

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 19th 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, 60 × 120 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.

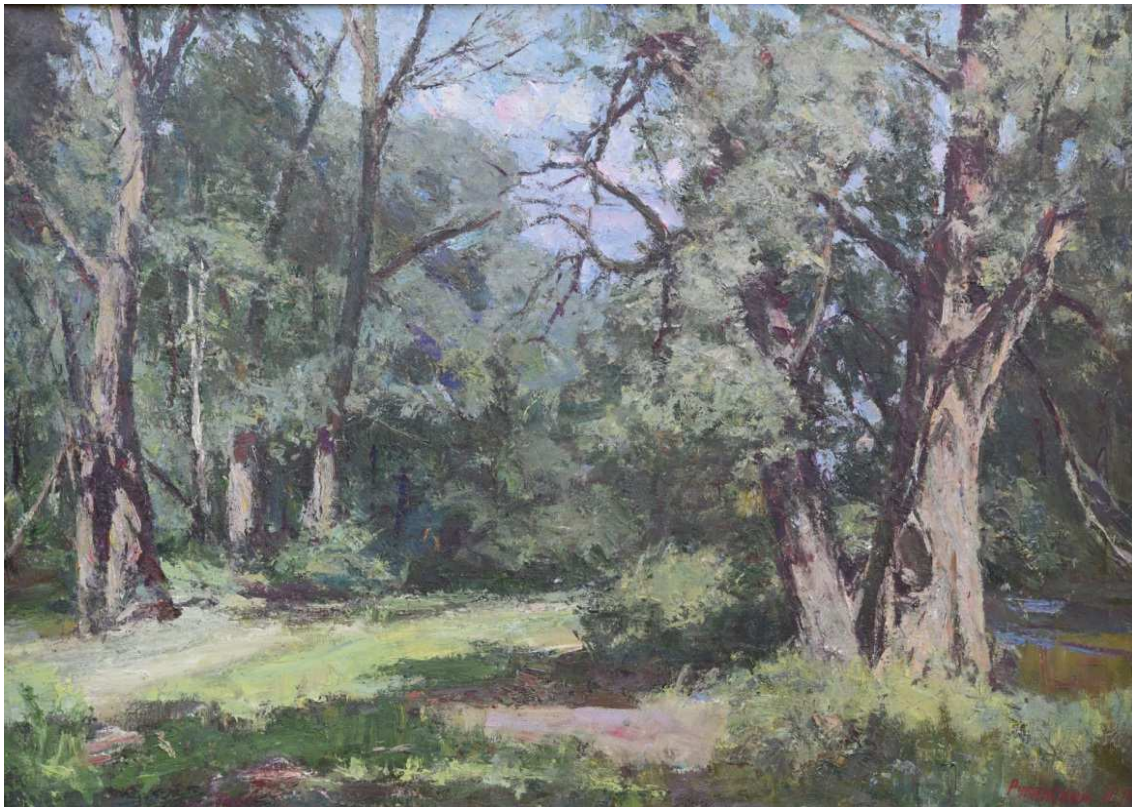


Illustration 14

Igor P. Rubinsky

Old Willow Trees (1991) Oil on canvas, 80 × 120 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, 60 × 90 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, 60 × 100 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

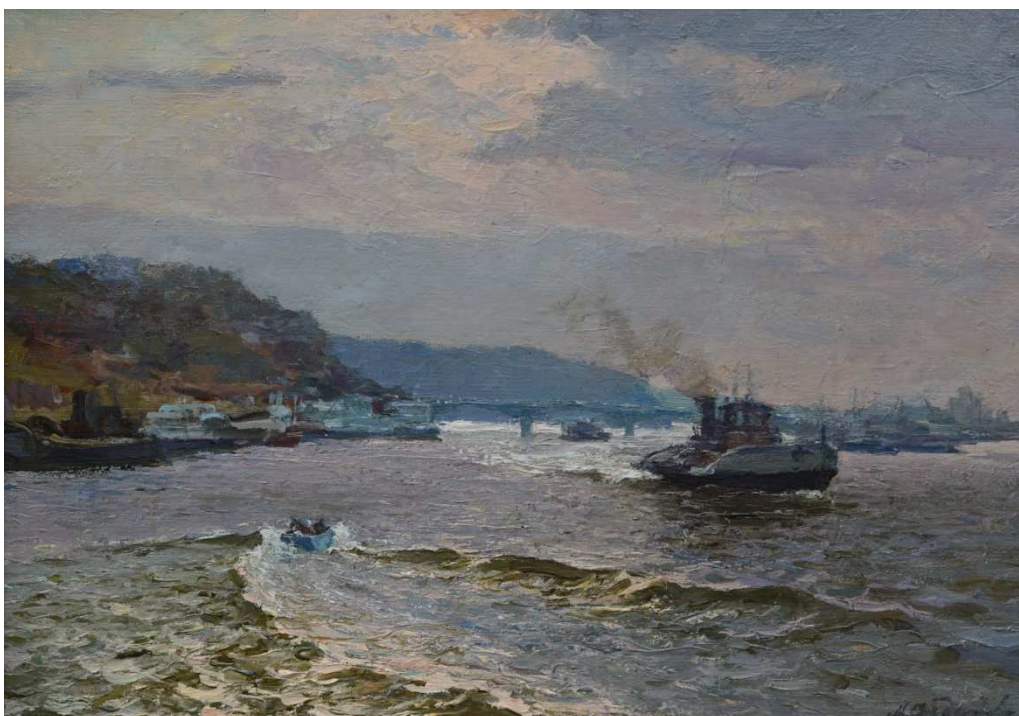


Illustration 17

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, 50 × 70 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, 50 × 70 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, 51 × 65 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, 73 × 98 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, 70 × 100 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, 70 × 100 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, 69 × 93 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, 70 × 100 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.