
MIKHAIL LARIONOV AND
NATALYA GONCHAROVA
Rayonists and Futurists:
A Manifesto, 1913

For biographies see pp. 79 and 54.

The text of this piece, "Luchisty i budushchniki. Manifest," appeared in the miscellany *Oslinyi khvost i mishen* [Donkey's Tail and Target] (Moscow, July 1913), pp. 9-48 [bibl. R319; it is reprinted in bibl. R14, pp. 175-78. It has been translated into French in bibl. 132, pp. 29-32, and in part, into English in bibl. 45, pp. 124-26]. The declarations are similar to those advanced in the catalogue of the "Target" exhibition held in Moscow in March 1913 [bibl. R315], and the concluding paragraphs are virtually the same as those of Larionov's "Rayonist Painting." Although the theory of rayonist painting was known already, the "Target" acted as the formal demonstration of its practical achievements. Because of the various allusions to the Knave of Diamonds, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," and David Burliuk, this manifesto acts as a polemical response to Larionov's rivals. The use of the Russian neologism *budushchniki*, and not the European borrowing *futurist*, betrays Larionov's current rejection of the West and his orientation toward Russian and Eastern cultural traditions. In addition to Larionov and Goncharova, the signers of the manifesto were Timofei Bogomazov (a sergeant-major and amateur painter whom Larionov had befriended during his military service—no relative of the artist Aleksandr Bogomazov) and the artists Morits Fabri, Ivan Larionov (brother of Mikhail), Mikhail Le-Dantiyu, Vyacheslav Levkievsky, Vladimir Obolensky, Sergei Romanovich, Aleksandr Shevchenko, and Kirill Zdanevich (brother of Ilya). All except Fabri and Obolensky took part in the "Target" exhibition, and *Oslinyi khvost i mishen* carried reproductions of some of their exhibits.

We, rayonists and futurists, do not wish to speak about new or old art, and even less about modern Western art.

We leave the old art to die and leave the "new" art to do battle with it; and incidentally, apart from a battle and a very easy one, the "new" art cannot advance anything of its own. It is useful to put manure on barren ground, but this dirty work does not interest us.

People shout about enemies closing in on them, but in fact, these enemies are, in any case, their closest friends. Their argument with old art long since



Mikhail Larionov: *Rayonist Portrait of Goncharova*, 1913. Location and dimensions unknown. Reproduced from Mikhail Larionov: *Luchizm* [Rayonism] (Moscow, 1913).



Natalya Goncharova: *Portrait of Larionov*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 105 x 78 cm. Collection Luis Mestre, Fine Arts, New York.

departed is nothing but a resurrection of the dead, a boring, decadent love of paltriness and a stupid desire to march at the head of contemporary, philistine interests.

We are not declaring any war, for where can we find an opponent our equal?

The future is behind us.

All the same we will crush in our advance all those who undermine us and all those who stand aside.

We don't need popularization—our art will, in any case, take its full place in life—that's a matter of time.

We don't need debates and lectures, and if we sometimes organize them, then that's by way of a gesture to public impatience.

While the artistic throne is empty, and narrow-mindedness, deprived of its privileges, is running around calling for battle with departed ghosts, we push it out of the way, sit up on the throne, and reign until a regal deputy comes and replaces us.

We, artists of art's future paths, stretch out our hand to the futurists, in

spite of all their mistakes, but express our utmost scorn for the so-called egofuturists ¹ and neofuturists, ² talentless, banal people, the same as the members of the Knave of Diamonds, Slap in the Face of Public Taste, and Union of Youth groups.³

We let sleeping dogs lie, we don't bring fools to their senses, we call trivial people trivial to their faces, and we are ever ready to defend our interests actively.

We despise and brand as artistic lackeys all those who move against a background of old or new art and go about their trivial business. Simple, uncorrupted people are closer to us than this artistic husk that clings to modern art, like flies to honey.

To our way of thinking, mediocrity that proclaims new ideas of art is as unnecessary and vulgar as if it were proclaiming old ideas.

This is a sharp stab in the heart for all who cling to so-called modern art, making their names in speeches against renowned little old men—despite the fact that between them and the latter there is essentially not much difference. These are true brothers in spirit—the wretched rags of contemporaneity, for who needs the peaceful renovating enterprises of those people who make a hubbub about modern art, who haven't advanced a single thesis of their own, and who express long-familiar artistic truths in their own words!

We've had enough Knaves of Diamonds whose miserable art is screened by this title, enough slaps in the face given by the hand of a baby suffering from wretched old age, enough unions of old and young! We don't need to square vulgar accounts with public taste—let those indulge in this who on paper give a slap in the face, but who, in fact, stretch out their hands for alms.

We've had enough of this manure; now we need to sow.

We have no modesty—we declare this bluntly and frankly—we consider ourselves to be the creators of modern art.

We have our own artistic honor, which we are prepared to defend to the last with all the means at our disposal. We laugh at the words "old art" and "new art"—that's nonsense invented by idle philistines.

We spare no strength to make the sacred tree of art grow to great heights, and what does it matter to us that little parasites swarm in its shadow—let them, they know of the tree's existence from its shadow.

Art for life and even more—life for art!

We exclaim: the whole brilliant style of modern times—our trousers, jackets, shoes, trolleys, cars, airplanes, railways, grandiose steamships—is fascinating, is a great epoch, one that has known no equal in the entire history of the world.

We reject individuality as having no meaning for the examination of a work of art. One has to appeal only to a work of art, and one can examine it only by proceeding from the laws according to which it was created.

The tenets we advance are as follows:

Long live the beautiful East! We are joining forces with contemporary Eastern artists to work together.

Long live nationality! We march hand in hand with our ordinary house painters.

Long live the style of rayonist painting that we created—free from concrete forms, existing and developing according to painterly laws!

We declare that there has never been such a thing as a copy and recommend painting from pictures painted before the present day. We maintain that art cannot be examined from the point of view of time.

We acknowledge all styles as suitable for the expression of our art,⁴ styles existing both yesterday and today—for example, cubism, futurism, orphism, and their synthesis, rayonism, for which the art of the past, like life, is an object of observation.

We are against the West, which is vulgarizing our forms and Eastern forms, and which is bringing down the level of everything.

We demand a knowledge of painterly craftsmanship.

More than anything else, we value intensity of feeling and its great sense of uplifting.

We believe that the whole world can be expressed fully in painterly forms:

Life, poetry, music, philosophy.

We aspire to the glorification of our art and work for its sake and for the sake of our future creations.

We wish to leave deep footprints behind us, and this is an honorable wish.

We advance our works and principles to the fore; we ceaselessly change them and put them into practice.

We are against art societies, for they lead to stagnation.

We do not demand public attention and ask that it should not be demanded from us.

The style of rayonist painting that we advance signifies spatial forms arising from the intersection of the reflected rays of various objects, forms chosen by the artist's will.

The ray is depicted provisionally on the surface by a colored line.

That which is valuable for the lover of painting finds its maximum expression in a rayonist picture. The objects that we see in life play no role here,

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but that which is the essence of painting itself can be shown here best of all—the combination of color, its saturation, the relation of colored masses, depth, texture; anyone who is interested in painting can give his full attention to all these things.

The picture appears to be slippery; it imparts a sensation of the extratemporal, of the spatial. In it arises the sensation of what could be called the fourth dimension, because its length, breadth, and density of the layer of paint are the only signs of the outside world—all the sensations that arise from the picture are of a different order; in this way painting becomes equal to music while remaining itself. At this juncture a kind of painting emerges that can be mastered by following precisely the laws of color and its transference onto the canvas.

Hence the creation of new forms whose meaning and expressiveness depend exclusively on the degree of intensity of tone and the position that it occupies in relation to other tones. Hence the natural downfall of all existing styles and forms in all the art of the past—since they, like life, are merely objects for better perception and pictorial construction.

With this begins the true liberation of painting and its life in accordance only with its own laws, a self-sufficient painting, with its own forms, color, and timbre.

MIKHAIL LARIONOV Rayonist Painting, 1913

For biography see p. 79.

The text of this piece, "Luchistskaya zhivopis," appeared in the miscellany *Oslinyi khvost i mishen* [Donkey's Tail and Target] (Moscow, July 1913), pp. 83–124 [bibl. R319] and was signed and dated Moscow, June 1912. It has been translated into French, although without the Whitman quotations [bibl. 121, pp. 110–12] and into German [ibid., German edition, pp. 111–13]. A similar text had been published as a separate booklet in Moscow in April of the same year [bibl. R361; reprinted in bibl. R7, pp. 477–83]; this alternate version lacked the Whitman quotations and the short conclusion on pneumorayonism and omitted, inter al., the curious references to

3. Aksenov means, presumably, Cézanne's *Mardi Gras* of 1888, which was in the Sergei Shchukin collection. It is now in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow.
4. Anton Rubinstein's opera *The Merchant of Kalashnikov* was staged by Sergei Zimin's company in Moscow in the winter of 1912/13.
5. In 1909 Petr Konchalovsky was commissioned by the merchant Markushev to execute panels and ceiling decorations for his Moscow villa. The Moscow Salon was the name of an important exhibiting society that held regular shows between 1910 and 1918. Konchalovsky's contribution to the first show in the winter of 1910/11, included his designs for the Markushev villa—*Gathering Olives, Gathering Grapes, Harvest, and The Park*.
6. In November 1911 Konchalovsky, together with Georgii Yakulov, designed the decor for a charity ball called "A Night in Spain" at the Merchants' Club, Moscow.
7. The portrait of the artist Yakulov was executed in 1910 and at present is in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. For Konchalovsky's own description of the work see bibl. R103, vol. 2, pp. 434ff.
8. Italian patriot and revolutionary. The reference, presumably, is to Mazzini's almost constant exile from Italy, during which he never ceased to believe in his dogmatic and utopian principles of Italian nationalism and working-class solidarity—despite the fact that for much of his life he was out of touch with the real moods of the Italian populus.
9. A reference to the prehistoric ivory figures of Brassempouy in southern France.

BURLIUK, pp. 69-77

1. "Texture" [*fakura*] in "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste." See p. 69 and bibl. R269.
2. Which Cézanne landscape Burliuk has in mind is not clear, perhaps *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (1896-98), which was in the Ivan Morozhnik collection, and is now in the Hermitage.
3. Poet, philosopher, and lexicographer.
4. Leading futurist poet, cosigner of "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste."

LARIONOV and GONCHAROVA, pp. 87-91

1. The egofuturists were primarily a literary group, formed in 1911 and led by Igor Severyanin.
2. The neofuturists were an imitative and derivative group active in 1913. Their one publication, *Vyzov obshchestvennyim vkusam* [A Challenge to Public Tastes] (Kazan, 1913), contained parodies of futurist poems and rayonist drawings.
3. Goncharova and Larionov broke with the Knave of Diamonds after its first exhibition in 1910/11, thereby alienating themselves from David Burliuk—and condemning "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste." Larionov regarded the Union of Youth as a harbor of outdated symbolist ideas, an attitude shared by several artists and critics, although Larionov still contributed to its exhibitions.
4. An allusion to *vsechestvo* [literally, "everythingness"], i.e., the concept that all styles are permissible—an attitude shared by Shevchenko [e.g., see bibl. R355].

LARIONOV, pp. 91-100

1. The Whitman extracts are from *Leaves of Grass*: the first from "Beginners," in "Inscriptions"; the second from "I Hear It Was Charged Against Me," in "Calamus." Larionov's choice of author is significant: Whitman was known and respected in Russia particularly among the symbolists and futurists, and his *Leaves of Grass* had become popular through Konstantin Balmont's masterful translation (Moscow, 1911). For contemporaneous attitudes to Whitman in Russia, see Balmont, "Pevets lichnosti" in bibl. R44, no. 7, 1904, pp. 11-32; Chukovsky, "O polze broma" in bibl. R44, no. 12, 1906, pp. 52-60, and Chukovsky, *Uot Uitmen: Poeziya gryadushchei demokratii* (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923). Also see nn. 3 and 6 to "Rodchenko's System," p. 305.
2. Undoubtedly Larionov owed some of his ideas, both in his theory and in his practice of rayonism, to the theories of the Italian futurists. He would, for example, have seen the Russian translations of *La pittura futurista* and *Gli espositori al pubblico* (see p. 79).

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of the Avant-Garde
Theory and Criticism
1902-1934**

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by John E. Bowlt**

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