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**Tretyakov
gallery**

Impressionism in Russia

Dawn of the Avant-Garde

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SPELLING STYLE

The Russian transliteration in this book follows the system of the Library of Congress. Apart from the bibliographic sections, diacritical symbols have been omitted, and names ending in -ii or -yi have been simplified to -y. In a few cases an exception was made in favor of a more common spelling. Dates with days and months are cited as listed in each individual source. When double dates are indicated, the first refers to the old date of the Julian Calendar, and the second is the date according to the Gregorian Calendar that was introduced in Russia after 1918.

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A NEW ART THE ESTABLISHMENT OF IMPRESSIONISM IN RUSSIA

Olga Atroshchenko

Impressionism already enjoyed worldwide recognition at the time it was still struggling to find its footing in Russia. Works like Konstantin Korovin's *Portrait of a Chorus Girl* (fig. 1) or Valentin Serov's *Girl in Sunlight* (fig. p. 26), the first work to use Impressionist techniques in Russia, created controversy among both critics and painters. Among the older generation of *Peredvizhniki*, or Wanderers, these compositions met with open rejection: in Impressionism the artists saw a threat to the emergence of greater, more substantial works. Indeed, Impressionism would only gain a foothold in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, following the founding of the Union of Russian Artists. Among the members of this exhibition association were mainly members of the Moscow School. Though they completed portraits, landscapes, genre, and historical paintings in the tradition of Realism, in their use of color they strove to overcome traditional tonal painting. They were interested in the problems of color, light, and air-filled space. With them, the *faktura*, or texture, of painting became a category of aesthetic value (fig. 3).

Although Impressionism was only one form of Realism and remained true to nature, for a long time Russian art historians only spoke in hushed tones about any kind of Russian version thereof. Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov replaced the term "Impressionism" with denominations such as "Neo-Realism" or "New Style."¹ In the 1930s and 1940s the word disappeared from the vocabulary of Russian art history completely. In 2003 Aleksandr Morozov, a specialist in Soviet art, observed that the work of Arkhipov, Grabar, and others had posed no threat whatsoever to the state—compared to other twentieth-century art movements, Impressionism was harmless in his eyes.² People first began to remember Konstantin Korovin, the founder of Russian Impressionism (fig. 2), around 1961, during the time known as the Thaw, when the political situation in Russia began to change. That year marked the centenary of the artist's birth, and only then was it permitted to honor him with a large solo exhibition, first in Moscow and then in Leningrad.³ In Russia, discussions concerning Impressionism have continued up through today in spite of Viacheslav Filippov's research in the 1990s and the major exhibitions on Impressionism in Russian art held at the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg in 2000 and at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow in 2003.⁴ The following text discusses the existence of Russian Impressionism and shows how it asserted itself as an artistic method in the teaching system of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture and the Reformed Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg.

¹ Cf. Fedorov-Davydov 1929a and Fedorov-Davydov 1929b.

² Morozov 2003, 106: "In it there was no particular potential for conflict as far as the subject was concerned, no pathos of protest, and certainly no call to disobedience." All citations translated from Russian by Brigitte van Kann and then from German by Alexander Booth.

³ Cf. Dmitrieva 1978.

⁴ Cf. Turchin 1994, German 1999, Filippov 2003, St. Petersburg 2000, and Moscow 2003b.



1) Konstantin Korovin,
Portrait of a Chorus Girl, 1887,
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



2) Konstantin Korovin,
A Paris Café, 2nd half of the 1890s,
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



10) Isaak Levitan,
March, 1895,
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



11) Igor Grabar,
March Snow, 1904,
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

rational approach Grabar adopted in his landscape paintings. With the help of Divisionist methods, Meshcherin was able to capture nature in all its vitality: branches in shimmering rays of gliding light, grasses in a colorful, flower-filled meadow swaying in a gentle summer breeze. Though the artist did not teach during those years, he inspired many painters to use Impressionist techniques.

FROM IMPRESSIONISM TO EXPRESSIONISM

Only after the reform of the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg in 1893–94, when famous painters such as Ilia Repin and Arkhip Kuindzhi took over teaching in the studios, was it possible to transmit the latest artistic methods there. Repin had acquired Impressionist approaches during his years of study in France. Under the influence of French painting, he produced pictures such as *A Paris Café* (fig. p. 29) and *Portrait of Vera* (1875, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow)—“à la Manet,” as the painter characterized it—but also works he made in Russia: *Along the Field Boundary: Vera Repina Is Walking along the Boundary with Her Children* (cat. 7), *Dragonfly* (fig. 12), and *In the Sun* (1900, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). In 1897 Repin explained his relationship to Impressionism: “Without impression, that is, without the freshness and power of impression, there can be no truly artistic work.”²⁵

Many of Repin’s students remembered his inspiring studio classes. “Repin gave no lessons, which is why those moments when, entranced by a beautiful bit of nature, he took hold of a canvas and joined us were all the more valuable,” Igor Grabar wrote.²⁶ Nicolai Fechin mentioned another particularity of Repin’s classes: “Repin never crushed a student’s individuality with his opinion; on the contrary, as a great artist he appreciated something more or less original He never tried to lecture, which he considered unnecessary for people who, like his students at the Academy, already had technical experience and a certain way of thinking. However, his advice as a master was always extremely valuable and of a compelling logic. It seemed that he was not only looking at the work, but into the student’s soul.”²⁷ From Repin, Fechin adopted Impressionist methods, which he enriched over time with his own discoveries. Gradually he developed an individual, loose style of brushwork and acquired what became his signature: working with a wide brush and spatula, and experimenting a lot with primer and paint.

In a letter to the artist Elena Tarkhanova in August 1894, Repin complained of a lack of understanding of artistic form: “I think this is the disease of us Russian artists who are stuck in literature. We lack the love of form, that fervent, childlike love without which the artist becomes dry and ponderous and fairly unproductive. Our salvation lies in form, in the living beauty of nature, but we get caught up in philosophy, in morals—how sick I am of that!” He looked optimistically into the future: “I am convinced that the next generation of artists will say goodbye to the tendency to search for ideas, to sophistry; they will heave a sigh, look onto God’s world with love and joy, and revive themselves in the inexhaustible plenty of forms and the color harmonies of their imaginations.”²⁸ In this respect, Repin understood the desire of his students to be trained in European private studios and did not try to impede them in any way.

Arkhip Kuindzhi headed the studio for landscape painting at the Higher School of Art and Design, which was affiliated to the Academy of Arts, for only a few years, from 1894 to 1897. In this short time, however, he succeeded in founding his own school. Although during the first phase of his teaching Kuindzhi encouraged his students to copy the landscape paintings of the Barbizon School, in his lessons he did not emphasize the study of the French Impressionists. Nevertheless, the art critic Alexandre Benois called him—of all people—the “Russian Monet.”²⁹ It was the related depiction of landscapes at different times of day as well as his interest in

²⁵ Guber 1970, 388–89.

²⁶ Grabar’ 2001, 108.

²⁷ Cited in Tuluzakova 2007, 33–34.

²⁸ Letter from Il’ia Repin to Elena Tarkhanova, August 1894, Manuscript Department of the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 31, ed. chr. 1338, l. 1–1 ob.

²⁹ Benua 1995, 314.

DISSOLUTION OF THE OBJECT: IMPRESSIONIST TRADITIONS IN THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE

Irina Vakar

The artists of the Russian avant-garde saw French Impressionism as the point of departure for their development. This may come as a surprise because there are hardly any stylistic similarities between the two and most Russian avant-garde artists had not even been born at the time Impressionism emerged. Moreover, Impressionism had its roots in a country that was unknown to many Russian artists. In modern Western art, the only time such a shift toward far-flung, foreign traditions occurred was likely during the Renaissance, when the discoveries of the Italians were taken up in many European countries. In Russia, however, this kind of cultural transfer was nothing unusual—for example, during the Europeanization of Russian culture in the eighteenth century.

With Impressionism, on the other hand, things turned out differently. For a long time, the ruling circles regarded it as a dubious and undesirable phenomenon. And yet, a certain number of artists became ambassadors of French innovations, including Ilia Repin, Vasily Polenov, his student Konstantin Korovin, and Viktor Borisov-Musatov. All of them had been in Paris before the turn of the century and had seen the Impressionists' paintings. It is thanks to them that individual elements of the new art gradually gained a foothold on Russian soil: plein-air painting, abandonment of the subject, loose brushwork, and brightening of color. Beginning in the 1890s they found their way into the style of the Moscow School of Painting. Then, around 1905, the canvases of Igor Grabar, Nicolas Tarkhoff, and Nikolai Meshcherin began to show the characteristic features of Russian Impressionism.

Among these characteristics was the combination of a new way of seeing with the traditional motif that usually charged the local landscape with poetic power.¹ Monet had painted London so assiduously because of the fog, Venice because of its watery atmosphere. He had been prepared to travel to Norway because of the snow. He needed water, air, and snow. For his part, however, Grabar—though he had studied Impressionism in Munich—only became an Impressionist in Russia, in an old manor house in a Russian village near the Russian forest.² The motif's significance was connected with the still-valid traditions of nineteenth-century Russian Realism. By the time the future avant-garde artists found their way to independent work around 1910, the tradition of a Russified Impressionism was already fully developed, an Impressionism that differed considerably from its origins.

¹ Cf. Sarab'ianov 1980, 178.

² Cf. *ibid.*, 180.



1) David Burliuk,
Morning: Wind, 1908,
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



2) Natalia Goncharova,
Corner of the Garden, 1907-08,
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



4) Mikhail Larionov,
Rain, ca. 1907–08,
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris



3) Mikhail Larionov,
Acacia Crowns, 1906,
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



5) Kazimir Malevich,
Portrait of a Member of the Artist's Family, 1906,
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

The Russian public's second encounter with French Impressionism was momentous: in 1896 works by Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir were shown at the *French Art Exhibition* in St. Petersburg and Moscow.³ Whereas the two Renoir pieces on view did not cause much of a stir, one of Monet's grainstacks was a sensation (fig. p. 55). Even years later Vasily Kandinsky and Petr Konchalovsky remembered having become painters after seeing it.⁴ Kandinsky wrote: "Previously, I had known only realistic art, in fact only the Russians," and added that, as a young man, for a long time he had studied details of paintings by Ilia Repin, Vasily Polenov, and Isaak Levitan.⁵ Though these are pictures with a pronounced narrative, taken as a whole they seemed to appeal much less to Kandinsky than individual passages that were particularly successful in painterly terms. And while he perceived Monet's work as a complete picture, "the power of the palette" made the greatest impression on him. All of a sudden the object—the bearer of meaning in Realism—had become obsolete: "I had a dull feeling that the object was lacking in this picture."⁶ But perhaps it was precisely for this reason that the fundamental difference to the Russian variety of Impressionism became clear—and with it the different possibilities and paths that opened up when Russian artists followed the French model.

DAVID BURLIUK'S IMPRESSIONIST EXPERIMENT

David Burliuk and Kazimir Malevich have described their impressions of another masterpiece by Monet, *Rouen Cathedral: Noon* (1894, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow). Both compared the manner of painting to plants. Burliuk likened it to colorful moss growing across the canvas. In 1913 he wrote: "The paint possessed the roots of its threads—they stretched themselves onto the canvas."⁷ Malevich in 1918 did not regard the canvas as the soil from which the artist grew plants, but the object presented: "He looked at the cathedral's body as if it were a seedbed . . . in which the painting he needed grew, a seedbed and field where grass and rye were growing. We talk about the beauty of the rye, the meadow grass, but we do not talk about the soil. This is how we should look at painted things, but not the samovar or the cathedral, the pumpkin or the Mona Lisa."⁸

In later memoirs from 1933 Malevich returned to this idea: "Working on Impressionism, I discovered that the goal of Impressionism never included an objective image. If it still retained its own likeness, it was only because the painter did not yet know the form that would represent painting 'as such' without eliciting associations with nature and objects of saying anything about objective truth, about illusions, without being an illustration or a story, but being instead a completely new creative fact, a new reality, a new truth."⁹

Although these statements come from different periods, they testify to the fact that future avant-garde artists retrospectively acknowledged the importance of French Impressionism for their artistic beginnings. From it they received the impulse to execute the subject for the sake of the color tones and not for the sake of the subject itself.¹⁰ After recognizing this peculiarity, Russian artists made it their rallying cry at the very beginning of the avant-garde movement and then turned it into their program, in so doing making the name of the artistic direction—Impressionism—a successful, yet, in terms of content, blurry campaign slogan. Thus David Burliuk's first manifesto, "The Voice of an Impressionist in Defense of Painting," with which he emerged in Kiev in 1908, did not in any way refer to this particular style, but to a new form of painting as a whole. Here, however, the term's imprecision became clear, for, as of yet, the term Post-Impressionism did not exist. Nevertheless, in the struggle for a new art, the stylistic differences between the Impressionists and Seurat, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne were not all that significant—they were all recognized as "liberators." Characterizing his

³ Cf. Doronchenkov 2018, 17. For the first presentation of Impressionists works in Russia, see the essay by Susanne Strätling, pp. 52–63.

⁴ Both erroneously dated this event to the year 1891.

⁵ Kandinsky 1994, 363.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Burliuk 1913, 103–05 (though Nikolai Burliuk figured as the author, the text was by his brother, David Burliuk). Citations translated from Russian by Brigitte van Kann and then from German by Alexander Booth, unless stated otherwise.

⁸ Malevich 1995–2004, vol. 1, 176.

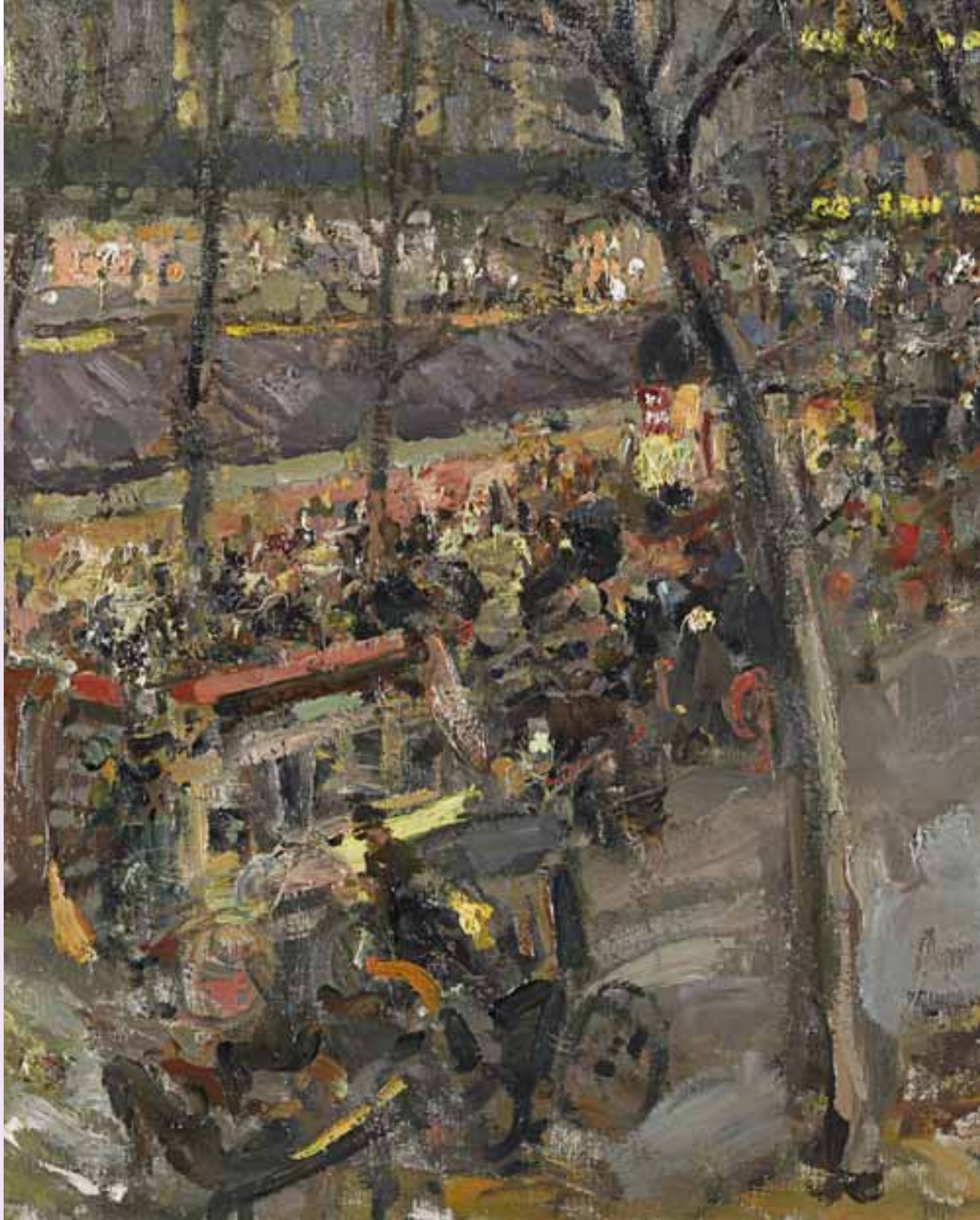
⁹ Malevich 2015, vol. 1, 31.

¹⁰ Cf. Georges Rivière, cited in Sarab'ianov 1980, 169.

MODERN LIFE: RUSSIAN ARTISTS IN PARIS

Tatiana Yudenkova

Paris was the European center of art and progress. In the late nineteenth century many Russian painters went to the French capital, where they became acquainted with the spirit of the modern metropolis with its operas, cafés, and street life. While the Russian Realism they had learned in Moscow was incapable of capturing this dynamic, the Impressionist style of painting that they encountered in Paris corresponded to this approach to life.



2 NICOLAS TARKHOFF

Street in the Parisian Suburb of Saint-Martin, 1901

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow





3 KONSTANTIN KOROVIN
Paris: Morning, 1906
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

IMPRESSIONIST THEMES: FRENCH MOTIFS

Tatiana Yudenkova

French Impressionism inspired Russian artists to achieve freedom in their painting and lightness in their subject matter. Working *en plein air*, they produced lighthearted images that departed from the existential themes of Russian Realism. In their portraits of friends and family, they showed that the private was worthy of being portrayed. With these innovations, Russian art caught up with modernism in Western Europe.



23 NICOLAS TARKHOFF
Breakfast, 1906
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow





24 ROBERT FALK
Liza in the Sun, 1907
State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan



39 KAZIMIR MALEVICH
House in the Country, ca. 1906
Verso: *Houses*, ca. 1906
Private collection, Berlin

40 KAZIMIR MALEVICH

Summer (or House and Garden), 1906

Collection of Vladimir Tsarenkov, London



42 SERGEI VINOGRADOV

In the House, 1912

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow





43 VALENTIN SEROV
Peter the Great in the Palace of Monplaisir, 1904
Collection of Vladimir Tsarenkov, London

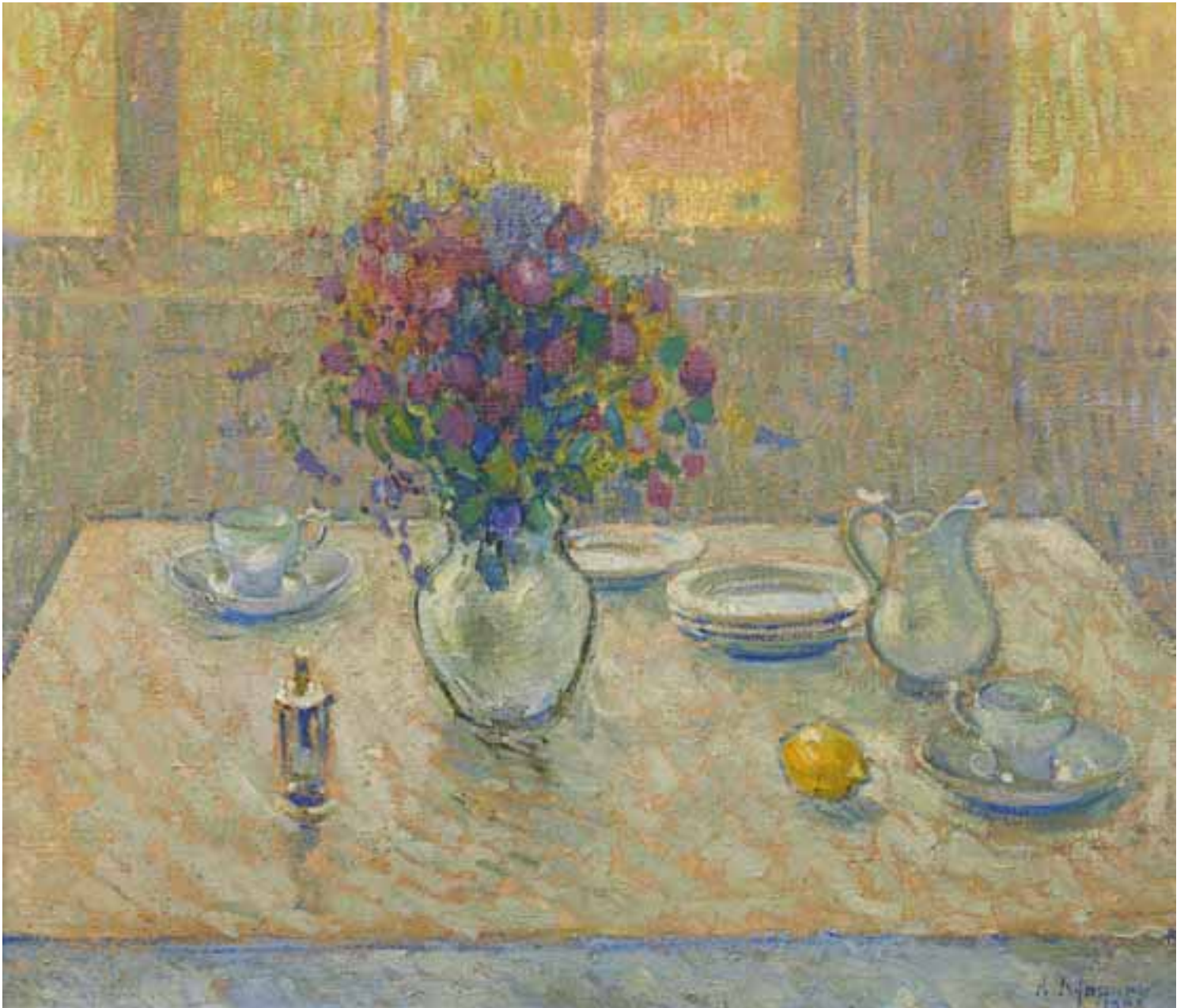


51 NATALIA GONCHAROVA
Bouquet of Daisies and Hat, 1907–08
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

52 ALEKSANDR KUPRIN

Still Life: Bouquet and Pitcher on White Tablecloth, 1909

Collection of Iveta and Tamaz Manashev, Moscow



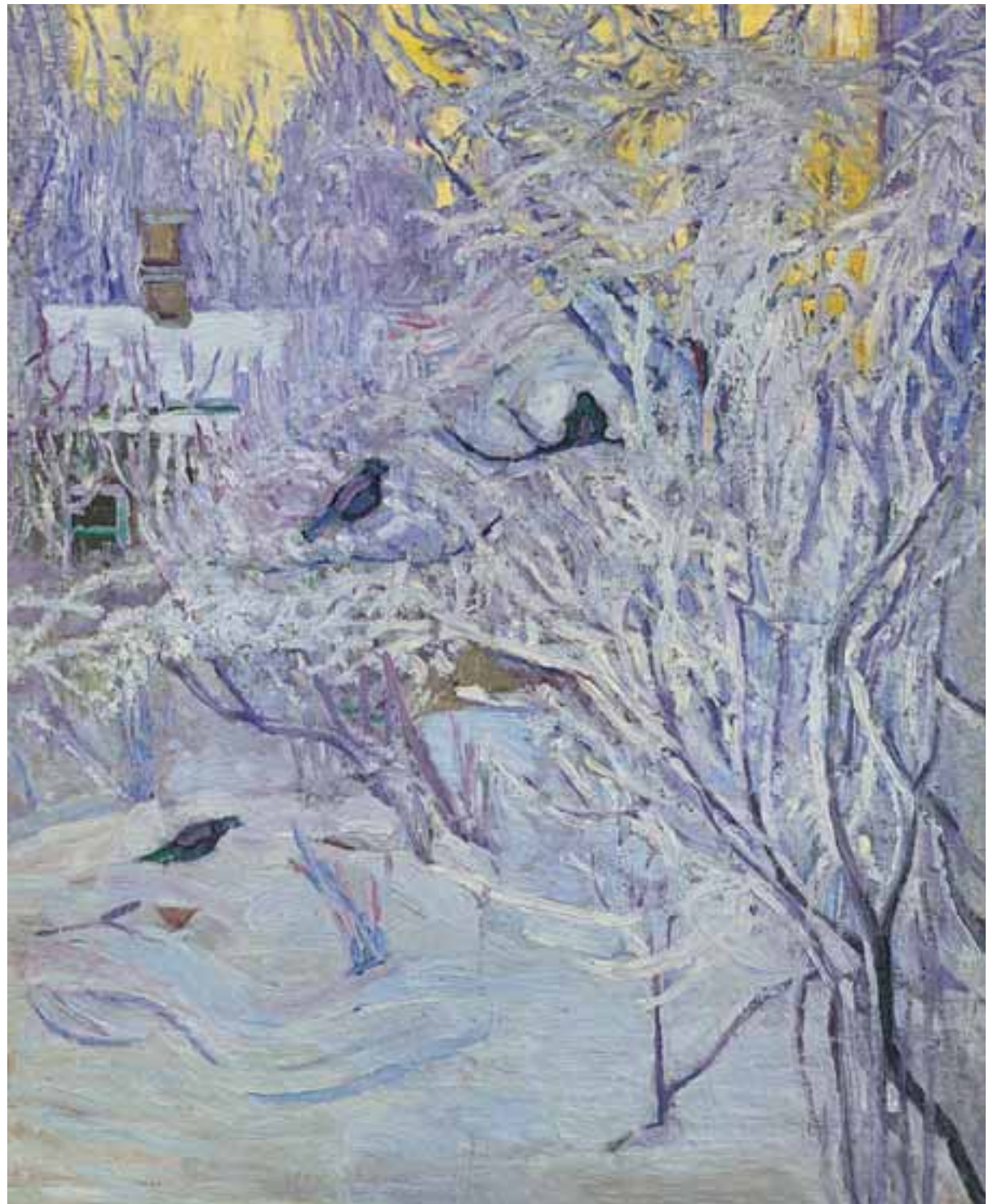


67 STANISLAV ZHUKOVSKY
Blue Snow: Spring, 1899
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

68 OLGA ROZANOVA

Corner of the House and Bullfinches in the Tree: Winter, 1907–08

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Miriam Leimer

ABRAM EFIMOVICH ARKHIPOV
(1862 Egorovo – 1930 Moscow)



The dominant motif in Arkhipov's oeuvre is the depiction of peasant girls in folkloric costumes, executed in bright colors. As a teacher, he showed future members of the avant-garde how to be freer in their painterly means of expression.

As a young man Arkhipov left his home village in 1877 to study at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture. There he was taught by → Vasily Polenov, whose students included → Konstantin Korovin and → Sergei Vinogradov. In 1884 he continued his studies at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg, but returned to the Moscow School after two years, graduating with distinction. In 1891 Arkhipov joined the *Peredvizhniki* (Wanderers) Association of Traveling Art Exhibitions founded by → Ivan Kramskoy. His paintings of this period focused on rural subjects. His early genre scenes had a socially critical character and dealt with the often-arduous nature of the rural population's everyday life. Influenced by plein-air painting, he developed his gestural style in landscapes (cat. 31). Broad brushstrokes as well as a luminous palette also characterize his folkloric depictions of peasant women (cat. 28). In 1894 he began to teach at the Moscow School alongside → Stanislav Zhukovsky, the later avant-garde artists → David Burliuk, → Robert Falk, and → Aleksandr Kuprin. As a member of the Union of Russian Artists, founded in 1903, Arkhipov was part of one of the most influential associations of the early twentieth century, to which his student Zhukovsky as well as → Igor Grabar, → Nikolai Meshcherin, → Nicolas Tarkhoff, and Sergei Vinogradov also belonged. (Cat. 28, 31)

VLADIMIR DAVIDOVICH
BARANOV-ROSSINÉ
(1888 Bolshaia Lepatikha –
1944 Auschwitz)



Baranov-Rossiné was one of the artists of the Russian avant-garde who developed their work in active exchange with the Post-Impressionist currents in Western Europe. His joy of experimentation was not limited to painting, but also included inventions in the fields of chemistry and optics.

After studying art in Odessa, Baranov-Rossiné went to St. Petersburg in 1908, enrolling at the Imperial Academy of Arts. Only one year later he left the Academy without a degree and joined the circle of early avant-garde artists around → Mikhail Larionov and the brothers → David and → Vladimir Burliuk. Works such as *Green Garden* (cat. 58) testify to his enthusiasm for Vincent van Gogh. His preference for round forms and segments of circles, which would characterize his later abstract work, was already evident in his choice of subject matter. Baranov-Rossiné stayed in Paris from 1910 to 1914. Like → Georgy Iakulov he met Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay-Terk, whose Orphic Cubism, characterized by circles and simultaneous contrasts, corresponded to his artistic ideas. He also engaged in scientific studies of color and light theory. In 1914 Baranov-Rossiné went to Christiania (now Oslo) and met Edvard Munch.

In 1917, the year of the revolution, he returned to St. Petersburg, but in 1925 he settled permanently in Paris, where he became increasingly involved in scientific experiments. It was there that he patented his optophonetic piano, which synesthetically combined visual and acoustic impulses. After the occupation of Paris by the German Wehrmacht, Baranov-Rossiné was arrested on account of his Jewish origins and deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1944. (Cat. 58)

DAVID DAVIDOVICH BURLIUK
(1882 Semirotovshchina –
1967 Long Island, New York)



David Burliuk is considered a key figure of the early avant-garde. His artistic output ranges from easel painting to performative readings that caused scandals on a regular basis.

After studying at the art schools in Kazan and Odessa, in 1903 David went with his brother → Vladimir Burliuk first to Munich, then, in 1904, to Paris. More decisive for his relationship with Impressionism, however, was Sergei Shchukin's substantial collection of French art, which Burliuk visited in Moscow after his return in 1907. There he met → Mikhail Larionov and became a driving force of the Russian avant-garde. During that time, he produced paintings influenced by Post-Impressionism, such as *Portrait of a Man* (cat. 29). After the departure of the two initiators → Natalia Goncharova and Larionov in 1911, Burliuk became one of the organizers of the Jack of Diamonds artists' association and, beginning in 1913, a member of the Union of the Youth, to which his brother Vladimir also belonged, as well as → Kazimir Malevich and → Olga Rozanova. Already in 1910 he had begun to further his education at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture with → Abram Arkhipov and → Konstantin Korovin, but was expelled in 1914. That same year he visited the established painter → Ilya Repin at his Penaten estate. Burliuk's broad artistic understanding found further expression in his activities in the circle of the futuristic poets Vladimir Mayakovsky and Vasily Kamensky. Together they organized performative readings to challenge their audiences. After the October Revolution of 1917, Burliuk traveled through the Russian provinces and lived in Vladivostok before going to Japan and, from there, to the USA in 1922. In New York in 1924 he had a solo exhibition at the Société Anonyme, the art organization founded by Katherine S. Dreier and Marcel Duchamp. (Cat. 29)

VLADIMIR DAVIDOVICH BURLIUK
(1886, 1887, or 1888 Kherson or
Kotelva –1917 Thessaloniki)



Like his older brother, Vladimir Burliuk is a representative of the Russian avant-garde of the early twentieth century. His artistic output, which includes many book illustrations, was executed over a span of only a few years, prior to his death during World War I.

Vladimir went to Munich in 1903 with his brother, → David Burliuk, to study art in the private school run by Slovenian painter Anton Ažbe, where → Igor Grabar and → Alexej von Jawlensky were already students. After a stay in Paris, he continued his artistic education at various schools throughout the Russian Empire. His early portraits of women (cat. 21, 22) show his rapid development from lifelike reproduction in an academic manner to a Pointillist technique. As a result, his style became more two-dimensional and his use of color freer (cat. 62). Beginning in 1907, Vladimir Burliuk participated in many of the exhibitions co-organized by his brother. He was a member of the Union of the Youth, to which, in addition to David Burliuk, → Kazimir Malevich, and → Olga Rozanova also belonged. In 1910 he exhibited at the *Jack of Diamonds* exhibition in Moscow organized by → Natalia Goncharova and → Mikhail Larionov. He also designed Futuristic books, including *Sadok Sudei* (A Trap for Judges, 1910), an anthology of Futuristic poems, which included works by Vasily Kamensky and his brothers Nikolai and David. During World War I he was drafted into the army and died in a bomb explosion on the Macedonian front in Greece in 1917. (Cat. 21, 22, 62)