

# **Consideration of Contemporary Russian Paintings (Revised Edition)**

**—The Tale of My Collection—**



**Norio Ishii**

## Contents

On the occasion of publishing this book on the Internet .....	3
Foreword .....	27
Introduction .....	29
First meeting.....	35
The first painting .....	39
Turning point .....	45
The search for good paintings.....	50
Prelude for the introduction of paintings.....	57
Russian art museums .....	82
Features of contemporary paintings .....	101
Artists leaping forward .....	122
Artistic level of contemporary paintings .....	137
Epilogue .....	156
Afterword .....	166
Lecture “On Russian paintings” .....	169
Main references .....	199
List of illustrations/Russian Artists’ Union ranking .....	201
Original foreword in Russian .....	203

## **On the occasion of publishing this book on the Internet**

Seeing the situation in Japan, where almost no attention is paid to Russian realism paintings, I had a question, “Why did such situation arise, though these paintings are so splendid?” and in the end it became my motive to write this book. This is because I had been stationed at Moscow office of my company, engaged in international logistics, for a period of four years since 1989. At that time due to a strange coincidence of the circumstances in my private life appeared a new pleasure to appreciate and collect paintings as one of a small number of my hobbies, or rather I was completely absorbed in this pastime. Since then I have always had the immeasurable pleasure and comfort thanks to the artistic charm of these paintings. Therefore it was quite natural for me to have such a question.

In the lapse of three or four years, however, such situation in Japan remained unchanged. In the meantime, I came to think that I should do something useful, even though it was small, so that the situation shall be changed for better, because in view of extremely high artistic level of contemporary Russian realism paintings, I think somebody on earlier occasion should introduce hereto these paintings in full scale. In reality, however, people who try to do it, if any, will be limited to a very small number. In other words it means that it is even probable for me to wait for it still for long time in vain. If so, I would have to try to do something in my own way somehow without relying on others. That’s why, thinking over this or that which I could do at that time by process of elimination, what remained with me in the end was to write a book about these paintings based on my experience.

In April of 1998, in half year after starting to write the manuscript, by which time about 70% of the draft of this book was ready, I was stationed in Moscow second time, therefore I accomplished this draft during the second time of my stay in Moscow. When I wrote up the draft, naturally I thought about the publication of this book first after I would return to Japan with the expiration of the term of my service. However, at the same time, paying attention to an enormous effect of rapidly-spreading information by the Internet, which many people in the world make use of, I had a plan to prepare for establishing my homepage some time near future after the publication of this book in Japan so that the specialists and art lovers etc. could read it in English and Russian which I know.

As for the publication of this book in Japan I could realize it somehow in May of 2005. As a result, the book saw a response of the publication, modest as it was: I received a lot of praising comments from the readers and besides, although the number

was not big enough, this book has been kept in the libraries of the ordinary universities or the colleges, teaching art as a special field, or the public libraries, covering to some extent all over the country. Thus the possibilities that this book will serve as a reference book of contemporary Russian realism paintings for people engaged in the special study of art or the practice of painting or art lovers. However, in a current situation of longstanding depression of the publishing world, where it is said that even a little bit high-priced book, especially an art literature, does not sell well, an insufficient demand for this book did not afford the publishing company to reprint it. So, under the existing conditions the effect of the publication will have to be quite limited contrary to my expectation.

So, that's why this time, at the preparatory stage for establishing my home-page on the Internet, as initially planned, I decided to publish on this website not only English and Russian translations, but also Japanese original.

Till that time I had re-read the text of this book translated into Russian over and over again even dozens of times and if in the process of re-reading I noticed any mistake and inappropriate or insufficient expression in the text of Japanese original, every time I corrected them and made the necessary alterations to Russian and English translations. And besides, in view of the decision to publish it in three languages, I newly wrote up this study to be put at the very beginning of the revised version of the Japanese original to enhance its quality and also added the new information which appeared after the issue of this book in Japan. Although the change of the text was not so big, I decided to make it public in my homepage, having accomplished all the necessary alterations at that time in my own way.

By the way, after my return home from the first stay in Moscow, seeing the situation in Japan which was almost equal to no attention being paid to Russian realism paintings, I simply thought without any careful consideration that this was because there was no environment in Japan enabling people to appreciate the excellent works of Russian realism painting at any time in art museums etc. However, the publication of this book gave me the opportunities to know of the tendency of the market in Japan for sale of paintings, through which I came to understand that only this is not the cause of the unpopularity of Russian realism paintings, but generally in Japan people have very little interest in the style of realism itself. In other words, I came to think that the reason why Russian paintings have not attracted much attention of the people consists not merely in the lack of opportunities to make their splendid works widely known, but also as a problem prior to this, a more serious reason lies in the fact that these paintings are

portrayed by the style of realism.

In Japan quite many artists, including amateur painters, paint the pictures with the realism style and speaking from the experience that I saw the exhibits at the exhibitions inviting public participation or of other natures, there exist the works belonging to good paintings in their own way. However, from the standpoint of demand, a good price won't be bidden even for the works of artists regarded as the leading authorities in realism paintings. Needless to compare it with the extraordinary prices for the works of the artists of Japanese style of paintings or the avant-garde enjoying high popularity, as this poor demand of purchase symbolizes the unpopularity of the style of realism itself.

However, thinking anew, this unpopular situation had continued since long before, but I was not aware of it because before and after I got especially interested in paintings, the circumstance in Japan was such that impressionism and postimpressionism were too often in the news and, maybe, distracted by this, I did not pay any attention to the reverse side of this phenomenon that realism paintings were left alone out of the focus of attention.

Therefore, in order to have a correct understanding for myself, I, with a careful consciousness of investigating the cause, once again read the Western art history, mainly focusing on the style of realism. Also, thinking over the matter by myself, I confirmed in my own way the existing fact that the specified factors having caused unpopularity of the style of realism paintings, such as a mere accident or a mistake similar to doing up the button in a wrong hole of the shirt which occurred in the course of development of art history concerning the fate of the style of realism paintings, and misunderstanding or prejudice, got tangled all together to form the situation that this paintings have not been fairly appreciated even till now for the period as long as more than a century. As it is a story concerned with Western art history, this tendency is true not only in Japan, but also in Europe, USA or other countries on a global scale. However, as such situation occurred almost with no relation to any default of the style of realism, I think it should be rectified as early as possible from the viewpoint of fairly appreciating the artists of realism paintings as well.

It seems that at present realism paintings are in the process of revaluation, though it is too gradual. However the tendency of making little account of realism paintings that was formed at a golden age of post-realism paintings remains strong-rooted even now to successively serve as one of factors of unpopularity of the style of realism. That's why the elimination of such a situation is required to accelerate this revaluation. Fortunately, we can take measures to get rid of this psychological factor by clearing up the misunderstanding. Therefore, availing myself of this opportunity, I'd like to point out

where exist the main causes of long-lasting unpopularity of realism paintings and try to clarify these causes in detail.

As a point of the subject is concerned with realism paintings, I think it better to briefly review the outline of realism paintings in Western art history, though it's familiar enough to many people.

The style of realism paintings, the cradle of which was in France, appeared on the front stage of history together with the February revolution in 1848 and left its traces in history that it bloomed in its own way for the period of the regime of the Second Republic and then the Second Empire, reaching the end after the collapse of Paris Commune in 1871.

It is a well-known artist Gustave Courbet (1819-77) that followed the traces exactly the same way, or rather, although there seemed to be several more artists who may be called master of realism paintings, there was no one except him who makes an outstanding presence felt from the viewpoint of the monumental greatness and importance of his works in Western art history. That's why the traces of his art activities coincide with the history itself of the movement of French realism paintings.

Courbet was born and brought up in a middle class family at Ornans, the provincial town of eastern part of France. As for paintings he did not have any official education of art, though he learned how to paint under the guidance of a local artist. Nevertheless, when he was 20 years old, he came to Paris to train himself for paintings, and there he exclusively engaged in copying the masterpieces of the great masters in the Louvre, such as Veronese (1528-88) of Venetian style, Rembrandt (1606-69), Velazquez (1599-1660) and others. Thus he mastered the great expression reminding viewers of a high-class professional artist already at the age of about twenty five.

At the initial stage of his activities as an artist he portrayed the romantic style of paintings. As regards the acceptance of his works by the Salon, however, he did not achieve a big success, but just after the left-wing interim government was established by the February revolution in 1848, this very artist suddenly began producing the realism style of paintings with the subject of a life of ordinary people, as if he had waited until the time was ripe. In the Salon held the next year after the February revolution *After Dinner at Ornans* (1848-49) first painted by him won the second prize and then in the next Salon in two years after that he exhibited even seven works altogether, inclusive of the masterpieces of his early days, *The stone Breakers* (1849-50), *A Burial at Ornans* (1849-50) etc. Then he suddenly became a famous artist by the time when this exhibition drew to its close.

Realism is the style of paintings derived from a strong repulsion against the style of

romanticism which takes an unusual, unique world as the subject. That's why one of the features of this style of paintings lies in that the usual affairs surrounding the artist are taken as its subject. For this reason the work depicting a scene of usual life of ordinary people with a big canvas, offering of which only to God or royals was still the customs at that time, was accepted with a surprise and caused a big sensation, and it evidently demonstrates that the style of realism was the avant-garde born earlier, ahead of the times.

The regime which had been favorable to Courbet ended its short life when it was at the age of four years and ten months due to the coup d'état by the nephew of Napoleon and the Second Imperia government, which put a socialist thinker Proudhon in jail on a charge that he had slandered Louis-Napoleon, regarded Courbet unfavorable person because he had not only a friendly relation with Proudhon, but also was under the influence of his social idea, while Courbet disliked this regime as well. Such relation fraught with a confrontation between them was to be continued for eighteen years till the collapse of the Second Imperia. Nevertheless, Courbet who established his own style of paintings, having mastered the traditional techniques for the painting expression of human body, kept expanding the way of supporting himself through painting works and by the time, when *Woman with a Parrot* (1866) exhibited in the Salon of 1866 had a big reputation, he was already an established great master, having newly gained the stable supporters of capitalists and rich aristocrats.

However, Courbet closed his fifty eight year's life in the exile place of Switzerland. He was a self-reliant artist who struggled unsupported, getting involved in the political matters. Maybe, for this reason, he did not have any ardent interest in forming a group of artists of the same will, nor in training the successors. That's why he had no pupils brought up with his special care. Besides, impressionists, who looked up to Courbet as their teacher, abandoned the practice that till that time the artists used to paint the works in their studio and made it a rule to produce their paintings by sketching outdoors with the aim to thoroughly pursuing realism paintings, which, however, as a natural consequence led them to the paintings to mainly express the light shining on the surface of the objects. As a result, it changed impressionism into the paintings which defect from realism contrary to their initial purpose to pursue pure realism paintings. On top of that, following various schools, such as postimpressionism, fauvism etc. succeeded and developed this stream of post-realism paintings without exception, that's why the style of realism paintings was on the sharp decline in France, the very birth place of the said paintings.

But on the other hand the style of realism paintings spread through the works of

Courbet to Germany, Holland, Belgium and then to Eastern Europe, Russia and North America etc. Among them especially in Russia realism paintings were destined to make an unusual development even till now.

By the way, most probably, there are quite lots of lovers of modern Western paintings, such as impressionism, postimpressionism etc. which can be said to be even an overwhelming majority in Japan, Europe, North America and other countries on a global scale. What I am going to mention from now on is just to try to overturn some concepts that have taken root as common knowledge pertaining to these paintings. Therefore, maybe, there will be some points which cause a reaction or perplexity for the lots of people loving these paintings, inclusive of the specialists, above all for the enthusiastic lovers.

However, in order to prevent from misunderstanding I'd like to explain; as a matter of fact, I myself also a lover of modern Western paintings. Just after I got interested in paintings during my stay in Moscow, I used to go to the museums every Sunday to see not only Russian paintings, but also Western ones. As you know, Russia has a lot of masterpieces of modern Western paintings produced before the time of the October revolution. The reason why I visited to appreciate these paintings so many times in the Pushkin Museum and the Hermitage, where these masterpieces are permanently exhibited, is that I was strongly attracted by the charm of these paintings. As a natural consequence I believe I know very well their high artistic level, but on the other hand besides modern Western paintings, I was simultaneously absorbed in Russian paintings, appreciating many masterpieces in detail. Such being the case, I have a strong feeling that modern Russian paintings, such as realism paintings etc. as well as contemporary Russian realism developed on base of the tradition of these paintings have the same artistic level as that of modern Western paintings.

To my regret, contemporary Russian realism paintings having developed through the period of the isolated times after the October revolution and successively through the times of the Cold War lasting long after the World War II are almost unknown to the Western countries even till now, though their artistic level is quite high. The reason why I think it a big loss for the people loving the paintings derives from my experience in Russia, where quite a healthy, environmental condition for the appreciation of paintings enabled me to look at many great works not only of Russian paintings, but also of modern Western post-realism paintings at the same period in detail and thanks to it, I came to acquire the method of how to appreciate the works of completely opposite style of paintings by comparing one with another in regard to their features, paying attention to their common factors and the different ones, as a consequence of which I think I

could understand the masterpieces of both styles of paintings more deeply. This comparative view of paintings shall be shown not only in the latter half part of this study, but also at several places in the text of this book. I think I could not have acquired this way of appreciation if I have not had the opportunity to look at both of these styles of paintings simultaneously. That is to say, judging from my experience as above, getting a close acquaintance with highly developed style of realism paintings is not an obstacle, but on the contrary, highly useful for the people loving paintings of impressionism and so on.

Under such circumstances, even if the description of this study from now on have a defiant trend in high probability, it has absolutely nothing to do with any intention to spoil the valuation or popularity of modern Western paintings, such as impressionism and so on, but as I mentioned at the beginning part of this study, it is purely for the sake of illustrating objectively and making it clear that the long-lasting tendency of underestimating realism paintings is founded on a misunderstanding. The defiant tone inevitably comes from this purpose. Therefore beforehand I'd like to ask for your understanding.

Then, let's return to the original subject. Next I will see how this unpopularity was formed in the French painting world.

What I'm going to mention from now on is basically the study on popularity and unpopularity, that's why first of all I'll review the relation between popularity of an artist and his artistic level. In general, if his artistic level is high enough, he shall win popularity. However, although it is rather exceptional, the high artistic level is not always followed by a deserving popularity. History saw such occasions. Needless to say, popularity is made by demand, which, however, is much affected by a demand of the times, frequent support or severe criticism of the critics and others. In other words, it means that if the artist has a high artistic standard, even though he resigns himself to an unfair recognition, it is quite possible that he will be drastically evaluated depending on the change of the external factor. Also its reverse case can occur. Nevertheless, his rating will be revived sooner or later together with the change of such external factor. Mentioning additionally in this connection, in case of an artist rather not rising above mediocrity, which differs from the aforesaid occasions, even if he is popular during his life time due to a political influence or other factor, he will be forgotten forever when this external factor is lost.

By the way, it is said that modern Western paintings began from impressionism. It is the growing bourgeoisie that purchased these paintings from 1880's on.

To tell about their popularity, modern Western paintings, such as impressionism and

so on can be referred to as an unusual example that a demand for purchase was pushed up drastically by the external factor unprecedented in Western art history. The reason why impressionism replaced neoclassical paintings that had been the leading group till that time is that “it was a novel, epoch-making art of paintings”. I think it’s a general understanding of the people who have ever read a history of modern Western art. In a sense, it’s certainly true, but if we review this phenomenon in art history that “impressionist suddenly jumped into the post of a leading school” from the standpoint as a general historical fact, the trend of a purchasing demand itself hidden behind does tell the more true story.

The growing bourgeoisie who had established the First Republican Regime after accomplishing the French Revolution supported the enthronement as the emperor of Napoleon who had settled a disorder after the Revolution, achieving a big results in the civil war with the counterrevolutionary forces as well as the war with the allied forces of the great cooperation countries for the coalition against France. However, the regime of this Empire had to continue the war with the great cooperation countries, which in the end led Napoleon I to the failure of his campaign to Moscow and his designation from the throne. Immediately after that Monarchy of Bourbon dynasty was restored in anticipation of the intention of the countries for the coalition against France and then, when this Monarchy revived after the hundred-day re-dominance by Napoleon I, the growing bourgeoisie under this revived Monarchy once again struggled with the royalty and aristocracy for hegemony and finally succeeded in holding actual power of society by the July Revolution in 1830.

The growing bourgeoisie had obtained historical paintings to adorn their mansions with them for a long period of time, following the example of the rich aristocrats. However, in order to understand the contents of a story or the allegory of historical painting, it was indispensable to acquire a high culture and knowledge, but, to tell the truth, the bourgeoisie, unlike the royalty and aristocracy, had a difficulty in understanding them, so wanted to have more understandable, familiarized paintings. When the works by Courbet exhibited at the Salon got a reputation, it is the bourgeoisie that purchased his works, such as portraiture, nude, a genre picture and landscape, because these were their kind of paintings.

However, as for landscape, a genre picture and portraiture of impressionism the bourgeoisie, who represented the class of growing citizens who made prudent and steady way of thinking, did not try to touch while the works of impressionists were always rejected in the screening of the Salon and were severely criticized in public every time impressionists held their own exhibition for the works refused by the Salon

for protest, but in 1880's the evaluation of impressionism finally came to rise, that's why they began to purchase the works of impressionism instead of buying historical paintings of neoclassicism that were hard to understand for them.

Consequently, reviewing the phenomenon that impressionism replaced the then leading school from the viewpoint of the trend of a purchasing demand, of course it was because of the fact that impressionism is an excellent painting, but nevertheless, it obviously shows that such aspect that these paintings were understandable and favorite ones for the bourgeoisie dominating modern society played a more important role than it, as a consequence of which modern paintings such as impressionism and so on came to monopoly satisfy the purchasing demand before long. But on the other hand the reason why neoclassicism was on the sharp decline was partly because these paintings failed to keep up with the current of the times. Nevertheless, as far as the artistic level is concerned, although it was heading for the decline from their prime, especially after the death of Ingres (1780-1867), it does not always mean that neoclassicism was inferior to impressionism, but merely shows that due to the drastic change of the times the transition from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie took place in the field of the purchasers' bracket of art and in general this became a direct cause of a serious depression in the sale of neoclassicism paintings. On one hand, as a result of the impact exerted by external factor of a demand of the times impressionism could go with the current trends, while on the other, neoclassicism was just the opposite. Therefore, it can be safely said that as far as popularity is concerned, the destiny for each of them was decided by good luck or misfortune in such completely-opposite ways.

As this historical fact shows, the drastic change of a demand for paintings from neoclassicism to modern Western paintings like impressionism etc. was a by-product born by the great turn of history that the ruling class of the society became the bourgeoisie of the industrial world in place of the royalty and aristocracy. Then, why did it occur that realism paintings that had been a favorite of the bourgeoisie and so must have followed the current of the times were on the sharp decline without ever restored in France, which is the birthplace of the said paintings and also the center of fine arts in the world? I'd like to consider it a little bit closely.

Courbet passed away. He did not bring up his successor. Impressionists who admired Courbet as their teacher deviated from the style of realism on their way despite of their intention to follow realism paintings more faithfully. All these occurred just by accident or due to a careless mistake like buttoning a shirt in its wrong holes, which, however, was a big loss for realism paintings. Having lost a pillar, realism painting became a family extinction, so to speak, in France, and after that followed one after

another only painting schools denying realism and before the heavy swells of such current of the times there was no room, in which a young talented artist just beginning with painting did not dare to have an intention to engage in realism paintings. As a matter of fact, the reason for the sharp decline of realism paintings was like this.

However, then if you have a question that the works of the realism style or something like that were not written after the period of impressionism on in Paris, it was not always the case. Although most probably it must be an exceptional case as the first class artist, a little bit later, in 1924 Russian woman painter Zinaida Serebriakova who was to be recognized later in Russia as a really-excellent artist moved to Paris from Leningrad (present Sankt-Petersburg).

Therefore first of all I'd introduce her career in Russia. If I explain a painting work only with words without showing the picture, her excellence is not really understandable. However, searching through the Internet with the key word of "Zinaida Serebriakova" makes it possible for you to look at the images of all her works I'm going to mention. Although their resolution is not so good, they may serve as a reference useful enough.

As soon as Serebriakova made her appearance in Russian painting world in 1910, drawing the attention to herself by *Woman at the Mirror Self-portrait* (1908-09), this self-portrait depicting the upper part of her body reflected in the mirror of a dresser in a bright room full of sunlight immediately gained a big reputation. She wears clothes without sleeves till shoulders. Exposing her right shoulder and slightly turning her body to right side, she stands at the dresser and fixes her eyes on her face reflected in the mirror, with having a comb by her right hand and holding a tuft of hairs with her left hand in front of her right shoulder. This expression enabling us to feel an open vigor even in a stability clearly shows that the author is a first-class artist having mastered the traditional style of realism paintings and from her beautiful eyes fixed on the mirror as well as from the look of her face with a faint smile we can grasp the satisfied expression of a cheerful, mischievous young woman.

This work was exhibited at the exhibition of "The Union of Russian Artists" known as a group of impressionists, but next year she joined "The World of Art" and became a regular exhibitor from then till her removal to Paris. Maybe, the reason why she became a member of "The World of Art" was partly due to the influence of her uncle (her mother's young brother), A.N. Benois (1870-1960)—a famous artist leading this school, an art historian and critic, but first of all the major reason for it lies in that she herself embodied in her works the style of paintings of pure art expressing the world far from the trends of the times based on the experience and emotion of an artist, which stands

for the characteristic of "The World of Art". The grand nature of the Neskuchnoye (present Neskuchnoye village, Harikov province, Ukraine) which was her mother's small territory, where she was born and spent every summer from her childhood, kept on enchanting her and became a source of her creative power. What she portrayed was limited to the landscape of the Neskuchnoye or the peasant girls in the background of such landscape, a self-portrait or the portraiture of her family, relatives and so on, and from such works filled with a quiet and happy life we cannot feel at all any tension just before the Revolution or a confusion of the society after the Revolution.

Actually I appreciated the works of Serebriakova many times in the Trechakov Gallery or the Russian Museum etc. and then inspected them once again in her album. Speaking from this impression, she was a master having already reached the level of the perfection just from the beginning, when she made a debut at the stage of art world at the age of twenty five. As regards the landscapes of her early days as well, although small in size, they are so high in artistic level to make us exclaim involuntarily, "How wonderful!" Let's take for example such work, as *At Neskechnoye. Ploughing* (1908), *A Herd* (1908-09), *Winter Crops* (1910) and so on, and we'll see either of them is large in composition, has a sense of stability, but at the same time is full of variety. In their bright color scheme on the whole we feel an attractive harmony peculiar to this artist, while in the figures of moving people, cattle or others is accurately expressed the feeling that they are actually moving. This characteristic can be applied to portraiture in its entirety, but what pushed her up to the first-rate artist before anything else will be her incomparable expression technique to flesh out a human body by the traditional realism method of paintings.

*The Bather* (1911) is a portrait of the bather who seems to take a rest after bathing. The artist portrayed her sister as a model for it and expressed the artistic beauty of a woman in the nude. Putting her right leg on the grassy shore with the knee up and soaking her left leg in water up to just below the knee, the woman, with her back to the bushes on the bank of a river, sits on a wrinkly, twisted big white cloth in almost naked figure, covering a part of her body with this cloth. Her upper body a little bit turned to the right is propped by her right hand and her left hand is extended over her right thigh toward her right hand and her both hands are tied as one with a part of the cloth grasped by her respective hands. In this way she turns her face to the left and her beautiful eyes looking over her left shoulder at something reflects a merry and relaxed mood. Such a daring pose is exposed to a light from the right side of the canvas to let it show up.

Probably a viewer appreciating this work for the first time was rather embarrassed to look at her fertile figure, but at the same time got a deep impression from this artist's

extraordinary capability of portrayal in a refreshed manner.

The portrayal expression of the object in this work, as in many other portraits of Serebriakova, looks heavy and stable, but at the same time something dynamic can be felt in it. This partly comes from the unstable posture of the model portrayed largely on canvas, but on top of that, it owes a great deal to her unique method of painting which causes the impression that the volume and heaviness grasped by human eyes are expressed from various points of view, namely, this portrait is portrayed as if various viewpoints, not only viewing from the front, but also looking from below to above or from above to below, or from left and right sides, were skillfully combined as one till the limit that it would not almost look unnatural. Therefore the legs are depicted largely in comparison with other part of the body, just as they look large when we sit in a bathtub and look down on our own legs because of the refraction by water, to form a stable, sturdy pyramid, while the expression of face, hands and other part of the body has a sense of movement, which gives an impression that this posture on the whole looks energetic, though she sits still.

This dynamic impression even increases in the expression of a picture with a group of people. *Bleaching Linen* (1917) is the work with a big size of canvas 141.8 x 173.6 cm depicting a scene, in which four young farm women gathered around a point in the field, with holding bleached linen by both hands or on their shoulder, and forming a circle, they began to hang a piece of cloth on a rod or spread it out on a ground to dry it. These energetic, respectively different poses of them, whose clothes or scarves the artist intentionally painted with different colors in view of color harmony on the whole, are grasped mainly from the standpoint looking from below to above and they are filled with powerfulness and sturdiness as though they firmly fixed their legs on the ground and towered up toward the sky. This expression of the farm women having an entirely-well-balanced coherence and a feel of tension makes an impression that they are moving dynamically.

Many artists of “The World of Art”, advocating anti-realism, expressed in their works their respective post-realistic forms with their own excellent method of paintings. Among them Sereveriakova carried out her own anti-realism by her realistic way of painting and for more than fifteen years till her leaving from her country at thirty nine years old she continued to produce to the public many masterpieces which are full of originality with a style peculiar to her. It seems to me that she remarkably distinguishes herself in an affinity aroused by her works even in the school of “The World of Art”, where many outstanding artists got together.

Then, if I say why such an artist left for Paris, at first she intended to stay there just

for a short time. She was married in 1905 and bore four children. However her husband suddenly died due to the infection of an epidemic in 1919. So she had to resign herself to bringing up her children alone. At that time Russia was in disorder after the Revolution and because of this situation nobody had a room in mind even to think of buying a picture. That's why in order to work as a painter and raise the children at the same time, she made a heart-breaking decision to select the way to go to Paris alone for not a long period, leaving her children with her mother.

Her works, however, did not almost sell contrary to her expectation. Her main purpose to regularly send the expense for bringing up her children did not get along in poverty, for the conquest of which she tirelessly struggled unsupported. She could not anyhow earn enough money for the children only in Paris and so from the next year on after her settlement in Paris she almost every year made a trip from there to one of the cities of England, Italy, Belgium etc. in Europe or of Morocco and stayed there for a certain period in search of the order of pictures, painting portraits and landscapes. Also from 1927 about once every other year she held her one-person exhibition mainly in Paris. As for this one-person exhibition, however, its frequency drastically diminished after exhibition in 1932, and such exhibition was held only two times in Paris in 1938 and 1954, though no doubt it resulted as such partly from a big influence of the World War II. At the end of 1920's she called two younger children one by one to her to live together, but she could not live together with her two elder children after all. She herself, too, without getting back to her own country, ended her 82-year life in Paris.

Serebriakova stubbornly stuck to her own style of paintings without accommodating herself to the current trends of anti-realism which was endlessly changing from half-concrete to abstract paintings, but on the whole her creative activities after her settlement in Paris was very tough and full of disappointment for her, which can be guessed from her letter addressed to her relatives just before the opening of a big retrospective exhibition held in Moscow in 1965 as a first trial to exhibit her works, including the pieces after her living in Paris. It tells of her anxiety about the success of the one-person exhibition, as follows. "How can I imagine that my pieces would attract the attention of the people of USSR? Judging from the criticism by the press or the tastes here, of course, this is because my painting art does not have any originality in its subject, in way of portraying and others...."

Nevertheless, this big retrospective exhibition in Moscow achieved a great success as if it blew her anxiety away. As for the works portrayed by Serebriakova in the immigration place for the period of more than half of her life, most of them are unknown about where they are and the entire list of them is not still clear even now, but

for the exhibition in Moscow were gathered up the pieces which were kept by Serebriakova and her relatives, or were borrowed from the owners. (In the album issued in 1988 at my hand are illustrated altogether 44 works written after her settlement in Paris. However, as this album has a subtitle of selected works, actually-exhibited such works might be a little bit more.) It means that the people of USSR for the first time appreciated at this exhibition her works written after she left from her country. Notwithstanding that a bright color harmony in her prime receded, they recognized in them not only the unmistakable handwriting (color pattern) peculiar to Serebriakova but also the expression of forms having a sense of stability and dynamics which had been rooted deep in the traditional method of realism paintings.

Judging from the situation that she had to come to Paris, I suppose Serebriakova was obliged to begin to work almost from nothing. Leaving her brilliant career and excellent pieces in her country, about which nobody knew in Paris, she started as an unknown painter. Therefore it is supposed that although she was an artist writing anti-realism paintings with realistic style, her portraiture and landscape were not regarded as such, but looked as if they were merely realistic works. Every time she held her one-person exhibition, she was severely criticized by the critics, but I think it was unavoidable, if taking into consideration the example that the works of impressionism which are evaluated so highly nowadays had been always rejected by the Salon and had become a target of ridicule by the critics etc. every time impressionists held their own exhibition to show their rejected works and others for a protest.

However, the reason why impressionists suffered from the harsh ridicule derived from the objective cause that judging from the traditional realistic styles of paintings since the Renaissance, there was something strange in their forms and coloring, but in spite of this, impressionism could finally conquer such criticism to acquire a fair evaluation. This is because of the repeated support by the side of critics who estimated that the paintings of impressionism were so original and revolutionary and it resulted from a self-purification of society having functioned, so to speak. In case of Serebriakova, speaking from the standpoint of artistic evaluation, the works painted by her for the period of her creative activities as long as more than forty years in Paris had no weak point and so, in an essential sense, they were the pieces which should have been properly praised. Nevertheless, Serebriakova had been badly criticized in a consistent manner and the aforesaid social self-purification did not work at all, which seems to me the evidence entirely showing that tendency similar to a firm myth to regard post-realism and non-realism paintings as absolute had been produced in the period, when impressionism and following post-realism schools won a high popularity

as if they were all the rage.

In addition, if I refer to information in this concern, it is said that “authoritarianism” and “exclusionism” in the avant-garde movement of an abstract painting became too extreme in 1960’s, which means the later years of Serebriakova. Under such circumstances an art historian Albert Boime published “The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century” to defend neoclassicism paintings which had been neglected as “worthless paintings”, and it gave the opportunity to revalue the style of neoclassicism little by little mainly in Europe after 1970’s on. Along with the process of this evaluation there appeared a tendency toward revaluation in the field of styles of realistic paintings, including realism. No doubt, it is quite welcome news for the realism style of paintings.

The aforementioned is the summary of how the unpopularity of the realism style was formed, which I put together from my own standpoint after I reviewed Western art history pertaining to the realism paintings.

Well, this time, in order to get rid of the cause of unpopularity of realism paintings as much as possible, I’d refer to the objects which even now become a source of the cause for the said unpopularity to clarify that a misunderstanding or prejudice against the style of realism is produced through these media. However, the main party producing this unpopularity is in any case ordinary people, inclusive of purchasers of paintings, who take a reaction to the source. Nevertheless, the mutual relation to each other is like this: speaking from the individual viewpoint, neither party can be said to have committed any blameworthy mistake in particular for producing such misunderstanding or prejudice, but rather it is comparable to the outcome caused by their unhappy pairing.

In any case, if a person having the misunderstanding or prejudice comes to understand from the bottom of his heart that such thought derived from his misunderstanding without any foundation, he can rectify his view. Of course, it occurs on an individual base. Nevertheless, if this study is widely read on the Internet, this individual rectification of misunderstanding or prejudice may expand drastically. So, expecting that this expansion becomes a big collective scale, I would close this study by showing that the very view for making little account of realism paintings merely resulted from the misunderstanding or prejudice.

There are two problems, one of which is that to speak from the nature of a commentary, a manual of Western art history after impressionism on is basically an explanation from the standpoint of supporting this modern art. Therefore, as a natural

consequence a tendency of praising the said paintings is undeniable. Maybe, depending on the manual, there will be a commentary, where such tendency is inconspicuous. After rechecking consciously modern art history, however, I for my part came to have an opinion that such tendency in high probability becomes the source causing a misunderstanding against realism paintings.

Such type of commentary also adopts a method of explanation somewhat to compare these paintings with completely opposite ones, but such method does not always come to the front. Also as for the phenomenon that impressionism paintings suddenly became a leading school, the relation of this phenomenon to its cause does not seem to have been explained so clearly and the only explanation which appears to be a reason for it is that “this painting was so novel and epoch-making”. These words can be taken by readers as if they said that impressionism was by far superior to neoclassicism which occupied then a leading position, and regarding the historical fact on the trends of purchasing demand for paintings at that time, though it is mentioned from a different purpose indirectly, any clear commentary about it which should lead to a proper modification of readers’ unilateral understanding is not made at all. In addition to it, such a story about Russian woman artist Serebriakova is not mentioned as well in modern art history. However, as history of Western art is in any case a history, it has a characteristic by nature that the historical contents are determined to some extent by an art historian in accordance with his historical view. Therefore, even though the undeniable facts in the past which can be treated as a part of art history depending on the viewpoint of an art historian are not dealt with in a general manual of modern art history, it cannot always be considered as an oversight.

Then, in such circumstances, what should do some reader who has an inclination to fall into one-sided understanding fraught with misunderstanding, blindly believing what is mentioned in a book, in order for him not to have an idea to make little account of realism paintings from misunderstanding? The most effective measures for it will be to bring the essential characteristics of modern paintings to light and make these basic features prominent by the method of comparison with those of completely opposite paintings.

As for such characteristics of modern paintings, fortunately I have an idea which I always bear in mind. So, I’d like to briefly mention what I have thought for a long time in contrast with the basic features of the style of realism for your reference.

It seems to me that the most essential characteristic of modern art lies in the point that this modern art is the paintings of “the defection from realism” which are completely opposite by nature to realistic styles of paintings till that time. But why is it

the most basic characteristic? This is because “the defection from realism” liberated a painting from the restriction of realistic painting regulations to obtain another painting means, with which modern paintings could open their own path. It will be quite evident if you take into your mind the following. As it is generally said, “the defection from realism” and “the shift to a plain perspective” characterize modern paintings. “The shift to a plain perspective” itself, however, is a technique incompatible with the style of realism that depicts three-dimensional perspective in accordance with the view of reality and thanks to this very forms of “the defection from realism” it could sweep away its unnatural appearance for the first time to acquire a persuasion.

Incidentally, then why do various schools of modern paintings have “the defection from realism” and “the shift to a plain perspective” as their common characteristics, though they differ from one another in the trends of artistic thought? This is because these are just exactly the definite evidence plainly showing that either school of modern paintings is with no exception a painting art effectively pushing the color harmony to the forefront to charm the viewers with this overall color balance.

If I put together a basic similarity and difference between modern paintings and realistic ones, taking the aforementioned into account, then it becomes like this: Both paintings are similar in such points that a color harmony plays a decisive role in producing a good picture and also an excellent expression of forming, which attracts to itself the attention of the viewers as a major element of color balance with the exception of a part of abstract paintings having no element of forms, even enhances the quality of its artistic level, while they differ in their way of expression, namely, modern paintings represent the forms with “the defection from realism” and their perspective becomes plain as a result of efficiently pushing color balance to the forefront, while realistic paintings express the forms with style of realism in conformity with reality and the perspective is expressed with a profound depth so that the three-dimensional world can be reproduced just as it looks actually. As for the points other than this, there remain such factors that post-realism paintings differ from respective schools in a method of painting because of the difference in their trends of artistic thought, though there’s no specific style in them, while realistic paintings vary in painting objects and a method of painting depending on each style. Nevertheless, if we grasp an essential characteristic of post-realism paintings in comparison with the style of realism paintings etc. then the only afore-said classification can be applied to and anything more or less than this is not required anyhow. In this case, what we should bear in mind is that any argument about which is more superior, post-realism paintings or realistic ones is quite useless and impertinent because their superiority depends on the originalities of respective artists

themselves and not on a means of painting expression.

By the way, speaking of the forms, I think that one of the greatest findings that post-realism paintings have left for posterity is that such forms with “the defection from the realism” arouse our sympathy. It is Japanese comics that this sympathy appeared till maximum. Even a school boy of the lower class reads a comic magazine madly. Anyhow, if we look at the pieces of Matisse or Modigliani etc., we instantly understand that the sympathy which is caused by their forms of “the defection from realism” is quite extraordinary.

In this respect, however, contemporary Russian realism paintings won't yield to it in any way. The forms grasped by the eyesight of an artist are expressed so completely and so realistically that they strongly attract their viewers. While you are looking at pictures, there often appear the cases when you come across, for example, the pieces with the expression of the treetops of forest to notice suddenly that just the same characteristic as you once saw in the same like scene is expressed there and admire involuntarily, “Ah, a genuine landscape is exactly reproduced here!” If you will see the treetops of forest in nature, it won't remind you of such remembrance to move you deeply. So, I think it's peculiar to art of paintings.

Anyway, meaning to grasp the most essential characteristic of modern paintings by way of comparison with completely opposite paintings lies in making the difference in the method of painting between them conspicuous and simultaneously it also teaches us that a relative superiority of painting art cannot be determined by the difference in painting style by itself. Therefore, I do assure that if you bear it in your mind as one of guidelines for the evaluation of paintings, this knowledge will surely help you.

The second problem consists in the point that a generally-accepted, but nevertheless, incomplete knowledge on the style of realism paintings to the effect that it copies the reality as it looks, will recall to a person's mind an association of a photograph because of their similarity. This association, as I will explain below, does work on the psychology of ordinary people, inclusive of purchasers of paintings, to lead them to their underestimation of this style of paintings, which consequently even now remains to be one of the factors causing unpopularity of realism paintings. I think this problem has not been seriously taken up so far in art studies because it has almost no concern with aesthetic evaluation of paintings. However, it cannot be ignored as long as popularity of an artist heavily depends on demand.

When anyone associates photograph with realism paintings, then the opposite association will take place quite easily (as photograph is instantly connected with a

camera in his imagination, I will herein regard it as a synonym of camera from now on just for convenience). Thus both are closely connected by association. In such cases, if I say what problem lies in it, then such association enables him to place in his mind realism paintings side by side with camera, with which everyone can take pictures quite easily and accurately only if he focuses on the object and presses the shutter. In other words, an artistic photo can be produced depending on how to take a picture, but if it is an ordinary photo which everybody easily obtains just through a common way of photographing, anybody quite well knows that it shall not be regarded as art. That's why, when such a photograph and realistic paintings which belongs to fine arts being completely different world from that of photographs are juxtaposed in his mind, then, to my incredibility, easily does occur a misunderstanding unconsciously thinking that the style of realism paintings is not so different from photograph. Once such misunderstanding takes place, before long it will closely connect with a tendency in Japan praising post-realism paintings even at present or with the aforementioned tone of commentary in art history of modern paintings and inevitably become a prejudice underestimating realism paintings.

A camera had been already a familiar thing in a daily life of the bourgeoisie when Serebriakova moved to Paris, and so it is quite feasible to apply the mechanism of misunderstanding which the association of camera will cause in the mind of present people to people of that time.

As I have a doubt that the misunderstanding which had occurred in this way in the mind of ordinary people of those days, inclusive of purchasers of paintings, exerted its influence on their psychologies to deeply concern itself with the formation of the then public opinion that modern post-realism paintings were absolute, first of all I'd like to revert once again to the previously-mentioned phenomenon that Serebriakova had been unpopular there for too long time till the very end of her life and briefly check the reason for it from the standpoint of purchaser.

At that time, the period of which was an era when only post-realism paintings were praised, the works of Serebriakova were severely criticized by critics every time she held her one-person exhibition. Therefore it was quite natural that almost all purchasers did not buy her works which are completely opposite to post-realism paintings. But on the other hand, it's also human feelings to wish to buy a picture with high artistic level if he is actually buying it. That's why among purchasers there must have been a person who had such desire much more strongly. He will have to burden himself with the result of his selection as to whether he will buy a certain picture or not, and so notwithstanding severe criticism made by some critics against her works, it is not

everything for him. Besides, her works are destined to be highly evaluated sooner or later because of her high artistic level. So, generally speaking, it makes him repent greatly that he did not take a risk to buy it. If we take it into consideration that Serebriakova's one-person exhibition was held altogether eight times mainly in Paris for a period of twenty eight years, it would have been quite natural that he tried to purchase any of her works next time after he noticed his failure that he did not buy it then. Consequently such a high class master like Serebriakova should have properly gained popularity someday eventually, though it would take a lot of times in adversity. Nevertheless, in reality, the growing bourgeoisie who once purchased realism paintings of Courbet, because they were understandable and favorite for them, kept refraining from buying the works of Serebriakova till the very end, though her realistic paintings, too, must have been quite understandable and favorite with them and moreover their artistic level is quite high, just like the pieces of Courbet.

In such an obstinate and consistent attitude I can see a strong antipathy against realistic paintings, but if the cause of such antipathy which deprived the purchasers of a faint possibility to buy her works cannot be completely explained only by the constant, severe criticism of critics, it seems to me that most probably it was a consequence that the mechanism of misunderstanding produced by the association of camera had worked on the purchasers of paintings and at the same time it was just a reversed response of the phenomenon that this very misleading mechanism exerted its influence on a buying psychology of the purchasers who had supported the golden age of modern paintings and contributed to the formation of their popularity to strengthen all the more their favor of modern paintings.

My purpose paying my special attention to and giving space to this matter, although it belongs to the past, is to illustrate an example that the psychological mechanism caused by the association of camera which looks quite harmless for everyone at first sight in some cases exerts a harmful effect on popularity of the style of realism paintings etc., but as it is concerned with psychology of people, there's no solid evidence. Nevertheless, I think its consideration is trustworthy enough in the light of present circumstances mentioning below.

This is because a chain of harmful psychological reaction against realism paintings which resulted from the association of camera even at present functions more or less effectively.

Its typical example will be the opinion that "realism paintings which accurately copy the reality are quite insignificant as art." Probably not everyone tells so based on the same ground, but the reason that accounts for the majority of people seems to be like

this. In the base of his thought there exists an aforementioned disregard of realism paintings that resulted from the association of camera, and in addition to it, if he many times had the experience to look at the works of realism paintings which did not differ so much from the photographs easily taken just in a quite usual way and he did not receive any strong impression from them, then such experience naturally made him express his dissatisfaction with realism paintings. Such kind of opinion I myself read in a literary column or similar part of a newspaper about twenty years ago and I remember that the contents of such opinion were similar to the aforementioned.

The key word having led to my following interpretation is the word of “insignificant” in the said opinion. If you think why the paintings copying the actuality is so “insignificant” as art, then you will understand that there appears a gap of logic in this opinion because it cannot be accepted as a reasonable argument without taking it into account that their thought to disregard realism paintings is concealed there. Besides, speaking from the standpoint of general human sentiment, if he had not received any strong impression from the realism works, it was quite possible that such experience reinforced the opinion. However, this reasoning which looks like having reinforced their opinion at first sight is not concerned at all with any insignificance of art, but it should be regarded as fully showing the difficulty in creating truly excellent realism paintings.

Speaking from my experience in Moscow, there was a picture giving the impression that it did not almost differ from photograph. Sketch was satisfactory enough to remind me of a photograph. Indeed it was drawn quite skillfully, but it aroused my feeling that it lacks something. Actually, contrary to my expectation, I came across quite a lot of such paintings, though such impression differed in various degrees. My sensibility does not make any response to such painting, therefore no matter how long I look at it, I do not understand whether it is a good piece, while on the other hand, if I come across a work with a high artistic level, then instantly I see this is a good painting.

How is this big difference explained? Ultimately it depends on whether or not overall color balance involving forms and composition is excellent enough. This color balance is the sum of two factors which comprise the forms of portraying objects and their arrangement on the whole, namely, composition. Therefore, if either of them has any defect, then the color balance will collapse.

A picture which looks like photograph shows that although sketch is satisfactory, either painted forms or composition has a factor disturbing the harmony of colors. Even if a painter very well knows that overall color balance is a decisive factor to create a good painting, this knowledge won't help him at all to produce an excellent work. Even though it is feasible to master how to draw and compose through constant training, a

sensibility to colors is especially difficult to learn. I have an impression that it is closely connected with innate talent and the fact that good paintings are limited in number can be explained by the scarcity of such talent.

If he expresses his dissatisfaction with realism paintings because he has never come across such a painting as he expects to see, then his dissatisfaction will disappear if he can look at paintings with a truly-high artistic level.

In many cases, however, I suppose this dissatisfaction is caused by misunderstanding resulting from the association of camera. If so, rectifying this misunderstanding will be required first of all. You will understand that it was derived from misunderstanding, if you see the reaction of the persons who were unexpectedly asked by you such a question: "Let's suppose that some professional artist of the style of realism has produced a picture by sketching, say, a mountain stream, and then in order to get the photo resembling this picture, if you take a photograph of the same landscape from the same direction and the same angle, then what is the difference between the picture and this photograph?" Almost all of them won't be able to make an appropriate answer to the said question because they have not thought of such a thing before. Then next time, when you will ask the persons who could not answer well to give alternative answer of "yes" or "no" to another question like this. "There is the opinion that realism paintings which copy the reality as it looks are quite insignificant as art. Do you agree with it?" Most probably he will reply "yes" even after hesitation because the realism picture which was placed side by side with camera in his mind through association has been replaced by camera when he replied.

This is a leading question specially devised in view of the circumstances, in which the association of camera produces a misunderstanding, and its experimental outcome seems to have made it evident that such psychological mechanism arousing the misunderstanding is very easily formed in the mind of common people through the medium of association, which implies that the aforementioned opinion, although it is not spoken out so frequently, is by no means in the minority.

However, as it is evident that a specialist of art is completely free from the aforesaid misunderstanding, if we recognize that the "copying" world of realism paintings belongs to a category completely different from that of camera, it is quite possible to avoid that the paintings are placed side by side with camera in his mind even when the concerned association takes place with him.

The difference between realism painting and photograph which instantly comes to my mind is that photograph shows a smooth and homogeneous picture as if we looked at the reflection in the mirror, because camera basically with the help of mirror make the

image in it fixed on film. When comparing it with realism painting, although as for the difference in reproduced colors I will put off its consideration a bit later to make way for the explanation of it from a different viewpoint, first I'd like to mention that I am haunted by the feeling that something is lacking in the expression of solidity, depth or heaviness, and besides, because of this one shot of image snapped a scene of some movement seems to me rather insufficient to express a feel of energy in full. In contrast to it, eyesight of an artist is a view recognized by human brains through retinas. He distinctly sees three-dimensional appearance and watches a person or machine moving which, as mentioned above, camera is not so good at expressing. Such features are expressed quite appropriately in the excellent paintings. Moreover, even if artists portray the same painting object from the same viewpoint, the composition and the focus or emphasis of the artists' scheme subtly differ and this distinction of artists, depending on their originalities and abilities, is displayed remarkably in the forms and brush touches, a tinge of colors and overall color balance. That's why, if the artist changes, there is no identical painting.

Also, although he is in the minority, there will be a person who thinks like this as a ground of the opinion that realism paintings are insignificant as art: "There is a good example showing art in nature. How can such paintings that accurately copy it be regarded as creative ones, I wonder? "

I think this is a fairly reasonable opinion. Needless to say, a very remarkable skill is required for copying the appearance of nature as it looks almost completely. Whether it should be considered art requiring originality or the imitation of craftsmanship will be the matter that divides the opinions.

However, if only following the example of nature was everything artists tried to realize, paintings could not compete with nature in any way even only from the large scale of actual nature and with regard to their "copying the reality" as well it would be considered almost the same as that of camera. But as there is an expression of "picturesque scene", paintings are in some sense superior to nature in "beauty".

In general this expression is utilized in the sense of "the view of unrealistic beauty". With regard to realism paintings, however, it has a particularly-different meaning. What does it mean? If explaining the reason, I think that from a standpoint of paintings a color balance causing our sympathy won't be produced almost in any case even if an artist copies the reality in very faithful manner. In other words, from it an excellent painting won't come out. That's why artists regulate the arrangement of colors skillfully within the limit that it won't look unnatural through the method of subtly changing the composition of an appearance of nature, painting with different colors the clothes of

persons intentionally written in or adding a concealed color to the painting. As you will understand that this color harmony is a very important point changing a piece into a good work, the creativity of painting art lies in the place other than copying. Besides, when both factors of forms and composition are in mesh to produce a good harmony, then forms of “the imitation of craftsmanship” turn out to be quite effective. Thus the work having gained the harmony of colors not only causes sympathy pleasing eyes, but also the forms themselves show originality according to the artists’ skill to strongly attract to themselves viewers’ eyes, for this very reason of which the artists regarded as masters are classified by ratings. Consequently when we look at a landscape with such high artistic level from a proper distance, a scene of nature is reproduced there vividly as if it were cut off intact from nature.

Till now I have explained in detail the second problem causing unpopularity of realism paintings, that is to say, if someone associates camera with realism paintings, it arouses the idea in his mind that realism paintings are not so different from photographs which anyone will obtain very easily by taking a picture with camera and it is this idea that causes the disregard of realism paintings. This unconscious thought, however, is no doubt based on misunderstanding. Therefore, in order for you to get clear understanding on it, for good order’s sake, in the end I’d like to briefly sum up the points, in which realism paintings differ from photographs.

Certainly realism paintings have a resemblance to camera with regard to copying the reality. As for this point, however, the paintings that are the reproduction of a world grasped by artist’s eyes basically differ from camera reproducing the actuality with a help of mirror. Expressing this difference on canvas is a very important and indispensable factor for realism paintings. Besides, artists not only reproduce the reality that they saw, but also subtly change the appearance of reality, namely, a little bit change the overall arrangement of colors, thus creating an exquisite color harmony, which can be regarded the most important and essential fundamental among the factors pushing up paintings to fine arts and it is just in this point that realism paintings decisively differ from photographs.

I got much of the knowledge that I mentioned in this study directly through my communication with painting works while appreciating them. You can see in this book a part of such works, though they are as small in number as thirty nine pieces in all. I sincerely hope that you'll enjoy appreciation of the charm of realism paintings, making revaluation of their merit.

March, 2015

Norio Ishii

## Foreword

Peter Ossovsky

\*People's Artist of the USSR

Winner of the USSR State Prize

Regular Member of the Russian Academy of Arts

Reading *\*\*\** "Consideration of Contemporary Russian Paintings—The Tale of my collection—", I was greatly surprised that Mr. Ishii succeeded in disclosing with non-Russian eyes the very thing that is peculiar to Russian artists, that is to say, the deep insight and enthusiastic attitudes of the artists towards the Russian landscape, and the traditions of Russian realism school, on the foundation of which a large number of talented artists not only of the national level, but also of the international scale have always been produced till now and will be produced in the future as well.

When I was still young, that was quite some time ago, in a period when Russian art was first introduced to Japan and was achieving success, to which Mr. Ishii referred in his book, too, I learned from the response of the Japanese newspapers that Russia had saved realism art for the entire world. And time confirmed that this thought was correct. Entering the 21st century, we can verify that a school, without which any attempt to engage in realism paintings would not be fruitful, has been preserved to function properly only in Russia and nowhere else in the world. Just the same as in case of ballet and music, namely, dancing, opera and performance of music, a serious school is indispensable to realism paintings. It's not my job to make it clear why the school of realism has disappeared in the developed countries of the world. So, returning to Mr. Ishii's book, the thought occurred to me that it was not a foreigner who had written this book, but a Russian. This is because so uniquely and so emotionally does the author feel what the Russian artists have put into their canvases.

Mr. Ishii started to collect paintings after he was transferred to Russia for work. Each of the works introduced in his book is of a sufficiently high artistic level, but even so, all of them are not necessarily the works of great masters. I understand quite well the difficulties arising in the course of looking for the masterpieces of Russian artists. In such a noble act of collecting art, plural earnest advisors and the financial possibilities

are quite essential, which would have been necessary to raise the Mr. Ishii's collection to a level in line with the true achievements of the masters of Russian realism. I dare to say realism as Russian realism despite the fact that essentially there is no ethnic definition in the concept of realism. But I said so because true realism had been developed only in Russia.

Anyway, Mr. Ishii has acquired almost all the paintings in galleries. He must be a person who does possess very sharp discerning eyes. That's why he could select such level of works as those introduced in this book, relying only on his own sensibilities and spending much time in looking for them. The number of paintings he has collected is not so large, and yet the author took great pains to introduce the paintings of my country to Japanese art lovers and for this I feel that no matter how highly we praise him, it cannot be too much.

I know that the author has a plan to publish this book in the West, where Russian realism of the second half of the 20th century is not well known. Just as Russian school was opened up to the world at the beginning of the 20th century, Russian realism of the 19th and 20th centuries shall be opened to the people in the world and it is not so long.

Consequently, this book introducing Russian paintings to Japanese society should not only be warmly welcomed, but also we must offer him any help in this labor from every side, considering that until now there has been no one among Russian art scholars who could accomplish the same like undertaking and besides I regard the undertakings of Mr. Ishii as the conducts which can be achieved only by a person who has a noble mind and does love painting art from the bottom of his heart.

Finally, speaking figuratively, I do hope that in the land of the rising sun, with the assistance of the author of this book, the sun would shine light on the significance and true meaning of Russian paintings of the second half of the 20th century, and thus is removed a thick curtain which has blocked familiarizing with the painting works by Russian masters. The world must know about fine art of my country which is founded on unselfish, limitless service and love for the fatherland, person and nature.

\*In the Soviet era, there existed the People's Artist of the Republic and the People's Artist of the USSR. Because these titles were different to some extent in value, "USSR" is still used for the People's Artists even now after the collapse of the USSR.

\*\*The title of this book is translated from the original title in Japanese, but the title of the book translated into

Russian is especially named as “Contemporary Russian Paintings through the Eyes of Some Japanese”.

## **Introduction**

For about four years from July 1989 I worked in Moscow as a representative of my company for international logistics, and while living there, thanks to a strange coincidence of circumstances, I happened to have a hobby of appreciating and collecting painting, which came to occupy a large place in my inner life.

The period of my living in Moscow was a great turbulent era in history, involving the collapse of the Soviet Union. The life of the usual Russian people was seriously affected by the drastic changes in systems and laws, and for quite some time, the situation was such that foodstuffs and daily necessities disappeared from the shops. When the attempted coup d'état by VIP of Soviet government took place in August 1991, a barricade of buses and trucks was built on the bridge across the Moscow River in front of the so-called Belui Dom (meaning the White House), which was the Supreme Soviet of Parliament of Russia, one of republics of the USSR (where Yeltsin, the then President of Russian, shut himself in). However, despite these upheavals overturning the foundations of society, the situation did not develop into street fighting and riots which once threatened to break out, and my overall feeling was that in general the city of Moscow had kept calm even throughout my all staying period.

To speak of contemporary Russian realism paintings which are the theme of this book, a lot of paintings constantly appeared in the galleries and they were still close existence to me as a foreigner, which I could manage to buy. Among them there were the works with high artistic value as well, though they were not so many and if you just had the discerning eye to recognize the good pieces, you could collect such works.

I myself didn't have any particular interest in paintings before I lived in Moscow. However, I grew to love them there, frequently appreciating various paintings and to my delightfulness, I found out that I had been endowed with some sensibilities to paintings. That I am the type of person who is easily enthused about things also helped, and I was so enchanted that I became completely absorbed in contemporary Russian paintings. As a result, I ended up collecting more than two hundred pieces, but considering that these paintings were highly praised on the whole not only by myself, but also by two Russian painter friends of mine and two experts of art appraisal of the Russian Ministry of

Culture, who actually checked the paintings when I applied for a permit to take them out of the country at the time of my return to Japan, I pride myself on the collection which, I believe, shows some level of contemporary Russian paintings.

The majority of the works are pure natural landscapes or the pieces depicting the lives of Russian people in nature. I did not have any particular intention to select only these kinds of landscapes, but it was just because nearly 70% of the paintings in the galleries were these kinds of landscapes and among them there were paintings I liked.

I wondered why there were so many natural landscapes. Thinking over the reasons, it came to mind that the lives of the Russian people were very closely connected to nature. Going a little outside Moscow, the extensive woods of white birch or commanding views of arable land or grassland edged with the woods of conifer trees in the distance spread out before your eyes. Coming in contact with such nature, you will feel the stress dissolve spontaneously, as if your soul were cleansed by Mother Nature.

If we think from the viewpoint of the concept of extended family, including grandfather and grandmother, many of ordinary citizens in the cities have *dacha* (summer house), small as they are, outside the city and from April until around the beginning of October, they are in the habit of leisurely spending weekends there, and also taking one or even two months of holiday in the summer, cultivating the vegetable garden, reading books while sunbathing or strolling through the forests. Perhaps that's why so many of them never lose their broad mind and their amiable simplicity. Although the difficulties in making a living did in fact weigh heavily upon them in the time of historic upheavals, the Russian people sought laughter in the world of humor and anecdotes (satirical stories about politics were popular in Soviet Union in the era of Brezhnev) without brooding so much over future anxiety, from which I used to have the impression that they live a tough, sturdy life day by day. For me as Japanese, there were many things to learn from such style of their lives, and it seemed that the artists themselves also lived in the same daily habits, expressing in their pieces the wonder of Mother Nature that has a deep connection with the lives of the Russian people.

My overseas assignment ended and when I brought these paintings home and hung them on the walls of my house, they looked even more attractive in Japan where the absolute amount of light was markedly greater, causing me to admire anew the high artistic level of contemporary Russian paintings. Even now, with the passage of nearly five years, I am not at all tired of viewing these paintings. They ease the depression and

stress of work in my heart and are irreplaceable things for me.

However, after my return home, contrary to my expectation I noticed for the first time that Russian paintings had been basically ignored in Japan. With almost no exceptions, there was no possibility to find an art museum that possessed realism paintings of Russian masters and at bookstores as well, although there was no lack of albums for European artists, you could not find any new publications illustrating Russian realism paintings. I checked the literatures of Western art history to find that some books did not even refer to the Russian realism paintings of the second half of the 19th century which seems to me to be of the world level. If there is a book touching on the subject even quite briefly, maybe, I should have welcomed it, thinking it better than nothing, but when I did find such a book, I read it, encouraged by my pleasant finding, and then I felt rather lonesome at simple descriptions, in which names such as Ilya Repin and Vasily Surikov appeared in brief. This situation seems to be of no great difference in Europe and the U.S., but it is definitely not because the artistic value of Russian art is low, but simply because the works are not even the object of evaluation due to a lack of familiarity as well as the fact that the studies of Russian art in the West and in Japan have not progressed to the level of shining a light on this situation.

However, contemporary Russian paintings had been introduced to and thrived in Japan in the 1970s, winning praise, and therefore I think that the Russian paintings most certainly do not cause us Japanese to feel something remote and strange. On the contrary, they are the kind of paintings, in which we feel sympathy and closeness.

As for Japanese artists, I love the paintings of Kaii Higashiyama even to the degrees that you can call me a big fan. I came into contact for the first time with a considerable number of his original works at a special exhibition held at a Tokyo department store in July 1997 to commemorate his 88<sup>th</sup> birthday, which made a deep impression on me. At the same time, however, I was surprised to see that the mood of these works resembled Russian paintings. Of course, one is Japanese style of paintings and the other—European one. They differ in painting methods. And it is not my intention to make anyone frown by saying that the styles were similar. I am willing to make a concession on this point, but I think that they have something common in what the artists perceived from nature as a matter before the step of painting.

Many of Higashiyama's works have an indescribable quietness suspended in the midst of nature and in this silence there is even a feeling that one can almost hear the sounds of nature's instruments—the echo of a waterfall, the tune of the wind. What is expressed there, rather than the beauty of nature, is the figure of Mother Nature

involving its beauty that awakens somehow a bottomless and mysterious feeling or awe, the mixed emotions of which we can feel quite realistically as if they are getting close by.

Sometimes I have also felt emotions similar to these in the rich hues of the expressions of nature in works of Russian paintings. It is said that in the depths of the Japanese psychology there remain traces of a primitive religion deifying nature. The people of Russia had been also polytheists, seeing gods in the sun and other natural phenomena until the conversion to Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and remnants of this can be seen in folklore and folk tales. Looking at Kaii Higashiyama's special exhibition, the thought suddenly came to me that perhaps Japanese and Russian may have the same like foundations for the viewpoint of nature.

Leaving this aside, I'm sure quite a few Japanese people would be deeply impressed, just like me, by the depictions of nature in Russian paintings, and therefore I can't help feeling it strange and sorry that nowadays in Japan even Russian paintings of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—not to mention contemporary Russian art—cannot attract attention of the people.

The thing is that in three or four years even the slightest change did not occur in this situation and it became my motive for writing a book on contemporary Russian paintings. Faced with the unpopularity of Russian paintings in Japan after my return home, my feelings of nostalgia, lonesomeness, and frustration grew gradually stronger, and I keenly and frequently felt the need to let Japanese people know the merits of Russian paintings.

No matter which object you will take, if you know the true value, admiring it from the bottom of your heart, it is bitter to see the object of your affection attracts absolutely no interest from those around you. My feeling on Russian paintings was just like this, though the reason for their indifference was that they had almost no adequate opportunities to know the true value. Therefore, the more time passed, the greater became my feeling that I should somehow rectify this situation even if a little.

My collection may not be called the most impressive one. However, even so, it includes the works that can cause the readers to feel the beauty of contemporary Russian paintings, and if I myself, charmed by these paintings and actually possessing a considerable number of pieces, do not try to make any appeals for the charm of this art

to change the situation in Japan, where Russian paintings never see the light of day, then who else except me can take up this role? Constantly asking myself such a question, I came to think that I would do something useful for the recognition of the merits of Russian paintings, no matter how small it is.

At first, I dreamed about renting gallery space to show my collection, but since it seemed evident that this effect would be weak and would not last long without doing it as a part of a large-scale project, I gave it up anyway and finally, through a process of elimination, there remained the idea to write a book on contemporary Russian paintings. I worked out a plan in various ways. However, when it came to a writing stage, I found it not so simple. It seemed to me that the only thing I could do at that moment was to show on paper the pieces of contemporary Russian paintings that had so charmed me and with their help try to deliver to readers the beauty of Russian landscapes. This confinement worried me much. I was unsure if I could do something useful with such a plan, but nothing would happen if I didn't try to write at least. So, anyhow I set about writing this book.

As regards the composition of this book, with a view to making it easier to read for people who think they don't understand art or for those unfamiliar with Russian paintings, and also from the standpoint of how I should write a book in order that deep understanding of Russian art can be promoted, I intend to bring first the story about the particulars that I myself who had no special interest in paintings have been charmed by contemporary Russian paintings and then to introduce the works from my own collection.

Because of this structure where the narrative is developed in such a way, I think the aspect of “a tale of my collection” is emphasized, but rather I will attach importance to the consistency of the narrative and intend to show you the pieces step by step in the course of development of this story.

Needless to say, these pieces are shown definitely just as examples to help you to understand what contemporary Russian paintings are and the main task of this consists in grasping the artistic features and disclosing the essential nature of Russian paintings through these examples.

The introduction of the works consists of four chapters; I select suitable pieces for each chapter from four different aspects according to the chapter's objective. In between, I insert the history of Russian art in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and I try to write

so that the general features of contemporary Russian paintings would be clarified as much as possible. As for abstract art, however, because it is only seldom seen in the galleries, I would exclude it from the scope of this book. As regards the realism paintings that are the theme of this book, it seems that there are quite diverse styles of paintings and a variety of different schools. So I'd herewith want to make it clear that the aim of this book is not a comprehensive introduction of overall trends in contemporary Russian art, but is to focus on the works of the traditional realism paintings that comprise the main stream in the painting circles of contemporary Russian art. The reason for this is that, when speaking of contemporary paintings in Russia which correspond to artistic level immediately accepted as international scale, what comes first above all is traditional realism art, and so the main point of this book is to make known somehow the remarkable charm of this painting art.

I could ask no greater pleasure than this modest book helping somehow in your understanding of Russian painting art.

## **First meeting**

I graduated from university in 1970. That same year, one of leading galleries in Tokyo, which has not already existed due to bankruptcy, introduced to Japan a large number of contemporary Soviet paintings in an exhibition for sale, likely the first time after the World War II ended. (The Soviet Union collapsed and is no more. Considering that the center city for art in the former Soviet Union was Moscow and Saint Petersburg, I will use the general term “Russian paintings” from now on with the intention of avoiding confusion). The exhibition was held in a department store in Sapporo and won favorable reviews. In the spring of 1989, immediately before I was transferred to Moscow, I happened to acquire at a used bookstore the albums for the contemporary Russian art exhibits held in 1973 and 1974 at a Tokyo department store. From the address on the opening pages, I learned that the same kind of exhibit had been held in some provincial town in 1971, and that from 1972 on, the exhibition was held in Tokyo once a year. I keep the albums to look at from time to time, and as far as I judge from these albums, it seems that a lot of excellent paintings were got together especially in 1973.

Thanks to the activities of this gallery, Russian paintings in the 1970s even saw a boom to some extent in Japan. Several books on Russian art were translated into Japanese and introduced in Japan during this time, which seems to have reflected this boom. I heard several years ago from someone who had worked at this gallery that a total of about 20,000 works of contemporary Russian art were sold in Japan. From this number, it's difficult to suppose that they were all good paintings, but certainly some excellent pieces must have been included in them. I believe the gallery did do good work in its own way, and yet it was a great misfortune for Russian paintings that it went bankrupt with the involvement of scandal having no concern with Russian paintings. Afterwards there appeared no real gallery to carry on their work in large scale and the first budding of Russian art having taken root in Japan ruined before its true merit was really understood.

As for myself, I did not have especial interest in paintings until I was transferred to Moscow in 1989. I was almost an outsider to those trends of Russian paintings in the 1970s in Japan.

Under such circumstances, I faintly remember a department store in Tokyo holding an exhibit of modern Russian paintings from Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery (as it proved later, it was in 1976.) Although I actually did not go to the exhibition, I saw a

poster or something like that advertising it, with a painting of a lady in a black overcoat and a black hat adorned with white feathers, sitting in an open coach. I remember I felt a touch of longing for the exotic beauty of the lady wearing sorrow in her black eyes. Much later, I learned that this was the masterpiece *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* (1883) by the painter Ivan Kramskoi (1837–1887) of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since this piece, translated in Japan as *Unforgettable Woman*, was an enlarged photograph and not the original painting, I may not say in a strictest sense that this was the first Russian painting I saw.

As for the Russian painting which I saw in original for the first time, and it occurred a little bit earlier than this, in 1970, I can mention *Rye* (1878) by the landscape painter Ivan Shishkin (1832–1898), active in the same period as Kramskoi. The piece depicts a tranquil rural landscape, where spreads out a vast field with ripe rye tilting golden heads of heavy grain and from the middle distance towards the background of its field ten or so large pine trees with shapely branches grow sparsely, standing as if they rose up against the clear autumn sky. Also, in the foreground a farm road leading through the rye field, pushing the rye right and left, exposes itself to us. On the very road with the wheel track left by a cart beating down the low grasses, just at this moment, the shadow casts are following after two swallows flying low in nimble flight.

I saw this famous painting in Russia at Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery or at Saint Petersburg's State Russian Museum when I visited Moscow and other cities as an assistant tour guide, while working at a small travel agency specializing in the former Soviet Union for about six months just after graduating from university. As soon as I climbed the stairs and entered the exhibition hall, this piece was hung directly in front of me. My memory of where I saw it is now uncertain (recently I visited the State Tretyakov Gallery and looked for this exhibition hall in the old building, but was unable to find any place that resembled it), but I remember very clearly even now how rye field unexpectedly caught my eye just as I entered the hall, and it did make a strong impact on me.

Each ear of rye with its detailed distinctness closed in on me and the overwhelming number of shining golden ears dazzled my eyes. A thrill ran down my spine and as though paralyzed, I remained in that position for I don't know how many seconds.

Although later, too, I have several times had the experience that an excellent painting made my hair stand on end and shivers run down my spine, my body being deaf to my commands was the first and last experience.

The flight of the swallows capturing the moment of flying near the ground and the serene appearance of the farm road remind me of the scenery of my own childhood imprinted in my heart and in this sense too, this painting is intimate for me. Many years later, I looked up the size of the painting in the album and got an unexpected feeling. It is a work done on a long canvas of  $107 \times 187$  cm, which is not so large for a Russian painting, but in my memory, it looked at least three times bigger. This is likely because, rather than appreciating the painting, I had a psychological experience to it then as though I stepped across the frame and entered into the landscape depicted there. Perhaps due to the intense impression having received from this painting, strangely enough I have had no memory of the other pieces I must have seen in the museum then.

Afterwards, because of the reconstructions of the Tretyakov Gallery, the owner of Rye, I did not have the opportunity to see the piece again for a long time, including while I was living in Moscow, but when I visited Moscow and other cities for private trip in July 1997, finally I was able to see it again. I reconfirmed my impression that this is quite excellent piece, and I was very moved, but my previous deep experience of a physical impact unfortunately did not reoccur.

As for the first piece of contemporary Russian paintings I encountered, it was a fairly impressive work. The subsidiary company of the gallery that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter dealt in trade with the former Soviet Union, and from time to time I visited to get the work of export shipment. I became relatively close with the person in charge, and one day around 1987 at the time of my sales visit to him, I was suddenly invited into a special room of the gallery adjacent to the office, where I was shown some excellent pieces of contemporary Russian paintings. Because the person in charge of selling the paintings stood beside me, ready to answer any of my questions, I wasn't able to relax and appreciate them, which is a shame when I think of it now. I particularly liked one of the pieces there, so I even asked about the price. Therefore it remains still very clearly in my memory. It was an oil painting of a bit longer canvas, about  $50 \times 80$  cm, expressing the scenery close to evening. In the background there was the opposite coast of a river with a low hill, behind which the sun was going to sink. A deep green forest on the hill and the ripples on the river surface from the middle

distance to the foreground were shining with the glow of the sunset and in the midst of quietness all the scenery looked beautiful and harmonious. I will never forget the rich hues of the quiet evening in that piece. Later when I was looking at the albums of the contemporary Russian art exhibitions I mentioned earlier, I realized that this painting resembled a work by the Russian (republic) People's Artist Nikolai Osenev (1909–1983) called *Quiet Evening*. I think it was certainly the same painting and even now I'm eager to see it once more to appreciate it in detail, but this is likely an unrealized dream nowadays.

## **The first painting**

I worked in Moscow for about four years, from July 1989 to May 1993. This period was a turbulent era in history, in which President Gorbachev, with the aim of changeover to democratization and a market economy, pushed forward with the movement of perestroika, but in the confusion ensuing from repeated trial and error, the country saw an ongoing economic slump, eventually followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

By the way, it seemed that Mr. Gorbachev, in the point that he changed the era with his fairness and foresight and in the tragedy due to being so ahead of his time, has something in common with Russian great writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century I love so much. He quickly perceived that the Soviet Union without any reforms would only fall further behind the developed countries of the West, and also he was well aware of the meaninglessness of the arms race which was ruining the economy. Therefore, with a new thinking of diplomacy, he led the world to peaceful coexistence away from the Cold War of bipolar confrontation between the US and the USSR, his achievement of which cannot be overestimated. However domestically, as everybody knows, hindered by a deeply rooted bureaucracy and the privileged classes, his will to reconstruct the economy had to be given up halfway without bearing any real fruit, leading to his reluctant resignation. Attacked by both conservatives and progressives, the faith of the Russian citizens in Gorbachev was lost completely, but history won't abandon him. I cannot say when, but I am certain that a time will surely come when his foresight will be properly understood, and his undertaking will be justly evaluated in Russia as well.

Living in Moscow in this turbulent era, I had the invaluable experience of watching on the sidelines how everything—system, laws, value standards and others—was overturned in a very short time, and how people were hit squarely with these direct effects in everyday life. The rules changed variedly, and people, liberated from their restraints, really felt their freedom and discussed social change with heated anticipation. However, as time went by, prices skyrocketed and shortages became severe. The majority of people, not surprisingly, were unable to change their ways of living, thinking, and former value standard so quickly in conformity with radical changes handed down from above, and most responded passively to the great waves of

the era. How to maintain and defend their lives became a significant, daily issue for people, and they, putting work aside, stood in long lines to obtain daily necessities. A little later, it also became everyday occurrences that people stand on the sidewalk to sell things to passers-by.

People working as artists were not exempted from this. Rather, precisely because they focused their attention on the pursuit of their own artistry and a depth of expression, no doubt they must have experienced so much these daily hardships. However, I can imagine that these came to them later than ordinary people. As long as their paintings were sold in the galleries, one of their sales channels, there was no problem.

The artists first affected by the change of the era were likely those who belong to the first rate artists. The state regularly ordered the works of these top artists, and in exchange for having their daily needs taken care of, the artists were not permitted to sell their works in regular galleries. (Also approximately until the first half of the 1980s, it was not permitted, as a rule, to take the works of about a hundred designated artists out of the country from the standpoint of preserving cultural property). When disorder appeared in the national art buying system, the works of some of these top-tier artists began to trickle into the regular galleries so that the artists might make a living. I heard that one gallery was even temporarily shut down once this was discovered by the authorities.

The time when I was stationed in Moscow seemed to coincide just with the period in which the most plentiful paintings were circulated in the galleries. Afterward, in the latter half period of my stay in Moscow, galleries having been frequented by foreign tourists and business people were unable to sell paintings very well because of changes in the national regulations on taking paintings out of the country. I'll revert to this matter in the later chapter.

It was in this period that I came to Moscow alone as the first Japanese head of a one-man office. For the first year, an office and a living space were set up for me in a hotel for long-term stays. My living space with 2DK(two rooms and dining kitchen) was situated in building adjacent to my office building and the window of about 15-square-meter living room faced south, and so received a good deal of light. One clear April holiday in 1990, after I had become accustomed to my work and was a

little bit free of strain, in which life in Moscow had held me, I was relaxed absentmindedly in the living room, when I suddenly noticed a bare state of the room. The plain white wall opposite the sofa was vacant except for partly occupied only by the stereo set, and besides, a single calendar hanging in the corner. Then I remembered that an acquaintance, who works for a certain manufacturer and had already experienced his station life in Moscow, once told me that he had collected the dozens of lithographs while living in this city, and I hit on the idea that hanging some picture might bring a little warmth to my daily life.

By the way, I don't care for room decorated with flowers. I can get comfort from looking at flowers in vase at longest for the first day or so, but after that, seeing their vigor fade little by little each day is a source of anxiety for me, which, therefore, relatively damps my pleasure of looking at flowers. So from the outset, I had no idea of having flowers in the apartment, but wanted to hang a picture.

A short time later, I visited a Russian gallery for the first time. Usually the gallery has the name "Art Salon" instead of "Gallery", which sounds more exclusively. It cannot be helped that the appearance of the shop does not look like a high class gallery for Japanese eyes. However, the paintings they sell are the fairly good pieces of art and befit the exclusive tone of the common name of gallery in Russian language.

The gallery I visited first time was on the left-hand side of the road in the direction of the Kremlin about twenty meters after Lenin Avenue straddled the inner loop road. Since this is situated in diagonal direction from October Square, we Japanese staying in Moscow called it the October Gallery, that was a place often visited by foreign tourists and the like. A large gallery in the shape of a long rectangle with the entrance in the center, and the exhibition area was split to the left and right. A lot of paintings were hung closely to one another everywhere on the walls, wherever there was the wall, and also were put against the walls wherever it was possible. It seemed that altogether there were a little over three hundred pieces. Most of them were oil paintings, while we could see watercolors and lithographs, though they were in small numbers. Also in this gallery not only paintings but also painting materials, souvenirs such as folk handcrafts, dyed goods with patterns causing us to feel an aesthetic taste (cloth screens kept on a wooden frames), and carpets were on sale. The large window facing the street was shielded with a white transparent curtain, and the

inside was just a little dim since the lights were not turned on during the day. After looking around for a long time, I selected an oil painting with size of 70 x 90 cm to take it home with me.

I hung this piece in the center of a white wall in my living room, so that I would come face to face with it every day. It was a painting by the artist Andrey Ovcharov (1926–1994, member of Russian Artists' Union) called *Foggy Morning* (year of production 1989, Oil on board, 70 x 90 cm.) (You can see this picture on the front hard-cover of this book). The piece depicts a boy holding a fishing line, sitting alone on the shore of a lake early in a summer morning with an opalescent fog not yet cleared up by the sun. Near the boy juts out from the shore into the lake a little bit decayed, wooden platform for drawing water and ahead of it the surface of the water spreads out across the canvas, with trees near and far on the opposite shore of the lake looking smoky and hazy in the fog.

Strangely, I can stare at this painting endlessly, unlike the photograph. Looking at the details as if I made my way deep into the picture, which made me imagine in various ways, I somehow began to have a feeling that I am strolling about in this painting. What I realized first while sitting on the sofa to look at the painting for a short time after dinner and so on was that the hue of the colors responded subtly to light and the painting looked different, slightly as it was. The impression I got from the painting varied slightly each time I looked at it—morning, noon, or night—depending on the amount of light of the room. Each time I somehow discovered something new and so it caused me to expect that I could find something else. Such being the case, I came to appreciate the painting, changing the distance and angle from which I view it.

I think a painting has a definite viewpoint from which it looks best. In general, a work can look attractive when you step back to look at it from some distance. I got the best results for *Foggy Morning* when looking at it diagonally from the doorway to the bedroom with a distance of about six meters. In short, this spot was the maximum distance I could take from the painting in my apartment. If I went any further, I would end up inside the bedroom and I could see the painting no longer.

One day, looking at the piece from this position, I sensed a power in the lake's

surface and had the impression as if the water surface was expanding left and right, and backward to the opposite shore, when the memory of a picnic with a few friends somewhere to a lake in my student days some decades ago suddenly came back to me. While walking together towards the lake, unexpectedly from far away there appeared a part of water surface through a open yard between the house and thicket of trees. Reflectively I felt at last we had got to the lake and breathed a sigh of relief. This water surface was full of a power that made me feel as if it expands further beyond the framework cut by the scene and I sensed the same power in the lake in this painting. I understood then through this first piece of Russian art that a painting has such a interesting world. So I paid much more attention to this piece, which naturally caused me to understand the essence of the paintings more deeply.

Since I took up art appreciation, I have also turned my attention to natural scenery. Observing a grove of trees while taking a walk in the evening, I understood that the appearance of the trees wrapped in a haze in *Foggy Morning* was a perfect likeness of this grove. I was deeply impressed with such skill of artist that he indeed reproduced the result of his observation quite perfectly, and another time I noticed with surprise that the ground with the sparse grasses gently sloping down to the right in the foreground of the piece had a depth broader than at first glance, abounding with a ruggedness, in all of which the feel of deep reality was expressed.

What most attracted my attention in *Foggy Morning* was the boy fishing. At first, I only admired the preciseness of molding expression of this boy sitting on the grass, but as I looked at him, I began to be captured by a question or curiosity as to why the boy wears a white hat in the morning mist. Maybe, was the hat unnecessary or had it any other meaning? Or what the boy thinks while fishing? The figure sitting, looking down as he fishes, also looks like the pose of a person with worries. His appearance reminds me of the famous work *Christ in the Wilderness* (1872) by Ivan Kramskoi, one of the finest Russian painters of the latter half of the 19th century. In this painting, Christ is sitting on one of rocks in the wilds, meditating in isolation. The anguished expression on his face, as he was in conflict with his conscience because of his deep love for the people, is said to express simultaneously the agony of Russian intellectuals of the artist's time. The boy hangs his head towards the lake, turning his

face downward, so we cannot see his expression, but in this piece produced in 1989, the artist of *Foggy Morning* likely laid the anxiety about the future in the midst of the chaos of Russian society onto the boy.

Looking at this boy who has the pose of a person with anxiety, I superimposed my own personal agony, which have absolutely no connection with the painting, and vaguely thought of myself. At other times, it seemed to me that the white hat the boy wears was a symbol to deny such worries. Anyone would sense a touch of loneliness in a boy fishing alone in a foggy lake and thus see worry in him, but depending on my own mood, I feel that the white hat is simply to ease this loneliness and was probably just added for balance. In this way, I view same painting every day and never grow tired of it. It's almost as if I'm looking at the actual scene through the window of the picture frame.

I bought the painting with the thought of finding some way to comfort myself in my lonely life in Moscow, having little room for a pastime, but I found a much greater comfort than I had expected, which caused me to have a desire to make a nail set in the white wall with each of the blank spaces to the right and left of the *Foggy Morning* so that I could hang there two more pictures which I like. That's why, almost by chance, appreciating and buying paintings from time to time were added to quite small number of my hobbies.

## **A turning point**

After nearly a year of my living in Moscow, in May 1990, UPODEKO (Care Division of the Diplomatic Core), an agency attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which provides services for works and daily life to embassies from abroad and representative offices stationed in Russia assigned me an office, and at nearly the same time I was given an apartment as well. There exists a thick forest in the southwest of Moscow, a little before subway terminal station Yugo-Zapadnaya on the left side of it in the direction of the suburbs. In front of the northern tip of this forest there are some apartment buildings and my apartment was in one of the buildings somewhat away from the forest. Half of the building, the south side facing the woods, was for ordinary Russians, while foreigners lived on the north side where the land opened up with a good view.

In the first 10 days of July, I moved into a 3-bedroom apartment on the 14th floor of the north side of the 16-story building. Then for the first time I noticed that the long-term hotel where I had lived till then was not an uncomfortable place for a foreigner stationed without family. There was always staff watching the people to come in and go out at the entrance, whether it was my apartment building or the separate building where my office was, and they would greet me or say something each time I came in or out. Generally I got the impression that they had simple consideration towards other people, regardless of age or sex, which had somehow been lost in Japanese cities. Maybe this is because of the leisurely pace of life, which affords them to have enough room in their minds for concern to others. Things progressed naturally to the point where we ended up having more intimate conversations.

By the way, this entrance staff normally worked together in pairs, with two days off after a 24-hour shift. Maybe because of this working system, the staff was mostly made up of women under thirty with families; the men who did work there were students working part-time if they weren't elderly retirees. It often happened that these workers were free when it turned nine o'clock in the evening, so they would occasionally invite me for a cup of tea or something.

It was a woman not yet twenty-five with blue eyes and blond hair that most frequently spoke to me. I would call her Natasha. She likely gained weight after

getting married and giving birth to a child, that seemed a little bit to have spoiled her look, but I supposed in her girlhood days she had been considerably beautiful girl with slender figure. When she sat at a table, laughing or smiling, her happy face looked attractive and her small, plump hands left one with an idea of feminine gentleness.

Paired up with her was a woman named Galya, slightly older than her, with her brown eyes and black hair. She had a certain power in her eyes, which gave me the impression that she had likely a firm will. A good-natured woman, she always welcomed me with a smile.

On New Year's Eve that year, Galya invited me to her home and gave me the precious experience of welcoming a new year with the Russian people. Her husband was not so tall for a Russian, of medium build, around thirty years old, and you could sense his good heart. When we were introduced, I saw a momentary curiosity float up in his brown eyes, as if he had heard many times about me from his wife and had been waiting to meet me, imagining what kind of man I might be. I didn't really feel the stiffness that so often happens at first meetings; rather both of us were soon able to open up to each other. In addition to myself was a friend of theirs from the neighborhood, a man just under thirty, whose extreme nearsightedness has been cured by the operation so that he could see normally without glasses. For a while, we chatted and drank tea. Different types of alcohol, carefully saved up for a new year, were taken out of the cupboard. After waiting until nearly midnight, Galya's husband led us all in a champagne toast, and we said our good-byes to the old year and drank up. A little later just at midnight, we toasted again welcoming the New Year and drained our glasses. Then the four of us chatted and danced, eating and drinking until dawn. These were very kind people who loved to entertain. Finally, in a bitter coldness at dawn we walked up to the main road together, and this kindness made a very deep impression on me: they waited there for a long time to see me off until at last we got a taxi and I climbed inside.

Now, getting back to the main subject, Natasha and Galya worked together every three days at the counter on the left side of the cozy hall on the first floor of the building, in which my office was. One more person, an elderly man, joined in this working group. His job was mainly to check people coming into the building. At that

time faxes had not yet been widespread and no telex could be fixed in the room I used as an office because of no availability of the power supply and special line for it. So I used the pay service that the women took care of through the telex inside the hall counter on the first floor for means of communication with Tokyo.

Because of this, I was able to join their tea-drinking companions, but it was always not only me, but also several other long-term residents were invited. Carrying with them the bottles of champagne and wine, they would get together one by one to the antechamber to the right inside the hall. Many of them were from Azerbaijan or Eastern Europe, and I would join in their pleasant chat to practice on Russian conversation as well, drinking sweet liquor together with the snacks, such as tomatoes, cucumbers and salami the women would lay out for us, and laugh very often with them. Just because my workplace and residence were very near, I usually went back home after I finished work to sit face to face with loneliness. In view of such situation I think I was fortunate enough to have these occasional times to get a sigh of relief at the warmth of other people, like a person having water at an oasis.

It was thanks to Natasha and Galya that I learned how Russian people celebrate life's turning points—birthdays, International Women's Day and so on. (In Russia, birthdays are an important event even for adults, so when you make friends, you must remember your friend's birthday, and when that day comes, you absolutely must call to wish them a happy birthday. It is the accepted custom of Russian people. Birthdays are often celebrated even in the workplace, but rather than being celebrated, the birthday person feasts co-workers and common friends to express his appreciation of their everyday social ties. It goes without saying that those invited bring flowers or some small present. On International Women's Day, men give presents to the women to show their love.) Feeling the aroma of Russian life near me, thus I could have fairly pleasant and comfortable times over there.

That's why, for a short time immediately after I moved to the new apartment, where people were not stationed at the entrance, and therefore opportunities to meet people were few, I was all the more perplexed at the atmosphere of the building as if it were isolated from the outside world, lacking the warmth of the people it held and sometimes I felt miserable somehow without knowing how to calm myself. In July, it was light outside until after eleven, and I felt somewhat indecisive when I went back

to my apartment, as though I wanted to go outside for a little relaxation. After having beer while preparing supper, I could drive no longer and every place was too far away for walking, and so, as I stared out from the kitchen window, I came to feel as if I was locked in my apartment. To conquer such feeling, I would put on some light music with big sound to distract myself or do some imitation of aerobics in the rhythm of the music for a change. It was in those days that I had holes drilled in the walls, just over a meter apart, and put screws in so that I could hang many paintings.

Looking back afterwards, I understood that this brief period of such unsettled situation was one of causes I became completely absorbed in collecting contemporary Russian paintings, and I venture to tell this personal story here which has nothing to do with the paintings because I hope to touch a little how Russian art has influenced me personally.

I always think that art appreciation is a communication between the painting and the individual looking at it. This experience pertaining to the painting, however, simultaneously tells one aspect of the effect that the painting exerts on him who appreciates it. In contemporary Russian paintings, as I noted before, the impression changes subtly depending on the amount of light, distance and angle the piece is viewed from. Because it looks as if the painting spoke, the desire to view this picture is born anew each time, no matter how many times you look at it. So I even began to look forward to returning to my apartment, and when I was actually looking intently at the paintings there, I was drawn into the art world and was naturally comforted, feeling at ease. This served for a change I needed, and then I was able to set about some work or do some reading or thinking without problems. On top of the pleasure of appreciating contemporary Russian art, I can say that this secondary effect of the painting was extremely helpful to me.

That's why my passion for collecting art got a powerful boost on the occasion that I had overcome my feeling of isolation and almost every week on my days off, I went out to look at paintings. It was not easy to find the paintings I liked, but even so, with the passage of time, they were being collected one by one, setting off the room with their individualities. The deserted feeling in the apartment when I returned home was mitigated to a strange degree, and when I returned from work, first of all I would take a break in my apartment, looking at all the paintings one after one slowly as if I were

looking at the face of my children, which particularly became a great comfort for me.

## **The search for good paintings**

On Saturdays, I often made the rounds of the galleries. Usually I haunted four galleries, my basic visiting course of which was roughly like this: there was a gallery looking out on Lenin Avenue, just over five minutes from my apartment by car, and I generally started from there. Then I went up Lenin Avenue towards the center of Moscow to the October Gallery, then past the Kremlin to the Petrovka Gallery behind the Bolshoi Theater and finally, the Kutozov Gallery behind my office.

In general, if the display area is not brightly lit, a painting will look dark and unattractive, but no matter which gallery you take, they hang white lace curtains in the windows and put off the lights during the day, as if they have prearranged it together. I often heard a remark from Japanese people living in Moscow or having experience to live there about how dark and gloomy Russian paintings are. I also heard secondhand that a Japanese artist who had visited Moscow suspected that the paintings were dark because the paint was of poor quality. Looking at the works exhibited in the new State Tretyakov Gallery in the same building as the Central Artists' House, it is certainly true that many paintings in Stalin era are dark, perhaps reflecting his time, but recent contemporary Russian pieces are definitely not dark. Nevertheless, if such impression is strong, it can be attributed to the dim light of the room where the paintings are exhibited.

However, certainly there exists a reason why the shops are kept so dim. It is bright enough for Russian people. I realized this because my first office which was located in the long-term hotel wanted sunlight and it was dim in the daytime, and so I used to turn on my desk lamp to save my eyesight, while one day my secretary asked me to turn it off, reasoning that it was bad for the eyes. In contrast to Japanese, Russian people seem to have eyes such that they find bright places dazzling and are able to see perfectly well in darker places. People who know Moscow very well may say; "Oh, yes. That reminded me of something." This explains why the lights are not turned on in the departure or arrival lobby of the Sheremetyevo-2 Airport even though in the daytime it is so dark that it seems to be meager for an international airport, the front door to the country. And with this same explanation we can also understand why the main lights of a Russian car driving through the streets of Moscow, which had been

once dimly lit at night till several years before as if the poles of street lamp were insufficiently equipped with, are remarkably dark compared with Japanese vehicles (the high beams that project the lights into the distance, however, are as bright as those of Japanese counterparts), and why at dusk in a summer evening, quite many cars drive with only their small lights on. When I was first transferred to the city, Japanese vehicles were still rare on Moscow roads, and because the lights of the Japanese vehicles brought in here without changing the brightness and high angle for use in Japan were too bright for Russian people, drivers of oncoming vehicles were dazzled, and almost always flashed their lights, signaling for the driver to turn off the lights immediately.

In any case, paintings which look bright enough to Russian people in the dim galleries look rather dark to us Japanese, night-blinded in the dark because we are used to live in bright places. Contemporary Russian paintings in particular tend not to show up well in dark places, while they are sensitive to light. To adjust the level of brightness to the eyes of Japanese, a little bit brighter light is needed so as to evaluate the true value of the paintings. Therefore, taking this into consideration, it is essential to compensate for lack of brightness in your mind when viewing the piece. If you keep this in your mind and look at it carefully, then you are able to distinguish good paintings even in the dimness.

Russian contemporary paintings were represented by quite various genres, covering religious painting, history painting, genre picture, portraiture, nude, landscape, still life, abstract and others, as if all oil painting genres gathered together in one place and the styles of expression were extensive and diverse. Nevertheless, the majority of the exhibits in the galleries were the realism paintings of landscape and still-life, with others seen only occasionally.

Aside from it, I think there were several galleries specializing in abstract art. I can see the virtues of abstract art, but it did not arouse enough concern in me, compared with representational art, so I visited two or so of these galleries with a friend, but I had never gone there voluntarily with my own will.

As for watercolor paintings, from time to time I saw good pieces, which had their own world of gentle color tones and high level of transparency peculiar to watercolors,

but I could not help feeling in these works a lack of something with regard to a feel of scale and the sensitive nuances of color tones which it is quite difficult to express with watercolors. During my staying period in Moscow, I saw a variety of pieces that interested me, but in the end, I didn't come across anything I was attracted strongly enough to acquire. However, this only means that I viewed the paintings through the filter of what I would choose if I selected one from among the pieces that were well done, without caring about the means of expression or the genre of the piece. Oil paintings seemed to have a larger range of expression when considered in the same criteria, and if I compared two excellent pieces, the oil painting somehow had the advantage. But essentially, watercolors and oils should be regarded as different means of expression, and in this sense, I'd like to add that there are definitely high level of watercolor pieces deserving attention among Russian watercolor paintings.

At the four galleries I frequently visited, about seven hundred oil paintings were on display. Once a week, half of the exhibits were changed for new paintings, with the remaining half replaced in the second week. The system was such that the change usually took place on Friday evening so that you could see new paintings on Saturday. No doubt, Saturday was a good day for sales at the galleries. This means about 1400 paintings were on display in a month. However, some of these kept their place for a while without being replaced as a rule, while it happened that I couldn't go to the galleries some week, or some paintings were likely sold before I got to see them. Therefore, it turned out that most probably I saw a little bit less than a thousand paintings a month. All of the displayed paintings were of a certain level and on the whole they were such that you would not be making a big mistake whichever one you will choose. However, among them, there was a considerable difference between particularly excellent pieces and those that were rather mediocre, giving us the impression that they were the mixture of good and bad. Naturally, the ratio of gems was small, but the artistic level of those gems was quite good. And even among the gems, there were even fewer paintings powerful enough that one would want to have always nearby, looking without ever getting tire of them; these were the paintings not always encountered at ordinary galleries.

Since the galleries were closed on Sundays, I used to go to museums or art bazaar (market) in the open air. Although I said art bazaar, they put up the paintings by the wayside for sale among other vendors who dealt with things such as wristwatches,

matryoshka dolls (typical Russia wooden dolls; created getting a clue from Japanese kokeshi dolls, the different-sized doll is put inside other according to the order of size), icons and stamp and badge collections. The paintings were sold, for the most part, by the artists themselves who painted them, but I once came across a mother selling painting done by her art student son.

A place I frequented first was the bazar of Izmailovsky Park, where in a forest of white birches street stands were crowded together on both sides of the path for about fifty meters along a promenade. Young Russian couples pushing strollers or holding the hand of a small child dropped by to take pleasure in evaluating the items for sale.

Then, a little bit later, I learned that the said bazar had moved to other place in Izmailovsky Park from the forest, so the next time on I headed there. In a new market place with no shade, surrounded by a high fence of wire mesh, there appeared a lot of traders selling Central Asian carpets and it certainly had the bazar atmosphere with a constant jam of people. As a result, however, the number of paintings on display had decreased.

That's why naturally I stopped visiting there, because the bazar location was far from my apartment. In the meantime, art vendors who seemed to have been forced out of Izmailovsky park bazar lined up on the sidewalk by the October Gallery, and I frequently stopped over at this place on the way to the galleries or museums. The art vendors were haunted by Moscow residents, tourists and business people from abroad and prospered there for about a year or so, but afterward they moved to the open air, ten minutes away from there on foot, in front of the square of the Central Artists' house situated opposite Gorky Park across the inner loop road.

The art bazar was first recommended to me by a Russian friend, who advertised that it has many good paintings, so I went with expectations. In general the paintings must look better outdoors in broad daylight. However, my honest impression was that the general level was considerably lower than at the galleries. I thought perhaps the good paintings had been sold out in the morning since I had gone there in the afternoon. So I tried to arrive as early as possible from next time on, but it seemed that this was also not the case. About two hundred pieces were displayed in all; among them there were copies of famous paintings from museums. They were oil paintings for the most part, of a variety of genres, including abstract and religious paintings,

with diverse styles. However, speaking about the genre, landscape was in the majority.

As for this landscape, the artists who painted them should have had some artistic power in their own way. However, I was concerned about the point that too many works gave the impression that they were painted just for sale or, in other words, the pieces had been done rather in easy-going way, with crucial steps omitted. In general the basic drawing was powerful enough. Therefore, I regretted all the more, because the handling of the colors was too beautiful to spoil the overall painting, which ended up as something different from reality. The mainstream of contemporary Russian paintings is the traditional realism of the latter half of the 19th century, and to put it simply, this is a technique for reproducing nature, the streets of a town and other aspects of the real world in line with reality. This painting also follows the traditions of realism. However, in order to express what you perceived from reality you should depict them with more soul or, in other words, you should add a greater variety of colors in conformity with what the senses require, while, in this case, I feel that these landscapes had been done quickly and uniformly with little investment of time, using beautiful colors to attract the eyes at a glance.

To tell the truth, the colors used by the artists are the very important point distinguishing expert painters from non-expert. Although it may be a thin line, this difference is a large gap that cannot be filled without talent and effort. It is quite obvious that such way of depicting just for sale won't improve the artist's ability in any way. Personally I'd like them to challenge themselves, always trying to do more than they are able to do.

Nearly at the end of my time in Moscow, a Russian artist friend of mine told me that galleries had been managed by the Artists' Union of the USSR (which disappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and its functions were passed on to artists' union in each of the independent republics. To avoid confusion from now on, I will refer to the Artists' Union of Russian except for the case when it is necessary to specify the Artists' Union of the USSR) as a channel for sales of members' works. Therefore, non-member artists were locked out from these galleries and had no choice but to sell their paintings in the street.

However, it was not always the case that there appeared no decent pieces at street

stalls. Thus, the artist friend with his whiskers and beard, who once taught painting at an art school and was a lovable man with cheerful personality, making us feel that he had a broad mind reminiscent of Mother Earth of Russia, on the occasion of telling me the aforesaid story about the galleries, spoke enthusiastically and forcibly on the success story of the street artist. It seems that there was one artist who spent many years selling his paintings at the street stalls. After long years of obscurity, however, his ability was at last recognized and all of a sudden, he became a famous painter. This friend did not directly say that the street stalls also had good paintings, but maybe he likely wanted to through the emphasis he placed on this episode. Anyhow, putting his story aside, I'm aware that there were passable works at the street stalls, though they were few in number. I came across some pieces that interested me there several times, and in fact, I even purchased some of them.

I'm sorry for the old data, but according to the information of 1974 there were about 8,000 painters in the member of the former Union of Artists of the USSR and 7,000 artists were waiting for the result of their application for the membership. Naturally these figures were somewhat different from those at the time of my first stay in Moscow, but roughly speaking, there were likely no major changes. With the enormous candidates, there was plenty of room for artists rarely seen at the street stalls to spontaneously join and show their paintings brimming with talent, and therefore, partly because of expecting such probability, I used to go there occasionally (however, when I moved to Moscow a second time in 1998, I realized that as a result of the galleries of the Artists' Union gradually being forced to be curtailed or closed down some shops from 1993 on, relatively good paintings began to appear at the street stalls, and so the painting situation there seems to have changed somewhat in recent years. So I'd appreciate if you understand this situation described as above is my impression from the first period of my stay in Moscow).

The more you have the experience to appreciate paintings, the deeper you will understand it naturally. Of course for this it is important to look at a great number of excellent pieces, but at the same time, you also need to view paintings with defects, by dint of which you will come to realize how difficult painting art is, which requires both talent and a long period of apprenticeship.

Generally speaking, Russian landscape painters have a solid foundation giving the impression that they are able to depict not only people, but also still life in their own

way and yet it does not mean that they are always able to depict their objects excellently. With the surging flow of a river, it is not easy to express the power of the water, and depicting such objects as a moving person, a fast-running horse etc., so that they could have reality and vigor is similarly difficult. I sometimes come across in the galleries historical paintings showing groups of people, but usually I feel something was missing in the depiction of the people. A person's mass is not expressed well unless the shades of colors are deep enough. If there is water in shouldered bucket, the painting must be such that the weight of the bucket full of water is felt; if empty, the figure carrying the bucket naturally changes. Even when these kinds of things were done well, occasionally I would come across some paintings that looked somehow disharmony and constrained because the composition is not appropriate. In terms of effectively expressing the aim of depicting, the composition, as a general rule, should be made so that it looked spacious enough and more attractive, but occasionally having seen failures, I see that it is certainly not easy to accomplish the tasks as they aimed all the time.

The works of a high artistic level overcome all of these difficult points, and thus embody excellently the three important elements of composition, form, and color balance. Of these three, matters related to color are the most difficult to learn and seem to be deeply linked to the artist's natural talent.

In any case, while appreciating the paintings, I took the time to look for good pieces and collected my favorites little by little. In the following chapters, I'd like to introduce some of my collection selected objective-wise.

## **Prelude for the introduction of paintings**

Now let me introduce the pieces I came across at the galleries. The problem is that if it was the original, you could judge the painting just by viewing it, but what you are actually going to see is the photo of the painting on a page. With photographs of paintings, the sizes and materials are different, and further, because the genuine colors are not reproduced so well, it is rather hard to appropriately judge the painting.

To be honest, I am only too aware that a photograph cannot exactly embody the representation of the original work. So I had some hesitation about showing the paintings like this on the pages. In fact, I was even asked in a half-joking and half-serious tone a question of how the painting differs from the photo. Comparing the photo with the original painting from my own collection of contemporary Russian art, the actual painting has the particular characteristic that its expression varies subtly according to the amount of light, the distance and the angle when viewing, and so the impression received changes each time the piece is viewed. Depending on the painting, this change can be quite remarkable, which is also one of major charms holding one's interest. The nature of a photograph, however, is completely different. The photo fixes the expression of painting in a moment when it was photographed, with no sensitive reaction to light like the painting has, so the viewer does not feel the movement of the piece, as if it spoke to him. On the other hand, the photo does not depend so much on the viewing environment. When we'll pay attention to the phase that Russian oil paintings react to a dynamic way of looking, the evident difference between the painting and the photo becomes clear, but this difference that is naturally taken as a matter of course can be made use of for a reference when taking a photo of the painting properly and effectively.

By the way, we usually appreciate the painting statically when we view it in a museum. We look at the work from a designated position in the given conditions and judge it. When I go to the galleries, I will choose bright hours in the daytime. Nevertheless, I also view paintings in a similarly-static way in the restricted conditions, trying to select a good one from among them. After I bring this painting home, however, the situation naturally leads me to view it in a variety of lighting from different angles and distances. From this experience I know that some conditions

allow the piece to be seen more attractively.

Depending on paintings, these conditions may differ a little, but anyway they can be found in sufficient brightness of natural light and in a large space (when I realized it, I thought I finally understood as if I noticed it for the first time that the majority of museums have large, bright halls not simply for stately appearance, but also for providing space to view the paintings dynamically). The main purpose of viewing the paintings dynamically is to try to find out the best conditions that allow painting to be seen at its best, and then you shall be able to recognize for the first time the true value of the piece.

Now, let me consider the matter; if you make the most use of the characteristic of photo to fix the expression of painting in one moment and take picture of a piece in its most favorable conditions, then is it possible for you to draw out the true excellence of the painting with photo? The answer shall be like following: you won't get its perfect reproduction, but you may acquire more or less satisfied level, with which you can make a compromise somehow.

I photographed the paintings I had collected when I returned home from Moscow and made an album for personal use; for this purpose, I took the photos from close up, capturing each piece just in the full range of camera screen. From this short distance, however, it's not possible to well distinguish the proper perspective and solid form of the picture, and so the photos are handicapped from the beginning because of the nature of camera copying the reflection in the mirror. Therefore, I made it a rule to judge a photo's quality by comparing the photograph with the painting from the distance the photo was taken, but I found that even in good conditions the exact colors do not really show in photos taken indoors in common way. After some trial and error, I came to stand an easel in the shade of the garden on a sunny day and photographed the pieces in natural light with a camera on a tripod, which offered quite an improvement in reproducing the colors, while, on the other hand, in view of the fact that the hues in the photo are different in each of the reprints, it seems that the method of printing must also have a connection with the finishing of reproducing colors. If someone who had seen the original piece and knew it well printed the photograph, it might be possible to make some adjustments and get closer to the actual colors of the

piece. Actually, however, I have them printed without this extra consideration, and so usually the colors in the finished photos are slightly different from those of the paintings. If I am able to obtain a resemblance of the colors, I cannot help compromising to some extent. Compared with the actual piece, the photo is snugly and cleanly fixed. Because of this, depending on the painting, the photo may look better than the piece, but it is no exaggeration to say that this is a proof that it is not much of a painting; an excellent piece will never give way to a photo of it. The reason why the photo looks inferior to the original is that the colors, which should be called the life of the painting, are slightly different from the original piece, which causes the difficulties in reproducing the deeper expression in the painting. If you take the photo in hand and moves it to the maximum away from your eyes, it shall be compensated to some extent, giving the impression that the photo approaches the actual work, so I always do this when looking at photos of paintings.

In this way, the photos cannot sufficiently embody the expression of the paintings, and herewith I explained it particularly in detail because, on top of the difficulty in exactly judging the value of the actual paintings with the photos, I feared that the photos of the paintings printed in the book might be taken by a reader for the paintings themselves. Speaking from my own experience, when I saw the first time the genuine picture that I had known from albums and made light of in some degree, I was surprised at how different my impression was, as if I saw it now for the first time and recognized that, contrary to my expectations, the actual work was something worth seeing. In other words, I had unconsciously taken the painting in the photo for the painting itself.

Therefore, to rectify such point and let the readers know the actual works in the state as close to the originals as possible, I decided to appreciate anew the pieces which I am quite well familiar with and state my impressions as a commentary on the pieces.

Art appreciation allows each individual to take various views. In this sense my impressions are definitely one of views and I'll mention this commentary just as a reference for the purpose noted above. If you keep in mind the difference between the photo and the painting and refer to the size of the painting and the commentary, viewing the piece with your eyes keeping as far away as possible from the page, then

you will find the photo begins to make fairly close approach to the actual work, allowing you to judge the merit of the painting to some degree. If you look at the pieces once in a while, your understanding of the painting will deepen accordingly, so I do recommend you will take the opportunity to appreciate the works more than once.



Illustration 1

Veniamin A. Safonov (1931 – 2003)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Summer (Podolsk)* (1980) Oil on canvas, 90 × 60 cm

The painting in Illustration 1 depicts a scene from Russian summer life simply and comfortably made in the midst of nature. The central point in the composition occupies a pond full of brownish water often seen in the suburbs of Moscow. In the foreground is an open field sloping gently to a pond. The artist's eyes from a slightly higher place are turned over the pond, a thicket of trees surrounding it, the planked platform jutting out into the pond and a small shed a little before the planked platform. Just at this time an old woman is following a path through the open field to draw some water. Such scene spreads out realistically in strong sunlight of the summer.

Shortly after I began to collect paintings, I found this one at the October Gallery and bought it, attracted by the way where the atmosphere of the summer in the suburbs of Moscow is expressed quite excellently. The title of *Summer (Podolsk)* is written on the other side of the painting, and so I later found out that the piece depicted summer in the suburbs of Podolsk, which is located about thirty-five kilometers south of Moscow and also the artist's place of residence. Because Russia is a northern country, people tend to think of summer in Moscow and neighboring areas as refreshing, even with the strong sunlight, just like summer in the highlands, but when June and July arrive, there are not always such days, but occasionally appears the time when hot and humid days persist in the daytime like a Summer in Japan.

The strong sunlight of this kind of mid-summer day pervades in this piece, and I think it is a considerably high level of work. The water surface of the pond reflects the strong light, glittering, and brims over with vigor, while the trees surrounding the pond hang their heads as though withered in the heat. In this portrayal we can feel an extraordinary power of the artist's expression. Also it's worth mentioning that the figure of the old woman going to draw some water quite well reproduces the feel of movement that she is slowly descending, with placing her cane uncertainly on the ground that slopes gently down to the pond.

The position in which the old woman is depicted is located on a straight line through the point of the planked platform as a fulcrum along the boundary between the pond and the trees that block the pond from view, while the shed stands on another line, along the boundary between the pond and the trees on the left side of the scene, that intersects at the same fulcrum of planked platform with the former straight line. The reciprocal relationship of the positions of the old woman, the planked platform and the shed looks clear and there exists a strong sense of stability. That's why I looked very carefully at the painting, wondering from where such stable feel comes and realized it has this composition. The stable effect of this diagonal composition allows you to feel that on the whole this painting has an organized order in the disordered scenery at first glance. Since there are no windows in the shed, we understand that it is a bathhouse, often found on the waterside (in the Russian countryside, the custom of bath day remains, boiling water for a steam bath every Friday). Probably, a little bit apart from here, there exists the main house, where the old woman likely came from to draw water. Even though drawing water has been

women's work from old days, it seems like severe labor for an old woman with bent back. While viewing her back faintly giving off a sense of daily life, spontaneously I was attracted to a variety of imagination on the daily life and the background of a life of this old woman.



Illustration 2

V. A. Tchepkasov

*Summer Day* (1960s?) Oil on canvas, 72 × 55 cm

I obtained the painting in Illustration 2 from a chaser who is also a member of the Russian Artists' Union. This chaser was a friend of my Russian teacher, and it seemed that he could not make a living by just carving metal, so he also took paintings on consignment from his acquaintances and scraped a living by selling them. My teacher asked me to meet him, and when he came to my apartment to show several paintings to me, this one had no frame and was slightly soiled due to a long lapse of time. In fact, the piece gave the impression that it had been depicted decades earlier (after having more experience, I understood that the color balance in this painting is a fairly old artistic technique sometimes seen in works of the 1960s). Neither the owner who

consigned the painting nor the chaser himself had any knowledge about the painting, including what kind of artist had done it. He just told me the artist's name and the name of the provincial town which was depicted in the painting, but regrettably, I forgot the name of the town in a little while. Having acquired this piece in such circumstances, the actual title remained unknown, but I felt it would be pity for it to remain untitled, so I later gave it a harmless provisional title of *Summer Day*.

As you can see, the painting depicts people sunbathing on the sandy soil of a river bank or swimming in the height of the intense midsummer heat against the hazy-looking, half-silhouetted buildings of the town on the opposite shore. The river is deep enough that the large boats navigate and a pleasure boat is anchored in front of the sandy shore with those bathing or swimming, waiting for its departure time. What I like about this piece is that the people enjoying the summer are painted three-dimensionally with a sense of reality and the heat piercing the sky has dyed air pink like a hot wind, a color tone of which naturally harmonizes with the tint of reflection in the river and the brown tone of the sandy soil, exactly bringing about the atmosphere of a hot riverside in summer.

Although it rather digresses from the main subject, allow me to introduce an episode concerning this painting. A representative of some trading company, who had kindly shown me friendliness because one of his hobbies was collecting paintings just like me, was due to return home and said to me, "I've asked someone from the Ministry of Culture to my apartment to get a permit to take paintings out of the country. So if you need to get the permit too, why don't we do it together?" Since it was necessary to get export permits to pay the taxes for paintings not purchased in galleries, I accepted his kindness for this particular painting. Giving him two photographs and the painting itself in advance, I myself went to his apartment a little later than the specified time. He greeted me in the doorway and on the spot he informed me of the assessment by the women, laughing generously: "The ladies from the Ministry of Culture could not stop praising your painting; it seems to be an extremely good piece." I greeted the two women smiling at me brightly with brimming favor in their eyes. In the meantime while we were having the chat about my painting, I imagined this nameless artist who perhaps had wasted his talent at the mercy of rough waves of a daily life and time. Evaluating this painting highly, the women art experts showed their interest to the artist, asking me about what kind of person he was. If he knew this, he would likely have been happier than I was. I cannot find his name on "Directory of the Members of the Union of Artists of the USSR".



Illustration 3

Roman L. Podobedov (1920 – 1992)

Member of the Russian Union of Artists

*After the Rain* (1991) Oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm

*After the Rain* (illustration 3) is a piece with the depiction of a beach on the Baltic Sea, not far from which a Latvian fishing village is located. The reason why I know it is the Latvian sea is that I also own another piece called *Latvian Fisherman* by the same artist, depicting similar-looking scenery on the beach. However, since it seems to me that *After the Rain* is a work superior to the latter, I have decided to introduce here this one, in which a scene from the fisherman's life on the beach just *After the Rain* is depicted with a beautiful and strong touch against the background of the ocean scenery. Moving clouds still hang low immediately after the passing of a sudden shower, but patches of blue sky are seen through breaks in the clouds. The sky and the ocean with white-capped waves stretch as far as the eye could see.

A boat with its fishing net spilling out onto the shore and so on are shown on the beach in the foreground, and a small fishing vessel anchored offshore not so far from this boat is moored with the bow facing the beach. On the deck of this vessel a fisherman is doing some kind of work. Judging from the position of the vessel with the

bow facing the beach and also from the scenery during daytime, I imagine that most probably he has just returned from fishing. This figure looks busy all the more in the midst of movement of the low clouds in the rear and the rhythm of the waves crashing against the beach.

More than anything else, what makes this piece excellent is how realistically the scene with its movement of the seashore giving off the freshness after the rain is reproduced with the balanced, vivid colors. The fishing gears protruding like long sticks from the bow of the fishing vessel are probably floats to support the nets, but the presence of these red and blue flags fulfills the role of balancing the colors and further enhancing the movement of the scene. My one concern is that the feel of the waves crashing onto the shore is somewhat hard, but this style is characteristic of this artist, and it is likely nothing more than a matter of taste.

When I saw *Winter in the Suburbs of Moscow* (Illustration 4) at the October Gallery, I thought it was a good painting at once, but after some wavering, in the end I left the gallery without buying it. The problem was that the size of the painting was as large as 74 x 117 cm, and so I felt it was too large when I thought about bringing it back to Japan to hang it in a rather small room. As I mentioned previously, the first piece I obtained for my collection (*Foggy Morning*) had the size of 70 x 90 cm, and I thought it considerably large. But even so, I kept thinking about this piece and did not feel at ease. Having been attracted to the painting, I returned to the gallery the following morning. That was a Sunday and the gallery was closed, but I peered inside as if I press my eyes against the thick plastic glass door of the entrance. Enclosing the glass around my face with both hands, I could see inside very well. When I realized that the painting stood against the pillar as it had been the previous day, unexpected joy rose up in me, because of which, without regard to anything else, I decided to buy it.

Generally speaking, a large painting is done in such way that the artist at first makes a study work on a small canvas and then tries it on a big canvas. So, among the large paintings there are many masterpieces, into which the artists put their souls. This is a memorable work for me in the sense that it removed my restraint about size; from that moment on I was no longer concerned about a work's size except for extremely large one.



Illustration 4

Fedor V. Shapaev (born 1927)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, Honored artist of Russia

*Winter in the Suburbs of Moscow* (1991) Oil on canvas, 117 × 74 cm

Looking at this painting close by, I noticed that the snow was painted a vaguely dirty white, with a pinkish grey faintly mixed into the white of the snow everywhere, perhaps to bring out a little roughness in the topography. I wondered why the artist chose such dingy colors, but if I view it again from a distance in a moderate brightness befitting the scene of this painting, then pure white snow field, where no person has trod upon except for the tracks of a horse pulling a sleigh along the mountain road full of ups and downs, has been reproduced vividly with a natural reality, from which you can see that the dingy tones were just calculated by the artist's skill so that a natural snow coloring appears when the painting is viewed from a suitable distance. The two horse-drawn sleighs coming together in a line onto this field of snow are depicted realistically as if they are about to pass in front of our eyes, and the feeling of the horse swinging its head and pulling the sled is clearly expressed. The artist's eyes look down somewhat from above at the landscape abounding with ups and downs. So the scene in the background looks as if a precisely-described, magnificent nature has been somewhat compressed and overlapped. Worthy of special mention is the exquisite

reality of the appearance of the thickets of white birches that have shed their leaves. Against the background of such grand nature, the horse-drawn sleighs catch the reflection of the pure white snow, bringing them into a sharp and marked focus. As far as I can see, this painting is unmistakably a first-class work.

Incidentally, a little after I acquired this painting, I noticed something unnatural in the walk of the leading horse and for a while I regretted having bought the piece. Bothered, I looked for paintings depicting horses in a variety of albums, but I couldn't find a horse with the same step. Since people sometimes rode horses on Moscow roads, when I came across one, I watched it very carefully to see how the horse was walking. Because the movement of its feet was too quick, I couldn't be certain but somehow, it seemed to me it did not carry itself in the manner depicted in the painting. After this, every time I looked at the painting, I pondered over all possible reasons because there must be a definite reason why the artist took the trouble to depict such step. Finally I was able to confirm this answer as I had imagined when I went to Vienna on holiday. The cover of a tourist brochure I had picked up by chance had a photo of a horse-drawn carriage at an amusement park, and the legs of the horse pulling the coach with children and adults on board had the same step as the horse in the painting. There is a burden on the horse when it is pulling something heavy, and it seems that the horse carries itself in this manner that looks so unnatural to a layman. The horse's legs have no longer bothered me since I reconfirmed that the artist knew the object of his painting very well.

*Beginning of the Storm* (Illustration 5) is a landscape placing two yachts in the center of the piece, while the sky unexpectedly becomes overcast, and a sudden squall starts to blow amid a yacht race or practicing for it on a lake somewhere. A slightly elevated mountain is in the background, and it looks to be a good distance from the yachts to the cliffs of the shore. From the degree of the roll of the waves at the beginning of the storm, we see, this is not the ocean, but a lake. Compared with the leading yacht on the right, which captured the irregular movement of the wind, the yacht on the left has a strong feeling of stability, with smooth sailing, which shows that the movement of the wind is unstable and non-uniform, just like the weather of beginning of a storm.

It goes without saying that the focus of the painting is the yacht on the left; the painting expresses the powerful motion of the yacht which sails fast with a large following wind in the middle of swells emphasized by the waves in the immediate



Illustration 5

Vitaly T. Davydov (1923 – 2007)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, honored artist of Russia

*Beginning of the Storm* (1991) Oil on canvas, 94 × 73 cm

foreground. The hues of the yacht using white as the basic color and the hues of the clothes and hats of the crew, which, taking into consideration the color balance, were deliberately done in different colors, harmonize well with the deep tones of the water surface, showing a varied expression. Not only this, looking closely at the piece, we come to understand that each composing element, namely, the mountains in the background, the two yachts, and the lake against the sky, creates a mutually contrasting composition, allowing us to feel a superb harmony and balance among one another in everything—the positions and shapes, size, hues, and the extent of the shade. Needless to say, this is because the artist, scrutinizing the contrasted harmony of one element with another, deftly arranged so that they looked more attractive, and thanks to this artist's high level of composing ability and skill in portrayal, this painting is finished as a truly impressive work. Concentrating its focus on the powerful movement of the yacht, it is equipped with the beauty and simultaneously

sense of power, vigor, and stability. Light comes in subtly from the left side of the canvas, faintly shining on the yachts and part of the mountains in the background, and the presence of this faint light makes the contrast among the yachts, the lake and the mountains distinct, further enhancing the artistic value of this work.

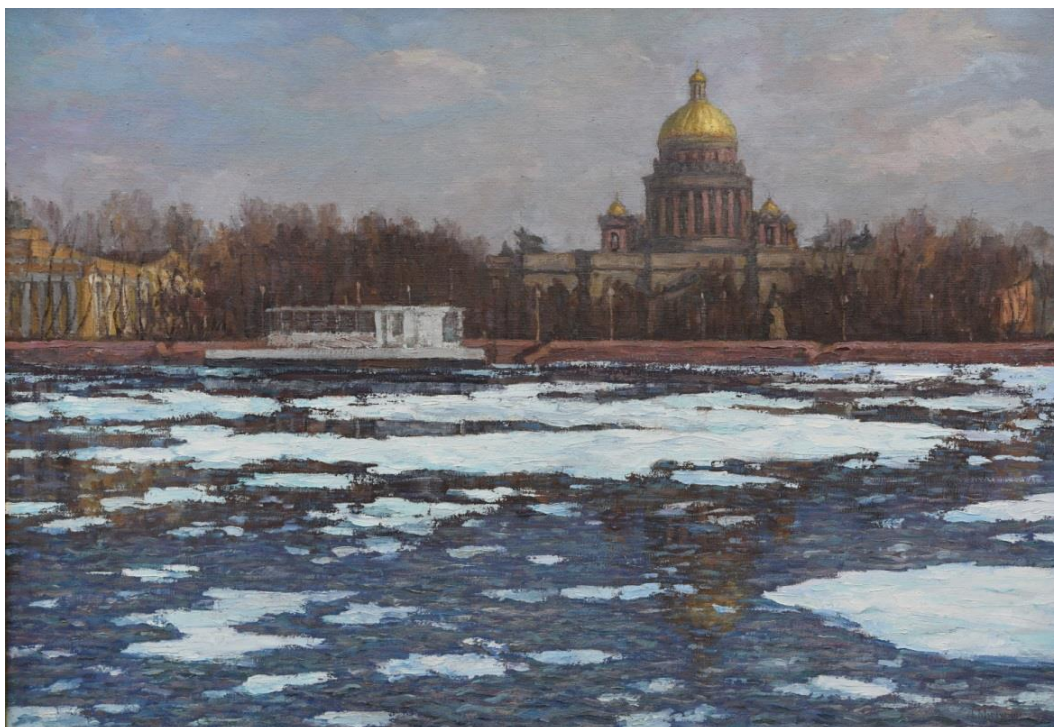


Illustration 6

Aleksander F. Michurin (1929 – 2004)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Ice Floes* (1991) Oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm

The painting entitled *Ice Floes* (Illustration 6) depicts the ice floes on the Neva River against the background of Saint Isaac's Cathedral. Saint Isaac's Cathedral is about 100 meters tall, a large Russian Orthodox temple that took forty year for finishing its whole construction in the middle of the 19th century. This building, reminiscent of the great power of the Russian imperial government of the time, rises at one corner in the center of the town, which the people of Saint Petersburg are proud of, and it is, so to speak, one of symbols of the town. The majestic dignity of this noble figure is embodied well in this piece.

I found it at a gallery facing Lenin Avenue, which was located diagonally across the avenue from my apartment building. At this time, there was also one other good painting, and I also liked the artist who painted it. However, the head of a Japanese representative office, who lived in Moscow at the same time as I did and who I became close to through work and art hobby, took a great liking to the paintings of this artist I had possessed by that time, and he asked me to let him know without fail if I found any of his other paintings. Because it would have been a shame to let a painting like this pass by, I decided to let him have that painting, and I acquired *Ice Floes*.

Consequently, after he took this opportunity to buy the painting I had introduced to him, he came by my apartment and we ended up in viewing *Ice Floes* together. As I learned from him that he had long been painting in oils as a hobby since his student days and even while his working for the company, so, showing respect for his experience, I asked for his impressions on *Ice Floes*, particularly from his perspective as a painter. He told me, "The greatest Western paintings in all ages generally have a division in the composition one-third or two-thirds from the bottom. However, I'd say that this painting has the division in the middle area and strays a little from the composition of a masterpiece." Although he was perplexed because he couldn't utter any praising words suitable for this situation, he gave me his honest and rather pertinent impression just like a person who indeed practiced oil painting in his student days.

After he went home, I became slightly concerned about what he said, and I wanted to check in detail that the piece was splendid enough as I had evaluated. Thus, I turned on the lights in my apartment and reviewed the painting carefully. To gain some distance from it, I took the piece from the left side wall of the rectangular room and stood it against one of speakers by a window. When I viewed it from outside the door facing the speakers, the Neva River spread out broadly to this side from the opposite shore, the color contrast became deeper, and the river's expression suddenly became full of life. The bluish white floes rose a little bit from the navy blue surface of Neva flowing leisurely and magnificently, or they floated as if stuck to the river's surface. These floes, the river surface rippled slightly by a gentle breeze, and the soft sunlight

of the blue sky gave off a breath of a spring still wintry, but full of a sense of openness. Viewing the work from a distance, I understood that the expression of the river surface had more than enough charm to attract the eyes, and I could be surely convinced that the focus of the piece was in the ice floes of the title.

Incidentally, when you move away from a piece, usually the background moves further away, and depth comes out, but strangely, in this painting, only the river surface stretches out to the foreground, while massive Saint Isaac's Cathedral won't move from its position. Because of this effect, it may be a mere coincidence, but the visual composition comes into the division exactly two-thirds from the bottom.



Illustration 7

Aleksey Ya. Koltsov (1912 – 1990)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, Honored culture worker of Russia

*Moscow, Kremlin* (1974) Oil on canvas, 117 × 69 cm

*Moscow, Kremlin* (Illustration 7) depicts the scenery overlooking the Kremlin across the Bolshoi Kamennyi Bridge (meaning “large, stone bridge”) from the opposite bank of the Moscow River. There seems to be a good number of paintings

depicting the Kremlin from this direction, where the beautiful view of almost the entire Kremlin, including the Vasily Blajennyi Church, is captured. I had seen several paintings like this in the galleries, but the artistic level of this piece was higher, and more than anything else I liked that it was done with the nuance of the Kremlin as a famous historic tourist attraction rather than the symbol of strict political power and authority, so I purchased this piece. The picture tinges its entire part with a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere, spaciouly depicting in a broad composition the Moscow River, where a pleasure boat with many passengers is cruising, and the Bolshoi Kamennyi Bridge, on which lines of vehicles, such as tourist buses and others are moving very slowly, and beyond them soft color tones of the Grand Kremlin Palace, the group of churches and other structures of Kremlin.

This piece was done in 1974, and according to the explanation of an old woman clerk, from whom I bought the work then, the artist himself liked it and kept it for a long time, but before long after he died, his wife was forced to let it go in order to eke out a living. There are so many tourist buses in the lines of vehicles almost stuck in traffic jam on the bridge that I wondered if it's probable in reality, and such scene gives the impression of enough economic surplus of the country. This piece was produced at the beginning of the economic slump during the Brezhnev years when the afterglow of high economic growth remained. All the more for this reason, I feel in the air of this piece something like an atmosphere that a country and citizens brim with confidence, and in this sense it is the work reminding us of the good old days.

.

This piece having the title *Dagestan* (Illustration 8) was done in 1965. Eight relatively small works by this artist were once exhibited simultaneously in the October gallery. Half were landscapes with construction sites, which were most likely study works for the large pieces ordered by the state. This was the one I liked the most among the remaining four general landscapes. In addition to the title, the artist's name, and the year of production, the word of *etude* was especially indicated on the reverse side of the canvas. A large-scale version of this painting may be kept stored at some museum in Russia.

Dagestan is a Russian republic neighboring on the west side with Chechnya, rocked by independence issues. Although I have never been there, viewing this piece, I imagine that it's most likely a picturesque mountainous country with Greater



Illustration 8

Aleksander S. Kulagin (1926 – 2011)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, Honored artist of Russia

*Dagestan* (1965) Oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm

#### Caucasus Mountains.

The precipitous rocks of the foothills, putting the river in with both sides, look like just a real rock, and the whole of the range of mountains in the background, where not one tree grows due to the high elevation, similarly makes us feel the severity and steepness of the bare rock. The green land of the hamlet, situated on an inner pocket of landscape encircled by the intersection of the foothills, which looks like a place of calm repose completely unlike its surroundings, and the calm appearance of the river flowing through the narrow mountain gap become even more outstanding in contrast with steep, stern peaks, giving the viewer a sense of relief and tranquility. The powerful style, characterized by the deep bordering, and the river's calm hue of a mugwort color make this work more impressive.

When I purchased this piece, at the same time I bought a large piece by the artist of *Winter in the Suburbs of Moscow* introduced earlier, but to tell the truth, I wanted to secure even two more pieces there by the artist Kulagin. I haven't forgotten them even now; one depicted the port in the foggy inlet of one of the Kurile Islands from the sea,

while the other placing its focus on a middle-aged man riding a bicycle on a rural village street somewhere in Siberia. Both were considerably good pieces, done with a powerful touch. I knew only too well that I couldn't afford to buy so many paintings at once. The good pieces do not necessarily appear at even intervals in line with my convenience, while there is also the possibility that I would come across better paintings the following week. For a while, I stared at the pieces, unwilling to pull myself away, but in the end, with no other choice, I left the gallery. When I was thinking to buy one of them if they won't be sold by the following Saturday, I heard the rumor that all the paintings had been stolen from the gallery. When I visited on Saturday, the paintings on display were completely different, so it seemed the rumor was true. I felt sorry that I hadn't taken the plunge to buy the paintings at that time, and I regret it even now.

*Sadovaya Inner Loop Road* in Illustration 9 depicts the road in the district to the northwest of the Kremlin, which runs in a loop with a radius of about two and half kilometers from the Kremlin at its center, and the building seen in the middle of the background is the American Embassy.

Roughly speaking, Moscow has the main roads stretching out radially from the center of the city with the Kremlin at its heart across the Sadovaya loop road to the suburbs. Therefore, as long as you recognize this road, you can somehow make your way home even if you get lost while driving. So it can be safely said that it is this road that newly arrived foreigners learn first. Usually it is extremely busy, but because many Russians go to their *dacha* in the suburbs on the weekends, except during the winter time, the traffic decreases incredibly, and it gives a unique opportunity to practice driving to get used to the right-hand side traffic and to memorize the appearance of the road.

This loop road was given the name Sadovaya (adjective meaning "garden") because a wooden wall once surrounded the Kremlin with some distance as a border to separate Moscow from the outside world at the end of the 16th century. Before long, however, the wall was cleared away, and a road was built on the site of this loop, accompanied by a garden filled with flowers and trees. The artist of this painting is not listed in "Directory of the Members of the Union of Artists of the USSR" issued in 1988, but because I purchased the piece at a gallery, the artist most likely became a



Illustration 9

D. Chukhrai

*Sadovaya Inner Loop Road* (1992) Oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm

member after this date. From the impression I get from the piece, I imagine he is probably still young, but I am not sure.

In any case, this painting is considerably excellent, and the atmosphere of the Sadovaya inner loop road is skillfully expressed. The road is depicted in a decisive, large composition, and the sense of broadness of the actual road is expressed quite well. What is truly excellent is that the vehicles running on this expansive road are shown with a feel of weight and reality. Viewing the piece from a moderate distance, the cars recede somewhat the moment you see them, looking as though the center of gravity shifted a little bit backward and then the focal point was tightly fixed. It is also mysterious how, in this very moment, the sense of stability in the expression of the running cars increases further.

The painting in Illustration 10 is entitled *Spring*. Around the time of May Day in



Illustration 10

Aleksander P. Bykov (1912 – 1997)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Spring* (1992) Oil on canvas, 100 × 75 cm

Moscow, the buds of deciduous trees begin to wake up from a winter sleep all at once, spreading out their leaves for three days or so. Thus, in an instant, all the branches have been covered by new greenery everywhere. This painting, placing its focus on the white birches, depicts the scenery in this season in the suburbs of Moscow or some other place, which is a painstaking work with a soft and fresh touch.

The white birch is a common deciduous tree found all over Russia, and no tree is closer to or more loved by the Russian people than this one. Since old days this tree has been glorified in poems and songs, and also when describing nature in novels, this tree has been often the focus of gentle, poetic sentiments. It seems that the graceful figure of a slender white birch likely calling to mind a woman captures the hearts of the Russian people. Such kind of traditional love of the Russian people for the birch can be felt remarkably in this piece. The still young birches, released from the long

winter and sprouting up new leaves, look weak and somehow uneasy, rather than enjoying a sense of openness in spring. The entire piece is filled with the tenderhearted eyes of the artist gently watching them, which caused me to smile. The birches are depicted in soft, gentle hues, and all of the surrounding nature—the field, the evergreen trees growing nearby, the river and the trees on the opposite bank, and even the sky—are unified with the soft hues, as if harmonizing with the birches. Looking at this painting, I can't help thinking of the proverb that “even the trees and the grass bow”. Although this proverb is used for a different meaning (the original meaning of this proverb is that everybody yields to the sweeping power), what has brought it to my mind is how the gentle feelings of watching over the birches became united as if the surrounding nature was dyed with the color of the birches. That it seems not at all unnatural and looks just like a scenery as if it was cut off direct from a beautiful spring landscape spreading out in the suburbs is the excellent feature of the piece. If you look at the painting from some distance, you'll see that the field in the foreground spreads out with ups and downs and the river is fairly far from there. The width of the river becomes more spacious than at first glance, and the clouds look three-dimensional. We get an impression that the work is not only tender and gentle, but, as might be expected from a male artist, this gentleness coexists with a supple strength, most likely this is because the color of the clothes of the fishing boys adds a pungent sense to the overall soft tones, and the transparency of clean air sharply penetrates the space.

Unfortunately, I own only this piece by the artist, but when my first time stay in Moscow was drawing to a close, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to see a private exhibition for sale of this artist by chance at a private gallery in Moscow. As it is quite usual for the case of Moscow artists, many of his paintings were masculine and magnificent, and I reconfirmed that he was a pretty good painter. However, these paintings were priced such that any one of the pieces easily exceeded my one month's local salary. It was a little thing, but a great prize for me that I could thoroughly appreciate his works and I got his small advertising catalog.

*Siberian Courtyard* in Illustration 11 places its focus on a courtyard somewhere in Siberia, depicting a scene from the daily life of a farmer. Unlike the courtyards of the landowner mansion house before the Revolution that often appears in Russian novels, this courtyard is compact, but the vast space in the background mitigates this narrowness. I heard that farmers in Russia who keep horses to cultivate the land for



Illustration 11

Sergei P. Bocharov (born 1953)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Siberian Courtyard* (1980) Oil on canvas, 50 × 50 cm

their own use were not rare even now, and this kind of scene is depicted in this painting; the farmers' custom of taking better care of the horses can be seen in the traditional house-style build having the stable next to the house. From the vast lake hazy in the background, I imagined freely that this courtyard was one of the farms on the hillsides surrounding Lake Baikal, while I also had the thought that it might not be a lake, but actually a large forest in Siberia.

Setting this question aside, the piece is a combination of a diagonal composition and a composition of projective method that some of contours of the buildings coincide roughly with the lines of radiations emitted in the direction of the foreground from a single point behind the gate. Because of this, the courtyard looks clear as if it was neatly arranged on the whole, and gives an impression that the scene in the courtyard has a firmly-fixed stability with its low center of gravity. What makes this painting truly excellent one owes largely to this composition, but the color portrayal is just as much factor in the painting's success. Strong sunlight shines brilliantly on the

courtyard, the horses, and the stable from the left side, and the skillful portrayal of this light and the shadows make the work lively and real. The two farm women looking in the shade are portrayed realistically almost as may be expected without being too dark. These farm women give the painting a sense of the reality of daily life and, together with the expression of light, make the piece extremely beautiful.



Illustration 12

Ivan A. Yazev (1914 – 2011)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*L.N. Tolstoy's House-Museum (Yasnaya Polyana)* (1986) Oil on canvas, 100 × 75 cm

It goes without saying that the house depicted in *L.N. Tolstoy's House-Museum (Yasnaya Polyana)* (Illustration 12) is the premises in Yasnaya Polyana where Tolstoy was born and spent the half part of his 82 year life altogether, writing his great works, such as “War and Peace”, “Anna Karenina” and others. The premises are about 190 km south of Moscow, and I wanted to visit them during my time in Moscow, but I ended up without fulfilling this desire. It is strange to say so, but instead I was able to

obtain this wonderful painting, and the regret that I could not actually go there is somewhat eased.

Viewing this piece, we can feel that the old tree propped up in the foreground is depicted quite substantially and realistically, with all artist's strength as if it was placed in the center of the piece; it seems to symbolize the tree rings of that time, during which the house that became a museum in the background and the surrounding environments have been preserved without changing since Tolstoy lived there, while, in contrast to this tree, the house is portrayed inconspicuously in moderate color tone from a direction that makes the storeroom noticeable, and the autumn birches behind it are also in inconspicuous dull gold. The artist's understanding of Tolstoy is reflected in this deliberate composition and way of painting.

The house that Tolstoy lived in for 40 years in all has a modest, calm appearance, which is quite suitable so that visitors would recall his personality, indulging themselves in the special feeling that he lived there, thought, and created immortal works which hold a solid position in the history of the world's literature. In the carefully tended garden a bunch of red flowers is blooming, and under the eaves of the storeroom attached to the house red flowers twining around like vines are also painted with a vague brushwork. These red tones make the work more attractive overall with a rich color balance and the leaves fallen from the old tree in the garden enhancing the quiet mood.

I obtained this piece at a gallery by the name of the Center of Fine Arts, which I will detail in a later chapter. I recall that when I purchased it, the older woman working there, as if she was reluctant to let it out of her hands, said repeatedly and regretfully, "This is a good painting. Indeed good one." Now I understand her feelings only too well. For me too, this piece is one that I want to always have nearby, and view without ever getting tired of it.

Incidentally, in June 2003, immediately before the end of my second period of residence in Moscow, I was finally able to realize my desire visiting Yasnaya Polyana, and thanks to this visit, I learned some new things that I'd like to mention here.

The building attached to the house is not a storeroom, but a veranda, where Tolstoy and his family often took breakfast in summer. Moreover, \*the old tree in front of the

house was already gone, and since I couldn't see any stump, I wonder that it was a creation of the artist. Modestly depicting the house just as in the actual scene would produce a painting that causes a weak impression without a point of emphasis overall. Perhaps, with the intent to avoid this, the artist adopted the composition contrasting strength with weakness and intentionally portrayed the old tree having a strong presence in the foreground, thus making the house behind it inconspicuous. I thought, "He is quite right, indeed. I have never imagined such way of depiction." Visiting Yasnaya Polyana, I came to understand for the first time the outstanding ideas of the artist for such a composition that made this painting quite excellent.

\*Afterwards some readers kindly pointed out that this tree had actually existed. It was an old elm, called "the Tree of the Poor", and had stood there around the depicted place, where neighboring farmers, the poor etc. often waited for Tolstoy to come out of the house, and asked for his advice on the various questions about the life. The tree was named after these people. However, because it died, it was taken out by the root in 1971, and a young tree of the same kind was planted in its place.

There exists an oil painting called *the Tree of the Poor* by People's Artist of the USSR Boris Sherbakov (1916-1990), which depicts a large tree with dense foliage just suitable for the title. Judging from the position of the tree in this work by Sherbakov, the actual position of the tree seems to have been a little more behind than the position of the old tree in *L.N. Tolstoy's House-Museum*. This is likely the reason why I didn't notice the young tree at the time of my visit.

In any case, the old tree had already gone at that time when the artist painted this piece, so it would be most natural to think that the author made use of the tree that had formerly stood there for his composition contrasting strength with weakness.

## **Russian art museums**

On Sundays when I had free time, I often visited art museums. In Moscow, Russian art is permanently on display at the State Tretyakov Gallery and the new State Tretyakov Gallery which is equivalent to an annex to the State Tretyakov Gallery and Western art is on display at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. In Saint Petersburg, Russian art is on display to the public at the Russian Museum and Western art at the Hermitage Museum.

For the first half of my time in Moscow, the State Tretyakov Gallery was closed for renovation. Going into 1992, the new building finally opened, and some exhibits could be seen, but all the facilities, including the old building, were opened to the public only in 1994, after I had returned to Japan. For this reason, the first museum I visited to look at Russian paintings when I was living in Moscow was the new State Tretyakov Gallery in the same building as the Central Artists' House, which is opposite Gorky Park across the Sadovaya inner loop road. On permanent display there are paintings after the October Revolution, including some contemporary pieces, mostly works at the time of the Stalin regime. In the course of my several visits, a glorified atmosphere of the personality cult in several pieces, where Stalin was portrayed, became quite cloying indeed, and I passed by these pieces without stopping, but on the whole, is exhibited a full sequence of valuable works which bridges a gap between Russian art from the latter half of the 19th century and contemporary Russian paintings. In addition, there is a large hall for special exhibition where in order to commemorate a special anniversary from the date of the birth etc. for one of the notable artist who passed away long ago, the special exhibition devoted to the celebrated artist is held from time to time. Only at the time of such exhibits a long line of art-loving Russian would form in this usually empty museum, and you have to get prepared to spend two or three hours in line before your entry.

I was blessed with opportunities to see several of these special exhibits during my time in Moscow, and above all, a one-person exhibit of the landscape artist Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842 – 1910), active in the latter half of the 19th century, was particularly impressive. In this special exhibition held in August 1992 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth, I for the first time in my life came into contact with his works, and besides, a large number of his works specially brought together. And his beautiful, persuasive depictions of the countryside of northern Russia and Ukraine, together with

large compositions and wide fields of vision, made a very deep impression on me, touching my heart.

The first impression which I received from Kuindzhi's works is how excellently light and the air are depicted, and even at a glance you can see that they are extremely good paintings, in which not only beauty, but also the natural atmosphere such as grandeur, quietness, and in some cases even mystery are felt. If you look at several pieces at one time, you'll understand that Kuindzhi brought the effects of light into focus to make the beauty of nature more prominent and thus expressed in his works how scenery could look enhanced with these effects of light. Kuindzhi was fond of taking up the scenes with light shining from the rear or some distant background, such as in the twilight or at night with a full moon, and there a beautiful world beyond description was laid out with unique color tones highlighted by light and shadow in the backlight composition. I'd like to herewith introduce one of such pieces, his farewell work of *Night Grazing* (1905-08).

In *Night Grazing* is depicted a scene where a herd of horses put to pasture at night is resting on the slightly elevated bank of a river during the time of white night. The background is occupied by a fantastic light shining brightly from behind the horizon, and from the background to the middle of the scene this brilliance gently illuminates the high sky with crescent moon or the earth and the river streaming leisurely towards the right side of the foreground from the middle of the horizon. In the foreground, the herd of horses on the left bank—grazing or resting here and there on the grasses—is depicted with dark colors rich in nuances in the shade of the backlit composition. Above all, the excellence of this painting is in the beautiful brilliance of white night, which is colored by the radiance of this fantastic light splendidly beyond description; the scene ruled by this brilliance is incredibly beautiful, fresh and unconstrained as if we saw a quite different world. The hues of the reflection on the river surface and the figures of the horses which stand still at the summit of the bank and look just like silhouette against the backlight horizon are quite impressive.

Kuindzhi used tar for the undercoat of his paintings, with the aim of keeping the pictures in good condition for a long time, and it is said that this caused chemical changes to darken his paintings in many years. This means that *Night Grazing* originally had brighter color tones. Nevertheless we can understand that the novel

colors emphasizing the contrast of light with shade are satisfactorily shown in this work as well. For 5 years or so from 1874, when he began showing his pieces at the exhibits of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions, these pieces with an even more conspicuous brightness due to his composition contrasting light with shade had a significant impact, and he drew attention as an artist, while at the same time he seemed unable to garner the support of his fellow artists in the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions because of his style of painting that tended towards romanticism and his fantastic, rather unrealistic color tones to support it, with emphasizing the contrast between light and shade. Perhaps it might serve as one of reasons that he lived a secluded life shrouded in mystery for the thirty years from 1880 until his death, and the five hundred oil paintings and approximately three hundred line drawings and so on he produced during this time were, with a few exceptions, first shown to the public by his pupils after his death.

Kuindzhi's bright, novel colors were inherited by students such as Arkady Rylov (1870–1939), Nicholas Roerich (1871–1947) and others, but to gain a true understanding of Kuindzhi's paintings that were so ahead of his time, one had to wait for the arrival of the era when these students were active in full scale. Kuindzhi's style is nowadays identified as neo-romanticism.

I go back a little bit retroactively. From 1990 on I periodically went to the State Tretyakov Gallery. However, I found it still closed each time and returned home disappointed. That's why I all the more felt joyful excitement when I entered into the museum for the first time after the new building opened in January or February of 1992. Religious icons were displayed in the first hall, and in next order were oil paintings focusing on portraits from the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century.

My purpose was paintings from the latter half of the 19th century, chiefly landscape, but because only the new building was open to the public, just a few of these works were on display, about enough to adorn one hall. The portraits of Mussorgsky and Tretyakov (founder of the gallery) by Ilya Repin, Ivan Kramskoi's portrait of *an Unknown Woman* or portraits of Lev Tolstoy and Ivan Shishkin (landscape painter), and Vasily Perov's portrait of Dostoyevsky, all the name of which is known also in Japan, and so on were on the walls, and these are masterpieces of portraiture worth seeing, and besides these, I was able to see just more than forty

landscapes. Of these, particularly impressive were Vasily Polenov's *Early Snowfall* and three pieces by Isaac Levitan.

As a painter of the Abramtsevo school and the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions, Polenov (1844–1927) was active in the latter half of the 19th century, and there are a number of small pieces reproducing the wonderful beauty of Russian nature among his landscapes from the latter half of '80s to the first half of '90s.

This *Early Snowfall* (1891) is one of these, an oblong work showing an endless, bleak field in the season when snow starts to fall. From the foreground to the middle, about one fourth of the canvas from right side is taken up by a snowy field with the islands of dried grasses, and the remaining part toward the left side becomes a snowy slope down to the river covered with a cluster of deciduous trees and a thicket of dark reddish-brown bushes, over which you see the lead-colored river, while the snowy opposite shore rising slightly turns around to the right along the river, and further away to the deep background, the wild field spotted with snow extends to the blue-tinged horizon touching the dull and stagnant, cold sky. Thus the beautiful deep figure of nature is depicted in the piece. From this scene portrayed in detail by a sense of reality with the vivid, cold color hues, we can acutely feel the amazing beauty of this desolate, wild Russian landscape. Although this is a relatively small painting with the size 84 x 44 cm, it is a masterpiece that nowadays testifies to Polenov's extraordinary artistic talent direct to us.

As for the landscapes of Levitan (1860–1900), I saw it the first time on a bus headed for Suzdal, an old city that prospered from the latter half of the 12th century to the beginning of the 13th century. However, of course, it was not the original painting I saw, but the photo of painting with the title *Vladimir* printed in a Suzdal tourist brochure. One Sunday in July 1991 I took part in a day trip to Suzdal organized by Japan Club in Moscow, a private organization of Japanese residents in Moscow. When we approached Vladimir, the guide speaking Japanese explained this piece, telling us that about a hundred years before, an artist named Levitan had painted the beauty of the roads in this area, introducing it to the people of Moscow. Listening to this, I turned the pages of the brochure to look at the work, and my eyes got glued to the beauty of the scene. I thought that if just a photograph could be so attractive, then the actual painting must be truly amazing and looked at it once again.

In the vicinity of Vladimir, even now, large fields spread out on both sides of the road, and the traces of the time when the painting was done markedly remain. In such

natural features several pathways of naked earth built up by people passing through the middle of the field become into one wide main road, which stretches out into the distance. To describe it briefly, the aforementioned is the scene depicted in the painting. (What I learned later was that this road was formerly called Vladimir Road, and when exiles and prisoners were taken to Siberia on foot, they always took the course through this road. That's why Levitan likely painted this road, putting his pathos in it.) Because of his ability, by dint of which he created this piece with the amazingly high artistic level, Levitan's name has been tied with *Vladimir* and firmly imprinted on my mind since that time. The first of his works I encountered at the State Tretyakov Gallery were *Evening Bells*, *Twilight* and *The Lake*; each of these was full of soul, and these high artistic levels did not betray my expectations. I would like to introduce *Evening Bells* here.

*Evening Bells* (1892) is full of a meditative poetic sentiment, and it can be said to have expressed the calm, peaceful, spiritual world of the church in a landscape. The painting depicts a group of white-walled churches surrounded by virgin forest on the opposite bank of the curving river as if they were divided by the river from the secular world. The churches stand, in a tranquil atmosphere, against an evening sky with fleecy clouds floating across in the twilight while the bells are ringing to tell the beginning of evening devotions. In this very moment a ferry boat full of pious villagers comes to the middle of the river, and two monks stand quietly welcoming them to that sacred place on the opposite bank. There is a ferry landing in the foreground, and the artist's view extends from the rear of this landing over to the opposite shore with the churches and into the background. The churches and the surrounding nature are illuminated by a gentle light of the setting sun, the calm color tones of which give off a deep quiet, and the reflection shown on the river surface makes this stillness all the more rich. One can imagine that the ringing of the prayer bells is being heard as if it was nearly absorbed by the stillness. A lonely person sits at the stern of the ferry boat moored on the left of the landing, contemplating as if he turns his ear to the sound of the bells, and this figure, seemingly a fisherman, as well as the appearance of the churches and the two monks symbolize the calm and quiet mood of this piece. This is the piece that makes us feel a composed, satisfactory state of the artist's soul, and is the excellent work focusing on the beautiful Russian landscape that relaxes the heart.

By the way, the Russian art in general, including literature, music, and fine art

rapidly rose to new heights during the period of a little more than 100 years from the second quarter of the 19th century, even becoming one of the highest artistic levels in the world. (In more than the first half of the mentioned 100 years or so poets, composers, painters, novelists and so forth on a world level who by far excel any forerunners before their times came into being one after another, and then, for less than its second half from the end of the 19th century till the 1930s, artistic thought took on the aspect of swift currents, with many schools being quickly replaced in the interval of only several years. In praise of such intensive boost of the arts in general, Russian, in the time of Soviet regime in particular, used to call the former a Golden Age and the latter a Silver Age.) Although these works took in the romanticism that was the artistic trend in Europe of the time and the realism which followed after that, it seems that this era was unique in the history of world art with regard to how extensively and highly the arts in general were boosted in an intensive manner.

What is often pointed out is that the history of world literature is filled with names such as Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Gorky, and on this tradition world-class literary masters continue to be produced till now.

In the world of music, to give some examples of composers, there is probably no one in Japan who does not hear of Glinka, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov. Also Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich made their marks on the history as great masters of the 20th century.

The world of fine art also is definitely no exception from this. However, for more than seventy years since the October Revolution the former Soviet Union had been, as it were, in the midst of a national isolation, and important works of fine art had been almost never taken out of the country, so their existence was almost unknown not only in Japan but also in Europe and North America. Because of this, most people, with few exceptions, even among Japanese intellectuals with a deep knowledge of the fine arts do not think there is anything worth seeing in Russian art and it is not unreasonable. No matter how many masterpieces there might be or how many reproductions of such masterpieces you will see in photos and the like, the actual, original work of art is the life of the piece, unlike in literature or music. If you do not see the original directly, you are not only unable to judge the value of the piece precisely in strict meaning, but also the real evaluation of the artist won't be

established unless you have the opportunity to repeatedly appreciate his works systematically over a long period. Even if the Russian art exhibitions held two or three times in the past won praise, and favorable criticism from art critics followed every time, it seems that such degree was not enough to change the situation and they had no choice but to be forgotten in time and excluded from the object of serious evaluation.

However, the era of the Cold War which had lasted for more than 40 years finally ended, and it has now shifted to an era of international cooperation, and so if these works of high artistic value are to be systematically introduced to the West in an organized manner in future, I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that, in the course of continuation of attempt upon attempt, artists earning high praise just as Chagall and Kandinsky who found success after they moved to the West will appear one after another and appropriately fill in the blank space in Western art history.

If we think about why Russian literature and art overall could see such a rapid uplift in the aforesaid period, we come to understand that Russia which had been isolated from the development of the Western history because of Mongol rule for 250 years since the beginning of the 13th century was forced to get into the political and cultural sphere of Europe in the 17th century and on, and push ahead with the westernization from the need to rank with neighboring great powers such as Sweden and Poland, testing the limit of their ability desperately to make the lag up in national power. We might say that the uplift of literature and art was born in the course of the bold efforts of intellectuals who, having absorbed the spirit of European civil society, attempted to make up for the lag of Russian society from the standpoint of modern civil society, and went beyond social status or interests, abandoning everything for the spiritual work of social reform.

Tracing the cause of this uplift of literature and art back to the past, we can find a foundation for this art development in the thorough westernization policies of Peter the Great (reign 1682–1725) and the same flow of the westernization that were maintained by his successors for a certain period of time. Along with the introduction of Western technology for increasing wealth and military power and also due to the need to increase the prestige of the nation, western culture came into Russia gradually. Then a base was being created through the accumulation of study and training and

after a while, a soil in which great talent might sprout was made ready. In reality, before any great talent could sprout in this soil, a period of study of about a century and a half from the reforms of Peter the Great was necessary. However, needless to say, the uplift of literature and art which made great leaps forward from the times of the predecessors does not only mean that these talented people, who had absorbed the fruits of this accumulated training, naturally attained it on this base only by fully utilizing their talents for this purpose.

To understand the background for why this was possible, we must take into consideration the fact that the Russian soil sowed with the seeds of Western culture was unique. What I mean by saying this soil was unique is all sorts of backwardness of the Russian absolute monarchy which laid its foundations on the serfdom. Because of this backwardness, the westernization was necessary in Russia, but paradoxically, this advanced Western culture resulted in lightening the backwardness of the old system. On this occasion, rather than endeavoring to overcome this social delay, the regime taking the course of the westernization conversely covered it up, which hindered the true modernization of Russia, and therefore, inevitably was repeated the contradiction that the people having embodied the western culture, which should be regarded as by-products of the westernization, were frowned as thinkers of dangerous thoughts and ejected from society. This contradiction became radicalized in the regime of Catherine the Great (reign 1762-1796) and in the period succeeding to it, when the flow of Russian history went on toward the opposite trend of the stream of European history.

Under the enlightened cultural policies of an excellent enlightenment despot, Catherine the Great, the writing and publishing activities flourished and the ideas of French civil society with its basic principles of freedom, equality, and fraternity took root among progressive intellectuals. The uplift of literature and art which began later in Pushkin's time owes a great deal to Catherine the Great's enlightened cultural policies. If she had not existed, the boost of Russian art would likely have been put off much later, on much smaller scale, and of an absolutely different nature in various interwoven factors of history. Catherine the Great, who realized the seriousness of the seeds sowed by her own just after the outbreak of the French revolution, switched to the reaction to oppress severely progressive intellectuals. From that point on, they were forced to live a life of agony in lonely speculation for several generations and, at

times, risked their lives to heroically tread a thorny path. In the end, however, the contradiction to keep on putting a lid on Russia's backwardness was transformed into the energy to resolve it. The more the resolution was suppressed by force, the more energy accumulated as if you were drawing a bow to the full and before long, it turned into big energy of the era, which exploded as the form of the uplift of literature, music and fine art in the world of art.

To tell the conclusion first, creating high artistic level of works was only possible by such a strenuous process that the talented people in these progressive intellectual groups, who had been annoyed by an injustice and contradiction arising from the backwardness, thought thoroughly in a fundamental way about people and society, referring to the movement of the western history in the midst of specific soils of Russia. They were able to have the common objective of social reform to overcome Russian backwardness and under this objective focused their energy to work hard by encouraging and competing with one another. Such mechanism of improving themselves personally functioned more extensively and we can conceive it as the reason why the masters of art appeared in many numbers one after another and not merely alone.

A group of young officers belonging to progressive noble intellectuals who chased after the French army that was getting back from Moscow in the Napoleonic Wars and entered into Europe was faced with the advanced society of the West and fully realized they could not just leave the backwardness of Russia as it was. This growing sense of crisis compelled them to establish a secret association putting forward a platform for the abolition of serfdom and a constitutional monarch, which soon developed into an underground political movement, finally leading to "Decembrist revolt" (1825), called the first bourgeois revolution in Russia. The revolt resulted in failure, but nevertheless this revolutionary movement exerted a great influence on the direction of thinking of progressive intellectuals later. They perceived the serf system and the absolute monarchy supporting it as the sources of Russian backwardness, and taking it seriously that the half done reform from above pertaining to the abolishment of the serfdom, rather than liberating the people, conversely plunged the lives of peasants into even more severe poverty and disorder, they groped for a solution, contemplating how to make Russia better, how oppressed people and moreover all of humanity as well could be happy. Through this groping, the talented writers and artists of them, each on his individual base, strongly reflecting the social aspects in their works, have established a unique and highly purified Russian realism art imbued with

the scent of the earth and the color of tragedy.

In painting, it is said that this realism art, roughly speaking, began with the dawn period of the 1840s, went through the development stage of the 1850s and '60s and then matured during the period from the '70s until the beginning of the '90s. This matured period, during the course of which Russian realism painting had obtained the truly advanced artistic content, was brought about by an avant-garde movement putting forward the cause of the social reforms. It began when Ivan Kramskoi and other artists established the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions in 1870 and they held their first exhibition in Saint Petersburg on November 19 of the following year. By the way, this exhibition preceded the first impressionist painting exhibition in Paris by more than two years. This was the opening of a golden age for Russian art.

Since the art exhibits itinerated around Russian and Ukrainian cities with the objectives of enlightenment and expanding markets for their work, the members and exhibitors were referred to as the artists of the Itinerant Exhibitions. (Taking the meaning of the Russian word "itinerant," the artists of the Itinerant Exhibitions are often translated as the Itinerants in Japan, but since the essential idea is the artists who take part in itinerating exhibitions, I refer to them as the Itinerant Exhibitors.) All the authors of the works I have referred to up to now, Kramskoi, Shishkin, Kuindzhi, Polenov, and Levitan were members of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions. Other famous Union artists were Vasily Perov, Nikolai Ge, Ivan Aivazovsky, Alexei Savrasov, Feodor Vasilyev, Ilya Repin, Vasily Surikov, Nikolai Yaroshenko and so on.

The Itinerant Exhibitors laid the foundations for their movement on ideological principles from the revolutionary democratic movement "v narod" (meaning "going to the people"), which saw a ground swell with the abolition of the serfdom in 1861 and the development of capitalism, producing quite many masterpieces of realism art depicting the social contradictions, the wretchedness and toughness of the people or a landscape beauty with a tasteful atmosphere and a poetic sentiment.

In the fall of 1992, I visited Saint Petersburg several times to see paintings of the Itinerant Exhibitors and others. It was a short itinerary: I would leave Moscow on the Red Arrow night train on Friday and arrive the following morning at my destination. I would then go around to the museums during the day and then get on the night train to return to Moscow Sunday morning. When I first visited Saint Petersburg like this, I

happened to meet a Japanese acquaintance in the State Russian Museum entry hall. He was the head representative in Russia of my client company and when he noticed me, rather than greeting me, he said simply, “Mr. Ishii, wonderful paintings here.” I came here after I looked at the French impressionist paintings and so on at the Hermitage Museum, while he had just finished looking around the State Russian Museum and was on his way out. His cheeks were flushed because his heart had been moved by the paintings, and his laughing eyes sparkled and glinted like a young boy. Probably he is a man who loves art with all his heart. The expression on his face and the magnificence of the paintings I saw afterward have been linked together and engraved on my memory.

The State Russian Museum was established in 1898 when the Mikhailovsky Palace, built at the start of the 19th century by the Italian architect Rossi, was converted into a museum, and therefore the exhibition halls are large with high ceilings. Indeed there are rooms illuminating rather dark, but on the whole it is a museum with good viewing conditions, where I had the opportunity to appreciate quite a lot of excellent exhibits divided by era, from religious icons to abstract paintings. Of the many paintings that left a deep impression on me, it is the works by Aivazovsky, Repin, and Surikov that I would like to mention here as particularly impressive ones.

Aivazovsky (1817 – 1900) was already a prominent romantic seascape painter in the 1830s. But honestly speaking, I did not like his works so much. Although I got the impression only by looking at an album of his paintings, I felt something a little bit artificial and old-fashioned in some of his works with the backlight compositions full of beam from a full moon in the distance which we can often see among his pieces.

I was, however, astonished by *Billow*, the large scale piece I saw for the first time at the State Russian Museum. The longer I looked at it, the more I felt compelled to take my hat off to its excellence. The size is extraordinary. On a large canvas of 505 by 304 cm it is depicted that in a boisterous, stormy sea a wrecked ship and the sailors who managed to escape from it are being toyed with between the waves, which is depicted so realistically that you would feel yourself in threatening danger. The power of the surging waves is further intensified by the large scale of the canvas, in which there's no wasted portrayal. Faced with the fury of nature, I could only be overwhelmed and was rooted to the spot.

Since the occasion of this experience, I have re-evaluated Aivazovsky. This piece was produced in 1889. My initial impression of several of his pieces produced up to

1860 was not changed greatly by my shocking experience in looking at *Billow*. However, as far as I understand, wonderfully Aivazovsky continued to show his talent till his later years and became even a greater painter by attaining through his long life an even higher artistic level in his own seascapes.

Repin (1844–1930) is a great painter who is often quoted to as the Leo Tolstoy of painting and breaking new ground in genre picture, historical painting, portraiture, and landscape, he is said to have made a great contribution to the realism paintings of the 1870s and 1880s.

Of his works at the State Russian Museum, *the Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan* (1880–91) is probably the best part of his masterpieces and made a very deep impression on me. Zaporizhia is situated on the Dnieper River about 500 kilometers southeast of Kiev and the Ukrainian Cossacks living there were famous for their bravery and full of self-reliant, independent spirit, having formed an autonomous self-governed organization on their own, similar to the Russian Cossacks of the basins of the Don and Volga Rivers. This piece is a historical painting taking as its subject the 17<sup>th</sup> century's historical fact that the Sultan forced these Zaporozhian Cossacks to obey, the theme of which is the brave and bold independent spirit of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

The Cossacks are writing their reply to the Sultan at a table outdoors. In the center of the canvas, a secretary sits at the table and around him, the ataman (head) with a pipe in his mouth and other strong men are standing or sitting at the table, watching the secretary write the letter. The letter is likely being dictated by the ataman and judging from the appearance that everyone's focus is directed to the secretary's hand, it seems that the secretary is slowly taking this dictation while murmuring the words back parrot-like. This reply, dodging the demand for submission, was likely full of humor. Everyone is delighted and laughing loudly. On a large canvas of 358 by 203 cm such a scene is portrayed with high-density and strong power. There is a sense of imposing weight in the richly colored portrayal of the group of Cossacks, along with an overwhelming sense of reality. Each of the Cossacks is a living human being and we see in the expression of brave and fearless looks marked with individualities

respectively a strong will to give their lives for freedom and honor. In this piece is depicted one scene from the lives of the Cossacks, and we feel a persuasive power that the truth is realistically portrayed there. This piece is, no doubt, one of his best works, into which Repin had poured his heart and soul and completed after spending twelve years of his life on it.

Surikov (1848 – 1916) is a master of historical paintings, ranking in the same like position with Repin. He left a lot of masterpieces penetrated by his outstanding talent and transcendent historical viewpoint, including *Morning of the Streltsy Execution* and *Boyarynia Morozova*. In the State Russian Museum were displayed four large-scale pieces and others, of which I'd like to herewith refer to *Stepan Razin*.

In 1670–71 broke out a large-scale peasant revolt, so-called the Razin rebellion, headed by Stepan Razin, who had been the ataman of the Don Cossacks, in the lower and central regions of the Volga River. In this rebellion, serfs who had fled to the Don and Volga River regions to become lower-class Cossacks stood up and revolted because the Romanov dynasty, having been exhausted from the war with Poland which lasted over ten years from 1654, imposed heavy taxes, dealing a harsh final blow to the peasants.

*Stepan Razin* (1907) is a historical painting taking this Razin rebellion as its subject. A large rowboat with inflated sails makes its way up the Volga River under a gloomy fall sky. In this piece the boat and Stepan Razin in it are depicted in a decisively closed up manner in the canvas and in its center Razin sits, bored, with his back against the mast, his feet stretched out on the rug-covered deck, and supporting his head with his left hand, elbow of which is leaned on elbow rest. In the front part of the boat behind him, four soldiers on each side pull oars and in front of him, four retainers rest in the poses as they likes. To comfort Razin, one of these men, just ahead of him, is playing a balalaika, but Razin is not at all entertained. The gloomy, thoughtful look on his face presents a striking contrast to his high-ranked follower's laughing in the stern. He turns his strong eyes of the leader of a rebellion right towards us, gazing into the distance, in which we feel a hue of anxiety expressing his presentiment of the tragedy as well as his firm, deep determination of a person

sticking to his conviction. I will never forget these complicated expressions on his eyes.

It is exactly for this reason that I selected this work in particular from among four large-sized masterpieces of his. This work is, no doubt, in line with the historical paintings *Morning of Streltsy Execution* and *Boyarynia Morozova*, which tragically captured turning points in history from the side of ordinary people. We cannot see the opponent who he is gazing at, but obviously Razin is clearly depicted as a tragic hero rebelling against power to represent the hopes and suffering of the people, which is observed not only in the relation of the soldiers to Razin and his gaze, but also in the clouded, gloomy Russian fall and the restrained color tones of the portrayals of the figures. Surikov painted this piece in 1907. He likely overlapped the social instability in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, because of which the frequent peasant revolts took place in many regions. His portrayals of characters and mentality have a sense of reality and weight specific to Surikov, different from Repin's, which is clearly demonstrated in this piece as well. It's a splendid work worth seeing.

Well, speaking of Russian art in the latter half of the 19th century, we cannot make do without referring to Pavel Tretyakov and Savva Mamontov, two businessmen having made a great contribution to its development. Theirs is such a famous story in Russia that I would like to touch on it briefly here.

Tretyakov (1832 – 1898), when he was eighteen years old, together with his younger brother, took over the business in Moscow that his family had done for generations. Being an art lover, he firmly made up his mind, at his young age, to build a national art museum for Russian art in Moscow and he worked towards this goal throughout his entire life and finally achieved it while working hard for the family business. Having a sharp and discerning eye for paintings, he began his collection by obtaining some works of genre picture that did not generally have fixed evaluation in society at that time. He and the artists were connected together by mutual understanding and relationships of trust and cooperation; on one hand, the artists produced excellent works, while on the other, Tretyakov actively collected them for his future national art museum, which became a strong support to the development of paintings for the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions. Tretyakov ordered portraits of those people who represented Russian intelligence of the era to such artists as Kramoskoi,

Ge, Perov, and Repin, through which he promoted the development of portraiture. It is thanks to him that we are able to view in museums a great number of famous portraits of scholars, literary men, composers, artists and so on who were of people active in a variety of spheres of work in society of that period, and the majority of them were intellectuals from varied layers of society.

He established a museum in the garden of his own home in 1874, and expanded it three times as the collection grew. In 1881 he opened the museum to the general public and at the time of the fourth expansion in 1892 he gifted the museum with all his collection to the city of Moscow. With the aim to enrich the collection, he continued collecting pieces until his death in 1898, and the donated collection was well over 2000 pieces, including religious icons. (According to the publication of the State Tretyakov Museum, there was a total of 1897 pieces in the collection donated in 1892, including 1289 oil paintings and the number of oil paintings in the collection catalog Tretyakov himself created 4 months before he died had reached 1635 pieces.)

On the other hand, the achievements of the railroad industrialist Mamontov (1841 – 1918) consist in his having supported the creative activities of artists who, in the period of transition from realism art to fin-de-siècle art, were to develop in full bloom a different painting from style of realism to represent another side of Russia and thus having made serious contributions to the development of the Russian arts. An art lover having a taste for vocal music and theatre, he gathered artists, composers, and writers around him, forming a unique arts circle with conservative tendencies. The circle was called the Abramtsevo school after the fact that the group used for its summer arts activities the grand Abramtsevo summer house Mamontov had obtained from the noble Sergey Aksakov, a Slavic controversialist and novelist. Member artists included Viktor Vasnetsov, Mikhail Nesterov, Vasily Polenov, Ilya Repin, Valetin Serov, Konstantin Korovin, Mikhail Vrubel and others. Through the group's various activities, the artists groped for new means of expression, and from the 1880s to 1890s, they made public piece after piece brimming with the profound lyricism of ethnic hues and works with novel color sensations.

Although the artists of the Abramtsevo school asked the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions for a place to present their works, what they aimed at was a nostalgic reproduction of ethnic traditions, and it was different from the aims of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions. While the realism art of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions

followed a gradually declining path in the 1890s with setbacks in the “Narodnik” movement, the Abramtsevo school opened up new paths of expression and took on the role of building a bridge to connect with fin-de-siècle art. It is fair to say that this work was nurtured by the powerful support of Mamontov that continued over twenty years from the late 1870s.

One Sunday in March 1992, I drove out to Abramtsevo, which is located about eighty kilometers northeast of Moscow. I went on through Yaroslav Highway and turned left a little before Zagorsk (now Sergiyev Posad) and then keep following the street for another thirty kilometers or so. It was a pleasant surprise to me to find Yaroslav Highway was a splendid road unlike those within Moscow, wide and in good pavement condition (in Moscow, the roads were improved on the occasion of the city’s 850th anniversary celebration in 1997, having restored the honor of the capital city), but turning left from the main line, I was faced with many gravel roads and no road signs. I somehow reached Abramtsevo, getting lost from time to time and asking someone for direction.

It was a fine day, lovely weather. Snow remained on the expansive premises of Abramtsevo, now a museum, and the remaining snow cover on the roof melted, drops dripping from the eaves of the house. In addition to the house, I wandered around the grounds, looking at the pseudo-Russian style wooden workshop, a bath-cabin, the church Vasnetsov designed based on ancient Russian architecture and the traditional ceramic majolica pottery workshop restored by Vrubel. I was impressed by Vrubel’s peculiar majolica ceramic pieces and a display of traditional folk crafts collected mainly by Mamontov’s wife and Yelena Polenova, who was a woman painter and Polenov’s younger sister.

Just at that time, Moscow’s new State Tretyakov Gallery was holding an Abramtsevo exhibit, so I was only able to see a few pieces in some rooms of the house, including Repin’s still-life of autumn flowers. In fact, my visit to Abramtsevo was inspired by the new State Tretyakov Gallery’s special exhibition; then I wanted to see even just once the place where these artists spent so many years pursuing their art activities and giving birth to so many excellent pieces. Surrounded by dense woods, it looked to be the ideal environment for art activities. The artists had sketched the area,

leaving behind many pieces depicting the beautiful scenery. Even now, artists frequently visit Abramtsevo looking for subjects for their landscape.

The new State Tretyakov Gallery's Abramtsevo exhibition was held over three months starting in the spring of 1992, and I went to see it a number of times before and after my visit to Abramtsevo. Of the pieces that made an impression on me, I would like to introduce here Serov's *The Girl with Peaches* and Vrubel's *The Seated Demon*.

Serov (1865 – 1911) first studied paintings under Repin in his career as an artist. It was the first year of my stay in Moscow, or maybe the year after that, that I came across the small portrait sketches by teacher and student—about thirty of each—on display in contrast with each other at Manege (an exhibition hall) in front of the Kremlin. At that time I first learned they had been teacher and student. However, it was hard to decide which one is better than the other; both left me with the impression of being quite capable artists. At the Abramtsevo exhibit as well just like the aforesaid exhibition at Manege, very interesting pieces by each of them on the same object, still life with apples, *The Hunchback (Study)* and *Portrait of Sophia Dragomirova*, were on display.

*The Girl with Peaches* (1887) was done by Serov when he was twenty-two years old, and the model was Mamontov's young daughter. It was done in the dining room of the Abramtsevo house. The model wears a pink blouse with a scarf brooch that is black with white spots and a red flower pinned to it, sitting at a large dining table covered in a white tablecloth. Both her arms are on the table from the elbows, and she holds a peach in both hands. To her left, a knife is put beside her, and a bit diagonally from her, near the center of the table, are three peaches.

Serov portrayed this girl in light color tones as if she were wrapped up in light, expressing the healthy beauty of youth. Some feature of a childhood still remains in her healthy face, which is turned to the diagonally left so that she is looking directly at us, with her eyes cherishing a sincere spirit to look at things honestly. In the window behind her, the leaves of the trees in the garden can be seen shining in the sunlight, and a bright outside light shines into the room through this window. This light plays an important role in dominating the overall brightness of the piece, and the green garden seen through the window is an essential clue to her bright cheerfulness. The light from behind her provides a backlight composition and so the girl's expression should be darkly visible. However, the artist dares to sacrifice a realistic treatment of

light, and lets her expression, the most important part of this portrait, be brightly conspicuous just till the limit so that it would not look quite unnatural, in which we can feel his new method of portrayal. This piece, filled with sunlight, is said to have opened up new paths for art movement, a masterpiece demonstrating the natural artistic talent of the young Serov.

As a reaction to the setback of the Narodnik movement in the 1890s did arise the decadence literature, superhuman-oriented trends of literary thought despising the people and existing ideas, and it was Vrubel (1856–1910) that was quick to represent these trends in the world of art. Even among his contemporary artists having the marked individuality, he seems to have been a lone genius for paintings of a different profile. Maybe such impression comes from the fact that among all the Abramtsevo school artists, he was the only one expressing the peculiar decadent themes by the line drawing method of paintings with fantastical and varied color tones, which is quite different from the method of realism.

His *Seated Demon* (1890) has something common with Nietzsche's individualism. Vrubel, who set himself sharply against the existing society, intending to be the "superhuman", created in this piece the prototype of demon, based on which he obstinately continued producing a series of demons as a symbolic theme of his emotional expression. He took the materials for this prototype from Lermontov's epic poem "The Demon", in which the demon, a former angel chased out of Paradise, wandering the earth, doing all kinds of evil, arrived in Caucasus and fell in love at first sight with Tamara, the daughter of old Goudal living in a castle in the mountains. At that time, however, she was seated at her wedding ceremony and after casting a spell on her fiancé hurrying to the wedding on horseback, the demon led him to waver in his judgment and caused his death. Besides, the demon seduced and destroyed her. The atmosphere of this poem, full of a self-torturing Satanism and nostalgia for lost Paradise, is wonderfully expressed in this painting.

In reference to the demon portrayed in this piece, Vrubel wrote a letter addressed to his sister by one year older, "Young, with wings on his naked back, in gloomy contemplation, this figure sits, putting arms around his knees against the sunset behind him, and looks at a flower garden that opens up into the forest." In this way, the demon sits surrounded by flowers in the center of the canvas, staring over his right

shoulder at a flower garden which is located toward the left side of the canvas and is not seen in the picture. The demon and the flowers around him are depicted with the line drawing style in the form of polyhedrons like cut gems, and the sunset glow shining in the distance on the left of the canvas dyes the surrounding sky in fantastical madder red color tones, leaving a mood of decadence hanging in the air. The eyes of the demon, gazing far away, are brimming with tears, and he keeps a gloomy silence, mourning the stigma of a demon destined to wander about on the earth. His naked upper body is quite muscular, befitting a “superhuman” demon, but the expression on his face captures a vacant moment of human-like repentance, the weak side of this demon.

By the way, in Vrubel’s series of pieces of demon, the demon in *Head of Demon* (1890–91), a work done a little after *The Seated Demon* as an illustration for Lermontov’s “The Demon”, also has a sad, human-like expression of looking for people’s understanding in vain. As Vrubel moved along to *Demon in Flight* (1899) and *Injured Demon* (1902), such a sentiment disappeared without a trace, changing into a desperate appearance and then the wretched, weak expression of the defeated. These figures of demons can be regarded as self-portraits symbolizing the respective stages of feelings of Vrubel who was sinking into madness without recognition of his excellent talent for painting during his lifetime.

Many of his pieces portrayed with the established, unique artistic style and magnificent colors is imbued with a feel of heavy appearance, giving the impression that realism runs through the bottom of his works, and the same can be said in *Seated Demon* as well. Vrubel has already earned a high evaluation in Russia, but I feel he will be one of the artists getting even higher and broader evaluation in future.

## **Features of Contemporary Paintings**

The main school of contemporary Russian art is called socialist realism, a school following the traditions of the realism art in the latter half of the 19th century. This artistic stream of thought became the mainstream in Russian painting circles after the avant-garde art which was all the rage from the 1910s to 1920s was dying down in the 1930s. When the Union of Artists of the USSR was established in 1932, this school was deliberately supported and encouraged according to national policies, and since then, realism traditions have been succeeded and developed unbroken for over half a century until now. The fact that socialist realism continued for such a long period as the main school of artistic expression was a product of the ideological cultural policies of the former Soviet Union, but setting aside the issue of whether national support and encouragement of only specific artistic school is right or wrong, history shows that pictorial art movements develop and bloom with the support of powerful sponsors, and this also applies to contemporary Russian realism art.

In the lapse of half a century of existence, these socialist realism paintings had already changed quite a bit when I lived in Moscow for the period from the last years of the Soviet administration to the rebirth of Russia, and their ideological coloring faded with the changing times and seems to have almost turned into something quite natural. Such genres as historical painting taking Revolution or civil war as their subject, landscape depicting the large factories of heavy industry or construction sites and war painting to defend the fatherland etc. displayed in the new State Tretyakov Gallery now do not meet the demand of the times to grow stale. At least, as far as I saw at galleries and contemporary art exhibits, these kinds of works had almost completely disappeared and general landscape and still life accounted for the majority of the works.

As I mentioned before, while living in Moscow, I came to appreciate paintings or collect them as one of my hobbies thanks to a strange coincidence of circumstances. I had not been particularly interested in paintings before I went abroad, and with almost no prior knowledge of them I was attracted to, and completely absorbed in the charm of contemporary Russian art. When my favorite works were collected to a certain number, I became concerned about how the collected works such as these landscapes differed from those of the same genre of the realism art in the second half of the 19th

century and also about where exists the difference of the painting styles between the artists of contemporary realism art, and so from these viewpoints I began to carefully compare one work with another among the pieces exhibited in museums or galleries, and compare such pieces with the works I had collected, and also searched for any useful materials on many occasions.

If you go to a museum, you can see the actual pieces done by celebrated artists of 19th century, and obtain individual albums devoted to the works of each of such artists relatively easily. However, it seems that for contemporary art from the 1960s and on, the work for evaluating these artists has not progressed so extensively, and the actual paintings are put away deep in the museums, with absolutely no chances to see them aside from special exhibitions held at some kind of turning point. A limited number of works by the limited contemporary artists can be seen individually one by one at the latter part of some comprehensive art album entitled “Soviet art” etc. and even if the albums for individual artists had been published in the past, they are no longer obtainable except for a handful of artists.

Searching around at several used bookstores, I managed to get some albums published in the past and pamphlets for personal exhibition for each of several painters, but these were in no way sufficient to answer my questions, and I was not able to glean any clue from them. Thus, the answers to my questions were put off for a while, but before long as my collection was being increased bit by bit, and when the pieces of several artists I like began to be collected in some numbers respectively, the answers appeared before my eyes as if a fog gradually cleared. Nowadays it is clear that the authors of my collected works were a group of artists active on the front line, and so in general it would not be a mistake to consider the answers derived from these artists as a general characteristic of contemporary Russian paintings. However, contemporary paintings from Saint Petersburg and Moscow differs somewhat with each other in painting style; to explain this briefly in a easily understandable way, the paintings of Saint Petersburg are said to be rather feminine and graceful against the forceful, masculine style of Moscow. The paintings I have collected are almost all by Moscow artists, so it must be said that the answers drawn from these works are, strictly speaking, features of contemporary realism art in Moscow.

Telling the conclusion first, contemporary realism paintings, in terms of the method of paintings, are on the extension of the realism paintings of the latter half of the 19th century and if looking at landscape and still life, we find that they developed realism methods even further, the important features of which lie in the point that the objects are thoroughly and elaborately expressed to reveal their essence. Because they express even the feel of volume and weight of the objects, the paintings vividly give off not only the atmosphere of quietness and sentiment, but also the solid sense of the existence and moving energy which they have in nature. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century all these were led by realism to completeness in the molding expression of person that occupies a central position in historical and genre pictures and portraiture. And it can be safely said that what had allowed deep insight into the inner world of portrayed persons through the disclosure of mental status was accomplished by contemporary realism paintings in landscape and still life. Precisely because the techniques for expression were handed down for generations and developed over the lengthy period of almost a half-century in the blessed environment of national support under cultural policies, this art even gives the impression of having reached the extreme development. These methods of portrayal are the features of these paintings overall, which are, no doubt, shared by the artists of contemporary realism. Because of this, discerning the differences between artists would become all the more difficult. Nevertheless, the stylistic differences of each artist are evident, and if you look carefully at pieces that at first glance resemble one another, you will be able to distinguish the difference in the forms or the brush strokes and see even larger differences in how the artist handles the coloring or the overall color balance.

As regards contemporary Russian realism paintings in general it is noticeable that Russian artists almost never use tube colors directly, but they mix them a little bit with other colors to create the color that they need. This is, of course, not to show the characteristic of the artist's palette, but because by mixing and adjusting the colors, they achieve a broad range of subtle colors; and besides, with skilled mixing, the colors add to the power, so that they can acquire an even greater expressiveness.

It applies not only to contemporary Russian art, but also is true of representational oil paintings of the world in general. Because the colors of the palette play a decisive,

important role in producing a good work in general, the artists have mastered these compounding proportions to produce the same colors at any time as needed, while seeking out new mixed adjustments to further expand the breadth of expression. These color hues are slightly different depending on the artist, and the artist's traits of the colors are conspicuously marked in the overall color balance of the pieces as well. This coloring is, so to speak, something like the artist's fingerprint (also in Japan, it is called the "color pattern"), and if it is a painting by an artist whose style you know well, you will be able to correctly guess the author just seeing the piece from afar which you have come into contact with for the first time.

I have in my own way perceived such things with regard to the pending questions about contemporary Russian art. Selecting the works of six artists in my collection that helped me to draw out these answers, I would like to herewith introduce two pieces by each of them.



Illustration 13

Igor P. Rubinsky (1919 – 1996)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, Honored artists of Russia

*Summer Evening* (1991) Oil on canvas, 120 × 60 cm

*Summer Evening* (Illustration. 13) is the work suggesting that in its background there is a Russian custom of spending the summer quite leisurely in the midst of

nature, working in the kitchen garden or sunbathing at summer house outside the city, and I think it depicts a scene where the children, apart from their parents, are fishing in a nearby river.

Around the time when my third year in Moscow was just starting, I learned from the head of a representative office of my client company about a gallery on the road, running in parallel with Leningrad Highway with the 6-meter-wide buffer zone of trees, on the right side towards the outskirts of the city in the diagonal direction from Belarus station. I saw this painting the first time I visited this gallery, and I immediately felt that what I had been searching for so long time was this piece.

This is because, in addition to the beautiful scene of a leisurely-shifting quiet summer day expressed with a poetic richness in the composed, stable color balance, the feel of the water in the river where the two boys are fishing is in fact wonderfully reproduced. The river looks like just the one with its clay bed that can be often seen in the countryside and the flow, which is so calm that it is almost difficult to recognize it, is indirectly made known to us by a disturbance in the water surface in the center of the river. The river surface, excluding this part, reflects the blue sky, the white clouds, and the trees on the shore like a mirror, and the hues of these reflections are truly real, increasing the feel of the water all the more.

Looking at this painting, I was reminded of a scene when I was totally absorbed in play on a summer day in my boyhood, and in the expressions of the river flowing very slowly, the summer sun that will never set illuminating the trees, and the white clouds floating in the bright blue sky we may feel a sense of the leisurely-shifting of time which would experience in childhood. Taking into consideration such expressions filled with the heart of the artist as well as the fact that this work, brimming with such light that it could be taken for an early afternoon, was given the title *Summer Evening* as if emphasizing the length of the day, I do repeatedly feel that the artist's viewpoint overlaps with nostalgic feelings for his childhood long ago. Maybe it is no coincidence by chance that I recalled my childhood and it seems to me even probable that they suddenly came to themselves from fishing and delighted to find that they still have plenty of time for playing like I did in the old days. In this sense, too, I feel this painting more close to me.



Illustration 14

Igor P. Rubinsky

*Old Willow Trees* (1991) Oil on canvas, 120 × 80 cm

*Old Willow Trees* (Illustration 14) is a piece by the same artist. As might be expected from the piece's theme of woods, the work suggests in your mind the forest paintings of Shishkin, a master of landscapes in the latter half of the 19th century, and as a matter of course, their styles are completely different. In contrast with Shishkin's delicate and attentive style, as if seen in the observation of a botanist, a characteristic of Rubinsky lies in his portrayal by extremely bold brushwork, which is fully demonstrated in this piece as well. His style is so powerful that we can be almost indifferent to scratches in the piece, if any, and yet at the same time we can realize that the artist's sensitive attention has been paid to every nook and corner of the canvas.

The willow trees that are different breed from those found in Japan have the feel of living trees, which have powerfully taken roots deep in the ground. Looking at this piece from a distance in natural light, the coloring of the trunks and the path through

the woods shown by the sunlight becomes thicker, and the feel of light increases. What is the most attractive more than anything else in this piece lies in the point that the fresh morning atmosphere of the forest of willows is wonderfully reproduced in the sunlight. The path through the woods is depicted wide, which makes us imagine the large scale of the overall forest.



Illustration 15

Pavel I. Rubinsky (born 1950)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Pacific Ocean* (1992) Oil on canvas, 90 × 60 cm

The painting in Illustration 15 has as its title *Pacific Ocean*. In Russia, the only places one can really look out over the Pacific Ocean are the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Kuril Islands, so most probably the painting was done in one of these places.

The piece makes quite different impressions when seen nearby and from a distance. Viewed from the side, the sea looks dull, and one would not say the work has any great charm in particular, but the moment it is seen from a distance in natural light, the

expression of the sea gets lively and a movement emerges. The waves washing the shore seem even more swollen, and the whitecaps impress on the viewer the power of the surging water. Near the shore, the movements of the water returning from the crashing wave and the crashing waves itself become mixed with the rhythm of the noisy waves of the sea. The ocean surface off the coast is rich with an uneven expression, allowing the viewer to feel the roughness of the currents, and the blue increasing on the horizon demonstrates the clarity of the water. The rocks feel just like rocks, the reality of which causes the viewer to feel as if he was actually standing on the rocky seaside and watching the moving sea from there.

I obtained this painting at the gallery my client introduced to me, called the Center of Fine Arts, which is not too far from Belarus station. The head of the gallery who had the sturdy build so often seen in Russian people was a middle-aged man with rather bloodshot blue eyes that always looked tired in a fleshy, red face, with somewhat thick lips. In the workplace he was referred to respectfully by his name and patronymic, Valery Dmitrievich, and he devoted himself to his work. I shook his large, thick hand each time we met, and as we became more intimate, I saw that he was a fairly unpretentious and kindhearted person.

After he learned that I liked the Rubinsky noted above, he began to keep Rubinsky's work in the back to show to me first, and this painting was the first piece I obtained in this way. Because the style is very similar, I thought at sight it was the work by Rubinsky himself, but I learned from the signature on the painting that it was done by his son Pavel. The fact that his style so resembles that of his father may call in question Pavel's originality as an artist, but this does not concern me so much. To be sure, their styles are quite similar, but careful comparison reveals differences in their coloring and the overall color balance. In contrast with his father's thick and calm color palette, Pavel offers us a sensitivity brimming with youthful poetic sentiment in a somewhat restrained color balance, making him one of my favorite artists.

*Last Snow* (Illustration 16) is also the work making a great impression on me by Pavel's richly-poetic sensibility. A lot of vast green belts still remain in the neighboring area, where the apartment houses stand in rows, on the inner side of the external loop road about 20-25 kilometers from the center of Moscow, and among



Illustration 16

Pavel I. Rubinsky

*Last Snow* (1992) Oil on canvas, 100 × 60 cm

them you can often see such woods of white birch. There were woods like this in Yugo-Zapadnaya, where I lived, and I often used to take walks there in the summer. This piece richly reproduces the atmosphere of the white birch woods at beginning of spring with restrained colors. The remaining snow cover has already disappeared by the roots of the trees, and the snow is left basically on the footpath because the snow there had been stepped on tightly by the people passing through. The brightness of evening afterglow peeks through the trees against the background of the sky. Like this, hints of spring hang thick in the surroundings, but probably because of this, the author turns his focus to the last snow, expressing with the restrained colors a tender sadness to take leave of the dying winter in the lonesome quiet of the deserted evening forest.

The picture *On the Volga River* (Illustration 17) shows an active traffic on the Volga River which plays an important role in the Russian economy. In the background appear low hills and sky, where light is playing with the clouds, showing the beauty of nature, and loading and unloading facilities on the river port, bridge and the town buildings are seen as if they were in harmony with the nature around them. The focal



Illustration 17

Mikhail A. Suzdaltsev (1917 – 1998)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union Honored Artist of Russia,

Winner of the USSR State Prize

*On the Volga River* (1992) Oil on canvas, 70 × 60 cm

point of the piece lies in the expression of the river surface, where a motorboat is opening up a path, leaving behind the waves spreading out to the right and left, which, together with another boat oncoming from the opposite direction, gives the piece an energetic movement. The expression of river surface reflecting the evening light is full of inconstancy which is elaborately expressed with soul-putting diverse colors and in this profound hue we can feel not only the outstanding skill of expression of the swelling waves involving light, but also a sense of gravity and depth of the water. No doubt this is a quite excellent work, where the energetic movement of the Volga River is vividly reproduced in a large composition.

I purchased this piece at the Petrovka Gallery behind the Bolshoi Theatre, and on the same day at another gallery I purchased by chance a piece by the same artist without noticing it. It was such a good piece that I felt I would regret it if I let it slip by me. So I forced myself to buy it, but when I later learned its worth, I felt a double

pleasure. Shortly after, the style made me wonder if it wasn't the same artist, and I was surprised to confirm that it was. Something in me flashed then and for the first time since coming to Moscow, I leafed through the album of contemporary Russian art exhibit I had found at a used bookstore in Tokyo just before leaving the country. Several pieces by the same artist were printed in it, and further, I discovered that this was the author of the paintings I had liked the most when I paged through this album several times in Tokyo. I remember as if it were yesterday that I felt my collection had almost reached the core of the Russian art world, indulging myself in an inexpressible happiness.

During my time in Moscow, I managed to collect a total of seven pieces by this artist beginning with this painting, and the next piece is one that I particularly like among them.



Illustration 18

Mikhail A. Suzdaltsev

*The Bank of the Volga* (1992) Oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm

This painting with the title *The Bank of the Volga* (Illustration 18) depicts an upper or middle part of the Volga River and the monastery built in a slightly elevated area on the bank as we see it. On the whole are expressed a natural beauty and simultaneously a sense of melancholic quiet hanging in the air. The calm, harmonious appearance of the monastery surrounded by forest makes us recall the quiet and simple religious life that had gone on inside, unbroken over centuries, and the boats moored to the shore in the foreground remind us of a simple life having been made since long before by people in the vicinity.

The appeal of this piece is, more than anything else, in the backlight expression of the river surface portrayed with unique colors, and this surface, conveying the gentle, detailed movement of the water, is depicted with elaborate meticulousness in diverse hues with shade even in brightness, which could not be captured accurately in a photograph, no matter how many photos were taken. Some doubts linger in the treatment of light in the coloring of the river, brighter than in the coloring of the sky, but this piece possesses the persuasive power to overcome these doubts. In the center of the foreground, two boats with anchors dropped are shown in parallel and a person in one of them is probably repairing fishing net or doing some kind of work. The presence of these boats tightens the piece, giving it a density. Rather small as it is, this piece is an excellent work comparable to large masterpieces.

*White Wild Roses* (Illustration. 19) is a work I acquired after a long search from the time when I wanted to have a still life with flowers. I think it is not easy to reproduce realistically the three important requisites at the same time, namely, the perspective of the flowers touching each other, the three-dimensionality of the flowers and the even more important, fresh sense of life of the flowers, and I had trouble finding a piece I liked because I could usually see a fault somewhere. This piece, however, fulfilled these requirements of mine and easily met my high standards, becoming my first still life and giving me the satisfaction of having acquired it. The painting's overall composition arranging the nice placement of the flowers to fill the space is wonderful, the balance between the flowers and the vase is natural, and the reality of the vividness of the flowers is excellently reproduced. The warm hue of the red keynote of the carpet mat under the vase deftly establishes the color balance, further setting off the splendid beauty of the white wild roses.

When I acquired this painting at the Kutuzov gallery behind my office, the



Illustration 19

Nikolai Ya. Belyaev (1916 – 2000)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, Honored Artist of Russia

*White Wild Roses* (1990) Oil on canvas, 65 × 51 cm

saleswoman told me the already long-past story of this famous honored artist of Russia who had lost his right, dominant hand in the last World War. However, he trained himself to be able to paint with his left hand, having overcome the despair, and made an amazing comeback. It added something extra to the value of this painting for me that I learned this wonderful piece had been done by an artist able to overcome such adversity. It is precisely in the face of adversity that our real worth is tested, and this artist, by recovering from it, showed his strong power for survival and such a personality of his is surely shown in a feel of the supple power and warm consideration which we can sense in this piece.

The next piece, *Autumn in Sergiyev Posad* (Illustration 20), is also one of the



Illustration 20

Nikolai Ya. Belyaev

*Autumn in Sergiyev Posad* (1975) Oil on canvas, 98 × 73 cm

paintings I particularly like. Sergiyev Posad is located about one hundred kilometers northeast of Moscow and was called “Zagorsk” before the collapse of the Soviet Union, but like many other places, it has reverted to its old name. The abbey seen in the background of this work is the Trinity Sergius Lavra, which was the head temple of the Russian Orthodox Church until about 1988 just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. A middle-aged couple intimately sharing an umbrella in drizzling rain is looking at the abbey from afar. Perhaps is this place the refuge of their souls? Or did they simply wish to better enjoy from the proper distance the beauty of harmonious outlook of the religious buildings of mediaeval times? Most probably, both are true for them. The atmosphere of the landscape damp with rain is wonderfully expressed in this rather gloomy, rich-colored beautiful scene and we feel the emotion of the

deepening autumn in it. Even watching from the back the couple leaning to each other under one umbrella, we can imagine they intimately live to support and protect each other. It makes this work somehow warm and increases the romantic air of the deepening autumn. The artist's excellent sense of color is amply displayed here, and the beauty of autumn in Sergiyev Posad is powerfully portrayed with varied colors in perfect harmony.



Illustration 21

Gennady I. Pasko (born 1940)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Rozhdestvenskaya Street, Yaroslavl* (1991) Oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm

*Rozhdestvenskaya Street, Yaroslavl* (Illustration 21) is a piece I came across at the Center of Fine Art in the early days of my beginning to visit there every Saturday, and purchased instantly on the spot. Yaroslavl is an old city on the Volga River about 250 kilometers northeast of Moscow and has prospered in recent years as an industrial area

in the Volga basin, which can be seen in the neat, calm-looking street and houses depicted in this piece. The houses standing in a row imposingly, as if they had roots deep in the ground, have the multi-colored beautiful outlook, and in a large composition they seem to be in perfect harmony with the spaciouly-expressed broad road and the endless blue sky above mixed with thin clouds.

I hung this painting on the bedroom wall of my apartment in Moscow and fatigued with the work, I would wake up late on Sundays and view this piece for a while from my bed. Looking at this work, I used to feel in it the atmosphere of the clear autumn weather of a Sunday morning, and the fact that only a few people can be seen on the wide street further strengthens this impression. I even had the thought that nothing could be better than this piece to enjoy the relaxed feeling of the morning on a day off.

When I made my Russian artist friend with whiskers and beard make a frame for this piece, he enthusiastically extolled it and took this opportunity to compliment my discerning eye for selecting it from among many others. Most probably he as well highly praised the point that the buildings colored with red etc. and the dark green and flesh-colored trees in the background, which are depicted half-concretely, in slightly distorted form, more than anything else arouse such a refreshed impression that sets off the solid appearance of the row of houses, thus making this work excellent in the balance of forms and colors. The wide street delightfully named \*Christmas Road is portrayed with moderate shadow, and together with the varied colors of the clothing of the passers-by it makes this piece even more impressive. It also impresses me that there is nothing unnecessary in portrayal of this work.

\* As for the correct meaning of the name of this street, most probably it was named after a famous man like a revolutionist or poet having any connection with this street. In this case, however, I think it is not so important who he is, and so herewith I dared to adopt one more meaning of this Russian word which seems to be more suitable for the atmosphere of this painting.

*Autumn Sun* (Illustration 22) is another favorite. This artist frequently paints the pictures, with trees growing wild, of the European part of Russia, placing the river in the center of the pieces. I have several of such works of his, and any single of them does not give the same impression. They are, so to speak, differently-flavored paintings respectively, each with its own value.



Illustration 22

Gennady I. Pasko

*Autumn Sun* (1991) Oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm

This piece is also a variation of this theme, in which the situation of how the weakened light of the autumn sun passing through the veil of clouds and shining on the misty field is excellently portrayed with a natural balance. The subtle change of colors which gradually fades out toward the distant view causes us to perceive the excellent feel of air, and the river surface reflecting the faint sunlight shows a natural feel of hazy light. Along with such expression the portrayal of the surrounding trees beginning to change color and the greenish plain richly demonstrates the mood of autumn. Viewing this piece from a distance in natural light, the sun and the surrounding clouds take in the light to increase the brightness. Then we see how realistically the daylight illuminates the edges of the thick clouds and gets to the ground through the mist. This piece, in which a difficult reproduction of a misty scene is accurately expressed, enables us to feel the outstanding ability and skill of this

artist and its artistic level is really quite something. It is quite natural that this painting is one of the pieces praised so highly by the two appraisers of the Ministry of Culture who came to my home to assess them for the export permit before I returned to Japan.



Illustration 23

Ivan S. Gomzikov (1917 – 1988)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*River Landscape* (1950) Oil on canvas, 93 × 69 cm

*River Landscape* (Illustration 23) is the work by an artist who studied painting under the renowned artist Sergei Gerasimov (1885–1964) of the Russian impressionism. That is to say, this is a Russian impressionist painting, but some readers familiar with the paintings of the French impressionists will likely be surprised that this is the impressionist piece. And such surprise is rather natural because the styles of these two groups are so different.

The Russian impressionist paintings were initiated by Ilya Repin and Vasiliy Polenov inspired by the art of French impressionists when they stayed in Paris for

studying at national expense. After their return to Moscow, they developed together with young artists of the generation following them mainly through the Abramtsevo school's art activities to pursue new expression. In terms of the use of colors, where the objects are portrayed with bright colors full of light without recourse to the colors inherent to the objects, the Russian and French schools of impressionism have a lot in common. However, if in the works of the French school the objects are buried in a wild dance of light as if they almost lost their outline and texture, then Russian impressionists maintain in general the traditions of Western art since the Renaissance and develop their paintings in the direction to markedly express the physical features of the objects, though it goes without saying that there exist the pieces which broadly take up the French style,

Looking at *River Landscape* from the standpoint of contemporary Russian realism art depicting the objects as naturally as possible, the color of the river surface differs from what the water actually looks, and in the overall painting with the bright scenery brimming with light, it is dyed with a deep navy blue, pregnant with strong light, from which we see this is an impressionist work. Compared with the Russian impressionism of modern time, however, there is a remarkable amount of light, and the objects are expressed with a rich reality as might be expected from something painted in 1950, in which we can see that this style, having been devolved from modern paintings, already has features of contemporary Russian art.

I often used to go by car west of Moscow to a place about an hour away near the upper reaches of the Moscow River in the summer, and each time, I would see from on the bridge a scene resembling this one. Judging from this experience, I can realize this piece captures quite skillfully, in every detail, the mid-summer day's atmosphere of such a scene. The realistic expression of the river bank exposed to the light is quite excellent. It seems that the river surface hardly ever looks deep navy blue in reality, and from the sense of the volume of the water, the river depth is expressed so deeply, which is also different from reality, but as might be expected from the skill, with which it was painted, these powerful hues conversely enhance a sense of presence of the river and increase the cheerful mood of the piece. This broad-minded and clear depiction portrayed with powerful masculine brush strokes, shall certainly leave those who view it in a bright mood.

I remember being surprised first that such style of work had been done in the

closing years of the Stalin era, but thinking back, the year of production corresponds to a period having recovered from the confusion immediately after the end of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), an era when the country was seeing remarkable economic recovery. Most likely, this piece reflects the positive side of this time when the people were enjoying the arrival of peace and the confidence as a victorious nation. According to Russian art history, impressionist art thrived most during the 1950s, which was later transformed into one of moderately-streaming, various schools of contemporary Russian art. Every time I look at this piece, it makes me realize the depth of meaning which the fine arts keep to themselves.

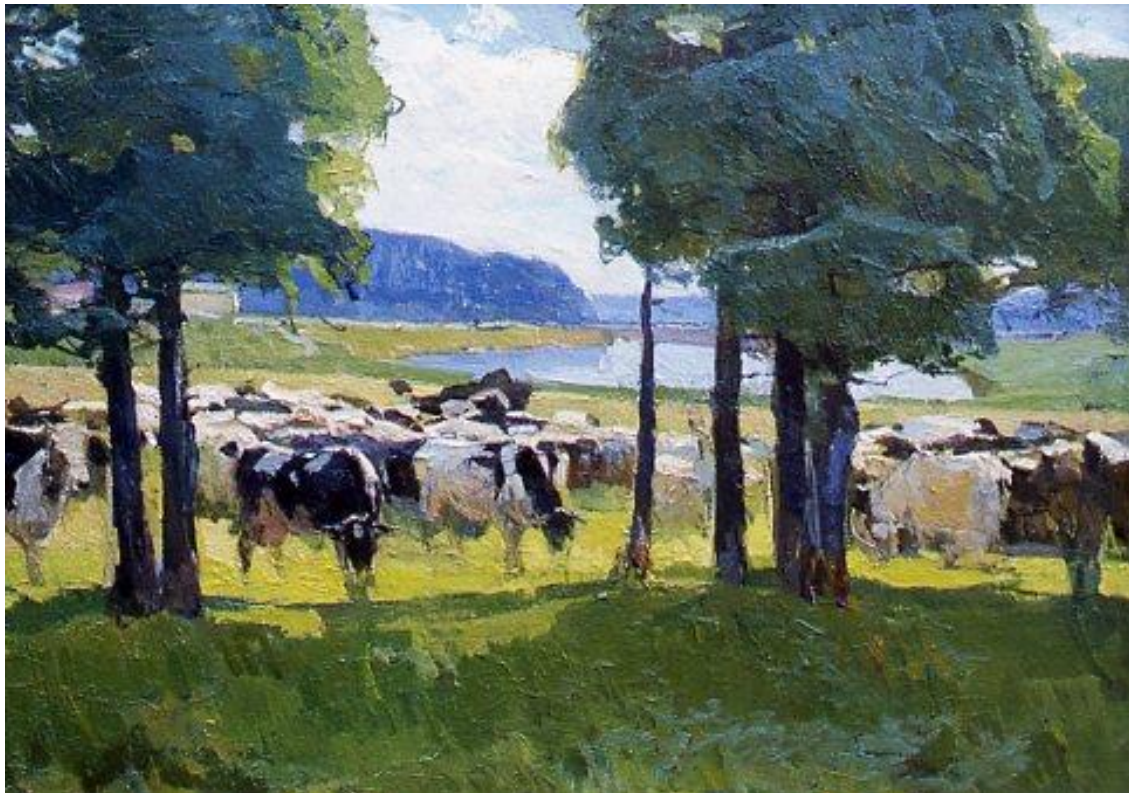


Illustration 24

Ivan S. Gomzikov

*Pasture, Herd of Cows* (1960) Oil on canvas, 100 × 70 cm

*Pasture, Herd of Cows* (Illustration 24) is the work which turns its focus on a herd

of cows, depicting the rural landscape of a pasture in Indian summer against the soft hues of a pond, forest and the sky with white clouds floating in. Gentle sunlight dominates the overall landscape, but despite this brightness looking just like a midsummer day, there is no corresponding feeling of heat and it looks as if a fluorescent light is shining. Such lighting situation convinced me that it is quite reasonable that the herd of cows, rather than seeking shade, is resting while basking in the sunlight.

This piece has the composition contrasting light with shade that is rather rare in contemporary Russian paintings; the foreground looks dim due to the trees dense with leaves and their shadows falling on the grass, and in between the trees is seen the bright view of the pasture with the herd of cows and its background. The artist adopted this composition often seen in the works of Arkhip Kuindzhi because he aimed to make the brightness conspicuous for the need of his expression. It is evident from the fact that the shadow of the trees with thick leaves falling on the grass occupies a wider area than it should do actually at the sacrifice of realism rules of painting. He made such adjustment from the view of composition in order that the focal point of the herd of cows may look even brighter, in which we see the consideration of the impressionism artist who attaches importance to light. The superior part of this work lies in the way that the herd of cows lit brightly like this is portrayed with an overwhelming reality. If we set the three in front aside, the cows are not at all carefully depicted individually, but seemingly are given colors carelessly with rough brushstrokes, and even the shadows of the cows to fall on the grass are not painted. However, if we look at the piece again from a distance, a feeling of solidity and weight with the clear outline of each cow is reproduced and we even feel as if the warmth of the living cows was being transmitted. There is the powerful accent of the herd of cows in the calm tranquility of this rural landscape flooded with light, and I never get tired of this skillful expression, no matter how many times and how long I may look at it.

## Artists Leaping Forward

In the course of three years since I started to go around the galleries as a hobby in Moscow, the number of artists whose style I liked and drew my attention among the artists having regularly exhibited in the galleries became around ten, and as regards two of them, who were comparatively young, I was able to see with my own eyes that their artistic abilities had grown to a considerable level respectively since a certain point of time. Therefore, in this chapter I would introduce their works.

One of these artists is Oleg Avakimyan, and he became my favorite painter through his work I acquired first at the gallery near my apartment on Lenin Avenue in the spring of 1991.

The piece having the title of *Winter in the Mountains* (Illustration 25) is a winter landscape of the mountains depicted in a large composition that arranged behind a mountain with a sanatorium on it even three mountain peaks and the bright blue sky above them. According to the very first secretary of my office, the piece depicts winter in the mountains of Armenia. Her late husband was Armenian and used to tell her that winter in Armenia tinged the air with pink. I once had the opportunity to show her this piece, and at the first glance she instantly decided so. Maybe she is correct as the artist's surname stands for Armenian. If so, then the mountains are the Lesser or Greater Caucasus Mountain Range, but at any rate the grandeur and the solid sense of existence of the mountains are really impressive. The presence of the skiers depicted small on the bridge shows the custom of enjoying winter holidays at a sanatorium, but at the same time is assigned a role in intensifying the sense of magnificent scale of these mountains; the skiers look even smaller before this grand scale. The light shining from the right side enhance a beauty of this scenery by adding to it the diversified nuances of shadows, and this sunlight does produce an exquisite harmony of the brown tones of the mountains and trees with the pinkish white hues of the snow, attaching a gentle stillness to the grand beauty of this painting.

When you look at the piece from a distance in natural light, depth appears in the

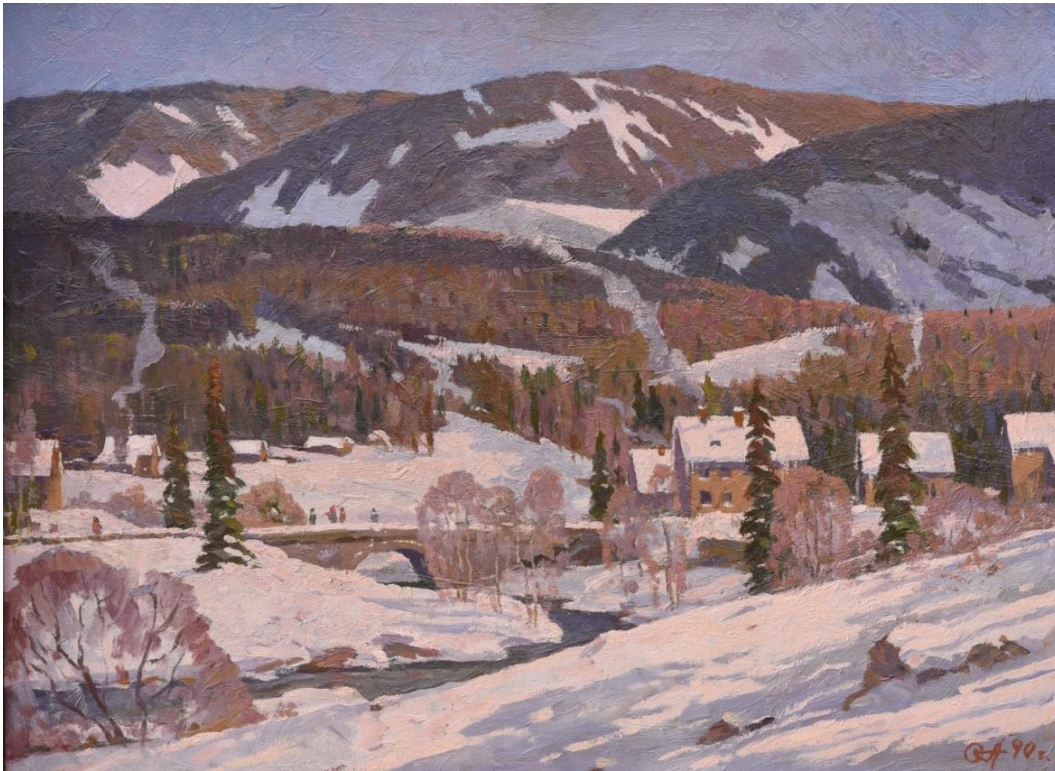


Illustration 25

Oleg A. Avakimyan (1949 – 2013)

*Winter in the Mountains* (1990) Oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm

blue of the sky and the feel of the sunlight shining on the peaks intensifies, which makes the contrast of the surfaces of the mountain peaks hit by sun with those of the shaded parts even more distinct. Besides, the air gets even clearer and the overall painting looks vivid as if it was refurbished. This piece the artist painted while staying at the sanatorium depicted in it has surely attained an excellent artistic level.

I hung it on the wall of my living room and I grew to like it more while looking at it every day, and naturally came to be interested in the artist. His name cannot be found in the latest “Directory of the Members of the Union of Artists of the USSR” dated April 1, 1988. Since *Winter in the Mountains* was on display for sale at a gallery open only to members of the Union of Artists, he probably became a member after the date of this publication. His father’s name is listed in this directory as an artist. It means that his artist stock spans the two generations of parent and child often seen in Russia. Most probably his talent for painting has been cultivated in the artistic environment of

such a family.

I later obtained an album published in 1985 with the title of “Young Artists Painting on their Country” in a used bookstore in Moscow, and his work was introduced there. From this, I learned that he was born in 1949 and studied paintings at the M.B. Grekov Art school in Rostov, which means that *Winter in the Mountains* was done when he was forty one years old, and in the Russian art world with lots of elder artists he can be regarded as still young artist belonging to a group who is successively expected to be very active in the future, too, to be recognized as a grand master.



Illustration 26

Oleg A. Avakimyan

*Winter in Yelets* (1991) Oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm

The next piece, *Winter in Yelets* (Illustration 26), is the one I encountered at the end of 1991 or the following spring at the same gallery, took a liking to and bought it. As

you will find in a map, Yelets is on the Sosna River, a tributary of the Don River, about four hundred kilometers south of Moscow, and is a medium-size city by Russian standard. The area depicted in this piece is likely a residential area that has flourished since old times. The street, shown in a composition setting a church in the center, has upward slope towards the church with wooden steps set up on one side so that pedestrians would not slip down, through which people are walking down or up in the clothes as they like and it makes this piece almost a genre painting depicting the everyday lives of the people while also being a landscape.

The sun seldom appears in Moscow in winter, but because Yelets is located by far to the south, they likely have many fine weather days there. The bright sun pours down on the snowy landscape, and the varied nuances of the shadows make this piece all the more worth looking. In the external appearance of the brick houses we can feel a heavy solidness, and the people walking along the street are also painted skillfully. It's a pretty good piece that allows us to feel the scent of life of the people in Yelets.

Avakimyan exhibited his works in the galleries regularly once a month from the spring of 1991 until the following spring. He consigned his works to three galleries, namely, the gallery on the Lenin Avenue or in Petrovka, or October gallery and one could not predict at which of these galleries his work would appear. At that time, I used to visit each of these galleries, so I must have seen almost all his works for that period, and as a result, by the spring of 1992, I had got four pieces, including the two introduced in this chapter. I gave up on the remaining two-thirds or so because I came across other paintings that I liked more, or I passed on them because the work did not sufficiently appeal to me.

After that period, however, for more than half a year, his paintings suddenly stopped appearing in any galleries, and I worried that he had abruptly fallen ill or that he had abandoned Russia and moved abroad, but around the start of winter that year, three large pieces suddenly showed up in the October Gallery all at once, surprising and delighting me. I say this because the artistic level of these three was one rank higher than the pieces up to then as if he had made some improvements. He seems to have worked hard somewhere on the serious production of paintings, resulting in these three pieces.

The next piece is one of these three that I particularly liked and purchased in a flash on the spot.



Illustration 27

Oleg A. Avakimyan

*Late August* (1992) Oil on canvas, 120 × 80 cm

This piece, entitled *Late August* (Illustration 27), depicts a scene close to evening in early fall with the restrained color tones of the basic color of brown from above the pond. The sun setting in the west can be seen through the thin veil of clouds in the sky, and this faint, gentle light dominates whole scene, creating an exquisite atmosphere rich in nuances. Its composition is large enough to drastically grasp the width of pond as broadly as possible, placing behind a deep landscape with the expressive sky and the large canvas of 80 × 120 cm is fully taken advantage of. The attractive point of this piece, above all, is in the expression of a realistic feel of water surface, and the excellence of this workmanship makes the piece lively and truly impressive.

Looking at this piece from a distance in sufficient natural light, the background recedes even further, bringing out a deeper depth and the sun, gathering the light, gets naturally radiant. The characteristic of this artist lies in the method of taking color balance based on basic color of brown, and this virtue is on full display in this work as well. The restrained color tone of brown tinged with the pathos gives off a feeling of regret at passing away of summer. It can be said that this piece, which I view constantly without ever getting tired of it, is one of the paintings I like the most in my collection.

When Avakimyan broke a fresh ground in his style of painting, there were only less than eight months left before I finished my time in Moscow, and the first gallery I generally went to at this time was the Center of Fine Art. I was no longer in the habit of always making the rounds of every other gallery. So regrettably, I was able to see just a few of his later works prior to the end of my station there.

And I'll never forget one of them. It was a painting of a vertical canvas about 120 × 80 cm and was truly excellent. On the right side of foreground, from the bottom till just below the middle of the canvas, was depicted in brown color tones a close-up of a covered coach standing still, and in the background on the left, the snowy street from possibly the 19th century looked hazy in the snow sprays crawling along the earth and dancing in the wind. On the remaining part of the upper canvas was portrayed an expressive sky covered by moving white clouds in a high extensive composition and a man, apparently the coachman, standing by the perch of the coach as if leaning on it, was looking up at the winter sun shining behind the clouds.

Why did this painting so charm me? It was because the sun, glittering through the cloudy sky, which was the focus of this painting, was portrayed with strong white color tones so realistically that could cause a viewer even a wonder and besides, that the weakened mild sunrays, while passing through the clouds and getting to the earth, casted light shades in the air was reproduced quite excellently and realistically with a reverberation rich in nuances.

Although I was deeply fond of this painting, the price which was also important factor for me was such a large sum that I almost wondered if the amount had been wrongly indicated by one digit more. This price was the evidence of deep confidence

on the part of the artist and the gallery, and the painting did have sufficient merit for the price, but faced with this high price, I was unable to make the decision to purchase it and in the end I gave it up. In the process of my painting collection, I have had a lingering regret at not buying a good painting in several cases, out of which this one has left the utmost regret in my mind even now. This artist, especially since he broke new ground, has aimed to reproduce an exquisite world colored with faint light, and embodied it in his works successfully. That's why I have the strong desire to see his later works and so he belongs to the artists whose future activities I have great interests in.

The second artist is Sergei Neshshimniy, who is also a friend of mine. He had a small studio made specially on the mezzanine and coming in and out is made only through a door at the back corner of the gallery named the Center of Fine Arts, and he occasionally repaired damaged paintings in this gallery or helped with frame production in the frame factory in the basement of the gallery, if necessary, but usually he painted in his studio.

He first appeared in front of me, introduced to me by previously-mentioned Valery Dmitrievich, because he was called down for repairs when I pointed out some damage to a painting on display. He mixed some colors together to prepare the necessary color on the spot and mended the scratch without difficulty. Noticing the accuracy of choosing colors for this painting and his outstanding skillfulness, I recalled the story I heard once that a genuine restorer of paintings must be an authority on depicting all sorts of forms and the various brushwork styles, in addition to having mastered the technique of how to mix paints for the required color. Neshshimniy's work at the place impressed me so much that I even thought that the restoration of paintings was his very profession for a while till Valery Dmitrievich finally asked me to look at his paintings. Then I realized he was an artist.

*Seaweed Collectors* (Illustration 28) is the work I first acquired together with one other landscape, when I visited his studio two weeks later. The piece depicts how seaweed is collected on the coast of the White Sea. According to the artist, the man standing in the boat in the foreground, sticking his pole in the ocean to get seaweed, is the artist himself, who actually experienced this scene and reproduced it in this work.



Illustration 28

Sergei A. Neshshimniy (born 1961)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Seaweed Collectors* (1985) Oil on canvas, 90 × 72 cm

The composition of someone standing and collecting seaweed in each of the three boats placed sideways at equal intervals towards the back is brimming with a sense of balance, and an united complete form raised to the level of fine arts is expressed in the movements of the three people captured in the moment of work. Their actions, with a feel of stillness in the movement and a movement in the stillness, are depicted as though they were connected to each other, and coupled with the expressions on their faces, they do attract us in a mysterious mood as if we were watching on the whole a Japanese traditional art of Noh dance. The color of the gentle white ocean, suggesting the transparency of the water, puts into relief these figures softly outlined with brown color tones. It shows that this scene is in quiet, wave-free inlet, but at the same time it brings out an effect that this is a stage on which the play is being performed.

Later, I became a good friend with Neshshimniy. When I was acquainted with him, he was still thirty years old. He was rather tall and a little thin for a Russian, and his mouth encircled by a thin beard often held a cigarette. He was the simple type of man that I like, extremely quiet and shy. He almost always did not try to sell his own works, nor made any self-advertisement. Consequently, I learned much later that he was a real member of the Russian Artists' Union, and had become a member when he was as young as twenty-seven. (To join the Russian Artists' Union, an applicant, after appealing one's name and artistic ability to some extent by taking part in various exhibitions, submits an application to the Union, continues to exhibit his or her works for fixed periods at exhibitions specified by the Union, and is judged on his or her qualifications. Neshshimniy had been actively exhibiting since 1985 and was approved for membership in 1989.)

The next work is a masterpiece enough to suggest the true abilities of this artist who has been welcomed as a member of the Artists' Union exceptionally young as he was.

*Evening, Forest Lake* (Illustration 29) depicts the evening scenery with a lake that looks like a small pond or a river with a forest on the opposite side. Because the bright evening sun is shining on the treetops of the forest, the lower part where the sun does not reach is veiled with emphasized shadows and, needless to say, this is because these areas are done with a painting method contrasting light with shadow in conformity with the laws of nature. From the title, it seems that the focus of the piece is in the shadows, but quite naturally the viewer's eyes travel first to the brightness of the evening sun. As might be expected, these bright areas are painted very well, in which the trees look three-dimensional, but what wonders us the most is that even the feel and warmth of the evening sun shining on the treetops is realistically expressed.

On New Year's Eve of the year when I had finished my work in Moscow, I went out on the balcony on the second floor of my home in the daytime to dust the frame of this piece. Then when I looked at the work in the shade of open air, I noticed that the areas depicting the evening sunlight took in the light and looked as if the actual evening sun was hitting the treetops. I don't intend at all to make an exaggerated description, but the portrayal effect was such that unconsciously I even held out my hands to capture the warmth of this realistic sunlight.



Illustration 29

Sergei A. Neshshimniy

*Evening, Forest Lake* (1991) Oil on canvas, 80 × 70 cm

Such being the case, the shadowed part of the scene looks dull, and so at first glance the piece on the whole seems to be inconspicuous type of painting, but carefully looking at the shady areas, we'll see they are attentively depicted with the same sense of solidity as in the areas, on which the evening sun is shining, and the forest and the lake sinking gloomily in the shade appear with a feel of the pleasant cool. The shadowed areas suggest that there is also a forest facing it, and looking at the painting again with this in mind, the imagined field of vision for this piece spreads out to the opposite side of the canvas, that is, behind the viewer, and the viewer's eyes naturally move to the shadowed areas. With careful viewing, the painting causes us to feel as if we were spending the very this moment as evening draws nearer while camping on the bank of a lake surrounded by woods, and we come to understand the intention of the artist in titling the work *Evening, Forest Lake*. This is surely a high artistic level of work, for which the author, with the aim to express the drastic contrast

between light and shadow, deliberately selected this scene difficult to make a good picture that does not have much charm for the layman's eyes, and nevertheless has succeeded in it wonderfully.

I invited Neshshimniy to Japan, as I had previously promised him, for three weeks from the beginning of October of the next year after my work in Moscow was finished. For about four days of them, I showed him around by car, from the Izu Peninsula to the Five Lakes of Mt. Fuji, and I made him acquainted with the beauty of autumn in Japan as the leaves were beginning to turn red. He would often get out of the car, and capture scenes on film and in sketches, based on which he produced several excellent Japanese landscapes after his return to Moscow.



Illustration 30

Sergei A. Neshshimniy

*Evening in the Mountains (Japan)* (1995) Oil on canvas, 97.5 × 57.5 cm

*Evening in the Mountains (Japan)* (Illustration 30), which is one of these pieces, depicts the view obtained by looking over the mountain pass of Jukkokutouge at a high point from the direction of Hakone and it is its drive-in that looks long and thin in

the center of the canvas. To tell the truth, before producing this piece, Neshshimniy drew the etude on the spot, which we reached by climbing up the mountain a bit ahead after passing through Jukkokutouge from the direction of Izu Peninsula. He began to paint just after two in the afternoon and as the sun went down three or four hours later, he depicted in this etude the view of afternoon towards evening, reflecting the transition of time while he was drawing. As for *Evening in the Mountains*, after he returned to Moscow, he produced it based on this experience before the impression would fade. The time in the piece, however, is a bit later in the evening.

He was impressed by the beauty of the Japanese landscape, but commented that this beauty was different from that of the Russian landscape. I didn't presume then to ask him what he meant, which I regret when I think of it now. If I were to give my own impression on this difference, the colors of nature—the rivers, the seas, the autumn leaves—differ and also the absolute amount of light is remarkably different. In addition to them, I would say that in Japan, while its perspective is limited, obstructed by mountains etc., the narrow views intensified by sufficient light are so distinct to show the smallest details, and the beauty of the Japanese landscape charms with vividness and delicacy in comparison with how the Russian landscape charms with its grandeur of scale. That's why I was extremely interested in how a Russian artist would express the Japanese landscape. The piece that I received was so wonderful, and did not betray my expectations.

In this work Neshshimniy did not simply depict a Japanese landscape. The rugged surface of the mountains is meagerly illuminated by the faint, indistinct evening light and such a feel of subtlety exuding from the expression of fine shades rich with inconstancy even in the dusk is just giving off a delicate flavor remarkably featuring the Japanese landscape. The mountains have a solid sense of reality with the expression of a rich atmosphere of mountains' autumn in the twilight, which makes this piece very impressive without any slightest hint of strangeness as a Japanese landscape. Neshshimniy's stay in Japan was short, but a close look at this piece shows us that he took advantage of the experience to enhance his artistic abilities.

*Russia, Kuzov Island (White Sea) (Illustration 31)* was done in 1996, about a year after Neshshimniy concentrated his attention on producing Japanese landscape. That



Illustration 31

Sergei A. Neshshimniy

*Russia, Kuzov Island (White Sea)* (1996) Oil on canvas, 90.5 × 50 cm

time corresponded to the period when he and a friend took their families to sail around the desert islands in the White Sea by his friend's prefabricated boat for more than a month when it turned to summer each year, as it had been their custom for several years. Their itinerary took them by train to a place called Kyem on the way from Moscow to Murmansk, where they built the prefab boat at the port which looked out on the White Sea. In 1995, he bought a prefab boat by himself and set sail on the White Sea with this friend in two boats. He told me that spending a week in the natural world of the White Sea and the desert islands relaxes and stretches the spine for itself, making you feel refreshed.

Based on the experiences of so enviable 1995 summer vacation, he reproduced in this piece the quite attractive scene of a desert island in the White Sea. The artist's viewpoint was high on the island, the coast of which we can see in the foreground, and he painted a panorama looking down on the sea from there. Speaking from the viewpoint of composition, the presence of the coast in the foreground brings about the effects marking conspicuous the broad space between the artist's view and the sea, and plays a role in setting up the dynamic and solid portrayal of the piece. The titled *Kuzov Island* (Basket Island) is the name of the island in the background, which comes from

the shape of the island that looks like an upside-down basket. The excellence of this piece, more than anything else, lies in the way how realistically, with vivid and gentle color tones, are expressed the feel of highly transparent air and the light overflowing throughout the entire landscape which is perfectly depicted with perspective. The skillful expression of light, in conformity with the laws of nature, in depicting the sea and the islands located from middle distance to background demonstrates how the artist has made light thoroughly his own already at such a young age. The expression of the strength of backlight reflecting off the surface of sea, almost hitting our eyes, is really impressive, and the hues of this expression have a power just like gushing, which can be said to be the evidence that it was done by a first-rate artist. The ocean surface is expressed so wonderfully that we can feel how light is actually reflecting, and the depths of the ocean, expressive even in its quiet, have a feel of solid mass, while the shallows have their own particular shallow texture. The great nature of White Sea in beautiful summer is reproduced with a high maturity.

**\*\***By the way, I had the opportunity to go to Moscow in summer of 2008. In this occasion to see the artist Neshshimniy there anew after a long interval, I contacted him beforehand by e-mail and availing myself of this opportunity, I incidentally attached to this mail the whole part of commentary dedicated to his works in this chapter, translated into Russian, to which I received a reply from him. If I quote its related part, it is as follows: "I received and read your letter with the extract from your book. Very large part of your commentary about my pieces coincides with my depicting intention which I tried to embody in the said pieces. Previously I did not discuss with you about paintings in detail, though it ought to have been done. If we had done so, it would have been useful and pleasant for me." Needless to say, this reply which was a pleasant surprise for me delighted me very much.

However, I hesitated to introduce it here to readers, since such idea made me feel as if I would show off my good eye for paintings, but in the end I decided to do so because, if taking into consideration the nature of this book intended for a wide range of readers, I think that such comments that enhance my prestige would function as a very important factor to work on the mind of readers affirmatively. That is to say, this book is intended not only for specialists and art lovers, but also for ordinary readers, including persons who think they themselves do not understand paintings very well. So I tried my best to write the book so that every reader can easily understand it. However, even if it has been actually done so, there appears another problem. Namely, intellect and sensibility are two different things. Therefore, thoroughly understanding the commentary which occupies a large part of this book does not always connect with a right judgment of a reader on whether or not the contents of such commentary are appropriate enough. As for my way of appreciating paintings, the excellent artist Ossovski mentioned in the foreword of this book: "The thought occurred to me that it was not a foreigner who had written this book, but a Russian.

This is because so uniquely and so emotionally does the author feel what the Russian artists have put their emotion into their canvases.” However, in addition to it, if even any one of the artists whose works are introduced in this book confirms concretely that the concerned commentary is very true to the essence of his depicting intention of his pieces illustrated in this book, there will be nothing more helpful than this. If the reader who does not have much self-confidence in how to appreciate paintings knows it, naturally his trust in the commentary will increase and as a result of paying more attention to the contents, he will be able to get from it more hints on how to appreciate paintings and so on. For instance, if you once again read the whole commentary of his works attentively now at this moment, then probably you may realize the characteristic of this artist that was hinted there. Namely, although his high level of portrayal capability is prerequisite conditions for his success, it’s worth mentioning that he has an outstanding scheming ability, based on which he selects the theme and portrayal object and then makes a careful preparation, before or while depicting, about how better the whole composition and the expression of objects are to be devised in order to attain the good result. That’s why his portrayal gets all the more attractive. If you review his works, taking such understanding into your consideration, then I think it shall become a quite unique experience worthy of trying for a fairly deep appreciation of paintings.

## **Artistic Level of Contemporary paintings**

My intention of introducing paintings from my art collection on pages of my book is to enable you to grasp through these works what kind of art contemporary Russian paintings is, and needless to say, the precondition for it is that the works introduced have the characteristics and artistic levels representing the core of contemporary Russian art. I myself know from my experience in Moscow that my collection meets this requirement, and it is exactly because I had been so deeply consoled by these works that it occurred to me to make use of this collection as a means of illustrating the excellence of contemporary Russian art.

Thinking it over composedly and logically, however, a person who is completely unfamiliar with contemporary Russian paintings has possibly no basis for making a judgment, and it may not be particularly strange if someone is inclined to doubt me, thinking that I highly evaluated the paintings I collected during my time abroad merely because I decided so arbitrarily. Even if such a example is too extreme, I'm sure that the question of an artistic level representing contemporary Russian paintings is a point of great interest for readers.

Therefore, in this chapter concluding my introduction of the works, I would like to take up in particular the pieces that could be said to have embodied the standard of high artistic level representing contemporary Russian art.

Determining this standard level representing contemporary Russian painting circles is an extremely difficult task, but fortunately, I have at hand a book that will help. It is an album called "Moscow Landscape Artists" published in 1979, which I happened to find at a used bookstore when my time in Moscow was drawing to a close. The album introduced one or two pieces for each artist of a total of 193 Moscow landscape artists, including fourteen People's Artists of the USSR, thirteen People's Artists of Russia (Republic), and fifty-eight Honored Artists of Russia, in order of age. The overall high level of the works can be adequately ascertained there, and we may say that this album represents Russian painting circles of the time. Judging from the Russian art world having quite a number of artists, that an artist was not selected there is not necessarily proof that he or she is not first-grade. However, because of the excellence of the works and a large number of People's Artists and Honored Artists, we could say the opposite is true.

The publication year of this album was more than ten years before I was stationed in Moscow, and I was able to confirm that out of 193 artists about 60, a little less than 80% of whom were People's Artists or Honored Artists, had already passed away when I was living in Moscow, and as for the remaining artists there was no way for me to know how many of them exhibited their works at the galleries I frequently visited, but as a result of collecting pieces I liked, seven of the artists introduced in that album are included in my collection. In the previous chapters I have introduced the works of two of them, but here, I'd like to take up the works of these seven artists, including these two anew, from the new viewpoint to exactly show how high an artistic level representing contemporary Russian art is

It goes without saying that the pieces I introduce here are not at all inferior to the works of the same artists selected for this album. Looking at these works, you'll be able to judge to a certain extent the level of contemporary Russian paintings, and also by comparing with and referring to these, you shall understand to some degree that the works having been already introduced till now also represent the artistic level of contemporary Russian paintings.

Moreover, the artist ranking for the artistic level published by "the Artists Trade Union of Russia" is an enough standard to more objectively confirm the value of the artists. That's why I listed for your reference the ranking of the respective artists introduced in this book in the right hand column of the illustration list at the end of this book with the aim to show what category of ranking these artists have received among the artists of the Russian art history on the whole from the eighteenth century up to now.

Therefore, before getting into the main issue, I think it quite rational to briefly explain the artist ranking of "the Artists Trade Union".

The list of artist ranking is released as a part of "United Artists Rating" published by "the Artists Trade Union". The Russian word of art is broad in its concept, and the word "fine art" translated from this Russian word does not necessarily cover its concept. In the category of artist, not only oil painters, drawers, and sculptors, but also metal chasers, architects, stage designers, and film directors are included. Because of this, "United Artists Rating" (Fifth Edition) issued in 2002 is made up of an art

ranking for the collection owned by 755 art museums, an oil painter and drawer ranking (later to be referred to as artist ranking), a sculptor ranking, and guidelines for the lowest prices for the artists' ranking. In the sixth edition, the architect ranking was newly added, and the metal chaser and film director rankings are currently being prepared for to be supplemented to the "United Artists Rating".

The artistic ranking is set up by twenty-seven professional collective mainly consisting of art scholars and critics of the Ranking Center attached to "the Artists Trade Union". The characteristic of the ranking is that these professionals do not consider existing authority such as having an honorable title from the (Soviet) Russian Artists' Union, having won noted awards, or being a member of an art academy—that is to say, the artist is assessed and ranked based only on the artistic merit of the works from a purely aesthetic viewpoint without any influence from opinions of influential groups and organizations. The first edition of the "United Artists Rating" was published in 1999; as a rare book right from the publication, it could not be found anywhere but large libraries. To further promote their objective of protecting the profits of artists and creating an ordered, standardized art market within Russia, the fifth edition was released on the Internet in June 2003. The artist ranking in this book was taken from the artistic ranking, where necessary, of this web-site. The artistic ranking covers all together 12572 artists from the whole of Russian art history, including not only contemporary artists, but also the artists in the past. The rankings are broken down into fourteen levels, from the highest "1" to a "7". "1" is artists of a world-class artistic level for over a century (thus, there is no "1" assessment for contemporary artists). "1A" is similarly a world-class artist who, however, has not stood the test of time of a century. "1B" is a high-class working artist with excellent organizational skills enjoying absolute demand and popularity. Thus explanations for each ranking are given. Although it is in Russian language, I'd attach the site address here for reference; interested readers may refer to it: \* <http://rating.artunion.ru>

\*The indication of rankings was removed from the Internet in January 2006, but instead, as of February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, you may buy a download version of the artists' ranking list through the aforesaid web-site.

By the way, on the next page is shown a rating table of the 193 artists in *Moscow Landscape Artists* according to the artist ranking. Re-checking these 193 artists with the list of Soviet Artists' Union members published in 1988, we see the changes in the number of artists given the title because this member list was made up after nine years

Rating Category	People's Artist of the USSR	People's Artist of Russia (Republic)	*Honored Artist of Russia (Republic)	No title (Soviet) Russian Artists' Union Member
1				
1A	2			2
1B	5			
2A	5	2	5	7
2B	6	3	6	1
3A		4	9	6
3B		6	17	10
4A	1		9	14
4B		1	29	43
5A				
5B				
6A				
6B				
7				
Total	19	16	75	83

\*Including eight Honored Art Activity Artists (2B - 1, 3B - 3, 4A - 1, 4B - 3) and five Honored Cultural Workers (4A - 1, 4B - 4)

from the release of *Moscow Landscape Artists*.

What is clear from this table is that while a definite correlation can be seen between the titles of the Artists' Union and the ranking level assessments, Artist's Union members with no titles are capable enough to maintain almost the same artistic levels as those of the artists with titles. In other words, a title suggests the fair judgment that the artist is of a considerable artistic level, but a lack of a title does not necessarily mean the opposite. All 193 members are, without exception, members of the Artists' Union and there are no artists ranked lower than "5A." In addition, many of the artists with the title of Honored Artist that is seldom given are ranked "4B," so it seems that meeting both conditions of being an Artists' Union member and being ranked "4B" or higher objectively shows a standard that the artists belong to a group of the top tier of artists

\*In February, 2013 I newly checked the web-site of the Artists Trade Union and found out the several notable alterations, the important information of which first of all lies in the point that the Artists Trade Union has qualified the rating level “1-3” of Russian professional artists as the level of the world scale and publicized the rating list of the international artists in total not less than 11500, which consists not only of all the artists having the rating “1-3” throughout the history of Russian fine arts from XVIII century till now, but also of great painters in countries other than Russia just for the same fixed period, having been selected by the same criteria of the artistic level as Russian rating “1-3”. The second important alteration, which is directly related with the aforementioned change, shall be the age limitation having been introduced to the rating of the artists: the rating level “1” in any case won’t be given to the living and working artists, nor the rating level “2-4” — to any artist younger than 50 years old, and so on. Needless to say, this means that the obstacles to be cleared for acquiring the artistic level higher than “4” in particular became harder and more severe for the artists.

In this connection, I myself pay attention to the artistic level of rating “4”, not to mention the rating of the international artists, because the artists with the rating “4” are by far more in number than those of “1-3” and form an inconspicuous mainstay, so to speak, of the painting circle among the artists “1-4” which represent the artistic level of Russian paintings. That’s why they occupy so important position as to exert a decisive influence on this artistic level on the whole and the thickness of their layer. And if I say about the actual artistic level of the artists “4” based on my experience, the majority of the works of the artists “4” are on such a high artistic level that enables viewers to feel what splendid paintings they are, which make it even possible to regard the artists “4” as first class, if we call the artists of “1-3” very first rate painters on the ground that the Artists Trade Union has qualified them as the painters of world scale. Such a high artistic level of rating “4” means nothing but an abundant reserve of the artists, from where some of them earlier or later are to be promoted to rating “1-3” and it symbolizes better than anything else that the activity level of Russian artistic circle on the whole lies in a very healthy condition.

Applying this standard to the artists in this book, \*nineteen of the twenty-six artists meet this standard, as shown in the right column of the Illustration List. Because the remaining \*seven are not assessed in the fifth edition of the *United Artists Rating*, their rank is unclear, but the number of artists to be assessed in the seventh edition increased to 21324 and will likely increase successively in future, so I expect the time will show that most of the remaining artists eventually turn out to have

embodied the artistic level of this standard in their works.

Setting this aside, nowadays it is clear that more than \*70% of the artists fulfill the two standards above. So I think we can safely say that the aim of objectively providing the ground that not only the artists I'm about to introduce here, but also the artists introduced till now are the representatives of contemporary Russian art has been achieved to some extent.

\*In January 2009, namely in three and a half years after the publication of this book, I asked the Artists' Trade Union about their renewed ranking assessment for the artists in this book. Their reply is shown in the right column of the Illustration List at the end of this book: rankings with mark → on the left are revised ones at the time of my inquiry, and also the newest rankings checked as of May, 2013 are shown with mark ⇒. The rankings with no arrow mean that they remain unchanged. Some artists have dropped their rankings, but they have their talents by nature respectively. So I don't worry about it so much.

As the introductory remarks were prolonged so much, let's revert to the main subject.

*Morning* (Illustration 32) depicts the riverside morning scene where against the background of the wild current of a curving river full of water a horse and foal are grazing on the bank, with the deciduous trees dyed the autumn golden colors growing on it.

This piece, as we may expect from the works of an Honored Artist, is very substantial in its expression, enabling us to feel a larger scale than the actual size of the painting. The bending and coursing river is portrayed such that the river rich in water flows quite lively with power, and the reality in the expression of such energetic current draws our eyes involuntarily. This is contrasted with the gloomy monotone sky of the early morning, further enhancing the sense of wild, vigorous movements, and the differences in the positions and color tones of each of the groves of trees arranged in the background, middle distance and foreground give the impression that they have rhythms in agreement with the flow of the river, simultaneously playing a role in increasing the power of the water rapidly flowing on through the broad river basin from the distance to foreground, and right to left.

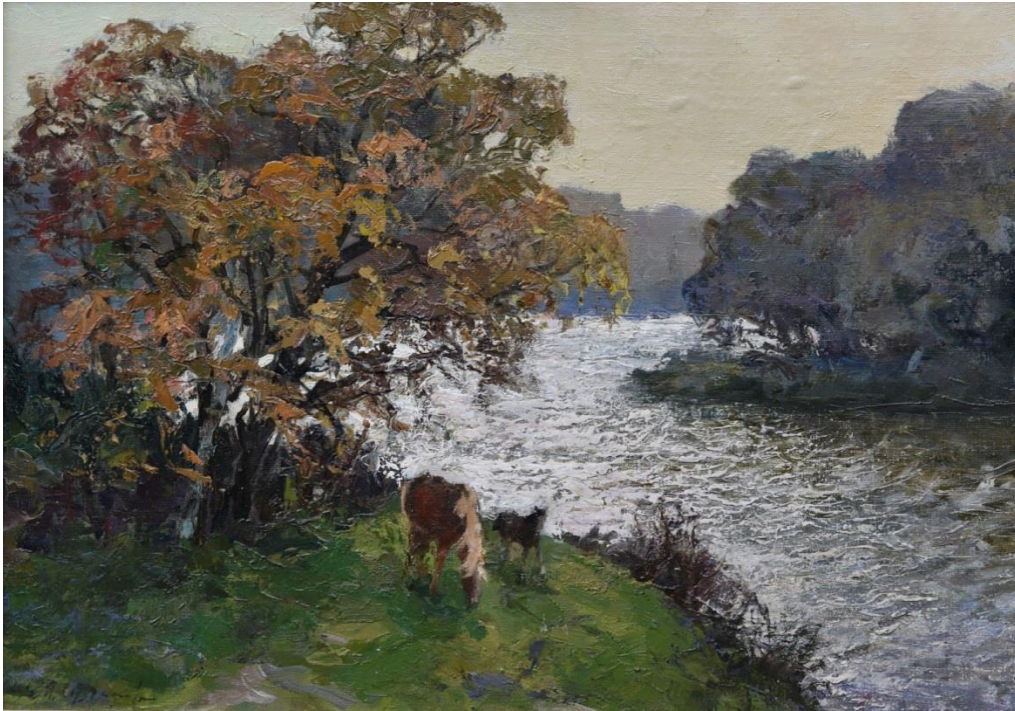


Illustration 32

Mikhail A. Suzdaltsev (1917 – 1998)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, Honored Artist of Russia,

Winner of the USSR State Prize

*Morning* (1992) Oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm

What is splendid about this piece, along with the excellence of such portrayal of the river surface, is how well the titular morning atmosphere is felt in the expression of partly shaded light and air imbued with a feel of fresh cool.

*Portrait of a Girl* (Illustration 33) is the only portraiture in my collection. You may wonder if I did not encounter any other excellent portraits. Of course, I did. There were two or three that I wanted to secure, but in general, I find it difficult to muster up the desire to have a portrait beside me if I have no spiritual connection with the portrayed person, just like someone close to me or any specific notable person, such as my favorite novelist or musician.

Nevertheless, I acquired *Portrait of a Girl* because I found a certain type of

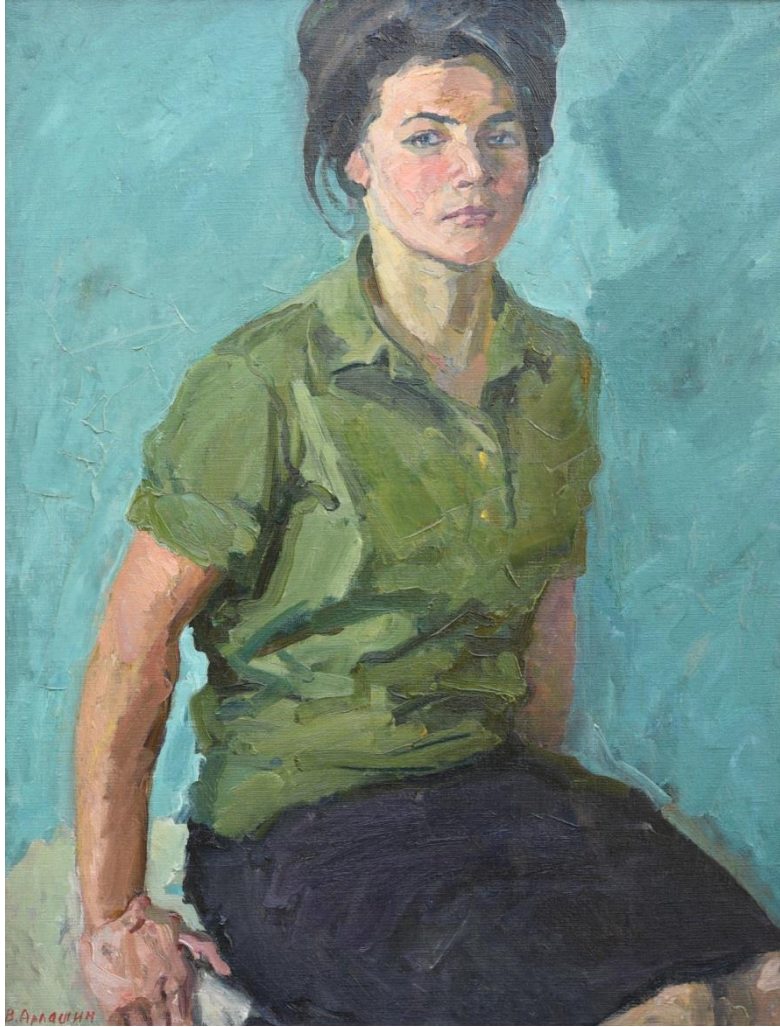


Illustration 33

Vasily A. Arlashin (1923 – 1998)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Portrait of a Girl* (1967) Oil on canvas, 90 × 100 cm

universal beauty in this healthy girl, and also because the painting itself is excellent. The girl sits on a chair without backrest, slightly turning to the left. Her back is straight, and her face turns towards us. This figure is brimming with a healthy youthfulness. Not everyone is likely to regard her as a beautiful girl at first glance, but she has her own appeal. Her long neck holding her head straight enhances her beauty.

When I first saw this piece, to be honest, she looked like a farmer's daughter, and somehow, I associated the expression of "babje leto". The bright, warm weather of

early fall is called “babje leto” in Russian; “babje” is the neutral adjective of “baba” (married farm woman) and if translate this phrase literally, it means “a farm woman’s summer.” The reason why a farm woman is referenced to in an expression for Indian summer is that the recurrence of a short summer is compared to the married farm woman whose peak of womanhood quickly faded, having no time to take care of herself, dressing up because of the hard work in the fields. In recent years farm life has improved and such old sayings are likely no longer necessarily the case, but this sort of tendency may remain in high probability.

I was reminded of this expression because I remembered the word “baba”, relating it to “babje leto” and actually in this piece, as if to back up my impression, are portrayed the girl’s simple, unadorned features, her clothes extremely subdued for a young girl together with the tanned arm showing out of the plain, green, short-sleeved blouse, and the dexterous hands accustomed to work, all of which suggest that she is a sweet, rural village girl. Most probably she must be surrounded by the life of farming village, in which the peak of womanhood fades more quickly than in the city. The artist recognizes in this girl a beauty supported by the health and youth of a rural girl before marriage, and depicted it lovingly in this portrait.

The portrayal of the lively expression of her hand on the chair, the form of her upper body with a sense of stability implying the firm support of the structure of her bones and muscles, and the sensible treatment of light in conformity with the laws of nature are indeed quite excellent, and the attentive consideration the artist gave to the depiction, including the way he partly provided the subtle shading for the wallpaper in the background, brings the artistic level of this piece even higher.

*The Foundation of the Port at Kamchatka: The Ships St. Peter and St. Paul* (Illustration 34) is the second-largest piece in my collection. It is also the sole historical painting I own, depicting a port scene in those days when the port at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky was founded. This port is said to be opened in 1740 when maritime explorer Vitus Bering wintered there so that he could explore Kamchatka a second time. The port opened that year in such a remote region as one of exits to the sea of Far East as a result of the Cossacks having advanced into Siberia as an advance



Illustration 34

Vitali T. Davydov (1923 – 2007)

Member of the Artists' Union, Honored Artist of Russia

*The Foundation of the Port at Kamchatka: The Ships St. Peter and St. Paul* (1991)

Oil on canvas, 130 × 100 cm

team since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and on.

As you will see, the painting depicts two large sailboats smoothly sailing the quiet inlet of the bay with sails unfurled. These are warships of that time flying the flag of the Russian navy, that is to say, St. Peter and St. Paul, the very ships used by Bering on his second expedition. The tall mountain, covered in snow, rising up behind the hills which form the line of the coast, is the Koryaksky volcano that is 3456 meters above sea level. The season is likely the beginning of June, just before Bering goes exploring. The mountain and sky in the background are bright with sunlight, by contrast with which the wharf in the foreground is depicted in deep shade, where it looks unpleasantly chilly, and a few soldiers are crowded around an open fire, trying

to warm themselves.

It goes without saying that the focus of this piece is the warship in the front. The artist put a great deal of energy into its portrayal and you can feel in it even a sense of weight. When you attentively see from which direction the sun shines on the sail and the stern, you'll instantly notice this light is unnatural as if it came from the projector. The reason why the artist intentionally did so is to make this warship conspicuous by showing light on it for the purpose of fixing it on the focus. In this portrayal having sacrificed the natural treatment of light are seen traces of efforts made by the artist who was well aware of the importance of its expression. Viewing this piece carefully, I can grasp something akin to the artist's sincere sentiment in the expression of the warship which is portrayed in the bright light with a feel of such weight and solidity that even a lever could not move it, in which I imagine the artist's pride and respect were embodied for Bering's great achievement which opened the port as early as 18 century as an advance base to the Pacific Ocean and for the foresight of the rulers of that time who entirely backed up his expedition, and in this very point I feel that I can see the motive of this artist for producing this piece. The presence of this warship tightens the composition of the piece, giving it a density. The position, size, and color tones of the warship are in perfect harmony with the dark brown hill in the background and the conic-shaped volcano covered with snow, shining pink in the sunlight, and do enhance the historical mood and beauty of this work, rich in nuances of light and shade.

*Strawberries* (Illustration 35) is a still life of fruits done from the viewpoint of looking down a little bit from above. The fruits, the containers that hold them, a towel, and a small carpet are put close to one another onto a small, black table, the scene of which is reproduced with bright colors in the light. The strawberries, apples, and currants that fill the dishes and the dishes themselves are represented with realistic colors and the texture the real things have. Above all, the titular strawberries that are the focus of the piece, although small, are portrayed carefully one by one, richly with a feel of solidity and bathed in light, this brilliant and simultaneously indescribable, soft red color tone is a feast for the eyes.

What is remarkable about this piece is that not only still life itself, but also the abundant light accompanying it are reproduced with a real feel. It goes without saying



Illustration 35

Rarisa S. Zatulovskaya (born 1924)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Strawberries* (1991), Oil on canvas 50 × 40 cm

that it is realized by the realistic portrayal of the objects with the bright, vivid hues and the firm outlines, the expression of which easily makes it clear that this is the work of a master. Zatulovskaya has a strong force in her portrayal of colors that is quite rare for a woman artist, and this wonderful expression is only possible when there is power in the painted colors.

By the way, the artist took attentive care in several points to enhance the completeness of this piece. Something has been placed in the back part of a little bit deep, flat wooden dish containing the strawberries to tilt the dish so as to make the contents clearly visible, suitably for the focal point, and, most probably, a cream, rather than white, towel has been put beside it to harmonize it with the wooden dish and bring out a soft mood. A multi-colored woven mat, with its warm color, is put under the earthenware pot filled with strawberries. The colors and size of the mat were intentionally selected and placed from a need to give brightness to this place and

arrange the color balance of the overall painting because the earthenware pot is a dark color. It can be safely said that the artist's capable brush and such a skillful care have produced this truly complete painting with an excellent, bright color balance. Looking at this piece from close, the dish with the currants has a worn-out appearance, and the towel looks a little dirty, but from a distance, unexpectedly such impression is swept away; the ceramic texture of the dish becomes apparent, and the towel appears to have a fluffy three-dimensionality. Although this piece is rather small in size, in the vivid expression of colors the viewers can feel the balanced radiance and deep transparency common to all the excellent paintings.



Illustration 36

Peter P. Ossovsky (1925– 2015)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union, People's Artist of the USSR,

Winner of the USSR State Prize

*Quiet* (1993) Oil on canvas, 73 × 73 cm

I selected this piece titled *Quiet* (Illustration 36) at the studio of the artist, to whom I was introduced by my whiskered and bearded artist friend during my second stay in Moscow. Its painting style differs from the realism paintings having been introduced up to now, and besides, it was painted by one of artists occupying a central position in the contemporary Russian art world. Therefore, taking into consideration such high attention it deserves, I decided to add it to this book and treat it in this chapter, viewing that his works were in “the Moscow Landscape Artists” referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

As you can see, the painting has a quite marvelous attractiveness. The piece having a clean and concise portrayal without any excessive details is full of a soft, transparent feeling like a watercolor, wherein is expressed a strong feel of reality and a quiet tranquility as if the soul was purified. The light shining out through the break of clouds, which is one of the features indicating this artist’s romantic tendencies, is portrayed with all his energy so elaborately and so realistically that it enhances the beauty of the piece on the whole, attaching to it mysterious hue. The quiet appearance of the boats with the reflection in the calm surface of the lake is a characteristic of this artist, and the presence of the boats against a background of conspicuous natural beauty all the more draws the eyes.

I had looked at a considerable number of paintings in galleries and other places till then, but it was the first time that I came across such style of work. I opened an album of Ossovsky’s that an artist friend of mine left for me with the words “if you’re interested,” and my eyes opened wide at the fresh charm of his landscapes. Looking in detail, wondering from where this charm comes, Albert Marquet occurred to me as an artist whose works gave me in a certain way a similar impression as I received from Ossovsky’s works.

Marquet is a French artist belonging to Fauvism, and in Japan, he is not so conspicuous hidden behind Matisse, but that he is indeed a grand master is proved by several of his masterpieces which are on permanent display at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts and at the State Hermitage Museum respectively. Almost all of these are landscape of town with canal or lake. On the whole, his paintings are captured roughly and simply, however, as far as the main point is concerned, the artist grasps it realistically. Such style of his painting creates an indescribable feel of reality

even in a calm atmosphere, and because of this, he has many fans in Russia.

What made me associate Marquet when I looked at Ossovsky's album is that I saw a common factor in the specific point that the works of Ossovsky on the whole are depicted with a quite concise expression, as if he made one step forward from realism, but actually all the more for it an emphasizing point portrayed by the style of realism looks more attractive and increases in a feel of reality. Certainly, it seems to me that my opinion of Ossovsky and Marquet resembling each other with regard to the effects that such painting techniques exert on the entire work is not greatly beside a point, but the styles and the thought embodied in the works are, of course, of different natures.

*Quiet* is a piece that clearly shows Ossovsky's characteristics. While it is an actual landscape, the sky, earth, and water are at the same time the symbols of his native land that Ossovsky loves beyond anything else, and in such style of expression that extra details are pared away to a minimum to leave only the essentials, I feel as though the artist's philosophies were embodied in it. Judging from a strong feel of existence of the boat, which is the motif that appears repeatedly in his works, I think the artist especially emphasizes the aspect that it is a human structure, which is placed against a beautiful scene illuminated by the light pouring down through the break of clouds like a revelation from god, creating an exquisite harmony and further setting off the natural beauty and stillness. I am likely not the only one who finds in way of this construction the religious view of Christianity. It can be said that this is a landscape depicted from the artist's meditation, and I believe this unique style with a strong inclination to romanticism will seriously enchant quite a lot of viewers.

As implied by the title, *Morning* (Illustration 37) is a nude giving off a fresh atmosphere of a fine morning, which depicts a scene where a naked woman hanging a towel over her right shoulder stands with her back to us at a garden gate, therefrom opens up a private path leading to the sea below. She somehow looks down at the sea before going down to swim. The rear view of the nude woman is brimming with a bright feeling of openness, and I particularly like how the piece does not make me feel the slightest bit uneasy about looking at a naked woman. I bought this piece on impulse.

I had had the opportunity to view many open-air nude pieces in galleries, majority

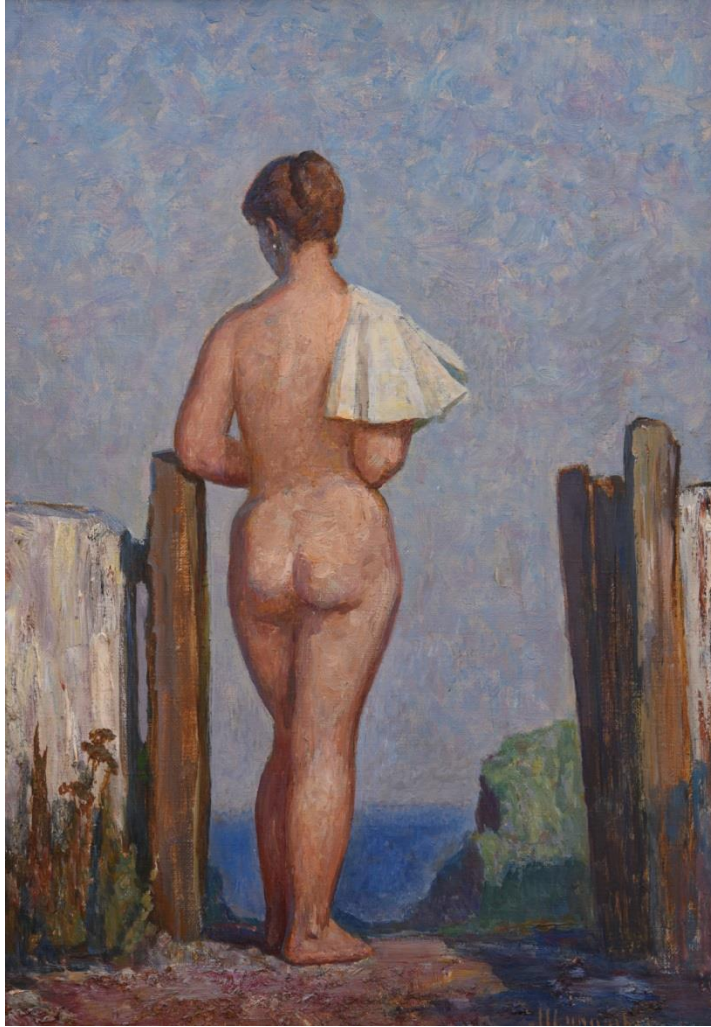


Illustration 37

Leviy S. Shshipachev (1926 – 2001)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Morning*(1992) Oil on canvas, 58 × 82 cm

of which portrayed a nude woman standing near a river's edge, surrounded by nature, and among them there were even such works giving the impression that the women had been gratuitously added to the nature, therefore it's also difficult to understand why a nude woman was there. When depicting the artistic beauty of female figure in the midst of nature, it is undeniable that the image becomes out of focus because it is overwhelmed by the surrounding nature, and that's why it is apt to give the impression as if it were half done.

Most likely, fully aware of this, Shshipachev decisively placed the emphasis on the nude woman's beauty in this piece. The object is specially portrayed so that the woman does not lose out to the surrounding nature. This figure from the back is depicted with such style differing from realism that almost could be referred to as a kind of formalism. The outline is bordered with dark colors that reflect almost none of the nuances of the outdoor light, and in this portrayal we feel a strong sense of existence and stability. Looking at this piece, I got the impression that the nude woman was portrayed first with a stable form and color tones, and the surrounding scene was incorporated later to add an invigorating atmosphere to this nude woman's beauty. In fact, her upper part from mid-section to head looks even more attractive because of the expressive high sky in the background, and the left side of her face against the refreshing sky makes us imagine that she is beautiful. Although I am not always satisfied with the portrayal of nature eliminating details, such approach which differs from realism brings about the artist's intended result, and we can sufficiently grasp the artist's skillful ability from this work.



Illustration 38

Georgi A. Sysoliatin (1936 – 2010)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*The Roads of Non-Black Soil: Riumnikovo Village* (1991)

Oil on canvas, 120 × 45 cm

*The Roads of Non-Black Soil: Riumnikovo Village* (Illustration 38) is somewhat dark piece, which is, in this sense, exceptional in my collection. I had the opportunity to

view several of Sysoliatin's works while I lived in Moscow, including non-sale exhibitions. Without exception, they were depicted with rather dark tones and it seems that such tones are characteristic of his color balance. Nevertheless, his expression is substantial enough to fully make up for this darkness, which applies to this work as well. The piece, having a large composition with wide view, depicts with a masculine, powerful touch the scenery of a desolate field, in the rear of which a group of trees in autumn colors stands as if to block the view in the background. On the left side of it there's open space commanding view, therefrom the lake and the boundlessly expanding scenery over the lake are seen against the blue sky with floating white clouds.

Since the titular *Roads* of this piece in original in Russian language is indicated as plural, they likely refer to the several wheel tracks left by trucks on the field. These connect to the road seen to the right of the group of trees, and because cultivated land is seen in the slightly rising geography on the opposite shore of the lake, it's likely that this leads to Riumnikovo Village somewhere nearby. The conspicuous group of trees in a position that blocks the distant view is painted in a characteristic style, and once you are accustomed to looking at them, you can feel in this portrayal a considerable charm pleasant for the eyes. It seems to me that these trees serves as a curtain hiding the stage, stimulating me to imagine that the village might be on the opposite shore somewhere in the area blocked by the trees.

The excellence of this piece lies in the portrayal of the field. Viewing it at a distance, the field spreads out backward much more, giving the impression that the painting has become more than two times larger. Oddly enough, what comes out is only the field, and the rest appears with almost no change, in which a surprisingly vast and devastated form of the field spreads out vividly. And it made me understand that much of the artist's energy was put into the expression of this field and that he deliberately used a wide oblong canvas from the viewpoint to make the most of this expression. Perhaps the field is laid fallow because the soil is barren. In the rough depiction of the earth turned up and carved out by vehicles in the mud, and the heavily depressed, deep green of the short grasses and mosses, the desolate feeling of a field left alone without looking back is expressed. Precisely because the field is depicted as having gone to ruin, naturally it

is contrasted with a beauty of the cultivated, carefully attended land in the sunny distance, and with the clear sky and the idyllic, drifting clouds, causing a viewer to feel that if he went to the other side of the lake, there would probably be something good there. This piece can be said to be the painting where the unseen Riumnikovo Village is expressed in an atmosphere of such expectation.

## Epilogue

When my stay in Moscow was nearing its end, the Center of Fine Arts I frequently went to every Saturday was closed. About three months ago, the gallery manager Valery Dmitrievich confided to me his concern about a European would-be tenant wanting to rent the gallery as a shop and told me negotiations were ongoing. He was against it, and told, as if he persuaded himself, that it would never happen, but despite his opposition, one day in the spring of 1993 the front wooden door of the gallery was locked forever.

The liquidation of the Center of Fine Arts became an initial example that several galleries from the Soviet era would be replaced by furniture shop, boutique or other over the following five years. The blow for the galleries was that the customs regulations for taking paintings out of the country had changed—I remember it taking place just before spring 1992. Up to that point, you could take the painting out by simply submitting the gallery's receipt to customs, but this changed so that you could not take a piece out of the country without paying duties in the same amount as on the receipt or getting permission from the Ministry of Culture. (The regulation changed again after that, and currently, if you do not obtain an export permit from the Ministry of Culture, the customs will not allow you to take the painting out.) On top of the procedures to get the permit from the Ministry of Culture being bothersome, it took about a week to obtain it, so foreign tourists and business people naturally began keeping away from paintings, which put the brakes on art sales. Valery Dmitrievich told me many times that he was working to have the Ministry of Culture put them back to the original regulations, but in the end, this did not happen, and the galleries gradually followed the course of severe selection. In 1996, about three years after I returned home, most galleries tried to endure the crisis somehow by selling souvenirs and the like, diminishing the number of paintings on display, but in the process of formation of a market economy which moved into a kind of bubble economy, the galleries, having suffered from this changing impact, disappeared from Kutuzov Highway in the fall of 1997, and in the spring of 1998 the October Gallery also closed its door.

It goes without saying that the reason for the decline of the galleries is the drop of the domestic demand in the midst of ongoing economic confusion, and tourists and other foreigners, who were the last hope for making up with this drop, held back their

purchase due to the changes in customs regulations. Overall, however, this liquidation could be seen as a result that the galleries were swept away, unable to stand up against the surging waves of the changing times.

However, with regard to the foreign tourists etc. it is by no means the case that their desire to purchase art disappeared. That's why I think the galleries might have been able to put the brakes on their own decline to a certain extent if they had offered a service to obtain export permits to remove the cause for tourists losing their interest, but yet the old-fashioned management methods from the Soviet era likely were not amended at the time of this crisis. The galleries never worked out any measures to pick up this neglected demand, and so a new type of gallery that focused on the withering demand of tourists began to appear, all the more leaving traditional galleries behind.

The works displayed at the galleries when I lived in Moscow were in general of a considerably high artistic level, but the truly excellent paintings were not so many in number, and certainly you could not find them at any time. For a person who lived there like myself, the galleries were extremely attractive in the point that you could find good paintings if you were patient enough to take your time, but on the other hand, for the people who visit Moscow from time to time wanting to buy art, the probability to encounter a painting with high artistic value was fairly low, and because the artistic levels of the displayed works varied, there was a probability to purchase with moderate price the piece which, however, is quite mediocre. In the situation where the time was changing towards the formation of a market economy, there likely remained an ample room for a new type of gallery compensating for these shortcomings to appear.

When I visited Saint Petersburg in autumn 1992, this type of new galleries had existed already. They had only paintings of a high artistic value in their own way, priced at such a level that could not compare with that of existing galleries. The galleries would get the permits to take the works out of the country in quite a short time, and it was also set up that in exchange for the high price, customers could safely buy an excellent piece, that is to say, the shift towards selection and high pricing had been already progressing then. When I called at this place again in the summer of 1997, this trend further deepened and high-quality galleries, the shop style of which was absolutely of no difference from that of galleries in the West, were located at the

noticeable places in high-class hotels. It was imprinted in my memory that all the pieces had been equipped with imported frames of high-quality, not to mention the merits of the paintings themselves,

It is in Saint Petersburg that I first noticed the high-end galleries, but also in Moscow I saw several exhibitions for sale at the Central Artists' House in 1991. I found there the pieces by artists whose works I have in my own collection more than once, and each time I inquired about the price, I was surprised at how high it was. It goes without saying that I wanted these pieces that have their own originalities respectively, but at that time, I was not inclined at all to obtain the paintings by the same artists of nearly the same artistic level and size at a price seven or eight times higher. That's why I did not pay any attention to the organizers of these exhibitions. Looking it back, I suppose these exhibitions were held by the high-end galleries. Also around the beginning of spring in 1993, just before the time of my returning home, I heard occasionally that privately-managed, high-end gallery had been set up somewhere in Moscow.

The decline of the galleries from the Soviet era and the birth of high-end galleries were the reflection of the changes in Russian society which, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, still more advanced somehow toward the formation of a market economy, and assuming that the time moves forward in conformity with the present-day historical trends, influential art dealers will also mature in the art sales market in Moscow sooner or later, and a hierarchy of contemporary artists will be created level-wise as in the West, and highly artistic works will likely come to be monopolized by these high-end galleries.

In any case, for five years or so from the time when my stay in Moscow was nearing an end, the art market went through such changes as I noted above, but before the start of perestroika, contemporary Russian art itself had been ahead of the times to sensitively react to the change in a social condition, which brought about the drastic change of the objects of portrayal as well as the change in the meaning for its social expressions. In order to make it clear somehow, I'd like to take a brief look back at Russian art history.

In pictorial art in Russia, same as in literature, there has been the tradition to express a social phase, which derived from the literary and pictorial art activities in

the 19th century, through which they criticized and tried to rectify the delays in the society in their literary and pictorial works. In art, the Union for Itinerant Exhibitions was representative of this. The genre depicting the social aspects was represented by the genre painting and historical painting, and characteristic of these works lay in the expression of social themes.

I think the following anecdote about Ilya Repin is deeply interesting in the point that it makes clear the essential differences between the style of the French impressionists which is very popular in Japan as well and that of their contemporaries in the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions.

Repin was sent by his art academy for studying in Italy and France for three years starting in 1873 (according to the regulation the staying period was five years, but he voluntarily shortened his stay and returned home). During this period, he stayed in Paris for two and a half years, looking with great interest at the works of the early impressionism. Unlike the Academy paintings done up to then in studios, the impressionists' works were produced outdoors under the sunlight and therefore, the bright color tones of light shining the objects were emphasized. Impressionism was the pure art to see the quality of art in this novel portrayal, and also it was the realism art at least at initial stage as it is suggested by the fact that the impressionists especially took measures of painting only outdoors just for thorough pursuit of realism paintings. This artistic method made a deep impression on Repin, and it is said that the influence of the impressionism could be seen in the expressions of the piece in a genre picture he undertook after returning from studying abroad. However, the impressionistic portrayals placing emphasis on the expression of light and shadow on surface of the objects or around them without depicting the essential figures of the objects obscured focal point and point of emphasis, thus hindered to express social phase. Repin came to realize it, and in his later works, he overcame the influence of the impressionists and established Russian realism art of paintings which bring out social issues with deep insight into the essential nature of things (When portraying a certain situation in sunlight, impressionist paintings expressed light not by shadowing techniques, but with a help of bright and varied colors. In this respect it was a revolutionary art of paintings that had not been seen before in the Western art world. In view of the fact that this novel

style of paintings gave a very big impact on later generations, and trends of thought in modern art stemmed and developed from there, there's no room of doubt that it was an extremely important art movement. However, on the other hand, if the country changes, the historical background and social conditions become different and the same can be said in the climate and geographical features. And so, it ought to be natural that the contents of artistic expression and methods of portrayal must also change appropriately in response to them. This anecdote of Repin suggests that modern Russian paintings are the result of a movement firmly rooted in the conditions in Russia, and even though it adopts the techniques of realism born in France, it is entirely different from that of Europe, having in itself such originality that the history of modern Western art cannot ignore).

In this situation, needless to say, the landscape paintings are done with critical realism techniques shared with historical works and genre pictures that gain an insight into the essential nature of things, and the natural beauty of Russia is portrayed soulfully and realistically; there are quite many great landscapes which are not at all inferior to historical pieces and those depicting daily life. However, it seems that the significant role of their social coloring is not very clear and this genre is placed slightly apart from the mainstream of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions that advocated social reform. Pavel Tretyakov, a famous art collector of the time, said to the effect that even landscape depicting only a dirty puddle is good enough if the truth and poem are expressed in it, and probably it was the typical opinion of that time to give the meaning to landscapes.

In the 1930s of the Stalin regime following the Russian revolution, the viewpoint of attaching importance to the expression of a social phase was politically emphasized in literature and art in all, the ideology called socialist realism took priority, and paintings began to be done in line with this ideology. As far as one can see from the permanent exhibition at the new State Tretyakov Gallery, the mainstream of genres in the Stalin era seem to have been historical pieces with Revolution and civil war as their subjects, portraits of revolutionists, landscapes with themes of constructing socialism, and war paintings handling patriotic themes on the war between Germany and the Soviet Union.

In more than a quarter of a century from then, in an era that needed perestroika, general landscapes became the mainstream in Russian realism paintings, and these

landscapes depicting nature and the streets of the cities, along with the daily lives of the people in them, almost were purely artistic works with no ideological coloring. Such features of contemporary realism paintings are strikingly apparent also in the pieces introduced in this book. As these pieces show, the characteristic of the style lies in skillfully depicting the form of objects to reveal the essence of the things and express their appearance as truly realistic as they are. At the institutions of higher art education such as the Surikov Moscow State University of Arts, students are taught the techniques of the French impressionists and post-impressionists, which contemporary Russian art has broadly taken up. Nevertheless, the techniques of traditional Russian realism, the style of which is to depict the essential nature of the objects as real as they are, are passed down as the core of its methods of paintings. As I said previously, these methods have been developed even further.

Now, I would like to think a little more deeply about these landscapes.

The landscapes of any era (in Russia) could be said to be the outcome of a manifestation that an artist, as his natural desire, sought for the expression of his artistic forms in nature and others which had so fascinated him. The portrayal is made based on what the sensitivity of the artist scoops up from the reality, so there is a considerable amount of room in it for the thoughts of the artist to slip in, which is also true of realism landscapes aiming to portray objects in conformity with reality. There always exists problem of where to place the emphasis when depicting the actual scenery, according to which the way of taking composition and infusing emotion through the handling of colors and the brush strokes will subtly change. Realistically painting the objects is the basis for the style of realism art, but practically it is the individual objects making up the picture that are painted realistically in conformity with reality, and the relationships of one object with another in their sizes and positions etc. are normally somewhat different from the real landscape. This is quite natural, given that the harmony of the colors of the overall picture plays the most important role in creating a good painting.

Thinking of the expression of social aspects in these landscapes, in case people or the buildings reminding viewer of them are inclusive in the objects of portrayal, it is possible to represent them if the artist has such intention. But if not, then these ideas will not be expressed, and in the case where the subject is pure nature, there is likely almost no room for such expression, regardless of the intention of the artist.

As for the landscapes of contemporary art for the period from perestroika to the collapse of the Soviet Union and later on, they mostly consisted of the pieces in which no expression of social aspects can be felt. However, the phenomenon that such kind of landscapes in the said period made up the mainstream in painting circles from the viewpoint of genre, and such landscapes comprised the overwhelming majority in the number of works produced then is unprecedented in Russian art history. Focusing on this point, we can see a social meaning reflecting the social conditions of the time even in the landscapes of contemporary art of this period.

As noted in the introduction of this book, speaking from the viewpoint of extended family unit, including grandfather and grandmother, many Russians who live in the cities, inclusive of even ordinary people, have *dacha*(summer house), though it has a wide variety in size from splendid stately mansions to small cottages, outside the cities surrounded by nature, making it a custom to take one or two month holiday in the hottest summer season, and also to spend weekends and holidays during the year except winter season, relaxing in the midst of nature. Of course, the main part of their lives is work, but every Friday evening many Russians hurry out to the *dacha* in fresh air outside the city, and spend their days off, having a refreshing change there. They have lived like this for a long time from the Soviet era, and it is one example that demonstrates Russia is a rich country. In addition to the ordinary people having *dacha*, the basic expenses required for daily life such as apartment fees (after the collapse of the Soviet Union, apartment ownership was transferred to the residents registered there, and the name of the apartment fees in conformity with the floor space have been changed to maintenance fees, which residents continue to pay to the state as they did till then), utility bills for lighting, heating and water for maintenance of life and phone bills so far are so small as to be called almost petty from the standard of the western countries. The *dacha* lifestyle is supported by the fact that almost no big money is needed for daily life except for food and clothing, and also overtime work is not required to ordinary employees as a rule.

In the period of historic upheaval when I lived there, foodstuffs disappeared from the shopfronts for a long time, which was widely reported on by mass media in Japan as well, but the reason why they could endure it without anyone starving to death was

because, thanks to the widespread *dacha* system, people were engaged in farm work in the garden of their *dacha* from spring through summer to stay alive, cultivating a year's worth of vegetables and thus they actually lived half self-sufficient life. And also because of the system of the Soviet era with almost no economic burden on the people being retained even now, in a lingering chaotic political situations, in which only trial and error have been repeated, the people show a traditional patience for economic policies that completely failed to get results. But while the economic turmoil dragged on, the ordinary people have become more and more dependent on the *dacha* because of their hardships. Most of them, without having faith in and expectations to the government, frequently come in contact with the vast nature spreading endlessly outside the cities, finding diversion in the wonder of nature, and thinking over how a person should live and lived their own lives at their own pace as if they knew the truth of life already.

In contemporary landscapes, nature itself and the wide-spread, typical lives of these Russian people living in that nature are expressed. Essentially it is thanks to the richness of the country that the ordinary people can live like this, but it is also the result of the nation, which has long flown the flag of socialism, having paid her attention to the welfare of the ordinary citizens. During the Stalin regime and the years after that, the objects of portrayal expressing social aspects with socialist ideology were the large factories, construction sites and so on, which, however, have shifted to portraying and the lives of Russian people reposing there. For me, it seems to be a rather natural consequence of development as the result of Soviet society having matured with time in general.

However, even in the landscapes depicting daily life, the main subject is nature, and daily life is secondary, as if melting in nature, in which we do feel almost no ideological coloring. This is because the actual lives of the ordinary people having no interest in politics and ideologies are depicted simply without ostentation in line with the method of realism painting, and also rather than ideology, the pieces are done from the viewpoint of pure art. The fact that these kinds of landscapes are the overwhelming majority in contemporary Russian realism paintings means that all the artists have taken these up constantly as the themes for artistic activities, and this artistic phenomenon,

already remarkable in the 1980s, reflects the conditions of society behind it.

I'm jumping ahead a little, but I think the society was on a trend of staying away from politics and ideology as a result of public sentiment having faded for a variety of reasons. Since describing this in detail would take us away from the themes of the paintings, I would restrict myself to reinforcing my opinion by the following aphorism which briefly comments on the major movement in history and naturally applies to the collapse of the Soviet Union as well; "changes of any era do not happen suddenly one day, but the groundwork to accept them is prepared long before."

In any case, landscape of contemporary Russian art expresses nature itself and the general lives of the Russian people having a close connection with this nature. It is these very Russian people and the artist, who is one of them, that look at the scenes depicted in these landscapes. In other words, landscape does not merely express nature and the lives of the Russian people in it, but also markedly includes the nuance of nature having become the spiritual support upon which Russian citizens live.

On the whole the essential features of realism paintings representing contemporary Russian art are such as I have remarked about it and illustrated by the works up to now.

If I look at them again from my individual point of view, the time I lived in Moscow was accidentally a lucky period for viewing contemporary paintings. The good paintings occasionally appeared in the galleries and it turned out that I myself happened to have the sensitivity to understand art. These two points met together by chance (if either of them had lacked, my extraordinary experience in paintings might not have come about), leading me to the situation that I was immensely absorbed in this painting world. In most cases, without knowing the names and background of the artists, I selected pieces from the viewpoint of only getting excellent, powerful paintings, and I ended up collecting a considerable number of pieces, the most part of which consists of landscapes. The reason why my collection mostly consisting of so many landscapes is partly because I wanted pieces that would enable me to relax in my apartment, and it is true that landscapes have satisfied such need, but more than this, I also had the strong desire to obtain a wide range of excellent paintings without clinging to a fixed genre. I collected painting with this standard, and by no means did I put a particular emphasis on collecting landscape. Nevertheless, ending up with such result is entirely because quite

many landscapes were displayed in the galleries, and some masterpieces were found among them in proportion to such quantity, and the relatively low number of pieces of other genres in my collection is explained by the fact that only a few paintings in the other genres I encountered in the galleries, and so their masterpieces were by far smaller in comparison with those of landscape. Thus, it was fortunate for me that I did not select paintings deliberately determining a genre, because it caused me to have a simple question, “Well then, why were landscapes all the time so many among the paintings exhibited in the galleries?” and it can be safely said that this led me to my insight as to the social meaning of contemporary landscapes.

At any rate, judging from my initial purpose just to enjoy myself, appreciating my favorite pieces hanged on the walls of my apartment, I think, as if I noticed it now for the first time, that it would have been quite enough to collect several works. However, because each painting has its own strong individuality which cannot be ignored, it was very hard for me to keep satisfied with the framework of this initial purpose, and I stepped outside this frame before I knew it, and when I realized this, unexpectedly I had become deeply involved in and enchanted by painting art. Besides, the situation has developed even up to the point that I write the book about the paintings, and I have a feeling that everything won’t end up only by this. Being attracted and addicted so much to contemporary Russian realism paintings can be considered in one aspect as just my personal experience.

However, what I can say with certainty from this private experience is that it is just the same as an integrated relation of one side with the other of a coin. Turning eyes to other phase of the fact, you will see that it is the work by the magic of high artistic level of the pieces that drove me mad so that I could have such experience. Therefore, heavily attracted to this art, by no means am I particularly special among Japanese people; I believe from the bottom of my heart that, if only one has the opportunity to get in touch with the wonder of this painting art, this painting world, removing without any difficulty anyone’s psychological barrier of national boundary, shall surely fascinate those who have artistic tastes to various degrees.

## Afterword

This book, in terms of the period when I communicated with the paintings, shines a light on the less than four years after I moved to Moscow in 1989, but the background for my reflection on the social meaning of contemporary Russian art is extended to December 1999, just before Acting President Putin rose to power. Such confinement of the extended period comes from the fact that I finished the basic draft of this book by that time. In view of the conclusion which I drew from my studies about the essential characteristics of contemporary Russian art, which had been mentioned along the lines of “introduction, development, turn and conclusion” according to the construction of this book, it is quite indispensable for the book that I make clear when this period ended. I think it is all the more indispensable because the Putin’s administration later has calmed down Russian political and economic chaos, which lasted more than ten years inclusive of the period of turmoil leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and has successfully drawn a line separating his days from the flow of the time till then. Under the stable administration of President Putin, looking ahead ten years or so, it is possible to guess that we will see the emergence of a new trend of painting works, reflecting the stream of thought and social conditions of these new times.

The conception of this book was worked out about six months before I moved to Moscow for the second time in April 1998, and in that half year before I fled to Moscow, I wrote up nearly 70% of the draft. But if I hadn’t got my second stay in Moscow, which allowed me to see through Russian society more deeply, I feel this book would not have been completed. Because I continued to live in Moscow after completing the manuscript, the release of the book into the world was delayed, but considering that it is the second time stay in Moscow that enabled me to complete it, I think I had no choice but to accept it.

By the way, when I returned to Japan for a short time in the summer of 2001, I came across and knew for the first time the existence of “the World Art Complete Works—Western Art” (publisher: Shogakukan), comprising twenty-eight volumes at the municipal library I happened to visit near my parents’ home, and in the part of this huge art publications, issued from 1993 to 1997, modern Russian art was also taken up. Judging from the overall construction of the complete works where each subject compiled exhaustively and comprehensively in line with the flow of the styles of

Western art history, Russian art was handled complementarily from the side, wherein I felt as if I looked at the traces of the commercial activities of a certain gallery that introduced Russian paintings to Japan during the 1970s and 1980s. This encyclopedia can be said to play a certain role in changing the situation in Japan, where Russian paintings never see the light of the day in respect that you can check it at any time if you go to the mentioned library, which I highly appreciate in this sense. Since modern Russian paintings are explained there more broadly, I would ask you to read it for your reference.

Consequently, the publishing situation in Japan regarding the literature on Russian paintings after I returned from Moscow the first time was slightly different from what I felt at that time, but even if I had known of this encyclopedia then, I would likely still have written this book. The motivation for writing, however, would have had the nuance of taking the next step for introducing Russian art. It goes without saying that taking into consideration the broad meaning which Russian paintings have, it is quite impossible to represent everything by several books. Because of the scarcity of the books or albums devoted to this subject, the attention given to Russian art in Japan is still extremely far from the level it deserves. So I look forward to more of the books on this subject coming out in the future for further changing the situation.

As for the foreword of this book, I asked Peter Ossovsky, a People's Artist of the USSR, to write it. I was given to understand that The State Tretyakov Gallery alone owns more than forty of his works, and a total of nearly 800 pieces are held by Russian art museums on the whole. The reason why I asked him in particular to review for the book is, of course, because this master artist is one of the leading artists in the Russian art world, but also because he was one of the artists who attracted attention to himself due to the style referred to as the “rigid style” at the start of the 1960s in the Khrushchev era.

“Rigid style” refers to the attitude and painting style of only a handful of artists who on each individual base, with exceptional courage, rejected adjusting himself for survival, and worked out his own way in art only by his own ability in the era when the natural trend was to ingratiate oneself with the people in power in full bloom, from which artists, too, were not exempted. A piece by this master artist is introduced in this book (Illustration 36), and his stubborn, sincere personality disdaining any ostentation is

obviously seen in the concise, clear style of this piece. Taking into account his straightforward personality, I expected to get his outspoken criticism of the book.

However, it did not mean that I had confidence in my book, but rather, I strongly wished to know how a first-class Russian artist would look at this book, and when I actually called on him to ask for his review of the book, I felt I was almost trembling with a touch of anxiety as to if my work is worth having the commentary of such an excellent artist. At any rate what I understood from visiting him was that despite his age as old as seventy seven, this master was still hale and hearty, producing his works with strong zeal. At that time, he was in the final stages of preparing for an upcoming one person exhibition. Nevertheless, to my extremely delightful surprise, the book review of his was ready with exceptional speed in two days after I handed him a Russian translation of the manuscript then. My artist friend, who had introduced him to me, later conveyed the message to me that Ossovsky had very much liked my manuscript; he had read it all at one sitting and written out the review the next morning with an intuitive flash. Naturally, this review from such a master brought me confidence and much encouragement, and I'd like to take this opportunity to once again express my sincere gratitude to Peter Ossovsky.

Publishing this book, I decided to include there the manuscript of the lecture as a supplement which I made on the subject of "on Russian paintings" based on the request of Japan Club in Moscow while I was living there the second time. Although there are some overlapping points with the text of this book, I included in it a lot of new items useful for understanding Russian art and these two have a relation to supplement each other. So I would be glad if you will read it together with this book.

April 2005

Norio Ishii

**“On Russian Paintings”** (lecture manuscript for Japan Club in Moscow)

Place: Meeting room of International Hotel (Moscow)

Time: Nov. 23, 2002 (Sat.)

Lecturer: Norio Ishii

Ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you all so much taking the trouble to come here today in spite of holiday. As Chairman of Japan Club Mr. Uehara told you in his kind introduction, my name is Ishii. I'm going to speak to you today on the subject “On Russian paintings”. The truth is, seeing so many people have got together here, I'm happily excited and perhaps a little bit ruffled. Please don't hold it against me.

First of all, I'd like to begin my talk by speaking how I came to have the knowledge of Russian paintings that more or less enables me to give a talk to other people about it.

As Chairman Mr. Uehara mentioned, this is a second period of my station in Moscow, and my total living time here, including my first time stay, is about nine years. The first time, I lived here for four years from 1989, in the turbulent historical era of the collapse of the Soviet Union. During that time, I added appreciating and collecting pictures to my list of hobbies, or rather I became completely absorbed in it. As a result, I came to know a little about Russian art. If going into more details, it is probably more correct to say that, at the stage of returning to Japan at the end of my first residence, I did not have such detailed knowledge about Russian paintings in general, although I knew about how to look at painting and the high artistic level of Russian art. After I returned to Japan, I studied Russian art to some extent and reinforced my personal experience of paintings during my time in Moscow, and what motivated me to do so was that I saw the situation in Japan, in which Russian art was given almost no attention to and I thought it strange.

Probably many of you visited the State Tretyakov Gallery or the Russian Art Museum in Saint Petersburg. As you understand from what you saw there, at least as for modern Russian paintings, they are truly wonderful. For my own part, I believe that

these are paintings at the top artistic level in the world, which are in no way inferior even to the French impressionism so popular in Japan. Also I am of the opinion that the contemporary Russian paintings having developed on base of this tradition keep a high artistic level less inferior to the mentioned arts. Since the contemporary Russian art had been enthusiastically introduced to Japan for the period from the 1970s to the 1980s, I think there are still many people who recognize how high this level is, but regretfully in Japan today, you can see nothing of Russian paintings in everyday life, and for art books as well, you certainly do not see new albums on modern Russian art in the bookstores among a lot of albums of the masters of European art. The more time passed, the more my dissatisfaction grew bit by bit, and I again and again felt the need to have Japanese art lovers know the wonder of Russian art. With the passage of three, four years, however, the situation in Japan had not changed at all, and after repeatedly asking to myself who else could be expected to do if I, knowing something of Russian art, did not do anything by myself to change this situation, I decided to do at least something that might be useful in spreading the merit of Russian paintings in Japan, even if only a little. Thus, as a result of considering a variety of things by process of elimination, what was left as a matter that I felt I could do was to write a book on Russian paintings. It seemed to me that I could write a book about the contemporary Russian paintings, which I was deeply devoted to, based on my experiences in Moscow. So, I worked out the plot of this book, and in line with the contents, I further studied and took in the knowledge of Russian art, that serves as a base of what I am going to talk to you today.

I completed the manuscript in the first half of my second period of residence in Moscow, and because I am still living here, it is not yet published as a book, but I have had the pleasure of having some people in Moscow read this manuscript. Their reviews seem to be not unfavorable, and I personally feel that I somehow managed to write it in line with my intentions. So when I am transferred back to Japan, I plan to have it published sooner or later. I have written such that the essence of contemporary Russian paintings is easily grasped, and also such that you will get to know of Russia as well to some extent. I will let you know when it is published, and I would be delighted if you read it then.

Now I'll go into the story of the paintings.

I'm sure many of you gathered here like paintings. Taking an interest in them requires some kind of impetus. Or rather, I should say that you realize you liked paintings with some kind of encounter. Some people have likely had the experience of coming across a piece they like at a museum and then going back to see it many times. In my case, the impetus was purchasing a piece, with the thought of hanging a painting to ease a bare atmosphere proceeded from the entirely-naked white wall in the living room of the long-term stay hotel where I first lived in Moscow. Generally, in a Japanese living space, one doesn't usually think to hang paintings because the space of naked wall is limited. However, thanks to the fact that I lived in the apartment in Moscow, such opportunity came up and now I even think that staying to work in Moscow was a fortunate turning point in my life. For my part, I did not have any particular interest in paintings till then. However, I obtained by chance the painting, which I began to look at every day in my apartment, and therefore quite naturally I became drawn into the wonder of the painting world.

By the way, the first painting I obtained was an oil painting of 90 × 70 cm by the painter Andrey Ovcharov. This painting with the title of *Foggy Morning* is a landscape depicting a boy holding a fishing line on the shore of a lake early in a summer morning with an opalescent fog not yet cleared up. The boy sits on the grass on the shore in the foreground of the painting. Next to him, a little bit decayed planked stage where water is scooped juts out into the lake, and the surface of the water spreads out from there through the canvas to the opposite shore with trees, smoky and hazy in the fog. A variety of elements drew me to this piece, but if I refer to the main element, this is because one day I felt the power the actual water surface has in the expression of the lake, having the impression that the water spread out far beyond the frame.

Touching the mystery of the painting, or rather the magic of art, I thought how amazing it was, having been engrossed in the piece. From this experience of mine I think that, in order to love paintings from the bottom of one's heart, it is essential first of all that a specific piece has entered into a person's mental life. The present day is called a stress society. We can say it is particularly true of the competitive society of Japan. People who have the hobby of art appreciation feel at ease while looking

carefully at a favorite painting. Calming down and feeling stress release as a result of concentration on appreciating a piece is what I always experience. Therefore, whenever I get the chance, I make it a rule to recommend everyone, “Why not obtaining a painting when you come across the piece you like, now that you are here in Moscow, where you likely have such chances?” If any of you here today does not yet have any painting, I suggest that you look for a piece you can enjoy. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if a new interest in art appreciation rise up within you thanks to this particular piece, just like the case with me?

Next, I’d like to talk how to view a painting.

When I say “how to view a painting,” it may sound as if there exists the fixed method of viewing, but that is absolutely not the case. Rather, I think it is no problem to view a painting in natural way. The important is to feel what the painting appeals, and the way of doing so varies with the viewers. So in this sense, we can say that the painting allows the varied ways of viewing. However, leaving this aside, there seems to be a method of viewing which deepens your understanding of the piece. I’d like to talk about it now.

I always think that art appreciation is a communication between the painting and the viewer. Entering into the world of the painting as if stepping across the frame, which, of course, I mean to do it in terms of feeling, in this way you put yourself inside the painting. If you carefully view the painting in this state and try to perceive the things expressed there, you’ll feel as though you are communicating with the painting. As for Russian paintings, they are never painted aimlessly, but the artists’ creative intentions are involved there, just like the works of literature. Therefore, the interpretation of the work ignoring its title that the artist named means to go away from the artist’s portrayal intention. So you should attach importance not only to the various impressions received from the painting, but also combine these impressions with the title of the piece, thinking about what the author intended to express. Only such a way basically leads to deepening of the understanding of the piece. A favorite painting can enlarge the room of your interest further to the background, in which the piece was depicted, other pieces by the same artist, the artist’s style, and even to the

background of the period in which the artist was placed. Thus, the painting is an extremely profound artistic field as the subject of your studies. It takes time to step into this stage, and it becomes too much specialized. Therefore, it is probably enough in any case for us here to recognize that such way of viewing helps to deepen your understanding of the painting.

And moreover, when appreciating a piece, you should change the viewing angle and distance in various ways besides looking at the picture from the front, because it will slightly change the impression you get from the piece. So, to know the true value of a work, it is necessary to try to find the position from which the piece looks best. I make it a rule to look at paintings in this way at museums, and one day, the woman watching over the exhibition area warned me, “ You must not move around like that.” She likely was worried that I would do something terrible to the paintings because I was changing my viewing position here and there so much. Sometimes such sort of things will happen, nevertheless you will not only get a subtly different impression, but also make unexpected discovery when you view it from a variety of positions.

There is the famous masterpiece of Valentin Serov with the title *The Girl and Peaches* among paintings permanently displayed at the State Tretyakov Gallery. I’m sure all of you know it; the piece depicts a girl sitting at the center of a large table, having a peach in her hands, with her back to the window, through which a bright outside light shines in. Moving from place to place to view this piece, I noticed something. When I moved from side to side, there appeared the interesting effect that only the table rotates while the position of the girl remains static. Wondering why it happened, I looked closely at the painting and understood that the table rotated all the more because the long edge of table intersects the gaze of the girl at not a stable right angle, but an acute or obtuse angle as if he anticipated such movement beforehand. I knew before that the piece took a backlit composition, and the girl’s expression was supposed to be darkly visible, but the artist sacrificed realism techniques to paint so that the most important element for a portrait—the girl’s face—was clearly visible. Viewing while moving, however, a new understanding of this painting’s composition is born. That is to say, setting the girl’s face diagonally and painting it from the front

was the result of the artist's trying to ease the backlit composition even a little bit. Serov's intention concerning the composition was in this respect, and I doubt if he planned the effect of the table rotation in advance, but the viewer naturally keeps on watching the eyes of the girl who was seated at the center of the table and looked at him sideways and therefore, he will see the table rotating on the axle of the girl slowly as he is moving. Moreover, at that time, he is aware that the girl's gaze is persistently on the viewer, which reminds him of the fact that this truly realistic gaze of the girl was the look given to Serov when he was painting this piece more than a hundred years ago. It is a very interesting discovery, and so the next time you go to the State Tretyakov Museum, please be sure to try it yourself.

As for other points to be taken into account when viewing, the contemporary Russian paintings are very sensitive to the light, while, at the same time, in general they have a tendency to lose the look of attractiveness in dark place. So to know the true value of a piece, it is essential to view it in bright conditions. Since the galleries in Moscow usually do not turn on the lights in the exhibition hall during daytime, and hang transparent lace curtains in their windows, the light thereof is generally insufficient. As you know, winters in Russia are long, and the sun seldom shows its face. It's even darker inside the houses. That's why Russians are accustomed to living in dim places by nature and they can see normally in such conditions of light. Maybe, some of you noticed that Russians usually do not turn on the lights in the room during the day. The reason why the departure and arrival lobbies of airport are dim is that they can see quite clearly without feeling any fatigue of eyes in gloom in daytime with the lights off, while Japanese having been raised in a place with a great amount of light are essentially night-blind in dark. So, in dim places, naturally the painting overall looks for us dark and less attractive, as if it had such finish by nature. It won't make us recognize the value of the painting, impressing only the dark painting on us. Thus, especially when you go to the galleries to buy a painting, it is necessary to take care to select a bright time of day. Moreover, if the paintings are hung side by side almost touching each other, in quite many cases the paintings will have an effect on each other and interfere with viewing. When you come across a piece you like so much that you want to buy it, it is best to have the clerk take it off the wall, and then

judge the value of the work on its own. The frame, too, may suit or not suit the painting, and it is necessary to select a frame that shows off the piece. The impression getting from a painting changes completely depending on where it is hung. It is what we often experience. Incidentally, when we see the paintings brought home from Russia in Japan, where the absolute amount of light is remarkably great, they look more attractive. I imagine that in the dim places in Moscow Russians can see the pictures just in the same condition as we see them in the light places in Japan. In this way, the painting is quite heavily dependent on the viewing conditions. Or to put it another way, it is not necessarily the case the painting will appear before you in the best conditions, and so some art lovers who enjoy looking at some specific painting would wonder if the painting is in good mood today. For them it is the existence to draw their concerns so much.

What I have just said is the knowledge that I came to acquire naturally by my own, the knowledge I have gleaned from my experience in the course of my collecting a certain number of pieces of contemporary Russian paintings, hanging them on my walls for fixed periods of time and viewing them in the various viewing conditions of morning, noon and night. I cannot say for sure whether or not modern Russian art and European paintings in general change so sensitively in such way depending on viewing conditions. This is because museums control to a certain extent the amount of light, and in reality you can't see the paintings in a variety of lightings according to the time of day, but I suppose that there is such tendency more or less. In any case, according to my own experience, at least contemporary Russian realism paintings tend to respond sensitively to light, so when viewing these works, it is essential to take such kind of care I mentioned.

Now, can we say what kind of painting is a good one?

I suppose some are of the opinion that as long as a person himself likes it, that's enough. I also think that the person liking the piece is a very important element and that this is fundamental. However, putting aside likes and dislikes, there exists artistic level undeniably for every work and for painting with low artistic level, even if you like it at first, you will likely soon tire of it. Once you tire of a piece, you'll no longer

want to look at it, and if it is hung in your room, naturally you'll want to put it away. This kind of painting cannot be called a good painting. Conversely, there is a painting that you grow to like later, even if you do not like it so much at first. At any event, if there are paintings that stand the test of time, those that you do not tire of after repeated and detailed viewings, paintings that on the contrary become better and better, the more you look at them, then those are what would be called good paintings.

If so, more concretely what sort of painting is it? Saying that it is a piece with a high artistic level is not really apt answer. It simply put "good painting" in other words, and so more explanation of its meaning is needed. I have said just now that you will tire of a painting with a low artistic level. I think anyone would agree that a poorly-done piece has a low artistic level. However, conversely, it is not necessarily the case that a well-done painting has a high artistic level. There are a surprising number of paintings that are painted very well, but somehow have a dry feeling, giving the impression that it lacks for something that makes a viewer feel at ease. A person's feelings tell the truth, which cannot be deceived for so long. This kind of painting, too, will soon lose its appeal.

I think one of the aptly expressed answers to the question about what kind of painting is a good one is a painting that feels pleasant when we look at it. In my experience as well, a common point for paintings with a high artistic level is that they feel pleasant when I look at them. This is not only in Russian paintings, but also applies to European art. Take for instance the works of artists such as Monet, Renoir's portraits, Matisse, Albert Marquet and Modigliani, and we understand that theirs are paintings that can be felt quite pleasant the instant we see them. Because of this we are convinced by ourselves of the correctness of their assessments as master artists. As for Russian realism paintings strictly pursuing an accurate formative depiction, unlike modern European paintings, generally it can be said that a painting having excellently realized three elements of the composition, formative depiction and color balance is a good painting. We can easily imagine from the finished pieces that Russian art schools attach particular importance to the formative depiction. Almost all the artists master to depict a variety of genres, such as landscape, portraiture and still life etc. In the case of realism paintings, I think it the essential conditions to master the formative

depiction in creating a good piece, but nevertheless, I always think that the most important factor among the three elements of the composition, formative depiction and color balance that plays the most decisive role in producing an excellent piece is the color balance. I was further convinced of this thought after I had a certain experience that supported the correctness of my impression, and now I'd like to talk about this.

Among the paintings I've collected, there is an oil painting work, with the size of 120 × 80 cm, called *Late August* painted by the artist Oleg Avakimyan, which is one of my most favorite works. This landscape depicts a scene from above a pond, close to evening in early fall, with a basic color tone of restrained brown; the sun going down in the west can be seen through the thin veil of clouds in the sky, and this gentle light rules the overall scene. In this exquisite atmosphere rich in nuances, the pathos for passing away of summer is wonderfully expressed. When at home in Japan, I took this piece off the wall by myself and because the frame was so heavy that unexpectedly it slipped off my hands, and part of the painting was damaged. It struck me terribly, but it was too late. With no other choice, I brought it with me when I was stationed to work in Moscow the second time, and tried to seek out Mr. Avakimyan to ask him to repair it for me, but no matter how I tried, I could not find out any trace of him. During my second period of residence, I learned that many of the artists that I had liked during my initial time in Moscow had stopped painting, which made me feel as if I saw the economic turmoil in Russia left its scars on artists as well.

In the end, a certain artist repaired it for me. However, shortly after feeling relieved, I noticed it looked somehow a bit strange. The portion that had been repainted for repair was an area with depiction of sky about 20 cm wide and 15 cm high at the most, and the impression that it is a good painting was somewhere gone. So I decided to have a female repair expert, with whom I got acquainted during my second residence in Moscow, work on it. I had asked this woman for repairs several times before, and without exception, when I brought her a painting, she used to comment, "This is a good painting. Repairing a piece like this is fun for me", but when I brought her this piece, she said nothing. I attached a photo of the painting taken before the accident and pointed out the area repaired, comparing it with the photo. Since the color in that area was somehow slightly different from the original, I told her that she should

repaint it in the same color as the rest of the sky and returned home. When I went to see once the repair was finally completed, to my delightfulness, I found that the painting had been restored, just as it had been! She remarked, “At first, I thought this piece was only big in size which it did not deserve, and it was not a good painting. However, when I repaired it, I understood its worth.” As I expected, “the truth was that the opposite quality of rather cold color hues had been mixed into the gentle and warm color tones, and it had ruined the color balance.” It seemed that’s why the piece did not look good.

What I learned from this experience is that even if the composition and formative depiction are exactly the same, if the color balance is not good, then the painting won’t be good. Judging from my experiences of viewing a lot of paintings, if an artist accumulates the training, he can come to acquire the skills for composition and the form, but I have the impression that learning color balance is exceedingly difficult, and that it is deeply connected with the artist’s innate talent. That the number of good paintings is limited can be explained by the general fact that such an innate talent is quite rare. On this point, Russian and European art are the same. I said earlier that looking at an excellent painting, it looks pleasant. Or in other words I can say that this is because the color balance is excellent. Of those artists referred to as masters, there are those who have learned to paint mostly on their own, without any formal art education, even if they have learned from teachers at times. In Russian art, the name of Ilya Ostroukhov, who was also an excellent collector of Russian paintings and later became the second curator of the Tretyakov Gallery, is put on that list. If we turn to European art, names like Cezanne, Gauguin, Gogh, Matisse, Vlaminck, and Utrillo come to mind. We can say that these artists inherently possessed an excellent sense of color.

I’d like to consider this color balance in more detail.

I myself saw the masterpieces of *Dance* and *Music* by Matisse which were on permanent exhibit at the Hermitage Museum. Matisse was commissioned to do these paintings by Sergei Shshukin, a famous Russian collector of modern European art, to display them in his own mansion in Moscow. I’m sure that some of you are familiar with these pieces, and these two oil paintings are almost of the same size, as large as

about  $390 \times 260$  cm. On a green hill against a blue sky, in one, five nude women in primitive figures hold hands to form a circle and dance in ecstasy, while in the other, also five nude boys in primitive figures are lined up standing or sitting in lower or higher positions, making us remind of a G clef and the notes of written music. The boy standing to the left and the boy sitting next to him are playing instruments, and the three boys sitting along from the center to the right side of the canvas are singing a chorus to the accompaniment of the instruments. It is obvious that in contrast to *Dance's* dynamic movement, *Music* expresses a quiet peace of mind, and because of this, the ups and downs of hill the boys are depicted on are gentle compared with the one the nude women dance on. These pieces as well look indescribably sympathetic. As for the colors used in the pieces, there are only four: the browns or black used for the hair and the outlines of the people, the red-tinged skin color to express the skin, the green of the hills and the blue of the sky. The only thing which we feel as to the artist's scrupulous care is that he painted the background etc. with changes in light and shade of color to evade the impression of monotone across the wide canvas and yet these pieces strongly attract the viewers, which enables us to reconfirm that Matisse is a great master indeed.

Looking at these pieces, I newly learned that each color of these pieces has its own strong power. The strength of the colors is also a large element in supporting the primitive figures and the almost simple composition of the large piece. It goes without saying that the reason why you receive the good impression from the painting is because of a profound pleasant feel which the contrast of the four color tones with one another calls up in your eyes, but such effect coming out strongly is derived not only from the excellent overall color balance, in which the composition and forms are closely connected, but also from a strong sense of power in each color, which I noticed for sure through these pieces, and I came to have my impression that this important point is the same for both European and Russian paintings.

As for Russian paintings as well, although there is an exception, in general excellent pieces have a strong force in their portrayal of colors. Where there is a strong power in colors, it can give rise to the effect of the tension of high density or the high transparency in painting. Therefore, an excellent color balance is not simply

the harmony of the colors, but also involves in most cases that each color has its own power and so it is necessary to add that only when these are involved together, the piece will become to be of a high artistic value. As for engraving or watercolor, the colors cannot emit such power because of the method of production or because the colors are thinned with water. In this respect the oil painting is unrivaled, and also it has incomparably broader range of expression for the delicate nuances of colors and the feelings of scale. Therefore, when we speak of painting, generally we refer to oil paintings. And when I refer to the word “painting” in this lecture as well, I’d imply oil paintings with it.

Now, I’d like to talk about today’s subject on what Russian paintings are.

The history of Russian art, excluding icons, is not so old. Peter the Great, over the whole period of his reign, from 1696, when he seized the real power of the throne till 1725, strongly pushed forward with westernization policies for increasing military power and wealth of the country, and it was after these westernization policies that western culture, including art, began to be brought into Russia. In the time of Peter the Great, Italian artists were invited to the country to give art instruction, and besides, Russian students were sent to Rome and Paris. In 1757, Empress Elizabeth established an art academy to teach painting, sculpture, and architecture, and Catherine the Great who followed her reinforced and expanded the art academy. Making it a traditional event to give the students graduating from the art academy with superior results the privilege of studying abroad at the government’s expense, Russia continued to make efforts for the acquisition of Western art persistently with no break from the time of Peter the Great.

As a result, in the second quarter of the 19th century artists who could by far surpass the predecessors began to appear in the domain of art, just as in the fields of literature and music. Karl Brjullov, Alexander Ivanov and Ivan Aivazovsky who could be called as old masters laid the groundwork in a sense to prepare for the shift from classicism or romanticism to realism. In the 1840s, Pavel Fedotov developed a caricature, revealing social contradictions with a realistic style. Going through the developing stage over the 1850s and ‘60s, Russian realism art is said to have come to

maturity over the period of the '70s and early '90s, and it was an art movement called the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions that supported this matured period.

Mr. Shuji Takashina in his book "Modern Art History" mentioned to the effect that the features of modern European art could be defined as the paintings jumping into the spotlight of history as a result that the unfortunate artists referred to as "traitors" or "independents" outdid the leading group by their art of paintings with an overwhelming force (because of these epoch-making novel paintings). The author did not touch at all on modern Russian art, but the same general principle also applies to modern Russian art.

The art movement known as the itinerant exhibitors began when their union was established in 1870 under the leadership of Ivan Kramskoi, and their first exhibition was held the following year on November 29 in St. Petersburg, but its start originated in an unprecedented incident occurring seven years earlier in 1863 at the St. Petersburg Art Academy.

This incident, famous in Russian art history as "the fourteen traitors" occurred, as follows; the fourteen graduating students led by Kramskoi signed and submitted to the art academy a petition to the effect that in place of the art academy designating the examination theme for the graduation contest to decide a student studying abroad at the government expense, they did wish to have the right to select the theme by themselves, and once it was rejected, then voluntarily the students left the art academy. It existed in the background of the students' strong petition that the art academy had long confined the theme of graduation contest only to ever-unchanging religious painting or classical history painting regardless of the changes in the trend of the times. Raising an objection to it and showing their will to protest the denial meant the instant expulsion from the academy, which mean the artists had to disconnect themselves from the institute to sell their work on their own, and support themselves. It compelled them to take a thorny, hopeless road, and yet the competent painters blessed with talent, who had approved their cause, came together and seven years later, they managed to establish the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions.

Since the exhibition moved to several cities in Russia and Ukraine for the purpose of enlightenment and expanding markets for their works, the members of this group

and the exhibitors were called the artists of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions. The main artists belonging to this group were Kramskoi, Alexei Savrasov, Ivan Shishkin, Ivan Aivazovsky, Vasily Perov, Nikolai Ge, Ilya Repin, Arkhip Kuindzhi, Vasily Surikov, Vasily Polenov, and Isaac Levitan, and others. The artists of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions laid the foundations for their movement on the ideological principles from the revolutionary democratic movement Narodism, which saw a grand swell with the abolition of the serf system in 1861 and the development of capitalism. They produced a quite many masterpieces of realism art, reflecting the social contradictions and the wretchedness and toughness of the people or merely depicting a landscape beauty filled with a sensitive taste and poetic sentiment.

By the way, since the French impressionists held their first exhibition two years after the first exhibit of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions. So, to a rare coincidence, these two art movements happened in roughly the same period. The French impressionist exhibition was a direct action on the part of the artists to show to the public their pieces which had not been accepted by the Salon (the government-sponsored official exhibition) and was a suggestive movement to protest and defy the conservative Salon that did not admit new art styles, favoring only neoclassicism.

Anyhow, when I think that the protest of the Russian art students developed into the radical movement of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions, it seems that the protest of the French impressionism artists is firmly within a moderate range. The root of the protest was the same for both the impressionists and the itinerant exhibitors. Modern times can be prescribed as the era, in which the “ego” sprouting from the consciousness of his individuality sought freedom as a result of the spread of thought on civil society, and was in conflict to a greater or lesser extent with the rules of society. That the protest of Russian art student was tinged with a tragic coloring and developed into an antiestablishment movement, which was much more serious than that of the impressionists, was due to the differences in the levels of social maturity. That is to say, this is because the feudal system of Russia was remarkably powerful, compared to France, to the degrees of no need to compare. From the viewpoint of civil society thought, Russia at that time clearly lagged behind in social systems, and it was

exactly for this reason that in Russia was going under way the situation, in which the movements urging social revolution from the bottom up to correct this became the energy of the era. It is quite natural that the difference of social and historical backgrounds of the various countries is clearly reflected in the objects and styles of art expression, and it should be properly reflected like that. While the paintings of the impressionists were of pure art to see the quality of art in expression itself, the paintings of the itinerant exhibitors brought forward social issues to the forefront, which was mainly expressed in a genre picture and historical painting. These pieces were done with critical realism methods, gaining a deep insight into the essence of things to put social issues into relief. In landscape as well, where expressing social issues is difficult, the same portrayal methods are adopted, and it seems that this way of painting enables us to easily grasp where the focus and the emphasis of depiction are put. It shows that the painting of the itinerant exhibitors was the product of an art movement having been rooted deeply in the national conditions of Russia, and it was the painting art that had been prospered exactly for the very reason that Russia lagged behind in modernization.

Now, among the causes of development of paintings in modern Russia, I'd like to touch briefly on one point that cannot be overlooked.

History shows that paintings flourish in places where art has the powerful patrons, and we see that, in spite of the delays in society, there was plenty room of the prosperity of art in modern Russia as well. The preservation of the system to send the student winning the gold cup in the art academy's graduation contest to Europe to study at the government's expense for a long period of even five years is an extremely important element. And besides, there were powerful patrons who supported arts among industrialists.

. Pavel Tretyakov, even though being watched occasionally by the police authorities for the reason that he supported the antiestablishment artists, kept buying paintings of great value from these artists throughout his life from his young age, and established a national art museum. The railway industrialist Savva Mamontov opened his house and villa to artists for over twenty years, starting in the 1870s, and supported the artists referred to as the Abramtsevo school. Artists belonging to this school included Repin,

Polenov, Vasily Vasnetsov, Mikhail Nesterov, Valetin Serov, Konstantin Korovin, Mikhail Vrubel, and others. Through various activities in the Mamontov school, these artists searched for new means of expression, and from the 1880s to 1890s, they brought into the world the works one after another brimming with the lyricism full of ethnic hues or with novel color sensations. The Abramtsevo school asked the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions for a place to make public their works, but their aim of a nostalgic reproduction of ethnic traditions etc. differed from the aims of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions. While the realism art of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions followed a gradually declining path in the 1890s in line with setbacks in the Narodnik movement, the Abramtsevo school opened up new paths of expression and played the role of a bridge connecting their school of paintings with the symbolism art from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20th century. Because of their powerful sponsor always nearby, these talented artists were at least able to live, and despite of the lagging Russian society, or rather exactly because of it, a desire to champion art sprouted in rich industrialists, and it seems that thanks to this situation the artists, having such relatively blessed environment, were able to concentrate on their painting works. This makes a striking contrast with the fact that many modern European artists, who, later recognized and praised as masters, were unable to sell their paintings while alive and suffered from poverty in their daily lives. It is a talent that creates excellent paintings, and we likely cannot say there is an essential difference in whether the artist has a patron or not, but there is no doubt that, in the adverse circumstances, a powerful patron encouraged the talent to bloom, in which we can see one part of the reason why modern Russian art was made to fully bloom.

Here, I would like to briefly introduce the features of the style of the itinerant exhibitors, using Repin's *A Religious Procession in Kursk Province* as an example. Since this piece is on permanent display at the State Tretyakov Gallery, I'm sure many of you know it, which is a masterpiece of a genre picture with the size of 280 x 175 cm, depicting a religious event to parade from the church to another place, carrying crosses and icons. Religious processions are said to have taken place three times a year, Christmas Eve, Easter and August 1. This procession, which proceeds slowly on

the road of wasteland, rather than dessert, of Kursk Province, about five hundred kilometers south of Moscow, is depicted in dry, bright sunlight, raising a cloud of dust behind it, and so we can say that this is the August 1 procession held for the purpose of a prayer for rain in the midst of long drought.

The painting, except for the upper portion of the canvas where the sky is depicted, has a composition of intersecting diagonal lines, and along the diagonal line from the bottom right to the top left, the parade continues far from the back with serfs bearing a portable shrine in front. Near the center of the canvas, where the diagonals intersect, it is depicted that the mistress of a land-owning noble family, holding an icon in her arms, moves forward as if guided by the bishop in full dress, and the figures such as guards, officers, high-level bureaucrats, purveyors, and clergyman escort her as if they surrounded her from both sides. These figures are painted so that they are clearly visible from the open space of the foreground, and they offer a marked contrast with the line, in the left front area, of the beggar women looking down as they walk and the hunchback boy about to be struck by an officer with a cane. In other words, in this religious procession, in which all the people of the region would likely take part, there are all human hierarchies, including the land-owning noble, and a microcosm of society is clearly expressed in this excellent composition. The contrast in the relationship between the upper class, surrounding the land-owning nobles, and the class gasping at the bottom of society, such as serfs and beggars being watched and whipped by the police authorities on horseback puts into sharp relief the social contradictions in modern Russia.

Viewing this painting, we feel a realistic power, as if we were actually seeing the religious procession nearby, and we are touched by his remarkable capacity of description to depict the molding of the crowd so realistically, clearly and concisely. However, if we closely examine the fundamental elements which raised artistic level of the piece so much as to produce such an impression on viewers and make them feel what an amazing painting it is, then we shall come to understand that the artist, to attain the highly artistic result, took the trouble to select a suitable subject on the base of his ability to get deep insight into social contradictions as well as acute composing power to put these contradictions into sharp relief, and in addition to these bases he

successfully worked out the portrayal and finally accomplished the high level he aimed for.

An interesting story remains as an anecdote hidden behind the success of *A Religious Procession in Kursk Province*, so I'd like to tell about it now. When I called it interesting, I mean it's interesting in the sense of deepening your understanding of Russian art. In 1877, about three years before he started on the painting I have just talked, Repin depicted the piece with the same theme, *A Religious Procession in the Oak Forest*. He stayed in Paris two and a half years, studying at the expense of the government, and saw in detail the new style of paintings in those days. These made a very deep impression on him. Above all, he was attracted to the works of Manet and Monet. This *A Religious Procession in the Oak Forest* was depicted next year after he returned from Paris. It was later re-painted and finally finished in 1891. Therefore the expression from the beginning did not remain, but it is said that the influence of the impressionists could be seen in the first version of it. Leo Tolstoy, who was shown this painting by Repin when visiting his studio, was not impressed by the impressionistic depiction that the trees threw the shadows onto the faces of the people in the procession, advising Repin that he had better depict only essential things. Struck by the correctness of these words, Repin overcame the influence of the impressionists, resulting in success of the masterpiece of *A Religious Procession in Kursk Province*. This anecdote not only demonstrates the differences in the styles of the impressionists and the itinerant exhibitors, but also clearly indicates the essential nature of their style. The features of this piece, the theme of which is penetrated by the artist's deep insight, are the features shared to a greater or lesser extent with the masterpieces of "critical realism" of the itinerant exhibitors, in which we can find a secret supporting the high artistic level of modern Russian art.

Just now, in the anecdote of Repin, I referred to the painting style of the impressionists. I would not intend to step into a comparative art study, but attempting a comparison of it with the different nature of art will be useful in further deepening an understanding of Russian art, so now I'd like to talk in some detail about the basic styles of the French impressionism.

The personal exhibition of Monet was held at the Pushkin Museum from January to March 2002, so I'm sure some of you went to see it. I, too, lined up in a long queue that took more than two hours in the midst of the cold winter, and although it was just once, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to see the Monet exhibition. Monet was a prolific artist, and I understood from the lists of his works at the end of an album I obtained previously in Japan that he had painted more than two thousand pieces. Since there were about forty pieces on display in the exhibition, it was really just a small part of his works. Even so, it was the first time I had seen so many of Monet's works assembled together in one place, which made a deep impression on me. Intending to pursue realism persistently, the impressionists stopped painting in a studio which was the practice having been made by artists till then and went outside to depict a scene from nature. In the Monet exhibition, among the pieces done so that the objects were buried in the bright and various colors that could be called the trademark of impressionist, there were also several paintings that embodied clearly the aim for realism. These were the pieces, in which sunlit, bright scenes were clearly depicted up to a distant view. When I associate the paintings of the French impressionists, immediately I am reminded of the works where scenery is expressed vaguely as if near-sighted people saw it without glasses. However, to know that the realistic paintings like these are also inclusive of in his works was helpful for me. The work that I liked was the *Rouen Cathedral* series, where in the twilight of approaching evening, the afterglow of a subtle light is wonderfully captured, which was just my expectation. Monet also painted many other series, such as *Water Lilies*, and viewing the Monet's exhibition, I came to have the strong impression that as a matter of fact, the work showing his true worth might be a series. Viewing one series and comparing them with one another simultaneously, I can grasp the subtle changes in the amount of light as if I held them in my hand and it can be certainly said that this is just the world of Monet.

Anyway, the style of the impressionism uses a portrayal technique called broken brush to express the light outdoors. As you know, colors have the property of becoming dark when mixed up. Therefore, without mixing together, they used a method of painting, in which two colors of paint are scooped up together with the tip

of the brush and put onto the canvas. Viewed from afar, the two colors join into one as if they mixed, and yet the brightness of the color is maintained. In this way, the bright outdoor light is expressed. However, since their main attention was naturally paid to the expression of the light, the artists, when painting objects hit by the light, made their own portrayal expressions which differ completely from conventional methods. The impressionists repudiated to express the objects which have in nature physical characteristics of inherent colors, three-dimensional figure and texture by the traditional techniques such as shading, fleshing out, and perspective, but reproduced them with the changes in colors depending on the degree of light hitting the object. So, it looks as though the objects were buried in a boisterous dance of light of varied colors. This portrayal method cut off the traditional techniques European art has been developed since the Renaissance. It is for this reason that the impressionist paintings are called revolutionary.

Well, what I have said just now is written in books explaining the impressionism paintings, so I'm sure all of you are aware of these points. However, now I'd like to talk a little bit on the things that are not written in any of these books.

As for the impressionism paintings, I have an impression a little bit different from the hitherto repeated explanation that refers only to "breaking off art traditions". Certainly, breaking off tradition can be said, but if asked whether all the aspects European art had traditionally developed were broken off by the impressionism art, I would say "no". When I went to Hamburg this April, I saw a Monet piece displayed at a modern art museum there and I was further convinced of the correctness of my impression. So, I'd like to introduce my view on this matter, referring to this experience.

Only one piece by Money was displayed at the Hamburger Kunsthalle. It was a still life with grapes and other fruits; I looked at the harmony of the colors, glittering with the broken brush of the piece, when all of a sudden emerged in my vision *Pyramids at Port-Coton*, a Monet's piece exhibited at the Pushkin Museum, as if overlapping on this painting. When I say *Pyramids at Port-Coton*, the piece likely doesn't click in your mind, but I'm sure some of you will remember the piece if I say that it depicted a group of perpendicular rocks in a bright sea that could be seen on the sawtooth

coastline. Namely, this experience taught me that the two paintings resembled each other very closely. For Monet, it was not the important matter to express the differences in the physical qualities of the fruit, and the ocean or the rocks, but the important was the expression of the light in these scenes. If so, the objects of the portrayal become merely something secondary mediating light. The possibility of this guess coming true seems to be extremely high in view of the characteristics of impressionism paintings. I felt that my sensitivity had unconsciously detected that these two paintings closely resemble each other in the color balance expressing the light of the scenes.

In other words, it is not a mistake to say that impressionism art is the painting art making much of the expression of light, but I wonder if the essence of this art is in the point that the main emphasis was put on the expression of the color balance, and through my experience in Hamburg, it has become almost a conviction within me. And when taking this viewpoint into account, and overlooking the trend of artistic thought after the impressionists and on, the very interesting way of viewing appears, as follows.

The flow of modern European art after the impressionism on went through what we generally call in one package as post impressionism, namely, the defection from the impressionism by Cezanne and Renoir, anti-impressionism, that is, symbolism painting represented by Gauguin and Gogh, and finally new impressionism by Seurat and Signac, and then moved to fauvism, namely, the expressionism paintings of artists like Matisse and Vlaminck. If we set aside the meaning of the themes expressed in each of the artistic streams of thought, there are characteristics that are shared by the portrayal trends of these schools. These are characteristics generally pointed out as “the defection from realism” and “the shift to a plane perspective” in paintings, but when we examine these common features from the viewpoint of the color balance, an immediate understanding can be obtained. That is to say, “the defection from realism” and “the shift to a plane perspective” were the result of attempting to simplify the molding of each object and the composition involving it, and we realize that this simplification was a means to effectively push the color balance in the forefront.

Cezanne parted with the impressionist techniques that depict the objects as if they

lose the physical characteristics, and just as Cezanne himself remarked, “Treat nature by the cone, cylinder, and the sphere,” he had returned to the solid expression of the form. However, this portrayal method was of a different nature from realism, and traces of the impressionism, pushing the color balance into the forefront, markedly remain. It is an unmistakable fact that the excellence of his pieces lies in the conspicuousness of this color balance, and his harmonious color combination of green accompanying dark green shadow with ochre also has a large influence on contemporary Russian art, too. In the paintings of Gauguin as well, the objects of portrayal are deeply outlined, the inside of which are generally painted flatly, and therefore, from a distance, it looks like a pattern. Especially as for Matisse, simplifying the objects of portrayal in distinct manner, and making heavy use of decorative patterns, he consciously depicted so that the color balance could be grasped definitely. In other words, in the trend of artistic methods by these schools we can find out the consistent direction of indicating the color balance in more defined way. What promoted it to the limit is cubism and abstract art, and perhaps it can be safely said that these are the paintings pursuing more purely the aim to charm the viewers with the color balance itself.

Perusing Western art history, we are given to understand that the argument about which is relatively more important, form or color, had been enthusiastically made in Renaissance Italy, but in latter half of the 17th century France took over the leading role in art and thereafter in this place the heated argument on the same topics recurred and finally the thought that color takes priority over form took root, and European art since then has developed to a greater or lesser extent along the line placing the importance on color. In this sense, we can see that the movement of the impressionists and on towards placing the emphasis on color balance is not the interruption of the artistic tradition, but further promotion in the tradition of emphasizing color. If our understanding is extended to the point that impressionism art is the paintings pushing the color balance into the forefront, it brings us quickly to this arrival point. Moreover, the question about why the stream of later artistic thought, including the impressionism, has the common characteristics of “the defection from realism” and “the shift to a plane perspective” in portrayals can be cleared up. It’s quite possible

that some art critic has already said these things, and I just don't know about it. If so, I would feel more encouraged, but in any case I do think it is not a mistake to affirm what I have just said applies to modern European paintings.

I've made rather long talk, or I should say I put too much energy into the special characteristics of modern European art techniques, centering the impressionism, but if we keep in mind the similarities and differences of their painting styles, we can obtain deeper understanding of modern Russian art, so it won't be a waste of time. When I call it Russian art, it sounds as if it differs from European art, but essentially, Russian art should be included in art of Europe, and just as French art, its root can be traced back to the art of the Italian Renaissance. European art from the impressionists and on has abandoned the part of the flow of technical traditions to promote one aspect of these paintings for their objective, attaching much importance to color balance in the flow of remaining tradition, while Russian art since the 18th century on has inherited the flow of these traditions as they were and let a matured own realism art bloom in Russia in the latter half of the 19th century. As I said earlier, the paintings of the Union of Itinerant Exhibitions and the Abramtsevo school are representative of the modern Russian art. The former paintings revealed the lagging modern society in a historical background and social conditions of Russia, while the latter is the paintings depicting Russia from the viewpoint of the ethnic traits etc. Judging from objective standpoint and not from favoritism, I believe that Russian can take pride to the world in the high artistic level of these paintings, expressing the subjects unparalleled anywhere.

Next, I'll shift to the talks about contemporary Russian paintings.

In Japan, contemporary art generally means abstract paintings or pop art, but in Russia, the term refers to realism. The reason why it is commonly accepted in Russia is that realism paintings account for the majority of paintings produced in the classified period of the present age. As to why it turned out like this, there is a historical background devised politically and artificially, and if I mention the details of the case, it follows like this.

Entering the 20th century, the flow of Russian artistic thought became to keep pace

with that of Europe. It began with the decadent symbolism of “the World of Art”, the creation of which was founded on the thought of individualism and Christian eschatology, then moved to the impressionism of “the Union of Russian Artists”, having conspicuous tendency to express national motifs, the primitivism of “the Blue Rose” school, and so on. Then next turn was cubism, and finally abstractionism. The period of this flow of artistic thought, covering from the end of the 19th century to the 1930s, following the October Revolution, is said to be an age of mental exaltation never seen before in Russia, when the literary and artistic thought, inclusive of painting, assumed the aspect of such a rapid current that the one school had been taken place by another in succession at an interval of just a few years.

However, as the enthusiasm and confusion of the October Revolution were calming down to cool the melting pot of the revolution, political calculation worked strongly in the movements of the cultural world to maintain the regime, leading to the situation where socialist realism ideology had its influence on painting art in just the same way as it had on literature and music. After the establishment of the Artists’ Union of the USSR in 1932, the state consciously encouraged realism paintings, and as a result, the paintings referred to as socialist realism have been maintained without a break for more than half century since then. One art school having been strongly supported and trained by the country over such long period is a rare phenomenon in world art history. However, conversely because of it, we can say, this painting art has accomplished an unusually high level of development with no examples ever seen anywhere else.

Because realism art had been artificially encouraged and maintained over a long period due to Russian ideological cultural policy, two artistic phenomena arose, leading to an understanding of what contemporary Russian art is.

One of them is that because these paintings had been inlaid by the country with a social framework, the following painting situation that strongly reflects the social upheavals was born.

It can be safely said that for the period from the end of the Soviet era to the Russian rebirth, when I first lived in Moscow, socialist realism paintings, in the laps of more

than a half century of existence, have undergone a large metamorphosis; the objects of portrayal have been changed, the ideological coloring has faded as if a bitterness was removed, and the paintings have become something close to nature. Genres, such as historical painting with the October Revolution or civil war, portraiture of revolutionists, landscape depicting the big plants of heavy industry or construction sites, and war painting with themes of the Great Patriotic War, which are on permanent display at the new State Tretyakov Gallery, did not any more meet the demands of the era, and faded away. As far as I saw in the galleries and exhibitions of contemporary paintings, these types of paintings had almost completely disappeared. General landscape and still life were in the majority of the works and I felt from them no ideological coloring. Most of these works were landscapes with nature alone as their object, and the resting others were the pieces depicting the lives of Russian people in nature or the streets of the towns etc. My impression, after having haunted the galleries every Saturday, was that these landscapes easily account for seventy percent of the total pieces on display. My collection, too, mostly consists of this type of landscapes. It is definitely not the case that I intended to collect only landscapes, but rather I collected paintings from the standpoint to look for good pieces worthy of appreciation. Nevertheless, things ended up this way. This is just because so many landscapes were exhibited there and in proportion to this number good works were also found mainly in the genre of landscape.

When four years passed after my first period of stay in Moscow matured and I returned home, I firmly decided to write a book on contemporary Russian paintings, and then a doubt came to mind: "At any rate, why were so many of landscapes displayed in the galleries?" I had the feeling that I would not be able to complete this book, unless I found the answer to this question, so I thought over various matters and as a hint to find the answer, I focused my attention on the *dacha* system.

The *dacha* system developed in the Kruschchev era, and if we remark in terms of extended families, including grandfather and grandmother, it seems that a lot of ordinary people working in the cities came to have a *dacha* already in the early years of the Brezhnev era. However, the economic turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union went on successively for a long period of time and people who parted

with their *dacha* to make ends meet, Russians who moved to Russia from other countries of former Soviet Union, and people having moved to other cities, casting aside their permanent homes, increased in number. Therefore, we can assume that in recent years the percentage of families owning a *dacha* has gone down, but even so, total number of dacha remains unchanged, and if you take a look around you, you will likely notice that in Moscow, most Russians still go to their dacha in the suburbs over the weekends, or on holidays except in winter, and besides take one or two month vacation in the summer to spend working in the vegetable garden at their *dacha*, walking in the surrounding woods, or sunbathing while reading a book, thus keeping the custom of spending lazy days in nature. What I often heard from Russian people was the complaints that the air in Moscow was too bad to live in, and if you actually go out of the city, you will understand only too well what they mean. Large woods and broad tracts of land spread out endlessly, and you feel as though your soul is washed clean by Mother Nature.

The economic turmoil continued from the period leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union to the end of the Yeltsin administration, and it was the *dacha* system that supported the life of ordinary people in these trying circumstances. When I came to Moscow to work for the second time in April 1998, it was at the end of the Yeltsin administration, and as you know, this was the period immediately before the devaluation of the ruble. Busy streets looked like a show of brilliant activity on the surface, but peeling off a layer, namely, for the large majority of ordinary people, the situation was such that the economic turmoil crawled across the bottom all as before. What I saw in the Russian people was that most of them had no confidence in, nor expectation towards the government. Every Friday evening they endeavored to go out to their dacha as quickly as possible, where they cultivate a year's worth of vegetables in gardens to defend their living, while on the other hand they come into frequent contact with the nearby nature, finding out a comfort in its beauty, and scoop from it a sober view on how people should live. As one of the ordinary people, artists also lived this *dacha* life style, and painted the works featuring the grand natural world outside the city and the lives of the Russian people in it. Landscapes depicting nature alone have always been a genre where it is difficult to inject an ideological coloring, but in

landscapes featuring the lives of Russian people in it as well, the main object is nature, and their lives were done secondarily as if they melted into the surrounding nature, in which we can feel absolutely no ideological coloring. The reason why we cannot feel any ideological coloring in them is because the actual lives of the ordinary people, having no concern with politics nor ideology, were expressed simply and without embellishment in line with realism law of paintings, and the pieces were done from a purely artistic viewpoint, and not from an ideological one.

The phenomenon that such landscapes account for the majority of works released to the world is unprecedented in Russian art history and it indicates that most artists uniformly tried to take up the landscape as the theme for their artistic activities. The fact that artists no longer depicted socialist realism paintings, and that the number of landscapes produced was in an overwhelming majority, and besides, these pieces were painted from a purely artistic viewpoint are strongly linked to one thing. That is, it shows that in the background of such phenomenon there existed the social conditions where public sentiment, in a variety of circumstances, was apathetic toward the government and ideology. From the beginning of my second period of residence in Moscow, I have consciously looked into respective contemporary artists' albums and the like, and from this impression, too, it seems that the tendency towards the situation that the paintings of socialist realism were no longer done and the purely artistic landscapes accounted for the majority had already happened at the beginning of the '80s, and this trend was accelerated with the development of perestroika. It is clear that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not take place suddenly one day, but the foundation to accept it had been being created since long time before, and I think the phenomenon of an increasing number of landscapes being painted can be explained by the thing that the artists all spoke for these social conditions, reflecting them in their works regardless of whether or not they themselves were aware of it.

Contemporary art originating in the ideological policy at the beginning of the Stalin era is called "socialist realism", which markedly reflected the demands of that time. However, if we look at the landscapes of pure art paintings on the whole that became striking from the '80s and on, we can also see conspicuous reflections of society there. That is to say, these landscape paintings have not only the depiction of nature or the

lives of Russian people in it, but also are noticeably inclusive of the meaning that the Russian people are increasingly leaning toward nature in the midst of the changing times, in which they found their spiritual support to live. This reflection of social conditions is also a feature rooted in the peculiar circumstances in Russia, and it is an element that should be attached importance to in better understanding the characteristics of contemporary Russian paintings.

Another artistic phenomenon coming from realism paintings as a specific style being supported for too long time is more essential and so more important than the first phenomenon, which can be seen in the point that the different elements flowed into this style and, as a natural consequence, in the frame of ambiguously expanded style of realism these portrayal techniques have deepened in various ways.

Modern Russia paintings, in the studying period, learned a great deal mainly from the masters of Italian Renaissance art, and that's why they particularly excel in molding expression of the human form on the whole. Contemporary paintings inherited the traditions of this modern art, having developed along this extension line. As the elements not found in modern art, we can point out how contemporary paintings have broadly taken in the portrayal methods of modern European art in a long sustaining process, letting the art of painting be broadened and diversified. In the Central Artists' House adjacent to the New State Tretyakov Gallery, one-person exhibitions of contemporary artists are held frequently, but even if I limit my remarks within the general framework of style of realism, there are so varied painting methods that I cannot really understand how many different schools there are. The change in style of paintings essentially comes from the innovative idea of an artist for expression, and it is from this that artistic style is eventually formed, but while there is some school of paintings instantly understandable for the portrayal intention of the author, there is also the other causing rejection, and on the whole many of these painting methods, from my sense of color, seem to give the impression that the degree of maturity is not yet sufficient. In this regard, if I look at traditional realism paintings, they give me something like a very real sense of relief.

In any case, looking objectively at this moment, we can say that the contemporary

realism, having developed on the tradition. Actually the core of the painting circle is made up by the artists of this school. Comparing these portrayal features with the techniques of modern art landscape and still life, contemporary art has the significant features of having further developed them, the major factor of which can be seen in the point that a realistic feel of the portrayal objects is thoroughly expressed to reveal the essence. They are grasped so accurately and realistically, according to the circumstance of the scene where the objects are situated. Therefore the rock looks just real rock or the differences in the shallows and depths of the river can be easily distinguished. That's why not only the atmosphere such as quietness and sentiment, but also solid sense of reality and lively energy are felt vividly. Thus we can safely say that almost the same thing as modern paintings enhanced to a perfection level the portrayal expression of human body in portraiture or historical painting, deepening the psychological expression and thus drawing nearer to the human inner world has been accomplished by contemporary paintings in landscape and still life.

As I just said, contemporary paintings have their common point in revealing the essential nature of things to express the feel of them completely. This means that contemporary artists share this aim in depiction. However, the form, brush work, and the overall color balance for expressing this depiction differ depending on each artist, and this is a world, in which the originality and talent of the artist play the important roles. It goes without saying that excellent works of contemporary art are remarkable for a high artistic level, and that's why unexpectedly I was drawn into this world, but I have already talked too much and there would be little meaning in explaining high artistic level only with words without showing any examples. Therefore, finally I'd like you to take a look at these four pieces that I brought along with me and I will offer supplemental explanations for each of them.

Works introduced:

- 1) Vasily Arlashin (1923–1998), *Portrait of a Girl* (1967)
- 2) B. A. Tchepkasov, *Summer Day* (1960s?)
- 3) Ivan Gomzikov (1917–1987), *Pasture, Herd of Cows* (1960)
- 4) Peter Ossovsky (b. 1925), *Light from the Heavens* (1996)

Well, allow me now to conclude this lecture. I've given you a general overview of the features of both of modern and contemporary paintings, and I hope that this modest talk will be of some use to all of you here today, and I would be delighted if my lecture would be of some help to your better understanding of Russian paintings.

Thank you very much for your attention.

## Main References

### “Literature in Japanese”

高階秀爾著『近代絵画史』上・下(中公新書)

フレデリック・アーツ(Frederic B. Arts)著(望月雄二訳)『ルネサンスからロマン主義へ(From the Renaissance to Romanticism)』(音楽之友社)

A.I.ゾトフ(А.И. Зотов)著(石黒 寛・濱田靖子訳)『ロシア美術史(Русское искусство с древних времен до начала XX века)』(美術出版社)

D.Ya.ベズルコワ(Д. Я. Безрукова)著(本田純一訳)『ロシアの美術(Рассказ о Третьяковской галерее)』(新潮社)

『米寿記念・東山魁夷展』(日本経済新聞社)

『73 現代ソビエト絵画』(月光荘)

『74 現代ソビエト絵画』(月光荘)

『ロシア近代絵画の至宝~トレチャコフ美術館展~』(NHK、NHK プロモーション 1993)

作曲家別名曲解説ライブラリー 22『ロシア国民楽派』(音楽之友社)

亀山郁夫著『終末と革命のロシア・ルネサンス』(岩波書店)

岩間 徹編『ロシア史』(山川出版社)

原 卓也監修『ロシア』(新潮社)

鈴木竹夫著『忘れえぬ女』(蝸牛社)

### “Literature in Russian”

«Великая утопия. Русский советский авангард 1915 - 1932» М.: Галард, 1993

Бестужева С.К. «П. Оссовский» М.: Советский художник, 1987

Дмитьева Н.А. «Михаил Александрович Врубель» Л.: Художник, 1984

Кеменов В.С. «Василий Иванович Суриков» Л.: Художник РСФСР, 1991

Круглов В.Ф. «Русский импрессионизм»

СПб.: Государственный Русский Музей, 2000

Леняшин В.А. «Валентин Александрович Серов» Л.: Художник РСФСР, 1989

Лясковская О.А. «Илья Ефимович Репин» М.: Искусство, 1982

Манин В.С. «Архип Иванович Куинджи» Л.: Художник РСФСР, 1990

Мезенцев М.В. «Мастера живописи. Крамской.» М.: Белый город, 1999

Пастон Э.В. «Василий Дмитриевич Поленов» СПб.: Художник РСФСР, 1991

Салахов Т.Т. «Молодые художники о Родине» М.: Советский художник, 1985

Федоров-Давыдов А.А. «Исаак Ильич Левитан. Жизнь и творчество. 1860 - 1900» М.: Искусство, 1976

Филонович И.Н. «Московские живописцы» М.: Советский художник, 1979

Хачатрян Щ.Г. «Айвазовский» М.: Арт-Родник, 1997

Шувалова. И.Н. «Иван Иванович Шишкин» СПб.: Художник России, 1993

«З. Серебрякова. Избранные произведения» Авт. С13 составитель Е. Ф. Савицкая М.:Сов.

Художник, 1988

“CDROM”

«Энциклопедия истории России 862 - 1917 г.г.» АО Коминфо, 1998

«Moscow for You” Cordis Media Ltd., Moscow 1997

”Internet”

«Единый Художественный Рейтинг |живопись и графика» пятый выпуск:  
Профессиональный Союз Художников, 2002

## List of illustrations

<u>The Rating of “the Artists’ Trade Union”</u>				
On the front cover		Andrey V. Ovcharov	<i>Foggy Morning</i>	4B ⇒3B
P. 27	1.	Veniamin A. Safonov	<i>Summer (Podolsk)</i>	→4A
P.28	2.	V. A. Tchepkasov	<i>Summer Day</i>	
P.30	3.	Roman L. Podobedov	<i>After the Rain</i>	→3A ⇒4B
P.31	4.	Fedor V. Shapaev	<i>Winter in the Suburbs of Moscow</i>	4B
P.32	5.	Vitaly T. Davydov	<i>Beginning of the Storm</i>	4B
P.33	6.	Aleksandr F. Michurin	<i>Ice Floes</i>	4B
P.34	7.	Aleksey Ya. Koltsov	<i>Moscow, Kremlin</i>	4B
P.36	8.	Aleksey S. Kulagin	<i>Dagestan</i>	4B
P.37	9.	D. Chukhrai	<i>Sadovaya Inner Loop Road</i>	
P.38	10.	Aleksander P. Bykov	<i>Spring</i>	4B
P.40	11.	Sergei P. Bocharov	<i>Siberian Courtyard</i>	4B
P.41	12.	Ivan A. Yazev		⇒4B
		<i>L.N. Tolstoy’s House-Museum (Yasnaya Polyana)</i>		
P.58	13.	Igor P. Rubinsky	<i>Summer Evening</i>	4B
P.59	14.	Igor P. Rubinsky	<i>Old Willow Trees</i>	4B
P. 60	15.	Pavel I. Rubinsky	<i>Pacific Ocean</i>	→4B ⇒5B
P.61	16.	Pavel I. Rubinsky	<i>Last Snow</i>	→4B ⇒5B
P.62	17.	Mikhail A. Suzdaltsev	<i>On the Volga River</i>	3A ⇒3B
P. 63	18.	Mikhail A. Suzdaltsev	<i>The Bank of the Volga</i>	3A ⇒3B
P.64	19.	Nikolai Ya. Belyaev	<i>White Wild Roses</i>	4B
P.65	20.	Nikolai Ya. Belyaev	<i>Autumn in Sergiyev Posad</i>	4B
P.66	21.	Gennady I. Pasko	<i>Rozhdestvenskaya Street, Yaroslav</i>	4B

P.67	22.	Gennady I. Pasko	<i>Autumn Sun</i>	4B	
P.68	23.	Ivan S. Gomzikov	<i>River Landscape</i>	4B	
P.69	24.	Ivan S. Gomzikov	<i>Pasture, Herd of Cows</i>	4B	
P.71	25.	Oleg A. Avakimyan	<i>Winter in the Mountains</i>	4B	⇒5B
P.73	26.	Oleg A. Avakimyan	<i>Winter in Yelets</i>	4B	⇒5B
P.74	27.	Oleg A. Avakimyan	<i>Late August</i>	4B	⇒5B
P.76	28.	Sergei A. Neshjchimny	<i>Seaweed Collectors</i>		
P. 77	29.	Sergei A. Neshshimniy	<i>Evening, Forest Lake</i>		
P. 78	30.	Sergei A. Neshshimniy	<i>Evening in the Mountains (Japan)</i>		
P. 79	31.	Sergei A. Neshshimniy	<i>Russia, Kuzov Island (White Sea)</i>		
P. 85	32.	Mikhail A. Suzdaltsev	<i>Morning</i>	3A	⇒3B
P. 86	33.	Vasily A. Arlashin	<i>Portrait of a Girl</i>	4B	
P. 87	34.	Vitali T. Davydov		4B	
		<i>The Foundation of the Port at Kamchatka: The Ships St. Peter and St. Paul</i>			
P. 88	35.	Rarisa S. Zatulovskaya	<i>Strawberries V</i>	4B	→4A
P. 89	36.	Pyotr P. Ossovsky	<i>Quiet</i>	2B	⇒3B
P. 91	37.	Leviy S. Shshipachev	<i>Morning</i>	4B	
P. 92	38.	Georgi A. Sysoliatin		4A	
		<i>The Roads of Non-Black Soil: Riumnikovo Village</i>			

## Предисловие

Знакомясь с рукописью г-на Исии «Современная русская живопись глазами одного японца», я был немало удивлен, как глазами своей нерусской души ему удалось открыть то, что свойственно русскому художнику, а именно глубокое проникновение и восторженное отношение к русскому пейзажу, к традициям русской реалистической школы, на фундаменте которой всегда возникали и будут возникать таланты не только национального, но и мирового масштаба.

Уже много лет тому назад в годы моей молодости, во времена первого знакомства японцев с русской живописью, о чем пишет в своей книге г-н Исии, и успеха показа ее в Японии, я узнал из отзывов японской прессы, что Россия спасла для всего мира реалистическое искусство. И время подтвердило эту мысль. Мы, войдя в XXI век, можем констатировать, что в моей стране, единственной в мире, сохранилась и существует школа, без которой всякие попытки заниматься реалистическим искусством бесполезны. Так же как балету, музыке, оперному, танцевальному и исполнительному музыкальному искусству, реализму необходима серьезная школа. Моей задачей не является вскрыть причины исчезновения школы реализма в ведущих странах мира, и, возвращаясь к рукописи г-на Исии, я ловил себя на мысли, что книгу писал не иностранец, а русский человек, так по-своему, эмоционально автор чувствует то, что вкладывают русские мастера кисти в свои полотна.

Г-н Исии начал коллекционировать живопись после того, как приехал в Москву. Картины, что представлены в его книге, обладают достаточно высоким художественным уровнем, и все же, это не означает, что все они написаны большими мастерами. Я прекрасно понимаю сложности, которые возникали в процессе знакомства с работами русских художников. В таком благородном труде необходимы серьезные консультанты и финансовые возможности, чтобы вывести коллекцию картин, собранную г-ном Исии на надлежащий уровень, соответствующий истинному состоянию и достижениям лучших мастеров русского реализма. Я называю реализм русским, хотя он не имеет национальных определений только потому, что истинный реализм имеет развитие лишь в России.

Г-н Исии знакомился с картинами по большей части в галереях. Надо быть человеком весьма проницательным, затратить время, чтобы полагаясь лишь на собственную

интуицию, отобрать работы того уровня, что представлен в этой книге. Собрав небольшую коллекцию полотен, автор книги внес серьезный вклад в ознакомление японского зрителя с живописью моей страны. Мне думается, что этот вклад трудно переоценить.

Я знаю, что в планах автора издать свой труд на Западе, где так же плохо ознакомлены с искусством русских мастеров реалистического направления второй половины XX столетия. Подобно тому, как русская школа была открыта для мира в начале XX века, я уверен, что русский реализм XIX и XX веков еще предстоит открыть людям нашей планеты, и это не за горами.

По сему, усилия предпринятые г-ном Исии по ознакомлению японского общества с нашей живописью, не только нужно горячо приветствовать, но и всячески помогать ему в этом, коль не нашлось русского искусствоведа, способного совершить подобный поступок, а я считаю деятельность г-на Исии именно поступком, на который может быть подвигнут лишь человек с благородной душой, влюбленный в живопись.

Остается лишь пожелать, говоря образным языком, чтобы в стране, где восходит солнце, с помощью автора этой книги оно осветило бы значение и смысл русской живописи второй половины XX века для народа Японии, и тем самым, упала бы завеса неизвестности в отношении творчества мастеров русской кисти. Мир должен узнать изобразительное искусство моей страны, основанное на бескорыстном и беспредельном служении и любви к России, человеку и природе.

Народный художник СССР

Лауреат Государственной премии СССР

Действительный член Российской академии художеств

Петр Оссовский



**About the author**

Norio Ishii was born in Tokyo on March 15, 1947.

Graduated from the First Literature Department of Waseda University, majoring in Russian literature