



fig. 1
View of exhibition in the Russian pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1924.
Fondo artistico e fototeca, Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee
della Biennale di Venezia.

The Russian Presence in the 1924 Venice Biennale

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In the 1920s, contemporary Soviet art was exhibited in numerous cities in the West. The well-known *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (First Russian Art Exhibition) took place in Berlin in the autumn of 1922 and then traveled to Amsterdam the following year.¹ There was an *Exhibition of Russian Painting and Sculpture* at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 1923, and the next year a *Russian Art Exhibition* was held at the Grand Central Palace in New York. The *XIV Esposizione internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia* (Fourteenth Venice International Art Exhibition), which featured the Padiglione del U.R.S.S. (the Russian pavilion), also took place in 1924.² The *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Art) was presented in Paris in 1925, the *Mostra internazionale delle arti decorative* (International Exhibition of Decorative Art) in Monza near Milano in 1927, and the *Exposition d'art russe ancien et moderne* (Exhibition of Russian Art Past and Present) in Brussels in 1928; there was an exhibition of Soviet art in England in 1929. In 1930–31 several exhibitions were held in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Stockholm, and Zurich. Moreover, the work of Russian artists living in the West was presented often in France and Germany during the twenties.³

Unlike the other exhibitions, the *Esposizione internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia*, better known as the Venice Biennale, was a regular event in which Russian art had been included since the first Biennale in 1895. The organizers of the 1924 Biennale were particularly eager to show recent works by artists in the Soviet Union because a decade had passed, and the Revolution had taken place, since works had last come from Russia to Italy for display at the Russian pavilion. In both 1907 and 1914, the Venice Biennale had featured works by Russian artists. Thus, official as well as personal channels between organizers and participants had already been established.

This essay will focus on the organization of the 1924 exhibition, the works of art that finally arrived for the Russian pavilion, how the Russians presented them, and how they were received critically in Italy. Based on the records and photographs preserved in the Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia, the identity of specific objects and their installation can be determined. It is also known which works were purchased for Italian collections and which were kept in the West at the artists' behest.

By the summer of 1923, efforts were initiated by the Italians through the trade delegations of both countries to encourage Soviet participation in the *XIV Esposizione internazionale*, which was scheduled to open in April 1924.⁴ Giovanni Bordiga and Ilario Neri, the principal Italian organizers, invited the Russians to submit a list of "representative and notable artists," who would each be represented by one or more works. Although in earlier years they had been in direct contact with the commissioner of the Russian section of the Biennale, F. Barenstam, in 1923 the organizers turned to the *Delegazione commerciale italiana* in Moscow for assistance. On June 11, 1923, Bordiga, who was president of the *Esposizione internazionale*, wrote to the Italian foreign minister, noting that, following the end of World War I, the shows of foreign art at the Biennale had all been resumed with the exception of the Russian pavilion—because there were still no diplomatic relations between Russia and Italy. "For this reason," he requested, "I beg Your Excellency to indicate whether I may initiate the necessary steps through the Russian trade delegation in Rome and also with the possible assistance of the Italian mission in Moscow." As a director of the *Esposizione internazionale*, Neri sent repeated letters and telegrams from Venice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome and to the *Delegazione commerciale italiana* in Moscow. On September

29, 1923, he wired the Italian trade delegation: "We beg you to reply promptly to our letters regarding the Russian artistic participation in the next show."

The first indication of any progress in the negotiations came in the postscript to Neri's letter of November 27th to the same delegation: "From news received indirectly, it appears that a committee for the Russian-art competition in Venice has already been selected. Please be so kind as to be precise also in this respect." The next day, Neri received a telegram from Signor Paterno, the spokesman for the Italian trade delegation in Moscow, stating: "As wired Foreign Ministry, confirm Russian participation." Likewise, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that the *Delegazione economica italiana* in Moscow had indicated the acceptance in principle by the government of the USSR of the invitation to participate in the Biennale.

In December 1923, Neri contacted Iordanskii, the Soviet representative in Rome, and, in a letter dated December 26th, inquired who had been selected commissioner, for he wished to approach him directly. Upon learning that the commissioner was Petr Kogan, president of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences, professor at Moscow University, and director of the Institute of Art and Archeology, Neri wrote to him in Moscow. In his letter to Kogan dated January 9th, Neri emphasized that all the works exhibited in the Biennale must reach Venice by late March and that he needed a list of objects as soon as possible. The response, however, was not sent until late February.

During this time the Italian trade delegation in Moscow continued to play a crucial role in the negotiations, since formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were resumed only on February 7, 1924. On January 19th, Paterno sent a telegram to Neri: "Please wire immediately if the Russian government may show applied art such as etchings, engravings, lace, wood carving, porcelain, architecture. For paintings wish to know how many pictures will be permitted each participant." Three days later, Neri indicated the organizers' preference for "*arte pura*" and added that "for each artist two works will be enough while solo shows of two prominent artists would be desirable." In a letter also dated January 22nd, Neri explained to Paterno that "as an exception, and especially from the point of view of ornamenting the rooms, it is agreed that some objects of decorative and applied art may be included but always in a very discreet and limited manner . . . However, regarding the number of works, we are of the opinion that, as a general rule, no artist may exhibit more than two."

When Kogan responded to Neri's letter, he apologized for the delay and explained: "I was not able to answer your letter right away because the great loss suffered in Russia with the death of V. I. Lenin has delayed our work in recent days." He stated that "we will take into consideration your wish that our section represent products most characteristic of Russian art." Kogan also inquired about the possibility of finding additional space to augment the Russian pavilion in case there should not be enough room to display the works and about the possibility of including decorative arts and porcelain in the exhibition.

By March, a tone of urgency can be detected in the telegrams sent to Kogan requesting information and repeating that the Biennale would open on April 24th. Italy's new ambassador to the USSR, Manzoni, transmitted the reply to Neri on April 5th: "Kogan informs Russian works [in] exhibition will reach Venice beginning of May. Paintings section includes about sixty works [by] principal artists. Other three sections [are] sculpture, theater design, decorative arts and porcelain. If administration will provide space in main pavilion Russian presence could be greater."

In a letter to Bordiga dated April 4th, Ambassador Manzoni wrote that "since the beginning of my stay in Moscow, I have been occupied with securing and speeding up the Russian involvement in the Venetian exhibition. I have found the best cooperation in this matter from the commissar of enlightenment, Lunacharskii, who lived in Italy for five years and knows and understands our language. Thanks to his good offices, the commissar of finance has approved the sum of 11,000 gold rubles (equal to 137,500 Italian lire) for construction on the Russian pavilion and for the costs of the Russian participation. Thanks to his good offices, the principal Russian artists have been persuaded to be represented in Venice with their best works. In this endeavor, Commissar Lunacharskii has been actively assisted by Professor Kogan."⁶ An enclosed article from *Izvestiia*, dated March 26th, stated that one hundred prominent artists had been invited to participate in the Venice Biennale, which the People's Commissar of Enlightenment considered to be "of the utmost importance." Ambassador Manzoni also sent Neri a translation of an article in the April 18th issue of *Izvestiia*: "The exhibition committee has more than 300 examples of paintings, works on paper, and sculpture, which come from different regions of the USSR but are presently in Moscow together with the items from the capital. The objects from Leningrad will arrive in a few days. In all, more than 500 works will be represented, among which many have as their theme contemporaneity. For example, *V. Lenin in the Mausoleum* (Shadr), the portrait of Trotskii (Annenkov), and other pictures from the Museum of the Red Army will be sent to Venice. Besides the major cities, there will be representative art from different places in Russia such as Armenia, Ukraine, etc."

In mid-May there was another flurry of telegrams. Bordiga cabled the representative of the Soviet trade delegation in Rome, inquiring when the works of art would reach Venice: "Commission together with works supposed to arrive May 5. Delay worries us more since exhibition now crowded is great success." Finally, on May 16th, Ambassador Manzoni could wire Venice: "1398 works sent yesterday [via] Brenner [Pass]." And a telegram from Kogan read: "Paintings sent we leave Friday 16 via Berlin." The Soviet organizers arrived in Venice in early June. In addition to the commissioner, Kogan, and the secretary general, Boris Ternovets, the organizing committee included A. Bakushinskii, Boris Shaposhnikov, V. Domogadskii, Abram Efros, A. Kondrat'ev, M. Kristi, A. Sidorov, Iakov Tugendkhol'd, and B. Vipper. According to an article in *Il Popolo d'Italia* from June 6th, Kogan explained in an interview that "our delay was due to the great distance between the two countries and to the infinite formalities which we had to overcome." Although the works of art had still not arrived, he was glad to participate in the Biennale. Kogan was quoted as saying that "As for the artistic movements, there is none of any representative value today in Russia which we have not collected . . . The decorative arts on which we place great importance—which is a direct manifestation of the artistic sense of our people—are widely represented." Kogan concluded: "We believe that we have done something worthy of the Biennale."

According to the official catalogue of the *XIV Esposizione internazionale*, there were 176 paintings, 19 sculptures, and 300 watercolors, as well as 80 examples of decorative art, in the Russian pavilion.⁷ Newspaper accounts also confirmed a total of approximately 600 works of art. The catalogue separated the works by medium, listed the artists alphabetically, and provided titles—without dates—in Italian. It stated, however, that all the objects had been executed during the preceding decade.

From the catalogue, it is immediately apparent that works

from a wide spectrum of styles and regions were presented in the Russian pavilion. Portraits by Natan Al'tman and Iurii Annenkov, landscapes by Anatolii Arapov and Igor' Grabar', Suprematist works by Kazimir Malevich and Liubov' Popova, and political-historical canvases by Boris Kustodiev and N. D. Nikonov were included. The Museum of the Red Army in Moscow lent eleven works: Annenkov's *Portret L'va Trotskogo* (*Portrait of Lev Trotskii*, 1923, no. 7), Sergei Chekhonin's *Portret Sidiakina* (*Portrait of Sidiakin*, no. 21), Vasilii Iakovlev's *Gazeta na fronte* (*Newspaper at the Front*, 1923, no. 55), Konstantin Iuon's *Parad na Krasnoi ploschadi v Moskve* (*Parade in Red Square in Moscow* [*Parade of the Red Army*]), 1923, no. 57), S. M. Karpov's *Agitpunkt* (*Agitation Committee*, no. 59), Kustodiev's *Bol'shevik* (*The Bolshevik*, 1920, no. 89) and *Portret N. Kuz'mina* (*Portrait of N. Kuz'min*, 1923, no. 90), Pavel Kuznetsov's *Na Krasnoi ploschadi* (*On Red Square*, 1923, no. 99), Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin's *Posle boia* (*After the Battle*, 1923, no. 130), Petr Shukhmin's *Provodnik* (*Guide at the Front*, 1923, no. 165), and Sergei Kononov's sculpture of the *Krasnyi kazak* (*Red Cossack*, no. 182). All of the works by Malevich, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Aleksandr Vesnin, and Popova listed in the catalogue were entitled *Suprematizm* (*Suprematism*) and stood in stark contrast to the works from the Museum of the Red Army. Since the pictures are reproduced neither in the official catalogue of the Biennale nor in photographs taken in Venice, identification of the works by the last four artists remains difficult.

Six photographs of the installation in the Russian pavilion were, however, published in an article by Ternovets.⁸ Two Suprematist paintings by Rodchenko (nos. 137, 138) are clearly visible at the far right in one of the installation shots (fig. no. 1). Adjacent to Al'tman's *Portrait of a Girl* (1923, no. 1),⁹ above, and David Shterenberg's *Natiurmort s korzinkoi* (*Still Life with Basket*, 1922–23, no. 164), below, the two Rodchenkos are presented with other paintings by Al'tman, Annenkov, and Shterenberg: on the same wall, at the top (from left to right), are Al'tman's *Rossia. Trud* (*Russia: Work*, 1921, no. 3; plate no. 107), *Natiurmort* (*Still Life*, 1920, no. 2),¹⁰ and Shterenberg's *Zhenshchina na divane* (*Woman on a Couch*, no. 161); below are Annenkov's *Vesna* (*Spring*, no. 10) and Shterenberg's *Natiurmort na mramornom stole* (*Still Life on Marble Table*, 1920s, no. 163) and *Peisazh* (*Landscape*, no. 162). Also listed in the Biennale catalogue, as no. 6, is Al'tman's *Petrokommuna* (*Petrocommune*, 1921, plate no. 108). According to lists of objects not exhibited but kept in storage, *Petrokommuna* as well as two still lifes by Al'tman were (probably) among the hundreds of works stored in Venice.

In the center of another view of the installation (fig. no. 2), Annenkov's *Portrait of Lev Trotskii* is immediately flanked, on the left, by his portraits of Polonskii (1922, no. 9) and Aleksandr Tikhonov (1922, no. 8)¹¹ and, on the right, by Abram Arkhipov's *Molodaia khoziaika* (*Young Proprietress*, 1924, no. 15) and Iuon's *Parade in Red Square in Moscow*.¹² Farther to the right, Nikonov's *V'ezd Krasnoi armii v Krasnoiarsk* (*Entrance of the Red Army into Krasnoiarsk*, no. 123) hangs below Shukhmin's *Guide at the Front*. Petrov-Vodkin's *After the Battle*¹³ can be seen at the upper left. A photograph of the entrance to the main gallery shows works by Kustodiev—including *Zimnii peisazh* (*Winter Landscape*, no. 85), *Portret Tat'iany Chizbovoi* (*Portrait of Tat'iana Chizbova*, 1924, no. 86),¹⁴ *Kupchikha* (*The Merchant's Wife*, 1918, no. 88),¹⁵ and *The Bolshevik*.¹⁶ There were also a landscape and the *Portret Adol'fa Mil'mana* (*Portrait of Adolf Mil'man*, no. 114) by Il'ia Mashkov, and *Natiurmort* (*Still Life*, 1922, no. 153) by Martiros Sar'ian. Robert Fal'k's *Krasnaia mebel'* (*Red Furniture*, 1920–23, no. 35) and *Zhenshchina v belom* (*Woman in White*, 1922–23, no. 42)¹⁷; Petr Konchalovskii's *Avtoportret s zhenoi* (*The Artist and His Wife*, 1923, no. 60), *Semeinyi portret* (*Family*

Portrait, 1923–24, no. 61), *Agava* (*Agave*, 1916, no. 65),¹⁸ and *Lezhashchaia naturshchitsa* (*Reclining Nude*, 1923, no. 67); and numerous landscapes by Sar'ian are also easily identifiable from photographs.¹⁹ Another wall was devoted to pictures by Kuznetsov, including *Devushka s verbludom* (*Girl with Camel*, late 1910s–early 1920s), *Mirazh v stepi* (*Fata Morgana on the Steppe*, 1910s), several still lifes, and *Red Square in Moscow* (nos. 91–99).

Although there are no photographs of the works by Malevich, they can be identified as *Chernyi kvadrat* (*Black Square*), *Chernyi krest* (*Black Cross*), and *Chernyi krug* (*Black Circle*), all circa 1923, and six planit drawings.²⁰ Whether the works were actually exhibited remains doubtful. Likewise, Boris Ender's canvas (*Extended Space*, 1922–23, no. 27; plate no. 325), which was acquired later by George Costakis, traveled to Venice but may not have been on view.²¹ Several paintings and works on paper by Aleksandra Ekster were photographed at the time of the Biennale in Venice and are also known from publications: for example, studies for sets and costumes for Iakov Protazanov's film *Aelita* (released in 1924) and stage designs for Calderón's *La Dama duende* (produced at the Moscow Art Theater in 1921), Innokentii Annenskii's *Famira Kifared* (*Thamyris the Cithara-Player*, produced at the Kamernyi Theater in Moscow in 1916), and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (produced at the Kamernyi Theater in 1921; compare plate nos. 610–611).²²

The Biennale catalogue contains a four-page introductory text by Ternovets summarizing the diverse artistic tendencies presented in the Russian pavilion. He begins by defining and contrasting the two schools of art which had developed in Moscow and St. Petersburg/Petrograd at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. He cites the exhibitions of Bubnovyi valet (Jack of Diamonds) as evidence for Moscow's artistic supremacy and also mentions the Moscow collectors Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov. Ternovets refers to the influence of Cézanne, especially on the art of Konchalovskii and Mashkov. He goes on to say that "beside this main current run other, less plentiful streams. It is easy to imagine that the spirit of the Orient must have its interpreters in the half-Asian city of Moscow. The personality of Pavel Kuznetsov took shape during his trips across the steppes of eastern Russia." Ternovets states that Cubism was dominant in Moscow, however, as it was in other centers of artistic activity. Not only Annenkov but also Malevich, Popova, Ekster, and Al'tman developed their work out of Cubism. He mentions the "transitory action of non-objective art, which refutes the representation of the visual world and which is currently known in Russia by the name 'Suprematism' . . . The majority of extremist painters, gathered under the common denominator of 'constructors,' have expressed their profound aversion to the traditional forms of easel painting and are attempting to find through direct participation in the procedures of the textile, metallurgical, and printing industries the solution to their problems." He singles out Shterenberg as an artist who is sympathetic to extremist tendencies but who has tried to express the pictorial aspect of the visual world while, at the same time, using the discoveries of the new technology.

Ternovets emphasizes that the Soviet festivals of recent years, the new monumental ornamentation, may have been marked by an extremist orientation but that, in his view, the sympathies of the Russian proletariat do not lie in this artistic direction. The people prefer a solid and vigorous Naturalism. A tendency toward an art based on the observation and study of nature and a particular interest in subjects of contemporary life are evident in the work of the young but already influential AKhRR (the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia).

Iakovlev, Shukhmin, Pavel Radimov, and Evgenii Katsman represent this movement in the present exhibition. He concludes by stating that "the artistic life of the USSR presents a picture of passionate searching, sometimes questionable and sometimes gainsaid by the struggle and competition between diverse tendencies, but a stirring picture which gives us the image of a people in quest of new forms for a new life."

The critical response to the exhibits in the Russian pavilion focused on the opening, which took place at 10 A.M. on Thursday, June 19th, with the Soviet ambassador, Iur'enev, present. According to the *Gazzetta* of June 20th, "the ceremony took place with simple and decorous solemnity." In addition to Kogan, several members of the Soviet committee, including Ternovets, Shaposhnikov, and Kondrat'ev, were present, as was Sar'ian. Kogan led a tour of the galleries but without giving a speech, "which was not necessary. The public could thus appreciate even better the interesting and varied body of works assembled in the pavilion. The only drawback was the lack of space for a suitable presentation of the extremely large number of objects on display." According to *Emporium*, Kogan delivered a few remarks in French, expressing his satisfaction that the USSR had resumed diplomatic relations with Italy "after the period of the Revolution and the suspension of Russia's relations with other countries."

Even before the pavilion opened, an unsigned article in the *Corriere italiano* of June 12th stated that the Russian delegation was larger and more imposing than any of the others. "The Russian pavilion will be distinguished from the others in that the commission concerns itself not only with choosing the works but also with showing the entire present situation of Russian art with all its disparate tendencies . . . Many say that the exhibition is the most beautiful opportunity for Bolshevik propaganda: no, it is rather the first and well-deserved affirmation of the art of a people who for a decade were not in contact with our Western world. And Italy—who should not fear Communist infiltration—is most happy, especially in Venice, to host such a worthy collection."

Writing in the August 7th issue of *Epoca*, Alberto Francini said of the exhibit that "there seemed to be no real correspondence between [Soviet] life and an art that today appears not merely traditional but behind the times. Yet, if one thinks about it, this situation is quite logical, since the consequence of the Revolution could only be to give value to the taste of the people who, not having had time to become the elite, had to be satisfied with the obvious and old-fashioned displays." He discussed the paintings of Konchalovskii and expressed his preference for the work of Fal'k and Aleksandr Kuprin. At the end of his article, Francini singled out "the few interesting ceramics on which revolutionary decorations appear."

Francesco Saporì also mentioned the ceramics—especially those from Mezhygorsk in Ukraine—and focused on the pictures by the Armenian artist Sar'ian.²³ He gave particular emphasis, however, to the work of Annenkov, "who accepts with open eyes some of the postulates of Cubism in order to confront realistically and alone the radical problem of form." When one considers his monumental *Portrait of Lev Trotskii*, one sees that "this painter of revolutionary Russia knows how to unite the expressive force of the past with the anguished achievements of today."

Sar'ian was well represented, with ten paintings listed in the catalogue (as had Fal'k and Kuznetsov), and surpassed only by Konchalovskii with thirteen works. According to a detailed list in the Biennale archives, however, there were sixty pictures by Konchalovskii shipped in two crates to Venice, where they were stored by the administration of the Biennale. According to another official document, 193 works sent from the Soviet

Union and twenty pictures shipped from Berlin to Venice were placed on deposit with the managing director of the Biennale due to lack of space in the Russian pavilion. Three works by Fal'k, for example, as well as four by Popova, nine by Ekster, and nine by Malevich were stored rather than exhibited in Venice. The Biennale catalogue includes only nine works by Malevich, and for this reason the question arises whether his works were actually on view. There is one work by Vladimir Tatlin on the list of objects sent from Berlin, although the artist is not mentioned in the Biennale catalogue.

The detailed list of works shipped from Berlin to Venice requires further attention. Evidently, three of the four Suprematist paintings and the works on paper by Popova (nos. 132–134, 388) were not exhibited. Likewise, Stepanova's Suprematist picture (no. 167), one of Rodchenko's Suprematist paintings (no. 141), and three works by Al'tman mentioned above (*Petrocommune* and two still lifes [nos. 4–5]) were apparently not on view, although they were listed in the catalogue. In addition, four works by Aleksandr Vesnin and six by Ekster, which do not appear to have Biennale catalogue numbers, were shipped from Berlin and stored in Venice. From a comparison of this list with the checklist in the catalogue for the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, it appears likely that works by Al'tman, Ekster, Popova, Rodchenko, Stepanova, and Tatlin first exhibited in Berlin in 1922 may have been sent in 1924 to Venice. Two works by Al'tman—*Russia: Work* and *Petrocommune*—along with Ekster's painting *Venetsiia (Venice, no. 34)*, and, it may be, the same four pictures by Popova were listed in the catalogues for both the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* and the Venice Biennale.²⁴

There can be no doubt that the Russians sent more works to Venice than could possibly be accommodated in the Russian pavilion in the Giardini pubblici. It is unclear what happened to the sixty pictures by Konchalovskii after the conclusion of the Biennale. The artist visited Italy later that year, however, and probably reclaimed the works when he was in Venice. On September 3, 1924, Ekster contacted the organizers of the Biennale, requesting that the paintings not exhibited but stored in the British pavilion be returned to her in Italy. In 1925, after the close of the Biennale, Kogan wrote on behalf of Ekster to say that her three paintings shipped in November had still not arrived in Paris, where she was then living. Nevertheless, the fact remains that numerous non-objective works listed in the Biennale catalogue were not exhibited in the Russian pavilion and that the impact of Suprematist art was really less significant than implied by the Biennale publications.

At least thirty-five works were purchased out of the Biennale and remained in Italy. In November 1924, Konchalovskii's *Family Portrait* was purchased by the Galleria d'arte moderna in Venice for 3,530 lire and Arkhipov's painting *Leto (Summer, no. 16)* was acquired by the Civica galleria d'arte moderna in Genoa for 2,500 lire. Giorgio Georgiadis of Trieste bought Arkhipov's *Young Proprietress* and Giovanni Dallavilla purchased Kuznetsov's *Girl with Camel* and Sar'ian's canvas *Erevan (1924, no. 154)*. Vittorio Lodigiani of Milan bought numerous objects, including Grabar's *Na lazorevom nebe (Blue Sky, 1923, no. 51)*, Konchalovskii's *Derev'ia (Trees, no. 72)*, Kuprin's *Krem'l' (Kremlin, no. 84)*, and Mashkov's *Iuzhnyi peisazh. Zakat solntsa (Southern Landscape: Sunset, no. 121)*. The well-known Florentine collector Charles Loeser acquired Vasilii Rozhdestvenskii's *Krymskii peisazh (Landscape in the Crimea, no. 145)* for 6,000 lire. Not only paintings and works on paper but also the decorative arts were purchased by private collectors as well as by the Museo delle arti decorative in Monza. Ceramics, lacquer boxes, plates, water jugs, and statuettes were sold from the Russian pavilion during the



fig. 2
View of exhibition in the Russian pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1924.
Fondo artistico e fototeca, Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee
della Biennale di Venezia.

summer and autumn of 1924.

The Russian organizers apparently stayed in Italy past the close of the exhibition. Ternovets, who traveled to Florence and Rome, remained in contact with Domenico Varagnolo of the Biennale secretariat. On October 31st, from Florence, he wrote a postcard in Italian saying that "today I want to meet Mr. Pozzi and visit Mr. Loeser, who acquired the landscape by Rozhdestvenskii." On January 1, 1925, Ternovets was again in Venice before traveling to Milan and Monza with Kogan on their way to Paris. A few days later, in an undated letter from Milan to Varagnolo and Bazzini, Ternovets mentioned that he had visited Lodigiani and seen his "interesting collection." Since the Biennale offices were closed on New Year's Day, he was "very sorry not to have been able to say goodbye personally. Please accept my warmest thanks for all the support and expression of friendship and kindness which I found in Venice. It is with feelings of deepest and most sincere gratitude that I will think of my stay in this beautiful city . . . In fifteen months I hope to see all of you and to renew our friendly relations."

On January 7, 1925, Kogan wrote from Milan to thank the Biennale committee and to say that he was sorry not to have been able to do so in person: "Unfortunately, due to various formalities, I was obliged to stay in Rome longer than I had planned and since then I have come to Milan to clarify the possibility of our participation in the exhibition of decorative arts in Monza. I consider it to be my most pleasant duty to tell you that I will never forget the thoroughly friendly welcome which we received from the administration of the Venice Biennale, the perfect order and superior culture which we found in Italy and in beautiful Venice. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing the entire committee again at the next Biennale in 1926."²⁵

Notes

1. See Andrei B. Nakov, "This Last Exhibition which was the 'First,'" in *The First Russian Show*, catalogue for exhibition organized by Annely Juda Fine Art, London (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1983), pp. 6–47; Peter Nisbet, "Some Facts on the Organizational History of the Van Diemen Exhibition," in *The First Russian Show*, pp. 67–72; and Helen Adkins, "Erste russische Kunstausstellung," in *Stationen der Moderne* (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1988), pp. 184–96.
2. I am grateful to Charlotte Douglas and Vasilii Rakitin, who encouraged me to pursue the subject, and especially to Dr. Sergio Pozzati, director of the Fondo artistico e fototeca of the Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia, who permitted me to study the archival material and was extraordinarily helpful during my trips to Venice in August 1989 and June 1990.
3. See Christina Lodder, "Exhibitions of Russian Art after 1922," in *The First Russian Show*, pp. 80–83.
4. All correspondence and other documents are located in the archives for the XIV *Esposizione internazionale* in the Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia, Palazzo Corner della Regina, Venice. All documents have been transcribed as written; the translations are mine.
5. Lenin died on January 21, 1924.
6. Anatolii Lunacharskii lived in Bologna and also in Paris before World War I. He was familiar with Western culture and was influential in arranging for the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* and for the *Pervaia vseobshchaia germanskaia khudozbestvennaia vystavka* (First German Survey Exhibition), the German Expressionist exhibition in Moscow in 1924. See Jane Kristof, *Critic and Commissar: A. V. Lunacharskii on Art* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1972).
7. XIV *Esposizione internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia*, *Catalogo*, 3d ed. (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1924), pp. 222–46.
8. Boris Ternovetz, "La Section russe à l'Exposition internationale de Venise," *La Renaissance de l'art français* 7, no. 10 (October 1924), pp. 535–47. The same text that appeared in the Biennale catalogue is translated into French and accompanied by illustrations. For additional information on Ternovets, see L. S. Aleshina and N. V. Iavorskaia, comp., *B. N. Ternovets. Pis'ma. Dnevnik. Stat'i* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1977).
9. Also known as *Portret Sil'vii Grinberg* (Portrait of Sil'vii Grinberg). Reproduced in Mark Etkind, *Nathan Altman*, trans. Manfred Denecke (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1984), p. 78.
10. Reproduced *ibid.*, p. 58.
11. See *A Selection of Russian Works*, sale catalogue for Christie's, London, October 5, 1989, no. 424.
12. Reproduced in Mikhail Guerman, *Art of the October Revolution*, trans. W. Freeman, D. Saunders, and C. Binns (New York: Abrams, 1979), no. 185.
13. Reproduced *ibid.*, no. 164.
14. Mark Etkind, *Boris Kustodiev*, trans. Ashken Mikoyan and Vladimir Vezev (New York: Abrams, 1983), p. 267.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
17. Reproduced in Giovanni Carandente, ed., *Arte russa e sovietica, 1870–1930* (Milan: Fabbri, 1989), pp. 258–59.

18. Reproduced in Vladimir Kemenov, *Konchalovsky*, trans. N. Lukoshkova (Leningrad: Aurora, 1973).
19. See Alexander Kemensky, *Martiros Sarian*, trans. Ashken Mikoyan (Leningrad: Aurora, 1975).
20. See *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1990), pp. 16, 211, 221.
21. Reproduced in Angelica Zander Rudenstine, ed., *Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection* (New York: Abrams, 1981), no. 540.
22. Ternovetz, "La Section russe," p. 545 and Ugo Nebbia, *La Quattordicesima Esposizione d'arte a Venezia—1924* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1924), pp. 160, 162–63.
23. Francesco Saponi, "La XIV Esposizione d'arte internazionale a Venezia," *Nuova antologia*, October 1924, pp. 22–24. See also Nebbia, *La Quattordicesima Esposizione*, pp. 167, 169 and Ternovetz, "La Section russe," p. 543.
24. Kustodiev's *The Merchant's Wife* or *Kupchikha za chaem* (*Merchant's Wife at Tea*) was reproduced in the catalogue of the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (no. 105) and also shown in the Biennale (no. 88).
25. Although the Soviet Union did not participate in the 1926 Biennale, Kogan was again commissioner in 1928 and Ternovets was a member of the committee.

The Great Utopia

*The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde,
1915–1932*

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

State Tret'iakov Gallery

State Russian Museum

Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

G U G G E N H E I M M U S E U M

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Kazimir Malevich
*Red Square (Painterly Realism: Peasant Woman
in Two Dimensions)*, 1915
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

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