



FROM UTOPIA TO TRAGEDY

UKRAINIAN AVANT-GARDE 1914 - 1934

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TEFAF MAASTRICHT

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FROM UTOPIA TO TRAGEDY UKRAINIAN AVANT-GARDE 1914 - 1934

Last year's gallery exhibition at TEFAF was devoted to the greatest Ukrainian artist of the early 20th century: Alexander Bogomazov. For 2017 we have decided to shift attention to his Ukrainian contemporaries.

Differentiating between 'Ukrainian' and 'Russian' is not easy when it comes to artists. Birthplace is one criterion, time spent working in the country another. Boundaries blur. Alexander Archipenko was born and raised in Kiev, yet is often deemed an American sculptor – even though he contributed a roomful of works to the Ukrainian Pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. Kazimir Malevich was born in Kiev and taught at the city's Art Institute in the late 1920s, but is invariably considered Russian.

Our exhibition concentrates on works produced on Ukrainian soil. It does not focus on Kiev, but swivels the spotlight 300 miles to the east, to the city that was capital of Ukraine from 1919 to 1934: Kharkov, just 20 miles from the Russian border.

Differences between 'Ukrainian' and 'Russian' art involve style, colour and use of national symbols, and reflect Ukraine's links to Central European tradition. The walls of Vasily Ermilov's *Design for a Recreation Room in the Kharkov Palace of Pioneers and Octobrists* are decorated with flowers whose bright yellows, oranges and deep blues mimic those to be found in Ukrainian folk art.

Two of the four works by Boris Kosarev owe much to Ukrainian folk art and iconography, while his 1921 *Portrait of Pablo Picasso* was shown at the 2012 Kosarev



A village in Ukraine 1900's



Kharkov 1900's

retrospective in New York alongside his twin portrait of Futurist poet *Velimir Khlebnikov* – whose muse Maria Sinyakova is represented by five works clearly Ukrainian in style and form. Sinyakova was a co-signatory of Khlebnikov's Futurist Manifesto, *Trumpet of the Martians*, and her country house near Kharkov became a hub for Avant-Garde artists and writers.

A dynamic, close-knit creative community thrived in Kharkov in the 1920s, when the city was not just Ukraine's political centre but also its artistic and cultural capital – epitomized by the opening in 1928 of the world's largest Constructivist building, Derzhprom, which dominates colossal Freedom (Svobody) Square to this day.

Other Kharkov-based artists featured in this exhibition include Anatoly Petritsky, with a colourful 1928 costume sketch for Puccini's opera *Turandot* in his 'roughly angular but lively style' (*Corriere della Sera*), Alexander Khvostenko-Khvostov, Sergei Yutkevich and Alexander Dovgal.

These were artists who believed all things were possible. Their credo: art has no limits.

Limits, alas, soon emerged. Stalin clamped the 1930s in a vice of conformity. Sinyakova disappeared from view. Ermilov was accused of Formalism and expelled from the Union of Artists. Kosarev, Petritsky, and Khvostenko-Khvostov felt compelled to embrace Socialist Realism. Many pioneering works of Ukrainian Modernism were destroyed, others consigned to decades of oblivion.

This exhibition aims to play a small role in restoring their talent to the international attention it deserves.

James Butterwick



UKRAINIAN AVANT-GARDE IN THE JAMES BUTTERWICK COLLECTION

There have been various exhibitions devoted to the Ukrainian Avant-Garde in recent years, and Ukrainian artists are increasingly in demand at auction.

But what was the Ukrainian Avant-Garde – and who were its leaders?

These are the questions tackled by James Butterwick. His collection covers the full timespan of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde, and represents a wide range of the artists involved – some of them unfamiliar, some of them better-known but not necessarily associated with their Ukrainian homeland.

The Ukrainian Avant-Garde movement spanned the first three decades of the 20th century. It originated at a time when art across Europe was radically rejecting the realism and naturalism of previous generations. It was characterized by the arrival of new forces with utopian hopes for a global revolution in the arts, and a desire to transform everyday items into works of art. There were two periods in the movement's evolution: 1900-17, covering the period of the late Secession, with artists actively exploring the newest artistic ideas of Europe; and the period from the Russian Revolution and end of World War I to the establishment of Totalitarianism in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s.

The basic identity of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde lay in its close links to contemporary ideas in early-20th-century Europe. The encounter with modern European art occurred in private studios, through exhibitions, artistic and literary publications, and among the artists directly associated with the life of European art. These included a group of innovators from Paris, Berlin and Moscow, among them Alexander Archipenko, Alexandra Exter, David Burliuk and Wassily Kandinsky. Their participation in exhibitions in the Ukrainian cities of Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa revealed the new European approach and the nature of changes to contemporary artistic expression.

In 1914 Exter – together with her fellow-Ukrainians Archipenko, Vladimir Baranov-Rossiné, Kazimir Malevich and the Burliuk brothers David and Vladimir – exhibited at the Société des Artistes Indépendants in Paris and, alongside Archipenko, took part in the Esposizione Libera Futurista Internazionale in Rome.

Various exhibitions featuring French Modernism – led by the 'Salon' organized by Odessa-born Vladimir Izdebsky in 1910 – also helped forge a new artistic mentality, not only among artists, but also among art critics and the public. Izdebsky wanted a Ukrainian audience to encounter the Avant-Garde forces of Europe via the works of Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, Rouault, Braque, Gleizes, van Dongen, Vlaminck, Matisse, Marquet, Metzinger, Rousseau, Le Fauconnier, the Futurist Giacomo Balla and – representing Munich's Neue Künstlervereinigung (New Art Society) – Kandinsky and Alexander Jawlensky.

Left:
Icon. Western Ukraine, mid-19th century



Fragment of a carpet, Poltava Region, 19th century



Icon on glass, Western Ukraine, 1887



Painted trunk, Cherkass Region, beginning 19th century



Ivan Baraniuk, Tile, St. Catherine and St. Barbara (detail), 1853

From 1909 to 1911 Izdebsky staged exhibitions in seven different cities in Ukraine and Russia. Their scope was expanded by lectures on contemporary literature and music, including public lectures on New European Art by Kandinsky.

The ethnographic and at times exotic nature of early 20th century European art impelled members of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde to seek inspiration from Ukrainian folk art, imbuing their elements and archaic forms with a contemporary dynamism often expressed in abstract form.

This attention to folklore was less a reflection of ethnographic interest than the start of the complex process of forming a national artistic identity. As Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire, this identity was the subject of national debate in early-20th-century artistic and literary publications. Escaping the cultural orbit of Imperial Russia was regarded as a crucial task by some of the artists who would determine the face of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde during the 'National/Cultural Revival' of the 1920s.

All these factors helped artists vanquish provincial inertia and realize themselves as part of European culture – and, by adopting this new ideology, turn it into a lifestyle. In this way artists and innovators determined the specific nature of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde, with its rich colour and sensual *joie de vivre*.

There were three centres of the Avant-Garde in Ukraine: Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa. The first Avant-Garde performances took place in Kiev, with exhibitions of Futurist works by Alexander Bogomazov from 1914 to 1916. Kharkov hosted an emerging artistic and Futurist poetic community during the second half of the decade. Odessa's Society of Independent Artists was formed in 1917 with Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso as its aesthetic heroes.

Initially the Ukrainian Avant-Garde movement was interlinked with its Russian counterpart. The search for a national path came next, oriented towards European artistic centres and ideas, and accompanied by fierce debate with former Russian colleagues now perceived as adversaries. The new generation of Ukrainian artists which emerged around 1920 did not embrace the nostalgia for the archaic and messianic to be found among their Russian counterparts.

One Avant-Garde pioneer was Kiev-born Alexander Archipenko, who emigrated to Paris in 1909 and joined the *Section d'Or* Cubist group. The French poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire was an influential advocate of his youthful genius, calling him the most impressive sculptor of the time. But the framework of Cubism became too restrictive for Archipenko and, continuing his experiments with volume and space, he developed a theory of 'empty space' by creating new sculptural forms with 'air breaks' – openings and cavities whose contours added to the sculptural image and revealed its inner space.

Archipenko was to sculpture what Picasso was to painting – an inventor of ideas that would nourish the curiosity of future generations. In addition to sculpture, Archipenko made flowing Cubist-style drawings based on geometric flattening

and dynamic formal contrast. His 1918 *Still Life* (p. 20) in the Butterwick Collection is a wonderful example.

The work of another Kiev artist, Alexander Bogomazov, reveals the stylistic evolution of a Ukrainian artist without direct access to European Modernism. His works on paper offer compelling evidence of his rapid mastery of diverse styles and techniques, and betray various influences from Impressionism to Futurism. His many sketches and drawings formed his 'creative laboratory', where he explored the mechanics of a new art. Still lifes like his *Carafe and Glass on a Mirror* of 1915 (p. 16) reveal the conceptual impulses he acquired, albeit indirectly, from Kiev and Moscow, and from Cubism and Italian Futurism. Objectivity and formal recognition were combined with the random aesthetics of Futurism. He embraced a variety of styles to sketch his favourite model – his wife Wanda – in the act of sleeping, smiling or reading (p. 14).

Bogomazov's research into the fundamentals of painting, including the physiology of visual perception and the history of European chromatics, reflected his involvement in European Avant-Garde thought; his theoretical studies stand alongside those of Wassily Kandinsky and Johannes Itten. Towards the end of his life Bogomazov studied the psychophysical capacities of colour, leading to his (uncompleted) triptych *Sawyers*, 1927-30 (below), for which he made numerous sketches such as his study for *Sharpening the Saws*, 1928 (p. 18).

Just outside Kharkov, the Sinyakova dacha at Krasnaya Polyana became an unofficial centre for youthful creativity in 1914 – with visitors including the local artists Vasily Ermilov, Boris Kosarev and David Burliuk and the Russian Futurist poets Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Boris Pasternak. Maria Sinyakova, one of five sisters, would become an important figure in Kharkov cultural life, and in 1916 signed Khlebnikov's Futurist manifesto *Trumpet of the Martians*, proclaiming a break with previous generations.



Wanda, c. 1913



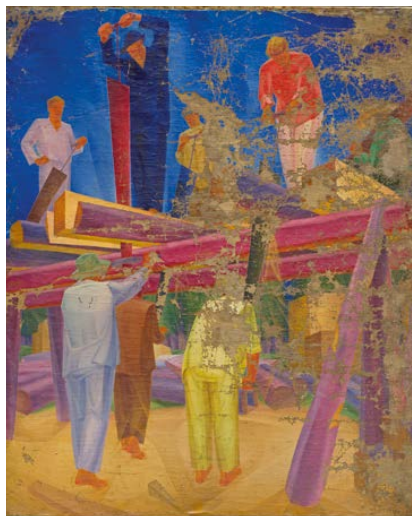
Alexander Bogomazov
Wanda Looking Over Her Shoulder, 1914



Alexander Bogomazov
Study for Sawyers 1928-1929



Alexander Bogomazov Triptych *Sawyers*, 1927-1930





Fireplace, Ukraine, 1900's

The Avant-Garde poetic environment helped shape Sinyakova's aesthetic approach – with modern, everyday objects, linked to images of Slav mythology, acquiring the meaning of a never-ending ecumenical life-process. She was stimulated by artists of the Northern Renaissance, French art from the turn of the century, and by her trip to Central Asia. She was also familiar with the Russian art scene, exhibiting at Moscow Avant-Garde exhibitions as a member of the St Petersburg 'Union of Youth'. As regards Ukrainian folk art, Sinyakova availed herself of new Avant-Garde techniques – like the use of pure colours for small details, or the one-dimensional development of the image – and based her compositions on the decorative murals and furniture to be found in traditional country homes, such as *Tree of Life*, painted at Krasnaya Polyana in 1914 (p. 44).

A separate aspect of her career was illustrating the works of the Kharkov Futurist poets. Her Neo-Primitivism is a distinctive aspect of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde movement, and served as a springboard for the next generation of artists.



Reverse of a peasant icon, Ukraine, 1900's

One of the young leaders was the Cubo-Futurist Boris Kosarev, organizer of the Kharkov 'Union of Seven.' His work was inspired by icons and folk art, yet responded to artistic innovation. The compositional techniques and imagery of medieval, religious and folk paintings were re-created first as Neo-Primitivism (his *Three Hamlets*, *Two Villages*, (p. 58) and *Village Pastoral*, (p. 66)) and then, slightly later, as Constructivism. Having begun his career as an Avant-Garde stage designer, his work differed in its unusual synthesis of Avant-Garde principles and the forms and stylistic elements of traditional Ukrainian icons. Kosarev used a plethora of materials – including stencil and collage – to create unusually expressive compositions and colour formulas, as in his portraits of *Picasso* (p. 62) and *Khlebnikov* (p. 60) or *Guitar* (p. 64), the latter no doubt inspired by the works of Braque and Picasso. Collage expresses the relative nature of the visible image and its infinite variability, provoking experiment with texture, shape and abstraction. His involvement in a host of different artistic projects – theatrical design, Soviet PR campaigns, printing, photography – gave him the chance to use a wide range of techniques, often using the simplest materials.



Boris Kosarev
Three Hamlets, Two Villages, 1921

The Ukrainian Avant-Garde was essentially apolitical, as were its European and Russian counterparts, although it could be said to have represented a form of aesthetic protest. But, in the 1920s, Ukrainian art joined with the Communist political platform to become a unified cultural-ideological programme. Artists' reactions to events in Ukraine was their answer to social and political upheaval. The distinction between the Avant-Garde art of the first and second stages becomes clear when the goals and demands of public taste are taken into account and the work of Avant-Garde artists during the turbulent 1920s should be viewed in this light.

The artist who represents this period most starkly is Kosarev's colleague Vasily Ermilov, who played a key role in giving Ukrainian art a more Constructivist direction. His ideas, similar to those of Walter Gropius

and the Bauhaus, aimed to prepare artists to work on the conversion of the surrounding material world. Like an artist-designer, Ermilov sought to produce objects that were both artistic and functional, whether in easel-painting, drawing, sculpture, posters, book design or architecture. The Kharkov magazine *Avangard*, launched by Ermilov along with the writer Valerian Polishchuk, became the platform for Constructivist and functional design in Ukraine.

Ermilov's portrait-reliefs in metal and wood experimented with combining different materials and textures. A landmark in his career were his designs for the *Kharkov Palace of Pioneers and Octobrists* (1934), using simple geometric volumes in various colour combinations (p. 36).

New artistic aesthetics were also disseminated in Ukraine by Alexandra Exter, whose Painting & Decorative Arts Studio, opened in Kiev in 1918, proposed an overview of European artistic trends as a basis for new art. Exter developed a programme of formal exercises on how to create rhythmic compositions and the spatial layout of geometric volumes; her pupils studied rhythm and momentum as independent artistic categories.

Of even greater importance in Exter's training programme was the study of folk art as a source of shapes and decorative motifs. By applying Ukrainian folk colours to the principles of Cubo-Futurism, Exter wrote her own chapter in the development of the European Avant-Garde in Kiev, producing a pedagogical system that she used at courses at Vkhutemas in Moscow and the Fernand Léger Academy in Paris.

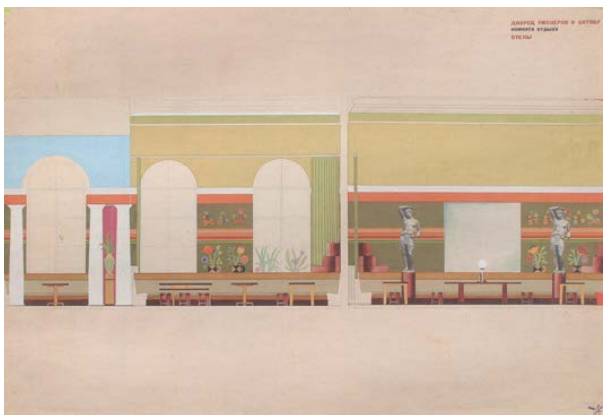
Exter's pupils in Kiev included Nisson Shifrin, Alexander Tyshler, Pavel Tchelischew, Vadim Meller, Anatoly Petritsky and Sergei Yutkevich, the latter present in the Butterwick Collection with two works, *Portrait of My Grandmother* (p. 22) and *Market Porter* (p. 24).



Vasily Ermilov, *Portrait of the artist, Pochtenny* (1923), Metal and wood

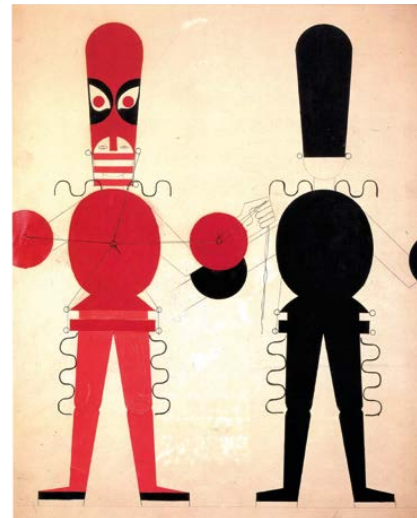
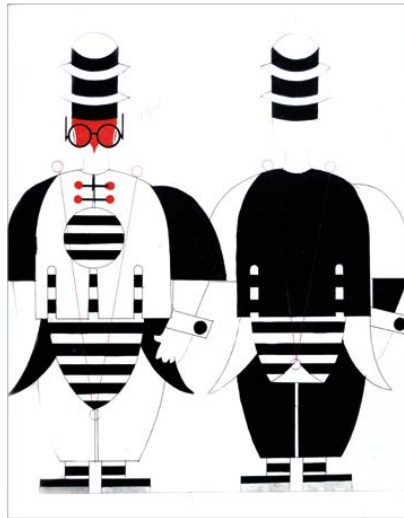


Vasily Ermilov (c. 1930)



Vasily Ermilov. Two designs for a Recreation Room in the *Kharkov Palace of Pioneers and Octobrists*, 1934.

Left & right: Anatoly Petritsky Two costume designs for *Turandot*, 1928



Khvostenko-Khvostov and Ermilov, Kharkov 1930's



Khvostenko-Khvostov and Ermilov at Kharkov Art School

A special place in Avant-Garde development belongs to 1920s Ukrainian theatre design, which was a European standard-bearer. Petritsky, the first great figure in the free construction of stage space, launched an artistic revolution by drastically changing the role of the artist – raising his status to that of director through his spatial solutions. A striking example of such Constructivist staging was Puccini's opera *Turandot* in Kharkov in 1928, one of the finest productions ever witnessed on Ukrainian soil. The costume design displays many of Petritsky's innovative ideas, especially the use of mixed media (Indian ink, lacquer, gouache, collage and silver paint).

Each costume was depicted from both the front and back. The colour used for the back of most costumes was black. This black was an important element of the performance. In the Kharkov production – when another of Princess Turandot's would-be suitors is executed after failing to solve her riddles – everyone on stage turned their backs to the audience, and the stage was flooded in black. The lengthy pause that followed helped create a sense of emotional drama which, in conjunction with the music, produced a searingly powerful impression.

Khvostenko-Khvostov, Petritsky's colleague and spiritual comrade, was another artist to apply Constructivist principles to the Ukrainian stage, using new types of European art – montage, cinema projectors, unusual stage transformers and installations. His work was a pinnacle of theatrical Constructivism in Ukraine. He was also an adventurous, essentially figurative draughtsman, as his drawing *The Waiting-Room* (p.26) shows. Its bird's-eye Constructivist perspective fills three-quarters of the sheet, using space as an Avant-Garde device to convey an everyday scene from Soviet life with a degree of irony.

Alexander Dovgal produced masterful drawings and paintings, but book illustrations were the main focus of his four-decade career. He spent his youth experimenting with various styles before settling on Expressionism as his guiding force. On occasions he drifted into caricature and satire in his favourite



Left:
Odessa, 1900's

medium of watercolour, with form defined in pen and ink. His *Book Illustration* (p. 34) is a case in point.

A short-lived, crackerjack episode of Ukrainian Art history was written by the Society of Independent Artists in Odessa from 1917 to 1919, whose reverence for French art – from Impressionism to Cubism – saw them dubbed the ‘Odessa Parisians’. The most notable members were George Boström, Amshey Nurenberg, Sigismund Olesevich, Sandro Fasini and Theophil Freiermann. Semyon Salzer (or Zaltser), who also took part in their ‘independent’ exhibitions, is represented in the Butterwick Collection by two racy works from 1929: *In the Nightclub* (p. 32) and *At the Bakers* (p. 30).

The first steps of the Odessa Avant-Garde were accompanied by revolutionary mayhem, with the Black Sea port in the firing-line. The last exhibition of the city’s Avant-Gardists took place in 1919, by when many artists had already emigrated or been killed during the Civil War. Their legacy was dispersed around the world – or lost. No blueprint was left for the next generation of artists.

Little survived, apart from rare works locked away out of sight in museum storerooms or family attics. The great artistic discoveries of Bogomazov and Ermilov, and the theatrical innovations of Khvostenko-Khvostov and Petritsky, were laid waste by a totalitarian system hell-bent on destroying artistic freedom. The names of Archipenko, Exter and Kandinsky – creators of the Avant-Garde – were blocked off by the Iron Curtain. Their rightful place in the cultural heritage of Ukraine would not be acknowledged for three-quarters of a century.

Elena Kashuba-Volvach

ALEXANDER BOGOMAZOV (1880-1930)

Wanda in Profile, 1914

Charcoal on paper

36 x 29 cm

Signed & dated *AB 1914* lower right

PROVENANCE

Artist's family, Kiev

Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

EXHIBITED

Alexander Bogomazov, TEFAF, Maastricht, 11–20 March 2016 (p. 31, ill.)



ALEXANDER BOGOMAZOV (1880-1930)

Still Life with Carafe and Glass on a Mirror, 1915

Charcoal on paper

29 x 30.5 cm

Signed & dated AB 1915 lower right

PROVENANCE

Artist's family, Kiev

Sotheby's, London, 4 July 1974 (lot 43)

Mrs Pellegrini/Galleria del Milano

Acquired from the above by the present owner



ALEXANDER BOGOMAZOV (1880-1930)

Study for Sawyers, 1928

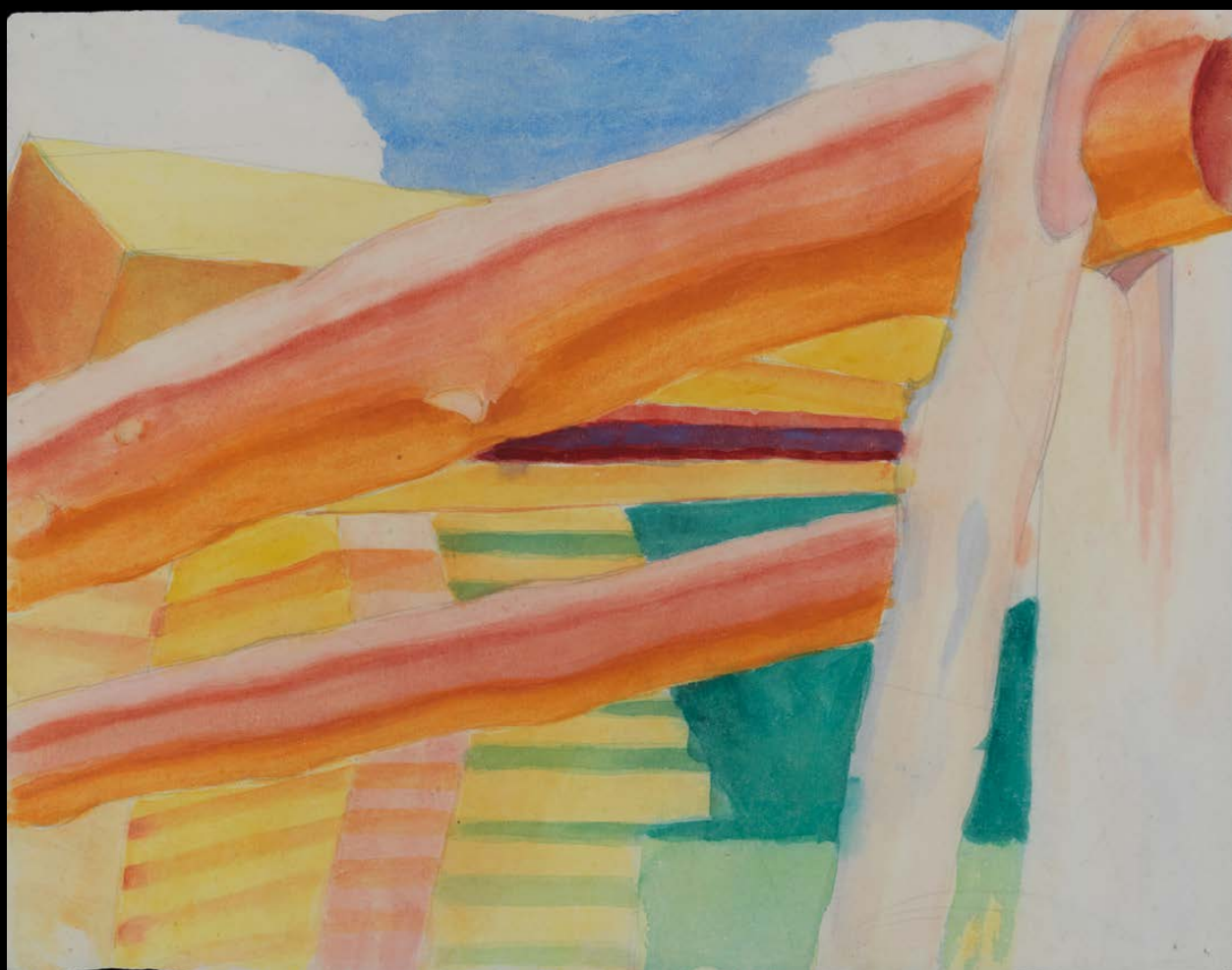
Watercolour on paper
29 x 35.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Artist's family, Kiev
Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

EXHIBITED

Alexander Bogomazov, Kiev, National Museum of Ukrainian Art,
December 1991 - January 1992



ALEXANDER ARCHIPENKO (1887-1964)

Still Life, c. 1918

Watercolour, gouache and pencil on paper

31.1 x 40 cm

Signed *Archipenko* lower right

PROVENANCE

Erna Futter, New York

Christie's, New York, 2 October 1990 (lot 86)

Collection of Lolo Sarnoff

Sotheby's, New York, 6 May 2015 (lot 346)

Authenticity confirmed by Frances Archipenko Gray



SERGEI YUTKEVICH (1904-1985)

Portrait of my Grandmother, 1918

Pencil on paper

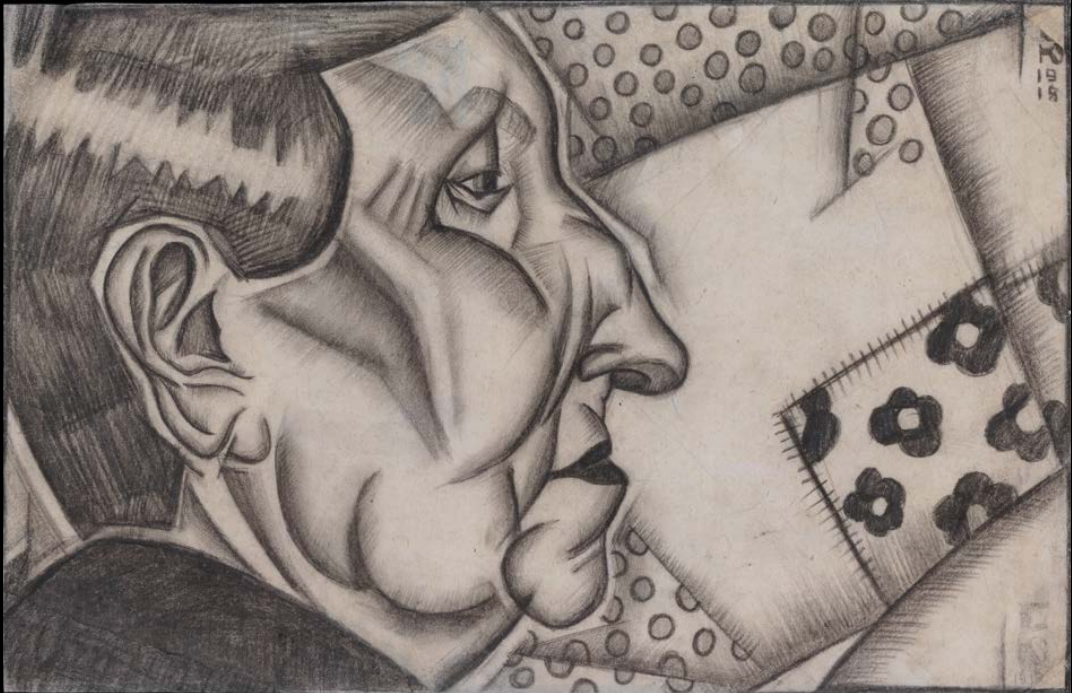
22 x 35,5cm

Signed & dated *C.YO* 1918 lower and upper right.

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the family of the artist in the 1980s

Sotheby's, London, Russian Pictures, 1 December 2015 (lot 64)



SERGEI YUTKEVICH (1904-1985)

Market Porter, 1919

Gouache over ink on paper

26 x 13 cm

Inscribed on verso *Севастополь* (*Sevastopol*) and 1919 учусь у Сезанна (*I am learning from Cezanne*)

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the family of the artist in the 1980s

Sotheby's, London, Russian Pictures, 1 December 2015 (lot 60)



ALEXANDER KHVOSTENKO-KHVOSTOV (1895-1967)

The Waiting-Room, 1920's

Sanguine on paper
47 x 59 cm

PROVENANCE

Gift of the artist's daughter Tatiana Khvostenko to Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

LITERATURE

Alexander Khvostenko-Khvostov, Kiev, Mistetstvo Publishers, 1987 (p. 73, ill.)



ANATOLY PETRITSKY (1895-1964)

Costume design for an executioner in Turandot, 1928

Mixed media on paper
72 x 53.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Gift of the artist's son Anatoly Petritsky to Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

EXHIBITED

Anatoly Petritsky, Exhibitions Directorate of the Union of Artists, Kiev, 1968 (cat. 239)

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

The Phenomenon of the Ukrainian Avant-garde 1910-1935, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2001 (p. 164)

Ukrainian Modernism 1910 - 1930, Kiev, National Museum of Ukrainian Art, 2006 (p. 251)

Anatoly Petritsky, Theatre Costumes and Decorations, Kiev-Lviv, 2012 (p. 169)

Grand Great, Inter Museum National Project, Mistetskyi Arsenal, Kiev, 2013 (pp. 128-129)

Staging the Ukrainian Avant-Garde of the 1910s and 1920s, The Ukrainian Museum, New York, 2015 (p. 239)



SEMYON ZALTSEY (1898-1941)

At the Bakers, 1929

Watercolour on paper

32.1 x 24 cm

Signed and dated *С. Зальцер* 1929 upper right

PROVENANCE

Gift of the artist Boris Fridkin to Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev



SEMYON ZALTSEY (1898-1941)

In the Nightclub, 1929

Watercolour on paper

35 x 22 cm

Signed and dated *С. Зальцер* 1929 upper right

PROVENANCE

Gift of the artist Boris Fridkin to Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev



ALEXANDER DOVGAL (1904-1961)

Book Illustration, 1933

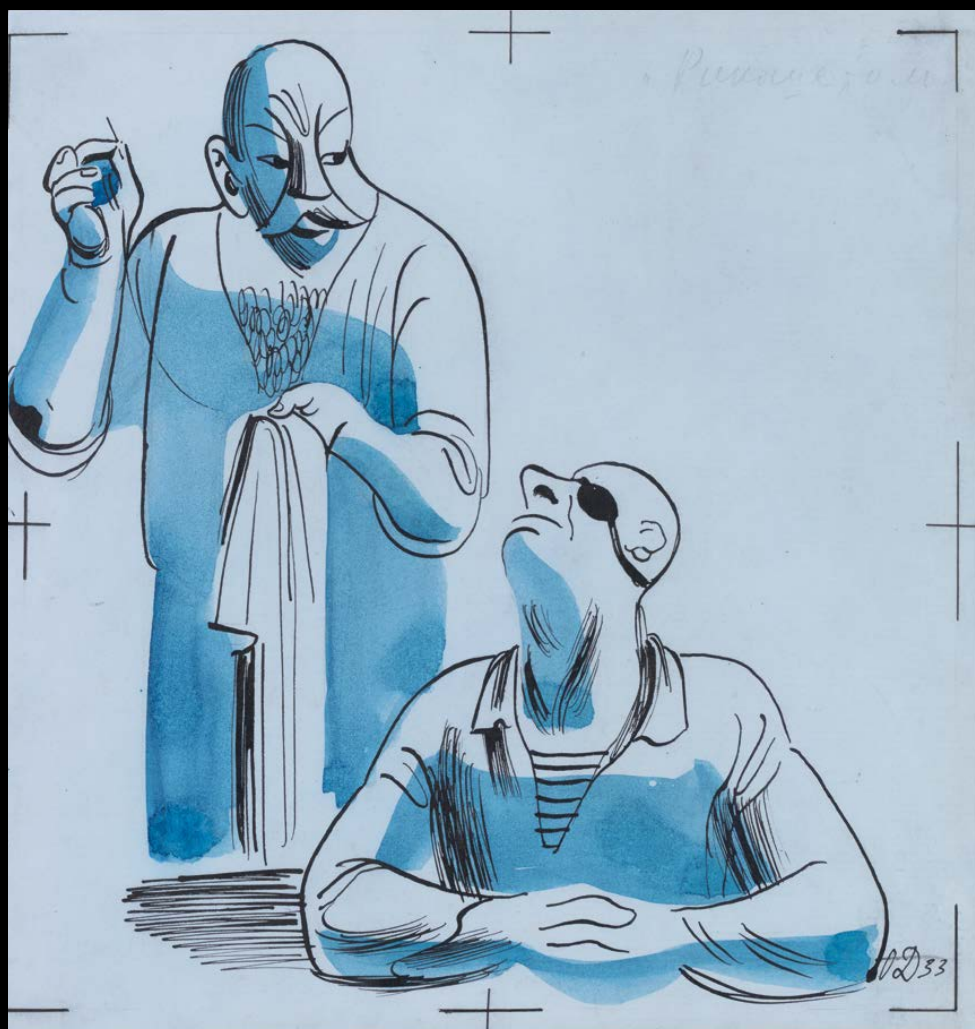
Watercolour on paper

25.1 x 23.5 cm

Signed and dated *A.Д.* 33 lower right

PROVENANCE

Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev



VASILY ERMILOV (1894-1968)

*Design for a Recreation Room in the Kharkov Palace
of Pioneers and Octobrists, 1934*

Gouache, pencil and collage on paper laid down on card
103 x 73,5 cm

PROVENANCE

Sotheby's, 20th-century Russian and European paintings, 4 July 1974 (lot 87)
Sotheby's, London, 2 April 1987
Collection of Alfred Taubman, Sotheby's New York, 5 November 2015 (lot 156)

КОМНАТА ОТДЫХА





THE HOME OF FUTURISM

AND THE FAMOUS FIVE WHO SHAPED THE AVANT-GARDE



Krasnaya Polyana today

В их доме родился футуризм! declared Lilya Brik, muse to Mayakovsky.

'In their house, Futurism was born!'

Throughout the second decade of the 20th century, the *crème de la crème* of Ukrainian and Russian Futurism would repair joyously, animatedly and often amorously to a wooden dacha in Eastern Ukraine. Their hostesses: five sexy stunners barely out of their teens.

Zina, Nadya, Maria, Ksenya and Vera Sinyakova were born in Kharkov between 1886-96. Maria, the middle sister, was the only artist; the others were musicians. Their guest-list reads like a *Who's Who* of Russian Futurism, including the artists Boris Kosarev, Vasily Ermilov, David Burliuk, Arseny Urechin, Vasily Picheta and Evgeny Agafonov; and the poets Velimir Khlebnikov, Boris Pasternak, Sergei Bobrov, Nikolai Aseyev, Bozhidar, Dmitry Petrovsky and Grigory Petnikov. And, of course, Vladimir Mayakovsky.

The sisters had four brothers – Fyodor, Vladimir, Boris and Viktor – whose own interest in culture seems to have been peripheral. Their parents Mikhail and Alexandra married in 1885. Alexandra died sometime between 1902-10, Mikhail between 1913-16. They let the girls run riot.

'They roamed the woods with their hair loose... their independence and eccentricity startled everyone!' gasped Brik, who dubbed Alexandra a 'freethinking atheist'. When she died, reported an astonished Kosarev, her daughters decorated first her coffin, then her – applying rouge to her cheeks, lipstick to her mouth and mascara to her eyelashes.

The dacha stood in Krasnaya Polyana, a village by the River Uda 10 miles south-east of Kharkov on the road to Donetsk. The 'meadows, cornfields, forest, misty river and blue skies,' purred Maria Sinyakova, 'served as my pictorial academy.'

Kosarev described the dacha as a 'large wooden house, with stairs leading up to the verandah where all the family and guests would have breakfast, lunch, dinner and countless tea-parties – though it might be better to talk about a non-stop tea-party, interrupted by breakfast, lunch and dinner.'

The walls of the house were covered with extraordinary red wallpaper spangled with parrots.

The girls were also relentless sunbathers – at a time when flashing female flesh was still strictly taboo. Interminable intellectual discussions around the samovar were interspersed with fun and games in the barn and hillside orchard, or along the riverbank. The whole place drizzled testosterone.



Zina as Cherubino in
The Marriage of Figaro



Maria - Ksenya - Nadya - Vera



Khlebnikov's *Trumpet of the Martians*

Maria Sinyakova would repair to the barn roof to enjoy the view of the river and surrounding forest. She would spend all day behind her easel, clothes and paint-tubes scattered in every direction.

The Sinyakova sisters wintered in Kharkov, where their father Mikhail – variously described as a merchant or landowner – had arrived in the 1870s from Akhtyrka, 70 miles to the north-west. They lived in a large brick house (still standing, shabbily) on Nikitinsky Pereulok, in a leafy suburb south of the river.

Belle Epoque Kharkov felt ‘more European and more free and easy – not just than Kiev, but than Moscow and Petersburg’, wrote Maria’s brother-in-law Nikolai Aseyev. ‘Everything was softer, warmer and friendlier. Clothes were more elegant and fashionable. The gentler mood benefited art. It was easier to seem new – people were internally responsive to everything that graced their lives. Perhaps the borderland spirit was manifest in the sense of freedom and beauty.’

Maria studied at Kharkov Art School then, from 1909, at the Blue Lily studio run by Evgeny Agafonov,* where her colleagues included Arseny Urechin (her future husband), Vasily Picheta (her future brother-in-law), Dmitry Gordeyev, and his brother Bogdan, who styled himself *Bozhidar* (meaning ‘gift of God’) in honour of the poet Velimir Khlebnikov (*Bozhidar* being a South Slav version of *Velimir*). *Bozhidar* was a brilliant linguist, pianist and, in Khlebnikov’s words, ‘the black-eyed king of conversation... all the sisters were in love with him, but he loved only Maria.’

Agafonov also ran the Голубой Глаз (Blue Eye) Theatre

on Ulitsa Gogolya where, on 25 April 1910, Maria’s eldest sister Zina gave a recital of songs by Fyodor Akimenko (1876-1945), who had taught Stravinsky in St Petersburg. Zina was accompanied on the piano by her sisters Ksenya and Nadezhda. By 1912 all three sisters, plus Maria, were in Moscow (the youngest, Vera, was still at school).

Zina (born 1886) was a soprano at the Bolshoi. She hosted a late-night salon in her flat on Tverskoy Boulevard, in a building owned by the artist Konstantin Korovin. Aseyev, Pasternak, Khlebnikov, Igor Severyanin and the musician Issay Dobrowen were among her attendant luminaries.

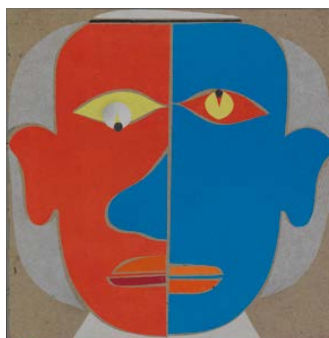
Nadya (born 1889) and her new husband Picheta had a flat across the Moscova river on Malaya Polyanka; Maria (born 1890) and Ksenya (born 1892) lived with them. Ksenya, the only blonde among the olive-skinned sisters, was studying music at the Conservatoire, while Maria attended the studio of Fyodor Rerberg,** under whom Bogomazov also studied.

Boris Pasternak frequented both Sinyakova apartments, and adored the sisters’ ‘wild’ (дикая) lifestyle. His younger brother Alexander described them ‘drinking vodka from the bottle and eating dried herring served up on newspaper... nice but provocative, always ready to argue... prone to interrupt and make cutting remarks.’ Leonid Pasternak berated his son Boris for frequenting such a shower. Boris, though, was in love with Nadya.

Mayakovsky happened on the scene apparently by chance. Maria and Ksenya bumped into him one day



Bozhidar Gordeyev



Boris Kosarev
Portrait of Velimir Khlebnikov, 1921



Khlebnikov

on Tverskoy Boulevard. He was wearing a black suit with a pink rose in his buttonhole; 'very modest, shy and awkward,' recalled Maria. That didn't last: Mayakovsky was soon chasing after their sister Zina.

During her stay in Moscow, Maria's work was exhibited in St Petersburg with the Union of Youth ('Союза Молодежи'), alongside Goncharova, Larionov, Malevich, Exter and David Burliuk – whom she described as 'a lyrical man, always reading poetry'. Burliuk fell in love with her, but in 1914 she married Arseny Urechin (who, coincidentally, had studied with Burliuk in Munich back in 1902/3).

Maria's honeymoon took her to Central Asia, where she was enthralled by Persian miniatures and Buddhist icons. But she left behind a broken heart: that of the hapless suitor Bozhidar. He hanged himself on 7 September 1914.

His only book of poems, *Бубен* ('Tambourine'), had been published in Kharkov four months before, with illustrations by Maria.

Maria and Ksenya left Moscow after the outbreak of World War I and set up house back at Krasnaya Polyana: a refuge and cultural oasis in the years to come.

To Khlebnikov, it became a second home. He was, claimed Maria, 'in love with all of us, one by one... although, for some reason, he never fancied Nadya.' In *Синие Оковы* ('Blue Shackles') – the title, Siniye Okovy, was a pun on Sinyakova – Khlebnikov wrote:

*Здесь не было 'да', но не будет и 'но',
Что было – забыто, что будет – не знаю*

*There was no 'yes', but there will be no 'but'
What was is forgotten – what will be: I do not know*

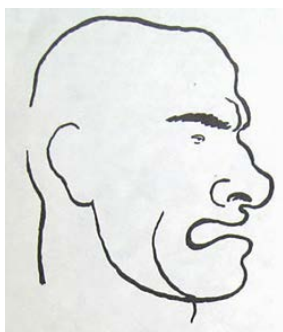
Khlebnikov also called Maria 'enchanted by God' (*одна зачарована Богом*), and printed her name as a co-author (along with Petnikov, Aseyev and, posthumously, Bozhidar) on the cover of his Futurist treatise *Trumpet of the Martians* in 1916.

A jealous Kosarev once tried to ambush Khlebnikov's riverside encounters with Maria by throwing stones at him. But poor Kosarev found Maria inaccessible – seven years older than him, and far taller.

Maria's husband Urechin, meanwhile, was living in Petrograd. Maria went to see him with Pasternak, and was introduced by Mayakovsky to Lilya Brik, who remarked on Maria's 'shining eyes, white against her dark skin. A bright, crazily-sewn hat sat on her head.'

In April 1915 Nadya also returned to Krasnaya Polyana from Moscow. Pasternak accompanied her as far as Tula (his poignant *Letters from Tula*, published in April 1918, evoked his despair at their parting). In June Nadya urged him to 'come quickly for God's sake'. Pasternak went to Krasnaya Polyana at the start of July. His three-week stay, wrote Nadya, 'sped by like a wonderful dream.' Pasternak evoked it in *Июльская гроза* ('July Storm'), writing: *У всех пяти зеркал лицо – Грозы, с себя сорвавшей маску* ('all five mirrors glare with the countenance of a thunderstorm, whose mask has been torn off').

In February 1916 Aseyev arrived in Krasnaya Polyana and proposed to Ksenya; they were promptly married across the river, in the village of Kirsanovo. Although



Maria Sinyakova, *Portrait of Mayakovsky* (1920s)



Maria Sinyakova, *Portrait of Aseyev* (1920s)



Maria Sinyakova, *Portrait of Shklovsky* (1920s)



Maria Sinyakova, *Portrait of Kruchenykh* (1920s)

Ksenya was 23, the priest thought she looked suspiciously young – and asked if she had her parents' permission to wed.

'No,' she replied. 'They're dead.'

Vera's marriage to Grigory Petnikov took place around the same time – but they were soon quarrelling, and Khlebnikov opportunistically transferred his attentions from Maria to Vera. Once, relates Kosarev, Khlebnikov climbed up after Vera into a mulberry tree, and began kissing her so passionately that they both crashed to the ground.

Like a harbinger of impending doom, the sisters' oldest brother Fyodor crashed through the ice on the river in early 1917, and drowned.

In 1918 Urechin joined Maria at Krasnaya Polyana. The Revolution and Civil War shattered the rural idyll. Tea-parties became a thing of the past. Meals were frugal, dependent on garden produce. As Khlebnikov wrote in *Синие Оковы*, 'the whole world vanished into the blue brilliance' (*И в синий блеск весь мир исчез*).

Aseyev penned the following elegy to his wife Ksenya:
*Ту, что шла со мной и мучилась,
шла и радовалась дням
в те года, как выюга выючила
груз снегов на плечи нам.*

*The one walking with me and suffering,
Walking and enjoying the days
In those years, when the blizzard was blowing
All the snow on to our shoulders*

In 1919 Nadya's husband Picheta joined the board of the Union of Leaders of Leftist Art in Kharkov. That is the last we hear of him. Khlebnikov died in 1922. In 1925 the dacha and orchard were requisitioned by Soviet authorities. Maria's barn, along with the adjacent summer-house, were pulled down in the 1930s. The dacha's vast cellar served as a haven during Nazi occupation, when 200 villagers were shot outside.

Today about one-third of the main building remains. It was used first by the local collective farm, then as a forestry bureau and, most recently, as a hostel for seasonal workers. It is now under the auspices of the district council. Ever since a new bridge was built across the River Uda two miles away, in the 1960s, Krasnaya Polyana – current population 420 – has become a backwater.

AFTERMATHS

Vera split with Petnikov in 1924 and settled in Moscow, latterly with Aseyev. She, too, had been courted by Mayakovsky – 'there was physical attraction, but no love,' assessed Maria – and was one of the last people to see him alive. In his *Memories of Mayakovsky*, Nikolai Aseyev wrote how, on Sunday 13 April 1930, Mayakovsky called round to see him at his flat on Myasnitskaya. Aseyev was out, so Vera answered the door. Mayakovsky, she reported, 'sounded strange. He was usually kind and considerate but now, contrary to custom, made no greeting.' He asked if Aseyev were at home. Vera said he wasn't. Mayakovsky 'was silent for a while, then sighed: "Well, then, nothing can be done."'

Next morning he was dead.

In Summer 1941 the Sinyakova sisters were caught up

in another literary suicide: that of Marina Tsvetayeva. Aseyev and Ksenya, together with Maria and Nadya, had been evacuated to Chistopol in Tatarstan after the Nazi invasion. On August 26 Tsvetayeva came to see them. She was holed up in Yelabuga, 100 miles away, and asked them to help her and her teenage son move to Chistopol. Aseyev promised to try.

Tsvetayeva returned to Yelabuga where, on August 31, she hanged herself – leaving a trunkful of poems and manuscripts for Aseyev and Ksenya, and a note pleading with them to look after her son.

Aseyev developed tuberculosis and died in 1963. The widowed Ksenya courted scandal by shacking up with the hell-raising ‘Russian van Gogh’, Anatoly Zverev (1931-86), forty years her junior. She also became his favourite model before dying in 1985.

Zina had died in 1942, Nadya in 1975. Nadya’s erstwhile paramour, Boris Pasternak, earned global fame – and Soviet vilification – in 1958, when *Doctor Zhivago* won the Nobel Prize. Pasternak died two years later. He had kept Nadya’s letters from the sultry summer of 1915 all his life. They were returned to her. She destroyed them.

Maria died in the portentous year of 1984. In the early 1920s she had left Krasnaya Polyana for good. She settled in Moscow – confining herself to graphic art, book illustrations and, for a brief spell in the mid-1920s, brilliant caricatures (including one of the writer Viktor Shklovsky, who lived in the same Leningrad apartment block as her estranged husband Urechin).

In 1940, when Maria illustrated his *Маяковский начинается* (‘Mayakovsky Starts Out’), Aseyev called her ‘an extremely majestic woman of tranquil beauty, with rare talent and a large, sceptical mind’. In 1943 she was interviewed by the Futurist poet Alexei Kruchenykh (1886-1968) for his series of *Встречи с художниками* (‘Meetings With Artists’). He found her surrounded by prints, charcoal and pastels, busy illustrating Perrault’s fairy-tales, Hindu legends and poems by *Vladimir Oblachny* (Mayakovsky’s nickname for Velimir Khlebnikov).



Anatoly Zerev Portait of Ksenya Sinyakova

Maria’s submerged, exuberant past was dragged to the surface during Stalin’s paranoid final years: she was kicked out of the Union of Artists in 1952 for ‘grovelling before Western art’ and reduced to painting toys.

She was reinstated under Khrushchev in 1956. That year, in his poem *Пять Сестер*, Nikolai Aseyev recalled the Five Sisters’ ‘shining eyes and ready laughter, unaffected by the years.’ They were, he concluded, ‘прекрасно непохожими на всех.’



Maria Sinyakova Portait of Mayakovsky

Splendidly Different.

Simon Hewitt

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Maria Olshanskaya: *О музах сохраняются предания...* (www.marie-olshansky.ru/smo/oxana.shtml)

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* Kharkov-born Agafonov (1879-1955) studied at the St Petersburg Academy from 1899 and illustrated several Kharkov satirical magazines in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution. In 1906 (along with Vladimir & David Burluk) he took part in the Seventh Exhibition of the Circle of Kharkov artists. He also featured alongside Bogomazov and Exter in the *Zveno* (‘Link’) exhibition in Kiev in 1908. From 1909 to 1911 he ran the Blue Eye experimental theatre in Kharkov and the Avant-Garde art studio Blue Lily. In 1913 he took part in Jack of Diamonds exhibitions in St Petersburg. After World War I he joined the Kharkov Khudozhestvenny Tsekh (Art Guild) and lectured for ProletCult, but emigrated to the USA in the early 1920s. As a radical teacher, who extolled the use of Ukrainian national motifs and bright colours, Agafonov’s influence on Kharkov’s Avant-Garde artists warrants deeper investigation.

** Fyodor Rerberg (1865-1938) graduated from the St Petersburg Academy in 1888. He painted landscapes, portraits and genre compositions. In 1905 he founded a private school, where he taught painting and drawing and lectured on art history; Malevich was among his first students. Rerberg had a solo show in Moscow in 1910.

MARIA SINYAKOVA (1890-1984)

Tree of Life, 1914

Watercolour on paper

35.4 x 22 cm

Annotated and dated *Красная Поляна. Лето 1914* (*Krasnaya Polyana. Summer 1914*) lower centre.

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist by Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

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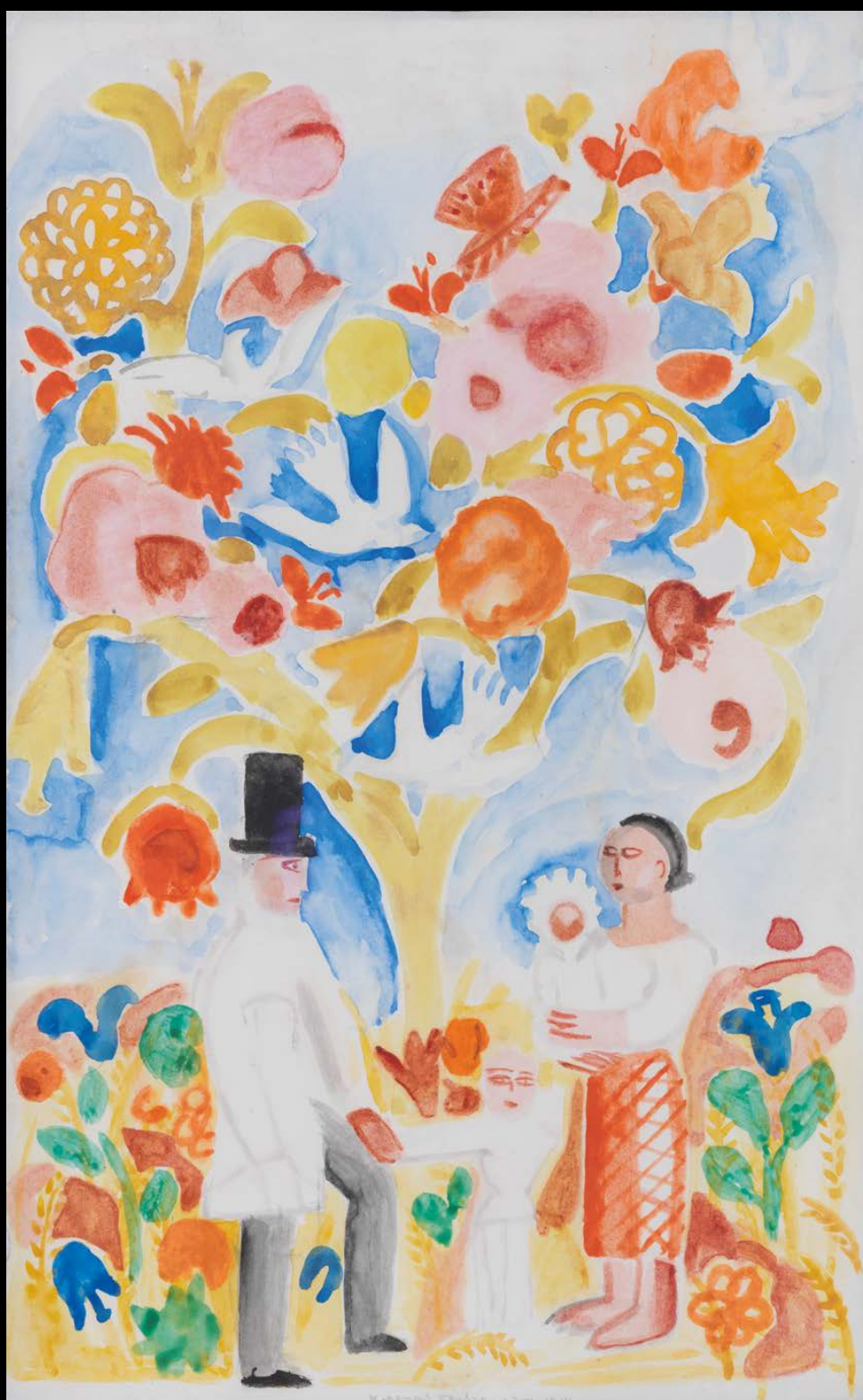
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MARIA SINYAKOVA (1890-1984)

Carousel, 1916

Watercolour on paper

35.4 x 22 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist by Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

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LITERATURE

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MARIA SINYAKOVA (1890-1984)

Family, 1920's/30's

Watercolour on paper

23,5 x 22,5 cm

Signed *M. Синякова* upper right

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist by Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

EXHIBITED

Maria Sinyakova, Kiev, Union of Writers of Ukrainian SSR, November 1969



MARIA SINYAKOVA (1890-1984)

Venus, 1971

Watercolour on paper

36 x 28 cm

Version of work painted in 1910s

Signed *M. Синякова* lower right

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist by Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev

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MARIA SINYAKOVA (1890-1984)

Washerwomen, 1971

Watercolour on paper

29.5 x 21.8 cm

Version of the work painted in the 1920s

PROVENANCE

Acquired from the artist by Dmytro Horbachov, Kiev





ЗЕМЛЯ

BORIS KOSAREV REMEMBERED

My father, the artist Boris Kosarev, lived a long life (1897-1994) but was not remembered until the end of the 20th century – thanks largely to the publication of *Ukrainian Avant-Garde Art 1910s-1930s*, a century after his birth. ‘If I drew like Kosarev, I’d be the Ukrainian Picasso!’ declared Vasily Ermilov. ‘His mesmerizing sense of line turns his drawings into masterpieces!’

When I was a little girl my father would take me to his studio and tell me about those wonderful times – conjuring names, dates and events from his memory like a magician: his early attempts to found a ‘new culture’ in 1916 with the ‘Group of Seven’... how Vasily Ermilov and Mané-Katz joined them... my father’s cover-design for their album *Seven + Three*...

After World War I everyone in Kharkov was cold, hungry and ankle-deep in soot-black mud. The city was crowded with war invalids, limping along beneath the blood-red banners of the Revolution. My father and his friend Ermilov thought themselves lucky to be part of this ‘carnival’ atmosphere. Materials were scarce. They shared an attic studio stuffed with icons, *lubki* (peasant woodcuts), canvases and so-called ‘city primitive’ shop-signs (crude paintings on wood). Their aim was to create a new visual style. Collage was their preferred medium. Ermilov also made bas-reliefs in metal and wood; Kosarev preferred paper – as in his *Guitar*, inspired by Picasso’s 1911 treatment of the same subject.

My father’s portrait of *Picasso* was assembled from torn-up shreds of the French flag, with only the dark eyes adding realism. He had seen a photograph of Picasso illustrating a newspaper article about the Avant-Garde in Paris and Munich.

‘I was lucky to meet so many talented people,’ he used to say. ‘I had Koltsov and Katayev as colleagues. I shared a room with Khlebnikov – our beds were almost touching. I knew Akimov well. I drew Evreinov and Mayakovsky. And I fell in love with each of the Sinyakova sisters ...’

The Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov was a practical fellow but, at the same time, utterly feeble. He was tall and thin, and paid no attention to his appearance. My father’s collage portrait *Khlebnikov* shows him with a flattened face, eyes rolling in different directions and a halo around his head made from semi-transparent paper: a crown for the so-called ‘President of Planet Earth’.

My father, Khlebnikov and Ermilov spent summer 1918 at Krasnaya Polyana. The normally reticent Khlebnikov came alive in the circle of the educated Sinyakova sisters. The atmosphere was full of love. Maria wrote how ‘Naïve painting fills my soul with space, given by God for the understanding of what is beautiful.’ Khlebnikov, Kosarev and Vera Sinyakova formed a bizarre love-triangle, although Vera’s feelings were confined to the artist.



Kosarev (1918)



Kosarev: *Self-Portrait* (1920)



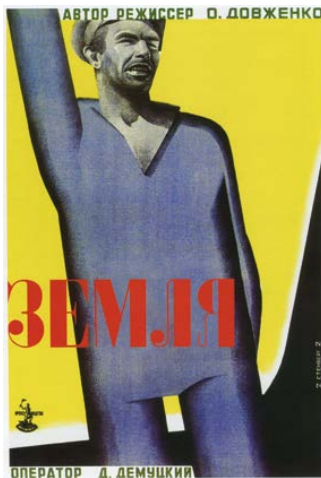
Seven Plus Three exhibition catalogue



Resurrection of Christ with 12 apostles, late 19th century, Kiev



Boris Kosarev (foreground) at work (1918)



Poster for Oleksandr Dovzhenko's film *Earth* (1930)

'If you look closely at the Krasnaya Polyana landscape,' wrote Khlebnikov, 'you become convinced that it is saturated with a special colour. We cannot see this colour, but we can and must *feel* it... beyond the forest, the fields and the sky. The colour of Krasnaya Polyana is eternal. It gives meaning to Nature. The artist who feels this colour has the key to the Little Russian [Ukrainian] landscape – and to its soul.'

Nowhere is this better seen than in my father's *Three Villages, Two Hamlets* (p. 58), a hymn to simple souls and true, heartfelt feelings, and his *Village Pastoral* (p. 66), featuring Adam and Eve as the keepers of the Earth who perpetuate the human species. Both works are divided up like icons into small scenes, each with their own meaning, yet combining to form a whole. In *Three Villages*, the bottom row evokes physical love, with a phallus as pagan symbol of Fertility. In the middle row we see crops and the fruit of the land. At the top, roses blossom behind a cow, and a fish lies beneath a dove and the Tree of Life – Slavic symbols of the origins of life.

Such themes were also evoked in the classic Soviet film *Earth*. After visiting my father's studio in 1928 the Director, Oleksandr Dovzhenko asked him to be part of his team. He worked as assistant cameraman – also producing a photographic record of the entire shoot.

I am grateful to James Butterwick for helping keep my father's memory alive, and for lovingly propagating the names of other Ukrainian artists forgotten for so long.

Nadezhda Kosareva



Oleksandr Dovzhenko at work on the 1930 film *Earth*



BORIS KOSAREV (1897-1994)

Three Hamlets, Two Villages, 1921

Watercolour on paper

24 x 19 cm

Signed and dated *B.K.* 1921 lower right

PROVENANCE

The artist, Kharkov

Nadezhda Kosareva, the artist's daughter, Munich

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BORIS KOSAREV (1897-1994)

Portrait of Velimir Khlebnikov, 1921

Collage on paper

22 x 21 cm

Signed and dated *B.K. 1921* lower right

PROVENANCE

The artist, Kharkov

Nadezhda Kosareva, the artist's daughter, Munich

EXHIBITED

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BORIS KOSAREV (1897-1994)

Portrait of Pablo Picasso, 1921

Collage on paper

22 x 21 cm

Signed and dated *B.K. 1921* lower left

PROVENANCE

The artist, Kharkov

Nadezhda Kosareva, the artist's daughter, Munich

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BORIS KOSAREV (1897-1994)

Guitar, 1923

Watercolour and collage on paper

38 x 31 cm

Signed and dated *B.K.* 1923 lower right

PROVENANCE

The artist, Kharkov

Nadezhda Kosareva, the artist's daughter, Munich

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Boris Kosarev, 1920s: From Painting to Theatre-Movies-Photography, Rodovid, Kharkov, 2009 (p. 161, ill.)



BORIS KOSAREV (1897-1994)

Village Pastoral, 1927

Pencil on paper

26 x 22 cm

Signed and dated *B.K. 1927* lower right

PROVENANCE

The artist, Kharkov

Nadezhda Kosareva, the artist's daughter, Munich

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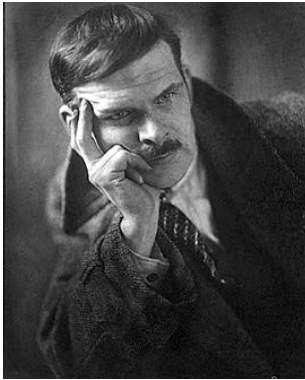
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BIOGRAPHIES



ALEXANDER ARCHIPENKO -
KIEV 1887–NEW YORK 1964

Son of a Professor of Engineering at Kiev University. Studied at Kiev Art School 1902-05, expelled with Bogomazov for rebelliousness. Briefly attended the teaching studio of Sergei Svyatoslavsky before moving to Moscow, where he first exhibited in 1906. Exhibited with Bogomazov in Kiev in 1908, then moved to Paris in 1909, where he was based at La Ruche and championed by Guillaume Apollinaire. Opened a teaching studio in 1912, with Léger, Gleizes, Survage and Duchamp among his pupils. Moved to Nice in 1914, had a solo exhibition at the 1920 Venice Biennale, and opened an art school in Berlin in 1921. Emigrated to New York in 1923, becoming an American citizen in 1929. He contributed 44 works to the Ukrainian Pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, yet never returned to Ukraine.



ALEXANDER BOGOMAZOV -
YAMPOL 1880–KIEV 1930

Attended Kherson Agricultural School 1896-1902 before enrolling at the Kiev Art School 1902; was expelled in 1905 with his friend Archipenko. Also studied under Svyatoslavsky, then in Moscow under Rerberg and Yuon, before resuming at the Kiev Art School from 1908 to 1911, when he travelled to Finland. In 1914 showed 88 works at the Kiev exhibition 'The Ring' and wrote his groundbreaking treatise *Painting & Elements*, analyzing line, form, colour and plane (the manuscript is now in the Museum of Literary Archives in Kiev). Taught in Armenia 1915, returning to Kiev in 1917. Involved in Agitprop 1919-21, then taught at the Kiev Art Academy for the rest of his life. In 1927 embarked on a revolutionary triptych, *Sawyers*, but died before completing it from the tuberculosis that had plagued him throughout the 1920s. A reconstruction of this masterpiece will be the highlight of the Bogomazov exhibition that opens at the Museum of Ukrainian Art in Kiev in September 2017.



ALEXANDER DOVGAL -
DEBALTSEVO 1904-KHARKOV 1961

Born into a family of Donbass railway-workers originally called Dougal. Schooled in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnipropetrovsk) before entering the Kharkov Arts Institute in 1922, where he was influenced by Mykhailo Boychuk's angular style – joining his Ukraine Association of Revolutionary Art in 1925. Taught at Kharkov Technical College 1931-33 and produced a series of lithographs on the theme of Socialist Kharkov in 1936. Exhibitions of his work were held in Kharkov in 1946 and 1958, Kiev in 1958 and Chuguev in 1959. His post-war output as a book illustrator, in a conventional style bereft of his youthful panache, was prolific.



ALEXANDER KHVOSTENKO-KHVOSTOV -
BORISOVKA 1895-KIEV 1967

Born the son of an icon painter in Borisovka, 50 miles north of Kharkov. From 1914 to 1917 he worked as a stage-painter and contributed to the satirical magazine *Budilnik* ('Alarm-Clock'). He then studied at the Moscow School of Painting & Sculpture with Malevich and Exter, whose Kiev studio he joined in 1918 – meeting Anatoly Petritsky, who became a lifelong friend. From 1919 to 1921 designed posters and billboards for Agitprop, and (along with Ermilov) window-displays for the Ukraine Telegraph Agency. Worked as a set-designer on Mayakovsky's play *Mystery-Bouffe* (1921), a projected version of Prokofiev's opera *Love of Three Oranges* (1926) and Glière's ballet *Red Poppy* (1929), becoming Artistic Director of the new Kharkov Theatre of Opera & Ballet. He also taught at the Kharkov Arts Institute, emerging as a leading light in Ukrainian Constructivism, and joined the Ukraine Association of Revolutionary Art. He was named Artistic Director of the Kiev Opera in 1946, winning a Stalin Silver Medal in 1949.

BIOGRAPHIES



BORIS KOSAREV -
KHARKOV 1897–KHARKOV 1994

Boris Kosarev – not to be confused with the USSR official photographer of the same name – studied at the Kharkov Arts Institute 1915–18. Towards the end of his course he became a member of the Cubo-Futurist ‘Group of Seven’, contributing to joint exhibitions and the album *Seven + Three*. He spent summer 1918 at the Sinyakova dacha in Krasnaya Polyana, meeting Velimir Khlebnikov. The influence of Maria Sinyakova and Ukrainian folklore is evident in his drawings *Three Villages*, *Two Hamlets* and *Village Pastoral*. Kosarev moved to Odessa in 1920 but returned to Kharkov in 1921 and subsequently concentrated on theatre and cinema, designing sets for Mikhail Lossovsky’s adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s *The Star-Child* in 1922, and assisting Director Alexander Dovzhenko on the Soviet classic *Earth* in 1930 (an album of Kosarev’s superlative photographs of the filming, which took place near Poltava, was recently published by the Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Film Centre in Kiev). Kosarev was evacuated to Pavlodar, Kazakhstan, during World War II; landed a Stalin Prize in 1947; and taught in Lvov 1948/9. His final decades were spent back in his native Kharkov where in 1985, aged 88, he gave a rare interview to mark the 100th anniversary of Khlebnikov’s birth.



ANATOLY PETRITSKY -
KIEV 1895–KIEV 1964

Raised in an orphanage from the age of 8, showing an early interest in theatre. Enrolled at the Kiev Art School in 1910 and attended the studio of Alexander Murashko from 1914, the year Petritsky’s work was first exhibited in public. Attended Exter’s studio before moving to Moscow in 1922, studying with Drevin and Udaltsova, who fostered his interest in Constructivism. Returned to Kiev in 1924 and became a central figure of Ukrainian Modernism, fusing Futurist poetry, theatre and design into a dynamic new language. His painting *Invalids* won first prize at the All-Ukrainian Exhibition of 1927 and was exhibited at the 1930 Venice Biennale (where it was awarded a medal). His ballet, opera and theatre productions in Kharkov, Kiev and Odessa in the late 1920s and early 1930s – notably Puccini’s opera *Turandot* and Viktor Oransky’s ballet *The Footballer* – earned huge acclaim. From 1930 Petritsky worked for the Avant-Garde magazine *New Generation*, writing that ‘the artist builds the theatrical costume like a functional thing which embodies the general stage design’. He also produced a series of semi-abstract portraits of leading Ukrainian cultural figures (many soon after arrested or shot). From 1934 Petritsky switched to Socialist Realism, exchanging creative freedom for Stalin Prizes and the title of People’s Artist of the USSR.



SEMYON ZALTZER -
ODESSA 1898-ODESSA 1941

Studied at the Odessa Art School under Kiriak Kostandi 1915 to 1919 and, from 1916, worked as an illustrator for local journals like *Theatre & Cinema*, *Melpomena*, *Bomba* and *Ogonki*. In 1918/19 exhibited with the Odessa Society of Independent Artists. Worked on Agitprop in 1920/21 and, along with Sigismund Olesevich, Sandro Fazini and Vladimir Muller, was one of the 'finest Odessa and Petersburg artists' hired to decorate the famous literary/artistic cabaret *Veselaya Kanareyka* (*The Happy Canary*). Close interest in cinema shaped his graphic art, whose savage irony had much in common with German *Neue Sachlichkeit*; he became known for his actors' caricatures published not just in Odessa but also in the prestigious Moscow magazine *Sovietsky Ecran* (*Soviet Screen*), launched in 1925. Also taught at the Odessa art studio run by Yuli Bershadsky until 1928. Later accused of Formalism. Refused to quit Odessa following the Nazi invasion. Final cartoon was published on 11 July 1941; massacred, with thousands of others, in the Jewish ghetto three and a half months later.



MARIA SINYAKOVA -
KHARKOV 1890-MOSCOW 1984

One of five sisters born into a wealthy Kharkov family, whose dacha in nearby Krasnaya Polyana became a magnet for Futurist artists and poets. Joined the radical art group *Budyak* (Thistle) in 1909 and the next year toured German museums. Moved to Moscow in 1912, studying under Fyodor Rerberg and Ilya Mashkov, and exhibiting in St Petersburg with the 'Union of Youth'. In 1914, after a honeymoon in Central Asia, returned to Ukraine and began illustrating the work of Futurist poets, including Khlebnikov; she was also a co-signatory of his 1916 Futurist Manifesto *Trumpet of the Martians*. Returned to Moscow in 1922, working as an illustrator and exhibiting at book fairs in Moscow, Leipzig, Cologne and Paris over the next decade. Fell into disfavour in the late 1940s, expelled from the Artists' Union 1952, reinstated 1956. Her only solo show to date – devoted to graphic works – was held at the Kiev branch of the Writers' Union in 1969.

BIOGRAPHIES



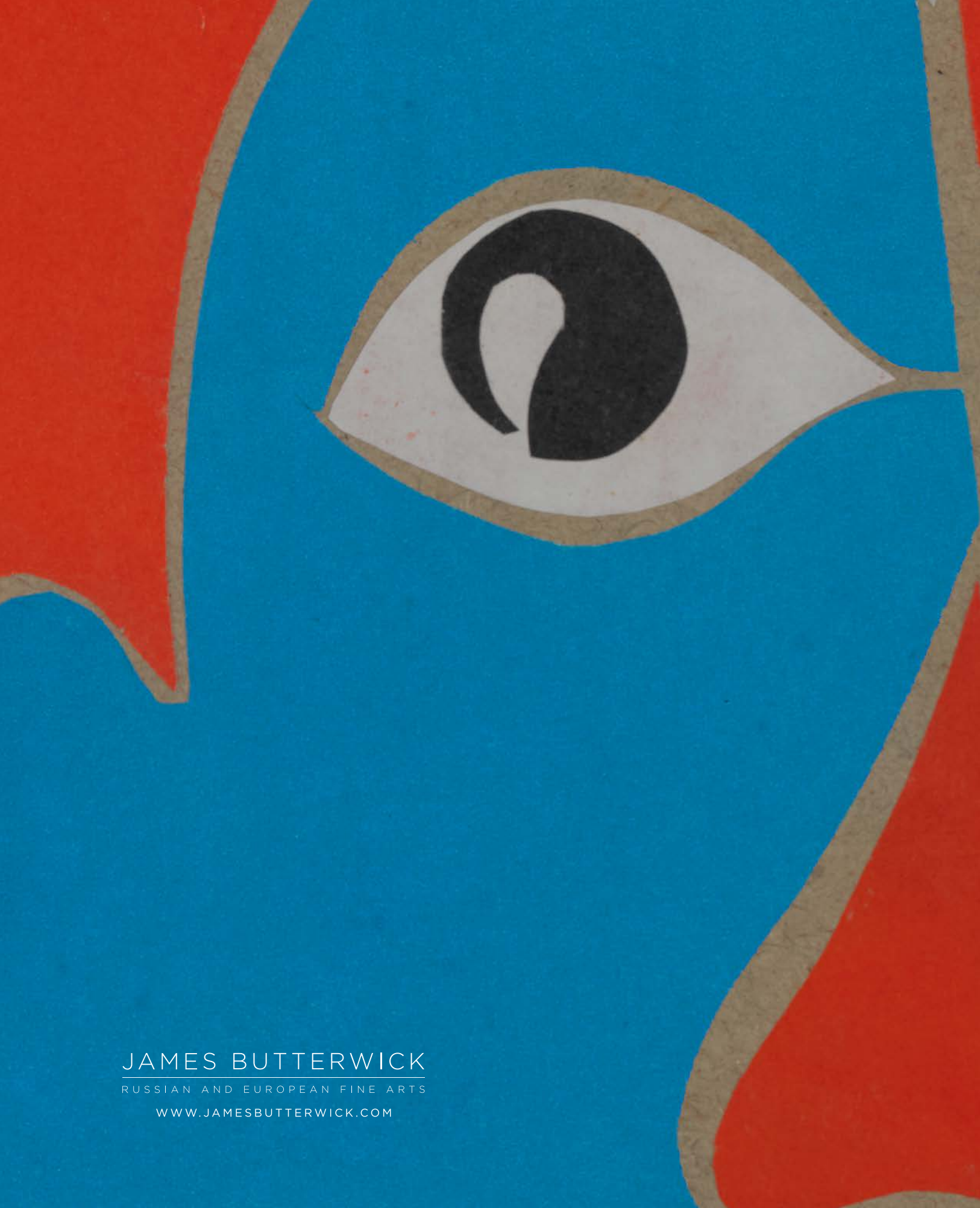
VASILY ERMILOV -
KHARKOV 1894–KHARKOV 1968

Studied under Edward Steinberg in Kharkov before moving to Moscow in 1912, where he trained with Mashkov and Konchalovsky. Served in World War I then helped form the 'Group Of Seven' in Kharkov, meeting Velimir Khlebnikov. From 1919 to 1921 worked on Agitprop, May Day decorations and window displays for the Telegraph Propaganda Agency alongside Khvostenko-Khvostov. His encounter with Vesnin and Popova in Moscow in 1921 decisively influenced the Constructivist aesthetic he adopted for prints, collage, photomontages and reliefs; he would also create his own *Ermilov* typeface. Co-founded the Kharkov Technical Arts Institute in 1922. Worked with El Lissitzky on the Ten Years of October exhibition in 1927 and at the giant *Pressa* exhibition in Cologne in 1928, when he became artistic director of the magazine *Avangard*. Designed interiors for the Kharkov Palace of Pioneers and Octobrists in 1934 but was subsequently accused of Formalism and expelled from the Artists' Union. The terms 'Ermilov School' and 'Ermilov Era' remain, however, synonymous with 1920s Ukrainian Art.



SERGEI YUTKEVICH -
ST PETERSBURG 1904–MOSCOW 1985

First recorded as a precocious teenager in Kharkov, studying at the Steinberg art studio – where attention focused on Gauguin, van Gogh and Cézanne – and meeting Velimir Khlebnikov. He then moved to Kiev, where Exter and Adolf Milman (a former member of the *Jack of Diamonds*) fostered his interest in Cubism. Helped Tyshler, Shifrin and Petritsky with designs for Kiev's 1919 May Day celebrations before working as an actor in Kiev and Sevastopol. After the Civil War relocated to Moscow to study under Meyerhold, issuing a manifesto entitled *Eccentricity* and launching the theoretical platform FEKS ('Factory of the Eccentric Actor'). In 1926 launched his own 'cinema collective' and, from 1928 to 1938, was head of the first cinema workshop at Lenfilm. From 1939 to 1946 directed the Song & Dance Ensemble of the NKVD (future KGB), before resuming his career in cinema to stunning effect – twice earning the Best Director award at the Cannes Film Festival (for *Othello* in 1956 and *Lenin in Poland* in 1966). One of his last films was the animated cartoon classic *Mayakovsky Laughs* in 1975.



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