Ward, who discussed their implications from a socio-economic standpoint and in terms of related display techniques. She argued that their deliberately manifested independent character was symptomatic of the attitude that reigned during that period in the sense of the 'distinction between public and private' that they marked. This tendency accentuated details aimed at the enhancement of the aesthetic experience, and introduced a high level of refinement to the art space. A quintessential private show was henceforth understood as an oasis where admiration of art could take place undisturbed by any 'profane' commercial undertones or the preferences of the crowd (Ward 1991: 599). As likewise suggested by Brzyski, it all created a paradox consisting of a general 'rhetorical disavowal of commercialism' by different independent turn-of-the-century art associations, a disavowal that nevertheless coexisted with their pursuit of display devices translating a sense of elegance and finesse and with the use of increasingly sophisticated marketing tools, such as partnering with the private galleries (Brzyski 2007a).

In essence, even though the commercial dimension was decidedly innate to the art world and was in fact growing steadily, high concurrence made artists seek an

apparently more neutral background than the large-scale annual Salon or World Fairs, where they could present their works in a favourable environment in which the viewer could better perceive their aesthetic qualities and where they could appear less commodified. The progressive preference for smaller and more chamber-like spaces indicated a different sensibility towards a work of art, or at least an attempt to reassess the dominant one. At the same time, spaces ran by dealers were crucial for associations unable to find a permanent location. For instance, both the Maison Durand-Ruel and the Galerie Georges Petit rented spaces to artistic communities and made them available for private displays.

When the Société des Artistes Indépendants was established in 1884 under the aegis '*sans jury ni récompense*', it provided a strong example of further self-organisation and of the options that this stance advanced for the artists (Ward 1986: 422). The main claim of the organisation corresponded to the idea that the right to exhibit was a fundamental right of an artist. This idea appears to be recurrent during the whole second half of the 19th century, especially in France, where it was to some degree associated with the logic that guaranteed the right to publish (Maindardi 1993: 20). Despite the prophetic role attributed to it retrospectively, its timeline indicates that it assumed this glory not before the dawn of the 20th century. Until then, the Indépendants were not acknowledged as an important organisation. Although it has rightfully been described as probably the most heterogeneous display, it was not even sufficiently reviewed in the press to place it in line with the Salon des Artistes Français and the salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (van Dijk 2016: 44). In fact, the artists who contributed to the Salon des Indépendants during its first renditions were not bound together by a shared motto, whether in terms of political views or aesthetic (Huston 1989: 105). The rules of this association did not prohibit its members to participate in the main Paris Salon, which is strong evidence of its uncompetitive and even amateur position at the time. The absence of any selection criteria made it unattractive for both experienced artists and aspiring radials, as the unlimited

quantity could not guarantee the quality of the show and therefore participation in it could not offer any prestige capable of stimulating the career of the participant.

The prominence that the Salon des Indépendants subsequently assumed is proportional to the prominence that the artists who contributed to it gained later in their careers. For example, in the 1890s, many exhibitors to the Indépendants drifted towards other more respectable venues, including the salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. This tendency suggests that the Indépendants exhibition was seen and used my many artists as an intermediate step in their careers, where they could gain experience of presenting their work publicly. It thus represented, alongside other independent artist-run societies and dealers' initiatives, an important element of the art system of the era, emerging as one of those that were referred by Jean-Paul Bouillon as 'structures d'attente' (Bouillon 1986: 101). During the early 1900s, the Indépendants promoted a totally different image for themselves, not the least because of the policies adapted by Claude Roger-Marx, who oversaw the painting section of the Centennial exhibition at the Paris World Fair in 1900 (revealed to be of a critical importance for the legacy of Impressionism). The Salon des Indépendants began to attract many emerging artists; these were not only locals but also more promising recent graduates from abroad, for many of whom it did not represent any contradiction to participate in the Indépendants while concurrently seeking a serious professional path. It should also be noted that exactly these early years of the decade witnessed an important shift in interest to, and in the collecting of, younger art that had immediately found expression in the market, as was made apparent in the cases the of the Barc de Boutteville and Berthe Weill's gallery shop (FitzGerald 1996: 25–26).

However, the exhibition society that might be righteously considered as the first secessionist art group that made a successful 'separatist' claim against the dominant art institutions was the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Although its founding members did surely play with the title of the homonymous society of 1861

on purpose (Bouillon 1986), there is barely any continuity between these formations. Several scholars concluded that from 1890 onwards it served as a model for the secessionist associations that formed in the years thereafter (Simon 1976; Cain Hungerford 1989; Tolède-Léon 2010; Jensen 1994). Indeed, one of the most distinct common traits among the European secessions was an aspiration to artistic cosmopolitism, and the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts was actually a spearheading advocate of the internationalisation of the Salon exhibition. This salon was partly descended from the quarrel over a growing number of foreign artists that were recipients of World Fairs prizes who submitted to the Salon, thus taking advantage of the privileged right to exhibit without the jury. The excess of submissions, which risked hindering the installation of the 1890 Salon, brought forth an argument between the minority of those who favoured foreign admissions and the majority of those who did not. The disagreeing party split from the main society to set up a new one named Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts under the leadership of Ernest Meissonier, who was much more indebted to the World Fairs for his professional recognition than to the academic realm.

Interestingly, the newly-formed Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts enjoyed governmental approval and secured for itself an advantageous venue at the Champ-de-Mars Palais des Beaux-Arts that had hosted the exhibits of the World Fairs several times and had a had a strong association with the event historically and was closely aligned to its overarching international spirit. The exhibition policy of the Nationale differed quite radically from that of the Salon des Artistes Français. Even though international artists were admitted to the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français, it allowed only French citizens among its members. In contrast, despite its title, the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts accepted non-citizens both as the exhibitors and as official members. In fact, international artists soon comprised a third of the members of the Nationale. This new Salon radically reviewed the jury system, making the jurors' mandates last only over one edition of the exhibition, while its selection was to

be determined by drawing lots. Moreover, the institution of awarding medals was suppressed, making admission to the status of full membership the main form of recognition that was available to the participants. Similar paths would be soon adopted by the Secessions in the German-speaking cultural space, alongside the adoption of a more international outlook. In so doing, the Nationale 'defended the principle of foreign exhibitors against popular local opposition, principally in the name of quality over quantity' (Jensen 1994: 160). It virtually became the first associative formation of professional artists, where the interests of the group – at least at initially – outweighed the values of specific internal alliances. Lastly but most importantly, the Nationale renounced the much-criticised practices of alphabetic or genre hanging and offered artists an opportunity to participate in the hanging process, positioning their art according to the authors' desires or according to what the logic of the works required (Cain Hungerford 1989: 74). The artists, hence, were invited to organise themselves into coherent bodies, as this would afford them reciprocal advantages in the final display.

The Société Nationale offered a coherent presentation of pre-selected artworks that seemed to be at least partly related in terms of aesthetic, in contrast to the Salon des Artistes Français. In fact, the elegant and thoughtful installation alongside its rigorous selection criteria made the Nationale's displays appear much more like the exhibitions of the private galleries and circles rather than any ordinary large-scale art gathering. Doubtlessly, it opted for a reasonable combination of a respectful appearance and a smart economic outlook, which allowed an effective fund-raising initiative based on the *souscription* formula that guaranteed its financial independence through stable earnings from sales (this was maintained until 1909, when the society became publicly-funded). This way, during the launch phase the society secured contributions from patrons and collectors, later named honorary members, who belonged to the founders' network (Tolède-Léon 2010: 105). The names of the donors usually appeared on the first pages of the exhibitions' catalogues,

which was very common in private shows at the galleries or within artistic circles but was truly radical for a venue such as the Nationale.

By the start of the 20th century numerous political and administrative officials began appearing among the honorary members of the Nationale (and then of the newly established Salon d'Automne), confirming an important tendency of the French Republican government's interest in maintaining control over contemporary arts to the extent that was possible at a time when private art galleries were gaining an unprecedented momentum (Tolède-Léon 2010: 115). The foundation of the Salon d'Automne in 1903, the fourth major salon in Paris, was rooted in the political climate to a much larger extent than in the cases of its peers. Besides the already common and well-established mechanism of utilising the endeavour for young and progressive artists to oppose the choices of the existing salons and to attract the attention of potential exhibitors, it aimed to propose an alternative display format driven by a synthetic vision of the arts. Its animator, notable Art Nouveau architect Frantz Jourdain, participated actively in human rights debates and social initiatives surrounding the modernisation of the city (Brauer 2013: 283). His engagement was directly connected to his wider views on the role of the decorative and industrial arts and their educative function. The idea of the new Salon was to reflect the ambition to organise a gathering where different forms of artistic expression could be presented together. It was reasonably scheduled to open in fall, not only to avoid the concomitance with the rest of primary regular art exhibitions of the year, but also to synchronise with the opening of the new theatre season.

In the fin-de-siècle context, Paris offered an unparalleled variety of presentational venues and inevitably attracted an increasing number of artists, including foreigners who sought to launch or strengthen their careers. Style-wise, the environment of the 1890s, dominated by the Société Nationale, was emblematised by the prominence reached by the *juste milieu* artists in terms of institutional layout. It also was crucial 'in defining the international "modernist" elite' such as Liebermann,

Skrabina, Thaulow, Klinger, Böchlin, and Zorn (Jensen 1994: 161), all of whom were contributors at one point or another through the second half of the decade. Overall, the rhetorical claims for organisational independence were part of a set of characteristics intrinsic to the European artistic *juste milieu*, as understood by Jensen (1994: 155). Hence the union-like structures of the main secessionist associations such as their membership policies and vote-based democratic management, despite their advocacy of the privileged classes' culture against industrialist social climbers (the realm from which, paradoxically, many of their patrons derived from).

Rather than having a predominantly aesthetic outlook, Central European secessions, all modelled at least in part after the Société Nationale in Paris, represented a strong political gesture. They expressed the attraction of the specific artists, especially in Germany (who were often members of younger generations, but not always; for instance, this was not in case of Munich) towards the scheme of the art scene that existed in republican France (Joyeux-Prunel 2018: 164–165). The issues of style and techniques were secondary in this regard, backed simply by the aesthetic pluralism of the founding groups of these associations. This gesture matured into a collective act based on their quest for novel forms of representation of national and cultural identity.

Two crucially important aspects of the secessionist initiatives of the last years of the century were their attention to display design, which was becoming more and more calculated, and their internationalising outlook, driven to a great extent by the denial of the provincialism and conservatism of the local artistic environments (Joyeux-Prunel 2018: 166). At the turn of the century, one's involvement in international exchanges through exhibitions of a secessionist type became a decisive career-building means. Concurrently, to host such events was now a primary channel for gaining recognition in the art field for a nation, or for re-gaining it, as was the case with the Salon d'Automne which was established to re-affirm the supremacy of Paris in the development of creative trends.

Finally, another ultimately eminent factor consisted in the strong link that many secessionist groups had with the realm of galleries and, therefore, the art market. Even though they usually had their own means to sell their work, these associations were closely connected to art dealers and operated through them as additional platforms for exhibiting and outsourcing patrons. Thus, the leadership of the Munich Secession used Edouard Schulte's gallery as such, while the Vienna Secession extensively drew on the facilities of the gallery of Othmar Miethke under the management of Carl Moll from 1904 onwards (Jensen 1994: 174; Joyeux-Prunel 2018: 174).

The rich diversity of international exhibitions and organisations ambitiously competing for resources to establish their own display venues did not escape the attention of art community in Russia. The salons in Paris and the sequence of the Secessions during the 1890s in Central Europe were promptly noted by artists and observers in the press. Most importantly, they stimulated the former to question the art infrastructure that existed at home.

2. European exhibitions and Russian art

In the meantime, Russian culture had witnessed an exceptional layering and a deepening sophistication of the art process, corresponding with an expanding popularisation of the art field – both in terms of actors in the art scene and in terms of media attention and promotion of trends – that cumulatively resulted in a remarkable increase of audiences. In this context, it seems essential for the purposes of this thesis to try to investigate all the different fields that the former affected, namely as it pertains to art practice, exhibition processes, art criticism, and various organisations that had specific roles and rhetoric. It is also critical to analyse the way that these domains influenced each other. In the second half of the 19th century, both in Russia and in Europe (although not simultaneously), the sequence of art shows seamlessly entered the routine of the fast-expanding urban communities as smoothly as the culture of newspapers had done in the previous decades. These reflected the rising demand on the market of art as well as on the merchandise that resulted from it, such as reproductions and magazines. Meanwhile, the diversity of art associations and publications emerging in the final decades of the century demonstrated the breadth of the tastes that underpinned this demand.

For a long time, Soviet and Russian research literature has approached the question of Russian artists' contributions to the European exhibition process through the prism of the broad term of 'cultural relations', a spectrum that encompasses all types of contacts 'with the West' – including those that were indirect – that took place or had a certain impact on the arts in Russia.[22] However, for the artists, the role and impact of their European contacts throughout that epoch could range from ones that provoked westernising attitudes to ones the stimulated reactionary, 'patriotic' ones. These arose from diverse impulses, which could include visiting art centres abroad and undertaking study sojourns or seeing international art featured in the exhibitions

[22] See mainly Sarab'ianov 1980 and Tolstoi 1983a, but also Paris-Moscou 1979 and Raev 1982.

on the local level, the latter becoming an increasingly frequent opportunity by the end of the century. However, the general desire for relating to European art in one way or another was a vivid illustration of the sweeping changes underway in the Russian cultural space more generally. These primarily concerned social transformations connected to industrialisation and the flourishing of urban society and the place of the artist in relation to this context, but also the increasingly solid platform that issues of nationalism were assuming in the intellectual and public debates of the time (Valkenier 2007: 45–46). Sergei Diaghilev himself, in his famous appeal to the artists, stated that the project of the art society had the Salon National des Beaux Arts and the Secession in Munich as its prototypes (Diaghilev 1897b). The issue has also been touched upon by scholars such as Dorontchenkov (2009a). Yet the problematics of European models shaping Russian art in terms of institutional layout has not yet been fully traced in a broader context. Here I propose a collection of contemporaneous statements, all of which illustrate this suggestion.

Paradoxically, many opponents of the early modernist tendencies in Russia were deeply also interested in what was happening in European art capitals and allowed this interest to stimulate their work. For instance, the chief critic of the Mir iskusstva community, Vladimir Stasov, is well-known to have published several reviews on the World Fairs, and he also wrote a series of in-depth materials dedicated to European art. His contributions, apart from his condemnations of Diaghilev's projects, sometimes fall out of sight in the discussion of cultural exchange; nevertheless, they represent a precious example of how the growing art world abroad and the art market stimulated a turbulent debate and called for a more articulated evaluation of the direction that Russian art should assume.

The polarisation of opinions on foreign art was just a symptom of a general differentiation of cultural perspectives in the end of the century. Indeed, the panorama of both art and literature became extremely heterogeneous during those years. Rivalries between groups and individual creators that proclaimed to defend a

certain aesthetic programme, although related to deeper disagreements beyond the realm of aesthetics, were what long determined this landscape.

In relation to exhibiting abroad, I am particularly keen in demonstrating how, despite an important number of programmed actions – namely state-sanctioned contributions or those backed by major patrons – the storyline of Russian artists' presence on the European scene reveals how these developments were impacted by apparently random events. Albeit often being moderately successful or even failing, these events say a lot about the state of art in Russia in the specific context. This thesis will not dwell on the question of direct influences of European artists on those active in Russia or of Russian origin, but instead will try to scrutinise the broader impact that emerged from the act of juxtaposing oneself, even theoretically, to a different context.

It was in the 1890s that the rhetoric of a comparison between Russian and foreign art intensified in the realm of criticism, a development that was to dramatically impact the subsequent generations of artists.[23] The reason behind this was an expanding of interrelationships (through communication, travel, etc.), and consequently a mainstreaming of the issue of what was to be the place of Russian art in the international panorama. As was emphasised by Alison Hilton, immediate encounters with foreign art did not merely introduce Russian artists to the latest tendencies; they raised their awareness of the need to confront themselves with others'

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[23] Prior to that moment, the question of whether it was beneficial for an artist to absorb trends and ideas from a foreign soil was a crucial problem for those temporarily residing abroad. One of the most concise statements regarding this was issued privately by Ivan Shishkin during his formative years in Dusseldorf: '[...] here, abroad, I am rather lost, and I am not alone. Many artists of ours, both in Paris and Munich and here in Dusseldorf too, feel somewhat uneasy and nervous – they naturally do not want to fall into imitation, it is not for us, while any proper singularity is still immature, and strength is lacking'. Original passage: 'Так вот какие вещи, добрейший Николай Дмитриевич, а все-таки дело скверное, я здесь за границей совершенно растерялся, да не я один, все наши художники и в Париже, и в Мюнхене, и здесь, в Дюссельдорфе, как-то все в болезненном состоянии - подражать, безусловно, не хотят, да и как-то несродно, а оригинальность своя еще слишком юна и надо силу' (Shishkin 1864). The generation coming of age in the 1890s answered the question univocally positively.

work and encouraged them to revisit the previously dominant matrix of comparison. Evaluating one's success was now complicated by the fact that aesthetically the boundaries were becoming increasingly blurred (Hilton 1979: 280). The very criteria of the singularity of Russian art, as perceived by the generation of the late 1870s and the 1880s, was a complex ideological construct that had matured alongside the political adjustments of the epoch. Before that, Russian art of the 18th and early 19th-century had openly aligned itself with broader European trends (whether it was the *fête galante* style, Roman subjects, or the Italian Renaissance masters that served as the main benchmarks of the academic art education system up until the mid-19th century) until it encountered a situation where it had to diversify itself.

With the reassessments currently developing in the relevant literature, one might partly disagree with the strand of research that has long been centred around the question of the cultural influences experienced by Russian visual culture from abroad. Even though several studies in this realm offered a highly detailed and in-depth analysis of the intersecting contacts of the time, it is worth saying that the perspective of bilateral relations might be slightly limiting. At the international exhibitions, such as, for instance, the Secessions in the German-speaking counties, the cast of participants was mixed, with less rigid divisions than at the World Fairs. It meant that this emerging 'internationalism' offered artists a slightly broader experience than just the possibility of learning about the trends of the host country. Hence, Russian artists, for instance, benefitted from learning about Scandinavian art through the exhibitions in Munich and Berlin.

The turn-of-the-century art process was underpinned by the social and economic order of the industrial and colonial age. In this system, exhibitions of all sorts occupied a prominent place while being at the same time its very essence and the 'subject of delirium' of the epoch, as referred to in an illustrious definition by Flaubert (1910: 415–444). The number of art exhibitions was growing at exponential rates through the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century, and the models they

followed were not limited to fine art academies' displays and official salons. Instead, they certainly saw art sections as a focal point of international exhibitions and World Fairs, and more generally in the way that art was presented.

Russian Empire was an active contributor to the World Fairs, in accordance with its pursuit of its economic and political interests (Fisher 2003; Swift 2021). The official committees and counsellors were usually less involved in the support of the art sections. These were, however, gradually acquiring importance as a category in which a state could demonstrate its supremacy.[24] As for the presence of Russian art in the more local events like the various salons and independent exhibitions that flourished in the 1880s and 1890s, it was initially uneven, heterogeneous, and essentially haphazard. There are several reasons for this. Logically, these events were less politicised by the organisers and were rather modest in scale, so official institutions often had no interest in establishing contacts with them and sending their artists. Secondly, these were often manifestations of the interests of the art community of a specific city, where the audience was usually small. Similar groups and organisations in Russia clearly prioritised reaching local audiences and collectors before becoming involved in small-scale European endeavours.

Other than bureaucratic and political difficulties, another factor that inhibited the eagerness of Russian artists to consistently commit to making steps towards working their way through the various annual displays and salons around

[24] Among the impulses for reaching out to peers in the West independently from the Academy's connections was the fact that support from the government was often insufficient when it came to the organisation of fine arts sections at the World Fairs. This issue was underscored even by the older and conservative cohort. Thus, full of outrage, Antokol'ski wrote to Stasov on the organisation of the Russian contribution to the International Exhibition in the USA that: '[...] for the art section, the very mirror of the soul of Russia – from the total of 900.000 [roubles] only 8.000 is conceded!!! [...] Have mercy! With this amount, considering today's currency exchange rate [...]! This means our art representatives will have to starve there and, if necessary, hang themselves on the nail for pictures'. Original passage: '[...] на художественный отдел, на самое-то зерцало души России — отпускают из общей суммы 900.000 только 8.000!!! [...] Помилуйте, ведь при такой сумме, при теперешнем курсе, да еще в Америке, где наш рубль равняется здешнему [французскому] франку! — Значит, жить там представителям искусства придется впроголодь, да на гвоздь для развешивания картин, в случае надобности, и самим повеситься' (Antokol'ski 1892: 740).

Europe was their mistrust towards French, and sometimes generally Western, contemporary art, a tendency that peaked in the 1880s. In fact, when the wave of interest in Scandinavian art arrived, it was read by many as a good sign and as an instance of the openness of those platforms to alternative 'schools', proving that the path of being accepted in the dominant culture was through the expression of uniqueness connected with an artistic interpretation of national heritage. The trends that marked this shift corresponded to the passage from academy-centred systems to more pluralistic ones. The proliferation of 'national schools' was simultaneously an outcome of this development, but also served as a further stimulus for the expansion of the exhibition process overall, with shows emerging as ideal platforms for contrasting diversities. Indeed, as Hilton remarks in relation to the Russian artists, this notion fostered their participation in shows abroad (Hilton 2018).

The artists who exhibited at the salons in Paris, for example, were largely those who – at least briefly – already resided in the city and could already orient themselves in its horizon by understanding the specificity of different shows' jury systems and the demands of the audience.[25] Yet even for them, exhibiting there was a risk, and it is not by chance that their attempts become more frequent upon the rise of exhibition associations that favoured international artists, such as the salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. In 1890, Vasilii Polenov, who had previously contributed to the main Paris salon in 1875, presented at the Champ-de-Mars with one of his variants of Christ at the Sea of Galilee, a subject he dedicated many works to (Tolstoi 1983: 124). One of the first artists who approached the issue with a certain level of

[25] For many Russian artists, Paris was a focal point in terms of art lifestyle and innovation. However, many of those who travelled to Paris for short stays were not always ready to orient themselves in its vast and ever-expanding arena. As Hilton observed, in the early 1890s only a few could grasp the order of the various trends that coexisted in the French capital (Hilton 1979: 272). Furthermore, she also closely addressed the issue of the failed expectations that were experienced by Russian visitors to Parisian salons and other exhibition sites, which were rooted in the fact that during that decade Symbolism dominated all these platforms.

consistency was Mariia Iakunchikova,[26] who submitted to the Champ-de-Mars several times throughout the 1890s and deliberated about it in her letters. Her friend Polenova asked her many times to write more updates about recent art events in Paris, for she was keen to learn as much about new French art as she could in Russia. Moreover, during her journey abroad in 1895 she was full of enthusiasm regarding the program of the season in Paris: 'In my opinion, the Salons are terribly interesting this year; our Russian correspondents expressed their dissatisfaction with them, but this is incorrect in my view' (Polenova 1895, as translated in Harkness 2009: 224).[27]

The interest of the Russian art community in the exhibition process in Europe was also fed by the curious fact that, in the 1890s, due to the costs associated with sending a correspondent abroad, it was common for Russian journalists to compose recaps of the exhibition reviews that were published in foreign newspapers and magazines. This custom was inherited from the methods of summarising opera seasons and other cultural chronicles. As argued by Kutlinskaia (2006), many observers even reckoned this practice as the most appropriate for the situation, alleging that, for instance, the French critique and the 'attitude of the audience' to painting 'stands on much more rational grounds and reached a higher stage of development than in the other counties, and especially on our end'.[28] She also points out how this attitude allowed the authors to scrutinise the emerging art trends while

[26] Upon the first editions of this salon, Russian artists living in Paris at the time were intrigued by it, and, according to testimonies, were particularly attracted to Anders Zorn. In one of her letters to Elena Polenova, Mariia Iakunchikova praised his loose painterly brushwork (Iakunchikova 1890).

[27] Original passage: 'По-моему, Салоны в этом году ужасно интересные, хотя наши русские корреспонденты и изъявили на них свое неудовольствие, но на мой взгляд это неверно' (Polenova 1895).

[28] Original passage: 'отношение публики [к живописи] стоит на гораздо более рациональной почве и достигло гораздо высшего развития, чем во всех других странах и в особенности у нас' (Parizhskie salony 1893, cited in Kutlinskaia 2006: 26–27).

maintaining a significant critical distance, consequently protecting themselves from attracting polemical responses.[29]

The deeply rooted need for exchange can be illustrated even through an ironic review of Russian art life that appeared in a short-lived St Petersburg daily newspaper Mirovye otgoloski, that summarised, among other issues, the outcomes of a major French art exhibition[30] held both in the capital and in Moscow: 'He exhibited at salons [...] When hearing such credits, one instinctively feels respect for the person in question. For Rusaks [Russians] to whom the Lord did not give a chance to visit any, these seem almost mythical, since the catalogues, although exquisite, do not convey the qualities of the originals'.[31] One may also find the lamenting about the gap between the quality of exhibitions in Russia and abroad in the memoirs of the Princess Tenisheva, one of the most ardent promoters of modern art drawing on the national heritage: 'When one happened to visit exhibitions in Russia after having seem some abroad, one's gaze was slipping from one paining to another but could not actually see anything'.[32]

The links existed, but they were not powerful and, most importantly, did not instigate a radical impact on the art life in Russia would later crystallise. Although artists travelled and even participated in European shows, and although there were some consistent presentations of foreign art in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the

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[29] To rely on the art journalism produced by Western European critics was also a very common pattern in the materials published by the Mir iskusstva, mainly because their publications were deemed to be more concise and professionally written.

[30] For the analysis of this event see Dorontchenkov 2021.

[31] Original passage: 'Он выставлял в салонах" — "он бывал в салонах"... При таком отзыве невольно проникаешься уважением к такому человеку; салоны для русаков, не умудренных Господом побывать там, являются чет-то мифическим, так как по каталогам, несмотря на хорошее издание, нельзя судить об оригиналах' (Izgoi 1897).

[32] Original passage: '[...] когда, бывало, после заграничных выставок приходилось посещать русские, глаза бежали с одной картины на другую, а смотреть было нечего' (Tenisheva [1933] 1991: 160).

situation changed sharply in the mid-1890s. Alexandre Benois described the shift in awareness about foreign painting that occurred in the last decade of the century in the following terms: 'private exhibitions of foreign artists organised in Petersburg and Moscow, travel abroad, and illustrated volumes on art becoming more accessible... all these brought us and the West closer together'.[33] He indicated that the core phenomenon that determined the art routine from that moment onwards was increasing mobility – of artists, of exhibitions, and, of course, of ideas and visual materials.

By the mid-1890s, European secessionism had become a force that the Russian art scene could no longer ignore. Russian artists were already keenly interested in what was happening in Munich. While in the city in 1893, Il'ia Repin wrote that it had become an impressively solid centre for the arts: 'there are up to five thousand artists here. A glass palace for exhibitions, many galleries of art – private, governmental, and commercial' (Repin 1960: 402).[34] During that period, Repin was travelling over Europe appraising what he saw from a rather specific point of view; he was keen to learn about the ways the art scene was organised in different contexts because he wanted to find solutions for a renewal of the academic system back in St Peterburg (Hilton 1979: 280).

Already a fertile ground for products of German culture such as literature and philosophy, the founding of the Secession and its first exhibition in 1893 fostered a growing curiosity of artists and critics in Russia. The birth of this organisation, despite having had several precedents in Parisian art life, attracted special attention. Recently, both Kochman (1997b) and Shabanov (2020) have touched upon the echo left by of the secessionist boom in Russia, but they were mainly preoccupied with

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[33] Original passage in Russian: 'Частные выставки иностранных художников, устраиваемые в Петербурге и Москве, общедоступность заграничных путешествий, распространенность иллюстрированных изданий об искусстве... все это сблизило нас Западом.' (Benois 1902: 178 cited in Lapshin 1980: 201)

[34] As translated by Kochman 1997a: 89.

aspects slightly different from those addressed in this thesis. As was already underlined by Sternin (1970: 114), different wings of the artistic arena interpreted their mission and role in their own ways, adjusting them to their specific needs. During the late 1890s, this tendency was particularly pronounced in the gulf between the group that would subsequently form the Mir iskusstva and Stasov as the figurehead of the values shared by peredvizhniki, both of whom operationalised the Munich secession as a paradigm to serve their own arguments. Sternin brings up a statement by Stasov that is characteristic of how he regarded the Secession movement as a universal phenomenon. In one of his letters to Il'ia Gintsburg (Statov 1893), he positively affirms that the secessionists are essentially 'our Quakers-peredvizhniki'.

To further demonstrate his early enthusiasm in this respect an excerpt of the 1894 article 'Is disagreement among artists a good thing?' might also be added:

> 'In 1892, the same story that had happened in Paris since 1890 occurred in Munich. Here, artists also felt that there was not enough room for all of them, that they are all too distant from each other [...]. Consequently, they acted so just as the French had three years ago. As it had happened back then, the best artists seceded [...] those who realised how harmful and embarrassing the ossified values that they inherited are, those angry with the slavery before the academic tradition as if it were a collar or a trap, those who decided that it is not worth it to suffer injustices anymore, especially from the part of their fellows'.[35]

[35] Original passage: 'В Мюнхене повторилась, в 1892 году, та самая художественная история, которая происходила в Париже, начиная с 1890 года. И тут тоже художники почувствовали, что всей их разросшейся массе не житье вместе, что между ними – пропасть, что давно уже образовались разные группы, у которых мысль и намерения, вкус и чувство-- все совершенно иные, и друг друга терпеть они дольше не в состоянии, пора развестись. Они и развелись, как за три года перед тем французы. Как и там, отделилась лучшая часть художников: все самые талантливые, все самые мыслящие, все чувствующие вред и стыд ненавистного предания, все негодующие на давнишнее рабство перед школьной академической традицией, как на капкан, как на ошейник, находившие, наконец, что не стоит терпеть ничьего произвола и несправедливостей, особливо от товарищей' (Stasov 1894).

It might even seem paradoxical, when compared to his successive anti-decadent rhetoric, if one recalls the fact that what was to dominate the secessionist platforms tended towards a Symbolist vocabulary and cosmopolitan attitude, both of which he opposed. Surprisingly, he dedicated a lot of attention to, and describes in detail, the entire process of the emergence and genealogy of the institute and praised its mission.

Stasov's article was in part a reaction to the alliance which some older peredvizhniki had entered with the Academy during the years that it was undergoing reforms. According to Stasov, this collaboration was jeopardising the balance of powers in Russia's artistic scene, which was for long driven by the opposition between Realist painting and the St Petersburg Academy; more significantly, he viewed this development as representing a major setback in its institutional development (Kochman 1997b: 80). This position had been guaranteeing the autonomy of the progressive parts of the art community from politics, thus reserving for itself a critical and independent stance. Hence the loss of the subversive status by peredvizhniki, which roughly corresponded to the phase when Realism was also losing its relevance. This created a situation where the place of such a radical actor in the art field was vacant. The lack of a conglomerating society that would meet the needs of the new generation for establishing a collective identity was layered upon the growing bulk of information on the new independent art associations in Europe. As a consequence, the interest of many artists in what was happening in Europe, seeking to import trends or experience them for themselves, matured incomparably to that of the preceding generation. Munich was one of the first candidates in this regard because it offered a wide range of facilities that one could not aspire to have even in any of major cities in Russia.

Here, it is also important to stress that Munich was careful in securing opportunities for international artists, both culturally- and exhibition-wise. This meant that to follow the Munich scene was synonymous with an ability to grasp

something about the international art trends. Even Repin was impressed upon his visit to Bavarian capital. In Munich, foreign artists could stand out using their different background relative to the local context as an advantage (Kochman 1997b: 89–90). This situation could potentially allow a newcomer to cultivate their artistic individuality without necessarily rejecting their own national identity, while at the same time connecting to a broader framework. Moreover, the newly founded Secession's progressive tenor made it exemplary for younger artists preoccupied with finding an alternative institutional structure to articulate a generational revolt that was long simmering.

Although in its layout, programming, and moderate rhetoric the Munich organisation was much more akin to the peredvizhniki than to the groups that replaced them throughout the late-1890s and early-1900s, such an analogy is not flawless. Indeed, they are comparable in their roles as societies that claimed autonomy on a variety of fields that included the display agenda, economics, stylistic choices, and wider aesthetic issues in their native contexts. Nevertheless, there is a contrast that cannot be overlooked, namely the emphasis placed by the Munich Secession on the aspect of international exchange, which placed it in perfect accord with the city's wider policy. One of the authors who has recently revitalised the discussion of possible parallels between the European secessionist paradigm and the breakout performed by peredvizhniki is Shabanov, whose argument consists in that no one had yet properly drawn a connection between them because the Russian art group had long been idealised and their commercial policy had been ignored (Shabanov 2020: 64). He also observes that juxtaposing the secessionist associations with the Mir iskusstva instead might not be accurate because the latter did not represent a proper example of artists' self-organisation due to the authority of its leader, Diaghilev. Undoubtedly, from an institutional point of view, the peredvizhniki satisfy most of the criteria common to European Secessions, including their moderate progressiveness, keeping links with the state art infrastructure, self-management, and

the subsequent fate of becoming a conservative organisation. However, I would argue that the dialectic of comparison might be secondary in this respect. What matters is that the secessionist model (branching from the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris) had a remarkably pronounced impact on Russian modernist art groups such as Diaghilev's circle or the Union of Russian artists [Soiuz russkikh khudozhnikov]. Even the facts that most of the avant-garde factions that subsequently arose articulated their programmes through exhibitions and sometimes tried to establish their own display platforms is evidence of the entrenchment of a logic of separation and autonomy whose relevance should not be overlooked.

Their international stance, alongside their commitment to progressive values, were key features that made the Secessions a model of an art community that closely reflected artists' exigencies. They echoed the ideas that were maturing among Russian artists in the 1890s concerning the beneficial character of external influences (Kochman 1997b: 91). For Diaghilev, these became a major characteristic both to import and to try to use at one's advantage when trying to integrate oneself in European art forums. According to him, Russian artists' contribution to that context were a vehicle for rekindling their artistic individuality (Kochman 1997b: 85).

Hence also the episodes that occurred during their contribution to the Munich Secession in 1896 and 1898 (discussed below), which resulted from the convergence of the hosting organisation's interest to display foreign artistic 'schools' and the aspirations of younger generations of Russian artists to connect with their peers that had found such a bright expression in the steps undertaken by Diaghilev and his circle. Moreover, such tendencies were further supported by the fact that the Secession was stepping back from evaluating art through the prism of competition between nations and, instead, oriented its rhetoric around foregrounding the synchronicity in artistic advancements among the different participating 'schools', who nevertheless preserved their autonomy and singularity.

Another factor that stimulated this generation to develop a coherent exhibition strategy abroad was the absence of consistency in previous Russian contributions. It was one of core issues for Diaghilev when he launched his programme in 1896 (Diaghilev 1896). The problem, however, attracted the voices of other members of the art community, for instance that of Igor' Grabar' (who was not yet get personally acquainted with Diaghilev). In an 1897 review of foreign exhibitions, largely dedicated to the Venice Biennale but also covering other concurrent events, Grabar' points out that other countries that were previously considered marginal in the art field were now being 'better and more extensively represented at any international exhibition in Europe than Russian artists'. Meanwhile, Russian works were 'always spread out in different halls, as if highlighting the discord prevailing among our artists; they are unwittingly getting lost amidst the artworks of other foreigners which leads, naturally, to the loss of their advantage'.[36] He lamented the lost opportunities that this form of organisation encouraged, and wrote that 'if Russian contributors would have had a special hall, if they would have been brought into some section, even of unofficial nature, the international audience would pay more attention to them, would understand that there are artworks expressing a certain movement, forming a proper school'.[37]

Grabar' spoke about the need to act collectively, but he also delineated the way it should be done, namely by operationalising the general interest in recognisable 'national schools' that dominated those displays and the art-historical discourse at the time. He was thus fully in sync with Diaghilev in these two propositions, articulating the need to adopt to the expectations prevalent in the contexts in which Russian

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[36] Original passage: 'всегда в разных залах, как бы наглядно показывая рознь, царствующую между нашими художниками, они невольно теряются среди произведений других иностранцев к полной своей невыгоде, конечно' (Grabar' 1897).

[37] Original passage 'Будь выделены русские авторы в особый зал, будь у русского искусства какой-нибудь раздел хотя бы и не официального свойства, иностранная публика обращала бы на них больше внимания, соображала бы, что перед нею находятся произведения, выражающие собою известное направление, представляющие целую школу' (Grabar' 1897).

artists – and this aspect was taken by both for granted – had to be aspiring to integrate into. These propositions were filled with a pragmatism that older generations were denied due to their idealistic vision of the social function of art; at the same time, they expressed a new kind of idealism linked to the cosmopolitan, 'modernist' agenda.

Grabar' also complimented foreign authors' interest in Russian art, albeit saying that some accounts contain mistakes and misunderstandings. Yet he argues that Russian artists should take in consideration all these comments regardless of their stance, in order to grasp the idea of what 'foreigners want and expect' from them.[38] Even after the ice had already been broken with the episodes from 1896 and 1898, to which two case studies are dedicated in the next chapter, these ideas did not stop expanding. In 1901, Nikolai Roerich was writing that 'for now, let us not forget the good words of prof. Muther who recently pointed out what new Europe should now be expecting from Russia, and let us try not to miss the occasions to participate in the foreign exhibition. In Venice this year, such an occasion was lost'.[39]

Among other commentators approaching these arguments was also Vasilii Kandsinkii. In 1899, in an observer capacity, he covered the latest exhibition of the Munich Secession for the daily newspaper Novosti dnia.[40] This review represents one of his first significant published pieces, appearing before his prominent article 'Critique of Critics' (in the same newspaper), long considered his very first published

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[38] Original passage: 'В заграничных суждениях о русском искусстве часто бывает не мало вздора и неправды смотря из какой книжки черпает суждение, но встречается и оценка, заслуживающая внимания — с точки ли зрения общеэстетических или хотя бы и личных требований. Ознакомиться со взглядами иностранцев на русское творчество, думаю, небесполезно для самих наших художников. Неправда и ошибочность суждений о них не должна их огорчать, — в этом случае они могут посмеяться, но все-таки любопытно знать, чего хотят и ожидают иностранцы от нас' (Grabar' 1897).

[39] Original passage: '[...] А пока не забудем хороших слов проф. Мутера, недавно заметившего, что́ новая Европа должна ожидать теперь от России, и постараемся не упускать случаев принимать участия на заграничных выставках. На венецианской выставке этого года такой случай нами пропущен [...]' (Roerich 2004 [1901]: 384).

[40] See the translation published by Kochman (1997a).

critical work (Kochman 1997a: 730). Subsequently, in 1902 he became a corresponding contributor of Mir iskusstva, covering exhibitions and other cultural events occurring in Munich; however, by then he had become less enthusiastic by what he saw. In his 1899 article, Kandinsky is very focused on issues of technique and style, praising Monet and Degas and reporting that significant space was dedicated within this 1899 edition of the Secession to the applied arts, upon which he dwelt significantly. Curiously, he describes in detail the contemporary Munich design enterprise of Vereinigte Werkstätte für Kunst in Handwerk, some members of which contributed to the Secession he reported about (a similar one was arranged by the Vienna Secession, as will be mentioned in the following sections, and comparable ambitions were pursued by the organisers of the *Contemporary Art* and *Architecture of New Style* exhibits in Russia in 1902–1903). Eventually, he sums up the efforts of the phenomena he concentrates on as a 'striving for beauty'.

In this regard, it seems essential to emphasise that Paris and Munich were not just the two most vibrant art centres in Europe, but were also particularly important to the Russian literary and artistic circles as role models for both the flow of stylistic innovation and for structural models of organising cultural life. In Diaghilev's accounts, for example, this attitude can be recognised at once. When, during the formative years of his persona as an art critic, he spoke about the secessionist associations that had been flourishing during the 1890s with a great enthusiasm, he called for the incorporation of certain characteristics and organisational schemes of these formations. He praised their independence and fresh outlook on exhibition policies (Diaghilev 1897b).

Artistic developments in Munich and Paris were routinely covered by art magazines in Russia through the late-1890s and the 1900s. These two destinations – German-speaking countries and Paris – appealed to Russian artists not least because they had a very solid artistic infrastructure with exhibition facilities and an advanced journalism that followed recent art trends. Naturally, this attention was particularly

pronounced in the lens of the modernist revues, first in Mir iskusstva and later in the magazines that inherited some of its values such as Zolotoe runo and Apollon.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how another archetype, the way German art overcame a rather stagnant period in the second half of 19th century (when a younger generation got fascinated by the 'national' theme and used it as a lever to overcome the 'crisis' that German art, in their opinion, was experiencing) was certainly of some relevance for observers among the progressive exponents of Russian cultural life. It is also noteworthy that to become an autonomous exhibition society in Russia would entail a translation of aesthetic values commonly shared by similar societies in Europe, who were, before the Vienna secession started gaining momentum, far from subversive. As was emphasised by Kennedy, the priorities of the Mir iskusstva circle, even though mainly not radical in terms of expressive means, 'corresponded closely to those of the Secession movements of the 1890s and to the contents of other art journals of the period' (Kennedy 1977: 7).

The paradigm of the independent exhibitions in Munich and the analogous ones in Paris, such as the Salon du Champ-de-Mars, undoubtedly shaped the selection of the first exhibitions of the Mir iskusstva. Their eclectic character was rooted exactly in the fact that the organisers sought to present a collection of the recent art trends, with which they were primarily familiar through their channels with Europe.

Diaghilev cherished an ambition to establish a Russian art Secession, and shaped many elements of the group he co-led after the German associations. Igor Grabar' was very enthusiastic towards the format of the Munich Secession, to which he was surely a regular visitor, and in particular to the fact that it dedicated considerable space to international artists. This kind of balance was, according to him, the best recipe for progress in the sphere of art, and he was in fact keen to see affinities

in the generational changes occurring in Moscow and St Petersburg in the middle of the decade.[41]

Overall, these processes where changes in the European scene steadily encroached upon the local discourse in Russia, in large part thanks to the openness of organisations such as the Munich Secession to international and stylistically innovative art, served as a major source of encouragement for the new generation in their aspiration to reinvent their artistic identity (Kochman 1997b: 92). The validity of the hypotheses expressed above can be further supported by the way in which the secessionist phenomenon was being described in 1899 by a Mir iskusstva author, most likely Al'fred Nurok, a music critic and member of the editorial group:

> 'Following the example of the Munich "secessionists", the pursuit to separatism has now gripped almost all major art centres in Germany and Austria. Groups of young artists in Berlin, Vienna, Dresden, Dusseldorf etc., after realising the ineffectiveness [sic!] of big academic "monster-exhibitions", are seeking to establish their own smaller shows, borrowing the term, the order, and some of the principles of happier and more experienced Munich artists. The head of such enterprises is usually someone of the more mature masters with a reliable reputation as an art innovator, whose name could serve as a guarantee to the audience that the works presented are serious enough'.[42]

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[41] Upon his arrival in Munich, he wrote that '[...] everything that is talented in Paris has formed a Secession refusé (Champ de Mars), while everything that is talented here – the Secession; in Russia (Moscow and, in part, St Petersburg) the same is brewing in the vest of the division of the Korovins, etc.'. Original passage: '[...] все талантливое в Париже составило Secession refusé (Champ de Mars), все талантливое тут — Secession, в России (Москва и отчасти Петербург) назревает то же самое отделение Коровиных е.с.' (Grabar' 1895).

[42] Original passage: 'С легкой руки мюнхенских "сецессионистов", страсть к сепаратизму охватила ныне почти все художественные центры Германии и Австрии. Отдельные группы молодых художников в Берлине, Вене, Дрездене, Дюссельдорфе и т. д., убедившись в невыгодности [emphasis mine] больших академических "выставок-монстр", стремятся к устройству своих собственных небольших выставок, заимствовав и термин, и порядки, и даже иные из своих принципов у счастливых и более опытных мюнхенцев. Руководителем подобных предприятий, обыкновенно, является кто-либо из более зрелых мастеров с прочно установившейся репутацией талантливого новатора в искусстве, имя и участие которого на выставке могли бы служить для публики известного рода гарантией в серьезности выставленных работ' (Nurok 1899: 14–15).

The observer continues by writing that by 'splitting from the academic parish'[43] (thereby, like Stasov, employing an allusion to religious schisms to underline the rigour of the new groupings), artists in Berlin and Vienna succeeded not only in establishing their organisations but also in claiming separate buildings for themselves. The rest of the publication describes the aims of the recently formed Berlin Secession and dwells on the figure of Max Liebermann, with particular emphasis on the fact that the exhibitions of the new society would be highly 'selective'.

Furthermore, throughout the 1890s there was an unprecedented number of opportunities to witness foreign art or to learn about it in press. Various foreign art exhibitions were organised, which were mainly in St Petersburg but sometimes travelled to Moscow and other cities. Major shows of French art were set up in 1891 and 1896 presenting a very diverse selection of works, while the Nizhnii Novgorod exhibition in 1896 hosted a broad array of Scandinavian art. There were also shows of Japanese art in 1896 and of Belgian art in 1898–1899 (Hilton 1979: 281–282).[44] Moreover, in 1900, Moscow and St Petersburg hosted the All-German Art Exhibition, a large-scale display that gathered artworks from different local schools and was backed by the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in St Petersburg.[45] Yet, despite their broad scope, these exhibitions were, as stressed by Dorontchenkov, rather eclectic. They consisted of works by widely established artists and rarely incorporated any radical approaches, thus translating a rather 'flattened

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[43] Original passage: 'Отделившиеся от академического прихода художники в Берлине и в Вене сумели, в сравнительно короткий срок, не только сплотиться в деятельные и плодовитые "ассоциации" сознательно работающих людей, но даже, что гораздо удивительнее, настолько упрочили свое существование, что оказались в состоянии устраивать свои выставки в собственных, специально для подобной цели построенных зданиях' (Nurok 1899: 15).

[44] This subject currently attracts a great deal of attention among scholars. To point out the most detailed studies, the publications by Ilia Dorontchenkov (2020; 2021) should be mentioned.

[45] Beloning to the previous last couple of decades, including works by Franz von Stuck, Julius Diez, Fritz von Uhde, Ludwig Dill, and others.

idea of the national schools' (Dorontchenkov 2007: 81). Critically, the German exhibition of 1900 had a special section reserved for the Munich Secession. Such a division was rather new to the wider Russian audience, and it particularly caught the attention of the reviewers, who did, however, acknowledge in their specialised publications that the idea of secessionism had expanded to many other cities in Germany and Austria-Hungary and that, surprisingly, the Munich association had long outlived its original mission. One critic observed that, while during the first years of its existence the Secession was still fighting for legitimacy and autonomy, fiercely distancing its community from any expression of dominant paradigms, around the turn of the century 'its mission seems to have been long accomplished; now there is no more need to support the emerging talents, as in the rhythms of modern life, many young artists have already become famous in the academic milieu. The Munich Secession did its part and continues to operate out of habit'.[46]

Nevertheless, the example of the Munich association was a strong reference point for a long time. Leonid Pasternak described that period in his memoirs (indistinctly moving from the 1890s to the early 1900s) as rich in external stimuli and called it 'the time of foreign Secessions',[47] emphasising the fact that European societies were providing examples of rupture with conservative values and paving the way for new ideas. In this light, he said that he and his peers

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[46] Original passage: 'Его тогдашняя задача давным-давно уже решена; теперь уже нет надобности давать ход начинающим величинам, потому что, при быстром темпе современной жизни, многие юноши становятся уже знаменитостями на академической скамье. Мюнхенский "Secession" сделал свое дело, — он продолжает уже жить по привычке; [...]' (Shchurov 1900: 307). Sergei Petrovich Shchurov (1866–1930) was a godson of P.M, Tretiakov, titular councillor and from 1900 the assistant curator of the fine arts section of the Rumiantsev Museum.

[47] Original passage: 'Мы жадно слушали, смотрели художественные отчеты, репродукции с работ, экспонированных на выставках и т. д. Это была пора заграничных "Сецессионов", т. е. молодых новых организаций, отколовшихся от старых обществ и порвавших с отсталыми академическими традициями. Это была пора брожения новых идей и теорий' (Pasternak 1975: 215).

> 'started to think of organising our own progressive association with our own exhibitions, independent from everybody else [...] We dreamt of exhibitions that would be free of selection, jury, and judgement. What mattered was the freedom of painting. As was demonstrated by the Paris salons, the jury principles, in fact, are detrimental for young emerging artists'.[48]

He was referring to the emergence of the Union of Russian artists,[49] a platform that expressed their claims for alternative display facilities in Russia in an even more articulated way than the Mir iskusstva circle did.[50] This quest for independence was also closely linked to the ideas of the Munich Secession, which served as an example of self-organisation. Thus, a critic covering the quarrel that preceded its establishment wrote that:

> 'The youth has for long been suffering from the routine and stagnation in the realm of the peredvizhniki [...] Finally, it decided to perform a 'sezession' and form a society. The first to withdraw from the ranks of peredvizhniki was the talented portraitist Serov, and others followed. The triumvirate consisting of Serov, the editor of 'Mir iskusstva' Diaghilev, and Al. Benois appeared to set up the new society. As a prototype they chose the Munich 'Sezession', borrowing its principal element of the charter – the right of the participant to display one painting without jury. This point is very crucial, as it works as valve that allows all kinds of

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[48] Original passage: 'стали задумываться над возможностью организовать свое, не зависимое ни от кого, прогрессивное художественное общество со своими выставками. [...] Мы мечтали о таких выставках, где отсутствовали бы всякие отборы, жюри, суд. Важна живопись, ее свобода! Ведь принцип жюрирования, как показывали парижские салоны, так пагубен для молодых, начинающих художников' (Pasternak 1975: 215).

[49] However, the new society aimed at making concurrence to neither peredvizhniki, nor Mir iskusstva, as it was underscored by Sternin (1976: 20: 152).

[50] See Sternin 1976: 17–25.

new talents to emerge and will open a freeway to creativity and original gifts'.[51]

The idea of 'secession' as a term used to describe independent and young art associations or groups that aspired to establish their own alternative exhibition platforms had become widespread by the early 1900s. Thus, in a letter to Rainer Maria Rilke, Pavel Ettinger, a prominent art critic, wrote that 'among local art circles we are now expecting a great event – the upcoming Moscow Secession. Local artists such as Vrubel, Korovin, Serov, Pasternak, Vasnetsov, and others are tied of the dictatorial and one-sided nature of Diaghilev's work, and therefore they have decided to open their own exhibition by Christmas time'.[52] Even though he exaggerated the dimensions of the revolt, the statement illustrates the overall enthusiasm about the possibility of a 'secessionisation' occuring in Russian art. Perceived as a promise of diversification and renewal, it was welcomed and desired by many forces within the art community. Moreover, the term 'secessionists' started to be employed by some reviewers in positive sense (Kugul'skii 1900: 2). Valkenier observed that this period of cultural history of Russian Empire often referred as the Silver Age 'can equally well be regarded as Gilded Age', as a flourishing phase for cooperatives among artists multiplying there in similar manner as it has been long occurring in Europe (Valkenier

[51] Original passage: 'Молодежь уже давно тяготилась рутиной, застоем среди передвижников [...] Наконец молодежь решила учинить sezession и образовать общество. Первым вышел из рядов передвижников талантливый портретист Серов, за ним потянулись другие. Составился триумвират из Серова, редактора "Мира искусства" Дягилева и Ал. Бенуа для организации нового общества. Прототипом новое общество избрало мюнхенское "Sezession", заимствовав коренной пункт его устава — о праве каждого члена общества выставлять одну свою картину на выставки без жюри. Пункт весьма существенный, своего рода клапан, который обеспечит свободный выход всем новым художественным дарованием и откроет свободу творчеству и может быть, откроет путь для проявления оригинальных дарований' (Kugul'skii 1900).

[52] Original passage: 'В здешних художественных кругах ожидается больше событие — предстоящий московский Сецессион. Здешним художникам — Врубелю, Коровину, Серову, Пастернаку, Васнецову и другим — надоела диктаторская и довольно односторонняя деятельность Дягилева, и они решили открыть здесь к Рождеству собственную выставку. Может быть, со временем из этого образуется постоянное художественное объединение. Так или иначе, выставка обещает быть очень интересной' (Ettinger 1901: 85–86).

2007: 54–55). Some other scholars also pointed out that not only the Mir iskusstva but later groups such as the Union of Russian Artists borrowed from either Munich or Berlin Secessions (Dmitrieva-Einhorn 2011: 193).

As for Diaghilev's project, it also aimed at expanding the audiences of the exhibitions, as he saw happening in other places. In should be noted that the field (also in terms of the market) that he was aiming at operating in was not vacant, and a struggle was required to establish a share in it. As was highlighted by Lapshin (1998), Diaghilev and his circle were challenging an entrenched set of actors and practices in the exhibition process and the corresponding market. To successfully reach a new audience, he followed a well-articulated multifaceted stratagem that covered everything from the selection of artists to the timing and design of the exhibition as well as promotional methods such as publishing shots of the installation in the association's magazine (Lapshin 1998: 7). His idealism notwithstanding, he never ignored the commercial aspect that was by then already considered as one of the primary criteria of success for exhibition ventures. The aestheticising approach employed by Diaghilev worked in the same manner as the mechanisms described by Martha Ward in respect to the Impressionists' shows, an issue that will be addressed in the following sections. By withdrawing from the commercialism of the mainstream exhibitions, he attracted his audience.

It should also be observed that the atmosphere of extreme competitiveness between the different generational groups and the scarce cooperation of those belonging to the same ones was one of the most dramatic and distinct traits of the art scene in turn-of-the-century Russia. Even though these tensions were rhetorically motivated by divergencies in artistic views, scholars are now foregrounding the narrowness in options for economic support for the arts played a major role in this situation (Scheijen 2009: 93).

II. 'TO CREATE AND PROMOTE A NATIONAL ARTISTIC SPIRIT'

1. The 1896 season and the search for an exportable 'national school'

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, a growing number of Russian artists had been contributing to the international exhibition in Munich that was organised in the Glaspalast. For instance, in 1889, two exponents of the older generation, Ivan Aivazovskii and Alexei Kivshenko, sent two works each, while in 1890 Konstantin Kryzhitskii and Ian Tsionglinskii each contributed a piece. In 1892, the 6th international exhibition in Glaspalast included works by Antokol'skii, Nikolai Dubovskii, Ivan Endogurov, Sergei V. Ivanov, and others (Lapshin 1980: 203). Their appearances, and in particular those that received prizes, were noted by the local press. In 1892, Antokol'skii was awarded for the sculptural piece *Christian martyr* and was praised for it by Stasov in an article published in Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta (Stasov 1892). Three years later, in 1895, the same recognition was given there to Il'ia Repin for the work *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks* (1880–1891). Throughout the last decade of the century, another noteworthy figure that was gaining momentum as an exhibitor in dozens of European cities was Paolo Troubetzkoy.

Nevertheless, the presence of Russian art in the German-speaking context and its coverage remained sporadic up until the occurrence of a prominent episode that is linked to the publication of a chapter written by Alexandre Benois and is included in the second edition of Richard Muther's *Die Geschichte der Malerei im 19. Jahrhundert* (Benois 1894).[53] It is worth mentioning that for Benois, this chapter was a first step in art historical writing and one of his first serious publications in general. When the first volume of Muther's history came out in 1893, Benois and his comrades welcomed it very warmly as it responded to their own research and, more

[53] The circumstances of the publication of the anthology were repeatedly described in Alexandre Benois' memoirs.

specifically, to their opposition to both academicism and realist painting. As Dmitrii Filosofov recalled in the mid-1910s, Benois did not share his plan to write a chapter on the Russian school (later, he would transform this into a full-length volume of a Russian edition of the book, anticipating his later writings) and corresponded with Muther while hiding his intentions from the others in the group of the future miriskusniki (Filosofov 1916: 14–15).[54]

In 1895, Benois received a proposal from Adolf Paulus, inviting him to collaborate with the Munich Secession to present a selection of paintings by Russian artists. Specifically, he was asked to organise a display of the Russian 'Mystical school'. In July of the same year, Benois wrote to Walter Nouvel that a month prior he had received a letter with a seal of the Munich Secession: 'It appears that I was contacted by Royal Counsellor Paulus, who must be the director of the exhibition'. Paulus, who according to Benois was advised by Muther about the candidacy of the possible mediator, proposed to him that he 'oversee the section of Russian Mystical school at the next year's show'. After reporting that he dissuaded Paulus of the idea that there was any proper 'school' of this sort, he wrote to his friend, quite firmly:

> 'The responsibility for arranging it would be assumed by myself. But there is yet no confirmation. Pass this to Bakst and Serëzha [Diaghilev]. Especially to the latter – maybe he could stop by while he is in Munich and talk to him [Paulus]'.[55]

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[54] Quoted as in Lapshina 1977: 20–-21.

[55] Original passage: '[...] месяц тому назад получаю из Мюнхена письмо со штемпелем Secession на конверте. Оказывается, что пишет мне Paulus Königliche wirk.[liche] Rath, по всей видимости директор выставки. Он просит меня взять, так сказать, устройство Отдела Русской Мистической школы на выставке в будущем году в Мюнхене. Ему посоветовал обратиться ко мне Muther. Я ему немедленно ответил, что в сущности школы Мистиков у нас нет, а есть 2, 3 художника и что ввиду разносторонности их выставке лучше было б сделать простой Неорусский Отдел. Устройство этого я брал на себя. Но до сих пор ответа нет. Сообщи это Баксту и Сереже. Особенно последнему, быть может он съездит по дороге в Мюнхен и переговорит с ним' (Benois 1895, partly cited in Sternin 1970:166). For a discussion of Benois' reaction over the question of 'mystical' trends among the artists of the time, see Raev 2000.

Due to his lack of relevant experience, Benois was surely doubtful about how the section could be mounted and was worried about hearing back from his correspondent. Even though he realised the importance of the occasion, this enterprise did not acquire primary importance for him, as evidenced by the fact that he forgot to tell Nouvel about it. His words also demonstrate that he did not have the ambition of being credited exclusively as the organiser, which is illustrated by his willingness to delegate some negotiations to a friend and by his extensive reliance on the association's management (even though this was common practice in that era).

As he described it later, for him this period was encapsulated by two major undertakings. These were the letter from Paulus and that the fact that his friend, Diaghilev, made his debut as an art critic. The fact that he gave equal importance to them is rather revealing and indicates how uncertain and somewhat anxious Benois felt about this opportunity. When remembering the circumstances of both developments in his memoirs, Benois admitted that, in fact, it was Diaghilev that would have better fitted this role, writing that 'in essence, he should have contacted Serëzha [Diaghilev] with the proposition which he addressed myself with (probably upon the advice of R. Muther)'.[56]

Paulus was moving instinctively, and from his tentative knowledge had inferred the existence of a localised movement or group. As a man of his own time, he was thinking in terms of the categories of national schools, especially because it was one of the main criteria in international exhibitions. This applied to both the relatively independent ones such as the one he worked for, and of course to the big fairs.

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[56] Original passage: 'В сущности и к Сереже следовало одному мюнхенскому художественному деятелю обратиться с тем предложением, с которым он (вероятно, по совету Р. Мутера) обратился ко мне' (Benois 1980: 87).

Benois was undoubtedly very flattered by the mission he was asked to cover. Even if it one assumes that the figure of Paulus was unknown to Benois before that, he subsequently characterised Paulus as a progressive personality in the German art world and remembered the fact that the latter collaborated as an expert with Paul Cassirer, the famous Berlin art dealer. In fact, right after the exhibition opened, Diaghilev praised him for being a figure that 'promoted and even created entire schools [in the eyes of the critics and public] that were previously undiscovered'.[57] The difficulties Benois encountered in the realisation of the section, as well as its relatively modest outcomes, made him evaluate this experience as abortive: 'When looking back to the past, I am surprised that I did not delegate this burden to the hands of my friend, but then I still harboured illusions concerning my abilities and was eager to undertake an active role in the future [...]. The task was to assemble a group of progressive Russian artists who could exhibit within a section that the commission of the show was ready to dedicate to them'. [58] In a pragmatic way, he acknowledged that the lacklustre outcome was simply attributable to his inadequate skills, writing that 'such enterprises never go well on their own, without constant reminders and prodding of the person in charge. Meanwhile, I did not have the right temper and neither did I have the kind of nerve required'.[59] It is also noteworthy to

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[57] Original passage: 'пропагандировал и прямо даже создавал целые школы, до того неизвестные' (Diaghilev 1896).

[58] Original passage: 'Оглядываясь теперь на это далекое прошлое, я удивляюсь, почему я сам не попробовал переложить эту обузу со своих плечей на плечи моего друга — однако в те дни я еще питал относительно себя и своих возможностей известные иллюзии и, напротив, собирался в дальнейшем играть какую-то активную роль, вовсе не ограничиваясь ролью какого-то закулисного суфлера-вдохновителя. Обуза же заключалась в том, чтобы собрать группу русских передовых художников, для которых выставочная комиссия Гласс-паласта предоставила целое отделение' (Benois 1980: 87).

[59] Original passage: 'Такие предприятия не устраиваются сами собой, без непрестанного напоминания, понукания устроителя, а у меня именно ни темперамента, ни выдержки и не было' (Benois 1980: 88).

observe how he rationalised the insecurity he was experiencing at the time, thinking it unwise to attempt such an enterprise abroad before trying their hands at home.[60]

The problem was apparently not only the lack of experience, but also the fact that none of the future founding members of the Mir iskusstva group personally knew artists who could be suitable for the occasion. He explained that, even if many of his fellows had long completed their 'self-training', they still felt insecure to come forward and make direct connections with the artists. Either way, the task offered by the administration of the Secession freed Benois from his caution and modesty and spurned him to take advantage of the 14th Travelling Exhibition that was to arrive at St Petersburg in February 1896. The kind of art Benois imagined would be suitable for the exhibition was, rather logically, the work of the younger generation of the peredvizhniki. The choice of Moscow painters derived from the interest that the future core of the Mir iskusstva cultivated while visiting their exhibitions during the late 80s and the early 90s. He was interested in inviting artists who could translate a certain homogeneous mood, or at least artists whose works were compatible with each other: 'that could have been impressive ensemble'.[61] His first idea was to bring together Manuil Aladzhalov, Nikolai Dosekin, Nikolai Dubovksii, Korovin, Levitan, Nesterov, Vasilii Pereplëtchikov, Serov, A. Vasnetsov, and others, reckoning that 'outside of Russia their art could certainly have an impact and cause surprise'.[62]

Primarily, Benois linked with Vasilii Pereplëtchikov and approached the others through him. Pereplëtchikov was keen to help and put Benois in contact with virtually all the artists that he wanted in the venture (Benois 1980: 88). A couple of

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[60] Original passage: 'Но кого было приглашать? Мы сами, наш кружок друзей в собственных наших глазах представлялись нам слишком еще незрелыми и незначительными, и сразу, не проверив себя в родной обстановке, выступать, да еще за границей на международном состязании, казалось неблагоразумным' (Benois 1980: 87).

[61] 'Для нас, особенно для меня, не было сомнений, что если бы собрать их всех воедино, то получилось бы удивительно внушительное целое, а за границами России их художество явилось бы чем-то весьма поразительным и неожиданным' (Benois 1980: 88).

[62] Ibid.

days later, Benois invited them to his house to discuss the possibility of their contribution, since he considered them to be the most notable painters of their generation, who could express the newest artistic developments of the moment. During the meeting, all invitees were positive about submitting their works for the section; however, when the time came, many pulled out for reasons that he did not describe in detail. Eventually, not all of the artists who Benois had invited agreed to send their works.

However, this occasion was extremely important, partly because, for Benois – and, in fact, for all his future co-members of the Mir iskusstva group – it was the first time that they had the opportunity to become acquainted with the most prominent artists amongst their contemporaries. For many, such as Serov, this episode will mark the beginning of a highly productive partnership under the aegis of the Mir iskusstva magazine and exhibitions.

Paradoxically, Benois was charmed the most by Pereplëtchikov and the least by Serov, who he considered to be a bit introverted and rather uncooperative. Even though this was nothing but a first-sight misperception, Serov indeed did not immediately respond positively to the offer. Benois even described his reaction as slightly sarcastic.

For Pereplëtchikov, it was a rather pleasant period, especially if compared to the oblivion he subsequently experienced. In 1896, he was noticed by Tretiakov, who bought his *Winter in the woods* [Zimoi v lesu] at the 24th Travelling exhibition and another canvas entitled *The early spring* [Nachalo vesny] a year later (Pereplëtchikov 2012: 9). During the 1890s, Pereplëtchikov explored a style that balanced between a proper painting and a sketch. Generally, he was for a long time associated with the 'study' or 'draft' attitude towards landscapes, his influence by Levitan notwithstanding (Pereplëtchikov 2012: 10–11). His path is, in fact, a perfect illustration of how hesitant many artists of his generation felt. He was highly

influenced by his European trips, and yet had made controversial remarks about how they never translated to any notable lessons for him.

In the middle of the decade, however, he developed a firmer attitude and started seeing himself as more distant and less loyal to the old school and its traditions. His diary reflections are critical for illuminating the developments of Russian art within the European context. Sadly, Pereplëtchikov did not make any entries during 1896–1897, which deprives us of his feedback regarding the exhibition under examination.

Meanwhile, the reasons behind Benois' mistrust of Serov were probably attributable to personal preferences. In addition, he was remembered by many contemporaries as a shy person; perhaps this opinion of Serov was also due to Benois' disappointment at seeing an artist he profoundly admired maintaining a distant comportment at their first encounter. It is difficult to imagine that Serov was against someone who was eager to provide some support in organising a display of his works abroad, especially if that were in Munich. First, as an art centre it was too prestigious to simply ignore the opportunity of exhibiting there. Secondly, Serov could not but have a special bond with the town where he began his art education back in 1873. To mark his first appearance in a foreign exhibition there was surely important for him as an artist. Finally, many studies have forcefully demonstrated that Serov was never indifferent about what he was presenting abroad. On the contrary, as underlined by Malycheva, he was very careful and conscious about the circumstances in which his works were presented outside Russia (Malycheva 2020: 203). The fact that he first exhibited in Europe at the Munich Secession, an alternative venue that had openly declared its detachment from the dominant academic framework, is plainly indicative as to the attitudes that he and several other artists held towards exhibiting abroad.

Benois also remembered the pleasant impression he had of Korovin, although he later realised how improvisation-based his style was, a trait which he valued slightly less than a technique mastered through thorough deliberation. He also was fond of A.

Vasnetsov, whose work he judged as being more authentic and sincere than that of his younger brother, and of Nesterov. Despite the friendship they developed in those years and Benois' fascination towards the topics Nesterov worked on because of their proximity to some of Dostoevskii's motifs, he subsequently became critical of the Nesterov's direction, characterising it as 'a disgusting domain of the ecclesiastical arts'.[63]

Mikhail Nesterov refused to submit his work to the Munich exhibition, arguing that he wished to send his paintings to the Nizhnii Novgorod exhibition instead.[64] This was primarily because he thought that they could be better received and understood there, and secondly because he did not intend to find himself serving as an 'exotic spice' or an 'appetiser' (Sternin 1970: 242). Notably, at a European level, Nesterov was not enjoying the acknowledgement he inspired among Russian critics. In fact, his attitude towards European platforms was fluctuant. In June 1896, he wrote to Alexandre Benois enquiring about the feedback that the exhibition drew, wondering 'if there are any news from Munich regarding our "debutants"'.[65] He then probably received a discouraging answer, and, when responding to Benois, bitterly observed that his 'thoughts about our debutants in Munich are rather bleak indeed'.[66] It seems that the real reason for declining the invitation was rooted in the doubts that the artists had during that period.[67] This is particularly evident in the way he sought

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[63] Original passage: 'И как раз в момент моего знакомства с Михаилом Васильевичем начался в его творчестве тот поворот или сдвиг, который откинул его далеко, — в самую отвратительную область церковного искусства, в ту самую область, с которой он сам начинал когда-то свою деятельность и в которой блистал его вдохновитель В. Васнецов' (Benois 1980: 93).

[64] This episode is reflected in his correspondence with Benois and was discussed by Sternin (1984: 164) and Dorontchenkov (2009b: 292–293).

[65] Original passage: '[...] не слышно ли что из Мюнхена о наших "дебютантах" [...]' (Nesterov 1896a).

[66] Original passage: 'Ваши впечатления от наших мюнхенских дебютантов, конечно, очень неутешительны' (Nesterov 1896b).

[67] Some discussion on this regard is provided by Hilton (2018: 71–73).

to acquire some information regarding the reception of the works that his fellow artists had risked sending abroad.

Benois' idea was to primarily involve Moscow-based artists in the exhibit. It is somewhat interesting to point out that more than one of the artists proposed and contacted by him for this enterprise were, in fact, the disciples, to one extent or another, of Vasilii Polenov. Polenov – who himself was significantly engaged with the French context – was fond of the Barbizon school and experimented intensively with the impressionist language, adopting it to his background and the Russian landscape and realities.[68] Benois and Diaghilev's convergence with the young Muscovites was further facilitated by the All-Russia Exhibition in Nizhnii Novgorod that brought together artists of very different styles. It is also worth pointing out that that show hosted several Finnish artists, including Akseli Gallen-Kallela, whose art Diaghilev started promoting from the following season.

According to the official catalogue of the 1896 Munich Secession,[69] the final pool of the Russian artists and works that were displayed – barely forming a section within the exhibition – consisted of three paintings by Levitan, one by Pereplëtchikov, two by Serov, and three works by Appolinarii Vasnetsov. There was also a sculpture by Troubetzkoy, who was always presented amongst the Italian, French, or simply international artists. As he had been directly invited by the organising committee, the latter's work did not belong to the set selected from Russia. Troubetzkoy had already participated in the exhibitions of the Secession in Munich, having contributed five sculptural compositions to the first edition that was organised in early 1893. However, as with many other art displays in Europe he took part in, he was featured as an Italian representative, in conformity with his place of residence.

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[68] He also introduced his pupils to the works of a series of artists ranging from Romanticism to Naturalism, and, thus, as Hilton (2018) emphasised, 'when abroad Russians sought out' the masters of all those different branches simultaneously. This adds up to the factors that describe why they digested modern French art movements in a blended and somewhat hybrid way.

[69] See Offizieller Katalog 1896.

Igor' Grabar' recalled that Serov's work was welcomed at the exhibition: '*A Deer*, probably the best of Serov's Nordic studies, is beautiful and rather rich in terms of colour. It was well received at the exhibition of the Munich Secession, where it was then acquired by the Bavarian prince regent' (Grabar' 1914: 124). Most likely, the acquisition of Serov's landscape was advised by Paulus himself because he was really close to Luitpold and was his counsellor regarding the arts from the moment the latter became a Regent in 1886. Paulus was descended from a family that possessed an art collection and had numerous contacts within the Bavarian high bourgeoisie and aristocratic circles. He often accompanied the Regent during his visits to the exhibitions – first to the Munich Kunstlergenossenschaft and then also to the Secession – and advised him over potential acquisitions (Makela 1990: 19–20).

The canvas, drafted during the artist's trip to the northern provinces in Russia and displayed under the title *A Lapland Village* [*Ein lappländisches dorf*],[70] is currently impossible to locate (Fig. 1). In 1896, it was shown alongside his other work, *A Portrait of Mm. L.*,[71] a title that almost certainly stood for *Portrait of Mariia Lvova (nee Simonovich)*[72] and had been painted by his cousin in 1895 (Fig. 2). It showed the same model that was featured in *The Girl Covered by the Sun* (1888), a painting that was widely criticised for its impressionistic technique, which had not yet been assimilated in the culture of Russian audiences.[73] Both portraits were made in the Domotkanovo residence (Favorskaia 2015:149), a mansion belonging to an amateur artist called Vladimir Derviz who cultivated a creative community there and allowed

[70] Catalogue number 349.

[71] Catalogue number 348.

[72] This oil painting is currently part of the collection of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. It was gifted by André and Stéphane Lwoff, the sons of Maria, to the French Musées Nationaux.

[73] For the feedback the work received and the reaction its stylistic choice provoked, including the infamous line about syphilitic look of the model, attributed both to I. M. Prianishninikov and V. E. Makovskii, see Zil'bershtein (1971b: 28–29) and Grabar' (1937: 117). For a contextualised analysis see Sternin (1970: 70), and for an examination of the role it had in the assimilation of French art trends in Russia see Dorontchenkov (2016: 311–313).

many artists to stay and work. They are both testimony to the artist's fascination with complex light effects. Serov had long searched for the correct background, and portrayed Maria leaning on the table between two windows with the light streaming through both.

In the meantime, another international art gathering that witnessed a substantial presence of Russian artists debuted in Berlin. It was put together by Emil Wiesel, a Russian artist[74] and man of letters of German descent. Since the mid-1890s he had served as a curator for the Imperial Art Academy's Museum and would later be actively involved in the organisation of the Russian contribution to the World Fair of 1900 in Paris. This mainly consisted of exponents of the older generation and included Aivazovskii, Beklemishev, Klavdii Lebedev, Aleksandr Makovskii, Vladimir Makovskii, Vasilii Mate, Repin, Viktor Simov, Dmitrii Kiplik, and Fëdor Rerberg, the last three being members of the Moscow Association of Artists [Moskovkoe tovarishchestvo khudozhnikov]. They likely displayed a series of pieces presented in the spring of 1896 at the Academy exhibition in St Petersburg, which was the first time Tovarishchestvo, established in 1893, contributed to it as a group. Another portion of that display was sent to the Nizhnii Novgorod exhibition that was taking place concurrently in 1896. Moreover, there were some artists from the younger generation also: Bakst, S. Maliutin, A. Ober, I. Ginzburg, and N. Kuznetsov. It was a very diversified presentation that, despite its quite substantial scale (37 artists with 67 artworks), apparently failed to attract any considerable attention from the audience (Lapshin 1980: 206).

Igor' Grabar' published a very detailed review on this exhibition, expressing his admiration for the Nordic and Scottish schools and reserving only a couple of final, perplexed lines for his compatriots:

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[74] Wiesel himself had sent his works to the Paris annual Salon twice, and was accepted both times.

> 'Finally, there are Russians, quite numerous and provoking a rather puzzling reaction on the faces of the fellow artists and visitors who accidentally ended up in the Russian section. If it had not been for I. E. Repin and another couple of secondary pictures, it would be a sight for sore eyes'.[75]

Diaghilev had, of course, closely followed the initiative his friend Benois was involved in, and immediately composed a review (Diaghilev 1896) that was soon recognised as a true manifesto of his ideas and vision of the main national art movements, with particular emphasis on the Russian one. Being one of his first public declarations of this kind, this article announced the mission that, according to him, was the destiny of Russian art. He provided slightly more positive feedback on the Munich participation, while firmly condemning the appearance of a few artists in Berlin as 'compromising Russian art' (Diaghilev 1896, in Zil'bershtein 1982a: 54). However, he used insufficiently articulated contributions, such as those in Munich and Berlin in 1896, as arguments in favour of his vision of how artists should act to succeed on such occasions. He then pointed out to the reason he supposed was lying behind this unfortunate and unsuccessful composition of the Russian section on that occasion, namely the lack of a conceptual bond holding the works and the artists together. He argued that 'the Russian section in Berlin is arranged without any logic, without any rationale. Anyone who wanted has sent whatever he wanted'.[76] Naturally, he used the other show which he was closer to as a positive and successful example: 'Instead, the impression that the exhibition at the Secession in Munich might give is

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[75] Original passage: '[...] Остались еще русские; их довольно много и... довольно много недоумений приходится замечать на лицах художников и публики, случайно забравшихся в русский отдел. Если бы не И.Е. Репин и две-три незначительных картинки, то негде было бы отдохнуть глазу. И. Е. Репин выставил только три портрета "г. Ге", "дочери художника" и "Франца Листа" — последний во весь рост. Ими очень интересуются'(Grabar' 1896: 832). Published in Niva magazine, established by A. F. Marks. Niva was one of the most influential popular magazines that covered art news during those years. In the mid-1890s Igor' Grabar' began collaborating with them.

[76] Original passage: 'Итак, русский отдел в Берлине составлен без всякой системы, без всякого руководящего начала. Посылал, кто и что хотел' (Diaghilev 1896, cited in Zil'bershtein 1982a: 54).

quite different'.[77] Diaghilev linked the increasing interest in Russian art that had arisen among Munich audiences to the impact of Benois's chapter in Muther's anthology. The real contemporary influence of this introductory overview was probably more modest. Nevertheless, it was surely an important milestone for the nascent group whose members had literally just emerged from their formative periods, particularly in terms of developing and aligning themselves to the vision of art history that they would subsequently promote through their platforms.

The statement Diaghilev issued upon this exhibition in Munich – which he saw first-hand during one of his European trips – was likely triggered by the poor press that Benois' pieces there had attracted, although he proudly reported that Serov's works were welcomed and pointed out the acquisition of the landscape. It should be added in this regard that during the 1890s there was indeed low awareness, if not complete disinterest, about visual arts in Russia. Even though the issue of Russian contributions to the World Fairs was taken very seriously by the imperial ministries and the Academy, these rare occasions were not enough to spark any broad curiosity.[78] This was partly attributable to their lack of sensationalism, a feature which was desirable by the audiences of these exhibitions that were exclusively held in important European cities. Up until the end of the century, there were only a few publications on Russian painting. Many scholars have discussed the fact that primary knowledge on Russian culture derived from the novels that were increasingly being translated into European languages and had by the end of the century made their way into many European theatres. There is a strong link between the myths that emerged

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[77] Original passage: 'Совсем иное впечатление производит выставка Secession в Мюнхене'. (Diaghilev 1896, cited in Zil'bershtein 1982a: 54).

[78] There were some key publications that might be used as examples illustrating the steadily growing interest around the arts in Russia, which was of course strengthened by the contributions to the various shows and World Fairs. Among these works were, for example, the guides and anthologies, such as Eugène Viollet-le-Duc's *L'art russe: Ses origines, ses éléments constitutifs, son apogée, son avenir* (1877) centred around Russia's architectural heritage, or Alfred Maskell's Russian art and art objects in Russia (1884), that covered mainly applied arts.

around Russian literature and the ideas within it, and the way in which Russian art was received when it appeared at the World Fairs and other international exhibitions.[79] As Raev observed, before the 1870s, it was merely considered as part of the wider European art process and had no relevance on the market (Raev 2000: 695).[80] Furthermore, up until the moment when Benois wrote his chapter for Muther's book, art criticism was hardly paying attention to Russian art, except for the major displays at the World Fairs and some occasional cases such as, for example, the pioneering personal shows of Vereshchagin.

Diaghilev's manifesto article tried to use the circumstances of this event to his advantage, contrasting himself to Benois's self-doubt and hesitation. As far as the show resulted in a debut of Moscow painters abroad as a group, he presents the case as the result of Paulus's flair: 'with his instinct he hit the target. He aimed at the very core of our only interesting school – the currently-emerging Moscow school', reporting that he was eager to discover the 'recently re-emerged' Russian 'mystical' school and its representatives such as Levitan, whose name was not unfamiliar to him. Yet, Diaghilev regretfully observed that the presentation was not vibrant enough, and commented on the misleading idea that Russian exhibitors had regarding the context in which they had been invited to participate. In his opinion, they 'seemed ashamed to present themselves as Russians', while he explained the underlying cause for the gap between their display and the audience's alleged expectations as attributable to the fact that 'people did not expect those greyish landscapes that gloomily peer out of corners as if begging to be noticed. They expected Neo-Byzantine "mystical" painting, a Byzantine Puvis de Chavannes, so to speak' (Diaghilev 1896, as translated in Dorontchenkov 2009a: 41–42).

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[79] See Raev 2000 and Bertelé 2011a, 33–50.

[80] As for the involvement of Russian creative personalities in the exhibition process in Europe through the years that correspond to our chronological framework, the studies of Ada Raev prove extremely resourceful and cover factors that traditionally escape the attention of scholarship. However, there are several issues that remain only cursorily addressed in her publications and merit further exploration.

This search for national traits was a very common pattern in the overall reception of the international exhibitions. Even when Stasov was summing up the decade where the number of foreign shows in Russia increased, he lamented the lack of representation of typical national features that characterised the sections of international artists (Sternin 1970: 128). Ironically, despite still working on the mythology of their singularity, the contributors to the international shows often followed the most popular stylistic trends of the field. These were mainly French, since at the time 'international' essentially was a synonym for 'French'.

According to Diaghilev, if the artists had tried to respond more wisely to the interest from abroad for the season of 1896 and had done so in solidarity with each other, the foreign audience might have then been impelled 'to reckon with us and agree that we still possess an untouched poetry of our own' (Diaghilev 1896, as translated in Dorontchenkov 2009a: 42). Above all, the general lack of experience in systematically submitting works for group exhibitions was, in his mind, at the core of the problem: 'And all of this this happens in the middle of the exhibition where [...] everything is filled with talent, competitiveness, and life'. Diaghilev was bothered by his contemporaries' lack of competitiveness, considering it of utmost importance that Russian artists become 'not occasional but constant participants in the art of all humanity'. He concluded that 'this solidarity is essential and must be expressed both by actively participating in the life of Europe and by attracting this European art to us' (Diaghilev 1896 in Zil'bershtein 1982a: 56).

Indeed, the presence of Russian artists at that edition of the Munich Secession did not receive much feedback from the German critics. The only relatively articulated evaluation that is known to scholars is by Paul Schulze-Naumburg, a critic and artist based in Berlin[81] who reviewed that year's edition of the Secession at least twice, first for *Kunst für alle* and then for the *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, an

[81] He exhibited at the 1898 Secession among the others, with two works (catalogue, p. 25). Later, Schulze-Naumburg would become a spokesman of Nazi classicistic architectural ambitions.

annual edition based in Leipzig. He dwelt on the Russian contribution a little bit more in his immediate feedback on the event, discussing it right before concluding his article with a discussion of Swedish and Norwegian art. In both cases, it transpired that his perception stemmed from his knowledge of literature.[82]

> 'For the first time there are several Russians in the Secession. They do not bring something revelatory, although it is fresh and honest art that recalls the earlier beginnings of the Scandinavians and from which anything can develop. I did not notice anything special as most of them are simply painted landscapes, which are characterised neither by boldness nor by a specific peculiarity, but they still remind us that they come from the country in which Turgenieff was born'.[83]

Schulze-Naumburg was rather pleased with the exhibition in general and admitted that the organisers of the Secession handled the task of showing the best amongst recent artworks much better than their newcomer colleagues from Berlin, who preferred quantity over quality. The critic overall had praise for the event but pointed out that the supremacy of German painters was evident over the foreigners. Their superiority consisted of two main aspects: their draftsman skills, and their capacity to express a specific national character. The criteria he employed perfectly illustrates the performance that was usually expected from artists at international exhibitions. However, he indicated that several foreign contributions were worth mentioning, among which were Scottish and Scandinavian artists.

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[82] The work of Troubetzkoy was, as expected, reviewed separately and from an openly international standpoint, without reference to any specific area of origin.

[83] Original passage: 'Zum erstenmal sind mehrere Russen in der Secession. Es ist grad keine Offenbarung, die sie bringen, aber eine frische und ehrliche Kunst, die an die früheren Anfänge der Skandinavier erinnert und aus der heraus sich alles mögliche entwickeln kann. Besonderes ist mir nicht aufgefallen, das meiste sind schlicht gemalte Landschaften, die sich weder durch Kühnheit noch durch besondere Eigenart auszeichnen, aber daran denken lassen, daß sie aus dem Lande stammen, in dem Turgenieff geboren wurde' (Schulze-Naumburg 1896: 293).

Overall, Russian art received a minimal response. This was definitely partly due to the quantity of the participants and the fact that the Russians were not grouped in the same hall. Another reason was that this modest selection conformed to mild tastes as landscapes, a dominant genre of many salons and exhibitions, prevailed; in their context, the style of the Russian contributions seemed almost excessively moderate and somehow close to the *juste milieu* fashion. In another, more condensed review, Schulze-Naumburg in fact wrote that they appeared to scrupulously adhere to the dominant trends, proving themselves to be 'genuine naturalists'.[84]

Nonetheless, despite the seemingly improvised way that contributions were arranged, the choice of landscapes to dominate that small display was not entirely accidental. It was all rooted in a common attitude towards landscapes and the potential they were traditionally attributed with in Russian art at the time. This attitude testified to how a symbolist vision of nature was framed against the local context and shaped the aesthetic thought of many artists in the 1890s. Working around themes of spirituality was something that could potentially be of a great advantage within the German scene, as it was something highly appreciated by Germans in both their own and foreign art. As for their allusions to literature, there was decisively a sympathy in the air for 'Russian Naturalism' which paved the way for subsequent art displays. This was clearly a point where the two cultures could find common ground.

The participation of 1896 was a small enterprise[85] compared to the rest of what had been happening in Russian art through those years. And this is a factor that should not be neglected; many creators and artworks that emerged around, or worked

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[84] Original passage: 'Auch ein paar Russen haben sich eingestellt, die sich als solide und ehrliche Naturalisten vorstellen' (Schulze-Naumburg 1897: 55; quoted in Malycheva 2020: 202).

[85] During that season, there was a major cultural event taking place in Russia: the All-Russia industrial and art exhibit, held in Nizhnii Novgorod from June to October. As underlined by Sternin, despite the fact that its fine arts section was rather second-rate, it was an occasion of significant importance because it brought together diverse groups and even the most oppositional wings of the contemporary art scene (Sternin 1970: 17–18).

with, Benois, Diaghilev, and the others addressed a limited audience at the time. Neither can the 1896 participation be regarded as highly innovative in terms of the stylistic and formal qualities of the works that were presented; nevertheless, it represented an important step as the cumulative result of coordination between private or independent organisations and groups. It might, therefore, be considered as a fundamental episode in the history of Russian modernist culture, as it was a relatively autonomous initiative and it aspired to a certain grade of internationalism that the art groups of the previous generations did not care about or even saw as noxious for the national tradition. Most importantly, previous generations did not consider such an internationalist perspective as part of their strategy.

The failure significantly discouraged Benois, but it worked as an enormous stimulus for the internal dynamics of the small group of friends and of Diaghilev in particular. Retrospectively, this might be considered applicable for the epoch's young artists in Russia in general. Even though a great number of monographs and works are dedicated to the early period of both Diaghilev as an individual and to the Mir iskusstva movement, this episode is usually seen as a marginal case or solely as a segment of Benois' biography. Yet it was a radical push in this context, and one of the main triggers of Diaghilev's personal programme.

On the back of this wave, Diaghilev, Benois, and their friends instigated a polemical campaign against conservatism on both aesthetic and institutional fronts. Even if the 1896 contribution to the Secession did not meet expectations, it had become clear to many of the exponents of the younger generation that interest in the 'Russian school' exceeded the platforms that were offered to them at the various European international exhibitions. The source of the problem appeared to be that, so far, no one had been found that could assume a proactive role in organising the contributions of Russian artists in a way that would exude the coherence needed to conform to the category of a 'national school'. Diaghilev was certainly attracted by the idea of assuming the aggregating function in this regard.

In 1897, another edition of the Munich International Art Exhibition was set up at the Glaspalast. It was a joint show organised in collaboration with the Secession.[86] A number of Russian artists contributed to it, although it was done in a more lacklustre way, without any concept or an overarching specific bond among the participants. The selection mainly derived from the choices of individual artists and the availability of the pieces. The same often applied to the mix of participants. The invitations were often distributed through the Academy or other bodies, which then made an announcement inviting submissions. Since these invitations were almost never personalised (consequently stemming the perceived importance of an artist's participation) and did not provide any guidelines for submitting works, artists were not motivated to strategically plan their contribution; at most, they tended to see such submissions as simple opportunities to test their audiences. However, it is worth mentioning that there was a person in charge of the Russian presence, a sort of commissioner appointed by the authorities on the request of the organisers. It was a Russian-born, Munich-based history and war artist of French descent named Franz Roubaud. The issue might have been that he was not authoritative enough or was busy with his major state order, *Live Bridge* [*Zhivoi most*] (1897, Panorama Museum 'Battle of Borodino', Moscow), completed and first presented in Munich that year, before coming to St Petersburg for the official credits.

The 1897 participants included Albert Benois, N. Dubovskoi, I. Endagurov, N. Kasatkin, A. Kiselev, K. Kryzhitskii, K. Lemokh, V. Makovskii, I. Repin, F. Roubaud, K. Savitskii, A. Vasnetsov, A. Ober, L. Pasternak, and P. Troubetzkoy. This kind of melange was very common in the 1890s when it came to the Russian presence at the art exhibitions in Germany (Lapshin 1980: 208).

In 1897, another crucial occasion for foreign display arose within the second edition of the Venice Biennale. Notably, that year, Alexandre Benois was invited to

[86] This apparently contradictory collusion in fact occurred several times and illustrates the general pragmatism of the Secession society in Munich.

join an academic committee designed to oversee the different contributions that the St Petersburg Art Academy secured abroad (Bertelé 2017: 304).[87]

As for the exhibition, Repin's *The Duel* (Fig. 3) was reviewed in The Studio's coverage of the Venice Biennale as 'a finely painted and dramatic picture' and was generally hailed as 'one of the most remarkable works in the Russian school', whose 'skilful management of the evening light shining through the trees and lighting up the figures, which tell their own story, is highly creditable and far from being theatrical or purely scenic as in the case of Siemiradzki's huge canvas, *The Girl Martyr*, in the same room' (M. G. S. 1897: 129). Igor' Grabar' reported on the feedback that Repin received in a summarising article on a series of foreign shows, topping it with keen criticism towards the policies of the Academy regarding international exhibitions (Grabar' 1897).

Throughout the following months, Diaghilev began his series of five manifesto articles praising internationalism and the aestheticising attitude in painting whilst simultaneously challenging the values of both the peredvizhniki and the academic environment. Despite his oppositional stance, some of the slogans Diaghilev decided to carry were not completely rejected by the older generation (and here, one may see another proof of the polemical nature of Diaghilev's early actions and statements). Already in 1893, there were conservative figures such as Vladimir Makovskii that recognise some problems in the existing organisation of the art life, recent reforms in the academy notwithstanding. As Pereplëtchikov recalled him saying, 'the society [Moskovskoe Obshchestvo liubitelei khudozhestv] should not manage the exhibitions and should delegate them to the artists. Instead, it should help them to organise competitions and submit works abroad'.[88]

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[87] See Bertelé 2017 for a detailed account of the event and the critical reception it provoked.

[88] Original Russia passage: '[...] общество не должно устраивать выставки, а должно предоставить это самим художникам, а его обязанность — помогать художниками, устраивать конкурсы, посылать за границу' (Pereplëtchikov 2012: 48).

2. The international versions of Diaghilev's 1898 *Russian and Finnish Artists Exposition* and its aftermath in Russian art debates

Aiming to attract the participation of Russians for the following editions, the administration of the Munich Secession contacted Diaghilev to oversee a possible Russian contribution.[89] His visit to Munich, during which he saw the 1896 exhibition, was likely the chance to meet and establish contact with Paulus and other representatives of the association. Diaghilev aimed to fulfil the mission that was failed by Benois' previous 1986 endeavour. Some programmatic statements that he issued preceded this venture, and they help to fully illustrate the determination that characterised his approach, indicating that it was part of a broader strategy that he was formulating throughout 1897 and early 1898.

His main ambition was to firmly establish Russian art in the global art discourse or, at least, in European art and art history. Furthermore, he planned to draw on the experience of fellows abroad and use the confrontation and comparison with them to investigate one's own national and artistic singularity. In order to do so, he proclaimed in his landmark appeal – which he mailed[90] to a number of artists, including Korovin, Levitan, Nesterov, Serov, Polenova, Iakunchikova and others, asking them to contribute to an exhibition scheduled for St Petersburg, Moscow, and then Munich – that it was pivotal to act 'as a unified entity'.[91] He rationalised this by

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[89] In his landmark letter-appeal to the artists that he aimed to involve in the venture, Diaghilev anticipated that it was planned 'to send it as a whole to the Munich Secession, since its organiser Adolf Paulus is at the present time conducting negotiations for a Russian section' with him. Original passage: 'Затем предположено выставку перевести в Москву, а оттуда целиком отправить на Мюнхенскую выставку Secession, так как с устроителем ее, Адольфом Паулюсом, в данное время мною ведутся переговоры о русском отделе' (Diaghilev 1897b; as translated in Kennedy 1976: 20).

[90] Substantial parts of this letter were published shortly after in an interview that Diaghilev, Mamontov and an anonymous artists issued to Peterburgskaia gazeta about the founding of the Mir iskusstva magazine (Iskusstva i remesla 1898).

[91] Original passage: 'Мне кажется, что теперь настал наилучший момент для того, чтобы объединиться и как сплоченное целое занять место в жизни европейского искусства' (Diaghilev 1897b).

citing the urgent need to formulate a brand new aesthetic approach and, most importantly, a novel institutional model shaped after the successful independent art associations in Europe. Having in mind the positive sides of the ongoing 'secessionisation' of the art world there ('expressed in such brilliant and forceful protests such as the Munich Secession, the Parisian Champ de Mars, the London New Gallery, etc.'), he invited his compatriots to follow the example of the 'talented youth [that] has grouped together and founded new enterprises on new grounds and with new programmes and aims'.[92] The drafting of the Exposition of Russian and Finnish artists served as an impetus to the founding of Diaghilev's 'own progressive society', which doubtlessly was inspired by and drew on them in its intended outline.

In the meantime, Diaghilev was charged with setting up the Exposition of Scandinavian artists. He wisely accepted the offer of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts and requested its financial support for his trip to the Nordic countries, which he then reported on in an article in Severnyi vestnik by the end of the year (Chernysheva-Mel'nik 2018: 45). For Diaghilev, Finnish art was already exemplary because it formed a distinctive school, in contrast to any visible direction that Russian art was heading. Moreover, it served as a vital link to Europe, albeit ephemeral. After this journey,[93] Diaghilev also made a stop in in Paris and recruited some Russian artists who lived there.

According to Bowlt, Diaghilev 'was aware both of the need for better exhibition facilities in St Petersburg [...] and of the emergence of a new art which had to be disseminated to a public outside Abramtsevo and Moscow' (Bowlt 1979: 88).

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[92] Original passage: 'Явление это наблюдается повсюду и выражается в таких блестящих и сильных протестах, каковы — Мюнхенский Secession, Парижский Champ de Mars, Лондонский New Gallery и проч. Везде талантливая молодежь сплотилась вместе и основала новое дело на новых основаниях с новыми программами и целями' (Diaghilev 1897b; as translated in Kennedy 1976: 20).

[93] It is interesting to notice that the connections he established during those years endured, as apparently Diaghilev then assisted M. Enckell in setting up 'an exhibition of Finnish artists at the Salon d'Authomne in Paris in 1908' (Pavlenko 2017: 40).

The fact that the young Moscow painters, some of whom had previously adhered to the society of peredvizhniki, were considered by Diaghilev as a potential core group for a possible project abroad is further illustrated in the statement that he issued concerning the 25th anniversary exhibition of the peredvizhniki. He aspired the event to help to articulate a movement, saying that he hoped it 'would establish us in European art. We are long expected there and deeply believe in it'.[94] One might think of this declaration as excessively enthusiastic, especially when taking into account the fact that it was very badly reviewed by the usual set of critics. Igor Grabar' had also expressed many reservations on its account. Moreover, it should be noted that only a couple of artists that exhibited in the show became linked with Diaghilev and his future initiatives. Nevertheless, he had chosen this occasion to make his point about the new generation being one of the key factors for success on the international scene. The 1897 exhibition of the peredvizhniki did indeed include a solid number of young artists alongside the regulars, some of whom even had study experience in Europe, a fact that was sceptically exposed by Stasov in his review of the event.[95]

Over this period, Diaghilev was relentlessly generating ideas and laying the groundwork for the future. While describing his ambitious plan to establish an art society in a letter to Benois, Diaghilev stressed the fact that for the exhibition anticipating the society's foundation, he would not only personally invite the artists he wanted – something that was not common practice – but would also select each and every artwork himself.[96] Many memoirs and testimonies accused him of being authoritarian in his work, but what is of interest for the present research is that these

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[94] Original passage: 'от этой выставки, надо жать того течения, которое нам завоюет место среди европейского искусства. Нас там давно поджидают и в нас глубоко верят' (Diaghilev 1897e).

[95] Chernysheva-Mel'nik 2018: 38–39

[96] Original passage: [...] Я учреждаю свое новое передовое общество. Первый год выставка будет устроена от моего личного имени, примем не только каждый художник, но и каждая картина будет отобрана мною' (Diaghilev 1897a).

cases actually form incredible precedents for modern exhibitions, where personal taste have become one of the most crucial factors for selection.

Nevertheless, the fact that the 1898 venture promised to be an exhibition, a guaranteed display that would be directly useful for the artists instead of another society with all its bureaucratic routines, surely made this project attractive for the artists. Most of the artists he invited actually submitted pieces.

The scarcity of scholarly attention towards this truly crucial episode is explainable by a lacuna in documentation (Malycheva 2020: 208); either the editions of the shows of Munich, Dusseldorf, Cologne, and Berlin had no catalogue, or the only one with a catalogue was the one in Munich. Indeed, the available sources are limited to a victorious statement issued by Diaghilev in Novoe vremia (Diaghilev 1898), a rather extensive article in Kunst für Alle (Keyßner 1898), and some other minor responses. For that reason, I will briefly describe the main features of the version held in St Petersburg, which, even though only a specific selection of its works travelled to Europe, remains, alongside the press feedback, memoirs, and correspondence, one of the few valid historical sources about these events.

In its first appearance, in St Petersburg, the show was split into three more or less equal parts, consisting of Finnish artists and artists associated with either St Petersburg or Moscow circles. A cosmopolitan stance was essential in this project, both in terms of the participants and the travel route. The vision that formed its theoretical base was centred around the notion of national schools, but it understood the latter in broad sense that considered the international context within which the new 'school' should be located and gain its place. The choice of Finnish art was also determined by this ambition, since a number of contributing artists had already gained widespread recognition at the international exhibitions in Paris, Munich, or Berlin (Pavlenko 2017: 37–39). Overall, the show included 21 Russian and ten Finnish artists, with nearly 300 works in total. However, as Bowlt stressed, the exhibition 'was more Russian than Finnish and even more Muscovite that

Petersurgian', reflecting the organiser's 'growing conviction of the value of the new Moscow art' (Bowlt 1979: 90).

The selection shown at the Stieglitz was highly diverse, ranging from impressionistic pieces to art nouveau and symbolism-charged works; nevertheless, many of them were tentative expressions of a 'national' image that was related to the expressive trends that dominated secessionist platforms in Europe. Vrubel' and Gallen-Kallela (Figs. 4, 5) were placed at the core of the exhibition. According to Pavlenko (2017: 41), Vrubel's work echoed the traits that Diaghilev most appreciated in Finns, namely the merging of elements that originated from creative research on the national mythology and at the same time an articulated orientation to the styles and devices gaining momentum in the European capitals' cultural scenes. This mix of attitudes manifested an ambition to translate a more universal artistic vision.

Diaghilev found significant success in terms of the loans, as he managed to secure works from the Norwegian National Gallery and from artists like Zorn and Werenskiold personally. Nevertheless, many Russian works were unavailable because they belonged to the Tretyakov gallery, which did not concede any loans within the country. Diaghilev was very specific in the requests he made of the artists; he had a clear idea of the number of works each would present and provided his friend Benois as an intermediary.

There were some devices that he had already experimented with in his first exhibitions. At the Exposition of British and German Watercolorists – as he himself explained in a promotional article he published in Novosti i Birzhevaia gazeta – the space was divided into sections of British, German, and Scottish artists, and a section of portraits by the 'famous Munich painter, professor Lenbach' (Diaghilev 1897c). This scheme represented the most common way of marking the space of an exhibition in major European venues during those years. This technique, which can be described as 'national sections combined with monographic or tribute rooms', became even more widespread by the late 1910s and was employed in the Salon d'Automne, the

Venice Biennale, the Secessions in Munich, and later in the Sonderbund shows. The exhibition of Russian and Finnish artists was a carefully prepared project where the Finnish part represented the more refined selection, while the Russian part was broader and more diverse (Kruglov 2009: 11). A great deal of attention was paid to the setup and the decorations.

In the Finnish part, naturalist landscapes and symbolist poetics prevailed. In particular, it sought to entangle more conventionally oriented and naturalist works with more rigorous symbolist, modernist pieces such as those by Enkell, in order to ease their reception by the conservative layers of audience and yet instigate a change in how national arts were perceived by both critics and artists. A detail that was also rather important in terms of the display choice is the placement of Kalevala scenes by Gallen vis-a-vis the canvas *Morning* by Vrubel' (Fig. 5), a move that was attacked by Stasov. The debate provoked by the show is well-documented and discussed in the relevant literature (Chuchvaha 2015: 72–73; Mokrousov 2012). Indeed, it was the tipping point that made conservative Stasov direct all his forces against the growing achievements of the emerging modernist group headed by Diaghilev.

Another interesting issue in the preparation of the show was that the policy Diaghilev wanted to pursue consisted in keeping the prices low, mainly in order to avoid scandalising the audience. He was initially hindered by the price proposals of his contributors, who tended to behave in a less realistic and pragmatic manner than himself. He wrote to Benois regarding his and Somov's pieces that he would 'set half of that price if you wanted to sell [...] I am saying it as a friend and suggest you think about it and quickly send the new prices'.[97] The exhibition, after all, was commercially successful, as most of the works were eventually sold (Vasil'eva 2009: 30).

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[97] Original passage: 'Затем далее относительно цен. Они у вас обоих невозможны. Я бы сделал ровно половину, если вы хотите продать [...]. Говорю это по-дружески и советую обдумать и прислать скорее другие цены' (Diaghilev 1897d).

Finally, it was pivotal that the exhibition was from the outset planned to be exported to Munich to be shown as part of the Secession's 1898 edition. Besides Munich, the itinerary included Dusseldorf, Cologne, and Berlin. Even though the original plan was to move the show to Moscow after its first presentation, the stop was soon cancelled for reasons that are impossible to identify and was not included in the announcements of the exhibition in the press in January (Vasil'eva 2009: 30).

The reasons lying behind the choice of the foreign route of the show were most likely practical, linked to the connections that Diaghilev had secured for himself in Germany and the fact that its scene was more open to foreigners than Paris, where international artists in the 1890s could never reach an equal level of the fame equal as their French fellows. It was also likely influenced by the strong presence of German cultural references – including in the realms of literature, visual arts, and art historical writing – that existed in Diaghilev's circle at the time.[98]

The display in Munich in 1898 was due to open on the 1st of May and last until June. Secession exhibitions usually opened in the summer and lasted for several months,[99] not necessarily preserving the same composition over time. This warrants the assumption that Diaghilev's project was part of that year's edition for those two

[98] Moreover, that year was intense for the art world in Europe and it was very timely to exhibit particularly in Germany. The Munich Secession was undergoing a phase of expansion and had just recently started a collaboration with the Münchner Künstlergenossenschaft (Munich Society of Artists), displaying together in 1897 due to the end of the lease and the demolition of the Secession building (Best 2013). Soon, it has finally found its home in a prestigious site next to the Glyptothek. In the summer of 1898, the Berlin Secession was founded, while in Vienna, the brand-new building of another alternative art society founded a year prior to that was completed.

[99] As was testified, for example, in the account by Grabar' (Grabar' 1898), the content of such shows could change over the opening months. This is also indicated by the fact that the catalogues were often reissued. For instance, the most diffused edition of the 1898 catalogue that does not include Diaghilev's section was printed around the end of June, when the works were on their way towards the next stop in Dusseldorf.

months, and was not reflected in the copies of the catalogue published later.[100] In the first days of July it was scheduled to be presented in Dusseldorf, before moving to Cologne in early August and finally reaching Berlin in September. In all three cities, the travelling exhibition was accommodated at the venues of Galerie Eduard Schulte[101] (Malycheva 2020: 211), whose Berlin salon would, eight years later, host another major project of Diaghilev's early period. Schulte's gallery was closely tied with the Munich Secession, as it displayed the members of the Free Union of the XXIV (Jensen 1994: 174). The Berlin branch of the gallery would soon become a focal point for both German and international progressive artists.

The export of this exhibition became a critically important occasion for many Russian artists belonging to different groups, beyond the narrow scope of the younger pro-European generation, to evaluate their chances and potential in the secessionist context of the time and more generally on the European scene. Many artists travelled to Munich and went to see the exhibition for themselves. Lapshin and Raev account that among the visitors were A. Vasnetsov, V. Borisov-Musatov, E. Lanceray, I. Levitan, M. Nesterov, V. Pereplëtchikov, V. Serov, but also A. Kuindzhi who brought his students on a study trip to Munich, including K. Bogaevskii, V. Zarubin, A. Rylov (Lapshin 1980: 209–210; Raev 1982: 123–125). This event was doubtlessly received with great enthusiasm by the artistic community in Russia, and many artists visited the exhibition to testify to how it went and to what kind of feedback it provoked among the public. Their impressions were reflected in several recollections and artists' correspondences. Levitan left a positive comment about it in his correspondence, characterising it as a 'serious', solid presentation of Russian art abroad (Levitan 1898,

[100] However, there probably was an edition of the catalogue or a separate brochure which listed the works, because in one of his articles Stasov complained about the fact that the organisers of the section 'dared' entitling it the 'Russian school' (Stasov 1898c: 135). Moreover, Nesterov also mentioned the existence of ad catalogue where one of his works was either just listed or reproduced as an illustration (Nesterov 1898a).

[101] The early art shops of Eduard Schulte Sr. successfully presented the Dusseldorf school for decades in the second half of the 19th century.

in Raev 1982: 124–125), while Somov was disappointed with how his works appeared in the context of the exhibition as they seemed 'greyish and pretentious' to him (Somov 1898, in Lapshin 1974: 87). He felt disillusioned by what he saw at the European shows of the season, saying he did not see any difference between the secessions and the old French salon. Meanwhile, Serov was intrigued by the sweeping rumours about the supposed enthusiasm it evoked in Germany (Zil'bershtein 1971b: 385).

Nesterov's reaction is the most controversial and, at the same time, the most illustrative. He praised Serov's works, who he deemed to be the most competitive of the group, believing, however, that the whole section was nothing more than an attempt to keep up with the rest of the schools. He was profoundly confused about his own contribution, unsatisfied with the way some of his works were hung, and overall feared that they could not be read in a correct manner due to their specificity and the presence of elements which could only be deciphered by those familiar with Russian culture, to the extent that they might have been entirely untranslatable to an international audience (Nesterov 1898b). Alison Hilton regarded Nesterov's experience as an important impulse for the deepening of his symbolist explorations. Indeed, during those months he revisited his criteria for the evaluation of creativity, concluding that it would be appropriate to 'formulate the new art thus: a search for a living spirit, living forms, living beauty in nature, thoughts in the heart – everywhere' (Nesterov 1898b; quoted as translated in Hilton 1979, 284–285).

However, one of the most remarkable reactions was the provocative disdain Stasov expressed in the pages of Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta. In his article on the major international exhibition held in Berlin over the same period, he provided a thorough review alongside a comparison with another event of a similar scale but of a rather different outline, which was probably the annual show of the Société des Artistes Français. Stasov underlined that all French art tended to be clustered around Parisian trends, in contrast to the German art life which was multi-centred due to historical

circumstances. However, he arrived at the conclusion that even there – as it had happened in France where artists, as he thought, only responded to the life of the capricious upper class – the 'true' national roots had now started to be forgotten, a process that culminated at previously diverse regional schools gradually resembling each other. Stasov condemns this dynamic as 'cosmopolitanism'. Both events also included works by artists from abroad, but Stasov lamented the fact that that Russians were absent, claiming that the real reason lied in their passivity and lack of entrepreneurial spirit. He wondered how it could be that 'they never have any time, will, and need to take some steps towards the international scene'.[102]

He was furious about the fact that the artists he admired and promoted did not appear steadily at art gatherings abroad – to which he, despite being a convinced nativist in the questions of art, attributed the highest importance. To Stasov, his conservatism notwithstanding, contributing to shows abroad was a sign of artists' passion for their cause. He was, however, even angrier because there were others who aimed at conquering the European exhibitions, and they were almost all grouped around Diaghilev. Further on, he warned the reader about thinking that this strong presence in Munich, contemporary to the events he was focusing on, could be the reason why no one had sent their pictures to Berlin. Stasov poignantly made clear that in there were 'no exponents of *real* Russian art'[103] in Munich. Instead, he continued, what was sent there were 'just a bunch of pitiful things created by Russian "decadents"'.[104] It should be said that in his analysis, Stasov openly favoured works that had a socially charged or dramatic subject matter, in accordance with his taste for works of his compatriots, and did not tolerate the typical salon paintings nor the

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[102] Original passage: 'У них уже никогда нет ни времени, ни охоты, ни надобности что-то предпринять по части художества, для заграницы' (Stasov 1898b: 2).

[103] Original passage: 'В Мюнхене не было представителей настоящего русского художества, русских живописцев и скульпторов' (Stasov 1898b: 2).

[104] Original passage: 'В Мюнхен было отправлено всего только несколько плачевных созданий русских "декадентов"' (Stasov 1898b: 2).

symbolist-wing works such as those of von Stuck,[105] which were one of the highlights of that show in Berlin.

This dismissive commentary on the contribution Diaghilev organised in Munich and other cities in 1898, minimising its relevance and the critical feedback it received, provoked a fierce reaction from the young art leader. Diaghilev immediately composed a detailed account that compiled the most generous comments that appeared in the German magazines and newspapers in reaction to the exhibition at all three of the stops it made. He was predominantly concerned with objecting to two main issues: the degree to which the artists and works selected were representative of 'Russian art', and the poor press that, according to Stasov, the project had received. Although it would not be historically accurate to say that the shows had became a real revelation, the reception was warm enough to warrant a claim of success. The unsigned response was published in Novoe vremia in mid-August. Diaghilev began his defence by pointing out the privileges that were given to the exponents from Russia: two large halls and the coverage of the fees for transportation and set up. Moreover, he stressed another achievement that was particularly flattering to him: the selection of works he presented there was accepted by the Secession committee without any alterations. This reliance on his taste was probably perceived by Diaghilev as a personal triumph and surely could not be omitted in this manifesto outline. The article was published in a minor and distinctly populist newspaper, which was a surprising development, most likely due to the fact that Diaghilev was previously denied from publishing another polemical review in Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta six months earlier. The edition in which Stasov was a regular contributor to, and with which Diaghilev had to that moment collaborated several times, then refused to publish Diaghilev's answer to Stasov's severe criticism concerning the Exhibition of Finnish and Russian artists at the Stieglitz Institute. The editor, Osip Notovich who

[105] Original passage: 'что-то по-старинному нелепое и безобразное' (Stasov 1898b: 3).

used to 'accommodate both critics' (Pyman 1994: 109)[106] until recently, had vetoed a piece submitted by Diaghilev in January. One should not think that the polemics that emerged throughout this exchange of opinions were the outcomes that Diaghilev consciously sought.[107] The quarrel was rooted in the extremely hostile judgement that Stasov promoted regarding the original Finnish and Russian artists exhibition presented at Stieglitz, labelling the organiser a 'decadent steward'.[108] These lamentations were in fact a sequel to his massive campaign against the aforementioned exhibition that Diaghilev mounted a couple of months earlier. As a consequence, Diaghilev consciously promoted – rather than merely analysed – his Munich project in the article 'German press on Russian artists' which was composed of extracts from favourable reviews,[109] representing a coherent account that aimed at reporting the indisputable success of the enterprise.[110] The summary suggested that landscape painting and those works that translated the atmosphere of Russian nature drew particularly warm feedback in all seven newspapers he observed; the name of Levitan, for instance, was repeatedly quoted.

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[106] Pyman, however, had slightly mixed up the debate between them regarding the St Petersburg and the international versions of the show. It is more likely that the polemical letter dated on the 29th of January, which Diaghilev composed and, after the refusal, even asked Stasov assist him in publishing, was never published.

[107] It should be noted, however, that the younger generation did not initially regard Stasov as a mere reactionary and harboured, in fact, great respect for his figure who was considered to be a godfather to the national realist painting school.

[108] Original passage: 'Над всем этим-то декадентским хламом г. Дягилев является каким-то словно декадентским старостой [...]' (Stasov 1898a).

[109] By that time, it was already a very common practice, and there were even agencies or individual intermediaries who collected extracts from the press regarding one artist, or even regarding his or her performance in certain display, and sent them to the artist or their representative.

[110] Reprinting or publishing a summary of the foreign public's reaction to Russian art at international exhibitions had become a custom even before the Mir iskusstva. It was practiced from Stasov to Sergei Makovskii, and was often done with distortions in the interests of the reviewer or the group he represented.

According to the author, the reflection of national singularity and nature combined with parallels (but not in an imitative form) with the work of Western colleagues were the elements that guaranteed this positive response. He stood firmly by his position, foregrounding arguments such as the fact that those reporters considered the show better executed than the appearance of Russian artists at the Glaspalast in 1897, which was sizeable but of inferior quality (Diaghilev 1898, in Zil'bershtein 1982a: 77). He then went on to quote a review that complemented the event, finally concluding that 'Russian artists have never performed so coherently'.[111] Indeed, as was also underlined by Lapshin (1980: 210), this occasion was unique because it was the first time that the younger generation appeared abroad as a proper group and without academic mediation.

Stasov, alongside many of their contemporaries, deduced that the article was authored by Diaghilev. The conflict then escalated in a reply he issued to reaffirm his point of view. His main argument in this reply was that the organiser misinterpreted the mission entrusted to him by the foreign committee and, instead of setting up a proper national contribution, presented a rearrangement of the Russian and Finnish Artists exhibition. Apart from the fact that Stasov apparently did not tolerate the fact that Finnish art was to represent the Russian Empire at an international showcase, he condemned that the artists who he was fond of, such as Serov, were placed next to the Finns, who he labelled 'decadent' (for example, Gallen-Kallela was a recipient of this characterisation). In the meantime, for the future miriskusniki, this type of collaboration was the reflection of their 'cosmopolitan' (Benois 1980: 187) views on art and of the ambition to insert Russian artists in the global European art process. Overall, Stasov had just repeated the ideas contained in his criticism of the exhibition at the Stieglitz Institute (Stasov 1898c, 135). However, despite the outraged tone of the note, Stasov was stressing a crucial ploy adopted by Diaghilev, although it would

[111] Original passage: 'На международных выставках, которые устраивались в Германии, русские художники никогда не выступали так объединенно' (Diaghilev 1898 in Zil'bershtein 1982a: 79).

be strange to expect the latter to behave otherwise: Diaghilev had ignored all negative feedback, while co-opting even neutral reviews in support of his arguments. Rhetorically highlighting the proximity of his endeavour to, and convergence with, the most innovative and progressive independent groups in Europe was more important to him than the project's concrete qualitative characteristics.

Paradoxically, as Musiankova observes (Musiankova 2015: 151), there was a participant in both the Stieglitz and the German versions of the show who was equally appraised by Diaghilev and Stasov. Valentin Serov's art received the most admiration and recognition from both quarrelling sides.

The aforementioned article from Kunst für Alle, generously illustrated with seven black and white illustrations,[112] was signed by Gustav Keyßner. Despite admitting the value of the presentation and observing its highlights, the critic maintained a rather reserved stance. He pointed to the lack of individuality in this interpretation of the 'realist' style, although affirming that they still translated the spirit of the country and its nature.[113]

At one point, Keyßner attempted to guess the Western influences of major artists in the section; for example, he indicated potential cases where the works of Somov had borrowed from British cult illustrator Aubrey Beardsley. The critic summarised that there were largely 'no new ideas nor unexpected revelations of technique or perception to be found' in this contribution. Nevertheless, he pointed out that:

> 'several new artists who really understand something of their craft, who study nature lovingly and – as much as they deny the Western European school – do not parade the method they learned there, but place their

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[112] Konstantin Savitskii, *Awaiting the Court Sentence* (1894–1895) (Figs. 6, 7), Mark Antokol'skii, *Spinoza* (1882) (Fig. 8), Alexandre Benois, *At the pool of Ceres* (1897) (Fig. 9), Konstantin Somov, *Rainbow* (1897) (Fig. 10), Valentin Serov, *Portrait of Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich* (1897) (Fig. 11), *Girl with Peaches* (1887), Konstantin Korovin, *Portrait of Princess S. N. Golitsyna* (1886) (Fig. 12).

[113] Keyßner's article is selectively analysed in Raev 2000 and is located within the context of German reception of Russian culture at the turn of the century.

> skills entirely in the service of serious objectivity, which better helps **to create and promote a national artistic spirit** than any form of artificial inbreeding'.[114]

He very positively assessed Nesterov's painting *The Monks* stressing how psychological characteristics were sharply reflected in the figures the artist depicted, and also dwelled on the work of Levitan, *Over Eternal Peace* (Fig. 13), which were both consonant with a melancholic contemplative mood praising nature's wisdom. Keyßner also appreciated Korovin's representation of a forest with a farmhouse and complemented Iakunchikova on her capacity to add some 'truly modernist touches' to her works. The unconditional favourite of the reviewer among the exhibitors was Serov, whose portraiture he praised for its 'objectivity' and efficiency in stylistic devises, resulting in valuable sense of 'simplicity'. He called Serov's portraits of the Grand Duke (Fig. 11) and the *Girl with Peaches* masterpieces, the former being in his opinion what gave the whole section of Russians its solid look.

Keyßner also published in the British magazine The Studio, where a year later he remembered that in 1898 'the large number of Russian and Finnish painters proved a novelty for the Munich public, and they were greatly appreciated' within the framework of the 'small and well-selected exhibition' of the Secession (Keyßner 1899a: 63). According to him, Nesterov's work instead 'carried distinctly national traits', taking inspiration mainly from the 'previous generation of Russian history parting' (Keyßner 1898: 71) alongside 'ancient mosaics', the latter being, according to the reviewer, also the source of Viktor Vasnetsov's inspiration. In another note, he

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[114] Original passage: '... Es war freilich insofern ein rein objektives Wohlwollen, das man ihnen entgegen brachte, als bei ihnen eigentlich neue Anregungen, unerwartete Offenbarungen der Technik oder der Anschauung nicht zu holen waren. Aber man freute sich eben, eine Reihe neuer Künstler kennen zu lernen, die etwas von ihrem Handwerk verstehen, die Natur liebevoll studieren und, sowenig sie die westeuropäische Schule verleugnen, nicht mit dort erworbener Routine prunken, sondern ihr Können ganz in den Dienst ernster Sachlichkeit stellen — was mehr, als alle künstliche Inzucht **einen nationalen Kunstgeist schaffen und fördern** hilft' (Keyßner 1898: 71). Emphasis added.

stated that '[...] the portrait by Seroff, the Russian artist, was one of the best in the whole exhibition, and is greatly admired, as it deserves' (Keyßner 1899b: 182).

Kunstchronik wrote about the 'almost elegiac melancholy that is articulated by the Russian and Finnish painters' depictions: vast lakes and gloomy distances, a dark cloudy sky above a deserted solitude', conveyed by 'the landscapes of Isaak Levitan-Moscow, Berndt Lagerstram-Helsingfors or Vaïno Bloomsted-Helsingfors' that treat these topics 'with a poignant eloquence'. Its observer, furthermore, approved the combined presentation chosen by the organisers:

> 'Guests from the Far East are warmly welcomed at the Secession – as are Danes, Belgians and the English – given that international mixing has always characterised the Secession. Today, the works are not even separated into rooms by nationality; rather, a cosmopolitan harmony is put in place favouring the overall impression'.[115]

Another interesting historical source on the event is a review written by Ants Laikmaa, an Estonian painter whose career is illustrative of how cultural space was structured at the turn of the century. Laikmaa was of a modest background. As a young man he attempted to enter the Fine Arts Academy in St Petersburg, eventually enrolling in the Academy in Dusseldorf. Saluting the show in Dusseldorf, he wrote that after years of stagnation on the frontier of international exhibitions, when 'only Vereshchagin and Repin were honoured with appreciation', one could finally attest to the success of a 'group of young men who follow their own path and are keen to

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[115] Original passage: 'Fast elegische Melancholie ist es aber, die aus den Schilderungen der russischen und finnischen Maler spricht: weite Seen und düstere Fernen, ein dunkler Wolkenhimmel über einer menschenleeren Einsamkeit – das ist das Thema, das die Landschaften eines Isaak Levitan-Moskau, eines Berndt Lagerstram-Helsingfors, oder Vaïno Bloomsted-Helsingfors mit ergreifender Beredsamkeit behandeln. Die Gäste aus dem fernen Osten werden in der Secession freundlich bewillkommnet, ebenso wie die Dänen, die Belgier und die Engländer, wie denn die internationale Vermischung von jeher der Secession eigentümlich was. Jetzt sind nicht einmal die Werke nach Nationen in den verschiedenen Räumen geschieden, sondern eine kosmopolitische Einträchtigkeit ist durchgefügrt, bei der der Gesamteindruck nur gewinnt' (Wiese 1898: 451).

showcase their aspirations and the way that they understand art to audiences abroad'. He emphasised that these 'painters of the younger generation who shifted from the old stances and wish go off the beaten path' were welcomed by their peers in Germany, despite being misunderstood by the public. He hoped that they would 'cross the border more often'.[116]

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the feedback relating to 1898 also depended on the tastes and orientation of the reviewers, and while the observer of the Münchener neueste Nachrichten, to Diaghilev's joy, favoured this display over the previous 1897 one in Glaspalast (Diaghilev 1898), there were also some alternative, albeit less frequently voiced, opinions. Some reviewers criticised the imitative nature of the recent art in Russia, condemning its French influence. For example, Adolf Rosenberg, writing for Kunstchronik, gave preference to the previous exhibition, saying that one could not get a real impression of the current state Russian painting 'which incidentally exhibited itself in a much more favourable perspective in Munich last year'.[117] Moreover, the critic stressed that all of it bore evident traces of Parisian trends. A Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration observer stated that Russian artists 'paint in all modern styles: Scottish, Dutch, but are especially impressionistic in the Paris School sense'. In this regard, he appraised Serov as the only exhibitor to have 'his own characteristically national style, and he towers above all the others in every respect'.

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[116] '[...] только перед Верещагиным и позже Репиным снимали с уважением шапки. Тем более радостно, что теперь группа молодых мужей, идущих своей дорогой, собралась для того, чтобы показать за рубежом, как они понимают искусство, к чему стремятся; это именно те русские живописцы младшего поколения, которые отошли от старых позиций, ищут самобытных путей [...]. Это признают в один голос также местные художники, народ живо посещает выставку, и если есть такие, кто пожимает плечами перед хорошими, самобытными работами, то зритель Дюссельдорфа еще недостаточно свободен от старых предрассудков, законов старой школы. [...] Поблагодарим художников Родины за посещение, и пусть они почаще пересекают границу' (Laikmaa 1898 in Fedorov-Davydov 1970: 587–588).

[117] 'Scharf ausgeprägte Individualitäten waren übrigens nicht in der Ausstellung vertreten; aber man würde Unrecht thun, wenn man nach einer durch den Zufall zusammen gewürfelten Sammlung einen Schluss auf den gegenwärtigen Stand der russischen Malerei ziehen wollte, die sich übrigens im vorigen Jahre in München von einer viel günstigeren Seite gezeigt hat' (Rosenberg 1898: 24–25).

For the critic, such a case seemed to contribute to the wider debate over 'the role of the national element in art' (Fuchs 1898: 318–319).

This idea of a derivative character, albeit being rather frequent in those years European writing, in this case was more of a figure of speech than an objective observation. The conservative strand of criticism in Germany was unsympathetic to the expansion of different stylistic currents that originated from the French capital, as they were seen potentially harmful to the local art schools. This resulted in 'Frenchness' being used as a derogatory term, one that was often transferred to progressive works in general. There is reason to believe that this attitude played a role in the reception of Diaghilev's project, especially when considering the moderate character of the works included. The most radical pieces that were shown in St Petersburg in the beginning of the year were probably the ones by Vrubel; however, unfortunately there is no historical evidence as to whether any of them reached Germany.

For Russian art students residing in Munich that time, the Russian show of 1898 must have been a significant event that confirmed or corrected their evaluations of their own early achievements, while it was also an opportunity to observe those of their peers and elder fellows. Even though the effect of this episode rarely figures in the records of the members of the Russian 'colony' in Moscow during those years, it was mentioned few times by Igor' Grabar'. He recalls that the presentation of Valentin Serov's works at the 1898 Secession section organised by Diaghilev was highly appreciated by their mentor, Anton Ažbe:

> 'In early 1898, Valentin Serov came to visit Munich [...]. We introduced him to Ažbe, while Marianna Verevkina had even arranged a party to celebrate his stay. Ažbe had the highest regard for Serov's portraiture that was displayed at the recent exhibition of the Munich Secession, and was flattered that Serov praised our drawings. Our work in painting impressed him to a lesser extent, and he was surely correct. Indeed, at the Secession we saw his spectacular portrait of the Grand Duke Pavel

> Aleksandrovich in cavalry armour with a horse and a very finely painted portrait of Mara Oliv made with undertones. How could we possibly compete with this great master of a European scale?'[118]

Following the show, Serov was admitted as a member of the Secession society and became the first Russian artist to receive such recognition. The success of the show also consisted in that several artists who participated in it were invited to display in the Glaspalast and in Hamburg in the following year. From that moment onward, Russian artists started being invited to contribute to these sorts of shows with greater frequency and found it easier to submit their works. The show marked a decisive turn in the general reception of Russian art abroad, although this success did not extend to its commercial viability in Europe. Few dealers were interested in marketing Russian artists, and the Russian artists lacked a strong figure capable of representing their interests within wider European art networks. The few examples of acquisitions that were concluded were from the artists who participated in major competitions such as the Venice Biennale (for instance, see the case of Maliavin); these artists frequently resided in big urban centres, such as Paris, Munich, and Berlin and cultivated their personal connections and networks (these included a variety of different personalities, ranging from Kandinsky to Tarkhov).

The foreign tour of this exhibition was one of the key points in Diaghilev's efforts for establishing contacts with the members of what he saw as progressive circles in European cities (who, in fact, ranged from the exponents of modernist trends to the bold representatives of the juste milieu). The ventures headed by Benois in 1896

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[118] Original passage: '[...] помнится в начале 1898 года, приехал Валентин Александрович Серов [...]. Мы познакомили его с Ашбе, и М. В. Веревкина устроила даже, по случаю приезда Серова, совместное с нами и Ашбэ пиршество. Ашбэ высоко ценил портреты Серова, выставленные на последней выставке мюнхенского Сецессиона, и был очень польщен, когда Серов стал ему расхваливать наши рисунки. Живописью нашей он не вполне был доволен и был, конечно, прав. В самом деле, в Сецессионе все мы видели его эффектный портрет великого князя Павла Александровича, в конногвардейских латах, с конем, и тонкий по живописи портрет М. К. Олив, взятый в полутоне. Куда же нам было тягаться с этим огромного европейского калибра мастером?' (Grabar' 1937: 134–135).

by Diaghilev in 1898 both neatly illustrate (despite the vigorous mission the latter announced in his early journalism, enhanced by the revolutionary role attributed to him by the decades of scholarship centred around him) how relatively mild and somehow cautionary the position of the emerging Mir iskusstva circle was. As was stressed by Valkenier in relation to the course the circle had taken during the first years of the magazine, it primarily 'identified with and introduced its readers and viewers to Europe's secessionists, that is to say, the moderately progressive – certainly not radical – orientation that emerged in the 1890s' (Valkenier 2007: 53).

Nevertheless, their international dimension, alongside the debate over the place of foreign participations that the second show triggered, are to be understood in this thesis as important factors in the re-orientation of the wider processes of Russian art. The growing interaction with Western art tendencies that were embraced in Russia thanks to their presence in exhibitions also supported this development. As argued by Kennedy, 'Mir iskusstva ushered in an era of rapidly multiplying exhibition societies, each formed by a small group of artists, each claiming to introduce a new level of modernity and sophistication into Russian art' (Kennedy 1976: 59). In terms of self-presentation and display strategies, its members moved (as did the generation that succeeded them) in a logic that could be partially compared to that of the Impressionists' shows and partially to the sophisticated displays of Parisian private galleries, both of which were attempting to sharply distinguish themselves from the bazaar-like atmosphere of the large salons and expos, the latter particularly resembling a market of commodities. While it cannot be argued that they replicated these models in their entirety, they definitely drew on them and adopted certain display and practical elements that were already prominent in Europe.

III. ACCOMMODATING THE FASHION FOR 'ARCHAISING' NORTH

1. 'Indigenous' iconographies vs modernist repertoire

In the cultural paradigms of late 19th-century Europe, folk heritage was seen as the path to enhance perceptions of national singularity and uniqueness in the arts and beyond and, as emphasised by Paston, to find the synthetic creativity which avowedly was lost in the past but could nevertheless be revived (Paston 2021: 182). The identitarian concerns that found their expression through this act of retrieval of 'folk' and 'native' visual elements were driven by the need to capture this singularity (Shevelenko 2017: 49). Moreover, this quest contained elements of a nostalgia for a 'lost' sincereness, simplicity, and purity of life and creative expression, all connotations with which the archaic cultural references were commonly charged with. The 'archaising' tendencies in Russian art at the turn of the century were very diverse, but can however be grouped around several tendencies. Thus, there are those artists who in their production referred to fairy tale images, to the rustical topoi of peasant cultures (both, for example, explicit in the work of Elena Polenova and the products of the workshops she headed in the Abramtsevo estate), to multiple phases of pre-Petrine history,[119] and to the mythologies of ancient Rus' and Slavic paganism.[120] In the Russian cultural space, these trends had very complex genealogies and, although synchronous with the wider revivalist trends developing around Europe, in the first decade of the century they contained strong connotational ambiguities. On the one hand, they were related to the 'modernist' developments and thus were connected to international tendencies; nevertheless, as stressed by Shevelenko (2017: 17), they were

[119] Another wave of interest in pre-Petrine architecture was, among others, perfectly reflected in the pages of the Mir iskusstva no. 16–17 from 1899, which included numerous photographs of the key architectural monuments of Kievan Rus'.

[120] On Orientalism in Abramtsevo and the 'peculiar amalgamation of exotic, purportedly Eastern elements with Slavic mythology' see the highly resourceful article by Taroutina (2019).

simultaneously closely interacting on the basis of a perception about a 'national project', stressing the foregrounding of the identitarian ideals of cultural singularity and uniqueness.

There is ample commentary about revivalism in Western culture, and recently there has been a renewed interest in locating the Russian contributions to the World Fairs, and in particular to that of 1900. To look at the World Fairs and the national participations within them through the lens of 'national identity' has long become a standard path in the studies that touch upon these mammoth cultural, and not in the least commercial, kaleidoscopes. Many works have dealt with the 1900 Paris edition and other World Fairs based on the perspective of 'constructing national identities'.[121] In this regard, there were also strong theses expressed by several scholars regarding the self-'exoticisation' and essentialisation performed by Russian cultural elites and artists before the audiences of the world fairs.[122] However, there is a pattern that remains only vaguely addressed in this regard. This concerns the way in which the authenticity attributed to the cultural constructs associated with the 'Russian North' formed on of the main elements of those processes, while simultaneously acting as the link to wider European creative trends unfolding around the continent.

While independent art expositions such as those examined in the previous sections were exemplary mainly in relation to the emergence of the networks between different art centres that mainly involved narrowly-defined artistic groups, World Fairs were in a much more direct sense cumulative expressions of the identities and values of broader assemblages of political and economic elites and were illustrative of their

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[121] Even if our work focuses more on the construction of the image located in the agency of the represented subject (made by the subject himself), the image's reception is always related to what is imaginarily associated with it; it is intimately connected with the encounter between the image and the recipients' expectations of it, and with the aforementioned constructed behaviour.

[122] The key shift in understanding the agenda of this enormous project is to utilise expressions such as 'construct', 'create' or 're-interpret' (Neo-Russian imagery) instead of phrasing these questions in terms of 'expression', as was typical in the relevant literature of the previous generation (especially in Russian-speaking publications).

attempts at self-representation and cultural hegemony. Indeed, one of the most recent critical reappraisals of the Russian contribution to the 1900 Paris World Fair penned by Shevelenko (2017: 37) sees the event as mainly shaped by the Europeanised Russian elite which was manifesting its collective mindset and reflecting the mechanisms that were determining the processes of knowledge production within it.[123] These manifestations are, arguably, the most remarkable cases of cultural constructivism of the epoch. The participating countries used them to negotiate their external 'identity' that they could communicate to their peers. Throughout the late-19th century, they were increasingly drawing on the imaginary of folk, 'native', or 'indigenous' traditions and mythologies (Paston 2021: 205), often arbitrarily manipulating their elements. The coverage of the 1900 pavilion in the Russian press revealed an urgent need for the emergence of easily articulable forms that could be claimed to represent a 'national artistic style'; moreover, the coverage placed grand expectations on the potential of that developing aesthetic which incorporated the aforementioned wide range of elements in correspondence with the revivalist trends of the era.

There is extensive research literature covering the theme of kustar production in the late-19th century and the circumstances around its revival in the cultural field and market of the period (for example, see Salmond 1996; Hilton 1995). The reasoning driving this resurgence was centred around the alleged decay of the traditional crafts. This decay, as was argued by Shevelenko, emerged from a biased assessment produced by the educated classes (2017: 55), who employed this idea in the process of constructing their collective identity. However, it is essential to add that this process, which integrated elements of the traditional applied arts into 'regular' artistic practices, bore some aspects of an 'appropriative' or 'messianic' attitude, as

[123] This perspective of analysis is decisively informed by a Foucauldian approach. Unfortunately, studies dealing with Russian culture of the late 19th–early 20th century rarely embrace this standpoint, likely due to the difficulties of combining it with meticulous historical-philological work. Nonetheless, it would be highly beneficial for future explorations in the field.

those visual elements could be incorporated into the new 'national' discourse only after undergoing an act of aesthetisation (Shevelenko 2017: 55) performed by professional artists in the form of guidance or the direct designing of folk-inspired objects. Hence the scheme that was used at the kustar section of the Russian contribution to the World Fair in Paris in 1900, where artists of openly modernist viewpoints were charged with embracing the heritage of peasants' crafts in order to present a depiction of 'Russianness' in the global art competition.[124]

Interest in collecting works of folk and traditional applied arts was on the rise among the Russian bourgeoisie and literati from the early 1870s (Paston 2021: 186). Yet, what had anticipated the debate about autochthonous aesthetic traits was that Russian literature, after gaining wide recognition in Europe, developed an internal discourse stressing its autonomous identity and was therefore less concerned with the urgency of proclaiming its national singularity vis-à-vis the international context (Krylov 2018).

In the meantime, regarding the visual arts, the focus on rhetorical devices that promoted the discussion of nationality in modernist circles and beyond, alongside the emphasis on how nationality was increasingly becoming assessed as a valuable element of a work – both recently addressed by Shevelenko (2017) in her careful study – form major contributions to the current state of the field.

In her reflection on the roots of the 'archaising' visual elements in the works of artists who moved alongside the 'modernist' trajectory, Shevelenko aims at interrogating the previously neglected issue of the reasons that underlie the apparently smooth reconciliation between the 'Western orientation' of modernist art groups in Russia (especially in the early phases in the second half of the 1890s) and the prominence that was given (by the same or similar circles) to the 'archaising aesthetic'

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[124] The success then gained by Russian crafts in Paris fostered their acceptance in the market as well as the attention of policymakers, and kustar industries enjoyed an unprecedented growth throughout the following decade up until the First World War. See Salmond 1996: 93; Piters-Hofmann: 2019; Winestein 2019.

and, in particular, to imagery referring to nativist topics or specific aspects of cultural heritage and history. She also interrogates these processes' impacts on the following generations of creators. This question emerges from the solid realm of research dedicated to nativist or 'archaising' motifs in art, architecture, music, and literature of the turn-of-the-century period that, among others, emphasises the autochthonous nature of these elements.

Shevelenko directs her attention to the insufficient contextualisation of these phenomena within the intellectual and cultural history of the late imperial period (2017: 18). Yet the instrumentalisation of these topics by artists seeking to position themselves within the domain of the 'new art', and hence trying to keep pace with the global (European) art trends cannot be underemphasised. Despite being addressed in several studies, this operation as an integral part of typically modernist strategies among Russian artists merits being seriously re-visited regarding the issues under discussion.

In this context, it is vital to point out that these elements' indigenous nature was defined not in terms of a historical opposition between the present and the past, but in the context of the growing influence of the Western modernist aesthetic (Shevelenko 2017: 29). The recourse to the visual elements and, beyond them, to the range of narratives that were considered to express elements of 'archaism' was one of the most pivotal instruments in the elaboration of a modernist aesthetic in Russia, operating as an outlet for the expression of the inherently contradictory relation whereby the local scene maintained profound international links and outlooks while simultaneously striving to produce a distinctly 'national' character. In fact, in this context, this contradictory act became synonymous to the essence of artistic innovation (Shevelenko 2017: 17, 30).

Drawing on remote traditions was already conceptualised as an 'archaising' attitude at the period, although the process had very diverse backgrounds. For the artists, it added both novel forms to their arsenal and allowed them to play with

allusions to the 'primitive' and 'unspoiled' qualities of those imageries; hence, for instance, the fact that children's books experienced an unprecedented thriving in the last years of the 19th century. The spectrum of references to these 'primitive' kinds of aesthetic experiences in the case of Russia in the turn-of-the-century period was all placed under the umbrella idea of a rediscovered 'Russianness'.

In a subsequent article written by Iakov Tugendkhol'd in 1910 on the pages of Apollon, it is interesting to see how the art critic equates the modernists' pursuit to reassess national heritage and elements of slavic mythology with the term 'archaism' [russkii arkhaizm] (Tugendkhol'd 1910: 21).[125] As emphasised by Nilsson, the subject entered the debates of Russian literati of the time in an attempt to reflect on the role of 'primitive' or 'ancient' imagery in the works of artists such as Roerich and Bakst. Indeed, Tugendkhol'd adopted the term to describe visual phenomena following an essay by Maksimilian Voloshin from 1909, who interpreted the work of these artists through the scope of the search for an aesthetic and spiritual ideal rooted in the most remote epochs (Nilsson 2000: 76–77).[126]

These 'archaising' subjects would appear with a growing frequency and intensity in the years thereafter in the production of a plethora of artists and creatives, peaking in the late-1900s and the early-1910s, with the visual choices of the Ballets Russes being one of the most evident examples. It should be underlined, however, that the major success that accompanied the Russian pavilion and especially the kustar section at the Paris World Fair in 1900 proved fundamental in validating these tendencies within Russian art at their inception, and therefore fostered their influence through the entire decade.

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[125] Tugendkhol'd's statement in the context of the problematic of how 'archaising' imagery was theorised by the Russian cultural milieu is also discussed by Nilsson (2000: 75–76).

[126] Voloshin mentions Nikolai Roerich's *Battle* (1906) (Fig. 14), Lev Bakst's *Terror Antiquus* (1908) (Fig. 15) and some other works.

Prior to that, throughout the 1880–1890s, artists such as Elena Polenova and Viktor Vasnetsov developed their expressive repertoires by relying consistently on adornments and foliage that derived from encounters with peasant environments and from an enthusiasm for collecting folklore and examples of traditional arts (Hilton 2019: 74).[127] However, the former equally inspired spiritually-charged appraisals of Russian landscapes.

Polenova was broadly acknowledged by contemporaries for her role in the wider tendency of bringing traditional heritage to life. After her death, she was deemed a 'great precept for the youth' by the press (Mikhailov 1902; Kirichenko 2012: 252), while in the words of contemporary artists such as Grabar', Polenova had quickly become the herald of a 'truly national, Russian creativity' (Grabar' 1902, in Salmond 1996: 77). Moreover, her role in the fin-de-siècle period was unique because, even if she belonged to the older generation in terms of age, stylistically she was more closely affiliated with the field where predominantly younger artists were active (Harkness 2009: 135). Her graphic works, tapestries, and designed objects mixed diverse local sources and this interpretative Slavic imagery was inspirational for the generations that followed (Hilton 2001: 63).

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[127] The Ambramtsevo community pioneered the form of collaboration between artists and peasants' workshops, within the scope of which they also co-developed architectural projects such as the Church of the Saviour. Moreover, the mission of the Ambramtsevo circle profoundly ignored any distinct hierarchies among the arts (Kirichenko 2012: 253). This trait doubtlessly appealed to the way that the applied arts and design were gaining momentum in European art capitals. Many items produced at Abramtsevo were designed reflecting the logic according to which everyday objects could assume spiritual connotations, connecting their owners with deeper layers of the nation's past. It was not far from the logic of the Arts and Crafts phenomena in other countries, where the artists enrolled to design projects under the aegis of imbuing everyday functional products with aesthetic values to make them available to broader groups of people. At the same time, the harmony of the Abramtsevo estate and the villages surrounding it was paradoxically backed by the industrial activity of its owner. The collective projects at Abramtsevo, and, in particular, their theatrical productions fostered their joint search for visual patterns reflecting the nationalistic endeavours of the members of the colony (Gray 2000: 113). Regarding the distinctive set of elements that rendered Abramtsevo a unique cultural phenomenon in the horizon of the era, see Hilton 1995, Salmond 1996, and Gray 2000.

Polenova's involvement with the renewal of children books' illustrations further demonstrates how profound the link of her revivalist pursuits with the broader European preoccupation with national heritage was. This link was reflected through her Romantic attitude in this endeavour (which also included the uncompromising adherence to the ideal of childhood as a unique life phase separate from the rest) alongside the expressive vocabulary that was associated with art nouveau trends. Her work in this realm was deeply attuned to the international trends of the era and her stylisation pattern had Western references.[128]

A colleague and a friend of hers, Maria V. Iakunchikova, also dedicated considerable space to endeavours related to the theme of childhood; she designed several toys made of wood that evoked fairy tale motifs and the architecture of old Russian towns-fortresses. It is noteworthy that this practice was also in complete conformity with broader European trends. Although she created them for her own children, it is certain that the interest in objects exhibiting a Neo-Russian style was unprecedented by the end of 1900.

Generally, as Harkness has pointed out, gender, despite the lack of scholarship dedicated to it,[129] was a very important factor in determining the shifts that the Russian art community was going through in the end of the century. For example, in the cases of Polenova and Iakunchikova, it is exemplary to note the commitment that was required of them in order to build a career as professional artists with the relatively modest means available to them (Harkness 2009: 12). In fact, applied arts endeavours were one of the key stratagems for both, as they shifted their attention towards this field partly because it was comparatively less challenging compared to the male-dominated fine arts world (Hardiman 2019: 306).

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[128] See Vyazova 2019 for a detailed iconographic inquiry. Moreover, see Vyazova 2005 for the general reception of British art in turn-of-the-century Russia, with a special focus on art magazines.

[129] It has only recently started to increase. For example, see Chuchvaha 2020.

While doing so, both sought to create a visual arsenal that could be suitable for internal identitarian pursuits and, at the same time, that could potentially relate to the international context and be synchronous with the art discourse abroad. Polenova was always keen to learn about recent advancements, and used whatever methods she could to be informed about foreign art. It is likely that her contact with exhibits such as the 1889 World Fair, where she saw French peasants' wooden goods (and carved wooden pieces from other areas) that bore certain similarities with Russian kustar productions (Harkness 2009: 156) might have had a stimulating and reassuring effect on her. Meanwhile, her younger friend and colleague, Iakunchikova, having moved to France for health reasons, was particularly keen to relate to Paris's art scene.

There were specific artistic and biographical tactics that both of them employed to engage with both the Russian and the international art scenes. In the 1890s, Iakunchikova used to send Polenova exhibition brochures from different salons in Paris, accompanied by handwritten annotations. Their correspondence demonstrates how the European culture of display at the turn of the century impacted Russian artists. In this regard, for example, learning about the Parisian agenda through the reserved lens of her connections gave Polenova an impression that French art was experiencing a recession, while the freshest trends were perceived to arrive from Nordic countries and Britain. As stressed by Hilton (2019), that situation inspired her to contribute to exhibitions in Russia and internationally alike.

Meanwhile, Iakunchikova did not wish to limit her circle to the Russian expats in the French capital and immersed herself in the vortex of what the French

capital offered to an artist,[130] namely an unprecedented variety of exhibitions and options both to attend and submit work; at the same time, she remained meticulously updated on art trends and the general situation back home (Harkness 2009: 138). Her path thereby illustrates a profound change in the attitudes shared by many Russian fin-de-siècle artists consisting, above all, in their willingness to engage with the international realm. Iakunchikova's professional persona, albeit dedicating considerable space to the mythology of her homeland, was profoundly shaped by the outline of the art system reigning in Europe's main art centres and particularly in Paris, largely focused around the programmes of the exhibition season. This layout and orientation were also shared by other members of that generation. In 1892, she submitted her work for the first time to the Parisian salon Champ-de-Mars, although she was not very confident about her endeavour. This canvas, *Window* (lost), was refused by the jury, but her submission illustrated how the artist was eager to attune her work to what she saw at both the Champ-de-Mars and the Indepéndants. Around 1892, Iakunchikova started working on engraving techniques and, in 1894, she displayed five aquatints (three according to the official catalogue, namely *Quiétude*, *L'Irréparable*, and *L'Effroi*) at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars (Figs. 16, 17, 18). These works demonstrate her familiarity with both the matrix of art nouveau and Japanese graphics. Soon thereafter, some of these works were reproduced in the progressive The Studio in 1895. That same year, she took a trip to England and made acquittance with the English writer, photographer, and art enthusiast Netta Peacock. After this success she decided to submit a larger oil work to the same salon, titled *Reflections of*

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[130] It could be argued that Iakunchikova's most active creative years lie in the span between two Paris World Fairs (1889 and 1900). She stayed in Paris with her family and visited the World Fair of 1889 several times. Subsequently she commenced her studies at Académie Julian, arguably the best option for women to study art in the city, since the official institutions only admitted men. She was not entirely satisfied with her teachers, but greatly appreciated the opportunities the school offered, namely the models and the classes dedicated to the anatomy. During those years she visited numerous exhibitions in Paris, where she admired artists like Anders Zorn, who was then at the peak of his career and international acclaim. On the non-official Russian input to that World Fair, see Aubain 1996.

an Intimate World (Fig. 19), and this time the piece was accepted. It is also worth noting that in late 1894, Iakunchikova co-organised an exhibition of female artists in Lafayette House in Paris that featured many works of mainly applied arts and embroidery (Hardiman 2019: 301; Harkness 2009: 214).

The way Iakunchikova refused Symbolism as presented at the salon of the French capital, was discussed by Harkness (2009: 184–85) and before that by Kiselev (2005: 35, 60–61). Despite her fascination with art's potential to covey the feelings she had about the surrounding world and the way she idealised Russian landscapes through this lens, she distanced herself (it is evident in her correspondence with Polenova; e.g. Iakunchikova 1894) from any mysticism and occult allusions, which, in her letters, she overtly called 'decadent'. Magic, in her work, was to be reserved exclusively to the realm of fairy tales and narrated in accordance with the folk tradition. Especially in her oil paintings, she concentrated all her understanding of spirituality on themes of nature, and in particular on the nature of her native areas which she was nostalgic about due to her forced separation from there. Iakunchikova's diaries and correspondence of the time illustrate her research and her keenness to reconcile impressionistic devices with her contemplative and philosophical attitudes towards nature and the landscapes of her native areas in Russia. This combined approach would extend to her exemplary fusion of Russian folk and fairy tale motifs with the Art Nouveau arsenal in the ensuing years. All these trends in her work almost coincide, which only reiterates the general proclivity of Russian artists of her generation to simultaneously explore trends such as impressionism and Art Nouveau and Jugenstil, all present in the visual discourse of the time period.

Polenova passed away during the phase of preparation of the kustar section of the Russian pavilion at the Paris World Fair of 1900. This preparation involved artists like Iakunchikova, Golovin, Vrubel, and Korovin, who assumed the leadership of the project after her death. The special bond of friendship between Polenova and

Iakunchikova made the latter deem her contribution to this project as a deeply personal endeavour. Encouraged by another friend of theirs, the British journalist and art enthusiast Netta Peacock, Iakunchikova assumed the task of finishing up the tapestry initially drafted by Polenova, *Ivanushka-Durachok and the Fire Bird*.[131] The works showed in the section that are currently attributed to Iakunchikova consist of a wooden dresser (Fig. 20), a toy village, and a large-scale (3×3,6 m) embroidered panneau titled *The Girl and the Wood Spirit* (Fig. 21). Iakunchikova undertook a major part of this work by herself, only being assisted by handicrafts masters at Solomenko, where she stayed during the final stages of production (Salmond 1996: 75). These two massive textile panneaux allegedly dominated the display at the section. Notably, the craftsmen were listed next to the items in the catalogue, thereby concealing the authorship of the designer; this was also true for other artists who contributed, such as Vrubel' and Golovin (Hardiman 2019: 295; 298–297). Such pieces were typically credited under the name of the manufacturing estate, in this case most likely that of Elizaveta Mamontova.[132]

In this work, as well as in the cover of the Mir iskusstva magazine designed by Iakunchikova, the artist's fascination with the visual patterns of Russian folklore and her interest in Art Nouveau are harmoniously reconciled. The panel is made up of numerous pieces of fabric that form flattened areas of colour, creating an airy effect that tends to make the whole piece properly pictorial. The general cut of the composition is highly photographic.

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[131] The significance of the kustar section in expanding the role of female artists at the time has been stressed by Hardiman (2019) and Harkness (2009). The exhibition was one of Iakunchikova's final projects, who passed away after a tuberculosis crisis in February 1902 in Switzerland. The Mir iskusstva hosted a very lyrical obituary for her in one of its issues; a few years later, they set up a commemorative display of her work with the collaboration of her husband, Lev Weber, as part of the second exhibition of the Union of Russian Artists.

[132] As Hardiman (2019: 296) points out, the appliqué panel was listed as produced at the workshops of the mansions of Maria F. Iakunchikova in Solomenko, in the Tambov Governorate.

The spirit of the forest, called Leshii in Russian, is part of Slavic mythology and Russian folklore tradition. It is an anthropomorphic creature that dominates the woods and can, if angered, kidnap the inhabitants of nearby villages. In fact, Netta Peacock, who wrote several articles dedicated to the works exhibited in the handicraft section as the press secretary – as one would term her role today – describes the work based on a myth in which Leshii traps children in the woods that are hiding behind trunks, and calls to them in a fake voice. Several elements of this work, both in terms of formal aspects and subject-matter, bear resemblance to one of Iakunchikova's engravings from the mid-1890s titled *L'Affroi*. Despite referring to mythology and thus telling a story through the figures of the girl and the Leshii, *The Girl and the Wood Spirit* is highly decorative and reflects Iakunchikova's explorations in this domain. Furthermore, the appliqué technique was rarely used by Russian handicraft masters, while it was more akin to the quilting techniques that had ceased to be employed in bourgeois and aristocrat households (Hardiman: 2019: 306). It is remarkable that in one of her reviews of this display, Netta Peacock, who was actively involved in promoting the work of her friend as well as the kustar section in the international press, stressed how everything in it was harmonised and created a coherent uniform vision; this was, of course, mainly a reference to its relationship with the domain of 'national character' (Peacock in Salmond 1996: 76). This statement emphasises the qualities of modern artwork that the artists of their circle had certainly long aspired to develop. Overall, this work is exemplary in the sense that it accommodated existing expectations regarding both the gender-marked distinction in applied arts as well as the external conceptions on Russian 'national character' (Harkness 2009: 277). At the same time, it also adopted the formal idiom that was expanding in the European art scene, thereby guaranteeing for itself the acceptance of professional audiences.

Meanwhile, in a wooden cupboard Iakunchikova designed for the interior displays in the kustar section, besides the rustic appeal and ornaments that evoked

'primitive' associations, she employed curved lines (Fig. 20). These were unusual for traditional kustar production but were widely present in French art nouveau designs and architecture (Harkness 2009: 273–274).

The kustar section was a project entirely attuned to the dynamics of how different types of displays had developed within the Expo paradigm through the last third of the century. As pointed out by Kazakova (2014), it was the issue of economic sustainability that drove the transformation of the World Fairs into hosting more and more entertaining displays, reflecting the universalist intent of the event, its orientation towards an ethnographic path, and its employment of exoticism to attract the audiences. The same logic was, in fact, behind Russia's choice at the 1900 World Fair in Paris. The representation of Russia through the ethno-geographical diversity that it encompassed and the immersive character of the kustar section were profoundly aligned with the general policy of the Expos that was geared towards entertainment and the attraction of investments, consequently subordinating the identitarian constructs that were presented in the pavilions to those aims.

For both commercial and ideological reasons, the kustar section was approved from the highest levels of society, and a committee was established right away (Salmond 1996: 74). It was led by Maria F. Iakunchikova (née Mamontova),[133] the head organiser of the kustar display. It featured five women out of eight total members, a fact that marked a continuation in the tradition of women patronage and involvement in kustar-based themes and recalled the ideas of the Women's Pavilion at the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Meanwhile, Korovin's candidacy – who had the special sympathy of the patron of the kustar section, the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Federovna – to oversee the kustar pavilion was confirmed by

[133] She was the artist's non-blood relative and Mamontov's niece. Their involvement in the same project provoked reactions, and the fact they had the same name caused significant confusion in early art-historical research on the subject.

the tsar (Harkness 2009: 271).[134] Korovin was assisted by Golovin, who oversaw the interior setting that had previously been entrusted to Polenova. Notably, Golovin was her protégé and they travelled in Europe together in the summer of 1897.

One of the main features of that World Fair was La Quai des Nations, along which several national pavilions were built. Although the exhibition was historicised as a triumph of art nouveau, only a few buildings were made in a manner that could be described as such (examples being the applied arts and furnishing sections). The temporary architecture of the national pavilions was mainly authored by French architects close to the École des Beaux-Arts. These façades stood in contrast to the general contents of the Fair that proclaimed the supremacy of the modern age over the past through its technological progress that placed history at its service (Wilson 1991: 134–135).

Initially, the secretary general, Alfred Picard, supposed that there would be mounted retrospective displays within the pavilions, but this idea was dismissed by many nations. Due to space constraints, many countries preferred to show what they thought could have a greater and more immediate impact, namely innovative and marketable products. In their turn, they were framed within the palimpsest of the past in the external façade, producing a result of overlapping layers of historical references placed without any coherence or overarching scheme. Among the pavilions of the Quai des Nations, one could distinguish those that used references to well-known historical buildings and those that reproduced themes derived from rural architecture, reflecting the wider fascination for elements of popular culture that was used to empower claims for 'national' uniqueness.

The French Committee had awarded the Russian participation with a large space, an act that could be considered as a diplomatic gesture aiming to underscore

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[134] Retrospectively, Korovin however said that he did not enjoy the organisational side of the work around the Paris project (Churak 2012: 264). Nevertheless, when he was asked by Diaghilev to complete a decorative canvas to match the ones by Vrubel' at the 1906 Salon d'Automne exhibit, he agreed without reservation.

the strength of the political alliance between the two states.[135] It was not located on the Quai des Nations but near the palace of Trocadero, the realm of 'exotic' regions. The title of the pavilion echoes this classification, as the Kremlin-like structure was called 'the Palace of Russian Asia' or 'of Asian Russia'. In the official documents, the Russian committee used the formulation 'the pavilion of the outlying districts' [Pavil'on okrain]. Both due to its location and on account of its content, the Russian pavilion was perceived as a colonial pavilion, and this impression was exacerbated by its ethnographic inclination. The conceptual grounds of the project were backed by the resources of the Russian Geographical Society that had been playing an increasingly prominent role in promoting the 'imperial project' at the World Fairs in the last years of the century (Shevelenko 2017: 45).[136] The architectural appearance of the pavilion recalled the 17th century Muscovite and Central Russian architecture that entered the affirmative language of the monarchy during the reign of Alexander III.

The international press interpreted this issue ambiguously, as some reviews indicate that the participation was 'read' in both ways, depending on the perspective of the observer. One strand viewed it as a perfectly acceptable 'imperial' pavilion that simply did not fit in the parade of the nations on the bank of Seine, while the other saw it as part of the colonial section due to its location in Trocadero alongside the 'colonial' departments of other European powers. This strand of observers, indeed, occasionally lamented the fact that there was no presence of 'la Russie d'Europe' to complement 'la Russie d'Asie' (Shevelenko 2017: 41). However, this did not provoke any criticism from within the Russian community other than the voice of Benois,

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[135] That alliance in fact enabled many cultural links that proved a fertile ground for the arts, while also correlating with the investment boom, both private and public, from France to Russia (Valkenier 2007: 53–54). Those links were favourable for the involvement of artists from the Russian Empire with exhibition platforms throughout the 1900s and 1910s.

[136] See Knight 1998: 126–127 on the place of folklore in the policies of the Russian Geographical Society.

who categorically stated that the country could not be represented solely by its remote territories and by its rural culture. Neither the 'Kremlin' nor the Russian village could in his eyes translate the 'national culture' (Benois 1900). This statement was very symptomatic indeed and was discussed by Shevelenko (2017: 39-50) and Harkness (2009). This omission of the 'metropolitan' urban culture and its aristocratic component that was criticised by one of the core personalities of Mir iskusstva would be rectified in their landmark exhibition titled *Two Centuries of Russian Art and Sculpture,* presented in Paris in 1906.

The emphasis on the features that might have appeared exotic to the Parisian public was enacted through both the main pavilion building and the 'village russe', and was enhanced by the fact that the pavilion was located in Trocadero and by the arrival of real craftsmen to Paris to attend to the construction of some parts of the kustar section. Overall, the Russian contribution created a representation of the country that not only was not topical, but generally was an interpretative construct whose claims to authenticity were nourished by the anecdotes about live peasants brought from Russia. The latter, in its turn, was to some extent a *tableau vivant*, an attraction analogous to the Le Vieux Paris immersive theme-installation that was conceived by the French participation. Both confirmed the way that the past was appropriated and exploited for the needs of the exhibition's main ambition to sum up the achievements of, mainly, Western civilisation.[137]

The kustar section [Kustarnyi otdel] was conceived of as a major demonstration of the peasants' manufacturing and handicraft products, that had experienced an unprecedented surge due to the support of private patrons and the state. Kustar displays were growingly common phenomena at industrial exhibitions across Russian Empire throughout the last two decades of the century. Moreover, the kustar displays inherited a longstanding representative tradition, as several previous

[137] For French observers it was all a strikingly bold appeal to the primitive and it was appreciated through these optics (see Normand in Salmond 1996: 91).

Russian participations to the World Fairs featured constructions modelled after peasants' log cabins that were used to display rustic items for sale (Tressol 2019: 350). The section at the Paris World Fair in 1900 in some ways acted as a summary of these tendencies and functioned as an enormous incentive for the entire revivalist current. It stimulated the latter in three major ways: it impacted the investments into the handicrafts industries, nourished the exploration of professional artists into the folk-inspired designs, and widened their general preoccupation with 'archaising' imageries. The architectural outlook of the 'village russe' in 1900 represented a complex of three interconnected elements, with allusions to forms of religious architecture, that of 'terem' towers, and traditional peasant 'izbas', a form of housing build with logs.[138] Each space was deliberately filled with exhibits that had functions related to the respective environments they represented. Thus, the church-like part featured icons, while the 'izba' one was dedicated entirely to items of handicraft production resulting from collaborations between artists and craftsmen that were gathered from various parts of the country and included furniture, textiles, toys, etc. This part was profoundly appealing to the ideals of symbiosis of the intellectual and practical aspects of creativity that seemed to be expressed in the joint efforts of artists and artisans and was highly influential in European culture at that point (Salmond 1996: 74–76). Moreover, throughout the 1890s, interest in Russian arts and crafts started to show itself in private collections in France (Tressol 2019: 352). Eventually, this aspect of fusion of craftsmen's skills with the artistic thought of the supervising artists was highly praised by critics.[139] At the same time, the 'village russe' and, in particular, the 'izba' also translated, in a different way, the ambition for an 'organic' and unified

[138] What was paradoxical is that the construction of these elements, aged in such a fairy tale stylising manner, was mainly supervised by an artist (Korovin) who had consistently digested a series of Western-European art trends and a primarily Impressionist way of treating the light and landscape. For a detailed account regarding the architectural composition of the 'village russe' and its stylistic origins, see Kharitonov 2018.

[139] Instead, for a brief overview of the French reception of modern Russian artistic production through the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, see Cariani 1999.

display although pushing it to the limits with its extremely pronounced rusticity in the manner in which it was produced. All this functioned as a validating signal for artists that were both involved in the project and not, and had a central significance for the younger generations.

The 1900 World Fair was the first in which Russia contributed works outside the strict domains of the realist school and academic painting, that had for long been its main export products. Moreover, the episode denoted the reconciliation of the Russophile and Westernising wings in the Russian art debate (Hilton 2018), signifying that both attitudes were beneficial for working out a successful stance in relation to international audience. This mixed position was further metabolised by the generation that was coming up in the late 1900s, making the employment of the elements that were thought to symbolise the national heritage one of the key strategies of the early avant-garde (Hilton 2019: 82).[140]

The 1900 Fair generally provides an excellent example of how countries strategized their participation in an exhibition. This approach primarily originated on the state level,[141] but also on the level of artists' creative choices. Notably, it also resulted in the impetus for the acquisition of Russian artworks into the foreign museums. After the exhibition, Léonce Bénédite supported the purchases of works by Troubetzkoy (*Leo Tolstoy on the Horse*) (Fig. 22), Leonid Pasternak (*Before the Exam*)

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[140] Literature covering the origins and the typologies of the revivalist devices in the artistic production surrounding the Ballets Russes and the early Russian avant-garde is broad. For concise accounts see, for instance, Kennedy 2003 and Sharp 2006.
However, the assumption reproduced by Hilton who quotes Camilla Gray in saying that Abramtsevo was the 'cradle of the modern movement in Russia', aiming at establishing a direct formal genealogy from revivalism to the art of the 1910s, is debateable. Neo-privitivism was more informed by French art and employment of peasant imagery was performed with a gaze that stood under the powerful influence of its schemes. The imagery of Abramtsevo was repeatedly suggested to be one of the foundations of the subsequent avant-garde experience. Yet, it was contested by a number of recent surveys as misleadingly evolutionist, focusing primarily on formal innovation and ignoring the complexities of cultural discourse within which this surge for the primitive within the Russian artistic field had emerged.

[141] See the way it was discussed by Remnev, who examined how the pavilion served the investment goals of the empire concerning the construction of the trans-Siberian railroad (Remnev 1991).

(Fig. 23), and Konstantin Korovin (*The Early Morning*) for the collection of the Luxembourg museum in Paris. However, it is noteworthy that the discussion over the acquisitions by the French museums was broadly supported and, in some cases, even initiated by the head of the St Petersburg Academy, I. Tolstoi.

The fact that the members of the younger generations were generously adorned with recognition both in terms of medals and press attention while the older cohort left Paris without any was to have crucial consequences. The achievement was immediately utilised by the Mir iskusstva camp, as evidenced by a letter that Grabar' wrote to his brother Vladimir:

> 'At the Paris exhibition in the Russian art section the awards were given exclusively to the artists collaborating with the Mir iskusstva – Serov, Prince Troubetzkoy received the honour medals, [while] Maliavin, Korovin, Mamontov received the gold ones and Maliutin and Golovin the silver ones. The Makovskiis and tutti quanti got the bronzes, and renounced [them] via telegraph'.[142]

It all served as the strongest form of validation for 'modernist' stylistic elements and for the discrimination of those that did not fit into that framework.

One of the key paradoxes of this episode, however, was related to the architecture hosting the kustar exhibits, composed by Korovin. It consisted of the fact that the imagery, which drew on the heritage of a patriarchal culture such as that of the traditional peasant communities in Russian provinces, functioned here, and was perceived, as a profoundly inventive, innovative, and revitalising gesture. This was also the case for the architectural research that was undertaken by the Abramtsevo circle. That issue notwithstanding, it was nevertheless accepted and appreciated by the international creative community thanks to its perceived uniqueness and exoticism.

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[142] Original passage: 'На парижской выставке в русском отделе искусства награды получили исключительно сотрудники "Мира искусства" — Серов, кн. Трубецкой — почетные медали, Малявин, Коровин, Мамонтов — золотые, Малютин и Головин — серебряные; Маковские e tutti quanti получили бронзовые и по телеграфу отказались' (Grabar' 1900).

The All Russia Industrial and Art Exhibition at the Nizhnii Novgorod fair in 1896, organised a year after Russia had officially accepted the invitation for the 1900 World Fair in Paris, bore numerous connections to the forthcoming European gathering and indeed served as an opportunity to prepare for it (Harkness 2009: 248).[143] While Korovin was working on the 'Far North' pavilion, Polenova was in charge of the kustar crafts section at the same Exposition. It was after this project that she was asked to oversee the kustar section of the 1900 World Fair pavilion.

The outlook of the pavilion that Korovin designed for the 1896 Nizhnii exhibit partly borrowed the form of factory constructions such as types of trading posts' docks that were widely used on the shores of the Russian northern territories (Kirichenko 2012: 253) (Fig. 24). Mamontov had prompted Korovin towards the idea of a process of a rediscovery of Russian northern territories and their cultural heritage, conveying his enthusiasm about the region. The Nizhnii Novgorod pavilion of the North in 1896 was successful, and reporters dwelt on Korovin's project significantly. Among other factors, they praised its exhibition design such as the artificial lights and, of course, the panels made by the artist.[144] Korovin's attention towards features that were intrinsically characteristic of the Russian North's popular architecture was biased by the general revival that this subject was undergoing in Russian intellectual discourses at that time. Its reassessment in historical discipline and architectural practice culminated in the 1880s, concurrently with the explorations of the Abramtsevo circle (Paston 2021: 192) and had an extended influence on visual arts.

Even through Korovin had very quickly replaced Polenova at the helm of the organising process for 1900 World Fair pavilion, the mood of the project maintained a

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[143] As in 1900, a significant amount of the effort gathered around Russian pavilion was spent on attracting investors to the Trans-Siberian railroad under construction; in 1896, Mamontov's pavilion was intended to publicise his railroad projects in the regions of Akhangerlsk (Hilton 2001: 61).

[144] Korovin headed to the North soon after his stay in Paris, a journey that was very important for his growth. It provided him with a considerable visual contrasts in his work and approach, and yet enabled the artist to appreciate the landscapes of the area and read it carefully as being at once harsh, delicate, and essential (Churak 2012: 259).

strong imprint of her repertoire of expressive means and stylistic orientation. Those, and the developments of Abramtsevo, were broadly promoted through this exhibition. Still, the presence of the 'Nordic' reference in his panels that figured in Russian pavilion's rooms was very vibrant and resonated with the European artistic agenda of the moment. He used numerous drafts produced during his journeys through the second half of the 1890s that bear traces of awareness of the ways in which nature was being represented in Scandinavian art in that period (Hilton 2019: 78). The approach to the panels made for Paris is comparatively much more synthetic and oriented towards integrating the images with the architecture and the space than those he made for Nizhnii Novgorod (Figs. 25, 26). Moreover, they were imitating a continuous flow of panoramas (Figs. 27, 28, 29). Some of these panels, however, as some scholars suggest (Churak 2012: 265), might have been created based on photographs, since there is no factual documentation of Korovin's potential travels to Siberia or Baikal.[145]

It is vital to emphasise that the Russian pavilion in Paris in 1900, alongside the subsequent Russian section at the Vienna Secession in 1901, made a significant contribution to paving the way for the further affirmation of the trope of the Northern identity[146] being associated with truly autochthonous, 'archaising' overtones.[147] In this context, artists started to regard these motifs as a valid identity element, not least due to the interest of the foreign audience.

The importance of their individual agencies in the expansion of the subject-matters and visual means relating to these categories cannot be underestimated. This process was anticipated by a surge in landscape painting and, in particular, its lyrical

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[145] All the panels that Korovin had done for Parisian exhibit are currently preserved in the collection of the State Russian Museum.

[146] For a panoramic account on the issue of the North in Russian art see Odom 2001 and, in particular, Hilton 2001.

[147] Previously, Netta Peacock wrote that Russian art seemed to her a 'curious mixture of the North and the Orient' (Peacock 1899).

variant, as evidenced in the production of Korovin, Nesterov, and, to lesser extent, Serov. Therefore, Korovin's panels that decorated the 1900 pavilion, and generally the impulse given by the projects for which he had undertaken his Northern journeys represented, as argued by Hilton (2019: 78), a strong confirmation of the ideals associated with landscape painting, the spiritual qualities of which supposed the existence of universal values in natural surroundings that were perceived as potential gateways to discover and connect with cultural roots. She also emphasised the role of the atmosphere of the Abramtsevo community, which in general encouraged artists to explore what was conceived as a Russian 'spirit of nature' and 'projected a profound connection to a sense of Russian identity' (Hilton 2019: 68–69). Korovin would retrospectively say that the stylistic singularity presented in the kustar section was, in his opinion, finely elaborated on that occasion and that 'its subsequent development began there' (Korovin, in Salmond 1996: 90).

Moreover, Hilton made a valuable point in arguing that the primary stimulus for reimagining the role of nature through the prism of a distinctly national imagery was provided by the artists involved in revival of the crafts, and not by those who worked with landscapes in a strict sense (2019: 81). The techniques employed and promoted by Polenova and Iakunchikova that derived from their attentiveness to modernist tendencies and specific expressive devices such as contouring and working with the colour field could not have passed unnoticed by Korovin. The transition that his images from the Northern trips underwent ahead of the Paris 1900 exhibition is characterised by a spreading acceptance of the decorative stance, informed by the aforementioned formal novelties. Korovin's design for the cover of the Mir iskusstva magazine of 1899 features a flat-coloured horizontal 'frieze' atop a folio that recalls the horizontality of the Paris panels that he was working on during precisely those months. Indeed, as was also previously discussed by Fedorov-Davydov, the explorations in search of pertinent ways to represent nature were inextricably linked

to the associated questions around stylisation and the decorative potential of visual art (Fedorov-Davydov 1956: 108–109; Hilton 2019: 81–82).

At the same time, the treatment of the landscapes was profoundly influenced by a romantic attitude that largely characterised Russian symbolist culture. It can also be assumed that the mystical reading of landscapes that is encountered, for example, in Nesterov, was an expression of the escapism that characterised the mood of a share of intellectuals and creatives in the transitional period from the late-1880s to the end of the century. What has been surprisingly under-analysed by scholars of the subject is how both the art that retrieved peasant crafts and the strand that explored the spiritual dimension of nature and landscapes, employed by artists as diverse as Polenova and Nesterov, were mediated by the romanticist pursuits that aimed at reviving folklore and fairy tales, ranging from the works of Zhukovskii to Pushkin (e.g., the notable passage 'U Lukomor'ia' from *Ruslan and Ludmila*). The strongest presence of the latter as a reference in this current of Russian art of the epoc, is found in Bilibin's illustrations to Pushkin's poems from the mid-1900s, which marked the peak of the mixture of art nouveau and Russian folk imagery in the artist's work.

Among others, Roerich had repeatedly and masterly exploited allusions to a 'Nordic' identity in his work during the 1900s. Moreover, he was also engaged in a discussion of the spiritual dimensions of landscapes, as seen in his ardently written 1901 article 'Towards Nature' [K prirode], where he claims that the 'artists of the present time heatedly strive to communicate the essence of nature' (Roerich 1901b). Roerich had also undertaken archaeological expeditions before embarking on his artistic career, which left a profound trace in his artistic sensibilities.[148]

Another artist who experienced comparable influences was Kandinsky. Conscious of the importance of 'archaic' or indigenous references in the personal mythology of a modernist artist, Kandinsky had verbalised his interiorisation of these

[148] The influence of ethnographical field and its expansion at the time was pivotal for that turn to the 'North' mythology.

experiences in a much more articulated way then his precursors-compatriots did (such as Korovin, who did however grant them considerable significance in his memoirs). The heritage of the northern regions of Russia would emerge strongly in his work. While he travelled there in 1889, Kandinsky would incorporate these experiences in his art starting from 1901, that is, only following the validation of this tendency on the international scale that became pronounced after the 1900 World Fair. After all, one can affirm that the recognition that Russian artists obtained at the turn of the century gave them more confidence and animated their hopes (Valkenier 2007: 54).

2. *Russische Künstler* at the Vienna Secession in 1901

Vienna was an appealing destination and yet a very difficult scene to conquer at the turn of the century. One of the key occasions through which the Austrian-Hungarian public could catch a glimpse of Russian visual arts was through the selection the country presented at the World Fair in Vienna in 1873. At that show, the organisers set up separate buildings or pavilions grouped around a specific topic or range of subjects for the first time. A range of objects was presented in numerous 'thematic' pavilions classified based on various categories such as commerce, colonial items, and design. These categories would vastly expand as the World Fairs progressed. Another central aspect of the 1873 edition was the ambition of the participating countries to foreground recent territorial acquisitions in order to demonstrate their colonial expansion, and Russia grasped the opportunity by showcasing items connected to the areas of Central Asia and the Caucasus (Fisher 2003: 140–141). This exhibition was also important for Russia because it was the first World Fair that the Empire had participated in after the liberation of the serfs. In the meantime, for the host country it helped to articulate its claims for cultural-political and economic supremacy in the region over Berlin after the triumph of the unification of the German Empire.

One of the most paradoxical traits of the Russian display in Vienna consisted in its dual outlook,[149] which combined academic painting and the works of the

[149] The two types of pictures presented in Vienna in 1873 probably created a rather contradictory effect: 'the exhibition became a manifestation of a kulturkampf which divided the nation's art world into two hostile camps' (Akinsha 2014: 21), those of the academics and of the more progressive realists. As occurred in 1897 in Venice (Bertelé 2017), the key figures of the two parties, Repin and Sermiradskii (both rather young at the time, 29 and 30 years old respectively) represented a contrasting force in the eyes of the critics with the colossal *Barge Haulers on the Volga* and the *Christ and Sinner*, respectively. Even though the pictures were displayed far away from each other (Sermiradskii's creation enjoyed its debut in the Kunsthalle in proximity to the top attraction of the art section, Jan Matejko's monopolising presence with, among the others, four monumental historical canvases – Kaiser 2016: 328), the polemics that arose around the success of Semiradskii marked the beginning of a long-lasting conflict between him and Repin.

peredvizhniki.[150] The Russian Academy of Arts had sent 'both works of academic artists, not too different in their topicality and approach to painting to their European counterparts', and the works of the newly founded independent realist group (Akinsha 2014: 19). The educational rigour of the peredvizhniki resonated with the overall theme of the 1873 World Fair, namely 'Kultur und Erziehung' (Culture and Education). The event was preceded by a well-received contribution that Russian artists had made at the London International Exhibition of Art and Industry a year earlier, in 1872. It was treated as a triumph by Stasov in his articles and included works by Vasilii Perov, Konstantin Makovskii, Vereshchagin, and Antokol'skii.

In 1899, at the Secession in Vienna,[151] the participants of Russian origin were limited to Paolo Troubetzkoy with six pieces – presumably almost all completed during his stay in Moscow – the mastery of which attracted occasional compliments in reviews, and Leonid Pasternak, who sent one work. On this occasion, Pasternak corresponded directly with a person from the Secession's organisational committee. One of the surviving letters, an answer to an invitation to contribute to the upcoming edition, demonstrates several noteworthy aspects concerned with the practical dimension of the exhibit, and illustrates Pasternak's enthusiasm and appreciation at being asked to be a mediator to send works by local artists and probably also to submit some drawings to the Ver Sacrum, the official magazine of the Vienna Secession.

> 'Last week I received a letter from the secretary of your association with the request of sending some of mine and my comrades' best works.

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[150] The rest of the Russian artists that exhibited included N. Ge (*Peter the Great Interrogating the Tsarevich Alexei Petrovich at Peterhof*, 1871), V. Perov (*The Hunters at Rest*, 1871), A. Savrasov (*The Rooks Have Come Back*, 1871), and the sculptors M. Mikeshin (*Millennium of Russia*) and M. Antokolskii (*Ivan the Terrible*). Stasov issued several articles dedicated to Vienna and the world art that reached its venues. Probably to his great regret, the presence of Russians did not solicit any outstanding feedback by foreign observers, and the one who won the rivalry was Sermiradskii, who returned to Rome with the medal.

[151] Interestingly, the name of Il'ia Repin is listed among the honorary members of the association of the Vienna Secession in the catalogue of the first edition held in 1898.

> Unfortunately, as it often occurs, the request came too late, for now both in Moscow and in Petersburg it is the high season for exhibitions and all the works are sent out there, and the dates overlap with the dates of your event'.[152]

Throughout those months, Pasternak was fully immersed in preparing the publication of the illustrations he made for *Resurrection*,[153] Lev Tolstoi's eagerly anticipated novel.

> 'In spite of the lack of time, I addressed the best of my fellow artists whose candidacies I found suitable (some of them have previously participated in the Munich Secession, and one of them, Serov, was admitted as a member), and was assured that they were keen to contribute, although they are rather confused by the short notice and whether you would still cover the shipping expenses (for it would need to be send through *grande vitesse*), etc. These are the obstacles. In the future, it could be organised perfectly'.[154]

Finally, Pasternak was sending a painting, *Before the Exam* [Pered Ekzamenom] (1895) (Fig. 23), that he had formerly presented at the 7th International Exhibition at the Munich Glaspalast in 1897, where it had received the second gold medal. In his letter, Pasternak stressed that the edition was a joint venture of the

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[152] Original passage: 'На прошлой неделе я получил от секретаря Вашего общества письмо с просьбой прислать к Вашей выставке несколько лучших картин и моих товарищей. К сожалению, как это всегда бывает, просьба аранжировать эту посылку является слишком поздней ~~и можно это устроить с успехом на будущее~~ в виду того, что у нас в Москве и Петербурге самый разгар сезона выставок и все картины разосланы на эти выставки, так как срок эти совпада~~ет~~ют с сроками вашей выставки' (Pasternak 1899). Strikeouts and punctuation preserved.

[153] Pasternak then presented those illustrations at the Paris World Fair in 1900.

[154] Original passage: 'Несмотря однако на отсутсвие времени я обратился к лучших художникам моим товарищам каких я нашел достойными (некоторые участвовали на Мюнхенской Secession один из них - Серов выбран членом) и я получил обещание что они пришлют, но их крайне затрудните столь короткий срок неуверенность в принятии Вашим обществом расходов (ведь надо посылать grande vitesse) по пересылке и т.д. А главным образом вышесказ. причины мешают. На будущее время можно будет это с успехом организовать' (Pasternak 1899). Punctuation preserved.

Glaspalast and the Secession, alongside mentioning that he was also invited to exhibit with the Austrian Artists' Association and was enquiring with his interlocutor about it. *Before the Exam* was subsequently presented at the Paris World Fair of 1900 in the Grand Palais and was on that occasion acquired by the Musée du Luxembourg, before reaching the collections of the Musée d'Orsay. Pasternak's appearance at the Vienna Secession in 1899 was very briefly reported on in the pages of the Mir iskusstva magazine the same year.[155]

At the turn of the century, the Viennese cultural landscape, and that of the Habsburg Empire overall, had overcome a major 'cultural redevelopment' phase (Schorske 2012 [1979]). The Vienna Secession, formed by a group of anti-traditionalist artists in 1897, became one of the key expressions of this process. Within its ideology, the claim for art to become an expression of 'modernity' was consistently articulated. Although its mottos proclaimed itself as being the voice of its time, its primary ambition was rather to offer a vision that would extend beyond the existing art forms of the epoch.

As occurred with several secessionist associations in Europe and beyond, the two main driving forces of this project were exhibitions and illustrated magazines, both perfectly suited to attract new audiences while simultaneously managing to strike a balance between having a large reach and maintaining a targeted approach. Moreover, the Vienna Secession was established in order to facilitate contacts and exchanges with peer artists abroad and with foreign cultures; a noteworthy example in this regard includes a major show of Japanese prints that the Secession hosted in 1900.

One of the most important traits of the entire body of exhibitions mounted by the organisation was precisely the fact that they were designed as artistic unites, where works were placed in a manner that made evident their relationship with each other to reflect the logic of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* within the framework of an

[155] Mir iskusstva, no. 15, pp. 15–16.

exposition. The milestone retrospective devoted to Beethoven in 1902 marked the beginning of stylistically homogeneous set-ups in Europe, where decorum and works were merged. This approach, which was much less of an interest for the German secessionists, soon expanded beyond the doors of the Viennese Vereinigung. It was a radical way of framing works of art and the elements of a tailored exhibition design that allowed the emergence of an innovative kind of experience (Tiddia 2017: 54–55). In this regard, one might simply think of the value that came to be attributed to the frames and the additional decorum in exhibition rooms, but also of the expanding market for the applied arts, which, in the case of the Vienna Secession, was directly linked to the organisation itself in the guise of the Wiener Werkstätte.

The secession 'manifested the confused quest for a new life-orientation in visual form' (Schorske 2012 [1979]: 209), and at the same time meant to accomplish the desire of broad layers of creatives to lift Vienna to a more prominent position as a modern art centre through the aforementioned means. This was a common trait of many art groups all over the continent that aimed to compete with the scene of Paris. The Secession accepted foreign art right away, first opening its exhibition rooms to German artists and, soon thereafter, to the exponents of the Glasgow School (Turchin 2009: 55). In the mid-1900s, it experienced a further split, as would also happen in Munich, due to the resentment engendered by what some members felt was the lack of conformity of the various expressive means it exhibited.[156]

A thorough look at the association's outline suggests that its nature was essentially that of a private group connected through a web of personal and socio-economic interests. Furthermore, this realisation points to the interconnectedness of similar groups in different cultural centres in Central Europe[157] that contributed to the development – although not equally distributed – of a relatively articulated Central European internationalism that even manifested itself in collaborative

[156] Klimt departed in 1905 and Schiele and Kokoschka in 1908.

[157] On this subject, see Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska and Mizia 2006.

displays such as the one Vienna Secession organised with the Polish 'Sztuka' (Krzysztofowicz-Kozakowska and Mizia 2006: 223). Another significant characteristic of the Vienna Secession was that its foundation was led by artists and men of letters that shared left-liberal views (Schorske 2012 [1979]: 214), rendering it an expression of a specific range of ideologies in a more acute manner than elsewhere. Moreover, in its management of the spaces of Joseph Maria Olbrich's building, the Secession 'pioneered the use of movable partitions' to make the set-up facilities adjustable to the needs of every singular ensemble and generally reflect the spirit of modern life (Schorske 2012 [1979]: 218–219). All these elements contributed to, and illustrated, its vision of the world of creativity as a form of retreat and its undertones of distancing itself from the commodification of art.

The 12th Secession exhibition, which was opened from 21 November 1901 to 8 January 1902, featured a major focus on the themes of the North and the corresponding artistic currents. This special interest of the association during that year was perfectly reflected in the stylised poster of one of its precedent exhibits (9th edition) designed by Alfred Roller (Fig. 32)[158] that combined simplified forms, androgynous figures, cool colour choices, and ornamental details recalling either cracked ice or cloudy northern skies.[159] The motivation behind this focus was the general fashion trend for Scandinavian art that took over the major venues in Europe. Many of its representatives were exhibited, alongside other artists that were apparently less aligned with the definition of the 'North'.

Among the highlights of the edition were *Angst* by Edvard Munch, who was exhibiting at the Vienna Secession for the first time, and Ferdinand Hodler's *The*

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[158] One of the founding members of the association, and its president in 1902. Roller himself embraced the ideas of 'totality' in the creative process and saw resemblances between the process of the set-up making and the magazine's layout, once saying that Ver Sacrum was akin to a big exhibition (Svetlov 2005: 78).

[159] It should also be mentioned that in the 1900s, the Viennese Secession introduced very bold design solutions in its visual communications, contributing dramatically to what would soon be considered a purely modernist aesthetic (see, for example, the poster from 1906 by Ferdinand Andri, the architect).

Chosen One. Overall, it was rather a contrast with the previous event in the spring of the same year, which was a special show devoted to the work of one of the Secession's founding members, Victor Krämer and featured intense reproductions of Orientalist traits from his trips to Palestine and Egypt (Waissenberger 1977: 58).

Before the 1890s, the theme of the 'North' in Russian painting was rather marginal; it was reactivated thanks to the archaeological and ethnographical research that flourished throughout those years and continued to inform wider art practices in the 1900s. The interest towards these topics, mainly expressed in Russian artists' foreign contributions in locales like the Munich and Vienna Secessions, was preceded by their consolidation in the works and series of singular artists like Serov and Korovin. The key episode in this tendency is represented by their journey to Russian northern lands. The two artists brought numerous studies back home that depicted landscapes, the everyday life of the population of these remote areas, vedutas of old monasteries, and sea views. It is vital in our opinion to locate this subject-matter as a tendency that developed in strict correspondence with the visual priorities delineated by wider European artistic discourses, contrary to contemporaneous criticism and dominant views in Soviet art history that conceptualised it as a purely national phenomenon rooted in the intrinsic qualities of the Russian natural landscape.

The workgroup of the association in charge with the organisation of the 1901 show included, among others, Richard Luksch, the husband of Russian émigré artist Elena Makovskaia, known as Elena Luksch-Makowsky.[160] Richard Luksch joined the Secession around the time that the young couple had moved to Vienna in 1900. In the career of Luksch-Makowsky, Vienna – where she studied – and, in particular, the milieu of the Secession played a significant role in her early success. She presented at its

[160] Luksch-Makowsky designed a series of coloured engravings for the catalogue of the 13th exhibition of the Secession that launched a phase in her work where she dedicated significant space to this technique (Turchin 2009: 56), developing a distinct style with a degree of primitivist touches.

exhibitions and contributed to the Werkstätte from 1900 to 1908,[161] the period that was long a primary concern of the relevant scholarship.

Two other organisers, Rudolf Bacher and Wilhelm List, both active as artists, supervised the selection of artworks from Russia. They had undertaken a journey during which they consulted the exponents of a broad range of styles and beliefs, going from Diaghilev to the top echelons of the Petersburg academic establishment such as the Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich, head of the Alexander III Museum, or Earl Dmitrii Tolstoi, who served as the officer in charge of the former from the same year[162] in St Petersburg. They also saw Pasternak and Korovin in Moscow, and, finally, Johan Jakob Tikkanen, art historian and professor, and the painter Thorsten Waenerberg in Helsingfors (nowadays Helsinki). The diversity of opinions that were collected on that occasion was emphasised by Akinsha, who also reported that Bacher and List likely 'had the chance to meet numerous artists including Mikhail Vrubel, Nikolai Roerich and Konstantin Somov, and visit such patrons of art as Savva Mamontov' (Akinsha 2014: 26).

The contribution mirrored the structure of Diaghilev's 1898 project, beginning with the pairing of Russian and Finnish participants. Even if Diaghilev's role in directing this contribution is considered indisputable, the St Petersburg core of his Mir iskusstva community was surprisingly lacking in Vienna, leaving space for an intense matching of Finns with the painters from Moscow. The overall picture, which would however remain marginal compared with the rest of the edition, translated a peculiar, albeit evocative, mix of northerly landscapes and works with a mythological subject-matter alongside some unexpected editions of portraiture with mystical

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[161] For an updated overview of her path, see Ewald 2017.

[162] Probably mistakenly referred by Akinsha as the president of the Imperial Academy of Arts, Dmitrii Ivanovich Tolstoi (1860–1941) was covering the post at the Museum from 1901 and then at the Hermitage from 1909. He was remembered as a very dynamic personality and an ardent promoter of Valentin Serov's oeuvre, and was also the elder brother of Ivan Ivanovich Tolstoi (1858–1916), vice-president of the Academy and one of the founders of the aforementioned Museum.

qualities. There was also a compelling balance emerging between them and the applied arts – mainly ceramics – the latter reflecting one of the primary concerns of the artists close to Abramtsevo.

Josef Hoffmann, one of the organisers and a major modern design pioneer and co-founder of the Werkstätte, had devoted a considerable part of his multi-pronged career to interior design. He introduced a series of decorative solutions for the displays of the Secession and his experiments in exhibition design deserve to be underscored in this regard. The expressive means that was being gradually incorporating in his set-ups converged to an increasingly totalising unity of the works and designs surrounding them. Hoffman most likely supervised the set up in the Russian section, and designed the pedestals for the sculptures (Akinsha 2014: 26). Certain elements developed on that occasion bear some similarities with the following exhibition projects that Diaghilev conducted.

While clearly relating to the recent success of the kustar display that was part of the Russian participation at the 1900 World Fair in Paris, the Russische Künstler section in Vienna plentifully used the arsenal of folk motifs developed within the realm of the Abramtsevo circle, positioning them next to the artists that were 'exporting medieval Russian topicality', such as Roerich. In this regard, Akinsha comments on how this fable-like imagery matched the overall European visual trends at the turn of the century that were adopted by artists from mainly Northern regions, with the aim of re-elaborating their folk heritage. The scholar also shrewdly observes that these accents only vaguely reflected the core values of Diaghilev's project, since the only artist who translated a valid mood of the internationalism that was thoroughly pursued by the Mir iskusstva leader then was Somov, who was featured with a series of watercolours (Akinsha 2014: 27).

On the occasion of this contribution, the Ver Sacrum, in the words of Peter Altenberg himself, issued a brief comment of praise about Kustodiev's *A Portrait of a young man*, which was actually a portrait of Ivan Bilibin (Altenberg 1902: 33; Lehner

2014: 108). One of the paradoxes of the reception of this event was the relatively reserved feedback for the works of Mikhail Vrubel. Despite his expressive means being the closest to the jugenstil fashion of the moment and his intense symbolism, his *Pan* (Fig. 39) was appraised by Richard Muther, who reviewed it on the pages of the Viennese weekly edition Die Zeit (Muther 1901a), in the light of bold national stereotypes instead of being read as a work that revealed a complex fusion of Greek mythology and Russian fairy-tale motifs.[163] Muther wrote that 'in the Russian section we saw the works of Purvītis and Rylov – both were lauded for their landscapes that combine a lyrical manner and rigorous colour solutions – alongside the friezes by Korovin that adorned the Russian pavilion at the Parisian exhibition'. Nevertheless, he observed that

> 'the deepest impression is given by two other masters. Konstantin Somov, a great and absolutely wonderful artist and a remarkable exponent of the romantics of Biedermeier [...], while "Pan" by Vrubel' is Russia itself, not Hellenic, but steppe Pan, a poor Russian peasant, all drunk with a doleful and dull gaze blurred by the moonshine and holding his fife as a bottle. In that very artwork, all the suffering weighting upon that land is contained' (Muther 1901a: 138).

Such a misjudgement was immediately denounced by artists in Russia. In a letter to Rilke, Pavel Ettinger wrote that professor Muther 'could not have a fairly complete picture' of Russian art at the Vienna exhibition, because 'List and Bacher left Russia with a poor catch, since most of the artists did not have any new works available. They basically do not produce many pictures' (Ettinger 1901, in Ettinger

[163] The article was briefly analysed in Raev 2000: 733–734.

1989: 86).[164] However, Muther was hardly intentional in his unpleasant summary of the endeavours of the artist, who was one of the most valued personalities of his generation. Muther reported that, to perceive the peculiarities of this work of art, one should consider its 'romanticism' and unique 'northern feeling' (Turchin 2009: 55). In its first 1902 issue, the Mir iskusstva reported that professor Muther dwelt significantly on the Russian section in his review, quoting his assessment of the works by Rylov, Roerich and Purvītis, which were mostly landscapes, as being imbued with the same spirit of sadness and thoughtful melancholy as that in Russian literature (Muther 1901a). Apparently Muther's misleading interpretation of Vrubel's *Pan* was omitted from this notice. If that was done deliberately, the strategy here would be the same as that of 1898, aiming to conceal negative criticisms in order to support the claims of success abroad and fraternity with the European modernist groups.[165]

In the room of the Secession's building dedicated to this Russian section, Korovin's monumental works were placed under the ceiling (Figs. 33, 34), creating a frieze effect quite similar to that of the radical display designed for the Beethoven tribute the following season, triumphed by Klimt's decorative frieze that would become a key work in the history of the Secession. The space was divided into two rows of images. The upper one was strongly dominated by Korovin's monumental panels: a series evoking the far north and a single large-scale composition depicting a small, roof-like structure in the middle of a dense woods. The latter is difficult to locate by identifying its currently accepted title and actual existence. It was listed in

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[164] Original Russian passage: 'Что касается русского искусства на Венской выставке, то вряд ли профессор Мутер сможет получить о нем достаточно полное представление. Лист и Байер вернулись из России с весьма незначительной добычей, ибо у большинства художников новых работ не оказалось. Русские художники пишут, в целом, крайне мало' (Ettinger 1901, in Ettinger 1989: 86).

[165] Original passage: 'В журнале "Die Zeit" проф. Мутер, разбирая последнюю выставку венских сецессионистов, с особенным вниманием останавливается на русском отделе [...]. О том же русском отделе критик журнала "Die Zeit" дает следующий восторженный отзыв: "...Пейзажи Пурвита, Рылова и Рериха проникнуты теми же настроениями грусти и вдумчивой меланхолии, которыми так богата русская литература..."' (Diaghilev 1902: 14–15).

the catalogue under the name of *Siberian panel* and was even reported as a loan from the Alexander III Museum. The friezes were made in tempera that encouraged a flattening and decorative effect.

The whole series is connected to a journey that Korovin had undertaken with Serov in the context of a major commission that he had received from Savva Mamontov for the Nizhnii Novgorod Exhibition in 1896. The patron had an idea of sending the artists to the Russian North as part of the preparation of the 'Far North' pavilion. Mamontov had been involved in a massive business project in that area and had even been actively engaged in development of railroads in the Archangel'sk direction. For the Nizhnii fair, minister Vitte charged Mamontov with the promotion of the enterprise in a special pavilion. Mamontov in turn entrusted the design project to Korovin and the architect Lev Kekushev. On the same occasion he also assigned a similar art commission to Vrubel, but the panels he drafted were rejected, thereby contributing to the artist's refusé image; nonetheless, his works were still presented, albeit in a special temporary building secured by Mamontov.[166]

The whole trip lasted two months during the autumn of 1894. Together the artists travelled to the Arkhangelsk Governorate, the Kola Peninsula, and Novaia Zemlia, but also to Norwegian and Swedish territories. The construction of the railroad had just begun, so they travelled by a steam ferry over the ocean. The panel that shows the 'Pomor crosses' that was presented as a frieze at the Secession was inspired by the days Korovin spent on board the 'Lomonosov' steamship (that was part of conditions Mamontov provided to the artists for their journey), when he saw those constructions traditionally used by the Pomor people for navigation. When recalling that period, he said that he tried to transpose the spirit and the emotions that he experienced whilst in contact with the nature of the Northern regions into his

[166] The case with Vrubel's works at the Nizhnii Novgorod exhibition, which, after being expelled by the academic jury, were placed at the pavilion made by S. Mamontov, dramatically recalls the episodes with the dissident pavilions around the World Fairs organised in Paris several times.

sketches and successive works. The effect of the totalising display was something that Korovin wanted to create back in 1896 when designing the installation of the pavilion entrusted to him – he had even placed some wooden baskets and animal hides in it to evoke the atmosphere of the local lifestyle. Meanwhile, in Vienna, his panels were presented with a significantly greater aestheticising perspective.

Korovin's experience at the 1900 Paris World Fair (where the artist collaborated with the geographer Pëtr Semënov-Tian-Shanskii) which stands between of those two events and was one of the major highlights of his career, emerges as essential in relation to his subsequent appearance in Vienna because it featured a massive selection of his monumental works. This was significant in terms of the acclaim that the works inspired by this journey received, the way it impacted his career, and for the significance that the subject-matter of the Northern territories acquired in Russian cultural production and its identity building process through that episode.

Notably, Korovin had undertaken his Northern trip[167] right after his return from France, where he was completely immersed in impressionistic ideals. Although his contemporaries did not sympathise with this passion of his at all,[168] this experience was pivotal for the development of expressive means characterised by the bond flat colour fields that gave these works a typically modernist decorative pathos.

The room reserved for Russian artists in Vienna was fashioned to some degree after the 1898 Exposition of Russian and Finnish Artists, but relied heavily on the woks and artists that appeared in Paris in 1900. Overall, the selection presented many

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[167] During the journey the artists could not work outside as they had expected due to the harshness of the natural conditions (notably horseflies and mosquitos). Nevertheless, they profoundly admired the life, architecture, and, most importantly, the nature of these lands (Korovin 1990 [1971]: 282).

[168] Mamontov, for instance, once wrote that it was the fallacy of the artist to seek any sort of French manner when working with such extraordinary material like Russian Nordic nature. See Kruglov 1997: 39. For the vicissitudes of the critical reception of the Impressionist technique and values in Russia, see Dorontchenkov 2016.

landscapes, including four works by Levitan not mentioned in the catalogue.[169] The display also featured profoundly poetical pieces such as *Pan* by Vrubel' and *White Night* [Belaia noch'] and *August* [Avgust] by Somov. One of the leading motifs, as was mentioned earlier, was that of old legends and fairy tales; these were most vividly expressed in the works of Vrubel' and Roerich, but also in the tapestries of Mariia V. Iakunchikova and the illustrations of her elder friend and recently deceased colleague, Elena Polenova. It is very likely that the tapestries in question were the same that were shown at the 1900 Paris kustar section. Just like the frieze panels of Korovin and Vrubel's fireplace, these pieces could probably have been destined for the Vienna presentation in order further endorse the image of Russian art after their positive appearance in Paris. This movement could also be partly attributable to the facilitated transport logistics.[170]

It was hardly possible to establish if all the panels came directly from the Parisian *Exposition Universelle*, because in the beginning of the 1901 there were several items coming from the Russian pavilion, including some panels by Korovin that were displayed in the 3rd Mir iskusstva exhibition that was held between the 10th of January and the 4th of February in the spaces of St Petersburg Fine Arts Academy (Figs. 30, 31). Thus, the panels were either split in two parts, or first came back to Russia and only then travelled to Vienna. There might have been a detail suggesting the validity of the first scenario, as the Russian Museum provenance information regarding Korovin's panels that were featured in the Mir iskusstva show reached the Museum directly (Virtual'nyi Russkii Musei 2022), but at the same time it must be noted that there were at least two panels that appeared first in St Petersburg and only

[169] As identified in Akinsha 2014: 111.

[170] The practice of touring exhibitions, as it was showed in previous chapters, was already a very widely diffused one at the time. However, optimising the route for only a selection of artworks was common as well, and was even reported by one of our personages. Thus, in the 1901 text 'On the Threshold of a New Current', Nikolai Roerich wrote that numerous works from the Paris World Fair of 1900 had reached the upcoming 4th Venice Biennale (Roerich 1901a).

then in Vienna, namely the tempera friezes *The Shores of Murman (Pomor Crosses)* [Berega Murmana (Pomorskie kresty)] and *The Caravan of Samoyeds* [Poezd samoedov], both executed with the assistance of Nikolai Klodt in 1899 (Figs. 28, 29). In any case, these circumstances are not of primary importance, whilst it is surely essential that the works evoking these subjects were extensively displayed abroad.

One of the critics wrote in Neue Freie Presse that this 'this "northern" exhibition' appeared to him capable of answering the very question of 'what is style' (Servaes 1901, as cited in Lehner 2014: 111). He also dwelt on Korovin's panels, praising their matt, opaque texture, which he deemed 'as simple as possible in terms of methods, and deep and enthralling in terms of effect'. He wrote that they conveyed a 'feeling for the generalness of Siberian nature' that was 'grasped in masterful strokes, and presented with a poignant tenor' (Servaes 1901, as cited in Lehner 2014: 112). The panels even aroused the interest of the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph I, who visited the Secession exhibition in mid-December and allegedly expressed his profound satisfaction at the fact that Russian artists were presented in such a way (Neue Freie Presse 1901, in Akinsha 2014: 114).

Doubtlessly, other eye-catching pieces were those by Vrubel, and in particular the richly garnished maiolica fireplace *Vol'ga and Mikula Selianinovich* (1899, executed in several copies) (Fig. 34). In the cumulative record that Servaes wrote for the section, he summarised it in the following passage:

> 'Brilliant freedom in the exploitation of natural forms combines with a very odd, bizarre, and daring taste, which, however, attains its safety and position by holding tightly and organically onto national tradition. Byzantine forms made strongly Barbarian shape the basic elements of Russian ornament' (Servaes 1901, quoted as translated in Lehner 2014: 112).

This account underscored the impact of this imagery on the overall impression that was made. Curiously, Vrubel's artistic production was perceived by

Servaes as a pure expression of 'Russianness' (he says, 'Russian clay vessels', probably because they were listed as produced in Mamontov's mansion without specifying other details).

Alexandre Benois remarked that those works of Korovin struck him as a complete 'revelation of the North' (Benois 1902: 238). In his *History of Russian Painting in the Nineteenth Century* that saw light in 1902, the critic has however pointed out that Korovin's panels of that period did not immediately draw the acclaim that he believed they deserved. The general audience, in his opinion, was not able to grasp their decorative qualities and monumental ambition: '[...] Korovin's undertaking was reckoned as a witty trick, as a merely exhibitionary escapade'; regardless of its quality, it was unable to compete with large-scale historical painting. For Benois, it was a symptom of the inability of Russian audiences to comprehend the painting, and of wider contemporary developments driving towards the dominance of primarily formal qualities. He continued: 'The misunderstanding encountered by K. Korovin [...] best illustrated how remote the Russian public generally is from comprehending the painting. In essence, the splendidly decorative, or, should we say, purely painterly talent of Korovin is just being wasted'.[171]

The same year, some Russian artists contributed to the International Exhibition at the Glaspalast in Munich, but, to the annoyance of some critics, the miriskusniki were absent from that event (Ostini 1901). In the meantime, in the dawn of the new century, the Darmstadt Artists' Colony was gaining momentum, its first exhibition opening in May 1901. It included a modest selection of Russian artists, namely Benois, Vrubel, Golovin, Maliavin, Serov, and Troubetzkoy. Their contribution was spotted by Muther, among others, who briefly mentioned them in

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[171] Original passage: '... на затею Коровина смотрели как на остроумную шутку, как на чисто выставочный фокус. [...] Недоразумение в отношении к К. Коровину [...] лучше всего доказывает как далека русская публика вообще от понимания живописи. В сущности изумительно декоративный, правильнее сказать — чисто живописный (ибо живописец и должен быть непременно декоратором: украсителем стен — все назначение его в этом) талант Коровина пропадает даром' (Benois 1902: 237–238).

his review of the event (Muther 1901b).[172] This presence was motivated by both the prominence attributed to the 'Russian school' in Germany at the time, as was argued by Raev (1982: 139), but was also owed to the diplomatic dimensions of the event, since Ernest Louis, Grand Duke of Hesse, was a brother of the Russian Empress and of the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna. Joseph Maria Olbrich was the core figure of the whole project, as he authored most of the 'houses' that were the sensations of the exhibition, declaring the values of the 'new style' and its potential expansion into the wider lifestyle as a triumph of synthesist ideals. The exhibition achieved widespread success and was enthusiastically received in Russia. In fact, the 1902 Architecture exhibition was partly structured based on the former (Paston 2021: 184), while some of its main creators were also featured in Moscow.

Following the Russian room in Vienna, there was a major show at Galerie Miethke in 1905 that presented Somov next to the Belgian symbolist artist Heinrich Vogeler and his wife and fellow artist, Juliette Massin. Somov was featured with over fifty works. He had previously appeared in a number of exhibitions abroad, likely being one of the most widely displayed Russian artists in German-speaking countries. He was featured in several editions of Berlin Secession such as the third one held at the Cassirer's gallery (Cassirer 1901: 38) and in the 5th edition in 1902, where he showed *La Dame en bleu* (a portrait of Elizaveta Martynova) from 1897–1900, receiving a warm welcome and praise for its melancholic mood and colour work (Raev 1982:

[172] His commentary, however, was unfavourably comparing their art to the French trends: 'And as pretty as the few Russian pictures sent by Alexander Benois, Maljawin, Seroff, Somoff and Michael Vrubel are, they mean little next to the tremendous feats of strength that has taken over Paris'. Original passage: 'Und so hübsch die paar russischen Bilder sind, die von Alexander Benois, Maljawin, Seroff, Somoff und Michael Wrubel geschickt wurden, so wenig bedeuten sie neben den gewaltigen Kraftleistungen, die in Paris imponierten' (Muther 1901b).

143–144)[173]. The same year, Igor Grabar'[174] wrote what might be considered a promotional review dedicated to Somov's work, but which simultaneously aimed to speak out on the whole set of values of the Mir iskusstva. It appeared in German on the pages of the Leipzig-based annual art journal Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst (Grabar' 1903), expanding the international prominence of the group. In 1903, the selection of the Berlin Secession at Cassirer's featured at least six works by Russian artists.[175] Mentioned in the catalogue are *Laugh* by Maliavin, The *Old Rus'* [Staraia rus'] and *Idols* [Idoly] (1901) by Roerich, *The Portrait of Princess Zinaida Iusupova* and *The Farmyard in Finnland* [Krest'ianskii domik v Finliandii] (both 1902) by Serov, and *Evening* (1900–1902) by Somov. These works were shown next to artists such as Max Liebermann, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Claude Monet.

In 1906, the Galerie Miethke in Vienna also featured Roerich in a group show, his work being listed in a separate catalogue that cumulatively covered his oeuvre (Akinsha 2014: 27). Miethke was the space actively used by the Viennese Werkstätte for presenting experimental designs. There is a profound analogy to observe between the function of the Galerie Miethke, where Somov and Roerich enjoyed their individual shows after the appearance of Russian art within the Vienna Secession in 1901 and which served as a showroom for the Viennese Werkstätte, and the setting that was chosen for the *Contemporary Art* enterprise in St Petersburg that was also conceived as a storefront of the progressive exhibition societies and art associations that sought to dedicate more space to design and the applied arts. It was

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[173] For information about Somov's success in Germany and Austria-Hungary more generally, see 145–152. Positioning of Somov under the light of such problems as irony, playful historicism and stylisation that was made by the critics in that period had a considerable impact on the reception of his work in those areas.

[174] At the dawn of the century, Grabar' was one of the first Russian critics to dwell significantly on the Vienna Secession's art, although initially with some reservations.

[175] For a brief discussion on the context of the contribution of Russian artists to the Berlin Secession see Dmitrieva-Einhorn 2011.

thought to become the platform for potential sales of products of this kind that were made by the affiliated artists or realised under their supervision.

IV. NEW APPROACHES TO EXHIBITION INSTALLATION

1. Emulating foreign design initiatives

It seems appropriate in this regard to locate the Vienna participation of 1901 within the context of the epoch's common concern around the topic of exhibition design, and, in particular, to frame it in terms of two major initiatives that took place in Russia in 1902–1903 that marked the point where the ideas of expressive synthetism triumphed among others at the Vienna Secession, empowered by Russian artistic and architectural thought of the first half of the decade.

In December 1902, the *Exhibition of Architecture and Art Industry of New Style*[176] [Vystavka arkhitektury i khudozhestvennoi promyshlennosti novogo stilia] opened in Moscow and presented, among others, interiors by Josef Maria Olbrich, who sojourned in the city for several weeks then (Experiment Editors 2001a: 259; Cooke 1988). The display featured productions from Austria, furniture by Korovin, numerous decorative panels, and a frieze in the Jugendstil spirit by local artists (Nashchokina 2011: 100–102), all largely seeking a convergence between the Abramtsevo style and Viennese art nouveau, the latter being predominant. The Mir iskusstva magazine published a large review of this exhibition, praising Russian contributors and reproducing it in a complete photographic reportage (Diaghilev 1903b: 97–120). Another radical art nouveau design display was the exhibition under the aegis of the short-lived enterprise *Contemporary Art* [Sovremennoe iskusstvo], initiated by Prince Sergei Shcherbatov and Igor' Grabar' in St Petersburg in January 1903;[177] it featured painting, prints, design, and even jewellery. The central concept of the project was to present the artworks in an elaborate setting that would enhance

[176] For the translation of a series of contemporaneous reviews of this event, see Experiment Editors 2001a.

[177] For reviews of the *Contemporary Art* exhibition, see Experiment Editors 2001b.

their effect. All these trends are indicative of the attempts to translate *Gesamtkunstwerk* ambitions that aimed towards a total fusion of all the arts realised through a display. Subsequently, the rich decorations within would be found at the Portrait Exhibition in 1905 and then again, featuring very similar elements, at the *Exposition de l'art russe* at the Grand Palais in 1906. These two crucial initiatives were closely linked to the field of architecture and to its agile development at the dawn of the new century. They often assume a marginal position in the art-historical surveys due to the simple fact that there were few or no fine art objects featured. However, I wish to argue that they were exceedingly important for the development of the era's aesthetic and were an expression of a new frame of thought about exhibitions as potentially meaningful devices in translating an artistic vision.

These were not the first decorative undertakings of the artists associated with the Abramtsevo community or the Mir iskusstva; for example, one of the brightest prior examples was the design of a lunchroom for Maria F. Iuakunchikova, commissioned to Elena Polenova and Aleksandr Golovin, with the panels drafted by Polenova right before she passed away. However, they were the first enterprises that were not restricted to a private space and that aimed to market the items of the 'new style' on a regular basis.

In the beginning of the decade, the art nouveau trends in architecture were increasingly addressed by specialised Russian journalism (Brumfield 1991: 53). They were generally regarded as lesser than the realm of design and interior ensembles; however, in December 1902, a major event that expressed the ideas and openness to the principles of the new style that was maturing occurred in Moscow. The First Architecture Exhibition, featuring environments designed by Mackintosh, Olbrich, William Walcot, Fëdor Shekhtel', Konstantin Korovin, Aleksandr Golovin, and Ivan Fomin, was a pioneering enterprise of its kind and immediately drew significant attention from both architectural and artistic communities. The coverage was not uniformly supportive of the exhibition's aesthetic, but the endeavour was nevertheless

promptly embraced and, on might even argue, operationalised by the Mir iskusstva, with several materials dedicated to it (Diaghilev 1903a) as an endorsement of the modern form of expression. The magazine broadly promoted this event, printing numerous photographs of the rooms featured in the show (these pictures now being some of the few remaining visual documents of the case) and employed it to support its programmatic argument concerning the importance of establishing and maintaining connections with foreign colleagues. This exchange with the European design field was, in Diaghilev's view, something that reinforced the quality of the contributing Russian creators' endeavours, as happened, for example, with the case of Fomin.

There was also a review that linked the production of the Abramtsevo circle with the advancements in design that were revealed in the Moscow exhibition. It was signed by Nikolai Filanskii, a disciple of both Valentin Serov and Fëdor Shekhtel' and one of the first observers to underscore their conceptual affinity. He suggested that by that point, the relevance of Abramtsevo had begun to wane, a development probably associated with its social dimension that was largely preoccupied with the revitalisation of peasant industries; nevertheless, he pointed out that the circle's work had catalysed the 'modern' aesthetic which was supposed to find expression in the architectural work of Fomin and Shekhtel' (Filianskii 1903; Brumfield 1991: 55). However, alternative feedback also emerged, including a very interesting article published on this regard in Iskusstvo stroitel'noe i dekorativnoe, which was even entitled 'Ist zu wienerisch' (meaning 'too Viennese') (Mikhailov 1903), and where the critic condemned the appropriative character of the exhibition's imagery and its participant line-up, claiming that they were 'too Viennese' in their outlook.

The circumstances in which the exhibition was put together were of an intersecting nature. Partially, the exhibition could be regarded as the result of a group of architects active mostly in Moscow who sought to unite to counter what in their view constituted the outdatedness of the Moscow Architecture Society, an

organisation founded back in 1867 that had long dominated the Moscow architectural scene in terms of the city's commissions. At the same time, it had a state-sanctioned element in its agenda, expressing the institutional consent of the initiative from the side of the royal circles. The committee of the exhibition was headed by a statesman, Vladimir Dzhunkovskii, who was in service as an adjutant for the governor of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich; he was accompanied by the latter's wife, the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna, who was the sister of the Empress and a royal patron of the exhibition (Dmitriev 1903; Brumfield 1991: 55; Kirichenko 2012: 255). The sisters were born as von Hessen-Darmstadt and were natives of the Duchy, where the exhibition of the Mathildenhöhe colony had just caused a sensation.

The Darmstadt colony's exhibition was doubtlessly a direct input that encouraged the aforementioned group of architects to start the initiative, which they hoped would function as a manifesto for their vision. One of the members of the group, Ivan Fomin,[178] visited the colony's exhibition in 1901 and expressed the idea of setting up a similar project to his colleagues (Kirichenko 2012: 255). Fomin and another organiser, Il'ia Bondarenko, were former assistants of Fëdor Shekhtel' and transferred their work on the exhibition to the established architect's studio. Fomin was also a proponent of involving Korovin, who had gained immense prestige for his exhibition architecture recently, most notably triumphing in Paris. Moreover, Fomin was surely aware that this contribution would ascribe the initiative with a leitmotif of plurality of artistic means, of unity between its branches. Finally, Korovin's name, who after all ended up designing three tables characterised by simplicity and subtle laconic forms, was a potent marketing tool.

The ideas associated with the art-nouveau current were already circulating in Russian architectural circles and their exponents were to some extent aware of what

[178] Fomin will also be active during the Soviet period, his contest entry for the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry building being an example of his subsequent work following his art-nouveau and neoclassicist phases.

was been happening around Europe, notably in Vienna. The Viennese version of this aesthetic had gained notable popularity in Russia, the main aspect of this transfer being focused around its aesthetic and decorative elements (see Nashchokina 2005: 128; Danilova 2012). This influence was even acknowledged by Olbrich, who visited the *Architecture* exhibit of 1902–1903 (Mikhailov 1903: 19).

When the Vienna Secession was initially founded, it did not provoke considerable interest from the Russian creative milieu. It was in part considered secondary in comparison to Munich. But this cautious, moderate attention or even neglect of the artistic side of Vienna Secession, was, as is pointed out by Nashchokina, contrasted by a stable interest that existed in Russia towards the key personalities of new Austrian architecture. After 1900, Vienna's critical acclaim as a cultural centre and especially as a place of architectural and stylistic innovation was becoming stronger (Nashchokina 2005: 119, 122). This was partly due to the success of Viennese architecture in Central and Eastern Europe and Italy, where its elements were increasingly appropriated. Moreover, a considerable role in this process was played by major exhibitions, namely the Paris World Fair of 1900 and the aforementioned display of Darmstadt colony in 1901, which was reviewed in the Mir iskusstva with profound enthusiasm (N. V. 1901). At the dawn of the new century, numerous architectural projects proposed for Moscow bore traces of Viennese imagery, namely from the works of Wagner, Olbrich, and Hoffman. Moscow architects were particularly attracted by its forms, largely because it represented a moderate variant of innovation and because this school presented itself as a result of a set of international mediations, uniting elements from the new masters of other countries as Charles Rennie Mackintosh or Henry van de Velde. It was the result of a selection of what were considered to be the best trends of the day, and could therefore claim a relative universality; in this quality, it was connected to the orientation of many younger Russian architects who were seeking a new style that would not have national connotations but which would, however, have commonalities with the work

of foreign peers, thereby enabling a connection with the international dimension (Nashchokina 2005:124, 126). Yet the most popular among the foreign art nouveau architects was arguably Olbrich, whose style Diaghilev had compared to the work of Golovin alongside that of Korovin and Iakunchikova, doubtlessly complimenting them. This opinion was expressed in a text that counteracted another review of the Darmstadt colony, authored by the 'omnipresent' Richard Muther. Diaghilev's statement on this regard appeared in a long article dedicated to the exhibition season in Germany and which was much more reserved that magazine's first notice on the event that had appeared in issue no. 2–3 a few months earlier.[179] Instead, Diaghilev now assumed a critical stance towards the 'new style' presented in Darmstadt which, apart from Olbrich's creation, he considered as lacking in individuality (Diaghilev 1901: 144; Turchin 2009: 52–54). Remarkably, some elements of the 'modern' stylistics were previously severely reproached on the pages of the Mir iskusstva in 1899 (no. 15 pp. 15–16); when referring to the newly inaugurated building of the Vienna Secession alongside some of its exponents, the magazine characterised them as instances of a 'mannered and formulaic "*modernism*"'.[180] Meanwhile, the Mir iskusstva's feedback on the *Architecture of New Style* exhibition in Moscow in 1902–1903 was favourable and, additionally, the photographic coverage was preceded by a vignette that recalled the shapes of the Secession's building.

As was already discussed, the synthetic approach was very strong in the Vienna Secession's repertoire, and this aspect had undeniably left a trace in the artistic mentality of Russian progressive creative circles, not least thanks to the international

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[179] Original passage: 'без сомнения, у дармштадтского архитектора есть некоторое родство с Коровиным, Якунчиковой, а главное с Головиным' (Diaghilev 1901).

[180] Emphasis added. Original passage: 'Стиль постройки, более претенциозный, чем в Берлине, с доведенным до крайности "модернизмом" орнаментики, едва ли отвечает солидным художественным требованиям, предъявляемым к подобного рода постройкам [...]. Что же касается собственно венских художников [...], культивируемый этими господами манерный и шаблонный "модернизм", заменив прежнюю академическую рутину, не сделал своих приверженцев более талантливыми [...]' (Nurok 1899: 15–16).

acclaim that it provoked at the time. Thus, the 'Viennese rooms' designed by Olbrich and Hoffman were indeed highlights of the Austrian-Hungarian contribution to 1900 Paris World Fair and gave birth to an entire current in interior design that emerged from the Darmstadt show of 1901 overseen by Olbrich, who was at that point at the peak of his career. This new design typology was exactly what galvanised both the exhibits of *Architecture of New Style* and *Contemporary Art* in Moscow and St Petersburg, respectively, in 1902–1903. Furthermore, the Moscow exhibit demonstrated a crucial issue related to this approach, namely the fact that its interiors were in large part tailored to be looked at and appreciated aesthetically, rather than being lived in straight away (Nashchokina 2005: 127–128).

Contemporary Art was also a project that drew on European prototypes which, even in the absence of a direct reference in the historical testimonies of that moment, seem rather obvious. First, it was to certain extent based on Siegfried Bing's Parisian gallery; their similarities in terms of their missions and approaches were previously noted by Bowlt (1979: 97). Bing was a pioneering art dealer who was one of the first to promote Japanese art, which was a major factor that contributed to the dissemination of the visual language associated with art nouveau; Bing was also a crucial figure for introducing the formula of exhibiting works of 'fine' art alongside elements from the applied arts such as ceramics, furniture, tapestries and other formats, often produced by the same artists. The design showrooms of the Munich and Vienna Secessions were also likely sources of inspiration for *Contemporary Art*.

As an enterprise, it was financed by Prince Sergei Shcherbatov,[181] himself an artist and collector who also left a detailed and passionate account of it in his reminiscences (Shcherbatov 1955: 160–180), and another collector and art patron, baron Vladimir von Meck, both rather young at the time. Shcherbatov's motivation was driven by the idea of establishing a salon that could express his claims for the need

[181] Prince Shcherbatov was a client of Bing's showroom and recalled having purchased some Japanese objects from him. See Shcherbatov 1955: 180.

to ‘formulate new principles of furnishing and interior design’ (Bowlt 1979: 97). In order to do so, the commission required of the artists included to design objects, decorative elements, and accessories. The display facilities were arranged within a private property that was acquired by the two sponsors in the city centre of St’ Petersburg. It should be noted that there were no architects involved in the realisation of the few exhibits of the enterprise that saw the light; all of them were artists of a pronounced ‘modernist’ orientation. Prince Shcherbatov sought

> ‘To create a centre that might have had an impact on the periphery and that could be a focal point, a place where creativity would be concentrated and where it could find its expression in the applied arts that are so intrinsically linked to pure art. All this should have been represented through a series of collective exhibitions, alternating and highly varied in their composition’.[182]

Here, it is worth noting that Shcherbatov was writing from post-war America, where the role of design in people’s lives was well-established. However, he articulated, although retrospectively, that the whole project was driven by the ideals of a synthetic vision of the relationship between the decorated space and the objects within it, and by the preoccupation with the embodiment of these of ideals in artistic practice. Hence, he continued:

> ‘The applied arts were supposed to be represented not as the usual selected line-up of different pieces, but to be assembled into a coherent concept of a group of artists who were supposed to be gradually called upon to arrange the interiors of the rooms. Those should have been conceived **as an organic and harmonious whole**, in which, from the

[182] Original passage: ‘Создать центр, могущий оказывать влияние на периферию и являющийся показательным примеров, центр где сосредоточивалось бы творчество, то есть выставлялось бы в прикладном искусстве, кровно связанном и с чистым искусством, долженствующим быть представленным рядом коллективных выставок, чередующихся и весьма разнообразного состава’ (Shcherbatov 1955: 158–159).

> decoration of the walls and furniture to all the details, the principle of unity that I had specified was to be applied as an immutable law'.[183]

Moreover, in his objectives Shcherbatov also listed the promotion of the work of Russian artists abroad, mainly through illustrated editions.

Grabar' was appointed to be a coordinator of the enterprise thanks to his passion for art, and also in part due to his long acquaintance with Shcherbatov from their Munich years; technical arrangements were entrusted to an engineer. For the former, this represented a debut in the field of exhibition making. Alongside the selection of artworks, he also was keen to turn the enterprise into another cultural platform with additional educational functions (Morozova 2015: 94). The organisers had rented a part of a mansion in the very centre of St Peterburg, not far from the building of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts; given the hostility of the Society towards modernist tendencies, this choice could potentially have attracted both visitors and critics. *Contemporary Art* opened on the 26th of January, and it aimed at impressing its audience with richly decorated sets and to incentivise immediate purchases because the displays were demonstrating the items integrated into their interiors. However, the only type of product that was successfully sold at the show was the jewellery of the French designer René Lalique. Some artworks were provided by the sponsors themselves, among which the Japanese prints supplied by Prince Shcherbatov, while the rest were selected by Grabar' from the cluster of artists belonging to the Mir iskusstva. At the same time, the show also aimed to exhibit artworks in urban interiors, therefore signalling the place that the 'new' art wanted to occupy within the modern living space.

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[183] Original passage: 'Прикладное искусство не должно было быть представленным только, как обычно, рядом тех или других подобранных экспонатов, а должно было выявить собой некий цельный замысел ряда художников, постепенно привлекаемых для устройства интерьеров комнат, как некоего органического и гармонического целого, где, начиная с обработки стен, мебели, кончая всеми деталями, проведен был бы принцип единства, мной указанный, как незыблемый закон' (Shcherbatov 1955: 159). Emphasis added.

The location was split in several sections with temporary walls, each of them showing an ensemble that aimed to express an integral visual concept. The display included interiors designed by Benois, Bakst, Grabar', Korovin, Lancéray, Golovin, and Shcherbatov himself. More specifically, the displays included a dining room designed by Benois and Lancéray with lavish stucco moulding, a boudoir by Bakst and Lancéray, a hall by Shcherbatov, an entrance space with a staircase by Grabar' that was apparently considered poorly made by the rest of participants, and a purely ornamental environment intended to resemble the Russian folk style nicknamed 'Terem' (as in the upper part of a traditional dwelling) that was complemented with decorative wooden engraved panels (Bowlt 1979: 97–98; Dolgova 2019: 43). Finally, the true highlight of the exhibit was, in all likelihood, Korovin's *Tearoom*. It was not an interpretation recalling a certain epoch, and neither was it a direct appropriation of the Western design movements. The design of the *Tearoom* combined attention to orientalist trends and to floral elements of the European art nouveau aesthetic, mixed with the delicate allusions to Russian nature to which he had dedicated his previous large-scale works that were discussed above. When in immigration long afterwards, Korovin recalled that these floral motifs expressed his enchantment with the vast rye fields of his homeland (Korovin 1990 [1971]: 128; Morozova 2015: 99). The space was probably the most functional one at the exhibition (Morozova 2015: 97–98), but, on account of its expressive solutions, it should be considered alongside his previously discussed exhibition designs as one of his major works that viewed space as a platform for creating an articulated and coherent imagery.

A valuable and novel detail in the way that the artworks were incorporated in these ensembles was, as one of miriskusniki, Mstislav Dobuzhinskii, recalled, that they were hung 'after the example of Diaghilev's shows, in a European fashion', notably with neutral monochrome walls and with the paintings being positioned a certain distance one from another in a single row (Dobuzhinskii 1987: 193; Dolgova 2019: 42).

Diaghilev is known for having broadly endorsed the initiative, but the commercial aspect of the project did meet some of his criticisms. He wrote that 'to attain the goals which "Contemporary Art" has set itself, it should come nearer to life and comprehend present-day demands; only then will it become an "enterprise" and not a fantasy' (as translated in Bowlt 1979: 98). Indeed, recurring comments in the critical feedback concerned the impracticality of certain exhibits.

Overall, it could be concluded that, while the 1902 Architecture show was the direct result of contacts with the Central European secessionist scene, *Contemporary Art* emerged from these experiences alongside the effect of validation that the 1900 Paris pavilion's success had encouraged. It is worth underlining that the visual documentation of the installation views of these two major exhibits, as well as some other key displays of the time, is mainly attributable to the illustrations in the reviews published in the Mir iskusstva magazines, highlighting the role it attributed to exhibitions as a creative means. The refined outlook of both shows was summed up in an extremely detailed review on the pages of the Mir iskusstva not coincidentally, but exactly due to its leader's fascination with the designs that conveyed a unified impression and reflected the Gesamtkunstwerk values.

2. Diaghilev's early Gesamtkunstwerk aspirations

The endeavours related to designing exhibitions were profoundly shared by the exponents of the Mir iskusstva and, above all, by Diaghilev. They were rooted in the synthetic approach and in their overall aspiration towards the union of all aesthetic elements, in line with the ideas of Gesamtkunstwerk that dominated the creative minds of the epoch. Moreover, as emphasised by Bowlt, Diaghilev recognised the urgency of rethinking the place of exhibitions as such in art practice (Bowlt 1979: 88), understanding them alongside the older functions as instruments for the expression of a certain set of ideas and ideals, while also hopefully better responding to artists' needs. Some aspects of his exhibition-making were synchronised with the most recent trends spreading over Secessionist platforms and salons and, to some extent, anticipated the attitudes that would be developed by the following generations in the Russian creative scene.

When speaking about the state of the practices that he could see around him, he was uncompromising: 'In my opinion, today's exhibitions, save for a few, are not really exhibitions but rather a random set of diverse and often mutually contradictory pieces'. He believed instead that 'if we look at the exhibition not as a tasteless bazaar that spreads over train-station-like spaces, then we must somehow regard it as a proper work of art, some kind of poem – clear, characteristic and, above all, coherent'.[184]

These aspirations were translated in the aestheticising approach that featured in almost all the exhibitions mounted under the aegis of the Mir iskusstva. This approach included thorough choices for the decoration of the exhibition spaces, such as regarding the colour of the walls and supports for artworks and distribution of

[184] Original passage: 'По-моему, нынешние выставки, за единственным исключением, – прямо-таки не выставки, а просто набор разных, часто друг друга отрицающих, случайных вещей. [...]. Если на выставку смотрят не как на оскорбительный для искусства базар, раскидывающийся в помещениях, похожих на вокзалы, то надо подразумевать под ней некое художественное произведение, некую поэму, ясную, характерную и главное – цельную. Только в таком случае можно рассуждать о выставке как таковой' (Diaghilev 1900a: 104).

plants and flowers (Kruglov 2009, 15), often used to complete the scene in accordance with the most refined trends of the moment. Janet Kennedy, when discussing the group's approach to the exhibition as an instrument in the creation of a complete aesthetic vision, observed that Diaghilev was programmatically turned against the inherited and outdated display practices. In particular, the randomness and vastness of the exhibitions represented, according to him and Benois, the key problem, and was linked to the commercialising spirit of contemporary art initiatives. She brings up a statement by Diaghilev that concisely characterises his vision and matches the aforementioned opinion:

> 'Every big exhibition is, in essence, not a festival day for art but a plague of art. There is nothing more injurious for a work of art than to be exhibited to the thronging multitudes in an enormous ugly room, frame to frame with the neighbouring works, painted by another artist, with another manner of thought and a different temperament'.[185]

Several artists, including Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva, recalled that he was very pedantic regarding the set-up and especially the arrangement of pieces, and passed hours together with the craftsmen in charge of the framing and hanging (Ostroumova-Lebedeva 1930). In her autobiographical notes, she dwells on how Diaghilev behaved in his capacity as exhibition organiser throughout his first ventures up until the period where their scale increased following the inclusion of many Moscow artists. She stressed that artists simply did not have any right to an opinion over the arrangement of the works, as this was exclusively in Diaghilev's hands. However, he compensated for it with his enthusiasm and eagerness to stay late with

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[185] Original passage: 'Всякая большая выставка есть, в сущности, не праздник, а язва искусства. Нет ничего губительнее для художественного произведения, как быть выставленным на показ толкающейся публике, в огромной уродливой зале, рама к раме с соседним холстом, писанным другим художником другого склада мыслей, другого художественного темперамента' (Diaghilev 1900, 149; as translated in Kennedy 1977, 59).

hangers and by 'taking off his jacket' to work alongside them 'in the midst of the dust', all done in a very positive mood (Ostroumova-Lebedeva 1930).[186]

Another one of his contemporaries who left some recollections of the practical details of Diaghilev's display approach was Arkadii Rylov, a landscape artist who was among the early members of the Mir iskusstva group and of the Union of Russian Artists, and who subsequently became a successful painter and teacher in the Soviet period. Rylov praised Diaghilev's talent for his skills in arranging the exhibition space and, in particular, for the wise stylisation that he employed in its design. He remembered that during the last show organised by the magazine, 'a specific colour of the background was chosen for each artist: the works of Vrubel' were placed against panels draped with a lavender muslin', while Rylov's paintings were framed in oak with an amber-yellow backdrop. 'The pictures by Milioti [were presented] with a gold-plated frame [and] were hang over vibrant red velvet, while the posthumous tribute to Borisov-Musatov was made with white narrow frames next to white muslin decor. The floor was covered with blue broadcloth' (Rylov 1934).[187] The ensemble

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[186] Original passage: 'Художникам не возбранялось приходить на устраиваемую выставку, но без права голоса, так как право развески и все дела по выставке были художниками переданы одному Дягилеву [...]. Бывало на выставке идет большая спешка. Дягилев, как вихрь, носится по ней, поспевая всюду. Ночью не ложится, а сняв пиджак, наравне с рабочими таскает картины, раскупоривает ящики, развешивает, перевешивает – в пыли, но весело, всех вокруг себя заражая энтузиазмом. Рабочие, артельщики беспрекословно ему повиновались и, когда он обращался к ним с шутливым словом, широко, во всех рот ему улыбались, иногда громко хохотали. И все поспевали вовремя. Сергей Павлович утром уезжал домой, брал ванну и, изящно одетый, как денди, являлся первый, чтобы открыть выставку. [...] Конечно, я говорю о тех годах, когда в выставках участвовало человек тридцать, не больше. Когда через несколько лет произошло слияние "Мира искусства" с москвичами, Дягилев отошел [...]' (Ostroumova-Lebedeva 1930 in Zil'bershtein 1982b: 321).

[187] Original passage: 'А как Дягилев умел оформлять выставки! Например, на последней выставке журнала "Мир искусства", устроенной в доме шведской церкви, для каждого художника был подобран особого цвета фон: для врубелевских работ щиты были задрапированы светло-лиловым муслином, для моих картин с рамами из дуба фон сделан был из темно-желтого муслина. Картины Милиоти в золотых рамах в стиле Людовика XV висели на ярко-красном бархате, а посмертная выставка Борисова-Мусатова – вся в белых узких рамах на белом муслине. Пол затянут синим сукном. Перед картинами – горшки с гиацинтами, при входе – лавровые деревья' (Rylov 1934 in Zil'bershtein 1982b: 323).

was complemented by laurel trees at the entrance and flowers placed right in front of the artworks.

By the first years of the century, this integral vision of the exhibition had spread far beyond Diaghilev's persona and had come to encompass the pursuits of several artists beyond those strictly associated with the Mir iskusstva. Prime examples of this were the shows that embraced multiple disciplines, including design and architecture, namely the ones organised in the context of the *Contemporary Art* enterprise started in 1902 in St Petersburg[188] and the First Architecture Exhibition in Moscow (1902–1903). They were an expression of an updated outlook on the role of design in contemporary creative production and reflected the desire to keep pace with the trends in Central Europe.[189]

The attitudes adopted by the Mir iskusstva leader were pragmatic in a broad range of aspects, including in the selection of participants, his well-planned rhetoric of innovation, his attempts to expand the repertoire of artistic forms (such as presenting items from the field of applied arts alongside easel painting), and in securing an opening period that would anticipate the scheduling of potential rivals; all these tactics aimed at establishing an audience (which reached 15000 visitors for the 1903 Mir iskusstva exhibition) and attracting potential collectors. Exhibition designs represented one of the core elements of this strategy, which was comprised of structuring the space by grouping the works of one artist together (Lapshin 1998: 61).

What is interesting is that this elaborate layout aimed at differentiating the exhibitions from the prevailing trends, which were drawing significant criticisms at the time on account of their 'commercial' attitude. As already mentioned in section 2 of the Chapter One, various elements of the European secessionist models permeated Russia's artistic life by the end of the century, and Diaghilev wanted to benefit from

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[188] Some discussion of these events is provided, for instance, by Bowlt (1979: 97–99) and Dolgova (2019). Some reviewers of these exhibitions were translated in Experiment Editors 2001a, 2001b.

[189] A deeper analysis of these ventures will be carried out in the following sections.

this state of affairs in alignment with both his organisational gifts and his commitment to aesthetic excellence.

The resemblance between art exhibitions and the marketplace was the main issue that bothered many members of the fin-de-siècle cultural elites in Russia. Benois once said that the Spring salon of the St Petersburg Society of Artists (a profoundly academic formation, despite the fact that it had only been founded in 1890, which linked with the peredvizhniki by the end of the decade due to their common intolerance of the modernist trends expressed by both the Mir iskusstva and other Moscow artists of a symbolist orientation) was nothing but a 'temporary store' that was unrelated to truly artistic values, while Diaghilev sustained that the peredvizhniki mounted their shows as bazaars in spaces that recalled the halls of train stations (Lapshin 1998: 61). To treat an exhibition as a proper work of art, praising its totality, was in this case the solution that they considered as optimal for addressing this problem.

At the same time, in the market of the last years of the century there was a clear trend of artists that were trying to appease the tastes of regular small collectors, resulting in the totality of works presented at different sorts of exhibitions being humorously mediocre. Overall, the era's art market in the Russian empire was relatively small, amounting to approximately a quarter of a million roubles. Diaghilev did everything he could in the realm of networking to secure publicity upon the opening nights prior to the launching of his exhibitions and to attract the presence of royal personalities when possible. At the 1900 exhibition of the Mir iskusstva, the

Tsar and the Empress purchased several items produced at the Abramtsevo workshops, as well as embroidery and ceramics by Golovin (Lapshin 1998: 62).[190]

Diaghilev's extreme attention to detail governed even the largest project of his early period, namely the 1906 Russian exhibition at the Salon d'Automne. As reported by Benois in his diary, Diaghilev was allegedly 'hypercritical' regarding the set-up, and 'instead of paying visits to important places spent days changing the hanging of the paintings and tormenting the upholsterers' (as cited in Tolstoi 1981: 282). Generally, the design of that show was carefully thought through, and every epoch treated in it was decorated in its own style. The next subchapter is entirely dedicated to analysing that landmark event.

[190] By the early 1900s, the Mir iskusstva pool of artists has garnered broad recognition and loyal clients among the highest segments of the elites (although the academic environment was firmly hostile to the miriskusniki). Indeed, as suggested by Lapshin, their core achievement was to be found in the development of a stable network of private collectors, reaching individuals such as Tenisheva, Morozov, Ostroukhov and Vladimir V. von Meck. However, in this regard its mission was not at all over; its final goal was illustrated in the 1906 show, which played with legitimising schemes, vindicated the imperial heritage, and symbolically eliminated the peredvizhniki from the collective heritage which the new Russian art was basing itself on.

V. EXHIBITIONS AS THE STAGE FOR LEGITIMISING GENEALOGIES

'The past never stays invariable. It changes with
us and always accompanies us in the present'[191]

Maksimilian Voloshin

1. *Exposition de l'art russe* (1906): the quest for an art-historical identity

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Russian artists of an academic or critical realist outlook had been occasionally presenting their work at the Paris salons. However, as was stressed by Tolstoi (1983a: 121), their appearances were provoking the interest of French criticisms only insofar as they related to conceptions of 'national types' and in terms of the possibility to learn about Russian life. In the late 1880s, the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts showed its interest in establishing links with French artistic groups, focusing mainly on those maintaining an academic orientation. These efforts resulted in several exhibitions of French art,[192] but the Society also strove to set up small displays of Russian art in Paris as a means of exchange and, notably, in order to arrange a channel for promoting and selling Russian art abroad. As was reported by Tolstoi (1983b: 64), the Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a request to the French authorities, probably in the late 1900, for an exhibition space to use during the fall for several weeks to exhibit Russian art. In the benevolent climate of the Russo-French Rapprochement of those years, the request was satisfied, and the Society was granted some halls at the Grand Palais (the venue which would be used for Diaghilev's exhibition in 1906) which were available

[191] Original passage: 'Прошлое никогда не остается неизменным. Оно меняется вместе с нами и всегда идет рядом с нами в настоящем' (Voloshin 1904).

[192] See the list of the shows in Tolstoi 1983b: 172–198 and also see Dorontchenkov 2021.

to be utilised from 1902. Nevertheless, the concession was not activated for reasons impossible to establish, and the attempt to create this channel must be considered abortive.

The Salon d'Automne was an institution that flourished and was successful from its very first editions. As was underscored by Huston, its emergence marked a decisive change in the outline of such organisations and in the Parisian art scene more generally, at a time when established masters directly impacted and controlled the paths of emerging artists (Huston 1989: 128). By the beginning of the new century, the Salon des Indépendants was becoming increasingly crowded, and different suggestions were circulating, including ideas about organising special showcases that could serve as 'vitrines' to present selections of the most progressive pieces by artists who were regular contributors to the existing salons, namely the Indépendants and the Salon Nationale des Beaux Arts. The project of a brand-new organisation was set in motion with the invitation of Frantz Jourdain, an architect of a well-articulated modernist attitude who had profound sympathy for the Impressionists, to serve as a president of the nascent venue.

What is noteworthy is that, with this figure at the leadership, the Salon d'Automne recognisably became a platform that, rather than defending the interests of a narrow set of artists (Huston 1989: 128), instead was oriented towards the promotion of a vision in both the visual field and that of cultural policy that was rooted in the attitudes of a specific social group, that of the republican elite. Among the honorary members listed in the catalogues of the first editions of the salon were numerous French literati and key personalities of the art system, including, for example, the curator of the Luxembourg Museum Léonce Bénédite, mentioned above. Moreover, in its frameworks, alongside the fine arts, ample space was dedicated to the crafts, and, in the following years, to furniture and even literary talks and music.

The crucial novelty introduced by the Salon d'Automne was that, in contrast to the formerly founded alternative exhibition associations, it was structured not to

foster the careers of younger artists through the conjoined presentation of their works with those of established artists, but instead aimed to involve young artists in order to give the exhibition a 'modern', progressive appearance in general. Thus one should also notice that its supposed marginality, serving the mythology of a salon struggling against artistic conservatives, was a thoughtful rhetorical tool that in reality was only found in the introductions to the salon's catalogues; this argument might be even further supported by the fact that the Salon d'Automne maintained close links with the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts and was, as already mentioned, supported by the dominant social groups (Huston 1989: 139–141, 203). This organisation overall had serious backing, but at the same time was very eager to promote the image of a militant artistic approach. This made it a perfect stage for marketing innovative art and a potential interlocutor to the foreign art groups who sought a stable but fresh and rigorous foothold to introduce themselves to the international audience, that had for long kept its gaze directed towards Paris.

The Russian section at the Salon d'Automne, mounted under the leadership of the relentless Diaghilev in 1906, is often described as a turning point in the process of the 'conquest of the West' performed by Russian artists, headed and long aspired by him.[193] Indeed, it was an event of outstanding importance, but it might be useful to situate it within this period in a slightly different way. The aforementioned historiographical effect is partly rooted in the fact that this episode is often inscribed within a broader chronology – either that of the Ballets Russes enterprise or the avant-garde movements in Russia – and is therefore commonly perceived as an anticipatory episode or a precursor to the radical wave of innovation in Russian visual culture. As it occurred in the case of earlier exhibitions realised through the

[193] On this regard the comparison can be made between his earlier declarations and the discourse that he elaborates around 1906, see Diaghilev 1896 and Diaghilev 1906a; Diaghilev 1906b.

contributions of Diaghilev and his associates,[194] it is accompanied by a myth of being a decisive triumph of the 'Russian school' that shaped its path for years thereafter. Because of its well-articulated ambition to challenge the opinions on Russian art that were dominant in the European capitals, the fact that it fitted the exhibit to the 'consumption' of those audiences (Sharp 2006: 143) gets slightly obscured. Nonetheless, the circumstances of both its organisation and reception were more intricate and deserve to be reassessed.

Despite the fact the fact many studies dedicate some space to this episode, the monographic works exploring it are limited to Tolstoi (1982; 1983a; 1983b) and more recently Chernysheva Mel'nik (2020). Toltoi's article, partly departing from Lapshina (1977: 189–192), is resourceful and dense in factual material, but his input has regrettably been only narrowly introduced into broader discussions. The second author offers only a brief analysis of the episode, and his perspective is limited to how the endeavour was seen by few exponents of Russian art journalism.[195] Meanwhile, the valuable question about how this event resonated with the political climate of the moment was addressed by Sharp (2006: 143–145). However, neither exhaust the potentiality of the subject, and the discussion of this event would surely benefit from further commentary.[196]

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[194] See, for instance, how the presumption regarding the univocally positive feedback on his early projects was dismantled by Dorontchenkov, exemplified by the 1897 Scandinavian exposition (Dorontchenkov 2019b).

[195] It also treats the episode exclusively through the 'anticipatory' point of view, as a preparatory step for the subsequent success of the Ballets Russes, indeed calling it 'the first Russian season'. Surprisingly, the Chernysheva Mel'nik's article does not credit the surveys of Tolstoi.

[196] This exhibition doubtlessly merits interest, not only for the specialised research associated with it but also in terms of curatorial practices and cultural projects. In the last couple of decades there was a growing tendency for reconstructing milestone exhibitions, which extended also to the 1905 *Exhibition of Historic Russian Portraits* that was tentatively re-created at the Russian Museum in St Petersburg in 2009 (see Vasil'eva 2009). Nonetheless, scholarship would sure benefit if such a viewpoint were viewpoint applied to the Russian section at Salon d'Automne in 1906.

Just as occurred in 1895–1896, the vague initial impulse for the 1906 Russian section originated from Alexandre Benois. Using the statements he issued around this date, it is possible to grasp the urgency of the idea that Russian art had finally come to have everything it needed to cease being a marginal actor in the international arena. In a letter to Lancéray from France in early 1906, Benois wrote that:

> 'The more I get acquainted with foreign art, the more I come to realise that we are far from being on the outskirts. Thus, at least theoretically, we can thrive in this sense. But how to arrange it? Who would promote us, organise everything; who is this brand-new, not solely Russian but global Diaghilev?'[197]

He then informed his friend that there were hints of setting up a Russian exhibition, which he held close to his heart, but which was not promising to be arranged as he expected. The core problem of the enterprise at that point lied in the lack of secure funding.

All the artists in their circle were from the very first moment extremely enthusiastic about the perspective of exhibiting in Paris. The reservations that impeded the initiative that were brought forward were largely related to economic issues. Even though, after the successful experience of the Russian contribution at the Paris World Fair, one could easily imagine that mixed artisan-artists' production could once again attract commercial attention in France, those who cherished the idea of presenting the fine arts were discouraged by the insecurity of the prospects. The first potential sponsor that Benois approached was Riabushinskii, who was the main founder and editor of the newly founded bilingual magazine La Toison d'Or, whom

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[197] Original passage: 'Чем больше я знакомлюсь с иностранным искусством, тем больше убеждаюсь, что мы все далеко не последние. Следовательно, теоретически вполне возможно процветание. Но как это осуществить? Кто нас будет рекламировать, устраивать; кто этот новый, уже не российский, а всемирный Дягилев? Здесь стала было налаживаться русская выставка. Я очень горячо отнесся к затее. Но теперь отчего-то повеял другой ветер. [...] Что теперь выйдет, не знаю, но, во-первый, нужны капиталы.' (Benois 1906)

Benois had started collaborating with from its first editions in 1906. As reported by both Lapshina (1977: 190) and Tolstoi (1982: 280) Benois asked Riabushinskii regarding the project, despite the fact that he did not find him likeable. Eventually he did not obtain any support from the merchant. Among other patrons he reached out to were Viktor V. Golubev and Prince Shcherbatov; Golubev was an art historian, collector, and archaeologist, and son of the collector and industrialist Viktor F. Golubev. Golubev Jr. was, like Benois, an alumnus of the Karl May School in St Petersburg and had moved to Paris in 1905. He also was a member of the prominent group of expatriate creatives Union des artistes russes, active since 1903.[198] However, neither of these potential commissioners agreed to contribute to the hypothetical exhibit of Russian art in Paris, for reasons that are currently impossible to establish.

Benois was anxious about keeping the idea confidential, likely because it was becoming popular by that time and other emerging art groups might have been interested in such an enterprise (Benois 1906). Just as it had occurred in the affair around the invitation to the Munich Secession, the grounds intuitively explored by Benois were intercepted by his friend Diaghilev, whose attitude was always more spirited and proactive. The latter must have activated his connections, and in particular those directly linked with state-related personalities. Soon, the head of the St Petersburg Academy, Count Ivan Tolstoi, had warmly welcomed the idea of the exhibition and stepped in as its official commissioner – a fact that guaranteed broad support through different domains, including diplomatic links, loans, and publicity. In April, Diaghilev sent a letter to Benois suggesting that they should immediately begin the work in order to prepare the Russian exhibit by the very next edition of the Salon d'Automne. It is the first time that the location is named in their

[198] Golubev was a prominent personality, highly integrated in both Russian and French cultural circles. His biography and public work represent a valuable glimpse on the intellectual history and the intercultural networks of the epoch. He was connected to artists such as Elizaveta Kruglikova, then an active participant in Parisian art life and the host of the Union des artistes russes, which was also known as Montparnasse circle of Russian artists abroad. He also was close to Nikolai Roerich, and even Auguste Rodin. See some of his letters to fellow intellectuals and artists are available in Polevaia 2006.

correspondence, and the motivation behind the idea of the site is a very interesting question which still needs to be addressed. Diaghilev wrote in decisive and highly ambitious tone:

> 'What do you think of raising the question of a Russian section in the present Salon d'Automne? Petersburg approves of the idea; I too am ready to take the thing on. Could you put out a feeler? The French would be fools not to agree. I'll show them the *real* Russia' (Diaghilev 1906a, as translated in Scheijen 2009: 148–149).[199]

The section was preceded by the success of the *Exhibition of Historic Russian Portraits*,[200] mounted in the St Petersburg Tauride Palace in 1905 (Fig. 35). This is broadly argued as having served as a 'laboratory' for further projects led by Diaghilev, and, in particular, for the one in the Salon d'Automne (Bowlt 2011: 77; Tolstoi 1982: 279), both because of its success and the tools developed within it. The Tauride Palace retrospective was a unique initiative with a persistent theatrical component (Bowlt 2011: 78). The exhibits there were arranged according to historical phases, mainly structured around the sequence of the reigns of different monarchs. The organisers had decorated each of them according to the spirit and style of a specific epoch (Kruglov 2009: 18–19). A travelling exhibition being placed within a contemporary venue such as the Salon d'Automne was an unprecedented approach. In its design solutions, it followed the standards of museum display that were starting to spread over the world at the turn of the century. Bakst was in charge with thee set design,

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[199] Original passage: 'Что ты думаешь, если теперь возбудить вопрос об устройстве русского отдела в нынешнем Salon d'Automne. В Петербурге на это согласны, я тоже готов взяться за дело. Не можешь ли закинуть удочки. Французы будут дураки, если не согласятся. Я берусь показать им настоящую Россию' (Diaghilev 1906a). Emphasis added.

[200] Numerous installation views photographs remained as a documentation of that exhibit. Apparently, they were issued in the form of a series of postcards.

both at the portrait show of 1905 and in Paris the year after.[201] Another major trial before the Paris exhibition was the Mir iskusstva show, organised in February 1906 and featuring several artists from the emerging Symbolist cohort. It prepared the conceptual grounds for the international project.

Benois was impressed and even shocked at the promptness with which developments were unfolding, and was intrigued to discover the source of funding that Diaghilev had succeeded in securing. The interest from the Russian cultural press was encouraging for the personalities involved the arts, and in no small part for Benois (Tolstoi 1983a: 135), who had much less control of the situation after Diaghilev rose to the task. Paradoxically, after Diaghilev left Paris in late August, where he supposedly made important contacts with potential French partners, not least thanks to Benois' connections,[202] the latter was not being kept updated on the course of the preparations and, being abroad, was to some extent excluded from the process which he himself was advancing at a brisk pace during the summer months.

What was pivotal about the 1906 show in Paris was the fact that it was an unprecedented independent venture, notwithstanding the fact there was certainly substantial support and loyalty towards it from the highest ranks of imperial and academic circles. The project relied heavily on the contributions of private collectors and cherished the potential to grow the network of patronage between France and Russia. A large part of the presented works had been lent by Russian collectors, namely Ivan Morozov, Vladimir Girshman, Ivan Troianovskii, and Vladimir von Meck. There were also loans from the collections of Sergei Botkin and Alexander Hausch (Lapshin 1998: 66). The artists and organisers arrived in Paris approximately a month before the arranged opening date. In his journal, Benois wrote that he was

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[201] The fact that, right from the beginning, Bakst was to be in charge of the exhibition design is illustrated by an encouraging article that appeared in Zolotoe runo no. 6.

[202] It is most likely that Benois had introduced his friend to Bénédite, who then secured the connection to the Salon d'Automne. Moreover, Diaghilev linked with the Russian diplomatic representatives, who then attended the opening of the show.

surprised to find out that the exhibition had been approved in the highest levels, and was even supposed to be presided over by the head of the St Petersburg Academy: 'A letter from Valechka: the exhibition is to be held under the aegis of Vladimir Aleksandrovich in Paris! Well, no one opposes that? Had even Zhenia lost his tongue? I find it ridiculous'.[203] His tone was clearly disillusioned, for Benois had probably aspired to mount an independent initiative and not play in the political realm. He described the final days before the exhibition as full of worries and urgency. He reported that 'all the time there were the Girshman spouses, [André] Saglio,[204] Ivan Morozov, Alexandra Botkina, Ivan Shchukin, who criticised everything outrageously. Later, Argutinskii and the unbearable Grabar'.[205] Everything indicates that Diaghilev had succeeded in providing the exhibition with institutional prestige; for example, the opening was attended by the President of France, Armand Fallières. Yet, Diaghilev likely disappointed his patrons by disregarding protocol and forgetting to introduce them to the French president.

Even through the official title of the display was *Two centuries of Russian painting and sculpture*, the historical narrative staged within it was drawn from the religious icons of historical Rus' presented therein. Prior to this show, neither abroad nor in Russia was there ever an exhibition that had organised the art of different epochs in a such well-articulated chronological order. Moreover, no private or even public collection in Russia had ever represented the history of Russian art so consistently in the context of a perfectly conveyed art historical narrative. This is one of the most essential aspects of the whole enterprise, despite the fact that the selection

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[203] Original passage: 'От Валечки письмо: выставка состоится и под президентством Владимира Александровича в Париже! И что же никто не протестует? Неужели и Женя проглотит? Пожалуй, это и потешно' (Benois 2008 [1906]: 72).

[204] French attaché who oversaw French artistic involvement in the World Fairs.

[205] Original passage: 'Постоянно бывали там: чета Гиршманов, Саглио, И.А. Морозов, А.П. Боткина, И.И. Щукин, который все безобразно ругал. Позже: Аргутинский и несносный Грабарь' (Benois 2008 [1906]: 72; Tolstoi 1981: 282).

was, naturally, highly partisan in its priorities. Partly, this ambition was attributable to the urgency of reassessing the chronology of Russian culture, a feeling that radiated from the controversies of the months of first Russian revolution in 1905 (Tolstoi 1982: 284). Indeed, one of Benois' main claims in the catalogue essay was that the show presented a coherent narration about Russian identity expressed through art. In this context, the presence of icons and kustar production were paradoxically promoting that identity in the same domain as the Russian 1900 pavilion in Paris did, namely through non-Western and often 'primitive' imaginaries, inadvertently emphasising its imperial, expansive character. This duality was exactly what Benois himself had been protesting against on the occasion of the Paris World Fair. To some degree it contradictorily shows him as still attached to the 'national school' concept. In the meantime, the Salon d'Automne was a platform that was tentatively imagining the art process in a more cosmopolitan manner.

However, this project was truly strategic exactly as it pertains to the ways in which history was treated through the prisms of the miriskusniki. It was shrewdly staged throughout this exhibition, which reasserted very diverse aspects of Russian cultural history. The most recent artworks, those that demonstrated its synchronous nature with Western trends, were shown to have roots in 18th century art, with its aristocratic elegance itself representing a segment of the dialogue with European art while simultaneously exuding a distinctly Russian spirituality in the form of the icons. Diaghilev described the point of view he chose as the most contemporary one. He deliberately did not aim to offer the viewer a properly objective vision, and justified his choice, its arbitrariness notwithstanding, by citing the needs of the moment which corresponded for him to the needs of the *recent* Russian art. In the introduction to the catalogue, he wrote that what the show corresponded to the 'true image of the contemporary artistic realm in Russia, its sincere spirituality, its respectful admiration

before the past, and its ardent faith in the future'.[206] At the same time, it was the same logic that stood behind the words of Benois, who thought it was the right moment 'to obtain a certain certification from Paris[207] when he tried to conceptualise the project in its earliest stages. Although the exhibit employed the World Fair 'national pavilion' logic within the completely different and more elegant context of an independent exhibition society, the national was presented here though original curatorial juxtaposition where the folk imageries were placed in the same timeline with the examples of aristocratic culture (Sharp 2006: 144–145).

Generally, the goal of the Russian section at the Salon d'Automne was to demonstrate the common affinities in the pedigree of contemporary Russian and European art, and through that idea claim the space for the former. Two main goals that served as pillars for the entire endeavour of the retrospective section were the rehabilitation of 18th and early 19th century Russian art, which evolved in step with the Western-European canons of that period, and the removal of the Realist tradition as the principal ambassador of national art. In recuperating the masters of the 18th century, they did exactly that, and they also inserted the narrative of forgotten treasures being finally recovered that was common in the European art historical discourse of the time. Overall, the genealogy fiercely supported by the Mir iskusstva artists and developed through their art-historical pursuits, editorial work, and exhibition projects formed the conceptual grounds of this ultimate Parisian enterprise.

The 12 halls obtained by the organisers were arranged as follows. The first hall, named 'Russian primitives', consisted of 35 icons from the collection of Nikolai Likhachev and one from the collection of Aleksei Khitrovo. The halls numbered from

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[206] Original passage: 'Это верный образ сегодняшней художественной России, ее искреннего одушевления, ее почтительного восхищения перед прошлым и ее горячей веры в будущее' (*Exposition de l'art russe* 1906; Zil'bershtein 1982a: 204)

[207] Original passage: 'Захотелось получить ряд аттестаций от Парижа' (Benois 1980: 452)

two to four dealt with the 18th-century art, while the fifth was dedicated to the masters of the 1830s. The sixth room contained both works of Nikolai Ge and Ivan Kramskoi, alongside pieces by Repin, Levitan, Polenova, and Iakunchikova. The central hall, richly decorated with potted plants and pergola fences, featured Vrubel's paintings, sculptures, and graphic works, as well as Korovin's paintings. The next rooms hosted the production of Golovin, Roerich, Ap. Vasnetsov, Konstantin Iuon, Serov, Somov, Troubetzkoy, and Artemii Ober. There was a section with impressionistic work by Grabar', Nikolai Tarkhov, and Mikhail Larionov, and then a hall with works by Alexej Jawlensky, Nikolai Milioti, and Filipp Maliavin. This was followed by one dedicated to the miriskusniki, namely Benois, Bakst, Anna Ostroumova-Lebedeva, Lancéray, Dobuzhinskii, and Elizaveta Kruglikova. The last hall was reserved for symbolist artists from Moscow such as Pavel Kuznetsov, Viktor Boris-Musatov, Aleksandr Matveev, Sergei Sudeikin, and others (Shervashidze 1906[208]; Tolstoi 1983b: 79). Overall, recent art represented a solid portion of the exhibit and was presented as belonging to the 'newest artists'.

In fact, these artists – who mostly belonged to the Blue Rose group – were concentrated in the concluding route of the exhibition, and since the whole project relied on a genealogical and chronological order, their works were framed as the apex of the entire historical development of Russian art. This is likely one of the main reasons that they received positive feedback from the demanding French observers. Artists such as Boris Kustodiev, Ivan Bilibin, Leonid Pasternak, and Natal'ia Goncharova were also featured, although it is difficult to identify the rooms in which their works were presented. Notably, the rivalry between artists from Moscow and St Petersburg was a feature that was delineated in the exhibition, wisely indicating the dynamism and richness of the artistic developments in Russia at the moment. To

[208] Aleksandr Shervashidze was an artist of Abkhazian origins who studied in Kyiv, Moscow, and Paris and contributed to the exhibition of 1906. He was also a good friend of Benois and the two spent a lot of time together when both were in the French capital during the summer and autumn of that year.

compare two 'schools' of two different cities is a traditional trope of art-historical writing and persisted ever since the times of comparisons between Florentine disegno and Venetian colour.

The design of the exhibition was entrusted to Bakst, who seemed to be satisfied with his work (Fig. 36). He wrote to Somov: 'The Russian section is strong and fresh [...]. Your display was presented with a sage-green background made of solid gunny cloths and was specifically thought of by myself'.[209] Meanwhile, Benois was not happy with the design developed by his colleague, particularly because of its high price. He wrote in his diary: 'What a senseless waste of money for those endless bosquets by Bakst that anyway did not surprise anyone here'.[210]

The catalogue, which bore the simple title 'Exposition de l'art russe', was comprised of over a hundred pages and was richly illustrated and decorated with vignettes also designed by Bakst, one of which translated the atmosphere of 19th-century Russian estates while the rest featured a mixed style that combined allusions to baroque decor or byzantine-inspired ornaments. The first illustration, placed on the first page of the list of works (Fig. 38), had previously appeared in no. 7 of Mir iskusstva (p. 17) and was a vignette to accompany the 4th chapter of Dmitrii Merezhkovskii's essay on L. Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. The choice of placing the image of what might seem like a traditional, generally aristocratic, feudal country mansion right above the list of the works that were intended to sum up the bicentennial history of national art was both symbolic and vitally strategic. The usad'ba, as a cradle of cultural life, was also correlated with the role it acquired through the last third of the century when such estates as Abramtsevo or Talashkino, to list the most notable ones, became centres of revivalist aesthetic ideas and practically fostered the market of folk

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[209] Original passage: 'Русский отдел очень силен и свеж [...]. Твой отдел на серовато-зеленом фоне аппетитной рогожки est particulièrement soignet par moi' (Bakst 1906).

[210] Original passage: 'Такая глупая трата на вечный бакстовский боскет, которым он здесь все равно никого не удивил' (Benois 2008[1906]: 72). The entry is dated by 26–30 September 1906.

crafts. The design of the catalogue cover featured some elements of rural embroidery with a strong folklore quality that was, however, 'mediated' by the refined gaze of the modern artists as was also the case in 1900 (Sharp 2006: 144) (Fig. 37). Nonetheless, it is critical to observe that the interpretation of national style that was developed by those centres was largely ignored by the historical narrative offered in the Paris exhibit.

If 1900 was an exercise in the retrospective cultivation of idyllic folk imaginary, 1906 was also the attempt to revitalise the imperial facets of Russian history. Generally, the excitement for reviewing and re-interpreting its timeline and for conceptualising 'its historical path' were some of the foremost characteristic features of the Mir iskusstva community (Tolstoi 1982: 279).[211] The vision of Russian cultural history that was articulated in the 1906 section tried to address the major identitarian lacuna that were revealed by the Russian contribution at the 1900 World Fair, where the 'metropolitan' culture was excluded from the construct it offered in favour of folk revival, which however was presented with a strong ethnographical stance (Shevelenko 2017: 57).

Diaghilev's Paris project largely consisted in presenting a genealogy of Russian artistic culture, and, coincidently, he also emphasised the importance of the recent production of his fellow miriskusniki and other younger symbolists by providing a concise and elegant pedigree that was deeply rooted in the common Russian and Western-European history. This logic might be further illustrated by the way he neglected art that related to folk or religious topics. In their turn, these omissions, although explained in the catalogue's preface, served as a stimulus regarding the display of Tenisheva's collection in Paris that took place a year later (Tressol 2019: 354–335). The objects and artworks that evoked folklore and fairy-tale inspired imagery were not placed independently, but were integrated into the general narrative

[211] The goal of the 'historical' project of the miriskusniki was bilateral and is deeply rooted in the logic adopted by the protagonists of the group, which, as was repeatedly emphasised by several scholars, aimed to promote (mainly younger-generation) Russian art abroad and foreign progressive (although not yet radical) art in Russia.

staged within the exhibition (Harkness 2009: 279). Tenisheva was furious at Diaghilev's choices and at the way the artists she appreciated the most were presented at the 1906 exhibition, and even sought to convince French critics to condemn his interpretation of 'Russsianness' in the arts.[212]

A broader ambition of the exhibition was to challenge the preconceptions about Russian art that were dominant abroad, and, in particular, in France. To direct the reviews, Benois even accompanied the journalists through the show. Nonetheless, to some extent it once again fell into the trap of the 'European' gaze. The French audience expected to see revocations of Byzantine imagery and was disappointed to witness art that did not manifest any exoticism but instead relied heavily on the European artistic matrix (Tolstoi 1983a: 139). Generally, the response it got from Parisian critics is attributable to the rhetoric used, especially in the catalogue. It compared the exhibits to the exponents of the European schools because it was trying to emphasise Russian art's belonging to a wider tradition (Tolstoi 1983b: 82), and the accusations about imitativeness were a logical side effect of this layout which was genuinely attempting to explain the art presented to the European viewer.

The show was broadly reviewed in France and afterwards in Germany. However, as was argued by Tolstoi (1983b: 148),[213] the diverse character of the French reception alongside the wide range of attitudes that biased them reveal that this event was not univocally deemed positive by critics abroad. The opposite would have been indeed too complicated to happen, as knowledge about Russian art other, than for some exponents of Realist school, had not yet entered the circulation of European criticism. Nevertheless, the attendance of the show was considerable and amounted to 60000 visitors, while the management of the Salon d'Automne officially made 15

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[212] On this regard, see her letter to Nikolai Roerich from Paris in Tenisheva 1906a; 1906b. Sergei Makovskii, who was her friend, wrote some very reserved reviews published in Russia.

[213] A previous, partial assessment of the feedback to the 1906 exhibition in Paris can be found in Alpatov 1960: 288–293.

artists from the Empire members of the society (Russkaia khudozhestvennaia vystavka 1906).

The most frequent idea that appeared in the reviews authored by Roger-Miller (1906), de Saint-Hilaire (1906), and Jamot (1907) concerned the imitative character of the entire artistic tradition. However, a shift in perspective still occurred, as the observers looked more carefully into the formal qualities of the works, trying to evaluate them from the positions of contemporary French criticism, and no longer out of a mere interest of learning about Russia's 'national character'.

Most of articles predictably dwelt on the historical artists and the representatives of the older generation. Yet some of them dedicated considerable attention to the works of 'newer artists', again appraising them formally and in the context of the recent art shown at the salon itself and analogous venues. Jamot (1907) compared Vrubel' to Gustave Moreau, while the impressionist work of Korovin was in his eyes owed to the influence of Anders Zorn; this applied to Serov's and, unexpectedly, to Maliavin's paintings as well. At the same time, the artists who were honoured in comparison to the French Impressionists were Tarkhov and Grabar', whose landscapes were reckoned by Jamot to be among the most 'pleasing' artworks of the entire exhibition. Further on, he appraised Borisov-Musatov as descending from the stylistic paradigms of Maurice Denis and Paul Gauguin and, this time legitimately, reported beardsleyist elements in the graphic works of the miriskusniki (Jamot 1907; Tolstoi 1983b: 152–153). The only modern artist who was praised by the reviewer was Somov, who was surprisingly deemed as 'the least French-like'. The reason for this was apparently to be found in his ironic touches, in relation to both his way of treating erotic subjects and to the re-enactment of the atmosphere of the past in his works.

Meanwhile, another review that dwelt much more on contemporary production was that of de Danilowicz (1906), who dove deeper into the work of Vrubel' – although without disregarding his match with Moreau – and underscored

his dialogue with traditional mythology and the former's revivalist ambition. De Danilowicz reserved the highest praise and recognition for Roerich, Pasternak, and Serov, who he believed 'merited to enter art history'. Vrubel's *Pan* (Fig. 39) was featured in the catalogue of the Paris exhibition as *Le Dieu Pan*, supposedly in order to avoid the embarrassing incidents owed to a misunderstanding of its iconography as happened in 1901 after the Russian section at the Vienna Secession was reviewed by Muther.

Zolotoe runo published a resumé of the French reviews that was, however, cleverly assembled to inform the reader only about positive feedback (Siunnerberg 1906). Even if the exhibition and its Berlin version attracted some criticism back home (Iashchenko 1906; Lazarevskii 1906; Kosorotov 1906; Makovskii 1906a; 1906b; 1906c[214]) largely due to the omission of the mammoths of Realist painting, who were absent not least because the imperial and city collections did not concede the loans, the main opponent of the miriskusniki was not there any longer to attack them. Ironically, one of the articles dedicated to the exhibition and praising its

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[214] Sergei Makovskii was particularly active in his attempt to diminish the achievements of this exhibition. Even if one of the first reviews he composed about it was moderate, those that he issued by the end of the year were centred on the opinion that Diaghilev not only betrayed the 'national direction' in Russian painting (Makovskii 1906c), but also concealed its eventual failures. Thus, he wondered: '[...] if the success, which is so eagerly advertised by those people who were involved here (too involved to be presenting an objective opinion), was real? Above all, the French did not buy any of the works from the exhibition'. Original passage: '[...] перед нами факты, которых нельзя *замолчать*, – факты, вызывающие невольное сомнение: действительно ли *был* тот успех, о котором готовы кричать лица, слишком заинтересованные, чтобы не быть... пристрастными? Прежде всего: ни одной картины с выставки французы не купили' (Makovskii 1906b). Even though one might agree that the show was not as triumphant as Diaghilev cohort claimed, Makovskii's arguments seems to be erroneous. In fact, Makovskii apparently had not visited the Parisian show, but only attended the version mounted in Berlin. Makovskii's statements regarding the sales, in particular, contradict the information that can be found in Benois' diaries. On the 22th of October, the latter wrote, 'Almost all my artworks are sold'. Later he also mentions that 'Bénédite is picking the items in the show for the Luxembourg [Museum]. He has allocated 1000 francs to the exhibiton'. Original passage: 'Почти все мои вещи проданы. [...] Бенедит на выставке выбирает вещи для Luxembourg'a. Всего ассигновал выставке 1000 франков' (Benois 2008 [1906]: 73).

contemporary segments appeared on the pages of Russkie vedomosti, right before Vladimir Stasov's obituary.[215]

In the years thereafter, many Russian artists, including Kandinsky and Jawlensky in the mid-1900s, would submit their works to the Salon d'Automne. However, most of the Russians who would contribute to its exhibitions in the start of the following decade were Symbolist early avant-garde creators. These included Vladimir Baranov-Rossine, Pëtr Konchalovskii, Pavel Kuznetsov, and Il'ia Mashkov in 1910, Bakst, Baranov-Rossine, Alexander Archipenko and Leopold Survage in 1911, and again Archipenko, Baranov-Rossine, and Chagall in 1912. Finally, 1913 saw over fifty artists of Russian origin displayed in the 11th edition of the Salon d'Automne next to the section of Russian folk art.[216]

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[215] However, Stasov wrote a writhing review on the February exhibition of the Mir iskusstva in St Petersburg. See Stasov 1906.

[216] On the engagement of Russian artists of the younger generation with Parisian exhibition platforms, see Marcadé 1979.

2. Russian Symbolism and 'a modern sense of art' at the 1908 Secession in Vienna

In the light of the strategies discussed in the previous chapters, the episode at the 31st edition of the Vienna Secession in 1908 seems like an uncompromising triumph of Russian fin-de-siècle artists within the scope of Europe's independent exhibition platforms. This edition was exclusively dedicated to Russian modernist production. Similar displays had been organised previously by the Secession; for example, it had exhibited a selection of artists from the Polish Artists' Association, Sztuka, based in Krakow, which had concise modernist and cosmopolitan aspirations. In doing so, the Secession followed the example of the Paris salons, including that of the Salon d'Automne. Thus, it had copied the tribute sections scheme and celebrated the recently deceased French symbolist master Eugene Carrière, just as their French colleagues did in the retrospective solo exhibit that was part of the 1906 Salon d'Automne together with an homage to Paul Gauguin.

The Russian edition in 1908 was part of the Secession's policy that aimed at illustrating how the modern artistic sensibility (Fig. 40),[217] which it considered itself as one of the main proponents of, was spreading over different 'national schools'. Unlike in the Paris edition of 1906, in Vienna there were a lot of works related to archaising and fairy-tales stylisations that were pieced by Roerich and Ivan Bilibin. Entitled *Moderne Russische Kunst*, the show occupied the whole building of the Secession in Friedrichstraße. In the preface to the catalogue, which was likely written by a person that was not directly involved in the Russian art process of the moment, the leading roles in the 'modern school of national painting' were ascribed to Roerich, Maliutin, Bilibin, Nesterov, Apollinarii Vasnetsov, and, surprisingly, also to Surikov. Their main achievement, according to the author, was to have introduced the

[217] It is interesting to notice that the scene represented in the poster designed by Bakst is taking place in a studio space featuring three women artists.

principles of 'immediacy and intimate subjectivism towards the ancient monuments of old Russia' (Sokolowsky 1908). However, their work was distinguished from the previous versions of the national style in painting, which the author judged as 'tasteless'. In his statement, he relied on the opinion of Sergei Makovskii, who was himself trying to arrange an exhibition of Russian art abroad during those years.

Makovskii's ideas that the younger generation of Russians who were exploring the themes of the 'national' in their art were supposedly free of the exaggerated sentimentality or the pretentious chauvinist attitudes of the older cohort, were here fully embraced by the author. What attracted both was clearly the commitment to the ideals of 'art for art's sake' and the ability to enclose allusions to 'eternal poetry' in their works. The subjectivity that transpired in the interpretations of the topics was connected to the mythology or the architectural gems of Old Rus'. Other artists in the exhibition, he continued, 'were not able to free themselves from the French influence yet' (Sokolowsky 1908), providing examples of Maliutin, Kustodiev, Lancéray, and Aleksandr Sredin. Moreover, he anticipated that there were also works that gave the chance to explore how primitive and even primordial motifs were approached by modern Russian artists; he dedicated significant space to describing Roerich's work, with particular emphasis to his interpretation of the North and his interest in the archaeological dimension of history. Both were read here as the evocation of the 'primitive' and its profound and spiritual notion of man's relation with the nature, and appreciated for how they were concisely and suggestively introduced to the visitor:

> 'In Roerich's pictures you can hardly see the people. Like trees and animals, like silent stones of deceased villages, they are standing quietly next to the elements of life. They do not exist individually, and it gives the impression that they never existed individually, as if they also used to

> live together with the trees and stones and mythical monsters of antiquity'.[218]

This haunting speculation about the imagery created in the works of Roerich is concluded with the notion that the artist brings the viewer back to the primordial, 'barbaric', original man, and therefore communicates something universal with his art, while references to national history only serve as a framework for this profound endeavour. All these points were derived from Makovskii's essay on Roerich that was published in Zolotoe runo in 1907 (Makovskii 1907).

One of the reviewers reproduced the angle from which the introduction to the catalogue was written, positively assessing the 'archaic' way of portraying nature that the newer Russian artists had developed. Austrian art critic Berta Zuckerkandl argued that:

> 'Already at the Paris World's Fair in 1900 it became evident that Russian art now is oriented towards the Byzantine Empire, and even further back to archaic, primitive forms. This movement is constantly expanding and is interpreted as a symptom of a similar disengagement of Russian art from foreign influences. [...] This deep mysticism of the tectonic also sprouted from that passion of coloration, the intonation of which was a secret held by the peasantry. And who else gave such art its rhythm other than the at times hysterically sweet, at times grandiosely resplendent, in

[218] Original passage: 'Auf den Bildern von Roehrich sieht man kaum die Menschen. Wie Bäume und Tiere, wie stille Steine verstorbener Dörfer sind sie mit den Elementen des Lebens namelos. Sie existieren nicht einzeln und es ruft den Schein hervor, als ob sie einzeln nie existierten, als ob sie auch früher mit den Bäumen und Steinen und mythischen Ungetümen des Altertums ein gemeinsamen Leben führten' (Sokolowsky 1908).

> part chilling, sceptical, but always powerful primal nature of holy Russia?'[219]

Exactly through this kind of semantic operation, these artists could, in her opinion, aim to express an original, characteristically Russian interpretation of 'a modern sense of art' (Zuckerkandl 1908).

Even though the presentations dedicated to Roerich and Bilibin was extensive, there was also a major focus on Bakst and the artists close to the circle of the Blue Rose. In fact, the exhibition also proved to represent a cardinal shift towards Symbolism in Russian art after the 1901 edition, when Viennese audiences had a chance to appreciate Vrubel's work. The show was an important source of affirmation for Russian symbolist painting and particularly for the Blue Rose circle, as Borisov-Musatov, whose inspiration lay behind the collective's formation, was represented with one canvas. Moreover, the exhibition was filled with remarkable examples of various Symbolist inclinations that emerged in the Russian art of the 1900s, not only in the country's main cities but also in provincial centres, a feature that had not previously been included in similar international displays.

Interestingly, the project did not originate from either of the capitals as had happened before, but was conceived of by a critic and art enthusiast mainly based in Kyiv. Aleksandr Filippov (1882–1942), a native of the city, was the editor of the illustrated magazine V mire iskusstva [In the world of art] in 1907–1910 which was modelled after the St Petersburg-based Mir iskusstva. The magazine had also organised several editions of its own art salon that featured Roerich, Petrov-Vodkin,

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[219] Original passage: 'Daß die russische Kunst sich nach Bizanz jetzt orientiert und weiter noch zurück zu archäistisch primitiven Gebilden geht, hat schon 1900 die Pariser Weltausstellung gezeigt. Diese Bewegung ist im steten Wachstum begriffen und wird als Symptom für die endliche Loslösung der russischen Kunst von fremdländischen Einflüssen gedeutet.[...] Dieser tiefen Mystik des Tektonischen entsproß auch jene Leidenschaftlichkeit der Färbung, die anzustimmen, einst Geheimnis des Landvolkes war. Und wer anders als die bald hysterisch süße, bald grandios prangende, halb eisig verzweifelnde, aber immer mächtige Ur-Natur des heiligen Rußland hat solcher Kunst den Rhythmus gegeben?' (Zuckerkandl 1908, as translated in Lehner 2014: 139–140).

and Maliutin in late 1910 – early 1911. Indeed, fellow creatives used to call Filippov a 'little Diaghilev', both for his zeal in organising editorial work and exhibitions and because he sympathised considerably with the aestheticising views of the leader of the St Petersburg group. The choices that he succeeded in presenting in Vienna reflected this logic perfectly (Akinsha 2014: 29). The Vienna exhibit of 1908, although modest in scale, signified 'modern' art's confirmation in the midst of an increasing fascination for all things Russian that was expanding in the second half of the 1900s. Indeed, after 1906, several shows of folk items were set up in Paris, including Tenisheva's collection that was presented in 1907 (Tressol 2019: 352).

The exhibit resulted in Kustodiev, Roerich, and Serov being the only three Russian artists that were invited to become corresponding members of the Union of Austrian Artists. It also led to three purchases from the part of Aurstian-Hungarian authorities, among which was one of the Kustodiev's works that had been presented in 1908 after being featured in Diaghilev's show in Paris (the *Portrait of Polenov's Family*, 1904–1905). However, the 1908 Secession was also remarkable due to its utilisation of the term 'modern', which was applied to the newest works of Russian art. This way, it employed mechanisms similar to those of the 'newest artists' section at Diaghilev's Paris exhibition, where the most progressive art was constructing and then manipulating narratives around tradition in order to claim its place in the contemporary art debate.

3. Modernist exhibitions and the historicising narratives: Sonderbund in Cologne and the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* in London

Subsequently, the *Section russe* travelled to Berlin, where it was exhibited at the Schulte gallery which was to some extent linked to the environment of the Berlin Secession. In 1907, a modified version of the show was presented at the 7th Venice Biennale.[220] However, after that episode, Diaghilev reoriented his activity towards music and theatre, which is the phase of his career that is most broadly addressed by scholars. It is worth noting that throughout the second half of the decade, the institutional landscape of Russian art changed radically as it witnessed the emergence of multiple progressive art groups. However, the exhibition strategies of the generation of artists that were associated with the Mir iskusstva and the Union of Russian Artists that were developed in the international realm were barely affected by those shifts because they relied largely on a foundation of already existing contacts and successful performances.

Among the members of the Russian creative community who shared values and tried, in some sense, to bypass the traditions of the fin-de-siècle groups were, for example, Zolotoe runo in Moscow, Apollon in St Petersburg, and the Kyiv-based V mire iskusstva. All these enterprises placed a strong emphasis on exhibition practices. Apart from Filippov, attempts at exporting Russian art abroad were consistently made by Sergei Makovskii, who organised a show of artists close to the Mir iskusstva in Brussels in 1910 and in Paris the same year. The latter was hosted by the prestigious Bernheim-Jeune gallery, then directed by Félix Fénéon. By that time, Bernheim-Jeune had already displayed the most innovative paintings of the time, including some works by Henri Matisse.

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[220] See Raev (1982; 2000) on the reception of the German version of the show and see Bertelè (2011a; 2011b) on the circumstances surrounding the display in Venice in 1907.

Personal links established through the early 1900s were vital for securing Russian artists' presence in foreign exhibitions. Notably, there were two exhibitions that were afterwards acknowledged as particularly remarkable for their considerable contributions to the establishment of the canons of European modernism. The input of Russian exhibitors in those occasions was limited. However, the tools that were employed by their organisers for arranging their displays, and the discursive choices that accompanied them, render these two episodes worthy of further examination.

A number of art shows from the early 1910s have become recognised as key events for the affirmation of the modernist paradigm. These episodes range from the small, chamber-like first exhibition of Der Blaue Reiter that took place in late 1911, to the massive *Armory Show* in New York in 1913, all valued for the expressive radicalness of the art they featured. However, one of their most common distinctive features concerned how they prepared the international success of the artists working with the most experimental forms, both in terms of critical acclaim and the market. Some of these milestone exhibits, however, contained a strong retrospective element, which was used for the benefit of the younger artists. Two of these shows were organised in 1912 in succession, and, although they were set up in Cologne and London by two different groups of commissioners, had a profound link between them while also adopting the same emphasis on a retrospective outlook.

These were the *Internationale Kunstausstellung des Sonderbunds westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler* (International Art Exhibition of the West German Special League of Art Lovers and Artists), mounted in Cologne, and the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* organised in London at the Grafton Galleries under the leadership of Roger Fry, by then already a prominent art critic and historian. Both represented the apex of the expansion of independent exhibition societies that was unfolding at the turn of the century. At the same time, everything in the wider rhetoric employed in these shows was centred around the defence of innovation and its legitimation.

By those years, it had become a common practice for medium and large-scale group exhibits to incorporate tribute sections into their selections. They were usually celebrative rooms devoted to the oeuvre of a recently deceased artist, often arranged in collaboration with an art dealership, in commemoration of those masters who were regarded as essential to the day's art by the members of the committee. Although it was a form which partly derived from the exhibition practices of the French art academy (Gahtan and Pegazzano 2018: 3), its importance for the discourse that aimed at providing a validation for the vanguards of the late 1900s and 1910s cannot be overestimated. Different kinds of appeals to historical references, both vague and personified in relation to an older master, were used by critics and exhibition organisers to justify their preferences.[221]

The 4th Exhibition of Sonderbund opened in Cologne in 1912, instead of Dusseldorf, where the organising body had mounted the previous editions. Especially from the second edition and thereafter, these were open to foreign art, and introduced innovative French works to the provincial German audiences by displaying artists such as Pierre Bonnard, Paul Signac, Édouard Vuillard, and early Georges Braque. Jawlensky and Kandinsky eagerly participated in that second Sonderbund. The Cologne edition was shown at the city's newly-built Kunsthalle and was composed of thirty rooms and almost six hundred works. Notably, an unprecedentedly elaborate network of actors independent from both state politics and the academic environment – from museum curators to artists and art leaders – was involved in its realisation. Neither did this composition attract too much criticism from the conservative part of audience, because there were well-known patrons and provincial politicians backing the initiative. Presided over by the art historian Richart Reiche, the committee expressed the ambition of introducing the most innovative painting styles (Reiche 1912: 3) alongside illustrating their pedigree, which was to be found in

[221] Their complex intersections were the root of numerous historiographical controversies, as well as the perpetuation of stereotypes by contemporaneous critique.

the masters of the 1880s–1890s, notably Van Gogh (125 paintings), Cézanne, and Gauguin (circa 25 works each). Many of these came from private collections, such as that of Karl Ernst Osthaus (Stamm 2012: 59), an open-minded art patron and the founder of the Folkwang Museum in Hagen, which was the leading institution devoted to modern art in the 1920s. The catalogue introduction indicated that the goal of the project was to 'discover to what extent the modern movement looks back to the old masters' (Reiche 1912: 6–7). By so doing, it claimed that contemporary German art was part of that cosmopolitan tradition which, especially in the case of the last two, became normalised through that same tribute displays at the Salon d'Automne: Cézanne was featured in 1904 and 1907, and Gauguin in 1906. The Sonderbund show also featured Signac, Picasso – who was juxtaposed to El Greco, another guest from the past – and Munch. As for the Expressionist cohort extensively presented here, the exclusion of the Fauves (Matisse was featured by only six works) was a deliberate committee choice that aimed to conceal his influence on German artists exploring the expressionist field and emphasise their originality and the Nordic roots of their art (Cestelli Guidi 1992: 27). Within that context, several pieces by 'Russian Munichers' were placed next to their colleagues from Der Blaue Reiter under the brackets of recent German art in rooms 17 and 18. There were two works by Vladimir Bekhteev, namely *The Rider* (*Rossebändiger*) from 1912[222] and *Diana on the Hunt* (*Diana auf der Jagd*), the latter having remained unsold. There were four works by Jawlensky, a *Self-portrait* and *Girl in Light Blue* (*Mädchen in Lichtblau*), which was sold at the show alongside a *Still-life* and *Read Head* (*Rotkopf*) from 1910. The other two are unidentifiable. He also contributed a *Female Portrait* (*Damenbildnis*) painted in 1912, which for some time remained in the collection of the sister-in-law of the writer Il'ia Erenburg. In room 17 there were two canvases by Kansinkii: *Improvisation Nr. 21a* from 1911, which is now in the collection of

[222] Now part of the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner Foundation.

Lenbachhaus, and *Boat Trip* (*Kahnfahrt*), created in 1910 (signed in Versailles), which entered the Tretyakov Gallery in 1922.

A number of exhibits from the Sonderbund were previously presented at *Manet and Post-Impressionists,* an ambitious show ideated by Roger Fry and also presented at the Grafton Galleries in 1910. In fact, the decision of building up a genealogy of contemporary artistic production starting from the three key figures of Van Gogh, Cézanne, and Gauguin was correlated to the way that Fry elevated Manet to the altar of a patriarch of modern art. This first enterprise he mounted was sharply criticised, but it became an exemplary case of how history-making was performed in the context of exhibitions, and was broadly examined by scholars.[223]

Fry had extended his theorising over modern art through the two exhibitions,[224] and while preparing the second one drew greatly on his experience of visiting the Cologne Sonderbund, which he had reported on for The Nation (Fry 1912). Even though Fry exported the use of the triad upon which the Cologne exhibit was based, he attributed a special place to the legacy of Cézanne. The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition opened in October 1912 and lasted, with a short pause, until January 1913. The rearranged appearance of the exhibition that was finalised in January might be recreated based on the updated edition of the catalogue (Fry, Bell, and Anrep 1913).

The exhibition was composed of three areas that were delineated more or less based on geographic criteria, but apparently without much classifying rigour. Fry curated the French part, and in doing was chiefly preoccupied with establishing the causal ties between Cézanne and the most recent British art. His colleague and friend, Clive Bell, was in charge with the British part, while there was also supposed to be an

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[223] See Nicolson 1951; Bullen 1988; Gruetzner Robins 1997: 15–45; 2010, Bruneau-Rumsey 2009 and Burlington Magazine vol. 152 (Shone 2010), various articles in which are dedicated to this issue.

[224] Fry's approach was significantly informed by the ideas of Meier-Graefe (Falkenheim 1980: 19) and was characterised by a profoundly formalist stance, which at the same time, did not exclude the spiritual dimension of aesthetic experience (Twitchell 1987: 42).

extensive Russian section overseen by Boris Anrep. Anrep was a Russian expatriate artist who, alongside Fry, shared a fascination with Byzantine art. He wrote an article about the exhibition in Russian which was published in Apollon (Anrep 1913).

However, Fry also wanted to connect the tradition of Cézanne with other national schools in order to illustrate the expansion of his visual language and ideas. Fry believed that his art was a perfect expression of the 'classic spirit', and this notion helped the critic to better conceptualise his reflection on Post-Impressionism, which was rooted in an evolutionist outlook and attempts to structure modern art as a lineage of formal developments. It is important to note that that Fry's theoretical approach was influenced by his earlier background in Early Renaissance art (Shiff 1984: 144).

A peculiar overlap of these ideas, and his reading of Cézanne as an iteration of 'classic' imagery in particular, had likely influenced his presumptions about Russian art. Moreover, on the earlier steps of his career as a critic, Fry labelled Cézanne, together with Gauguin, as 'proto-Byzantines' (Verdi 2017: 544). In 1911 there was also a performance of the Ballets Russes in London where it was touring for the first time, and it is plausible that the impulse for this Russian section derived from there. The tour's programme included the opera *Prince Igor*, performed with a set designed by Roerich that was guided massively by an archaising aesthetic evoking the themes of Slavic paganism.

The choice of artists and the respective works arranged by Fry for his exhibition reflected his interest in primitivist evocations (Protopopova 2008: 90) (Fig. 41). Fry also underscored the synthetic qualities of new Russian art and its decorative potential. From a logistical standpoint, there was reportedly a problem either with shipping or with customs control that impeded the arrival of a portion of the works on time. Goncharova's, Mikhail Larionov's, and Martiros Sar'ian's contributions only appeared for the rearrangement in January, and immediately garnered attention (Igumnova 2006: 19). It is most likely that Goncharova was featured with two works

from the series *The evangelists* (1911) that mixed the expressionist arsenal with religious iconography, and with *Street in Moscow* from 1909. Larionov's works included a variation on the subject of the soldier, while Roerich displayed eight canvases – including *Battle in the Heavens* – and several sketches for set designs (Igumnova 2006: 20) (Fig. 42). The emphasis on the archaism present in Russian art as a phenomenon with a strong spiritual potential was also emphasised by Anrep in the introductory note (Anrep 1912). The Byzantine and Scythian allusions, as explored by the art of Natal'ia Goncharova and Roerich, must have swayed Fry. Additionally, they likely met the public's expectations for exotic and archaising imagery (Protopopova 2008: 89–91) and resonated with the Byzantine ideal revered by Fry and his circle. Members of the Bloomsbury Group were deeply enchanted by Byzantine art, which formed an important element in their aesthetic views and the ways they theorised about them. It was considered as an ancestor of authentic and genuine expressiveness (Berkowitz 2018). Serving as spiritual-aesthetic category rather than a proper historical source, it allowed Fry to formulate a rhetoric of transcendent values that united the great art of the past with the great art of the day, which he proceeded to incorporate throughout his practice.

Overall, in giving the floor to progressive artists, including several Russians, these exhibitions also made a remarkably instrumental use of history. This served as a validating means for the most audacious examples of stylistic innovation, presenting them as heirs to the French art of the 1880s and 1890s that had been gaining momentum on the market and steadily entering not only private, but also public collections in Europe at the time.

CONCLUSION

This thesis addressed the history of Russian turn-of-the-century art groups through a lens that emphasised the wide range of ways through which they programmed and instrumentalised their participations in exhibitions abroad. Particular emphasis was given to their participation in the secessionist platforms of the dominant art and cultural centres of Europe such as Munich and Paris. This thesis demonstrated that, in this context, shifting the analytical focus from the categories of cultural or national identity to the dimension of strategies prove profoundly beneficial. This orientation is useful because such a perspective attributes active roles to the artists and emphasises the ways in which they exercised their agency, instead of supposing that their actions were exclusively dictated by their membership or participation in a specific background. Modernist artists in Russia, just like their foreign peers, consciously made use of diverse strategies, within which their approaches towards exhibition practices played a vital role.

The findings of this study can be collectively understood as a new interpretation of the processes under which the international artistic networks that involved Russian modernist artists became established. By the late 1890s, the younger generation of artists in Russia were becoming increasingly motivated to participate in the European exhibition process. This necessity led them to reformulate their image in accordance with their goals of exhibiting their works abroad, beyond the supervising gaze of the academy. To accomplish this, they all shared an urgency to express themselves as the representatives of a modern national school, the latter being the most widely adopted criterion for critical appraisal at the independent art shows and therefore a crucial issue for most artists' professional identities. At the same time, they were in line with two main preoccupations shared by their colleagues abroad. The first was to find or expand one's presence in the art market, while the second concerned their aspirations to secure their place within the wider art-historical

narrative, which was imposed by the dominant paradigm centred around art history and which was increasingly determining art practice. These needs were complemented by the increasing prominence of the mechanisms of external validation, which, as I argued, compelled artists to exhibit abroad regardless of the prospects of gaining ground within the foreign art communities.

Throughout this thesis various aspects of this process were scrutinised, leading to the following conclusions. Firstly, Russian fin-de-siècle artists' contributions to the independent art exhibitions and Secessions in European art capitals stimulated a major discussion between conservatives and progressive members of artistic field, centred around the aesthetic values and formal features associated with the movements that were gaining momentum in the European scene at the period. Secondly, the Russian art groups of that generation, namely the Mir iskusstva and the Union of Russian Artists, evaluated and tried to import the secessionist models they observed in Europe (primary from an organisational standpoint, but in some cases also in terms of stylistic choices). They did so in order to be more up-to-date and to be able to 'speak the same language' as their peers abroad. Thirdly, many Russian artists of different stylistic orientations carefully and wisely aligned themselves (sometimes probably not entirely deliberately) to the trends of the international exhibitions and to what they perceived were the expectations of foreign audiences regarding their work. Their eventual successes in those occasions worked as a catalyst for the expansion of certain themes; this was the case of the later phase of folk revival, and, as was argued in this thesis, also applies to the proliferation of motifs centred around the Russian North. Finally, by the mid-1900s, the use of art history as a tool within the exhibition's wider narrative had become another increasingly important strategy for the organisation of their presentations.

Overall, the argument that aesthetic agendas were not the sole motive force of the changes witnessed in Russian fin-de-siècle art was supported by providing evidence that these developments fit closely with, and were often anticipated by,

concrete institutional alterations. This thesis argues that it was these alterations that actually opened the way for and enabled changes in form, instead of subscribing to the conventional claim in the relevant literature that sees a reversed relationship between the two domains. To actively be involved in the art field was the precondition that no artist could neglect, and therefore, in order to give space to expressive innovation, they had to primarily and fundamentally secure themselves a platform and space within that field.

The discourse that eagerly compared Russian art with foreign art assumed a steady pace in the 1890s for the reasons discussed above. Therefore, the entire grid for evaluating works of art was going through a major process of disruption and renegotiation at the period, and artists were increasingly looking for opportunities for confrontation and cultural exchange in order to be in a position to better evaluate their work. As argued here, the idea of national singularity in the arts, which itself as a category had been formulated in the context of global events such as the World Fairs, or the imperative to present an updated version of a national school, were the predominant factors driving the exhibition strategies of the artists entering the mature phase of their paths in the late 1890s–early 1900s. To exhibit abroad through a reliance on the proper networks instead of on the academic environment that had for long overseen and determined the nature of Russian contributions at foreign art gatherings (which were then largely limited to the World Fairs) meant that artists and creative groups needed to think more carefully about what works to send and how to relate to the criticism received there. Moreover, outside the World Fairs, artists were less constrained by politics and could explore the still very topical issues of national singularity in the arts in a more liberal manner.

This thesis also explored the rhetoric adopted by Russian artists and exhibition organisers as a powerful device that allowed them to reorient public opinion within the logic of external validation. Thus, as was illustrated among other cases, no project of Diaghilev's throughout the decade of 1896–1906 was an

uncompromising victory. Nonetheless, he rearranged the positive and neutral feedback to lay out his argumentation in the press, thereby creating successes out of his endeavours. First, he did so at the 1898 exhibition in Munich, but he also pursued the same strategy in 1906, this time attempting to give directions to the French art journalists about how to write their reviews. This practice was imitated by the leaders of the art groups that emerged in Russia in the late 1900s, for example by Sergei Makovskii.

To sum up, I wish to foreground the argument that all the participations analysed and compared in this thesis were unified by the ambition to be included into the narratives of the new and relatively globalised art; this is by essence a purely modernist pursuit, one that characterises the modern artist as a sociocultural archetype. Faced with the European fin-de-siècle art scene, Russian artists, whose paths I sought to reflect on here, did succeed in linking themselves with the secessionist environments, members of which were the gatekeepers of the symbolist-Jugendstil domain; however, they basically failed in attracting the consistent support of the private galleries which would go on to become the leaders of determining trends in the art process (and secured the success of the avant-garde movement) from the late 1900s onwards. In this regard, however, it should be observed that potentially useful insights could emerge from research dedicated to that second realm, in which the production of the artists discussed in this thesis circulated in the late 1900s and the early 1910s.

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70 Russische Bilder.

Im Gerichtssaal.

Russische Bilder.

Von G. Keyßner.

Wenn wir in Deutschland und speziell in München, der Hauptstätte internationaler Kunstausstellungen, bisher von russischer Kunst zu sehen bekommen hatten, war nicht viel und ließ auch kein allzugroßes Bedauern darüber aufkommen, daß es nicht mehr war. Der Bildhauer Antokolski und der Maler Repin, das waren (von Wereschtschagin natürlich abgesehen) vielleicht die beiden einzigen Künstler des zeitgenössischen Rußland, von deren Persönlichkeit man sich ein klares Bild eingeprägt hatte. Repins berühmte „Antwort der Kosaken", vor ein paar Jahren im Glaspalast ausgestellt (Abb. i. H. 1 d. 11. J.), gehört in der That zu den Werken, die man nicht so leicht wieder vergißt, wenn man sich auch dabei bewußt bleibt, daß die derbe Kraft und der barbarische Humor der Einzelschilderung die Wirkung des Bildes ausmachten, nicht einheitlich malerische Konzeption und Vertiefung. Diese letzteren Vorzüge finden sich vielleicht in höherem Maße auf dem hier abgebildeten „Rekrutenabschied", der in diesem Jahr in Wien zu sehen war. Hier ist das Seelische mit Empfindung, aber ohne Sentimentalität geschildert, und die schöne Gliederung der Gruppen durch das in der Mitte oben hereinfallende Licht giebt dem äußern Vorgang einen künstlerischen Zug, der ihn weit über die Sphäre des anekdotischen Genrebilds hinaushebt.

In München selbst war Repin weder im vorigen, noch in diesem Jahr vertreten. 1897 vermißte man ihn wirklich; denn das Ensemble seiner Landsleute, das sich den Besuchern der siebenten „Internationalen" darstellte, war nicht gerade glänzend zu nennen. Die Münchner Akademie, wenn ich nicht irre, hatte die Auswahl der russischen Bilder getroffen und mit großer Umsicht sich bemüht, uns Westeuropäern klar zu machen, daß auch im heiligen Rußland manchmal nüchterne, temperamentlose Landschaften und philiströse Genrebilder gemalt werden. Einzelnes, wie Sawitzkis „Im Gerichtssaal", zeigte einen naiven und ehrlichen Wirklichkeitssinn, der sich auf der Reproduktion des genannten Bildes, wo uns das harte grellose Kolorit nicht mehr stört, gar nicht unsympathisch präsentiert. — Aber man war doch etwas verwundert, daß ein Volk, dem die europäische Litteratur den grandiosen und völlig eigenartigen Realismus Dostojewskis und Tolstois (des Tolstoi der früheren Jahre selbstverständlich) verdankt, sich in der Malerei nicht gleichfalls zu einem wirklich künstlerischen, d. h. individuellen Realismus sollte erheben können. Heute wissen wir, daß es mindestens auf dem Weg zu einer solchen Erhebung ist, und diese Wissenschaft verdanken wir der Kollektion russischer und finnischer Werke, die, von Herrn Diaghilew in Petersburg zusammengestellt, im Mai und Juni dieses Jahres die erste Ausstellung der Münchner „Secession" in ihrem neuen Heim am Königsplatz schmücken half und anfangs in Berlin sich aufhielt, wo sie gleichfalls das lebhafte Interesse der Kunstfreunde wachgerufen hat.

Ich sage: „gleichfalls"; denn in München hat man,

Figure 7: Keyßner, G. (1898) 'Russische Bilder', *Kunst für Alle*, vol. 14, no. 5, 1 December 1898, pp. 70–73. Available at https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/kfa1898_1899 (Accessed 21 May 2022).

Figure 8: Antokol'skii, M. M. (1882) *Spinoza* [Marble]. The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg (Brockhaus and Efron 1906–1913).

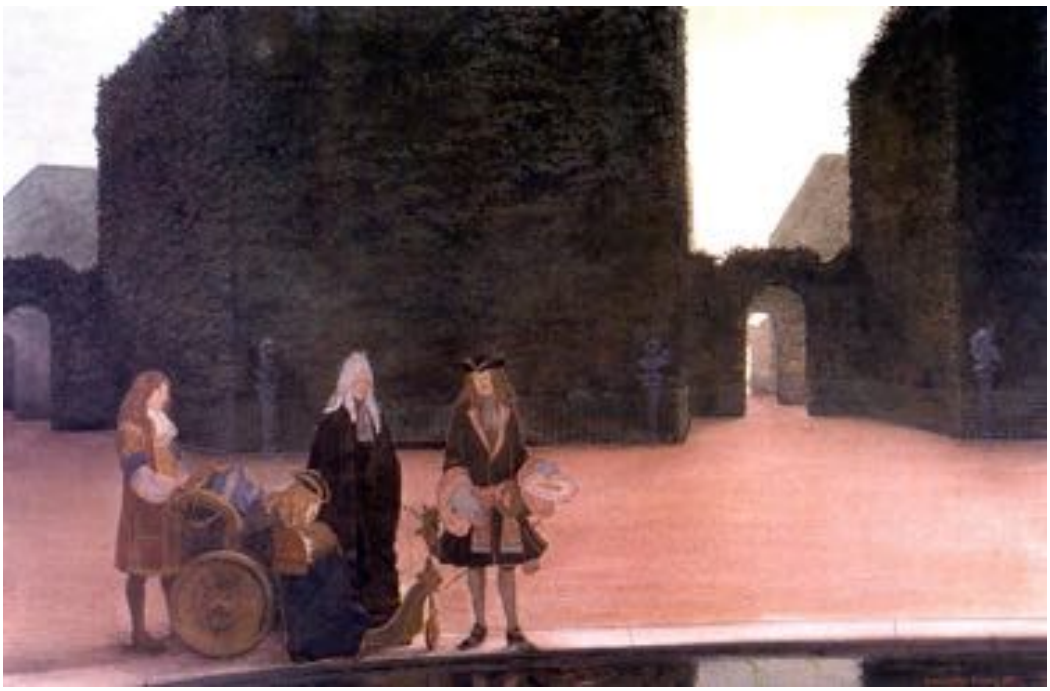

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Figure 19: Iakunchikova, M. V. (1894) *Reflections of an Intimate World* [Oil on canvas], 115×66 cm. Private collection, Chêne-Bougeries, Switzerland.

Figure 20: Iakunchikova, M. V. (1899) *Cupboard* [Wood] (Normand 1900: 284).

Figure 21: Iakunchikova, M. V. and Solomenko workshops (1899) *The Girl and the Wood Spirit* [Embroidered panel], 300×360 cm. Private collection. Christie's (Hardiman 2019: 307).

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Figure 26: Korovin, K. A. (1896) *Fishing in Murman Sea. Panels made for the Pavilion of Far North at the Nizhnii Novgorod Fair* [Oil on canvas], 211×431 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Kirichenko 2012: 269).

Figure 27: Korovin, K. A. and Klodt, N. A. (1899) *Pier Near a Factory in Murman. Panels made for the Russian Pavilion at the World Fair in Paris in 1900* [Tempera on canvas], 100×349 cm. The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Figure 28: Korovin, K. A. and Klodt, N. A. (1899) *Shores of Murman (Pomor Crosses). Panels made for the Russian Pavilion at the World Fair in Paris in 1900* [Tempera on canvas], 100×349 cm. The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Figure 29: Korovin, K. A. and Klodt, N. A. (1899) *The Caravan of Samoyeds. Panels made for the Russian Pavilion at the World Fair in Paris in 1900* [Tempera on canvas], 102×454 cm. The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

Figure 30: Mir iskusstva exhibition held in the spaces of St Petersburg Fine Arts Academy from 10 January to 4 of February 1901. Mir iskusstva, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 101.

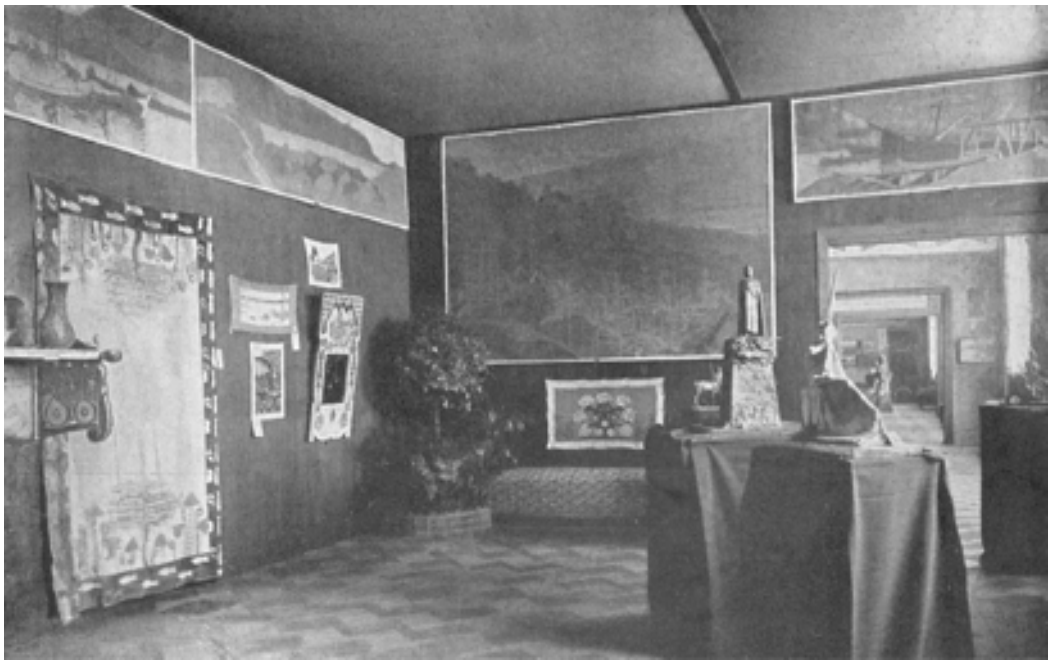

Figure 31: Mir iskusstva exhibition held in the spaces of St Petersburg Fine Arts Academy from 10 January to 4 of February 1901. Mir iskusstva, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 101.

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Figure 33: Nähr, M. (1901–1902) *Hall 'Russische Künstler', 12th Secession exhibition* [Photograph], ÖNB, Vienna (Akinsha 2014: 31).

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Figure 35: (1905) *Exhibition of Historic Portraits at the Tauride Palace in St Petersburg in 1905*. *Hall of the Epoch of Empress Catherine II* [Postcard], National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. Available at https://nlr.ru/petersburg/spbpcards/prochee/2.htm (Accessed 21 May 2022).

Figure 36: (1906) *Sculpture hall at the Exposition de l'art russe at the Salon d'Automne, Paris* [Photograph]. Heritage Image.

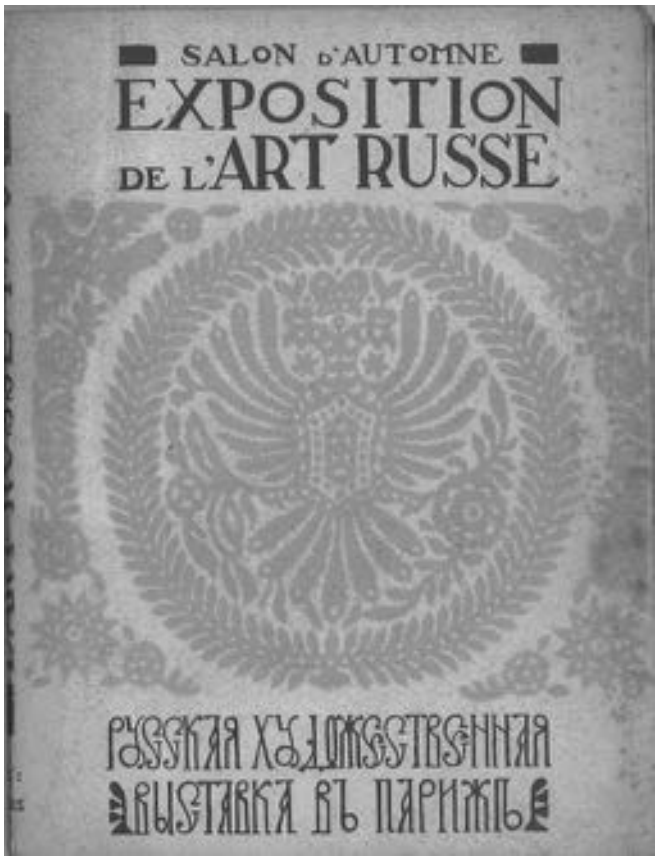
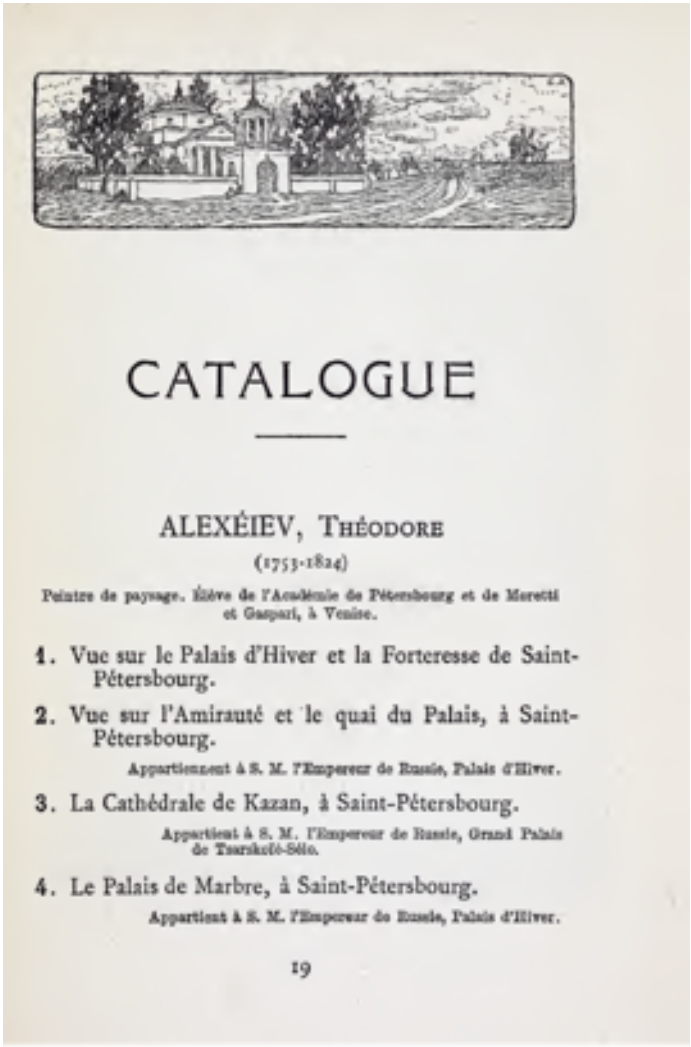


Figure 37: (1906) *Cover of the catalogue of the Exposition de l'art russe at the Salon d'Automne, Paris*. Moreau frères, editeurs.



CATALOGUE

ALEXÉIEV, THÉODORE

(1753-1824)

Peintre de paysage. Élève de l'Académie de Pétersbourg et de Moretti et Gaspari, à Venise.

1. Vue sur le Palais d'Hiver et la Forteresse de Saint-Pétersbourg.
2. Vue sur l'Amirauté et le quai du Palais, à Saint-Pétersbourg.

Appartiennent à S. M. l'Empereur de Russie, Palais d'Hiver.

3. La Cathédrale de Kazan, à Saint-Pétersbourg.

Appartient à S. M. l'Empereur de Russie, Grand Palais de Tsarskoïé-Sélo.

4. Le Palais de Marbre, à Saint-Pétersbourg.

Appartient à S. M. l'Empereur de Russie, Palais d'Hiver.

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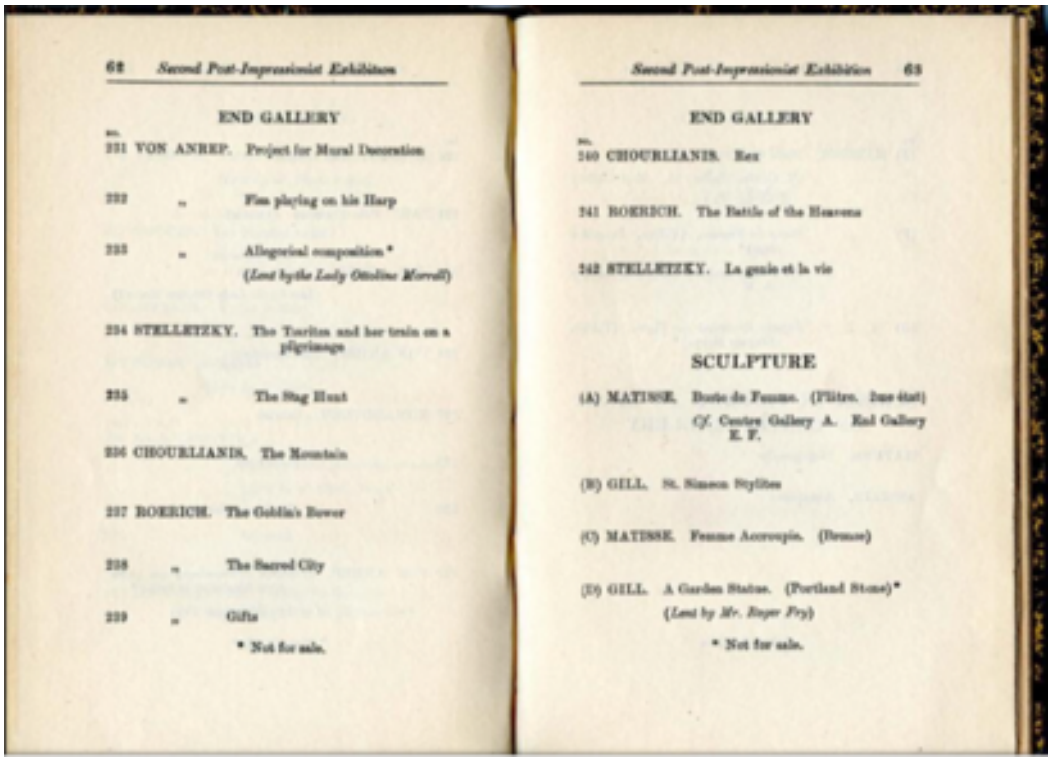
Figure 38: (1906) *The catalogue of the Exposition de l'art russe at the Salon d'Automne, Paris*. Moreau frères, editeurs.

Figure 39: Vrubel', M. A. (1899) *Pan* [Oil on canvas], 124×106 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Figure 40: Bakst, L. S. (1908) *Sketch of the poster of the Exhibitions of works of Russian artists at Vienna Secession* [Watercolour, gouache and pencil on cardboard]. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



62 *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*

END GALLERY

no.
231 VON ANREP. Project for Mural Decoration

232 „ Finn playing on his Harp

233 „ Allegorical composition *
(*Lent by the Lady Ottoline Morrell*)

234 STELLETZKY. The Tzaritza and her train on a pilgrimage

235 „ The Stag Hunt

236 CHOURLIANIS. The Mountain

237 ROERICH. The Goblin's Bower

238 „ The Sacred City

239 „ Gifts

* Not for sale.

Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition 63

END GALLERY

no.
240 CHOURLIANIS. Rex

241 ROERICH. The Battle of the Heavens

242 STELLETZKY. La genie et la vie

SCULPTURE

(A) MATISSE. Buste de Femme. (Plâtre. 2me état)
Cf. Centre Gallery A. End Gallery E. F.

(B) GILL. St. Simeon Stylites

(C) MATISSE. Femme Accroupie. (Bronze)

(D) GILL. A Garden Statue. (Portland Stone)*
(*Lent by Mr. Roger Fry*)

* Not for sale.

Figure 41: (1912) *Catalogue of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*. Pages listing the works of Boris Anrep, Nikolai Roerich and Dmitrii Stelletskii [Print]. Available at https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/collection/item/35311-second-post-impressionist-exhibition-grafton-galleries-oct-5-dec-31-1912?offset= (Accessed 21 May 2022).

Figure 42: Roerich, N. K. (1912) *Battle in the Heavens* [Tempera on cardboard], 66×95 cm. The State Russian Museum, St Petersburg.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the presence of artists from the Russian Empire in international art exhibitions in the European cultural capitals at the turn of the 20th century. Starting from the late 1890s, their presence has triggered a growing polarisation of opinion on the definition of national heritage and of its place in creative processes. The internal aesthetic dilemma within the Russian art world was inspired both by modernist dynamics in Europe in terms of style and institutional layout, and by a need to revisit one's cultural identity within an increasingly global field. Throughout their careers, the exhibitors abroad had to (re)formulate their position vis-a-vis the international art community and their own backgrounds and histories.

This research views the role of Russian artists in fin-de-siècle exhibition process in Europe as a stimulus for the debate on modern aesthetic in Russia. It aims to investigate the display models employed throughout those years to rethink the evolution of expressive language in Russian art and the creation of cross-cultural networks in connection with the rise of new exhibition strategies and work patterns among artists.

In doing so, it seeks to decode the significance of this participation for both the reception of these artists in a European cultural context and for their own evaluation of their path. The main concern of the present research is to situate it not as a timeline of narrative-building events that punctuate the history of Russian art, but rather as a swift process where the market and the agencies of the individuals involved are as important as the quest for a renewed collective identity.