

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 nature 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.