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"Storm Gathering over Russian Art": From the History of Polemics on Impressionism in Russian Criticism of the Early 1890s

I wish to thank the Clark Art Institute Research and Academic Program for the opportunity to continue my study of the topic discussed in present essay. At the turn of the 20th century different European art schools got to know and adapted the new painterly idiom, the birth of which is usually associated with the first generation of the Impressionists of the 1860s-1870s. The process ran into difficulties virtually everywhere. A cause of special drama was the fact that the artistic and social establishment often viewed new poetics not merely as a breach with the classics, but also as a product of foreign influence and assault on the domestic tradition.

The Russian art world of the late 19th century was still too conservative to readily embrace the new painterly idiom, which did not correspond to the customary characteristics of being true to life and in the nature of a narrative. The tastes of the solvent public, which was receptive to art, were largely formed by the Academy and two decades of the consistent policy pursued by the Wanderers, who by the end of the century posed as the true guardians of the national tradition. Even though Russia saw unprecedentedly intense international contacts in art in the 1890s, with about a dozen major foreign exhibitions held in St Petersburg and Moscow, throughout the decade there persisted in the Russian artistic community the latent isolationism that the Petersburg-based World of Art association sought to overcome in its art policy at the turn of the century[1]. However, the problem

[1] See Janet Kennedy, "Pride and Prejudice: Sergei Diaghilev, the *Ballet Russes*, and the French Public" // Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh (eds.), *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*. Cambridge, 2003, pp. 90–118; Ilia Dorontchenkov, Between Isolation and *Drang nach Westen*: Russian Criticism and Modern Western Art around 1900 // Carol Adlam and Juliet Simpson (eds.), *Critical Exchange: Art Criticism, 1700–1900: Emergence, Development, Interchange in Eastern and Western Europe*, University of Exeter; Peter Lang Publishers. 2009, p. 285–308.

of the "French Menace" was already on the agenda well before its first exhibitions, which were declaratively international by nature.

In the 1880s and 1890s young Russian artists steadily mastered *plein air* painting that contemporaries frequently associated with Impressionism. There is an indicative episode in Igor Grabar's memoirs: "When P.M. Tretyakov, who with his wonderful instinct felt the genuine novelty and significance of Serov's Girl Lit by the Sun and purchased it for his gallery in 1889, at a regular lunch given by the Wanderers Vladimir Makovsky asked him traditional dinner: 'Since when have you, Pavel Mikhailovich, been inoculating your gallery with syphilis?'"[1] The well-known genre painter could supposedly have lost self-control out of jealousy towards a potential competitor: Tretyakov's choice could have meant a change in his taste and posed a certain threat in the future to the interests of the older Wanderers. Yet Makovsky's flippant and insulting formula was nevertheless quite to the point. *Plein air* effects in the form of spots of light and shadow on the girl's face might have been taken for an advanced stage of the malaise common in the 19th century. Makovsky's words not only described Serov's style aphoristically, albeit disparagingly. They also pointed to the source: syphilis was known as the "French disease". The Wanderer Makovsky thus spoke of the Paris origin of the new style of painting that sought to convey the transient effects of lighting, banished narrative and liberated the artist from the need to produce a "finished" work and "say everything there was to be said" dictated by Salon art and 19th-century narrative realism. The word "impressionism" was not uttered. Yet the listed qualities of Serov's *plein air* canvas brought him close to that phenomenon.

Local critics turned to the question "What is Impressionism?" in the first half of the 1890s. The degree to which the Russian artistic community was familiar with this phenomenon was predictably low. Suffice it to state that the early works of masters once belonging to the Batignolles Group were not shown in this country until 1896. Claude Monet was represented by *Haystack in the Sun* (1890, Kunsthaus, Zurich) and the *Étretat* landscape, Renoir by "By the Piano" and "The Source", Degas by "Pink Dancers"[2].

True, way back in the 1870s young Russian artists living in Paris knew about the Impressionists, as is attested Ilia Repin's correspondence, who first mentioned Manet as early as 1874[3]. For instance, he wrote to Kramskoy: "...the language spoken by everybody is of little interest, conversely, an original language is always noted sooner, and there's a wonderful example – Manet and all the Impressionalists"[4]. Somewhat later he confessed

[1] Grabar, I., *Moya zhizn. Avtomonografiya* (My Life. Automonograph), p.125.

[2] Guide to the French Art Exhibition organised with the permission of His Imperial Majesty with the assistance of the French Ministry of Fine Arts for the benefit of the Care Committee of the Red Cross Sisters under the patronage of Her Imperial Highness Princess Eugenia Maximilianovna of Oldenburg, St Petersburg, 1896, p. 27, 63, 75.

[3] See letter to F. Chizhov, 24 June 1874. // Polenov, V.D., Polenova, E.D., *Khronika semiy khudozhnikov* (Chronicles of an Artists' Family), Moscow, 1964, p. 134.

[4] Letter of 29 August 1875, Paris – Correspondence of I. N. Kramskoy, vol. 2, Moscow, 1954, p. 345.

to another correspondent: "…I adore all the Impressionalists, who are increasingly gaining rights for themselves here. Manet is already a long-time celebrity"[1]. Yet familiarity and, possibly, a certain influence that found expression, for instance, in the study *On a Turf Bench* (1876, State Russian Museum) by no means indicated reception. Way back in early 1874 Kramskoy and Repin exchanged letters, in which they formulated the ethically substantiated rejection of any future impressionistic "temptation" with colour and light for the sake of ideological painting, the mission of which is the truth of life[2].

A little later, in 1876, Emile Zola, a correspondent for the St Petersburg *Vestnik Evropy* who had attended the Second Impressionist Exhibition, told the Russian readers about Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Degas and Sisley[3]. I should agree with Rosalind Blakesley who believes this article to be "…perhaps, the most comprehensive interpretation of impressionism to appear by that time in the Russian press"[4]. However, his detailed account of the goals and specifics of new painting based on Edmond Duranty's characterisation did not reference the audience's visual experience: Zola's descriptions were not backed by either illustrations or even less so exhibition practice. His articles about the Impressionists published by the Russian periodicals were of little help in introducing the local public to Impressionism.

In 1886, Vladimir Stasov published a lengthy and rather sympathetic review of *Critique d'avant-garde* (Paris, 1885) by Theodore Duret and quoted at length, among other things, the article about Manet[5]. Nevertheless, Stasov's article was rather an exception. Rafail Kaufman pointed out that readers of domestic magazines of that period usually "…could not even learn what the world 'Impressionist' meant specifically"[6].

[1] Letter to N. A. Aleksandrov. 16 March 1876. Paris – I. Repin. *Izbrannye pisma* (Selected Correspondence) in 2 vols. 1867–1930. Vol. 1, Moscow, 1969, p. 175. Published with corruptions.

[2] See *I. Kramskoy's Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 295, 303. For details see David Jackson, "Western Art and Russian Ethics: Repin in Paris, 1873–76" // *Russian Review,* 1998, July, pp. 394–409. Cf. Dmitrieva, N.A., Peredvizhniki i impressionisty (The Peredvizhniki and the Impressionists) // Iz istorii russkogo iskusstva vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX veka (From the History of Russian Art of the Late 19th – Early 20th Centuries), Moscow, 1978, pp. 18–39; Elizabeth Kriedl Valkenier, Opening Up to Europe: The Peredvizhniki and The Miriskusniki Respond to the West // Rosalind P. Blakesly, Susan E. Reid (eds.). *Russian Art and the West: a Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and Decorative Arts*. DeKalb, 2007, 45–60.

[3] Emile Zola, "Parizhskie pisma. Dve khudozhestvennyie vystavki v maie" (Letters from Paris. Two Art Exhibitions in May), *Vestnik Evropy*, 1876, No. 6, pp. 873–903.

[4] Rosalind P. Blakesley. Emile Zola's Art Criticism in Russia – Carol Adlam and Juliet Simpson (eds.), Critical Exchange: Art Criticism of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Russia and Western Europe. Oxford et al., 2009, p. 270.

[5] See *Khudozhestvennye novosti* (Art News), No. 5, 1886, pp. 141–52.

[6] Kaufman, R.S., *Ocherki istorii russkoi khudozhestvennoi kritiki XIX veka. Ot Konstantina Batyushkova do Aleksandra Benua* (Essays on the History of Russian Art Criticism of the 19th Century. From Konstantin Batyushkov to Alexander Benois), Moscow, 1990, p. 222.

In the 1880s some of the young Russian artists who were subsequently to be associated with "Russian Impressionism" started going to Europe. in 1885 Valentin Serov visited Munich; Konstantin Korovin stayed in Paris in 1887. Much later he recalled that trip: "I also remember my first impression of French painting. […] Light colours […] Much of what we also have, but there is something of an entirely different sort. Puvis de Chavannes, what a beautiful thing! And the Impressionists… I have found in them all that for which I was so berated at home in Moscow"[1]. It should be borne in mind, though, that the last exhibition of the Impressionists opened in May 1886 and that its exhibits strongly indicated a gradual shift to pointillism. Korovin's *Portrait of a Chorus Girl* (1887, State Tretyakov Gallery, formerly dated 1883), *At the Tea-Table* (1888, State Polenov Memorial Historical, Art and Nature Museum Reserve, Tula Region) and *in the Boat* (1888, State Tretyakov Gallery) painted right after his return to Russia bear no imprint of that avant-garde poetics, although the impact of impressionism is obvious.

For the European viewers impressionism of the 1880s – early 1890s was far from always associated with works by the Batignolles Group. The movement's relative integrity of the 1870s was a thing of the past even before the series of impressionistic expositions came to a close. Its members now entered personal relations with official exhibitions, dealers and collectors. in parallel, the relatively uniform impressionistic vision of painting of the 1870s was also eroded (cf., for instance, Renoir's gravitation to the "classics" and Pissarro's Neo-impressionistic aspirations). John House analyzed this process and pointed out that almost simultaneously, "In the years around 1880, many former star students from the Ecole des Beaux Arts turned to contemporary subjects and adopted modified forms of impressionist handling; many of their new works won them medals at the Salon, or were purchased by the State… (Albert Besnard, Alfred Roll, Jules Bastien-Lepage, Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret) "[2]. Roll's huge canvas Le *14 juillet 1880* (1882, Petit Palais, Paris) exemplified such adaptation of impressionistic techniques and modern subjects. That government commission commemorated the establishment of a new national holiday and simultaneously produced a socially presentable "portrait" of the Third Republic, thus helping the Salon public accept modern themes of city life interpreted in the impressionistic manner. That was how the phenomenon Robert Jensen aptly called the "after-Impressionist *juste milieu*"[3] took shape. According to Jensen, it was that phenomenon, which soon turned international, that formed the basic modernist institutes (the Salon de Champ-de-Mars, Secessions, etc.), found an ally in the system of commercial galleries that promoted modern art and gradually accustomed visitors of European art exhibitions to new painterly

[1] Korovin, K. *Moi ranniye gody – Konstantin Korovin vspominaet…* (My Early Years – Konstantin Korovin Recalls…) I. S. Zilbershtein and V. A. Samkov (eds.), Moscow, 1990, p. 364.

[2] John House. *Impressionism: Paint and Politics*. New Haven and London, 2004, p. 198.

[3] Robert Jensen. *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siecle Europe*, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 138 ff.

poetics, albeit in its compromise versions: "The *juste milieu* were able to carry the banner of modernity without insisting upon the radical independence of the Impressionists… The Impressionists laboured throughout the 1870s to establish the veneer of independence that would place their art above commercial concerns, whereas the *juste milieu*, outside the Impressionist coterie, and more importantly, outside Paris, were able to appear immediately and simply as internationally recognized 'masters'."[1] It was in this "second-hand" way that the new painterly idiom was perceived both inside and outside France in the 1880s-1890s.

The first truly representative exhibition of modern French art of the 1890s was a result of the slowly but inexorably forming political and military alliance between Russia and France against the German Empire. In late April a large-scale art and industry exposition that presented the resources of France and her colonies and her achievements in industry, farming, arts and crafts opened in the pavilions which had survived from the 1882 All-Russia Exhibition on the Khodynskoye Field and ran until early October. Painting and sculpture were allocated sixteen halls, in which nearly 700 artworks (including 650 paintings) were on display. Thus, the exhibition reproduced on a smaller scale a model of the French sector of the Universal Exposition and included some of its exhibits. Like other monarchies, the Russian Empire refrained from taking official part in the 1889 Universal Exposition, which commemorated the centenary of the French Revolution, but did not prevent domestic entrepreneurs from contributing to it privately. Some reporters now presented the Moscow exposition as a gesture of gratitude for the Russian contribution: "…there has been no precedent of the state occupying the top rung of civilization coming with all the novelties of efficient labour, technology, taste and talent to visit another nation. The French have the honour to make such an innovation; meanwhile Russia has the pleasure of being the first country to get such attention and high esteem"[2]. The political importance of the exposition was stressed by the status of its organisers, visits paid by royalty (Alexander III visited the exposition on 18 May) and the repercussions of concomitant events: on 13 July a large French squadron entered Kronstadt and then its crew visited Moscow. Such symbolical gestures gained special importance against the backdrop of the resumption of the Tripartite Union between Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy in May 1891.

Despite the significance of the exposition, its practical organisation left much to be desired: work on it continued for nearly a month after the official opening and entailed a financial imbroglio[3]. Reviewers unanimously complained about the inordinately dense placement of the pictures, many

[1] Jensen, Op. cit., p. 149.

[2] [No byline] "Frantsuzskaya vystavka v Moskve" (French Exhibition in Moscow), *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, 29 April (11 May) 1891, No. 117, p. 1.

[3] See [No byline] "Iz zhizni i pechati" (From Life and the Press) // *Russkii vestnik*, No. 6, 1891, pp. 334–5.

of them (including those aspiring to be the hits) hung against the light and lacking labels or even index numbers. The catalogue had glaring mistakes in the translation of the titles of some canvases into Russian. But even when some of those shortcomings had been eliminated, reviewers continued to question the choice of works, which failed to give an intelligible idea of the modern French school. Reviews sounded disappointment: "The entire exhibition of artworks has the nature of a purely chance assemblage of pictures, statues etc. from some very large collection amassed not by a connoisseur, nor even an amateur, but a mere trader who has put up his goods for sale";[1] "...the present French exhibition fails to give a true idea of the French school. The choice of pictures and sculptures was a rush job and is rather slapdash";[2] "Rumours of the brilliant success of French art at the latest Universal Exposition in Paris have whetted these expectations among our public. And now that the exhibition is open, it has failed to meet even half the hopes pinned on it"[3].

Meanwhile, the exhibition did demonstrate the major trends of mainstream French art. Stalwarts of the Salon were there, among them William-Adolphe Bouguereau (*The Youth of Bacchus*), Léon Bonnat *(Idylle*, 1890), Jean-Léone Gérôme (*Slave Auction*, 1884, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich's collection, currently State Hermitage) and Benjamin-Constant (*Victrix*, Salon of 1890). Historical paintings were represented by Jean-Paul Laurens (*Interrogation* [Bernard Délicieux at the Inquisition Tribunal], c. 1882–3, *After an Interrogation*, 1882), Évariste Luminais (*The Sons of Clovis II*, c. 1880). The piece de resistance was a large bravura canvas by Ferdinand Roybet, *Charles the Bold at Nesle* (1890 (?)), for which a special cubicle had to be built in the exhibition pavilion. Naturalism was represented on a fairly large scale from city scenes by Jean Beraud, "The Salon Jury" 1885) by Henri Gervex to *To the Capstan!* (1890) by Léon Couturier and *Blessing of the Young Couple before Marriage* (1880–1) by Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret. Pierre Lagarde (*Vision of Saint John of the Cross*) demonstrated symbolist leanings towards simplicity that reviewers attributed to the influence of Puvis de Chavannes. Painted with impressionistic glamour, *After the Ball* (Courting, 1889, private collection) by H. – L. Doucet added a piquant touch of Parisian demi-monde sensuality to the exposition. And, finally, canvases by Albert Aublet, Alfred Roll and Gaston Latouche tackled *plein air* studies on easel painting scale.

Russian reviewers had good reason to be unhappy. The exhibition art section obviously lacked any pivotal idea that could make it integral and expressive. On the one hand, it adequately reflected the image of French art,

[1] [No byline] "Frantsuzskaya vystavka v Moskve" (French Exhibition in Moscow). Arts Section – *Russkaia mysl,* September 1891, p. 192.

[2] Stasov V. V., "Moskva i dve eyo vystavki" (Moscow and Its Two Exhibitions) // *Severny vestnik,* 1891, No. 8, 2nd pagination, p. 272.

[3] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki 1891 g. v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 16, October 1891, Year 3, p. 43.

which a visitor to annual Salons could have formed by the time the main exhibition organization split in 1890–1. of course, far from every leading artist of France contributed to the exhibition and far from every exhibitor had a worthy representation. Some reporters listed what they thought to be lamentable omissions. Stasov missed Bastien-Lepage, Lhermitte, Raffaelli and the late Millet and Manet and was sorry that Meissonier, Beraud, Neuville, Breton and Dagnan-Bouveret had only one work each on show (the latter two were represented by works from S. Tretyakov's collection)[1]. Alexander Kiselev deplored that Meissonier, Carolus-Duran, Bastien-Lepage and Rochegrosse had either no or scant representation at the exhibition[2].

It seems that, when reviewing the omissions, Russian critics proceeded from either the French "table of ranks" they knew or from preference for paintings showing local nature, the life of the people and social characters that had been inculcated by the Wanderers. Consciously or not, they looked for the usual, the expected and what was capable of striking a familiar chord in the Russian viewer. Hence their attention to the representations of nature, which the domestic public of that period saw in plenitude at exhibitions, and special dissatisfaction with French landscapes[3].

Preference for narrative genre scenes with clearly outlined social and psychological characters led to the following judgements: "…there are hardly two hundred ideological pictures at the entire exhibition, but even among those most have half-baked, half-formulated or even barely outlined ideas and give way to outward painting";[4] "Despite the large number of the exhibited pictures, they give next to no idea of French social life, at least inasmuch as genre pictures and scenes of everyday life do"[5]. An influential Petersburg newspaper's correspondent who signed his reviews with a cryptonym claimed: "The salon has absolutely no 'drama of our days'"[6] and deplored the absence of socially meaningful canvases that would, if only remotely, bring to mind Zola's *La Terre* and *Germinal*. It was obviously no accident that the landscape painter and critic of the *Artist* magazine Kiselev especially liked *Return of a Missionary*, a scrupulously executed

[1] Stasov, V.V., Op. cit., p. 273.

[2] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 17, November 1891, Year 3, p. 44.

[3] Cf.: Novy ukazatel khudozhestvennogo otdeleniya Frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve v 1891 godu (s kriticheskim obzorom naiboleye vydayushchikhsya proizvedenii) (New Guide to Art Section of the 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow (with a critical review of the more outstanding artworks), Moscow, Tovarishchestvo Skoropechatnia A. A. Levenson, 1891, pp. 40–2; [No byline] "Frantsuzskaya vystavka v Moskve" (French Exhibition in Moscow), Arts Section – *Russkaia Mysl*, September 1891, p. 197.

[4] Ki[se]lev, A., Op. cit., p. 44.

[5] [No byline] "Frantsuzskaya vystavka v Moskve" (French Exhibition in Moscow), Arts Section – Russkaia Mysl, September 1891, p. 194.

[6] Sv. Frantsuzskaia vystavka v Moskve (Ot nashego korrespondenta) (French Exhibition in Moscow (From our correspondent)) – *Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta,* No. 133, 15 (27) May 1891, p. 2.

anecdotic picture by Jose Frappa, famous for his scenes from the life of the French clergy[1].

Reviewers pointed to art market pressure on French artists as expressed, among other things, in their specialization and sticking to the genre or technique that had once brought success. Russian critics invariably recognised the exceptional technical craftsmanship of the French painters, at times rather simple-heartedly attributing it to the well-developed system of drawing in secondary school. The reverse side of this praise was the implied or directly stated superficiality of French art going after illusory painterly effects and decorative qualities of representation rather than social or psychological content.

Such an approach resulted in a circumstance that was rare in the history of Russian criticism: contact with the unprecedentedly large exhibition by the chief art school of modernity led to conclusions about the triumph of contemporary domestic art rather than self-doubts and thoughts about one's own "backwardness". That motif came through distinctly in a number of articles. As could be expected, Stasov arrived at the same conclusion: "As soon as you return from the exhibition to the city, cross the Moskva River and ask for admission to the great Russian gallery collected by P. M. Tretyakov… […] You take a breath with a gratifying and calm feeling. Russian talent is being gained without any detriment."[2] Kiselev formulated a similar attitude at greater length, however, while observing a rhetorical distance: "A different opinion […] is distinguished by a patriotic tenor. People holding it find nothing that Russian artists could learn from the French. 'True, they say, the French nearly always have very exact drawing, often excellent moulding, a lot of taste in tones and combination of colours, there are charming heads and interesting characters and portraits, and melancholic landscapes marked by an indisputable mood. However, all that is not so exemplary as to keep us from finding in our school works not only of the same power, but even in many respects superior to all these marvels'."[3]

Critics had already voiced their pride in the modern state of Russian painting even before the French exhibition. in 1890, Piotr Gnedich deplored in the *Artist*, the main national art mouthpiece, the missed opportunity of creating a national art section at the Universal Exposition of 1889 that could have demonstrated the local school with its highest accomplishments and unity of diverse trends, from Repin to Siemiradzki. He believed that Russian art of the past few decades, "…brought together, […] could have

[1] Ki[se]lev, A., Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 19, January 1892, Year 4, Vol. 1/Season 3, Vol. 5, p. 87. This is the only painting from the exhibition reproduced on a separate insert in this volume of the journal. It also appeared on the title page of Issue 9 of "Journal de l'exposition Française à Moscou en 1891. / Журнал Французской выставки в Москве 1891 года."

[2] Stasov, V., Op. cit., pp. 277–8.

[3] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 16, October 1891, Year 3, p. 42–3.

drawn a result that could hardly have been attained by the French, Spaniards or Germans, who had significantly outstripped us in technique. [...] We can proudly say that, even though we have no Meissonier, Knaus, [Carolus-]Duran, Defregger, [Gabriel von] Max, Makart, Piloti or [Alma-]Tadema, we have much of what foreigners would be wise to learn from us."[1]

The organisers of the French exhibition had obviously not foreseen one of its results: never before had local viewers come across such a number of nudes displayed in public. Even in the second half of the 19th century Russian painting rarely depicted nude females and left next to no notable specimens of the "nude" genre[2]. Exceptions were few and far between: ranging from Konstantin Makovsky's *Rusalki* (Mermaids, 1879, State Russian Museum) and Henryk Siemiradzki's *Phryne at the Poseidonia in Eleusis* (1889, State Russian Museum) to Martselii Sukharovsky's *Nana* (1882), branded as pornography. Now female nudity could be seen in the Khodynskoye Field pavilions on dozens of canvases by French masters, ranging from mythological and allegorical compositions in accordance with theme requirements to *plein air* studies with their purely painterly interest in the naked body: "The French are great masters of painting flesh. As usual, pictures showing female bodies in all sorts of views and postures predominate at the exhibition. There are so many of them that we won't even bother to enumerate. We see male bodies in no more than five or six pictures..."[3]

Russian reviewers found themselves hard put. For obvious reasons they did not grasp the many social contexts of nude representations in modern French painting[4] nor did they have suitable language and intonation to speak about nudity in painting, a circumstance fairly reflected in press coverage. Some reviews revealed a conflict between the tradition inherited from the Academy to associate nudity with an abstract ideal and the custom to consider a picture as a representation of reality: seeming departures from "perfection" were associated with the real physical defects of the sitter. The provocative eroticism of Aublet's *Oriental Beauty (Turkish Woman at a Bath)* or Benjamin-Constant's Victrix seemed to be ignored, and talk about it was replaced with discussion of a coloristic trick performed by the artist or of the imperfect shape of the sitter[5].

[1] Rectus [Gnedich, P.P.]. *Sovremennoye russkoye iskusstvo*, No. 8, September 1890, Year 2, Vol. 1, pp. 70–1.

[2] Cf. Nesterova, E., *Pozdnii akademizm i Salon* (Late Academism and the Salon), St Petersburg, 2004, pp. 387–404.

[3] [No byline] "Frantsuzakaya vystavka v Moskve. Khudozhestvennyi otdel" (French Exhibition in Moscow. Art Section) // *Russkaya mysl*, September 1891, p. 200.

[4] See, for example, Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870–1910*. Cambridge, 2001; Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889–1900*. New Haven and London, 2004, pp. 19–76.

[5] Cf. Dukhovetsky, F., Art Section (hall V) // *Journal de l'exposition Française à Moscou en 1891. Journal hebdomadaire. Seul organe de la Commission Supériere de l'Exposition*, p. 4.

Russian critics of that period had a specific attitude towards "nudes", considering them a field of art devoid of any clearly formulated meaning, but acceptable because it helped solve purely decorative or painterly problems. At the same time, speaking about several examples of female nudity at the 1891 exhibition of the Society of Saint Petersburg Artists, Sergei Glagol' saw in them the result of undesirable Paris influences: "...just so, one of the senseless nudités cluttering both our French exhibition in Moscow and every one of the Paris Salons. We have felt a gap in this field ever since the time of [Timofei] Neff [...], but God save them from such senseless imitation of the French."[1]

Kiselev, a Wanderer painter who made his debut as an *Artist* reviewer with a report about the French exhibition, was especially harsh in his impressions of the plenitude of naked French females in the Khodynskoye Field pavilions. He repeatedly addressed the problem of nudity in his article. It was precisely on that sensitive subject for the domestic public that Kiselev reproduced the hypothetical response of a Wanderer type viewer as the basis of the essential difference between Russian and French art, with the latter's self-sufficient virtuosity and hypocritical hedonism: "...any representation of body with the aim of exclusively showing up a modern really naked woman [...] is inappropriate at an art exhibition. Irrespective of the fact that this aim in itself has nothing to do with art, unless linked with an artistic idea, [...] it is just indecent by dint of the importance art has in real life, by dint of the wild contradiction, which arises in the heart of every ethically developed human [...]. To say nothing of the situation of women who are as yet not used to looking at the pictures without seeing in them a reflection of life. I have more than once observed a glaring colour of shame and painful dismay on their faces. However, most of us men take no consideration of these sufferings, all the more so since they are caused by the sight of something that gives us pleasure, albeit of a beastly nature. [...] But such a protest would not even be understandable to the French."[2]

By no means everybody shared Kiselev's categorical attitude, but beyond doubt it reflected the purism of the Russian public. Anyhow, out of the numerous nudes reviewers chose a few acceptable ones in which pictures of naked women were justified by the genre situation, which seemed somewhat to level out eroticism. Some critics listed Gerome's *Slave Auction* among such works. However, reviewers especially sympathized with *A Mould from Nature* by the young artist Edouard Dantan (1887): the realistically depicted scene at the studio of a sculptor who is intently taking a plaster cast of the leg of a patiently waiting and naked girl might have been interpreted as irony of the positivist age over the Pygmalion myth.

[1] Glagol, [S.] [Goloushev, S.S.]. "Kartinnye vystavki letnego sezona 1891 goda" (Picture Exhibitions of the 1891 Summer Season) // *Artist*, No. 15, September 1891, p. 132.

[2] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 19, January 1892, Year 4, Vol. 1/Season 3, Vol. 5, p. 77.

Even Kiselev made an exception for this canvas: "…the best that the school could give is combined in this picture with a fresh sense of the beauty of form and colour scheme and then used to implement an idea so exquisite, innocent and at the same time piquant as taking a mould of the sitter's leg, produced as a result a work of such fine taste and bouquet that it can only be compared with the most expensive wine, healthy, pleasant and slightly inebriating. For all her reality the model from whose leg the plaster cast is being made is practically the most exquisite and virtuous of all the real nudités of the exhibition"[1].

It was natural to expect that a large-scale exhibition like that would also exhibit works by the Impressionists, with whom the Russian public was familiar only from hearsay. However, that did not happen, and some observers took the absence of impressionistic canvases as a significant drawback of the exhibition. Clamouring again over the choice of exhibits, Kiselev wrote: "Where is that throbbing life, sunlight and the notorious *plein air*, where are the Impressionists who have freed painting from the tight shackles of lighting and outdated composition and perspective methods? With a very small exception, the exhibition has nothing of this sort"[2]. Stasov remarked in passing that only Tattegrain's *Pêcheur à la foëne dans la baie d'Authie* (1890), of which he had a positive opinion, was executed "in the manner of the Impressionists"[3]. Kiselev, who was more insistent in looking for the Impressionists, categorized works by only three artists, Roll, Aublet and Auguste Durst, as belonging to that trend: "In his *In the Park* Roll placed a half-naked woman seated on a chair with her back to the viewer and a black dog next to her on the grass. The surprising bare back is shining and glaring in the sun against the dark background of the park and makes one think about the technical power of talent that is satisfied with such a meaningless story.

In *Fête-Dieu* Aublet presents a whole group of elegant ladies fussing around a rosebush in the bright blazing sun […] The excellently, delicately drawn and painted ladies with bared heads, however, do not feel that scorching sun and are all eyes, as if they were indoors and mocking the artist's futile attempts to convey real sunlight. True, the picture is very light, but not sunny; the green of the trees and especially grass is of unpleasant

[1] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 19, January 1892, Year 4, Vol. 1/Season 3, Vol. 5, pp. 87–8. Cf. "…ordinary workers are taking plaster casts of a naked woman. It is a factory production of plaster statues. Neither the moulders nor the female sitter are aware or even see body 'nudity'; all the three of them are just workers concentrated on their job in exactly the same way as if they were making casts of some ancient marble" ([No byline] "Frantsuzskaya vystavka v Moskve. Khudozhestvennyi otdel" (French Exhibition in Moscow. Art Section) // *Russkaya mysl*, September 1891, p. 200). Cf.: Sophie de Javigny, Edouard Dantan, 1848–1897. Paris [2000], p. 110–114.

[2] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 16, October 1891, Year 3, p. 42.

[3] Stasov, V.V., Op. cit., p. 276.

spinach colour. […] Duresat's *L'après midi* on a huge canvas and his other, miniature piece, *Après dejeuner*, ridiculously and typically emphasise the original craving of the Impressionists to inflate the empty content inordinately and belittle subjects of greater significance and human interest."[1]

This opinion of individual artworks is in line with the overall assessment of Impressionism, which, according to Kiselev, had basically nothing to distinguish it from modern French painting, the main characteristic of which, he thought, was interest in outward effects and lack of ideological content: "…they do not go beyond the stereotype objective of impressing the eye with original and beautiful outlines, arranging light and shade spots, choosing auxiliary tone to the brightly coloured outstanding object, forcing relief until it becomes tangible, or blinding with a fleck killing all the rest. in this realm […] the aged classics and realists inevitably agree on the outward objectives of landscape and nature mort, going hand-in-hand with the young descendants of the latter – the impressionists and *plein air* painters […]; The entire main force of French art, these large ships of classicism, materialism and impressionism, together with the small fleet of as yet undecided innovators, are following the mainstream towards tinsel aims in taste, style and ephemeral originality, or often without any aim whatsoever, driven by nothing but the market demand of unprincipled and vain plutocracy"[2].

The painter Kiselev found impressionism in no way outstanding from the general flow of French art. The reader could find a different – alarmist – view of impressionism in an unexpected place, namely, the pages of the official exhibition weekly. Starting from issue 8 it published an art section review by the journalist Fedor Dukhovetsky. The review opened with a lengthy warning about the sickly tendencies in modern French culture, against which the author deemed it necessary to immediately caution his readers: "Of late, in parallel with the emergence of a realistic and naturalistic trend in French literature, art, too, has become dominated by realism, but just as literary realism has led to decadent extremes, real art has degenerated into impressionism. Decadents in literature and impressionists in art represent two homogeneous extreme trends striving to dominate the intellectual life of France. […] Impressionists […] introduce in the field of art new techniques, with the help of which they try to convey the impressions that they perceive and that are incomprehensible for most of the people. Sharp effects of colour contrasts, lighting with scattered light,

[1] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 19, January 1892, Year 4, Vol. 1/Season 3, Vol. 5, pp. 74–5. Another observer describes Alfred Roll's canvas in a similar way: Glagol, [S.], "225 let Parizhskogo salona i poslednii salon 1891 g." (225 Years of the Paris Salon and the Latest Salon of 1891) // *Artist*, No. 15, September 1891, p. 29.

[2] Ki[se]lev, A., "Frantsuzskaya zhivopis (Po povodu frantsuzskoi vystavki v Moskve) " (French Painting. Apropos 1891 French Exhibition in Moscow) – *Artist,* No. 19, January 1892, Year 4, Vol. 1/Season 3, Vol. 5, pp. 71, 73.

the deadly colouring of human body which is rarely encountered in reality and produces all the more stronger effect on the impressionists, careless drawing, the impossible execution of the accessories or their utter lack are all the characteristic features of the new school, which has so far had modest success, although recent reports claim that its works have this year flooded the Salon de Champ-de-Mars, which opened on 15 May"[1]. It seems that, examining the exposition hall by hall, Dukhovetsky should have cited the examples of impressionism that had alarmed him so much. Yet his descriptions of canvases in the impressionistic manner (e.g., *The Spring* by Latouche) differed little from similar passages by Kiselev, including "gastronomic" and "vegetable" metaphors often applied at that time to impressionist works (the green of "unpleasant spinach colour" in Kiselev, and "light green botvinia for grass" in Dukhovetsky[2]). As the word "impressionism" was not sounded, the warning opening the art section description remained hanging in the air.

However, in early 1893 the *Na pamyat* (To Remember) almanac edited by the selfsame Dukhovetsky (censor's permit of 31 October 1892) was issued by Théophile Gagen, who published *Zhurnal Frantsuzskoi vystavki* (French Exhibition Weekly) in 1891. The editors stated that contributors had "…exclusively purely literary and artistic objectives, […] and position themselves above party affiliations and disputes dividing our journalist world into strictly closed circles"[3]. The book consisted of poetry, prose, romances, critical articles and reproductions of paintings. These included verses and poems by Prince D. Tsertelev, Prince M. Volkonsky, stories and features by V. Nemirovich-Danchenko and P. Gnedich, the comic mystery play joke *Belaya liliya* (White Lily) by V. Soloviev and several translations from the French. Insets reproduced K. Trutovsky's *At the Fence* (a specimen of Ukrainian folk scene typical of that artist), H. Siemiradski's *Rus Burial in Bulgaria* (a variant of the painting for the Historical Museum of Moscow), *Reception at Maecenas* by S. Bakalowicz (1890), a study by V. Perov, *Show-booth Interiors at Promenade during a Performance* (1863–4, currently State Tretyakov Gallery), and Kemerer's watercolour *Parisian Character*, showing a young Parisian girl adjusting a stocking, as if accidentally, on the sidewalk. The almanac closed with the disproportionately large advertising supplement "About Industry", which broadly represented the businesses run by the publisher Hagen.

On the face of it both the literary section and the reproductions conformed with the principle of "non-affiliation", but it was the artistic section

[1] Dukhovetsky, F., "Art section (Hall 1) ". *Journal de l'exposition Française à Moscou en 1891* (Journal hebdomadaire. Seul organe de la Comission Supériere de l'Exposition), Ed. Théophile Hagen, No. 8, 16 June, p. 6.

[2] Dukhovesky, F., "Art section (Hall 4) ". *Journal de l'exposition Française à Moscou en 1891* (Journal hebdomadaire. Seul organe de la Comission Supériere de l'Exposition), No. 14, 28 July, p. 8.

[3] *Na pamyat* (To Remember) almanac, published by T. I. Hagen, ed. F. A. Dukhovetsky. Book 1. Moscow: T. I. Hagen printing house, 1893, no page number.

that shattered that illusion. The almanac included two articles by Vladimir Gringmut (1851–1907), a leading journalist of the influential monarchist newspaper *Moskovskiye vedomosti* and a number of other likeminded periodicals that formulated the ideology of the reign of Alexander III. In the early 20th century, Gringmut was one of the founders of the *Chornaya sotnya* (Black Hundreds) organisation. A former member of the Mikhail Katkov milieu, Gringmut became an unswerving enemy of liberal reforms and advocate of the idea of a Russian Orthodox kingdom based on the primordial union of the sovereign and the people. in this respect Russia was opposed to the rest of the world: "Russia is neither West nor East: it has no use for either the wretched materialist lack of ideology of Europe or the strict fanaticism of Asia [...] Russia is Russia, a state absolutely peculiar, a state mostly Orthodox Christian and if only for this reason standing immeasurably higher than other European and Asian states and nations"[1]. Gringmut saw a guarantee for the existence of Russia in immutable autocracy. Naturally, any constitutional regimes and first and foremost the Third Republic served for him as a living negative example of a social system. Gringmut paid special attention to education problems: he not only taught at the Crown Prince (Katkov) Lyceum for many years and headed it from 1894, but worked actively to promote classical education[2]. Being primarily a political journalist, he often addressed problems of art and literature. In that, too, he remained a champion of tradition and an enemy of such phenomena as Wagnerianism in music and naturalism in literature[3].

One of Gringmut's articles accompanied the publication of a study of an unfinished composition Perov created as a Paris pensioner. Gringmut spoke highly of the artist's ability to convey characters and psychological states and in this way contrasted him with modern artists who have turned into "walking photographic cameras" and substituted interest in the surface of phenomena for attention "to the inner aspect of the visible world"[4]. Citing Perov as an example for contemporaries, Gringmut placed his own accents in the artist's works. He hailed the departure of the author of *The Easter Procession*... from "the spurious 'denunciatory' yet fashionable trend of that period" and admired his *Hunters at Rest* that "had become the heritage of all Russian people"[5].

[1] Gringmut, V.A., *Sobranie statei* (Collected articles). 1896–1907, Moscow, 1908, p. 233.

[2] Cf. Gringmut, V. 1) O nekotorykh merakh, mogushchikh sposobstvovat uluchsheniyu prepodavaniya drevnikh yazykov v nashikh gymnaziyakh (On Some Measures Capable of Improving Teaching of Ancient Languages at Our Gymnasias), Moscow, [undated]; 2) Nash classicism (Our Classicism), Moscow, 1890.

[3] Cf. Temlinsky, S., [V. Gringmut], Zolaizm v Rossii. Kriticheskii etyud (Zolaism. Critical study), Moscow, 1880.

[4] Gringmut, V., "Vnutrennost balagana na gulyanii vo vremya predstavleniya." Eskiz V. G. Perova ("Show-booth Interiors at the Promenade during the Performance". Study by V. G. Perov // *Na pamyat*, p. 112.

[5] Ibid.

However, it was Gringmut's article "Storm Gathering over Russian Art" that emerged as the critical centrepiece of the almanac. It opened with the statement that modern literature was in crisis: the multitude of new phenomena and names, according to the author, opened up no roads to the revival of literature that had sunken in decline from the times of Goethe, Pushkin, Byron and Hugo. That state was characteristic of modern culture as such: "Just as in literature, there appeared 'new schools' and 'new theories' in music and painting, all of them characterized by the same signs of that perversion, negation and annihilation of art ..."[1] One of the reasons was the disappearance of talents on a par with those who worked in the first half and middle of the century. In the world of art Cornelius, Kaulbach, Horace Vernet, Delaroche, Calame, Thorvaldsen and Canova remained the master standards for Gringmut. Meanwhile, according to him, modern "mediocrities" sought to produce not so much artworks as new theories. That scourge first hit music and literature and only then art, which explained the fact Russian music and literature "had already managed to get infected with the western anti-artistic epidemic while Russian painting is yet untouched by it"[2]. Now if in music such a destructive theory was created by Wagner, an artist of "near genius", "the pompous mediocrities" Zola and Manet were responsible for their appearance in literature and painting. Formulating his vision of the objectives of creativity, Gringmut resorted to the authority of Goethe, Lessing and A. K. Tolstoy, but in fact reiterated the common places of idealist aesthetics: "To comprehend the beauty of the universe, he [*artist*, I.D] needs no painstaking experiments or reasoning: in the moments of inspiration he grasps the *invisible beauty of the visible world,* which is the final objective of his art ..."[3]. The outward aspect of phenomena has no value of its own, therefore artistic means producing an illusion of reality are only valuable inasmuch as they make it possible to reach out to the "hidden soul" of what is being depicted. in the canvases of the masters of the Renaissance who repeatedly represented the Madonna "... the main merit consisted not in the theme but in its execution and, consequently, what mattered the most was not 'what' but 'how'"[4]. The situation was different in painting schools Gringmut called "naturalistic", as well as "tendentiously political" and "socialist" (without explaining what he meant by the latter), that aimed to depict the sordid aspects of reality.

It is only towards the middle of the article that Gringmut names the danger the title had warned the reader about. Until then decline had manifested itself in either content or form, but not in the increasingly perfected artistic technique, whereas now art risked losing any artistry whatsoever

[1] Gringmut, V., "Groza, nadvigayushchayasya na russkoye iskusstvo" (Storm Gathering over Russian Art) // *Na pamyat*, p. 58.

[2] Ibid., pp. 58–9.

[3] Ibid., p. 60.

[4] Ibid., p. 62.

because the crisis had affected all the three aspects of creativity. Now the ominous attributes of "anti-artistry" "…were openly preached by the entire school of painters who call themselves 'impressionists'"[1].

Gringmut cited several exhibits of the 1891 Moscow exposition as examples: "We did not believe our own eyes looking at that childish daubery in rich gilded and carved frames that was passed to us as artworks. Bright gaudy blots splattered over the canvas without any perspective were supposed to depict diverse absolutely banal things, but did so with such deliberately careless clumsiness that we decidedly wondered how those *lubok* pictures could have made it to the exhibition, which was to present French painting in its best and most attractive aspect"[2]. According to Gringmut, the objective of the movement which had grown from Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* consisted "…of the slavishly true copying of nature based on […] purely outward *impressions* it produced on you, as a result of which those new-fangled artists call themselves 'impressionists'"[3].

In his description of the new school Gringmut proceeded from the literary understood name. He sought to trap the impressionists with the contradiction, claiming that the painter's view was inevitably subjective, and that if ten cameras produced ten identical pictures of the same object, ten impressionists would deliver ten different canvases based on the same motif: "meanwhile Manet declared 'unconditional objectivity' as the main dogma of the impressionists […] and all his followers were convinced that they were depicting the first objects which came handy with photographic precision…"[4] Fundamental indifference to the object they represented was for Gringmut a cardinal sin of impressionism: "For them all objects, phenomena and creatures have only an outer shell without any inner content. They will paint for you a full-size woman in a white dress seated on the grass with the sole purpose of daubing a huge white spot against bright green spinach, but they have no concern about the expression on that woman's face or about her character, or for that matter about her inner world…"[5]

Gringmut drew a direct parallel between Zola's naturalist school and the followers of Manet, accusing them of lack of substance and story, of the "photographic" reflection of the outward appearance of phenomena and the desire to produce an impression on the public at all costs, but "…not on its spiritual world or its *nerves,* with the help of blunt, bright, disharmonious and gaudy effects"[6]. He explained the success of impressionism by three circumstances: the impressionistic manner was too easy and therefore

[1] Gringmut, V., "Groza, nadvigayushchayasya na russkoye iskusstvo" (Storm Gathering over Russian Art), p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 62.

[3] Ibid., p. 62.

[4] Ibid., p. 63.

[5] Ibid., p. 63.

[6] Ibid., p. 65.

accessible to anyone without talent[1], the public *en masse* was ignorant and, finally, practically all modern critics lacked principles, lived by chasing originality and sensation and for this reason helped advertise charlatans in art.

The Moscow journalist expressed solidarity with the "no-nonsense" French critics who were disgusted with impressionism[2], yet pointed out that the very circumstance that indignation had not abated for nearly thirty years was evidence of the growing influence of the school: "From 'martyrs of convictions' they have now become triumphant prophets of 'new art' and embarked on their triumphal march all over the globe [...]. Germany is already full of French and domestic 'impressionists' now; last year they made their first attack on Russia..."[3] He saw the first symptom of domestic painting being infected in a picture of the Wanderers exhibition of 1892 – *Returning from a Walk* by the artist S.K. Piotrovich, who was not named in the article and whose works bespeak interest in *plein air*. However, it is now difficult to say to what extent his canvas of 1892 was indeed a product of French influence.

The conclusion drawn by Gringmut is full of alarm: "It will take less than ten years for this storm heading towards Russian painting to break out over it with all its destructive force [...]."[4] However, while stating the helplessness of Russian painting that inevitably had in store the fate of the already decadent music and literature, Gringmut impulsively raises his stakes. Calling for combatting the "epidemic" in art and pinning hopes on the revival of Russian art in the new 20th century, he bases his alarmist optimism on the fundamental spiritual and political difference between Europe and Russia. He views the impressionist invasion as a battle doomed to be lost in the great war, which is still to be won eventually by the autocratic Orthodox country: "I don't know if the West can nurture such hopes [for the revival of art, – I.D.]: they have another storm there gathering not only over art, but over the entire society and government, one that is far more terrible and destructive – the storm of *socialism* that we Russians have every means to get rid of"[5].

A few months after the publication of the almanac Gringmut reprinted his article as the first section of a brochure, *Enemies of Painting*[6].

[1] That common place in anti-impressionist criticism is illustrated by a caricature of Caran d'Ache (pseudonym of Emmanuel Poiré), "Impressionist and His Picture", reproduced on a colour inset between pages 64 and 65.

[2] Gringmut's sources remain an open question. He shows familiarity with Zola's essay on Manet in *Mes haines*, which had several editions in the 1870s and 1880s. The only critic Gringmut referenced sympathetically was Arthur Baignères 1834–1913), published, among others, by *Gazette des Beaux-arts*. At the same time, he names no other artist apart from Manet and erroneously cites 1877 (instead of 1865) as the year when *Olympia* was exhibited at the Salon.

[3] Ibid., p. 64. The article was written in 1892.

[4] Ibid., p. 64.

[5] Ibid., p. 66.

[6] Gringmut, V., *Vragi zhivopisi (Enemies of Painting). I. Impressionism. II. Photography*. Moscow [1893], pp. 1–48. Censor's permit of 9 April 1893.

Predictably, photography was announced to be another enemy[1]. The text of the section on impressionism underwent practically no change with a sole exception: one more example of hostile invasion had been added: "…when the French impressionist Dumoulin came to Moscow in 1893, he found himself *en pays de connaisssance*. True, serious critics gave unfavourable reviews of his pictures: for instance, F. Dukhovetsky of *Moskovskiye vedomosti* rather aptly called his art 'reporting in painting' (it is indeed reporting and of a very poor sort, literally 'reporter's daubery'); nevertheless, Mr Dumoulin has already found considerable sympathy amid the public and painters."[2]

Dumoulin could be considered an impressionist as much as Roll or Aublet: he applied spectacular techniques to the exotic Oriental landscape, a genre that was traditional and popular with the public[3]. His Russian voyage and exhibitions (for instance, the exposition at the Saint Petersburg Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in the spring of 1892)[4] came as the result of a commission to paint a panorama, *The North Squadron of Battleships in the Port of Kronstadt* (jointly with A. P. Bogolyubov, 1893, Versailles), showing the historic visit of the French fleet in 1891. The Petersburg exhibition catalogue indeed characterized him as an impressionist, "…but one of the most sensible ones, the advantage owing to which he had been elected to the latest Salon jury"[5].

Gringmut's article met with a number of biting, albeit fleeting responses in the *Artist*, at that time the leading art magazine in Russia. For instance, the Moscow University reader and prolific literary reviewer Ivan Ivanov denounced the entire almanac *Na pamyat* (To Remember) as an attempt at commercial advertising under the smokescreen of "pure" art and called Gringmut's article "a rambling feuilleton", yet had no objections of substance and did not even mention the word "impressionism"[6]. Somewhat later, poking fun at one of Gringmut's critical reviews in *Moskovskiye vedomosti*, A. Kiselev remarked in passing: "The graveness of his intentions in the

[1] The second part of the brochure based on Gringmut's report to the Society of Art Lovers and the article in *Moskovskiye vedomosti* (No. 80, 1893) is arranged as a polemic with Robert de la Sizeranne, who upheld the right of artists to use photography when creating their pictures.

[2] Gringmut, V., *Vragi zhivopisi* (Enemies of Painting), p. 39.

[3] L. Dumoulin (1864–1920) founded the Société Coloniale des Artistes Français in 1908.

[4] Exposition Louis Dumoulin. Tableaux & Etudes. Japon, Chine – Cochinchine, Malaisie, Italie – France. 19 Avril 1892. St. Petersbourg / Société Impériale d'Encouragement des Arts.

[5] Ibid., p. 8. Further on, the author of the text Jean Fleury tries to dispel a prejudice: "For many an impressionist means the same as an improviser who hastens to fix on paper or canvas the first impression he gets from an object. […] But we see that this concern to capture and stress all the shades is incompatible with improvisation". Ibid.

[6] Ivanov, Iv., "Reklama na pochve chistogo iskusstva" (Advertising on Pure Art) // *Artist*, No. 28, March 1893, Year 5, Vol. 3, pp. 137–9.

capacity of an art critic went even as far as attempting to save Russian art from the storm heading towards it from the west"[1].

It seems that the world of art did not take Gringmut's forecasts seriously; nevertheless, the word "impressionist" in the mouths of Russian critics remained more likely an undesirable characteristic. For example, Nikolai Dosekin sought to ward suspicion of belonging to that trend off K. Korovin, explaining the existing opinion by the fact that the artist had lived in Paris for some time. Singling out Chavannes-like canvases, such as *a Northern Idyll* (1892, State Tretyakov Gallery), he wrote: "Colouring, the harmony of tones… differ sharply from modern French impressionism. The latter… is characterized by light and a fairly bright gamut of colours. Korovin's paintings have a dark, barely coloured palette that is exclusively his distinctive mark."[2]

For a long time a considerable portion of what the *Artist* published about art abroad was based on retelling material from foreign publications and on reproductions[3]. But the September issue of the magazine finally carried a lengthy review of the Salon de Champs-de-Mars and the Salon de Champs-Élysées written by an eyewitness. This was the young Odessa painter Piotr Nilus. While on the whole sharing the Russian artists' conviction about the superiority of art of substance that consciously set itself lofty tasks and explored human psychology, he at the same time pointed to the preponderance of the *plein air* approach in all fields of French painting which was already spreading to all the leading European schools. According to Nilus, as a result of the vogue for *plein air* "present-day landscape artists of a new formation are primarily after: 1) conveying just an overall spot of light and colour and 2) the quivering of both on objects, which is attained by special methods of applying colour. […] in a sunny landscape we usually notice that colours are taken of utmost brightness and at the same time the lightest. All details are nearly absent from the drawing and tones: they dull the colour and make the drawing look pedantic. […] but taken together, all that in skilful hands, of course, produces such a stunning chord of light and colour that it blinds you, albeit temporarily"[4]. Nilus seems to be the first in Russia to have spoken of the growing influence of the pointillists

[1] Kiselev, A., "Etyudy po voprosam iskusstva (Pisma k chitatelyu). Pismo 2-e. Nasha publika i nasha kritika" (Studies on Art Problems (Letters to the Readers). Letter 2. Our Public and Our Criticism) // *Artist*, No. 29, April 1893, Year 5, Vol. 4, p. 47.

[2] As quoted in: Kaufman, R.S., "Ocherki istorii russkoi khudozhestvennoi kritiki XIX veka. Ot Konstantina Batyushkova do Aleksandra Benua" (Essays on the History of Russian Art Criticism of the 19th Century. From Konstantin Batyushkov to Alexander Benois), Moscow, 1990, p. 247.

[3] Cf., for example, Ki[se]lev, A., "Kartiny parizhskikh Salonov 1892 g. (po ikh reproduktsiyam) " (Pictures of the 1892 Paris Salons (from their reproductions) // *Artist*, No.22, September 1892, Year 4, Vol. 9, pp. 101–6.

[4] Nilus, P., "Neskolko zamechanii o frantsuzsskoi zhivopisi v svyazi s obzorom Salonov 1894 goda" (A Few Notes on French Painting in Connection with 1894 Salon Review) // *Artist*, No. 41, 1894, p. 80–81.

and tried to give an unprejudiced explanation of striving after brightness in shades: "even now that this trend has comparatively very few exemplary works [...] one could, if not borrow the idea of pointism [sic! – I.D.] in general, learn a great deal"[1]. Anyhow, he had to point out that the pointillists repeated themselves and bred numerous imitators. in parallel he stated that impressionism, which taught modern painters resonant colours, was ceding ground: "[...] the remaining extreme impressionists [...] are now in obvious decline and do not understand the fruit of what they have sown"[2].

Right after the article by Nilus, who in fact excluded impressionism from the range of relevant artistic phenomena, the same September issue of the magazine included the first part of a story, *The Impressionist*, by Gnedich (to be continued in the following issue)[3]. Written with ease and brimming with comic episodes, it cardinally changed the tone of the debate and seemed to clarify the meaning of the word "impressionism" in the Russian art discourse of the early 1890s.

Piotr Gnedich (1855–1925) started publishing his writings in the late 1870s, and by the early 1890s he was famous as an exceptionally prolific and widely read man of letters, author of numerous short and long stories, plays and feuilletons. An *Artist* magazine chronicler even believed that Gnedich "...ought to be ranked among the leading novelists of modern times"[4]. However, that opinion is a compliment: Gnedich published critical articles in the magazine under the penname Rectus. Before taking up *belles lettres* the writer had studied painting at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts for five years, but did not matriculate, which enabled him to act as an art critic and write a universal History of Arts, which, though compilatory, had several reprints.

The story opens with the French Marguerite Cursey coming to the studio of the painter Nikolai Pletnev[5] to sit. They had met by chance when the Muscovite paid the tram fare for the young foreign girl whose purse had been stolen. The girl identified him as an artist by his drawing portfolio and confessed having worked as a sitter in Paris. She had moved to Moscow because French artists were getting "used" to her[6] and she now served as a governess. But her true vocation was "being a sitter", so Marguerite was bored with her chores, yet did no sit for anybody because "Moscow art-

[1] Nilus, P., *Neskolko zamechanii o frantsuzsskoi zhivopisi v svyazi s obzorom Salonov 1894 goda*, p. 82.

[2] Ibid., p .83. Albert Besnard was cited as an example of this type of impressionist.

[3] *Artist*, No. 41, September 1894, Year 6, Vol. 9, pp. 85–98; No. 42, October 1894, Year 6, Vol. 10, pp. 104–16. Reprinted: Gnedich, P.P., *Mgnoveniye i drugiye rasskazy* (Instant and Other Stories). 1890–1895, Saint Petersburg, 1896, pp. 99–191.

[4] *Artist*, No. 36, April 1894, Year 6, Vol. 4, p. 176.

Артист. 1894. апрель. № 36. Год 6. Книга 4. С. 176.

[5] Pyotr Gnedich was a grandnephew of the writer Nikolai Gnedich (1784–1833), who was a friend of Pyotr Pletnev (1791–1866). The name of the main character seems to suggest that he could be the author's alter ego. I am grateful to Natalia Mazur for having brought this to my attention.

[6] Gnedich ignored the obviously put-on motif.

ists say that a 'nu' is pornography" "...mixing up two notions – un modèle et une fille[1], and paid little for sitting. She finds in Pletnev a rare person for Russia who regards a sitter as a colleague rather than a chasee and readily agrees to sit for a mural commissioned to him by some Caucasus branch of the Ethnography Museum. The mural is to show a Scythian youth taken prisoner by Amazons who had inhabited the steppe foothills of the Caucasus in the days of yore. For Gnedich Scythians were the ancestors of the Slavs and therefore "...there was much of Russian blood in the veins of the daring semi-mythical heroines of the Caucasus" (41; 89). Judging by the lengthy ecphrasis, the result was to look like Siemiradzki canvases: "Pletnev showed a moment when the Queen and her retinue had ridden up to the prisoner. [...] The handsome Scythian youth with his arms tied behind his back was standing proudly amid the guards, but when his eyes met the dark eyes of the Queen, he bent his head [...]. The Queen, too, [...] seems to be astounded by his beauty" (41; 89). Pletnev is a fairly young but respectable mainstream artist, a member of the Academy who stays away from the Bohemians and experimentation. His studio is full of old expensive furniture, glass cases with Japanese dishes and Pompeii vases "...with the inevitable Makart bouquets and even more inevitable statue of Venus de Milo" (41; 86). When after seeing Pletnev's work, Marguerite wants to pay him a compliment, she says: "C'est du vrai talent! C'est un Rochegrosse!" (41; 88).

At first Gnedich focuses on the relations between the sitter and the artist. Dictated by the plot opening, the motif is apparently largely prompted by the situation in domestic art – the recent French exhibition shocked viewers with a multitude of female nudes. The question of female sitters was discussed especially actively in the year of the publication of this story[2], and after the 1893–4 reform of the Academy of Arts female sitters began to sit at the Academy studios (they appeared at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1897)[3]. in February 1894 the *Artist* published a poem by Iakov Polonsky "Model", whose message is clearly present in Gnedich's story: "Forgetting hours of need and leisure, / in work we found pleasure, / When catching light and shade, / On your young body. [...] You managed, serving art, / To breath, like marble, cold / And bend our wild desires / To the mere aesthetic feeling"[4]. The narrator's thoughts gradually become those of Pletnev himself: "There is not a shade of sensuality here. [...] Some pure, sacred link of common service to art always takes shape between the model and the artist. Should flesh triumph over spirit

[1] *Artist*, No. 41, 1894, p. 88. Hereinafter the issue and page numbers are given in brackets after the quotation.

[2] Cf. "Naturshchitsy" (Female Sitters) // *Peterburgskaya gazeta*, No. 84, 27 March 1894; No. 94, 6 April. For details see Samu, M., "Sluzha iskusstvu... Khudozhnik i model v russkoi khudozhestvennoi culture XIX veka" (In Service to Art... The Artist and the Sitter in Russian Artistic Culture of the 19th Century)// *Iskusstvoznanie*, Nos. 3–4, 2014, pp. 434–47.

[3] See Shamu, M., Op. cit., p. 444.

[4] Polonsky, Ia., "Naturshchitsa" (Model) // *Artist*, No. 34, February 1894, Year 6, Vol. 2, p. 117.

and mutual platonic interest shift to material ground, this will spell the end of an artwork: its sincerity will be gone!" (41; 87). As an example of such collaboration Pletnev recalls a picture that he saw "at one of the Paris Salons" (41; 87), depicting a cast being made of the naked model's leg: "The three of them seem to have put their heart in the question: 'will we make it or not?' The old man, his assistant and the young girl are all so far away from any conventional staged sensuality, so preoccupied with the common mission of art that an outside viewer from the crowd would perhaps hardly believe the sincerity of the author of this genre" (41; 87). Visitors to the Russian exhibitions would easily recognise Dantan's canvas *A Mould from Nature* (1887) that was shown in Saint Petersburg in 1888 and in Moscow in 1891.

A new commission received by Pletnev gave an impulse to the development of the plot: he was asked to design a bathroom in the mansion of a certain baron. The proposal, which the main character found somewhat unworthy of a true artist, was nevertheless accepted because the adjacent premises were designed by Dufresne, Siemiradzki, Makovsky and Liphart. The nature of the room dictated the choice of a nude for the motif; meanwhile, according to Pletnev, "…it is considered with us short of a mauvais ton…" Pletnev shares his doubts with his model, reiterating platitudes about the objective of a Russian artist consisting of the search for character and profundity, and Marguerite in fact provokes him into taking the commission by piquing his self-esteem: "It is just that you don't know how to paint a female body and besides have no models. I've been to the Tretyakov Gallery here… I've never seen such a collection of monsters as your sitters" (41, 90).

It is in this dialogue that the theme of impressionism is first brought up. Pletnev thinks that "… a nude is needed for the bathroom, semi-antique, semi-modern, yet without a tinge of that sensuality typical of the French impressionists" (41, 90). It is Marguerite that nudges him to turn to *plein air*: "Paint a body the right way, the way genuine masters do it; not pink and yellow, but alive with reflexes of the sky and the water" (41, 90). As it is impossible to attain such an effect in a studio, Pletnev, who has never painted a body in full life, is carried away by the thrill of a new task and decides to go to the country away from Moscow, to the Vladimir Gubernia, where his only relative, the widow of his uncle who was a priest, lives with her brother, prior of the Astafievo village church.

The new creative project leads Pletnev to start thinking about the objectives of painting. At first he had thoughts of Starodum, who had read Max Nordau's bestseller: "He did not recognise impressionism the way it is understood by the contemporary painters of France. He saw little nature in their milky pictures painted, as it were, on chalk, and found more affectation in the simplicity they sought after than in the former conventionality of the Old Masters. The whole of their newest school smacked of some psychopathy, as it were. As if all those young people had just been released from Salpetriere deparments… Colouring has been lost with them, and

what is left is a mosaic, chaos instead of colours" (41, 92). But "...impressionism... in the sense of immediately capturing a chance image if it has a strong character or lyrical mood – Pletnev recognized that and was ready to go after it" (41, 92). Then the artist went on to recollecting his studies at the Academy, the routine reigning in its classes and "the deadly pedantism"[1], from which a trip to Europe had saved him. In Paris Pletnev was struck by Meissonier and Fortuney, in Spain he did copies of Velasquez, in Amsterdam contemplated Rembrandt and "...came back more than ever aware of the falsehood and conventionality of modern painting techniques (41, 94). Then finally, before going to sleep, the artist at last decides to do "...something new, strong and more definite" (41, 94).

His trip to the Vladimir Gubernia results in a chain of comic situations. To begin with, Pletnev has to explain to the widow and her brother the priest what he does with the young French woman sitting for him in the nude ("painting Susanna... from the Book of the Prophet Daniel"). For the sake of decorum Pletnev stays at his aunt's, leaving Marguerite in the village policeman's care. The appearance of the young attractive foreigner stirs up the men: the village policeman makes a display of hospitability while the priest puts on his best robe and racks his brains for a few foreign words. The aunt suspects Marguerite of matrimonial intentions and tries to protect her unsuspecting nephew.

On the first morning before getting down to work Pletnev noticed several times that the natural effects of light and shade made him recall impressionist pictures (42; 104, 105). For work in the wood by the spring pool a space had been fenced off with a canvas sheet for Marguerite to sit, and the artist got down to depicting a mermaid by the water. He was inspired: "It now seemed to him that he had to cast everything aside, forget everything and start something new, but he did not know what" (42; 110). In front of his eyes the quietly sitting Marguerite begins to transform, as it were, into a painting: "She was all matt greenish halftones on the one side and all transparent warm orange on the other. Some crawling shadows now and then went sliding over her and disappeared below, at her feet in the grass. [...] It was altogether not the body he had been used to painting, there was much of the new there, something fairytale, airy and flat. The face came out entirely flat, with a goldish green reflex really burning on her cheek" (42; 110). Excited, Pletnev understands that a picture painted like that would provoke attacks from journalists and "connoisseurs", and a grim picture of an Academy art exhibition began to unfold in his mind: "Siverko, February morning. The snow had melted, and the sledge runners are cutting through naked stones. The houses are all splattered with jaundiced blots, as if a perennial spite against the human race makes their liver ache. [...] With his lively bright mood the artist addresses the public and says: "Look how warm and light my picture is, how far it all is from rent,

[1] This story echoes the writer's later recollections. See Gnedich, P.P., *Kniga zhizni. Vospominaniya. 1855–1918* (A Book of Life. Memoirs. 1855–1918), Moscow, 2000, pp. 46–82.

from piles and Ingermanland hoarfrost". […] But the connoisseurs say: "Outrageous – a green chin and a geographical map of the United States for a face! Poor thing, he must have contracted impressionism" (42; 110).

That feeling of hopeless routine that had passed on from Academy studies to art makes the artist trust his impression wholeheartedly: "And with some frenzy Pletnev starts painting a green chin because with the green grass lit up by the sun it could be of no other colour. […] Do we indeed see the colour of objects the way they are? No, we see everything conventionally changed and this is the way it should be painted" (42; 110). "He liked the thought that he […] would irk those thick-headed idiots at the exhibition with his technique and his ideas that were diametrically opposite to theirs" (42; 112).

Back from his *plein air* studies, the inspired Pletnev found his aunt conferring with the elder Sozont, a "half-prophesizing or half-raving" (42; 113) keeper of the old behests. Sofia Anempodistovna resorted to the elder's advice to free her nephew from the French woman's charms. As soon as Pletnev and Marguerite appeared, the elder demanded that the "woman of different faith" leave the table, but encountered the artist's joyful rage that finished off his new "identification":

"So, you, father, don't want to be defiled and sit amid us?"

"I don't!"

"Then get the hell out of here!"

[…]

"Blessed are you when men revile you and utter all kinds of evil", the elder broke out, apparently unwilling to part with his lunch. "I'll leave and shake off the dust. But before that answer two questions: […]

"Who are you?"

Pletnev squinted his eyes.

"An impressionist", he said.

"I don't know what this word means. What do you want to do under the cloak of this word? To ruin the old world and create a new one?"

"That's it!"

To his aunt's dismay and the content of the priest, for whom the preaching elder was a bothersome rival, Sozont retreated and Pletnev had to answer Sofia Anempodistovna's question as to what after all impressionism was: "And this, auntie, is something like a bugaboo, only scarier…" (42; 115).

Gnedich did not explain to the Russian reader the principles of the new painting – he only described a *plein air* experience, which had nothing specifically impressionistic about it (save for the mention of the green reflex). Nor was the writer a champion of impressionism, as his repeatedly reprinted review of the history of art graphically showed. in its 1898 edition, which had Meissonier as the key figure of modern French painting, Gnedich devoted but a few words to Manet: "…he lively and truthfully perceives the varicoloured objects in full light and strives after flexibility and

simplicity in moulding, knows the nature of modern life and, finally, makes use of lighter tones of colours"[1]. Nothing was said of impressionism even in connection with landscape. It was not until the beginning of the new century that Gnedich found a few words for that phenomenon: "The *plein air* artists, impressionists, pointists [pointillists – I.D.] and so on, are all those that hunger and thirst for truth. They may occasionally deviate and one may feel passion, decadence and baroque in their quests, but this is still better than the dull, self-righteous Academy stultification"[2].

The question whether this story of Gnedich, polemical as regards the stereotypes of Russian artistic consciousness, could have had a direct target remains open. Could there have been a link between it and Gringmut's article and brochure? One can hardly speak of Gnedich's opposition to the conservative monarchists: as a writer he pursued an opportunist policy and contributed to publications of different leanings, including the *Russkii vestnik* (Russian Messenger). Two of his pieces were published in the *Na pamyat* almanac, and precisely this circumstance makes it possible to assert that he was familiar with Gringmut's article. There was hardly any polemic in Pletnev's inner monologue with the dogmatic scholarly approach in aesthetics, stating, among other things: "…the Germans started claiming that Cornelius and Kaulbach were great artists. And the Russians believed it" (42; 112), although Gringmut included precisely these two names in his short list of genuine 19th-century talents[3]. in this respect far more significant is the parody image of Sozont appearing by the end of the story, a guardian of Orthodoxy and victimizer of people of other faith, who accuses Pletnev of the desire to destroy the old world and build a new one, that is to say, one way or another using apocalyptic and revolutionary vocabulary[4].

Thus, for Gnedich in 1894 "impressionism" was not so much a method or school of painting as a sign of the liberation of the artist who trusts his own observation and sense of nature. During the same period the British painter and critic Charles Furse described the situation in Europe in a similar way: "…readers of modern art criticism are probably familiar with the use of the term impressionism. It is one of the commonest in the art jargon of the day and bears with it the peculiar advantage of being, to most people, a mere phrase, utterly unintelligible… it has come to be a title differentiating the

[1] Gnedich, P., "Istoriya iskusstv (Zodchestvo, zhivopis, vayaniye) " (History of Arts. Architecture, Painting, Sculpture). Vol.III. "Ot epokhi Vozrozhdeniya do nashikh dnei" (From Renaissance to Our Days). Saint Petersburg: Izdaniye A. F. Marksa / *Niva* Illustrated Library 1898, p. 279.

[2] Gnedich, P.P., "Istoriya iskusstv (Zodchestvo, zhivopis, vayaniye) " (History of Arts. Architecture, Painting, Sculpture). "Iskusstvo Zapadnoi Evropy posle epokhi Vozrozhdeniya. Russkoye iskusstvo" (West European Art after the Epoch of Renaissance. Russian Art). Third edition. Saint Petersburg: Izdaniye A. F. Marksa / *Niva* Illustrated Library 1907, p.186.

[3] Gringmut, V., Storm Gathering over Russian Art, p. 58.

[4] The glaring parallel with the Russian text of *The Internationale* is groundless: Arkadii Kotz did his translation using the words "We will destroy the world of brute force… / And we will build our own new world…" in 1902.

work of those painters who are striving after an expression of their artistic individuality from those who look upon art as a commodity, the supply of which is consequent on the demand"[1].

Gnedich published his story, in which impressionism comes across as a symbol of creative individuality that trusts its experience, in 1894, marking a sort of intermediary milestone in the Russian acquaintance with a new phenomenon in painting. However, the *Artist* magazine could no longer influence the evolution of a more sophisticated idea of impressionism: its publication stopped in early 1895[2]. Monet, Renoir and Degas canvases were first shown in Russia in 1896, but that episode did not have a decisive influence on the Russians' acquaintance with impressionism either. To understand it conceptually, a modernist and at the same time distinctly "western-leaning" vector had to take shape in the domestic art process, accompanied by the purposeful exhibition policy of the World of Art and the recognition of impressionism as the central art phenomenon of the second half of the 19th century, which came after the 1900 Exposition Universelle.

[1] Charles W. Furse, "Impressionism – What It Means" // *Albermarle Review*, 1 August 1892. Cit. R. Jensen. Op. cit., p. 140.

[2] Cf. the story of the donation of Caillebotte's collection to the Luxembourg Museum based on French periodicals. *Artist*, No. 45, January 1895, Vol. 1, p. 241.