

The works of genius and mediocrity—the latter are justified because they have historic interest.

The painting of those who have long since decayed (who they were is forgotten, a riddle, a mystery)—how you upset the nineteenth century. Until the 1830s, the age of Catherine was enticing, alluring, and delightful: precise and classical.

Savage vulgarization. The horrors of the Wanderers—general deterioration—the vanishing aristocratic order—hooligans of the palette à la Makovsky¹ and Aivazovsky,² etc.

Slow development, new ideals—passions and terrible mistakes!

Since the first exhibition of the World of Art, in 1899, there has been a new era. Artists look to the West. The fresh wind blows away Repin's chaffy spirit, the bast shoe of the Wanderers loses its apparent strength. But it's not Serov, not Levitan, not Vrubel's³ vain attempts at genius, not the literary Diaghilevians, but the Blue Rose, those who have grouped around *The Golden Fleece* and later the Russian impressionists nurtured on Western models, those who trembled at the sight of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne (the synthesis of French trends in painting)—these are the hopes for the rebirth of Russian painting. . . .

NIKOLAI KULBIN

Free Art as the Basis of Life:

Harmony and Dissonance

(On Life, Death, etc.)

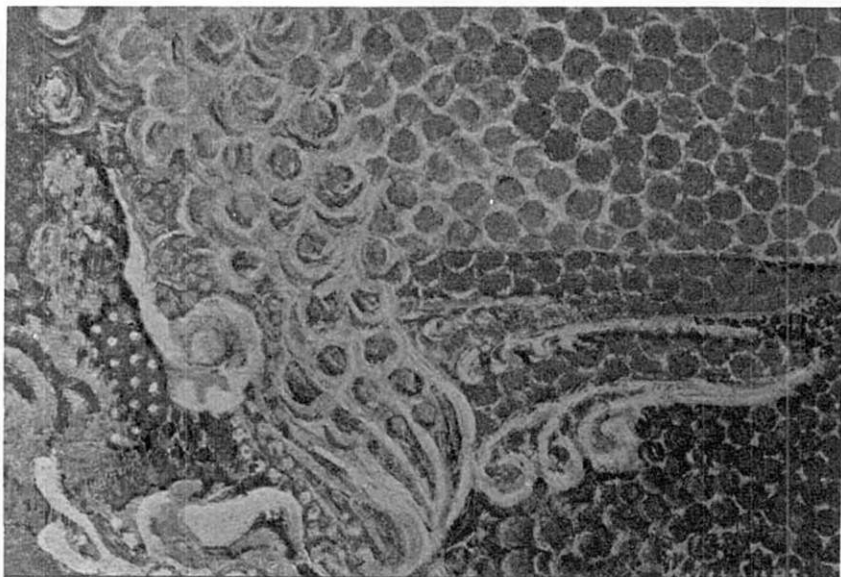
[Extracts], 1908

Born St. Petersburg, 1868; died St. Petersburg, 1917. Professor at the St. Petersburg Military Academy and doctor to the General Staff; taught himself painting; 1908: organized the Impressionist group; lecturer and theoretician; 1909: group broke up, dissident members contributing to the founding of the Union of Youth, opened formally in February 1910; 1910 on: peripheral contact with the Union of Youth; close to the Buriuiks, Vladimir Markov, Olga Rozanova; ca. 1913: illustrated futurist booklets and other publications; 1914: invited Filippo Marinetti to Russia.

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This piece, "Svobodnoe iskusstvo, kak osnova zhizni. Garmoniia i dissonans. (O zhizni, smerti i prochem)," appeared in the miscellany *Studiya Impressionistov* [Studio of the Impressionists] (St. Petersburg, March 1910), pp. 3-14 [bibl. R224], and these extracts come from pp. 3, 4, 8-10, 13-14. The volume appeared just after the "Impressionist" exhibition [see bibl. R221] and at the same time as Kulbin's exhibition the "Triangle" [bibl. R241] was opened in St. Petersburg (March 1910). It also included poems by David and Nikolai Burluk; Velimir Khlebnikov's famous poem "Zaklyatie smekhom" [Incantation by Laughter]; a so-called monodrama, "Predstavlenie lyubvi" [Presentation of Love], by Nikolai Evreinov (to which Kulbin contributed three illustrations); an essay by Kulbin's scientific colleague Aleksei Bori- syak, "O zhivopisi muzyki" [On Musical Painting]; and Kulbin's "Free Music" (bibl. R227, a variant of which appeared in *Der Blaue Reiter* [The Blue Rider], bibl. 96). Essentially Kulbin was concerned with liberating art, literature, and music from conventional patterns and replacing these with the "intuitive principle": in music he followed closely the atonal theories of Arnold Schoenberg and was obviously influenced by the current interest in sound-color relationships manifested by Vasilii Kandinsky, Aleksandr Skryabin, and the St. Petersburg theosophist Aleksandra Unkovskaya; similarly, Kulbin later welcomed Aleksei Kruchenykh's transrational language (*zaum*) and in painting went so far as to presage the mandala theory by maintaining that "painting is the spontaneous projection of conditional signs from the artist's brain into the picture" [bibl. R101, p. 151]. One of these conditional signs that Kulbin saw as recurrent in history was the triangle, a sign that we can identify, of course, with theosophist philosophy, with Russian symbolist aesthetics, and with Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art*. The triangle assumed such importance for Kulbin that he organized an artists' group of that name and began to sign his writings with its graphic representation. It was at the "Triangle" exhibition, in fact, and at similar shows organized by Kulbin, such as *Sovremennye techeniya v iskusstve* [Contemporary Trends in Art], in St. Petersburg in May 1908, that experiments in automatic or intuitive painting were presented: for example, a blind painter submitted canvases to "Contemporary Trends," the peasant primitive Petr Kovalenko ("discovered" by David Burluk) contributed five canvases to the "Wreath" subsection at the "Triangle," where Kulbin himself was represented by several intuitive works bearing such intriguing titles as *Blue on White* and *White on Green*.

The present text echoes the intuitive, symbolist tone of Kulbin's Impressionist group (not to be confused with the French or Moscow impressionists) and of some members of the Union of Youth, one that can be perceived in the art and writings of Pavel Filonov, Markov, Rozanova, and Kazimir Malevich. Before publication, Kulbin had delivered the text as a lecture to the Society of People's Universities in St. Petersburg in 1908, and on February 12, 1912, he gave a similar talk under the title "The New Art as the Basis of Life" at a debate organized by the Knave of Diamonds [see pp. 69-70 and 77-78]. Part of the text is reprinted in bibl. R14, pp. 15-22.



Nikolai Kulbin: Illustration for Nikolai Evreinov's play *Predstavlenie lyubvi* [Presentation of Love]. Kulbin and Evreinov were both involved in several theatrical enterprises in and around St. Petersburg, including the Association of Actors, Artists, Writers, and Musicians in Terioki. This play was not produced, but the text and illustrations appeared in *Studiya Impressionistov* [Studio of the Impressionists] (St. Petersburg, 1910) [bibl. R224] and as a separate publication (St. Petersburg, 1916).

Harmony and dissonance are the basic phenomena of the universe. They are universal and are common to the whole of nature. They are the basis of art.

ARTE
|
NATUREZA

Life is conditioned by the play of the mutual relationships between harmony and dissonance and by their struggle.

The life of nature, the common life of the House of God, is the life of great harmony, of beauty, of Him.

NATUREZA
HARMONIA
BELEZA
DEUS

Complete harmony is Nirvana, and the weary I aspires toward it.

Complete harmony is death. . . .

In music, the plastic arts, and literature, concord calms the spectator, but discord excites him.

From my own researches I am convinced that it is possible to determine concord and discords in the spectrum, in the scales of colors, just as in musical scales.

CONCORDÂNCIA
E
DISCORDÂNCIA
NA ESCALA
DE CORES
COMO NA
ESCALA
MUSICAL

In view of this, I have drawn attention to the very special significance that

SIGNIFICÂNCIA
P/ A VIDA E
A ARTE

combinations of adjacent colors in the spectrum and combinations of adjacent sounds in scales have for life and art. By scales I mean those with small intervals. . . .

At this point I may mention that by means of these phenomena that I call "close combinations"¹ and the processes of these close combinations, it is possible to depict all kinds of pictures of nature and of subjective experiences in painting, music, and other branches of art.*

The Meaning of the Theory of Art

Many people say:

"The theory of art? What does that have to do with us? That's something dry and bookish. Does it claim to be something? I want art, not arguments. The artist creates because there burns within him a sacred flame. He creates without reasoning, and I want to enjoy art without reasoning. The mortifying analysis of art kills art."

Those who say this do not notice that they have not departed from theory and that what they have said is their own theory of art.

Away as far away as possible from the dry, the abstract, and the mortifying!

We recognize only harmony, dissonance, rhythm, style, colors, joy, and grief!

The theory of art is the artist's song, his word, his music, his plastic art (embodiment, depiction).

So perhaps we don't need any theories then? We'll simply read poems, listen to symphonies, and look at pictures.

No! There are no poems, symphonies, or pictures that are devoid of ideas. Pictures, words, music, and the plastic arts are the artist's expression. Works of art are the living, vivid epistles of art.

Not everyone has the gift of reading these hieroglyphics. Anyone can say whether a photograph or an academic picture resembles his established conception of "nature." But there is no art in this.

In order that the spectator apprehend the real subjects of art and be able to enjoy the poetry that is inherent in them, the ideas of art must be aroused in him. In order that the artist create the subjects of art, the poet must be aroused in him.

The poetry of art is the theory of art.

* Incidentally, from my own experience I advise painters to depict light with the help of discords. The results are convincing.²

We, cells of the body of the living Earth, fulfill her desires, but not all of us hear her voice.

It is difficult, very difficult, to read spontaneously the hieroglyphics of life and of the structure of the crystal, the flower, and the beautiful animal.

Not everyone has the gift of reading the rudiments of the art created by the most beautiful of animals—primitive man and our children—although it is simpler.

There are few loving hearts capable of reading artistic ideas in the great works of bygone art. While contrasting the old artists with the new, the mob is still deaf to the ideas of the old artists. Those who love, think, and desire—such are the flower of the Earth. They desire poetry and hear it in the Good Book and in the thoughts of Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, Goethe, and other literati great and small: these are the real theory of art.

This theory of artistic creation is the key to happiness because art is happiness. It is the philosopher's stone, the magic wand that turns life into a fairy tale. It is poetry.

This poetry represents the principles of life. Knowledge of them inspires the mood of art, sharpens vision.

He who knows these principles sees poetry in works of sincerity depicted by an artist—persecuted and, invariably, a newcomer; works about which the ignorant say: "Rubbish, daubing!"

Roger Bacon asks: which is better, to be able to draw an absolutely straight line by hand or to invent a ruler with the help of which anyone can draw a straight line?

For the artist this ruler is the theory of artistic creation. Without it every artist would have to remake our creative culture. All his strength would be spent on this, and he would have no chance of speaking his own new word.

But why, then, do we see certified "artists" every day—artists who study anatomy, perspective, and the history of painting in the official academies—remaining bureaucrats of art? Conversely, street urchins and shepherds are sometimes artists and poets. The theory of art provides us with the answer:

The theory of artistic creation is not taught there. (NAS ACADEMIAS)

Well-behaved bureaucrats and exhausted artists teach and learn there.

They are nice people, but they have no wings, they cannot fly. If a real artist turns up in such an academy, then he suffers the fate of an eaglet amid a brood of hens. Either they will peck him to bits before his beak has developed, or he will hurt somebody himself.

The shepherd Giotto reads the theory of art freely in nature herself, studies color and line while driving his flock from one beautiful picture to another. Moving to the town, he examines works of art and takes from them

TEORIA DA CRIAÇÃO ARTÍSTICA
POESIA
PRINCÍPIOS DA VIDA
POESIA EM OBRAS SINCERAS DE UM NOVOATO PERSEGUIDO
T. DA CRIAÇÃO ARTÍSTICA
RÉCUA (TRA)
MITE AO AR
TISTA DIZEA SUA PALAVRA
ARTISTA
VÓO

UNCIAS
A
IDA
I
ENTI-
CISMO?
I
OGIA
ARTIS
SQ
TUDA
MAS
IÊNCIAS
A
IDA
(K)

"VERY ARTISTICA"
VÔO (ARTISTA)
LEIS ESTREITAS
(TEORIA) ANIMA
LOGIA Q' NATU
REZA

their own particular guidelines; he reads, converses about art, and thirstily imbibes the juice of the fruits of art, throwing away the peel and the mold. In his own creations Giotto puts into practice artistic truth, the truth of art. The eagle's wings function not irregularly but by strict laws that represent the theory of eagles.

This is the theory of artistic creation. It is essential both for talent and for genius.

Tolstoi is the sun. But in his erudition disregards the sciences of Mephistofeles. And so, to the surprise of many, there are spots on the sun.

Chekhov to a lesser extent, but he studied the sciences of life. A doctor's knowledge³ not only did not hinder him from creating, but also lent his creation an extraordinary force, a humaneness almost evangelical.

Ruisdael manifested artistic ability at fourteen years of age, but he first became a doctor and only later a painter; this helped him to establish a great new sphere of painting—the landscape.

The theory of artistic creation has taught man how to compose a poem, to discover colors, and to discover living harmony. This theory is inherent in pictures themselves and in discourses about pictures. . . .

I. Theory

Ideology. Symbol of the universe. Delight. Beauty and good. Love is gravity. Process of beauty. Art is the quest for gods. Creation is the myth and the symbol. Freedom. The struggle of Titans and Olympus. Prometheus and Hercules. Painting and servitude.

A single art—of the word, music, and the plastic arts.

Creation. Thought is the word. Feeling. Will. Individuality. Child. Artist. Talent. Temperament. Sensation. Contrast. Dynamic principle in psychology. Growth and decline. Associations. Revelation and consciousness. Search, imagination, realization. Artistic vision. Mastery of unconscious creation. Accumulation of impressions, processing of them (the throes of creation). Outbursts of creation (inspiration). Interchange of creation and self-criticism. Harmony. Dissonance. Peace and life. Harmony of sequence. Rhythm, Style.

Artist, picture, and spectator.

Blue. Thought in word, sounds, and colors. Drawing is melody.
PENSA TO . PALAVRA, SOM, COR / DESENHO E MELODIA

Red. Mood. The sounds of colors. The colors of the word. The colors of sounds. Scales. Ornament.

COR - PALAVRA - SOM

→ PSICOLOGIA ESTÁ PRESENTE NA CRIAÇÃO E NA COGNIÇÃO

Yellow. The plastic arts. Free creation. Illusion and form. The psychology of depiction. Mutual creation of artist and spectator.

Cognition. Sight and blindness. The psychology of the spectator. Sympathetic experience. Criticism.

Supplements. The life of the artist, of the picture, and of the spectator.

II. The History of Art

The sources of art. Nature. People. Nation.

Movement of the pendulum, realism—idealism. Ants. Spiders and bees. Translational movement. Evolution and revolutions in art. Cycles of art. Destruction, fertilization, decadence. Sowing. New styles. Flowers and fruits. School. Academism. Degeneration.

The Past. Primitive art. The periods of antiquity. The Middle Ages. The latest cycles.

The Present. Contemporary art trends.

New Tendencies. The revaluation of values.

VASILII KANDINSKY

Content and Form, 1910

Born Moscow, 1866; died Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1944. 1896: arrived in Munich; 1909: with Alexei von Jawlensky et al. founded the Neue Künstlervereinigung [New Artists' Association]; began *Improvisations*; 1909–10: Munich correspondent for *Apollo* [bibl. R41]; 1910: contributed to the first "Knave of Diamonds" exhibition; 1911–12: first abstract painting; exhibitions of *Der Blaue Reiter* [The Blue Rider]; 1914–21: back in Russia; 1920: participated in the organization of Inkhuk; 1921: participated in the organization of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences; 1921: emigrated; 1922–33: taught at the Bauhaus.

The text of this piece, "Soderzhanie i forma," is from the catalogue for the second Salon exhibition, organized by Vladimir Izdebsky in Odessa, December 1910–

- Sovetskaya arkhitektura pervykh let Oktyabrya 1917-1925* (Moscow, 1970), p. 25 [bibl. R21].
40. For details see A. Ya[nov], "Krizis krasok," *Zhizn iskusstva* (Petersburg, no. 45, 1923, p. 15 [bibl. R65].
 41. Statement appended to Exter's contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition " $5 \times 5 = 25$ " (Moscow, 1921), n.p. [bibl. R446].
 42. Statement appended to Rodchenko's contribution, *ibid.* The exhibition "Nonobjective Creation and Suprematism" opened, in fact, in January 1919, not 1918 (see p. 138). At the 1920 exhibition in Moscow ("Nineteenth State") Kandinsky, Shevchenko, and Varst (Stepanova) were also among those represented. Despite Rodchenko's assertion that he "proclaimed three basic colors" at " $5 \times 5 = 25$," Kulbin had shown works with the titles *Blue on White* and *White on Green* as early as 1910, at the "Triangle" exhibition in St. Petersburg [bibl. R241; and see p. 12]. In any case, Malevich, had, of course, painted his *White on White* in 1918.
 43. Statement appended to Varst's (Stepanova's) contribution, *ibid.*
 44. Quoted in Lobanov, *Khudozhestvennye gruppirovki*, p. 101. Although purist art had still been supported at the constructivists' first session within Inkhuk on March 18, 1921, attended by V. Ioganson, Konstantin Medunetsky, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and the Stenberg brothers, an industrial approach soon came to be favored. As early as August 1921 Nikolai Tarabukin delivered a lecture at Inkhuk entitled "The Last Picture Has Been Painted" [for details see bibl. 252]. In December of the same year Stepanova gave a talk on constructivism in which she emphasized the value of industrial design.
 45. In *Na puryakh iskusstva*, ed. V. Blyumenfeld et al. (Moscow, 1926), p. 3 [bibl. R381].
 46. Quoted in Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, p. 310.
 47. The Makovets society was named after the hill on which Sergii Radonezhsky built the Troitse-Sergieva Lavra (now the Zagorsk monastery and museum complex) in the fourteenth century, a gesture that expressed its members' emphasis on the spiritual, religious quality of art. This was immediately apparent in the society's manifesto, issued in the journal *Makovets* (Moscow), no. 1, 1922, pp. 3-4 [bibl. R77]. For details on Chekrygin see the catalogue of his recent retrospective [bibl. R163].
 48. See, for example, Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov's introduction to the catalogue of Kazimir Malevich's one-man exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1929 [bibl. R366]; see also Sergei Isakov's introduction to the catalogue of the unrealized Pavel Filonov exhibition at the Russian Museum, Leningrad, 1930 [bibl. R507, and see p. 284].
 49. *Istoriya russkoi zhivopisi v XIX veke* (St. Petersburg, 1901-1902), p. 274. And see p. 5.

NOTES TO THE TEXTS

BURLIUK, pp. 8-11

1. Member of the Wanderers. His initially tendentious exposés of Russian rural life degenerated into sentimental, historical scenes.
2. Famous for his innumerable seascapes.
3. Regarding Isaak Levitan, Valentin Serov, and Mikhail Vrubel', see Introduction.

KULBIN, pp. 11-17

1. In December 1911, at the All-Russian Convention of Artists, in St. Petersburg, Kulbin gave a lecture entitled "Harmony, Dissonance, and Their Close Combinations in Art and Life," which was later published [bibl. R230].
2. Kulbin was interested in microtone music (what he called "free music") and in the associa-

tions between the color spectrum and the conventional seven-tone scale. The second article in *Studio of the Impressionists* was, in fact, a piece by Kulbin on "Free Music: The Results of Applying a Theory of Artistic Creation to Music" [bibl. R227]; the main ideas of this article had already appeared in Kulbin's booklet *Free Music* [bibl. R226], and later appeared in German as "Die freie Musik" [bibl. 96].

3. By profession both Chekhov and Kulbin were doctors.

MARKOV, pp. 23-38

1. "Logic has deprived Nature of the divine." Reference not traced. Probably a quotation from Novalis or the early Hegel.
2. For explanation of *lubok* see n. 4 to Introduction, p. 298.
3. Presumably a reference to the writer, composer, and painter E. T. A. Hoffmann. Like Novalis and other German romantics, Hoffmann enjoyed a vogue in Russia in the 1900s.
4. Markov's ideas on "texture" [*fakura*] were scheduled to appear in a subsequent issue of *Soyuz molodezhi* [Union of Youth], but since the journal ceased publication after the third issue (March 1913), Markov's essay was published separately [bibl. R233]. At the end of his text Markov also indicated that he would be writing on other principles, such as gravity, surface, dynamism, and consonance, but these essays were never published.

SHEVCHENKO, pp. 41-54

1. For explanation of *lubok* see n. 4 to Introduction, p. 298.
2. Signboards and trays were particularly prized by David Burluk, who had a large collection of them. Mikhail Larionov was very interested in the *lubok* and in 1913 organized an exhibition of them [see bibl. R252 and bibl. 132, pp. 33-37, where part of the catalogue, including Larionov's and Natalya Goncharova's prefaces, is translated into French]. Shevchenko collected children's drawings, some of which were shown at the "Target" in 1913, together with signboards and naive paintings by the Georgian primitive Niko Pirosmanshvilj.
3. Painter, wood sculptor, and stage designer known for his highly stylized depictions of pre-Petrine Russia.
4. "Grass writing" is presumably a reference to the Chinese *ts'ao shu*, a hieroglyphic style used in the first and second centuries A.D. In appearance *ts'ao shu* resembles intertwined leaves of grass.
5. The title "Old Believers" refers to those members of the Russian Church who disagreed with ecclesiastical reforms instituted by the Patriarch Nikon in the mid-seventeenth century. Among the first to condemn Nikon's preference for the Greek Orthodox and hence more Western conception of Christianity was the famous Petrovich Avvakum, traditionally regarded as the founder of the Old Believers. The general policy of the Old Believers, who were from all classes, was, despite forceful opposition, to maintain the rich, Byzantine traditions of the Church; this affected considerably the outward appearance of their dress, icons, *lubki*, etc.
6. See Larionov's articles, pp. 87ff.

GONCHAROVA, pp. 54-60

1. Goncharova was represented at the first and second exhibitions of "Der Blaue Reiter" in 1911-12; she also contributed to Roger Fry's "Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition" in London in 1912 [bibl. 106, 107, 142].
2. See Larionov's articles, pp. 87ff.

ARSENOV, pp. 60-69

1. Member of the Wanderers. Known for his scenes of factory and prison life. Regarding Repin see Introduction.
2. For further details regarding the Knave of Diamonds members whom Aksenov mentions, the following references may be consulted: Mashkov [bibl. R323], Kuprin [bibl. R324, R331], Rozhdestvensky [bibl. R343], Lentulov [bibl. R309, R322], Konchalovsky [bibl. R316, R317], Falk [bibl. 105, R260, R346], Exter [bibl. 61, 80, R181].

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

**Edited and Translated
by John E. Bowlt**

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[*passagem ao Ocidente, iniciada desde 1910 mas
conscientemente na exposição de arte Russo de 1912
(março 1912)*]

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