

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

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

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

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

allow the piece to be seen more attractively.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Illustration 1

Veniamin A. Safonov (1931 – 2003)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

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

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

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

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

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



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



Illustration 2

V. A. Tchepkasov

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

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

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

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

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



Illustration 3

Roman L. Podobedov (1920 – 1992)

Member of the Russian Union of Artists

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



Illustration 4

Fedor V. Shapaev (born 1927)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Illustration 5

Vitaly T. Davydov (1923 – 2007)

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

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

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



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

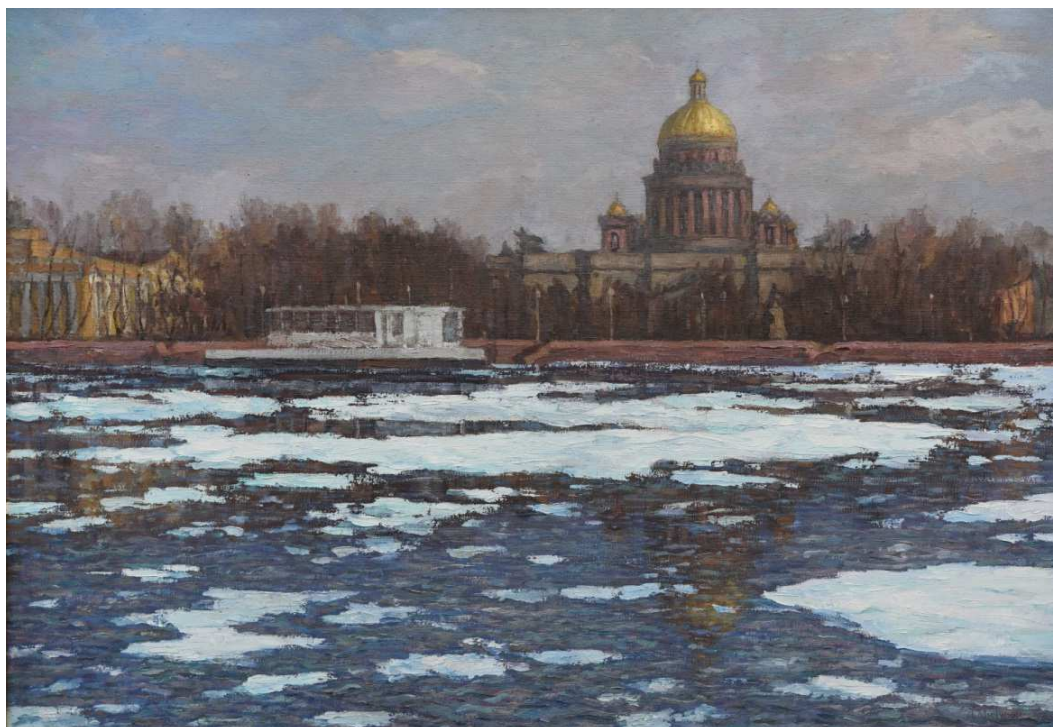


Illustration 6

Aleksander F. Michurin (Born 1929)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Illustration 7

Aleksey Ya. Koltsov (1912 – 1990)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





Illustration 8

Aleksander S. Kulagin (born 1925)

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

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

#### Caucasus Mountains.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Illustration 9

D. Chukhrai

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

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

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

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



Illustration 10

Aleksander P. Bykov (1912 – 1997)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

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

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

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



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

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

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



Illustration 11

Sergei P. Bocharov (born 1953)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*Siberian Courtyard* (1980) Oil on canvas, 50 × 70 cm

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

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

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



Illustration 12

Ivan A. Yazev (1914 – 2011)

Member of the Russian Artists' Union

*L.N. Tolstoy's House-Museum (Yasnaya Polyana)* (1986) Oil on canvas, 70 × 100 cm

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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