

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

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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 was such that 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 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 70 × 80 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 80 × 120 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 15 cm high and 20 cm wide 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 260 × 390 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 19th 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 175 × 280 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 Monet 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

Russian paintings which can be accepted as international artistic level is indeed this 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.