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**“MEMORY OF GENRE” AND “MEMORY OF THE HEART”
IN KUZMA PETROV-VODKIN’S WORKS**

The aim of this article is briefly to outline the problems and possibilities of studying the role of general cultural and personal memory and the characteristics of its operation in Petrov-Vodkin’s works in the light of the history of the idyll and the idyllic in Europe and Russia. This master is obviously of special interest to analysing the aspects of the history of art reflected in the title of the present collection. It is not only a matter of Petrov-Vodkin being “a central figure at the crossroads of creative trends and a certain core of Russian culture of the first third of the 20th century” (3, 5). The specifics of his creative personality that combined the qualities of a painter, writer, philosopher, theoretician, naturalist and good judge of character reveals numerous aspects and levels full of “a dialogue with the past”, with the artist himself thoughtfully reflecting on this “work of memory”.

A product of its epoch from the formal stylistic point of view that combined the characteristics of realism, modernism (symbolism) and the avant-garde, his art “remembers”, retains and naturally synthesises the features and images of the art of the past across an unprecedentedly wide range, referencing folklore and antiquity, Russian icons and the Italian Renaissance, Oriental culture and 19th- and early 20th-century masters of Russia and Europe. His references and “quotations” are not eclectic, but evidence an in-depth command of the original sources and the harmonious blending of their qualities into his integral system attuned to modernity and open to the future.

From the point of view of world outlook and, so to speak, cultural and psychological plane, this diversity was, of course, a manifestation of that “universal feeling” and heeding of the voices of the ages which Andrei Bely described as follows: “We are now, as it were, experiencing the whole of the past: ...They say that at the crucial moments of man’s life the whole of it

flashes by before his heart's eye: now the entire life of mankind is flashing by before us... we are reliving all the centuries at a go"¹.

At the same time, intense diachronic links and manifestations of the "memory of the ages" were closely connected with Petrov-Vodkin's endless work of personal daily memory. With childhood memory always of paramount importance to man, few artists of that period related the imagery of their works (and spatial compositions) so frequently and graphically to their childhood memories, the "topoi" of their native parts and families as Petrov-Vodkin did (with the exception of perhaps only Chagall). Petrov-Vodkin's autobiographical books are unique in the pithiness of his thoughts on history and culture and the amount of mundane details. His ideas of the role of memory of the past, including that of classical art in 20th-century culture, are also found in many of his letters and articles (e.g., the 1937 article "We and Pushkin") and in his educational practice, "The Science of Seeing". His legacy also includes examples of "immaterial memory shown" in reality (see, for instance, the picture *After Battle*, 1923).

All these characteristics were analysed, in one way or another, or at least mentioned in the vast literature about Petrov-Vodkin. Nevertheless, its growing amount in the past few years seems somewhat to have blurred the focus of perception of the master's legacy. Written from different positions as far as world outlook and methodology are concerned, these studies, as a rule, prioritize those aspects of Petrov-Vodkin's legacy that are close to their authors (Petrov-Vodkin as a "cosmist", carrier of the Orthodox tradition or, on the contrary, a master with close ties to West European masters of the past and his contemporaries). At the same time the vibrant feeling of his integrity, the emotional, moral and poetic "core" of his quests and discoveries and his untiring referencing the past in the name of the future are often lost. One has the impression, to quote Petrov-Vodkin speaking about the crisis he experienced in Paris in 1907, that "Something valuable has been forgotten, something that has to be found or to recall what has been forgotten..." (2, 667). A study of Petrov-Vodkin in the light of the category of the idyll and the idyllic, perhaps, could help bring together and enliven the different aspects of Petrov-Vodkin's legacy and clarify the laws of its integrity and the specific operation of memory.

Of course, the way we see it (just as modern experts in literature do²), these categories are absolutely devoid of any shade of lightweight sentimental

¹ Bely, A. "Emblematika smysla. Predposylki k teorii simvolizma" (Emblematics of Meaning. Approaches to the Theory of Symbolism) // Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm kak miroponimaniye* (Symbolism as World Outlook), Moscow: Respublika, 1994, p. 26. For a general review of this phenomenon see Lapshin I., *O vselenskom chuvstve* (On Universal Feeling), Saint Petersburg, 1911.

² For lack of opportunity to give a detailed bibliography on the relevant problem let me single out writings of M. Bakhtin and V. Tyupa, as well as collections of the past few years with numerous articles of modern scholars, including those dealing with the role and nature of idylls in works of 20th-century Russian artists (K. Somov, W. Kandinsky, A. Plastov, etc.): *Myth-Pastoral-Utopia*, Moscow, 1998; *Pastoral v sisteme kultury: metamorfozy zhanra v dialoge so vremenem*



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Family Portrait
(Self-Portrait
with Wife
and Daughter). 1933
Private collection,
Saint Petersburg

“sweetness” and are not associated with primarily one phase or form of the history of culture. Speaking of the idyll we mean the genre (type, meta-genre, *modus artisticus*) which diversely manifested itself in different kinds and styles of literature and art (frequently in combination with other genres) and expressed the people’s ever-lasting need of benevolent, serene and “happy” union with one another and ever-generating nature, of attuning themselves to the rhythms of cyclic time and the sense of natural involvement in the “entire” cycle of life and the “music of spheres”. The literature theoretician

V. Khalizev writes that “we should speak not only about the idyll as a genre, but also about the idea of happy and natural existence underlying the idyll being common to the entire humanity and universal. ...The idyllic in literature is not only a comparatively narrow field of showing life as carefree, contemplative and happy, but also a boundlessly broad sphere of active, efficient and at times sacrificial aspirations of people to attain idyllic values, without which life inevitably slides towards chaos”¹.

The concepts of the “idyll” and “pastoral” (a sub-genre of the idyll) were also used occasionally in writings about Petrov-Vodkin and his milieu². For instance, D. V. Sarabianov briefly yet substantively pointed to

(*Pastoral in the System of Culture: Genre Metamorphosis in Dialogue with Time*), Moscow, 1999; *Pastoral v teatre i teatralnost v pastoralii* (*Pastoral on Stage and Histrionics in Pastoral*), Moscow, 2001; *Pastoralii nad bezdnoi: Sbor* (*Pastorals over the Abyss: Gathering*), Moscow, 2004; *Pastoral kak tekst kultury: teoriya, topika, sintez iskusstv* (*Pastoral as a Text of Culture: Theory, Topics and Synthesis of Arts*), Moscow, 2005; *Sovremennyi chelovek: dvizheniye k pastoralii?* (*Modern Man: Moving towards Pastoral?*), Moscow, 2011; *XVIII vek: literatura v epokhu idillii i bur* (*18th Century: Literature in the Epoch of Idylls and Storms*), Moscow, 2012; *Pastoral: metamorfoza ideala i realnosti* (*Pastoral: Metamorphosis of the Ideal and Reality*), Moscow, 2014.

Let it be noted that, although the word “pastoral” figures in the titles of most of these collections, most of the authors justly consider the pastoral as a sub-genre of the idyll. For details of these methodological differences and extensive bibliography see the dissertation for a doctor’s degree: Balashova, E. A. *Funktsionirovaniye russkoi stikhotvornoi idilliki v XX–XXI vv.: voprosy tipologii* (*Functioning of the Russian Poetical Idyll in the 20th-21st Centuries: Problems of Typology*), Kaluga, 2015.

¹ Khalizev, V. E. *Teoriya literatury* (*Theory of Literature*), Moscow, 1999, p. 72.

² We mean by Petrov-Vodkin’s milieu above all the “World of Art” and the “Blue Rose” members.

On the whole the idylls of that period and related elegies were not forgotten by art students: the notions of “pastoral”, “paradise garden” and “The Garden of Eden” were often analysed in writings about Art Moderne that was brimming with nostalgic dreams and “heavenly visions”. Of special interest are books and articles by O. S. Davydova, although her approach to this problem somewhat deprives art of a focus on real nature.

P. Kuznetsov's kinship with the traditions of the world idyll and also detected its features in the "Oriental" works of Petrov-Vodkin. In a recent monograph N. Adaskina states (unfortunately, without dwelling on this theme) that his artistic mentality is "archetypal" and "the family is always shown idyllically" in his pictures (3, 73). The Modern Explanatory Dictionary speaks of a "simple pastoral motif" transformed in *The Bathing of a Red Horse* into a "poetical allegory of the destiny of Russia"¹. Even more frequent are descriptions of important features of Petrov-Vodkin's legacy essentially in line with the idyllic genre, but refraining from using this concept (see, for instance, *The History of Russian Art* by M. Al-lenov or G. Pospelov's writings about "the circle of life" in 19th-century Russian painting). But first, the importance of the idyllic element in **all** of Petrov-Vodkin's works (for all their multidimensionality) seems to be underestimated (just as in 20th-century domestic art as a whole²). Second, the specifics of Petrov-Vodkin's legacy presupposes a clearer understanding of the essence and history of the idylls in big time as we speak of the artist whose hallmark was his striving after self-identification vis-à-vis the entire history of art and in this respect his works form "parallels" with the diverse "layers" of history of this meta-genre, as it were, "recollecting" them and moving freely along the "generic tree" of the idyll.

The nature of problems of interest to us can be easily demonstrated taking Petrov-Vodkin's *Midday* (1917), one of the most representative pictures from the point of view of genre, style, imagery, meaning and philosophy, as an example. Painted during the revolutionary period and soon after the death of the artist's father, it was a tribute to his memory. Petrov-Vodkin depicted the expanses of his native Volga Region as if seen by a bird that has left its nest and the round golden fruit maturing on the apple-tree branches reaching out to the sun. He brought together episodes from the life of a peasant family from different times in the same space. There is the joy of love and motherhood, labour and leisure, home building and the inevitable turning to dust – the eternal round of human (folk) life on Earth.

The artist is not satisfied with painting a small corner of his native Khvalynsk environs: the point of view he chooses invites us to see and feel that it is a part of the huge world with one vista opening after another on the planet rotating in space round the sun.

¹ See: <http://enc-dic.com/modern/Petrov-vodkin-kuzma-sergeevich-24-oktjabrja-5-nojabrja-1878-34469.html>

² For instance, Pospelov, G. wrote in one of his recent articles about the specifics of painters such as A. Shevchenko, A. Deineka and P. Kuznetsov: "One of the crucial objectives of art studies is to qualify this trend as the new revival of the idyllic landscape and genre in Russian art" // Pospelov, G.G. *O kartinakh i risunkakh: Izbrannye statyi ob iskusstve XIX–XX vekov* (Of Pictures and Drawings: Selected Articles on Art of the 19th – 20th Centuries), Moscow, 2013, p. 370.

Art students have said many a right thing about the artist's love of his homeland expressed in the picture, its "spherical" perspective, his feeling of "involvement and interconnectedness in the harmonious whole of all phenomena and forms of nature, including man"¹, about the specifics of its perspective structure, the parallels between the picture composition and hagiographical icons and Petrov-Vodkin's heartfelt representation of the mundane in the people's daily life, their "works and days" (3, 90).

These "works and days", which indirectly reference the title of Hesiod's poem, a fundamental piece of the world idyll, and the many other characteristics of the picture all indicate kinship with precisely the idyllic. What is more, in a sense *The Midday* may serve as an ideal illustration of M. Bakhtin's characteristic of the "idyllic chronotope"². It shows the characters (and the artist) as closely linked with their native land and nature, and the different types of the idyll (love, childhood, family, labour and pastoral), and the continuity of the generations as part of the eternal revival of nature, cycle and spheros³ of life.

The very title of the picture (and the state of nature it conveys) is a typical idyll topic since ancient times. In the formal stylistic and semantic planes of the picture it is easy to detect not only "hagiographical", but also other prototypes of different periods and "layers" of the history of the idyll, such as folklore, antiquity (both in the motifs and in spatial composition akin to the perceptive perspective of idyllic scenes in Ancient Roman painting),⁴ sentimental romanticist and realistically mundane (remember the importance Russian idyllic culture of the 19th century attached to representations of peasant children and mothers, haymaking and harvesting).

At the same time Petrov-Vodkin's specific colour system intensifying the energy of "white light", the re-interpreted Cezannism of forms and globalism relay to us thoughts of precisely the 20th-century artist, a contemporary and compatriot of V. Vernadsky and A. Chizhevsky, A. Platonov and M. Prishvin, V. Khlebnikov and M. Heidegger, K. Malevich and M. Matiushin.

¹ Adaskina, N.K. "Pedagogicheskaya Sistema K. S. Petrova-Vodkina" (Educational System of K. S. Petrov-Vodkin) // *Ocherki po russkomu i sovetskomu iskusstvu* (Essays on Russian and Soviet Art), Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1974, p. 283.

² "Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane. Ocherki po istoricheskoi poetike" (Time and Chronotope Forms in the Novel. Essays on Poetics of History) // Bakhtin, M. M. *Voprosy literatury i estetiki. Issledovaniya raznykh let* (Problems of Literature and Aesthetics. Studies of Different Years), Moscow, 1975, pp. 373–84.

³ For a concise and multidimensional account of antiquity sources and the history of ideas of "round" cosmos (spheros) in later periods see Shevchenko, V. *Proshchalnaya perspektiva* (Farewell Perspective), Moscow: Kanon+, 2013.

⁴ See Gombrich, E. H. *The Story of Art*, Moscow, 1998, pp. 113–4 and *The Pastoral landscape*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992.



Much of the above, of course, applies not only to the *Midday*, but the entire world of mature Petrov-Vodkin: this picture has motifs and solutions that can be found in many of his works – “genre scenes”, landscapes and still lifes – “in closeup”. We could see here the ploughing Mikula Selianovich from the 1918 revolutionary panel or a young rider on a scarlet horse, a unit of soldiers going up a hill to die “for the sake of life on Earth” and the features of the Mother of God in the image of a seated peasant mother having a respite.

Just one work brings to mind thoughts about the specific memory of genre characteristic of Petrov-Vodkin’s art and laws that impart the memory of the deeply rooted traditions of the idyll of different epochs and lands in its household and mundane, earthly and cosmic, concretely realistic and sacred dimensions to the imagery of this picture addressing contemporaries and open to the future. If we do not confine our review to his mature works but trace the whole of the road he travelled, we will see that his evolution, quests and experienced influences demonstrate the “memory” of Russian and European idylls unfolded in time from forms found in the immediately preceding paintings of the second half of the 19th century and up to their sources. I would like to try and briefly survey the specific “operation of memory” at different stages of his development and its coordination with the artist’s personal experience and “memory of the heart”.

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Midday. 1917
State Russian
Museum, Saint
Petersburg

Before that, however, as it is a matter of a broad spectrum of historical “layers” and types of idylls, it is necessary to offer a most general outline of our notions of their big-time evolution¹.

Deeply rooted in human mentality (they say that it shows manifestations of the memory of the “primordial wholeness”, “the restoration of the ancient complex and continuous folklore time” (M. Bakhtin), the Jungian archetypes of the Mother and eternal going back to the sources, etc.) the idylls in the broadest sense of the word have always been of paramount importance to human life (as, incidentally, attested by the “profane” viewers’ predilection for precisely idyllic images and preponderance of idylls in naïve art).

However, as a separate literary genre the idyll branched off and formed in late antiquity as “compensation” for man’s growing alienation from nature in the conditions of urban civilisation growth, as a means of the emotional re-unification of people with nature and an expression of the need for harmony and life without social contradictions.

The name of the genre is associated with the collection of writings of the poet Theocritus of Alexandria (ca. 300 – ca. 260 BC): the Greek *eidyllion* is interpreted as a “little picture”, a “little image”. Focussing mostly on the simple way of life of shepherds amidst nature, those “little pictures”, like *Eclogues* and *Georgics* of the Roman poet Virgil, became the most important and better-known specimens for the centuries-long traditions of this genre. But the real history of the idylls of antiquity, of course, had started earlier and goes back to primordial folklore, mysteries of the rebirth of nature, legends of the Golden Age and happy Arcadia, and the works of Hesiod and Homer².

The circle of the main characters of the literary idylls formed gradually in antiquity, both mythical (rural and forest gods, Daphnis, nymphs and household gods) and real – simple-hearted and good-natured shepherds, children and their caring mothers and primogenitors, lovers, farmers, fishermen, birders, etc. – all those who by their occupation and role in procreation were close to the beginnings of the eternal renovation of the life cycle

¹ Of course, many important theoretical and historical aspects and phenomena are reduced here, because in this case it is important to give the most general outline of the problems. For details of the nature of the genre and its individual modifications in Russian painting of the second half of the 19th century see Petrov, V. *Vasily Perov. Tvorchesky put khudozhnika* (Vasily Perov. The Artist’s Career), Moscow, 1997; introductory article to the catalogue of A. K. Savrasov’s exhibition at the State Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow, 2005, reprinted 2011) and the article “Ivan Sokolov... stranny i slavy” (Ivan Sokolov... Strange and Glorious) // *Antikvarny mir*, Moscow, April 2008, p. 6–39.

² For instance, episodes connected with Odysseus’s love of the home hearth, the image of Penelope and the description of the land of the Phaeacians in *Odyssey* served as models for many idyllicists of the later periods, and the same is true of a reflection of the antiquity ideas of “spherical” cosmos and the representation of scenes of peaceful life in the description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*.

and retained the “simplicity”, “naivety” and integrity of their characters and way of life “within” nature.

Although the notion of “the idyll” as a genre appeared in literature, as a meta-genre idylls had been present even earlier in plastic arts that originally inspired the poets of idylls: the first programmatic idyll of Theocritus already had an *ecphrasis* for a tuning-form – a description of a bowl with the representations of a fisherman, lovers and a little boy with grapes and foxes – and therefore tried to emulate classical Greek vase painting models (suffice it to recall *A Pelike with a Swallow*).

The main motifs, symbols and pervasive formal principles of the idylls also coalesced in antiquity. They were harmonious compositional and rhythmical linearly connected (most frequently three-part or two-part) structures that naturally connected the characters one with another and with the whole of the depicted space, circular and spherical constructs, parallels between human life and the changing seasons of the year, and the symbols of the sun, the evergreen tree of life, home (the hearth), water sources, animals and birds, flowers, fruit and so on.

With the advent of the Christian age the idylls, far from waning attained a new cosmic and spiritual transcendental dimension and proved paramount in shaping Christian symbols (shepherd, lamb, etc.) and the ideas of paradise (Garden of Eden, joys of paradise), finding expression in the representations of the gardens of love, books of hours, etc. in medieval art.

As an independent genre the idylls flourished again in the Renaissance period, merging the idyllic traditions of antiquity and the Middle Ages on the basis of humanistic thought and in new spatial coordinates and attributing an idyllic nature to many representations of saints (Franciscans especially idyllic), the Holy Family and above all Madonna and Child (idylls attained special heights in Venice in the works of G. Bellini and Giorgione¹). After going through a crisis and being broadly cultivated in the period of mannerism and baroque, idylls survived for a while in strictly classicist and “gallant” antiquitising forms and started gradually to be brought up to date. As urban civilisation expanded and the bourgeois man increasingly distanced himself from nature, burgher idylls with socially concrete characters came into being alongside playful rococo pastorals and images expressing the sentimentalists’ nostalgia for “the paradise lost”, “the Age of Astraea” and “the natural man”. Assertion of “familial” harmony and sanctity of “the private man’s” hearth moved to the foreground in the sense of involvement in the cycle of life as was characteristic of Biedermeier and its subsequent modifications (including the Salon and international kitsch, both antiquitising the “historical” and “modern” household with its typically narrowing horizon, shallow and fake sentiments, and “sublimation of feelings to the counterfeit” (N. Dmitrieva). Nevertheless, in the 19th century, too, the high, “co-natural” idylls transformed and played

¹ Yailenko, E. *Venetsianskaya antichnost* (Venetian Antiquity), Moscow, 2010.

an important role in the West European art of Corot, Millet, the artists of the Jules Breton and Bastien-Lepage circle, E. Manet¹ and the Impressionists (O. Renoir and B. Morisot), and then the symbolists (Böcklin, Puvis de Chavannes), Postimpressionists (Gauguin, the Nabis) and artists of the first third of the 20th century, including Matisse, the "neoclassicist" Picasso and others².

In pre-Petrine Rus (and in Russian folk culture up to the 20th century) the idylls lived on in both archaic, syncretic folklore forms (primarily in spring sun rituals and symbols) and icon painting as an important aspect of the worship of the Mother of God, the Trinity cult and "Russian sanctity" with its "heartfelt warmth", "sympathy for every creature", etc. It was not until the late 18th century that West European forms of the idylls smoothly gained a foothold in Russia, growing in importance in the time of N. Karamzin and A. Pushkin. In painting, this tradition manifested itself in antiquitising "Italian" and "Russian" variants³ and reached its peak in the first half of the 19th century in the works of F. Tolstoy, A. Venetsianov and his coterie, and in some works of A. Ivanov (*Apollo, Hyacinthus and Cypress*, and studies with boys). As the "ideal" shifted to "real" dominant, the life of idyllic traditions in Russian culture (as in the West) "bifurcated". In Salon and Academy painting idylls were in the nature of comfortable pleasure, imitation and "perversion".

The best of the realists with their aspirations towards "daily unity with the universe" (F. Dostoevsky) found the ground for idylls in the poetic aspects of peasant labour, rural estate (and to a lesser extent petty bourgeois) family life and the Ukrainian idyll. The images of peasant children were quite characteristic of this "layer" of idylls in literature and painting⁴. Although Russian realism of the 1860s and 1870s was dominated by the drama meta-genre and the idylls, being in a passive state, were relegated to the periphery and little attracted the positivistically-minded "Wanderers", thoughts about "the fate of the idyll" and idylls themselves in the prosaically controversial contemporary world remained an important feature

¹ See Chernysheva, M. *Manet*, Moscow, 2002.

² See: Philippe Boby de la Chapelle. *Paradis retrouvés. Un itinéraire artistique*. Paris, 2005; *Kingdom of the Soul. Symbolist Art in Germany 1870–1920*. Edited by Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds. Munich • London • New York, 2000.

³ See Allenov, M. M. *Tema "zolotogo veka" u A. Ivanova* (The Theme of the "Golden Age" in A. Ivanov) // Vipiper Research Conference, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 1982; Allenov, M. M. *Obraz prostranstva v zhivopisi "a la Natura": K voprosu o prirode venetsianovskogo zhanrizma* (The Image of Space in a la Nature Painting: On the Nature of Venetsianov's Genre) // *Sovetskoye iskusstvoznaniye* 83, Moscow, 1984; Yailenko, E., *Mif Italii v russkom iskusstve pervoi poloviny XIX veka* (The Myth of Italy in Russian Art of the First Half of the 19th Century), Moscow, 2012, and others.

⁴ F. Zelinsky, a leading expert on antiquity, opined in his article about Theocritus in the Brockhaus-Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary that "in *Peasant Children* and related poems Nekrasov... came closest to the Greek poet than any bucolic of the time of Catherine the Great").

of painting, especially that of Moscow (V. Perov, I. Pryanishnikov, A. Savrasov and others)¹.

By the end of the century, in the conditions of “twilight”, the crisis of traditional ties and the accelerated onslaught of urbanist machine civilisation, idyllic impulses became especially relevant, now in the form of a languishing and comforting “mood” that took artists and their imagination to villages and small towns still imbued with poetic charm on the river banks and ever more frequently to old estates and parks feeding dreams of “all-encompassing unity”, the wish to fill (and perhaps even vanquish and spiritualise) the cold and prosaic reality with images born of fantasy and loaded with “the music of an integral man” (M. Vrubel). The generation of Serov-Levitan-Korovin was more inclined towards the idyllic landscapes and genre scenes of the poetically realistic and impressionistic type (remember the special affection Serov and Nesterov had for *Rural Love* by Bastien-Lepage), meanwhile the idylls of the subsequent “formations”, starting with the “retrospective dreams” of the “World of Art” artists, tended to “recall” the ever more distant and deep-lying “layers” of the history of culture and simultaneously turned “for support” to the latest scientific trends. Precisely Petrov-Vodkin became one of the most significant explorers and trailblazers in this direction. In his works frustration caused by the gap between the memory of “childhood paradise” and the thorny uncertainty of the huge changing world awakened and fused together the memory of many of the stages and types of world idyll history mentioned above, transforming it into belief in the forthcoming victory of “organic culture” on earth – the aim “perhaps unattainable, yet inevitable”, to quote M. Prishvin.

Primary, “preverbal” childhood impressions of people, nature and family relations are always of paramount importance in the maturing of artists and their finding their “identity” and kindred traditions. They are especially important in works of men of genius of an idyllic bent, who convey ideas of “unabused”, childishly pure and happy life in direct unity of man and nature. This is absolutely true of Petrov-Vodkin. Nature of rare “planetary” beauty in the environs of Khvalynsk, a loving mother, a “simple kind-hearted” family, early “intimacy with Earth” (as Petrov-Vodkin put it) and the



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Courtyard
at Night. 1901
State Russian
Museum, Saint
Petersburg

¹ See the aforementioned book about Perov and articles about A. Savrasov and I. Sokolov. The customary ideas of the mundane genre of that period ignore very important distinctions between its idyllic, dramatic and naturalist (ethnographical) types. The tremendous importance of the idyllic dimension in the works of major Russian realist writers, above all Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov, and its intensity even in public thought have been left out here. For instance, in *What Is to Be Done?* N. Chernyshevsky described the desired state of society as “an idyll for all and everybody”.

people's life and work, and acquaintance with folklore and the art of icon painting were all described more than once in writings about Petrov-Vodkin and, more importantly, determined much in his works.

However, his "road to himself" was not easy. His impressions of social life in the province and in St Petersburg and studies at the F. Burov classes of painting and drawing in Samara (1893–5) and at the Stieglitz School (1895–7) were not conducive to the development, "self-evolution" of his talent. His memories of native Khvalynsk, the Volga, his cozy home, love of his mother who was his main correspondent and a "supreme being" of sorts, the sacred focus of his childhood memory¹, compensated for his dissatisfaction with the philistine environment and the forms of art promoted by his teachers in those years.

It was only in Moscow, in the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (1897–1905) that he found support to embark on a road to big art² and felt at home in the spiritually creative atmosphere formed way back by V. Perov, A. Savrasov and V. Polenov, the fact pointed out by Perov's disciples N. Kasatkin and K. Gorsky (the latter said that Petrov-Vodkin was endowed with a "sacred fire". 1, 44). Characteristically, M. Nesterov, who

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Family at the Table
(Shoemaker's Family).
1902
Research Museum
of the Russian
Academy of Arts,
Saint Petersburg

¹ "The image and soul" of Mother soared over all the "filth" of "fake hypocrites" around in the city, "the princes of this world" and "the stormy world of people" (1, 39–40).

² "Disappointed with the Stieglitz School... Don't see any charming beauty... I seem to hear the quiet splash of water of the mirror-like smooth surface of the Volga ... I have no backbone. I am finally transferring into a new atmosphere (...) to Moscow ... my school, Russian school is starting" (1, 322); "Moscow and its character is dearer to me" (1, 139).





rejected the painterly system of mature Petrov-Vodkin, would later recognise “Aksakov-type” “incomparable simplicity, genuine tone”, “warmth and artlessness” typical of the Moscow idyll in his books (1, 281).

Like his comrade and fellow-countryman P. Kuznetsov, Petrov-Vodkin turned out to be especially sensitive to the “pleasing” imagery of Serov’s painting (who became his chief teacher), Moscow idyllic landscape painting and “mood” elegy. His early works painted during his trips back home are in tune with Levitan and have Chekhovian traits (*Two in a Boat*, *Courtyard* (1897), *By the Estate* (1899) and especially *Courtyard at Night* (1901), most likely showing the artist’s mother with geese).

His multifarious creative interests during those years bespeak his gravitation towards other types of the idyll: alongside dramatically idyllic themes of the Perov type, he tried his hand at Salon and Academy idylls in the spirit of Siemiradzki and Bakalowicz¹ as well as Böcklin. He recalled

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
The Artist’s Family.
1903
Art Museum
of K.S. Petrov-Vodkin,
Khvalynsk

¹ This range of interests is also evident from his earlier works and from his letter to Mother dated 1900, in which he describes his sketches: “A small peasant hut, an old father, his son with his wife have just supped, the hut is semi-dark and sad... they have sunk into reverie to the tunes of foul weather, every one of them frozen in one’s own posture... now I’m drawing the opposite – the bright sun, a boat has come up to a marble stairway and two women are getting out of it – this one is from Egyptian life” (1, 51). Petrov-Vodkin is known to have gone through a brief period of infatuation with Siemiradzki in his youth, but soon came to the conclusion that it was “empty decorative treacle”. That the young Petrov-Vodkin caught Perov’s impulses of the Moscow school is borne out by the fact that in 1900 he worked on a sketch of *The Drowned Woman* that has not survived (1, 55).

his early infatuation with Böcklin's "satyrs and naiads" in connection with his 1900 trip to Germany, where he was disappointed to see Böcklin's "sloppy" paintings in the original, the artist he until then had found close in his "humanness" (1, 311).

A bicycle journey to Germany across Belorussia and Poland, studies at the Azbe school and impressions of German museums and exhibitions and the Germans' way of life and culture marked a highly important stage in expanding his "memory storeroom". He later recalled his musings before canvases of Stuck and Lenbach, at an exhibition of French art in Munich, etc., apparently naming far from everything that became engraved in his memory and later showed in his works. Munich and Berlin exhibitions of the early 1900s "brimmed" with works of symbolist artists weaned on the ideas of Nietzsche and the antiquitising "paradise idyll" of poet Stefan George's circle, which would be echoed (for instance, pictures by L. von Hofmann and A. Volkman) in some of his later works.

But in the very beginning of the 20th century Petrov-Vodkin felt greater kinship with a peculiar combination of the mundane idyll in the Biedermeier traditions and sacred evangelism in the spirit of F. von Uhde, one of the leaders of the Munich Secession, whose *Christ of the Poor* visited poor people in modern surroundings and blessed the life of honest toilers.

The influence of von Uhde's religious painting is seen already in the description of paintings that Petrov-Vodkin together with his friends did in 1902 in the Saratov Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God and that were destroyed at the request of the clergy for "modernising" religious painting". To some extent it may have determined the solution of the two versions of the painting *Family: Family at the Table* (*Shoemaker's Family*, 1902, Research Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts) and *The Artist's Family* (1903, Petrov-Vodkin Picture Gallery of Khvalynsk). They clearly outline the spiritual situation with which the artist started his career: the idyllic domestic scene also conveys the feeling of the sacred family circle and the memory of the vast and mysterious world in which the children are to live and work. With the images of the mother and the boy, his alter ego, Petrov-Vodkin obviously alludes to the representation of Madonna and Child (in the version *Family at the Table – The Holy Family*)¹. In the same year of 1903 the sacred dimension of the image of motherhood was introduced in pure form in the *Mother of God and Child* majolica on the façade of the church of the Vreden Orthopaedic Institute in St Petersburg. (Moscow painting had already known a similar combination

¹ His letters to Mother also evidence his desire "to emulate Jesus Christ" that was typical of Petrov-Vodkin at that time and of his feeling his special mission: "I am proud that you have passed the noble behest to me, too, since childhood... This is what Jesus Christ, who has given all his aspirations and his life for others, is all about... and now somewhere in silence a great man is working to bring clarity and peace to earth, there should be one thing – faith in that man will after all come to this, and the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of great truth will come to earth". GRM. F. 105. Ed. khr. 1. L. 31–32.

by Perov¹.) Such representation of the sacred plane through the mundane was even more characteristic of symbolist literature, in which simple family scenes were frequently perceived as a window onto the world of “supreme beings” (see, for instance D. Merezhkovsky’s poem *The Family Idyll*).

The Mother of God and Child executed in the pronouncedly Modern style was a manifestation of the symbolist “clearing away the obstacles for time and space”, which is felt in his *Self-Portrait* of 1903 and his literary writings of that period – the plays *The Sacrificial* and *The Ringing Island* marked by the influence of F. Nietzsche, H. Ibsen, G. Hauptmann and V. Soloviev. During that time Petrov-Vodkin lived through a sort of Treplev period (remember Chekhov’s character of *Seagull* with his “world soul”) of passionate experience of new, cosmic parameters of spiritual self-identification. The subjects and style of his 1904 studies (*Prometheus*, *Demon*, *Fantasy* and *Hermit*) bespeak his intense thoughts about the existing energies of being and culture, the earthly and the celestial, “the beastly” and the “angelic”, and the “glowing” (fiery) constituent of man and his works. In painting, this found expression in the specific Vrubelian tenor of some of his works, in general cultural and philosophical planes in his esoteric interests and Goetheanism. Ever since the time of K. Rabus² Moscow artists had worshipped Goethe, first as a poet, naturalist and theorist of colour. For Petrov-Vodkin he was primarily the author of the 1st and 2nd parts of *Faustus* who looked into the praphenomena and created symbols of cosmic essences. Petrov-Vodkin recalled how, together with his architect friend – “a peasant son still full of landscape insight” – read Goethe in 1904, “bathing in cosmic romantics... Microcosms and macrocosms... brought life into motion... Ages of earthly deposits, shifts and catastrophes rose before us, rhythmicised by the genius of the artist. Periods of world events became stamped out in front of us. Rows of atmospheres coiled around the earth, receding into the depth of other systems and nebulas” (2, 506).

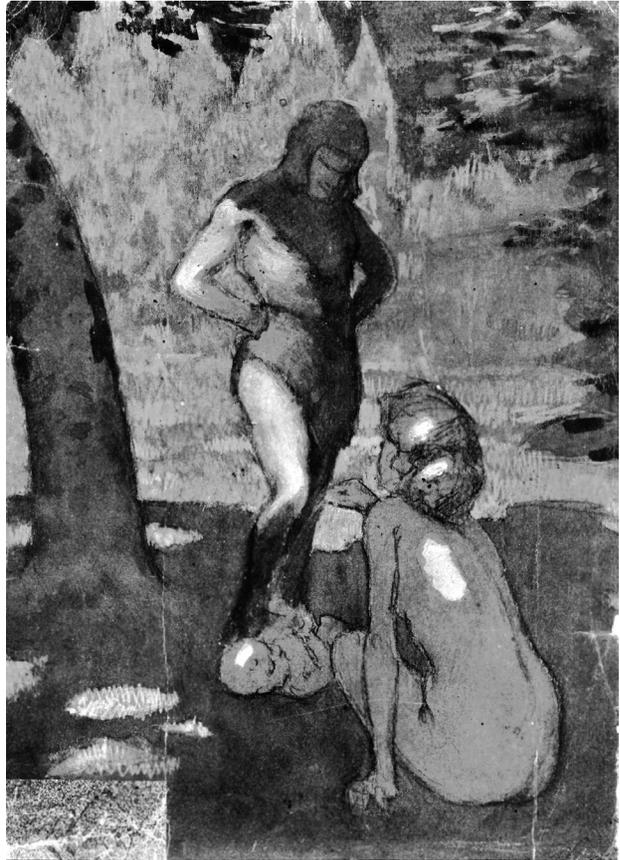
Goethe, beyond doubt, largely influenced Petrov-Vodkin’s desire to embody the cosmic essence of harmony and beauty, “ideal consonance and



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Orpheus. 1904
Private collection

¹ I mean here the matching pictures *Sleeping Children* and *The Mother of God in the Everyday Sea. An Artist’s Dream*, which Perov painted in 1868.

² See the introductory article to the A. Savrasov exhibition catalogue for K. Rabus teaching the theory of colour “according to Goethe” and Levitan (who also studied works of the German poet philosopher) formulating his ideal of a landscape painter by quoting Baratynsky’s *To Goethe’s Death*: “He lived the life of nature”. Vrubel, too, was passionately enthusiastic about Goethe and delighted with the epic poem *Hermann and Dorothea* and the novel *Elective Affinities*.



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Adam and Eve. 1904
Private collection

chords” and “the music of the spheres”. During his “Vrubelian” phase, this found expression in the picture *Orpheus* (1904). At about the same time Petrov-Vodkin might have conceived *Chaos* (1906), in which an infant of the harmony of reason and orderly universe is being born out of “blind nothing”: the head of the embryo surrounded by snakes of chaos is a sphere as a symbol of consummate cosmos.

The brief period of dramatic Vrubelism soon gave way to (or merged with) the idyllic dominant of works, which evidence influence of Borisov-Musatov¹ (*Blooming Garden*, *In the Garden*, *Adam and Eve*, all 1904). However, Petrov-Vodkin found works of his older colleague “incomplete”: “they lacked ...a probe into the symbol of things” (2, 513). Now if there was more of the poetically illuminated “mood” in Musatov’s watercolour *Daphnis and Chloe* (after the ancient idyll), Petrov-Vodkin’s sketch for *Adam and Eve* obviously marked his probing deep into reflections on the praphenomenon

¹ Petrov-Vodkin himself recollected the influence produced on him by Borisov-Musatov’s works and family life, the coziness of his household where “flower garlands... the wife and the sister as if descended from his canvases were a link between his household and his pictures....soft femininity felt in everything...” (2, 513).



of humaneness as the sinless state of people befitting God's wonderful creation. This reaching out to the fundamentals and different historical forms and ways of correlating man with the harmony of cosmos became the main vector of Petrov-Vodkin's quests in the second half of the 1900s and the maturing of his "poetic philosophy of colours" (1, 77). From the formal point of view, the artist obviously shifted to neoclassicist (antiquitising) symbolism.

His trip to Italy in 1905–6 was obviously prompted by his desire to go "to the heart of the matter" in the history of art. Even his itinerary is proof of his "bold" aspirations: Istanbul (Byzantine and Islamic art), Athens (Ancient Greece), Italy (Eternal Rome, Venice, Florence, Naples, Pompeii, etc.)¹. He did not work much with his brush and primarily focussed on studying nature and artworks, consciously amassing his **memory stocks**, "a huge groundwork now already for his own experiences in Paris" (1, 79), attaching paramount importance to the "planetary" aspect of the history of pictorial art as a succession of different forms of "**merging with nature through painting**" (1, 318).

It has been pointed out more than once that it is impossible to understand Petrov-Vodkin's subsequent works without his Italian impressions.

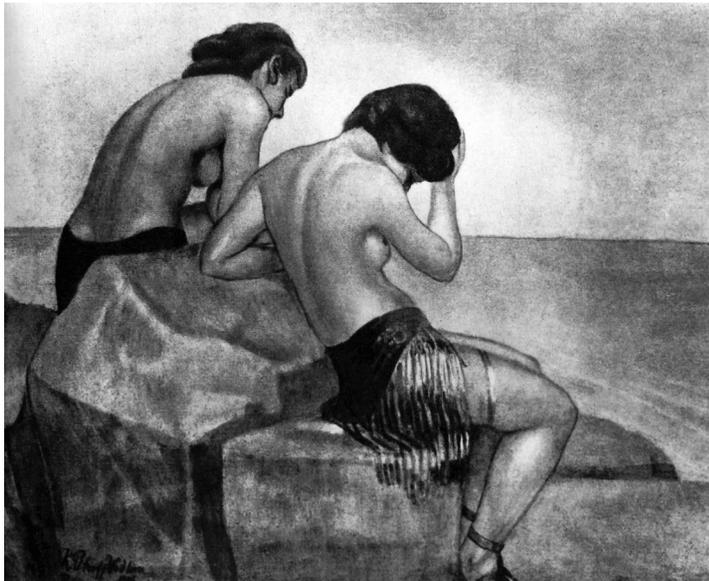
¹ During that trip Petrov-Vodkin was still under Goethe's tremendous influence as is attested by his itinerary and the "geopolitical" drive (like Goethe, Petrov-Vodkin went up to the neck of Vesuvius) and by a fascinating piece of drama, *A Tale of Life*, written by him in Italy in late 1905 in imitation of *Faustus*. Curiously, Petrov-Vodkin planned (but failed) to visit Sicily, where Theocritus had been born and "where... nightingales are and where there is always eternal spring" (1, 85).

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Goatherd. 1932
Headpiece
to the chapter
"Living Nature"
of his story *Euclid's*
Space
State Russian
Museum, Saint
Petersburg

However, they usually speak of the influence of masters of the Italian Renaissance. Yet, even more important is the fact that the artistic cosmos of antiquity and the cultural prototypes of Ancient Greek art were, according to him, unsurpassed in perfection, "the immediacy of creativity" (1, 73), "measure of tact" (hereinafter for antiquity see chapters 16–17 of *Prostranstvo Evklida* (Euclid's Space)) and the revelation of the beauty of the human body "apparatus"; for Petrov-Vodkin they became the benchmark and measure of understanding the history of art. In future, the artist felt Hellenistic culture ("Greek energy") "clear, sunny and nakedly simple for all and everybody" as "our common homeland". He also associated the highest accomplishments of early Russian art with the "inherited Hellenistic world outlook", which "will bypass the dry canons to transform into Rublev and Dionysius of our Renaissance". It is characteristic that among the few drawings for the "Italian" part of his book the artist included a pastoral picture of an ancient goatherd, obviously referencing the associative row headed by Hesiod, formerly goatherd and peasant and the author of *Works and Days*, on the pages where he correlated antique beauty that he thought most genuine and modernity.

Of course, Petrov-Vodkin also pondered on the essence of antiquity giving way to "the new sky" and "new culture out of the other world" "with talismans of fishes, the cross and the lamb". Yet, in his reasoning on the Hagia Sophia dome and Byzantine mosaics, "the two voices of Graeco-Roman culture and Christianity" in "Eternal Rome" and the favourite masters of the Renaissance there lives memory of the fact that the artists of antiquity discovered "all the sources of expression... the laws of constructing and unfolding forms which the masters of the Renaissance operated with" and that the best masters of the Renaissance, according to Petrov-Vodkin,

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Elegy. 1906
Whereabouts
unknown



knew how to combine “the Greek measure of tact” and “the medieval focus on the thing”. He found masters dealing in the idyll especially close to him: the memory of Fra Angelico and Raphael, Giorgione and G. Bellini (whose Madonna from the Brera gallery he regarded as short of the “most intimate” piece of world painting) lived in his works and texts to his last days. And among the images of his infinitely appreciated Leonardo da Vinci he preferred the most idyllic *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* that he saw already in the Louvres. In the subsequent development of European art Petrov-Vodkin saw signs of increasing “rift between man and planetary life”, the overcoming of which became one of the main goals of his own quests.

Formal studies and impact of European art (first and foremost that of Puvis de Chavannes and Les Nabis) seen from the point of view of stylistic characteristics are usually brought to the fore from among Petrov-Vodkin’s works of the first Paris period (1906–7). This attraction had, of course, far deeper-going reasons matching the artist’s desire to comprehend impressions accumulated in Italy and to translate into life his thoughts about the essence of art, the relationship of original classical sources and the unity of the microcosm of an artwork with the harmony of macrocosm that he was seeking. Puvis de Chavannes, an avowed idyllicist and singer of antiquity, just as the “poet of spring” Maurice Denis who was close to Maeterlinck, a favourite of Petrov-Vodkin’s at that time, attracted him not only by the outer but also by the inner form of their art and the ways of realising the “dream of the Golden Age” and attaining the feeling of “celestial bliss” and the state “of heaven and earth united in harmony”¹. At the same time he obviously tried to avoid the immaterial “otherworldliness” (“the beautiful nudity”, as he would put it later on) of their works and, inspired by the plasticity of antique art, to arrive at the unity of spirituality and symbolic meaning and to convey the main laws of the “rising up” and interaction of bodies in world space, in “round” living cosmos. His quest is discernible in studies from nature (with their living memory of antique statues seen in Italy, in *Seated Hermes* in particular) and especially in works of 1906, such as *Elegy* (has not survived) and *At the Fountain* (State Tretyakov Gallery), in which by all appearances Petrov-Vodkin sought to understand and embody the invariant foundations of different genres in pure form².

By portraying in his *Elegy* melancholy women on the seashore, he tried to express, alongside full volume and bodily concreteness, the poignant feeling, inseparable from this genre, of how small and transient humans are in the face of the ocean of space and time. Even though (as distinct from the expressive study referencing antique prototypes and partially Böcklin) this picture “smacks of the studio”, it formulates some

¹ Petrov-Vodkin, K. S. *Zvenyashchii ostrov* (The Ringing Island) // RGALI. F. 2010. Op. 1. Ed. khr. 118. L. 7.

² Petrov-Vodkin continued thinking about the specifics of genres and their impact on the author himself and the viewers; see, for instance, his works of 1908 *Theatre. Drama* and *Theatre. Farce*.

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
At the Fountain.
Study, 1906
State Tretyakov
Gallery, Moscow



Flora (Spring).
1st century B.C.
Fragment of fresco
from Castellammare
di Stabia
National
Archaeological
Museum, Naples



important general principles and “brings together outward attributes of Petrov-Vodkin’s future pictures”¹. The unfinished work *At the Fountain* in all likelihood meant to convey the fundamentals of the idyll as an epitome of the light feeling of people being party to the eternal source of life and the cycle of being. Anyhow, the picture is constructed of motifs and symbols associated with the idyll (circle, bowl, the reflection of the sky in water, maidens dancing with “their arms gracefully entwined in a round” (Homer’s description of the shield of Achilles) and contains a direct reference that imparts the antique “measure of tact” to the image: one of the maidens is a “double” of Flora, one of the most poetical images of antique paintings from the Museum of Naples. A text from the artist’s notebook of that period corresponds to these works: “Poetry is the rhythm of world movement. Joy – happiness in peace – in friendship with world laws (love) (idyll – VP) ... melancholy – awareness of being subordinate to irreversible will ... (essence of elegism – VP) (1, 292).

For all their “theoretical” interest these works are in the nature of a laboratory study devoid of vibrant energy, which gives an insight into the growing pains experienced by the artist in Paris in 1907, when he felt that “something valuable had been forgotten, it was necessary to find or recall the forgotten” and “to shake off the superfluous that has accumulated in this city of immense rumble and folly” (1, 93).

A trip to Africa (April – June 1907) helped overcome the crisis. Many cultural figures inside and outside Russia at that

¹ Sarabianov, D. V. *Russkaya zhivopis kontsa 1900-kh – nachala 1910-kh godov. Ocherki* (Russian Paintings of the Late 1900s – Early 1910s. Essays), Moscow, 1971, p. 36.



time felt the need to give an energy boost to the sense of life and its foundations through contact with primordial nature and the way of life and beliefs of “primitive” peoples. It was especially natural of Petrov-Vodkin with his genetic “kinship with Earth” and thoughts of the fundamentals of human existence.

Works and letters of that period show that he found in Africa support for his “search of heaven” and resound with the joy of finding the sought impressions and experiences (he felt he was “in real paradise”: “it is some fairytale, any minute now Adam and Eve would leap out from behind a palm-tree”¹ (1, 103). He also confessed that those experiences were also the awakening memory of “childhood paradise”: “I recognized myself again as I was in childhood... granted Mother’s caresses” (2, 669).

In his African works, Petrov-Vodkin went back stylistically in a way: his pictures of the desert at night evince memory of Levitan’s meditative merger with twilight space and there are elements of the “mundane” idyll in his scenes from the life of the aborigines (*The Kiss* and *Negress*). As distinct

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
A Nomad Family
(African Family).
1907
Chuvash State Art
Museum, Cheboksary

¹ From then on the word “paradise” often recurred in the artist’s letters. “My paradise”, he says about his favourite tropical garden in Biskra. “Our love will be our leisure and will give us heaven on earth”, he writes to his wife (1, 105–6). Cf. “In the village outside Paris there is downright paradise: blossom, greenery, nightingales trilling, but still, it is hard to find a spring or moonlit nights such as we have on the Volga” (1, 116); “In Urrugne there is a small paradise amidst roses, mountains and the sea” (1, 116), and so on. In the *Aoiya* story written for children (Saint Petersburg, 1914, started in the early 1910s) the character admiring the beauty of the mysterious island says: “how good ... the garden of paradise must have been like that...” (p. 48).



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
The Dream. 1910
State Russian
Museum, Saint
Petersburg

from Gauguin’s idylls, Petrov-Vodkin focusses not on the “mysterious beliefs and the nirvana of life amidst the spirits of nature” of the aboriginal Garden of Eden, but on the manifestations of eternal and simple constituents of the life of the local tribes amidst nature, such as work, love, childbirth and raising of children, in which he saw a “common, ever-lasting and timeless substance independent of any variables and always alive”¹. The main picture of the series – the idyll *A Nomad Family* (which the artist called *African Madonna*) – is a modified design of *The Family* of 1903–4 drawing, but based on impressions of antiques: the figure of the Mother looks sculpted and monumental in the spirit of ancient representations of reclining goddesses.

“The Recollection of the forgotten” in Africa boosted the artist’s creative potential, cleansing and invigorating his sense of the universal kindred (family) sources of human history, including the history of antiquity: in his idyllic *Greek Panel* (1910) produced two years later he freely interpreted the motif known from ancient vase paintings in a lively lucid portrait of an antique family “trinity” and fitted into the Golden Age tradition of European art (bringing to mind above all Flaxman).

Other works of the late 1900s – early 1910s were likewise executed in idyllic and elegiac modes, starting from *The Shore* (1908), which had been conceived well before the African journey and which echoed both the antique prototypes and works of Puvis de Chavannes, in particular his *Jeunes filles au bord de la mer* (Young Girls by the Seaside, 1879) and *Pastoral Poetry* (1891).

¹ Sarabianov, D. V. Op. cit., p. 49.



“Memories” of the world idyllic traditions also play an important role in *Dream* (1910), which Petrov-Vodkin painted after his return to Russia. He is known to have encoded it as a symbolical representation of “the human genius... poetic mind... whose awakening is guarded... by beauty and... monstrosity... that perpetually accompany creativity”¹. The affinity of the structure of this picture with Raphael’s idyllic *Vision of a Knight* was pointed out more than once. The row of parallels to the image of a “poetic mind” can be extended significantly with representations of sleeping characters by idyll painters of different ages, such as Giorgione, Correggio, Millet, our Venetsianov and the selfsame Puvis de Chavannes, who conveyed a similar collision of choice in *Le rêve* (The Dream, Musée d’Orsay) showing Fortune, Glory and Love coming to the sleeping poet in dream.

Petrov-Vodkin repeatedly painted the state of sleep (repose), a motif naturally associated with the idylls: sleeping peacefully (“the sleep of an infant”), man temporarily leaves the “autonomous regime” and with the rhythm of his breath and heartbeat merges with nature, “going back” to it. Other works, too, demonstrate the link with that tradition. For example, in one of his illustrations to *Aoiya* the picture of a sleeping girl nearly literally coincides with *The Sleeping Shepherd Boy* by the idyllic genre artist A. Lashin (1862, Penza Museum of Art), which in turn had classicist prototypes.

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Language of Colours.
1910
State Museum
of Arts of the Republic
of Kazakhstan,
Almaty

¹ Cit. Selizarova, E. N. *Proizvedeniya Petrova-Vodkina v Gosudarstvennom Russkom muzee* (Works of Petrov-Vodkin at the State Russian Museum), Moscow, 1966, p. 2.

The range of “memories” of the antique, Renaissance and Poussin idylls is also represented by *Witches* (1908, has not survived), *The Expulsion* (1911), *Bacchante* and *Youth* (both 1912). In his *Language of Colours* (1910) Petrov-Vodkin again echoes the idylls of Borisov-Musatov and Denis.

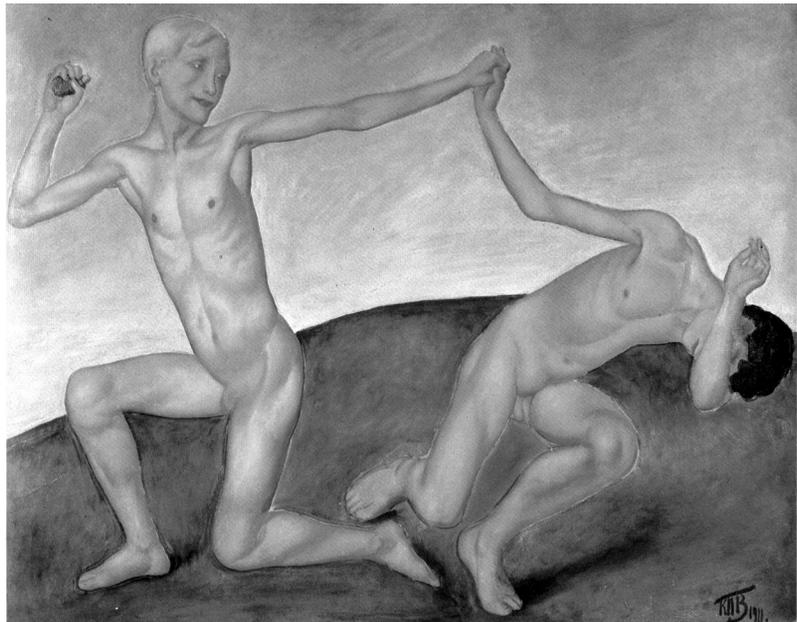
From the 1910s, his re-unification with Russian cosmopsychologos (G. Gachev) and Early Russian art traditions began to play an important part in his works. On the face of it the impulse came from Petrov-Vodkin’s work in Ovruch, where he did frescoes *Abel’s Offering* and *Cain Killing His Brother Abel* and a representation of a rainbow with the Eye of Omniscience on the dome above in St Basil’s Golden-Domed Church. However, it was no chance commission and the clients’ desire to have frescoes done “in 12th-century style” matched his aspirations; what was more, the artist himself chose the subjects and their solutions.

Bypassing the entire range and depth of the problems connected with Petrov-Vodkin’s recourse to icon painting traditions, let me point out that this part of his works, too, was directly linked with his childhood memories: he said that while he worked on the frescoes, memories of the first impressions of Old Believers’ icons¹ and his own childhood experiments in this field woke up graphically and vividly.

The theme of heaven (paradise garden), as we saw, persisted in his texts and works. Now he addressed the biblical story, which had for ages served as a basis for pondering on the destiny of man’s “sinless” essence after he

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Boys (Boys at Play).
1911
State Russian
Museum,
Saint Petersburg

¹ Characteristically, he starts enumerating Novgorod school icons that he had remembered from childhood for their “colour glow” with the “idyllic” icon *In Thee Rejoiceth All Creation*, and he found Rublev and Dionysius “close and familiar already from childhood” (1, 130).



had embarked on the road of knowing good and evil. Now if the meek shepherd Abel repeatedly appeared in literature as a sort of ideal pastoral character (see, for example, *The Death of Abel* by the well-known 18th-century idyll painter and poet S. Gessner), the image of Cain more than once served for other latter-day authors as a prototype of people endowed with “pride” and “a doubting spirit”.

Obviously, it was precisely this dialectic coexistence in human history of people “naively” loyal to the supreme heavenly light and endowed with “features of divine wisdom granted by God to pure and simple souls”¹ and of the willful ones endowed with a gift of creativity but falling away from God (“proud dissention from heaven”) that Petrov-Vodkin was concerned about in this story. Such interpretation also clarifies the artist’s statement that he dedicated his *Boys at Play* (of the same year 1910 and obviously linked with the subject and solution of the Ovruch frescoes) to the memory of Serov and Vrubel (with whom, especially with Vrubel, he indeed had a friendship-animosity relationship).

This dialectical aspect in no way contradicts the nature of the picture as a sort of cosmic idyll of childhood (space is given here as planetary “ground”) in line with representations of angels playing in Heaven (the *Dance* panel of Matisse, its closest parallel, is likewise a version of the fragment of the “paradise” picture, *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (Joy of Life, 1905–6, Barnes Foundation, USA) by the French master inspired by Greek vase painting) and “mundane” idyllic pictures of playing children in genre painting (see, for example, V. Perov’s *Children at the Skating Rink*). According to V. Kostin, the idea of doing this picture occurred to Petrov-Vodkin when he watched children playing on the beach. There is no doubt that, working on it, Petrov-Vodkin also recalled “studies with boys” by his favourite A. Ivanov.

Thus, 1910 saw the principles of art of mature Petrov-Vodkin crystallise distinctly, combining “the native and the universal”, mundane idylls frequently connected with personal childhood and family experiences and “planetary” symbolist solutions with harmoniously welded layers (iconographical, spatial, light/colour and melody) storing the memory of artistic revelations of antiquity and the Renaissance, folk art, the experience of realistic painting and “sunny mysticism” (E. Trubetskoi) of early Russian icons, images of the Theotokos, frescoes of Dionysius and, of course, Andrei Rublev’s *Trinity*.

Scholars have more than once written about the influence of spherical space, inner music and the images of Rublev’s icon on the mature works of Petrov-Vodkin and the manifestation of that influence both in his direct address to that subject and in many of his pictures, from *The Bathing*

¹ See Poirret, Pierre. *Prosveshchennyi pastukh, ili dukhovnyi razgovor odnogo blagochestivogo svyashchennika s pastukhom, v kotorom otkryvayutsya divnyie tainy bozhestvennoi i tainstvennoi premudrosti, yavlyayemoi ot Boga chistym i prostym dusham* (Enlightened shepherd, or spiritual talk of a devout priest with a shepherd that reveals wondrous mysteries of divine and mysterious wisdom granted by God to pure and simple souls), Russian translation, Saint Petersburg, 1806.

of a Red Horse (1912) to *After the Battle*. This link is especially visible in some preparatory works, a sketch for the painting *Young Girls on the Volga* in particular. It in no way contradicts the thesis of the idyllic dominant in Petrov-Vodkin's works and prompts an even deeper probe into the nature of this meta-genre. After all, from a certain point of view it was Rublev's *Trinity* that in the history of world art produced perhaps the most consummate image of the benevolent feeling of all-encompassing world unity that one way or another forms the essence of idyllic aspirations¹ (even in "profane", narrow and modified versions). The compositional, semantic and musical fundamentals and principles of trinitarity in a circle² conveyed by Rublev in his work of genius can be observed in a multitude of idyllic artworks, from Hellenistic vase painting to works by Millet and the neoclassicist Picasso.

In Russia, for all the twists and turns of its cultural development, this tradition, the same as specific experience and interpretation of light as divine energy that creates the world and is one and only in its physical, spiritual, emotional and ethical incarnations³, was of special significance as the basis for the enforcement of "pan-humanity" and "daily unity with the universe" (Dostoevsky) that was characteristic of figures of secular Russian culture. It was only natural that scholars (M. Alpatov, D. Sarabianov, M. Allenov and others) more than once stated that major Russian painters associated with the idyllic tradition, such as V. Borovikovsky, A. Venetsianov, A. Ivanov, A. Savrasov and I. Levitan, had things traced back to Rublev in their works, and that this, of course, also applied to 20th-century artists, including Petrov-Vodkin, P. Kuznetsov and other masters gifted with "monumental lyricism" (V. Favorsky), who consciously referenced Rublev's prototype.

Petrov-Vodkin was just as sensitive to the traditions of Russian painting of the Theotokos icons, above all of the Eleousa type, which apparently best expressed the idea of sacredness of "motherhood in general" (as he put it). At the same time his works somehow "remembered" not only the ancient "Motherhood of Earth"⁴, early Russian icons of the Theotokos and frescoes of Dionysius, but also, on the one hand, the images of the great Italian idyll painters – Fra Angelico, Giorgione and "the most hearty Bellini" – and, on the other, 19th-century Russian idylls, not only those of Venetsianov and his school, but also of masters of Russian "ideal realism" whose works

¹ In the Bible the Trinity comes to the pious Abraham and Sarah, in whom scholars see a parallel with Philemon and Baucis, the textbook characters of the bucolic tradition.

² For writings about the Trinity and trinitary structures in everyday life, knowledge and history of culture that are especially informative for our subject (including illustrations) see Borzova, E.P., *Triadologiya*, Saint Petersburg, 2013.

³ Dmitry Sarabianov repeatedly wrote about that, in particular, in his book *Russkaya zhivopis. Probu-zhdeniye pamyati* (Russian Painting. The Awakening of Memory), Moscow, 1998, and in the article "Ogon i svet u Surikova" (Fire and Light in Surikov) // *Iskusstvovoznaniye* 2/98, Moscow, 1998.

⁴ In *Aoiya* Earth is repeatedly described as "the great mother of all things living".

focussed on the idyllic element, albeit buried deep in prosaic reality. In this sense, even though the “passive” paintings of the “Wanderers” were alien to Petrov-Vodkin, his works linked him to them through inner social ethics and poetical imagery as strongly as any other master of his generation. This refers to the similar “manifestation” of “Madonna” features and “haloed humaneness” in ordinary women and children with the help of tacit quotations from classical painting and iconography (see my book about Perov) and the thrust of the “softener of evil hearts” (does Perov’s *Troika* not have the same meaning?) and to the specific depiction of idyllic scenes from peasant life (for all their different colour scheme, some of Petrov-Vodkin’s works literally “echo” Perov’s sketches).

The solution of the pastoral motif of *The Bathing of a Red Horse* “remembers” the solar ridges of the housetops of people “living by the sun” (from S. Yesenin’s *Kliuchi Marii* (Maria’s Keys)), riders on the Parthenon frieze and the host of heaven from icons, V. Serov’s luciferous *Bathing of a Horse* and the joy of merging with nature which Petrov-Vodkin experienced on the Volga shores in his youth and which 19th-century idylls wonderfully expressed, in particular Turgenev’s *Bezhin lug* (Bezhin Meadow) and V. Makovsky’s genre scenes showing peasant children and their favourite pastime, grazing horses at night¹. Precisely this merger of the real mundane (idyllic) and sacred “layers” coordinated by the existing state of society and culture makes a picture express hope for one’s awakening and acting in the stormy modernity of the “light essence” of being which the artist asserts, “dreaming about the purification of mankind and passionately cherishing the idea of its regeneration... through the restoration of primordial human qualities”².

An understanding of the high idyllic nature of the emotional charge, visual thinking and “memory stock” of Petrov-Vodkin’s art helps understand the link between his works and the quests and discoveries made by avant-garde masters with whom he had much in common. His letters of the late 1890s – early 1900s show that, like the future “leftists”, he thought intensely about the consequences of the spread of machines, electricity, the discovery of radioactivity, “disappearance of matter” and so on. Goetheanism nourished the artist’s interest in the cosmic nature of earthly form, the laws of gravitation, the essence of entropy and the laws of the perception

¹ Curiously, Ivan Bunin, too, cited similar moments of his childhood as the happiest in his life.

For the idyllic feelings in the course of work on the *Bathing of a Red Horse* see the artist’s letter from Grekov’s estate, where he worked on the picture in the summer of 1912: “We have landed, I could say, in paradise – it’s so good here! The river, forest and good people... I love to go boating... amidst the trees, amidst water lilies – such rest and the quiet of solitude... I like very much the way this family treats peasants and mutual love and in general the moving and hearty simplicity of life, – ...The garden is well-kept because watering is excellent... a flower garden ...It’s paradise – water and forest and the steppe with kurgans ... there are many lakes wonderfully deep ... there is plenty of fish ...painting a picture” (...) (1, ...).

² Sarabianov, D. V. Op. cit., p. 36.

of space and time. Early on, he pondered on the importance of Cezanne's painting and the energy-related essence of colour and had first-hand knowledge of early Futurist ideas even before Marinetti "invented" the term. Small wonder that in the late 1900s he found nothing new in his talks with N. Kulbin, who played an important part in popularising scientific discoveries among artists, asserting the energy paradigm in art and understanding the abstract origin of art as part of the cosmic process, in which the same laws of radiant power structuring operate at all levels "from the kingdom of minerals and plants to planetary motion and manifestations of human spirit".

As mentioned above, already in his Paris works Petrov-Vodkin sought to overcome the "wonderful nudity" and immateriality of symbolism by expressing the feeling of the universal foundations of the formation of bodies in world space. His works and texts (at times closely echoing Malevich's theories) also contain thoughts of "weightlessness", the overcoming of terrestrial attraction as a sign of the forthcoming epoch: in many still lifes he produced a complicated effect of signs of recognisable "Euclidean space" combining with curvilinear structures and of the coordination of shapes with one another and with space, which results in the feeling of objects soaring in cosmos.

The avant-gardists carried away by new universal feelings succumbed to the temptation of "breaking up the universe" and the euphoria of venturing into the infinity of cosmos and "Victory over the Sun", all perceived as a particular case of the manifestation of universal "energy action". In Petrov-Vodkin similar sentiments were balanced out with an acute feeling of the cycle (spheros) of life, poetical disposition and specific life and spiritual experience that intensified his feeling of the "solar essence" of terrestrial phenomena, including man and his creativity. Let us say that Malevich tended to reduce humanness and art to the burning-hot operation of the "skull" and the "organisation of elements" beyond terrestrial attraction (in fact, outside the solar-terrestrial relations), which led to the rejection of the "laws laid down by Adam and Eve" and of "Apollo". Petrov-Vodkin, conversely, remained true to the "Apollonic" energy of "good and light", "the chief life activator of the planet", "the Sun our father" (as the artist put it), correlation with which also determines the human "measure of tact" and the semantic basis of living "warm" human tongue and art (as Prishvin put it, "All things beautiful are from the Sun, and all things good are from the friend"; among the avant-gardists V. Khlebnikov understood that and conveyed it in his art better than anybody else) Wishing as much as any "leftist" to see the regeneration of the world and art and verifying his aspirations with exact science of the tectonics of the universe, Petrov-Vodkin was after not negating but synthesising traditions and going out into Lobachevsky-Riemann space without forgetting the fundamentals and immutable truths of Euclidean Space. That is why his works are naturally characterised by "memory" of the many phenomena of classical art rather than its "rejection".



In fact, Petrov-Vodkin's spherical perspective and "Science of Seeing" actualising the sense of the roundness of the Earth and its movement along the axis and circumference of the Sun centre turn out to be a modification, planetary dynamic expansion and assertion in the new conditions of the sense of the solar life cycle and of the unity of micro- and macrocosm, which is an inalienable feature of the lofty world idyll. His ability (and desire to teach his students) to "hear the planet" by welcoming and seeing off the Sun essentially coincides with the experience of the "music of the spheres"¹ by the ancient Greeks (Orphists and Pythagoreans), Sun worshipping by Russian sentimentalists (remember Karamzin and I. Dmitriev ritually waiting for sunrise on the Volga shore) and the striving of Savrasov and Levitan to pass on the feeling of the unity of light and heat, spring in nature and man's inner world through their paintings and disciples. That is why Petrov-Vodkin's still lifes, in no way inferior to works of the avant-gardists in conveying energy interaction among the prototypes, at times possess qualities that bring to mind the best specimens of "idyllic still lifes" of the distant past, for instance, the ancient "charming still lifes of the types of two lemons with a glass of water" (E. Gombrich) from Herculaneum, which the artist must have seen in the museum of Naples. E. Serednyakova, a sensitive student of Petrov-Vodkin's still lifes, sees in them a combination of "trompe-l'oeil elements with the sacred world of icons" and also

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Pink Still Life.
Branch of an Apple
Tree. 1918
State Tretyakov
Gallery, Moscow

¹ The writer Gennady Gor "was always impressed" in Petrov-Vodkin's works "by harmony that one is tempted to call by a less common word taken from physics – orderliness. ...with the help of colour and drawing the artist brought order not only to the world he depicted, but also to the soul of the viewer, who would suddenly begin to understand his unity with the very music of being". // Gor, G., *Volshbnaya doroga* (Magic Road). Novel, Novellas, Stories. Leningrad, 1978, p.???

recalls the art of the early Renaissance¹, whereas E. Medkova interprets the *Pink Still Life* as "likening of the artist's studio to paradise" (like Serednyakova, somewhat immaterialising its interpretation in mystical spirit)². Just as indisputable is the memory living in Petrov-Vodkin's works of turning the objective world into a "treasure" (to quote the artist) and the ability to encapsulate the feeling of domesticity and "heaven in a flower cup" characteristic of F. Tolstoy's watercolours and the still life elements in works of A. Venetsianov, G. Soroka and the best masters of the European Biedermeier. The artist's legacy keeps the memory of this tradition in the form of a still life with flowers, fruit and a scroll of music in Biedermeier style painted on the piano front plate in 1919, to which he later added a portrait of his daughter (kept at the Petrov-Vodkin Art Gallery of Khvalynsk).

The foundations of Petrov-Vodkin's world outlook and work survived and continued to evolve, changing to conform to the new tendencies and circumstances of the existence of painting and culture in general under the Soviet regime. True, in the period of the First World War, the two 1917 revolutions and the Civil War his works were occasionally tinged with disturbing expressiveness, acquiring a nearly apocalyptic nature. Yet, in the most tense and complicated moments they continued to uphold the "human face" and the fundamentals of being that were "**simple and close to human sentiments**"³.

Many cultural figures shared that idyllic imagery in their notions of the meaning and ultimate goals of the dramatic developments in the country. The idea of "heaven on earth", which is hardly perceivable nowadays, and striving "towards the dawn" and towards "the bright future" indeed sustained the energy of creativity and life-building of that part of the intelligentsia which embraced the revolution, including members of the associations "Skify" (Scythians) and "Volnaya filosofskaya akademiya" (Volfila, Free Philosophical Academy), to which Petrov-Vodkin also belonged. Jesus Christ "crowned with a wreath of roses white" leading revolutionary sailors in Alexander Blok's poem is also idyllic. Yesenin (who was primarily idyllic) pictures the future of art as some "universal garden, in which people

Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
Painting
on the piano front
plate. 1919 – early
1920s
Art Museum
of K.S. Petrov-Vodkin,
Khvalynsk



¹ Serednyakova, E.G. "Natyurmortnaya kontseptsiya K. S. Petrova-Vodkina v kontekste russkoi khudozhestvennoi kultury" (K. S. Petrov-Vodkin's Still Life Concept in the Context of Russian Artistic Culture) // *Vvedeniye v khram* (Presentation in the Temple), Moscow, 1997, pp. 626–34.

² Medkova, Elena, "Rozovyi natyurmort" (Pink Still Life) // online magazine *Iskusstvo*, No. 13, 2006. <http://art.1september.ru/article.php?ID=200601308>

³ From the declaration of the "Four Arts" society, which Petrov-Vodkin helped to organise and to which he belonged.

would relax blissfully and wisely walking around... under the shady branches... of a huge tree and which is called socialism or paradise” (S. Yesenin, *Kliuchi Marii*). Boris Eichenbaum saw paradoxical “idyllic philosophy of a permanent riot” in Ivanov-Razumnik’s¹ convictions after the October 1917 Revolution.

This is especially true of Petrov-Vodkin with his hard won and, in its own way, theoretically substantiated faith in the future assertion of coveted “organic culture” that re-unites man with the rhythms of the Universe and the basic laws of nature. “In the chaos of construction one string sounds hope for anyone not immersed in personal affairs...: A wonderful life lies in store! ...An earnest of hope is that the ‘people’ felt they were humankind, and now that this feeling is here ...it will not disappear,”² he wrote in 1917, when he produced the aforementioned planetary idyll *Midday*. One way or another, he had retained that hope till the end of his life, even though he understood the entire difficulty of the development of the country and art and had a premonition of an even harder ordeal.

The specific revolutionary idyll and belief in the mass (family- and labour-related) groundwork of the revolution predetermined the design and execution of his covers and illustrations for the *Skify* (Scythians) collections and the *Plamya* (Flame) magazine, the nature of his decorations for the 1918 celebration of the revolution anniversary (*Mikula Selyaninovich, Fire-bird* and *Flowers*), the modifications of the red horse images in his works of the 1920s, and his trying his hand at agitprop porcelain³.

The idyllic dominant also manifested itself in many other works of Petrov-Vodkin of the late 1910s through the 1930s, albeit with a different degree of poignancy in conveying the planetary “rolling of the world ship”, the measure of activity and dynamism, dramatisation, concrete characterisation and the complexity of spatial compositions.

One can speak of an idyllic “dimension” even in respect of *The Death of the Commissar* (1927): the dramatic event (the plastic solution of which is usually compared with the Renaissance representations of *Pieta*) takes place on the perennially round Earth, amidst the fields and hills, villages and rivers of rural Russia, rather than in the abstract space or some linear “historical road” or “world scene”. The trinitary idyllic basis of the representation of the “sacred bonds of comradeship” in *After the Battle* (1923) has already been mentioned earlier.

¹ “Sudba Bloka” (Blok’s Destiny) // Eichenbaum, B.M. *O literature* (On Literature), Moscow, 1987, p. 357.

² Petrov-Vodkin, K. “Na rubezhakh iskusstva” (At the Cutting-edge of Art) // *Delo naroda*, 28 April 1917.

³ His design of the agitprop plate *Wedding* also “incorporated” different bucolic “layers”: worker and peasant “Adam and Eve” looking like Russian fairytale characters were painted on an Imperial Factory blank surrounded by fruit, wheat ears and flowers (as Italian majolica wedding dishes have it). The design on the rim of the plate “remembers” the eternal “dance of life” – the round dance of maidens on the shield of Achilles in Homer and in Petrov-Vodkin’s *At the Fountain*.



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
In the Nursery
(*Morning*
in the Nursery). 1925
Private collection

The bulk of paintings and drawing of the 1920s-1930s, as before, focussed on the experience and assertion of the “sacredness” of motherhood and childhood and the familial origin of life that Petrov-Vodkin deemed of cardinal importance. In the early 1920s the sacred, “Madonnish” aspect predominated in those images. They include representations of the Theotokos as such and the picture *1918 in Petrograd* (1920), which combines worry over the destiny of “sacred humaneness” in the years of trial with faith in the supreme meaning of the developments. Although later works assumed a concretely mundane tenor, the “Madonnish” plane was still there (*In the Nursery* (1925), *Motherhood* (1925), *First Steps* (1925), *Mothers* (1926), *Alarm* (1926) and others).

Many works of this line were prompted by personal experiences: the long-awaited birth and raising of a child, which had a creative “theoretical” meaning for the artist: according to a 1926 text, *The Story of a Birth*¹, while being a doting father, he scrupulously analysed the process of his daughter’s development, verifying, as it were, the tenets of his “science of seeing”, ideas of the role of preverbal experience and the optimum “organisation of memory”. At the same time he did everything for his heiress to have the qualities of a “new man” incorporating love for the native town and “kinship” with nature, which was graphically manifested in “family” portraits and drawings, many of them downright pastoral.

Work on mundane, family subjects in the cultural context of that period amounted to taking a public stance: at the time of unheard-of turmoil

¹ Included in the text of memoirs of the artist’s daughter: Petrova-Vodkina, K., “Prikosnoveniye k dushe” (Reaching out to the Soul) // *Zvezda*, No. 9, 2007.

in daily life, calls to renounce the traditional family forms and aversion to any type of the petty bourgeois idyll, the artist, who hated petty bourgeois narrow-mindedness and aspired towards a “universal” future, upheld the lasting importance of warmth and accord in family microcosm (“a small collective”) as the groundwork of society, depicting scenes from worker and peasant family life that were close to his heart. Without forsaking the planetary characteristics of dynamic space found by him, to some extent he reverted to his original traditions of 19th-century idyllic genre and family scene and landscape painting. Many of Petrov-Vodkin’s still lifes are also, as it were, enlarged fragments of an idyllic family household.

The idyllic substance of Petrov-Vodkin’s works graphically manifested itself in his book designs for children, starting with illustrations for *Aoiya* (that was scheduled to be reprinted in the early 1920s). At the same time, he designed several books, in which his memory of idyllic traditions revealed new aspects. Thus, in his design of the spring tale *Snegurochka* (Snow-Maiden) we see a peasant round dance (the artist produced a similar drawing for the *Plamya* (Flame) magazine in 1918), jumping over a bonfire, etc., his general style reminiscent of idyllic rural silhouettes of Fyodor Tolstoy and Elisabeth Boehm. His design of S. Fedorchenko’s *Priskazki* (Storyteller’s Introductions) is an amalgam of idyllic scenes in the spirit of 19th-century rural poetry¹ (with peasant grannies and their grandchildren), lively gentle animal painting and ornaments with short of “Blue Rose” style “angelic” motifs, fiery hearts² and the Sun tenderly looking upon the world.

The cozy still lifes *Fruit and Berries* for children, executed in the mid-1920s and unpublished until 1937, are also very interesting with their “quiet life” of toys and fruit, the artist’s trademark qualities, and at the same time carefully adapted to the small world of a child (it was in this series that Petrov-Vodkin came especially close to the Biedermeier spirit).

Memory of the favourite masters of the Renaissance, just as the idyllic aspect, is present even in Petrov-Vodkin’s stage designs. While bravely facing the drama of history in his designs for the productions of *Satan’s Diary*, *Boris Godunov*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Army Commanders – 2* (1929, staged by V. Meyerhold), he all of a sudden recalled the world idyllic traditions in his sets for *The Marriage of Figaro* (1935), in which a huge reproduction of the mother and child from *The Tempest* of Giorgione occupied most of the backdrop.

The artist said at the end of his life: “I... have chosen favourites, whom I have revered and respected to this day, who have been teaching me throughout my life and... with whom I have exchanged thoughts in a quiet whisper growing stronger from that” (2, 329). I think that the memory of *The Feast of the Gods* by G. Bellini’s is alive even in his later picture *House-warming Party* (1937).

¹ When working on those illustrations he, of course, remembered his childhood love of rural poetry of Koltsov, Nekrasov and Surikov, whom he tried to emulate in his early literary experiments.

² To this day a similar relief ornament decorates the window and door frames of some of the 19th-century houses in Khvalynsk, the artist’s hometown.



Kuzma
Petrov-Vodkin
House-warming
(Workers' Petrograd).
1937
State Russian
Museum, Saint
Petersburg

A specific feeling of sharing space with the creators of distant epochs found expression in the *Triple Portrait* of 1935, in which Alexander Pushkin appears next to the author and Andrei Bely¹.

Petrov-Vodkin reflected the key features of his world outlook, creativity and memory “gold reserves” profoundly and from numerous angles in *Moya povest* (My Story), his two-part autobiography (*Khlynovsk* and *Euclidean Space*; he intended to write the third part, *Moyi uyuty* (My Lares and Penates)). Although art historians (above all A. Rusakov and S. Daniel) have said many a cogent word about Petrov-Vodkin’s books, their idyllic substance seen so graphically and multifariously has so far elicited no attention².

¹ Andrei Platonov, who was in many respects close to Petrov-Vodkin, expressed this type of attitude to classics in the most concise way in the title of his 1937 article “Pushkin Is Our Comrade”. Of interest are notes of Petrov-Vodkin, who then headed the Pushkin commission of the Leningrad branch of the Artists’ Union: *On Pushkin and Pushkin and Us*, in which he wrote about “the great heart, perspicacious mind” and “most profound sunny optimism” (1, 131) of the poet who “has come to save us when we banalise our work and to help us when we climb to its heights. We can’t do without him here” (1, 326).

² The two-part *My Story* is closest in genre to the traditions of a “growing-up novel”. Some qualities of both the texts and Petrov-Vodkin’s personality can be described with what M. Bakhtin said about the typical “bucolic” character of the classic growing-up novel: “The bucolic world, which is going to ruin, is taken not as a naked fact... of the past with all of its historical limitations, but with certain philosophical sublimation... profound humaneness of the bucolic man himself and humane relations between people are moved to the fore, followed by the integrity of idyllic life and its organic link with nature... This doomed little world is contrasted with a huge but abstract world in which people are disconnected, egotistically isolated and selfishly pragmatic, in which labour is differentiated and mechanised, and in which products are separated from labour as such. This huge

This is especially true of *Khvalynsk* (initially given the patently idyllic title *In the Nest*), the text of which, for all the realistic characterisation and depiction of the dark sides of provincial Russian life, is literally brimming with idyllic topoi, loci and corresponding vocabulary. For instance, the artist's narrative of his near and dear is a string of heartfelt descriptions of motherly love, delight at the child discovering the world for the first time, people labouring and having rest, festivals, haymaking, change of seasons, etc. All these descriptions are not of ethnographical or phenological nature, but reference world and Russian idyllic traditions and record the "specks" and layers of life impressions and experiences, which, according to the author, predetermined the best and most valuable aspects of his personality and creative career. Many drawings to *Khlynovsk* contain idyllic motifs – a morning on the river, a mother bent over the cradle, a young girl rider "wrapped in sun" and so on.

The idyllic in Petrov-Vodkin's books is not confined to the description of personal experience or the artist's "memory of the heart". A number of consistent notions associated with the idyllic and crucial to Petrov-Vodkin's "dynamic model" of the world clearly transpire in the polydimensional descriptions of journeys across Russia and foreign lands, historical retrospectives and individual characterisation.

One of them is the notion of "homeliness", which, according to the artist, fixes the idea of some integral, reliable, warm and physically and spiritually harmonious space and contact with living nature, a "simple livelihood balance" that man needs and the absence of which makes the sound perception of the large world and attunement to the rhythms of the universe impossible. Drawing parallels (like Virgil in *The Georgics* or Maeterlinck in *The Life of the Bee*) between the world of the humans and the life of birds and bees, Petrov-Vodkin scrutinises and ponders on the historical types of "homeliness" developed by people, specifying their peculiarities among different nations – the Russians, Germans, Jews and French. Needless to say, his striving after warm family comfort and idyllic "sympathy with nature" (the same as, incidentally, passion for travelling and extreme situations – "being poised at the edge of the abyss") and his descriptions of how his mother's and his own household is organised, his attitude to his wife and the upbringing of his daughter both before and after the revolution are usually pervaded with idyllic and downright pastoral, "heavenly" motifs that are also often encountered in "family" portraits.

"Heart" is another crucial notion in Petrov-Vodkin's "philosophy of feelings". This word recurs in different contexts in his letters and books

world has to be re-assembled on a new basis, made one's own and humanized. It is necessary to find a new attitude to nature, not only to the small nature of one's native corner, but to the big nature of the big world, to all the phenomena of the solar system, to the mineral riches of the earth, to the diversity of the geographical countries and continents. The restricted bucolic collective should be replaced with a new one ...capable of encompassing the entire humankind". Bakhtin, M.M. Op. cit., p. 382.

recording the qualities of his near and dear and the works of art his own "heart had left a mark on" (Emerson).

Thus, speaking about childhood memory and "the reserves of images, the reserves of ... homeland seeds" received during "that brief period", he stresses that they taught "the infant heart to beat in unison with the people who find the life of bees hard, yet who know how to spark it up with undying love for earth and man" (2, 141). This image of human heartbeat also has a cosmic meaning in his texts. Speaking about his mother, he recalls her "treating the landscape, plants and especially animals poignantly and imparting human feelings to them; cosmos was for her a single whole with an enormous pulsating human heart inside, and here she had some especially right approach that erased divides between lives" (2, 82). In the course of his adventures on a mysterious island, the protagonist of *Aoiya* (a reflection of the author's spiritual experience) unexpectedly goes down to the very "heart of the earth" (to which, as it transpires, Dante had gone down before him) and suddenly discovers that "his own heart was beating in unison with that of the earth"¹. In 1910, Petrov-Vodkin defined the very meaning of his painterly quests as "love talk" with nature and "reckoning heart formulas while trying to find accord between our worlds and our bearings in the universe". He also spoke there of the radiant Integral lasting beauty of the universe – "from the shining stars above me... to the tender heart of man" (2, 669).

The author of the *Theotokos Softener of Evil Hearts*, who valued most a "simple and hearty" atmosphere in everyday life, understood heartiness as synonymous with genuine poetry that pervaded his favourite works ("the heartiest Bellini").

Focus on this notion may look strange in an article about the artist whose works are usually singled out for formal rationality. Furthermore, today more attention is paid to the "loss of heart core" and the focus is on altogether different categories and aspects of 20th-century art history. Meanwhile, much of Petrov-Vodkin's legacy and the entire art process of the past century literally cry for the need to revive in the relevant memory of art studies and bring back into circulation the characteristic and fate of this "light/heat" level of spiritual life and work, which is of paramount importance from the anthropological, historical and cultural point of view. Otherwise many aspects of the dialectics of the development of art and its meaning-making cannot be understood (just as without a study of the objective laws of harmony and rhythm of solar-terrestrial space and the relationship between them and man's inner world and emotional and ethical qualities).

Closely linked with the idylls throughout their history, this notion is, for instance, extremely important to understanding the difference between the Petersburg and Moscow schools of painting and, in the Soviet period,

¹ Petrov-Vodkin. *Aoiya*, Saint Petersburg, 1914, p. 88. Interestingly, this motif is also found in Renaissance literature.

to discerning the specifics of “monumental lyricism” of the best masters of the 1920–30s, in particular, the leading members of the “Four Arts” association (one of whose leaders was Petrov-Vodkin), who thought that “the growth of art and the development of its culture is at a period when its specific elements tend to manifest themselves to the utmost extent in what is simple and close to human feelings” (from their declaration) and that “a search for new painterly forms should arouse emotions and find the road to the human heart”¹. In literature “heart authenticity” was, among other things, the main principle of world perception in works of Prishvin and especially of Andrei Platonov, whose use of this notion was especially close to that of Petrov-Vodkin and for whom the most dangerous evil of contemporary world was “heartlessness” because “without the heart” and “without being gentrified... with animals and plants” mankind “will perish, become depleted and fall into the evil of despair like the lonely one into loneliness”².

Saying (or rather reminding people of) this, we perfectly remember that in the 20th century idylls took sundry narrow, fake and modified (kitsch, glamour and other) forms, the most grim and suffocating of which was cultivated by the Nazi officialdom. However, awareness of that makes it all the more imperative not to forget about the true light-bearing sources and phenomena of this meta-genre since, to quote the Norwegian scholar Ole Martin Høystad: “As Westerners, we have no alternative to the heart as the central symbol in our view of humanity”³.

As for the subject matter of this article, I am convinced that it is necessary to continue systemic research in this direction that can help us understand

¹ Bebutova, E., Kuznetsov, P., Obshchestvo “4 iskusstva” (“4 Arts” Society) // *Tvorchestvo*, No. 11, 1966.

In this case it is worth recalling the cover of the *Makovets* issue No. 3, 1923, executed by Vladimir Favorsky. “It is a compact symbolical formula, a ‘hieroglyphic’ of mankind’s evolution from the depths of the ocean to the sun. The stages of life development are outlined concisely – a blue fish, yellow dandelion, green tree and, in the upper register, a red horse and flying dove. The colours of the four elements have been taken, the basic colours of Early Rus’ masters. The symbols are repeated twice in opposite directions – on both sides of the rectangular frame enclosing the outlines of a toga-attired man and inside his body, as if uniting and encompassing all phases and stages of development, all the elements of earth and heaven. Man is the pinnacle of the centuries-long History of the evolution of life. Man is the portent of the future consummate sunlike world. He is the son of the Earth and at the same time the son of the Sun. And the heart in his chest is the sign of the Sun. That is why the movement of life and the road of ascent to eternal perfection go on and on. The poetical metaphor has a profound underlying idea and worldview paradigm. The author correlates man with a lasting flower and infinite Universe.” Zverkov, E., Kushnerovskaya, G., *Slovo o Chernysheve (A Word about Chernyshev)* // *Narodnyi khudozhnik RSFSR Nikolai Mikhailovich Chernyshev 1885–1973*. Exhibition Catalogue, Moscow, 1990, p. 23.

² Platonov A. *Iz zapisnoi knizhki 1935 goda* (From a 1935 notebook). <http://a-platonov.narod.ru/knizhki/notes12.htm>

³ Høystad O. M. *A History of the Heart*, London: Reaktion Books, 2007, p. 232.

not only Petrov-Vodkin’s legacy, but also some as yet unfathomed important aspects and regularities of the “operation of memory” in domestic art of the 20th century.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. Petrov-Vodkin, K.S., *Pisma. Statyi. Vystupleniya. Dokumenty* (Correspondence. Articles. Speeches. Papers), Moscow: Sovetsky khudozhnik, 1991.
2. Petrov-Vodkin, Kuzma. *Prostranstvo Evklida* (Euclidean Space), Saint Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2000.
3. Adaskina, K.S., *Petrov-Vodkin: zhizn i tvorchestvo* (Petrov-Vodkin: Life and Work), Moscow: BuksMArt, 2014.